

The Covenantal Structure of the Bible

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The Covenantal Structure of the Bible (revised version)
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The Central Theme of the Bible

Chapter One

What is the central theme of the Bible? To answer this question, we must consider one that is more fundamental: Does the Bible have a central theme? If the Bible is one book, it is apparent that the answer must be yes. Certainly, this is the answer that has been given by Christian people from every land, language, and culture who, for almost 2000 years, have confessed that the Bible is a unified revelation from God.

More importantly, the Bible itself confirms this testimony. Although written by over 40 different authors over a period of about 1500 years, the Bible presents an integrated worldview in its doctrines of God, man, law, history, and salvation. The harmony of the Biblical teaching is all the more wonderful since it represents an organic growth of revelation in the historical outworking of God's covenant relationship with His people from the original creation to the end of the world.

Christians from all ages have confessed the unity of the Biblical message, but they have not all found the unity of the Bible in the same themes. They do not all agree which theme is central. Some, for example, have suggested the idea of redemption. Now the Biblical story surely is the unfolding of a redemptive drama. The Bible tells us how man fell into sin and how God in His grace saved man (Gen. 3:1-15). It tells us of God's great love for sinful men and the death of Jesus to redeem man (John 3:16). The Bible teaches us that the Holy Spirit was sent into the world to apply Jesus' redemptive work (Rom. 8:1-14). At the climax of history, we will see the world redeemed and the full manifestation of God's glory (1 Cor. 15:22-28).

Thus, redemption is surely one of the grand themes of the Bible. But, redemption does not seem to be a broad enough theme to include all major themes. To be specific it does not seem broad enough to include topics like creation, which occurs before there is any need for redemption and seems to be more important in the Bible than just background information for redemption. It would be difficult with a central theme as narrow as redemption to find a proper place for other themes such as angels, Satan, fallen angels, hell, and so on. As important as redemption is to the Biblical story, it does not seem to be the true organizing center of the Bible.

Others have suggested that the central theme of the Bible is Christ Himself. This must be true in some sense for Christ is the Creator of the world and the Word of God incarnate (John 1:1-3). From the fall to the consummation of redemption, the Biblical message centers on the person of Christ as the Savior of the world. He is prefigured in types and predicted in prophecy (Luk. 24:25-27). Whatever answer one gives to the question of the main theme of the Bible, Christ must be a part of the answer. But in what sense should we think of Christ as the center?

Many Bible teachers believe the covenant is the most important theme in the Bible. Again, the covenant is definitely a main theme. The Bible tells the story of God's covenants with Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12 ff.). It tells us how Adam broke the covenant and brought the human race, which he represented, into sin and judgment. To Noah, Abraham, Moses, and David, God bestowed covenantal promises that represented a renewal of the covenant with Adam and the promise of a better covenant to come. That better covenant, of course, is the new covenant in Christ. He came into the world to be our new representative, to succeed where Adam had failed.

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By His death on the cross, He redeemed us from sin and judgment — the Adamic curse. In His resurrection, we receive life. Thus, from creation to redemption, the whole Biblical message is covenantal.

Like redemption, the covenant is definitely a unifying theme of the Bible, but it also seems to be inadequate to bring together the full range of Biblical revelation. By itself, the notion of covenant tends to be abstract and difficult to define. What we need is a theme that is broad enough to embrace every major Biblical idea, a theme that includes redemption, gives proper honor to Christ as the Creator and Savior, and also does justice to the centrality of the covenant.

Such a theme is the kingdom of God. In the kingdom of God, all of the other suggested major themes are included and given proper place. In addition, the kingdom of God includes other themes important for our understanding of the Bible, such as creation, the Biblical teaching about angels and demons, the doctrine of final judgment and everlasting punishment. Christ Himself remains a central theme of the Bible because as the King, He is the center of the kingdom, its very essence. Redemption as a central theme is the unfolding drama of God's restoring the kingdom to its original purpose.

Also, the theme of the covenant finds its proper place when we recognize that the covenant is the constitution of the kingdom, the definition of the Heavenly King's relationship to His people. In the Biblical story, kingdom and covenant are almost synonymous and at least mutually dependent conceptions. The covenant defines and establishes the kingdom; the kingdom in its essence is an extended covenantal relationship.

Genesis begins with the creation of the kingdom of God and the rebellion of man under Satan. The rest of the Bible tells how God restores the kingdom to Himself and brings man back into the position of kingdom glory that God originally designed for him. History is the story of God's war against Satan. God defeats Satan and reconstructs His kingdom through Christ, bringing to pass His original purpose for the creation.

The Gospel that Christ preached was the Gospel of the kingdom of God: "And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people" (Mt. 4:23; cf. 9:35; 4:17; 5:3, 10; 6:33; 10:7; 12:28; 13:11ff.; 16:19, 28; 18:3-4; 19:14; 21:43; 24:14; 25:34). Paul, the great apostle, preached the message of the kingdom: "And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him" (Ac. 28:30-31; cf. 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23). The last book in the Bible celebrates the everlasting establishment of God's kingdom: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15; cf. 1:9; 12:10). The last chapters of the book of Revelation describe the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, the fulfillment of God's purpose for the creation and the final manifestation of the kingdom of God (Rev. 21-22).

Christ as the head of the new covenant brings in the kingdom of God, fulfilling the promises made to Abraham and David, accomplishing all that God had designed for man in the original creation. Satan's attempt to destroy the kingdom is defeated by the Messiah who saves the world and establishes the everlasting kingdom.

Thus, the covenantal kingdom of God is the central theme of Biblical revelation. All the other suggested central themes find their proper place within this theme, for the covenant is the

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constitution of the kingdom, Christ is the king, and redemption is God's work of restoring the kingdom so that man as God's viceregent may fulfill his original purpose.

What is a Covenant? (Part 1)

Chapter Two

When we say that the kingdom of God is a covenantal kingdom, we refer to the fact that the covenant defines God's relationship with man and therefore, the covenant is the "constitution" of the kingdom. But, we must consider more specifically what a covenant is. To begin with, we must understand the essence of the covenant, for it is often misunderstood. Sometimes even Biblical scholars erroneously state that the covenant idea in the Bible is essentially the same as the idea of a contract. This is not true. Contract and covenant differ in their very essence. A contract is a conditional relationship established for the mutual benefit of the contracting parties. A contract is a limited commitment, continuing only so long as the mutual benefit continues. The covenant is not a contractual type of relationship, limited by the mutual benefit of the parties involved.

To discern the essence of a covenantal relationship, we need only to consider the book of Deuteronomy, one of the first books of the Bible and one that emphasizes the covenant. Deuteronomy shows clearly that the essence of the covenant is love. First, God's love for His people is the basis for His calling them. Then, they are urged to respond to Him in love, expressed by loyalty to the covenant established with God.

For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.

The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His lovingkindness to a thousandth generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments; but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.

Then it shall come about, because you listen to these judgments and keep and do them, that the LORD your God will keep with you His covenant and His lovingkindness which He swore to your forefathers. He will love you and bless you and multiply you; He will also bless the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, your grain and your new wine and your oil, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock, in the land which He swore to your forefathers to give you. (Deu. 7:6-13)

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In these verses we see that the origin of the covenant is the love of God for Abraham and his seed. God determined to bless the children of Israel and to make them His own people. He did not choose them as if He were getting “a good deal.” There is nothing contractual here. In grace, He determined to love them and to bestow His blessing upon them.

But love requires mutuality. It is a two-way street. So, God demands that the children of Israel also love Him.

Hear, O Israel! The LORD is our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. (Deu. 6:4-5)

Now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require from you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the LORD’S commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good? (Deu. 10:12-13)

As these verses make clear, a covenant is a commitment of love. Since it creates a relationship fundamentally different from the mutual profit-seeking relationship of a contract, it must be established in a different manner. In the Bible, a covenant can only be established and sealed by an oath, which usually involves an oath-taking ceremony like circumcision (that is, in ancient Israel, the act of circumcising a child constituted a covenant oath). The oath is so important in a covenant that the word oath is sometimes used as a synonym for covenant (cf. Deu. 29:12, 14).

What then is an oath? An oath is a self-maledictory promise. When one takes an oath, he promises to preserve the covenantal relationship and seals the promise with words that call a curse upon himself if he should fail to keep his promise. The curse of the covenant is death.

Many Christians may not realize that a curse is part of the traditional Christian wedding vow. “Till death do us part” means “until death,” but it includes the idea that nothing but death can end the covenant, implying the curse of death on the one who is disloyal to the oath. Another aspect of the traditional wedding vow illustrates the type of commitment demanded in a covenant. For example, we say “in sickness and health,” and “for better or worse,” which witness to the fact that even if the relationship turns out to be “unprofitable” for us, we will not abandon our partner because of economic or other adversities. Marital love is self-sacrificial. There is no basis for dissolving the relationship unless one of those who took the vow betrays it and undermines the whole relationship. Sickness, poverty, or an unpleasant personality cannot undo the oath. In marriage, each person takes an oath to give himself or herself sacrificially to the other, without thought of personal profit.

The wedding illustration is especially appropriate, for God’s relationship with Israel is compared to the relationship of husband to wife (Ezek. 16). So long as Israel is faithful to the love of the covenant — and “faithful” here does not mean sinless perfection, but rather repentant faith and love — God will never leave her or forsake her. His commitment to bless her cannot be shaken.

But, it is not in God’s relationship with Israel that we see the full meaning of love, for the Bible does not unfold the full meaning of covenantal love until the advent of Christ. It is in the relationship between Christ and the Father, that we first see that covenantal love is the eternal fellowship of Father, Son, and Spirit.

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Father, I desire that they also, whom You have given Me, be with Me where I am, so that they may see My glory which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. . . . and I have made Your name known to them, and will make it known, so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them, and I in them. John 17:24-26

In the relationship of Christ and the Father, we understand that John's words "God is love" have Trinitarian significance. God is love because the Father, Son, and Spirit share an everlasting love for one another. Each of the three Persons of the Trinity wholly devotes Himself to bless and glorify the other (cf. John 7:18; 8:50, 54; 11:4; 12:28; 13:31-32; 14:13; 16:14; 17:1, 4, 5, 22, 24). God Himself in the fellowship of Trinitarian love is the ultimate kingdom, and the relationship between the Persons of the Trinity is the true covenant.

This has profound significance for the Biblical story of creation and redemption. God created the world as His kingdom to manifest His glory (cf. Psalms 8, 19). Since the three Persons of the Trinity constitute a covenantal kingdom of love, the created world, too, is a covenantal kingdom over which God set Adam and Eve to rule. Their rule was to be based upon love for God and one another. They were to guard the created world and take care of it so that it would bear fruit for God's glory (Genesis 2:15). The fall of man was a rejection of God's love and a rejection of the way of love among men. The violence of the pre-flood world is the climax of the rebellion of the fall and the logical outcome of the rejection of God's love.

Redemption means the restoration of the covenantal purpose of God. Man is restored to his original calling as God's image, which means man is called back into the fellowship of the covenantal love of the Father, Son, and Spirit. The created world, too, must be restored to its original purpose of revealing God's glory through the covenantal stewardship of God's image. The kingdom of righteousness and love must come to historical realization in order that Satan's lie and the temptation in the Garden may be utterly defeated to the glory of God. Redemption finds its fulfillment in the kingdom of God. God has poured out His covenantal love upon us in Jesus Christ in order that through faith in Him we may be re-created as His children and brought into an everlasting fellowship of love.

The Bible is the story of God's covenantal kingdom — its creation, its corruption by sin and folly, and God's gracious redemption of that kingdom to the praise of the glory of His grace. The central theme of the Bible, the covenantal kingdom of God, reveals the nature of the Triune God as a God of love who has called man into a fellowship of love with Himself.

What is a Covenant? (Part 2)

Chapter Three

The essence of God's covenant is love, but the idea of a covenant also implies a formal relationship. The mutual commitment of a love relationship is sometimes expressed in a legal form that makes the obligations of love explicit. A covenant is such a formal love commitment.

Again, the analogy of marriage is helpful. The fact that a wedding vow is a legal ceremony does not detract from the love which it expresses. On the contrary, if a man professes to love a woman, but he refuses to assume legal obligations, the reality of his love is dubious at best. God's love for man is expressed in the legal form of a covenant in which God takes obligations upon Himself and calls man to be loyal to the covenant. The covenant, therefore, has a clear structure and may be expressed in formal legal language. The book of Deuteronomy, the book of covenant love, provides us with our understanding of the covenant. The whole book is a covenantal document, structured in terms of a five-point outline that is used throughout the Bible to define the covenant. Ray Sutton explains the outline of Deuteronomy as follows.

Transcendence (Deut. 1:1-5). The covenant begins with an acknowledgment of God's absolute Lordship. He grants the covenant. He is the absolute King.

Hierarchy (Deut. 1:6-4:49). In this section of Deuteronomy, Moses describes the history of Israel in terms of God's leading and blessing. God gave Israel leaders, covenantal representatives. When Israel was faithful to God, she obeyed her leaders.

Ethics (Deut. 5-26). The central section of the covenant defines how God's people are to live so that they can be His holy nation. God's relationship with His people is an ethical relationship. They must be righteous to enjoy the blessings of the covenant.

Oath (Deut. 27-30). The covenant promises blessings for those who obey the law and curses for those who rebel. When God's people take the oath of the covenant, they call upon God to curse them if they disobey and to bless them if they obey.

Succession (Deut. 31-34). The final section of the covenant concerns the heirs of the covenantal blessings. God intends for the covenant to continue from generation to generation in godly families. Training children to follow God and working to pass the blessing on to the future is essential to true covenantal obedience.¹

Of course, the five-point outline is not the only outline of the covenant that has Biblical validity. James Jordan, in an inductive study of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, suggests that threefold (Trinity), fourfold (world foundations), fivefold (housebuilding), sixfold (man),

¹ Sutton's original outline did not spell the word THEOS as the outline above, but the points are the same. See, Ray Sutton, *That You May Prosper* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1987).

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sevenfold (Sabbath), tenfold (law), and twelve-fold (covenant people) organizations of the covenant material are also possible.² However, although Jordan does not believe that the division of the covenant into five parts has any actual priority over other possible outlines, he shows that a five-point outline is used most frequently by Moses and is not an arbitrary invention of expositors.³

Also, the ten commandments, according to North,⁴ Sutton,⁵ and Jordan,⁶ are structured as a twofold repetition of the five point covenant outline.

1. The first commandment, by teaching that God alone is to be worshiped, calls us to honor the transcendent Creator and Redeemer. By forbidding murder, the sixth commandment protects the image of the transcendent God.

2. The second commandment and the seventh are related throughout the Bible in the connection between idolatry and adultery. Both sins are perversions of submission to the God-ordained order.

The third section of the covenant, ethics, has to do with boundaries, which is also the point of the eighth commandment: “Thou shalt not steal.” The third commandment demands that we wear the name of God righteously – a call to obey His law whereby we show the glory of His name in our lives.

4. The fourth and the ninth commandments are both concerned with sanctions since the Sabbath is a day of judgment in which man brings his works to God for evaluation; the command not to bear false witness views us in the courtroom participating in the judicial process.

5. The fifth and tenth commandments correspond to the fifth part of the covenant, inheritance/continuity. In the fifth, children, the heirs to be, are told how to obtain an inheritance in the Lord. In the tenth, we are forbidden to covet, a sin that leads to the destruction of the inheritance in more ways than one.

We have seen that the five-point outline of the covenant is 1) actually the outline of Deuteronomy, 2) repeatedly used in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and 3) the structural outline for the ten commandments. Thus, it may be used as a tool for Biblical exegesis and relating the covenant to the concrete details of daily life. Jordan lists the five points in broad terms that make the broader implications of each point clear.

² James B. Jordan, *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1989), pp. 3-6. Jordan also suggests a threefold approach to the covenant in, *The Law of the Covenant* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1984), p. 7: “In summary, the covenant has three aspects. There is a legal bond. There is a personal relationship. There is a structure within the community.” He develops a four point and a twelve point approach in *Through New Eyes*, pp. 130-31.

³ *Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy*, p. 6, 9-10.

⁴ Gary North, *The Sinai Strategy: Economics and the Ten Commandments* (Tyler, Texas: Institute for Christian Economics, 1986).

⁵ Op. cit. pp. 214-24.

⁶ Op. cit. pp. 10-13.

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1. Initiation, announcement, transcendence, life and death, covenantal idolatry.
2. Restructuring, order, hierarchy, liturgical idolatry, protection of the bride.
3. Distribution of a grant, incorporation, property, law in general as maintenance of the grant.
4. Implementation, blessings and curses, witnesses, Sabbath judgments.
5. Succession, artistic enhancements, respect for stewards, covetousness.⁷

We will use this five-point outline of the covenant to help analyze the various covenants in the Bible so that we may obtain a detailed understanding of each covenantal era. While the general structure of the covenant is the same, covenant revelation grows over time. To see the implications of the covenant for each era and observe the growth of the covenant, it is helpful to consider each point in every Biblical covenant.

As we shall see, the first point, the Lordship of the Triune God, is essentially the same in each covenant. However, God reveals Himself in each covenant in different ways so that His people come to a deeper understanding of Him. The second point concerns the representative system established on earth. In each age there are representatives in church, state, and family who are God-appointed leaders for His people, but the details of the system change in different ages. The third point covers the detailed commands for daily life that God gives to His people. These, too, vary from age to age, though the heart of the righteous demand of the law of God is unchanging. Righteousness always means love, and the specific obligations of love are defined by the nature of the personal relationship, for example, father-child, husband-wife, brother-brother, etc. The fourth point, blessings and curses, varies, depending on the actual situation of the people of God. Also, the fourth point deals with covenantal ceremonies, our renewal of the covenant oath, the details of which change a great deal from covenant to covenant. The fifth point which deals with inheritance, varies with the second and fourth points in accordance with the covenantal situation of the people of God. Before we consider each covenant era in detail, it is important to grasp of the overall covenantal structure of the Bible.

⁷ Covenant Sequence in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, p. 14.

The History of the Covenants (Part 1)

Chapter Four

The doctrine of the covenant structures the Biblical story. In the beginning, God created man and the whole world in a covenant relationship with Himself, placing Adam in the Garden of Eden, the sanctuary of the world. There, Adam was to enjoy God's highest covenant blessing, fellowship with God Himself. But, Adam broke the covenant on the very first Sabbath day. This could have been the end of the story, but God is a God of grace. He renewed His covenant with man and promised to establish a wholly new covenant through a new Adam (Gen. 3:15). The promised Savior would be the Head of a new humanity that would fulfill the purpose of God in creating the world as His kingdom (cf. Rom. 5:12-25).

When we read Genesis 1-3, we see how man rebelled against God, but the word "covenant" is not actually used in these chapters. How, then, do we know that Adam's relationship with God was covenantal? We understand that the original relationship was a covenant because we see all the elements of the covenant in the narrative and because Hosea explicitly refers to this arrangement as a covenant (Hos. 6:7¹). Furthermore, when the word covenant is first used in the Bible in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9-17, the repetition of the same language that occurs in the first chapters of Genesis clearly indicates that the covenant with Noah is a redemptive renewal of the original covenant with Adam.

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered. Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things. But flesh with the life thereof, which is the blood thereof, shall ye not eat. And surely your blood of your lives will I require; at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man. Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made he man. And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. (Gen. 9:1-7; cf. Gen. 1:26-28)

The original covenant with Adam is the basic covenant for the entire era that begins with the creation and lasts until the incarnation of Christ. Paul points to this when he explains the whole history of the world in terms of two men, Adam and Christ (Rom. 5:12-21; 1 Cor. 15:22-49). Adam was the head of the old covenant. Christ is the Head of the new covenant. Adam was the viceregent of God who failed and led his sons into sin (Rom. 5:12). Christ is the viceregent of God who kept God's covenant and won the blessing, both for Himself and for His seed (Rom. 5:19; cf. Isa. 53:10-12).

¹ The correct translation of Hosea 6:7a is: "But they like Adam have transgressed the covenant . . ." See, Benjamin B. Warfield, "Hosea VI.7: Adam or Man?" in *Shorter Collected Writings*, vol. 1, pp. 116 ff.

The History of the Covenants (Part 1)

The Bible records six additional covenants from the time of Adam's fall until the advent of Christ. These covenants are secondary — renewals and extensions of the covenant with Adam, each of which underscores a particular aspect of man's responsibility as God's image. In the Garden, Adam was a priest whose responsibility was to guard the Garden and his wife Eve (Gen. 1:15-25). He was also a king who was given dominion over the world (Gen. 1:26-28). And he was a prophet to whom God spoke (Gen. 1:16-17). But, Adam was also immature, which is what is symbolized by the nakedness of Adam and Eve at creation. Because of Adam's fall, the progress of the covenant after him is based upon God's redeeming grace. Despite man's sin, God works in history to reveal Himself through His covenant love. In redemptive grace, God leads man from immaturity in the Garden through a covenantal process of growth, leading to maturation in Christ.

The six "sub-covenants" in the old covenant era develop in two cycles from priestly to kingly to prophetic. These "sub-covenants" are new versions of the original Adamic covenant, rather than entirely new or independent covenants. Each of these covenants renews the Adamic covenant and adds a promise of redemption, a promise that develops and grows from covenant to covenant. Though these covenants do not bring in a "new creation," they do significantly change God's administration of men's affairs in the Adamic world-system. They guide history toward Christ, until He comes to consummate all the promises of salvation (2 Cor. 1:20). They show the historical progress of God's purpose for creation. Satan tempted man to sin and ruined man as God's viceregent, but in Christ and by grace God restored man, so that he can work in history by the power of the Holy Spirit to bring in the kingdom of God.

The First Priestly Covenant: the Adamic Covenant

The first of these post-fall covenants is not explicitly called a covenant in the text of Scripture. Like the original covenant with Adam, it must be inferred from the context. After the sin of Adam and Eve, God appeared in the Garden and confronted them for their rebellion, but He did not institute the curse of the covenant in its fullness. Judicial, physical, and covenantal death were imposed, but God also granted time and a promise of salvation. Adam and Eve died covenantally, for they were cast out of the Garden, away from God. Grace appears, however, in the fact that they were apparently allowed to offer sacrifices near the Garden (cf. Gen. 4:3). They also began to die physically, but by the grace of God they were allowed to live long enough to have descendants. The seed of the woman, God had promised, would bring salvation (Gen. 3:15).

The grace of God is also seen in that God made coats of skins and clothed them (Gen. 3:21). The animal skins point to the fact that Adam and Eve died judicially through their covenantal representatives, the slain animals. This established the sacrificial system of the old covenant that prevails until Christ. We do not know the details of the covenantal arrangements at this time, but it does seem to be clear that Cain and Abel knew that they were to offer animal sacrifices. Genesis explicitly says that God did not accept Cain nor his bloodless offering, while He did accept Abel and his offering (Gen. 4:4-5; cf. Heb. 11:4). Noah also understood the idea of animal sacrifice and even distinguished between clean and unclean animals (Gen. 7:1-2).

The first covenant emphasized man's priestly responsibility, for Adam's primary work in the beginning was to guard the Garden (Gen. 2:15). Satan's attack against Eve tested Adam as a

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priest and guardian. Adam failed. But, even after Adam was cast out of the Garden, his sons continued to have priestly responsibility. Cain and his seed rejected their calling. By contrast, the family of Seth was characterized by its worship of God (Gen. 4:26). However, even the godly line of Seth apostatized by marrying unbelieving women and forsaking the worship of the true God (Gen. 6:1-5).

This first covenant era ended with the flood. God brought covenantal judgment against a world of men who, except Noah and his family, had all become like Cain and Lamech. However, as in the beginning, when God brought judgment, He also graciously granted a new covenant.

The First Kingly Covenant: the Noahic Covenant

The covenant with Noah is the second covenantal renewal of the Adamic world after the fall. What is new in this covenantal arrangement is that man is given the responsibility to act as a judge (Gen. 9:5-6), something not permitted earlier when Cain murdered Abel (Gen. 4:15). This covenant emphasizes man's responsibility as king. It is not that priestly duties are absent. But for the first time in history man is required to administer capital punishment for murder. This is a blessing for human society and indicates historical growth. However, this covenantal era also ends in abuse, and in precisely the same area in which man was blessed: the authority to govern. Man attempted to raise his throne as high as heaven through the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1ff.). God judged man's sin by destroying the tower and dispersing men throughout the world.

The First Prophetic Covenant: the Abrahamic Covenant

Again, after judgment, God graciously renewed His covenant with man. God worked in history to fulfill the promise of salvation and rebuild the kingdom that Satan was trying to ruin by tempting man to rebel. God elected Abraham and established the seed of Abraham as His covenantal priestly people. From this point in history until the coming of the new covenant, men must approach God through the people of Abraham — “salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22b). The Adamic world continues, but it has been significantly changed. What was merely implicit in the covenants with Adam and Noah is made explicit for the first time. To Abraham is given the vision of a world redeemed from sin and restored unto God: “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Gen. 12:3b; cf. Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14).

The prospect of global blessing is the characteristic of the prophetic period. Again, this does not mean that Abraham is not a priest or a king. We see that he offers sacrifices, leads an army, and is promised dominion over the nations and kings to come from his loins (Gen. 22:3ff.; 14:13ff.; 17:5-6). But, the office of prophet receives more emphasis. In fact, Abraham is the first man in the Bible to be called a prophet: “he is a prophet” (Gen. 20:7). The prophetic blessings of Isaac and Jacob are prominent features of the Genesis story. The patriarch Joseph was a man of prophetic wisdom who brings the blessings of Abraham to the Egyptians.

Like sinful men before them, the seed of Abraham broke the covenant and became idolatrous in Egypt (Josh. 24:14). Therefore, God brought covenantal judgment upon His

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people, and they were sold into slavery under Pharaoh. When they cried out to God, He graciously heard their prayers and delivered them through Moses and Aaron.

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Chapter Five

The Second Priestly Covenant: the Mosaic Covenant

Although the Hebrews, like Adam, had rebelled against God's covenant by committing idolatry in Egypt, God graciously sought His wayward people and granted a new covenant. The covenant given through Moses was considerably more advanced than any covenant until that time. In part, this was because the people of God had grown to be a nation. They needed a fuller, more detailed statement of the covenant, for the promise to Abraham that his seed would be as the stars of heaven was being fulfilled (Deu. 1:10; 10:22; cf. Heb. 11:12).

The Mosaic covenant gave Israel not only the promise of salvation, expressed in detail through the sacrificial system, it also provided a statement of God's commandments and statutes. The law included instruction in wisdom for civil government, something that would be necessary in the new land.

However, it would be wrong to think of the theocratic civil law as being the primary feature of the Mosaic covenant. Clearly it is not. More space and concern is devoted to the tabernacle, the laws of cleanliness, the sacrificial system, and the festival calendar than to civil laws. Also, what we see as "civil laws" contain much that is priestly in character. Man's kingly and prophetic responsibilities have been revealed in past covenants, so all three aspects of man's work as God's image appear in the law of Moses. But the priestly element is prominent. Above all else, the Mosaic covenant centers on the gift of the tabernacle — God's dwelling place among the people of Israel. For the first time in the post-flood history, God's dwelling place with men was reestablished. Man, represented by the high priest, was again permitted to enter God's presence.

The nation of Israel, however, was never really faithful to the Mosaic covenant. In the days of Joshua they kept the law of the Lord, but after Joshua's death, they repeatedly wandered away from God's commandments, as the books of Judges and 1 Samuel show. Their failure to keep the covenant was especially a failure to worship the true God in accordance with His commands. This is seen in the final judgment in this era which came after the priest Eli and his sons defiled the worship of God in the extreme (1 Sam. 2:22-36; 3:11-14.)

Covenantal judgment, however, came in a merciful form. In the case of earlier apostasies, God repeatedly handed the Israelites over to their enemies, who oppressed them until they repented of their sinful idolatry (cf. Judg. 2:1-23). This time, however, God Himself, symbolically speaking, went into captivity to the Philistines when the ark of the covenant was taken in battle (1 Sam. 4ff.). Not until a new covenant was given did the ark of God return to its proper place.

The Second Kingly Covenant: the Davidic Covenant

Israel's leader Saul was a transitional figure and a transparent failure. His reign was the end of the older covenant and the preparation for a newer one. The era of the Mosaic covenant came to a full end when God brought in a new covenantal leader, David, and a new covenant, which included the Davidic promise of the Messiah (2 Sam. 7). The Monarchical era also brought in a more glorious form of worship, the temple. Solomon became the greatest king of the old covenant era, the greatest "Adam" since the original man of the Garden. But like his first father, Solomon fell. He broke all three Mosaic prohibitions for monarchs — building an aggressive military, marrying many wives, and taxing oppressively (Deu. 17:16-17). No doubt Solomon also forgot the commandment for the king to write his own copy of the law and read it daily (Deu. 17:18-20). All of this combined to lead Solomon to commit in deed what he had already committed in his heart: idolatry (1 Kg. 11:10). As a result of Solomon's sin, the kingdom was divided into north and south (1 Kg. 11:11ff.; 12:22-25).

The northern kingdom did not even have a single godly leader. From the beginning, every king was idolatrous and disobedient to God (1 Kg. 12:26-33; 15:34; 16:2-3; 16:18-19, 25-26, 31; 22:51-52; 2 Kg. 3:1-3; 10:29, 31; 13:1-2, 10-11; 14:23-24; 15:8-9, 17-18, 23-24, 27-28; 17:20-23). Eventually, the vast majority of the godly people in the northern kingdom migrated to Judah so that all twelve tribes were preserved in her (2 Chr. 11:13-17; 15:8-9; 30:1-11, 18). About 720 B.C., the apostate northern kingdom was carried into captivity to become slaves in a new Egypt, Assyria (2 Kg. 17:5-6; 18:9-12).

Like her northern sister, Judah gradually departed from the covenant, and was carried away into captivity (2 Kg. 24:1-5; 25:1-21; 2 Chr. 36:6, 15-21). The descendants of Abraham were back where they started — slavery in a foreign land. But just as God never really forsook them in Egypt, so also in Babylon, God was with them. And when they repented, God heard their prayers and after seventy years, He delivered them and restored them to the land (Dan. 9:1-27; 2 Chr. 36:22-23; Ezr. 1:1-4).

The Second Prophetic Covenant: the Restoration Covenant

For the last time in the old covenant era God granted a renewal of the Adamic covenant that postponed final judgment and expanded the promise of salvation. This restoration covenant prevailed until the coming of Christ. God had promised the Israelites that they would come back into the land after 70 years of captivity (cf. Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10). At that time He would make a new covenant with them (Ezek. 37:21-28). The new covenant of the restoration era was inaugurated by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (cf. Ezr. 5:1). As with other new covenants, there was a new house of God (Ezr. 1:3; 3:1ff.; 5:1ff.) and a new priesthood (Ezr. 2:62-63; 3:8-10; 6:18, 20; 7:11ff.). The temple vision seen by Ezekiel (40-48) taught the people of God that there was a heavenly temple of great glory that the earthly temple merely symbolized. But for the first time in her history, this heavenly temple had been opened, so to speak, for all to see. The children of Abraham also were given a new name. From this time forth, they were called Jews.

There were other changes in the administration of God's covenant. For example, the land of Israel could not be restored to the families according to the allotments in the days of Joshua

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(Josh. 11:23; 13:1ff.; 15:20ff.), nor would there be a king in Israel anymore. Daniel had instructed the Jews that they would be under the dominion of Gentile kings until the coming of the Messiah (Dan. 2; 7). All this meant that many details of the law of Moses could no longer be literally applied, though even the statutes and precepts that could not be literally applied would provide wisdom for the elders of the towns.

As in the first prophetic period, the work of evangelism among the nations of the world was especially prominent. Two entire books are devoted to ministry to the Gentiles: Jonah (actually written at the end of the Davidic period) and Esther. Ezra and Nehemiah too share an international perspective that is significantly different from the times of the kings. The prophetic books of this period — Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi — look for the establishment of God’s global kingdom through Israel’s witness (cf. Hg. 2:5-7; 2:21-23; Zech. 2:11; 4:12ff.; 8:22-23; Mal. 4:2).

The New Covenant: Christ as Prophet, Priest, and King

Including the pre-fall Adamic covenant era, there are seven covenantal eras in the old covenant. In all of these, certain common features obtain. All seven of these covenants deal with “the world of Adam,” the first creation. But the coming of Christ brings a wholly new covenant — a new world. “Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new” (2 Cor. 5:17b).

Jesus, the New Adam, fulfills the righteous requirements of God’s covenant and brings the blessings of the covenant to a new humanity. There is no more need for animal sacrifices because His sacrifice solved the problem of sin once and for all (Heb. 10:1-14). The world itself, which was “made subject to vanity” because of Adam’s sin (Rom. 8:20), was reconciled to God by Christ’s atoning work (Col. 1:20) and was restored to its original ceremonial cleanness. Therefore, there can no longer be unclean lands or holy places. There is also a new human race to occupy the new world. Every member of this new race is a priest, including women and Gentiles. All have equal access to the throne of God (Eph. 2:12-22; Gal. 3:28; Col. 3:11), for Christ Himself is the Great High Priest who brings His people unto God, and everyone who is baptized in Him has been made a son and heir (Gal. 3:26-29).

Now that the world has been redeemed and man has been saved through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the new humanity can inherit the glory originally intended by the heavenly Father. In the person of Christ, a glorified Man sits at the right hand of God, ruling the world until “He hath put all enemies under his feet” (1 Cor. 15:25; Psa. 110:1; Eph. 1:22; Heb. 1:13). Only then, when the church, His body, shall have conquered all the nations through the preaching of the Gospel (Mat. 28:18ff.), will Jesus return in glory for the final judgment (1 Cor. 15:23-28). The new race, converted to faith in Christ is not sinless, to be sure, but righteous by God’s grace and the power of His Spirit. They have been saved in Christ in order to fulfill the original Adamic commission to subdue all things to the glory of God. The world will be filled with men, every desert will be turned into a Garden and the potential of the creation will be developed to the praise of Creator. History can come to an end when Satan is wholly defeated, man truly saved, and God glorified both as Creator and Redeemer.

The kingdom which began in the Garden will be fulfilled and a wholly new era, the ages of the eternal kingdom, will begin. The new humanity will inherit their resurrection bodies and live

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with God in everlasting glory. When the covenants of creation and redemption are fulfilled, man will be glorified with Christ in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21-22), but this is not the end. It is the beginning of something new, something more glorious and wonderful than we can imagine.

The Edenic Covenant

Chapter Six

The pre-fall covenant with Adam governs the entire era from the creation until the coming of Christ. The new covenant in Christ is a fulfillment rather than a replacement of the original covenant. In other words, the entire Biblical story of the growth of God's kingdom is grounded in the Edenic covenant given in Genesis 1-3. This means that we must understand these chapters properly to be able to understand the rest of Scripture. To begin our study, we will first consider the condition of the kingdom at the time of creation, the five points of the covenant in the Edenic Covenant, man's response to the covenant and God's judgment.

The Kingdom

God created the world in six days. Why six days? Because His work in creation was to set a pattern for man to follow — work six days, rest one day (Ex. 20:9-11). Furthermore, man's work was to be the continuation of God's work. The world was dark, formless, and empty at the beginning (Gen. 1:2). For six days God worked to give the world light, form, and living things. The crown of His creation was man, who was commissioned to continue the work that God had begun (Gen. 1:26-28).

When God created man, He first created Adam, the head of the race. Then, God created Adam's home, the Garden of Eden, while Adam watched (Gen. 2:8), giving Adam an example of how he was to work. The Garden was organized with two special trees in the center, a wall around it, and a gate in front¹. Man was allowed to eat freely from every tree in the Garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:16-17). Man had two basic responsibilities: to guard the Garden, and to till it so that it would bring forth more fruit (Gen. 2:15).

God trained Adam for family life by bringing all the animals before him and having Adam name them (Gen. 2:19-20). Naming the animals meant more than pronouncing a sound; it meant assigning a "label" to each animal that appropriately described it. Adam learned about each animal and understood something of its meaning and purpose in the kingdom of God. He saw that the animals resembled man in many ways but that there was also an immeasurable biochemical gap between man and the animals. Adam realized that all the animals had mates, but he was alone. Adam was ready to be given a wife that he would cherish. His unspoken prayer was answered and God gave him Eve (Gen. 2:21-23).

The world Adam and Eve ruled was divided into three parts. 1) The Garden of Eden, their home, was a mountaintop sanctuary where they met with God directly. 2) The land of Eden was the land of the sanctuary, close to God. 3) The rest of the world was farther away from the Holy Place where God manifested Himself. There was another threefold division of the world. 1) The

¹ We are not specifically told of a wall or gate, but when the Bible says that Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden and that God stationed cherubim at the East of the Garden so that they could not return, a wall and a gate of some sort seem to be presupposed.

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heavens were above them, ruled by the sun in the day and the moon and stars at night (Gen. 1:14-18). 2) The land was their home. 3) The great ocean was underneath them. This is the source of the symbolism of the world as a threefold structure, later reflected in the tabernacle and the temple.

The Covenant

The five points of the covenant are not presented in simple covenantal order, but they all appear in the text.

1. The entire passage (Gen. 1-3) demonstrates the absolute Lordship of God who creates all things according to His will and plan. God's sovereignty in creation is especially seen in that all things are created by His Word. The tenfold speaking of God in the creation story (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26, 28, 29) corresponds to the tenfold Word of God in the Mosaic covenant, the Ten Commandments. There is even a hint of the Trinity in the creation of Adam and Eve, both in the divine counsel — "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen. 1:26) — and in the very fact that human society is God's image, no less than the human individual.

2. Adam is the lord of creation under God. He is the original king of the world and, with his queen, has dominion over all creation (Gen. 1:28). Adam is also the original priest and prophet, since God speaks to Adam, who then teaches his wife the word of God (Gen. 2:16-18). His priestly responsibility is seen in the command to guard the Garden sanctuary (Gen. 2:15), for priests in later times were the guardians of the temple. His responsibility as the first husband and father included farming the Garden (Gen. 2:15) and having children to fill the earth for the glory of God (1:28).

3. In a sense, these responsibilities constituted the commands of the covenant also, but the ethical heart of the covenant was found in the command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). As the command was stated, Adam should have inferred that the prohibition was temporary. For, the emphasis is clearly on God's gracious provision of all the trees of the Garden (2:16). The fact that there were two trees in the midst of the Garden with names (Gen. 2:9), one of which was forbidden, constituted a divine invitation to eat from the other, the tree of life.

The command not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not simply a command about eating. The real issue was, Would Adam and Eve trust God and obey Him simply because He is God? To test Adam's obedience in something he understood to be a matter of righteousness — murder, for example — would still have been a test. But God gave Adam a more difficult test. Obedience to the command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil does not have the kind of obvious ethical significance as a command like "Thou shalt not kill." If Adam had obeyed God when tested, he would have manifested the faith and love that is the true heart of obedience. For this reason, God tested Adam on what may seem like an arbitrary issue.

4. The blessing and curse of the covenant were set forth in the two trees. The tree of life would bring blessing if Adam and Eve chose it rather than the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they chose the forbidden tree, however, they faced the curse of death. It was as if the Lord were saying to Adam what Moses later said to Israel: "I call heaven and earth to record this

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day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deu. 30:19).

Note that this is not a question of Adam and Eve becoming God's children through their righteous deeds. They were already His beloved children, living in His house, eating from His table. The test in the Garden was a test of perseverance. If Adam had passed the test, he would have persevered in faith and been blessed. At some point that would have included the blessing of being allowed to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and receiving robes of glory, symbolizing the fact that Adam and Eve had been exalted to higher position in the kingdom of God.

5. Had Adam chosen life, he and his posterity would have inherited the world and Satan would have been cast out. If Adam had refused Satan's temptation he would have understood the true meaning of good and evil, the very thing the tree and the test was supposed to teach him. In other words, the prohibition of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was pedagogical. If the lesson had been learned, Adam and Eve would have graduated into a higher status and all mankind after them would have enjoyed the covenantal blessings they won.

Adam's Covenantal Response

Satan appeared in the Garden in the form of a serpent. This was allowed by God in order to test Adam and teach him the essential meaning of good and evil. Merely giving Adam a lecture on the philosophy of good and evil would not have really furnished Adam with the understanding he needed. Just as when God wanted to give Adam a wife, He first provided a project that would be meaningful to him for his whole life, and would, at the same time, teach Adam of his need for a wife, so also when God wanted to teach him about good and evil, He sent Satan to test him. This required Adam to guard the Garden from evil. If Adam had successfully defended the Garden from Satan's attack, the hard part of his guarding work would have been over.

When Satan approached Adam and Eve, Adam should have understood from Satan's challenge the real meaning of good and evil. Good and evil are not substances or things; rather, the words good and evil describe our covenantal response to God. For man, to submit to his Creator is the essence of good and to rebel is the essence of evil, for man's whole life is defined in relation to God. Had Adam learned this truth by submission to God's will, he would have been confirmed in holiness by eating of the tree of life. We might say that Adam had a choice of sacraments, the magical sacrament of Satan, which promised power through disobedience to God, or the covenantal sacrament of God, which promised life and all good things by submission to Him.

What Adam actually did was more evil than most realize. When Satan addressed Eve, Adam, who was standing by, said nothing. In other words, he intentionally allowed Eve to be deceived into eating the fruit in order to see what would happen to her (cf. 1 Tim. 2:14). He set up his wife as a guinea pig, using her to test God. If she did not die, then he would know it would be safe for him to eat also. Nothing happened to Eve, so Adam assumed it was safe to eat. But the fall had already occurred when Adam decided to let Eve eat.

God's Covenantal Judgment

God appeared in Person to expel Adam and Eve from the Garden. They heard the sound of God, which was probably like the sound of the glory-cloud (cf. Ex. 19: 16; 20:18; 1 Sam. 22:8-16; Ezek. 1:4ff., esp. vs. 24), like the sound of thunder. Nothing in Genesis implies a gentle, soft sound. Adam and Eve, like the nation of Israel at Mount Sinai, were terrified by what they had heard and they hid themselves (Gen. 3:10). God spoke to Adam first because he was the covenantal leader. He pronounced judgment on the Serpent first as the source of the temptation. And in that judgment is found the initial promise of salvation, the basis for a new covenant: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15).

Adam and Eve died that very day, just as God had said. They died judicially through their representative, the animal sacrifice offered in their stead which bore the curse of the covenant for them (Gen. 3:21). This is the beginning of the sacrificial system in the Bible. Judgment included the promise of life in a new covenant, which would provide a representative who could truly take away sin.

Being expelled from the Garden was another form of death, for Adam had been created to have fellowship with God. Cast out of the Garden, Adam and the race of men after him hunger for the true Garden of God, without really knowing what it is that they are seeking: "Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35).

In addition, the processes of physical decay, the gradual "death" of their bodies began that day. Sickness and pain, fatigue and the sufferings of the body in the aging process were not part of the original creation. From the day they sinned, Adam and Eve "began to die" physically. Beyond the physical death they experienced, the whole creation began to experience a kind of death also. The universe was "subjected to futility" (Rom. 8:20) because of Adam's sin; the entire animal and physical world was brought into the "bondage of corruption" (Rom. 8:21).

But in judgment there was also grace. God did not merely annul the original covenant and destroy the race He created in His image, though it would have been righteous for Him to have done so. He rendered a form of judgment that included provision for redemption. This involved two aspects. First, God made provision for the continuation of the old covenant, a postponement of final judgment, so to speak. Second, God granted man the promise of a new covenant — the seed of the woman would come and destroy the serpent. Thus, the covenantal situation set up by God's judgment of Adam and Eve was a temporary extension of the original covenant that included a promise of a new and better covenant in the future.

Satan, therefore, was not the victor in the Garden or in history, even though his influence was and still is great. The promise of the victory of the seed of the woman meant that man would, by the grace of God, fulfill the commission which was given to him in the Garden. The kingdom of God with man as king under Him would eventually come to full manifestation in history. But it would take the death of the seed of the woman to accomplish this. Mankind needed a new covenantal head to establish the covenantal kingdom in history.

The Post-Fall Promise

Chapter Seven

The world itself was changed by the fall. Adam's sin changed his relationship with God. This also caused a drastic alteration in Adam's relationship to his environment, and in his relationship with Eve. In addition, Adam's internal subjective condition became profoundly depraved. The extension of the covenant granted to Adam and Eve after the fall could only be temporary. For, it was based upon the sacrifice of animals which had to be repeated. It could not solve the fundamental problem of man's sin, which demanded a sacrifice that could wholly take away sin and guilt. What the animal sacrifice did provide, however, was time, for it postponed God's judgment against man so that he could continue the project God assigned had him at creation.

The Kingdom

In many respects the situation of the kingdom was unchanged. Adam was the head of the race — prophet, priest, king, and father. The earth was divided into three distinct areas, the Garden of Eden, the land of Eden, and the rest of the world. Adam's responsibility was to till the ground and worship God rightly. Although the new environment presented new challenges, the fundamental definition of good and evil did not change. God was still Lord over all, determining all things according to His perfect will.

However, there was a fundamental covenantal change that was comprehensive in its effects. Adam had aligned himself with Satan's rebellion against God, placing the world under Satanic authority, not in a proper sense (*de jure*), but practically speaking (*de facto*). From this point on, Satan is called "the prince of this world" (John 12:31). Adam was under Satan until he repudiated him. Adam's children, too, were open to Satanic influence and attack.

The distinction between Eden and the world before the fall was simply a matter of proximity to God, but now that Adam had sinned, the Garden of Eden became the holy place into which man could not enter. Eden became the holy land and the rest of the world became the defiled land. Again, it should be emphasized that evil is not a substance. Evil means to have a wrong covenantal relationship with God. After the fall, the world under Adam became covenantally separated from God — defiled or unclean — because it had been cursed with Adam. Wherever God manifested His presence, the area became "holy space," temporarily freed from the curse by virtue of God's gracious presence.

Death, Paul says, entered by sin (Rom. 5:12). Death is an ever-present and inescapable reality in the fallen world because of the curse; in other words, after the fall, the world is defined by the curse on man. Only in the grace of God is there hope for salvation.

The Covenant

1. God remained Lord over the world, but Adam could not approach Him as before. Man could no longer have intimate fellowship with Him as he did in the Garden. However, there was still hope, for God revealed Himself in a new manner. He was not only the absolute Lord of Creation, He became man's Redeemer. God made a promise to Eve of the Seed that would conquer Satan and deliver man. He also made "coats of skins" for Adam and Eve and clothed them (Gen. 3:21), thus teaching them of a future substitutionary sacrifice that would cover their sin and shame.

2. Adam's position in the world was compromised. He was still responsible to God for his leadership in priestly, kingly, and fatherly duty, but he was also open to Satanic temptation in a new way. He now had an internal sympathy with Satan's sinful rebellion against God. Therefore, for Adam to stand with God meant a life-long war with Satan and a war against the sin in his own heart. From this time, Adam's work included the fight to reclaim for God what Satan had stolen. For Adam to have authority in a fallen world meant that he must fight, either for God or against Him. Authority also included the pain of perseverance in a sin-cursed world. Adam would have had to work even if he had not sinned, but after the fall, his work is no longer the pure pleasure it should have been.

3. The essence of righteousness cannot change, but specific instructions do change as the covenantal situation changes. Before the fall there was no need to teach Adam not to kill or steal because he was not inclined to commit such sins by nature. After the fall man's duty must be spelled out in some detail. We do not know how much or precisely what kind of revelation Adam had beyond what is recorded in the Bible. His descendent Enoch is said to have walked with God (Gen. 5:24), which implies more than just "spiritual fellowship" and may have included prophetic revelation.

Even without special divine revelation, man, as God's image, knew in his heart that murder was sin. Cain, for example, did not need an explanation of his crime. At the same time God forbade anyone to take vengeance for the murder of Abel (Gen. 4:15). Man was not yet mature enough to share in the judicial office, at least not with reference to capital punishment.

Lamech, the true heir of Cain's nature, committed the sin of polygamy (Gen. 4:19) — forbidden implicitly in the original doctrine of marriage: "Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24). His violence exceeded that of Cain in its intensity and pride. There can be no doubt that he did not worship the true God.

The other great sin of the era is recorded in Genesis 6. "The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose" (Gen. 6:2). The "sons of God" here definitely refers to the godly line of Seth. This verse gives us an explanation for what happened to the righteous before the flood. We are told in Genesis 5 about many generations of men who were the Christian descendents of Adam. How could their children just disappear? The answer is that they didn't disappear, they apostatized. Like Solomon, their hearts were turned away from God by the non-Christian women they married, for they took their wives from the daughters of the family of Cain. Of all Seth's children, only Noah remained faithful to God at this time of global infidelity (Gen. 6:8).

4. The curse of the covenant, already seen in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden, was progressively applied to sinful men. Cain was driven farther east of Eden than Adam and Eve. Then, expulsion from the presence of God reached its climactic point in the

judgment of the flood. Here the apostate descendants of Seth, together with the progressively wicked descendants of Cain, were driven from the face of the earth and the world was brought back to a new beginning.

The blessing of the covenant was revealed in a special fashion in the life of Enoch. Enoch's exemplary righteousness won for him the extraordinary blessing of being taken up to the presence of God without dying. This showed men that the blessing of the covenant was forgiveness of sins and everlasting life with God in heaven.

5. Man was to inherit the world as the kingdom of God, but sin deprived him of the full enjoyment of that inheritance. The grace of God intervening on man's behalf did preserve for men a certain degree of the original blessing in this life, even for those who did not repent of their sins. Cain became a city-dweller and his descendants were used of God to develop musical instruments (Gen. 4:21), for even the wicked serve God's purpose in history.

When the godly line of Seth apostatized, they lost everything. Only Noah found grace and was preserved from judgment. Noah, his wife, and his children lived on to become the new first family in a new world, having also inherited the knowledge and technology of the early ages: "the wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just" (Pro. 13:22).

Man's Covenantal Response

From the sin of Cain to that of Lamech, the seed of the Serpent imitated their spiritual father. Murder, polygamy, pride, and tyranny characterized their family line. The Sethites, on the other hand, were godly for many generations. Seth's first son Enosh became a priest and led men in the true worship of God (Gen. 4:26). The line of Seth apparently continued to be godly all the way until the time of Noah, who was named in hope that men would find comfort in him (Gen. 5:29). But the seed of the woman was deceived by the seed of the Serpent and led astray. The sons of God, the Sethite "seed of the woman," married ungodly "Cainite," "seed-of-the-serpent" wives. Their children became mighty men (Gen. 6:1-4), who were corrupt and filled the earth with violence (Gen. 6:11). The whole race, except for the family of Noah, joined the Serpent in rebellion against God. This naturally led to mutual hatred and destruction among them, for Satan can only provide unity in hatred of God. And hatred against God is ultimately the hatred of all life and creation.

God's Covenantal Judgment

The sons of Seth broke the covenant like Adam before them. They turned the blessing into a curse. God destroyed the whole earth and brought the human race back to its original state of just one family. The judgment of the flood was an undoing of the creation, a de-creation judgment. When the flood waters covered the earth, the world looked like it did at the beginning: "And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).

In judgment God was merciful: "God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that was with him in the ark" (Gen. 8:1a). Noah and his family were preserved so that man could make a new start after the flood. The animals were preserved in the ark so that there

The Post-Fall Promise

would be a new animal world, too. In the “final judgment” of the flood, in other words, redemption was included. God would bring about a new world.

No other judgment in history is so much like the final judgment as the Noahic deluge. The almost-final judgment of the flood is the Biblical paradigm for covenantal final judgment. Whenever a covenantal era ends in judgment, the literary figures of speech recall the flood with the language of global catastrophe. Covenantal judgment is always, theologically, de-creation, even though no subsequent historical judgment is actually as spectacular as the flood.

After the flood, God established His covenant with Noah — a new covenant that was a renewal of the Adamic covenant, with redemptive additions (Gen. 9:1-17). Noah became the new Adam for a new world. The first covenantal period after the fall of Adam ended in great failure and sin. But where sin abounded, grace did “much more abound” (Rm. 5:20).

The Noahic Covenant

Chapter Eight

The covenant with Noah marks a new beginning. As is clear from the commission given him by God, Noah is regarded as a new Adam: “And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 9:1). The destruction of the world by the flood brought an end to the Edenic era and to the worship system centered in the Garden of Eden. But just as God gave man a new covenant after the fall, God graciously gave man another new covenant after the flood. This new covenant, like all the covenants of the old covenant era, was an extension of the Edenic covenant. Like later covenants, the Noahic covenant added new revelation that further amplified the promise of the new covenant. As in the pre-flood era, each “new covenant” in the old covenant era ended with God’s judgment on man’s sin, because “in Adam” man cannot escape his sin. At the same time, however, the judgments of God in history were never merely negative. Each judgment furthered God’s kingdom purpose by leading history unto Christ, the Second Adam who saves man.

The Kingdom

The world changed radically after the flood. This probably included the geographical changes that caused the drift of the continents. If theories of a “water canopy” — the idea that the pre-flood world was “covered” by a cloud layer that produced a greenhouse effect, keeping the whole planet warm — are correct, radical changes in climate and in the surface of the earth would have been evident. In any event, Noah and his family would have been quite conscious of the fact that they lived in a new world.

The greatest change, however, was the loss of the Garden of Eden. The sanctuary of God was no longer with men. No more was there a divinely ordained world-center to which men came to meet God, and no holy land close to the sanctuary. In these terms, the post-flood world is a world without God. This means that the re-creation of the world is incomplete, for it lacked two of the three parts of the Edenic world. In the original creation God created the world (Gen. 1:1), then the land of Eden, and last of all the Garden (Gen. 2:8). After the flood there is a new world, but there is no new holy land. The new holy land is not re-created until Israel conquers Canaan. The sanctuary is not really completed until Solomon’s temple, the new Eden. This means that the re-creation of the world begun after the flood continues for centuries until in the days of Solomon when there is a Garden-Temple at the covenantal center of the world, surrounded by the holy land.

Incomplete as the Noahic situation was, Noah was a new Adam, the covenant head of the new race. In this new world, however, Noah was not alone with his wife. (We don’t even know his wife’s name.) His three sons, Japheth, Shem, and Ham, and their wives (again, we do not know their names) were also with Noah in the new world. Instead of a family of two, the new world began with an extended family of eight individuals, which was really four families.

The Five Points of the Covenant

The covenant with Noah is referred to explicitly as a covenant (Gen. 6:18), but there was no explanation of what a covenant is. In other words, covenant was not a new idea to Noah. The language of the covenant in Genesis 9, furthermore, makes it clear beyond reasonable doubt that the covenant with Noah was simply a continuation of the arrangement with Adam. Now, however, the covenant was given to a new race that was sinful from the beginning.

1. God as Creator, Redeemer and Judge of the world gives the covenant to Noah and his family. The divine initiative and grace is everywhere prominent. God's blessing establishes the covenant and gives man a new start. It is important to note that every covenant begins, as did the covenant in the Garden, with God blessing man (cf. Gen. 1:28). God's covenant is never "neutral" — a mere offer of either blessing or curse — nor is it ever based upon man's works.

2. Man as prophet, priest, and king is given new responsibilities. Noah was clearly the ultimate human authority in the new world and was the "king" of the race. He functions as a priest in offering sacrifices (Gen. 8:20) and as a prophet in pronouncing blessings and curses on his sons (Gen. 9:25ff.). But the primary difference in man's authority is judicial. Before the flood man's judicial authority was confined to cases other than capital punishment (Gen. 4:14-15). With the Noahic covenant came authority and responsibility to execute murderers (Gen. 9:6). This was not mere permission to execute; God commanded it. Just as in the flood God Himself executed the whole race for their violence (Gen. 6:11-13), He commanded Noah to execute the wickedly violent man. Ultimately this is merciful because the execution of individual murderers stops violence before it spreads to the point that it mandates the judgment of a whole society. This also represents historical growth — the Seed of the woman, as God's image, was given a share in God's judicial authority in order to protect the world from violence so that the man's historical mission could be accomplished.

3. Just as God had forbidden the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the Garden, so now God forbade the eating of blood (Gen. 9:4). For the first time, however, it was specified that man is permitted to eat the flesh of animals (Gen. 9:3), though not, apparently, the animal sacrifices. The sacrifices offered by Noah were "whole burnt offerings" in which the entire animal was offered to God on the altar. Noah not only knew to sacrifice, he also understood the distinction between clean and unclean animals (Gen. 7:2-3). Beyond these few points, however, we do not know much more about how he led the worship of God. Speaking of ethics more broadly, the commandments of God were the same as they were for Adam and Eve. Noah and his sons were to fill the earth (Gen. 9:1), and rule over it (Gen. 9:2) so that the kingdom of God could be realized in history.

4. In the gift of the covenant to Noah, it is the blessing of the covenant that is stressed. "And I will establish my covenant with you, neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth" (Gen. 9:11). The sign of the covenant, the rainbow, was placed in the sky to remind God — not man — of the covenant promise (Gen. 9:13-16). God promised that He would never again curse the whole globe (Gen. 8:21). He would preserve the regular patterns of creation so that man could know how to live and build the kingdom of God (Gen. 8:22). This promise of regularity in creation is foundational for scientific progress.

But the new race in Noah was a continuation of the old race in Adam. Man continues to rebel against God, inviting the covenant curse on the race for their apostasy.

The Noahic Covenant

5. Noah and his children inherited a new world. God's grace was upon them. If they had kept his covenant, the blessing would have only grown. Rejoicing in God, Noah planted a vineyard. He seems to have been the first man to discover wine. At any rate, he drank the wine, a symbol of blessing and rest in the Bible. It was perfectly legitimate for Noah to drink wine and rest in his tent because his work was done. It was the proper time to enjoy God's blessing. The Bible never condemns Noah for his drinking here. His son, Canaan, who attempted to steal authority and blessing, symbolized in the robe of Noah, was condemned. His rebellion, however, was only a foretaste of what Noah's descendents would do later.

Man's Covenantal Response

Sinful man was not content to inherit the blessing of the covenant and labor patiently for God's glory. Rather than seek from God a temple or a place of worship, man attempted to build his own new Eden, the tower of Babel (Gen. 11:4). The new race wanted a world center to preserve religious and political unity among themselves. More than this, man wanted the new world center to glorify himself. The tower of Babel, thus, was a declaration of independence from God. Man himself would determine the way to heaven. In essence, the tower of Babel was the whole race of Noah's descendents imitating the sin of Canaan, which may be described as plotting to steal his father's authority and set himself up as king. Canaan's true heir, Nimrod, the great hunter, led men in a rebellion against the heavenly Father, seeking to "steal His robe" and set up a rival kingdom.

God's Covenantal Judgment

God "visited" the tower of Babel. He saw that men were unified against the kingdom of God. The Babel system allowed wicked men like Nimrod to establish a political tyranny upon the basis of a false religion from which it would have been difficult for anyone to escape. The result could have only been a repetition of the days before the flood, an age of universal corruption. To preserve a remnant and confound the rebellious purpose of men, God confused man's language. This meant more than men using different words for the same objects. Different groups of men had different perspectives on the world and man's work in it (Gen. 11:7-9). This led to mutual distrust and the breakdown of the Babel establishment.

Men scattered to all parts of the earth (Gen. 11:9). But everywhere they went their leaders imitated Nimrod, building their own little Babels, each of which was supposed to be the true center of the world. Every tribal group claimed that it was the true heir of man's glory. Here is the starting point for the false religions of the ancient world, all of which were variations of "Babelism." Each tribe built its own towers, ziggurats, and pyramids. Each had its own priesthood that supposedly could communicate with the gods and were often declared to be descendents of the gods. The similarities and differences of archaic societies and their religions all stem from Babel.

The dispersion of men meant that those who rebelled against God also hated one another, so that Satan's imitation kingdom could not succeed even superficially. The judgment of God on the tower of Babel set up the world for a new covenant administration in which God would

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choose a special people to be His priestly representatives among men. Once again, judgment prepared the way for a new manifestation of grace.

The Abrahamic Covenant

Chapter Nine

The Abrahamic covenant revealed the plan of salvation with greater clarity than ever before. In both the post-fall promise and the covenant with Noah the saving grace of God is revealed, but the plan of salvation is still rather obscure. With Abraham the promise of the new covenant is considerably expanded, providing a much clearer vision of the future salvation. Thus the Abrahamic covenant became the “reference covenant” for the rest of the covenants in the old covenant era. The Mosaic, the Davidic, and the Restoration covenants are all explicitly grounded in the Abrahamic covenant. The Noahic covenant and the post-fall promise function more like a “hidden foundation.” They are actually referred to, but usually indirectly, by way of allusion and in figurative language, and much less frequently than the Abrahamic covenant.

The New Covenant also points especially to Abraham. Two of Paul’s most important doctrines proclaimed the fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant — the doctrine of justification by faith (Rom. 4), and the doctrine of the gift of the Spirit as the essence of new covenant grace (Gal. 3). A third theme developed in Paul’s writings, the understanding of the Church as the new people of God, the adopted children of Abraham, is basic to understanding the new covenant and its relationship to the old (Gal. 3:7-9, 14, 29). Thus, the Abrahamic covenant is an essential key to Biblical interpretation.

The Kingdom

Before the call of Abraham, the world of that day, like the world of Noah, lacked a God-appointed world center. It also lacked a unified priestly system. Abraham’s own family worshiped idols (Josh. 24:2), but there were some true priests. We know that Melchizedek, the king-priest of Salem (Gen. 14:18-20), was a true priest of God and there were probably others — at a later period in history Jethro, Moses father-in-law, was also a true priest (cf. Ex. 3:1; 18:1-24). The tribes were scattered throughout the world as a result of God’s judgment on Babel. The multiplicity of languages and religious differences among them led to mistrust and conflict. There were also places, such as Sodom and Gomorrah, in which the pre-flood extremes of depravity were seen once again.

In these circumstances, Abraham was chosen to be the progenitor of a race of priests that would culminate in the Savior of the world. From the time he was chosen, men were required to relate to God through Abraham. Those who blessed Abraham would be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed (Gen. 12:1-3). Though a world-center was not established at that time, a priesthood for humanity was. Wherever Abraham settled, he dug wells and built altars (Gen. 12:7,8; 13:4, 18; 21:33; 26:15) establishing that location as a “sanctuary” — a simplified version of Eden and a temporary world-center. Most importantly, the covenant promised the “Seed of Abraham,” the center of God’s plan, who would bring blessing to the whole world.

The Five Points of the Covenant

1. With the new stage of covenantal development, God's revelation of Himself also advanced. God repeatedly manifests Himself to the Patriarchs, and those close to them, in various ways: in human form (Gen. 16:9; 17:1; 18:1ff.; 22:11, 15; 26:2, 24; 32:24ff.; 35:9), in "a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp" (Gen. 15:17), in dreams (Gen. 15:1; 20:3; 28:12; 31:11, 24; 35:7ff.; 41:1ff.; 46:2) and by His word (Gen. 12:1; 21:12; 22:1; 25:23; 31:3; 35:1). Also, there is a hint of the Trinity in the Angel of LORD, who is the LORD, but is also apparently distinguished from the LORD (Gen. 16:7ff; 21:17; 22:11, 15; 24:7, 40; 31:11; 48:16). God's name is especially "Almighty" (Gen. 17:1; 28:3; 33:20; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:24, 25), but He is also the God who sees (Gen. 16:13) and the LORD who provides (Gen. 22:14).

2. Naturally, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the race of priests, were themselves priests also (Gen. 12:7ff.; 13:4, 18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 3, 7). More importantly, Abraham was the first man in the Bible to be called a prophet (Gen. 20:7) and Isaac and Jacob functioned as prophets (cf. Gen. 27, 49; Psa. 105:15). Joseph, as advisor to the king and the man who saw dreams of the future, was the classic prophet of the era. In a secondary sense they were also kings. Abraham judged kings (Gen. 14). Isaac was so powerful and rich that a king claimed he was afraid of Isaac because his power was greater than the king's (Gen. 26:16). Jacob blessed the Pharaoh (Gen. 47:7). And Joseph became ruler of all Egypt (Gen. 41:40ff.). Perhaps their priestly responsibility had the most far reaching consequences: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:3; cf. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 27:29; 28:14), but these men themselves were, above all, the first prophets of God in a new age of prophetic revelation.

3. The law of God was revealed to the Patriarchs in greater detail than we know. Abraham, for example, offered birds according to the rules later recorded in Leviticus (cf. Gen. 15:10 and Lev. 1:17), and Judah knew the laws of the Levirate (Gen. 38:6ff.). Though by grace God chose Abraham and made him what he was, it is also true that God blessed Abraham because of his righteousness: "For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Gen. 18:19). When the Lord spoke of this to Isaac, He said that Isaac would be blessed "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws" (Gen. 26:5). Whatever the precise details were, it is clear that Abraham had a revelation of God's law and obeyed it.

4. Abraham was blessed of God and was chosen to be a blessing to the world. As always, God took the initiative in dispensing His blessing. He called Abraham and selected him as a channel of blessing for the world. Abraham received the blessing by faith (Gen. 15:6) and showed the reality of his faith by obedience (Gen. 26:5). Isaac and Jacob, too, received the blessing of the covenant and passed it on to the children of Jacob (Gen. 26:3ff.; 27:28f.; 28:3f.; 49). The book of Genesis ends with a prophetic picture of Abrahamic covenant blessing extending to all the families of the earth: the children of Israel live in the best part of Egypt (Gen. 47:6, 11) and Joseph is on the throne of Egypt providing bread for the world (Gen. 41:57).

5. God's promise to Abraham is well known: "And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing: And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2-3). Abraham, however, would not see these blessings in his own lifetime, at least not in their fullness. The ultimate blessing of the Abrahamic covenant was in the final blessing: "in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed." Paul was referring to this when he

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wrote: “For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” (Rom. 4:13).

The promise that those who blessed Abraham would be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed means that, in the end, only those nations who believe in the God of Abraham will survive, other nations will disappear. At the same time, it is promised that the blessing of Abraham will extend to “all families of the earth,” which means that the whole world must someday be converted. We do not face a future of most nations gradually disappearing, but of nations converting to Christ.

Since all those who are converted become the children of Abraham, Abraham inherits the world through the spread of the Gospel, as Paul explained: “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer. . . . in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith. . . . And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, heirs according to promise.” (Gal. 3:7-9, 14, 29)

Man’s Covenantal Response

Until they are led to Egypt at the end of Genesis, the Patriarchs were faithful to God. Though they all sinned in some form or another, they were great leaders of the faith. The sons of Jacob were less impressive, though they too clearly repented of their sin against Joseph (Gen. 42:21) and the book of Genesis ends with them all living in harmony and faith (Gen. 50:18-21). At the beginning of Exodus, however, the children of Israel are enslaved (Exo. 1:8ff.). The Pharaoh was certainly ungodly, but the real reason for the Hebrews being in slavery was that they had broken the covenant and committed idolatry (Josh. 24:14; cf. Lev. 17:7) and were therefore under the curse of the covenant. They had to be disciplined by God to be brought back to Him. As before, the covenantal age ended in failure and sin on the part of man. Once again, that led to a greater revelation of God’s grace.

God’s Covenantal Judgment

God blessed the Patriarchs for their faithfulness and disciplined them when they sinned. He led them in mysterious ways and worked wonderful miracles for them: “When they were only a few men in number, Very few, and strangers in it. And they wandered about from nation to nation, From one kingdom to another people. He permitted no man to oppress them, And He reprov’d kings for their sakes: ‘Do not touch My anointed ones, And do My prophets no harm.’” (Psa. 105:12-15). Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob learned through their experiences of His power and goodness.

When their descendants departed from God in Egypt, He sold them into slavery — as He also would do later in Israel’s history — to turn them back unto Himself. The children of Israel in their tribulation cried out to God and He sent Moses and Aaron to save them. God granted them a new covenant with greater revelation and greater grace.

The Mosaic Covenant

Chapter Ten

It was no coincidence that Egypt came to be ruled by a Pharaoh “which knew not Joseph” (Ex. 1:8). Even as the era of the Noahic covenant ended in the failure and rebellion of the tower of Babel, so too the era of the patriarchs ended with the apostasy of the children of Israel. Moses does not mention it directly in the book of Exodus, but Joshua, in his final sermon to the Israelites, reminded them that they had served other gods in Egypt (Josh. 24:14) and warned them that if they served other gods again God would judge them (Josh. 23:1ff.). The children of Israel became slaves in Egypt because of their sins. But where sin abounded, the grace of God “did much more abound.” God gave Israel a new covenant.

As with the previous covenant administrations, the new covenant that was given through Moses did not abrogate previous covenants, it was built upon the previous covenants. The law of Moses was not opposed to the promise (Gal. 3:17-18). It was instituted upon the basis of the Abrahamic promise in order to further the historical realization of the Abrahamic promise (cf. Ex. 2:24; 6:8; Lev. 26:42; Deu. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5; 29:13; 30:20).

It was, furthermore, the first covenant in a new cycle of covenants. The Adamic covenant had been priestly, the Noahic kingly, and the Abrahamic prophetic. The cycle began again with the Mosaic covenant, the new priestly covenant that bestowed greater grace than had been seen in any of the covenants since the fall. God would again dwell with man. A new sanctuary and limited sanctuary access was the essence of the grace of God granted in the Mosaic law. It was neither the office of prophet or king that constituted the core of the Mosaic administration; the tabernacle with its Levites, priests and sacrificial system was central.

The Kingdom

For the first time in history since the fall, the people of God were granted their own distinct land and a sanctuary. There was no king established by the Mosaic administration, though laws which anticipated a future king were part of the law (Deu. 17:14-20). The overwhelming emphasis of the law is priestly, not political. Detailed attention is given to the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 35-40) and the sacrifices and laws of purity (Leviticus). God deals with Israel as a priestly nation (Numbers) and blesses them when they worship Him in truth (Deuteronomy).

The tabernacle worship system, including the Levites and priests, is the central concern of the law and the most important feature of the new covenantal situation. The Levitical system included first the office of the priest, more important in the Mosaic administration than either kingship, not yet established, or prophet, an occasional figure, not a permanent office. Priests as the judges of the supreme court dealt with the difficult cases the local courts could not handle (Deu. 17:8-13). Matters of ritual purity, a major concern of the law, were all judged by the priests (Lev. 13ff.). The sacrificial system, the very center of Israel’s worship, was also committed to the priests. They were also important in the administration of Israel’s welfare system (cf. Deu. 14:28-29; 26:12).

The Mosaic Covenant

An important aspect of the law, often forgotten, is the provision of Levitical cities. Instead of being given farm land, like the other tribes, Levites were given forty eight cities (Num. 35:1-5). These cities would be cultural centers of trade, education, music, and law. The six most important cities in the Mosaic period were the six cities of refuge, which would have special significance as places of judgment in addition to their normal significance as Levitical cities (Num. 35:6-8; cf. Josh. 20:1-9). The central location and accessibility of these six cities in particular, and the Levitical cities in general, indicates the intention of the law for Israelite culture to be distinctly Levitical and Biblical. Israel, the nation of priests, was to be priestly in its cultural life.

The Five Points of the Covenant

1. God revealed His glory to Israel at Mt. Sinai in terrifying splendor (cf. Dt. 5:1-5, 23-29), giving them the Ten Commandments, the essence of the Mosaic “new covenant.” The Exodus deliverance as a fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that his descendents would be brought back to the land of Canaan (Gen. 15:13-16) was a new revelation of God’s character. Abraham and the other patriarchs knew the Lord as El Shaddai, the God of power, but they did not live to see Him keep His covenant promise to give the land of Canaan to the seed of Abraham. To Moses and Israel of his day, God revealed Himself as LORD, so that the full significance of the covenant name of God became manifest as it had not been before (Ex. 6:2-8; 34:5-7).

2. The law spoke of prophets (Deu. 18:9ff.), kings (Deu. 17:14ff.) and priests, but especially of priests. God established boundaries for the land and a system of cities, courts, worship and welfare. Israel had a “constitution” given by God to direct her in her priestly service to the world. The family was strengthened as an institution by a gift of land which could not be taken away, by implicit limits on taxation, and by limits on the authority of the magistrates and priests.

For the first time in history the authority of priests and kings is clearly divided. The priesthood belongs to the tribe of Levi, no other tribe could legitimately assume the privileges granted to it. Prophets might be from any tribe, and, though only an occasional office, they had a special authority transcending priests or kings if necessary, though either priests or kings might also be prophets. Kings would eventually come from the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-12; cf. Num. 24:17). From this point forward in Israel’s history, therefore, no Israelite could be both priest and king — until the Messiah, who would be like Melchizedek (Psa. 110).

3. The revelation provided in the Ten Commandments and in the case-law commentary (Ex. 21-24; Deu. 6-26), which expounded the fuller religious, civil, and cultural meaning of the Ten Commandments, gave Israel a distinct ethic that would be the essence of their wisdom in this world (Deu. 4:5-6). The law was a unit. The real meaning of the Ten Commandments could not have been seen apart from the broader application given in the detailed laws from Exodus to Deuteronomy. In particular, the sacrificial system established in Leviticus expounded the worship commanded in the second commandment, showed what it meant to honor God’s name in worship, the third commandment, and how to keep the Sabbath.

The law revealed God’s righteousness in its commandments and His grace in its sacrifices. It surpassed all previous revelation. Israel was given an ethical revelation — priestly in its

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central concern, but applicable to every aspect of life — that would guide her in wisdom so that she could lead the world unto God (Deu. 4:1-8).

4. The law of Moses, like every other covenant administration, included the threat of the curse for disobedience and the promise of blessing for obedience, but it was not, nor could it have ever been, a “legalistic” covenant. The Pharisaic interpretation of the law was, as both Jesus and Paul taught clearly, a perversion of the law’s true meaning. The law was given as a blessing for Israel to lead her in the way of joy, prosperity, and peace (Deu. 6:10-11, 24; 8:7ff.; 10:13; 12:7, 12, 18; 14:26; 16:11, 14, 15; 26:11; 29:9; 30:5, 9, 15). The greatest blessing of the law was the tabernacle, a God-given sanctuary, His dwelling place among His people. The promise of the covenant that God would be with His people found concrete fulfillment in the gift of the tabernacle sanctuary. However, this too was clearly temporary, since the law looked forward to a more permanent sanctuary to be established in the future in an unspecified location (Deu. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23-25; 16:11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; etc.).

The law of Moses, of course, included the curse also. Though the law was a blessing for the people and a manifestation of grace, it was also, at that point in history, the most emphatic revelation of God’s righteous wrath against sin that had ever been given to man. The profound definition of sin and the just punishment required by the law were intended to impress upon Israelites their need for the grace of God. Moreover, the law warned repeatedly that if Israel departed from God’s ways, she would be rejected from her position of covenant leadership and privilege (Deu. 28:15ff.).

But this is not “legalism” by any reasonable definition. The curse of the law was applied to those who did not persevere in the relationship of blessing that the covenant established. Or, to put it in other words, the curse was applied to those who rejected the covenant blessing, for in the nature of the case, the covenant is a two-way relationship. What must be understood is that the curse and the blessing were not set before Israel as two equally possible destinies that she was to choose by her free will or determine by her works. Israel was blessed by God. That was where her covenant life with God began. She would continue to enjoy the blessing of the covenant if she persevered in the covenant, that is, if she responded to God’s promises in faith, to His love with love. But, the curse warned, if she betrayed that love, she would inherit the wrath of God.

5. The law established an elaborate system for the continuation of the priesthood and the inheritance of land. Also, it emphasized the central concern of inheritance — inheritance of faith — by commanding parents to educate their children in the covenant, including this duty as an expression of parents’ loyalty and love to God. “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God [is] one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (Dt. 6:4-7).

Israel was given the land of Canaan as their covenantal inheritance, but what was given as a gift of grace and received by faith also had to be won by hard works of faith. Israel was required to fight for the inheritance, but the battle was the LORD’s. He would give them the victory. Not only was Israel promised the land of Canaan, God reaffirmed the Abrahamic promise of evangelical (Gospel based) world dominion. If Israel would keep the covenant, she

would lead the nations of the world to blessing and, by bringing blessing to all the world, inherit the earth (cf. Deu. 4:6-8; 28:1, 7, 10, 13).

Man's Covenantal Response

Although Israel had a bad start in the wilderness, the next generation under the leadership of Joshua conquered most of the land of Canaan and began to set up a God-fearing nation with God's covenant law serving as the Law above the law. After the death of Joshua, however, repeated apostasy brought repeated covenantal discipline. Israel did not heed Joshua's final warning (Josh. 24). She intermarried with the non-Christian nations and fell into idolatry (Judg. 2:1-3, 11-15). By spiritual compromise she subverted her own authority as God's priestly nation and was sold into slavery, as she had been in Egypt.

When Israel cried out unto God, He sent them saviors, judges to deliver them from their enemies (Judg. 2:16-18). Thus, periods of relative faithfulness were followed by periods of apostasy in cycles of sin, judgment and repentance until the time of Samuel when a final judgment was brought on the nation. Saul had been given as a sort of "permanent judge," but he too, like the nation he led, departed from God and brought judgment upon himself and his people.

God's Covenantal Judgment

The supreme blessing of the Mosaic covenant, the tabernacle, was destroyed after Israel brought the ark of God into battle, as if it had magical power to give them victory (1 Sam. 4). God delivered the ark, the symbol of His presence, into the hands of the Philistines (1 Sam. 4:11). In effect, God Himself went into captivity in the place of His people, bringing judgment on their enemies as well as covenantal discipline on Israel (1 Sam. 5:1-6:18). Like the Egyptians before them, the Philistines were terrified at God's judgment and they sent the ark back to Israel. The ark, then, came out of "captivity" with the gold of the Philistines, as Israel had come out of Egypt with spoil.

But the tabernacle system was never again "normal." The ark was separated from the tabernacle and the two were never brought together again. The Mosaic system ended with the breakdown of its center. Also, Israel's premature demand for a king, motivated by their desire to be "like the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5) won for them a king who was truly like the kings of the nations and a reflection of their national waywardness. Saul's folly came to its climax in the murder of Ahimelech and the priests of Nob (1 Sam. 22:16-19). Though he prepared the way for the next kingly period of the covenant, Saul invited God's wrath for his rejection of the covenant. Nor had Israel kept the covenant any better than Saul. But the gravest sin, and that which did more to ruin Israel than any other, was the sin of Eli and his sons who defiled the priesthood (1 Sam. 3:11ff.). The nation of priests had failed in their central responsibility. But God remained faithful. He would continue to manifest His grace in giving them another new covenant with a true king.

The Davidic Covenant

Chapter Eleven

Just as God's people were oppressed by a Pharaoh "which knew not Joseph" at the end of the patriarchal era, so they were oppressed by a king who apparently knew not the LORD at the end of the Mosaic era. Saul was a transitional figure — the first king of Israel, and, yet, because of his sin, not altogether a "true king" — not as evil as Pharaoh in many ways, but from another perspective, even worse than Pharaoh, for he sinned against greater light. Furthermore, as king of Israel he massacred eighty-five priests and destroyed the priestly city of Nob, killing men, women, and children in Israel (1 Sam. 22:18-19), though he had spared the pagan king, Agag (1 Sam. 15). He also sought to slay David whom he knew to be God's anointed one.

It was only with David that Israel truly had a king from the LORD, a man "after His own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14), one to whom the Lord gave a new covenant. God's new covenant with David did not abrogate the law of Moses or the promise to Abraham. On the contrary, it augmented and fulfilled them both, especially in three matters, the final conquest of the land, the establishment of a hereditary kingship, and the provision for a new place of worship. The first of these is often forgotten, though Scripture specifically calls attention to it. To Abraham God had said, "Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18). Finally, after hundreds of years, the promise was fulfilled: "And Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt: they brought presents, and served Solomon all the days of his life" (1 Kg. 4:21).

The kingship was spoken of in the law of Moses, but no king was provided. This was in part because of the curse of God on the seed of Judah, most of whom were the children of bastards (cf. Gen. 38) and, therefore, not qualified for kingship until the tenth generation (cf. Deu. 23:2). Even if the family of Judah had been qualified, however, Israel was not, during the Mosaic era, mature enough for the institution of the kingship. Only when she had developed, culturally and spiritually, would the kingship, central government, and a central place of worship be established.

Thus, the same covenant that established the family of David as the royal family also gave to Israel a central place of worship, the city of David, Jerusalem. The law of Moses alluded to a central sanctuary, but only with the Davidic covenant was it actually provided. Planned by David and built by Solomon, the temple system brought about important changes in the law and worship of Israel. Again, this is often forgotten. The ceremonial aspects of the Mosaic system, though not the ethical, are significantly revised to fit the new covenant situation.¹

In addition to fulfilling certain promises of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, the Davidic covenant further developed the most important aspect of the promise of the covenant, the doctrine of the Messiah. The Abrahamic covenant had promised that the seed of Eve who

¹ I am aware that this is a basic and somewhat ambiguous statement. After all, we cannot finally disentangle the ethical, symbolic, ceremonial, and civil aspects of the law. Each is involved in the other. This implies that already in the time of David, there would be debates among Levites about how certain laws were to be applied in the "new covenant" situation.

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would save the world would be of the family of Abraham. The prophecy of Jacob had pointed to the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:8-11). The Mosaic covenant had foretold of a prophet like Moses (Deu. 18:15). Now, the new kingly covenant developed that promise further by declaring that Messiah would be a royal descendent of David through his son Solomon (2 Sam. 7:8-29; Ps. 89).

The Kingdom

In the days of David and Solomon the world destroyed by the Noachic flood was finally rebuilt. Once more there was a central world sanctuary to which men could come to worship God. David apparently understood from the book of Genesis that Jerusalem, the home of Melchizedek, the priest-king like the Messiah, was to be the city for God's temple (cf. Heb. 7; also Psa. 110, written by David). In the holy city the king dwelt beside God's house, the idea being that the human king is a representative of the divine king. There was a holy land around the sanctuary through which the influence of the holy place was to flow to all the world. With the reestablishment of the threefold division of sanctuary, land, and world, the world was finally rebuilt. The destruction of the flood had been overcome by the grace of God.

The provision of a king to rule the holy land and to serve as a symbol and representative of the heavenly King evidenced the growth of the covenant. The kingdom of God was much more visible and powerful in the days of Solomon than it had ever been since the fall.

David, a godly king, was naturally responsible to promote the rebuilding of the worship system that had been broken down through the sin of the priest Eli, who dishonored God by not judging his wicked sons (1 Sam. 2:22-36; 3:11-14). God graciously granted to David the honor of preparing the building of His house and to David's son the blessing of building the new Temple-sanctuary, a more mature and glorious Eden model than the tabernacle. God also directed David and Solomon to change the priesthood to fit the new covenant situation (cf. Heb. 7:12). First, David redesigned the priesthood by appointing them to serve the temple in courses (1Chr. 23-24; 28:11-13; 20-21). Second, Solomon expelled Abiathar the high-priest and appointed Zadok in his place, in fulfillment of the prophecy against the house of Eli (1Kg. 2:27, 35).

A new temple in the center of the land that had been promised to Abraham and a glorious king to represent the true God — this is the kingdom situation in the days of David and Solomon. Israel was at the height of her power and glory as God graciously fulfilled the covenant promises He had made to her fathers.

The Five Points of the Covenant

1. Transcendence: When David had defeated his enemies and established his authority, he called the prophet Nathan and declared his intention to build a house for God. But God had a different plan. He would build a house for David, "thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever" (2Sam. 7:16). God took the initiative in setting up David as the head of a dynasty of kings that would culminate in Christ the Messiah, King of kings and Lord of lords.

2. Hierarchy: David and his seed were established as the human representative leaders of the kingdom of God. The Levitical system, established by the law of Moses, would continue to

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function, though it would be modified to fit the new kingdom situation and the new house of God. Twenty four courses of priests were appointed to serve the temple in turn. The high-priesthood was taken away from the family of Eli and given to Zadok, according to the prophetic word of judgment spoken through Samuel.

The family and the land inheritance system remained as it was under the law of Moses, though by the time of David, with the increase of rural population, the natural migration of families from farms and villages to larger cities must have begun. Godly culture reached its height under David and Solomon. Later, when the northern kingdom turned from God in the days of Jeroboam and afterwards, godly families from the north relocated in the south, preserving a remnant from each tribe.

The kingdom of Israel was ruled by a God-given king who, though he committed very serious sins against God, sincerely sought the glory of God and the growth of His kingdom. David, the king, and Solomon, his son, were both prophetically inspired to write Holy Scripture that accorded with their particular dispositions and gifts: David, Psalms, and Solomon, Wisdom literature.

3. Ethics: The law of God given through Moses was modified significantly. A new sanctuary in a set location with a new family as the high priests are not small changes. Choirs, too, were appointed. In its civil aspects, however, there would have been little change in Moses' law. The king, as the supreme judge of the land, was to manifest the spirit of the law in his rule so that the meaning of the law would become clearer to God's people over time. David ate of the showbread that was reserved only for the priests, an apparent act of disobedience that God not only blessed, but our Lord used to teach the Pharisees the true meaning of the law (Mk. 2:25-27). Solomon the supreme judge of the land demonstrated such wisdom in the application of God's law that the queen of Sheba traveled to Jerusalem to meet him — the ideal sort of missionary outreach that Deuteronomy 4:5-8 depicted.

4. Oath: The king in Israel represented God to the people, as did the prophet and the priest. Just as God dealt with the land primarily through the priests during the Mosaic priestly age, so He dealt with the land through the kings during the Davidic royal age. When kings were righteous, they brought God's blessing on the whole nation and when they were sinful, they brought God's curse on the nation also. David's sin in numbering the people was not dealt with as a private sin (2Sam. 24). Nor was Solomon's sin of idolatry (1Kg. 11). However, Judah's kings were often better than the people, seldom worse. As the nation grew more corrupt, the people were cursed with evil rulers, whose moral character reflected the character of the people.

5. Succession: The office of the king was to be inherited by David's descendants, eventuating in the Messiah. But Solomon's idolatry destroyed the united kingdom, dividing the land into north and south. The northern kingdom from the beginning worshipped the true God of Israel through an idol, as the Israelites in the wilderness had. They eventually fell into the grossest forms of idolatrous perversity. The north never enjoyed even a single godly king. The southern kingdom, by the grace of God, had some godly kings, but in the end, was overwhelmed with wickedness and idolatry worse than the north. Because of its sins, the house of David appeared to have lost the Messianic promise. God cursed the royal line, swearing that no one from the descendants of Coniah would ever rule the land (Jer. 22:28-30). The inheritance of the kingdom was lost, apparently forever.

Man's Covenantal Response

The same history of apostasy and judgment followed by repentance that we have seen in previous eras re-occurred during the period of the monarchy. David himself sinned against God by committing adultery with Bathsheba and murdering Uriah the Hittite. Though he repented, he later sinned again by numbering the people. Solomon sinned by marrying non-Christian wives who turned his heart away from God. Then, the son of the wisest king of Israel, listening to the younger advisers rather than the older wise men, foolishly insisted on his authority when he should have been gracious (1Kgs. 12). Because of sin and folly, the kingdom was divided into two, Israel and Judah.

The remaining history of both kingdoms is the story of progressive apostasy. Both Israel in the north and Judah in the south turned away from God, Israel shortly after the division of the kingdom, Judah more gradually over a longer period of time. In the end, they were the same. They both became apostate, idolatrous kingdoms that brought upon themselves the wrath of God.

God's Covenantal Judgment

God took away Israel's status as an independent kingdom. Never again would she regain the glory of Solomon's kingdom. Taken into captivity to Assyria, the apostates of the northern kingdom disappeared from history. The southern kingdom was led to Babylon for seventy years but by God's grace Judah — which by the time of the exile already included within her borders a remnant from all twelve tribes — was allowed to return to the land and rebuild the temple. The people of God had once again broken the covenant, but God's grace brought them back into the land to give them a new and even more glorious beginning.

The Restoration Covenant

Chapter Twelve

The seventy years in captivity were God's discipline for Israel's neglect of His law, particularly their neglect of the Sabbath year (2 Chr. 36:21). This was precisely the judgment He had forewarned of in the Mosaic law.

Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins. . . .

I will make the land desolate so that your enemies who settle in it will be appalled over it. You, however, I will scatter among the nations and will draw out a sword after you, as your land becomes desolate and your cities become waste. Then the land will enjoy its Sabbaths all the days of the desolation, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land will rest and enjoy its Sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your Sabbaths, while you were living on it. (Lev. 26:27-28, 32-35)

The transgression of the Sabbath command apparently began from the time of the building of Solomon's temple, indicating Israel's failure to follow the law from the beginning of the kingdom era. But again, where sin abounded, God's grace abounded still more. At the end of the seventy years of captivity prophesied by Jeremiah (Jer. 25:11-12; 29:10), God raised up a Gentile Messiah, as He had promised through Isaiah (Isa. 44:28-45:4). Cyrus the Persian defeated Babylon and pronounced the decree that restored Israel to her land (Ezr. 1:1-4).

The Kingdom

The restoration period is the last era of Israel's history as the people of God and the climactic period of old covenant. The kingdom of God grew beyond Israel and spread to the nations. Four great empires had been appointed to protect His priestly people. Though as a kingdom, the new Israel has less glory than it did in the days of Solomon, Israel's loss of independence and submission to Gentile powers was not a backward movement in the kingdom program of God. Abraham had been chosen by God so that through him all the nations of the world could be blessed (Gen. 12:3). In the restoration era, this was fulfilled more than at any other time in Israel's history. Through the dispersion, Jews had spread all over the world, taking with them the knowledge of the true God.

Though Daniel spent most of his life serving the king of Babylon during the time of captivity, he is still a good picture of what the restoration era is about, for he served "Darius the Mede," also. Daniel's job was that of an advisor, the supreme advisor, to the king of Babylon and then head over the satraps and presidents in the kingdom of Persia (Dan. 6:1-3). Essentially the king intended to designate Daniel as the actual ruler in Persia, as Joseph had been in Egypt:

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“the king planned to appoint him over the whole kingdom” (Dan. 6:3). This was not a “secular” calling. To advise the king and aid him and the daily affairs of rule was one of the functions of a prophet. One of the most well known examples is the prophet Nathan, who served as an advisor for David (cf. 2 Sam. 7).

In other words, during the restoration era, Israel as a nation would no longer be a great civil power, but she was appointed by God to serve as a prophetic witness to the world. It was Israel’s prophetic task to give godly counsel to the leaders of the Babylonian, Persian, Greek, and Roman empires who protected her. Through her special position in the empire, she was called to spread the knowledge of the true God. The final era of Israel’s history, thus, was a prophetic era in which the word of God went forth more broadly than at any time in Israel’ history.

Her new temple in Jerusalem lacked the glory of the temple of Solomon (cf. Hag. 2:3), but, as was appropriate for a prophetic people in an international age, her real new temple was the “heavenly” temple that was revealed to Ezekiel (40-48). Jews in this era were given a glorious vision of Israel’s worship and its global significance that made explicit the purpose of the tabernacle and temple. Through the worship of the true God, the priestly nation was to bring blessing to all men.

The Five Points of the Covenant

1. Transcendence: God’s sovereign control over the nations was revealed in this period of the old covenant more than it had been in any other. Daniel foresaw the whole history of the world from the time of Babylon to the time of establishment of the kingdom of the Messiah (Dan. 2:27ff.; 7:1ff.). The kingdoms of this world were in His hand and He was guiding history as He willed. For the Jews as a nation, this greater revelation of God’s Kingship was important, for on the surface, it would appear that they were in the hands of unbelieving rulers through much of this period. But the fact that God had predicted the history of the entire era from the beginning put all of this in a different light. The Jews learned anew that “The king’s heart is in the hand of the LORD, as the rivers of water: He turneth it whithersoever He will” (Pro. 21:1).

2. Hierarchy: Civil rule had been taken from the Jews and given to the Gentile empires, but the Gentiles were appointed as protectors, not persecutors. So long as the Jews were faithful to God they would find that Gentile rulers favored them above the other nations, as, for example, the king of Persia favored the Jews in the days of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther and Mordecai. The temple had a new priesthood examined and approved by Ezra (Ezr. 2:62). Jerusalem was rebuilt no longer as a civil center but, which was far more important, as the world center for the worship of the true God. Also, sometime near the beginning of this era, the scribes and the Pharisees apparently developed as a “prophetic” ministry of law experts to teach the people God’s word. In the beginning, they were, no doubt, faithful to God.

3. Ethics: The civil law given to Israel through Moses could no longer be applied in its literal fullness for a number of reasons. To begin with, the Jews would have to conform to the civil ordinances of the ruling empires. The most obvious example of laws that had to change were the Mosaic regulations concerning the king, but other laws were affected, too. In some cases, this might include the definition of a crime, in other cases it may mean the imposition of a punishment different from that specified in the Mosaic law. We know, for example, that Jews under the Romans were not allowed to execute criminals, and in Roman times, the sin idolatry

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would not have been defined as a crime against the State. Land laws, too, had to be modified, for after the return from the Exile not all families could prove their identity and many of the original families no longer existed. Add to that different boundaries, and clearly the division of the land in the days of Joshua would no longer be relevant. In sum, various modifications of the civil and social laws were required, but the essence of the law — the righteous requirement of the law — remained unchanged. Love to God and love to one's neighbor were the heart of the law for Moses and for Ezra.

4. Oath: During this era the most conspicuous leaders of the nation were the prophets and teachers of Scripture — the scribes and Pharisees. If these men had been faithful to God, they would have led the nation in righteousness and the Gentile kingdoms would have shown favor to the Jews. This is what we see, for example in the books of Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther — God sovereignly led the kings of Persia to show special kindness to the Jewish people. The Jews would be blessed by God so long as they kept His law and submitted to the Gentile authorities He placed over them. During much of this era, however, the Jews were oppressed, not primarily because of the Gentile empires' wickedness, but because of their own lack of faithfulness to God.

5. Succession: The Abrahamic promise of global blessing was not in any way hindered, but actually facilitated by the fact that the Jews were under the rule of Gentile empires. More than any other time in their history, Jews had opportunities for trade and travel, which spread the knowledge of God into Gentile lands. It is no coincidence that the reforms of world religions took place during this period. Changes in the religions of Greece, India, and other nations may well have been due, at least in part, to the influence of ambassadors sent by Daniel from Babylon's court, traders from the Persian empire, and other Jews who brought the knowledge of the true God with them wherever they went.

But Paul complains that the Jews failed their mission as ambassadors for God's kingdom: "Behold, thou art called a Jew, and retest in the law, and makest thy boast of God . . . Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God? For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written" (Rom. 2:17, 23-24). By the end of this era, the Jews, rather than inheriting the world, had won for themselves ignominy because of their hypocrisy.

Man's Covenantal Response

The Jews rejected God's covenant grace in this era as they had done in previous eras. As in every era of the old covenant, the children of Adam imitated their father in the flesh. By the time of the Roman empire, they were again suffering in bondage to a foreign power. But the sinfulness of man reached a climactic high in the restoration era, for at the end of this age, the Messiah appeared. Jesus Christ, the incarnation of God, who came to save the Jews, lived among them for 30 years and ministered to them for 3 years. Their response to God's grace was clear — they hated the Savior with a passion. And the most enthusiastic opponents of Christ were the leaders of the people — the scribes and Pharisees in particular, but also the priests — for He exposed their hypocrisy and ungodliness.

Jesus' basic charge against the Pharisees and scribes was that they had departed from the Bible and substituted man's traditions in its place. They claimed the authority of God for

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traditions that had been added to God's word. They claimed to be the true interpreters of God's word, but they distorted its meaning for their own profit: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess" (Mt. 23:25).

When the Jews delivered Christ to the Romans that He might be put to death, even Pilate knew that they hated Jesus because of envy and not because of any misdeed that He had done (cf. Mt. 27:18). Therefore, when they were given the choice between Barabus, a criminal, and Christ, they preferred Barabus (Mt. 27:20-22) — a decision that perfectly manifested the nation's spiritual standards. In the end it was all the people, not just the leaders who took upon themselves responsibility for Jesus' death: "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children" (Mat. 27:25). Here was the final rejection of God's grace and the full manifestation of man's sin. Nothing in the entire history of the world so clearly exhibited the truth that the essence of man's sin is the hatred of God Himself (cf. Rom. 8:7).

God's Covenantal Judgment

The judgment of God against the sin of the Jews began with the resurrection of Christ, for the resurrection pits God's evaluation of Christ against that of the Jews. Death could not hold Jesus because He was the sinless Son of God. By the resurrection God declared to the world His approval of Jesus, who by the cross had gained the victory over sin and death. God's judgment, then, began with vindication. He raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand, granting to the despised and rejected Jesus all authority in heaven and on earth (Mat. 28:18). The man who was crucified as king of the Jews was exalted to become King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Rev. 19:16).

God's blessing on the ministry of the apostles, doing miracles through them and vindicating their claims as spokesmen for the true God and Messiah, is another aspect of God's covenant judgment. For this was the beginning of the creation of a new Israel, a new seed of Abraham that would be born of the Spirit, not the flesh. This also meant a new law, a new priesthood and a new temple.

But before the Church could be fully established, God's covenantal judgment on those who were responsible for the rejection of the Messiah had to be completed. That judgment would be fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem, which Jesus had predicted would take place within one generation of His own death (Mt. 24:34). Within forty years, in A.D. 70, God brought the Roman army to Jerusalem, just as He had brought the Babylonians in 605 B.C. and later in 597 and 587 B.C.. The Romans destroyed the old Jerusalem and its temple, bringing about a final judgment on the old covenant people and bringing the end to the old covenant era.

Ever since that judgment, the physical descendants of Abraham have not offered the blood sacrifices required in the law. Nor do they observe the great feasts of the Jewish calendar according to the law. The destruction of the temple in A.D. 70 brought about the complete end of the nation of Israel as God's special people. God choose a new nation, descended from Abraham according to a spiritual birth by faith (Gal. 3:26-29). The new nation included a remnant of Jews together with Gentiles from every land and tribe. But what makes this new nation fundamentally different from the ancient people of God is the new head, the Last Adam, who as the representative for His people fully satisfied the wrath of God against sin and brought

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the blessing of life eternal. For the first time in the history of the world since the fall, the human race was set free from the dominion of sin and evil. The way of life and blessing was opened up. Now, it is only a matter of time and the work of the Spirit before the world will be saved and the knowledge of God will fill the world as the waters cover the sea.

The New Covenant

Chapter Thirteen

Unlike previous “new covenants,” the New Covenant in Christ truly “recreated” the world (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17). From the fall of Adam, the Adamic covenant had been renewed over and over, each covenant bringing a new Adamic leader, a new priesthood, a new temple, and a new Eden, but none of these brought about the salvation of the world. In every “new covenant” prior to the coming of Christ, the covenant head was a mere sinful child of Adam who broke the law like his father. Thus, the curse of the covenant that had been pronounced upon Adam and his race could not be taken away, only postponed. None of the new “Adams” of the old covenant eras could fulfill the promise that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent, because they themselves were crushed, over and over.

But in “the last days” Jesus the Christ appeared (Heb. 1:2) and brought in a covenant that was really new. This covenant included a new sacrifice that could take away sins, a new temple not made with the hands of men, a new priesthood called from every tribe and nation, and a new people of God born from above by the Spirit. Christ, therefore, is the true antitype of Adam, the head of an entirely new race and a new world order, established upon the basis of His saving work (cf. Rom. 5:12-25).

The Kingdom

In the original kingdom situation, man was placed in a Garden-sanctuary and given dominion over the world. There was a distinction between the Garden, Eden, and the rest of the world, but the difference between the three original spheres was not a matter of unholy versus holy, but one of holy, versus more holy and most holy. Man’s dominion task was to fill the world and transform it all into a Garden of God that would manifest the praises of its Creator-King. The fall of Adam brought ruin. The world was defiled. Man was cast out of God’s presence. And Satan took *de facto* control over everyday affairs among the race of Adam. Thus, the original creation was judged, and the world remade in Noah’s days, but still the problem of Adam’s sin was not solved. Only the coming of the Messiah, the promised Seed of the Woman, could bring decisive change.

When Jesus was born, the world of the Restoration covenant had deteriorated to the point of final judgment. The land was defiled with the sins of an apostate people; the temple was defiled with the sins of an apostate priesthood. The people of God were in slavery to a foreign power, but in a newer and more subtle way than ever before, for they were in their own land and enjoyed a measure of external freedom and tolerance for their religious institutions, though this was mixed with contempt and oppression. Externally they were in subjection to Rome, and many of their leaders, the Sadducees in particular, were spiritual slaves of the Greco-Roman worldview.

How unlike the early days of the Gentile era was its end! The age of the Gentiles commenced with men like Daniel, Ezra, and Nehemiah functioning as prophetic advisors to the

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kings of the Gentiles. For the age of the Gentiles, the ideal relationship between the Jews and their Gentile kings was illustrated in Esther. The Gentiles were the God-appointed guardians of the land, but the Jews were supposed to share rule with them as queen, with Jewish wise men supplying advice to the court. So long as the Jews were faithful to God, the Gentile kings would favor them and take their advice seriously.

By the time that Christ came, however, the times of the Gentiles had almost reached their conclusion. As in previous apostate ages, the people of God were oppressed. But the Jews of Jesus' day embraced their slavery as if it were freedom. When Pontius Pilate, asked the Jews: "Shall I crucify your King?" the chief priests, the official leaders of the land, answered: "We have no king but Caesar!" (John 19:15).

They spoke more truly than they intended, for the children of Abraham and their leaders, the supposed heirs of Ezra and Nehemiah, had degenerated into legalistic nitpickers who were more concerned with worldly honor and riches than the kingdom of God. The real leaders of the Jews were the Pharisees, who were primarily responsible for leading the Jews astray. Thus, from the beginning of His ministry our Lord bore prophetic witness against them for their rejection of God's word. His primary word for them was hypocrite (Mat. 6:2, 5, 16; 15:7; 16:3; 22:18; 23:13-15, 23, 25, 27; Luk. 13:15) — they were not what they pretended to be.

The Pharisees not only deceived people in their own day, people in our day, too, ironically misunderstand them to have been zealous followers of Moses. Quite the contrary, the essence of Christ's charge against them was that they had forsaken the law of Moses and gone after the traditions of men. To expose their unBiblical hypocrisy, Jesus repeatedly asks them, "Have ye not read?" (Mt. 12:3, 5; 19:4; 21:16, 42; 22:31; Mk. 12:10, 26). The traditions of their Jewish ancestors were, no doubt, originally intended as an aid in the interpretation of the word of God, but these traditions had come to replace the authority of God's word. That was the essence of Jesus' charge against them: "For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men . . . Full well ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition. . . . Making the word of God of none effect through your tradition, which ye have delivered . . ." (Mk. 7:8, 9, 13).

It was this bondage to the word of men that constituted the real slavery of the Jews in Jesus' day, just like it was bondage to the gods of the pagan lands that constituted the real slavery of previous ages. The power of Rome represented the word of man in its most impressive form. The Jews hated Rome, but they did not know the freedom that is found in obedience to God. Indeed, as much as they may have hated Rome, they preferred virtual slavery to her power than true service to the living God.

The Jews showed clearly that slavery to man, no less than slavery to idols, means slavery to demons. Thus, although the Jews were ruled by an essentially secular power for whom the worship of the emperor was not religion so much as it was a means of subjugating people, they were not merely without God in secular despair. The land was filled with demons. In the Gospel accounts of Jesus ministry, we read that everywhere Jesus went He was confronted with demons who cried out against Him. Repeatedly Jesus casts out demons to save the oppressed. But casting out demons does not truly heal men who do not turn unto God, as Jesus told the Jews:

When the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and not finding any, it says, 'I will return to my house from which I came.' And when it comes, it finds it swept and put in order. Then it goes and takes along seven

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other spirits more evil than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first.” (Luk. 11:24-26)

Israel as a whole, then, was apostate. Her leaders were hypocrites. Though she did not worship idols as she had in the days of Jeremiah, her worship was vain (Mr. 7:7). Jesus came to her as a prophet calling for repentance and promising the grace of God, but Israel rejected his testimony just as they did the ministry of Jeremiah.

However, even in this time of demonic apostasy, Jesus was able to find a remnant who believed in God and followed Him. This remnant had to be led out of Egypt — which is what Israel had become — unto a new land, the church of Jesus Christ. At first, this remnant was persecuted by the false church — the circumcision according to the flesh — but Jesus promised that they would eventually be vindicated by God and become the firstfruits of the kingdom harvest that extends to every land and tribe.

For the coming of the Messiah is the very center of history, the turning point in God’s kingdom program. Though every covenant before this ended in failure because of the sinfulness of man, now at the end of the age of the Gentiles — in “the last days” — God granted a new covenant (Heb. 1:2) which changed history because it brought true redemption from sin. In a way radically different from any time before, the New Covenant in Christ ushered in a new world, created a new race of men, and established a new sanctuary with a new priesthood.

In order to truly bring in a new covenant in which man could be restored to favor with God and become His beloved child, Jesus had to fulfill the requirements of the old covenant perfectly. The law demanded death for the sin of Adam and his posterity (Rom. 6:23). Unless the price for sin was paid, there could be no question of a new covenant: “without shedding of blood is no remission” (Heb. 9:22b). The old covenant sacrificial system promised redemption through a substitutionary sacrifice. Jesus fulfilled the promise and therefore took away the condemnation of the law:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things to come, He entered through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation; and not through the blood of goats and calves, but through His own blood, He entered the holy place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkling those who have been defiled sanctify for the cleansing of the flesh, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without blemish to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb. 9:11-14)

For by one offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified. (Heb. 10:14)

At the same time, the New Covenant may be regarded as a renewal of the old covenant, for it does not simply abolish the old covenant, it fulfills it (cf. Mat. 5:17-18). The New Covenant in Christ restores what Adam lost and makes it possible for his descendants to accomplish the work that he became unable to finish. Just as every renewal of the original Adamic covenant in the old covenant eras involved continuity, so does the recreation of the world in Christ. Man in Christ still has the responsibility to subdue the world to the glory of God (cf. Mat. 28:18-20).

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What is called the “Old Testament” is not abolished as God’s truth to be replaced by what is called the “New Testament.” There is in fact one book, all of which is relevant and applicable to the Christian life, as the books of the “New Testament” make abundantly clear. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works” (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

The good work that the new humanity is called to do is twofold. The building of God’s kingdom now not only means the fulfillment of the original creation covenant task that God gave to Adam and Eve, often called the cultural mandate (Gen. 1:26-28), it also involves the fulfillment of the Great Commission (Mt. 28:18-20). The first commission was given to the family, which is still the primary social institution for its fulfillment. The gift of children is to the family, the rearing of children is primarily a family responsibility, and economic activity belongs to the family. Christ’s great commission, however, was given to the Church, to which belongs the responsibility of preaching of the Gospel, teaching and baptizing.

By teaching the word of God to individuals and families, the Church brings God’s saving power to the world, for the Holy Spirit works through the Word. Families are renewed by His power. As the Church and the Family fulfill their God-given calling, whole nations will be transformed and the kingdom of God will eventually spread until the world believes in Christ. “All the ends of the earth shall remember and turn unto Jehovah; and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee. For the kingdom is Jehovah’s; and he is the ruler over the nations.” (Ps. 22:27-28).

The Five Points of the Covenant

1. Transcendence: God’s transcendence has been revealed in every covenantal era since the creation of the world, but never in so full and powerful a manner as it is revealed with the coming of the New Covenant. To begin with, there is a revelation of God’s transcendent sovereignty in the rich and detailed fulfillment of all the Messianic prophecy of the old covenant. We read of the realization of hundreds of Messianic prophecies which pointed to the details of Jesus’ birth, life, and death.

Just as other “new covenants” involved a greater revelation of God’s character, the New Covenant reveals who God is so fully that previous teaching about God seems obscure in comparison. The New Covenant revelation of God comes with the incarnation of Christ and the gift of the Holy Spirit. The New Covenant teaches us that God is a Trinity. This truth is not altogether absent from the old covenant, for the Angel of the LORD is distinguished from the LORD at the same time that He is identified with the LORD (cf. Gen. 22:15-16; Ex. 3:2-6; 1 Chr. 21:15; etc.) and the Holy Spirit is spoken of (Psa. 51:11; Isa. 44:3; etc.). But the clarity of the new revelation is incomparable. As John said, “No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.” (John 1:18).

2. Hierarchy: Christ became man and the Holy Spirit is given to man, thus uniting God and man in covenantal love and fellowship with an intimacy that surpasses all that men had imagined. Pagans saw themselves as becoming gods, but the gods of the pagans were neither transcendent nor righteous. The God of the Bible does not make us “gods” in the sense that pagans dreamed of, but He does make the Church His bride, bringing her into the covenantal

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fellowship of the Trinity, which was God's original purpose in creating man. In Christ, man is not only saved from sin, he is made an heir of God (Rom. 8:17). The new race of men in Christ is one with God covenantally in an eternal fellowship of love (John 17).

This means that God's covenant people can no longer be determined by racial relationship to Abraham nor through a bloody ritual like circumcision. Jesus fulfilled all bloody rituals through the cross. He opened a new way to God through faith in His death and resurrection. The new people of God are thus the people of faith (Rm. 4:1-25). Not that the people of God in the old covenant were people of works or people of unbelief. On the contrary, Abraham and David are the great examples of saving faith that Paul appeals to in showing us justification by faith (Rm. 4:1-8). The point is, rather, that faith is emphasized more fully than ever before because grace is revealed more fully than ever before. Thus, the new people of God are defined by faith.

Jesus fulfilled the meaning of man as prophet, priest, and king becoming all that Adam should have been and more. In Him, the new race of men are also made prophets (Ac. 2:16-18), priests (1Pet. 2:5), and kings (1Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6). This means the transformation of the individual into Christlikeness (Rom. 8:29) and, through the Holy Spirit's regenerating and sanctifying work in individuals, the transformation of the family (Eph. 5:22-6:4), the church (1Cor. 12:13), and the State (Rom. 13:1-6). The State has priority in preserving peace, which is its primary responsibility. The Family has the exclusive right to bring children into the world and rear them for God. The family is also the institution in charge of economic growth. To the Church has been given the responsibility of teaching God's Word and administering the covenantal ceremonies of baptism and the Lord's Supper. From the perspective of building God's kingdom through the Word and Spirit, the Church has priority.

3. Ethics: Just as Jesus brought a new revelation of God and a transformation of God's people, He also brings a new ethic. He did not set aside the ethical teaching of the law of Moses, though He did bring about the end of the sacrificial system, the land laws, and other distinctively Jewish aspects of the law of Moses, such as food restrictions and dress codes. But the ethics of the law of Moses are taught with greater depth than ever before (cf. Mat. 5-7). The essence of the law of Moses as love to God and love to neighbor is contrasted with the Pharisaic perversion of the law into a mere outward ceremonial righteousness (Mat. 22:34-40). Above all, Jesus perfectly sinless life manifested the real meaning of God's law like no commentary ever could.

His great command expressed the central demand of the law of Moses, with His own example added as the perfect manifestation of that law: "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." (John 13:34-35). Paul follows Jesus example and sums up the Ten Commandments in the word love (Rom. 13:8-10). The details of the law of Moses are profitable for our instruction, for they are part of God's word, all of which is inspired and profitable (2 Tim. 3:16-17). But the details of the law must be seen in terms of the purpose of the law, which is to teach us how to love God and our neighbor. Christ showed us the way.

4. Oath: The curse of the old covenant, death to sinners, was fully revealed and fully carried out on Christ. He bore the sins of the world (John 1:29), satisfied the wrath of God (Rom. 3:25; 1John 2:2), and redeemed the world from the curse (Tit. 2:14; John 3:16-17). Jesus death and resurrection constituted a final judgment against sin and the victory of righteousness over sin and death (cf. Rom. 5:12ff. 1Cor. 15).

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Because Jesus took away the curse, the way of blessing is opened up for men who believe in Him. Eternal life, the blessing of the covenant that was originally symbolized in the tree of life, is now given freely to those who simply believe in Christ (John 3:16; etc.). The Gospel is the declaration that the curse has been taken away and that God is reconciled with man. The world is no longer under a curse and in need of cleansing, for Jesus cleansed it once for all. Every place is clean. All food is clean. The way of salvation is opened and, by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus will save the world through the Gospel (Mat. 28:18-20; John 3:17).

The Church follows Christ. It is normal, though not necessarily without exception, for the Church in any new area to go through persecution and death, just as Jesus did. The Church, too, wins the blessing through the curse. The early Christians won the victory against the Roman empire not by military conquest, but by the shedding of their own blood and the witness of Jesus (cf. Rev. 12:11, 17). The Church's confidence in God and her steadfast faith in the face of death eventually was used by the Spirit of God to convict the conquerors of their sin (cf. John 16:7-11). When Christians take up the cross and follow Jesus, the power of His resurrection life is with them and they conquer the world (cf. 2Cor. 4:10-12).

5. Succession: Jesus is the God-appointed "heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2) the true seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:16) to whom had been given the promise of the world (Rom. 4:13). But the Jews plotted to kill the heir and steal the inheritance for themselves (Mat. 21:38). What they accomplished, ironically, was the guarantee that Jesus would inherit all things, for it was in what appeared to be His greatest defeat — death as a criminal — that Jesus won the victory against sin, death, and the devil (Col. 2:14-15). The resurrection of Christ vindicated Jesus and proved that He is the Messiah. But most of the Jews did not believe. The destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70, then, publicly vindicated Jesus as the true prophet who foretold the coming of the covenant curse (Mt. 23-25), just as Jeremiah and the prophets of old, and therefore also demonstrated that He is the Messiah and His followers the true people of God.

At His ascension, Jesus sat at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords, but His rule was not really publicly manifest until the destruction of Jerusalem, which vindicated His person and teachings. Now that He has been vindicated, He leads His church in world conquest through the preaching of the Gospel (Rev. 19:11-16). The Church is called to live as followers of the King of kings. Her Lord is resurrected, ascended, and seated at the right hand of God. It was because Jesus inherited all things, that Paul could say to the Corinthians, "Wherefore let no one glory in men. For all things are yours; whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours; and ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's." (1Cor. 21-23).

Israel was given the land of Canaan as her inheritance, but she had to fight to make it her own. When, therefore, the Church of Jesus Christ has been given the world as her inheritance, she, too, must fight the spiritual warfare of the Gospel to bring the world into subjection to her Master (Mat. 28:18-20; Eph. 6:10-18; Rev. 19:11-16). The whole world is under Jesus dominion (Mat. 28:18; Eph. 1:20-23; etc.), but the whole world does not yet love and obey Him. By her own obedience to God, by prayer and preaching the Gospel, the Church of Christ will subdue the world so that a redeemed world will be able to fulfill the original commission that God gave to Adam and Eve in the Garden. God's glory will be seen in all the world, and man's God-given purpose will be fulfilled.

Man's Covenantal Response

Man's covenantal response to God's grace is twofold. First is the response of Christ, the perfect man and the representative Head of the new race. Jesus obeyed God's word perfectly in His life and He rose to heaven to sit at the right hand of God as King of kings and Lord of lords. For the first time since the fall, there is a man who has loved God and kept His commandments so that the love of God might be revealed in history and a new humanity might be created by God's grace.

The Church is led by the Holy Spirit to obey Christ and will eventually win the world to faith in Christ. But she will never be perfect until Christ's second coming. History, therefore, will always be characterized by a warfare with sin, by human folly, selfishness, and pride. Indeed, the last generation of man will largely apostatize and reject the Gospel. When the God-hating men of this generation attempt to destroy the Church by violence, Christ will return and bring final judgment (Rev. 20:7-10).

God's Covenantal Judgment

God's covenantal judgment upon Christ at the cross opened the way of salvation so that the human race (not every individual man, but the majority, the world) has been saved from God's everlasting wrath. Although many men will reject the Gospel, in the end, the majority of men shall be saved (John 3:17). In history God's covenantal judgment of individuals, families, and nations that reject the Gospel brings about the growth of the Church and her ultimate victory. But God judges and purifies the Church itself through covenantal discipline (Heb. 12:4-13). Persecution and suffering come from God both for the spread of the Gospel and the purification of His people, as by fire (1Pet. 1:6-7).

The end of the present covenantal era will be with final judgment and the eternal states of heaven and hell (Mat. 25:31-46; Rev. 20:11-15). The final judgment is a judgment of works (Rev. 20:13) because it is man's works that manifest his faith and declare publicly what he really believes. It is also judgment according to works because both the rewards of eternal blessing and the degree of eternal curse are determined by the actual lives that men live in this world.

Judgment by works and salvation by faith do not conflict, for true faith works by love (Gal. 5:6). It always manifests itself in deeds (Jam. 2:14-26). That false faith and hypocrisy, too, manifest themselves in deeds was never more clearly shown than in the cross of Christ, for it was the religious leaders of His day who claimed to have faith in the true God who killed Jesus. The final judgment, then, will bring to light the true heart attitude of men and show how it was manifested in their works. God will judge and reward every man with perfect justice. But to His people, He will give more than justice, for God will reward them for good deeds which were never perfect and could never in any strict sense merit reward.

In eternity, the Church will glorify God and enjoy Him forever. She will grow in knowledge, love, and wisdom as she forever sees new aspects of the beauty and glory of God. God Himself and all the wonder of His infinite greatness is what makes heaven a place of the most perfect happiness. We do not know what works God has for us in eternity, but we do know that the Church of Christ looks forward to countless ages of new tasks to perform with and for Christ, that she will enjoy an eternity of activity in rest with her blessed Savior (Rev. 22:1-5).

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For those who hate God, heaven itself would be a sort of hell, for nothing is more loathsome to them than God Himself. The minority of men who have stubbornly rebelled against His goodness will spend an eternity in hell, writhing in endless pain. They will hate themselves for the foolishness that will be inescapably clear to them even as they hate God for making it clear to them. We will not recognize our former friends there anymore. For all of the sin and wickedness that is in their hearts, that had been graciously repressed by the Holy Spirit during their earthly lives, will then be fully developed and manifest as much as it can be within the confines of the eternal prison.

The history of God's covenant is brought to an end as far as man's task on earth is concerned. But God's relationship with man continues to be a covenantal relationship and eternity will bring forth endless ages of glory and wonder. The essence of the covenant is love and the final purpose of the gift of God's covenant to man is that man be brought into the fellowship of the Triune Persons. That is where the Bible ends — a vision of man in heaven with God, living in a sanctuary-city filled with every sort of blessing known to man.

And there shall be no curse any more:
and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be therein:
 and his servants shall serve him;
 and they shall see his face;
 and his name shall be on their foreheads.
And there shall be night no more;
and they need no light of lamp, neither light of sun;
 for the Lord God shall give them light:
 and they shall reign for ever and ever.
 (Rev. 22:3-5)