

CHAPTER 1: COVENANT AND COVENANTS

The Bible is a big book with many stories, laws, genealogies, and even dedicates a great amount of space to instructions for construction. Some of the content seems easy enough to understand. Other content seems strange. All of this content comes bound together as one book, but there are two so-called “Testaments” (old and new) as well as sixty-six individual books written over the span of about 1,500 years. Do all of these books fit together somehow? Is this one book or many? Is this book telling one story or many different stories? It can all be quite overwhelming and intimidating to get the big picture.

Trying to arrive at a big picture view of Scripture involves working through many details. That can be difficult. What I will attempt to do in this study is to help you with the big picture. I want you to see how all the many stories of the Bible make up one story. These stories and this story are all structured by what the Bible calls *covenant*. A couple of branches in the Christian church lay great emphasis on covenants as that which best ties all of the Scriptures together in one coherent whole. If you have been around Reformed and Presbyterian types for any length of time, the word *covenant* is bound to have come up. It is the reason for our government, the reason we baptize infants, the reason we drink coffee at church, and the reason for just about everything else in the church. It is the default answer for the unknowable questions of life. When in doubt you simply answer “covenant” and the response will be, “O yes, the covenant.” But when asked, “What exactly is this covenant?” answers might not be as forthcoming. Hopefully, after you are finished reading this, you will have a somewhat better grasp on just what the covenant is and how covenant as a Scripture theme unites the Scriptures into one story.

The biblical teaching of covenant in Scripture is pervasive. There is not one passage in Scripture that it does not touch. So, it is not my intention to cover everything there is to cover about the doctrine of covenant. Our focus will be on *how the doctrine of covenant unifies the Scripture*, drawing all its different parts into one story that culminates in Christ Jesus and his church.

There is certainly a need in the church for a study like this because there are so many different views on how best to put the Bible together; that is, what system of thought or structure makes all the stories agree with one another. Conservative Christians believe that there are no contradictions in the Scripture. But at times our beliefs are put to the test. So, we try to find from the Scriptures themselves a structure into which all of the various parts fit. When we approach the Scriptures and we have bits and pieces—sometimes large sections—that just don’t fit with the rest, we know that we are off somewhere and our approach needs a bit of adjusting.

Reading the Scriptures is something like putting together a puzzle. The Bible has many pieces that fit together to form a great and glorious picture. There are systems that, when complete, find pieces lying all over the floor with huge holes in the picture. Others have fewer pieces left dangling when finished. Because of all of our limitations and God’s own infinity that he has somehow revealed in this Book, we will never get all the pieces together so that we have everything figured out. But we should strive to have as few pieces left over as possible.

These structures dictate how we approach the Scripture. Some people will say, “Well, we should just read the Bible and not try to put it together in any structure.” But that is impossible. Structures that dictate how we read the Bible are like noses: everyone has one. We all have basic assumptions that we bring to the text; ways that we think things ought to fit together. Some are less complex than others (i.e., few assumptions), but we all have ways to try to make things fit

together. There is nothing wrong with structures in themselves. The question is always, “What does justice to the text of Scripture? Do you have to leave out pieces and shove other pieces into places where they don’t fit?”

Down through the centuries people have suggested many different unifying themes. One that is common in American Christianity is known as *dispensationalism*. There are various forms and nuances of this, but it is the basic the approach that most American evangelicals take. One of the characteristics of this way of approaching the Scripture is that there is a great divide between Old Covenant Israel and the New Covenant church. Though many in the theological academic world have softened on this a bit, it is a popular approach to Scripture. There is the belief that God deals with Israel and the church in some fundamentally different ways. This affects the way, for instance, we view the inclusion of children in the church. The way they understand this overall structure affects how they understand the parts that deal with passages that speak about children in the New Testament. My intention is not to point out and contrast every difference between this approach and the approach I am taking. What I want to do is to tell this story in the way that we believe it best fits together. Many Christian friends will, no doubt, agree on many points. But there are some definite points of disagreement. There is no need to accentuate these. I only want you to ask yourself as you read, Does this way of telling the story do justice to the text of Scripture and make sense out of the biblical story?”

What is a covenant?

In order to begin, we must first ask the fundamental question: What is a covenant? Usually when we want to know what a word means, we run to a dictionary and look up the definition. That is certainly a way to discover the meaning of a word. But sometimes dictionary definitions can’t explain the many characteristics of a word in its various contexts. O. Palmer Robertson, in his book *The Christ of the Covenants*, relates trying to define a covenant simply is like trying to define the word “mother” with a dictionary definition. A mother is a female who has borne and takes care of children. Is that factually correct? Why, yes. But does that really tell us what a mother is? Not really. Simple definitions leave us lacking something.

Nevertheless, we need to start with a definition and then begin to describe covenant in a little more detail. There have been many definitions through the years offered for covenant. Here’s what we will be working with:

A covenant is a bond created by God in which he publicly declares who and what belongs to him, how they are to relate to him, and how he will reward faithfulness and punish unfaithfulness.

Fundamentally a covenant is a *relationship*; it is a *bond* or *union*. A covenant joins people with other people and/or non-humans together in a way that they weren’t before. This bond re-defines the person’s life. In some sense it changes his identity. Think about it in terms of a man who becomes a father. When a child is conceived, this man’s identity is changed in some way. He is now a father. He is no longer who he was before. Now he is known as this person in relation to this other person. This is also true when a person is married. When a person is married, he/she becomes a wife or husband. This is a bond that does more than simply add something to my life. It is not as if this identity is bolted on me, but I could be understood without it. It redefines me as a person. I am now a husband. Even if my wife dies or we go

through a divorce and my status changes, I am changed forever by this husband-wife bond. My life can no longer be understood the way that it was before.

This is what a covenant is, and this is what a covenant does. The Bible speaks of marriage, for example, as a covenant in various places (Mal 2.14; cf. also Pr 2.17). This is the type of relationship that God says that he has with Israel. In Isaiah 54 we hear that Israel's Maker is her husband (Isa 54.5; cf. also Jer 31.31-34). God binds himself to his people as a husband binds himself to his wife, re-defining their lives. Their lives and stories are now all wrapped up together in this union.

But in Scripture this bond is not only between God and people or people and people. This bond is also realized in God's relationship with non-human creation and, by image, our relationship with non-human creation. We and God are bound in covenant with the earth, trees, animals, etc. We see it early on and explicitly in Scripture. In Genesis 9, after God flooded the earth and delivered Noah, his family, and the animals, God made a covenant, not only with Noah but also with every living thing (Gen 9.8ff.). Within this covenant is the promise of the order of the seasons (Gen 8.22). God's covenantal union is realized with all of creation, even the sun, moon, stars as the cosmic clocks. In Jeremiah 33.20, 25 God makes it explicit again that he has a covenant with day and night. All of creation exists in the covenantal relation, this bond with God.

When God created the world and man in it, he stood in relationship to all of it. By virtue of creation itself God bound himself or united himself with his creation. This union in Scripture is called *covenant*. Every relationship that God has is covenantal. In redeeming man and creation after man fell into sin, God was re-establishing a proper relationship. He was renewing his covenant, making the changes necessary for everything in the relationship to be right and move forward. Nothing—we ourselves, our relationships with one another, non-human creation and our relationship to it, God and our relationship with him—nothing can be understood properly without understanding the biblical teaching of covenant. It is atmosphere of every relationship in Scripture; it is the air that we breathe and the Scriptural culture in which we live and move.

A covenant is a bond. Anytime we deal with God's covenant with his creation, this *bond is always created by God*. God is the one who initiates and determines the nature of the covenant. Neither we as humans nor the non-human creation comes to God and tells him that we want to work out a covenant with him. He initiates and declares with whom the covenant will be and what its terms will be. We see this with his relationship with non-humans as well as humans. In Genesis 9.12 God proclaims, "This is the sign of the covenant that *I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you*, for all future generations...." Also, when specifically dealing with Abraham and his seed, God says, "And *I will make My covenant between Me and you*, and will multiply you exceedingly." (Gen 17.2) God himself establishes and sets out the terms of the covenant. He tells us the nature of the relationship, its promises, privileges, prescriptions, provisions, and punishments. He tells us what constitutes faithfulness and unfaithfulness. These are non-negotiables. Our only choice is to submit or rebel; to be faithful or to break covenant.

This bond that is created by God is *real*. This is not the shell of a relationship or some type of "gotcha" relationship in which God says, "We only had a covenant, we didn't have a real relationship." That is just not possible. If God relates to all things in terms of covenant, if this is what structures his relationships, then there is no other way to relate to God. This relationship is real. There is not a covenant relationship and some other kind of relationship. There are various ways that God relates to each one of us within the covenant because he is a personal God and deals with us as persons, but the covenant itself is real.

God expresses the reality of this relationship in the promise of his covenant that itself is a thread that runs through the entire tapestry of Scripture from Genesis to Revelation: “I will be your God and you will be my people.” Every time we hear phrases in Scripture such as “my God” or “your God,” those are summary statements of God’s promise to be a God to us. To be able to speak about God as our God or our Father is to assume this relationship that is the covenant. Even though it is not said explicitly in the opening chapters of Genesis, this covenant is there when God creates Adam. Adam becomes his son (something that is explicit in Lk 3.38). God is Adam’s God and Father. Adam is his son. They are in a real relationship.

This relationship continues through Scripture. We see it stated explicitly with Abraham in Genesis 17 where he proclaims, “And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you.” (Gen 17.7)

God’s people throughout the ages hear this promise throughout the rest of Scripture. They stand in this special relationship with God. They live and pray according to it. When they rebel, the fact that they are God’s people is brought home to them in their punishments. He disciplines them as sons, those whom he loves. This relationship matures through the ages as all father-son and husband-wife relationships do. But that fundamental relationship remains the same. Jesus shows us this when, after he is raised from the dead, he tells Mary Magdalene to go to his brothers and say to them, “I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God” (Jn 20.17). The covenant is the relationship wherein we confess in union with Christ that God the Father is *our* Father and *our* God. We belong to him and he to us. God declares who is people are and he relates to them as his people. The relationship is real.

When all of history culminates in the new heavens and new earth, when the New Jerusalem descends from heaven as a bride adorned for her husband, we hear the declarative promise once again in Revelation 21.3: “He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” When God closes the final chapter on the history of the world as we know it now, this covenant will remain. What was true about his people from the very beginning will be true in the end: God is our God, we are his people. This is what it means to be in covenant with God.

This bond created by God has *boundaries*. This means that there are stipulations. There are places we can’t go and things we can’t do. There are limits. This is true not only for humans, but for the rest of creation as well. The seas have their limits (Ps 104.9). According to the covenant God made with Noah, the seasons have their limits; there are times for each season (Gen 8). Day and night have their boundaries (Gen 1; Jer 33). Animals have their boundaries as well. If animals cross those boundaries, for example, by killing someone, they are to receive punishment under God’s covenant law (e.g., Ex 21.28).

God’s covenant defines for all of creation what it can and cannot do. This, of course, is true for man. It defines the boundaries of all of his relationships. The covenant has laws that define right and wrong, sin and faithfulness. There are privileges to be enjoyed, activities to be avoided. There are blessings that come with faithfulness or obedience and curses that accompany unfaithfulness or disobedience. There are promises to be realized through faith(fulness) and punishments from which to flee.

When people persistently cross the boundaries without repentance, *the covenant can be broken*. God says this explicitly when dealing with Abraham in Genesis 17. The ones who refuse to give the sign of the covenant to their sons have broken God’s covenant (Gen 17.14). The entire nation of Israel, who stood in relationship to God as a wife to her husband, broke the covenant as

a whole (Jer 31.32). Consequently, God divorced his wife. The covenant can be violated so that the good relationship is destroyed.

This is true in the New Covenant as well. Jesus warns the disciples in John 15 that they are branches that can be cut out of the vine. The Vine is Jesus himself. The writer of Hebrews warns his readers concerning the possibility of breaking covenant in Hebrews 6.4-6 and 10.26ff. To use the words of Hebrews, when we count the blood of the covenant wherewith we are sanctified an unholy thing by disregarding the covenant demands, we have broken covenant. We abide in this covenant by faith. When we reject God and his Word through unbelief expressed in the stubborn refusal to repent, we have broken covenant.

Our lives are defined by this covenant and its boundaries. This is true about all men and not just those who are faithful worshipers of God. God gave original man boundaries that bind all men. All men exist in this covenant relationship with God and are bound to obey him by virtue of that relationship. When those boundaries are violated, the Bible calls this sin or transgression or iniquity. These are violations of this relationship that God has created and, when people persist without repentance, they experience the punishment of death that the covenant prescribes from the beginning. All of our lives are defined by and, thus, bounded by these relationships God established with us.

When God establishes this covenant, he makes it clear who stands in relationship to him in this or that particular covenant. God's covenant is a *formal or public bond*. People who are in this relationship are publicly identified and identifiable. God sets them apart and declares them in certain ways to be his people. He does this by various signs and seals. We see a number of these through Scripture. One of the most well-known is that of circumcision. This is the sign of the covenant given to Abraham and his seed in Genesis 17. Through circumcision, which God declared to be his covenant (cf. Gen 17.13), these people enjoyed the privilege and the responsibility of having God to be their God and they to be his people.

Time and again throughout Scripture God gives signs and seals declaring who are his special people, set apart from the others in the world and unto himself. The blood on the doorposts in Egypt during the Exodus was a sign that marked God's people out (Ex 12.13), distinguishing them as those who were being saved from those who were being destroyed. His covenant was with them. There were also baptisms, feasts, and other signs of God's covenant with his people. In these God says, "These are my people. I am their God." Today we continue to have that declaration through baptism and the Lord's Supper. These are signs and seals of the covenant. They tell us who is in this covenant with God in Christ and who isn't. Jesus declared in the institution of the Supper as we read in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and 1 Corinthians that this cup was the New Covenant in his blood. This is a covenant meal. Those who eat and drink with Jesus at his table are set apart as God's people.

But this is not only true with man. This is also true with the non-human creation. God declares what belongs to him and what his promises are for it. We see this in Genesis 8 and 9 when God makes his covenant with man and every other living thing, promising regular seasons. God gives a sign of his covenant: the bow in the clouds (Gen 9.12-17). In doing so he declares once again that this is his creation. It belongs to him. In it he is also declaring his promise to the creation. He is promising to save it. He makes this very public declaration so that all the world will know what belongs to him and what he plans to do with it.

In all of these signs and seals that formalize the bond that both human and non-human creation have with God, God pledges himself to all that he has promised. He declares his relationship with them and says what he will do with them. These signs of his covenant declare

his personal involvement with us. When he gives us his Word, he is giving us himself because “the Word is God” (Jn 1.1). Those who participate in or receive these signs are declared to be God’s people.

Each person who receives these signs has the declaration pronounced over him—“You belong to Me”—but these signs put us in relationship with one another as well. God’s covenant with each of us puts us in union with one another. The covenant is a *community creating bond*. God is not just “my God.” He is “our God.” The Father is not only “my Father.” He is also “our Father.” God’s covenant puts me in union with God *and all of those who are in covenant with God*. The covenant creates a community in which people are bound together in this same relationship with God. The community consists of all those who receive these signs of the covenant. Presently these are those who are baptized and participate in the Supper. Previously God set his people apart by other signs. Each person in the community is bound by the same laws and is to relate to God and the others according to those laws. Each person’s life is defined now in relationship to these others in the same community. This community is defined by God’s covenant and not by the boundaries that men impose. Wherever, for instance, people today are baptized in the Triune name and participate in the Supper, those are the people of God, the ones with whom we are in covenant.

The community extends through time and all of the changes that have occurred. As I mentioned earlier, that covenant theme that unites the people of God from Adam to the last chapter of this present history is that God will be our God and we will be his people. God has always had a people. We today remain in union with those who have come before us who have been declared to be God’s people. Paul makes this plain to the Corinthians when speaking about the children of Israel crossing the Sea: “Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all *our fathers* were under the cloud, all passed through the sea...” (1Cor 10.1). Those who crossed the Sea, most of whom died in the wilderness, were “our fathers.” They are a part of this same covenant family with whom we are in union. A fact that should not be lost upon us is that Paul is speaking to Gentiles as well as Jews. This covenant bond put the Gentiles in the family with Israel of old. These people who passed through the Red Sea were the fathers of Gentile believers as much as they were Jewish believers.

The writer of Hebrews unites those of his present generation in the church with all those men of faith who came before. He moves from the story of creation to speak about figures such as Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and many others who all, in faith, were looking for a promise to come. He concludes by saying, “And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect” (Heb 11.39-40). All of these people who have been declared to be the people of God throughout the ages are in union with us and cannot be complete or perfected without us. That covenant bond unites us across historical lines. That has been true from the beginning, remains true now, and will continue until God closes this book on this history when he raises us from the dead. God’s covenant creates a community that transcends geographical, cultural, racial, socio-economic, and even historical boundaries. We are united by the promise that God is our God and we are his people. Though God has dealt with us differently through the ages, we are and will remain his people, bound together in the covenant he established with us.

The way the Scriptures present the covenant to us reveals to us that this biblical teaching is not just the playground for theologians who do commerce in esoteric thoughts, but rather the doctrine of the covenant concerns every person, and especially Christians, in their day-to-day

living. As a member of God's people through baptism into the Triune name, you need to realize that *the relationship you have with God is real*. Many people today, especially in American evangelical circles, want to define a relationship with God by many ways other than the way God defines it. While I understand that many of their intentions are praiseworthy because they want to see people live faithfully, some have been driven to unnecessary doubts and have not worked from what God has already said about them. There are some who tell you that if you haven't had this subjective experience in which you were suddenly overwhelmed by your sin and turned with great brokenness to God, then you are not a Christian. Understanding the fact that we are sinners in need of a Savior is of utmost importance and not to be minimized. We must all realize this truth about our lives, not in a once-for-all-time dramatic experience only, but throughout our lives. But to rest whether or not you belong to God on what you feel or have felt is simply not biblical. God initiates the covenant. God declares who you are, and he does so through your baptism and your continual participation in the Lord's Supper. If you participate in these signs, you belong to him. He has declared that you are in covenant with him. As such, you are to respond to him in faith, believing what he has said about you, and live according to that which he commands us.

When you begin to live with this as the basis of your Christian life, you can actually focus on living the Christian life instead of always worrying if your experience was good enough. You can stop asking the questions like, "Was I really converted? Did I really have enough faith?" God declares that you are a member of his people. Receive that and live by it. His relationship with you is real. In it he has pledged himself to you in love. He has declared that you are his child and he is your Father. Believe it.

This teaching of the covenant also demands *a response of gratitude to God for his grace*. God brings you into relationship with himself because of his grace, not because you have performed some work to make you worthy. He has not declared you his people because you had a great experience or because you have done so many good things. There is nothing you can do to earn this relationship with God. He includes you because he wants to include you. Your response to that is simply to live and breathe gratitude to him; to recognize that which he has given you and give him thanks for it.

This gratitude is not only expressed with our lips but in the totality of our lives. God demands *faithfulness* from his people. Being in covenant with God means that you are called to a certain way of living. You *are* in union with God. This relationship, as I said, is a call to faith. We are to believe what God says and walk according to the ways he has prescribed, holding to his promises. There can be no presumption on our part that says, "I'm in covenant with God, therefore I can live in sin all that want." That is simply not true. God will not abide those who persist in sin. He provides forgiveness, but he provides forgiveness for those who come to him faithfully confessing their sins in repentance. As we do this, God will forgive us. For those who persist in their sin, presuming upon God's grace, the covenant which was intended for blessing will become a curse. Those who have had the privilege of knowing the grace of God in covenant have a greater responsibility and, therefore, a greater punishment for unfaithfulness.

God's covenant is a bond created by God in which he publicly declares who and what belongs to him, how they are to relate to him, and how he will reward faithfulness and punish unfaithfulness. It is the tie that unites the themes of Scripture as well as his people. God's covenant tells us who we are and how we are to live.

How do different covenants relate to one another in Scripture?

Our concern now is to see how the various covenants that God makes throughout Scripture relate to one another and tell one story. We'll begin with a general overview and then I will come back and unpack some details a little later.

As we read Scripture we see that there are many covenants made between God and man. There is a covenant with Adam and original creation, with Noah, Abraham, Israel in the time of Moses, David, a new covenant that restores Israel after captivity, and *the* new covenant in Christ. Is there really any relationship between them at all, or is God junking old covenants and make new covenants all the time? Is there something that ties all these different stories, these various relationships, and eras of history together, or are we serving a covenantal ADD God? As you might suspect by now, all of these covenants are related. They are all moving toward the fulfillment of one plan that God predestined before the worlds began, something to which Paul alludes in Ephesians 1. God works this plan out in history by means of his covenants.

Covenants and history

If we are not careful, we might put the biblical doctrine of covenant into a theological category that somehow separates it from history. If we do so, then we are terribly mistaken. Covenants are not simply *ideas*. They are history. They are God's relationship to people within the progress of history, structuring his dealings with them. Covenants shape history. History is determined by God's covenants and covenants are worked out in history. This is relatively easy to see from the very first page of Scripture, God's covenant book. The Bible doesn't begin as a textbook on philosophical theology, but as history: "In the beginning...." From there a story is told which is the history of the world.

History is not the shell in which we find the kernel of the covenant. What God does in history with people *is* his covenant. One aspect of a Christian view of the world is that history is real and significant. God's dealings with us don't rise above or somehow escape history. God relates to us in history and through his acts in history; something that is ultimately seen in God the Son entering our history in the flesh.

For example, when we study the Exodus from Egypt, we are studying how God saves his covenant people. We are not digging through the historical record to find the kernel of salvation to which it points. The Exodus does point us forward and is realized in greater glory in Christ, but the Exodus *was* salvation, not just some physical picture of a (so-called) "spiritual" salvation. The Exodus was not a mere "external" that God is using to show us is something about an "internal" salvation. The Exodus is a less mature stage of salvation relative to the maturity or fullness of salvation that will come in Christ Jesus. But that doesn't make it any less real. History is real and significant. It is where God meets and works for his people.

The study of the biblical teaching of covenant is the study of history. It is how God relates to man in the progress of history. It is how God moves history forward to his intended end. God's covenantal dealings with man push history forward to a determined end or goal. Herein is yet another vital aspect of a Christian view of history and God's covenant dealings: *History is moving forward to a goal*. History has a beginning, middle, and end (just as all good stories do). We have come from somewhere, we are going somewhere, and we will end up somewhere. We are not in a vicious, never-ending circle like a hamster running on a wheel or like the Hindus and their belief in reincarnation. Even though many patterns repeat themselves in history, they are not

exactly the same. The same themes resonate to help us understand what is going on, but they are to be seen more as a spiral that moves forward and not a circle that never ends.

History is musical. There are repeated themes throughout that may appear in many embellished ways, but they are all moving toward that final chord. God's covenants are taking the world to a particular place; a place he intended to take it from before the world began.

People have approached the arrangement of these covenants in different ways. Some, like the Westminster Confession of Faith, have put the history of covenants under two big headings: before the fall was the "Covenant of Works" and after the fall, when God promised to redeem man was the "Covenant of Grace." Others have spoken about the "Covenant of Creation" and the "Covenant of Redemption." Those are some of the more widely used titles. With some qualifications, all of these reflect that we believe God has one, unified plan in relationship to his creation. Within that plan he has some fundamental ways of relating to creation and accomplishing his plan.

There have been those who have objected to arranging the Scriptures under these headings that are not themselves in Scripture but are deduced from Scripture. Some have said that the Scriptures don't speak explicitly of one, over-arching covenant as this but of covenants. Many will affirm that there is one plan but several covenants. That's true, but that doesn't mean giving names like these is an illegitimate practice or necessarily distorts the biblical picture. "Trinity" is not a title given to the totality of God in Scripture, but it is plainly taught and rightly reflects Scriptural teaching. I'm not going to quibble about the words. I'm fine with saying that there are many covenants and one plan.

There is one plan. There are differences before and after the fall in the way that God deals with man, but there is still one plan. There are differences in the way God relates to man in the times of Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, the Restoration, and Christ, but there is still one plan. One constant through that one plan is that God deals with all in terms of covenant. It is a theme that unifies the one plan. All of these covenants share the same fundamentals and all are moving history to accomplish God's purpose. *The biblical story is one continuous, coherent story of the loving plan of our tenacious, unconquerable God to bring his original purposes to pass for his creation: to share his life with his creation.* Each chapter in the story in which new covenants are made don't annihilate the previous chapters, but build upon them, moving the history to its end (i.e., in the sense of its final goal and intended purpose).

Jesus as the hermeneutic of history

The fact that this is one story with various chapters or one plan with different stages is told at every level of our existence within creation. It is such a part of our experience that it is difficult to step back and see it at times. It is our atmosphere that goes virtually unnoticed by us. Asking us to step back and examine it is like asking a fish to step back and contemplate water. It is quite difficult for him to describe. The environment of water is just the way of life for the fish. Nevertheless, God reveals to us how history moves, and therefore, the way we are to be thinking about it. The story is the story of a maturing creation—human and non-human—growing from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood. God has written the whole story of history in each person conceived in the womb of his mother.

This movement reflects the way God created the world and, therefore, will be reflected in how God's image, man, develops the world. The world begins "formless and void," a big mass of water hanging in space. The creation is an immature, undeveloped creation. Through the six days

of creation God takes the creation from immaturity to maturity, bringing it and himself to a place of rest on the seventh day. Each day within creation is distinct. There are new and better aspects of creation each day as it moves from glory to glory. But it is fundamentally the same creation stuff that God created on day one. There is a continuity that unifies the whole work.

So it is with the rest of history and the way God and man relate throughout as creation is being developed. Each stage, like a passing day, is left behind, but the realities created, formed, and filled during that day are the building blocks for the next day ... and the day after that ... and the day after that.

To change the image, we can understand the movement of history like that of a growing child, the clothes of each era of history are outgrown so that each stage of life needs new clothes. But again, each stage of life builds upon the previous, transforming it from what it was into something new and more glorious. There are, of course, problems in each era of man soiling the clothes that God gave him through sin. Not only do they outgrow them, they also tatter them through sin. None of this deters or detracts from God's tenaciousness in completing his plan.

Thinking of the eras of history and God's covenants in terms of movement from immaturity to maturity rather than sealed containers butted up against one another with little relation is not only helpful, but it is the biblical picture itself. Paul draws upon this theme when he discusses one movement in history between God's dealing with Israel under Moses through the time that Christ comes in Galatians 3–4. Being under the Law, Paul says, is being a child under the disciplinary care of someone who has the responsibility to watch over us. This was Israel under Law. But now in Christ we have grown up to become full heirs. We have matured in Christ, coming out from under the Law the way that Israel was under Law. He also uses this image with the Corinthians when describing love in 1Corinthians 13. Comparing the age previous to the age in which they now live is comparing childhood to manhood. When he was a child he spoke, reasoned, and understood as a child. But when he became a man, he put away childish things (1Cor 13.11). Both of these certainly have their specific aim within their contexts, but they reflect an overall movement of Scripture that sees humans and the rest of creation moving from one stage of maturity to another.

In each stage of maturity there are new responsibilities given and different expectations ... just as it happens with each one of us as we grow older. When you are an infant, very little is expected. As you grow older your relationships become more complex with greater expectations. So it is with God and his relationship to the world and the maturation of creation into its full maturity. There are definite epochs where things radically change, but they are dragging the world into the future while using, building upon, yet transforming the past.

The way we know that this is ultimately true is by looking at the life, death, and resurrection of the One upon whom all of history hinges: Jesus Christ. Through his death and resurrection we know that Jesus brings in the New Covenant. He proclaims as much when he institutes the Supper. His death and resurrection not only tell us that the New Covenant has been introduced, but in Christ's person and work we discover how we are to understand the movement of all of history. Jesus told the two disciples on the road to Emmaus that everything, beginning with the first books of the Bible and continuing all the way through the Scriptures, spoke of how he would have to suffer and rise again (Lk 24.13ff.). In Ephesians 1.9-10 we hear Paul saying among other things that God pulled all the lines of history and all the various parts of history together in Christ. One of the many implications of this is that history being summed up in him means that history is to be interpreted by his own life, death, and resurrection.

So, what happened with Christ and what do we learn through Christ about how God

relates one historical era to another? We learn principally that death and resurrection as experienced by Jesus are the key to understand how the old passes away and the new comes. The bodily resurrection of Jesus shows us that God doesn't leave the old creation completely behind. Jesus didn't leave his original creation body behind in the grave. Instead he takes it through death and transforms it into something more glorious in resurrection. There is a movement from one stage of glory to another stage of glory. There is a radical continuity with what was before. It is not annihilated. The stuff of original creation is still there ... something quite obvious from the fact that he retained the scars in his hands, feet, and side (cf. Jn 20.27). The old creation body is still there in some way. But there is a radical discontinuity as well. While the old body is the one that is raised, the old body raised is now completely transformed. Even the wounds in Jesus' body are glorified. This new body can appear in rooms with locked doors. In this new stage of glory there are some things that fall away like the old grave clothes that Jesus left behind in the grave because they aren't needed anymore. There are also new things that are added, like the new robes of glory that Jesus now has.

Through these spectacles we are understand the movement through the eras of history and the way God's various covenants relate to one another. Each covenant dies, but it is not annihilated. It is raised into a new covenant, shedding some unnecessary things and taking on some new things. Nevertheless, there is a newness to it that changes everything. We may think that this is difficult to grasp, but again, it is as common as our experience of entering into the covenant of marriage. Each person has his or her own story, but they radically change in marriage and become something totally new. The two people are still two people, but now they are one flesh. They weren't husband and wife before marriage but now they are, even though they are still the same two people. When a new covenant is inaugurated there is sameness and difference, continuity and discontinuity. The various covenants in Scripture are this way as well. There is one story being told but all these distinct chapters that introduce and build upon the previous chapters.

Sometimes when you read a great story that has a number of chapters, the author takes you here and there in the beginning in what seems to be a very disjointed trip, jerking you back and forth between various characters and what is going on in their lives. But as the story progresses and reaches its climax, all the themes pull together so that you see how it was all working together. So it is with the story of Scripture as it matures, moving toward its zenith in Christ. When we get to Christ and look back through his life, death, and resurrection, we see how the whole story is unified. We understand better what God was doing all along ... just as the disciples on the Road to Emmaus came to understand (Lk 24.13ff.).

I believe the best way to study these various chapters or covenants is to see this story in seven chapters. Or we might like to think of it as maturity in seven stages. All of these reflect a singular plan for God to complete his purposes. One way we understand that all of these are tied together is that the whole story is told in each chapter with various historical peculiarities. Like the music I mentioned earlier, there are these recurring themes that tell us that God is dealing with us in fundamentally the same ways as he moves history toward its goal. Yet, there are distinct eras in which God deals with his creation in specific ways, giving it what it needs for that stage of maturity, like the movement of a great symphony.

The story begins with *creation*. In creation we see God's plan: to share his divine love. God wasn't forced to create for any lack that he had in himself. He created from an overflow of love within his relationship as Father, Son, and Spirit. Each member seeking to glorify the other in their own union decide in their eternal council to create a world that will share their life.

God creates the world and man as its highest creature and chief representative. Man is created in the image of God and relates to him as a son relates to his father (cf. Lk 3.38). God created man in union and communion with him. Man is in covenant with God. God creates the man immature. The rest of creation is also immature compared to where God wants it to be. God sets before him the task of maturity for himself and the world around him. He wants man to grow up into his likeness and be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth, taking proper dominion over it, developing it into a fit place for God and man to dwell together.

In his infancy, Adam is given one basic command to obey. He is to refrain from eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Man disobeys, falling into sin and condemning himself and his posterity to the judgment of death. God promises that he will rescue him and complete his purposes: to unite himself with his creation and share his life with it.

From the time of Adam onward sin matures. Cain and his line represent this growing problem in the world. Sin matures to the point that God has to take the creation back to its original state of being formless and void, one big mass of water hanging in the universe. He does this through the Flood. But in the midst of pronouncing this judgment, God establishes his covenant with a man named Noah, a member of the old creation. God delivers his original creation in and through Noah. He does this by building a boat that reflects the created order and carries his family and representatives of all the animals into the new creation that is to come through death. In the midst of the judgment of the flood, God remembers his covenant and moves the world toward its new creation (Gen 8.1). He brings Noah, his family, and the animals into his new creation and puts Noah into a new garden: a vineyard.

God's covenant with Noah is that he would save the entire created order. The sign of his promise is the bow in the clouds. Salvation is not reserved for one part of creation—humans—but for the entire creation—land, sea, animals, rocks, *etc.* Man has grown up a bit and is given some responsibility he didn't have before. In order to stem the tide of violence, God gives man the authority to judge and execute those who shed blood (i.e., capital punishment). They couldn't do this before with Cain and his children. Because of this violence ran wild. But now things have changed. Even with the changes, it is still the old creation that is being saved.

Even while it is being saved, sin is still in the hearts of men. Ham, Noah's son, seeks to seize Noah's robe, his authority. His descendants through Canaan bear the curse of this sin. Sin begins to mature again. God's people are joining up with the wicked in rebellion against God. They decide to build this tower and city to unify the people and so that they will not spread out and fulfill the original mandate that God gave them. Man has perverted his authority in creating this city and tower, so God must keep man from completely destroying himself in sin. He judges those who built this monument to humanism, confusing their languages so that they must spread out. He ripped humanity into pieces, bringing death to the human race.

In the midst of all of this sin, God chooses a man from Babylon (Ur of the Chaldees) named Abram. Abram, like Noah, is a part of this old creation. To him he promises that the entire world will be saved through his seed, his child. There is a problem. Abram's wife, Sarai, is barren. She embodies the problem of the creation under the curse of sin: death. No new life can come. God is telling the story that the world is dead because of sin and cannot share his life in its fullness. Not only is this a problem, God waits until both Abram and Sarai are well past the years of conceiving a child before he does anything. Out of death will come resurrection of the dead. God shows us this in Abram and Sarai (who become Abraham and Sarah) by giving them a child, and then he shows us this again when, in a parable, God takes this child, Isaac, through death and resurrection (Gen 22; Heb 11.19). God will save the world through Abraham's seed. But that

seed will save the world through death not in spite of it. He will go through death and be raised to new life. In doing so he will bring life to the world, accomplishing the purpose and promise of God's original creation plan.

This covenant with Abraham and his seed continues through Isaac and then through Jacob, who becomes Israel. God delivers Israel and his children from famine by taking them down to Egypt. But while in Egypt sin matures once again and has to be cut off. Israel, Abraham's seed, begins to worship the gods of Egypt (Josh 24.14). The gods of Egypt represented in the Pharaoh, begin to oppress, just as false gods always do. The sons of Israel groan under the oppression and God hears their groaning and remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2.24). YHWH delivers his people from Egypt through the defeat of all the gods of Egypt, and he brings them to Mt. Sinai to establish his covenant with them. God sets Israel apart as a nation with a mission. That mission is defined in the Law that he gives them.

While there are many specifics in the Law, one over-arching purpose of the Law is to give the seed of Abraham, Israel, a new relationship to God and to the nations for the purpose of completing the promise to save the world through the seed of Abraham. Through God's relationship with Israel, he will fulfill his promises to complete his creation purposes and plan. They have the responsibility of being a priest to the nations; praying and being the place of sacrifice for the nations. This is a new stage of glory and with it comes greater responsibility.

At the direction and plan of YHWH, they build a house for the name of YHWH: the Tabernacle. At the Tabernacle heaven and earth meet and a place for the nations to draw near to God is created. This place of drawing near to God involves offerings of all kinds that we, many times, call sacrifices.

Israel doesn't do so well with this. They allow sin to wreck their new privilege when they construct and worship the golden calf. From that time forward they fail in so many ways with regard to their responsibilities. Yet, God is not unfaithful to his covenant, nor has he turned from his plan. Nevertheless, there are consequences. God must deal with Israel. Once again he brings them under the oppression of Egyptians, but this time we know them as Philistines at the end of the time of the Judges. (We learn from the genealogy in Genesis 10 that the Philistines and the Egyptians are kin.) At this time the house of God is torn down. The Tabernacle is dismantled (cf. 1Sam 4).

Time and again they plead for deliverance. God must deliver the deliverers, save the saviors. He has done so through raising up judges, but Israel needs a king. Moses told them that there would be a time for them to have a king, but they would have to be patient (cf. Dt 17.14ff.). God would deliver Israel and in delivering Israel he would deliver the world through the king. Israel seizes a king before the proper time in the person of Saul. That doesn't turn out so well. But God's promise and purpose are not thwarted.

God raises up David and establishes his covenant with David. David and his successors will have greater responsibilities than those in previous covenants. This is the nature of new covenants. But this is only a progression in the same plan and purpose of God. God will give David a son who will be God's own son (2Sam 7.14). This son of David will sit on the throne of Israel. But this throne of Israel will be the throne of YHWH himself (1Chr 29.23). It will be his task to lead, deliver, and protect the people of God as a shepherd does with his sheep. David's son will also build a new house for the name of YHWH and YHWH will build David's house (2Sam 7.1ff.).

Sin moves in almost immediately. David and his son, Solomon, sin (even though many

good things are accomplished). The kingdom is divided under Solomon's son because the sins of Solomon are only intensified under the rule of Rehoboam, his son. Sin continues to mature and is reflected in the kings of both sides of the split kingdom, Israel and Judah. Though there are several good kings along the way, the bigger problems are not solved. The kings overall don't lead the people right, and they fall into sin time and again, not fulfilling the responsibilities given to them in the Law. Eventually God has to expel them from the land and destroy the Temple built by the king. During the time God's people are in captivity, exiled from the land, God speaks to them through prophets like Jeremiah, Daniel, and Ezekiel promising them a new covenant. God would be faithful to his previous covenants, raising up a king, the son of David, who will deliver Israel and rebuild the Temple through which the nations will be saved, fulfilling the promise to Abraham. God promises a restoration.

Jeremiah calls this restoration "the new covenant." Some will say that this only applies to the time when Christ comes, but that is not the case. God is making a new covenant with Israel in which he will restore them to their land and Jerusalem and the Temple will be rebuilt. But this new covenant has new dimensions. God has wanted them to be a witness to the nations all along. Now he scatters them across the nations in this empire where they have Gentile kings. This empire itself moves from stage to stage: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and finally Rome. During the Medo-Persian rule God raises up an emperor that sends them back to re-build the city and the Temple so that they can fulfill their mission to be a blessing to the nations. Ezekiel spends a large portion of his prophecy talking about this great Temple (Ezek 40–48).

God delivers them in the midst of this new empire situation. But once again sin begins to mature. Nevertheless, God is faithfully, tenaciously fulfilling his plan. It is coming about in *the* New Covenant. In the New Covenant in Christ God's plan and purpose are fulfilled: the world is saved in Christ and creation is united with God and shares in his divine life of love. God the Son becomes flesh when sin has reached its greatest maturity. It was the fullness of times in so many ways (Gal 4.4). Jesus comes as the second and last Adam, the true Son of God, to be faithful where Adam was unfaithful (Rom 5.12-21; 1Cor 15.45). Jesus is the mature Noah, the one not only through whom the world was created, but also the one through whom the creation will be saved. He passes through the waters of baptism and arises to have the dove land upon him. Through Christ's cross all authorities in heaven and on earth have been reconciled to him (Col 1.15-20). His are the governments of the world.

Jesus is Abraham's seed through whom all the nations of the earth are blessed with life. He is born under the Law (Gal 4.4) so that he might be the place—the true Israel—who will suffer the death the Law prescribes. He will be the priest to and for the nations.

He is the son of David, the true King who sits on YHWH's throne who lead and delivers his people. He is the true shepherd. In him we have the new and true Temple of God as he goes through death is raised with a transformed body, a new Temple. Now all who are in him are the Temple of God and this Temple is the place where all the nations of the earth find blessing or life.

All of God's promises are "Yes" and "Amen" in Christ (2Cor 1.20). All of history is summed up in him. God's one story is leading up to this chapter the entire time. He doesn't annihilate what comes before him. He takes it up in himself, takes it to its proper death, and transforms it into new creation. In doing so he is completing the plan and purpose of God's original intention of creation.

Jesus Christ is the theme and goal of the entire story. It is in him that the story finds its unity. But that relationship that God has with his creation throughout history that is fulfilled in

Christ is the story of his covenants. The covenants are his relationship. God unites himself to man in Christ by means of covenant. The promises are promises of his covenant. The plan is the plan worked out in covenant. Jesus Christ is that which unifies the story of Scripture, but it is only as we understand how God relates to us in terms of covenant that we can understand how Jesus unites the entire story of history in himself.

CHAPTER 2: CREATION COVENANT: SHARING OF THE DIVINE LIFE OF LOVE

At the beginning of every good story there are certain characters and plot lines that are set. We are introduced to the main players in the story. We start seeing some of the relationships that will be developed throughout the story. This is precisely what happens at the beginning of the Story of stories. God sets the stage introducing himself, who he is in relationship to creation, what the creation is, what the purpose of creation is, who the significant players are in the story, their place, his relationship to them, their relationship to him, and their relationship to everything else. Getting a grip on these first scenes is crucial to understanding how the rest of the story works out. So, let's begin looking at the first chapter in this story of God and his creation.

This chapter aims to answer several pertinent questions: Does God really relate to the creation in terms of covenant or is this something that is being forced upon the text? What does it mean for God to relate to the creation in terms of covenant? More specifically, what does it mean for God to relate to man within creation in terms of covenant?

Let's start with a basic summary of God's relationship with creation from the beginning. What we learn from the creation account is that *God established his covenant with the world and man by virtue of the acts of creation themselves. In doing so he created a bond between himself and his creation defining what creation is and its purpose. That purpose is to share life with him; a purpose that is ultimately realized only in Christ.*

God Creates a World in Covenant with Himself

In the beginning God created heaven and earth. God created the world, not because of any lack in himself that he had to fill, but because of an abundance within himself that he desired to share. Life within himself as Father, Son, and Spirit was so full that he desired to share his life. So, he created the world to do that very thing. From the beginning, in the act of creation, God is in relationship with the creation. That relationship is known biblically as *covenant*.

Some people question the validity of describing God's original relationship as being covenantal. One reason for this is that the word covenant itself doesn't appear in the creation account. In fact, the word covenant doesn't appear in Scripture until Genesis 6.18, when God is dealing with Noah. Is it, therefore, appropriate to speak about God's relationship with creation as being covenantal? I believe that it is for a number of reasons.

The word "covenant" doesn't need to appear in the text in order for the reality of the covenant to be present. It is somewhat like speaking about marriage. I don't have to say "covenant of marriage" all the time. When I say "marriage" or "husband" or "wife," all of those words indicate that I'm speaking about a particular type of covenant. There is no need to say covenant for the covenant to be present. Covenant is the context that gives meaning to all those words.

We find this throughout Scripture. One definite covenant promise of God is that God

declares certain people to be his people. He doesn't have to repeat all the time, "You are my covenant people" or "I am your covenant God." Every time we hear "my people" or "my/our God," we know that the covenant is structuring that relationship. Wherever there are the elements and atmosphere of the covenant, there is God's covenant.

There are other places in Scripture that give, what I consider to be, explicit references to the fact that what God did before Genesis 6 was to be understood in covenantal terms. That is, his relationship with creation was properly understood as his covenant with creation. Hosea prophesies to Israel concerning her adultery committed against YHWH, her husband. They violated the covenant. The way YHWH speaks about this is important for our concerns. He says in Hosea 6.7, "But like Adam/man they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me." Israel was a new Adam. Like Adam they transgressed *the covenant* God made with them. They were disobedient. It is possible to translate "Adam" simply with the general "man," but it seems that YHWH is referring to a specific man and a specific covenant: the covenant made in the beginning at creation.

Then there is also a prophecy in Jeremiah that alludes to God's covenantal relationship with creation from the beginning. God is promising to be faithful to his covenant with David. He gives assurance of his faithfulness by saying that if someone can break his covenant with the day and with the night so that they don't come at their appointed times, then his covenant with David can be broken (Jer 33.19ff.). When was a covenant with day and night established? His covenant with day and night was established in creation when God separated the light from the darkness calling the light Day and the darkness Night (Gen 1.3-5).

It is true that the word covenant doesn't appear until Genesis 6.18, but it is present before that. In fact, in this first mention of the word there is an allusion to an already existing covenant. God is speaking to Noah about his plans to destroy the earth. He tells Noah, "But I will establish my covenant with you...." (Gen 6.18) The phrase that is used here alludes to the continuation of something that was already in place. God is confirming a preexisting commitment or relationship to his creation. This covenant was already there. Now, God is saying that his covenant plans and purposes established before Noah will be carried out through Noah. Noah will be a new Adam.

Not only do we have these references that all point to the fact that covenant is there in the beginning of creation, we have characteristic elements of the covenant that are there. When we examine the rest of Scripture and understand how covenants are made by God, we see that foundational to all of these is what God did in establishing his relationship to the creation in the beginning.

How is a covenant made? What is the ritual by which a covenant is instituted? Covenant rituals have patterns. These patterns can be structured a number of different ways depending on the emphasis. All of them bear resemblance to one another at some level, and, more importantly, they all indicate the presence of covenant-making. We can see God's covenant-making in a five fold action. The purpose of this covenant-making is to take something from where it is initially and make it better; or, to use biblical terms, to glorify it. Here are the five basics actions:

- 1) God takes hold of the creation. He lays his hand on something or someone with the determination to make it something new and more glorious.
- 2) God restructures it. He takes what was one thing and makes it something else by separating, adding other things to it, putting different things in a new relationship with one another, and giving new names.

3) God distributes the work. Aspects of this newly created relationship are given specific functions in this new situation. They have new responsibilities.

4) God evaluates. He steps back, as it were, and looks at what he has done, passing judgment on it.

5) God enjoys his work. He has labored. That labor has produced fruit. That fruit provides enjoyment and rest.

This five-fold action of covenant-making is seen in the original creation.

1) God takes hold of the formless and void creation that he has made. He does so by his word. When we hear, "And God said," God the Word is laying hold of the creation.

2) God restructures this formless and void creation by separating one thing from another and putting them into new relationships and giving them new names. Light is separated from the darkness and called Day and Night. The lights are separated into sun, moon, and stars. The waters are separated and their spaces are given new names. Land is separated from the water and given new names. God restructures the world.

3) God distributes the work of the individual parts of creation. Waters above and waters below are given their functions. God sets the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament and gives them the function of being cosmic clocks for signs and festival times, and for days and years. The seas and land are given their places. Land animals and creatures of the sea are given their functions. There are all these boundaries, but they are all in relationship with one another.

4) God evaluates his work of creation when he sees that it is good. He does this after almost every day of creation and then at the end of the creation process.

5) Once he evaluates that everything is good, God goes to his rest, his Sabbath, on the seventh day.

All these actions along with the specific references are enough to tell us that God relates to his creation in terms of covenant.

The world and every particular part of it is in covenant with God. There is a bond, a relationship, between God and his creation in which he defines and declares what it is and what its purpose is. This covenant that God establishes in creation means that he is taking something from the place of its immaturity to maturity. Covenants are active, making history and all that is in it move from one stage of glory to another.

God Creates Man in Covenant with Himself

Though certainly not all that God is concerned about, man becomes the central focus of the story of creation as its chief representative. Man is the height of creation and, in relationship to God and the rest of creation, has privileges and responsibilities, promises to be pursued and

punishments to be avoided. Man created in covenant with God is in a living, active, progressive relationship with God. God intends that he mature from his original state, moving to greater and greater glory. While all of creation is in covenant with God, God chooses to make man who will be a part of this covenant but will have a special relationship with him. Man will have a special place in creation because man is uniquely created as the image of God. Like the rest of creation, the act of creating man reveals that man is in covenant with God.

- 1) God takes hold of the dirt of ground, determined to make man out of it.
- 2) God restructures this dirt, separating it from the ground, fashioning it into this body, and breathing into it the breath of life. He calls this new thing created from the old, “Adam,” or “man.”
- 3) God gives the man responsibilities, distributing work to him. He is given tasks. Before the woman is made, Adam is given the task of serving/working and guarding the garden (Gen 2.15). After the woman is made they are blessed and told be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth, and subduing it (Gen 1.28). He has boundaries. Adam is told that he can’t eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Gen 2.17). It is his responsibility to refrain from this as much as it is his responsibility to pursue these other activities God prescribed for him.
- 4) God evaluates everything after the sixth day and says that it is all very good.
- 5) God then rests and enjoys the fruit of his labor in initial fellowship with man. (This pattern is also evident in the creation of the woman.)

Man, both as an individual and in relationship to one another, is in relationship to God by virtue of creation. The creation of man draws special attention to itself because this relationship between God and man is unique. Man is the image of God. Being the image of God means that man is not God himself. But being in the image of God means that he bears resemblance to God. Man is inexorably joined to God in his creation as the image of God. Man is in relationship with God.

The covenant tells man who he is

This creation covenant with man—being created in the image of God—defines life for man. It is man’s identity. This covenant tells man who he is. The way God creates and relates to us doesn’t involve only one little aspect of our lives; as if what the Bible is talking about concerns *only* the religious or so-called “spiritual” aspects of our lives while leaving the other realities of life untouched. *We are* the image of God. That definition of man given to us by God defines us in our totality. Every aspect of our being—mind, will, emotions—are all understood in terms of being in the image of God.

The image of God is not only being about who we are as individuals but also the fact that we are created as image-bearers in relationship to one another means that every relationship—interpersonal, economic, political, etc.—are all encompassed in what it means to be in the image of God. Our lives can’t be segmented off into religious and non-religious aspects. There is ultimately no sacred-secular. Being the image of God means that all of life is determined

by this covenant, this relationship with God.

All men are God's image. This means to exist as a human means is to be in covenant with God. That is a fundamental reality that may be intellectually and emotionally rejected, but it can't be changed. Someone can completely disregard the reality of who he is, but he can't change it. Covenants with God are established by God. He initiates and defines the terms. Man's only response is either submission in faithfulness or rejection in rebellion.

God creating man in his own image means that God established this relationship and defines who man is. *Man doesn't define himself*. He is not a law unto himself, and he doesn't determine for himself what is right and wrong. This fundamental reality defines us from the first day of our creation throughout eternity. We will never be anything less than the image of God. That image has been and will continue to be perverted, twisted, and distorted, but the fundamentals of being the image of God remain with us. We have this same fundamental relationship with God throughout history. Therefore, some of the basics of who we are and how God relates to us and expects us to relate to the world are found right here in the beginning. They are in seed or immature form, but they remain consistent and are expounded and mature throughout history. We can only know ourselves truly and our purpose in life as we submit our mind, will, and emotions to the way God defines us by his word.

This covenant tells man his responsibilities

Being the image of God and having this relationship with God means that we have responsibilities. Man has a purpose to be fulfilled. To fulfill that purpose, man is given tasks to be done and activities to be avoided. Man's relationship with God is not aimless. This relationship is not stagnant. It is moving somewhere all the time. God's purpose for man as his image is a part of who he is. Man's responsibilities are not extras that God tags on to us. They tell us who we are. Being in the image of God doesn't mean that we are like a static portrait. The image of God is, like God himself, living and breathing. The image of God is active. The relationship is active.

The activity for which God created us is determined by him. God lays out some of the basic activities and responsibilities of man in the beginning. As I mentioned, these are found in their most basic forms in man's original creation. They will take on new dimensions as time progresses, but the same basic responsibilities will be incumbent upon man throughout his existence because this is what it means to be God's image.

Before the woman was created, God gave the man himself specific instructions: serve/work and guard/keep the Garden of Eden (Gen 2.15). These were and remain two basic tasks of the man. Man was to *labor*. As the image of the God who worked in creating the world, man was to reflect or image him and be a laborer, developing the creation. This was to be a service to the creation, moving it toward greater glorification ... just like God did.

When God created the woman and put her in the Garden with Adam, this was the first addition to his fundamental responsibility, the first stage of glorification. The woman, who is now part of the Garden, is to be served and guarded by the man. (Song of Songs makes the connection between the woman and the garden explicit.) The man is to cultivate her so that she is glorified. He is created first and is thus her head, her authority (1Cor 11.3ff.; 1Tm 2.8ff.). But he is to use his authority for her glorification.

As the image of God, man is also to *guard* the Garden. He is to enforce and maintain the proper boundaries of the Garden, protecting it. Like his service, his guard-duty included guarding

his wife. One way that he serves and guards the woman is by instructing her in the boundaries that God set. The one boundary Adam learned a short time before the woman was created was that there was a tree from which they could not eat: the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam was to instruct her in this and maintain the boundary, thus, guarding/keeping the covenant. This is instruction and guardianship would be an exercise in faith. Nothing marked off that tree from all of the other trees except the word that God proclaimed about it. It just looked like another one of the fruit trees God provided. From the beginning man was to live by faith and not by sight. Neither the man nor the woman was to make a judgment concerning the tree based on what they saw, determined for themselves, or determined by what some other creature told them about the fruit of the tree. They were to live by every word that proceeded out of the mouth of God. From the beginning—even before the fall—man’s relationship with God was to be characterized by faith. That is the position of a creature made in the image of God. To live properly as the image of God man has always been called to live a life of faith. This means that man must determine what the world is and how he is to relate to it by how God defines it and how we are to relate to it.

So then, man is to be a laborer and a guardian, and in all these things he is to walk by faith. Once the woman is created, God gives man as man plus woman their image-bearing responsibilities. Working within their particular roles as man and woman, they are to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. They are to subdue it and have dominion over every other aspect of creation (Gen 1.28). This was the life given to them by God as his image-bearers. This dominion was given for the purpose of glorification, not destructive self-consumption. The whole world was to teem with life, growing more and more to look like God’s house: heaven. God’s throne room—heaven—was created complete or mature. It was the image to which the earth was to conform. We read in the opening lines of Scripture, “In the beginning God created heaven and earth. And *the earth* was without form and void...” (Gen 1.1-2a). The earth was without form and void, but heaven was not. Heaven was created complete, mature, as God’s throne with a fixed number of heavenly hosts, the angels, all around him. The earth, however, was a project that was to be developed by man throughout history (cf. e.g., Ps 115.16).

Man was to pattern the world after heaven. We see glimpses of this later when God has Moses build the Tabernacle. Moses is up on the mountain and God shows him a pattern of his own throne, heaven, and tells him to make a copy of it on earth (Cf. Heb 8.5; Ex 25.40; 26.30). The earth is to look like heaven. This is what Jesus taught us to pray when we pray, “Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6.10). God’s throne, the highest heaven, is the pattern for the earth. Man as the image of God is tasked with the responsibility with building the creation into a house for God and man to dwell (something that we see is done at the end of Scripture as John records it in Rev 21.3).

The covenant tells man his destiny

Built into this mission is a goal, a destiny for man. God created man in covenant with himself to grow up to be more and more like God and to make the creation more and more like God’s house. God created man to enjoy the life that he himself enjoyed from all of eternity. But man must grow up to the place where he can handle all the responsibilities that this life entails. Man’s destiny is determined by God. This will happen. God’s creation with man in the lead will become this dwelling place for God and man. A man will exercise proper rule over all the earth as the image of God and bring it to its fullness, its greatest expression of maturity.

Now, how will these covenant responsibilities be carried out? We are not left in the dark about that either from the first pages of Scripture. First, we see that *they are fulfilled organically.* Our physicality is an aspect of our being in the image of God. It is not something from which we are trying to escape. It is not the hull that carries around the kernel of the real us inside. The way God created us as embodied images of him is part of who we are and how we fulfill our covenant responsibilities.

God created man in his image to be like him: a creative being. We don't create in the same way that God creates, but we are to be creators nonetheless. One aspect of man's creative mandate is to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth with other humans. Man's covenant task will, in part, be fulfilled through the bearing and rearing of children. This involves much more than simply the physical act of bearing children. But bearing children is necessary for man's covenant responsibilities to be completed. We can't fill the earth with others if we don't have children. Those children will also be image-bearers of God and, thus, will be in covenant with God, having the same basic responsibilities toward God, others, and the creation around them. God deals with every descendant of Adam in terms of his covenant, and this covenant is fulfilled organically.

But we also learn that *our covenant responsibilities are fulfilled progressively.* This is something that will be done over time. Humanity will grow to fill the earth over time, and it will take time ... and patience ... for those successive generations to glorify the earth through their labor.

God's original covenant with creation in general and man in particular set the stage for all that is to come. Creation has this predetermined destiny, and man, as God's image, will always be God's image and will, therefore, always stand in relationship to God. Even after man sins, he will still be God's image-bearer and will have the same responsibilities. When God comes to man after he sins, he comes to restore him, giving him his original purposes once again. Sin will have to be dealt with because it brings death.

Sin is perversion of the actions that God takes in establishing his covenant.

- 1) Sin takes hold of the creation for the purpose of destruction.
- 2) Sin restructures people by ripping them apart and causing them to relate in enmity with one another and with God ... just as it happened in the Garden. Restructuring the relationship, sin seeks to rename all the disparate parts.
- 3) Sin gives new responsibilities, distributing work to destroy one another in rebellion against God. Man is to fight with God and one another and not the serpent.
- 4) Sin evaluates the situation and it is good in its eyes, because its purpose was destruction.
- 5) Sin, then, lives and matures in the misery that it creates.

Sin rips us apart as individuals, causing us to be at enmity with what we know to be our purpose in life. It rips us apart from one another, causing us to be at enmity in our relationships with other humans. Sin rips us apart from God, causing us to want to hide from him in our

shameful rebellion as we see when man ate the forbidden fruit. Sin, therefore, keeps us from fulfilling our purpose as God's image-bearers. God will ultimately deal with sin through the woman and her seed who will deal the death blow to the serpent by bruising his head (Gen 3.15). There will be hints, types, and shadows of what is to come for many centuries from this time forward. But until it happens in its fullness, the man and the woman are restored to a proper relationship with God and one another and the serpent in which man is called to continue in the responsibilities given to him at the first.

Sin will make the tasks given to man more difficult, but God in his grace will see to it that the covenant tasks of man will be accomplished. He comes to the woman and tells her that she will still bear children and be under the authority of her husband, but child-birth will be painful and she will chafe under her husband's authority. He comes to the man and tells him that he still has responsibility to work the ground, but it will now produce thorns and thistles. Nevertheless, God will cause it to produce good fruit.

Man still has gardening responsibilities even though he is out of *the* Garden. This means that he still has responsibilities to guard the covenant boundaries. This becomes clearer in successive covenants in which God explicitly tells his people time and again that their responsibility is to "guard" or "keep" his covenant (cf. e.g., Gen 17.9, 10; Ex 19.5). Man is to guard the woman and her environment. He is to nurture and cultivate her. She will sometimes be resistant and produce thorns and thistles herself, but as man looks in faith to God in his task, she will be fruitful.

We find in Genesis 3 that God's purpose for man and for the world has not fundamentally changed after the fall. What God is doing in redemption is putting the creation project back on track. Sin and the death that it brings will be dealt with because they frustrate creation's purpose at every level so that creation groans and travails waiting to fulfill its purpose (as Paul says in Rom 8.19ff.). God promises that all of this will be dealt with and his one purpose and plan for creation will be fulfilled. God will share his divine life of love with the creation.

Living the Story

Once again we see that this biblical teaching of covenant is important for our everyday lives. *Being created and re-created in the image of God means that you are in a relationship with God that defines who you are, what you are to be doing, and your purpose in life.* Your relationship with God is inescapable. You are created by him. Now, as Christians, you are re-created in Christ Jesus being renewed into his image and likeness as Paul says in Ephesians 4.

What we face is essentially the same problem that the first man and woman faced: there are voices all around us trying to persuade us that what God says about us isn't true; we define our own lives; we are the captains of our own ships, the determiners of our own purpose. When we listen to these voices as they compete against the voice of God, our lives are torn apart by sin. It can be no other way. The source of those voices didn't create or redeem you and, consequently, do not love you and have your best interest at heart. Though many times to our minds they may seem like reasonable voices, they are competing with the word of God. We are called to walk by faith, submitting ourselves to what God says about us.

Submitting in faith to God's Word has great benefits at every level. When the voices of the serpent that come through the world tell us that we are nothing and worthless, and we see evidence of that in ourselves, the word of God is to be heard and submitted to that says that we are the righteousness of God in Christ and that our lives have meaning and purpose. When the sin

that has torn us apart in ourselves and in our relationships tells us that there is no recovery, that all will be death, the voice of God in Christ says that you are forgiven and restored.

Dear believer, hear the voice of God in Christ to you concerning who you are and believe it. For those who may not be believers: you are created by God and are inescapably in relationship to him. He defines your life in every respect. To fight against this is to fight to your own destruction. Submit to him and his purposes for you and know what your life was meant to be all along.

CHAPTER 3: THE NOAHIC COVENANT: GOD'S PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD

So, in the beginning God established his covenant with the entire creation and specifically with man who would be his image-bearer. God told him who he was, what he was to do, and informed him of his destiny. Man was created as the image of God to serve and guard the garden and be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth and subduing it. God gave him one restriction: he must not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The man disobeyed that command, introducing sin and the death that it brings into the world. God comes to the Garden, hunts the man and his wife down, and eventually restores them to proper relationships with himself, one another, the serpent, and the world around them. Sin, death, and the serpent will be dealt a death blow eventually, but in the mean time God set the creation project back on the tracks. Sin frustrates the completion of that project and will have to be dealt with to complete the project, but the project is still on. Man still has his tasks in which he must mature and bring the world with him into this state of maturity in which the world will look like God's own throne room: heaven itself.

God restored the man to these tasks telling him to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. But just like the ground that he would work and guard, so the woman, who corresponds to the garden, will produce both good fruit as well as thorns and thistles. From her would come good seed and the seed of the serpent. God created the world to mature through these genealogical lines. But now sin is a part of the process. Sin will mature. That is precisely what we see as the story moves forward.

After the fall of Adam, he and Eve had two sons (at least two who are specifically mentioned): Cain and Abel. We discover through the story of these two sons that sin is on a course to mature over time. Cain, it comes to be known, is a thorn while Abel is good fruit. Through Cain violence against others is introduced. Because Cain despises his brother and his acceptance before God, he kills his brother Abel. For this sin God exiles him further from the land of Eden into the land of Nod.

Something that is important for our focus in this part of the story is Cain's worry about being killed by others who would seek justice (Gen 4.14). God strictly forbids anyone from touching Cain (Gen 4.15). Men, at this time, don't have the authority to execute murderers. This inability to stem the tide of violence on the earth through capital punishment means that sin and its consequences will be practically unrestrained. What Solomon later says in Ecclesiastes comes to pass: "Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil" (Eccl 8.11). Righteousness was supposed to mature in man. Instead sin matures through the genealogical line of Cain. In the seventh generation from Cain the sin of violence is perfected. Lamech proudly proclaims to his two wives (also a sin) that he has killed for the slightest infractions against him (Ge 4.23).

Nevertheless, God has not abandoned his creation plan. Through Adam and Eve good

fruit is borne: Seth. When he comes on the scene there is revival of the worship of YHWH. In his time men began to call upon the name of YHWH (Ge 4.26). Adam's genealogy is traced through Seth (Gen 5). He is the one made in Adam's image, taking up his specific responsibilities. He and his line are the ones through whom God will work to accomplish his plan.

But a problem arises. The good fruit starts mixing with and being choked out by the thorns and thistles. The sons of God—the line of Seth—and the daughters of men—the line of Cain—begin to intermarry (Ge 6.1ff.). That which characterizes the line of Cain—violence—begins to take over the whole world. There are no clear distinctions between the lines anymore. They are all corrupt and the world is filled with violence; men killing other men without restraint or punishment. God sees or evaluates the situation and declares that his Spirit will not always abide with man. The Spirit will not always give him the breath of life. God gives man one hundred twenty years to repent. After this he will destroy the earth, the consequence and fruit of sin. The old world must die because sin has matured and not righteousness.

Does this mean the annihilation of the old world? Will God discard his original plan and purpose for the creation, or will he, somehow, move the creation forward with man in the lead? We find out in the way that God deals with Noah.

Sometimes the covenant with Noah is passed over and given little attention. It is thought by some to be only a time of punishment for the world and only creating a climate for the “real redemption” of the world—the salvation of man—to take place. I believe that this is a terrible misreading of the biblical story. God's covenant with Noah is integral to understanding the unity of God's plan and purpose revealed in Scripture for the salvation of the world that comes in Christ Jesus.

God establishes his covenant with Noah. In doing so he takes those covenant ritual actions we looked at in chapter 2. God takes hold of the world, restructures it, establishing new relationships, gives new tasks, evaluates everything, and then enters into a time of rest (which, interestingly enough, is the meaning of Noah's name). More specifically, *in his covenant with Noah, God promises that the entire world—animals, dirt, as well as cultures—will be saved through his preserving grace, some of which will be exercised by man's own responsibility to carry out capital punishment.*

As I have mentioned previously, these new covenants do not mean the annihilation of the old. There is a real death of the old world that occurs. In the case of the covenant with Noah, the entire heavens and earth are destroyed. But in God's economy, resurrection of the old in a more glorified state is what occurs after death. The old world is there, but it is transformed. This is the case with God's covenant with the creation and Noah in particular. There is a continuity with the first creation. The old world is in the new world; the old covenant is in the new covenant.

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

As we look at the story of Noah, we see that there are several indicators that God is not scrapping his original creation and its purpose. Instead he is ever marching forward so that sin and death don't have the final say.

I will establish my covenant

First, there is God's initial conversation with Noah in Genesis 6. In Genesis 6.18 God tells Noah that he will establish his covenant with Noah. We discussed this some in earlier, but

let me refresh your memory. Though some want to dispute it, it seems clear from this phrase as well as its context in Scripture that this phrase refers to God's continuing a commitment that he has already made. He is continuing a covenant made at an earlier time. This covenant is the covenant God has with creation. God made this covenant with creation and established a man to be his representative to see to it that his purposes were carried out. When particular men failed to carry out his purposes, God found someone to replace them. At this time in history, that man was Noah. He was God's new Adam.

Think about it as being a company. This company has a plan to produce this certain product. The owner puts a man in charge of the company. He establishes his relationship with that man for a purpose. When that man doesn't fulfill his purpose, instead of seeing his whole company fold, he establishes another head of his company to produce what he wants produced. The company and its purpose and desired product haven't changed because the owner hasn't changed his mind. But the company needs new leadership, so the owner establishes another leader to continue his vision for the company. This is analogous to what God was doing with creation. He is putting Noah as the head of his creation, and through him he plans to fulfill his original purpose. He is not letting the creation go. He is continuing his original commitment. This is what it means for God to establish his covenant with Noah.

Men and animals are all from the first creation

Everything in the text screams at us that God is continuing his plan. Noah himself is not an alien from another planet, nor is he created from something else after the flood. Noah is a member of that first creation. It is Noah who will pass from the first creation to the new creation through (symbolic) death. Even so, it will be the same Noah.

Not only is it Noah who passes from old creation to the new but also his family. Noah's family goes on to the ark with him before the flood comes. This is not a new family after the flood. This is the old family of Noah passing through the death of the first creation and entering into the new creation.

This covenant is not only with men. It is also with non-human creation. God doesn't make non-human creation fresh after the flood. Noah takes animals from the old world. There are explicit connections between the way the Scriptures mention these animals in the time of Noah and the way they are mentioned in the original creation account. Animals and creeping things in Genesis 6.20 and 8.17 are mentioned in the same way in Genesis 1.24, 25, 30. These are the animals from the first creation that are passing through the waters into the new creation.

Another reference to the fact that we dealing with the old creation being transformed is that the basis for capital punishment given to Noah in Genesis 9 (something to which we will return momentarily) is the fact man is made in the image of God. This links what is being done with Noah to the original creation of man found in Genesis 1.26-27. Man is not fundamentally something different. He is what God created him to be originally. There has been no fundamental change in man as God's image.

Man's original purposes are renewed explicitly

Coinciding with the understanding that man continues in his original creation state as the image of God is the command that God repeats twice in Genesis 9: "be fruitful and multiply" (Ge 9.1, 7). This command comes after Noah, his family, and all the animals disembark from the ark.

They have stepped off the boat into this new world freshly renewed to hear that their original mandate remains in tact. This is the original creation covenant being renewed through Noah and his family.

When God first created man, he intended that man would be fruitful and multiply in every sense of that word. Man was to have children, who would also be in the image of God even though immature. These children, by virtue of being born into a family whose parents were in relationship with God, would also be declared to be in relationship with God (i.e., in covenant). They would have the same identity and with it the same responsibilities to mature into that which God wanted them to be. Noah, a righteous man, leads his family in this way. Because of God's grace, he takes his first creation family with him. And when he steps off that boat with his family, that same covenantal connection between him and his family still exists (that is, until Ham and his line break covenant).

All this to say, God is accomplishing his plans along the lines of the way he created the world to operate and mature. The old creation is within the new.

Imagery points to a continuity

Not only do the people, animals, and commands in the story point to the fact that God is continuing his original plan, the imagery in the story also points to this fact as well. When God created the world, he did so in what we might call a "three-decker" universe. The Second Word alludes to this when it says, "You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in *heaven above*, or that is in the *earth beneath*, or that is in the *water under the earth*" (Ex 20.4). There are these three regions to this created order: heaven, earth, and waters under the earth. When God instructs Noah to build a boat, just guess how he tells him to build it: with a "lower, second, and third deck." (Gen 6.16) The lower deck will be submerged under the water, the second deck will be on top of the water, and the third deck will have a window, like the windows of heaven referred to in the story of the Flood as well as elsewhere in Scripture (Gen 6.11; cf. also e.g., Isa 24.18; Mal 3.10). This ark is the image of the world.

Noah made this ark from wood from the original creation, spoiling the first corrupted creation as it were. He builds a new world in model form (and also literally) within the old world. This world is the new world joined with the previous world that will itself enter into a new world after the Flood. In this ark, as Peter says, these eight souls will pass through baptism and be saved (1Pet 3.20-21). They will come into this new world, but it will a renewed first creation.

God's plan to save the entire created order

Everything in the story points to a unity with God's original purpose and plan. He has not fundamentally changed. To do so would be to concede defeat to sin and the death that it brings. But our tenacious, unconquerable God will not allow that to happen. The world will mature in the way that God created it to mature until it shares life with God the way God intended. One truth that all these factors tell us is that this covenant that God makes with Noah and the rest of creation is that God intends to save his entire created order, not just man within it.

The story surrounding Noah is not given much attention when talking about God's plan for saving the world. But it is a horrible mistake to give little shrift to or leave out the story of Noah, the Flood, and God's covenant with Noah altogether and skip from the fall to Abraham. The covenant that God makes with Noah is integral to God's plan for the salvation of the world,

and, thus, the unity of the Scriptural story.

When the Noahic covenant is dealt with, there are times in which people will refer to it as simply a time when God promised to preserve the creation so that he could accomplish his purpose in saving man. The Noahic covenant, it might be said, establishes God's "common grace" but has little to do with God's "saving grace" (by which they mean saving people). "Common grace" as it is popularly understood speaks of the non-saving benefits that are shared by both believer and unbeliever, by the faithful and unfaithful. Jesus spoke about this in Matthew 5 when he instructed his disciples to love their enemies and so be children of their heavenly Father. Our heavenly Father causes his sun to shine on the evil and the good and causes his rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Mt 5.45). Unbelievers live in the same world and share God's grace with believers in this way. But this common grace has no saving benefits.

While it is true that unbelievers share great benefits along with believers because of the covenant God established with Noah, the focus of the Noahic covenant as being merely about common grace *for people* is way too narrow. This covenant is not simply about people. God makes this covenant with Noah, his family, and with "every living creature" (Gen 9.9). Every part of creation will be saved, not just man within it (or worse, from it!). The covenant with Noah and the creation that establishes the regularity of seasons and day and night in Genesis 8.20-22 doesn't just provide some type of "context" for man to be saved. The regularity of the seasons allows the world to mature and be fruitful. This covenant doesn't somehow separate man from the creation but establishes man and his functions within creation *so that the entire creation in all of its aspects can and will be delivered from sin and death*. The creation around us is not some "necessary evil" that continues on just so that man within it can survive for a while and then, one day, be delivered from it. God's promise to Noah establishes God's original creation purposes: the entire creation will be heavenized.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

Nevertheless, the world could not continue as it was. What God originally created was corrupted by sin. Sin matured to the point that it had to be cut off in a drastic fashion. God had to take the world into a state of death so that it could be raised to new life so that it could reach its goal. So, while the old creation is still present in the new world, the new creation is also present in the old world. Not everything stays the same. There is a transformation between the old world and the new world. Death of the old world really does happen and really does make a new situation. The question is, After moving through this massive death and coming into this resurrection, what is changing? How is man being glorified? How is the creation being glorified?

Man is given new authority

We will first deal with man's new situation in the world. Glorifying man means, in part, that God gives man more responsibility. "To glorify" in the Bible generally speaks about making something heavy. "Glory" refers to heaviness. For example, when God established Aaron and his sons to be priests, he instructed Moses that garments should be made for them for "glory and beauty" (Ex 28.2). They made all of these clothes out of plant and animal materials and had all sorts of beautiful stones integrated into the outfit. That priestly garb was literally "heavy." But this heaviness was the glory of the priest that he had to carry around. This glory revealed in his vestments spoke of his authority and responsibility before God and the people.

God's intention for man from the beginning was that he be glorified. Man was to mature and be clothed with garments that would reflect his position in the world, his calling, his vocation, his authority. To glorify man involves giving him more authority, more responsibility.

When God delivers Noah into the new creation, this is precisely what we see him doing. Remember the context of the story up to this point. The line of Cain was a violent people. When Cain killed Abel he was afraid that whoever found him would kill him. But God forbade anyone from killing Cain (Gen 4.14, 15). As I already pointed out, man did not have the authority before the flood to stem the violence of society by the use of capital punishment (i.e., putting a man to death for killing another man). Because of this sin matured and the entire earth, save Noah, became corrupt, characterized by violence.

The new world is different. When God makes his covenant with Noah, after telling him to be fruitful and multiply and indicating that he still had dominion over all living creatures (Gen 9.1-2), God tells him that man will have to give an account to other men when they shed blood. This will not only apply to men, but also to animals. Just as we see explained and expanded in the law given to Moses later, animals that kill humans are to be judged and punished in the same way: their lives are forfeited (cf. e.g., Ex 21.28ff.).

God vests man with the glorious robe of authority to execute God's own vengeance on murderers. Man has grown up a bit and is deemed by God to be able to handle this authority in a way that he obviously could not in the lifetime of Cain and before the Flood in general. But things have changed. This bestowal of authority tells us of a couple of things. First, it tells us that governments are accountable to execute God's justice. After the flood God gives this responsibility to man. While there will be times that God will intervene and take drastic measures to correct problems, man is responsible to handle societal problems. These governments are not to be a law unto themselves and, therefore, revert to what was true about the world before the Flood. These authorities are to submit to the law of God. These governments are supposed to be men who are more mature images of God and thus reflect the judgments of God in the world.

These governments are not merely structures. They are *men*. As men they are in covenant with God. Being in covenant with God means that they have responsibilities before God. This government responsibility, not so incidentally, is simply an expansion on the original responsibilities given to man. The man was to "serve and guard the Garden," something that eventually included other people. Man is to enforce those boundaries of the covenant with the authority God has given him in the way that God has instructed him. What God is doing in the time of Noah is adding a new dimension to that original responsibility.

God gives man the tools he needs to accomplish his God-given tasks in this new stage of the life of the world. Man will now have the authority to enforce the boundaries of the covenant—guard the garden—by taking the life of those who take the life of another. He has a judicial authority that he didn't have before. This itself will take on several different forms as history progresses, but this never changes. Whether it is the near-kinsman (many times translated "redeemer"), the judge, the king, or the emperor, the authority that God gives to execute his wrath upon evildoers is never taken away. Paul makes it clear in Romans 13 that the authorities that are in place are ordained by God. They are his ministers, literally his deacons, and bear the sword to execute justice (Rom 13.1-7). They will, in turn, answer to God for how they used that authority, but they have that authority. Some have used it wrongly through the years. Jesus himself was executed unjustly. But that doesn't revoke the authority given to man to enforce capital punishment.

Second, it tells us that cultures as cultures are a part of God's plan of the salvation of the

world. The covenant with Noah is not just about God saving individual souls. It certainly involves that, but it is not limited to that. God created man in his own image as both an individual and a community. Man was created to be a society and have a culture. God's establishment of authority to execute capital punishment means that he cares about societies and their cultures. Because this is God's covenant with man and, therefore, a part of his plan to deliver the entire world, this authority given to man is part and parcel to God's saving the world. This is one of the means by which God will accomplish his purpose to save the world. Society and culture cannot be separated from what it means to be in the image of God. So, when God works to restore his image and cause it to grow into what it is supposed to be, societies and cultures are inexorably involved.

This also means that societies and cultures bear responsibility to conform to God's standards. This is not just about individuals having a heart-only religion. This is about all of society—families and nations—be organized under God's lordship, willfully submitting to the King of kings. It is only as this happens that God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Third, capital punishment speaks of the grace of God given to cultures. Some people think of capital punishment as a cruel. You might hear questions like, "Why is it that we kill people to tell people that killing people is wrong?" People who ask these questions put the taking of all human life on the same level. That is, they say it is the same thing for a judge to have someone executed as it is for someone to enter your home and take your life. The Bible doesn't make that type of equivocation with "killing." One is murder. The other is justice. They both end with a dead person, but they are not the same. The last thing some people see is that capital punishment is God's grace given to man and the society. But that is because they don't understand sin or look through biblical eyes.

God gave capital punishment after sin had its run and the world turned into a place where murder was commonplace. Man can't survive like this. The purpose of creation can't be completed under these circumstances. God gives man the authority to execute murderers so that sin won't mature to that point anymore in a society. Societies in which this is neglected will have sin grow up to full flower, and that will mean the death of a society. God glorifies man by giving him this authority.

There is one more aspect about this that needs to be pointed out. When God gave this judicial/governmental authority in the covenant with Noah, this was not nation specific. For example, God gave laws to Israel that didn't necessarily apply to other nations. Food laws didn't apply to the Gentiles. But this covenant with Noah is a universal covenant. All the governments of the world are responsible to the King of kings. All governments of the world are given this authority and consequent responsibility. God makes this covenant with the whole creation and with "every living creature" (Gen 9.9, 10), not just one nation. All societies are responsible to order their cultures according to the way God has commanded.

A New Sign

Not only did God give Noah new responsibilities, glorifying him, God also glorified the creation by giving it a new promise with a new sign of this covenant. In the Garden God gave the man and the woman two trees as signs of his covenant: the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But now God adds a new sign: the bow in the clouds.

This sign is quite interesting when you understand what it is. The word used for "bow" in Genesis 9.13 speaks about a "war bow." In the Flood God declared and executed war on the

creation in a specific way. But now he is hanging up his bow, as it were. This is indicated by the fact that this bow is a sign that he will never destroy the earth again with a flood. The earth will continue through its regular seasons (Gen 8.20-22). God will not cut off all creation as he did during this time (Gen 9.15). God puts this multi-colored sign in the cloud so that when he sees it he will remember his covenant and act in restraint toward the creation, refusing to bring it to this kind of death again. God will be gracious and longsuffering with the world. Interestingly, at the end of Scripture we discover where this bow or rainbow actually is: it is around the throne of the Lamb (Rev 4.3). Jesus is always looking at the earth through this bow, remembering his covenant.

Living the Story

God's story shaped by his covenants speak to the realities of our lives at every level of our existence. We learn from God's interaction with Noah that *sin affects every aspect of our human existence along with the rest of non-human creation*. One aspect of the old creation that continued to exist before and after the Flood was the presence of sin in the human heart. God proclaimed both before and after the Flood that the thoughts of man are evil from his youth (Gen 6.5; 8.21). That sin is something that must be subdued in our own hearts. When it is not, what we see in the Flood is that it not only affects us, but it affects everything around us. Sin brings death to individuals, relationships, and to the rest of non-human creation. Sin is not simply an individual or personal matter. It starts in our hearts, but it doesn't stop there.

We also learn that *God is as concerned about societies as he is individuals*. God's plan for the world is not limited to snatching individual souls out of the creation. That would mean defeat for God's overall plan and purpose. No, God's plan is much bigger and more glorious. He is concerned that families as families, cities as cities, states as states, and nations as nations submit themselves to the lordship of Jesus and have all of their societal structures ordered by God's laws. This will be a consistent theme that continues to unite the story together, even to the point where Jesus commissions us to "disciple the nations."

What God establishes through Noah also instructs us that it is *God's grace that is fundamental to who we are and the accomplishment of the tasks he has given us*. Whatever God has called us to do, he has and will supply everything that we need. This is not a matter of us pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps and doing these things in our own strength. We are given the grace from start to finish. That's how we operate.

In the beginning of the story of Noah the Scripture says that Noah found grace in the eyes of YHWH (Ge 6.8). Everything throughout the story—blessings, commands, responsibilities—all indicate God's grace to Noah and to the rest of man from that point forward to do what he has called us to do. God has not called us to what his grace has not empowered us to do. Consequently, we boldly march forward in the grace of God to finish the work to which he has called us.

God's covenant with Noah is the expression of his grace to a world with which he desires to share his life. In his covenant God promises that the entire world—animals, dirt, as well as cultures—will be saved through his preserving grace, some of which will be exercised by man's own responsibility to carry out capital punishment. Through God's unrelenting, powerful love, his covenant purposes will be accomplished.

CHAPTER 4
THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT:
GOD’S PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH ABRAHAM’S SEED

You might think that after the Flood all of those problems from before the Flood would have been solved. But in the carrying over of the old creation into the new creation, though transformed, the problem of sin still remained. As mentioned in the last chapter, God’s declaration concerning the human heart was the same before and after the fall: the intentions of man’s heart are evil from his youth. (Gen 6.5 & 8.21). These people that God saved through the waters were still sinners and were called to do battle with the sin that was in their hearts and in society. One of Noah’s sons, Ham, like Cain, did not want to overcome the sin. We learn this from Ham’s actions relating to his father.

God had given Noah authority. In Scripture clothing is usually associated with one’s office. Noah laid aside that robe to take the rest that God gave him after the flood and with the fruit with which God blessed him in his vineyard. He was lying in his tent without his robe. In what I consider to be a recapitulation of the sin of Adam, Ham seeks to seize the robe of authority given to his father. His brothers refuse to throw in their lot with Ham and, instead, cover their father without ever seeing his nakedness. Ham’s sin is another fall in this new Garden scene in the new creation. Ham and his line through his son Canaan are cursed (cf. Gen 9.18ff.).

Ham’s line, through his son Canaan, takes up that wicked vocation of Cain’s line: they become the seed of the serpent through whom sin will mature in the world once again. Eventually, once the sin of the line of Canaan reaches the maturity of sin, God will cut them off from the land through the conquest under Joshua. But right there in the fresh new world, sin begins its growth once again. It moves through this genealogical line like a genetic disorder passed down from generation to generation.

But it doesn’t stay confined to one line. Nimrod, one of Ham’s sons and a violent man (“a hunter [of man],” Gen 10.8-9) like his predecessors, seeks to unite the world by building a city and a tower. He is following a pattern of Cain who built a city after he was exiled. The Tower of Babel or Babylon becomes a focal point of the story of Scripture and the maturation of sin. Nimrod and his ilk don’t want to spread out through the earth as God commanded. Instead they want to keep everyone in one place, trying to move things back to the way they were in the good ol’ days before the Flood. They will maintain order through violence, even using this new judicial authority to carry out their wicked plans.

Shem, the son through whom Noah’s vocation would be taken up and who was to rule over Canaan’s line (cf. Gen 9.26), is not immune. Like the sons of God before him, this chosen, godly line begins to intermingle with the sons of the serpent, adopting their confession of one humanistic state.

This can’t go on. God will not allow it. He comes down and sees what is happening, passing a judgment upon the situation. He confuses the languages of the people, scattering them throughout the world. In all of this malaise, someone has to take up the vocation to be the image of God in a proper fashion. That man will have to be from the line of Shem because God has not abandoned his promise to work along this genealogical line. This brings us to the story of Abraham and with him, his sons, the patriarchs.

As we read in Genesis 12.1-3, God calls Abraham out of the land of Babylon—Ur of the Chaldeans or Babylonians—to go to a land that he will show him. God makes promises to Abraham about what he will do for him. This inaugurates God’s covenant with Abraham. *God*

promises to continue his plan for the redemption and maturation of the creation through the death and resurrection of the seed of Abraham. Once again God is taking up the old creation, taking it through death, and transforming it in resurrection into a new epoch in history. We see throughout the Abrahamic story that the old creation is still present even as God makes this new covenant.

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

What we read in Genesis 12 is only the beginning of the covenant God makes with Abraham. God's covenant unfolds in the life of Abraham with specific, emphatic covenant-making rituals. What begins in chapter 12 is continued and moved forward in chapters 15 and 17. Just like with all of God's covenants that unfold throughout all of history, these aren't different covenants that God is making with Abraham. These are one covenant with dimensions being added as time progresses. Certain themes ties all of these together.

Paul lets us know in Romans 4 that the chronology of the way God unfolds his covenant with Abraham is important. What God did with Abraham and when tells us, for instance, how Abraham can be the father of all who believe, both Gentile and Jew. In Genesis 15 God counts Abraham righteous by faith. He did this while Abraham was still uncircumcised (meaning he was still a Gentile). It was only after this that God gave him the sign of circumcision which sealed this righteousness he already had by faith. Circumcision set him apart from the Gentiles, but now he is a father of all who believe. Again, even though it is developed in stages, it is one covenant with Abraham that is carried on through particular sons in his lineage who were sovereignly chosen by God like Abraham himself to carry out God's covenant mission for man.

Our focus has been on the unity of Scripture and how God's covenants provide that unity. We see in the Abrahamic covenant a continuation of the same story with new dimensions. His life and the covenant God makes with him are both old and new. He and the world are being transformed through death and resurrection. There are several key aspects to this covenant that tie it both to the old world and the new: *seed, land, and blessing.*

Seed

Implicit within God's original statements to Abraham and explicit later on in Genesis 15 and 17, God promises to give Abraham a "seed." Sometimes this is translated "offspring" or "descendant." The seed in this case refers to a child or children. While the intentions of translations like "offspring" or "descendant" are good, they narrow the biblical imagery down too much.

In the beginning God creates plants producing seed and fruit trees that have seed in themselves (Gen 1.11). The plant world provides images of man. Man is gardener, a farmer. He has seed that he plants and cultivates in a garden that he protects (i.e., the woman). That imagery shouldn't be lost upon us. Abraham being promised a seed is the continuation of the promise that he will take up the original gardening responsibilities of his father Noah and, before him, Adam.

God's original creation order was that the man and the woman would have children and, without sin in the world, all of those children would be good seed. They would be cultivated in the fear of the Lord and would have seed in themselves so that they would become fruitful in their time. When sin enters the world, God's plan is redeemed. He will continue his original plan. God will restore the children born in sin to their believing parents so that the family he created

can complete their mission on the earth. But there is a difficult twist: there will be bad seed. Man's garden responsibilities will be difficult and he will fight hard with the ground. Sometimes thorns and thistles will grow instead of good fruit. Nevertheless, God promises that good fruit will be produced. There will be good seed. God will complete his plan through a genealogical line, just like he intended from the beginning. Eventually there will be a seed—the seed of the woman—who will finally defeat the seed of the serpent.

When we come to the story of Abraham, once again we find that he is connected to the old world like Noah before him through genealogy. He is not something completely new, coming from another world or freshly created from something other than this world under the curse. No, Abraham is from the line of Shem (Gen 11.10ff.), the line God promised would overcome the wicked line of Canaan (Gen 9.26), the ones who had taken up the vocation of the serpent. God has not abandoned his creation plan or intent. Abraham and Sarah are both from the old creation. This covenantal-genealogical line of promise remains significant within the story of Abraham and Sarah. It is not something that stops when it reaches Abraham so that God starts all over with another plan.

One of the major themes of the story of Abraham is that God has promised a seed to Abraham and Abraham spends many years waiting on God to fulfill that promise. Eventually God gives him that promised seed, Isaac. Even though it is Isaac who is chosen to take up the special “seed-line” mission (a mission that will become clearer as the story progresses), the broader principle of God redeeming his creation order of parents and children and their relationship to him is still in place. God includes all of Abraham's household as his people, not just Isaac. Ishmael as well as all of the servants of Abraham in his household are included in God's “ark” that is now the family of Abraham. They are all declared by God to be his people.

Not only is Abraham connected to the old world through the continuing genealogical promise, we also find that he and Sarah are themselves images of the old world under sin. They are symbolically united to the old world in a very literal fashion. The old world is under the curse of death. This happened in Adam and was recapitulated in Noah and most recently reached its fullness, its maturity, at the Tower of Babel where God ripped humanity to pieces. The world is dead. The garden is barren. This is realized in Sarah, Abraham's wife. She has a barren womb. She is dead (something that Paul alludes to in Romans 4). Though she is not being cursed because of personal sin, she is reflective of the condition of the world: dead and, thus, unfruitful. The only hope for the world is resurrection; life from God that comes by his gracious, re-creative power. But all of this is to say that Abraham and Sarah are very much a part of the old world.

Land

Not only is the theme of the *seed* prominent in the story of Abraham, there is also a theme of *land*. Like the seed, this is not a new theme in the story of Scripture, but one that is taken up by God with Abraham. In the beginning God created the earth. On the third day he caused the land to emerge from the water. From that land, that dirt, sprang up all of those seed-bearing plants and trees that had fruit with seed in themselves. Also from the dirt God created the land animals, birds, and man (Gen 1.24; 2.7, 19), all of which are considered a part of the land.

In the Flood God submerged the land once again—including man, land animals, and birds—saving only that part of the land that was carried through the waters on the ark. But then God caused the original, cleansed land to emerge into the new creation along with those who had been saved through the waters. Because sin had not been abolished, some of this land would still

have thorns and thistles growing in it. The land would be occupied by the likes of the sons of Canaan, the seed of the serpent.

In God's covenant with Abraham he promises him a land. This land is the land of the old creation (i.e., the creation that was there under sin before God's covenant with Abraham). God is not going to make a completely new earth for Abraham and his seed. They will inherit the old. The old must be transformed through faithful labor under God, but it is the old that is transformed not something new altogether.

The Bible speaks of land in at least two different ways: the dirt (*'adamah*) and an organized space or people (*'erets*). Later to speak of the land becomes practically synonymous with speaking of Israel. The land is geographical space, but it is also the place in which man dwells and is organized into cultures, societies, or nations. God's promise to Abraham is that he will be a blessing to all nations (Gen 12.1-3). All the lands of the earth will be blessed in Abraham and his seed. Paul interprets this in Romans 4.13 that the entire world is the inheritance promised to Abraham.

So, when God promises Abraham that he will inherit the nations, to what nations is he referring? Well, back in Genesis 10 the nations of the earth that participated in the debacle at Babel are mentioned. There are seventy nations there in Genesis 10, a symbolic number that goes on throughout Scripture to represent all the nations of the world. Abraham will inherit all the nations that defected and were dispersed at Babel. These are the nations of the old world. God didn't annihilate the old world. He rearranged it dramatically, bringing it to a death in ripping the peoples apart. But these are still the old nations. These nations are the nations that will be blessed through Abraham and his seed.

The land in both of these respects—geographical space and nations—is at war with Abraham. This reflects the curse that is being executed by the ground promised in Genesis 3. Adam was told that he would work the ground and he would eat of its fruit by the sweat of his brow. The ground would fight back, being unwieldy and wanting to produce thorns and thistles. As history progresses and the relationships of the ground and man become more complex, we see this battle being waged at more complex and mature levels. This is what Abraham is facing.

Abraham has nothing but problems with the land after God makes these promises. Consider just a few instances. Just after God's pronouncement in Genesis 12, Abraham is driven out of the land by famine. Eventually, the land can't hold both him and his nephew Lot and they have to divide (Gen 13). The land rises up against Abraham in the form of people as well. The kings of the land (the nations) rise up against Abraham's kinfolk, Lot, and Abraham has to fight the nations to restore his nephew (Gen 14). Abraham's children, Isaac and Jacob, experience the same types of battles themselves with things like wells and kings.

This is the old world in which Abraham lives and in which this covenant is made. He is not snatched out of the old world but left in it for its transformation and maturation.

Blessing

Another prominent theme that begins in creation, continues through Noah, and finds a place in God's covenant with Abraham is that of *blessing*. We hear just after the man is created as man and woman that God "blessed them," telling them to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth, and subduing it. "Blessing" is much deeper than the superficial "good things happening to you." Scripturally, blessing involves God sharing his own life with people so that they can enjoy and do at a creaturely level what God himself enjoys and does as God.

When God blessed the man the woman, he allowed them to share life together in a most intimate way. They were in a union of love. They formed a community. Every other aspect of the blessing God grants is dependent upon this union. Abraham and Sarah are blessed as husband and wife and will continue to share this union with one another. This blessing, as will be seen, will be extended to others who will eventually live in a community that reflects the life of God.

Blessing also originally involved being fruitful and multiplying, filling the earth. Man shared the blessing of being a creator of life. He brings new life to the world through what we call procreation.

Blessing also included dominion over the earth. Within the blessing of man originally and inexorably connected to the promise of progeny is the ability to subdue the earth, organizing, beautifying, and filling it up so that it will reflect God's heavenly space.

When God comes to Abraham he gives him a seven-fold blessing. The use of the word "blessing" itself in this context tells us that God is continuing his original creation project through Abraham. Again, he is renewing his creation mandate. In fact, in Genesis 17.6 God's promised blessing is that Abraham and Sarah will be "fruitful," making an explicit connection with the original man as well as the continuing work through Noah and his family.

The fact that it is a seven-fold blessing shouldn't go unnoticed either. We have in this an imagery that connects this blessing with the seven days of creation. The number "seven" is important in telling us what God is doing through Abraham: he is making a new creation. But again, while it is new, it is this original creation made in seven days that is being transformed.

Once again we see that the old creation and God's purposes for it are not being abandoned. In fact, they are progressing. God is moving them ever forward. But moving forward through history means change. Just as children mature into adults—the story of history written into every life—so God causes the world to move forward into greater maturity. As this maturity happens things change. There are new dimensions to life, added responsibilities, and new life situations for which we need to be equipped. So, while the old world is still in the new world, there is a new world that transforms the old world.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

The themes of *seed*, *land*, and *blessing* not only indicate that Abraham is united to the old world, but what God does with them in the covenant with Abraham tells us that he is making a new world.

Seed

With each decline and fall in history, the mission of the seed is refocused and narrowed. This begins with a man like Seth. Seth, the son of Adam, and his entire line are supposed to fulfill the mission of being the image of God. But the line becomes corrupt and God must narrow the focus down to another Adam figure who will start up the creation project afresh. The line of Shem, the son of Noah, becomes corrupt. They join up with the Babelites. God takes one of the descendants of Shem, Abraham, a member of the old creation, and makes a new creation out of the old. Abraham is old and yet new. He is God's new Adam along with his wife Sarah, a new Eve, from whom God will accomplish his creation purposes. This will continue through Isaac, who is chosen over Ishmael, and Jacob who is chosen over Esau, and the sons of Israel, who are chosen over every other nation on earth.

This narrowing of the seed should not be misunderstood to mean that these are the only ones who are being saved during this time. These aren't the only ones who have a relationship with God. The seed is the one who has this special mission that God declared in Genesis 3.15. The seed's mission is exclusive, but the effects of what he does will be a blessing to the nations (Gen 12.1-3). The Abrahamic covenant begins to help us see more clearly how God's plan for the salvation of the world (i.e., redemption from sin *and* bringing the world to maturity) is universal in scope and particular in mission.

The seed will have the responsibility to bruise the head of the serpent for the sake of the world. The seed will have the responsibility to lead the world into being more and more conformed to the image of God and making the world look like God's heaven. The Abrahamic covenant also begins to give us a clearer picture of how this will happen: through death and resurrection. Sarah has a barren womb and is well past child-bearing years when God tells her she will have this promised son. Abraham himself, being nearly one hundred years of age is also as good as dead in terms of being able to father children (something to which Paul alludes in Romans 4). The seed and life for the world will have to come through death, not in spite of it. There will be no getting around it. God will have to raise the dead.

This is further explained to us when God gives the sign of the covenant of Abraham in Genesis 17: circumcision. Being a sign of the covenant, as Paul says, a seal of the righteousness Abraham already had by faith (Rom 4.11), we understand that God is still working within the same covenant structure already established in Genesis 12 and 15. He is sealing all that he has already told him. But in circumcision he is also intimating how this will come about. Circumcision is a covenant ritual that cuts a man in half. It is a symbolic death. In it he dies to who he was before and all of his previous relationships. In this case, he endures the death brought on from the sin of Adam. He bears the sin and dies for it. Of course, he lives through it because it is ritual death and God is gracious. But it is a real death.

Sin must be dealt with, and death is the only way to deal with it. It is only after Abraham is circumcised that the seed, Isaac, can be born. Once Abraham is "cut off," once he dies, then, in a powerful act of resurrection and re-creation, God will produce life. Through death will come resurrection.

Circumcision, among other things, marks out who is called to endure this death; who will carry this mission; who will bring life to the world through death. This is the mission of the seed, Abraham's seed. We see this later in Isaac's life when he is a young man. Abraham takes him to Mt. Moriah to offer him up as a sacrifice. The writer of Hebrews indicates that in some sense Isaac died and was resurrected. It was in parabolic fashion, but death and resurrection are seen there on the mountain (Heb 11.19).

Land

Not only is the seed given greater and new clarity, we also see that the promise of land is given greater clarity. In that famous covenant-making (or, literally, covenant-cutting) ceremony in Genesis 15, this promise becomes the focus. Remember the two ways the land is spoken of: the ground and the organized people. Up until this time Abraham has been fighting both through famine and kings. The curse has produced thorns and thistles, and God's people must continue to plow, plant, and cultivate—fight the ground—in order for it to be fruitful. This fruit will be the ground producing fruit and the nations being at peace with God and one another and productive.

Will this ever happen? How can this happen if Abraham doesn't have an heir who will

take up and complete this mission? This is his question in Genesis 15. God takes five different types of animals that are made out of the dust of the ground, just like man, and has Abraham divide them all in half except for the birds. While Abraham is in a deep sleep (like Adam was when God was making the woman), God passes through these animals in the form of a smoking furnace and flaming torch. These animals, representative of both the land and man (specifically Abraham) will be reconciled through the work of God. God will bring them together, not allowing the curse to be the last word.

The image of God as the smoking furnace and flaming torch evokes images of God's presence on the top of Mt. Sinai (Ex 19). His presence is a "consuming fire" (Heb 12.29). The fact that God chooses to reveal himself in this image is telling of how this reconciliation will take place. Reconciliation will come through the fiery furnace. God's people must needs go through God's furnace of affliction, but they must always remember that it is God's fire and they will be the better for it. They will suffer under the Egyptians for four hundred years, but God will bring them out of it a glorified people. God will bring peace. It will come through a war that will take several different forms, but peace will come. Once the sin of the people of the promised land (i.e., the land of Canaan, grandson of Noah) is filled up, God will execute his war upon them and cleanse the land, a token of what he will do ultimately through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ.

God will give Abraham a seed. God's promise concerning Abraham's seed is described in several places in interesting, yet telling terms. In Genesis 15 they are compared to the "stars of the heavens" (Gen 15.5; 22.17; cf. also 26.4; 37.9-10). In other places Abraham's seed is compared to the "dust of the earth" (Gen 13.16; cf. also 22.17; 28.14; 32.12). It is quite explicit that God is speaking about the numbers that will eventually be counted as Abraham's children. But these images speak of something else. God could have simply said that they would be innumerable. But he used the images of the earth and the heavens. The stars of the heavens are put in the firmament heavens on the fourth day of creation in order to be rulers of the earth (Gen 1.16). Jacob (who becomes Israel) and his family all understand that they are the lights in the heavens. When Joseph speaks about the sun, moon, and eleven star-constellations bowing down to him, they readily understood (Ge 37). Abraham's seed will constitute a new heavens and a new earth. They will be the ones who rule. Therefore, the land-ground and nations-will be at peace. God makes the fact that Abraham's seed will be rulers quite explicit in Gen 17.6: "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and *kings shall come from you.*" God will bring peace to the earth through an Abrahamic seed who will have all authority in heaven and upon earth.

Blessing

Closely associated with the promise of the seed and the land is the blessing pronounced by God concerning Abraham. God also blesses Abraham, moving that original creation project forward in him. God eventually makes Abraham and Sarah fruitful in giving them a son, Isaac. That son is fruitful, and it continues on until the sons of Israel were in Egypt having been "fruitful and increasing greatly; they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them (Ex 1.7)." God blessed him with fruitfulness. But it was not just through Isaac. God made Abraham a father of many nations. Ishmael is blessed. Then after Sarah dies and Abraham marries Keturah, he fathers many more children who become nations in the world (cf. Gen 25.1 ff.). Abraham is the father of many nations.

The Abrahamic blessing to all nations is also carried out through establishing worship

and evangelizing the nations. In Abraham we see more clearly the plan and project of God for his people. Blessing involves dominion, and in Abraham we see clearly a way that this dominion is taken in the world. It has always been there, but it is given more clarity and moved forward in Abraham in a way that it wasn't before. Abraham goes throughout the land building altars everywhere he goes. Though it goes far beyond the introductory scope of our study, these altars established by Abraham become the altars to which the people of God return later throughout their history. He goes through the land evangelizing, seeing people converted to the worship of God Almighty. For example, we find in Genesis 14 that the Amorites are Abraham's allies (Gen 14.13). Also, at Sarah's death, we discover that the Hittites, considered Abraham a "prince of God" among them (Gen 23.6). They were around one of those altars Abraham built. Abraham established the worship of God in the land and evangelized the people.

This is how God's people will rule the earth: they will establish the worship of God in an area and call people to come and worship him. Abraham's seed will lead the world in understanding what it means to worship God. They will be the place for worship. It is here that the world will find life—blessing. Blessing will flow out from the altars of Abraham's seed and give life to the world.

One aspect of the blessing that is new with the introduction of Abraham is that the blessing of the world will depend upon how the world relates to Abraham: those who bless Abraham will be blessed, and those who curse Abraham will be cursed. The way the world relates to Abraham and his seed will be the difference between life and death. Abraham and his seed are the place where you meet and learn about the one true God and how to worship him. Those who respond by blessing them will themselves be blessed.

Now, how was Abraham to respond to all of this from start to finish? The same way Adam was to respond when God told him what to do and not to do. The same way Noah was to respond when God told him to build a boat: faith. Before and after the fall, faith has always been the proper response to God's word. Abraham was a man of faith; a man who believed God's promise that he would raise the dead (Rom 4.17). That faith must characterize those who want to be called his children and inherit the promises given to him.

The unity of God's plan remains unbroken. Sin causes all sorts of disruptions, divisions, and death, but our God is the God of resurrection. He brings life from the dead. His plan and purposes will not be defeated. His purpose marches on.

Living the Story

Abraham is given and has taken up God's original creation project. One aspect of this project comes into even clearer focus with Abraham and is incumbent upon his children to remember: *worship is fundamental to our dominion-taking project*. The way cultures begin to change is the establishment of faithful worship. Once the altar and house of God are established, then the culture can begin to be developed. It is not developed by first establishing a proper government system. Cultures are built properly through proper worship.

Abraham himself only saw small glimpses of what was to come in the future, but he was faithful in establishing these cultural centers. God honored those places later on in history even though for spans of time they went through serious decline. If we are to be like our father Abraham, then we too must see that worship must precede and be the foundation for any cultural change that we may seek. It may take generations to come about, but God will honor the faithful worship of his people.

Operating in this way is a call to faith. It is *faith that must characterize the children of Abraham*. All Abraham had to go on from God was his word. He discovered that his word was trustworthy; he was a God who was Almighty and could raise the dead. But he had to wait a long time before he saw much of anything come about. Abraham's children—that would be we who are in Christ—must live the same way: by faith. We are not to judge the world around us by what we see happening. We judge by God's word. Only through the eyes of faith do we see the world as it really is.

As we operate in faith, we, the people of God, become a blessing to the nations because *blessing comes through Abraham's seed*. For the nations to live in these blessings, they must acknowledge the true seed of Abraham: Christ and his people. The only way the world will be blessed—individual lives put back together, relationships restored, societies living in peace—is for the world to bless the seed of Abraham. The world must acknowledge and submit to the true seed of Abraham and discover who and how to worship. When the world does this, the world will come to life.

CHAPTER 5

THE MOSAIC COVENANT: GOD'S PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH THE LAW

We left the story last time dealing with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God established his covenant with Abraham, blessing him, promising him a seed and a land. Though there were some hiccups on the way, Abraham was faithful. God initially fulfilled his promise to Abraham and Sarah by giving them Isaac. Isaac, after his own death and resurrection on Mt. Moriah, was eventually married and had sons through Rebekah (who, like her mother-in-law, was initially barren). Of his two sons, Esau and Jacob, God chose Jacob to take up the seed-line mission. This mission involved being the people who would die so that the blessing promised to Abraham—life for the world—could be realized.

Jacob lives a faithful life (contrary to popular opinion). Along the way he must battle different people: Esau, his brother, as well as Laban, his uncle and father-in-law. Eventually he discovers that the one with whom he has been wrestling the entire time has been God himself. From the womb God put Jacob in these wrestling matches so that he might mature to become a true image-bearing son and be able to handle the responsibility given to him. He wrestles faithfully through all of these matches, and God changes his name to Israel, because, God says, he has wrestled with God and men and prevailed (Ge 32.28). Israel is one who wrestles with God and man and prevails. Israel is one who goes through the fiery trials and is to endure because all of Israel's struggles and even death will mean life for the world. Blessing will flow from Israel to the rest of the world. Israel must be a man ... and eventually a people and place ... who can endure death and trust God for resurrection.

Sadly, this is not the characteristic history of Israel's children; at least not all of them. Israel has twelve sons, one of whom is chosen to rule over all the rest. He is a younger son and the older sons (and possibly even Jacob/Israel himself) doesn't quite like what he hears about God's revelation through dreams of this younger son, Joseph, ruling over all of his other brothers as well as his parents. So, several of the sons of Israel decide to dispose of this younger brother who is chosen to reign over them. They want to kill him, but he winds up being sold into slavery, eventually ending up in Egypt.

Through a series of events, this slave boy becomes the Pharaoh's right-hand man. He is

even considered to be a “father to Pharaoh” (Gen 45.8). This means that he is teaching Pharaoh what is right and wrong and telling him how to judge the world that is under his control (cp. Ps 105.22). Pharaoh knows that Joseph has the ear of the one true God because of two dreams that he interpreted for Pharaoh. Those dreams revealed that there would be seven years of plenty and seven years of famine. Joseph directed Pharaoh in what he should do through all of it.

Well, the famine struck the land of Canaan, just like it did back in Abraham’s time. This famine drove the sons of Israel to Egypt to look for food ... just like Abraham had to do years earlier. Again, through a series of events, Joseph reveals himself as their brother and brings his whole family down to Egypt. The sons of Israel were to find refuge in Egypt. Egypt was to watch over and care for Israel—that is, they were to bless the seed of Abraham—and, in turn, the sons of Israel were to teach the Egyptians who and how to worship (something that Joseph was doing).

While Joseph was alive, things were going well. But after Joseph died (and possibly before), the children of Israel became intrigued with all of these gods that the Egyptians had worshiped. They began worshipping those idols of the Egyptians (Josh 24.14). The old covenant world of Abraham was breaking down. There was a fall into sin. Along with that, they were entering a new situation of growth that demanded new structures. God takes care of all of these things in the next major epoch of history through Moses and the covenant he makes during his time. In consistent covenant-making fashion, God will *take hold* of Israel, *restructure* her, *distribute* his work (i.e., give her certain responsibilities), *evaluate* her, and then go to his *rest* and enjoy what he has done.

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

Once again, as we see this new epoch of history dawning in the time of Moses, we see that it is a continuation of what God has been doing previously. He has not jettisoned his original creation plan and purpose. He is ever and always moving it forward. The old creation is always present in the new. Even when we see significant differences, they are differences that arise from transformation of the old, not its annihilation. So it is with the relationship between the covenant through Moses and its relationship to Abraham, Noah, and the original creation. Having seen the unity of God’s plan between creation, Noah, and Abraham, we now look specifically at how the Mosaic covenant relates to the Abrahamic covenant. We discover yet again that these two are not at odds in any way, but what God does through Moses is the same old plan. Those themes that united the Abrahamic covenant are still present in the Mosaic time: *seed*, *land*, and *blessing*.

Seed

When dealing with Israel under Moses, God is indeed dealing with “the sons/children of Israel.” God doesn’t introduce a new group of people on the scene from a totally different family or some being from another planet. These are the direct descendants of Abraham. They are Abraham’s seed. God’s genealogical-covenantal promises are still in force. He has not abandoned his plan, creating a new people from whole cloth. Even when the children of Israel heinously sinned at Mt. Sinai by worshipping the golden calf when the covenant proper was established, God would not abandon this genealogical promise. Yes, he threatened to wipe out all of Israel at that point. But he said that he would make Moses a great nation. Moses, of course, was also a descendant of Abraham. God is committed to his plan. His creation order will be redeemed.

At this time in history he begins by redeeming Israel from Egyptian slavery. The children of Israel are under severe bondage. God hears their groaning and he remembers his covenant (note: singular) with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Ex 2.24). God's dealings with Israel in Egypt and beyond are based upon the fact that they are heirs of God's covenant promises given to their fathers. They are participants in this Abrahamic covenant. They are the seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise.

The fact that they are the continuing seed of Abraham from that old world that is breaking to pieces is also seen in the fact that they continue to receive the sign of that covenant: circumcision. They are the ones who have taken up the seed-line mission. Interestingly, when the Law is formally given to Moses, there is no repeated command to circumcise their male sons on the eighth day. It is assumed that they would do this. The only way to assume this is because they understand themselves to be Abraham's seed, and, thus, still a part of the Abrahamic covenant. From this point forward, and especially seen in the later Scriptures (the New Testament), we see a relationship between circumcision given to Abraham and the Law given through Moses. There is an inexorable unity between the two.

Paul, in warning the Galatians not to turn back the clocks to the time before Christ came, tells the Galatian churches that the one who receives circumcision is obligated to keep the whole Law (Gal 5.3). Before Christ came, to receive the sign of the covenant of circumcision meant that you brought yourself under the Law of Moses. The Abrahamic covenant is united to the Mosaic covenant. This is the same seed God promised Abraham.

Land

Not only is there a unity and a continuity with the seed of Abraham, there is also a unity and continuity with the promise of land given to Abraham. In Genesis 15 God promised Abraham that he would inherit a specific land. In that covenant ceremony of Genesis 15, God even told Abraham how long it would be that he and his seed would be slaves in the land: four hundred years (Gen 15.13). When those four hundred years were up, God would bring judgment on that nation and deliver his people and give them this land (Gen 15.14ff.). This time of deliverance lands squarely on what we know as the Exodus. It is at that time that God delivers his people, and under Moses and continuing with Joshua (and beyond) God gives them the land promised to Abraham.

Instructing Moses what to tell the people about their upcoming deliverance, he tells Moses to relate to them that he will bring them "into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession" (Ex 6.8). What God accomplishes for the sons of Israel under Moses is the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise, not its annulment.

Blessing

The third theme that unites the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants is that of blessing. The promise of the Abrahamic covenant of blessing is partially fulfilled in the Mosaic covenant. Abraham has become fruitful and multiplied. A nation has formed from him. At the beginning of Exodus we read language that intentionally reflects this theme of blessing that began in creation and continued through Noah and Abraham: "But the people of Israel were **fruitful** and **increased greatly**; they **multiplied** and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was **filled** with them. (Ex 1.7). God has been faithful to his promise with Abraham. The sons of Israel during the time of

Moses are the fulfillment of the promise of blessing to Abraham. Once again, this ties them to Abraham and the covenant made with him.

Even in the covenant made at Mt. Sinai we see that Israel herself is to take up this promise and responsibility of blessing. They are to be faithful to God's covenant. When they are faithful to God's covenant, God promises them in Leviticus 26.9 that he will cause them to be "fruitful and multiply" and he will confirm his covenant with them. (Leviticus, was also a part of the covenant established at Mt. Sinai. The children of Israel don't leave Sinai until Numbers 10.) The children of Israel are the ones who have been given this special vocation by God to be his true image-bearers in the world. They are to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth, and subduing it.

As God has multiplied them, so he will cause them to subdue the land that he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They will take dominion through the conquest of the promised land beginning with Moses and continuing through Joshua. They will subdue the earth, establishing worship in the world, and work the land to make it fruitful in every way. (Well, that is at least what they were supposed to do.) This was their God-given vocation as children of Abraham.

You see, the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants are not at odds with one another. This is something that Paul addresses in Galatians 3. The Mosaic covenant becomes a means by which the promise given to Abraham is eventually fulfilled completely. The Mosaic covenant is not the end or the goal. That is what Paul is telling the Galatians. Paul proves this from the nature of the covenants themselves. BUT this doesn't mean that the Mosaic covenant is contrary to the Abrahamic covenant. God forbid! God is fulfilling his promise and plan given to Abraham *through* the Law-covenant given to Moses. The Mosaic covenant is the advancement of the Abrahamic covenant just not its final destination. God's promise to Abraham that he and his seed will be a blessing to the nations will come about *through* God's dealing with Israel. God is not setting up some alternative track to the covenant with Abraham.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

Though the covenant through Moses is unified with the covenant given to Abraham and that old world remains in some form, there are some new aspects that are being added as God restructures his people in this new administration in history. The old Abrahamic heavens and earth—the old world—had to come to its death so that it could be resurrected into a new, better, and more mature life. God makes all things new, transforming the old world.

The Law

There are several distinguishing marks of this covenant given through Moses to Israel. One of the primary distinguishing marks is *the Law*. God's covenant through Moses was made at Mt. Sinai. Lest we think that this only involves the Ten Words, we need to understand the historical setting.

The people of Israel came to Sinai and God began his covenant-making with them in Exodus 19. From that point in Scripture up to Numbers 10 the people are still at Mt. Sinai. All during that time God is instructing them. This includes the instructions for and the building of the Tabernacle in the latter part of Exodus, the instructions for worship in Leviticus, and the arranging of the people along with their responsibilities at the beginning of Numbers. Yes, the two tablets of stone with the Ten Words written on them were foundational to the covenant and,

in some sense, represented the whole of the covenant. They were the heart of the covenant. But there is much more to the covenant at Sinai than *just* the Ten Words. God unfolds it over the course of a year.

The Law, *Torah*, was instruction about who they were and how they were to live as God's people. This doesn't mean that all of the elements of the Law given at Sinai were completely new. There were, in fact, elements of the Law given at Sinai that were already being practiced in previous times. For instance, the designation between clean and unclean animals was something of which Noah was aware. He was told to take so many clean animals and so many unclean animals with him on the ark (Gen 7.2). Noah only sacrificed clean animals when he disembarked from the ark (Gen 8.20). God gave Israel new relationships with clean and unclean animals, but those designations were not completely new. God transformed them.

It is also true that before the Law as given at Sinai that the Sabbath day was already set aside as a day of rest and worship. God gave Israel manna before they arrived at Sinai. There he gave them specific instructions concerning gathering manna on the sixth day and resting on the seventh (Ex 16). This is an ordinance carried on from the creation. It is not new, but it is given a special place in the life of the nation of Israel.

As mentioned earlier, the Law takes on a special relationship with the continuing sign of the covenant of circumcision. Circumcision, as we learned in the preceding chapter, was the mark that, among other things, marked off the people who had the mission to be cut off for the sake of the world. Circumcision told you who would complete the Abrahamic mission so that the Abrahamic promise of life to the world would come. Circumcision separated this particular seed of Abraham from all other believers as well as the rest of the world for the sake of mission. What we find is that circumcision provided a foundation that is now explained in detail and expanded in the Law. Circumcision separates this special people from all the people of the earth, and the Law further clarifies these distinctions from the nations through laws like the food laws. The Law also tells them how they, separated from the nations, are priests *for* the nations. They are given laws concerning worship by which they will lead the Gentiles to the mountain of YHWH and teach them what it means to worship the one true God. We discover in Numbers 15 that the Gentiles can't draw as near as the people of Israel in many ways, but they can come to the Tabernacle and offer sacrifices and participate in all of the Feasts except Passover. There are Gentile believers out there. Israel is not the only people who are believers. But they are the ones with this priestly mission. That mission will be in place until it is completely accomplished and there is an end to repeated blood sacrifice. Circumcision in general and now the Law more specifically marks out the place and the people in whom the sin of the world will be brought to justice. This will be the place of death; something indicated by the sign of circumcision. It will be through that death of Israel that life will come to the world in fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. The world, in this sense, must be saved *through* the Law; that is, through the Law people, Israel. It is a necessary chapter in the story.

There are many changes as Israel is constituted as this special people with this specific mission. God himself writes the foundational covenant documents with his own finger in stone initially (cf. Ex 24.12; 31.18). These are the Ten Words. The fact that they are "Ten Words" would not be lost upon a Hebrew at this time and they should not be lost upon us. While God created the world in seven days, he did so with ten words. "And God said," is repeated ten times in his creative work in Gen 1. God is making a new creation in Israel. As mentioned, it is continuous with the old, but these Ten Words will form a new nation. They will be a new world, a new creation.

While we are here, there are some misconceptions about the Law that need to be handled briefly. There is one that has lingered in a number of circles for a long time. Misconception #1: *The Law was given to be a way of salvation by works*. Some will say that the Law was intended to be a way of earning salvation with God. Israel never could do it, so God had to come up with a new way. Others will modify this and say that if the Law could be kept perfectly, then someone could be saved by the works of the Law. But God knew that no one could do it, so the Law is only meant to show us that we can't be saved by our own works.

While it is true that we can never merit salvation by works before God, the Law was not some shell game that God was playing. The Law was never intended to be some type of meritorious salvation-by-works system. People may distort it like this, but that distortion should never be attributed to God's intention. Just a couple of facts that prove this isn't the case. First, the Law is given after the salvation of Israel from Egypt. It is not the means of their salvation. It is *consequence* of their salvation. God saved them and then told them how to live before him. That historical order is important in understanding God's intent.

Secondly, the Law itself provides substitutionary sacrifice for sins as God's gracious provision. The Law is not just a list of do's and don'ts that show us a ladder to God that we can never climb. The Law provides for the sins that will be committed when the other laws are broken. God graciously provides atonement for sin *within* the Law itself. It is not some brownie-point system with God by which we earn his favor.

Some misuse Paul's words in places like Gal 3.12, "The Law is not of faith." They put the Law as a legal code of merit in opposition with simply trusting Jesus. But Paul is dealing with the fact that the Law and the situation that it creates is not the final fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise. The Law anticipated something beyond itself. It was a means to the accomplishment of the promise of God that Abraham believed. The Law created a people and a place to deal with the curse of sin—death—so that the promise given to Abraham of life to the world could be accomplished. Remember, resurrection has to come through death. There is a group of people who must be cut off. This is the mission of the circumcised seed of Abraham. Once that mission is accomplished, that specific mission of the Law and the people it creates is over. Once the once-for-all death occurs that leads to resurrection, the purpose/mission of the people created by the Law is over and the gospel preached to Abraham concerning his seed being a blessing to the nations will be realized. This is what Paul is talking about in context. Those who seek to use the Law as a way to merit God's favor—and there are people who have and do—use the Law unlawfully.

Misconception #2: *The Law was impossible to keep*. This is the same vein of thought as the previous with a different twist. "The Law demands perfection and no one has ever kept the Law except Christ."

Christ was the only one who was every sinless to be sure. And Christ is the only one to fulfill the Law's purpose. But Christ was not the only one in history to be considered righteous according to the Law. We find at the beginning of the Gospel of Luke that at least two people are explicitly stated to be righteous in terms of God's Law: "And they [Zechariah and Elizabeth, parents of John the Baptizer] were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord." (Lk 1.6) These two couldn't be condemned by the Law because they had been faithful. This doesn't mean that they were sinless. It means that when they sinned they went and offered the appropriate sacrifice *because that is what the Law commanded*. To offer sacrifice for sin was to be a Law-keeper and, thus, to be righteous and walk blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

The Law could be kept. The impossibilities came with the oral law tradition of people like the Pharisees who made the Law into something that it wasn't. That was a yoke impossible to bear and what Jesus condemned.

Misconception #3: *The Law is a revelation of God's harshness.* There is this idea that God was trying to burden his people down with an unbearable load. The Law is the revelation of a "mean God" while Jesus is the "nice God" who satisfies his "mean Father." This is a complete misunderstanding of the Law and, therefore, God himself.

Harshness, as I said, came from the additions to the Law in the oral law tradition, not the Law itself. People today seem to have a difficult time seeing that the Law given to Israel is an expression of God's grace, but it is not difficult for the writers of Scripture. Psalm 119 is praise of God's Law. The Psalmist loves the Law of God. The Law, as the expression of God's own character, is the revelation of what life really is. Even in its purpose of designating a people (and eventually a person) to die, this is *the way of life*. God gives himself for the sake of others. If we are to know true life, we are to do the same. The Law tell us what that looks like in our relationships with others by showing us how to live justly with others and maintain right relationships. When the other nations around Israel saw Israel living out God's Law, they would marvel at the graciousness and justice of God's Law according to Deuteronomy 4.6-8.

God made man in his image. If we want to know what it means to live as true humans, we must look to God in whose image we are made and pattern our lives after him. His character is revealed in the Law. The Law as it was given to Israel had a specific function in an historical era that ended in some sense, but what it reveals about God's character is unending. We still learn from every jot and tittle of the Law.

So, why the Law? Paul says that it was added because of transgressions (Gal 3.19). In short, what he is saying is that sin is intensified and brought to a place and a people where it will be dealt with finally and forever so that the blessing of Abraham can come to the nations. The Law is new, creating a new situation for the seed of Abraham. But it continues the purpose, promise, and plan of God given to Abraham.

Worship

One aspect of the Law that also has a distinctly new element is the worship of Abraham's seed. Yes, they are still worshipping the God of their fathers, but they must do so in specific ways and at a specific place. Worship takes on a new shape. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob went around establishing altars everywhere. The worshiped under the open sky. Now God will build a house, a Tabernacle that will have a centralized altar.

Before Moses, the firstborn of every family was a priest. But the firstborn are replaced by the Levites in general and the sons of Aaron in particular (cf. Num 3.12, 41, 45; 8.18). While wandering through the wilderness Korah, Dathan, and Abiram decided to rebel against this new order and try to go back to the old ways. But God established this new order of priesthood through Aaron (Num 16-17).

The Tabernacle became the place where God would meet with and dwell among his people. He would be their God. They would be his people, and he would dwell with them (cf. Exod 25.8; 29.45; cf. also Lev 26.9-12; Num 35.34). This is new. God met with their fathers, but he didn't set up a dwelling with them. Now, heaven is coming to earth at the Tabernacle. Heaven and earth are being united. This has been the purpose of God from the beginning, and it is progressively being fulfilled. The earth is being "heavenized."

The Tabernacle itself represents a continuity with the old world. It is built from the spoils of Egypt, the old world that was just destroyed. But God makes a new creation out of the old. Their worship is transformed. Specific details are given concerning these offerings they bring near. They are given feasts based upon the deliverance from Egypt. Their worship is transformed. It is new. But it is still the worship of YHWH and the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham.

Government

Not only does the Law transform their worship, it also transforms their government. Israel has grown. The family has been fruitful and multiplied both biologically and through evangelism. Israel leaves Egypt with a mixed multitude (Ex 12.38). It has outgrown its old wineskins. This growth of the people of God necessitated a change in the type of government they had. In Exodus 18 we see this new government being organized. Moses is told by Jethro, a priest of God Most High and his own father-in-law, that what he was doing judging the people by himself was not good. It was not good for him to be alone. He needed a helper. Moses has to be glorified like Adam. He has to give up his old situation and be transformed. Through this God establishes elders in the land to judge for Moses. Ruling just because you are a patriarch in the family is not the way things will work. These are men who should be chosen based upon their character.

Names

Not only does the government change, but there are also some name changes. This is a time in history where God makes it clear that when he reveals more about himself through history and does new things with his people, it calls for the revelation of new names. This begins with God himself. We read in Exodus 6 that God revealed himself to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as “God Almighty.” He is the God who is able to fulfill his promises to his people. He can do whatever he wills to do, and his people must trust him. But, he says, he didn’t reveal himself as YHWH. Now, they knew the name “YHWH.” But during this epoch in history, the name YHWH takes center-stage. YHWH is the God who is all that he says he is. He is faithful. He is the God who *fulfills* his promises. This is what he does with the children of Israel and this is why he reveals himself as YHWH.

Of course, since we image God, when he goes through a name change, so do we. Before this time the seed of Abraham were known as “Hebrews.” They were descendants of a man named Eber from the line of Shem (Gen 11.10ff.). That is why they were called Hebrews. But at Mt. Sinai they become “Israel.” They have entered another stage of life and have a new name. It is somewhat analogous to the monikers we give people at different stages of life: child, adult, senior adult. When you grow up, you have new designations. This will morph into “Jews” and then, eventually, “Christians” after Christ comes. Each name change reveals that the plan of God has moved forward.

This covenant established through Moses with Abraham’s seed continues on through the time of the conquest and the judges. This world too will crumble and eventually be torn apart in the time of Samuel when the Tabernacle is dismantled. But until that time it is the new world created from the old.

Living the Story

As Christians look at the Law of Moses today, the heart of the Mosaic covenant, there are many disputes as to its continuing relevance. But since we know that it is eventually fulfilled in Christ and we are to follow the pattern of Christ's life, we must acknowledge that the Law continues to speak to the way that we are to live. "All Scripture," Paul says, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, [and] for instruction in righteousness" (2Tm 3.16). The Law is Scripture, and *obedience to God's Law, when understood properly, is the way of a truly free life.*

We live in a time and culture in which people believe the whole concept of law is a strike against freedom. Freedom for them means doing whatever they want. Being sinners it means that we ought to be able to live in as much sin as we want without consequence. True freedom, though, comes when we live as we were intended to live. True life is found in living as the image of God. That is who we are, and that dictates what it means to live truly free. Even though we find ourselves constantly falling short of God's law and know that we are worthy of condemnation, God's commandments are for our life. He doesn't give us commands simply to bury us under their weight any more than a warning label that says "poison" is trying to restrict your freedom. He gives us commands so that we can avoid that which is detrimental to us and pursue that which is healthful. Obedience to God is liberating. Disobedience will destroy you.

In the Law we find the way of life. The path to life is through death, something the Law prescribed. But the Law always promised and anticipated the resurrection that was to come in Christ. So we, following Christ, lay down our lives by taking up our own crosses with the anticipation of resurrection. The Law reveals to us what it looks like to offer ourselves up to God and for one another.

CHAPTER 6

THE DAVIDIC COVENANT:

GOD'S PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH THE KING OF ISRAEL

Between the time of Moses and David, the sons of Israel enjoyed some good times and some bad times. The incident with the golden calf at Mt Sinai while the covenant was being made portended things to come. The Mosaic world constructed and especially symbolized in the Tabernacle would not last.

But this didn't happen all at once. God established this new world despite the failings of his people. He maintained that world for a long time. Moses and the sons of Israel wandered through the wilderness for approximately forty years. They had to do so because they refused to be giant-killers and take the land that God promised them. The writer of Hebrews described it as them hearing the gospel and not mixing it with faith (Heb 4.1-2). So, God cleansed Israel of that old generation except for Joshua and Caleb, the faithful remnant from that generation.

Under the leadership of Joshua, the children Israel marched through the land of Canaan and took possession of the land. They were established in the land under Joshua even though not all of the enemies had been completely driven out. Leaving some of the inhabitants in the land proved to be detrimental just like God said it would. Like they did in Egypt, the children of Israel began worshiping the gods of the other nations. These gods—the rulers of these lands—began to oppress them just as the Egyptians did years before.

Just as happened in Egypt, God's people cried out to him in their distress and he heard

them. At just the right time God raised up particular judges. These elders that were in the land under Moses became, literally, the messiahs of Israel, delivering them out of oppression. The whole land in its various parts with various judges all went through these cycles of fall-deliverance-fall again and again. Each time God delivered them.

The time of the judges came to its apex and conclusion under Samuel. Samuel was what we might call a miracle baby born to a barren woman. He was dedicated to the service of the Tabernacle from the time he was weaned. He began as a priest, serving the house of YHWH, he progressed to being a judge in Israel, and then he was considered a prophet. He was a faithful man, but not all was well in Israel. The priest whom he served, Eli, along with his sons, were not faithful. Eli's sons were committing sexual immorality with the ladies who helped with the Tabernacle service along with taking the parts of the offerings that were reserved only for YHWH. God promised Eli through a message given to Samuel that his house would be cut off from service to the house of YHWH. Eventually this happened completely. But it happened initially when the Philistines were attacking Israel around Shiloh. This was the place of the Tabernacle at this time. Israel was losing the battle, so the elders of the land decided that they would go get the ark of the covenant and use it as some sort of charm that would give them good luck in the battle. They were trying to manipulate YHWH. It didn't happen. The ark was captured by the Philistines. Along with this, the sons of Eli died. One of the wives of the sons of Eli gave birth about the time that the ark was captured and named her son Ichabod, meaning "the glory has departed."

From this time forward the Tabernacle was torn to pieces, never to be reassembled. The old world constructed under Moses was completely gone. God's faithful moved back to worshiping on altars in groves of trees and high places (which was allowed in this unusual time). Even though the ark made its way back to the camps of Israel, the Tabernacle and the ark were in two separate places. The old Mosaic glory had departed. The old heavens and earth were torn down. That world was dead.

But just as God has been doing all along, death was followed by a resurrection into something new and more glorious: a king and a kingdom. This is where we are in the story as we look at the Davidic covenant. *Having created a people and a place to deal with the sins of the world through the Law, God chooses David and his seed out of Israel to take up the purpose of Israel.*

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

From the beginning of the story of Scripture, there have been several themes that have tied the story together. These became especially clear in the time of Abraham. They were evident in the time of Moses, and now we see them uniting the story of David with all that has come before.

Seed

The first theme is that of the *seed*. Back in Genesis 3.15, when God was pronouncing curses upon the serpent and his seed, God promised that he would raise up the seed of the woman who would deal the death blow to the seed of the serpent by wounding his head. Through the centuries and in the midst of a humanity consumed by sin, God raised up various men to take up this seed mission. We have seen Noah. From Noah was born Shem. From the line of Shem

eventually came Abraham. From Abraham there was Isaac. From Isaac came Jacob, who later became Israel. Israel moves from being the seed as a singular man to being the seed as a nation with twelve tribes. The seed now has a more corporate identity. David and his sons are from the tribe of Judah, one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Once again, we see that God has not created something or someone fresh from nothing. He is *taking hold* of the old world already created, *restructuring* it, *distributing responsibilities*, *evaluating* it, and then *enjoying* his rest in the new creation. While God transforms who the seed is once again in the Davidic covenant, the basic purpose of the seed established in the beginning has not changed.

Land

Another theme that has been consistent in God's purpose is that of the *land*. In the beginning God gave man—as man and woman in union—the purpose of taking dominion over the land. This would mean cultivating the land and making it fruitful in every sense of the word. Psalm 115.16 says, “The heavens are YHWH's heavens, but the earth he has given to the children of man.” As we learned previously, God created heaven as his throne-room, complete or mature. It was a place that did not have to be developed. That throne-room became the pattern for what man was to do with the earth. It was the blueprint for man's work. Man was to develop the earth as a house for God. Once completed, heaven and earth would be joined together, not separated by a firmament. This is why God gave the earth to man.

Sin frustrated but did not thwart God's plan and, thus, man's work. So, through the years, God promised his seed-people a land in which the work of dominion was to take root and become a model and something of a headquarters for world dominion. We see this especially when we come to Abraham. God promised Abraham a specific land (Gen 15), a promise that he confirmed through Moses (cf. e.g., Ex 6) and then conquered some through Moses and mostly through Joshua (Num; Josh *passim*).

This promise originally given to Abraham finds specific fulfillment in the time of Solomon, David's son, showing us that God is fulfilling his one plan and promise. Here is the promise given to Abraham in Genesis 15.18: “On that day YHWH made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your seed I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates....’” In describing the time of Solomon and his reign, this is what we read: “Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt. They brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life” (1Kg 4.21). This is the promise fulfilled. But it is the same plan and promise that has been there from the beginning. God's plan and purpose are one. He has not started over.

Blessing

Both themes of seed and land, along with some other themes, come together under a theme of *blessing*. God *blesses* the man and the woman in the beginning and tells them to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it (Gen 1.28). God comes to Abraham and gives him a seven-fold blessing (Gen 12.1-3). He tells Abraham that he will bless him and make his name great (Gen 12.2). This same blessing is given to David in the covenant God makes with him. God tells David, “And I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth” (2Sam 7.9). God will also bless David with a son (2Sam 7.14). David will be fruitful.

Not only this, David and his son will experience peace, having all of their enemies

subdued. They will experience the blessing of dominion. He tells David, "... and I will give you rest from all your enemies" (2Sam 7.11), something that David was experiencing at the time of the making of this covenant (2Sam 7.1). Solomon, whose name means "peace," would experience this also.

During the time of Solomon, Israel is characterized as being as many "as the sand of the sea" (1Kg 4.20), an image that harks back to the promise given to Abraham (Ge 22.17). David and his son(s) inherit the blessing of Abraham. This is one story with different chapters.

Law

God's people have always been called to obey him. From the Garden all the way up to the time of David, this has not changed. What they have been called to do has changed, but the principle of obedience followed by blessing and disobedience followed by curse has remained the same. For the man and the woman, they were to eat from every tree of the Garden and refrain from one. Noah had his laws. Abraham walked faithfully and was to teach his children to walk faithfully in all he commandments and ordinances of YHWH (Gen 18.19). One of those specific laws given to Abraham was that of circumcision, the sign of the covenant administered to male children eight days old. That law was the seed form of the law that would be given through Moses. Circumcision, like the Law that came later, separated these people unto God from the rest of the world for a purpose. This Law in all of its dimensions was given to Israel so that Israel might walk in the ways of her God.

When we come to David, not only is the basic principle of faith-filled obedience still in place, but the Law given specifically to Moses is still something that must be obeyed. Moses, in preparation for the king that would come after him, instructed Israel in writing that the king was to have an authorized copy of the Law for his own meditation (Dt 17.18-20). David instructs his son Solomon before he dies that he is to guard/keep "the charge of YHWH your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn..." (1Kg 2.3). Many situations have changed historically, but David and his line are to maintain the Law given to Moses. There will be some changes, as we will see, but the fundamentals of the Law remain the same because God is fulfilling his one plan and purpose.

Worship

One other area of continuity that we see is in the area of *worship*. Again, as we will see, there will be significant changes in this new Davidic world, but the same Levitical/Aaronic priests are still in place. They are the old world being transformed, but they are the old world nevertheless. The Tabernacle, as mentioned earlier, is destroyed. But it will be taken up and made more glorious in the Temple. These structures are different in many ways, but there are continuities with the old in many things. They have the same basic layout, with the same types of furniture, and worship is to be conducted in the way that it is laid out in Leviticus.

One piece of furniture that draws special focus is what was common to the "heart" of both Tabernacle and Temple: the ark of the covenant. The ark of the covenant was taken by the Philistines and eventually returned. Under David the ark will make its way to Jerusalem and dwell in a tent that is not the Tabernacle. Under Solomon the ark, the throne of God, will make its way to the Holy of Holies. This ark of the covenant—the heart of the Temple—is that chest that

contains the Law of God written on stones and given through Moses. The heart of the people of God and their worship remains the same though many other things change around it.

Worship, as established in the Tabernacle, is still centralized. Once the Temple is built, open-air altars can no longer be used for sacrifice lawfully. The people of God must come to the Temple. There is a continuity in the way worship must take place.

The old world is all there as the covenant is established with David and his seed. But this old world in its previous form can't handle the new historical situation. It would be like putting new wine into old wineskins. So, God transforms the old world into a new world, continuing his plan of maturation and glorification.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

Seed and the son

Previously the seed had been a singular individual and then expanded to encompass an entire corporate nation. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were all individuals who had this seed status. But all of the sons of Israel as a whole enjoyed this privileged status together as the twelve tribes of Israel. When God comes to Moses, instructing him to go to Pharaoh, he tells him that Pharaoh is to be told, "Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, 'Let my son go the he may serve me...'" (Ex 4.22-3). Israel as a whole is God's firstborn. The son is collective or corporate. Even though there are hints of what will come in the future, we don't see the reality of what the seed will become until the covenant with David. In 2 Samuel 7.14 we discover that David's son will be the singular son. David's son will be God's son. God's seed mission is narrowing back down to a singular person.

The seed mission devolving upon David's son doesn't mean that Israel has lost all corporate status before God. Israel as a whole and in its individuals all belong to God and are in covenant with God. But in designating David's son as God's own son, God is saying that Israel's king embodies the purpose of Israel as a whole. The king of Israel takes up the story of Israel in himself. The king of Israel is Israel's representative. The king of Israel will take up the vocation of Israel as here representative so that the sin or the righteousness of the king will effect the whole of Israel. His sin will not be his own, but will affect the whole nation. His righteousness will result in blessing for the nation.

We see a vivid illustration of this in its sinful aspects when David sins by mustering the people of Israel in peace time. This is David's sin, but the whole of Israel must suffer severely so that thousands are killed because of David's sin (2Sam 24). Solomon sins by chasing after other gods because of his multiple wives. Because of this, God will tear the kingdom apart (1Kg 11.1ff.). Many times after this we see this with the kings of Judah.

The fate of Israel is wrapped up in the life-story of the king of Israel. The king of Israel is a new Adam. What he does he does as a representative of Israel. And, inasmuch as Israel is a representative of and for the rest of the world (and she is), the king of Israel represents the entire world. The world's destiny lies in Israel. Israel's destiny lies in her king. What the king of Israel does affects the entire destiny of the world.

King and kingdom

In the re-structuring and glorification of Israel, the old government must be transformed.

Back in Exodus 18 when the world during the time of Moses was being made new, God established elders in Israel to rule over tens, fifties, hundreds, thousands, and ten thousands (cf. Ex 18). The structure of this government indicated that these elders or judges were leaders of a military force. They were structured according to armies. That makes sense because it was as YHWH's armies that the sons of Israel were delivered out of Egypt (cf. e.g., Ex 12.41). This position became more militaristic as time went on and Israel began being oppressed by her neighbors. These (literally) anointed ones, or messiahs, were deliverers who delivered the people through all the times of the Judges. But they were not kings (even though some seem to have attempted it).

God promised early on that Israel would have a king. When Jacob/Israel was blessing his sons in Genesis 49, he said that a king would come from the tribe of Judah (Gen 49.10). Moses told them that they would have a king and gave prescriptions for the king (Dt 17.14ff.). This king would come through the line of Judah. But the man Judah sinned grievously. He had an illicit relationship with his daughter-in-law through which he had illegitimate sons (Gen 38). According to the Law of Moses, these children wouldn't be allowed in the assembly of YHWH for ten generations (Dt 23.2). It was not until the sons of Jesse came to be that Judah's children met this most basic qualification. One reason the book of Ruth was written was to show that David was the first one in the line of Judah who qualified to be king. The book ends with an exciting (!) genealogy that lists ten generations between Judah and David. God is fulfilling his promise to establish the promised king. But the kingship is new.

The children of Israel tried to force the issue a generation early and wound up with Saul. Saul was a Benjamite, not the promised king. Trying this was not a new thing. It seems that Gideon, the judge, tried to do something like this as well. In an amazing act of *chutzpah*, he named one of his sons, "My father is king," Abimelech. Abimelech sought to destroy his other brothers and make himself a singular king over the people (Jdg 9). But it wasn't time.

The king established by God would be his son. As his son he was heir to the throne of his Father, YHWH. YHWH's throne on earth was in Israel and, more specifically, in Jerusalem. David and his son(s) sat on YHWH's throne. We read in 1Chronicles 29.23: "Then Solomon sat on the throne of YHWH as king in place of David his father. And he prospered, and all Israel obeyed him." The throne of David *is* the throne of YHWH. God has exalted his son to sit on his throne.

In establishing a king, God also established the fact of a kingdom. A kingdom is a sphere in which a king reigns. That entire sphere is organized under his lordship, living according to certain laws, and being judged according to the king's judgment. The king is the supreme judge. He has other judges under him (like Moses did). But he is the final authority. All judgment is given to him. Being that David and his son are sitting on the throne of YHWH, this means that this kingdom is YHWH's kingdom. This is the kingdom of God. The kingdom of God is being established on the earth. Though it is not realized in its maturest state, God's kingdom has come and his will is to be done on earth as it is in heaven. David and his son, in reigning over and representing Israel, are reigning over and representing the world. The rest of the world may not realize this, but it is the way God sees the world.

Priesthood and Temple

At the heart of this kingdom is the Temple and, thus, the worship of God's people. This has been central to the life of the world from the beginning and only continues to be expressed in

its various forms through the life of the people of God. Worship and its location take new form in the Davidic world. God established the priesthood through the line of Aaron. All of the Levites, even though they were not all priests, had priestly duties. Aaron and his sons were the priests and high priests. This was still the case in the time of David. But because the world is maturing and taking new shape and greater glory, the Levites and priests take on new functions. In the old economy they were in a moveable tent. Many Levites had functions relating to the fact the Tabernacle was portable. In Numbers 3 we find three major groups of Levites and their duties. All had the duty to guard the house of God, but one group took care of all of the coverings (Gershon), another group took care of all the furniture (Kohath), and the last group took care of all the framework (Merari). But during the kingdom period, the Temple is built, and it is a permanent structure. There is no longer any need for these types of service because that time has passed. In 1Chronicles 23.25-26 we read: “For David said, ‘YHWH, the God of Israel, has given rest to his people, and he dwells in Jerusalem forever. And so the Levites no longer need to carry the tabernacle or any of the things for its service.’”

Besides that, the number of Levites and priests multiplied greatly. David reorganizes them and gives them new functions. They still have the basic function of guarding the house of God, but now their functions have been more glorified. The priests are formed into 24 divisions (something that continued until the time of Jesus). The Levites had all sorts of responsibilities with everything from money to music. The situation changed in this new world, so the responsibilities changed as well.

During this time the priesthood went through a change as well. There was a narrowing of the priesthood. That is, not all the sons of Aaron would be priests from this point forward. It came to be that only those who descended from Zadok, one of Aaron’s descendants through his son Eleazar, would be able to be priests and high priests.

Aaron had four sons: Nadab, Abihu, Eleazar, and Ithamar. From these would come the priests in Israel. Well, just after the Tabernacle was built, the first two, Nadab and Abihu, offered unauthorized fire and were consumed by the fire of YHWH (Lev 10.1-3). This left Eleazar and Ithamar.

Ithamar’s descendants included Eli and his sons, the ones who were presiding at the Tabernacle when Samuel came on the scene. God promised Eli that his family would be cut off from serving in the house of YHWH because of their sins. God didn’t do this completely until the time of Solomon. Abiathar the priest who served during the time of David and a descendant of Ithamar (1Chr 24.3), conspired against Solomon and his accession to the throne. Solomon had him banished, completely cutting off the house of Eli and, thus, Ithamar. This left Zadok who was descended from Eleazar. This became the official line of the priesthood. The priesthood still descended from Aaron, but it had to be narrowed down. It was during the kingdom period that the his priesthood changed, taking on a new form.

The priests themselves were always servants in the house of YHWH. They began their service around open-air altars, changed and became servants in the Tabernacle. But, again, the Tabernacle was a mobile home. In the kingdom era this changed. From the beginning God’s purpose and mission for his son was to build a house in which he and his son would dwell together. David knows this and wants to build that house (2Sam 7.1ff.). YHWH forbids him to do so for several reasons. It will be his son, who is also the son of YHWH, who will build the house. What must be done first is that YHWH must build David a house. That is, YHWH must build him up through giving him a son. David’s house is people. (This, by the way, is also true of YHWH’s house.)

This always happens. YHWH first builds a house for his people, then his people, in response and in imaging him, build a house for YHWH. God made a house for Adam first, and then Adam was to build a house for God. Once YHWH builds David's house in his son, then the house-Temple can be built for YHWH's name. YHWH's son, the king of Israel, is the Temple-builder. David's son is the one authorized to build the Temple.

This Temple that is originally built by Solomon has some of the same basic structures and elements of the old Tabernacle. There is an outer court, a holy place, and a Holy of Holies. It includes the same types of furniture: laver, altar, lampstand, Table for the Bread of the Presence, altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant. But all of this is more glorified and there are additions. The house is permanent instead of transportable. It is much bigger. There are water chariots outside the north and south sides of the Temple proper. There are steps up to the Temple proper. When you walk up the steps there are two bronze pillars named Jachin and Boaz, a priestly and kingly pillar, that hold up and guard the Temple. The wood inside is different and moves from one type of wood to another. There are two more cherubim in the Holy of Holies. Many things are the same, but many things are different.

This is a more glorious house than the Tabernacle. The old Tabernacle was ripped in half. It died, and along with it Israel which it represented. The old world—the old heavens and earth—were destroyed. But now a new world has been raised to a glorious new existence. This was all YHWH's doing and not David's vivid imagination. The plans for this glorious house were given to David by YHWH himself (1Chr 28.19). YHWH affirmed all of this by coming and dwelling in this house (2Chr 7.1ff.). God evaluated the work and then moved to his place of rest, enjoying what was created ... just what he does when covenants are made.

Prophets

Another prominent feature in the Davidic world that is not completely new but takes on a different form is the presence and ministry of the prophets. Like I said, prophets were nothing new. Abraham was a prophet (Gen 20.7). Moses was a prophet (Dt 18.18; 34.10; Ac 3.22; 7:37). But prophets come to play a major role in relationship to the king and the kingdom.

Prophets were those men who sat in the council of God, deliberated with him over what was going on in the world, heard the verdict of God on the situation, and then came and delivered that verdict to the people who needed to hear it. The kings of Israel had a special relationship to the prophets. Prophets were the fathers to the king and, therefore, were obliged to honor the prophets. Prophets were ambassadors of the King of kings. The kings of Israel were God's vice-regents, not the absolute authority. They must heed the voice of the prophet, or the kingdom will be taken from them.

The consequences of not heeding the prophets are displayed for us in the life of Israel's first king, Saul. Twice he disobeyed the prophet Samuel. The first time he grew impatient and offered sacrifice before Samuel arrived. The second time he refused to destroy utterly all the Amalekites as directed by Samuel. God tore the kingdom from him and gave it to David. David, though he sinned grievously at times, heeded the prophet's word. When confronted with sin, he repented.

The major role that the prophets played becomes evident in the persons of Elijah and Elisha who are quite prominent in the books of Kings. They are king-anointers and those who bring declarations to the kings from the King of kings.

Gentiles

The last transformed situation to which I want us to draw attention during this time is the relationship of the king and Israel with the Gentiles during this Davidic world. Abraham and his seed have always had a relationship with the Gentiles; sometimes it was good and many times it was not so good. Abraham himself submitted to a Gentile king, Melchizedek, paying tithes to him. Abraham and his seed were under the rule of Gentiles for over 400 years. They served the Gentiles in those situations, but the relationship was more characterized by conflict. Eventually the Egyptians had to be defeated and the Canaanites had to be conquered through war. Even at the beginning of David's reign there are some mop-up battles that have to be dealt with to finish the conquest that was left uncompleted before his time (cf. 2Sam 5.1ff.).

Situations changed during the kingdom period. God gives rest to David and to Solomon from all of their enemies (2Sam 7.1; 1Chr 22.9). The relationship with the Gentiles changes. We find Gentiles blessing the seed of Abraham. Hiram, king of Tyre, provides all of the cedar for the Temple that is to be built (1Kg 5). The queen of Sheba comes to Solomon to learn wisdom and brings gifts (1Kg 10.1ff.). The Gentiles are bringing the riches of the world to the garden-mountain of God.

Not only this, but when God sends a drought to Israel, he sends his prophets to the Gentiles and provides for them there. Elijah goes to the widow of Zarephath to be provided for (1Kg 17.9ff.). Jesus himself makes a big deal out of this (Lk 4.26). The Gentiles are playing more of a prominent role in God's story.

The prophets not only have a position of authority with the kings of Israel and Judah, they also have authority over Gentile kings. Elijah, a prophet to Israel during the reign of Ahab, anoints a Gentile king, Hazael, to be king of Syria (1Kg 19.15). Elisha, Elijah's successor, ministers to Naaman, a Syrian military commander (2Kg 5.1ff.).

One difference between the pre-kingdom and kingdom period (at least while it is operating properly) is that Israel was conquered by and then conquering the nations, taking their riches as the spoils of war. During the kingdom the nations are willingly giving or blessing Israel. Just as David writes in Psalm 110.3, the people are offering themselves willingly. God's plan is moving forward.

Living the Story

Eventually great David's greater Son will come and fulfill all that God promised David. Looking back on this fulfillment from our perspective, we see that *as the people of God we live in a kingdom with a King to whom all judgment has been committed*. We are in a kingdom who has Jesus as King.

It is somewhat difficult for us as Americans to think of "kingdom" and "king." We don't live in that kind of culture. Nevertheless, the Bible describes our Christian culture as that of being in a kingdom. This means, among other things, that the whole of life falls under the sphere of the lordship of Jesus the King. Once again we are confronted with the fact that this is not some "religious" aspect of our lives that can be safely hidden away until we must pull it out on Sunday only then to safely store it until we meet again. Being in a kingdom and under a King means that all of life is governed and will be judged by the King. All of life is to be lived by his laws. What we learn from this King and the kingdom is a theme that has been consistent and will remain consistent until we see it in its greatest expression: this kingdom is characterized self-giving

service. The king's purpose in Israel was to take up the vocation of Israel. The vocation of Israel was to serve the world by giving itself. So, the kingdom purpose remains the same. This is the way of the kingdom.

Our unrelenting God marches ever forward in his plan. He will establish David's son in an everlasting kingdom. And he shall reign until all enemies are put under his feet (Ps 110).

CHAPTER 7
THE RESTORATION COVENANT:
GOD'S PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD THROUGH A NEW TEMPLE-CITY

The Davidic world was torn to pieces relatively early. After Solomon built the Temple, the wealth of the nations that was flowing into Jerusalem made him a powerful king. He began acting like kings of the pagan nations. In direct disobedience to the commands laid out by Moses in Deuteronomy 17, Solomon brought in excessive riches. He took in six hundred sixty-six talents of gold per year. For a place the size of Delaware, that is quite a bit. He multiplied wives, taking seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines (1Kg 11.3), showing the world just how wealthy and powerful he was. He was in alliance with all of these other nations, but he didn't require their conversion like his father Abraham. His wives turned his heart from serving YHWH his God. He also multiplied chariots, which meant that he was preparing to be an aggressive war-machine for world conquest. God forbade this. This is not how God planned for Israel to serve the nations.

Because of these things, God raised up adversaries for Solomon, eventually anointing Jeroboam to take ten of the tribes and secede from Israel. This secession happened under Solomon's son, Rehoboam. The house of Israel was ripped to pieces. The Temple still stood at this time, but it would eventually reflect the divided kingdom. What we read through the course of the books of Kings and Chronicles are the stories of the kings of Israel and Judah. There were some that were good, but for the most part, many of them led the people astray.

In the north, Jeroboam, in order to establish his power in Israel, made two golden calves at which the people of Israel would worship. He was afraid that if they went back down to Jerusalem to the Temple to worship, their hearts would be turned back to the house of David, and he would lose his power. From that time forward, one of the recurring themes in the account of the kings of Israel was that they walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, which itself was nothing more than a recapitulation of the sin of the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai. They were idolaters. God gave Jeroboam this kingdom, and he would take it away because of their sins. He did this approximately two hundred years after Jeroboam was anointed king. God raised up Assyria and, in 722 B.C. Assyria conquered the northern kingdom of Israel, taking them captive, and taking people from many of the other provinces in their empire and filling the land of Samaria with them (2Kg 17.24). God punished them for their idolatry (cf. 2Kg 17.7ff).

Judah didn't fair much better. They did have glimmers of hope throughout their history in attempts to restore worship. There were several good kings along the way. But Judah would eventually follow her sister, Israel, and go into captivity. They were given the opportunity to learn. When Assyria was on its march through all the lands, conquering Israel among them, they set their eyes on Judah as well. Under king Hezekiah and because of his dedication to YHWH, Judah was spared in a most miraculous way: the angel of YHWH killed 185,000 Assyrians while they were asleep (2Kg 19.35). Judah was spared.

They didn't learn the lesson. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was a wicked king and

established sinful practices in the land once again. Later, Josiah would come along and re-establish the worship of YHWH, but these reforms didn't last. Josiah's son, Jehoahaz, began to reign in his place. But Egypt came in and deposed him, putting his brother, Eliakim, as a vassal king in his place. They changed his name to Jehoiakim. He was a wicked king.

It was during Jehoiakim's reign that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, the world empire of this time, came in and began to subjugate Judah. He took captives beginning in 605 B.C. People like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Ezekiel were part of this. Jeremiah was prophesying at the time. And he told the kings of Judah as well as the people to submit to Nebuchadnezzar, go into Babylon, set up house, and work for the welfare of their cities (Jer 29.4ff.). He told them that after seventy years YHWH would restore them.

The people considered Jeremiah a traitor. The kings refused to listen to him and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. This provoked Nebuchadnezzar to attack Judah a second time. This time it was under the reign of Jehoiachin. Nebuchadnezzar took everything out of the Temple and all the skilled people of the land. He set up Zedekiah as his vassal in Jerusalem.

Zedekiah decided he didn't like the situation and rebelled. Then Nebuchadnezzar came in the third time and destroyed the Temple and the walls of the city. It was laid bare. He only left the poorest in the land. This happened around 586 B.C.

There are some who believe that what happens between David and Jesus is all a part of the same covenant. Well, that doesn't seem quite right. God does some transformative works during this time period. During this time, God promises that he will make a new covenant with Israel and Judah, restoring them to their land, rebuilding the temple, and rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem after seventy years. While we know that this covenant is ultimately realized in Christ, there is a fulfillment *before* the Son of God is made flesh. This, of course, is true about *all* of the covenants. As John Calvin says concerning Jeremiah's prophecies:

He indeed speaks of the return of the people to their own country, and this ought to be allowed, though Christians have been too rigid in this respect; for passing by the whole intermediate time between the return of the people and the coming of Christ, they have too violently turned the prophecies to spiritual redemption. There is no doubt but that the Prophet makes a beginning with the free return of the people from captivity; but, as I have said, Christ's redemption is not to be separated from this.... (*Calvin's Commentaries*, vol. 10, Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 149)

Nevertheless many skip right over some glaring historical changes such as the Gentile world empire that becomes the dwelling place for the people of Israel, the return to the land of Israel to rebuild the Temple and the walls of the city in Jerusalem, the re-establishment of the priesthood, and several other major changes, all the fulfillment of the promise to restore Israel to the land after seventy years. God once again is establishing his covenant with Israel in bringing them back to the land. He uses the same language he used with Noah to speak about establishing his covenant. He speaks about renewing his already existing relationship and moving it forward for the future. Ezekiel refers to this specifically in Ezekiel 16.62, it is in various places throughout the book of Jeremiah, and it is scattered throughout just about all the prophets.

In good covenant-making fashion, God is *taking hold* of his creation, *restructuring it*, *distributing responsibilities*, *evaluating it*, and then entering into his *rest* and *enjoyment* of what he has done. What we will examine in this chapter can be called *The Restoration Covenant*. *Because of Israel's sin and also with a greater purpose in mind, God creates a new world order*

under a Gentile empire in which Israel is scattered among the nations in order to disciple the nations.

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

In the previous chapter we saw how all of the other covenants found their continuation and fulfillment (temporary) home in the Davidic covenant. Today we see how the Davidic covenant continues to be unified with what is to come. God is moving his one plan and purpose forward; one story, several chapters.

Seed & the son of David

As we have seen from the beginning, God established the fact that he would work through his original creation purpose of procreation and would fulfill his promise for the world through genealogical lines. Specifically, after sin came into the world, God promised a seed who would eventually deal the death blow to the seed of the serpent (Ge 3.15). We have seen how that promise has been worked out over time and how it came to be understood in David and, more particularly, in David's son. These are still the descendants of Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God has not abandoned his promise or his purpose. This continues on even during the time of the turmoil in both the northern and southern kingdoms. YHWH, through Jeremiah, promises that he will not abandon the promise to David in the strongest terms:

Thus says YHWH: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the fixed order of heaven and earth, then I will reject the seed of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his seed to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes and will have mercy on them. (Jer 33.25-6)

God's covenant with David and his son are as sure as the sun rising and setting each day. God promises that the restored kingdom to come will have David—i.e., David's son—ruling over it (Ezek 37.24).

Again, some here believe that this reunited kingdom never happens at all. But that is not exactly the case. Though we don't see the fullness of the promise come until Christ Jesus, we do see the kingdom coming back together and one of David's sons, Zerubbabel, ruling over it. Israel, the northern kingdom, is taken captive in 722 B.C. Judah's troubles officially begin in 605 B.C. and reach their climax in 586 B.C. with the destruction of the Temple. But the Babylonian empire took over all that the Assyrians possessed, which would include the tribes from Israel. While in captivity all of the tribes join back together and eventually some return to the land together. Their name changes so that they all become Judahites—or as we hear that said in the New Testament, "Jews"—but they are all back together. Evidence of this is found in Luke 2.36 where we read of Anna, the prophetess, who is of the tribe of Asher. Asher was one of the ten tribes that split from Judah. They are back in the land. There is no such thing as "the ten lost tribes." God is continuing his plan, reuniting his kingdom. This will be finally fulfilled in Jesus, but it is the same plan.

Land

Another promise of God concerned the land. From the beginning this was to be the whole earth. But we have seen how God was accomplishing this in piecemeal. He promised Abraham a land that stretched from Egypt to the Euphrates (Gen 15). This was realized under Solomon (2Kg 4). The people are exiled from the land, but God promises to restore them to that same land. He will make some new arrangements, but it will be the same land that was promised before. Jeremiah prophesies:

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, declares YHWH, when they shall no longer say, 'As YHWH lives who brought up the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt,' but 'As YHWH lives who brought up and led the seed of the house of Israel out of the north country and out of all the countries where he had driven them.' Then they shall dwell in their own land." (Jer 23.7-8).

This restoration God brings will overshadow the Exodus that established them as a nation.

Blessing

That larger category of blessing under which seed and land fall is also still in place. They receive all of these things because God remembers and is faithful to his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They are inheritors of Abraham's blessing. In Ezekiel 34.25ff. God promises to make them and the places all around his hill "a blessing" (i.e., to the nations around them). In Isaiah 19.24 God again promises Israel that they will be "a blessing in the midst of the earth." (Interestingly, both Egypt and Assyria are also included in this as well.)

Law

Still another aspect of the old world that continues in the new is the Law. God promises through Jeremiah that in this new covenant he will write his Law within their hearts. What Law could this possibly be but the Law that he gave to Moses ... a Law that according to Deuteronomy 6 was always supposed to be on their hearts (Dt 6.4ff.). The people of God will still be obliged to the Law of God. Yes, there will be new situations in which they must apply the Law. Not everything will be as it was 800 - 1000 years earlier, but those fundamental laws of God will still be in force.

Priesthood and Temple

Worship conducted through priesthood and Temple will also have continuity from the old world to the new world. In the captivity and exile, there are some changes. When they return they must reestablish the proper lines of succession, but they *do* reestablish those lines. As we saw last time, the legitimate priesthood from the time of Solomon forward was through the line of Zadok. This will still be the case. Ezekiel makes this very clear when revealing his vision of a new Temple (cf. e.g., Ezek 40.46). It is only through the line of Zadok that the priesthood is legitimate because he is one of the sons of Aaron. When Ezra and the others return to the land to rebuild the Temple, he calls for the Levites whom David and his officials set apart for the Temple work (Ezr

8.20). The priesthood will have to be re-sanctified, but they must still be authorized priests from the line of Aaron through Zadok. Jeshua or Joshua the son of Jozadak becomes that high priest (cf. Ezr 5.2; Zech 3.1)

The Temple plays an important role in this restoration. The Davidic world was destroyed when the Temple was finally laid waste. Ezekiel has a vision of a rebuilt Temple that is so massive that it can never really be built. It exceeds the glory of the Solomonic Temple, but there are some of the same basic features.

The people go back under the decree of Cyrus, the king of Persia (Ezr 1), to build the Temple. The work wanes. Then, under the renewed decree of Darius, eventual successor to Cyrus, they continue the work of rebuilding (Ezr 6).

It is true that the outward structure of the Temple doesn't compare with the glory of Solomon's Temple or match Ezekiel's vision. God has other plans at work concerning the nature of the Temple. But there is a Temple in which the people of God will worship, continuing the plan God as to have a house for his name.

Prophets

In the Davidic world we became more familiar with the prophets as their prominence increased. Their prophecies and writings are a predominant feature during this time. In our Bibles, Isaiah through Malachi essentially deal with this time period. (You can see just how much material this involves in Scripture.) Nevertheless, whether we are talking about prophets before the exile, during the exile, or after the exile, they are all prophets who come from God's people calling them to faithfulness to the covenants God established with them.

Gentiles

During this time we also see that the relationship God established between the seed of Abraham and the rest of the nations remains fundamentally the same. Israel and the nations were to remain distinct until this mission of the seed of Abraham was complete. We see many of God's people staying faithful to those distinctives. Daniel and his three friends—Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (a.k.a. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego)—maintained those distinctives. They are distinct from the Gentiles for the sake of being a blessing to the Gentile nations.

We see yet again that God has not abandoned his purpose. Though there are many changes, we still see the old world right there in the new. But, as I said, there are many changes. Just as you change in many ways from your infancy to your adolescence—still the same person but different in so many ways—so God's world and his relationship to it is the same but different. There are new features to this new stage of history.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

Oikoumene

The old Davidic wineskins couldn't handle the new wine of this new age. God had to provide new wineskins. He had to provide a new structure for his people Israel in relationship to the nations in order to accomplish his predestined purpose. He revealed this plan to a Gentile king and made it understood through one of his prophets.

In Daniel 2 we have the record of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (the one who took Judah captive), having a dream or a vision. This vision was of a statue with a head of gold, a chest and arms of silver, abdomen and thighs of bronze, legs (shins) of iron, and feet of iron mixed with clay. A rock not cut with hands came out of a mountain, rolled down and crushed the entire statue and grew as a mountain to cover the whole earth.

Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar what he dreamed and then interprets it. These are four successive kingdoms (or what we might call empires): Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome. The rock that comes out of the mountain, in summary, will be God's kingdom that removes this empire system that God sets up. These are four kingdoms, but they are only one statue. God establishes for this time an empire system that will move from one to another leader. What is interesting about the unity of this statue is that it is made up of the materials that made up the Temple of Solomon. There is a movement from the Most Holy Place with gold, to the silver, to the bronze, to the iron that made up the outer gates (1Chr 22.3). It seems to me that this empire system is a new Temple of God for God's people in some form or fashion. The nations would be a house for God's name. Israel, the ones who bear God's name in a special way, will dwell in this house. Israel is God's glory that now fills this house (Isa 46.13).

This is quite important, especially when we come to the conclusion of the Bible when Jesus comes on the scene. They are under the last of these kingdoms: Rome. There are several times in the apostles' writings when we read them referring to "the world." Sometimes that translates the word *oikoumene*. That word, I believe, refers to this empire-world that God set up during the captivity. It is not every last square inch of soil on the earth. It is a world created by God that will serve a purpose and then come to an end, just like all of the other (covenant) worlds God created previously.

God puts Israel in this empire-house. He scatters them among the nations, keeping them from turning the Temple into a new Tower of Babel (i.e., trying to stay in one place). They are being punished for their sins, but there is a plan working along and underneath this as well. God scatters them among the nations so that they can be evangelistic, bringing the nation to worship the God of Israel. During this period, Israel establishes little colonies throughout the empire in the form of synagogues.

They are evangelizing like their father Abraham. We see it with Daniel and his friends as they witness for YHWH in kings' palaces. This evangelism project becomes perverted, and in the time of Jesus Israel's evangelists have to be rebuked. They traverse land and sea to make one proselyte and, by doing so, make him twice-fold a child of hell (Mt 23.15). This has to be corrected, but evangelism was supposed to be taking place at this time.

Israel was not to view this situation as something from which they needed to escape. They were to submit to it as God's plan for them to serve the nations. They never really did like it. Jeremiah was telling them even when they were taken captive because of their sins that they were to go peacefully into Babylon, live at peace, and seek the welfare of the cities in which they lived (Jer 29.4-7). Some listened. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, Nehemiah, and (eventually) Mordecai and Esther were all very high-ranking officials in the empire, being recognized as wise. They used their positions for the furtherance of the blessing of Abraham to the nations.

This empire-house was a new Temple of sorts. As such, the empire was to be a protector of God's people. The empire was to bless the seed of Abraham like Egypt did during the time of Joseph. When they did so, they would be blessed. But the empire was also God's instrument of discipline for Israel as well. When Israel stepped out of line, God would use the empire as a rod to discipline his people. This was the new situation that was set up with Israel in relation to the

nations. They were Israel-in-empire. They were to understand their kingdom as subjugated to the nations for the sake of serving the nations.

Kingship

Because Israel has a new place in relationship to the nations, the kings of Judah—the sons of David—have a new role as well. They will serve this greater kingdom until they can be exalted over all the nations of the earth. Of course, the kings of Judah don't like this at first. Three kings disregard the counsel of Jeremiah the prophet and Nebuchadnezzar has to put down three rebellions. But there is one king at the end of the book of 2 Kings that begins to give us glimmers of what is to come.

Jehoiachin surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar when he attacked Judah. After Nebuchadnezzar died, one of his descendants, Evil-merodach, took the throne of Babylon. He freed Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a position above all the other kings in the Babylonian empire (2Kg 25.28). He reigned with this Gentile king, being given a position to shepherd the nations according to YHWH's Law, teaching the Gentiles just as Joseph did in Egypt.

Later, under Cyrus, king of Persia, the people of God return to the land under Zerubbabel, who is a descendant of David. Zerubbabel reigned over a united kingdom once again even though it was in this new world situation. (He is the "governor" spoken of in Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, & Zechariah.)

There is an obvious shift in the way that God explicitly relates to the Gentiles. He sets up this empire house for his name. The kings who reign over it are his servants. Nebuchadnezzar is referred to as "my servant" (cf. e.g., Jer 25.9; 27.6), a title that God gave to men like Moses and, more recently, David. It is the title he gives to Israel. God gives Nebuchadnezzar dominion over everything like a new Adam and makes his "king of kings" (Ezek 26.7; Dan 2.37). The God of heaven gave him this title and all the dominion that goes with it.

Cyrus, the king who follows Nebuchadnezzar during the Medo-Persian era, is literally God's messiah, his anointed one (Isa 45.1). This is a promise given to David's son who will be the son of God. Cyrus, this Gentile king, has assumed this place by God's own decree. Cyrus is God's appointed "shepherd" (Isa 44.28) who will rebuild the Temple; again, a task given specifically to the son of David. And, it is Cyrus, who, in fulfillment of the word of Jeremiah the prophet, sends the people back for the express purpose of rebuilding the Temple (cf. Ezra 1; 2Chr 26.22-3). Cyrus is the initial fulfillment of this new covenant promised through Jeremiah the prophet. Yes, like all covenants, this is ultimately fulfilled in Christ. But the initial fulfillment is right here in this new Temple-city/Empire world that God has created.

One lesson that God is teaching Israel (though Israel refused to learn it for the most part) is that Israel would not be the extent of the kingdom of God. God's kingdom, in accordance with the blessing of Abraham, would extend to all nations and require the submission of all kings, not just the seed of David. David's seed served the nations of the world and would rule all the kings through service, but Israel as a nation was not the extent of God's kingdom. God is revealing the nature of his kingdom and how his people will disciple or be a blessing to the nations.

Priesthood

During this time there is also a change in priesthood. The Temple had been destroyed. This removed the place for the service of the priesthood (at least in some ways). God moved

away from the Temple even before it was destroyed. It became an abomination, and he left it desolate or empty. At the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecy we see God's throne chariot—his glory cloud—picking up and moving east (Ezek 10). He is moving to Babylon. He will go before his people like a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. They are to follow him to Babylon.

The priesthood changes. Ezekiel becomes something of an “open-air” high priest since the Temple is going away. We know this because the only person in Israel who could ever see the glory cloud in this way was the high priest. He was the only one who had access to the throne-room, the Holy of holies. Ezekiel serves as a high priest in exile. But this is not the way it will always be. He prophesies of a restoration and a new Temple.

When the people return, there will be a little problem: the priesthood was corrupted by sin. That means that the priests would go to the Temple and offer a sacrifice for cleansing. But wait. There is no Temple. If there is no Temple, then there is no way to be cleansed. But if they don't have a priesthood, they can't consecrate a Temple. They are in a pickle.

God reveals to the prophet Zechariah how he will do this. In Zechariah 3 Zechariah has a vision of a man named Joshua who is in filthy clothes. He is the corrupted high priest. YHWH himself cleanses Joshua, giving him new clothes, and, thus, re-establishes the priesthood directly. When the people return to the land and rebuild the Temple, they will have a fresh, (re)new(ed) priesthood.

Temple

And they would build a new Temple. As mentioned, Cyrus, the king of Persia sends the captives back to the land for the express purpose of building the Temple. He provides for them what they need to do so. The book of Ezra and the prophecy of Haggai in particular are concerned about the rebuilding of the Temple. Ezra leads them and Haggai stokes them up when they stop working. But they are discouraged. Not only does their Temple not match Ezekiel's vision, but this Temple doesn't even come close to the structural glory of Solomon's Temple. God's vision revealed to Ezekiel, though, is moving the people to understand more of the nature of the Temple that is to come, moving away from the Temple in Jerusalem to that Temple that will encompass the whole earth. Ezekiel's Temple is one more piece in the ever-expanding puzzle that moves God's people's eyes from the types and shadows that God revealed to the substance that was coming in Christ. The glory of this new Temple required some adjustment in thinking. God is expanding his Temple by having his people scattered throughout the *oikoumene*, the empire-world. They, the Temple of God themselves, are to be sharing God's life with the world.

The glories of Ezekiel's Temple expand greatly on the glories of Solomon's Temple. Everything is multiplied in size and number to massive proportions. But we also see this expansion in what is proceeding *out* from the Temple instead of remaining *in* the Temple. There is a theme of water that runs through the Scripture and is seen as growing expansively up to this time. We begin in the Garden. There is a river that comes from above the Garden of Eden, flows through it, and splits into four, symbolically flowing to the four corners of the earth. It gives life to the earth so that the entire earth can share the life of the Garden. These rivers were cut off during Noah's time. But God will restore them. The patriarchs begin by digging wells all over the place. Then, in the Tabernacle, we see this big laver of water for cleansing, to restore people to the presence of God, which is life. Then, in Solomon's Temple, there are ten water chariots on

the north and south sides of the Temple leading to the laver that symbolically show us a river flowing out from the Temple. But it stops in the courtyard. But in Ezekiel's vision things change. There is a river that flows from the Temple. It begins quite shallow. It is ankle deep. But then it flows out of the Temple complex to the rest of the world getting deeper and deeper as it goes.

This is quite reflective of what is going on during this time period. The water that had been kept, as it were, in Israel is now flowing out to the nations in a new a dynamic way that it hadn't before. Sure, Israel was always to be a light to the nations. But now God is doing something new with how Israel will relate to the nations. There has been growth, glorification, maturation. It is not yet complete, but it moving that way.

Living the Story

God's one, unified story is our story. It is the history of the Christian family. It tells us who we are, how we arrived where we are, and how we are to live. We must never forget is that as Christians, this is our story. This is not just some piece of interesting history. This is our family. One thing that we learn from this portion of our story is that *the church exists not simply for her own life but for the life of the world.*

The church lives as God's mission in, to, and for the world. We are not simply here to gain knowledge (though knowledge is very important). Neither are we here simply to hole up and take care of our own (though we should certainly be taking care of our own). The church exists as the image of a Triune God whose life is so full within himself that he can't help but share it with others. His life flows from him to others, reaching out and bringing them in to share life with him. Time would fail me to go into all the ways that this is done as the church. But one of the measures of a healthy, God-honoring, faithful church is whether or not we have a hospitable spirit; a desire and effort to welcome those who are not like us and bring them in to share our life. Christ's church needs constantly to be challenged to find new ways to show God's hospitable life to the world. The river that wells up in the church will then flow to give life to those around us.

CHAPTER 8

THE NEW COVENANT: GOD FULFILLS HIS PROMISE TO SAVE THE WORLD

The story of Scripture comes to an abrupt, albeit a somewhat positive, pregnant pause. We are left with the people of God under Persian rule at the end of 2 Chronicles (which is the end of the Hebrew Bible). Some of the people have returned to the land, rebuilt the Temple, and rebuilt the walls of the city of Jerusalem. Some good things have happened during this time. God raised up people like Daniel and his three friends to be high-ranking officials in the provinces of the Persian Empire. When some within the Persian empire tried to attack the Jews, God used Esther and Mordecai to put down the attempt and kill Haman, the man who led the opposition. The victory was so great that the Jews established a new feast: the feast of Purim.

But that is about where the Scriptures leave us. The next thing we know we are under Roman rule and Jesus is being born in Matthew. That doesn't mean that there was no history in between. God chose not to give us a Scriptural record of it, but he didn't leave us completely without knowledge. He told us through Nebuchadnezzar and Daniel that there would be these kingdoms that would rise up to be a house for his people: Babylon (which existed at the time of

Daniel), Persia (which is where the Hebrew Scriptures end), Greece, and then Rome. We must do some digging outside of Scripture for how things worked out in what is commonly called the “Intertestamental Period.” What we discover is that things worked out just like God said they would. Here is a brief sketch.

Greece took over the Persian Empire in the fourth century B.C. under a conqueror named Alexander, who would eventually be called “the Great.” Alexander sought to bring the Greek culture to the whole world (i.e., the entire empire). This was called *Hellenization*. (It is called Hellenization because “Helen” is the root for the word “Greek” in the Greek language). He was pretty successful seeing that the conclusion of God’s story is written in Greek.

Alexander didn’t live very long. His empire was divided up among his generals who, as you might imagine, didn’t really care about sharing this power with one another. There were many wars attempting to reunite the empire. One of the kings who desired to rule the whole empire was a man who was called Antiochus IV. He later took the name “Epiphanes,” because he claimed to be the epiphany (i.e., manifestation, revelation) of a god. As he was conducting his wars, he came to Jerusalem where stood the rebuilt Temple. In an attempt to obliterate the distinctiveness of the Jews and bring them totally into the Hellenization project, he decided that he would set up the standards for pagan gods and sacrifice a pig at the Temple. Bad mistake. As he and his men went around trying to enforce the new standards in making people sacrifice to the gods, one man named Mattathias, an old priest, not only refused to do so, but, in the spirit of Phineas, he killed a fellow Jew who did along with the Greek soldier who forced him to do it. Mattathias then fled to wilderness.

One of his sons, Judah (or Judas), led a rebellion against Antiochus and drove him and his armies out of the land in the second century B.C. He became known as Judah Maccabee (or Judas Maccabaeus), which means “the hammer.” He went in and cleansed the Temple and re-established a fairly independent rule in Israel. But he didn’t do things like they should have been done. There was no re-establishment of the proper priesthood or kingship. The priesthood was bought and sold like common goods and the kingship essentially went to the powerful.

During this time groups like the Sadducees and Pharisees sprang up. The Sadducees were the aristocrats who liked the Greek culture and did whatever was politically expedient to maintain their power. The Pharisees started off relatively well, it seems. They were the conservatives. But their conservatism turned into an idolatry of the oral law; that is, those interpretations of the rabbis that were passed down by word of mouth. (Some even claimed that they came from Moses himself). This was one of the main battles Jesus had with the Jews during his ministry.

All the while this was happening, the new world kingdom prophesied in Daniel was coming on the scene. Rome was rising to power. In 63 B.C. Rome took over the province of Judea (which is a small area in what was once the land of Israel). They allowed the Herods to rule the province for a while, but eventually they set up their own governors in the land. The governor that we know the best is Pontius Pilate, a Roman governor prominent in Scripture and whose name is spoken by Christian churches practically every day in our Creeds.

The old restoration covenant is in full decline. The people of Israel are in a mess. There is a need for a new covenant. God will bring in a new covenant. But this time it will be unlike any other covenants in the past. This will be the last one. After this, there is no other. This doesn’t mean that God will cease his work. He will not. But everything from this point forward will be within this new covenant structure. Reaching the zenith of the covenants, we see that *in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, a new covenant is inaugurated and all of God’s*

covenants find their fulfillment; humanity ripped apart by sin is reunited and the original creation project is put back on track and moved forward.

Something Old: The Old World in the New World

Since the time we looked at the creation covenant, we have been seeing some themes that tie the story of Scripture. We have seen the basic themes and how they have expanded as new covenants were introduced. In this chapter we will continue with those and see how these themes pass through death and enter into a new transformed, mature existence in Christ Jesus. As these themes are fulfilled in the one man, Christ Jesus, all the lines begin to pull together so that we see these various themes relating to one another in Christ. They are not distributed to different people as has generally been the case. Now they are converging in Christ.

Seed, Son, King

We see this convergence as we see Jesus as the fulfillment of the *seed* who is also the *son* who is also the *king*. Paul tells us in Galatians 4 that Jesus was “born of a woman, born under the Law.” The eternal Son of God became flesh. He took on the flesh of existing humanity, becoming a part of this present world order.

Jesus became a part of humanity. Within humanity he became a part of a particular family. Paul says that Jesus was born “under the Law.” This means that he is in this human line that descended from Abraham and was constituted a nation under Moses. He is a part of the old, continuing story of Israel. Yes, his birth was unusual. He was conceived in the womb of a virgin and, thus, had no biological father. But he was born of a woman, having a genealogy that descended biologically through Mary and legally through Joseph (according to the genealogies of Luke and Matthew respectively).

Hearing the phrase “born of a woman” also echos the promise of God all the way back in Genesis 3.15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” The woman will have a seed, a son, who will defeat the seed of serpent. Jesus is the fulfillment of that promise. He is the promised seed of the woman. This seed line that began in Genesis 3.15 and now concludes in Christ Jesus had many developments along the way. We have seen how the seed line and its mission was raised up and maintained by God through Adam’s son, Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel as a whole, and then it devolved upon Israel’s king: David and his son. There are many times in the Scriptures we hear allusions and even direct attribution to Jesus being the “son of David” (Mt 1.1; 9.27; 15.22; Rom 1.3). We hear it, for example, in Matthew’s opening genealogy in which Matthew traces Jesus’ lineage and leads us to see Jesus as the son of Abraham–Isaac–and the son of David–Solomon. Jesus is the culmination of the seed line. He is declared mockingly, yet truly, to be “the King of the Jews” at his crucifixion. He is the son of David.

Luke goes a step further. He traces Jesus’ lineage back through David and Abraham, but he doesn’t stop until Adam. Jesus is the fulfillment of the entire story beginning with Adam. Jesus is, as Paul declares in both Romans and 1 Corinthians, the “second” and “last Adam” (Rom 5.12-21; 1Cor 15.45). He is the who ultimately replaces the first Adam and completes man’s mission.

These genealogies have a specific purpose, just like they always have: to declare clearly

who the seed is. Once we reach Jesus Christ, recorded genealogies are no longer all that important. Once the mission of the seed is fulfilled in Christ, there is no longer any need for these genealogies. That is why the apostles are unconcerned about them in their writings. This doesn't mean that God's created order concerning the family and its fruitfulness in children is over. It doesn't mean that God no longer works along these covenantal-creational lines. He does. The apostles, I believe, make this abundantly clear. The genealogies have mainly to do with who is accomplishing the mission of the seed. Now that Christ has accomplished that mission, in Christ, we are all the seed, heirs according to the promise, and are on mission with Christ (cf. Gal 3).

The story that is being told in Christ's life, death, and resurrection is precisely the story that began in creation and continued through the patriarchs and Israel that is being told and brought to its climax in Jesus. We have not started a completely new story while obliterating the old.

Law, Blessing, & Gentiles

Not only do we see that Jesus enters this story that is already being told to bring it to its conclusion as the seed, son, and king, we also see how the themes of *law, blessing, and the Gentiles* converge to tell us that Jesus is the conclusion of this same story. In God's original creation he blessed the man and the woman, telling them to be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth. God's blessing of man meant life for the world. The world was to be filled with life. Blessing practically becomes synonymous with life.

Sin entered the world and death through sin. This frustrated the original intention. Blessing couldn't be realized. Death that holds on to people becomes the order of the day. They don't go into a death-like sleep as Adam did and wake up soon after to be glorified. (The woman is the glory of the man, and, therefore, Adam is glorified after his deep sleep. See 1Cor 11.7.) They enter into that death-sleep and don't wake up. There is no glorification on the other side of death.

As we have already seen, God promised a seed. This seed was designated by circumcision during the time of Abraham and eventually by the Law that came through Moses. Among its many functions, the Law created a place and a people to deal with the sin of the world. In circumcision and the Law, Israel was cut off from the rest of the world for the sake of the world. Israel died to the world for the sake of saving the world. In doing this, God ripped humanity in half. Now there was Israel (who eventually became "Jews") and Gentiles. As long as there was this division marked by circumcision and the Law, the world existed in death. This is what death is. Death rips apart what belongs together. Since God created man in his image to reflect his unity, man ripped in half like this cannot be God's intention for man. The division between Jew and Gentile was a loud declaration that man was not as he was supposed to be.

The Law intensified this problem of death brought on by sin through Adam but was also put in place to deal with this problem. It was never intended to be the final answer to the problem. It was the instrument or the necessary pathway that led to the solution of the problem. To be "under Law," to be Israel according to the flesh, was to live under the sentence of death. The Law was created to deal with sin, and the only proper way to deal justly with sin is death. The Law, therefore, always held out the promise of the life that was to come, but the mission of the Law and its people was to accomplish the cursed death brought about by Adam's sin. Jesus, Paul says, was born "under the Law in order to redeem those under the Law" (Gal 4.4f.). Jesus becomes a part of and the preeminent "Law person." As Israel's King, he takes on the

responsibility and embodies the entire story of Israel. Jesus will take on the cursed death that the Law was designed to deal with. The Law shows us in shadow form that the way of life is through death. It is through the giving of yourself for others that you come into the blessing that is life. It is *this* Law that is fulfilled in Christ and his death. He took the curse of the Law, God's wrath against sin, so that the blessing could come. But it is the Law that was established through Moses that he is fulfilling.

Only *after* this purpose of the Law is fulfilled that the blessing of Abraham—life for the world—can come (Gal 3). Jesus fulfills this Law so that the blessing of life may come, not just to the Jews, but to all the nations whom the Jews were to serve (i.e., the Gentiles). Throughout Jesus' ministry we see him ministering to and foreshadowing this blessing to the nations. He heals their sick and proclaims their faith at times to be greater than that which he has found in Israel. Once the Law's purpose is fulfilled, the Gentiles will experience the blessing promised through Abraham. But again, it is the blessing of Abraham that is being experienced. That which God promised to Abraham is reaching its fullness in Christ. God hasn't thrown the old book away and started a new one.

Land

Not only do we see how these themes unite the story of Scripture and teach us of God's covenantal dealings with us, but we also see how the theme of the *land* is a part of this continuing story. Jesus comes to the earth as it was left under Adam and developed and even decimated by sin. Up to this time God had been fulfilling his creation project for man through this seed line. It was maturing. Man was to have dominion over the whole earth, but he kept messing up these new gardens that God was making from which life would flow to the world. The land of Israel along with its Temple was a new garden from which the world would receive life. It became the place through which God's river of life would flow to the world. Israel and her land always looked forward to the whole earth being covered with the knowledge of the glory of God as waters cover the sea.

Jesus comes to Israel. He walks through this land, teaches in this land, dies in this land, and rises again in the land. Jesus is a part of Israel who went to captivity and returned to the land under Cyrus and is now living in this empire world under Roman rule. This is not a new story. It is the old story continued and brought to its climax.

Priesthood & Temple

The priesthood and Temple are also themes that unite the story in Christ with all that has come before. Jesus comes on the scene and we find him being presented at the Temple, debating with the teachers of the Temple at age twelve, teaching in the Temple, and cleansing the Temple. Jesus is concerned about this Temple rebuilt by Zerubbabel and Joshua, the high priest. Why is he so concerned? Because he is the son of David, Israel's king. David's son builds and re-builds the Temple. Jesus has a mission to cleanse the present Temple—Israel—and eventually destroy it so that it can give way to a new Temple. There are new and more glorious things coming.

He is also concerned because he is the promised glory that fills this house. When Jesus leaves the Temple for the last time in the Gospels records, he is leaving Israel's house desolate, empty, like the glory that departed from the Temple during Ezekiel's time. They have committed abominations which cause this desolation. (Cf. Mt 21–24)

Prophet

Prophets also play a vital role in the unity of the story. A prophet is one who deliberates in the council of God and then declares the final verdict to the necessary parties. They are fathers to the kings and, therefore, the kings were to honor them by obeying the word of the prophet. God promised through Moses that a prophet would arise like Moses. This prophet would speak the counsels of God and all would be obliged to obey him (Dt 18.18-19). Jesus is that promised prophet. The disciples on the Road to Emmaus understood him to be a prophet (Lk 24.19). Peter declares explicitly in Acts 3.22-23 that Jesus is the fulfillment of what Moses prophesied in Deuteronomy. Jesus is the conclusion of the story.

All of these themes point to the fact that Jesus is becoming a part of the flow of this story. The same old story that began with Adam is present in Jesus' person and ministry. But just as with all covenants, there are some radically new things as well. This covenant is even more so because it is in this covenant that we understand all the previous. In Christ they are all tied together. Jesus takes the old world of covenants in Adam to their death in his own body. He raises them transformed into a new covenant. He doesn't annihilate. He fulfills and transforms. There is newness that must be recognized.

Something New: The New World in the Old World

Seed, Son, King

We take up the same themes and see how they have been transformed. In Jesus we see the Person and the mission of the seed come to full flower. What began with Abel, was picked up with Seth, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Israel as a nation, David, Solomon, *etc.* is now realized in Christ Jesus. The seed/son became Israel. Israel-as-seed-and-son became her king. Now Israel's king is Jesus. Jesus is Israel all grown up; mature Israel. He is the *man* Christ Jesus. Israel's history—Israel's story—is now to be realized in Christ. All other stories about Israel that don't include Christ are not the same story. They are not God's story concerning his chosen people. That story finds its finality in Christ. Israel continues on because Christ *is* Israel so that all those who are outside of Christ who are grafted into Christ can also be said by Paul to the Ephesians that they become a part of the commonwealth of Israel (Eph 2.11 ff.). But Israel as a distinct nation with a distinct purpose is no more. That Israel died and rose again in Christ into a more glorious existence. There is no more need for a distinct ethnic group of people called "Jews." The people of God had a name change. No longer are they called Jews. They are called "Christians" (Ac 11.26). The covenant changes and there is a name change with it. The church in Christ Jesus *is* Israel in her fullness. The church is what Israel was always intended to be. To go back to a state of Israel or to emphasize the Jews somehow as God's chosen people apart from Christ is to turn back the clock to before the time of Christ. It is to separate Jesus from the mission of Israel. It is to say that nothing changed with Christ's coming death and resurrection. Paul would say that this person is saying that the death of Christ was all in vain if this old world distinction still exists (Gal 2.21). If Jesus didn't fulfill the mission of Israel, we are still in our sins and Christ died for nothing.

Consequently, if Israel as she was under the Law is to continue to exist OR come back into her old existence form (e.g., rebuild the Temple and re-establish Temple worship), then there is a denial that Christ fulfilled the mission of Israel. This cannot be.

Another aspect of this is that the seed, the son of David, having fulfilled the mission of Israel by serving the nations is now exalted by the Father to be king over all the nations. That statue that is set up in Daniel 2—the empire world—is now overtaken by this stone cut out of the mountain. The King of Israel has been exalted to rule by fulfilling the role of being a servant-king who offers himself up for the sake of the people of the world. Through this he brings down the whole empire system, inaugurates God’s kingdom, and rules the world. The nations for which he asked the Father in Psalm 2 have been given to him for his inheritance.

But then there is also something new about this Son of God that wasn’t true ever before in the history of Israel. Yes, he is David’s son according to the flesh, but he is also YHWH himself. He is the eternal Word made flesh (Jn 1.1, 14). No son of David was also the fullness of the YHWH himself. They only represented YHWH. Jesus *is* YHWH in the flesh. He is “God with us,” Immanuel (Mt 1.23). God himself has taken on the mission of Israel and Israel’s king to die for the sins of the world. God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself (2Cor 5.19). God took upon himself the form of the suffering servant, humbling himself by giving his life (Phil 2.6-8). Jesus is that promised seed of old, but he transforms what it means to be the seed, the son of David, king of Israel.

Law, Blessing, & Gentiles

As I mentioned earlier, Jesus is born under the Law in order to take the cursed death of the Law in order to bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations. This he does. In doing so he transforms Israel’s identity along with the nations. In Jesus’ death he fulfills and releases Israel from the mission that she had up to this point in time. Once Jesus dies as Israel’s king, taking on the curse of the Law, Israel’s mission as the Law people dies. What happens now is that the need for circumcision that set them apart for this mission is no longer needed. The mission is over. Israel’s mission has come to its culmination and rest in Christ.

That is not the end of the story. Even though the death of Christ was unique, the people under the Law and in the old Adamic world knew death. Death in itself was nothing new. But Jesus didn’t only die. He transformed death into a pathway to life when he rose from the dead. In his resurrection we learn something about Jesus himself: he truly was God’s Son, the seed who was sent to complete the mission. Paul says in Romans 1.4 that God the Father declared Jesus to be his Son with power through the resurrection. This means that the blessing promised to Abraham is now realized in the world. Life has come to the world and can now grow and fill the earth.

One way in which this is realized—and a very new situation—is the fact there is no more Jew-Gentile distinction in Christ. In his own flesh Christ tore down the walls that separated us and united us in his own body (Eph 2.11 ff.). God’s people are no longer torn to pieces between this seed line people and the non-seed line people. We are all the seed in Christ Jesus.

This doesn’t mean that the Law no longer has any relevance to our lives. Jesus came to fulfill it, he says, not annihilate it (Mt 5.17-19). The Law set the pattern for Christ’s own life that is ultimately revealed in his death and resurrection. The Law remains a pattern for us. The grand purpose of the Law to bring about the saving death of the seed is fulfilled in Christ’s once-for-all death, but Christ’s life shaped by the Law remains the shape of our own lives. The cross was always the way of the Law and, thus, the path of life. And so it remains.

Yes, many historical situations have changed so that we have to apply the Law in different ways, but the fundamental character of God revealed in the particulars of the Law still

apply to all of life.

Land

The promise of the land also finds new, transformed expression. The original promise to Adam was that the whole earth would be developed following the pattern of heaven. It was his task to take dominion over the entire earth for this purpose. Through his obedience unto death, Jesus was exalted by the Father to be the Lord over heaven and earth (Phil 2.6-11; Mt 28.18). God's promise that had been fulfilled progressively in bits and pieces comes to its fullness in Christ. The entire earth belongs to him. God promised after the fall through Noah that he would save the entire created order. His plan was never simply to save only people. He has always been concerned about everything he created, not just men. In Christ God fulfills his covenant with Noah to save the world. Understanding this we can understand better those passages that speak about God loving the world and Jesus being the Savior of the world. Jesus being the Savior of the world doesn't mean that every person in all of history will inherit glory. It means that this entire created order, from dirt to cultures, is under his loving lordship and is moving towards God's purpose. There are those who refuse to submit to his lordship. They will be thrown out of his world. But this world has been, is being, and will be saved.

Priesthood & Temple

Not only has the promise of the land moved from one stage of glory to another, so has the ministry of the priesthood and the Temple. We saw during the Restoration that God was moving away from the type and shadow of a glorious Temple in Jerusalem to the substance of his promise to have a Temple that encompasses the earth. This Temple will be made of people (something the Temple always represented). Jesus embodies this in himself. Jesus presents himself as the fulfillment of the Temple. He told the Jews, "destroy this Temple and I will raise it up in three days" (Jn 2.19). He was speaking about his own body. People are coming to him for the forgiveness of sins. Everybody knew that forgiveness of sins happened at the Temple. But Jesus is forgiving sins as if he is the new Temple and God himself!

In Jesus we see and hear one of the purposes of the Temple fulfilled. Back when we looked at the initial construction of the Tabernacle we heard God say that the purpose was to fulfill his promise. He said, "I will be your God, and you will be my people, and I will dwell with you" (Ex 25.8; 29.45; cf. also Lev 26.9-12; Num 35.34). Israel's God would be "God with us." The purpose and promise of God to dwell with his people is realized in the Temple that is Christ Jesus. He is as the prophet foretold and Matthew records, Immanuel, God with us.

Throughout the conclusion of the Scriptures (commonly called the New Testament), Jesus' body is understood as his people, the church. The church as Jesus' body is this new Temple along with Jesus himself. He builds this new Temple, the church, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets with himself being the chief cornerstone (Mt 16.18; Eph 2.20). This Temple is made up of living stones (1Pt 2.5). The people of God in Christ are the Temple of God now both individually and collectively (1Cor 3.17; 6.19). We in Christ are the full expression of what the Temple was always intended to be. What the Temple shows us in types and shadows Jesus and his church fulfills.

This was experienced dramatically on the Day of Pentecost recorded in Acts 2. When the first Tabernacle and Temple were built, once the project was completed, God came into the

house in dramatic fashion; lighting the fire on the altar and filling the house with his glorious presence (Ex 40; 2Chr 7). On the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit came in and lit the altar fires. These altars just happen to be human altars upon whom the fire rests. There is no more mediating Temple structure needed. Man may draw near to God in Christ without being completely consumed by the fire.

With this new Temple there is a need for a new priesthood. This is a very new development. Throughout the time before Christ, one of the aspects of the unity of God's story had been this priesthood through the line of Aaron. Even after the people came back from exile, they had to re-establish the priesthood through Zadok, one of the descendants of Aaron. But Jesus is not of the tribe of Levi and, therefore, not one of the sons of Aaron. How then is there continuity in the story there?

Jesus, according to Hebrews, has a greater priesthood than that of Aaron's. This is for a number of reasons. Jesus does something that was never done in Israel before: he unites the office of king and priest together in one person. We see hints of this in people like Moses and David, but not anything like this. There is one, though, before them all that did this. He is this mysterious figure back in Genesis: Melchizedek. He is a king and priest who comes out and blesses Abraham and, in turn, Abraham pays tithes to him, acknowledging the superiority of his priesthood. Hebrews says that the Levites and, therefore, the sons of Aaron were subordinate to the priesthood of Melchizedek because they paid tithes to him even while they were in the loins of their father Abraham (cf. Heb 7). This greater priesthood can assume the lesser priesthood. Thus, a Melchizedekian priest can fulfill the priesthood of Aaron without having to be a direct descendant of Aaron.

Jesus is that priest. He is the son of David who is promised in Psalm 110.4 that he will be a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek. This is quite new in Christ ... and it is superior. Aaron's priestly line kept dying. This priesthood lives on forever because Christ lives forever.

Prophet

The last theme that we deal with that unites the story together is that of the prophet. According to Jesus, John the Baptizer was the last of the old world prophets (Mt 11.13). The old world prophets' main ministry was to Israel (or Israel and Judah). Kings were obliged to hear their words. They anointed Gentile kings at times and Gentile nations were to heed the word of God that they spoke, but their ministry was limited. Jesus as a prophet has an expansive ministry to all the nations of the earth. All the kings of the earth are to pay homage to him, hearing and heeding his words as the very words of God. All kings will give an account for how they responded to the word of this prophet.

Living the Story

So then, the Scriptures are one unified story that is united and fulfilled in Christ and his church. *Since the Scriptures are one unified story of how God relates to his world through his covenants ultimately fulfilled in Christ, then the whole of the Scriptures are our story and remain relevant for our lives.* I realize in an introduction to a subject like this that information can be a bit overwhelming. Getting the big picture when there are so many details is not easy. But even while we may be overwhelmed with information, one thing that we cannot fail to see is that all of Scripture is there *for us*.

Paul tells the Corinthians that what was written concerning the children Israel is there for our example so that we might learn how God relates to his people in obedience and disobedience (1Cor 10.1ff.). He also tells that all of Scripture is God-breathed (“inspired”) and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tm 3.16-17). We are not “New Testament Christians” as it is commonly understood in our culture. That is, we don’t find everything we need for everything about the Christian life in the New Testament. That simply doesn’t stand with what the apostles themselves wrote about the Scriptures! We are whole-Bible Christians. We can’t even really understand what the conclusion of the story means unless we read the first two-thirds to three-fourths of it. The unity of the Scriptures, among other things, means that all of the Bible is for us. It is God’s Word to us today in the twenty-first century. We neglect it to our own peril.

This requires something of us. It requires that we understand our history so that we will know who we are and what we are supposed to be doing. All that has been said may seem to some like the playground for theologians, but it is not. It is for all of the people of God. From Adam to Christ, from Moses to Revelation, all of it is there to teach us of Jesus and, in him, how to live before God in his world. Let us then be diligent in meditating upon the story. And may we pray that, like the disciples on the Road to Emmaus, our hearts will burn within us as Christ, by his Spirit, tells this story again and again (Lk 24.13ff.).

CHAPTER 9

CONTINUING ON IN THE NEW COVENANT: OUR UNITY WITH THE STORY OF SCRIPTURE

Throughout this book we have seen how the entirety of the Bible is one story that culminates in Christ. Jesus Christ is not only the apex of the story, but his life, death, and resurrection are the means by which we interpret all the Scriptures that come before. In Christ we see how God was working all along. Jesus embodies in himself this history. Consequently, he shows us that God brings these historical covenants to birth, they mature, eventually die, and then rise again into a new epoch of history. The world has been transformed, just like the resurrected body of Jesus. It is the same old creation body completely renewed.

In Jesus Christ we have seen the apex of creation’s story. The story of Scripture finds its climax in Christ. But our Bibles don’t end with the Gospels. Scripture continues on. History is transformed in Christ, not brought to its ultimate conclusion. In other words, we are not yet done with the story. The finish line of the old creation is the starting gate for the new creation in Christ. We live in the time in which the creation project has been renewed, set back on track, and looks toward its ultimate conclusion. This happens between the Advents of Christ.

There are no more major covenant epochs. The covenant inaugurated in Christ takes us from his time on earth until our resurrection from the dead. What God established in Christ’s death and resurrection is the way that he will deal with us to the end. This New Covenant is final. History will still ebb and flow in the current of the pattern of Scripture. There will still be deaths and resurrections that come in all shapes and sizes. But the covenant in Christ remains.

The continuation of the story is evidenced, of course, by the fact that we are all still here. We also have the witness and explanation of the apostles in the final chapters of God’s revelation we call the New Testament. God doesn’t leave us in the dark as to what is going on in between the Advents of Christ. The church created in Christ continues the story of Christ. The whole of

the conclusion of Scripture makes this plain. But Luke points us clearly in that direction. Luke wrote his Gospel in order to give Theophilus an “orderly account” of those things that had been fulfilled in Christ (Lk 1.1-4). But then he writes his second volume, Acts, and begins it this way describing his Gospel: “In the first book [i.e., the Gospel], O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus *began* to do and teach....” (Ac 1.1). The Gospel record is the *beginning* of Jesus ministry, not the end. Jesus continues to work even after his ascension. His story continues on through the church that he created. It is, after all, his body. His body continues to live on in the world, so the story continues.

The story continues well beyond the historical boundaries of the writings of the apostles, but from their writings we see how the church is to be living this life in the New Covenant. What we discover is that God reset his creation project in Christ as the last Adam and, through his Spirit working in the church, this creation project will be completed. The church’s life in Christ and by the Spirit is radically new, but we are living the same story that started in the original creation. *The continuing mission of Christ through the church by the power of the Spirit is to bring the world to its maturity so that heaven and earth will be a completely united house for God and his people to dwell together.*

Throughout this book I have been noting those aspects of continuity between the old world and the new world. We have already done that in the last chapter on the New Covenant in Christ. But something that we need to understand is that the old world passed away *decisively* in Christ’s death and resurrection but *progressively* in history. So, we need to turn our attention to what occupies the attention of the apostolic writings.

The Old World Passing Away

The Temple and Jerusalem

When describing epochs of history, we may have a tendency to think that one morning a person wakes up and declares that a new epoch of history has begun. We give nice, neat dates to these epochs in Western history, for instance, so that the Renaissance begins in this year and ends with the coming of the Modern era in this year. Those dates are good to give us a general idea of the time period we are describing, but history is not so neatly divided up. Epochs blend into one another. There are major moments in which we can say, “That was an important event that moved things forward into this era.” One epoch overlaps significantly with the previous and the following epochs. There are precursors to that event and then this epoch bleeds into the next one. So it is with the coming of the New Covenant in Christ. The work of Christ was the decisive act, but that set the course of the old world on its slow dying process. The old world passes away over a generation and the new world—new covenant—is inaugurated over this same generation.

Jesus gave the apostles the time frame when he spoke to them about a judgment to come within the generation in which they were living (Mt 24.34). The apostles understood this and wrote within this context and with this coming end of the old world in mind. Paul speaks about it 1 Corinthians 7.31 when instructing the Corinthian Christians concerning marriage and remaining unmarried and how they were to be responding to the times in which they lived. He tells them that “the present form of this world is passing away.” The apostle John, I believe, alludes to this as well in his epistles when he tells his readers, “At the same time, it is a new commandment that I am writing to you, which is true in him and in you, because *the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining*” (1Jn 2.8). And also, “And *the world is*

passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever” (1Jn 2.17). The writer of Hebrews makes it plain as well. He is writing to people who are being tempted to turn back to the old world and its ways, rejecting Christ. They want to go back and join up with the Jews and worship at the Temple to ease the persecution they are facing. The writer of Hebrews, in dealing with a passage from Jeremiah, teaches them, “In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what *is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away*” (Heb 8.13). His verbs are very clear here. The old covenant is *becoming* obsolete; it is growing old and is ready to vanish away. Right now they are in this transition time between the end of the old world and the birth of the new world in its entirety; that is, when the New Covenant will be shed of much of its Old Covenant trappings. The apostolic period in the church was this transition time.

The question is, How would they know when the old world passed away? They would know when the old world passed away completely when it was completely destroyed. Where was the old world? The old world was centralized and embodied in the Temple and Jerusalem. Remember, the Restoration covenant involved the rebuilding of both the Temple and Jerusalem. This was central to the previous covenant. As long as it stood, the old world was still in existence. The old Temple and the walled Jerusalem represented the age-old division between Israel and the nations that had now been remedied in Christ. But as long as it stood, the old world was still in existence.

Early Christians recognized and respected this. We read at the end of Luke’s Gospel that the followers of Christ “were continually in the temple praising God” (Lk 24.53). We find them at the beginning of Acts in and around the Temple, worshiping there (Ac 2.46; 3.1ff.). While the Temple stands, even Paul continues to participate in some of the old world Temple rituals (cf. e.g., Ac 21.26). As long as the Temple stood, that meant that God wasn’t completely finished with it. At the crucifixion he certainly declared plainly what he would be doing with it as he tore the veil of the Temple (Mt 27.51). That was a decisive act. But he gave time for the Jews to hear and respond to the proclamation before he finished the work.

The Temple would be destroyed. Jesus prophesied this and three of the Gospel writers declare it plainly in their Gospels (Mt 24–25; Mk 13; Lk 21). Jesus will come in judgment on the old Temple as he foreshadowed in his cleansings of the Temple, and he will finally destroy it. He will come in this fashion just as he did in earlier epochs of history: he will raise up a nation as his servants, and they will destroy the Temple. They will be his instruments. Just as Assyria and Babylon were YHWH’s rods to discipline his people and ended old worlds years before, and just as they were the manifestation of his presence in dealing with Israel, so the Romans will be in this destruction of the Temple.

Jesus said that this destruction of the old world embodied in the Temple and in Jerusalem would come to an end within a generation (Mt 24.34). He prophesied this around A.D. 30. The Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70. It was a forty year period in which the old generation died off just as they did in the wilderness years before.

This is the time of the New Testament. Just as with all the previous covenants, this doesn’t mean that there is no continuity with the old world. We have already seen that there is continuity with all that came previously. The old world is very evident in the new world here. Jesus takes Jewish men and makes them the foundation of the new Temple-city that he is building. This is made plain in John’s Revelation. The twelve foundations for the walls of the city had the names of the apostles on them; the apostles who were Jews. So, the old world is still a vital part of this new construction project in which Jesus, the King, is engaged.

The Oikoumene

The Temple and Jerusalem weren't the only aspects of the old world of the Restoration that would pass away. The Jews, Temple, and Jerusalem are representative of the whole world. The whole world of Restoration is, in some sense, constructed around them. The old world divisions between Jew and Gentile are still in place. But what was the world that they represented and in which they lived? That world was the world that God constructed and revealed to Nebuchadnezzar and interpreted through his Jewish prophet, Daniel: the empire-world (or the *oikoumene*). This world was represented in a statue that God revealed to Nebuchadnezzar in a dream. It had a head of gold—Babylon—chest and arms of silver—Persia—abdomen and thighs of bronze—Greece—and legs and feet of iron and iron mixed with clay—Rome. These were the four kingdoms that would make up one empire. This would be the world house in which the people of God were to live until God brought it to an end. But that whole system in God's economy is still built upon this Jew-Gentile distinction (with some caveats). This was in place until Israel completed her mission.

God not only revealed to Nebuchadnezzar that this empire would exist, but he also revealed to him that it would end during the Roman empire. Nebuchadnezzar saw a rock cut out of a mountain without hands that rolled down and hit the statue in the feet (i.e., Rome) and brought the whole system down. This rock grew into a mountain that covered the entire earth (Dan 2). Some will say, "But the Roman empire lasted until the fifth century before it finally came down." This is true. But this prophecy has a specific context and perspective with which it is dealing. The empire system as it relates to Israel as the people of God will end. Israel and the empire are a part of this Restoration world that comes to an end. So, in God's economy, while the Roman empire continues in form for several centuries after this, its time for its specific purpose in relating to Israel is over. This is no longer how the world is viewed by God ... and that's the only perspective that really counts.

The new empire of empires is the one established by Christ: the kingdom of God. He is the king. He is the new Cyrus and Darius as well as the new David and Solomon. This doesn't mean that there will be no more structural empires in the world from this time forward. And this isn't a commentary on the goodness or evilness of empires *per se*. This is saying that the world has changed. The old house of empire constructed in Daniel for the whole world as well as the Temple in Jerusalem are no longer central to God's plan.

During this transition time we see some interesting things going on with the empire. The Jews on the whole never did like the empire set up, but they cavorted with the powers-that-be in the empire when it suited them. In this way the Jews and the empire came together in the person of Pontius Pilate to kill Jesus. The whole world was involved in the killing of Jesus. But then, during the transition time recorded in the book of Acts, we see some hints at a shift indicating who are the new people of God. We find in the book of Acts that the Romans—the empire people—are responding to and protecting Christians to one degree or another. The Jews are the ones persecuting the church and the empire is running to the rescue. We see this especially in the life of Paul. The Jews conspire to kill him when he goes up to the Temple for his purification rite in Acts 21. The Romans come and arrest him, but in doing so protect him from death. He uses his Roman citizenship as an advantage and appeals his case to Caesar, gaining audience with lesser kings along the way. These Greeks are responding to the gospel message. We learn in Philippians 1.13 that Paul has gotten the message to the entire praetorium (i.e., the soldiers closest to Caesar who protected him).

Nevertheless, this empire must come to an end in God's special purposes. Before it comes to an end, the gospel of the kingdom must be preached to this entire world. Jesus says this in Matthew 24.14: "And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world [*oikoumene*] as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come." The old world doesn't just end completely at the death and resurrection. The gospel must be proclaimed to it. Jesus sets this statement in the context of the pains of giving birth. The old world is giving birth to a new world. These birth pains will be experienced in tribulations. But when the gospel of the kingdom goes into the entire empire world that God constructed for these temporary purposes, then the end of the labor pains will come and the new world will be born. So, Paul goes about preaching the gospel first to the Jew and then to the Greek (Rom 1.16). This is the make-up of that empire world.

The Jew I believe we understand. When Paul went into a city, he would first go to the synagogue—the place of the Jews—and he would reason with them through the Scriptures. Then he would go out to the empire people—the Greeks. The word "Greek" is not completely synonymous with "Gentile." All Greeks were Gentiles, but not all Gentiles were Greeks. Greeks were the people who were a part of the empire. They were the ones under the rule of the empire and characterized by Greek language. They were Hellenized. When Jesus said that the gospel of the kingdom must be proclaimed to the entire "world" (*oikoumene*), he was speaking about that world that God constructed during the Restoration. He wasn't speaking about China and Brazil. Within the period between A.D. 30 and A.D. 70 this old world heard the message of the gospel, was given a chance to respond in repentance and faith, and then the old world ended with the destruction of the Temple.

And that is how the old world finally passed away. But that is not the final chord of all of history. The old world was giving birth to a new world. The new world was present, would mature, and would come to its completion.

The New World Now and Coming

Most of the New Testament is historically specific. The Gospels are historical records of some of what Jesus said and did and cover the years between 4 B.C. and A.D. 30. The epistles are letters written to specific churches dealing with situations they are facing in their current times; times that lasted from A.D. 30 to A.D. 70. The Bible is not a collection of "timeless truths" in the sense that there are no specific historical contexts for the individual books. The Bible is written within history to specific people of specific cultures and situations. Like all of Scripture, even though the original text is culturally and historically specific, it is all profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness so that we might be thoroughly equipped for every good work (2Tm 3.16-17). The Scriptures are sufficient in every way to give us direction for this new world that was begun in that apostolic generation and continues on until today and will until the final resurrection. The Scriptures tell us who we are, give us laws that put boundaries on our lives as Christians, and they give us a trajectory of mission for what we are to be doing between the birth of the new world in A.D. 70 and its full maturity that is to come.

In writing the Gospels and the epistles, though directed to specific times and places, the apostles answer important questions for us concerning who we are in relationship to this entire story. They tell us what we are to be doing as well as how it all ends. We are not given many details of how everything will work out in the in-between time, but we are given enough to know

how to live in these times and understand where everything is moving.

Seed

The apostles pick up on themes of Scripture in telling the people of God in Christ who they are. They are players in the same story that God has been telling from the beginning. In the beginning God created man and woman in his own image (Gen 1.27). This is, as we saw, the definition of what it means to be human. Man *is* image of God. What happens in the New Covenant in Christ? Do we become something fundamentally different so that God has to reinterpret everything and so that humanity's identity established in Genesis is no longer relevant? Not at all. Jesus comes as *the* image of God (Col 1.15). Because Jesus is God incarnate, our thoughts might first run to the fact that image speaks of his deity. Jesus is certainly divine, but "image of God" takes us back to Adam. Jesus is the last Adam, the true man, the true image of God (Rom 5.12ff.). He is a new Adam created, as it were, in the resurrection. He rises to walk around in a garden. But it is not good for the man to be alone, so God the Father creates a helper comparable to him from his riven side while he is asleep. When he rises, he is glorified with a new bride.

So, Jesus + the church = the new man; the new image of God. He is the husband, and the church is his bride (Eph 5.32). It is in that image that we are being renewed and in which we are growing up more and more into the likeness of our God. In other words, we are maturing in this image. To be in Christ is to be in this new humanity. This new humanity was to be fruitful and multiply, filling the earth. This progeny would be the *seed*. When we are united with Christ, we are born from above (Jn 3) and become the seed, sons of God in Christ Jesus.

Paul picks up on this theme when teaching the Galatians who they are now in Christ. He tells them that they are the seed. Specifically, in Christ, all Christians are the seed of Abraham and, therefore, heirs according to the promise given to Abraham (Gal 3.29). To be in Christ is to be Abraham's seed and to be the possessor of the promises given to him. The promise given to him involved this renewed creation project with its intended end: life for the world.

What we have seen is that this theme of the seed developed over time. The seed is a son, and the son eventually becomes the king. The language of the apostles is replete with this language concerning those in Christ. We are "sons of God" (Jn 1.12; Rom 8.14, 19; Gal 4.6; Phil 2.15; 1Jn 3.1, 2). As sons of God we sit with Christ, the King, in heavenly places above all principalities and powers, ruling the world with him (Eph 1.20-23; 2.6). This is who we are. This is the Christian identity. Those who have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ (Gal 3.27). Consequently, they assume this identity.

Having this identity is as much a responsibility as it is a privilege. Being the seed means certain things. It means for one that we are *bound by God's laws*. We can't live just any way we want to live. There are certain boundaries for our lives; boundaries that God himself defines. These are all throughout the apostolic writings, but just as an example, in Ephesians 4 Paul goes through a catalogue of these character qualities and actions that the people of God being renewed in the image of God are to have. Within then church, brothers and sisters, are to be speaking the truth with one another because we are members of one another. We are to be angry and sin not. We are not to steal but engage in honest work so that we may have something to share with those in need. We are not to let corrupting communication come out of our mouths but only that which is good for edification. We are not to grieve the Holy Spirit. We are to let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and slander be put away from us and be kind, tender-hearted, forgiving one

another even as God in Christ has forgiven us. These are some examples of how we are supposed to be living as the people God. All of these things are really nothing all that new. They are found in God's laws of old in one form or another.

The Law of God, though transformed in Christ, is not abrogated. It shows us the way of life. Yes, we must think through the cultural specifics of the Law and those things that have changed in Christ, but there are some bedrock character issues that simply reflect the eternal life of God himself. These are expected of the new humanity.

There are laws that provide boundaries for us, but the seed is also *involved in Christ's mission*. We have seen in Scripture that the seed had a mission. That mission was to give life to others by giving his life for others. There is a mission to suffer for the sake of the world. We know that God brought this plan as it was laid out in the Scriptures and in history to its unique climax in Christ. But we see in the apostles' writings that the life of Christ and, therefore, the pattern of history before Christ provides a pattern for our lives. That is, we are to take up our crosses in self-denial for the sake of others. The whole of 1 Corinthians concerns this cruciform living. Paul teaches us there in specific examples of what it means to live the cruciform life and the wisdom of God in it. The church is to take up this mission in everything from daily service to one another all the way to giving one's life in death for the sake of Christ. This is the mission of the seed, and we are the seed, the renewed image of God.

Land

It would be through this giving of our lives that another aspect of God's original purpose for us and the world would be accomplished: dominion of the earth. The original creation plan was to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. The earth was to be developed to be a glorious house for God and his people. Christ is doing that as the last Adam and we, the church, with him as his bride. Subduing the land involved everything from plowing the dirt and growing crops to developing cultures with government structures that reflected the rule of God.

Taking dominion of the earth in this way involves all sorts of vocations. It began with Adam being a farmer. But as history progresses and humanity matures, dominion takes on new tasks. We see it early on in Genesis when the wicked precede the righteous in areas such as metallurgy, music, and developing business around livestock (Gen 4). The righteous are to do these things as well. God made this clear when he set people apart as a nation and had them build a house that eventually involved all of these things and more.

God has many vocations for his people in the world. Not all who serve God do so in the servant-priesthood (i.e., as pastors) or as missionaries. That was, in fact, never the case. Culture's center is worship and so a servant-priesthood is necessary for the proper development of the culture, but that is not all there is. Once special worship takes place around God's throne, you leave. You don't leave it all behind, but you are building culture in a specific way. The culture is to flow from this special worship so that whether you are working with farm animals or high-powered computers, whether you are working with the poor or with the wealthiest and most powerful of society, you are doing for kingdom purposes. All lawful vocations are a part of God's continuing project. We are all called to do different things, but we are all working for the same purpose: to see the kingdom progress and for the earth to be a fit house for God and man.

Blessing

Continuing this original creation project now implemented in a transformed fashion in

Christ is not accomplished in our own strength. The truth of the matter is that it was never to be this way, even in the beginning. It is understood that it comes from God's blessing; that is, his power that gives life. In the original creation we hear preceding the command to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it that "God blessed them" (Gen 1.28). This blessing was his power to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. This creation blessing was given to the seed line until it was fulfilled in Christ. Now it is given to all of those in Christ. Paul alludes to this in Galatians 3. There he tells us that this blessing in Christ is realized in the Spirit that Christ poured out on his church on the Day of Pentecost. He is the blessing and the source of blessing that comes through us. He is, as we confess in the Nicene Creed, "the Lord and Giver of life." He is the one that Christ sends in order to breathe life into the world through the church.

How does this blessing operate in the world to bring life to the world? Like it always has only with more power than it ever did before the giving of the Spirit. Originally, the blessing involved the ability of the man and woman to be fruitful and multiply in terms of having children. It meant more than this, but it fundamentally included producing other image-bearing creatures. God was speaking about having real children through what we call "biological" means. One thing that we need to get clear here: there is no such thing as something being "merely biological." Yes, it takes the life of a man and a woman coming together to have another life produced, but the Spirit gives life. He is the breath that we breathe. These aren't *merely* natural, biological processes that can be understood apart from God's governing and sustaining activities. Relationships between parents and children are never *merely* biological. They are much deeper than this superficial understanding ... and we know it in our bones. These relationships are covenantal. The Bible knows nothing about "mere biology." Jesus was born in the line of Adam (Lk 3) to redeem the line of Adam. As the last Adam he brought about a renewal of the creation order distorted and perverted by the first Adam and realized in his progeny. To redeem that creation order means that God puts his creation project back on track so that the children of his people are also to be counted as his people. There is the realization of the sinfulness of our children. Our children aren't "naturally born Christians." Children of believers are Christians by the promise/Word of God. As Abraham was promised that God would be a God to him and to his children, and we are heirs of the Abrahamic promises, so our children have God as their Father as well. God's word of promise is stronger than blood. God's grace in Christ is stronger than the sin that rips us apart.

Having children and rearing them up as disciples of Christ is one way the blessing of life comes to the world. From our homes we are to fill the earth with worshipers of Christ. But there are others who aren't born to Christian parents or who have forsaken the faith. What do we do there? The blessing of Abraham is not just that his biological children would enjoy this life, but that all of the nations would enjoy this life. The Spirit works through the proclamation of the gospel to bring life. It is his Word and Spirit that makes new creation just as it did in the beginning. Just as God spoke and the Spirit brought life, so now we, filled with the Spirit, proclaim his Word, and life is brought to the world. This is our calling as the church in union with Christ. We are called to disciple the nations. This is the project that is nothing more than the original creation mandate. It was in seed form then. In Christ we find the full flower.

We see in the apostolic writings that this is not simply seeing individuals turn to Christ (though that is absolutely necessary). What we see is that people like Paul are go around establishing little colonies of heaven throughout the empire. These are new societies, a culture within the cultures, formed in Christ confessing him as Lord. These are little bits of heaven come to earth, impressing the mold of heaven upon the earth.

This mandate given in the beginning looked toward a conclusion. The world and man's project in and with it were moving somewhere from the beginning. In Christ, the main hindrance of sin was dealt with in a decisive fashion so that the project could continue on *and be completed*. Just as sure as it was from the time of Adam that Christ would come into the world to accomplish what God the Father planned for him to accomplish, so it is just as sure that this mission of Christ in the world through the church will be completed: the kingdom will develop, the nations will be discipled (cf. Matt 28.18-20). Once this project is complete, Jesus will hand the completed kingdom over to the Father (1Cor 15.20-28).

Some mistake this type of thinking with a triumphalism that sees a straight line of progress ever moving upward. This is not the biblical picture. We must remember the biblical pattern: glorification comes through death. Progress is many times made when it looks to the naked eye as if everything is going backward and falling apart. There will be times of prosperity for the church, but there will also be times of suffering. Neither ultimately hinders the goal. In these ways the goal of a mature creation is reached. This is the aim of our salvation. It is not simply to snatch our individual souls out of hell, but it is for the world through the church to come to this mature position.

We are called to mature and lead the world into maturity. We are not snatched up to heaven once converted because we are still involved in this mission to and for the world. We see glimpses of this world in Revelation 21. Some have mistakenly believed that this was a picture of heaven, the place where we will go to our rest after we die. That is not what the text says. This city is the glorious bride, the Lamb's wife (Rev 21.9). This city is a Temple city in which God and man dwell together. Interestingly, this image given to us is not the image of the final state of things. Certainly that are reflections of that final state. But this is the church as she is *and* what she is becoming. We know that this is not the final state because along side the river of life that flows out of the midst of this city are trees of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (Rev 22.2). When the final resurrection comes, there will be no more outreach to the nations such as this. This is the picture of the church as she is in Christ. She doesn't look this glorious to us right now, but she is. But in this image we also have the image after which we are shape our existence as the church. We are, as it were, to live up to the name we have been given.

This is who we are and who we will be. When it is all said and done and history as we know it now in the New Covenant in Christ comes to its conclusion in our resurrection, God's plan that he had from the beginning will be complete. He will not fail. Now, live the story.