

The background of the cover is a scenic landscape. A paved road with a white dashed center line and a white edge line winds through a valley. The valley floor is covered in dry, golden-brown grass. In the distance, there are rugged mountains with patches of snow. The sky is a clear, pale blue. The overall lighting is warm, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

Our Reason for Hope

**An Exposition of the Old Testament
on the Meaning of History**

T. F. Leong

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on the Meaning of History**

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Our Reason Trilogy

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*To M.G.
beloved wife of my youth
who shares my reason for hope
roommate, helpmate and soulmate*

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Preface

Every story has an ending, without which it has no meaning. For we know what a story means only if we know how it ends. History takes the form of a story; in fact fiction mimics history. So history has meaning only if it has an ending. Otherwise history is like a never-ending tale that keeps us seeking for the meaning behind the twists and turns in the plot without the assurance that we will eventually find it in the end.

And it is not enough that history has an ending, any ending. It must have a meaningful ending. If history ends with the total annihilation of the human race, then history would still have served no meaningful purpose. With the global ecological crisis threatening to destroy planet Earth and the frequency of global economic crises, where is history going? Is there meaning to it?

The Old Testament describes not only how our world began but also how it will end, and end meaningfully. It gives us a reason for hope. And it helps us make sense of the twists and turns of world history. This exposition of the Old Testament is thus not only on the meaning of history, but also about how we can participate in it. But can we really take the Old Testament seriously? In this exposition we will let the Old Testament speak for itself.

Synopsis

The meaning of history is about the purpose and goal of history. According to the Old Testament the purpose of history is to fulfill the Creation Mandate originally given to Adam. The Creation Mandate is to build a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and is consistent with His will. Due to the Fall of humanity, the Creation Mandate could not be fulfilled as originally intended. The Messiah, whom the New Testament calls the second and last Adam, came to reclaim the original Creation Mandate for humanity so that it will be (more than) fulfilled. The Great Commission is thus the post-Fall and post-Christ version of the Creation Mandate. The goal of history then is the ultimate fulfillment of the Creation Mandate—a global civilization that is perfectly in fellowship with God and perfectly consistent with His will—in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

This book is unique in that it interweaves into one coherent exposition five strands of Old Testament studies usually separated into different books: theology, ethics, mission, history, apologetics. So the relevance of the Old Testament to the Church and the world is transparent throughout the book. This approach, which builds on the overarching narrative framework of the Bible, is based on the recognition that the Noahic and Abrahamic Covenants are applications of the Creation Mandate, and that the Mosaic, Davidic and New Covenants are applications of the Abrahamic Covenant.

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Introduction

Beginning of the Universe

The first verse of the Bible declares without apology that the universe had an absolute beginning: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Genesis 1:1; cf. Capon and Craig 2004: 36-49). The Hebrew word for “create” is used in the Old Testament only to describe God’s creative activity. In and by itself the word does not mean that God made the universe out of nothing. But the context of this verse implies that He did. For if God created the material universe “in the (absolute) beginning (of the universe),” there was no preexisting matter before its creation.

The New Testament book of Hebrews, which is an exposition of the Old Testament, makes explicit what is implicit in this verse: “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Hebrews 11:3; cf. Capon and Craig 2004: 78-83).

Genesis 1:1 as Dogmatic Presupposition

In its original context Genesis 1:1 served as a polemic against the dominant belief-system of the time: polytheism. Polytheism affirms the existence of many gods. According to this belief-system matter

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has always existed. Even the gods were generated from uncreated matter, and the present universe was created by the gods out of preexisting matter. Since the gods were generated by an impersonal force, it implies that this force, better known as Fate, and not any of the gods, is in control of the universe. In contrast, Genesis 1:1 teaches that an uncreated personal God created, and hence owns and governs, this universe.

Today, Genesis 1:1 serves as a polemic against the dominant belief-systems of our time: materialism and pantheism. Both these systems deny that God created the universe. Both affirm that the universe has always existed and hence had no beginning. Materialism, also known as naturalism, affirms that only the material exists; the spiritual does not exist. This rules out the existence of God and the human soul. Hence materialism implies atheism. Materialism is similar to polytheism in that both affirm that life (in the case of polytheism, divine life) is generated from uncreated matter. Materialism undergirds the theory of evolution.

Pantheism on the other hand affirms that only the spiritual exists; what we consider material is only an illusion. Everything in the universe, including human beings, is just different manifestations of one spiritual reality, one impersonal "God." Hence everything is one, and everything is "God." If our experience of reality seems to be otherwise, it is because we have not learned to see reality as it really is. Pantheism is similar to polytheism in that both affirm that an impersonal force is the ultimate reality in the universe. Pantheism undergirds New Age phenomena.

The belief-system introduced in Genesis 1:1 is known as theism. It affirms the existence of a God who is beyond and distinct from the universe (He created it) as well as present and active in the universe (He sustains and governs it). Hence, unlike materialism and pantheism, it affirms that both the material and the spiritual exist. We grant that theism is a dogmatic presupposition. But so are pantheism and materialism. Even materialism is a dogmatic presupposition because we have no objective means to prove that the spiritual does not exist. In fact it is much easier to affirm than to deny that something exists. As C. S. Lewis (1961: 117) explains: "A negative proposition is harder to establish than a positive. One glance may enable us to say there is

a spider in the room; we should need a spring-cleaning (at least) before we could say with certainty that there wasn't" (cited in Vanhoozer 2012: 257-58).

Need for a Working Presupposition

The dogmatic statement of Genesis 1:1 undergirds everything else taught in the Bible. We have the freedom to reject this presupposition as sheer myth. And we have the freedom whether to read the Bible at all. But if we choose to read the Bible, we need to recognize that what the Bible teaches can only be understood in light of this presupposition. So unless we read the Bible with Genesis 1:1 in mind, we will likely misunderstand what the Bible teaches, and thus abuse it.

Mortimer Adler (1972: 292), who was chairman of the editorial board of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, warned about two mistakes often made when reading a book built on dogmatic assumptions:

The first mistake is to refuse to accept, even temporarily, the articles of faith that are the first principles of the author. As a result, the reader continues to struggle with these first principles, never really paying attention to the book itself. The second mistake is to assume that, because the first principles are dogmatic, the arguments based on them, the reasoning that they support, and the conclusions to which they lead are all dogmatic in the same way.

In other words, to understand what the Bible teaches we need to accept, at least temporarily, what Genesis 1:1 affirms. Having thus understood what the Bible teaches, we can still reject it. We may do so because we do not accept the presupposition upon which the arguments and conclusions are based. Or, even accepting the presupposition as true, we may find the arguments not valid and hence the conclusions not acceptable. In this way we know what it is that we are really rejecting, and why we are doing so.

As a result of the pervasive influence of the theory of evolution, and hence the materialist presupposition that undergirds it, many people reading the Bible today have intellectual problems with the supernatural elements in the Bible. To people with a materialist

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mindset the supernatural is simply impossible. They rule it out even before hearing it out. So when they read the Bible, they get so distracted by what their presupposition rejects, that they fail to understand the Biblical message. They are actually struggling with the Biblical presupposition and not the Biblical teaching, for they never really pay attention to what the Bible is really saying.

If they would accept what is presupposed in Genesis 1:1, at least temporarily, the supernatural elements in the Bible would pose no intellectual problem at all. As Ronald Nash (1998: 16) argues, “A God powerful enough to create the universe and the laws by which it operates can hardly have problems controlling the universe in ways that make possible such extraordinary events as miracles, prophecy, and providence [and answers to prayers].” Let us be reminded by Adler’s warning that though Nash’s argument is based on a dogmatic presupposition (Genesis 1:1), the conclusions he makes about extraordinary events are not themselves dogmatic presuppositions but logical implications.

Basis for the Working Presupposition

However, a person with a materialist mindset may think that accepting the dogmatic presupposition of Genesis 1:1, even temporarily, would be committing intellectual suicide. There is really no need to feel this way, especially in light of the Big Bang theory, currently the standard scientific theory on the origin of the universe. The following confession of astronomer Robert Jastrow (1992: 106-107), a self-professed agnostic, is self-explanatory:

Science has proven that the Universe exploded into being at a certain moment [the Big Bang theory]. It asks, What cause produced this effect? Who or what put the matter and energy into the Universe? ... And science cannot answer these questions The scientist’s pursuit of the past ends in the moment of creation.

This is an exceedingly strange development, unexpected by all but the theologians. They have always accepted the word of the Bible: In the beginning God created heaven and earth. ... For the scientist who has lived by his faith in the power of reason, the

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story ends like a bad dream. He has scaled the mountain of ignorance; he is about to conquer the highest peak; as he pulls himself over the final rock, he is greeted by a band of theologians who have been sitting there for centuries.

Materialist scientists may not accept Jastrow's straightforward interpretation of the Big Bang theory in terms of "the moment of creation." They may prefer alternative interpretations that are consistent with their dogmatic presupposition that the universe had no beginning. Others who do may come up with theories to explain how the universe could somehow be "created" without God. But even then they cannot now claim that accepting Genesis 1:1 as a working presupposition is intellectual suicide. For as supposed by Jastrow, Genesis 1:1 is logically the most sensible explanation for the Big Bang theory, even from the scientific point of view.

Furthermore theism is also intellectually defensible, and it has experienced a remarkable resurrection in academic philosophy. In an academic book on the history, defense and implications of atheism, theist William Lane Craig is given the space of a short chapter to present the theist case against atheism. In that chapter Craig (2007: 84) reports,

In 1980 *Time* marveled, "In a quiet revolution in thought and argument that hardly anybody could have foreseen only two decades ago, God is making a comeback. Most intriguingly, this is happening not among theologians or ordinary believers, but in the crisp intellectual circles of academic philosophers, where the consensus had long banished the Almighty from fruitful discourse" ("Modernizing the Case for God," *Time*, April 7, 1980, pp. 65-66). The article cites the late Roderick Chisholm to the effect that the reason atheism was so influential a generation ago is that the brightest philosophers were atheists; but today, in his opinion, many of the brightest philosophers are theists, using a tough-minded intellectualism in defense of their belief.

Quentin Smith is one of the philosophers who argue for atheism in the same book. In another article he says, "God is not 'dead' in

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academia; he returned to life in the late 1960s and is now alive and well in his last academic stronghold, philosophy departments” (Smith 2001: 197; cited in Craig 2007: 70).

What then would it be like if we read the Bible consistently in the light of the dogmatic presupposition of Genesis 1:1? This in fact is what we plan to do in the exposition that follows. We will focus on the Old Testament, making occasional references to the New Testament when this enhances our understanding of the Old Testament.

Part I

The Creation Mandate

Genesis 1-7

Chapter 1

Beginning of Humanity

Genesis 1:1 declares that God created the universe out of nothing. Genesis 1:2 clarifies that at this initial stage of God’s creative activity, the earth was “formless and empty.” It was not yet habitable. If the Big Bang theory indeed represents the origin of the universe, it is a scientific commentary on Genesis 1:1. Genesis 1:3-2:3 reveals that in “six days” God renovated the earth and our solar system so that the earth is habitable, and then created plant, animal and finally human life (cf. Wenham 1987: 11, 36-37; Poythress 2017).

Fine-tuning the Universe

Another recent scientific discovery, the Anthropic Principle, is then a scientific commentary on how the universe was created and our solar system renovated specifically to make life possible on earth. For this is how eminent physicist John Wheeler (1996: vii) describes the Anthropic Principle:

What is man that the universe is mindful of him? ... It is not only that man is adapted to the universe. The universe is adapted to man. Imagine a universe in which one or another of the funda-

Chapter 1: *Beginning of Humanity*

mental dimensionless constants of physics is altered by a few percent one way or other? Man could never come into being in such a universe. That is the central point of the anthropic principle. According to this principle, a life-giving factor lies at the centre of the whole machinery and design of the world.

This discovery that the universe is adapted, or “fine-tuned,” for supporting life on earth is more detrimental to the materialist view of the world than the Big Bang theory. For even materialist scientists who believe that the universe was “created” without God find it hard to believe that such a universe could come into existence all by itself. To them, it is purely by chance that our universe is what it is. But the probability of such an intricately fine-tuned universe coming into existence by chance is so extremely slim that they have to come up with the multiverse theory. This theory claims that there were extremely many, perhaps an infinite, number of “big bangs” creating multiple universes, and ours just happens by sheer chance to be thus fine-tuned. But there is no evidence whatsoever to support this theory.

As Gregg Easterbrook (2002), a contributing editor for *The Atlantic Monthly*, points out, “Several variations on the multiverse theory are popular in academia [only] because they suggest how our universe could have beaten the odds without a guiding hand.” In other words, the theory is taken for granted just because it is needed to avoid the most obvious conclusion on the origin of the universe: Genesis 1:1. The multiverse theory may be convincing to people who are already biased against Genesis 1:1. But others will probably agree with Easterbrook: “But the multiverse idea rests on assumptions that would be laughed out of town if they came from a religious text” (for a philosophical critique of the multiverse theory, see Holder 2016).

As to whether the seven days in Genesis 1 are 24-hour days, the debate is needless. For on the one hand, as far as the Bible is concerned, the seven days in Genesis 1 are the same as the seven (24-hour) days in the Book of Exodus: “For six days work may be done, but the seventh day is a Sabbath of complete rest, holy to the LORD.... It is a sign between Me and the Israelites forever, for in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, but on the seventh day He rested and was refreshed” (Exodus 31:15-17). But on the oth-

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er hand, as far as the Bible is concerned, the seven (24-hour) days in Genesis 1 need not be understood as a factual description of what actually happened. The very fact that God is said to have “rested and was refreshed” alerts us that the description need not be taken as factual. For according to the Bible, unlike humanity, the Creator does not need rest, let alone be refreshed (Isaiah 40:28-31). So the idea of six days of work and one day of rest is actually about humanity rather than about God (cf. Exodus 23:12; 2 Samuel 16:14).

If we grant that it need not be a factual description, how then should we understand it? There is enough evidence in Scripture that when God revealed truth that was beyond the experience of the immediate audience, He did so using terms the audience could relate to even though the description may not match the actual facts. A good example is Isaiah 56:6-8, where God revealed through Isaiah that one day, following the coming of “My salvation” and thus the revelation of “My righteousness” (Isaiah 56:1; cf. Romans 1:16-17), Gentiles will become God’s people together with Jews. This prophecy has been fulfilled in the form of the Church. But the prophecy expresses this truth in terms of Gentiles worshipping God in the Temple in Jerusalem. We now know that factually this is not what actually happens. Why then the non-factual description?

In the Old Testament, Gentiles were not allowed in the Temple because they were not God’s people. So to say the Gentiles will one day be worshipping in the Temple unmistakably means that they will become God’s people. In fact the Jews would not be able to see how Gentiles could be God’s people if they did not worship in the Temple. Thus Isaiah 56:6-8 reveals a New Testament truth that was beyond the Old Testament experience of its immediate audience. So God had to use terms that would enable them to grasp the truth even though the description would not match the facts. As we shall see (Chapter 43), the non-factual description of the New Jerusalem in Revelation 21-22 is to reveal truths about Heaven, which is beyond any human experience, not just that of the immediate audience.

What actually happened when God created the world is likewise beyond human experience. So it is not surprising if a non-factual description is actually used to express truths about God’s creation. However, as illustrated in Isaiah 56:6-8, to grasp the teaching of the

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text we still need to read it as though the description is factual, of course giving allowance for figures of speech. So though we need to read the seven days as 24-hour days, we do not need to insist that the description must match what actually happened. The teaching here, expressed in terms of God setting the example, is that human beings are created in such a way that they need daily rest to be refreshed, culminating in a whole-day weekly Sabbath rest (see Mark 2:27).

In other words, presenting God's creation in terms of seven 24-hour days, even if non-factual, lays the foundation for the Sabbath (Fourth) Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), which we shall see is not just about the weekly rest. In fact to truly observe the Sabbath Commandment, one has to observe all the other nine commandments (see Chapter 10). Interestingly, Isaiah 56 uses this very commandment to represent God's covenant with His people, which means, it sums up the entire Ten Commandments (see verses 2, 4 and 6).

Hence just like the idea of Gentiles worshipping in the Jerusalem Temple in Isaiah 56, the idea of God working for six days and resting on the seventh in Genesis 1 expresses a fundamental truth of the Bible. Since God renovated (fine-tuned) the earth and our solar system in six days so that the earth is habitable, the purpose of describing creation in terms of the seven 24-hour days, even if factual, draws our attention not to the *process*, but to the *product*, of creation: a fine-tuned world in which humanity needs to observe the Sabbath Commandment. We shall see that observing this commandment is crucial to protecting the earth's ecosystem, which is a part of the fine-tuning.

Creation of Humanity

Genesis 1-2 clearly teaches that not only the universe, but also human beings, are created by God. He created Adam and Eve, the first human couple, and through them the rest of the human race. We will not get side-tracked and bogged-down here by the debate over creation versus evolution. For the debate is actually between theism and materialism, the dogmatic presuppositions that undergird the respective positions. In fact the "conflict" that (Biblical) religion as a whole has with (modern) science is actually a conflict not with science but with materialism (for an elaborate discussion on this point and how

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modern physics actually favors theism, see Barr 2003). Harvard geneticist Richard Lewontin (1997), himself an evolutionist, argues that “what seems absurd depends on one’s prejudice [or presupposition].” And he confesses that (materialist) scientists are willing “to accept scientific claims that are against common sense,” despite obvious problems that discredit them, “because we have a prior commitment, a commitment to materialism.”

The theory of evolution involves seeking and accepting only natural (material) explanations to the scientific data, even when they are not sensible. A supernatural explanation (creation) must be rejected even when it is most sensible. Lewontin goes so far as to say: “It is not that the methods and institutions of science somehow compel us to accept a material explanation.” But rather they are “forced” by their prior commitment to materialism to do their science in such a way that they will end up with material explanations. Lewontin insists that “materialism is absolute, for we cannot allow a Divine Foot in the door.” This means, God must be absolutely ruled out regardless of the evidence. But we do not suppose many evolutionists, unlike Lewontin, would acknowledge that their “science” is controlled by a dogmatic presupposition.

Theist scientists and theologians have been addressing the theory of evolution and related issues head-on, and the debate is still ongoing (see for instance, Nevin 2009). If we presuppose, even temporarily, theism as expressed in Genesis 1:1, we can see that the relevant scientific data can be interpreted to support creation. In fact, if we do not rule out theism, even scientific data provided by evolutionists can already be readily interpreted to show that an intelligent designer must be the cause of not only the universe, but also life on earth (see for instance, Dembski & Kushiner 2001).

Even atheist philosopher Thomas Nagel (2010: 49) recognizes that once intelligent design is admitted as a real possibility, “it becomes a serious candidate for support by empirical evidence, in particular empirical evidence against the sufficiency of standard evolutionary theory to account for the observational data.” Intelligent design naturally points to creation.

Even an evolutionist may admit this, but then objects that this interpretation is not science but religion. To him the very nature of sci-

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ence requires that it admits only natural or material, and not supernatural or spiritual, explanations. It is indeed correct that, as a rule, we do not resort to spiritual explanations when interpreting observed data. For instance, when we mix two colorless liquids, X and Y, and the mixture turns green, we do not seek a spiritual explanation. That is superstition. But this rule needs to be put in proper perspective.

The Bible affirms that physical laws were built into the universe when God created it (Psalm 148:6; Jeremiah 33:25). Hence when liquid X is mixed with liquid Y, the mixture obeys a physical law and turns green. Science involves studying and applying the laws God built into the universe and the world. So in doing science we seek to explain physical phenomena in terms of these laws, which means, seeking natural explanations. But this does not mean that God, who made these laws, cannot in isolated occasions do something not anticipated by these laws.

So to insist that only natural explanations can be admitted regardless of the evidence, as in the case of ruling out miracles even before looking at the evidence, presupposes that the spiritual does not exist. This materialist presupposition is not science but philosophy (cf. Barr 2003: 1). For the scientific method, which depends on observations of the *material* world, can neither prove nor disprove the existence of the *spiritual* world.

“The most obvious limitation [of science] is that scientists will never observe, know, and explain everything about [*even*] the physical world” (Gauch 2003: 368). The American Association for the Advancement of Science admits: “There are many matters that cannot usefully be examined in a scientific way. There are, for instance, beliefs that—by their very nature—cannot be proved or disproved (such as the existence of supernatural powers and beings, or the true purposes of life)” (AAAS 1989: 26; cited in Gauch 2003: 370).

And if the materialist presupposition is incorrect, when the subject of investigation directly involves the spiritual, the observations and conclusions made based on this presupposition are all the more likely questionable. For even in physics, traditionally considered “the most objective, rigorous and ‘pure’ science” (Leane 2007: 7), our presuppositions affect not only what we observe, but also how we interpret what we observe (Kuhn 2012: 23-34). So given the limitations of

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science, it is neither reasonable nor wise to rule out the spiritual before looking at the evidence.

Furthermore, what we read in Genesis 1 involves processes in which God built the laws into the universe and the world. Even the Big Bang theory recognizes that at the beginning of the explosion the laws of physics did not apply (Hawking 1998: 126). When we talk about the origin of the universe and of the various forms of life, we are talking about situations when the respective laws were not yet in place. So all the more it defies reason to argue that even in these situations, a spiritual explanation must be ruled out even when it makes the most sense.

In other words, just as in the case of the multiverse theory, whether creation or evolution is more convincing from the scientific point of view depends on whether we presuppose theism or materialism (or how much our sense of judgment has been influenced by the overwhelming academic pressure of the materialist “scientific consensus” to conform to it). Thus if we presuppose the theism of Genesis 1:1, at least temporarily, the teaching that God created humanity poses no intellectual problem even in view of modern science.

The Image of God

We will now move on to consider God’s purpose in creating humanity, which is actually the overarching theme of not only Genesis but also the whole Bible. And in our upcoming exposition on the created condition of humanity and its subsequent “Fall,” we shall also for the same reasons not get side-tracked and bogged-down by issues raised by contemporary science that presupposes a materialist paradigm.

To set the stage let us take note of the original dwelling place of Adam and Eve (Genesis 2:8-17). God repeatedly described the world He created as “good,” and after the creation of Adam and Eve, as “very good.” Besides renovating the earth and the solar system so that the earth is habitable, God further formed a small part of the earth and turned it into the Garden of Eden. It was a place most conducive for human dwelling, where food supply could be taken for granted (Genesis 2:16; cf. 1:29). God placed Adam and Eve there, where He Himself dwelled and had direct fellowship with them.

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The creation of human beings is summarized in Genesis 1:26-28 (and elaborated in Genesis 2:4-25). God created humanity, male and female, in His image, according to His likeness. The equality of men and women is unmistakable. God created Adam from “the dust of the ground” and then breathed into him “the breath of life” so that he became a “living being” (Genesis 2:7). But God did not create Eve the same way. If He did, there would arise the question of whether the two independently created beings are equal in their humanity. But since God created Eve from a part of Adam’s own body so that he could exclaim that she was “at last, bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh” (Genesis 2:21-23), the question does not arise at all.

Biblical Interpretation of “God’s Image”

And as Moises Silva (1996: 206-207) puts it, “when Genesis tells us that God created Adam and Eve ‘in his own image,’ the focus is not on some specific quality but on human beings in their totality God made Adam and Eve like him and so they are able to exercise dominion over the earth.” Hence being made in God’s image according to His likeness means human beings, both “body and soul,” are like God and thus reflect Him in some ways. By considering what the Bible clearly teaches about God and about human beings, we can outline in what ways human beings are like God.

Firstly, human beings have God-like *nature*. Most significantly, “God is Spirit” and human beings worship Him “in spirit” (John 4:24). Human beings, like God, are spiritual beings. The Bible teaches that human beings have not only a non-material soul but also a spirit (Cooper 2000: 52-72; 110-19). Actually the terms “spirit” and “soul” are used interchangeably in the Bible and hence “they do not denote two distinct substances Distinguishing ‘spirit’ and ‘soul’ does, however, remind us that humans are ‘spirit’ in a way animals are not” (Bavinck 2011: 325), and thus can operate in ways animals cannot.

This basically means human beings, like God, are persons; they are self-conscious beings who can not only think and feel, but also reason and make choices, and are thus responsible for their actions. Most importantly they can relate not only to one another, but also to God Himself. In fact, “the spirit of mankind fulfills its true destiny

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when it lives in conscious relationship to God its Creator” (Osterhaven 2001: 1133).

Unlike God, human beings also have a material body. But this does not mean the human body is not part of the image of God. God can think and reason without a body, human beings cannot. This is clearly seen in people who have suffered brain damage. Hence our God-likeness, such as our ability to think and reason, has to function in and through our physical body. In fact, the Bible also teaches that the body forms a “functional unity” with the soul (Cooper 2000: 33-51). It is like the functional unity between TV waves and the TV set—in terms of substance they are separable, but in terms of function they are not.

Secondly, human beings have God-like *qualities*. They have a capacity to love and a sense of justice. These qualities are so universally observed and experienced that they need no elaboration at this point. As we shall soon see, they are central to God’s purpose for the human race.

Thirdly, human beings have God-like *abilities*. Besides the ability to communicate, they also have the ability to create. This is amazingly illustrated by the human ability to create computer software. According to Bill Gates (1996: 228), “Human DNA is like a computer program but far, far more advanced than any software we’ve ever created.” Based on the teaching of Genesis 1-2 we can conclude that the genetic code in the human DNA is part of the creative work of God—He designed it.

But even without presupposing Genesis 1:1 in coming to this conclusion, Gate’s observation is most sensibly interpreted as suggesting that a super-intelligent Mind similar to but far, far superior to the human mind created the genetic code. Only one with a presupposed bias against Genesis 1:1 would fail to see how sensible this interpretation is. Gate’s observation thus shows that there is an uncannily God-like ability in human beings. Would a biologist concur with Gate’s comparison of computer software with the genetic code? Here is an oft-quoted testimony of the prominent atheist and evolutionist Richard Dawkins (1996: 17): “The machine code of the genes is uncannily computerlike.”

Alternate Interpretation of “God’s Image”

Recently it has become popular among Old Testament scholars to understand the expression the “image of God” not in terms of how we are like God, but rather as designating “the royal office or calling of human beings as God’s representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God’s rule or administration of the earth’s resources and creatures” (Middleton 2005: 27).

However, even a proponent of this view acknowledges that understanding “image of God” in terms of “a royal motif is not simply dependent, however, on the context of its use in Gen 1:26. ... If a royal image lies behind the use of *šelem* [“image”] in Gen 1:26-27, it must rest on an idea or expression of kingship found outside of preserved Israelite sources” (Bird 1981: 140; cited in MacDonald 2005).

In other words, this alternate interpretation is not based on a plain reading of Genesis 1:26-27 and the Old Testament, and for that matter, the New Testament as well (see particularly Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10; cf. Blomberg 2016: 80-81). It equates the meaning of the “image of God” with God’s purpose for the human race as spelled out in Genesis 1:28. Our interpretation understands the phrase “according to Our likeness” as clarifying that the phrase “in Our image” means human beings are like God in some ways (for a thorough defense of this interpretation, see Jastram 2004: 41-60).

In any case, even if the alternate interpretation is correct, human beings cannot be that functional “image” fulfilling what their “royal office or calling” requires them to do without being like God in some ways, as our exposition below shows. In fact as far as Genesis 1:26-28 is concerned, bearing the image of God and fulfilling God’s purpose are inseparable (see for instance, Silva 1996: 207, and the references in footnote 6). Hence for all practical purposes to bear the “image of God” is to be like God in some ways.

The Creation Mandate

God’s purpose for humanity is expressed as follows: “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over everything that moves on the earth” (Genesis 1:28). It is called the Creation Mandate. To

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properly understand this mandate we need to take into consideration the context in which it was given. And since God made human beings in His image according to His likeness in order that they could fulfill their God-given purpose (Genesis 1:26), there must be a correlation between the Creation Mandate and the ways human beings are like God.

First of all the mandate was given to Adam and Eve when they were still dwelling with God in the Garden of Eden, before they sinned against Him in an episode called the Fall (Genesis 3). And before sin came into the world, human beings could also dwell and have fellowship with one another in harmony. This correlates to God's purpose in creating human beings in His image with the God-like *nature* of personhood. For it is as persons that human beings have the God-like ability to communicate and fellowship with God and with one another.

“Subdue” and “Rule” Creation

God created human beings male and female so that they also have the God-like ability to procreate in order to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. They were commissioned to “fill the earth” so that they would eventually “subdue” the whole earth and “rule over” all the other living things that populate the earth. As John Walton (2001:186) points out,

If people were going to fill the earth, we must conclude that they were not intended to stay in the garden in a static situation. Yet moving out of the garden would appear a hardship since land outside the garden was not as hospitable as that inside the garden (otherwise the garden would not be distinguishable). Perhaps, then, we should surmise that people were gradually supposed to extend the garden as they went about subduing and ruling. Extending the garden would extend the food supply as well as extend sacred space (since that is what the garden represented).

The Garden of Eden was “sacred space” because in this place God, who is holy, had direct fellowship with Adam and Eve. Since

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God is holy, those in fellowship with Him must also be holy (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16). Thus within this space God's will must be done, "on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:9-10). So when they later sinned by disobeying Him, they were driven out.

The need to submit to God's will is not just because of His holiness, but also for the good of the human race. For in practical terms doing God's will on earth is about loving one's neighbor as oneself (Leviticus 19:18) by doing justice and loving mercy (Micah 6:8). This correlates to God's purpose in creating human beings in His image with God-like *qualities*—the capacity to love and a sense of justice. Only then can we have true fellowship with one another and experience real happiness.

It is unfortunate that the words "subdue" and "rule" have been misunderstood to mean exploitation and domination, and the Creation Mandate has thus been wrongly blamed for the global ecological crisis. Depending on the context, these English words and the respective Hebrew words they translate can have negative or positive connotations. Consider the different connotations of the word "subdue" in the following sentences: "The criminal subdued his victim" (negative); "The police subdued the criminal" (positive). In the Bible the two Hebrew words do have negative connotations (Nehemiah 5:5; Ezekiel 34:4) but not here in the context of the Garden of Eden before the Fall, when sin and greed had not yet come into the world (cf. Leviticus 25:43: "Do not rule over them harshly, but fear your God"; Micah 7:19: God will "subdue our iniquities").

Within Eden human responsibility to the earth was "to work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15). The mandate to "subdue" the earth was in the context of filling, and thus inhabiting, the less hospitable earth outside of Eden (cf. 1 Chronicles 22:18). As surmised by Walton, to "subdue" the earth would then mean further forming the earth, making the whole earth hospitable like Eden, and thereafter, "to work it and take care of it." Hence the idea of exploiting the earth is not only foreign, but opposed, to the mandate.

And to "rule" or "have dominion" need not imply "domination." Human beings, made in God's image, are to have dominion the way God Himself would. When God later decided to destroy humanity through the Flood (Genesis 6) because of widespread evil as a conse-

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quence of the Fall, He commanded Noah to build an ark to protect and preserve not only his own family but also other living things that would have otherwise perished. God's idea of Noah's "dominion" over them involved protecting and preserving them!

Furthermore, according to the Sabbath Commandment (Exodus 20:8-11), not only human beings, but also the animals, are to rest from work (at least) one day a week. And even when the animal is working, it must not be mistreated. This is clearly seen in the law that forbids the owner from muzzling his ox while it is threshing so that it can eat some of the grain while it is working (Deuteronomy 25:4). The spirit of the Sabbath Commandment was further applied to the Sabbath Year, when even the land was to rest for a year out of seven (Leviticus 25:1-7). So domination and exploitation of God's creation were prohibited. Faithful stewardship of the earth is clearly implied.

The Sabbath Commandment has the goal of curbing economic greed. This is best seen when its application to the Sabbath Year was extended to the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-28). On this year, agricultural land that was sold had to be returned to the original owner. When enforced, this law would have had the effect of helping the people overcome the temptation to covet their neighbor's land and thus observe the Tenth Commandment (Exodus 20:17). It is not a coincidence that the commandment that embodies stewardship of the earth has as its goal the curbing of economic greed. For it is not difficult to conclude from reports related to the ecological crisis today that at the root of the problem is economic greed.

Therefore if people all over the world have been living according to the teaching of the Old Testament, there would not be an ecological crisis at all. Now these ecologically friendly instructions were given after the Fall, when sin had corrupted the God-like qualities of human beings. So it is inconceivable that the mandate given before the Fall to have "dominion" over God's creation could imply "domination" over it.

Build a Global Civilization

But how would the multiplying of human beings and the filling, subduing, and ruling over, of the whole earth actually work out in histo-

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ry? When God rested from His work of creation (and renovation) on the seventh day, as Albert Wolters (2005: 41-42) puts it,

This is not the end of the development of creation, however. Although God has withdrawn from the work of creation, he has put an image of himself on the earth with a mandate to continue. The earth had been completely unformed and empty; in the six-day process of development God had formed it and filled it—but not completely. People must now carry on the work of development: by being fruitful they must fill it even more; by subduing it they must form it even more. Mankind, as God’s representatives on earth, carry on where God left off. But this is now to be a *human* development of the earth. The human race will fill the earth with its own kind, and it will form the earth for its own kind. From now on the development of the created earth will be *societal* and *cultural* in nature. In a single word, the task ahead is *civilization*.

Thus the Creation Mandate is to build a civilization that will spread to the whole earth. This correlates to God’s purpose in creating human beings in His image with God-like *abilities* other than the ability to communicate and procreate; they have the abilities to further “form the earth” from where God left off. But what kind of civilization will this be?

Recall that the Creation Mandate was given before Adam and Eve sinned and were then in direct fellowship with God. And since “filling and subduing and ruling over” the earth involved turning the whole earth into Eden, where God would dwell with human beings, the civilization God intended would not only be *global* but also be *in fellowship with Him*, and hence, *consistent with His will*. And as we have noted, consistence with God’s will, which involves loving one’s neighbor as oneself, will ensure harmony and true fellowship with one another.

The rest of our exposition will highlight how this civilization is to be built so that it fulfills its purpose according to the Creation Mandate. It will also highlight how God moved, and still moves, history so that such a civilization will eventually be built and thus reaches its goal at the end of history. In other words, this exposition on the pur-

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pose and goal of human civilization is actually on *the meaning of history*, which is about the purpose and goal of history (cf. Löwith 1949: 5-6; Nash 1998: 38-39).

If one chooses not to accept the Creation Mandate as God's purpose for humanity, and thus the purpose and goal of history, what are some alternatives based on the other dominant belief-systems?

Alternatives to the Creation Mandate

According to Mesopotamian polytheism, humanity was created to relieve the gods of manual labor and to serve them by meeting their needs, especially their need for food and drink through the constant offering of sacrifices (Bottéro 1992: 222, 225-26). In contrast, the Creation Mandate involves human beings serving God by meeting the needs of fellow human beings, not the needs of God, who is fully self-sufficient. In the Old Testament, the offering of sacrifices was to meet the need of human beings for the forgiveness of sin.

According to New Age pantheism, which affirms our oneness with "God," our problems are due to our ignorance of our godhood and thus our failure to tap into the divine power already within us. So we are to be transformed by changing our consciousness to become awakened to the awareness of who we truly are and what we can really do. This can be achieved through a range of techniques such as channeling (spirit contact), mind-emptying meditation and consciousness-raising seminars. Some still believe that when sufficient people are thus transformed, they will bring in an utopia, a "New Age" of peace, prosperity and perfection (Newport 1998: 4-18).

Materialism as expressed through the theory of evolution claims that life on earth came about by accident. It naturally has difficulty answering the question, "Why are we here?" Evolutionary psychologist Steve Stewart-Williams (2010: 194, 198) is candid enough to answer, "*we are here because we evolved, but we are not here for any purpose*" (italics his). He is not denying that "we can have ends and purposes and tasks in our lives, and ... that we all choose little goals for ourselves.... However, if we're interested in the question of whether life is *ultimately* meaningful ... there is no reason to suppose ... that life has any ultimate meaning or purpose." While he tries to explain how this

“gloomy conclusion” does not mean that life is not worth living, he acknowledges that, “For a species [the human race] inclined to see itself as the very purpose of the universe, some of the implications of evolutionary theory [like the ultimate meaninglessness of human existence] may be unpalatable.”

If we presuppose (scientific) materialism, which means all that really matters in life is the material, then the “ends and purposes and tasks in our lives” that we can have, and the “little goals” that we all choose, will most sensibly be centered around material things. In fact, the term “materialism” often refers to this (economic) view and way of life. Hence scientific materialism justifies economic materialism and with it, economic greed.

The Suitable Helper

God made human beings in His image, *male and female*, so that they could fulfill the Creation Mandate. For this reason He instituted marriage and pronounced that “a man shall leave his father and his mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). The phrase “become one flesh” refers to sexual union (1 Corinthians 6:16). However, insofar as a man does not “cleave” to his wife in a literal sense, to “become one flesh” refers to more than just sexual union itself (cf. Mark 10:7-9). The pronouncement presents marriage as the bonding of two persons (“cleave”) resulting in marital oneness (“one flesh”). But why is this oneness of persons described in terms of sexual union?

Meaning of “One Flesh”

We recall that a person’s body and soul form a functional unity. Thus when the soul yearns for someone, the body longs for that person (cf. Psalm 63:1). The bonding of soul is in this sense also the bonding of body, and vice versa. In sexual union the bonding of the body, soul and spirit of two married persons reaches its fullest expression. This is the most intimate communion between two human beings, and it has the potential of resulting in an offspring, which then unites the couple further through a biological bond.

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This explains why sexual union is needed to consummate the marriage and seal the marital bond. There is hence no better way to represent this wholistic oneness than sexual union. Becoming “one flesh” in marriage thus involves “a oneness and intimacy in the total relationship of the whole person of the husband to the whole person of the wife, a harmony and union with each other in all things” (Davidson 2007: 47).

It thus implies that not only divorce (Matthew 19:4-6), but also polygamy, is against God’s will. For no man can realize this wholistic oneness, represented by the one-to-one act of procreation, with more than one woman concurrently.

Since marital oneness is wholistic, when God created Eve to be Adam’s “helpmate” (Genesis 2:18), she is designed to help him fulfill the Creation Mandate in every aspect, not just in procreation. In fact a woman can contribute to the Creation Mandate without being married. Hence when God said it was not good for the man to be alone and thus created a helpmate for him, He did so not just for the man’s personal good, but also for the good of His creation as a whole.

Functioning as “One Flesh”

The Hebrew word for “helpmate” is used in the Old Testament mostly to refer to God as our “Helper” (see Psalm 54:4). Eve’s status as a “helpmate” is hence not second-class. There are two kinds of help. The first: “I am able to do this myself, but I am occupied with something else; please help me.” The second: “I am not able to do this myself; please help me.” From experience, a wife’s help consists of both kinds. If a woman is able to render the second kind of help beyond procreation, it implies that there are significant differences between men and women beyond the biological. This is widely observed and has been confirmed by social science (see Moir 1998).

Women’s contribution to God’s purpose for humanity will then be complementary, and not just supplementary, to that of men. In fact, it is clarified that Eve was a helpmate “suitable for him.” The Hebrew phrase literally means, “like opposite him,” with the sense of, “matching him.” The phrase most naturally expresses “the notion of complementarity rather than identity” (Wenham 1987: 68).

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For this reason we have avoided the term “gender” though it is widely accepted. As sociologist Peter Berger (1996) puts it,

“Gender” is feminist English for “sex.” The very term reveals the ideological agenda. It is a term derived from grammar.... Grammatical gender is freely variable. Thus the word for “sun” is feminine in German [while] masculine in French.... [Hence] all so-called “gender roles” are just as freely variable [and can thus be easily reversed—women playing the role of fathers and men playing the role of mothers].

Even with respect to having children, a man complements a woman not just in procreation but also in parenting. The mother’s role in raising children is indisputably indispensable. But the father’s role has been recognized as also indispensable. According to sociologist David Popenoe (2009: x), “strong families with involved fathers in life-long marriages are irreplaceable for a strong and stable moral order, for adult well being, and ultimately for the well being and success in life of their children.”

Acknowledging that women’s contribution is complementary actually uplifts the status of women to that of true equality with men. A wife is a *help-mate*, not *help-maid*. But equality in status does not necessarily mean equality in responsibility. The designation of Eve as *help-mate* does imply that Adam was given the role of being ultimately responsible and, in that sense, bore the burden of leadership. For even when God is a man’s Helper, it is the man and not God who is ultimately responsible for how he lives.

Since a wife complements her husband in every aspect, he would, and should, actively involve her in decision-making. In fact only then can they be functioning as “one flesh.” But being the one ultimately responsible, the husband also has the “privilege” of having the final say. We suppose not many wives would begrudge this in view of the responsibility that comes with this privilege. This is especially so because, as originally intended, the husband is to live out his God-like qualities of love and justice and make decisions accordingly. In a pre-Fall context it would be natural for him to do so. We shall see how Scripture makes adjustments in a post-Fall context.

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Actually in the pre-Fall context it would be hard to say who effectively, in practice, is the leader. For when two persons are created without sin or self-centeredness to be united in love as “one flesh” to complement each other, they are “wired” to function practically as “one item” not just in terms of procreation, but also in direction.

This is well illustrated in the account of the Fall in Genesis 3, albeit in a negative way. Eve was deceived by the Serpent and was tempted to disobey God. When she yielded to the temptation, Adam was with her but instead of stopping her, he followed suit. It indicates his agreement with her in her act of disobedience. Adam and Eve “stand together as ‘one flesh’ at this point as well” (Fretheim 1994: 361). God rebuked Adam for listening to his wife in this matter (Genesis 3:17). Functioning as “one item” with her should not have resulted in disobedience to God.

We can then conclude that it is God’s will that a man and his helpmate provide leadership to their family as equal partners though God holds the husband as the one ultimately responsible. This is made possible by what happens when a man and a woman get married to become united as “one flesh.”

Precondition for “One Flesh”

When God instituted marriage, He declared that a man is to “leave” his parents in order to “cleave” to his wife. The Hebrew word translated “leave” often means “forsake,” with a range of nuances where the forsaking does not necessarily involve leaving in the physical sense. For example, it is often used of God’s people forsaking Him (Deuteronomy 31:16), or of God forsaking His people (Deuteronomy 31:17). It can even refer to forsaking something intangible and impersonal, as in, “he who rejects (literally, forsakes) reproof goes astray” (Proverbs 10:17).

The Bible does not forbid a man from leaving his parents physically to start his own family. But we know from Biblical teaching and traditional culture that a man’s “forsaking” of his parents for the purpose of marriage does not involve abandoning them in any negative sense. Obviously this “forsaking” involves abandoning something significant. What could this be? It has to be a crucial aspect of

the parent-child bond, one that when abandoned, enables him to bond with his wife so that they can truly function as “one flesh.”

The meaning of this “forsaking” can be demonstrated as follows. A man is in a coma as a result of an accident. The doctors need authorization from the family to operate on him. His parents and girlfriend are available to sign the papers. Who would they approach? The answer is obvious and is presumably the same in every culture. What if the young lady had just become his wife the day before? Who then would they approach? We suppose in most, if not all, cultures they would approach the wife. We submit that this expresses what it means by the man having “forsaken” his parents.

With the abandoning of this aspect of the parent-child bond comes a corresponding change in the parent-child relationship, such as not allowing his parents to interfere with how he and his wife should raise their family. Hence without abandoning that parent-child bond, it would be impractical for the man to exercise leadership over his own family, let alone share that leadership equally with his wife.

Equal but Not Exact Partnership

Needless to add, this partnership is shared equally but not exactly. For any partnership to work, someone has to be given the privilege and responsibility to have the final say. God gave these to Adam and we can assume that He made him with the corresponding disposition, and made Eve with the complementary disposition. It is a common observation, at least in a traditional society, that a wife would gladly yield ultimate responsibility to her husband unless he happens to be an irresponsible man.

But how can it be an “equal” partnership when one partner has the final say? Though only one has the final say, both have equal say. Whenever there is a difference in opinion, the one with the final say is to weigh the two “equal says” impartially and decide accordingly. In this sense, it is an equal but not exact partnership. But how can this work in practice when the one making the final decision is not a neutral party? A God-fearing husband, who recognizes that God holds him accountable for the “final say,” is motivated to be impartial in deciding whether his or his wife’s “equal say” is the “better say.”

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This could work in a pre-Fall context, but can it work today? As we shall see, the central teaching of the Bible is about restoring humanity, male and female, to (ultimately more than) their original image of God with the God-like qualities of love and justice (Colossians 3:9-10). In any case, when two persons, united in body and in spirit, are intent on a God-centered life together, differences of opinion will be fewer and will mainly be on matters not worth fighting over. So coming to a consensus would be the norm in most situations.

People who insist that a marriage must be an “exact partnership” are not being realistic. For this means that both partners have the final say, which is nonsensical; or neither partner has the final say, which assumes that it is *always* possible for them to reach a consensus. And this assumption is unlikely to be true even in cases where the couple are effectively living separate lives. Even if it is, this is not a real marriage as the couple are not functioning as “one flesh,” except perhaps in procreation.

It would be better to accept that one partner must be given the responsibility of having the final say, but reject that it must always be the husband. There may be some merit to this suggestion. For some men are more like Eve, and some women are more like Adam when it comes to bearing the burden of leadership. What if one such man happens to be married to one such woman? And even if this is not the case, what happens when, for some other reason, the man could not or would not bear the burden of being ultimately responsible?

It is beyond our scope to go further into this debate except to highlight the case of Deborah, the prophetess, and Barak (Judges 4). God commissioned Barak through Deborah to lead an army into battle to deliver Israel from foreign oppression. The battle was humanly impossible for him to win. But God promised him victory. Apparently, unlike Deborah, on his own Barak did not have the faith to claim God’s promise. So he accepted the commission only when Deborah agreed to accompany him. The record shows that he even handed the responsibility of leadership over to her (Judges 4:14). This story has been interpreted differently according to one’s preconceived stand on women’s role (Schroeder 2014: 247-58). Granted that marriage is an equal but not exact partnership, the question is whether the story endorses female leadership in the family when this becomes necessary.

Chapter 2

Beginning of Sin and Evil

When God created Adam and then Eve in His image, their God-like nature was unmarred, their God-like qualities uncorrupted, and their God-like abilities unimpaired. But these God-like characteristics were not yet well developed. We know that God created them with the ability to speak, but we cannot assume that they already had the ability to read and write, let alone create computer software. They certainly had the potential to do all these, and more. But their God-like abilities still needed to be developed accordingly. As for their God-like qualities, being uncorrupted would undoubtedly mean there was no inclination in them to do what is wrong in light of God's holiness. Hence the problem of "the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak," which characterizes marred personhood, did not arise.

If they had remained in this state, and as their God-like characteristics developed, they would have been able to fulfill the Creation Mandate as God intended. And they would have built a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will. But Genesis 3 records the "fall" of humanity from this pristine state and consequently God's original purpose for the human race was derailed. What happened?

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Fall of Humanity

In the Garden of Eden there were two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Access to the tree of life meant access to immortality. God Himself said eating of this tree would result in living forever (Genesis 3:22). Of all the many trees in Eden, Adam and Eve were prohibited only from eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. They were warned that, “in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (Genesis 2:17).

The phrase “in the day that” simply means “when,” and the warning does not necessarily mean that when they eat the fruit, they will die immediately or die as a direct consequence of eating it (see Walton 2001: 174-75). When judgment was actually passed on their disobedience, they did not die immediately. As it turned out, after they ate the fruit, they were driven out of the Garden of Eden and hence no longer had access to the tree of life, which meant they no longer had access to immortality. In this sense they “shall surely die.” Adam would have to toil to make a living until the day he dies (Genesis 3:19). It took 930 years before Adam died (Genesis 5:4). And being driven out of Eden also meant they no longer had fellowship with God as before, which can be understood as “spiritual death.”

Being made in the image of God, Adam and Eve had the free will to choose. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil presented to them the option to choose to obey or not to obey God. Given their original state just the presence of the tree did not pose any problem. But without an active temptation to disobey God, their willingness to obey God was not really tested.

So God permitted the Serpent to tempt them using a subtle deception. Eve was the immediate target. Even with the temptation, Adam and Eve could still have resisted it. For no matter how tempting it was to sin, unlike fallen humanity, they could choose not to sin as easily as choose to sin. Any act of disobedience would then be a perfectly free choice of their perfectly free will. Eve yielded to the temptation because she was deceived into doubting the truthfulness of God’s word and sought to fulfill human desires through means outside of God’s will, and Adam, who was with her, listened to her.

“Knowledge of Good and Evil”

What is involved in eating the fruit of this tree that it warrants such a drastic consequence? Eating the fruit resulted in them becoming “like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:5; cf. 3:22). What then does it mean to have “the knowledge of good and evil”? And how does merely eating of the fruit result in having this “knowledge”?

Firstly, the Hebrew word for “knowledge” does not refer to what we call “head knowledge” but to “experiential knowledge.” In fact the word “know” in Genesis 4:1 goes so far as to refer to the most intimate experience or “knowing” between a man and a woman: sexual intercourse. Secondly, though this knowledge is something Adam and Eve did not and should not have, it was something that God has. However we understand this “knowledge,” it cannot mean something that violates these two conditions.

The “natural” understanding of the phrase, “knowledge of good and evil,” is that it refers to the “experiential knowledge” of what is good as well as what is evil. It fits in well with Adam and Eve’s act of disobedience, for through this act they came to personally experience and hence “know” what is evil.

However this understanding will also mean that God personally experienced evil by having committed it Himself. So we cannot understand the phrase in its “natural” sense. The phrase “knowledge of good and evil” functions as an idiomatic expression, in which the individual words do not necessarily have their normal meanings (adapting Fretheim 1994: 350). So the meaning of the phrase cannot be derived from combining the meanings of the individual words.

An idiomatic phrase functions as though it were one word, as in the English idiom, “know the ropes,” which means know how to do something, and may have nothing to do with ropes. The meaning of an idiomatic phrase, like in the case of a word, can sometimes be inferred from the context in which it is used. For instance, we can infer the meaning of the phrase “know the ropes” from this sentence (taken from the Internet): “The best way to go into a business is to first find a mentor, free or paid, who knows the ropes to teach you.”

There are two other contexts in Genesis (24:50 and 31:24, 29) where the words “good” and “evil” are used in an idiomatic expres-

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sion. These cases not only confirm that “(knowing) good and evil” is idiomatic, but also help us determine its meaning. Suffice it here to look at only the first case.

In Genesis 24 we read about Abraham sending his trusted servant from Canaan to his relatives in Mesopotamia to find a wife for his son Isaac. When the servant reached the town, he asked God to help him identify a suitable woman for Isaac. That woman turned out to be Rebekah, Abraham’s grandniece. When he asked for permission from her family to take her back to Canaan, he recounted how God had enabled him to identify Rebekah as God’s choice. Laban and Bethuel, her brother and father, replied, “The matter has come from the LORD; we cannot speak to you evil or good” (Genesis 24:50). Obviously “evil” and “good” are used in an idiomatic expression here since the “natural” meaning of the expression makes no sense. So it has been interpreted as an idiom and the clause translated as, “we can say nothing to you one way or another” (NIV).

In this context it is clear what they were saying: since God had already chosen Rebekah, it was not up to them to decide and answer him one way or another. They did later ask Rebekah if she would go; but as for them, they had no say over the matter. Hence “good” and “evil” are used here in an idiomatic expression to mean the lack of *autonomy* in decision-making. In this case exercising autonomy would mean usurping the prerogative of God. A similar conclusion can be made from the idiomatic use of “good” and “evil” in Genesis 31.

Exercising Moral Autonomy

When we apply the idea of autonomy in decision-making to the phrase “knowing good and evil,” we see that it fits perfectly in the context the phrase is used (Genesis 2-3). For the very act of eating from the tree that bears this name is itself an act of exercising autonomy from God, since He had explicitly commanded them not to do so. This disobedient act then results in them experiencing and hence “knowing” autonomy in deciding what is right (“good”) and wrong (“evil”). And since only God has the autonomy to decide what is right and wrong, in yielding to the temptation, Adam and Eve yielded to the desire to be “like God” in this forbidden manner. There is a

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world of difference between *deciding* what is right and wrong (God's prerogative) and *discerning* what is right and wrong based on God's commandments (our responsibility).

This analysis confirms the interpretation of theologians like Herman Bavinck (2011: 341):

the point of the “fall” narrative in Genesis is the human desire for *autonomy* from God [emphasis his]. To “know good and evil” is to determine good and evil, right and wrong, by oneself, and refuse to submit to any external law. It is, in short, to desire emancipation from God; it is to want to be “like God.” The issue in Genesis is whether humanity will want to develop [and build a global civilization] in dependence on God, whether it will want to have dominion over the earth and seek its salvation in submission to God's commandment; or whether, violating that commandment and withdrawing from God's authority and law, it will want to stand on its own feet, go its own way, and try its own “luck.”

The essence of sin then, and now, is the will to autonomy from God and His commandments. It is rooted in unbelief in God and His commandments. People who want autonomy to decide for themselves what is right and wrong, and thus live their life as they see fit, would naturally want God and His commandments out of the way. A convenient way would be to deny even the existence of God. The Bible considers this folly (Psalm 14). For if God created this world and humanity, He alone knows how human beings should live in this world to make the most of it.

In fact, the Book of Ecclesiastes seeks to convince us that to venture out to try our own “luck” in this world without God is disastrous for human beings as individuals as well as a race. As we shall see when we come to Ecclesiastes (Chapter 34), the book therefore concludes by calling us to “fear God and keep His commandments,” adding that “this is (the essence of) every man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13); that is, this is what it means to be human.

The Wisdom Books, of which Ecclesiastes is a part, teaches that “the fear of the LORD” is the “beginning” of both knowledge and wisdom (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). It means, the fear of God is needed to

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gain *wisdom* to discern what is right and wrong as well as to gain *knowledge* of what is true and false (cf. von Rad 1972: 65-68). Humanity is thus denied not only (moral) autonomy to decide what is right and wrong, but also (epistemological) autonomy to determine what is true and false. For wisdom is an application of knowledge, and thus what is right and wrong is a function of what is true and false (cf. Magnuson 2012: 56-59). For instance, whether it is *right or wrong* for Adam and Eve to eat from that tree depends on whether it is *true or false* that God had commanded them not to do so.

When the Serpent questioned Eve whether God had indeed commanded them not to “eat from any tree,” she replied that God had only commanded them not to eat from that tree, “lest you die.” The Serpent then tempted her to disregard God’s command, saying they would surely not die, but would instead become like God. When Eve relied on her own judgment instead of God’s word to determine the truth, she was exercising epistemological autonomy (cf. Frame 2015: 22-23, 54). When she then chose to disregard God’s command and ate from the tree, she was exercising moral autonomy.

Therefore seeking knowledge (and thus wisdom) independently of God as revealed in Scripture (exercising epistemological autonomy) will lead to either rejecting, distorting or, at the least, abusing the truth. Yet “autonomy is always the goal of fallen man” (Frame 2015: 26; this massive book highlights the prevalence of epistemological autonomy in the history of Western philosophy and theology).

Evidently the human preference for epistemological autonomy is an expression of the human desire for moral autonomy from God. In view of this (fallen) human desire, it is all the more necessary that we presuppose Genesis 1:1, at least temporarily, in order to understand what the Bible is really teaching.

Fallen Humanity

We have already previewed the most dramatic consequence of the disobedience of Adam and Eve—they were driven out from the Garden of Eden and hence no longer had access to the tree of life. And we are told specifically why Adam and Eve were driven out of Eden: “lest he reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life

and eat, and live forever” (Genesis 3:22). Why did God not want them to live forever?

We need to first look at the consequence of their disobedience on their disposition as human beings. We cited Bavinck that, “the point of the ‘fall’ narrative in Genesis is the human desire for *autonomy* from God.” This human desire was not innate in the disposition of Adam and Eve before they sinned. In fact they may not even have felt it before the temptation. Ecclesiastes 7:29 assures us that “God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.” The rest of the Bible and human experience testify that this “human desire” has since become innate in the disposition of human beings.

Reality of Original Sin

The narrative of Genesis 3 clearly presents the message that there was a definite change in the disposition of Adam and Eve as a direct consequence of their act of disobedience. First of all, they became aware for the first time that they were naked and felt ashamed. And this psychological change came with moral implications. For when God asked Adam whether he had eaten of the forbidden tree, he blamed Eve. And when confronted by God, Eve blamed the Serpent. Each of them blamed someone else for disobeying an explicit command of God.

And the narrative of Genesis 3-4 demonstrates that this fallen disposition was passed on to their descendants. We need to read a narrative as a narrative. A narrative does not spell out its message in a proposition, such as, “the disposition of Adam and Eve was changed as a direct consequence of eating the forbidden fruit.” It presents its message in the form of a story. And the flow of the plot is part of this message. So the very fact that the account of Cain’s murder of Abel in Genesis 4 follows immediately the account of the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 shows that Genesis 4 is about the consequence of the Fall on the descendants of Adam and Eve.

Also, reading Genesis 4:1-16 as a narrative, it becomes clear why God accepted Abel’s offering but rejected Cain’s, which led Cain to murder his brother. For we capture the message of a narrative by also looking at what the characters are like. We know what a character is

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like by looking at his actions (words or deeds) and better still, his reactions (words or deeds) because reactions are usually spontaneous, revealing a person's true character.

The narrator tells us that Abel was "a keeper of flocks" and Cain "a tiller of the ground" before saying what each of them offered to God. Basically they offered to God according to their respective occupations. And the narrator specifies that God had regard for both Abel and his offering but not for both Cain and his offering. So God looks at the worshipper as well as the offering. Therefore we need to look at what Cain and Abel were like, and not just their offerings, to know why one was rejected and the other accepted.

Abel was a godly man because he presented to God "the fat portions of some of the firstborn of his flock," which in Old Testament terms means the best of the best. In contrast Cain just offered something from his harvest. This alone is not enough to convict Cain of ungodliness. But his reaction to God's rejection of his offering reveals his character. He became angry enough with his own brother, who did him no wrong, to murder him. And after that he lied to God that he did not know where his brother was. When convicted of the crime, he showed neither remorse nor repentance. Cain was certainly an ungodly man. God saw what was in his heart and rejected him before He rejected his offering.

God had warned Cain that "sin is crouching at the door; and its desire is for you, but you must rule over it" (Genesis 4:7). Obviously this sin refers to something that is resident within Cain's disposition (cf. Genesis 6:5b; 8:21b). Since Cain went ahead and murdered his brother, he yielded to sin and allowed it to rule over him instead.

The narrative thus presents the teaching that Cain inherited from his parents their fallen disposition, and together with it, sin. Since this inherited sin differs from, but is the source of, the actual sins that people commit, theologians have called it "original sin." Henri Blocher (1997: 18) defines it as "*universal sinfulness*, consisting of attitudes, orientations, propensities and tendencies which are contrary to God's law, incompatible with his holiness, and found in all people, in all areas of their lives."

This manner of interpreting the narrative recognizes that Scriptural stories, contrary to common belief, do embody doctrines (au-

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thoritative teachings). Erich Auerbach (2003) in his classic book, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, compares the Old Testament with the works of Homer. According to him:

The Scripture stories do not, like Homer's, court our favor, they do not flatter us that they may please and enchant us—they seek to subject us, and if we refuse to be subjected we are rebels.

Let no one object that this goes too far, that not the stories, but the religious doctrines, raise the claim to absolute authority; because the stories are not, like Homer's, simply narrated “reality.” Doctrine and promise are incarnate in them and inseparable from them ... (15).

Thus Biblical narratives have a built-in authority that Auerbach's sensitivity as a literary critic is able to not only detect but also explain. If we need proof that both Old Testament and New Testament narratives teach doctrines, consider this: the entire life of Christ as narrated in the Gospels is summarized and interpreted by John 3:16; and the life of Abraham as narrated in Genesis is used by Paul in Romans 4 to argue for the doctrine of justification by faith.

Furthermore human experience testifies to the reality of a fallen human disposition indwelled by sin. In seeking to demonstrate that the doctrine of original sin explains observed reality “better than any rival theory,” Blocher (1997: 91) argues that “Lord Acton's dictum, ‘Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely’, applies beyond the field of politics. Even more accurately, we should say that corruption (of the will) is *already* present; lack of power simply prevents it being manifest, but power allows its expression.”

This is well supported by the horror experienced in the German and Russian concentration camps:

It has been fully demonstrated, especially, that the worst of torturers do not belong to a separate category of ‘monsters’. Most of them had been ‘decent’ people, ordinary folk, good neighbours, good fathers. Circumstances brought to light what they were capable of doing ... ‘In other circumstances,’ Todorov (1992: 37) discerns, ‘they would not have behaved as sadists; they are just

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ordinary people who have found there an easy way to taste the pleasures of power' (Blocher 1997: 86).

Reinhold Niebuhr was fond of quoting the *London Times Literary Supplement*: "The doctrine of original sin is the only empirically verifiable doctrine of the Christian faith" (Blocher 1997: 84). One need not agree that original sin is the only empirically verifiable Christian doctrine to agree that it is indeed empirically verifiable.

The counter-observation that human beings are also capable of heroic sacrificial acts of love as well as taking an uncompromising stand against injustice only serves to confirm the doctrine. For the Bible teaches that humanity was originally created not evil, but good, with the God-like qualities of love and justice. The doctrine specifically teaches that sin is a condition that humanity has fallen into and its God-likeness is only corrupted, not annihilated. Hence in terms of what human beings would do, they are neither completely evil nor completely good. Cain exemplifies the evil that can be manifested in a human being while Abel, who also inherited his parents' fallen disposition, the good.

Coming back to why God did not want Adam and Eve to live forever, we now see that if they could live forever, they would live forever in their fallen condition. And there would then be a world of people who would live forever in this fallen condition. When we realize what it means to live in this condition, and that the best education in the world can never reverse the condition, and that this will last forever, can there be any reason for hope? So God's driving Adam and Eve out of Eden has a redemptive purpose, which will soon be revealed. As to the question of why God allows evil to exist at all, it will be answered in the course of our exposition, especially when we come to the Wisdom Books of Ecclesiastes and Job.

Alternative Explanations for "Evil"

People who have presupposed a belief-system other than the theism of Genesis 1:1 will reject this Biblical explanation for the phenomenon we call "evil." This is because it contradicts their presupposed belief-system. A polytheistic view is expressed in *The Babylonian Theod-*

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icy, a piece of classic Mesopotamian wisdom literature: the “gods made men prone to injustice. ... Whatever evil men do ... is done because the gods made them that way” (Lambert 1960: 65). We cannot then talk about redeeming humanity from its fallen condition. There is thus no reason for hope of a better world, especially since the gods themselves has created humanity to be evil.

Materialism, which denies the existence of the soul, will have to explain evil in purely material terms. Cambridge psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen (2011) seeks to understand human cruelty by “replacing the unscientific term ‘evil’ with the scientific term ‘empathy’” (xii). People who are “evil” are those who are lacking in “empathy” due to their “self-focus.” They are so “imprisoned in their own self-focus” it is “as if a chip in their neural computer were missing” (18). In other words, “evil” is caused by a “malfunction” in the “empathy circuit in the brain” (41). If evil is explained in purely material terms, can we then hold people accountable for the evil they have committed? Are we then to say that people like Adolf Hitler, Idi Amin, and Pol Pot should not be held accountable for their cruelty?

As for pantheism, since it affirms that everything is one and everything is God, logically the distinction between “good” and “evil” is an illusion. This view is even more difficult to reconcile with human experience. So it is not surprising that people who call themselves “pantheists” may deny that this is part of their belief-system. But there are pantheists who are consistent enough to admit that this is what they believe. In an authoritative book on the New Age religion, Wouter Hanegraaff (1998: 281) writes that, according to this belief-system, people commit “evil” because they “are ignorant of their inner divinity.... They should not be condemned for the products of their ignorance.” To illustrate, he cites the assertion of the prominent New Ager and channeler Kevin Ryerson, as reported by Shirley MacLaine (1985: 246-47):

“I think”, said Kevin, “that what you are calling evil is really only the lack of consciousness of God. The question is the lack of spiritual knowledge, not whether or not there is evil”. ...

“But where is the place of evil in this scheme then?”

“It doesn’t exist. That’s the point. Everything in life is the result

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of either illumination or ignorance. Those are the two polarities. Not good and evil”.

Provisions of Hope

Having considered how God’s driving Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden has a redemptive purpose, we now look at the other consequences of the Fall in this light. We need to recognize at the outset that God cursed the Serpent (Genesis 3:14-15) and the ground (Genesis 3:17-18), but not Adam nor Eve. We shall see that both these curses also have a redemptive purpose.

Curse on the Serpent

To appreciate the redemptive purpose of the curse on the Serpent, we need to first recognize what or who the Serpent represents. We know from Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 that the “talking snake” in Genesis 3 is actually Satan himself, the arch-enemy of God and His people. However there is no need to think of Satan disguising himself as a snake or possessing the body of a snake.

Just as the dragon is used figuratively to refer to Satan in Revelation, the serpent is used in Genesis 3 to refer to him. The first clue is that snakes do not talk. And snakes do not eat dust, which God said the cursed Serpent would (Genesis 3:14). The figurative language used to describe Satan in Genesis 3 is not as transparent as elsewhere in the Bible, but it is worth exploring it here even though this involves a level of discussion more technical than the norm adopted in this exposition. For Genesis 3 has been dismissed as a myth because of the presence of a “talking snake.” Also, it will help us to better appreciate the promise of hope in Genesis 3:15.

Most people are familiar with the difference between a simile, “You are *like* a snake,” and a metaphor, “You *are* a snake.” In both cases, the nouns “you” and “snake” are both mentioned. The Bible frequently uses another figure of speech of this category where only one noun is mentioned: “Snake!” The “you” mentioned in a simile or a metaphor is only implied in this case. E. W. Bullinger (1968: 744) calls it a hypocatastasis, adding that, “If *Metaphor* is more forcible

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than *Simile*, then *Hypocatastasis* is more forcible than *Metaphor*, and expresses as it were the superlative degree of resemblance.”

There is also such a thing as an extended (or “continued”) simile, metaphor or hypocatastasis. Psalm 23 is a good example of an extended metaphor. “The LORD is my Shepherd” is a simple metaphor. But the shepherd metaphor is used to make a series of comparisons between how a good shepherd treats his sheep and how God treats His people, so much so that the whole psalm is a metaphor.

The serpent in Genesis 3 is a hypocatastasis. For it does not say, “Satan is like a serpent ...” (simile), nor “Satan is a serpent ...” (metaphor) but, “The serpent is more crafty than the wild animals that God had made” (verse 1). Here *both* the serpent and the wild animals (creatures of the serpent’s kind) are figures of speech (cf. Matthew 15:27, which means, just as dogs are allowed to eat crumbs from the bread that their master gave his children, Gentiles should be allowed to receive “crumbs” from the blessings that God promised the Jews). So the verse means, just as a snake is more crafty than creatures of its kind, Satan is more crafty than created beings of his kind.

This way of referring to Satan and his craftiness is more direct and forceful than the simile or metaphor. So Genesis 3 is not about a literal talking snake, just as, “Behold, the Lamb of God!” (John 1:36), is not about a literal sacrificial lamb. And since Genesis 3 makes further comparisons beyond the craftiness of a serpent by describing the fate of the accursed Satan in terms of other characteristics of a serpent, it is an extended hypocatastasis (like the “vineyard” in Isaiah 5:1-6, which is a more obvious example because its interpretation is spelled out in 5:7 and 5:13; cf. Bullinger 1968: 748, who equates an “allegory” with a “continued metaphor” as in Psalm 23, or a “continued hypocatastasis” as in Psalm 80:8-15).

So the curse that the Serpent shall go on his belly and eat dust is not about snakes being cursed to crawl (as though they did not do so before) and eat dust (which they do not do so at all). In other words, the curse on Satan to “crawl on his belly” (like a snake) and “eat dust” is just a figurative but forceful way of referring to Satan’s defeat and humiliation (cf. Psalm 44:25; Isaiah 49:23).

With this in mind, we look at Genesis 3:15: “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed;

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He shall *crush* your head, and you shall *bruise* His heel” (the same Hebrew word is here translated differently as “crush” and “bruise” because a man’s attack on a snake’s head is to crush it, while a snake’s attack on a man’s heel only has the effect of bruising it). The crucial point here is the identity of the woman’s seed. Though there is enmity between the woman’s seed and the Serpent’s seed, the woman’s seed crushes the head of the Serpent, and not the head of his seed.

Traditionally Christian theologians have identified the woman’s seed as Christ, who “crushed” Satan’s “head” at the cross while Christ’s “heel” was “bruised” by Satan in the process. This is the earliest promise of hope for fallen humanity (for a careful study of Genesis 3:15 “as the fountainhead of the Old Testament’s anticipatory [Messianic] hope” see August 2017). Even “the oldest Jewish interpretation [available] ... takes the serpent as symbolic of Satan and look for a victory over him in the days of King Messiah” (Wenham 1987: 80). Recognizing that the Serpent is a hypocatastasis for Satan makes this interpretation more compelling.

Judgment on Eve

The judgment on Eve (Genesis 3:16), and hence women in general, was basically multiplied pain in childbirth, and we may add from observation, even possible death due to labor complications. To appreciate the redemptive purpose of this judgment, we turn to Ecclesiastes 3:14: “for God so works that men [human beings] should fear Him.” In its context it means that God uses uncertainties and adversities to cause people to turn back to Him. Now that sin has come into the world, there is a need for ways to help fallen humanity to “fear God and keep His commandments” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). But just as uncertainty and adversity can make or break a person, pain and suffering have a way of causing people to turn to God or, harden their heart and shake their fist against Him.

Another consequence that fell on Eve was that her husband was no longer the same as before. Adam’s blaming Eve for his own disobedience to God was only the beginning, and a rather mild form, of men’s mistreatment of women that has been witnessed throughout history, which led to radical feminism in the West.

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Fallen men's mistreatment of (fallen) women is summed up as: "he [now sinful] shall rule over you." The equal partnership that is due women as helpmates shall be denied. Instead they shall be more like helpmaids. But this is to be tempered by God's judgment on Adam (discussed later), which would help him fear God and keep His commandments. Throughout history there have been God-fearing men who do not mistreat their wives. But

Unfortunately, the notion that a wife is there to serve and obey her husband and that he has the right to beat and bully her has not entirely disappeared. We find remnants of these old beliefs not only in traditionalist societies, but also in our own. In the United States today, all too many wives are forced to seek shelter in battered women's homes—that is, if they are lucky enough to find their way out of an abusive relationship (Yalom 2002: xvi).

It is in the context of the multiplied pain in childbirth as well as her husband's ruling over her that we are to understand God's statement to Eve: "Your desire shall be for your husband." Before we do that, we need to first look at the meaning of the word "desire."

The particular Hebrew word used here occurs in the Old Testament only three times. Here it refers to a wife's desire for her husband. In Genesis 4:7 it refers to Sin's desire for Cain (to control him, which led to the murder of his brother). In Song of Songs 7:10 it refers to the husband's desire for his wife. To appreciate how this word is used in the three different contexts, we need to recognize the difference between the denotation (the actual meaning) of a word or phrase, and its connotation (the additional nuance implied) in the context it is used. To illustrate, compare and contrast these two sentences: 1. "His girlfriend is *looking for him*"; 2. "His creditor is *looking for him*." His girlfriend and his creditor are both looking for him (denotation), but each for a different reason (connotation).

Similarly, in all the three contexts the word "desire" has the same denotation but not necessarily the same connotation. But it has become popular among scholars to conclude that just because Sin's desire for Cain is to control him, Eve's desire for her husband is also to control him. This amounts to saying that the girlfriend is demanding

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payment for a debt just because this is what the creditor is after. The fact that “desire” is also used to refer to the husband’s desire for his wife in Song of Songs, obviously (in that context) not to control her, should caution us from confusing connotation with denotation.

Hence a more sensible interpretation of “your desire shall be for your husband” is that provided by Irvin Busenitz (1986: 212): “In spite of the fact that man will rule over woman, and in spite of the fact that intimacy may result in the pain (and possible death) due to childbirth, yet woman will desire and yearn for man.”

This desire becomes a redemptive provision in light of the new realities concerning childbirth and the (abusive) disposition of men. For this desire not only causes women to still want to marry and have children as a result, but as generally observed, has also enabled women to endure their abusive husbands. Without this desire the family as an institution would have suffered even in ancient times. This does not justify mistreatment of women nor suggest that battered wives should never leave their husbands. In fact, as we shall see, God cursed the ground so that men would fear Him and keep His commandments to do justice and love mercy.

Besides, God also had a redemptive plan to undo the effects of the Fall altogether, already hinted at in His curse on the Serpent. Fast-forwarding to the time when this redemptive plan was accomplished in Christ, Christian husbands are commanded in the Book of Ephesians to love their wives (let them have equal partnership as helpmates). And wives are to be subject to their husbands (let them bear the responsibility of leadership).

When we consider the New Covenant, we shall see how true followers of Christ are given the spiritual resources to live out this teaching of Ephesians (5:15-33), so that in a Christ-centered marriage, what we have said about the role of the helpmate in a pre-Fall context can be increasingly realized.

Judgment on Adam

Originally Adam and his descendants were to fulfill the Creation Mandate by filling the earth and subduing it, which would involve turning the rest of the earth outside Eden to become as hospitable

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for human dwelling as Eden, where food supply could be taken for granted. But when God cursed the ground because of Adam's sin, "it shall produce thorns and thistles for [against] you, and (yet) you shall eat the plants of the field. (So) by the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground" (Genesis 3:18-19).

This means the earth could no longer be subdued so that food supply could be taken for granted (cf. Turner 1990: 36). This explains why after the Flood, when the Creation Mandate was reapplied, the part about subduing the earth was left out (Genesis 9:7).

The curse on the ground was thus a judgment on Adam, and men in general, for the ground became hostile to agriculture as a result, and so making a living became difficult. And traditionally the burden of providing for the material needs of the family falls on men. In premodern times there was no such thing as "economic growth." It was either "famine" or "no famine." The famines that we still see in underdeveloped countries could happen anywhere in the ancient world. For most people, food supply could not be taken for granted.

The Industrial Revolution has changed all that. Industrialization seems to have reversed the effects of God's curse on the ground in terms of agricultural productivity. Before industrialization, a high percentage of the population had to be in farming. Today only a fraction is needed, freeing the rest to produce economic goods and services that are mostly not essential to human survival. Is this a blessing or another curse? In purely material terms it would be an unqualified blessing if not for the ecological crisis brought about and aggravated by industrialization.

For to increase agricultural productivity farmers have to rely on more than heavy machinery. Instead of subduing the earth as originally intended, the "thorns and thistles" (which include pests and diseases) are being subdued through the use of chemicals that directly pollute and harm the earth. As we shall see, this widespread and generous use of toxic chemicals is not the only thing in industrial societies that harms the earth. One can easily think of the pollutions from factories and cars. But even this is not all.

God cursed the ground for a redemptive purpose. Food is essential to human survival. So with a ground that is hostile to food production, fallen human beings would be compelled to turn to God and

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seek His help in this matter for survival. This leads to the fear of God. We have referred to the fear of God several times before, and to the teaching of Ecclesiastes that God uses uncertainties and adversities to cause people to acknowledge Him and thus fear Him and keep His commandments. When we consider the Wisdom Books as a whole, we shall take a closer look at the meaning of the fear of God (Chapter 31). For now, a working description will suffice.

When the speaker in Ecclesiastes directly exhorts his audience to “fear God” for the first time, it is in the context of warning against not fulfilling vows made to God (Ecclesiastes 5:1-7). Now vows made to God are voluntary and are usually costly. And it is entirely between the worshipper and God; no one, except God, knows about it, and even if he tells others about it, no one, except God, will hold him accountable to fulfill it. So only people who truly “fear God” would fulfill costly vows made to God. This means, *to fear God is to do His will even when no one, except God, is watching or holding us accountable* (cf. Proverbs 5:21). It means being conscientious in doing God’s will, which includes doing to others what we want others do to us, and not doing to others what we do not want done to us.

From observation as well as experience we can see that when people are economically prosperous, they do not see the need for God, and hence feel no compulsion to fear Him and keep His commandments. In fact a Hebrew sage once prayed to God:

Two things I ask of You, do not refuse me before I die: remove far from me deception and lies, give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that I need, lest I have too much and deny You and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be in need and steal and dishonor the name of my God (Proverbs 30:7-9).

Adversity may have the opposite effect of causing a few to turn away from God, but prosperity causes most people to do so. God called ancient Israel to be a model nation. From His warning to Israel just before the nation possessed the Promised Land, we can better appreciate His true intention in cursing the ground to limit economic prosperity (Deuteronomy 8:6-17):

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Therefore you shall keep the commandments of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to fear Him. For the LORD your God is bringing you into a good land, ... in which you shall lack nothing So when you have eaten and are satisfied, you shall praise the LORD your God for the good land which He has given you. Be careful lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments ... which I am giving you today. Otherwise when you have eaten and are satisfied and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the LORD your God ... and you say in your heart, “My power and the strength of my hand have made me this wealth.”

This warning shows that God desires human beings to enjoy economic prosperity, but not at the expense of spiritual apostasy. This can already be inferred from the fact that the ground was cursed in response to Adam’s sin. Before sin came into the world, the earth could be subdued so that food could be as abundant everywhere as in Eden. After sin came into the world, God had to limit economic prosperity in order to limit the tendency of sinful human beings to turn away from Him and spiritual things. For when people turn away from God and spiritual things, there will be deadly consequences.

We will here focus on the material consequences brought by industrialization itself. We are referring to the global ecological crisis caused by human beings in industrial societies. This crisis threatens to destroy the earth, the very home of human beings.

Without the agricultural productivity made possible by industrialization, which by itself already comes with the price of polluting and harming the earth, there would not be the ecological crisis that we experience today. Initially, when more and more people were freed from agriculture to produce industrial goods, the goal of the economy was to meet the needs and wants of consumers. It was then a “production economy,” where the focus was on adequate *production*. But in the early twentieth century it became a “consumer economy” when there was an over-production of consumer goods. The focus has since then been on adequate *consumption*.

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In an article in the *Pacific Ecologist* social science professor Sharon Beder (2004) explains what happened. She

explores the history of consumer societies from the 1920s when over-production of goods exceeded demand. Instead of stabilising the economy, reducing working hours, and sharing work around, which would have brought more leisure time for all, industrialists decided to expand markets by promoting consumerism to the working classes.

The consumer economy, fueled by economic greed (lack of the fear of God) on the part of producers as well as consumers, is the basic cause of the current ecological crisis. Instead of the economy meeting the needs and wants of people, it is now the consumer who must keep on consuming beyond their needs and even wants to meet the “needs” and “wants” of the economy. This not only over-drains the earth’s resources, but also overwhelms the earth’s capacity to cleanse itself of the various forms of pollution caused.

And the ecological consequences are threatening the very survival of the human race. The economic greed that fuels the whole phenomenon can itself be attributed to the economic prosperity brought by industrialization. The fallen human heart is such that prosperity whets the appetite (read: greed) for more prosperity (Ecclesiastes 6:7, 9). Hence we are trapped in a vicious cycle.

Though machines have relieved human beings of much physical labor in industrial societies, and computers have even relieved them of much mental labor, work has never been so stressful, and was never so detrimental to the institution of the family. God knew what He was doing when He cursed the ground. It was a blessing in disguise. This will become clearer when we consider further other consequences of industrialization. But we can already conclude here that industrialization has replaced God’s redemptive curse on the ground with a man-made curse on the earth that backfires on humanity.

We are not discounting the genuine benefits of industrialization, such as the elimination of poverty (though very unevenly because of economic greed) and the advancement of medical science (though it adds to the ecological crisis because medical research is not exempted

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from economic greed and its consequences). However, fallen humanity as a whole cannot handle the material prosperity that industrialization brings, resulting in industrialization doing more harm than good.

Since God so works that human beings should fear Him, as we continue to consider the havoc wreaked by industrialization, we should all the more take to heart the message of Ecclesiastes, that to venture out to try our “luck” in this world without God is disastrous for human beings as individuals as well as a race. As we shall see, industrialization need not be this destructive if it is shaped by a commitment to God and His purpose for humanity.

Chapter 3

Beginning of Civilization

If the Creation Mandate is about building a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will, what then is a civilization? We have seen that building a civilization is about using our God-like abilities to further develop the earth culturally. This involves cultural development in both material and social terms. What then is this developed culture like?

Construction of Civilization

The first civilization was that of Cain and his descendants. They built a city (Genesis 4:17), and together with it they developed an economy (Genesis 4:20), cultivated the arts (Genesis 4:21), and invented technology (Genesis 4:22). These are marks of a civilization. But the most glaring thing about the Cainite civilization is that it was built without acknowledging God, let alone being in fellowship with Him. For they were not only living outside Eden, they did not even “call upon the name of the LORD” (cf. Genesis 4:26), which means they did not worship the Creator God. And to alert us to the fact that this civilization was also not consistent with God’s will, the narrator tells us that Lamech, of the sixth generation from Cain, not only violated God’s

will for marriage by practicing polygamy, but also boasted to his wives about murdering a boy just for having wounded him.

Hence unlike Cain, who at least expressed fear for the consequence of murder (Genesis 4:14), Lamech showed no such fear (Genesis 4:24). The narrator therefore presents to us the long-term consequence of a godless civilization: the gradual desensitization of the conscience, and hence the certain disintegration in morality. The story does not end here.

At the end of Genesis 4 the narrator recounts the birth of Seth to replace the godly Abel. We have just referred to Genesis 4:26, which reveals that it was only after the birth of Seth's first son that people (the Sethites) began to worship God. Hence the Sethite line had a godly beginning. Genesis 5, which traces the descendants of Seth up to Noah, indicates that unlike the Cainite line, the Sethite line was godly. In fact Enoch, of the sixth generation from Seth, was so godly that "God took him" away to be with Him without Enoch having to experience death (Genesis 5:24). And Noah, of the ninth generation, was exceptionally godly.

Destruction of Civilization

Then Genesis 6:1-4 records the intermarriage between the "sons of God" and the "daughters of men." These cross-unions resulted in a hitherto unprecedented situation, where God "saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, for every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Only Noah remained righteous. So God decided to destroy the wicked world through a massive flood and spare Noah and his family. In this way the world could be rebuilt through the godly Noah and his family.

Who were the "sons of God," and why did their marrying the "daughters of men" lead to such intolerable widespread wickedness? There are basically three views held by Bible scholars: angels, rulers, or Sethites. If we read Genesis 4-6 as a self-contained narrative, the Sethites view best fits the context (for a thorough defense of this view see Keil and Delitzsch 1981a: 127-37).

As pointed out by Kenneth Matthews (1996: 319, 330), it is significant that the extended account of Noah and the Flood is embed-

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ded in the genealogy of Seth that begins in Genesis 5:1 and ends in Genesis 9:29 (cf. Genesis 5:5, 8, 11, *et cetera*). This means the flood account is about the descendants of Seth. So the sudden introduction of the otherwise unidentified “sons of God” as the main subject of the story naturally means they are the Sethites. This is how we read a narrative. Luke, who used this very genealogy to trace the ancestry of Jesus all the way to Adam through the line of Seth, referred to Adam as “the son of God” (Luke 3:38). Seth and his male descendants would then be “sons of God.”

The structure of Genesis 4-6 also points to the same conclusion. For Genesis 4 records the line of Cain and Genesis 5 the line of Seth. The mixing of the two groups in Genesis 6 naturally implies the mixing of the two lines. Again this is how we read a narrative. And since the Sethite line was godly as opposed to the Cainite line, “sons of God” naturally refers to the male descendants of Seth while “daughters of men” to female descendants of Cain.

Bruce Waltke (2001: 116), though he rejects the Sethite view, acknowledges that “Superficially this [interpretation] best fits the immediate context contrasting the cursed-laden line of Cain with the godly line of Seth.” He says “superficially” because this interpretation requires us to understand the word “men” in the phrase “daughters of men” in Genesis 6:2 as only Cainite (or rather, non-Sethite) men, whereas in Genesis 6:1, the same word “men,” to whom “daughters were born,” clearly refers to all men. His objection is that the word “men” cannot refer to all men in one verse but only to some men in the very next verse.

So Waltke adopts a combination of the angels and rulers views. For he recognizes that angels are sexless spirits and thus cannot procreate and so concludes that “the sons of God” were demonic spirits that possessed despotic rulers to impregnate women. But the context favors the Sethite view. If Waltke’s objection falls, there is no case against this interpretation.

Can the same word refer to all of an entity in one verse but only to part of the entity in the very next verse? In the Old Testament, certainly yes. As C. F. Keil (Keil and Delitzsch 1981a: 130-31) points out, the phrase “sons of Israel” in Judges 19:30 refers to the whole nation of Israel; but in the following two verses (Judges 20:1-2) the

same phrase refers to the nation minus the tribe of Benjamin. How do we know that there is a shift in meaning? Here in Judges 19:30-20:2 the context clearly requires it. How do we know there is a similar shift in meaning in Genesis 6:1-2? Even those who object to the Sethite view recognize that the context favors it.

Genesis 4-6 is then saying that because of sin that indwells fallen humanity (Genesis 3), even the godly line will eventually be corrupted. In fact, the same message obtains even if we accept the angels or rulers view; the only difference is that the message is less direct and forceful. For since the flood account is embedded in the Sethite genealogy, Genesis 6:1-4 still highlights the ultimate corruption of the godly line. This message is still relevant today. It challenges any ideology seeking to build or rebuild an ideal civilization without an effective remedy to the inherent flaw in fallen human nature.

City in Civilization

Even though the first city was built by the godless Cain, who may have built it out of wrong motivations, we do not suspect that building a city is in itself inconsistent with God's will. We have in fact assumed that it would be a natural expression of our God-like abilities in fulfilling the Creation Mandate (cf. Bartholomew 2011: 38-43). This is mainly because when the Creation Mandate is ultimately fulfilled, it also involves a city, a perfect "garden city"—the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

Since the ultimate civilization God has for (redeemed) humanity is that of an urban paradise, David Smith (2011: 23) rightly concludes that "the transition from rural innocence to urban civilization is granted the divine stamp of approval." In fact, "The trajectory in Scripture from the 'garden' of Eden to a city reflects the role of the city as a symbol of God's intent and humankind's desire to develop the creation and to build places of culture and community" (Bartholomew 2011: 161).

In the Old Testament the Hebrew word for "city" (as used in Genesis 4:17) can be translated "city," "town," or even "village." Certainly Biblical cities cannot compare with modern cities in terms of size and population. Hence what can be regarded as a city in the Old

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Testament, in terms of size and population, is what we call a town today (Fry 1979: 438). So we define a “city” simply as a permanent settlement of a relatively large and socioeconomically diverse population supported by the necessary means to sustain such a settlement (cf. Reader 2004: 16).

The most basic means needed to sustain a city is of course a viable *economy*, without which there cannot even be a permanent settlement. The relative density and diversity of the urban population, and the ensuing complexities, challenge the human mind and inspire human creativity. This leads to new *technology* and industry as well as improvements in the economy. Since human beings are spiritual beings with spiritual needs, they would also express their creativity in and through the *arts*. Summarizing the work of urban theorists, theologian Tim Gorringer (2002: 149) puts it nicely: “The creativity of the cities is manifested above all in the arts, in the economy, and in industry.” This means the city is crucial to civilization.

Seven Spheres of Civilization

Certainly we need to also include the two basic spheres of culture without which a civilization cannot be built, let alone survive—the *family* and *education*. And for a civilization to thrive there is a need for the sphere of *religion*. In today’s context, this claim may be contentious. But it is really not, for true religion is basically the fear of God. According to the New Testament, “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God ... is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained from the world [lusting after possession, pleasure and power]” (James 1:27; 1 John 2:15-17).

In other words, true religion involves living out our God-like qualities of love and justice (cf. James 2:8). Since unloving and unjust behavior is considered “uncivilized,” religion is crucial to civilization. Finally, for a city to function properly, there must be some form of legal and political organization, which means, the sphere of *government*.

We can now list the seven influential spheres of culture that characterize a civilization: religion, family, education, economy and business, arts and entertainment, media, and government. We have added business to economy because the modern economy is business driv-

en. Entertainment is included with the arts because the arts are to be enjoyed. And since we are listing the influential spheres of culture, we have replaced technology in general with a specific expression of technology: the media. As we shall see, the media, which is driven by communication *technology*, is the most influential means in modern times to help ensure that a civilization is what it is supposed to be.

City Not Intrinsicly Evil

We have just seen the central role the city plays in building a civilization. However it is tempting to view the city as intrinsicly evil given that modern cities seem to be consistently characterized by spiritual, moral, social, economic and political evil. But we must not allow our experience and observation of modern cities to color the way we read the Bible. For a “city” (or town, by our standards) in the Biblical sense differs from a modern city not only in terms of size and population, but also in structure and sophistication.

We have defined the city in such a generic way that it is applicable to a premodern as well as a modern city. The negative phenomena that characterize the modern city, such as the lack of community, and the consequent moral, social and psychological problems, need not be associated with a premodern city (see Mumford 1961: 14-15, 558).

Another “evil” that has been regarded as intrinsic to the city is economic parasitism. For a city is by design sustained by food supplies produced outside the city. This is how Jacques Ellul (1970: 151), who holds a deeply negative view of the city, puts it:

The city, then, cannot function except as a parasite; it needs constant contributions from the outside. One might be tempted to speak of exchange, but the city has nothing to exchange. What the city produces is for her own use. Notwithstanding tractors, electricity, and fertilizer, what the city can produce for the country is absurd and ridiculous compared with what she receives.

Indeed the very nature of a modern city is such that its inhabitants consume food they do not produce. Not only that, the goods and services the city produces are mostly not essential to human sur-

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vival or wellbeing. We are more likely to agree with Ellul that what the city produces “is absurd and ridiculous” when we recall that the consumer economy requires people to keep on consuming beyond their needs and even wants just for the sake of sustaining itself. In the process it creates an addiction to consuming things that meet no real need and causes an ecological crisis that threatens human survival.

However the economic parasitism that characterizes the modern city is alien to the premodern cities of Old Testament Israel. For the important thing about the Biblical “city” (read: town), “was not the size of the settlement but the fact that it was protected by a wall and strong gates.... And there are a number of passages in the Old Testament in which the difference between walled towns and unwalled villages is noted (Lev. 25.29-31, Dt. 3.5, 1 Sam 6.18)” (Fry 1979: 434-35). And economics professor John Mason (1999; drawing on Frick 1977 and Fritz 1995) provides a helpful description of the relationship between the (walled) Biblical city and its “(surrounding) villages” (Joshua 15:32, *et cetera*) in early Israel:

The city represented, therefore, protection or security for those who lived and worked both within its walls and its surrounding environs.... Israelite society [was] predominantly pastoral ..., displaying an interdependence between rural and urban rather than a conflictual or exploitative relationship.... Most city inhabitants were farmers who cultivated fields and gardens in the vicinity of the city, ... reflected well in the book of Ruth. Boaz, ... hardly a peasant-farmer being exploited by city aristocrats, lives in the city and goes to his fields to oversee his work crews (2:4, 9)....

The conception of early Israel that emerges, therefore, is of a series of largely independent economic regions containing a relatively large walled city near the center and a number of villages spreading out from the city which existed in a symbiotic relationship with the city. Many of those who worked the lands surrounding the city lived within the city and moved in and out of the city gate(s) to conduct the normal affairs of life (381-84).

Mason (387) also highlights the contrasting “situation in ... virtually all [non-Israelite] societies of that era: a concentration of political

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and economic power in the hands of few, concentration which led generally to an oppressive organization of the regions and peoples surrounding the cities to the benefit of the city-elites.”

Although even premodern cities were generally plagued by negative phenomena, these were due to human sinfulness, which can be manifested in a rural or an urban context. Thus evil has been associated with cities because sin entered the world even before the first city was built.

It may be argued that the city is more prone towards evil than the village. This is because the very existence of a city usually means that an economy adequately viable for a relatively large and socioeconomically diverse population has been achieved. And the sense of material security and prosperity that results is enough to cause fallen humanity to become prone to turning away from God and His will. We saw in Deuteronomy 8:5-17 how God warned Israel against forsaking Him as a result of economic security and prosperity. To conclude that the city is by nature evil is to argue that economic security and prosperity are in themselves evil.

The “city” in generic terms is not intrinsically evil. But how human beings build a city depends on the dominant belief-system, which becomes incarnated in the shape the city takes, in terms of both the physical environment as well as the corporate way-of-life. The corporate way-of-life is expressed mainly through the seven influential spheres of culture. Obviously this incarnation happens most readily and pervasively when the belief-system suits the (sinful) human desire for moral autonomy from God. This understanding of the city is crucial to analyzing the problems of modern civilization and to recognizing the solutions needed. To these we turn next.

Modern Civilization

The tragic outcome of the godless Cainite civilization has serious implications for us. For modern civilization, built through the process of modernization, is also a godless civilization. Modernization, which basically involves industrialization, has transformed our physical environment and corporate way-of-life into that distinctive condition called modernity. We who live in modernity may be wondering what

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“distinctive condition” we are talking about. For the environment and way-of-life we are so used to are found in every modern city of the world. There is, in this sense, nothing distinctive about it. So modernity becomes invisible to us just as water is invisible to the fish swimming in it.

To “see” modernity we need to first compare and contrast the environment and way-of-life of a modern city with those of a pre-modern village. The basic characteristics of a modern city are so distinctive that every modern city looks and feels the same. Someone who has lived in a modern city is able to adapt quickly when in another modern city for the very first time. But imagine what happens when someone who has always lived in a premodern village suddenly finds himself in a modern city. We can see modernity most clearly through his eyes. But having “seen” modernity, even Christians may still wonder what the big deal is.

Incarnation of Materialism

Since modernization is driven by materialist assumptions, modernity incarnates materialism and hence atheism. Craig Gay (1998: 3), a professor in interdisciplinary studies, has warned Christians that

because practical atheism is so deeply embedded in the central institutional realities of our society and culture—in political life, in science and technology, in the economy, and in the production and transmission of culture—the threat that it poses to the Church and to truly human existence in general is not always immediately evident.

This warning is about the incarnation of materialism and atheism in the modern way-of-life (see Gay’s book for details). We only need to recall and consider the consumer economy to appreciate the seriousness of this warning. For a consumerist way-of-life is built on the assumption that God and spiritual things do not exist nor matter.

Materialism not only infuses and shapes our way-of-life, but also our environment, to the detriment of our soul, which materialism denies exists. Lewis Mumford (1961: 426) remarks in his classic book

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on the city: “The law of urban growth, as dictated by the [materialist] capitalist economy, meant the inexorable wiping out of all the natural features that delight and fortify the human soul in its daily rounds.” We witness this whenever “development” takes place. But there have also been voices of caution. Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore’s first Prime Minister, speaking at the official opening of the National Orchid Garden in 1995, said: “I have always believed that a blighted urban landscape, a concrete jungle, destroys the human spirit. We need the greenery of nature to lift up our spirits” (Koh 2000: 40).

The built environment of modern cities is not just the incidental consequence of “the law of urban growth.” David Smith (2011: 81) reports that

in a classic study of the history of urban planning, Peter Hall observes that the influence of Le Corbusier’s ideas on urban development in the twentieth century has been ‘incalculably great’, with results which were ‘at best questionable, at worst catastrophic’ (Hall 1996: 203) ... For Le Corbusier city building involved a struggle against nature in which she must be undermined; the architect and planner need to ‘hack at nature’ and take a position in which they oppose her.

This means the “blighted urban landscape” that characterizes modern cities is also intentional. Not only that, Gorringer (2002: 4) reports that in the twentieth century, architecture was dominated by “a brutalist technology for which ‘man’ was a ‘machine’ and buildings, accordingly, ‘machines for living in’.” He is referring to the slogan of Le Corbusier. This means the house we live in only needs to be functional from a machine’s point of view.

What then is the function of a house from this point of view? According to philosopher Alain de Botton (2006: 57),

Le Corbusier arrived (‘scientifically’ he assured his readers) at a simple list of requirements, beyond which all other ambitions were no more than ‘romantic cobwebs’. The function of a house was, he wrote, to provide: ‘1. A shelter against heat, cold, rain, thieves and the inquisitive. 2. A receptacle for light and sun. 3. A

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certain number of cells appropriated to cooking, work, and personal life.’

The “romantic cobwebs” would include the design of the building, the decorations and furnishings that serve no function except to make the house look beautiful. But “the human soul cries out for the nourishment of beauty” (Gorringe 2002: 198). So it is not surprising that most of us would invest in some “cobwebs” to find some relief for our soul.

Hence, thanks to the materialist ideology driving Le Corbusier’s influential ideas on urban development, not just the landscape of a modern city, but even the buildings we live or work in may be hostile to the human soul. With such a stifling of the human spirit, in a modern city God does not feel real and spiritual things do not seem true. Instead of quickening the fear of God the modern city quenches it. So much so that even religious people may not see anything wrong with the consumerist way-of-life. In modernity it is very tempting for even religious people to live as though God and spiritual things do not exist or matter (cf. Gay 1998).

Degeneration of Civilization

God’s purpose for humanity involves having fellowship with Him and with one another. This requires a community that is conducive for cultivating fellowship with God and with fellow human beings. But modernity renders not only the idea of fellowship with God quaint, but also the need for fellowship with fellow human beings trivial. For the environment and way-of-life in a modern city are also hostile to the formation of community, where neighbors have face-to-face fellowship and can be counted on in times of need. This cultural development is consistent with the materialist view of human beings that in-forms the building of a modern city. For if human beings do not have a soul, they need fellowship with one another as much as robots do.

What is more consequential to belief in God, and to God’s purpose for humanity, is that modernization modernizes not only our environment and way-of-life, but also our way-of-thinking. As theo-

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logian David Wells (1993: 91) laments, it is “precisely because modernization has created an external world in which unbelief seems normal, it has at the same time created a world in which Christian faith is alien.” Thus it can be difficult for even professing Christians to resist the materialist mold of the external world from shaping their way-of-thinking. In a different context, anthropologist John Reader (2004: 9) concludes, “Clearly, the integral role of the city in human affairs runs deep—well beyond the streets and buildings and into the realms of conscious and sub-conscious awareness that make us who we are. To paraphrase Winston Churchill: ‘We shape our cities, then they shape us’.” For better or for worse.

Given how godless modern civilization is, it is not coincidental that, like the Cainite civilization, morality and God’s will for marriage are increasingly falling apart. A materialist would certainly deny that godlessness has anything to do with the degeneration of morality under modernity. An argument for the necessity of religion to restore and maintain moral order has come from an unlikely source.

In reviewing Guenter Lewy’s book *Why America Needs Religion: Secular Modernity and its Discontents*, philosopher J. Budziszewski (1997) highlights that Lewy actually set out to disprove the view that “the real crisis of our age is a crisis of unbelief.” He ended up doing the opposite though he still rejects the reality of God. “While he insists that a few individuals manage to be good without belief in God, he just as insistently denies that a whole culture can do so. The reason turns out to be that even these few are living on borrowed scruples.”

This partial conversion of one who professes to be “neither a Christian nor a theist” is not surprising. For in his book Lewy (1996: 133-34) himself raises this challenge:

Those inclined to doubt the important role played by religion in upholding the moral order may want to confront the question posed by Dennis Prager, a Jewish writer and editor in Los Angeles: Imagine that you are walking alone at night in a dark alley in a bad neighborhood in Los Angeles, and you see several [Prager specified 10] strapping young men walking toward you. Would you or would you not be relieved to know that they had just attended a Bible class? It is a sure bet, Prager maintains, that “even

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if you are a member of Atheists United, if you are a member of Down with God, Inc., you, too, would breathe a major sigh of relief if you were walking in a dark alley and you knew they had just been studying Genesis. Because while it is possible they will mug or rape you, deep in your gut you know that the likelihood is that they won't" (Prager and Glover 1993: 4).

There are atheists who argue that they would also be relieved if they knew that the 10 men in the dark alley had just been studying secular humanism. Even if we grant this, Prager (2007) would respond that in the real world, in the bad parts of modern cities, it is more likely to find 10 men studying the Bible than secular humanism, or any other subject that would bring us relief in that dark alley. This observation is itself a testimony to the role (true) belief in God plays in changing lives for the better.

Redeeming Civilization

Between 1978 and 1995, someone in America sent or put out 16 parcel bombs, killing 3 people and injuring 23, some very seriously. The victims included top-ranked scientists and engineers. For lack of a better name the FBI called him the Unabomber (acronym for *university-airline-bomber*). The authorities had no clue who he was. Despite the most intensive manhunt in FBI history, they failed to catch him all those 17 years.

His 1995 bomb killed the president of the California Forestry Association. Two months later, *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* both received a 35,000-word essay. It turned out to be a manifesto that calls for a worldwide revolution against the harmful effects of the modern "industrial-technological system." The anonymous writer demanded that one of the newspapers publish it in full or else he would send another bomb "with intent to kill." The authorities recognized the writer as the Unabomber. Both the Attorney General and the FBI Director recommended the manifesto be published. The two newspapers decided to share costs, and on 19 September 1995 the manifesto appeared as a supplement to *The Washington Post*.

Materialist Solution

The manifesto is titled “Industrial Society and Its Future” (Unabomber 1995; a corrected and improved version is included in Kaczynsky 2010: 36-120). It begins with these words:

The Industrial Revolution and its consequences have been a disaster for the human race. They have ... destabilized society, have made life unfulfilling, have subjected human beings to indignities, have led to widespread psychological suffering ... and have inflicted severe damage on the natural world. The continued development of technology will worsen the situation.

He also said that the social and psychological problems we experience are the consequences of industrial society requiring human beings to live in an environment for which they are not suited. In terms of the theory of evolution, which he had taken for granted, he is saying that since the human species evolved under primitive conditions, human genes are good enough to enable human beings to live in a primitive and not a modern industrial environment. This will in fact rule out civilization altogether, whether modern or premodern.

Was the Unabomber a madman? As a result of the published manifesto, the Unabomber’s own brother, who recognized his writing style, did the painful duty of reporting him to the authorities. Dr. Theodore Kaczynsky was arrested in April 1996. He pleaded guilty to avoid the death sentence and is now serving life imprisonment without the possibility of parole. “He earned his Ph.D. [at the University of Michigan] by solving, in less than a year, a math problem that one of his professors himself had been unable to solve” (Combs and Slann 2007: 342). He then became an assistant professor of mathematics at the prestigious University of California, Berkeley.

Blaming his own social and psychological problems on the “industrial-technological system,” he gave up his prestigious career and lived as a hermit in a cabin in the mountains of Montana, without a telephone, electricity or running water. He wanted the world also to renounce industrial society and return to a primitive environment and way-of-life. He was out to redeem the world from the harmful con-

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sequences of industrialization. Realizing the difficulty, he said in his manifesto, “In order to get our message before the public with some chance of making a lasting impression, we’ve had to kill people.”

The method of the Unabomber was indeed extreme, but what about his message? Is life in industrial societies indeed unfulfilling? Noted writer Walker Percy (1984: 3) asks, “Why does man feel so sad in the twentieth century? Why does man feel so bad in the very age when, more than in any other age, he has succeeded in satisfying his needs and making over the world for his own use?” (cited in Wells 1993: 53). Has the situation improved in the twenty-first century?

What about the claim that our unhappiness is due to the incompatibility of our genes? Has this claim been considered “scientific” by materialist scientists? While anticipating the publication of the Unabomber’s entire manifesto, *Time* magazine ran a cover story by evolutionist science writer Robert Wright (1995) entitled “The Evolution of Despair,” with the subtitle “A new field of science [evolutionary psychology] examines the mismatch between our genetic makeup and the modern world, looking for the source of our pervasive sense of discontent.”

Built on materialism, modern civilization, in terms of both the physical environment and the corporate way-of-life, is indeed not conducive for human beings made in the image of God. Echoing the view of the Unabomber, Robert Wright (1995: 50) himself confesses in the said *Time* article:

Whether burdened by an overwhelming flurry of daily commitments or stifled by a sense of social isolation (or, oddly, both); whether mired for hours in a sense of life’s pointlessness or beset for days by unresolved anxiety; whether deprived by long work-weeks from quality time with offspring or drowning in quantity time with them—whatever the source of stress, we at times get the feeling that modern life isn’t what we were designed for.

The solution most consistent with the theory of evolution is the Unabomber solution: a complete withdrawal from civilization. This is extremely drastic. But if the theory of evolution is true, as claimed by materialists, we have no other option. And this means that material-

ism has created a civilization in which people who believe in materialism should logically renounce it.

The extreme anti-civilization perspective of the Unabomber is also shared and promoted by others who do not advocate violence and have not (yet?) withdrawn from civilization. In the enlarged edition of his book *Against Civilization: Readings and Reflections*, prominent anti-civilization philosopher John Zerzan (2005: 1) reports, “Since the first edition of [the book in 1999,] the general perspective referred to by its title has begun to make sense to a growing number of people.” The book contains excerpts from the Unabomber’s manifesto (now developed into Kaczynsky 2016). In the foreword to the book acclaimed social-change activist Chellis Glendinning spells out that “it is not just contemporary industrial society that is dysfunctional; it is civilization itself” (xi). So the Unabomber approach to redeem the world by rejecting civilization is gaining acceptance.

Pantheist Reaction

As a reaction to the spiritual emptiness that characterizes life in modernity, New Age phenomena, which are based on a mixture of pre-modern polytheist and pantheist spirituality, have exploded in Western and Westernized societies. How is it that religious phenomena based on primitive spirituality could re-emerge out of and within full-fledged modern civilization? According to sociologist Peter Berger (1999: 13),

The religious impulse, the quest for meaning that transcends the restricted space of empirical [materialist] existence in this world, has been a perennial feature of humanity. (This is not a theological statement but an anthropological one—an agnostic or even an atheist philosopher may well agree with it.) It would require something close to a mutation of the species to extinguish this impulse for good.

Hence if evolution is true, it has adapted humanity to be religious in order to live in the (primitive) world in which humanity evolved. According to evolutionary biologist Dominic Johnson (2016: 11),

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“religious beliefs and practices ... were actually *avored* by Darwinian natural selection because they improved the survival and reproductive success of believers in our ancestral past ..., religion is not an alternative to evolution, it is a *product* of evolution.”

And since New Age spirituality is basically primitive religiosity, its unexpected re-emergence in modernity would then support the Unabomber’s theory that we are genetically “wired” to live a primitive way-of-life. Except that the Unabomber was not consistent enough; he did not adopt a primitive religion as well. But is evolution true to begin with?

Theist Solution

The Biblical alternative to modern civilization is a civilization that takes the Creation Mandate seriously. In its original context, the mandate involved “subduing” the earth outside Eden to make it as conducive for human dwelling as Eden. The created environment outside Eden, which is the natural environment of the earth, was already soothing to the human soul and refreshing to the human spirit. To fulfill the mandate will involve building cities in such a way that this feature is preserved if not enhanced. Other human-friendly features such as conduciveness towards the formation of community should also characterize cities.

Unfortunately, as stressed by Mumford, modernization has literally bulldozed God’s created environment into spiritual wasteland. Due to the personal vision of Lee Kuan Yew on the need to temper the harshness of the concrete jungle on the human spirit with the greenery of nature, Singapore managed to beat “the law of urban growth” to some extent to become a “clean and green city.” But this requires “political will and sustained effort” from the government. In this case, the need to draw in foreign investments was a major motivating factor. According to Lee, “in wooing investors, even the trees matter.” For “He thought that well-kept trees and gardens were a subtle way of convincing potential investors, in the early crucial years, that Singapore was an efficient and effective place” (Koh 2000: 40).

However most countries are not like Singapore, a small island lacking in natural resources, with the need to use every possible

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means to attract foreign investments. Hence to redeem the physical environment, a country and its government need to have a higher purpose strong enough to resist the pressure of “progress” in economic or material terms, whenever this threatens the earth and thus the human race.

As for the formation of community, under modernity, a conducive built-environment by itself is not enough. For Gorringer (2002: 185-86) reports,

the American town planner Clarence Perry was already recommending ‘neighbourhood units’ of 3,000 to 9,000 people in the 1930s. The theory was that a neighbourhood should be small enough for everything to be within walking distance, but large enough to support an elementary school, local stores and services The theory is excellent, but we have yet to learn how to realize it on the ground.

He goes on to say that there have been townships that

were built on these principles, and none of them are remarkable for a sense of community. If we ask why, we can of course point to developments which keep people at home—increasing comfort, home ‘entertainment’, increased mobility, long working hours—but I suspect it is more in terms of the lack of common purpose

In other words, under modernity, the obstacle to the formation of community is our way-of-life and the lack of a transcendent purpose for living that draws people together as a cohesive community.

Hence both the physical environment and our corporate way-of-life need to be redeemed through fulfilling God’s purpose for humanity—the Creation Mandate. The rest of our exposition of the Old Testament is actually about redeeming civilization. The focus is on redeeming humanity as the means to redeeming civilization. Attention will be given to how we can fulfill the Creation Mandate in and through the seven influential spheres of culture.

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Part II

The Noahic Covenant I

Genesis 5-11

Chapter 4

Rebooting of Civilization

Genesis 4-6 presents the message that because of human sinfulness, even the godly line of Seth was eventually corrupted. It highlights the nature of human sinfulness. The message of Genesis 6-9 then is that before unrighteousness swallowed up the last remaining family from the Sethite line, God did what He had to do to give humanity a new start. Hence God sent the Flood to destroy the world and instructed righteous Noah to build an ark to preserve his family (and the animals).

Memories of the Flood

There are parallel accounts in the ancient world of a massive flood similar to that recorded in Genesis 6-9. And

Many of these stories conform to a basic pattern. Religious man saw in these upheavals of nature the activity of the divine and attributed their cause to man's angering of the gods. Most frequently, one man and his family, the favorite of the gods, survived the deluge to father a new human race (Sarna 1966: 38).

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It is tempting to assume that the Genesis account was borrowed from parallel accounts in Mesopotamia. But the differences are too great to make this assumption credible (see Walton 1989: 34-42). A sensible conclusion is that they are based on the common memory of a massive flood in the distant past. But the memory was filtered and shaped according to the respective belief-system. With different belief-systems undergirding Genesis and its Mesopotamian counterparts, the differences in the flood accounts are to be expected.

It is instructive to compare and contrast the flood account in Genesis with that in the Mesopotamian *Atrahasis*. For our purpose, we will only highlight the difference in the specific reason for the flood. According to the polytheistic account of *Atrahasis*, the reason was that the human race had become too noisy as a result of overpopulation. The gods could not sleep and so decided to rid the world of this annoying noise pollution. The gods were thus presented as self-centered capricious beings.

In contrast, Genesis presents the reason as the widespread wickedness of humanity (Genesis 6:5-7). And God is presented as patient and compassionate. For we read that God felt “sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.” He felt sorry not for Himself but for humanity. For when there is widespread wickedness, there is widespread suffering. We are told specifically that the earth was “filled with violence” (Genesis 6:11, 13). Wenham (1987: 171) notes that the Hebrew word for “violence” is most often paired with another Hebrew word that means “oppression.” He adds, “‘Violence’ denotes any antisocial, unneighborly activity. Very often it involves the use of brute force, but it may just be the exploitation of the weak by the powerful or the poor by the rich (e.g., Amos 6:1-3), or the naive by the clever (Prov 16:29).”

God was thus grieved that humanity was on this pitiful self-destruct course. His compassion, let alone His sense of justice, demanded that He did what He did so that the world could begin afresh. But He waited till there was only one family left that was not affected by the spread of wickedness before He acted. This shows His patience.

Both of the flood accounts are written by human beings. In preserving the memory of the Flood, one account puts the gods in a bad

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light and presents the crime of humanity as simply being too noisy, and hence not deserving the drastic judgment. The other account puts humanity in the worst light, thus clearly deserving the judgment, and presents God as patient and compassionate even in His judgment. If granted that the Flood did happen, which account is more likely telling the truth?

As for the ecological crisis and the human suffering that have marred modern civilization, our exposition points the source also to human sinfulness. The Unabomber, who presupposed a materialist belief-system, blames it entirely on the Industrial Revolution. Industrialization is only the means and not the source. This blaming of others for our own woes began with the sin of Adam and Eve. Unless we accept the reality of original sin, we may not readily acknowledge that the source of human problems is human sinfulness, whether in the ancient or the modern world. Genesis presents an exceptionally honest picture of the (fallen) condition of humanity.

Creation Mandate Reapplied Partially

When God decided to destroy the wicked world, He had in mind a new beginning for humanity. He also had in mind a covenant with Noah and his descendants (and creation as a whole). This covenant stipulates how He will relate to the world and how human beings should relate to one another in the post-Flood world. He first expressed His intention to make that covenant even before the Flood (Genesis 6:18). A covenant is basically a binding commitment or obligation between two or more parties to fulfill a set of terms. The covenant, as well as its terms, may be established unilaterally or bilaterally. Covenants were often made between human beings; they differ from what we call a “compact” and a “contract,” in that a covenant is divinely sanctioned as it is sealed with an oath before God (cf. Williamson 2007: 38-39). In the Old Testament one of the covenanting parties is God Himself. Our focus in this exposition is on divine-human covenants.

The Noahic Covenant and its terms are spelled out unilaterally by God after the Flood. On God’s part, recognizing that human beings are still prone to wickedness, He promises not to destroy the world

again, and that the laws governing day and night and the seasons of the year will be preserved for as long as the earth exists (Genesis 8:21-22; 9:8-17). On the part of human beings, the covenant requires that they fulfill the Creation Mandate (Genesis 9:1-7; cf. Isaiah 24:5-6). The blessing to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth is repeated here. But this version of the Creation Mandate leaves out the subduing of the earth and the ruling over God's creation. As noted before, this is no longer relevant as God has cursed the ground, rendering the earth no longer subduable as *originally* intended. Basically, as we have seen, this means agricultural productivity is affected.

Other aspects of "subduing the earth," particularly in terms of city-building, the economy, the arts and technology, do not seem to be affected (cf. Turner 1990: 38). Otherwise there would not be an Industrial Revolution. However, as a result of the Fall, "ruling over God's creation" can no longer be as originally intended, and has in fact been corrupted into exploitation and domination of God's creation. As a consequence, the way human beings build cities, grow the economy, develop the arts, and use technology, are often expressions of human sinfulness. The negative consequences of industrialization illustrate this well.

Now that human beings are no longer living in Eden, the goal of the pre-Fall Creation Mandate to turn the rest of the earth into Eden, as originally intended, is also no longer relevant. We recall that within Eden, because it was where God dwelled with human beings, God's will must be done. But it does not imply that since human beings no longer live in Eden, they are no longer required to do God's will. The whole earth belongs to God and human beings are still to do God's will, in terms of how we live and how we relate to God's creation. The Flood itself shows that human beings outside of Eden are still accountable to God. The difference, with sin having come into the world, is that they can no longer dwell with God like Adam and Eve did before the Fall.

Rebuilding a Global Civilization

In other words, Noah and his family were to build a global civilization that would be as consistent with God's will as possible. The "in

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fellowship with God” part of the Creation Mandate did not apply (yet). In this sense the mandate was only partially reapplied. As we shall see, God has a redemptive plan for humanity to be in fellowship with Him again.

God’s will for humanity under the Noahic Covenant, which is still relevant today (Genesis 9:16), is expressed as follows: “Whoever sheds man’s blood, by man his blood shall be shed; for in the image of God He made man” (Genesis 9:6). Though Adam was made in God’s image according to His likeness, Genesis 5:3 notes that Seth was born in Adam’s, and not God’s, likeness and image. But Genesis 9:6 makes it clear that this does not mean that Adam’s descendants are no longer considered “made in the image of God.” What it means is that Adam’s marred image of God, and not the original image of God, was passed on to his descendants. On this basis the Creation Mandate, for the fulfillment of which human beings were made in God’s image, was reapplied. But since the image of God is now marred, unless and until this image is redeemed (Colossians 3:9-10), the Creation Mandate can only be partially fulfilled.

Instituting Formal Government

Genesis 9:6 has been the Biblical basis for capital punishment for convicted *murderers* (capital punishment for other offences under the Mosaic Covenant is a separate matter, which will be addressed in Chapter 14). For it does not just stipulate death for murderers, but also that it is to be executed through human agency (“by man”). And this stipulation has been fulfilled in history through the execution of a death sentence passed by a human court of law, which is integral to and presumes a functioning government. Ancient Jewish sages went so far as to say that through Genesis 9, “the principle of formal government was introduced” (Elazar 1995: 111).

The need for government to curb and punish human wickedness makes sense in light of human sinfulness and God’s promise not to destroy the world again. The need is explicitly recognized in the Book of Judges, where “everyone did what was right in his own eyes” because “in those days there was no king” (17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25). Echoing Genesis 9:6, the apostle Paul says in Romans 13:1-7 that all

governing authorities are (supposed to be) servants of God as they are instituted by Him to praise what is good and punish what is evil. By emphasizing that the government “does not bear the sword for nothing,” Paul certainly does not exclude capital punishment, as the “phrase most obviously has in view the power of life and death which was then, as for most of human civilization, the ultimate sanction for government” (Dunn 1988: 764).

Reformulating Capital Punishment

Since the death penalty has been opposed by even Christians today, we need to take a closer look at the meaning of Genesis 9:6 and its moral and legal implications (cf. Budziszewski 2004: 109-22).

The basis for capital punishment given here is that the Holy God made human beings in His image, and human life is therefore sacred. Unless we claim that human beings today are no longer made in the image of God, which means they are sub-human, the death penalty still applies. The underlying teaching is that because human beings are made in the image of God, any willful act of injustice against a human being is a deliberate violation of the sanctity of human life, and amounts to showing contempt towards God Himself (cf. Proverbs 14:31). Murder is the most blatant violation of the sanctity of human life, and amounts to treating God with utmost contempt. If the punishment must fit the crime, the just sentence for murder has to be the death sentence. When practiced properly (see below), capital punishment can infuse society with the sense that human life is sacred. A lesser sentence, on the other hand, cheapens human life and desecrates the holiness of God.

The sanctity of human life is then God’s reason for requiring us to “do justice and love mercy,” which summarizes His will for humanity (Micah 6:8). In practice, unless we see something of the Holy God in one another, we will not likely feel enough constraint (the fear of God) within us to treat one another justly and mercifully. Since any mistreatment of a human being is a violation of the sanctity of human life, courts of justice have not been limited to murder cases but cover the whole range of criminal and civil offenses. So a denial of the validity of capital punishment is not only a denial of the sancti-

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ty of human life, but also a denial of God as the basis for morality. It amounts to denying the reality of God.

In modernity God does not feel real because it incarnates the idea that God does not exist. It is thus not surprising that the death penalty does not “feel right” and so opposing it becomes popular. This is taking murder, the gravest injustice against another human being, too lightly; modernity with its godlessness will all the more breed rampant injustice, just like the widespread “violence” that led to the Flood. There is a difference between opposing an improper practice of capital punishment and opposing the practice itself.

How then should capital punishment be practiced? Firstly, under Old Testament law (Deuteronomy 17:6-7) a murder suspect can only be convicted on the basis of (at least) two or three eyewitnesses, and “To forestall a conspiratorial process in which witnesses would collaborate in misrepresenting the truth, the witnesses would themselves be forced to hurl the first stones of execution” (Merrill 1994: 261). Also, the penalty for perjury is that of the case being tried, which means the death penalty for bearing false witness in a murder case (Deuteronomy 19:16-19).

These safeguards were intended to prevent a wrongful murder conviction (cf. Marshall 2001: 207). In other words, the teaching is that no one accused of murder should be put to death without a water-tight conviction. If a murder conviction is not *reasonably* water-tight, the death sentence though upheld in principle, should automatically be commuted to life-imprisonment. For the accused is also made in the image of God and we cannot risk putting an innocent person to death; there is divine sanction to take the life only of one who is truly guilty of murder. In this way we uphold the sanctity of human life, that of the victim as well as the accused. Otherwise capital punishment cheapens human life.

Secondly, while God’s will involves doing justice, it also includes loving mercy. This should be applied to murder cases as well (cf. Marshall 2001: 229). The just sentence on murder is no doubt the death sentence. But there is still a place for mercy depending on the circumstances. Showing mercy when mercy is deserved upholds the sanctity of human life. Compare and contrast the case of a battered wife who had endured her abusive husband for years till she could

take it no more and decided to poison him to death, with that of an unrepentant serial rapist-cum-murderer who preyed on young girls. When both are convicted of murder, should they be treated exactly? Does at least one of them deserve mercy? If so, there is no Biblical basis for *mandatory* death penalty even in water-tight convictions. In these cases, should the judge be given the discretion to commute the death sentence (justice) to life-imprisonment, with or without the possibility of parole, depending on the mitigating factors (mercy)?

All this means, when capital punishment is properly practiced, few convicted murderers would be put to death. And these would be those who are so evil and unrepentant, and whose crimes are so unprovoked and hideous, that the conscience of few people would question their execution.

Beginning of Nations

In Genesis 9 God blessed Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply so as to fill the earth (verses 1, 7). Genesis 10, commonly known as the Table of Nations, records the scattering of the post-Flood human race into different nations occupying different parts of the earth (verses 5, 20, 31-32). Genesis 11:1-9 explains how the scattering actually happened. It did not happen voluntarily. In fact all the people, who then spoke the same language and had the same culture, were determined not to be scattered. To ensure that they did not scatter, they built not only a city but also the well-known Tower of Babel. This went against God's purpose for blessing Noah and his sons to be fruitful and multiply.

We are not told exactly why the building of the tower could ensure that they would not scatter, except that by building the tower they would "make a name" for themselves. But we can infer by imagining why having "made a name" for themselves by building the tower, they would not scatter. For the glory of having "made a name" for oneself has always been an obsession of fallen humanity. So when they had a share in the glory of having built the magnificent tower, they were not likely to give it up by going elsewhere.

In order for God to fulfill His goal for humanity to fill the earth, He confused their language so that one group could no longer under-

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stand another group, and they were thus forced to go their separate ways. This scattering also served another purpose. God said, if as one people speaking the same language they could accomplish such a feat, “nothing that they purpose to do will now be impossible for them” (verse 6). This statement highlights the creative and innovative potential of the God-like abilities of human beings when they could communicate with one another and cross-fertilize one another’s minds. It is made in the context of a sinful human race bent on opposing God and His purpose. Sooner or later they would do something that would be self-destructive. We just need to look at what has happened in modernity, where the cross-fertilization of human minds is unprecedented in human history. We have considered the havoc wreaked by industrialization, but we have not even mentioned the threat of a nuclear war.

Nationhood and Nation-building

We now take a closer look at Genesis 10 to see what the Bible means by the term “nation.” For the Bible has much to say about God’s will for a nation, that is, God’s idea of nationhood. But before we can apply this teaching, we need to ensure that how we understand the word “nation” today is close enough to what the Bible means by the term. In the process we also consider the terms “race” and “ethnicity.” All three terms are familiar English words, but discussing what they mean can be a complicated matter. For our purpose we will not discuss how these terms have been understood, but focus on how they should be understood in light of Genesis 10. This also avoids making an already complex subject more complicated.

Genesis 10:32 summarizes the whole chapter: “These are the clans of the sons of Noah, according to their lines of descent, by their nations. And from these (clans) the nations were spread out over the earth after the flood” (cf. Genesis 9:19). This verse teaches two things about nations. Firstly, all nations originated from Noah, and thus all post-Flood human beings are descended from one man. Hence in terms of biological descent there is only one human race. The other meaning of “race,” as in “Malay” or “Chinese,” is not based on biological descent even though officially a person’s race is

determined this way. For if a man says his race is Chinese because his father is Chinese, why then is his father Chinese? If he says it is because his grandfather is Chinese, why then is his grandfather Chinese? We can keep asking this question until we come to Noah. Was Noah Chinese?

Meaning of “Race”

“Race” in this second sense refers to a group’s physical characteristics, especially “skin color, facial features and hair type” (Manickam 2008: 718). People from the same immediate biological lineage tend to have the same racial (physical) characteristics, as these are genetically determined. If every descendant of Noah had the same skin color, facial features and hair type, this concept of race would not have arisen at all. Actually we are intuitively aware that race is about physical characteristics and not biological descent. For we may find ourselves saying to someone whose parents are both Chinese, “But you do not look Chinese; you look Malay!”

According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Van den Berghe 1991: 336), racial characteristics have “no inherent significance, but only such significance as is socially attributed to them in a given society.” When social significance is attached to a racial group, affecting how it is treated or how it treats others, it is racism. The ugliness of racism is well recognized; even racists denounce racism, except their own. Though racial characteristics are recognized in the Bible (Jeremiah 13:23), no social significance is given to them and the concept of “race” as a social category is absent (cf. Sadler 2005: 147-51). Instead, as we shall see below, the more recent concept of “ethnicity” can be readily found.

According to Genesis 10:32 the first nations were formed from clans, that is, according to immediate biological lineage. This was how nations began as a result of the confusion, and hence the division of languages, which presumably was according to clan lines. But it does not mean that in the Bible the term “nation” applies only to nations formed based on biological lineage alone (cf. Block 1986: 493). For even right at the beginning, the nation of Israel, which God intended as a model nation, incorporated people who were not descendants of

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Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (see Exodus 12:38, 47-49; Leviticus 19:33-34; Numbers 9:14; Deuteronomy 14:28-29; 31:9-13). They are called “resident aliens” (see Baker 2009: 176-89)—the near equivalent of modern “permanent residents,” in contrast to “foreigners” (Deuteronomy 23:20) and “temporary residents” (Leviticus 25:47).

Meaning of “Ethnicity”

This is where the concept of ethnicity comes in. According to the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article cited above, “if a group were socially defined in terms of sharing a common language, a common set of religious beliefs, or some other cultural characteristics—*without* physical considerations—then it would be an ‘ethnic group.’” In other words, while race refers to a group’s physical characteristics, which are *innate*, ethnicity refers to a group’s cultural characteristics, which are *acquired*. This understanding of ethnicity is well illustrated in the Federal Constitution of Malaysia, which defines a “Malay” basically as “a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom” (Article 160.2).

Though “race” and “ethnicity” are distinct, they are often confused as though they mean the same thing, for people of the same race tend to have the same ethnicity. This is because traditionally people of the same biological lineage (having similar racial characteristics) tend to live together, speak the same language and practice the same religion and custom. This explains why terms like “Malay” and “Chinese” can refer to either race or ethnicity.

Since the same term can be understood as race or ethnicity, it adds to the confusion. This confusion complicates ethnic relations and thus national integration (and even international cooperation) as it allows racism to get into the picture. It leads to ethno-centrism, which prejudices one ethnic group against others based on culture (read: race), and to a negative form of nationalism. “Nationalism,” understood as devotion to the nation in protecting and promoting its aims, interests and identity, including freedom from foreign control, is not necessarily bad. But this negative form of nationalism, which involves pursuing the interests of one ethnic group at the expense of even others within the same nation, confuses not only ethnicity with

race, but also nationality with ethnicity, and thus becomes racially exclusive. The devotion should rather be to nation-building (as discussed below), a positive form of nationalism.

People of the same *clan*, living within the same *territory*, and speaking the same *language* (Genesis 10:5, 20, 31) naturally develop a common culture that is different from that of another clan living in a different territory and speaking a different language. So what distinguished one nation from another in Genesis 10 is what we call ethnicity. Thus Genesis 10:32 teaches, secondly, that a nation is formed based on ethnicity, or more accurately, a common language and culture (cf. Hays 2003: 59). This explains why a word that refers to ethnicity, such as “Chinese,” may also refer to nationality. But since people do emigrate from their homeland, an ethnic Chinese may not be a Chinese national, but instead be a Malaysian in nationality.

Differentiating ethnicity from race has far-reaching implications for nationhood. For while race is exclusive because physical characteristics are innate, ethnicity is inclusive because cultural characteristics are acquired. This means, though the core characteristics of a particular ethnicity do not change (cf. Nestor 2013: 38-39), a particular person may be able to adopt an ethnicity (ethnic identity) that is different from that of his ancestors by acquiring the core characteristics that constitute the adopted ethnicity. In Malaysia an Indian Muslim, who is racially Indian, may become an ethnic Malay if he “habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom” (cf. Nagata 1985; Abdullah 2014: 56-57).

So an ethnic group can be multi-racial as people of different races can acquire the same language and culture. And since a nation is formed based on acquired characteristics, it is also inclusive. This explains why the nation of Israel could incorporate people of a different biological lineage. But just having the same language and culture is not enough for a group to be considered a “nation,” whether in the Bible or in today’s world.

Meaning of “Nation”

Let us first consider how the term “nation” should be understood in today’s context. Hugh Seton-Watson (1977: 1), in his classic book on

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this subject, defines a nation as “a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness” (versus Smith 2004: 129; cf. Conversi 2007: 23-24). And “national consciousness,” at the least, is the awareness that one is part of something more than one’s race or ethnicity. To Frantz Fanon (1966: 162-63), a highly regarded postcolonial thinker, this includes the sense that *all* the people in one’s country share a common destiny as well as have a share in building up that destiny. It is thus “the all-embracing crystallization of the innermost hopes of the whole people” (121). But not every individual in a country needs to have this consciousness first before the country is considered a “nation.” According to Seton-Watson (1977: 5), “a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves to form a nation, or behave as if they formed one.”

Does this understanding match the concept of nation in the Bible? Yes, for the following reasons (cf. Roshwald 2006: 14-22; 2007: 242-51; Hastings 1997: 14-19). Due to kinship ties, it was natural for members of a clan to feel that they were an integral part of the group. We can expect each of the nations in Genesis 10 to manifest this sense of solidarity (cf. Kreitzer 2008: 133-34). Also, since the sense of solidarity was based on kinship ties, and not on something loose and temporary like common interests or even common goals, the people would be aware that they had a common and shared destiny. Hence we can expect each of the nations in Genesis 10 to also manifest such a national consciousness.

In any case, anyone reading the Old Testament can see that ancient Israel obviously demonstrated not only a sense of solidarity (Judges 19:27-30), but also a national consciousness (1 Samuel 8:1-5). It was undoubtedly a “nation.” This was the case even before Israel had a king, what more after (cf. Grosby 2002: 13-27; Rivers 2005: 125-29; note that what Rivers means by “ethnicity” is actually race).

Finally, since the common culture that binds a nation can be a hybrid culture that transcends the specific cultures of distinct ethnic groups, a nation can be “Formed from one or more ethnicities” (Hastings 1997: 3). Therefore a nation can be multi-racial as well as multi-ethnic as long as in addition to a common (national) culture, there is also a sense of solidarity and a national consciousness among

Chapter 4: *Rebooting of Civilization*

the people. A national culture can be developed as a result of living together within the same territorial boundary; a sense of solidarity can arise from an awareness of the challenges facing the country; a national consciousness can be awakened on the basis of a shared history and a shared destiny.

To fulfill the Noahic Covenant, a multi-ethnic country lacking a common culture, or a sense of solidarity, or a national consciousness has to work at nation-building at this basic level, in addition to building a national civilization that is as consistent with God's will as possible. God's idea of nationhood involves both levels. For a civilization consistent with God's will is one that seeks to uphold justice for all, regardless of race and ethnicity. And this is not possible unless the people have enough in common so that they can feel they are an integral part of something bigger than their racial or ethnic group, and that their welfare depends on the welfare of all other groups (cf. Jeremiah 29:7). When we consider the Mosaic Covenant, we shall see what a national civilization consistent with God's will actually looks like (Chapters 17-18).

To better understand the meaning of a nation we need to contrast it with a "state." A nation, a socially unified group of people occupying the same territory, naturally needs some form of legal and political organization to function properly; otherwise it lacks law and order (Judges 21:25). "A state is a legal and political organization, with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens" (Seton-Watson 1997: 1), and to claim "the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within [its] territory" (Weber 1991: 78). Strictly speaking, the State corresponds to the whole group of people (the citizens) thus unified, but the term is often used to refer to just the sub-group (the Government) that exercises the power.

A state may actually cover a country that is not (yet) a nation. Often it covers one nation (the "nation-state"), which may be multi-ethnic, as in the case of Malaysia. It may cover multiple nations, as in the case of the United Kingdom. And a nation may be divided between different states as in the case of North and South Korea. The government, one of the seven influential spheres of culture, is a legal and political apparatus that can enhance nation-building. Or it can do the reverse.

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Part III

The Abrahamic Covenant

Genesis 12-50

Chapter 5

Beginning of Redemption

The Noahic Covenant anticipated a redemptive plan that would do something about the fallen human condition. Firstly, the covenant was made recognizing that the sinful condition of humanity had not changed (Genesis 8:21). This means the spread of wickedness, which led to the Flood, would happen all over again. Yet in the Noahic Covenant God promised He would not destroy the world again. This implies that God planned to take a different approach to the problem of human sinfulness instead of destroying the world when its wickedness becomes intolerable, and then starting the cycle all over again.

Secondly, though the Noahic Covenant still requires humanity to build a civilization that is consistent with God's will, there is no provision for the civilization to be in fellowship with God. But God's purpose for humanity, as expressed in the Creation Mandate, involves both. So unless God does something about human sinfulness, which is the barrier to fellowship between the Holy God and fallen humanity, His purpose cannot be fulfilled. Hence there is still the need for another covenant to address the problem of sin, and thus make it possible for humanity to build a civilization that is both consistent with God's will and in fellowship with Him.

Chapter 5: *Beginning of Redemption*

The rebellion of the Tower of Babel resulted in not only the people being scattered into nations according to clans, but also the whole world alienated from God. Genesis 11, right after describing how all this happened (verses 1-9), focuses on the lineage of Shem, the son of Noah from whom Abraham descended (verses 10-32). The flow of the text gives the impression that the solution to the problem of human sinfulness is going to come through Abraham.

Faith and Redemption

Sure enough, in Genesis 12:1-3 God revealed a plan involving Abraham and his descendants with the goal that “all the clans (or nations) of the earth shall be blessed.” This global plan is obviously God’s answer to the global alienation. This redemptive plan is known as the Abrahamic Covenant. It is the beginning of the fulfillment of the promise God made in Genesis 3:15 to redeem humanity.

The Abrahamic Covenant is a promise God made to Abraham (and later to his descendants as well) to bless him and make him into “a great nation,” which turned out to be Israel, so that through them the whole world will be blessed. Hence God now chose one man and one nation to work out His global redemptive plan. On Abraham’s part, he only had to leave his homeland, his father’s household and his relatives and go to a place that God would show him. Abraham fulfilled his part, and the place he was to go turned out to be Canaan, which Israel eventually inherited as their homeland.

The Book of Joshua (24:2) highlights the fact that, like most people in the ancient world, Abraham was born and raised in a polytheistic household. Even if he did not actively worship the idols, he did not worship the Creator God before he was called to leave his polytheistic environment (cf. Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000: 46-47). The world as a whole was still alienated from God. But even then God was not left without a witness. In fact right in Canaan there was Melchizedek, king of Salem (the future Jerusalem), who was also priest of “God Most High,” which is another name for the Creator God (Genesis 14:18-22; cf. Psalm 78:35, 56). However God did not call Melchizedek; He called Abraham instead to be the channel of blessings to the whole world. In other words God’s choice of Abra-

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ham “is not to be regarded as a reward for his righteousness before God, but as an act of free unmerited grace” (Keil and Delitzsch 1982a: 228). And it was by faith that Abraham accepted God’s gracious offer, especially since he did not even know where God would lead him (Hebrews 11:8).

In New Testament terms, Abraham came to know God and became His channel of blessings “by grace through faith” and not “by works.” The only “works” (fulfilling God’s condition) Abraham did to receive God’s promise was to leave his homeland, his father’s household and his relatives, thereby breaking all ties with his polytheistic past. But strictly speaking this was not really a condition, for the promise involves forming a new nation in a new homeland, as well as embracing a new belief-system. If Abraham refused to leave, it would amount to rejecting the gracious offer itself. It is like being given an offer, with no conditions attached, to work in another city with a company that is everyone’s dream. To accept this unconditional offer one obviously has to leave one’s existing home-city, employer and colleagues, as well as embrace a new work-system. Hence the Abrahamic Covenant is basically unconditional.

This is confirmed in Genesis 15 where God made two specific promises to Abraham, who was then in Canaan but still childless. God said He would greatly multiply Abraham’s *biological* descendants, and that his descendants would possess Canaan. Both these promises, already introduced earlier in Genesis 13:14-17, are integral to the Abrahamic Covenant inaugurated in Genesis 12:1-3. They are given prominence here in Genesis 15 and later in Genesis 17 because they were of immediate concern to Abraham.

Genesis 15 also recounts a ceremony in which God formally “signed” the Abrahamic Covenant to assure Abraham that His promises would surely be fulfilled. According to the custom of the day (cf. Jeremiah 34:18-19), the parties making a covenant would cut animals into two and line the parts in two rows. They would then walk together in between the parts while pledging to fulfill the terms of the covenant (cf. Hamilton 1990: 430-33). However in this case only God “walked” between the animal parts; Abraham was then in deep sleep. This means God alone “signed” the covenant and therefore He alone was obligated to fulfill the terms of the covenant. Hence God

unilaterally and unconditionally guaranteed that His entire redemptive plan would be fulfilled.

Obedience and Redemption

However, there are a number of texts which show that Abraham had to be obedient to God for the terms of the covenant to be realized. For even after the covenant was formally “signed” in Genesis 15, and before instituting circumcision as a sign of the covenant, God said to Abraham: “I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless, that I may confirm My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you greatly ... and will give to you and to your descendants ... all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 17:1-2, 8). Note that the two promises introduced in Genesis 13 and highlighted in Genesis 15 are repeated here. God was undoubtedly talking about the same covenant (contra Williamson 2007: 84-91).

In Genesis 22, the need for Abraham to be obedient is even more explicitly highlighted in an oath God made after Abraham passed a test of obedience. For in the oath God swore that He would surely greatly multiply Abraham’s descendants and through them “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, *because you have obeyed My voice*” (verses 15-18). When this promise was passed down to Isaac, God said that just as He swore to Abraham, He would multiply Isaac’s descendants and through his descendants “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; *because Abraham obeyed Me ...*” (Genesis 26:3-5).

This means even though God unconditionally guaranteed that the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled, Abraham still had to be obedient to God for the terms of the covenant to be realized. Hence a divine promise that is received “by grace through faith,” and in that sense “unconditional,” does not exempt the recipient from obeying God and living a life that is consistent with His will. This is after all God’s original purpose for humanity. In fact God’s redemptive plan involves redeeming humanity from sin so that God’s original purpose for humanity can be fulfilled. In other words, the very idea of redemption implies obedience.

But how can God unconditionally guarantee that He would fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant, and yet its realization was dependent on

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Abraham's obedience to Him? We shall resolve this apparent contradiction later when we look at Abraham's faith development (Chapter 6). It is significant that when the covenant was further passed down to Jacob, Isaac's son, God did not say, "because Isaac obeyed Me ..." (Genesis 28:13-14). In other words, the need to pass a test of obedience to secure the Abrahamic Covenant was limited to Abraham only. After he passed that test in Genesis 22, the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant will surely come to pass, no matter what happens to Jacob and his descendants.

Drama of Redemption

The "great nation" that God promised Abraham consists of all the descendants of Jacob. It is known as Israel because Jacob's name was later changed to Israel to reflect his transformed character. Jacob had twelve sons, each fathering a tribe of the nation, except for Joseph, whose two sons each fathered a separate tribe. This exception was the result of Jacob adopting the two grandsons as his own sons.

When God "signed" the covenant in Genesis 15, He spelled out the boundary of the land in Canaan that Abraham's descendants would inherit. However He also qualified that before his descendants possessed the Promised Land, they would be in a foreign land for 400 years. The reason given was that the current occupants of the land were not wicked enough to be justly dispossessed. What is not said is that Jacob and his sons also needed a safe haven where they could be fruitful and multiply into a sizable nation before they possessed the land. This foreign land and safe haven turned out to be Egypt. Genesis 37-50 records how they ended up in Egypt, and the Book of Exodus records how Moses took the nation out of Egypt. The Book of Joshua then recounts how Joshua led the nation into the Promised Land.

How did Jacob and his descendants end up in Egypt? It began with Joseph's older brothers selling him into Egypt. And in fulfillment of God's calling for Joseph, which was revealed to him in dreams before he was sold, he became the Prime Minister of Egypt. God put him there "to preserve life" in view of a great famine that would affect not only Egypt but also Canaan. When the famine came,

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Joseph was able to sell food stockpiled from the preceding years of abundance. So his brothers came from Canaan to buy food, which eventually led to the whole family joining Joseph in Egypt.

Before Jacob died, he gave divinely inspired predictions, expressed in poetry, concerning each of his sons. Judah had the best future: “The scepter [kingship] will not depart from Judah ... until he to whom it [the scepter] belongs shall come and the obedience of the nations shall be his” (Genesis 49:10 NIV). The Hebrew (poetic) line translated as “until he to whom it belongs shall come” is actually problematic. This translation adopts one of the four main alternative interpretations. Kenneth Matthews (2005: 895) considers this interpretation the “most commendable.” Gordon Wenham (1994: 478), though he favors another interpretation, “acknowledge[s] that the alternatives are possible, all at least agree that this line is predicting the rise of the Davidic monarchy and the establishment of the Israelite empire, if not the coming of a greater David.”

In other words, though the problematic line in Genesis 49:10 can be interpreted in different ways, “The basic image is clear: The poet depicts Judah as a royal figure, whose rule ... will continue for a lengthy period until a climactic event occurs that assures a glorious future, when he will reign over obedient nations and a fertile earth” (Fretheim 1994: 665). In light of the Old Testament taken as a whole, this coming world ruler has to be the Messiah (or Christ), “the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David” (Revelation 5:5).

The Book of Genesis then ends with the death of Joseph in Genesis 50. Before he died, Joseph made his kinsmen swear that they would take his bones back to Canaan because he believed that God would fulfill His promise to bring them back to the Promised Land.

This broad outline sets the stage for a more detailed look at Genesis 12-50, focusing on the lives of Abraham, Jacob and Joseph. Before we do that, it is important to point out that the development and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant go way beyond Genesis 12-50. The clearest indication is that, as spelled out in Genesis 15, the 400-year sojourn in Egypt and the subsequent return to Canaan are part of the Abrahamic Covenant. This means the Mosaic Covenant, which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:4-6), is a development and fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

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Also, the promise of a coming world ruler in Genesis 49:10, which is also part of the Abrahamic Covenant, is the basis for the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7. And since the New Covenant, promised in the Prophetic Books, replaces the Mosaic Covenant so that God's people can actually fulfill God's purpose for them (Jeremiah 31:31-34), it is also a development and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. Finally, the New Covenant is fulfilled in the New Testament (Hebrews 8:6-13); Paul could even say that the Gospel he preached to the Gentiles was announced in advance by God to Abraham when He said, "All the nations shall be blessed in you" (Galatians 3:8).

In other words, it takes most of the Old Testament as well as the whole of the New Testament to see the complete development and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. That is why even though this covenant is about God's redemptive plan for humanity and addresses the problem of sin so that humanity can fulfill the pre-Fall Creation Mandate, we will not see much of this in Genesis 12-50. Genesis 12-50 presents only the beginning of God's mission to redeem civilization. While this mission is being accomplished, the world is accountable to God through the Noahic Covenant.

This quick survey of the covenants provides the larger context for a proper understanding of the Mosaic Covenant, which when taken out of this context, is often misunderstood and even considered to be inconsistent with the Abrahamic Covenant. This cannot be the case if the Mosaic Covenant is a development and fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant.

Even though God's redemptive plan for the world is fully realized only in the New Testament, as far as how humanity should respond to God's redemptive plan is concerned, it was already realized and embodied in the lives of Abraham (faith development), Jacob (character transformation) and Joseph (leadership development). This means we can learn from them how to respond to God's redemptive plan today. We now turn to explore this teaching before moving on to the Mosaic Covenant.

Chapter 6

Abraham and Faith Development

The account of the life of Abraham in Genesis 12-25 is a narrative with a coherent plot. And the narrator has made it obvious that the climax of the plot is in Genesis 22. For right after this chapter he quickly wraps up the life of Abraham: Genesis 23 records the death of his wife Sarah; Genesis 24 records the marriage of his heir Isaac; and Genesis 25 records his death.

Ultimate Test of Faith

Genesis 22 is about God testing Abraham to see whether he truly feared God and would thus obey Him at all costs. When Abraham passed the test, God swore by Himself that He would surely fulfill the terms of the Abrahamic Covenant (verses 16-18). God's promise by itself is already good enough. But to demonstrate to Abraham and thus also to all of us how unchangeable His purpose is, God guaranteed the promise with an oath, rendering it doubly certain that He will surely fulfill everything He promised in the Abrahamic Covenant (Hebrews 6:13-18).

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In the test God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, whom God had insisted to be his heir. The fact that child sacrifice is abominable to God is beside the point as God was only testing Abraham to see how he would respond. So when Abraham took the knife to slaughter his son, God stopped him just in time. Abraham must have had considered the apparent contradictory intentions of God. For if Isaac was to be sacrificed, how then could he be his heir?

Hebrews 11:17-19 explains that Abraham believed that after he had sacrificed Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. Where did Abraham learn this kind faith? We read that he had twice lied about his wife being his sister, each time to save his own life (Genesis 12:10-20; 20:1-18). He did not have this level of faith prior to Genesis 20. A coherent reading of the narrative of Genesis 12-22, bearing in mind that the plot climaxes in Genesis 22, will show that God Himself, beginning with Genesis 12, was preparing Abraham to pass the ultimate test of obedience in Genesis 22. For the plot of a narrative “functions to transform a chronicle or listing of events into a schematic whole by highlighting and recognizing the contribution that certain events make to the development and outcome of the story” (Polkinghorne 1988: 18-19). How then do the events narrated in Genesis 12-21 contribute to the outcome in Genesis 22?

General Growth in Faith

When Abraham responded to God’s call to leave his homeland, his father’s household and his relatives, God did not say that the promised great nation would come from Abraham’s biological descendants. The narrator sums up Abraham’s response: “So Abram went as the LORD had told him; and (read: but) Lot went with him” (Genesis 12:4). Why highlight that his nephew Lot went with him unless this is crucially significant? For this information is also included in the very next verse, which recounts as a matter of fact that Abraham took with him his wife Sarah, his nephew Lot and all his possessions.

Recall that Abraham was supposed to leave not only his homeland, but also his father’s household and his relatives. Hence he was not supposed to take Lot with him. Why then did he do it? The clue is already given in Genesis 11:27-32, which sets the stage for Genesis

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12 onwards. For it highlights the barrenness of Sarah (Abraham's wife), which means he had no son (yet), as well as the death of Lot's father (Abraham's brother), which means Lot could potentially become Abraham's heir (cf. Steinberg 1993: 50-52). This explains why Abraham took Lot with him. Abraham had enough faith to leave his homeland not knowing where he was going, but not enough faith to believe that God could give him descendants of his own to form the great nation God promised.

His obedience was thus incomplete as his faith was still infantile. It was only when Lot left him (13:1-13), that Abraham finally fulfilled his part completely, which also meant Abraham's hope that Lot might become his heir was dashed. Accordingly God specifically promised that Abraham's descendants would be very many and that they would possess Canaan (13:14-18). Through God's protection and blessing in his embarrassing encounter with the Pharaoh when he lied about his wife being his sister, and later in his dangerous expedition to rescue Lot (14:1-16), Abraham's faith would have grown.

In Genesis 15, the still childless Abraham proposed to God that his slave Eliezer be his heir. Only then did God reveal to him that his heir would come from his own body. When God then said that He would greatly multiply Abraham's (own) descendants, "Abraham believed in the LORD, and He credited it to him as righteousness" (verse 6). This signals an increase in faith.

When God further said that Abraham's descendants would possess Canaan, Abraham asked for a tangible assurance. God responded with the ceremony in which He unilaterally and unconditionally "signed" the Abrahamic Covenant. As pointed out in Hebrews, God's promise by itself would have sufficed. In formally "signing" the covenant after the manner of how human beings covenanted with one another, God condescended to the human level to help Abraham further believe in Him that His promise would come true.

When Sarah gave her maid Hagar to Abraham so that he could have an heir through her, Abraham accepted it because it made sense to him as this would fulfill God's condition that his heir would come from his own body (Genesis 16:1-4). After all it was Sarah who took the initiative, and what she did was in accordance with the custom of the time (Hamilton 1990: 444-45). And God did not say (not yet!)

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that his heir had to come from Sarah's body. Why not (yet)? Recall that Sarah was barren; so it would take greater faith to believe it.

Hagar bore Abraham a son, Ishmael. When Ishmael was a teenager and Abraham was too old to father any more children, God said to Abraham that his heir was to come from Sarah's body as well (Genesis 17:15-21). Since Abraham protested, pleading with God that Ishmael be his heir, it shows that hitherto Abraham did not have the faith to believe God for what is humanly impossible. But God insisted that Sarah's son, to be named Isaac, would be his heir. God even promised that she would bear Isaac "at this time next year." There is no indication that Abraham believed in this promise (not yet!).

Looking at Abraham's faith development, it makes sense why God did not reveal to Abraham at the beginning that his heir would be his own son through Sarah. For he obviously did not have the faith to believe that Sarah could bear him a son, and thus may not have responded to God's call to leave his homeland. The plot indicates that God revealed His intention stage by stage according to Abraham's level of faith, which God was helping him grow gradually.

Focused Growth in Faith

When God came to reassure Abraham in Genesis 18 that "at this time next year ... Sarah your wife shall have a son" (verse 10), Sarah overheard it and it was her turn to be skeptical. The narrative moves on to recount God's intention to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, as well as the actual destruction of the two wicked cities (Genesis 19). In the process Abraham learned how to intercede before God by praying for Lot and his family, who were then living in Sodom. This prepared him for what follows next in the plot.

Genesis 20 recounts the second time Abraham lied about his wife being his sister. Just like in the previous case, Sarah was taken by Abimelech. But unlike the previous case, God intervened before Abimelech touched Sarah. Otherwise, the paternity of Isaac would be in doubt as God had promised that in less than a year's time she would bear a son. God afflicted Abimelech with a fatal disease, and then said to him in a dream that he was going to die because he had taken a married woman. God had also closed the wombs of all the

Chapter 6: *Abraham and Faith Development*

women in his household. Acknowledging that Abimelech was sincerely mistaken about Sarah, God told him to return her to Abraham, adding that Abraham was “a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live.” Abimelech obeyed. Abraham prayed to God, and God healed Abimelech and opened the women’s wombs so “that they might have children once more” (verse 17; Westermann 1987: 148, 151; cf. Matthews 2005: 260).

Then Genesis 21 begins with, “The LORD visited Sarah as He had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son ...” Did Abraham and Sarah eventually believe that this was going to happen? There is no indication that they did prior to Genesis 20. This explains why God closed the wombs of the women in Abimelech’s household. For after seeing that God could open closed wombs in response to prayer (faith in God), Abraham and Sarah would surely believe that God could open her womb too. If God could open Sarah’s dead womb, God could surely rejuvenate Abraham. Genesis 20 is the narrator’s way of saying that Abraham and Sarah eventually believed.

Now we are ready to return to Genesis 22. We only need to add that Abraham obeyed God promptly as he began the journey “early in the morning.” And he evidently believed that God would raise Isaac from the dead. For we read that when Abraham left his servants for the place where he would sacrifice his son, he said to them, “Stay here ...; I and the boy will go over there, and we will worship and (we will) return to you” (verse 5).

How did Abraham learn this kind of faith? We saw that his faith in God concerning an heir had been increasing step by step. When Abraham finally believed in God that Sarah would bear him a son, he “recognized that his own body was as good as dead ... and the deadness of Sarah’s womb” (Romans 4:19). He had thus come a long way, from a polytheistic background, to complete faith in the Creator God who “gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not (yet) exist” (Romans 4:17). He obviously developed this level of faith from his experience in Genesis 20. When this faith had become sight in Genesis 21, it was just a small step forward to believe that God could literally raise Isaac from the dead.

Redemptive Faith and Obedience

We now consider the apparent contradiction that though God unilaterally and unconditionally guaranteed that He would fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 15), yet He later said to Abraham: “I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless, that I may confirm My covenant between Me and you, and will multiply you greatly (Genesis 17:1-2; see also 22:15-18; 26:3-5; but cf. 28:13-14). In other words, Abraham had to be obedient to God for the terms of the covenant to be realized.

There is really no contradiction. What it means is that in Genesis 15 God Himself alone guaranteed that Abraham would truly fear and obey Him, which Abraham demonstrated convincingly through passing the ultimate test in Genesis 22. It is like a driving instructor, who is so confident that he can teach a student with poor motor skills to pass the driving test in his first attempt, that he unilaterally and unconditionally gives the student a money-back guarantee. Like what God did with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-2, the instructor would still warn the student to drive properly even before the test. Of course no human instructor can be that confident. But we are talking about the divine Instructor here. In this case, God was confident that He could work in the life of Abraham such that Abraham’s faith would mature to the point where he would completely trust in the God to whom nothing is impossible as He created everything out of nothing.

Abraham’s obedience in Genesis 22 is due not just to the maturity, but also to the quality, of his faith. According to Genesis 15:6 Abraham’s faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, that is, counted as obedience to God (cf. Wenham 1987: 329-30; Hamilton 1990: 423-27). What kind of faith is this? It is significant that Genesis 15:6 says Abraham “believed *in the LORD*,” and not Abraham believed in what God had just promised. Of course the verse is indirectly saying Abraham believed in the promise, in the sense that he believed that what God had just promised—his descendants would be numerous like the stars—would come true. But by drawing our attention to his faith in God rather than his belief about the promise of God, the verse is saying that Abraham believed in the promise only because he believed (trusted) in the God who gave it.

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It may be helpful to spell out that the “believe in” in the phrase “*believe in a promise*” (in the sense that we believe that the promise will come true), does not have the same nuance as that in “*believe in (depend on) God*,” who makes the promise come true. And it is possible to believe in a promise of God but not believe (trust) in God Himself. In this case it is more than believing that a promise will come true, for it involves trusting in (depending on) the promise itself, rather than in God, to make the things promised come true. It is as though there is magical power just in believing that the promise will come true. This happens when a person believes that a promise of God will come true but refuses to obey God. For when we believe (trust) in God, we accept *everything* He says. This includes not only all His promises, but also all His commands. In other words faith in God will manifest itself as obedience to Him and His commands.

Abraham believed in God, not just believed in the promise of God. This was demonstrated when he obeyed God’s command to sacrifice Isaac. God had insisted that Isaac, and only Isaac, would be Abraham’s heir through whom Abraham’s descendants would come. So the command to sacrifice Isaac amounted to cancelling the promise of God. Abraham did not know that God was only testing him. If he had believed in the promise but not believed in God, he would not have obeyed God. But because Abraham believed in God, he would obey God as well as believe that God would not break His promise. So he believed that the promise would still come true even if he sacrificed Isaac. By faith (in God) Abraham reconciled the command with the promise by assuming that God would raise Isaac from the dead.

This understanding of Abraham’s faith helps us to also resolve an apparent contradiction in the New Testament. Both Paul and James consider the faith of Christians to be the same as that of Abraham. Paul argues that a Christian is justified (reckoned as righteous) by faith alone, and not by works (Romans 4:1-8). However James argues that a Christian is not justified by faith alone, but by works also (James 2:14-26). Significantly, both of them cite Genesis 15:6 in their respective arguments.

Paul was looking at Genesis 15:6 in and by itself. He is correct that Abraham was reckoned as righteous because of his faith (in

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God) alone. And it is the same for the Christian. Paul is opposing those who say works (obedience) is needed in addition to faith before one is justified. James himself makes it clear that he was looking at Genesis 15:6 in light of Genesis 22 (see James 2:21), where Abraham's faith was tested and confirmed to be a living faith through his obedience (works). Hence without works it is questionable whether one has faith (in God) at all. James is questioning those who say they have "faith" but have no works to back it up.

Chapter 7

Jacob and Character Transformation

We saw that Abraham's faith impressed even God. And his faith was contagious. His trusted servant was able to trust in God for guidance when he was sent on a difficult mission to find a suitable bride for his master's son Isaac from among his master's relatives in a faraway land (Genesis 24:12-14). And Isaac knew how to pray to God to open the barren womb of his wife Rebekah (Genesis 25:21).

Neither Isaac nor his faith was perfect. Like his father, he also lied about his wife being his sister for the same reason though in his case it was not pre-planned. To his credit, prior to this he obeyed God by not going down to Egypt to escape a famine (Genesis 26:1-7). Isaac is thus portrayed as a man of faith who was obedient to God though a pale reflection of his father. Other than his favoritism towards Esau his older son, we can infer that he lived a life that was reasonably consistent with God's will. He was thus a worthy heir to the Abrahamic Covenant.

The same could not (yet) be said of his younger son Jacob, who inherited the covenant from him. He was a deceiver. God had to do a thorough work on him before his life could be reasonably consistent

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with God's will. The plot covering Genesis 28-35 is about Jacob's character transformation. As we consider these chapters, we need to be mindful of the role of faith in character transformation. We will then see that inasmuch as faith in God manifests itself in obedience to Him and His commands, for people with obvious character flaws, it will also result in noticeable character change.

Manifesting Character Flaw

Jacob used deception twice to get what he wanted. In the first case, he deceived his brother into selling his birthright as the firstborn for just a bowl of stew (Genesis 25:29-34). This birthright meant a double share of the family inheritance (Deuteronomy 21:17). Then when Isaac was about to formally pass the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant to Esau, Jacob went along with his mother Rebekah's plan to deceive Isaac into passing it to him instead (Genesis 27:1-29; 28:3-4). Esau reacted to the second deception as though the birthright and the blessing were two separate things. But Hebrews 12:16-17 treats these as a unity; in this particular family the birthright of the firstborn comes with the blessing of the Abrahamic Covenant (Waltke 2001: 363-64). By selling it for just a meal, Esau "despised his birthright" (Genesis 25:34).

We are informed that it was God's idea all along that Jacob, not Esau, should inherit the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 25:23; cf. Romans 9:10-13). But Jacob's use of deception to get it obviously indicates that he did not believe in God. For faith in God will manifest itself in righteous conduct. The deceptions revealed an obvious character flaw in Jacob. Because of the second deception, Esau was so angry with Jacob that he wanted to kill him. Rebekah had to arrange for Jacob, her favorite son, to flee to her brother's place far away until Esau's anger subsided. It turned out that Jacob would be there for twenty years.

Suffering the Consequence

Jacob's character transformation thus began with him suffering the consequence of a wrong he committed. He "got away" the first time

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he deceived Esau. One may “get away” with even a few acts of injustice. But since these acts are symptoms of a person’s character flaw, he will continue to manifest them until his character is changed. He is not likely to “get away” every time unless he dies young. In fact it is better to get caught earlier, for one becomes bolder the more one “gets away,” and the wrong committed then becomes more blatant and the consequence more painful.

When Jacob fled home to a faraway place, he was desperate. This was when God could catch his attention. He spent the first night at a place he later named Bethel, which means “house of God,” for here he encountered God (Genesis 28:10-22). In a dream God affirmed the Abrahamic Covenant to him and promised to protect him wherever he went and to bring him back safely. Jacob on his part vowed that He would be his God if He would indeed protect and provide for him. Jacob was beginning to learn to trust in God. He exemplifies the tendency of fallen humanity to turn to God only when there is no other option.

There is no evidence that Jacob acknowledged that he had done wrong, let alone repented. The first step in character transformation is to acknowledge that one has done wrong and that one has a character flaw. Suffering the consequence of a wrong committed should help us do that. But if we choose to blame others for the pain, we will not only miss the opportunity to be changed for the better, it will also reinforce our character flaw.

When Jacob reached his uncle Laban’s place, he was well received. After Jacob had stayed there for a month, Laban asked him to name his wages as he did not want Jacob to serve him for nothing (Genesis 29:15). Jacob had fallen in love with Laban’s younger daughter Rachel, and so he offered to serve seven years for her hand. Laban agreed. The seven years went by like a few days to Jacob because of his love for Rachel. The wedding was held. The next morning, Jacob was shocked to discover that he had married Laban’s less attractive older daughter Leah instead. When he confronted his uncle about the deception, Laban explained that it was not their custom for the younger sister to marry first. He then promised to give Rachel to Jacob in a week’s time, but for another seven years of service.

Recognizing Character Flaw

Why did Jacob accept the extra seven years without protest? Laban had obviously deceived Jacob, and Jacob realized it. Jacob was getting a taste of his own medicine. Laban's deception also involved one sibling substituted for another; the medicine could not have tasted more similar. So Jacob had no moral standing to protest. He had been as guilty as his uncle. And Jacob had seven years, which must have felt like a few decades, to mull over this. This was a crucial phase in Jacob's character transformation.

Injustice is least obvious from the perspective of the person at the giving end. To neutral observers he has obviously done wrong, yet he may deny it and swear that his conscience is clear. Injustice is most obvious from the perspective of the person on the receiving end. To see injustice clearly we need to put ourselves in the victim's shoes. This is implied in the Great Commandment, "Love your neighbor as yourself," which summarizes the Ten Commandments (Leviticus 19:18; Romans 13:8-10). For it means loving (treating) another person as though we were that person. To do this we must first put ourselves in his shoes.

Jesus rephrased this commandment as, "Do to others what you want others do to you" (Matthew 7:12), which is known as the Golden Rule. This rule, especially the negative version, "Do not do to others what you do not want others do to you," is taught in virtually every religion (Neusner and Chilton 2008), and is acknowledged by even atheists (Epstein 2009).

However, to avoid misunderstanding, we need to clarify that the Golden Rule is another way of saying, "Do justice and love mercy" (Micah 6:8), for this also summarizes the Ten Commandments (cf. Wattles 1996: 46-48). Hence, the Golden Rule is about treating others with justice (tempered with mercy when mercy is deserved), and not about acting out our personal desires or preferences. Otherwise a policeman who has apprehended a criminal will have to release him as this is how the policeman himself would desire to be treated if he were in the shoes of the criminal. The policeman would be doing injustice if he releases the criminal, and the criminal himself recognizes it though he desires to be released.

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The Golden Rule requires us to put ourselves in the shoes of those on the receiving end so that we can better fulfill God's purpose in doing justice and loving mercy. Fallen human beings do not naturally want to do this. In fact they resist it. This is why the Golden Rule is "hard to follow. Religious and secular people alike fail at it all the time" (Epstein 2009: 114). Only a genuinely God-fearing person who recognizes that his "neighbors" are made in the image of God will want to do this.

Like Jacob, we may be forced into the shoes of those on the receiving end. These are opportunities for us to acknowledge and repent of the wrongs we have done to others. For even one who regularly mistreats others and claims that his conscience is clear can still recognize injustice when what he did to others is done to him. He may choose to acknowledge that he had been doing the same thing to others and repent, or he may choose to deny it, claiming that what was done to him is "different" from what he did to others, when the only real difference is who the victim is. This amounts to blatant rebellion against God as the truth is now staring at him.

Repentance and Faith

Based on Jacob's changed character later in the narrative, we can infer that Jacob did come to acknowledge his wrong and repented. The next phase of Jacob's character transformation focuses on him developing a negative feeling towards deception (the specific expression of his character flaw), and learning to trust in God to protect and to provide so that he would not again feel the need to use deception.

After completing the second seven years of service, Jacob asked his uncle's permission to go home. By then he had two wives, their respective maids, who also bore him children, and eleven sons and a daughter. Laban, who recognized that he had been blessed by Jacob's God on Jacob's account, refused to let Jacob go and asked him to name his wages again. Jacob accepted the offer and proposed that from the animals under his care, all the rare ones, such as a black sheep or a spotted or striped goat, would be his wages (Genesis 30:31-33). Laban agreed, but cheated by immediately removing the existing rare ones so that Jacob had none to begin with. Jacob then

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practiced selective breeding and the animals he pastured kept producing rare ones (see Hamilton 1995: 283-84). He outwitted, but did not deceive, Laban.

According to Jacob's own testimony it was God who was blessing him (Genesis 31:6-12). God first gave him the idea to choose the rare ones to be his wages. Though Laban changed Jacob's wages "ten times," God ensured Jacob continued to prosper. For instance, when Laban changed his wages to only striped animals, the animals produced striped ones. After six years, God told Jacob to take his family and wealth and leave (Genesis 31:3). He left without informing Laban. He did not deceive his uncle; he just did not honor him, for otherwise he would not get to leave. Laban deserved it.

Through enduring six years of Laban's deception and seeing how God prospered him despite that, Jacob learned to trust in God as well as developed a negative feeling towards deception. When Laban caught up with Jacob and testified that Jacob's God had warned him not to harm Jacob (Genesis 31:29), it reinforced in Jacob's heart that God was true to His promise to protect him.

Bearing Fruit of Repentance

After this, Jacob sent messengers to Esau to inform him that he was coming to see him (Genesis 32:3-5). This clearly indicates that he had repented of his wrong against his brother. But when the messengers returned and informed Jacob that Esau was coming to meet him with four hundred men, Jacob panicked, for his last memory of Esau was an angry man who wanted to kill him. His fear climaxed the night before he met Esau. He prayed earnestly to God to protect him. That night he wrestled with a man and would not let Him go until He blessed Jacob (Genesis 32:24-32). The man was actually a manifestation of God (cf. Genesis 16:7-14; Judges 13:3-22), who changed Jacob's name to Israel. Through this encounter Jacob sought and received the assurance that his prayer was answered. And the change in name indicates a change in character.

When Esau met Jacob, he was so glad to see his younger brother (Genesis 33:1-16). He had obviously forgiven Jacob, who not knowing this, had feared needlessly. Having now been reconciled to his

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brother, Jacob could put his past behind him and move on. Before God instructed him to return to Bethel to fulfill his vow made there twenty years ago (Genesis 35), something tragic happened to his family that would complete the process of Jacob's character transformation (Genesis 34).

When they camped outside Shechem, Jacob's daughter Dinah visited the women in the city and was raped by Shechem, son of Hamor, the prince of the land. Shechem then asked his father to get Dinah to be his wife. When Hamor met Jacob to ask for Dinah's hand, the sons of Jacob agreed on condition that all the males in the city became like them, that is, circumcised. Hamor managed to convince the men in the city to accept this condition in view of Jacob's wealth. When the men were still in pain, Simeon and Levi, two of Dinah's full-brothers, went into the city. They not only killed Hamor and Shechem and "rescued" Dinah, they also killed every male and looted the city. They used deception to take revenge.

Jacob became very fearful that the cities around them would punish them for this crime. Deceiving others had now become something dreadful to him. A man who truly fears God has two characteristics. Firstly, he trusts in God and so feels no need to use unjust means in his dealings with others. Jacob developed this characteristic by the time he met Esau. Secondly, a God-fearing man feels a healthy "fear" within him that constrains him to do right and restrains him from doing wrong. Jacob developed this characteristic by the time they left the vicinity of Shechem.

As they journeyed to Bethel, God protected them by putting a fear over the surrounding cities. Before arriving, Jacob asked his household to put away their idols and purify themselves. As an act that indicated he was fulfilling his vow, he built an altar there to God. His return to Bethel marked the completion of his character transformation. There God reaffirmed the change of his name as well as the Abrahamic Covenant.

Soon after, Jacob's beloved wife Rachel died while giving birth to his twelfth son. The rest of Genesis portrayed Jacob as an honest man, with one fault. Like his parents, he showed favoritism—he favored Joseph and Benjamin, the two sons of Rachel, over his other sons. But God used this to fulfill His purpose

Chapter 8

Joseph and Leadership Development

Leadership involves three basic qualities: character, conviction, and competence (cf. Berkley 2008: 45). A person of *character* is one who would “do justice and love mercy.” Character is needed in every calling, but is particularly crucial to leadership. For people vested with power are prone to abuse it and hurt others and the cause they represent. Also, a true leader is one whom people follow *willingly* because they believe he can be trusted to “do justice and love mercy.”

Not many, however, would follow one who has no direction, no matter how trustworthy he is. A leader not only needs to know where he is going, he must also have the *conviction* that this is where he should be leading his people. A conviction is a deep-seated belief that enables one to weather the toughest storm. The deepest conviction is that which springs from faith in God. For unless one believes deeply that it is God who has called him to lead the people to where they are going, his “conviction” is not a belief that he would die for.

Needless to add, a leader also needs to know how to lead the people to where they should be going. He thus needs to have the relevant *competence*. Different types of leadership, such as leadership in

the army as opposed to leadership in the university, require different sets of skills. Since competence is related to one's talents, one's calling in leadership is usually in line with one's innate abilities. And since these abilities still need to be honed through training and experience, leadership development covers this leadership quality as well.

Painful Path to Leadership

The life of Joseph as recounted in Genesis 37-50 embodies leadership development. When Joseph was seventeen years old, God revealed to him that he would one day be a ruler; this was fulfilled about thirteen years later when he became the Prime Minister (PM) of Egypt. However when he shared this with his family, even his father rebuked him for being so presumptuous. His older brothers, who were already jealous of him because of the blatant favoritism of their father towards him, hated him even more.

Joseph's becoming the PM of Egypt was part of God's plan to bring the whole family into a "foreign land" (see Genesis 15:13-14). In order for this plan to be accomplished, God had to do three things: prepare Joseph for the position; place him there; get the family to emigrate to Egypt. We will read the narrative with these interpretive keys in mind.

Because of their hatred towards Joseph, his older brothers sold him to some traders, and then lied to their father that he had been torn apart by a wild animal. The traders were on their way to Egypt and they sold Joseph as a slave to Potiphar, an important officer of Pharaoh. But God was with Joseph and prospered him so much that he was ultimately promoted to become the CEO of Potiphar's estate. However, Joseph was falsely accused of attempted rape and thus imprisoned when he rejected the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife.

In prison, God was again with Joseph and he became the warden's assistant. It was here that he met Pharaoh's chief cupbearer and chief baker, who were imprisoned because they had offended the monarch. Each of them had a divinely inspired dream, which Joseph was able to interpret. Just as Joseph's interpretations had predicted, within three days the baker was executed and the cupbearer restored to his position. Joseph had shared with the cupbearer that he was

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wrongly imprisoned and asked him to “remember me” when he got out. But he forgot about Joseph.

After two years, the cupbearer remembered Joseph when Pharaoh had two dreams that his wisemen could not interpret. Joseph interpreted both the dreams as having the same message: there was going to be seven years of great plenty followed by seven years of severe famine. He then proposed to Pharaoh to appoint a capable man to oversee the stockpiling of one-fifth of the produce in Egypt during the seven years of plenty. Pharaoh was so impressed with Joseph that he appointed him PM to oversee such a massive project. The famine turned out to be not only severe but widespread; even his brothers in Canaan had to come to Egypt to buy food.

Role of Divine Providence

God worked in and through events and circumstances so that Joseph eventually became the PM of Egypt. The term “providence” refers to what God does after He had completed His work of creation. It includes what He does to ensure that His purpose for humanity as well as His plans for specific individuals will be accomplished, as in the case of Joseph.

God works in three ways. Firstly, He works through *ordinary* events. There were two turning points in the life of Joseph, without which he would not have become the PM of Egypt, namely, being sold as a slave and being put in prison. Both events were caused by human jealousy, so nothing extraordinary was involved. These events were followed by two *extraordinary* ones, namely, the two sets of divinely inspired dreams that Joseph interpreted, without which he would have remained in prison. God usually works through ordinary events, but occasionally He uses extraordinary means as well.

There was also a set of circumstances without which God’s plan could not be accomplished. The traders happened to be going to Egypt and they happened to sell Joseph to Potiphar. The two servants of Pharaoh happened to be imprisoned and the cupbearer happened to forget about Joseph. These circumstances are what we call “coincidences.” But when a series of coincidences line up in such a way that it accomplishes a pre-announced plan, they are not random

coincidences. We call this the *extraordinary-ordinary* means of providence as it has elements of both. As we shall see, this is taught more clearly in the Book of Esther.

Cultivating Leadership Qualities

How then did God prepare Joseph to be the PM of Egypt? In terms of his *character*, it was refined through his ordeal of being sold as a slave by his own brothers and being imprisoned for having done the right thing. In view of the powerful position he was going to hold, he needed to be put on the receiving end of injustice and suffer much so that he would do justice and love mercy when placed at the giving end of power. The fact that he prospered in both situations showed that he responded positively to the ordeal. If he had been unforgiving and bitter, his life story would have been different.

God revealed to Joseph in advance that he was going to be a ruler. Yet for the next thirteen years he was either a slave or a prisoner. Psalm 105:19 tells us that, until what he told his family (he was going to be a ruler) came to pass, what God revealed to him (he was going to be a ruler) tested him. When God's word finally came true, the ordeal had not only refined his character, but also inspired in him the *conviction* that God had sent him to Egypt for a purpose. For when he revealed himself to his brothers, he could comfort them saying, "it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Genesis 45:8).

A Prime Minister needs not only political but also economic skills, especially in times of economic crises. Joseph developed economic and political *competence* as a slave in Potiphar's household. For him to rise up from the bottom to the top as the CEO of Potiphar's estate, he would have developed this competence on his way up. His political skills were further honed in prison when he was put in charge of all the prisoners.

Hence being a slave and a prisoner not only refined his character, but also enabled him to develop the conviction and competence needed to be the PM of Egypt. In other words, the painful journey that placed him in that powerful position was the same journey that prepared him to function there (cf. Clinton 2012).

Demonstrating Leadership Qualities

Joseph put his political skills to work in overseeing the stockpiling of grain throughout Egypt during the years of plenty. But his political skills were best seen in how he treated his brothers when they came to buy food during the famine. They could not recognize him. Though Joseph recognized them, he did not reveal who he was and instead spoke to them through an interpreter. He accused them of being spies and interrogated them. In the process they mentioned their youngest brother Benjamin, the other son of his mother Rachel, who was at home with their father.

After detaining them for three days, Joseph withheld Simeon and let the rest return home with the grain they bought. He told them to bring their youngest brother on their next trip to prove their innocence. They knew how difficult this was going to be. For their father Jacob had lost Joseph (because of them!), and so would not risk losing Benjamin by letting him come along. So they had put themselves in this predicament. Not knowing that Joseph could understand them, they confessed to one another their guilt in selling Joseph; they considered their present distress a retribution for that wrong. Joseph turned away and wept.

For their next trip, Judah managed to persuade their father to let Benjamin go with them. It was not easy. Reuben, his oldest brother, had tried earlier but failed. Why did Judah succeed where Reuben failed? Partly it was because by then they had eaten all the grain they bought from Egypt, and partly because Jacob was convinced Judah could be trusted to protect Benjamin. Reuben had said to Jacob that if he did not bring Benjamin back, his father could kill his two sons. This shows he would rather risk losing two sons (even his own) than risk losing his own life. But losing two (favorite) sons was exactly his father's fears. Can Reuben then be trusted to ensure his father would not lose two sons?

Judah on the other hand said to his father that he would take the blame personally. In further contrast to Reuben, he understood Jacob's fears and realized his father could die of heartbreak if Benjamin did not come back. For in Genesis 38 we read that Judah himself had lost two sons and was very protective over his then youngest son. He

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had thus developed the conviction needed to convince Jacob that he would do everything he could to protect Benjamin.

When the brothers returned to Egypt with Benjamin, Joseph invited all of them to dinner at his home. There he demonstrated very blatant favoritism towards Benjamin. Just as his father had blatantly favored him resulting in his brothers selling him, Joseph was effectively “turning back the wheel of time to the original crime against himself, with the circumstances reproduced and the ten ranged against Benjamin” (Sternberg 1985: 303; cited in Matthews 2005: 792). But this time it did not bother them, for they enjoyed their dinner as if nothing happened.

After dinner Joseph trapped Benjamin so that he could detain him. Judah, speaking with conviction, made an impassioned plea to take Benjamin’s place, saying that otherwise his father would die from losing another (favorite) son. Joseph could not hold back his tears and wept openly, and revealed who he was.

Subsequently Joseph asked for his father to join him in Egypt as the famine would last five more years. With the blessings of God, Jacob brought his entire family to Egypt. Naturally he had appointed Judah to take the lead. Judah had natural leadership *competence*; he masterminded the selling of Joseph. Genesis 38, besides showing how Judah developed the *conviction* needed to persuade his father, also indicates a *character* transformation in Judah. For he readily admitted his wrong against his daughter-in-law Tamar when he discovered why she had deceived him. And he redeemed his wrong against Joseph in pleading to take Benjamin’s place. Thus he became a worthy recipient of the honor that kingship would remain within the tribe of Judah (Genesis 49:8-10).

It is easy to misunderstand Joseph in the way he “mistreated” his brothers. But the fact that he turned away and wept when he heard their confessions, and wept loudly when he revealed himself, and then told them not to be grieved for having sold him, showed that he had no ill intentions. And when he heard that they were again fearful of him after their father had died, he wept. He reassured them there was nothing to fear and added that, “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Thus Joseph had already forgiven them. Why then the apparent mistreatment?

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By not revealing himself too soon Joseph was able to observe their genuine responses. For “if Joseph had immediately disclosed himself to his brothers and they had professed their guilt and repentance for their wrong to him, would he really know if their repentance was genuine? Or, for that matter, would *we*?” (Mann 1988: 73). Genuine repentance results in a changed disposition and thus changed actions (Luke 3:7-14). The drama of “mistreatment” at his home was needed to test if they had indeed changed. For “Only by recreating something of the original situation—the brothers again in control of the life and death of a son of Rachel—can Yosef be sure that they have changed” (Fox 1983: 202; cited in Waltke 2001: 566).

As Fretheim (1994: 630) puts it, “The brothers need to pass through an ordeal in order to bring their memories and guilt to the surface, where it can be dealt with adequately, before reconciliation can truly take place, and hence safeguard the future of the family.” For reconciliation requires the betrayed party to be able to trust the guilty party once again. Joseph could choose to unilaterally forgive his brothers, and he did, but to be able to trust them again he needed to regain the confidence that they were worthy of his trust. This was not possible unless Joseph could see genuine repentance, resulting in real change, in his brothers. In fact forgiveness is not experienced until there is reconciliation.

As for Joseph’s economic skills, they were put to use in his proposal to stockpile food. Businessmen today, though aware of the business cycle of economic boom and bust, often fail to practice this principle. But Joseph’s economic skills are better seen from the way he treated the Egyptians during the famine. Instead of distributing the grain as “free handouts,” he made the people buy it. And when their money ran out, they had to give their livestock, and finally even themselves and their land, in exchange for grain. When the famine was over, Joseph gave them seed to sow on their (previous) land, but required them to present one-fifth of their produce to Pharaoh. Was Joseph being tyrannical in thus “enslaving” the Egyptians?

To understand a narrative we are dependent on the narrator. In the first part of the narrative, he portrays Joseph as a God-fearing man. And he tells us that the Egyptians themselves asked to be “slaves of Pharaoh” (Genesis 47:19). Also, in Genesis 47:25 he tells

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us that they “do not regard Joseph as a tyrant but as a savior” (Waltke 2001: 591). In view of possible famines, this economic reform was actually beneficial to them, “for now their food supply was Pharaoh’s responsibility” (Wenham 1994: 449).

What Joseph did was apply an economic principle implied in Old Testament laws, that is, free or unconditional handouts can do more harm than good (cf. Payne 1998). For instance, farmers were forbidden to harvest the corners of their field so that the needy could come and glean and thus support themselves (Leviticus 19:9-10). It was not a free handout as they had to work with their hands. What this means is that there must be room in an economy to empower the needy who are able-bodied to support themselves (cf. Carlson-Thies 1999: 474-76). Cases like one-off handouts to people who have just suffered a calamity are not the same as giving on-going handouts to people who can work.

In any case, the beneficial economic reform required a “corporate tax” of just 20%, which was low compared to the average of more than 33% in that part of the ancient world (Waltke 2001: 591).

Hence we have seen how the leadership qualities of character, conviction and competence are developed and demonstrated in the life of Joseph. Recall that faith in God has a role in the formation or transformation of character as well as in the cultivation of conviction. Since character and conviction are fundamental to leadership, faith in God has a role in leadership development.

Every human being has some kind of God-given competence; when this is honed, a person of character and conviction can be a leader in some way in his sphere of influence. This means through faith in God, one can not only become part of God’s redemptive plan, but also contribute significantly to God’s purpose for humanity—the Creation Mandate.

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Part IV

The Mosaic Covenant

Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Chapter 9

Moses and the Exodus

A new phase in God's redemptive plan began with the Book of Exodus. The family of Jacob had multiplied into a nation. The 400 years of sojourn in Egypt was coming to an end. A Pharaoh who "did not know Joseph" had come to power. He claimed to be concerned that the rapid numerical growth of the Israelites might cause them to rebel and "escape from the land." So he imposed forced labor upon them, and even decreed that their male infants be thrown into the Nile. He did not realize that these unjust measures, supposedly to prevent the Israelites from leaving Egypt, had the unintended consequence of actually propelling it.

God's Providence in the Exodus

God allowed the Israelites to be oppressed so that they would be willing to leave Egypt. In fact they cried out to God for deliverance, and He responded by calling Moses to lead the nation in an exodus out of Egypt into Canaan (Exodus 3-4). God Himself said He was doing this because of the Abrahamic Covenant (Exodus 2:24-25; 6:6-8; cf. Genesis 15:13-14). The journey from Egypt to Canaan involved crossing the Sinai Peninsula. To lead such a large group of people

across the wilderness required Moses to have the competence of a military leader as well as that of a capable shepherd familiar with the terrain. God had prepared Moses for this mission even before the Israelites cried out for deliverance (Exodus 1-2)!

Pharaoh's decree to throw the male Israelite infants into the Nile led to Moses being adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. So Moses was raised as a prince. This included a privileged education in reading, writing and speaking as well as in military leadership (cf. Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000: 78). When Moses killed an Egyptian in defense of an Israelite, he had to flee to Midian and became a shepherd in the Sinai Peninsula. When he was ready to lead Israel in the Exodus, God called him to return to Egypt and request Pharaoh to let the Israelites go.

In the Old Testament God's name is represented by the Hebrew word YHWH, which scholars today vocalize as "Yahweh" (formerly "Jehovah"). In this exposition we follow the convention of translating it as "the LORD." When God called Moses, He revealed the significance of this name as "I AM WHO I AM" (Exodus 3:13-14; cf. 6:2-4; Waltke 2006: 364-69). YHWH "is the third person masculine singular" of the Hebrew verb "to be"; the Hebrew word for "I AM" "is the corresponding first person singular" (Sarna 1991: 17-18). In other words, YHWH ("HE IS") "expresses the quality of absolute Being, the eternal, unchanging, dynamic presence" (17). In this context it implies (cf. Exodus 33:19), "I am there, wherever it may be ... I am really there!" (Childs 1974: 69). Hence "God will always be there for his people" (Hamilton 2011: 66). With respect to the Exodus, "The name of Yahweh functions as a guarantee that the reality of God stands behind the promise [God gave to Abraham] and will execute its fulfillment" (Childs 1974: 115). Moses was thus assured that his mission would succeed regardless of Pharaoh's response to the request to let the Israelites go.

When Moses approached Pharaoh, of course he refused (Exodus 5-6), resulting in a series of power encounters in the form of the famous Ten Plagues (Exodus 6-12). After the tenth plague, Pharaoh relented and let the Israelites go, only to regret it. The ensuing pursuit resulted in his total defeat when God opened up the "Red Sea" to let His people cross over and closed it back on the pursuing army. God

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demonstrated His power not just so that they “may know that there is none like Me in all the earth,” but also “to proclaim My name through all the earth” (Exodus 9:14-16). Thus, in line with the Abrahamic Covenant, God had the nations in mind when He redeemed Israel from the tyranny of Pharaoh.

Two months after leaving Egypt the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai (Exodus 12-18) and camped there for eleven months. What we read in Exodus 19-40, the whole of Leviticus and Numbers 1:1-10:10 is a record of what happened at Sinai.

God’s Goal for the Exodus

The first significant event was God making a covenant with Israel through Moses, known as the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 19). God said to the nation that if they would obey His voice and keep this covenant, they would be God’s “treasured possession among all peoples,” and would be to Him “a holy nation” and “a kingdom of priests” (verses 5-6). This is a more elaborate way of saying the nation would indeed be God’s people and God would indeed be their God (Exodus 6:7). Prior to this God had already called Israel “My people” (Exodus 3:7; 5:1). But to experience that relationship they needed to keep the Mosaic Covenant.

To obey God’s voice means total submission to Him, not just to His expressed will (cf. Fretheim 1991: 210-12). After the people unanimously agreed to enter into the covenant, God revealed that keeping the Mosaic Covenant involved observing the Ten Commandments and all the laws based on it (Exodus 20-23). The covenant was then formally ratified (Exodus 24). Keeping the covenant would allow Israel to possess and remain in the Promised Land. On God’s part, He would not only keep His promise to bless them, but also dwell among them through the Tabernacle (Exodus 25:8).

The second half of the Book of Exodus concerns the Tabernacle, its construction and related matters, such as the setting apart of Moses’ brother Aaron and his sons as priests (Exodus 25-40). After the Tabernacle was constructed, God made His presence felt in a visible manner. Leviticus then records the instructions and laws governing the functioning of the Tabernacle, and how Israel should live in light

of God's dwelling in their midst. It also narrates the formal consecration of Aaron as high priest and his sons as priests as well as the beginning of the priesthood (Leviticus 8-10).

Rejection of the First Generation

Israel was then ready to move on to Canaan. A census was taken of all the males twenty years old and above who were able to go to war (Numbers 1). The Levites were exempted as they were called to take care of the Tabernacle. This implies the need to fight real battles to capture Canaan, as well as to trust in God to ensure victory. This was exemplified in their victory over the Amalekites on their way to Sinai (Exodus 17:8-13). Joshua, Moses' assistant, and his men overcame the Amalekites only when Moses' hands remained lifted up, an expression of faith in God.

Before leaving Sinai they celebrated the first Passover to commemorate how God took them out of Egypt (Numbers 9). The Passover was instituted when they left Egypt so they, and future generations, would remember the Exodus and remain committed to keep the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 12:21-27; Deuteronomy 5:15; 6:20-25).

When they arrived at Kadesh Barnea, the southern gateway into Canaan, Moses sent out twelve men to spy out the land before going in to capture it (Numbers 14-15). Ten of the twelve came back with the report that though the land was indeed very good, the people there were too strong for them to capture it. Only two, Joshua and Caleb, believed otherwise. Caleb in fact spoke with conviction, "We should certainly go up to take possession of it, for we are surely able to do it" (Numbers 13:30; Joshua 14:7).

The task was indeed formidable; the Canaanites were not only strong, their cities were large and fortified. What then enabled Caleb to speak with conviction that they could capture the land? Obviously this conviction was based on the belief that if God could perform the ten plagues and open up the Red Sea, nothing is impossible with Him. The ten also witnessed the same series of miracles; why then did they not share Caleb's conviction? God Himself has provided the answer: Caleb "has a different spirit and has followed Me fully" (Numbers 14:24).

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The ten (and most of the Israelites) had not been following God fully. In fact just three days into the wilderness after crossing the Red Sea and celebrating the miraculous victory, they grumbled when they had no water to drink (Exodus 15). If God could open up the Red Sea, could He not provide water in the wilderness? Their miraculous experiences did not build in them the conviction that with God nothing is impossible because they did not have an obedient spirit. So they failed to believe in God and to follow Him when circumstances were difficult. For a disobedient spirit is an unbelieving spirit to begin with. This nullified the faith-building experiences that they had.

Not surprisingly the nation as a whole listened to the ten faithless men and feared the Canaanites, and thus rebelled against God. Because they failed to believe in God and thus refused to “listen to God’s voice,” God decided that those twenty years and above, except Joshua and Caleb, would die in the wilderness. God would only bring the next generation into the Promised Land. Israel then spent thirty-eight years of wandering in the wilderness waiting for the older generation to die off.

Preparation of the Next Generation

Relatively few events are recorded in the account of these thirty-eight years, giving the impression that there were not many events worth recording. We will highlight a few of the recorded events that exemplify the three categories of temptations that human beings then and now are prone to fall into: money, power and sex.

Numbers 16 records the rebellion led by Korah, Dathan and Abiram against the leadership of Moses and Aaron. Insofar as Moses and Aaron were both called by God to lead Israel, the rebellion was against God Himself. They were envious of their God-chosen leaders. Their rebellion was really a *power* struggle, and they were severely punished by God.

People who are envious of those God has given the privilege of leadership need to realize that to those more is given, more is required (Luke 12:48). Moses was a humble man (Numbers 12:3). For instance, just before arriving at Sinai, he readily accepted his father-in-law’s advice to share his authority with others so that they could

share his workload (Exodus 18). But Numbers 20 records the incident where Moses and Aaron were disqualified from entering the Promised Land when they disobeyed God. The people had assembled against them because of the lack of water. Out of frustration Moses struck the rock twice with his staff to bring out water instead of speaking to it. Aaron was implicated because he was co-leading with Moses, and God had in fact commanded *both* of them to speak to the rock (verses 2, 6, 8, 10, 12). Even granted that what Moses did was not just disobedience, but also an abuse of God's authority symbolized by the staff (Lim 1997), given the circumstances, the punishment still seems too harsh. God's judgment seems unfair until we recognize that leaders incur a stricter judgment (cf. James 3:1), especially when they abuse the authority vested on them.

Toward the end of the wandering, on their way to the east of Canaan, the Israelites defeated Sihon king of the Amorites and then Og king of Bashan (Numbers 21:21-35). Thus Israel took over their respective lands, which were east of the Jordan River. Israel fought both battles purely out of self-defense, and the lands they possessed as a result, which were eventually occupied by the tribe of Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh, were not part of the original Promised Land (Numbers 32).

Seeing what happened to Sihon and Og, Balak king of Moab sent messengers to Balaam, a renowned diviner, wanting to hire him for a fee to curse Israel (Numbers 22). Balaam said he needed to get permission from the God of Israel. Obviously God said "No." So he turned down the offer. But he reconsidered it when Balak sent a more distinguished group of messengers offering to "surely honor you richly, and ... do whatever you say" (verse 17), which amounted to a "payment in the form of a blank check" (Olson 1996: 143). He insisted no amount of money could buy his services unless God gave him permission. This time God gave him permission to go with the messengers, but he must only do what God tells him to do.

On the way, God was angry with Balaam and he almost lost his life. Unless we accuse the all-knowing God of being capricious, in light of the *money* promised, Balaam must have harbored in his heart the thought of cursing Israel (cf. Cole 2000: 388-89). This is supported by the fact that God warned Balaam again that he must only do

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what God tells him to do (verse 35). Furthermore Balaam did have evil intentions toward Israel (see below). It is hard to believe that Balaam could not be tempted even in his heart by the offer of a “blank check.” The very fact that he would reconsider the request to curse Israel, even after God had already said “No,” reveals that he had found the tempting offer rather difficult to resist. It was only after this near-death encounter with God that Balaam could be used by God to bless Israel through five God-inspired oracles (Numbers 23-24). In this way God “turned the (intended) curse into a blessing” (Deuteronomy 23:5).

When Israel was camped at Shittim, which was their last station before they crossed the Jordan River into Canaan, “the men began to indulge in sexual immorality with Moabite women, who invited them to the sacrifices to their gods” (Numbers 25:1-2 NIV). The mastermind behind this deadly trap was none other than Balaam (Numbers 31:16). He managed to use *sex* to trap the Israelite men into worshipping foreign gods. With God on their side, God’s people need fear no external intimidation, only internal corruption. Many people died as a consequence. It was a terrifying thing to have the Holy God dwell in their midst. We will appreciate this better when we take a closer look at the Ten Commandments and the Tabernacle.

By now all those who were not supposed to enter the Promised Land, except Moses, were dead (cf. Deuteronomy 2:14-16). A second census was taken, and Joshua was commissioned to succeed Moses (Numbers 26; 27:12-23). Before Israel was fully ready to enter and capture Canaan, God had one last thing for Moses to do. Through a series of speeches, recorded in Deuteronomy, Moses renewed the Mosaic Covenant with the second generation of Israelites and admonished them to observe it. Then, having seen the Promised Land from afar, Moses died even though “his eye was not dimmed, nor his vigor abated” (Deuteronomy 34:7).

Creation Mandate Applied Nationally

To better understand God’s purpose for the Exodus and the Mosaic Covenant, we need to backtrack and consider the larger context. The Mosaic Covenant, not just the Exodus, is a development and fulfill-

ment of the Abrahamic Covenant (see Exodus 6:2-8; cf. Fretheim 1991: 208-209). Israel became God's people because of the covenant God made with Abraham (Deuteronomy 7:6-8). Inasmuch as God chose Abraham by grace (Joshua 24:2-4), Israel became God's people by grace (cf. Joshua 24:14; Ezekiel 20:1-17).

However, because God is holy, God's people must be holy by keeping the Mosaic Covenant (Leviticus 19:2). Israel was called (by grace) to be a "*holy nation*" so as to be "a kingdom of *priests*." This means, "Through divine favour, Israel is said to enjoy an affinity, or fitness [being holy] for access [as priests] to the divine dwelling place, the presence of God" (Davies 2004: 238). Since priests function as intermediaries between God and humanity, this calling also means bearing witness to God. Having been set apart as holy (in position), the nation must also be holy (in practice) by observing the Ten Commandments. The nations would then say of God's people, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people" (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). Israel would then have the credibility to declare to the nations God's glory, sovereignty and judgment of the world, and call them to worship Him (Psalm 96).

This is in line with the Abrahamic Covenant that Israel was to be a blessing to the nations. Recall that the Abrahamic Covenant is God's plan to redeem humanity through the nation of Israel. And, as we have noted, redeeming humanity is God's means of redeeming civilization to fulfill the Creation Mandate. Thus the Creation Mandate was reapplied (nationally) through the Mosaic Covenant to build a national civilization that would be both consistent with God's will and in fellowship with Him.

Israel was to live out God's idea of nationhood as a model for all nations. This is why Israel was called a "*holy nation*" and a "*kingdom of priest*." So God's will must be embodied not just in their personal life, but also in their national life. Thus God's will must be manifested in the nation in the social, economic and even political realms. As Walter Brueggemann (1994: 835) puts it, "Israel is to be a community in which worldly [secular] power and holy purpose converge."

It is significant that Israel was oppressed in the social, economic and political realms before God redeemed them out of Egypt. It was a sharp contrast to the national civilization Israel was called to build

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in Canaan. This should have given them the motivation to not only build such a nation, but also refrain from mistreating the resident aliens in their midst. For they knew what it meant to be mistreated as resident aliens in Egypt. In other words, the remembrance of the Exodus through observing the Passover should motivate them to keep the Mosaic Covenant by loving their neighbors—both the natives and the resident aliens—as themselves (Leviticus 19:33-34; cf. 24:22).

Israel must be holy because, as God's people, God was dwelling in their midst through the Tabernacle. They were to build a national civilization that was not only consistent with God's will, but also in fellowship with God. And we saw how terrifying it can be for the Holy God to dwell in the midst of fallen human beings. But it was necessary for Israel to take this risk, for in fulfilling the Creation Mandate nationally, the nation was to be a model for all nations also in terms of being in fellowship with God.

When the nations of the world are eventually blessed, a global civilization that is consistent with God's will and in fellowship with Him shall emerge.

Chapter 10

The Ten Commandments

At the heart of the Mosaic Covenant is the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17). By observing these commandments (from the heart), Israel would be building a national civilization that is consistent with God's will. And the nation would be holy enough for the Holy God to dwell in their midst. To better appreciate the meaning of the Ten Commandments we re-present it as follows (adapted from Kaiser 1983: 84):

- I am (being) the LORD, who redeemed you from slavery,
- (1) You shall have no other gods besides Me;
 - (2) You shall not make any image as an object of worship;
 - (3) You shall not abuse the name of the LORD your God.
- (4) Remembering the Sabbath day to keep it holy,
 You shall not work more than six days in a week.
- (5) Honoring your father and your mother,
- (6) You shall not murder;
 - (7) You shall not commit adultery;
 - (8) You shall not steal;
 - (9) You shall not bear false witness;
 - (10) You shall not covet what others have.

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This way of presenting the Ten Commandments retains the imperative (command) sense of the Hebrew words usually translated “remember” and “honor,” as well as enables us to classify neatly the commandments into three categories: relationship with God (commandments 1-3); relationship with money (commandment 4); and relationship with people (commandments 5-10).

Relationship with God

The first three commandments are based directly on who God is. The Bible presents God as omnipotent (all-powerful), omnipresent (all-present) and omniscient (all-knowing). This view of God is consistent with the teaching of Genesis 1:1 that God created everything in the universe out of nothing, which this exposition has presupposed from the outset.

If God is all-powerful (Jeremiah 32:17, 27), He can be fully trusted to protect and to provide. So there is no need to trust in other (so-called) gods as a backup in case God fails. To trust in and hence worship anything besides God amounts to denying His omnipotence. If we worship “God” plus something else, we are worshipping a “God” of our own imagination, that is, a “God” who is not all-powerful and thus may fail. Worshipping a god of our own imagination is the essence of idolatry. Hence one can be idolatrous and thus violate the First Commandment even when one claims to be worshipping God.

The main concern of the Second Commandment is not worshipping foreign gods as this is taken care of in the First Commandment. It is prohibiting the making of any physical object of worship, even when it is intended to represent the Creator God Himself. For if God is all-present (Psalm 139:7-10), He fills the universe. Representing Him with a physical object limits Him to a specific location. This amounts to denying His omnipresence. This is again idolatry as it is worshipping a god of human imagination.

Violating the Third Commandment, such as when people swear falsely in God’s name, is unlike violating the other commandments. For abusing God’s name is not just violating a commandment of God, it is also violating the name of God. And God’s name stands for who He is. Since this violation abuses God Himself, one would

all the more not dare do it if he is consciously aware that God already knows what he is about to do. To misuse God's name intentionally thus ignores that He is all-knowing (Psalm 44:20-21). So unless one denies God's very existence altogether, abusing God's name amounts to denying God's omniscience.

God's omnipotence was most obvious to the Israelites, for they had just witnessed how He manifested His power to redeem them from slavery in Egypt. If they consciously observed the Second and Third Commandments, they would also cultivate the sense that God is also omnipresent and omniscient.

Relationship with Money

The Fourth Commandment is about money as it limits one's economic activities. It is about submitting one's economic life to God. Elaborations of this commandment show that it is not just about observing the Sabbath *Day*, but also the Sabbath *Year* (Exodus 23:10-11), where the land is to rest one out of seven years. The ecological concern of this commandment is obvious. And on the seventh Sabbath Year, called the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-34), land that had been sold was to be returned to the original owner. The economic concern of the Sabbath Commandment is hence unmistakable. It serves to curb economic greed, which is the basic cause of the current ecological crisis.

Relationship with People

The Fifth Commandment is about honoring human authorities. Like the Sabbath Commandment it covers more than what is explicitly stated. When we consider the Book of Deuteronomy, we shall see that it is about honoring not just parents, but also the other human authorities in the nation. This explains why the next five commandments are tied to it. For these commandments are basic to law and order in a nation.

The Sixth to the Ninth Commandments, which prohibit murder, adultery, theft and lies, constitute the basic morality recognized by all cultures. Though traditionally many cultures deviate from God's will

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by permitting a man to have more than one wife at the same time (polygamy), it is unimaginable that any culture would permit a man to freely have another man's wife. Hence a deviation like polygamy does not mean that there is no core morality recognized by all peoples. In fact, insofar as polygamy circumvents what would otherwise be adultery, it recognizes the commandment against adultery.

The commandment against telling lies has a specific application in a court of law. In fact, it is phrased in legal language: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor." Since eyewitness testimony is crucial in a trial, the Ninth Commandment is basic to the enforcement of laws based on the previous commandments. In the course of a trial, an oath sworn in God's name may be required (Bovati 1994: 283-86, footnote 62). When this happens, this commandment goes together with the commandment against abusing God's name.

Unity of the Ten Commandments

Even more basic to these commandments is the Tenth Commandment. For covetousness, an expression of sinful human disposition, is the root cause behind murder, adultery, theft and lies. This commandment teaches that

True obedience involves avoiding not only certain actions but also intentions and attitudes toward others in relationship, perhaps best captured in such words as envy or greed or lust. Covetousness has a way of breeding discontent and easily leads to abuse and crime; it is a basic source of social disorder and trouble in interpersonal relationships (Fretheim 1991: 238).

Jesus was applying this teaching when He said a man who looks at a woman with lustful (covetous) intention has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). Most crimes are caused by the covetousness of the criminals themselves; some crimes are triggered by the covetous actions of others, such as a jealous husband assaulting his wife's lover. If covetousness, the pre-crime attitude or intention, is curbed in the heart, there would hardly be any crime. But in practice this can happen only when people believe in the Holy

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God, who is omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient, and thus fear Him and keep *all* His commandments.

This explains why Paul could say that covetousness is idolatry (Colossians 3:5). For one cannot be truly worshipping the all-powerful, all-present and all-knowing Holy God, and yet consciously harbor covetousness in his heart. Such a person is worshipping a god of his own imagination, which is, Money, Power and Sex. Jesus puts it more bluntly: “You cannot serve God and Money” (Matthew 6:24). In this light the Sabbath Commandment, which is basically a commandment to curb covetousness, unites the first three commandments with the last six. No wonder Isaiah could just refer to the Sabbath Commandment when he obviously meant the Ten Commandments (Isaiah 56:1-8).

In other words, how we relate to God (commandments 1-3) and how we relate to people (commandments 5-10) are affected by how we relate to money or material things (commandment 4). This exposes the moral implications of (scientific) materialism, the view that all that exists in this universe is material. For scientific materialism implies not only atheism, but also economic materialism, the view that all that matters in this life is the material, which justifies preoccupation with material things. This is precisely what the Sabbath Commandment opposes.

Therefore all ten commandments come in one package. We cannot affirm the universal applicability of the commandments against murder, adultery, theft and lies without affirming the universal relevance of the other commandments as well. In fact, the Sabbath Commandment, which unites all the commandments, is explicitly based on God’s creation of the world (Exodus 20:11). This means it is applicable to all human beings, not just the Israelites. Israel was to observe the Ten Commandments because the nation was called to build a *human* civilization as a model for all nations.

Application of the Ten Commandments

This does not mean that all the laws of Israel, which are applications of the Ten Commandments in their historical and cultural context, are directly applicable today. How the Ten Commandments is to be

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applied in a nation today depends on the context of the nation concerned. We will now look at Exodus 20:22-23:19, known as the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 24:7), to see how the Ten Commandments was applied in the context of ancient Israel. This will help us see how the Ten Commandments can be applied in the context of a modern nation. For now we will focus on the laws that apply the commandments against murder and theft.

It is important to recognize that just as the intention of a commandment goes beyond what is explicitly stated, a law that applies a certain commandment can be extended to all cases similar to the specific case discussed (cf. Stuart 2006: 442-45). Hence the case of an ox killing a person due to the negligence of the owner (see below) covers all similar cases, such as the case of a dog killing a person, as well as the case of someone recklessly riding a horse, or driving a car, and killing a person.

We will begin with the concept known as *lex talionis* (the law of retaliation) as expressed in Exodus 21:23-25: “you shall impose (as penalty) life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, bruise for bruise.” It is obvious from the context that this is a frozen formula not to be understood literally. It simply means the penalty must fit the crime, not less than what is deserved, and certainly not more (cf. Sarna 1986: 182-89). For in the next two verses we read that if a man destroys the eye or knocks out the tooth of his slave, he shall set the slave free as restitution. The formula was applied literally only in outright premeditated murder, not even in manslaughter (Exodus 21:12-14). We have seen that in the case of murder, the sentence that fits the crime is the death sentence (Genesis 9:6).

The case of the goring ox (Exodus 21:28-32) further illustrates how the formula was to be applied. If an ox gored a person to death, it must be put to death (cf. Genesis 9:5). The ox’s owner was not liable unless he had been warned before that his ox had a habit of goring and yet did not confine it. In this case, he faced the death penalty as well. Even then, since it was not exactly premeditated murder, there was a provision for him to pay a ransom for his own life. But the restitution was “whatever demanded of him” by the victim’s family, presumably subjected to the judge’s agreement (cf. Exodus

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21:22). This shows there is no price-tag to a human life. Therefore this provision upholds the sanctity of human life, both that of the victim as well as the offender.

This provision applied equally whether the victim was a man or a woman, an adult or a child. However, it did not apply if the victim was a slave, in which case the owner of the slave would only get a restitution of 30 shekels of silver, the then price of a slave. This does not mean that a slave was not considered a human being. From the other laws relating to slaves, especially when compared to similar laws in neighboring nations, we can see that slaves were still valued as human beings.

For instance, the Babylonian Code of Hammurabi (sections 15-16) prescribed the death penalty for anyone who helped a slave to escape through the city-gate, or who harbored a fugitive slave in his house and did not surrender him at the summons of the authorities. In contrast, we read in Deuteronomy 23:15-16 that a fugitive slave should not be surrendered to his master; in fact he should be allowed to dwell freely in whichever town he chose to live in (cf. Baker 2009: 130-34). This contrast in fact highlights the fundamental difference between the laws in the Old Testament and those of the neighboring nations: human values have priority over economic considerations (Wenham 1979: 282).

Why then a price-tag on the life of a slave in Exodus 21:32? There is such a thing as the law of unintended consequences, that is, “actions of people—and especially of government—always have effects that are unanticipated or ‘unintended’” (Norton 2008: 505). We have seen how Pharaoh’s attempts to prevent the Israelites from leaving Egypt actually propelled it. Just as a law made with bad intentions may have good consequences, a law made with good intentions may have bad consequences. In this particular case, which represents all cases of causing death due to negligence (such as Deuteronomy 22:8), if a slave owner were entitled to a restitution of “whatever is demanded” he might be tempted to set his slave up to be killed. This would endanger the life of slaves. In any case, the ransom money did not benefit the slave nor his family.

So the “price-tag” actually protects slaves and does not compromise on the principle that human values are more important than

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economic considerations. This principle is also exemplified in the case of a thief killed in the act of breaking in (Exodus 22:2-3):

If the thief is killed at night, the killer is not guilty of murder; if in the daytime, he is. The principle guiding this ruling is: killing is justified to protect oneself and family, but not to protect property. If it were legitimate in the protection of property, there would be no distinction between night and day” (Patrick 1989: 35).

For in those days there was no electricity; at night one could not even see whether the intruder was armed or not. With a little imagination we can appreciate why killing the intruder was an act of self-defense. In fact even today, this is the law to turn to for Biblical support for the legitimacy of killing in self-defense.

As for the penalty for theft, the Old Testament prescribes restitution, paying back more than what was stolen (Exodus 22:1-4). If the thief was not able to do that, he would be sold as a debt-slave (made to work for pay) to meet this demand. This law is still applicable today, as Charles Colson (1988: 154-55) testifies:

Recently I addressed the Texas legislature I told them that the only answer to the crime problem is to take nonviolent criminals out of our prisons and make them pay back their victims with restitution. That is how we can solve the prison crowding problem.

The amazing thing was that afterwards they came up to me one after another and said things like, “That’s a tremendous idea. Why hasn’t anyone thought of that?” I had the privilege of saying to them, “Read Exodus 22. It is only what God said to Moses on Mount Sinai thousands of years ago.”

We have seen so far that except for murder, restitution is the standard penalty imposed. The criminal justice system embodied in these laws differs from that which currently dominates in modern states; instead it matches Restorative Justice (Van Ness and Strong 2010), the alternate criminal justice system that is gaining popularity worldwide and has recently been promoted by the United Nations

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(2006). We shall elaborate on this when we look at the Ten Commandments as the Constitution of ancient Israel (Chapter 17).

Insofar as the commandment against covetousness (pre-crime sin) cannot be enforced by human authorities, there are laws to prevent crimes that are enforceable only by God. For instance, if someone discovers even his enemy's ox or donkey going astray, he is to bring it back to its owner (Exodus 23:4-5; see the expanded version of Deuteronomy 22:1-4, which shows the extent to which one is to do justice and love mercy to one's neighbor).

An "enemy" is defined as "one who hates you," not one whom you hate; it is assumed that one should not hate one's neighbor (Leviticus 19:17). Only the conscience of a God-fearing person would be pricked to observe this law. Jesus reiterated this teaching when He said, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). If enough people do this, the crime rate would surely be negligible.

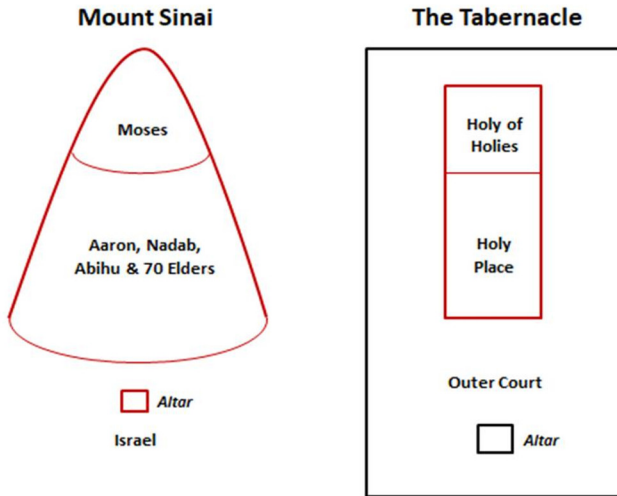
Chapter 11

The Tabernacle

At the heart of the Mosaic Covenant is also the Tabernacle (Exodus 25-40). Israel, as God's holy people in position, should be holy in practice by observing the Ten Commandments and the laws based on it. God, as Israel's God, would keep His promise to dwell in their midst through the Tabernacle (Exodus 29:45-46).

When Israel first encountered God at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19), only Moses could go up the mountain to meet Him. No one else was allowed to even touch the edge of the mountain. Later when Moses went up to receive the stone tablets engraved with the Ten Commandments as well as instructions concerning the Tabernacle (Exodus 24:9-18), he took with him Aaron and his two oldest sons Nadab and Abihu, and seventy elders, but not all the way up. Only Moses and his assistant Joshua could go all the way up.

Hence in approaching God, there were three divisions of space. At the foot of the mountain, where Moses had built an altar, all Israelites could gather. Even then they had to first consecrate themselves through washing their clothes and abstaining from sex. At the top of the mountain, only Moses (with his assistant) could go up to receive the stone tablets. In between, only Aaron and sons (priests-to-be) and the elders could approach.



The Tabernacle, which could be viewed as the “portable Mount Sinai,” was patterned after this three-part division: Outer Court, Holy Place and the Holy of Holies (see diagram above). For the Outer Court, where the altar is, all Israelites could enter. Even then they must be ritually clean. Only the priests could enter the Holy Place and do their work there. As for the Holy of Holies (the most holy place), where the Ark of the Covenant containing the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments was placed, only the High Priest could enter once a year. The ark symbolized the presence of God (Joshua 3:3-4), over which God manifested Himself in a tangible manner (Exodus 25:22; Leviticus 16:2).

Actually there were not just three divisions of space but five (cf. Milgrom 1991: 724-25). The land outside the Outer Court, but within the boundary of the Promised Land, was the fourth division, where the laws based on the Ten Commandments were enforceable (Deuteronomy 12:1). Though God manifested Himself in the Tabernacle (later the Temple), He was said to “walk among you” and thus dwell in their midst within the Promised Land, rendering it the Holy Land (Leviticus 26:11-12; cf. Deuteronomy 23:12-14). Gentiles could visit the Holy Land but not enter the Outer Court. Finally, there was the rest of the earth outside the Holy Land, where the Mosaic Covenant

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did not apply, but the Noahic Covenant (which still applies to the whole earth today) was applicable.

Meaning of God's Holiness

To understand these divisions of space, we need to appreciate the idea of holiness. Some ideas can be more adequately defined or described than others. We may know an idea intuitively, yet not be able to put it adequately in words. As scientist-turned-philosopher Michael Polanyi (2009: 4) puts it, “we can know more than we can tell.” For instance, the Book of Leviticus is full of rituals. But what is a “ritual”? Even scholars specializing on the subject have difficulty defining it (Bergen 2005: 5-6).

The idea of “holiness” is even more difficult to define. Most people capture intuitively what “holiness” means by hearing the term used in the context of their culture or religion. But the meaning thus captured may or may not be adequately consistent with the meaning in the Bible. To capture intuitively what holiness means in the Bible, we need to look at how holiness is manifested or experienced in the Bible. For now we will only consider what holiness means in the context of the Holy God dwelling through the Tabernacle in the midst of Israel, a holy nation and a priestly kingdom.

If a definition is to be given, to be “holy” means to be set apart (Leviticus 20:26; cf. Deuteronomy 14:2); but this hardly says anything about what holiness really means. Time, place, objects, persons, and even a whole nation, can be set apart or sanctified by the Holy God to serve a holy purpose. Israel as a nation was set apart to serve as a priestly kingdom to all nations. But what is this set-apartness really about? God says in Exodus 19:5-6 that this involved Israel keeping the Mosaic Covenant. We have just taken a look at what that means. It means, at the individual level, being morally pure in one's actions, intentions and attitudes. By thus observing the laws, at the national level, the peoples of the world would say of Israel, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deuteronomy 4:5-8).

But holiness is more than moral purity; it also involves ritual (non-moral) purity (Leviticus 20:24-26). In fact, since inanimate objects can be made holy, moral purity is not even central, though abso-

lutely necessary, to the meaning of holiness when applied to persons, whether God or humans. Hence to understand the Tabernacle, we need to also consider the non-moral dimension of God's holiness as well as the ritual purity prescribed in the Book of Leviticus.

Applied to God, the idea of being set-apart does not involve Him *becoming* set apart; God is intrinsically holy. As we shall see, Isaiah, who calls God "the Holy One of Israel," presents His set-apartness as His absolute uniqueness in the universe (Chapter 41). There is absolutely nothing whatsoever like Him. Recall that to understand the Bible we need to presuppose, at least temporarily, the claims of Genesis 1:1. This verse, which implies not only God's omnipotence, but also His self-existence, already presents His absolute uniqueness. For it defines God as the uncreated Creator of everything else.

Human beings, made in God's image, are like Him in some ways. Thus human beings can be holy like Him in some ways by keeping His commandments. For God is love and is just and He made us with a capacity to love and a sense of justice. And since God's commandments embody love and justice, keeping them is simply to be holy like Him in terms of His love and justice. But when compared in absolute terms, human beings are not like Him. Apart from His self-existence, He is also all-powerful, all-present and all-knowing.

There is something else absolutely unique about God that cannot be put in words at all. This indescribable something about God required Moses to take off his shoes when God appeared to him through the burning bush (Exodus 3:5). It also allowed God, when He appeared to Israel on Mount Sinai through thunder, lightning and a thick cloud, to have anyone other than those authorized put to death just for touching the edge of the mountain, and remain just.

Meaning of God's Glory

This something about Him is manifested *visibly* in His glory (cf. Hartley 1992: lvi-lvii). In fact, "It has been well said that God's 'holiness is his hidden, concealed glory.... But his glory is his holiness revealed'" (Wenham 1979: 156). The thunder, lightning and thick cloud that Israel experienced at Mount Sinai was an expression of God's visible glory. This display of power and splendor can evoke terror or wor-

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ship, depending on how one is related to God. But what Israel saw then was not the full revelation of His holiness. For when Moses asked to see His “(full) glory,” God replied, “You cannot see my face [full glory], for no human can see Me and live” (Exodus 33:18-20).

The term “glory” refers to what is glorious, which encompasses what is splendid and prestigious as well as what is praiseworthy and honorable. At the human level it usually refers to what is glorious about a person in terms of his achievements. And since human beings are made in God’s likeness, they are also made for glory. All this explains the human drive to pursue glory, even at the expense of moral integrity. Since what is immoral is blameworthy and shameful, moral purity is integral to glory. This is well illustrated when an Olympic champion who broke a world record is later found to have cheated by using illegal drugs and stripped of his medal. And even if he is not found out, can the cheater *feel* glorious?

At the divine level “glory” refers to what is glorious about God, both in terms of who He is and what He does. Since God’s glory is a revelation of His holiness, and moral purity is integral to glory, it explains why moral purity is integral to His holiness. And since human beings are to be holy as God is holy, moral purity is also integral to human holiness. A holy but immoral person is a contradiction of terms. And those who are set apart by God as holy are already in a limited sense sharing in God’s glory unless this is nullified by anything that is blameworthy and shameful. Hence to feel glorious, there is no need for them to pursue after glory; they just need to live holy lives according to God’s commandments. This was what Israel was called to be and to do.

Coming back to glory at the human level, when one’s achievement is more glorious than that of others, we say he “outshines” the rest. So intuitively we associate *figuratively* glory with brilliance. When God’s glory is a manifestation of the indescribable something about Him, this out-shining of His holiness is not figurative but *literal*, and is therefore visibly brilliant. It is “the radiant power of His Being” (Vriezen 1966: 150; cited in Hartley 1992: lvi). The brilliance is so intense that no human can see it in its fullness and survive.

All this means, in order for God to dwell in the midst of Israel, the holiness of God required Israel to approach Him through the

three-part Tabernacle. And on occasions when the glory of God filled the Tabernacle, a thick cloud would cover it and nobody could enter it (Exodus 40:34-35; cf. 2 Chronicles 7:2). “The cloud was not the glory but a visible envelopment of the divine glory ... [so that] its brilliance was contained in part within the cloud so as not to be impossible to look upon” (Stuart 2006: 792). When Israel approached God through the Tabernacle with all the attendant rituals that we will soon look at in Leviticus, they would capture intuitively the indescribable something about God, which is central to His holiness.

God’s Holiness and Human Sinfulness

Though the Tabernacle (or later the Temple) and the attendant rituals were not intended to be a permanent means through which God dwells with His people, the idea of God’s holiness that they embodied and thus revealed is eternal. So today we can still capture intuitively something of God’s holiness through an empathetic reading of Exodus 19-Leviticus 27. Only then can we feel adequately the holiness of God, and thus be moved to take God and the Ten Commandments seriously. Otherwise, even people who believe Genesis 1:1 as truth may have problems with what they read about God in the Old Testament. As for those who do not even accept Genesis 1:1 as truth, when they read the Old Testament, they will all the more stumble all over the place.

The universe and the world God created embody the reality of God (Psalm 19:1-6). Paul says God’s existence and His eternal power are obvious from looking at the things He has created (Romans 1:18-32). As we have argued in the Introduction, even in explaining scientific discoveries as sophisticated as those in astrophysics, Genesis 1:1 makes better sense than rival theories if one does not presuppose the non-existence of God. Paul adds that people intent on exercising moral autonomy from Him suppress this natural perception of God and His power. We have shown how this suppression has reached a climax in modern civilization (Chapter 3). For under modernity not only the way-of-thinking and way-of-life, but even the physical environment, incarnates the idea that there is no God. Hence even God’s existence, let alone His holiness, does not feel real. So all the more we

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need to consciously accept the claims of Genesis 1:1, at least temporarily, if we want to understand what Exodus 19-Leviticus 27 teaches about God and His holiness.

God's holiness renders Him inapproachable, especially by sinful human beings. Only "holy" (set-apart) people can approach Him, but in a limited way. Even Moses, who could speak with God "mouth to mouth," could not see His face and live. Since only God is intrinsically holy, "any person or thing is holy only as it stands in relationship to Him. Thus there are degrees of holiness depending on the proximity of an item or person to [Him].... The closer a person or thing gets to God the more holy it becomes, and the holier it must be lest it be consumed by his holiness" (Hartley 1992: lvii). This is reflected in the three-part division of the Tabernacle and the five-part division of the earth, and in who can approach the respective divisions.

Under the Mosaic Covenant, the High Priest was the holiest, followed by the priests, the Levites, and then the rest of God's people. Thus only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, the priests the Holy Place, and the Israelites the Outer Court. Gentiles could not even enter the Outer Court. The whole set-up creates a physical environment that not only gives the impression, but also reflects the reality, of the spiritual distance between the Holy God and sinful humanity. We can feel this distance more acutely when we recognize that the closer one gets to God the more holy one has to be.

Since holiness is more than moral purity, this means that the priests were not necessarily the most morally pure people, though the more holy one is, the more moral one is expected to be. They were set apart by God to be the most ritually pure, and they had to meticulously maintain their level of ritual purity. To be morally or ritually defiled and be near to God can be deadly. Nadab and Abihu were already consecrated as priests when they offered incense in the Holy Place (Leviticus 10:1-3). But they defiled themselves by doing what was (ritually) unauthorized and they died instantly. God Himself explained: "Among those who come near Me I will demonstrate My holiness, and before all the people I will display My glory" (verse 3).

We can choose to read this text in light of Genesis 1:1 and in its own immediate context, and thus capture something of God's holiness, or we can choose to read it otherwise and stumble over it. New

Testament believers need to recall that Ananias and Sapphira also died instantly for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). In the case of Nadab and Abihu, it was the beginning of Israel as a holy nation; as for Ananias and Sapphira, it was the beginning of the Church, which like Israel is also called to be holy (1 Peter 1:14-16).

God does not act in this way most of the time because of His mercy. Otherwise no one would be alive. God acted strictly according to His holiness at the beginning of each of these redemptive eras so that the people would capture intuitively something of His holiness. This then helped them to appreciate His mercy when they sinned against Him and did not die. Most people do not realize that God's mercy is to lead them to repentance (Romans 2:4).

When Moses was up on Mount Sinai receiving the two stone tablets and the instructions concerning the Tabernacle, the people made a golden calf to represent God and danced around it (Exodus 32; cf. Deuteronomy 4:15-18). Hence they violated the Second Commandment and worshipped God in a manner that violated who He is. Contrast how God would be perceived through this manner of approaching Him with that of worshipping Him through the Tabernacle. They would have been destroyed by God if not for Moses' intercession. Because they were prone to violating God's holiness, God did in fact say that He would no longer dwell in their midst, but instead send an angel to lead them to the Promised Land (Exodus 33). This makes sense as we have seen how "impractical" it was for the Holy God to dwell in the midst of fallen humanity. God relented when Moses refused to accept this alternative.

How then could the Holy God dwell in the midst of sinful humanity? This leads us to look at the Sacrificial System, which was integral to the functioning of the Tabernacle.

Chapter 12

The Sacrificial System

Insofar as God is holy and fallen humanity is sinful, God could not dwell in the midst of Israel without doing something about their sinful disposition as well as their sinful thoughts and actions. And since holiness is more than moral purity, Israel's ritual impurities (see below) must also be atoned for. The English word "atonement," is derived from at-one-ment (with God). Under the Mosaic Covenant this was accomplished through the Sacrificial System.

Atonement for Sin: the Rituals

The system had five main offerings. All except one involved offering up sacrificial animals. The Burnt Offering, in which the whole animal (except the hide) was burnt up (Leviticus 1), atoned for "the general sinful disposition of the presenter" (Hartley 1992: 19). This offering was made twice daily on behalf of the whole nation so that God could dwell in their midst (Exodus 29:38-46), but an individual could also offer it on a voluntary basis.

The Grain Offering (Leviticus 2), as the name implies, is the only non-animal offering. Like the Burnt Offering it was also offered twice daily on behalf of the nation, and for an individual it could be

offered on a voluntary basis as a gift to God “in recognition of his lordship and his total claim on the presenter’s life” (Hartley 1992: 29). The other voluntary offering is the Peace Offering (Leviticus 3). Only the fat of the animal was burnt up, the meat being shared between the officiating priest and the presenter’s family, who together with invited guests had fellowship over the meal in the presence of God. The occasion could be “to praise God for good fortune or success, in fulfillment of a vow, or as a spontaneous expression of love for God” (Hartley 1992: 41).

The Sin Offering (Leviticus 4:1-5:13) and the Guilt Offering (Leviticus 5:14-6:7) atoned for specific sins committed (for a discussion on why the Hebrew phrase usually translated as “sins unintentionally” should instead be “goes astray in sin,” see Kaiser 1994: 1033-34; but cf. Sklar 2012). They were thus not voluntary. What distinguishes the two is that in the cases where restitution was also involved, the Guilt Offering was needed. The Sin Offering atoned not only for sins committed (moral defilement) but also for major ritual defilement (minor ritual impurities required no sacrifice). Animal sacrifices were costly. To enable even the poorest to offer the Sin Offering, they could offer flour in place of a sacrificial animal (Leviticus 5:11-13).

In God’s presence, a person with moral or ritual impurity would be consumed by His holiness, referred to as His “wrath.” We have seen what happened to Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10:1-3). The reason sacrificial animals could atone for impurity so that fallen humanity could be at-one with God was that the blood of the animal symbolized life (Leviticus 17:11). The life (blood) of the animal was offered up as a ransom in exchange for the life of the worshipper, with the effect that the defilement, whether moral or ritual, was cleansed (Sklar 2008) and God’s wrath appeased (Kiuchi 2007: 46-47). In this sense the sacrificial animals died on behalf of sinful humans.

Inasmuch as both moral and ritual impurity defiled not only the worshipper but also the Tabernacle (Leviticus 15:31; 20:3), God’s sanctuary must also be purified. For when impurities pollute the Tabernacle, they “make it unfit for the presence of God” (Wenham 1979: 228). In fact, as stated explicitly in Leviticus 15:31, it was the defilement of the sanctuary that caused death. So the Sin Offering cleansed not only the worshipper but also the Tabernacle (Sklar 2007).

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Then once a year, on the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16), the High Priest had to first make atonement for himself (and his household) and then for the nation as a whole. He had to enter the Holy of Holies to sprinkle sacrificial blood on the top of the Ark of the Covenant to cleanse the Tabernacle. He then laid his hands on a live goat and confessed over it all the sins of the nation, thus symbolically transferring them to the “scapegoat,” which was then sent away into the wilderness.

By thus atoning for the sins of the nation as a whole, transgressions that were not specifically atoned for because the individuals concerned did not offer their respective sacrifices would also be taken care of. This collective cleansing of the nation was needed so that God could continue to dwell in their midst. However the individuals who did not offer their sacrifices would not have received forgiveness. This parallels the Christian teaching that though Christ died for the sins of the whole world, only individuals who accept Him experience forgiveness.

Atonement for Sin: the Basis

It must be clarified that the sacrifices had no intrinsic efficacy (cf. Gane 2005: 9). They accomplished their purposes only because God accepted them. Amos 5:21-24 spells out that God would not accept the three voluntary offerings unless they “let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.” In other words, “outward acts of piety are rejected by Yahweh [the LORD] if they are not accompanied by covenant behavior (justice and righteousness)” (Olyan 1991: 144). This implies a life of repentance from sin and faith in God as well as habitual confession of sins committed.

This explains why in Psalm 51, when David was confessing his sins to God, he said God did not delight in Burnt Offerings (yet). What God desired (then) was a broken and contrite spirit. Under the Mosaic Covenant such a spirit was embodied in the Sin Offering and the Guilt Offering. Since these offerings were offered specifically for sins committed, the very act of offering them involved a confession of the sins concerned. They were thus concrete expressions of repentance. In the case of the Guilt Offering, repentance was even

more concrete in the form of restitution. Of course it is still possible to offer them insincerely, without a contrite spirit (cf. Psalm 40:6-8); but their high costs would deter most people from doing so.

Fallen human beings, including those who claim to believe in God, are prone to place their faith in rituals rather than in God. Whether they are aware of it or not, they are assuming that the rituals are intrinsically efficacious. This assumption is consistent with the polytheistic belief-system but not with that of the Bible. Bible scholars who read the text without first presupposing Genesis 1:1 often make the kind of error pointed out by Roy Gane (2005: 9): “E. Gerstenberger [1996: 59-60] is wrong when he asserts regarding Israelite animal sacrifices: ‘As is the case among other peoples, blood is considered to be a magical substance efficacious in and of itself.’”

An interpreter of a Biblical text who, at least temporarily, cares to honor the Bible’s own theistic premise spelled out in Genesis 1:1 would be careful enough to recognize that a ritual prescribed in the Bible is not of the same kind as that of “other peoples.” Under polytheism, rituals have intrinsic efficacy because they “were founded on the premise that there was a material force that was superior to the gods, a force that was impersonal and could be manipulated by impersonal [magical] means” (Hartley 1992: lix, drawing on Kaufmann 1972: 23-24). The belief-system expressed through Biblical faith excludes and opposes this premise. We shall take a closer look at this when we consider the Book of Deuteronomy (Chapter 19).

In fact since flour could substitute for a sacrificial animal for the Sin Offering, it shows that the shedding of animal blood, though it did accomplish atonement, was only a symbolic act. So the blood of bulls and goats (in and of themselves) did not and could not take away sins (Hebrews 10:4). According to the New Testament, God accepted the animal sacrifices when offered in faith and repentance because of the (future) sacrificial death of Christ, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). The animal sacrifices then served as “credit-cards” that God accepted then in view of the future “payment” to be made by Christ (Romans 3:25; cf. Schreiner 1998: 195).

The redemption accomplished through the blood of Christ was effective specifically for “transgressions committed under the first

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covenant” (Hebrews 9:15). This implies that it was effective even for transgressions in Old Testament times. As F. F. Bruce (1990: 220, footnote 111) puts it, “This retrospective validity of the death of Christ is stated in more general terms, which cover Gentiles as well as Jews, in Rom. 3:25 (‘whom God set forth as an atonement ... to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins’).”

Atonement for Sin: the Means

Since what really mattered was faith and repentance and the (then) future atonement through Christ, why then the need to sacrifice animals at all, which was a costly thing to do? Interestingly, the whole point was that the offering must cost something to the worshipper (1 Chronicles 21:24). This helped the worshipper express *faith*, and to do it through a bodily act. For it takes faith to give up something costly for no apparent benefit other than what God has promised. And an offering made specifically for the forgiveness of sins committed also expressed *repentance* through a bodily act.

Why does a bodily act matter? Underlining this aspect of ritual is the Biblical teaching that the human body and soul form one functional unity. Faith and repentance must thus be expressed through the mind as well as the body. The tendency to dichotomize mind and body is another unfortunate characteristic of modernity (cf. Gorman 1997: 19). Even in the New Testament, which teaches that Christ has already made atonement for sins once and for all, thus rendering the animal sacrifices obsolete, faith and repentance are still expressed through rituals in the form of Baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

By involving the body, rituals recreate the experience of the truths they embody. This is spelled out in the case of the Passover, which was to commemorate the Exodus. Part of the commemoration was the eating of unleavened bread on that day and for six more days (the Feast of the Unleavened Bread). The specific reason for this ritual is that when they left Egypt, they left in haste and hence had to eat unleavened bread because they had no time to bake bread the usual way (Deuteronomy 16:3). So the ritual required them to use not only the mind but also the body to remember the event. They would

thus remember not only the fact, but also the feeling (leaving in haste), of the Exodus. Hence it recreates the experience, not just recall the memory.

And recreating experience is important. The Passover was also intended to pass on the knowledge of their redemption from Egypt to the younger generation (Exodus 13:8), but this cannot be accomplished without the younger generation participating in the ritual. In Biblical understanding, knowledge is not what we call “information,” which is detached from experience. One has not acquired knowledge of something until one has experienced it in some way. This cannot happen without both the mind and the body being involved. Thus the claim made by theologian Theodore Jennings (1982: 112) that “ritual action is a way of gaining knowledge,” and not just “to transmit knowledge,” is not controversial.

Meaning of Ritual Purity

With this understanding of the role of ritual in Biblical faith, we are now ready to appreciate what the ritual purity prescribed in Leviticus 11-15 was all about. Leviticus 11 prescribes which animals were ritually “clean” and thus could be eaten, and which were ritually “unclean” and could not be eaten. There have been many theories as to why certain animals were unclean. The most sensible theory is the one based on the understanding of anthropologist Mary Douglas (1984: 52) that “the Holy” is about “wholeness and completeness.” Associating holiness with wholeness and completeness makes sense; it readily explains ritual impurity as described in Leviticus.

First of all, physically defective animals could not be offered as sacrifices, and physically defective priests could not perform the rite (Leviticus 21-22). To appreciate why physical wholeness or completeness mattered, we can look at God’s complaint in Malachi 1:6-8 that the people were offering to Him lame and blind animals. God challenged them to present these animals to their Governor and see whether he would be pleased. The same can be said if they used a lame or blind courier to deliver the gift. So if what was not whole or complete was not appropriate for the Governor, who because of his status was in a sense “set-apart,” could it be appropriate for the Holy

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God? It would profane the holiness of God. Obviously what was appropriate for the Governor might not be appropriate for God, whose “set-apartness” is absolute. Hence priests could not come into contact with death (which is unwholesome) except when it involved family members; for the High Priest there was no exception.

Extending this sentiment to other items that would be considered inappropriate in light of God’s holiness, we can see why skin diseases rendered one ritually unclean and contaminations like mildew rendered one’s house unclean (Leviticus 13-14). Genital discharges, whether natural or unnatural, were also considered unwholesome (Leviticus 15). It is obvious why this was the case with unnatural discharges (genital diseases). Natural discharges (menstruation and sex) were considered unwholesome since they involved the loss of either blood or semen, which are both associated with life. Thus childbirth also rendered a woman temporarily unclean (Leviticus 12). Hence in this way the idea of holiness was expressed through the body.

Applying the idea that holiness is symbolized by wholeness and completeness to the food laws, unclean animals are those that lack what was considered complete for its class, such as water creatures without scales and fins (eel and prawn), or land animals that are without split hoofs (horse) or do not chew the curd (pig). Birds of prey (eagle) would be unclean because they feed on carcasses, which are unwholesome. These were thus inappropriate for God’s holy people. These distinctions also “discouraged table fellowship with the Canaanites, whose diet would ordinarily include the pig and other items condemned as unclean [and] were thus a practical means of maintaining Israel as a holy people” (Sprinkle 2006: 117). Through this process they could feel that they were indeed set-apart from other peoples (Leviticus 20:25-26).

Since all this mattered only because the Holy God dwelled within the Holy Land through the Tabernacle, we can infer that “the purity system is central to creating a sense of sacred space for ancient Israel” (Sprinkle 2006: 120). The three-part division of the Tabernacle and the five-part division of the earth created a physical environment that embodied the idea that God is holy. But the sense that the Holy Land was indeed sacred space would be weak unless God’s people experienced it through the use of their body as well. So the ritual sys-

tem as a whole was crucial to shaping the way-of-thinking of God's people concerning who God is and who they were.

In other words, "Ritual is ... one of many ways in which human beings construe and construct their world" (Jennings 1982: 112). In the case of Israel, the world construed and constructed through the ritual system was a ritualized physical environment and way-of-life that embodied the idea that God is holy. In such a world people can feel that God is not only real but also holy. When one feels that God is indeed real and holy, it helps him to preserve his moral purity, and to repent whenever he fails.

And since even impurity incurred anywhere within the Holy Land could pollute the Tabernacle, it also created the sense that God was indeed present ("will walk among you") wherever they were (Leviticus 26:12). This awareness would all the more make an impact on their moral and social way-of-life. Hence observance of the Ten Commandments, or lack of it, depended partly on how well the ritual system was upheld.

Jacob Milgrom (1991: 736) highlights this connection when he commented on the ethical foundations of the dietary laws: "In the biblical view the Decalogue [Ten Commandments] would fail were it not rooted in a regularly observed ritual, central to the home and table, and impinging on both senses and intellect, thus conditioning the reflexes into patterns of ethical behavior" (cf. Wright 1990: 197). From what we have just seen, this observation can be extended beyond rituals affecting the home and table to the entire ritualized environment and way-of-life of the nation in the Promised Land.

How is all this relevant to us today? We do not live in such a physical environment nor adopt such a way-of-life. It is precisely because the physical environment of modern towns and cities, as well as the modern way-of-life, incarnate the idea that there is no God that all this is relevant. It is in fact urgently relevant if we want to stop our way-of-thinking from being molded by modernity and to start renewing our way-of-thinking to one that is consistent with Genesis 1:1.

First of all, by becoming aware that modernity has been molding our way-of-thinking with the result that the godless consumerist way-of-life feels normal, and then consciously rejecting it, we minimize its power over us. Our exposition on modern civilization (Chapter 3)

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was to help us do this. What is needed next is to allow texts in the Bible like Exodus 25-Leviticus 27 to remold our way-of-thinking. The process may take a while, but the sooner we begin to put the Biblical way-of-thinking into practice (through our body), the shorter the process would be (Romans 12:1-2).

We do this by immersing ourselves in the text as though we were living within the world it describes, and allowing it to evoke in us thoughts and emotions that are embodied within it. The exposition here seeks to sensitize us to experience the text in this way. And we must add, it would be even more effective if we can also immerse ourselves in a community that already embodies the Genesis 1:1 way of thinking and living.

Necessity for Ritual Purity

The assumption behind the food laws in Leviticus 11 that what we eat (how we use our body) affects how we think (and thus how we live) is seen more clearly in Leviticus 17:10-16, which forbids the eating of blood and animals that died naturally (with blood still in the carcass). “For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls” (Leviticus 17:11). If blood represents life and can atone for human souls, it must be considered sacred. Eating blood then expresses disrespect for life created by God. This wrong use of the body can thus inculcate disrespect for life (cf. Wenham 1979: 245), which leads to mistreatment not only of animals, but also of humans.

Today we may not associate blood with life the way ancient people did. Thus this law may not be as relevant to us. What then are some practices today that would inculcate disrespect for human life as made in God’s image? In our exposition of Genesis 9:6 on Reformulating Capital Punishment (Chapter 4) we have already considered the indiscriminate rejection of the death sentence for murder (note that Genesis 9:4 also forbids eating “flesh with its life, that is, its blood”). Another example would be the acceptance of abortion on demand (cf. Exodus 21:22-25).

If how we use our body, even in matters relating to ritual purity, can affect how we think and live, what more when we misuse our

body in outright violation of moral purity, and do not repent? Cultivation of respect for human life through ritual purity will be nullified if we are not committed to a life of moral purity. This explains why even though the Book of Leviticus as a whole is concerned with the functioning of the Tabernacle and the ritual system, it has a section that directly addresses moral purity: Leviticus 18-20.

Leviticus 17-27, like its counterpart in Exodus (20:22-23:19), reiterates and elaborates on the Ten Commandments. The Exodus passage pays special attention to murder, theft and bearing false witness. The Leviticus passage balances it up by paying special attention to adultery (Leviticus 18:6-30; 20:10-21). All sex outside of marriage (which in the Bible can only be between a man and a woman), especially between close relatives, is forbidden. As Genesis 2 teaches that a woman is one-flesh with her husband, a daughter- or sister-in-law is considered a close relative (cf. Wenham 1987: 71). Sex is such a powerful force that when abused, it can even destroy a kingdom, let alone a family. Therefore it is not surprising, and in fact expected, that it is strictly regulated in the Bible.

Leviticus 19 summarizes the Ten Commandments. Firstly, all ten commandments are represented. Secondly, it spells out twice the ground principle behind all the commandments: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (verses 18 and 34; Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14; cf. 1 John 4:20). And it demonstrates that there is no dichotomy between moral and ritual purity by interweaving sample rulings from the purity system into the list of moral instructions. In fact the basic verse stating why God’s people must be holy sets the stage for the whole chapter: “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (verse 2). Hence it is unmistakable that holiness involves not only moral but also ritual purity.

Christians are also called to be holy because God is holy (1 Peter 1:15-16). Since the (ritual) purity system of the Old Testament is not directly relevant to Christians, how then do they maintain “ritual purity”? Ritual (non-moral) purity is needed when God dwells in the midst of His people. The New Testament teaches that just as God dwelt among the Israelites through the Tabernacle, God the Spirit dwells *within* Christians, who are thus “the temple of the living God” (2 Corinthians 6:16; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). So we look in the

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New Testament for non-moral obligations placed on Christians specifically because God dwells within them.

And they are found in the very context where God's people are described as His temple. For in 1 Corinthians 6, after describing believers as "the temple of the Holy Spirit" (verse 19), Paul says they must therefore "glorify God in your body" (verse 20). And this affects every aspect of life, whether moral or not. Paul makes it explicit that Christians must glorify God in their body even in the non-moral aspects of life when he says, "Therefore whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). This makes sense, for just as God's glory was manifested in the Tabernacle (later the Temple) God's glory is to be manifested in the temple of the Holy Spirit, which is holy (1 Corinthians 3:16).

Paul explains what this involves: something may be lawful (not immoral) but it may not be profitable and may not edify, and may even cause addiction (1 Corinthians 6:12; 10:23). This teaching should guide Christians as to what is appropriate ("holy") for the "temple" of the living God. Paul applied it to eating food offered to idols as an example of something that is not wrong in and of itself, but which can cause others to stumble with respect to their faith in God. This "unholy" act is thus worse than being not profitable nor edifying. And when a Christian, called to love his neighbor as himself, still insists on doing it and stumbles others, he has become addicted to it. This obviously does not glorify God. So again we see the ethical implications of "ritual purity," now in New Testament terms.

Chapter 13

The Sabbatical System

We highlighted that Leviticus 17-27, like its counterpart in Exodus (20:22-23:19), reiterates and elaborates on the Ten Commandments, and that it pays special attention to adultery (Leviticus 18:6-30; 20:10-21). Since Leviticus as a whole is concerned with the functioning of the Tabernacle and the ritual system, this passage pays even more attention to the Sabbath Commandment in the context of the functioning of the Tabernacle (Leviticus 21-27).

This commandment is incorporated and elaborated here in terms of “the appointed times that you shall proclaim as holy convocations” (Leviticus 23). These were the holy days (holidays) of the nation. Other than the weekly Sabbath rest-day (verse 3), there were annual holy days. These included the annual Sabbath rest-day (verses 23-25), the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost), the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths, all of which involved offering sacrifices at the Tabernacle (later the Temple). The specific types of offerings needed for the respective occasions are further elaborated in Numbers 28-29. For three of these annual holy days all adult males were required to be present. (Exodus 23:14-17; 34:18-26; Deuteronomy 16:1-17).

Meaning of Observing the Holy Days

The fact that the Sabbath Day is listed together with the annual holy days makes it unmistakable that all holy days were applications of the Sabbath Commandment. The presence of God through the Tabernacle made the Holy Land a sacred space. The Sabbath, being holy (Genesis 2:3), is sacred time. Human beings live in space and in time. Therefore observance of the holy days within the Holy Land was a whole-and-complete (holy) experience of being a holy people serving the Holy God. In other words observing the Sabbaths was integral to the functioning of the Tabernacle (Exodus 31:12-17; 35:1-3). This then explains why the Sabbath was the sign of the Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 31:13).

For Israel the Sabbath commemorates not only the creation of the world (Exodus 20:11) but also their redemption from Egypt (Deuteronomy 5:15). The Passover and the Feast of the Unleavened Bread required them to eat unleavened bread for seven days to commemorate their leaving Egypt in haste. The Feast of Booths required them to live in tents for a week to commemorate their journey from Egypt to Canaan. And the Feast of Weeks required them to present the firstfruits of their harvests in recognition that their material blessings came from God. While the Day of Atonement accomplishes spiritual redemption, the Feast of Weeks commemorates their physical redemption out of Egypt into Canaan. For redemption out of slavery and material need is not complete without redemption into freedom and material blessing.

Learning to Live Within God's Story

Since the holy days commemorate God's creation of the world and their redemption from Egypt, if the nation observed them in spirit and in truth, they would not only remember but also sense that they were living in the narrative or story of Creation and God's redemptive plan. This was a serious matter; for it is crucial which story we are, consciously or unconsciously, living in. If we are living in the story of Evolution, it means we live as though there is no God, no spiritual reality, and no life after death. The moral and economic implications are far-reaching. The power of living within a story was high-

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lighted in a morning talk-show in 2007 in the United Kingdom when an “expert panel” was discussing the problem of youth gangsterism in response to a recent spate of senseless killings. One of the panel members asked (cited in Roxburgh 2010: x):

What has happened to us? How did we get here? When I was growing up as a young boy, we did lots of things that were wrong, but nothing like this. Back then [he’s talking about the late fifties and early sixties], we all lived inside a way of knowing what was right and wrong. We all knew the story of Jesus, and there was a Christian background. It didn’t mean we went to church, but we all knew the same story. These kids today have nothing like that anymore! There’s no common story shaping us. How did that happen?

Actually there is a common story shaping us: the narrative of the free-market (read: consumer) economy, a plot within the story of Evolution. It is about “the struggle for success, the greed, the getting-and-spending in a [consumeristic] world... Most of us have made this so thoroughly ‘our story’ that we are hardly aware of its influence” (White 1998; cited in Bartholomew 2000: 2).

Enough has been said in this exposition as to why (Genesis 3) and how (modernity) we got here (Chapters 2 and 3). Our focus now is how to get out of here: consciously living within the story of Creation and God’s redemptive plan. And we just noted that if Israel would observe the holy days in spirit and in truth, they would cultivate the sense that they were living in this (true) story of the world. Now that the holy days are not directly relevant to us (Galatians 4:8-11), how then can we cultivate the sense that we are living in the story of God’s plan for humanity that began with Genesis 1:1?

We already have this story, from creation all the way to the consummation of history, narrated between the covers of the Bible. Historically we are located between the two comings of Jesus Christ, somewhere in the Biblical story between the end of Acts and the end of Revelation. We just need to familiarize ourselves with at least a broad outline of this story and immerse ourselves in a meaningful way in this overarching narrative as the true story of the world.

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For believers in Christ this immersion is most meaningful. Even for Gentile believers, because they have been “grafted” into the Abrahamic Covenant (Romans 11:24) through Baptism (the New Testament equivalent to circumcision), the narrative of redemption in the Old Testament becomes their “family history” also. And through the Lord’s Supper (the New Testament equivalent to the Passover) Christians commemorate their redemption in Christ as well as look forward all the way to His Second Coming (1 Corinthians 11:26).

However, in modernity there a problem, even for believers who study the Bible:

Many of us have read the Bible as if it were merely a mosaic of little bits— theological bits, moral bits, historical-critical bits, sermon bits, devotional bits. But when we read the Bible in such a fragmented way, we ignore its divine author’s intention to shape our lives through its story. All human communities live out of some story that provides a context for understanding the meaning of history and gives shape and direction to their lives. If we allow the Bible to become fragmented, it is in danger of being absorbed into whatever *other* story is shaping our culture, and it will thus cease to shape our lives as it should. Idolatry has twisted the dominant cultural story of the secular Western world. If as believers we allow this story (rather than the Bible) to become the foundation of our thought and action, then our lives will manifest not the truths of Scripture, but the lies of an idolatrous culture. Hence, the unity of Scripture is no minor matter: a fragmented Bible may actually produce theologically orthodox, morally upright, warmly pious idol worshippers! (Bartholomew and Goheen 2004: 12)

Also, Biblical theologians tend to dichotomize what a Biblical text “meant” to the original audience in the ancient world and what it “means” (its relevance) to us today. Thus what is normative for us is only “what it means to us” and not what it meant to them. This approach fails on two counts (cf. Wilson 2001: 255-58).

Firstly, when we use words to express truth, the outcome is always historically and culturally bound. For example, even the “time-

less truth” that “God is holy,” though always true, must be understood in its historical and cultural context. For to some people today “holy” simply means “morally good” and nothing more. We saw that the two sons of Aaron dropped dead before God because they did not treat God as holy. But how could a “morally good” God strike them dead just for not following a non-moral (ritual) instruction? Hence we must understand “holy” as understood in the Biblical context. Thus to understand even a “timeless truth” (“what it means to us”), we still need to *understand* “what it meant to them” by *entering* the narrative world of the Bible. This will help ensure that the “truth” that we grasp and apply corresponds adequately to reality.

Secondly, it fails to see that the overarching narrative of Genesis to Revelation, as a whole and in its parts, is a medium to help us experience or encounter the reality that the truths refer to. That is, the Bible itself is a medium through which we access Biblical reality. As demonstrated in our exposition on the Tabernacle (Chapter 11), to catch a glimpse of the holiness of God while reading about the sudden death of Aaron’s two sons, we need to read it from the Biblical perspective that informs how the Israelites understood what happened. We need to *experience* what it meant to them by *participating* in the narrative world of the Bible. That is, experience what it means to us when we get into their skin and think their thoughts and feel their feelings. Otherwise instead of seeing God as holy we may see Him as hot-tempered, or even barbaric.

Hence when we immerse ourselves in the narrative world of the Bible and read texts in that context, our thinking and feeling can actually be shaped according to the teaching of Scripture that is expressed or embodied in the text (see further the exposition on Kingdom Worship in Chapter 29). For instance, in the Book of Ruth we read how the godly Boaz practiced the Old Testament law (Leviticus 23:22) of allowing “the poor and the alien” (Ruth was both) to glean in his field. How do we apply this law as lived out by Boaz? What does it mean to us today in a postindustrial society?

Since this law is an application of God’s command to love our neighbor as ourselves, we can certainly think of an equivalent way to take care of the poor today. But we will miss something important if we do not dwell on what it meant to them and be changed by it. If

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we take the time to put ourselves into the world and shoes of Boaz and learn to think and feel like him, our thinking and feeling can be shaped in such a way that it becomes natural for us to do something similar in our context. Otherwise, all we have is a nice proposition of how we can practice the principle embodied by this law today (what it means to us) and do nothing about it. This transforming effect of the Bible is similar to (but not exactly) that of a well-written novel or a well-made movie that embodies a powerful message.

In other words, we cannot extract and use Biblical truth the way we extract and use coconut milk. We need to taste the Biblical milk by chewing the kernel and consume it all.

Meaning of Keeping the Sabbath Holy

We now move on to Leviticus 25, where the elaboration on the Sabbath Commandment continues. We have highlighted in our exposition on the Creation Mandate (Chapter 1) that the goal of this commandment is to curb covetousness, and that this is best seen in Leviticus 25. For we see here that the Sabbath Day is extended not only to the Sabbath Year (the seventh year), when the land is to rest for a year (verses 1-7; Exodus 23:10-13), but also to the Jubilee Year (the seventh Sabbath Year), when land that was sold would be returned to the original owner. Moreover those who were sold into slavery because of debt would be set free during the Sabbath Year (verses 39-41; cf. Exodus 21:1-11; Deuteronomy 15:12-18). Deuteronomy 15:1-6 also prescribes the remission of debt on the Sabbath Year. In fact the return of land is practically also a remission of debt.

Hence the Sabbath Commandment embodies the Great Commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself in a way that would be hard to put into practice without the other half of the Great Commandment—to love God with all of one's soul (Matthew 22:34-40). For the love of God sets us free from the love of Money (Matthew 6:24) to love people. So the Sabbath Commandment unites both halves of the Great Commandment and sums up the Mosaic Law in a practical way. We have already shown in our exposition on the Ten Commandments that this commandment, being a commandment to curb covetousness, unites the first three commandments with the last

six, so much so that Isaiah could just refer to it when he obviously meant the Ten Commandments (Isaiah 56:1-8).

Therefore it is not surprising that Israel failed to observe the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year when they fell into the temptation to worship idols and thus failed to love God with all their heart. This happened in spite of Leviticus 26, which specifically promises material blessings if Israel would keep the Sabbaths and “fear” the Tabernacle, and not worship idols, and warns of punishments with increasing severity if they violate the Mosaic Covenant. Yet Israel failed to keep both the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year.

We must recognize that violating the Mosaic Covenant is much more than breaking God’s commandments. God did not expect Israel to keep His commandments perfectly; no fallen human being can do that. That is why built into the Mosaic Covenant itself is the Sacrificial System to provide for the forgiveness of sins. Israel violated the Mosaic Covenant by refusing to repent when they sinned, and then showing no “fear” of the Tabernacle when they offered sacrifices without repentance (Amos 5:21-24). Note that in Leviticus 26, the warning about the ultimate punishment against unrepentant violation of the Mosaic Covenant—exile from the Promised Land—is repeatedly expressed with respect to Israel’s repeated failure to observe the Sabbath Year to allow the land to rest (see verses 34-35, 43; cf. 2 Chronicles 36:21).

Thus keeping the Sabbath was a matter of life and death for Israel. For violating it amounts to violating the Ten Commandments. What then would life be like if they observed the Sabbath Commandment in spirit and in truth, which amounts to upholding the spirit and the truth of the Ten Commandments? In other words, what would life be like if they observed the Tenth Commandment against covetousness through keeping the Sabbath holy?

Enjoying True Rest Within God’s Story

Leviticus 18:1-5 prescribes that the nation observe God’s commandments and laws, and promises that if a person does them, “he will live through them,” which means, “he will enjoy life through them.... For the OT writers life means primarily physical life. But it is clear that in

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this and similar passages more than mere existence is being promised. What is envisaged is a happy life in which a man enjoys God's bounty of health, children, friends, and prosperity" (Wenham 1979: 253).

In other words, one experiences *shalom* (Psalm 119:165), which means wholeness in every aspect of life and peace in every relationship, with God and people as well as with circumstances. Obviously an individual experiences *shalom* to the extent that others are also observing the commandments and laws of God. And it is not difficult to imagine why one must observe the Ten Commandments to experience *shalom*. For murderers, thieves, adulterers and liars, whose actions are manifestations of covetousness, can have no peace (Isaiah 48:22; 57:21) and thus cannot experience *shalom*. In fact covetousness in and of itself already robs one of (inner) peace. For a covetous soul is restless as it cannot be satisfied (Ecclesiastes 6:7-9). Hence one cannot experience *shalom* without overcoming covetousness through faithfully keeping the Sabbath holy to enjoy true Sabbath rest.

What then is true Sabbath rest? "Rest on the Sabbath as if all your work [in this world] were done.... *Rest even from the thought of labor*" (Heschel 1951: 32; italics his). That is, not only the body rests, the soul also rests. However, unless one is relatively free from covetousness, even when one stops working physically, one's soul is still not at rest. And since the body and the soul are a functional unity, the body cannot really rest if the soul is not resting. This explains why to experience *shalom* one must overcome covetousness through faithfully keeping the Sabbath holy.

This means God's people under the Mosaic Covenant, even after having found "rest" in the Promised Land (Joshua 21:44; 1 Chronicles 22:9), must have an adequately God-fearing heart to overcome covetousness in order to enjoy true Sabbath rest (Psalm 95:7-11; cf. Hebrews 4:4-10), and thus experience *shalom*.

Under the New Covenant, which shares the same goal as the Mosaic Covenant (Chapter 38), true Sabbath rest and thus *shalom* are also available to believers in Christ, now as well as eternally (Hebrews 4:1-3, 11; Revelation 14:13). There is thus far more to keeping the Sabbath holy than most people have ever experienced or even imagined. For though true Sabbath rest (from work) can be experienced weekly, and even daily, it is purest and richest when we have accomplished

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our mission in life (when all our work in this world *is indeed* done) and we know that we are about to depart to a truly “much better” place.

This is well illustrated in the experience of the apostle Paul. When he was under house arrest in Rome, he faced the possibility of execution (Philippians 1:12-26). He tells us he did not know whether to desire life or death. For to him, to live is Christ (fruitful labor in the world), and to die is gain (blissful rest in the presence of Christ). He struggled between desiring the “much better” (death) and the “more necessary” (life). He felt it was more necessary to remain only because he believed he had not yet completed his mission. He was later released from the house arrest. About five years later when he was writing his second letter to Timothy, he was in prison and again facing the possibility of execution. This time there was no struggle at all: “the time for my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (2 Timothy 4:6-7). His work was done; he had no desire to stay longer than necessary. Paul did not survive this imprisonment.

All this means when we enjoy true Sabbath rest while living within the Biblical narrative, which ends with eternal life with God, we are experiencing “the taste of eternity or eternal life.” For “The Sabbath possesses a holiness like that of the world to come” (Heschel 1951: 73-74). And the world to come in the New Heavens and the New Earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21-22) is the ultimate and perfect fulfillment of the Creation Mandate, which defines and drives our mission in life in this present world. Even the Mosaic Covenant, epitomized here by the Sabbath, was intended to fulfill the Creation Mandate (nationally) within the Promised Land. And if the nation of Israel faithfully practised the Great Commandment, with God dwelling in her midst and ensuring material blessings, would the Holy Land not already be “heaven on earth,” a foretaste of Heaven?

Leviticus 27 closes the book with instructions on fulfilling vows. In view of the focus on the Sabbath Commandment in Leviticus 21-26, this is a sensible way to conclude the book. For vows are made voluntarily to God and one who vows is accountable only to God to fulfill the vow. So whether one fulfills a vow, which is usually costly, is an indication whether one truly fears God as well as whether one has overcome covetousness.

Chapter 14

Old Testament Religion

Strictly speaking our exposition of the Mosaic Covenant is an exposition of Old Testament religion. But because the Mosaic Covenant expresses God's purpose for a nation, Old Testament religion is in this sense normative for all nations. So our exposition has been highlighting the relevance of the Mosaic Covenant for today. But since what is normative was applied in the context of *ancient* Israel as a *holy* nation, there are elements in the religion that were applicable only within this context. A failure to recognize this has led to the misunderstanding that some of the laws are unjust.

Leviticus 17 begins with the requirement that when they slaughter an ox, a lamb or a goat for food, they should do so at the Tabernacle as a Peace Offering. They were then living in tents around the Tabernacle. Recognizing that they were idolatrous in Egypt (Joshua 24:14), this was to ensure they would not fall back into superstition and worship "goat demons" in the wilderness. Deuteronomy 12, which anticipates their occupation of Canaan, removes this requirement as it would not be practical for them to travel to the Tabernacle (later the Temple) every time they wanted to eat meat (verse 15).

Also the stipulation in Exodus 20:24-26 on making an altar for offering sacrifices was only a temporary measure until the completion

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of the construction of the Tabernacle (Stuart 2006: 471-73). Therefore a law may become obsolete even within the Old Testament itself when the context changed. A parallel but slightly different law on altar building is given in Deuteronomy 27:5-7. As Victor Hamilton (2011: 365) puts it,

It should be clear that the differences between the two accounts suggest a considerable difference in timing and place. The law in Exodus draws attention to any altar any Israelite could quickly put together in a few minutes even as he journeys through a barren, rocky wilderness. That in Deuteronomy anticipates settlement in the land and the erection, not of *an* altar, but of *the* altar at Mount Ebal.

This clearly shows that the laws that applied the Ten Commandments in the context of Israel need to be understood in the context they were given. In other words, a law may make sense *only* when understood within its specific context. If we impose our own context on it, we are doing it injustice. We must bear this in mind in reading the laws in the Old Testament. We now illustrate this principle by highlighting three thorny aspects of Old Testament religion.

Religious Freedom

A superficial reading of the Old Testament may lead one to think that there was no religious freedom in ancient Israel. For if you happened to be born into an Israelite family, you were bound by not only the Ten Commandments but also all the laws under the Mosaic Covenant. Under the Mosaic Law, worshipping idols was punishable by death. If you were born an Israelite, you had no choice whatsoever but to worship the God of the Old Testament and in the manner prescribed. Or so it seems.

To address this apparent injustice we need to explore an aspect of Old Testament religion ignored in Old Testament studies. It is the question of whether an Israelite individual or family could opt out of the religion at will. Since an Israelite who worshipped foreign gods could be put to death, could he opt out?

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We have seen that when God presented the Mosaic Covenant to the nation at Mount Sinai, they were given a choice as to whether they would be bound by this covenant. The people unanimously chose to do so. Hence there was religious freedom. The question then arises: what about future generations, who did not participate in that choice? Since religion is a matter of personal conscience, why should they be bound by the choice of their forefathers? They did not choose to be born an Israelite to begin with.

It must be recognised that Old Testament religion was bound up with a piece of land. God said explicitly that they must observe the Mosaic Covenant not only to enter, but also to remain in the Promised Land. In fact, later in their history when they failed to do so despite repeated warnings, they were exiled to Assyria and Babylonia.

This aspect of Old Testament religion has a very important implication on the question of religious freedom in the Old Testament. Since their occupation of the land was conditioned upon their observing the Mosaic Covenant, any Israelite living in the land is deemed to have chosen to remain in the religion and be bound by the Mosaic Covenant. Anyone who chose to opt out of the religion must also opt out of the land. And there was no law that forbade an Israelite from leaving the land to leave the religion.

The Book of Ruth indicates that an Israelite family could easily emigrate out of the Promised Land. In this particular case, they left the land and sojourned in Moab because of a famine and not because of a rejection of their religion. We can be certain that this example of emigration was not unique as in ancient times people could freely leave their homeland and live in a foreign land (cf. Beckman 2013). Abraham emigrated from Ur to Haran before entering Canaan. And he went to Egypt to escape a famine. Moses not only left Egypt, where he was born and raised, and lived with the Midianites, he even married the daughter of the priest of Midian. When David was on the run from Saul, he not only lived with the Philistines for a while, he even served in their army.

Hence an Israelite individual or family who wanted to worship the gods of Moab instead of the God of their forefathers could have freely emigrated to Moab for this very purpose. And the Mosaic Law was not applicable outside of the Holy Land (Deuteronomy 4:27-28;

cf. Vogt 2012: 134). If they did not leave the land, they were considered to have opted to remain in the religion and were therefore punishable by the relevant religious laws. So the blanket prohibition to worship foreign gods does not imply a lack of religious freedom in ancient Israel.

We are not aware of any religion practised today that is bound up with a piece of land. Thus it is easy for us to misunderstand the Old Testament on the subject of religious freedom.

Capital Punishment

In our exposition of the Noahic Covenant, we have already shown the reasonableness of capital punishment for murder, even in today's context when it is properly applied (Chapter 4). What needs further clarification is capital punishment in the Old Testament for non-murder cases like idolatry and adultery. This seems unjust by today's standards. How could capital punishment be just for these cases?

We need to look at the matter from two angles. Firstly, the laws were to be applied according to the dictum, "do justice and love mercy." We saw that in the case of the negligent ox owner whose ox gored a person to death, though the stipulated penalty is death, he could redeem his life with money (Exodus 21:28-32). This means a stipulated death sentence was to be understood as the maximum sentence for the respective violation. Depending on the mitigating factors, the sentence could be reduced. The death penalty is spelled out as non-negotiable only in the case of premeditated murder (Numbers 35:31), "and this seems to be the force of the Deuteronomic phrase, 'your eye shall not pity,' in Deut. 19:13, and by analogy in 13:8 (idolatry); 19:21 (false witness); and 25:12" (Wenham 1979: 285).

We need to consider the two non-murder cases in the above list (idolatry and false witness) where the death penalty is spelled out as also non-negotiable (Deuteronomy 25:12 was not a case involving capital punishment, but the case of a peculiar crime requiring the cutting off of the offending hand). The case concerning idolatry was not just about worshipping foreign gods, but instigating others to worship foreign gods. So it was too serious to deserve mercy. And the case concerning false witness was not just about any perjury, but per-

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jury in a case involving the death penalty, and thus it amounted to attempted murder. Hence, viewed in light of the dictum, “do justice and love mercy,” we can safely conclude that the death penalty was not to be applied indiscriminately.

Secondly, capital punishment in ancient Israel needs to be viewed from the angle that the Holy God dwelled in their midst in a tangible manner. In our exposition on the Tabernacle we have already considered the meaning and implications of God’s holiness (Chapter 11). When God first appeared to the nation at Mount Sinai, He ordered that any (unauthorized) person who touched the edge of the mountain be put to death. For doing so would desecrate His holiness. If we have a problem with this, it simply means we have not appreciated the holiness of God as we should. And if violating God’s instruction by merely touching the edge of the mountain deserved death, what more violating the Ten Commandments?

But all this is in the context of the Holy God dwelling in the midst of the holy nation. Even then justice was to be tempered with mercy. Hence the death penalty for offences other than premeditated murder was and is not relevant outside of ancient Israel. Thus, when properly understood, capital punishment beyond murder makes sense only in the specific context of ancient Israel as a holy nation.

Sexual Equality

As our exposition on Genesis 1-2 demonstrates, the equality of men and women as human beings made in the image of God is a fundamental teaching of the Bible. But there are some laws that seem to violate this teaching. We will look at three laws that seem to discriminate against women. We will use them to illustrate that, properly understood, such laws did not discriminate against women.

We begin by taking a look at the Fifth Commandment, which clearly upholds sexual equality: “Honor your father and your mother,” which is rephrased as “every one of you shall fear (obey) his mother and his father” in Leviticus 19:3. Also, as we have seen in the case of the goring ox (Exodus 21:28-32), the life of a man and the life of a woman were considered equal in the eyes of the law. This shows that the basic assumption behind the Mosaic Law is sexual equality.

Laws that seem to violate this assumption need to be evaluated in their specific context.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4 is about a law allowing a man to divorce his wife and writing her a certificate of divorce if “he is not pleased with her because he has found some indecency in her.” Presumably the supposed “indecency” is not adultery as this is covered by a harsher law. The certificate of divorce enabled her to remarry and be taken care of, but the law prohibited him from taking her back if she had remarried and later became divorced or widowed. In the modern context this law seems unjust as it made it so easy for a man to divorce his wife, and it says nothing about a woman’s right to divorce her husband.

Jesus has helped us understand this law better when He reaffirmed the Old Testament teaching that divorce is against God’s will right from the beginning, and clarified that Moses had allowed divorce because of “your hardness of heart” (Mathew 19:8). In other words, if Moses had not allowed it, a husband intent on divorcing his wife would still do so secretly if he could, or would abuse her in one way or another. Divorce was thus allowed and regulated for her sake.

Also the husband is forbidden to take her back if she had remarried, even after the death of her second husband. This would have had the effect of preventing a frivolous divorce as well as promoting the recall of a rash decision before the woman remarried (Keil and Delitzsch 1981b: 418). And in their premodern context, a wife wanting to divorce her husband would be unheard of. Since the law was meant to regulate what would actually happen, there was thus no need for a provision to allow a woman to divorce her husband. Even in a modern context, because of a woman’s desire for her husband (Genesis 3:16), she is less likely to want to divorce her husband.

A related law is found in Numbers 5:11-22. If a man suspected, without evidence, that his wife had committed adultery and felt jealous, whether she was actually guilty or not, he was to bring her before the priest. She would go through a “trial by ordeal” by drinking holy water and taking an oath before God. If she was innocent, nothing would happen; otherwise her belly would swell. Compare this with the life-and-death kind of trial by ordeal found in the Code of Hammurabi. A suspected adulteress was to throw herself into the

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Euphrates. It was assumed that if she was innocent she would survive, if not, she would drown in the river (section 132; cf. section 2).

Hence, seen in its premodern context, the perfectly harmless (if the woman was innocent) trial by ordeal in the Old Testament actually brought justice to women (cf. Ashley 1993: 122-24). It enabled an innocent wife to clear her name and save her marriage. To insist that the husband should not feel jealous without evidence is simply ignoring reality. The question then arises: why was there no similar provision for a woman to put her husband through the test? The obvious answer is that, like in the case of divorce, in their context such a law was not necessary.

Actually an Israelite woman who had adequate evidence that her husband was sleeping with another woman could put him through the test in most cases. All she needed to do was to inform the husband of the adulterous woman about it (unlike today most women then were married, and married young). He could then put his wife through the trial, thereby indirectly putting her partner through the test as well.

In both the laws just discussed, the (legal) rights of men, but not the corresponding rights of women, are spelled out. We have tried to explain that given their context and the fallen nature of men (Genesis 3:16), such cases actually did not discriminate against women. There is a law that provides a broader perspective to matters like this. In the Old Testament, like in other traditional cultures, inheritance, especially agricultural land, was passed down from fathers to sons. This made sense in an agricultural economy. Numbers 27:1-11 records the plea of the daughters of Zelophehad, who had died in the wilderness without sons. Since daughters did not inherit land, his family would get no land when they entered Canaan.

This seemed unjust even in their context. So Moses consulted God, who stipulated that they could inherit their father's share of the land, but for practical purposes they should not marry outside their tribe (Numbers 36:6-9), which would not be an issue in their context. For otherwise their land, which was part of the land allotted to their tribe, would be transferred to the tribe they married into. This stipulation then became law for all cases in the future where a man died without sons. This example shows that laws that seem unjust in our

context made sense in their context. And when it seemed unjust even in their context, adjustments could be made to rectify the problem. It also shows that the laws must be given the benefit of the doubt.

We now take a look at a law that seems to blatantly violate sexual equality. Numbers 30 is about vows made to God; we have discussed how seriously God views vows (Leviticus 27; Ecclesiastes 5:1-7). A vow made by a man is binding on him. But a vow made by an unmarried woman can be annulled by her father, and one made by a married woman can be annulled by her husband (the annulment must be made on the day the man hears about it, otherwise the vow will stand). Why the apparent inequality?

Vows to God are usually made out of desperation and are thus costly and are most often made rashly (see verse 8). Most people regret making them, and would not honor them when the crisis is over (see Ecclesiastes 5:1-7). Hence it would be a relief to have one's vow annulled. The phrase "and the LORD will forgive her" is used repeatedly to stress that God would remove the guilt of the non-performance of the vow following the annulment (Ashley 1993: 575). Jephthah would wish his wife could annul his vow (Judges 11:29-40; in this specific case, however, since the content of the vow blatantly and gravely violates God's standard of morality, the question arises as to whether it was ever valid in the first place).

It would not make sense for both husband and wife to be able to annul vows. But why was there a need at all for a husband to be able to do so? Vows, being costly, are major commitments that affect the whole family. And as shown in our exposition of Genesis 1-2, a proper understanding of sexual equality means the husband bears the responsibility of having the final say in the family (Chapter 1). This law simply applied this teaching. The fact that a vow made by a widow or a divorced woman "shall stand *against* her" (verse 9) shows that there was sexual equality on this matter. But this "equality" was a responsibility that a woman would be glad to be relieved of.

We have chosen to discuss these three laws not because they can be more easily explained than others, but because they seem to violate sexual equality more explicitly. Applying the principles used to explain these cases will also clarify the other laws that seem to discriminate against women.

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The ground principle has been that we must understand a law in question in its own context. But because we are historically and culturally so remote from the world of the Bible, our access to the specific context is limited. This means, all the more we need to give the laws the benefit of the doubt. One way to overcome (partially) this limitation is to compare and contrast the law concerned with a corresponding law in the surrounding nations. We will likely see that in the context of the ancient Biblical world, the Israelite law is actually just and wise (Deuteronomy 4:6-8).

This principle is most productive with respect to the issue of slavery (cf. Webb 2001: 36-39). Slavery in the Old Testament was of a very different kind than that of modern times. It served a just purpose, even to those who were enslaved (cf. Haas 2003: 780-82). For instance, a member of a family in serious financial need could be sold to meet the need, with the opportunity to be redeemed whenever the means became available. Even if not, the slave would be freed in the seventh year. In our exposition of Exodus 21-23 we saw that the laws governing the treatment of slaves were rather humane, especially when contrasted with those in the Code of Hammurabi (Chapter 10).

Chapter 15

Covenant and Grace

There is a tendency to see a sharp discontinuity between the two parts of the Christian Bible: the Old Testament is about law and the New Testament is about grace. It is as though there is no grace in the Old Testament, and there is no law in the New Testament. This is a misunderstanding of not only the Old Testament, but also the New Testament. And there are serious consequences to practicing such a distorted version of the Christian faith. So an exposition of the Mosaic Covenant is incomplete without addressing this issue head-on. Our exposition of the Mosaic Covenant so far has already exposed in some ways the error of this view of the Bible. To address the issue head-on, we now pick up from where we left off in our account of Moses and the Exodus (Chapter 9).

Just before Moses died, the new generation of Israelites, together with Moses, Joshua and Caleb, were camped at Shittim (in the plains of Moab), which was their last station before they crossed the river Jordan into Canaan. What happened there up until the death of Moses is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. The record of what happened after Moses died continues in the Book of Joshua.

The subject matter of Deuteronomy is essentially the renewal of the Mosaic Covenant with the new generation of Israelites just before

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they entered the Promised Land (5:1-3; 26:16-19; 29:10-15); “the emphasis, however, is not on the details of the renewal ceremony, but the words that Moses addressed to the people gathered for the occasion” (Craigie 1976: 30). Appended to these words of Moses (Deuteronomy 1-30) is a record of the commissioning of Joshua to lead the people into Canaan, the last words as well as the death of Moses (Deuteronomy 31-34).

Those words of Moses are basically an exposition on the Mosaic Law (1:5), which consists of the Ten Commandments as the core, the elaborations of these commandments and the case laws that applied them to the specific context of *ancient* Israel as a *holy* nation. We have already considered the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:2-17), some of the elaborations (for example, Leviticus 23:1-8) and a number of the case laws (for example, Exodus 22:1-4), as well as their relevance for today (Chapter 10). We now take another look at the Mosaic Law from a different angle. To appreciate how much grace is expressed in the Mosaic Covenant we need to follow Moses’ argument closely.

God’s Faithfulness Despite Israel’s Unfaithfulness

The exposition on the Mosaic Law goes beyond the actual legal contents. In fact Moses began his exposition by recounting some major events that happened from the time God instructed the nation to leave Mount Sinai (Horeb) to where they were currently stationed. This included the rebellion of the first generation at Kadesh Barnea and the conquest of the lands east of Jordan by the new generation (1:6-3:22). This recounting provided the historical backdrop to the covenant renewal, and served to remind them of the repeated unfaithfulness of the nation contrasted with the constant faithfulness of God. It thus set the stage for reminding them of God’s grace (undeserved favor) toward the nation.

The recounting also served as an object lesson when Moses began to exhort them to be faithful in observing the Mosaic Law (4:1 forward). He stressed that they had to observe the Law “so that you may live and go in and take possession of the land which the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.” They had just been reminded

of how the older generation was not allowed to enter the Promised Land because of their rebellion at Kadesh Barnea. They were then reminded that some from their own generation had perished because they fell into the trap of Balaam and committed sexual immorality with Moabite women and worshipped foreign gods at Baal-peor.

Central to the covenant renewal was Moses' reiteration of the Ten Commandments (5:6-21), followed by a lengthy exposition (5:22 forward). He first told them that if they would obey God's laws, the other nations would recognize that Israel was so privileged to have a God who gave them such wise laws (4:5-8), and reminded them that God chose them, took them out of Egypt, and gave them this privilege only because "He loved your fathers" (4:37). Moses was referring to the Abrahamic Covenant, which is no doubt a covenant of grace. By this we mean that not only the covenant with Abraham was made by grace, the covenant itself embodies grace. This is clear from our exposition of the Abrahamic Covenant (Chapter 5). What is not (yet) as clear is that the Mosaic Covenant itself was similarly a covenant of grace (cf. Barker 2012: 84-87).

When Moses began to expound on the Ten Commandments, he commanded them not only to fear God, but also to love Him, and to teach their children to do the same (6:1-9). And if they would do that, they would be able to testify to their children that God's laws were "for our good always and for our preservation" (6:24). To fear God is to do what is right and not do what is wrong even when no one, except God, is watching or holding us accountable. To love God is to do the same; the difference is in the motivation. Fearing God springs from the fear of displeasing God, and of the consequences. Loving God springs from gratitude to God for His love, for "We love [God] because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19).

Obviously we are more likely to obey God if we love Him as well as fear Him. And the more we realize how much we do not deserve His love, the more we love Him. So following the command to love God, Moses exhorted the Israelites to obey God within the context of an exposition on how God had been good (read: gracious) to them as a nation despite their rebelliousness (Deuteronomy 6:10-11:32).

He was relentless in reminding the nation that, "from the day that you left the land of Egypt until you arrived at this place, you have

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been rebellious against the LORD” (9:7). This means not only the first generation, but also the second generation, were rebellious at heart. This was already illustrated by the idolatry instigated by Balaam at Baal-peor. Moses reminded them that even right after having committed themselves to observe the Ten Commandments, the nation rebelled against God by worshipping the Golden Calf (9:8-13).

Israel’s Election Unconditional and Undeserved

To drive home the message of grace, Moses was equally relentless in reminding them that all the good that they had experienced, and would soon experience, from the time they left Egypt to their imminent possession of the Promised Land, was because of the Abrahamic Covenant (6:23; 7:6-8; 8:18; 9:5; 10:15; 11:9). He spelled out that God “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” (7:7). And he added that God was going to dispossess the Canaanites so that they could possess the land “not because of your righteousness,... for you are a stubborn people” but because of the wickedness of the Canaanites, in order to confirm the oath He swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (9:4-6). Even their (future) ability to make wealth in the Promised Land, Moses told them, was to “confirm His covenant with their fathers” (8:18). And it was through Moses’ intercession on the basis of the Abrahamic Covenant that God forgave the nation over the Golden Calf incident (9:14-10:5).

To better equip the nation to obey God, Moses explained to them that through their being fed manna in the wilderness for 40 years, they would have learned from experience the truth that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (8:3). This means, God’s word is more basic to human existence than even food. So “if the command of God directed the people to do something or go somewhere, the command should be obeyed; shortage of food or water, lack of strength, or any other excuse would be insufficient, for the command of God contained within it the provision of God” (Craigie 1976: 185). Later Moses made explicit the inference that God’s provision is contained within

God's command: God promised Israel that if they kept His commandments, He would ensure that their livelihood would be well taken care of (11:8-17).

Therefore, if they remember the experience that taught them this truth, they would not be easily tempted to disobey God. By identifying with their experience through immersing ourselves in the narrative, we can also learn this truth. Jesus overcame the temptation to turn the stone into bread by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 (Matthew 4:4). He later rephrased this verse for His disciples as, "seek first the kingdom (of God) and His righteousness [give priority to doing God's will]; then all these things [your livelihood] shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

The renewal of the covenant with the second generation formalized the passing on of the Mosaic Covenant to them. The fact that they could inherit the Mosaic Covenant after it was broken by the previous generation shows that grace was built into it. This grace was an extension of the grace in the Abrahamic Covenant. For God promised Abraham that his descendants would become a great nation within the Promised Land. The Mosaic Covenant was only a means to realize this promise, and was thus an internal development within the Abrahamic Covenant. So when one generation of Israelites broke the Mosaic Covenant and thus could not become or remain as that great nation, the next generation could take its place. In fact, when necessary, God could even replace the Mosaic Covenant with a better covenant, so that all that He promised in the Abrahamic Covenant would be fulfilled.

Provision for New Covenant in Mosaic Covenant

A focal concern in the covenant renewal ceremony is the warning that after they have settled in the Promised Land and have borne children and grandchildren, if they then violate the Mosaic Law by worshipping idols (and refuse to repent), they would be exiled and scattered among the nations (4:25-28). A similar warning was already given in Leviticus 26:27-39, and later repeated in Deuteronomy 28:36-46. But Moses assured the nation that if they should indeed be

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exiled, and if they would truly repent, God would restore them because of the Abrahamic Covenant (4:29-31; Leviticus 26:40-45). Again we see the grace embodied in the Abrahamic Covenant extended to the Mosaic Covenant.

In Deuteronomy 30:1-5, the “*if* you are exiled” supposition becomes a “*when* you are exiled” presupposition. Moses foresaw that in spite of his best efforts in preparing the nation to enter and remain in the Promised Land, the nation would eventually be exiled (cf. 31:16-18). Then he revealed that when God restores them, it will not be a restoration to the Mosaic Covenant.

Earlier in the covenant renewal ceremony, in exhorting them to observe the Mosaic Law so that the “*if*” would not become a “*when*,” Moses commanded *them* to “circumcise your heart” (10:16), which refers to “a true, inward devotion” to the way of God (McConville 1993: 136). Now with the presupposition that the exile will take place, Moses reveals that *God Himself* will “circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants” so that they would love God (and obey Him) and thus live (30:6).

From the Prophetic Books (see particularly Jeremiah 31:31-34; cf. Ezekiel 36:26-28), we know this circumcision of the heart by God refers to the New Covenant, which replaces the Mosaic Covenant. As Peter Craigie (1976: 364) puts it,

In 10:16, the “circumcision of the heart” is a part of the exhortation to obedience; it was something required of the people that they could [but would not consistently] do. In 30:6, it is seen rather to be an act of God and thus indicates the new covenant, when God would in his grace deal with man’s basic spiritual problem. When God “operated” on the heart, then indeed the people would be able *to love the Lord and live* (v. 6).

This makes sense as the Exile was the absolute last resort to bring the nation to repentance (Leviticus 26), and if it had to happen, it meant the Mosaic Covenant was inadequate as a means to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant (cf. Jeremiah 31:32). So a restoration without advancement and enhancement to the means to fulfill the Abrahamic Covenant will not do. And this reference to the New Covenant was

part of the closing statements in the covenant renewal ceremony (Deuteronomy 29-30). Hence within the Mosaic Covenant itself there was a gracious provision that, should the nation break the covenant and thus be exiled, God would replace it with a better covenant.

There is no question that the New Covenant is a covenant of grace. And since it replaces the Mosaic Covenant, it is also an internal development within the Abrahamic Covenant. Hence just as the grace expressed in the Mosaic Covenant is an extension of the grace in the Abrahamic Covenant, the grace in the New Covenant is also an extension of the grace in the Abrahamic Covenant. In other words, there is continuity (as well as discontinuity) between the grace in the Mosaic Covenant and the grace in the New Covenant.

Foretaste of New Covenant in Mosaic Covenant

The tendency to see a sharp discontinuity between the Old Testament (law) and the New Testament (grace) is due to a misreading of New Testament texts such as John 1:17: “For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.” We highlight this text because not only it cannot be read as though there is no grace in the Law, but also, ironically, when it is read together with John 1:16, it specifically says that there is grace in the Law.

First of all, to argue that there is no grace in the Law just because the text says, “*grace and truth* came [*only*] through Jesus Christ,” would require us to also argue that there is also no truth in the Law, which is nonsensical. Since there is truth in the Law (Sprinkle 2006: 29-40), the text gives room for grace in the Law as well.

And John 1:16 describes the blessings that Christ brings as “grace *upon* grace” (most translations). The “for (because)” conjunction that connects John 1:17 to John 1:16 shows that the phrase “grace upon grace” in John 1:16 refers to the contrast between the Law and Christ in John 1:17, that is, the grace that came through the Law in contrast to the grace that came through Christ. This clearly means there is grace in the Law. New Testament scholar D. A. Carson (1991: 132) argues that the phrase is better translated as, “grace *instead of* grace,” and recognizing “the tight link between v. 16 and v. 17,” affirms:

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“On the face of it, then, it appears that the grace and truth that came through Jesus Christ is what replaces the law; the law itself is understood to be an earlier display of grace.” He then tears apart the “chief objections against this understanding of the flow of the text.”

Deuteronomy presents the difference, or discontinuity, between the New Covenant and the Mosaic Covenant in terms of who performs the “circumcision of the heart”: God or the people themselves. But the goal remains the same: to love God and obey Him. Hence the discontinuity is only in the means, and not in the end. When we come to the Prophetic Books, we will elaborate on God’s circumcision of the heart, and the place of the Law in the New Covenant (Chapter 38; see also Postscript). For now we consider whether grace was involved at all when an Israelite under the Mosaic Covenant had to circumcise his heart himself, that is, when he had to love God and thus obey Him from the heart without the benefits of the grace that comes with the New Covenant.

All human beings are created with a moral sense to fear God, expressed mainly through the conscience (Romans 2:14-16; cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Hence there are people who are not even “religious” but are conscientious (“God-fearing”). So God has equipped every human being to obey Him, but due to the fallen human nature, no one can obey God perfectly, and depending on the moral climate of the community, a conscientious person may be hard to find.

The command to circumcise their heart (10:16) was given in the larger context of Moses exhorting them to obey God’s commandments while expounding on how God had been gracious to them. Read in its immediate context (10:12-11:7), this command was to fear God as well as to love Him in response to His grace. The specific expression of God’s grace highlighted here is that “the LORD your God is the God of gods and the Lord of lords” who owns everything in the universe, and yet He set His affection on their forefathers and had chosen them above all peoples, and had given them commandments “for your good” (10:12-17). And in choosing them for Himself, God had to deliver them miraculously from Egypt (11:2-4).

Since they were eventually exiled, it means that they not only failed to love God, but also failed to fear Him. It demonstrates that the expression of God’s grace under the Mosaic Covenant in em-

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powering God's people to obey Him was inadequate. When Israel broke the Mosaic Covenant and were exiled, it was not simply because they violated the Ten Commandments; it was because they refused to repent and so receive forgiveness. For God did not expect His people, whether under the Mosaic Covenant or the New Covenant, to obey the Ten Commandments perfectly. No human being in this world, no matter how God-fearing, can do that; everyone is in need of forgiveness of sins.

The Exile shows that their hearts remained uncircumcised; otherwise they would repent when they sinned (Leviticus 26:41). And it does not mean every Israelite refused to repent; it means the nation as a whole, especially those in leadership positions, refused to do so.

As explained previously (Chapter 12), Israelites who received forgiveness of sins (through the Sacrificial System) did so on the basis of the (then) future death of Christ, which is the ultimate expression of God's grace. Thus the grace that is realized under the New Covenant was already (partially) experienced through the Sacrificial System, which prefigured Christ's atoning death, under the Mosaic Law!

Chapter 16

Covenant and Justice

Parallel to the claim that the New Testament is about grace and not law is the claim that it is about love and not justice. This assumes that love and justice are mutually exclusive. Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff (2008) debunks this assumption (96-108) before expounding on justice in the Gospels (109-31). As we continue to look at the Mosaic Covenant as presented in Deuteronomy, we will see that love and justice are inseparable; if one is indispensable, so is the other.

Under the Mosaic Covenant Israel was called not only to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might” (Deuteronomy 6:5), but also to “love your neighbor as yourself” (Leviticus 19:18). We tend to think of “love” as a feeling. But as Jewish Biblical scholar Abraham Malamat (1990: 51) has shown, “the Bible is not commanding us to *feel* something—love—but to *do* something—to be useful or beneficial to help your neighbor.” By comparing Leviticus 19:34, where the command is reiterated, with Deuteronomy 15:12-15, where the command is applied, we can see that “love” is indeed not about how we feel about others, but what we do to them.

Love and Justice

Jesus makes this unmistakable when He rephrased the command as, “Do to others what you want others do to you” (Matthew 7:12), which is the positive version of the Golden Rule. This is why one can love even one’s enemies (Matthew 5:44).

Recall that “to do justice and love mercy” (Micah 6:8; cf. Deuteronomy 10:12-13) is another way of summarizing the Ten Commandments. Hence to “love your neighbor as yourself,” which means “do to others what you want others do to you,” is in practice to do good to others by doing justice and loving mercy. Hence love and justice are inseparable.

What then is justice, and how is it related to mercy? Justice and mercy are best understood in relation to grace. Mercy, in its broader sense, refers to compassionate treatment of an offender or a person otherwise in need. But for our purpose here, we will focus on its narrower meaning: not doing to an offender what is bad (the penalty) that is deserved. Grace then is the exact opposite: doing to someone what is good (a favor) that is not deserved. Justice fits right in between: doing to someone what is deserved, whether good (favor) or bad (penalty).

Hence justice cuts both ways. This is because human beings are made in the image of God (Genesis 9:6). On the one hand, it means human beings have intrinsic worth and so a person deserves to be treated accordingly (favor). On the other hand, it also means human beings are morally accountable for their actions, and so an offender deserves to be treated accordingly (penalty).

Neighborly love will uphold social, political and economic justice (favor), thus ensuring that needs in these realms will be met—the good that is deserved. When justice involves doing to someone the bad that is deserved, love will ensure that the penalty is just. Further, Micah 6:8 not only says “do justice” but also adds, “love mercy.” So justice (penalty) is to be tempered with mercy, and this involves love. “Justice” by the book, regardless of the mitigating factors, is unloving and unjust. For the offender is still made in the image of God. Hence even though justice cuts both ways, it is still an expression of love.

Justice and Human Rights

What is referred to as “*human right*” is the good that a human being deserves simply because he is made in God’s image (cf. Wolterstorff 2008: 94-95; 342-61). Note that while a legal right may not necessarily be a human right, human rights should be protected by law as legal rights. The concept of human rights is certainly taught in the Bible. However, the term has been hijacked to cover not only legitimate rights, but also individualistic (self-centered) demands, even including what is unjust. So we need to be cautious in using the term. “Human rights,” understood as justice, cannot include anything that violates the Golden Rule or the basic morality recognized by all peoples (the Sixth to Ninth Commandments).

To understand the nature of human rights we will take a (selective) look at Deuteronomy 12-26. Like Exodus 21-23 and Leviticus 17-27, these chapters elaborate on and apply the Ten Commandments. Some scholars have argued that the elaboration and application of the commandments in Deuteronomy even follow the order of the Ten Commandments (cf. Woods 2011: 49-55). They “have not agreed on the precise identification of particular sections with specific commandments, but the broad outline seems generally convincing” (Wright 1996: 5).

Human Rights and Basic Morality

Since our concern here is the basic morality recognized by all peoples, we will only consider the sections from the Sixth (murder) to the Ninth (bearing false witness) Commandments.

The commandment against murder actually reads, “You shall not kill.” But since Exodus 22:2-3 allows for killing in self-defense, it is clear that the commandment is against murder and not killing in general. The section on murder in Deuteronomy (19:1-22:12) does distinguish killing that is murder from killing that is not. In between outright murder and killing in self-defense is manslaughter, which does not deserve the death sentence (19:1-10), but unlike killing in self-defense, is not entirely free of guilt (see Numbers 35:22-28). As for killing in a (holy) war (20:1-20), it is a topic that we shall consider after we have looked at the Book of Joshua (Chapter 21).

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Of particular interest to us is this stipulation: “When you build a new house, you shall make a parapet for your roof, that you may not bring bloodguilt on your house if anyone falls from it” (22:8). Israelite houses had flat roofs, which could be used for human occupation. This stipulation shows that, like in the case of the goring ox (Exodus 21:28-32), negligence leading to death is a very serious offence. This means, injustice can be perpetrated, or human rights violated, by what is done to a person as well as by what is not done for his sake. This helps us determine the scope of human rights.

There is a stipulation about finding a lost property and returning it to the owner, and taking care of it when the owner is not yet known (22:1-4). It seems out of place in this section on murder. Not so, if we recognize that Moses was also concerned about preventive measures to minimize the breaking of the commandment concerned. The stipulation is about putting the Golden Rule into practice in daily life. If and when watching out for one another has become a culture in the community, hate-crimes like murder would be minimized. This requires a God-fearing, if not a God-loving, community.

Following the topic of murder is that of adultery (22:13-23:14). It is stipulated (22:23-27) that if an engaged woman (considered married in their culture) was being raped but she did not cry out for help, it was assumed that she was committing adultery. But this did not apply if it happened outside the city; for unlike in the (ancient) city where the cry would not go unnoticed, out in the field, the cry may not be heard at all.

This shows that, just as not every case of killing is murder, not every case of having sex with someone other than one’s spouse is adultery. The context, especially the motive, matters. The motive matters so much that Jesus could say that a man who covets another man’s wife has already committed adultery with her in his heart (Matthew 5:28). (This is not to say that motive is *all* that matters; adultery in the heart is not exactly adultery. So a good motive is not a license to doing what is bad.) This insight is crucial when we look at the ethics of truth-telling.

It has been explained in our exposition on Old Testament Religion (Chapter 14) that due to the hardness of heart, divorce was allowed under the Mosaic Law to protect the interests (rights) of the

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unfortunate woman (24:1-4). For in that context, forbidding divorce would do more harm than good to women. But there are two stipulations here involving situations where a man is forbidden to divorce his wife (22:13-21; 28-29). In both cases, the man had wronged the woman in a significant way, and as a consequence was disgraced before his community. Thus the hardness-of-heart concession no longer applied as he should feel more deeply the moral and social obligation not to mistreat his wife. The Mosaic Law takes the high moral ground to forbid divorce in such situations.

These laws on divorce illustrate that in seeking to do a good that is deserved (a right), the end can be achieved through even opposite means; and that out of good intentions we may actually do more harm than good when the wrong means is used. This helps us to consider how (and how not) to uphold human rights.

There is a stipulation that is particularly helpful to minimize a sin like adultery. When they went out to war (even when outside of the Holy Land), they were required to ensure ritual purity in the camp because “God walks in the midst of your camp” to ensure victory. So “He must not see anything indecent among you lest He turn away from you” (23:14). This would remind them, and should deepen their sense, that God who dwelt in their midst was watching (over) them. And adultery is an indecent act that is particularly sensitive to being watched (cf. Proverbs 5:20-21).

How is this relevant today? Since the New Testament teaches that Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit, they can cultivate the sense that God is always with them. They just need to practice recognizing His presence in their daily lives even while doing the most mundane chores (Brother Lawrence 1982). Initially the practice will have to be intentional, which gradually becomes habitual. It will then be relatively difficult for them to commit adultery.

The section on theft is rather long (23:15-25:17), and for good reason, as this is the most common crime. Theft is taking what belongs to others without their permission. But again, not every case of taking what belongs to others without permission is theft. This is illustrated in two similar stipulations (23:24-25; cf. Luke 6:1). When a person, particularly a traveller, is hungry, he is free to enter a vineyard or approach a standing grain and eat to his satisfaction; but he is not

allowed to carry anything away. It is not theft (it is his right) unless he carries something away. This legal provision has implications for the “fair-use” of copyrighted “intellectual properties.”

Recognizing Legitimate Rights

A human right is a good that a human being deserves because he is made in God’s image; but not every good that a human being demands or desires is deserved (Wolterstorff 2008: 21-26). How then do we determine what is deserved and what is not? What is deserved is obviously not something that is immoral or bad for the recipient, or is unfair to others; and it is certainly not something frivolous. We now survey a range of examples to guide our conscience.

We have already considered two examples in our discussion on murder and adultery, namely, the right to life and safety, and the right (particularly for the wife) to fairness in a marriage (see further 21:10-17). And we also have one example with respect to theft: the right to “fair-use” of intellectual properties. We now add five more from Deuteronomy 24.

The stipulation against conscripting a man to war or to a duty that separates him from his wife in their first year of marriage (24:5) is about the right of husband and wife to live together. The harsh law against kidnapping for the purpose of selling the victim as a slave (24:7; cf. 23:15) is based on the right to live as a free person. In fact this right is a foundational reason God redeemed Israel from slavery in Egypt (cf. Nardoni 2004: 61-62).

There are two stipulations that protect the economic welfare of the needy. A creditor is forbidden to take as a pledge any item that his debtor needs in order to live (24:6, 13). Hence everyone has the right to the basic necessities of life. The principle that using the wrong means to uphold a right may do more harm than good is particularly relevant when it concerns economic justice. This is clearly illustrated in the stipulation to allow widows, orphans and resident aliens to glean in a vineyard or farm (24:19-22; cf. Leviticus 19:9-10), which is a provision to uphold the right to make a living. For the means stipulated involves working with one’s hands, instead of receiving regular handouts, which does more harm than good.

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Finally, a creditor was not allowed to enter his debtor's house to choose whatever he wished as a pledge (24:10). This is about not dehumanising even a person who is desperately poor, because he is still made in God's image. It is about the right to one's dignity as a human being. But this provision can be easily abused. A mere insult may be claimed as a violation of human rights. (Ironically, the "freedom of expression" to insult others has been claimed as a human right!) The safeguard provided in this stipulation is that there is no human rights violation unless a person's dignity is violated to a degree at least comparable to the example given.

There is also a stipulation that aims at preventing theft. Merchants were exhorted not to carry two types of weights (25:13-16). This is to pre-empt falling into the temptation to cheat (a form of stealing) by using a heavier weight when buying, and a lighter weight when selling (cf. Amos 8:5). The principle here is to purpose in one's heart not to cheat or steal before the opportunity arises. Otherwise the temptation may be too strong to resist.

Since theft is a rather concrete expression of covetousness, the exhortation against carrying different weights can be easily read as addressing covetousness. This is also true of the other stipulations in Deuteronomy 25. For the same reason the stipulations in Deuteronomy 26 about obligatory tithes and offerings can be read as addressing theft (stealing from God) as well as covetousness. Where then is the section that addresses bearing false witness?

According to Deuteronomy 26, they were required to speak the truth before God through an oath-like confession when they present an offering or a tithe. They had to declare before God that they had done what was required of them in their tithes and offerings. Unless they would lie even to God, these stipulations would effectively minimize covetousness.

Justice and Ethics

Hence Deuteronomy 26 is about bearing false witness as well as covetousness. To consider bearing false witness (not telling the truth) together with covetousness (the motive for doing so) is instructive, especially in understanding the ethics of truth-telling.

Philosophers debate over the ethical dilemma when we have to tell “lies” in order to save lives. There are in fact two well-known cases in the Old Testament where “lies” were told to save lives out of fearing God (Exodus 1:15-21; Joshua 2:1-7). Our conscience testifies to the rightness of their not telling the truth. If we believe that it is always wrong to lie (absolute morality), how then can we reconcile our conscience with this belief?

The best solution presented is the view that when two moral laws conflict, we are to do the higher duty (save life) and not the lower duty (tell the truth). In this case,

one is not culpable for subordinating the lower duty to the higher one [For] the lower command is not really broken when the higher command is followed. Just as a magnet does not break the law of gravity in attracting a nail, killing in self-defense does not violate the law of respect and preservation of human beings (Geisler 2010: 115, 111-12).

However, this sensible solution still implies that it is right to lie sometimes. A linguistic tweak to this solution will remove the problem. We saw that not every act of killing is murder, not every sex-act with someone other than one’s spouse is adultery, and not every act of taking what belongs to others without permission is theft. By extension, lying is not telling the truth, but not every act of not telling the truth is lying. Not telling the truth may in fact be an expression of love rather than covetousness. To selflessly risk one’s reputation or life in not telling the truth to save lives does not constitute lying.

In other words, *morality* is absolute: it is always wrong to murder, commit adultery, steal or tell lies. *Ethics* is applying absolute morality to specific cases. In exceptional circumstances the ethical thing to do may differ from what is expected, as in the case of withholding the truth to save lives. But this is not relative ethics as it hinges on absolute morality.

So we end our discussion here on justice with the ethics of truth-telling. It shows how much *love* may be needed to selflessly risk one’s reputation or life by withholding the truth in order to uphold *justice* in protecting human rights (the right to life in this case).

Chapter 17

Covenant and Constitution

We have just looked at the political implications of the commandment to “love your neighbor as yourself” in terms of justice at the personal level—human rights. We now move on to look at its political implications in terms of justice at the national level—constitutional government.

The Book of Deuteronomy is structured in the form of the suzerain-vassal treaty of the ancient Biblical world (cf. Woods 2011: 41-47). Such a treaty is a type of covenant, one that obligates the vassal (weaker party) to be loyal to the suzerain (stronger party) by fulfilling a set of stipulations. The suzerain on his part is obligated to fulfill his promises. The Mosaic Covenant can be considered as a suzerain-vassal treaty between God and Israel (cf. Kline 1963).

However, unlike a standard suzerain-vassal treaty, the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant are such that Israel was obligated not only to God but also to one another. For the list of stipulations is nothing but the Mosaic Law. The best way to see how the Mosaic Covenant obligated the Israelites not only to God but also to one another is to consider how the Mosaic Law is summarized in the Bible itself.

As recognized by Jesus Christ, the two commandments—love God with all your heart; and love your neighbor as yourself (Matthew

22:37-40; Deuteronomy 6:5; Leviticus 19:18)—sum up the entire Law. Thus, in accepting the Mosaic Covenant the Israelites obligated themselves to love God as well as to love one another. Hence the Mosaic Covenant was not just a covenant between God and the people but also a covenant between the people themselves.

Israel as a Covenant Community

In other words the nation became a community bound by a covenant that obligated them to love one another. Israel is thus a “covenant community.” And since the Mosaic Covenant is an application of the Creation Mandate, this means Israel as a nation was called to be a covenant community as a model for all nations.

A covenant is a morally binding commitment between two or more parties to fulfill an obligation to achieve defined goals. It differs from a compact in that it involves God as the morally binding force, even when He is not a direct covenanting party. That is, a covenant has divine sanction; a compact is entirely secular. How then can Israel be a model for “secular nations” today?

The most basic characteristic of a covenant community is that it is formed with the consent of the people. For it was with the consent of the Israelites that the Mosaic Covenant was first made and later ratified at Mount Sinai (Exodus 19:8; 24:3). And when the covenant was renewed at Shittim with the second generation, their consent was also involved (Deuteronomy 26:17).

It is significant that even God Himself did not obligate Israel to keep the Mosaic Covenant without their consent (cf. Elazar 1995: 168-72). This implies that no human government can obligate its people to recognize its rule without their consent. This is the basic premise of what we now call “democracy.” This similarity between ancient Israel and a modern nation may surprise us. And this is not the only similarity.

When the apostle Paul summed up the Mosaic Law to just one commandment, it is not “love God with all your heart,” but “love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14). This makes sense as in Biblical thinking, one cannot truly love God without loving one’s neighbor as well (1 John 4:20). For this reason Paul

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could affirm that the Mosaic Law is fulfilled when there is love for one another.

Recall that Jesus also summed up the Mosaic Law as loving one's neighbor as oneself, but rephrased it as the Golden Rule: "Do to others what you want others do to you" (Matthew 7:12). This rule, especially the negative version, "Do not do to others what you do not want others do to you," is taught in virtually every religion (Neusner and Chilton 2008), and is acknowledged by even atheists (Epstein 2009). This is not surprising as "the work of the Law [is] written in their hearts" (Romans 2:14-16). Hence the Golden Rule has divine origin and sanction.

In other words, as far as God's will for a covenant community (as a political entity) is concerned, upholding the Golden Rule fulfills the Mosaic Law. And since the Golden Rule is another way of saying, "Do justice and love mercy" (Micah 6:8), when a group of people have consented, however this may be accomplished, to obligate themselves to love one another by doing justice and loving mercy, a covenant community has been formed. Hence it is possible for even secular nations to become covenant communities. And since the No-ahic Covenant requires humanity as a whole to do justice and love mercy (Chapter 4), it is necessary for all nations to become covenant communities. What then should a nation look like when it becomes a covenant community?

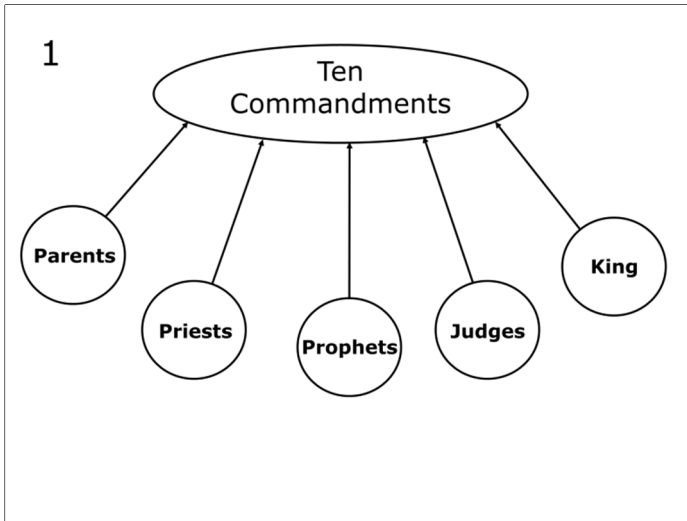
Israel as a Constitutional Monarchy

Deuteronomy 16:18-18:22 is an elaboration and application of the Fifth Commandment—"Honor your father and your mother." This section discusses the calling of the judges, the king, the priests and the prophets. In other words this commandment is about honoring not just the parents, but also the other authorities in a nation. Since the Mosaic Covenant bound individual Israelites and the nation as a whole to the Mosaic Law, each of these authorities was subjected directly to the Ten Commandments (see Figure 1).

This is the Biblical model for a nation. What is exceptionally significant is that even the king was subjected to the Mosaic Law (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). This was revelatory in its time. For

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This was in marked contrast to virtually all other Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, or African societies—which to the ancient Hebrews was the entire known world—in which kings were above the law or *were the law*, or even worse, *were gods*, as the Pharaohs considered themselves in Egypt (Grossman 2007: 95).

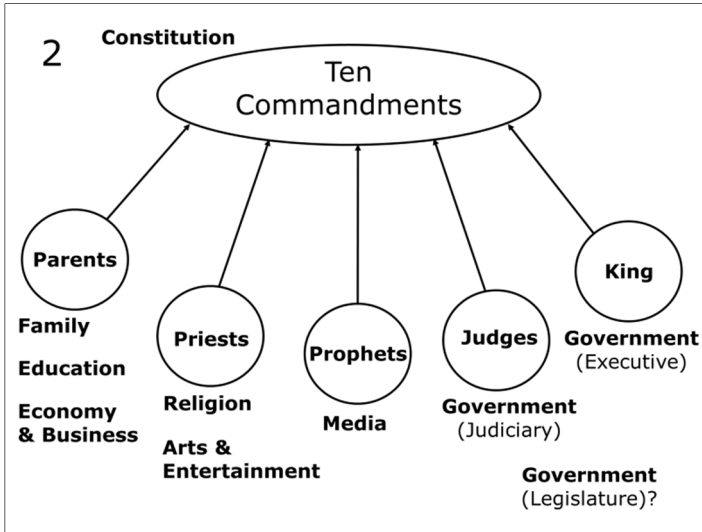


By subjecting even the king to the Mosaic Law, God introduced into Israel what is now known as the “rule of law” in politics. The Book of Deuteronomy was thus intended to serve as what we now call the “constitution” of the nation of Israel. A newly installed king was to make his own copy of this book, so that he would have read through it at least once.

This development is not surprising. For given fallen human nature, especially since “Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely,” a government that is subject to a constitution and rules accordingly is central to upholding the Golden Rule in a nation. Since the Golden Rule sums up the Mosaic Law, a secular nation can be considered a covenant community if the nation is bound by a constitution that adequately embodies the Golden Rule. And since the Mosaic Covenant is an application of the Creation

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Mandate, which is about building a civilization, we re-present the model in light of the seven influential spheres of culture (Figure 2):



If even the king was not above the Mosaic Law, the judges must surely judge the people according to the Mosaic Law, and not according to the dictates or wishes of the king. In our modern context, the counterpart to the king in Israel is the executive branch of the government, and the counterpart to the judges is then the judicial branch. Since both the king and the judges submit independently to the Mosaic Law, the two branches are to be independent.

Is there then an Israelite counterpart to the legislative branch of the government? Strictly speaking, only the Ten Commandments and the elaborations of these commandments formed the constitution of Israel. The case laws of Israel then are the counterparts to the regular bills passed in the legislative branch of the government. And since even the case laws were given by God through Moses, they were also independent of the king and the judges. Hence with this clear separation of powers, all three independent branches of a democratic government today are reflected in the Mosaic Law.

This uncanny similarity is not coincidental. In an article published in a law journal, Jewish Biblical scholar Bernard Levinson (2006) ar-

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gues that Deuteronomy is “the first constitution” in the world and thus contributes to “rethinking the origins of rule of law and separation of powers in light of Deuteronomy.”

However he overstates his case in claiming that the constitutional model in Deuteronomy “seems never to have been implemented.” If we take the Biblical record of the history of Israel seriously, the model did shape politics in ancient Israel to a recognizable extent (see for instance, Ahab’s recognition of the limits of his powers versus the view of his foreign wife in 1 Kings 21:1-10). Even if its impact on ancient Israel was limited, the same cannot be said of its influence on the modern world. For Levinson’s own article implies that the Mosaic Law undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development of modern constitutionalism.

And this has indeed been confirmed to be the case. Jewish political science professor Daniel Elazar (1995, 1996, 1998a, 1998b) has shown in a quartet of meticulously researched books that through Biblical influence, in tandem with the growth of Christianity, the covenant tradition in politics that originated in ancient Israel developed in premodern Europe and blossomed (most richly) during the Reformation. Even Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Baruch Spinoza, considered fathers of modern political thought, inherited it but secularized the concept of covenant to compact. Out of this Biblical tradition, modern constitutionalism emerged in the British colonies that later became the United States of America, and spread throughout the world, even to places without a prior covenant tradition (cf. Blaustein 2004; Lane 1996: 63-71).

And the Reformation had a distinct contribution to this eventual development. According to political science professor Jan-Erik Lane (1996: 28):

While neither Luther nor Calvin reached any radical conclusions about the rights of the people versus the prince ... other puritans [*sic*] drew specific constitutionalist conclusions from the doctrine that human beings were equal in the face of God. [For] “they all assert vigorously that there exists no absolute sovereignty save that of God ... There can be no such thing as unlimited human authority. God recognizes Kings as his agents and has, indeed,

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created them” (Allen, 1964: 315-16). The relation of God to the king being one of trust, the king had to govern the country bound by law, divine and customary, and to the common good of his people.

We noted earlier that when a group of people have consented, however this may be accomplished, to obligate themselves to uphold the Golden Rule, a covenant community has been formed. In the modern world this is usually accomplished through adopting a constitution that adequately embodies the Golden Rule. For by consenting to be bound by such a constitution, the people are consenting to obligate themselves to uphold the Golden Rule.

However, when this happens in a place without a prior covenant tradition, it may have only the form but not the substance of a covenant community. It may thus lack the culture needed to uphold the constitution by interpreting and implementing it in the spirit of the Golden Rule. In such a case the work of nation-building includes developing such a culture.

Turning now to the parents, they obviously represent, then and now, the sphere of the family. In the ancient world, the economy was home-based and education was basically the responsibility of the parents. Hence the parents also represent the sphere of education as well as that of economy and business. And in ancient Israel the practice of the arts was centered in the Tabernacle or the Temple. Hence the priests represent not only the sphere of religion but also that of the arts and entertainment. As for the prophets, who played the role of holding even the king accountable to the Mosaic Law, they represent the sphere of the media, which plays the role of holding the government accountable to the constitution.

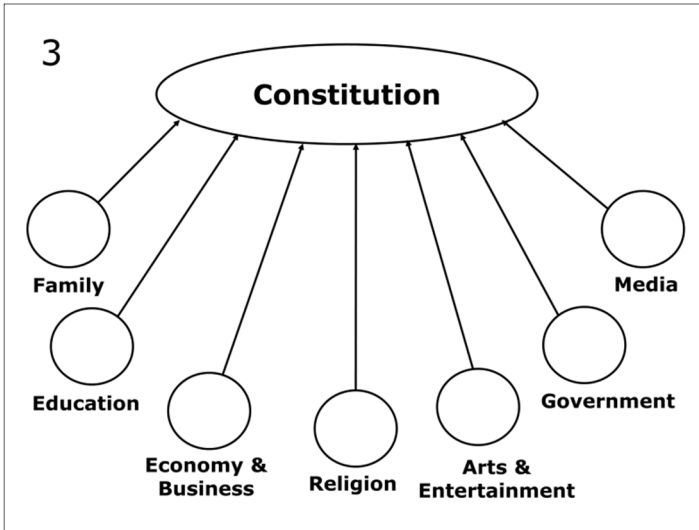
Biblical Model of Constitutional Government

We can now present the Biblical model for a nation in terms of the seven influential spheres of a modern civilization (see Figure 3).

Insofar as the parents, the priests and the prophets were subject directly to the Mosaic Law, each of the seven spheres is subject directly to the constitution. If the constitution embodies adequately the

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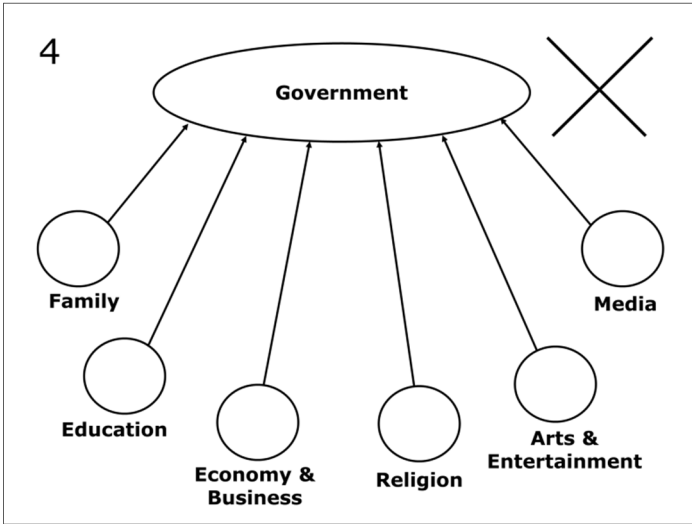
Golden Rule and is correctly interpreted and implemented by the government, justice is ensured for every sphere of the nation. This model shows that in a covenant community, justice—the good that human beings made in the image of God deserve—must be built into the political structure of the nation. For without justice at the structural level, justice at the personal level is only a far-fetched dream. We will have a better understanding of how this works when we consider God’s will for each of the spheres (Chapter 18).



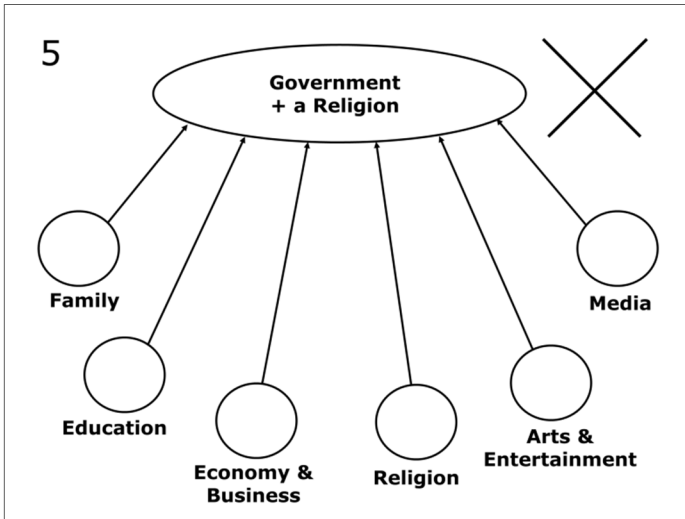
For now, to clarify what this model means, we need to spell out what it does not mean. Most importantly, the government holds the nation accountable to the constitution, not to itself. In other words the Biblical model is not like what is represented in Figure 4.

This is the model of a totalitarian state like that of the communists. Many nations today adopt, at least in name, the constitutional model in Figure 3. But due to fallen human nature, none practices it perfectly. In practice, they are somewhere between the constitutional model and the totalitarian model in Figure 4. The reason may be that the government misinterprets, or even violates, the constitution. It may be that the constitution itself is defective.

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And the Biblical model is certainly not like Figure 5:



This is the model of a religious state like that of the Taliban. Even in ancient Israel, the priests were independent of the king, answerable only to the Mosaic Law. This means God's will is that the practice of religion is to be independent of the government. Hence

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freedom of religion is considered a basic human right. Religion answers only to a constitution that embodies the Golden Rule. In fact in essence, religion is to fear God and keep His commandments, which are summed up by the Golden Rule.

It is easy to miss this teaching because there seems to be no freedom of religion in ancient Israel. We have already seen in our exposition on Old Testament Religion that this is not the case (Chapter 14). In any case, the *apparent* lack of religious freedom is due to the Mosaic Law itself and not to a religious decree of the king. In fact “The relation between the Hebrew monarch and his people was as nearly secular as is possible in a society wherein religion is a living force” (Frankfort 1978: 341). And the Mosaic Law as it stands was applicable only to ancient Israel as a holy nation occupying the Holy Land.

The constitutional model has far-reaching implications. Some implications are more obvious than others. To illustrate, we consider its (less obvious) implication for the criminal justice system of a nation. Currently the dominant criminal justice system, even in nations with a constitutional government, treats crime as primarily an offense against the state, and not the victim. So the usual penalty for a crime is a fine or imprisonment or both; the material loss of the victim is generally not taken care of, for even the fine imposed on the offender goes entirely to the state. Where then is justice for the victim?

This system is more in line with the totalitarian model than with the constitutional model. For under this system, which is a legacy of premodern Europe,

the king became the paramount crime victim, sustaining legally acknowledged (although symbolic) injuries. The actual victim was ousted from any meaningful place in the justice process, illustrated by the redirection of reparation from the victim in the form of restitution to the king in the form of fines. With the new political structure, a new model of crime emerged, one in which the government and the offender were the sole parties. This model brought with it a new purpose as well: rather than making the victim whole, the system focused on upholding the authority of the state (Van Ness and Strong 2010: 9-10).

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In our exposition of the Ten Commandments (Chapter 10) we mentioned that under the Mosaic Law the usual penalty for a crime was restitution (to the victim). We also noted that this practice is in line with the alternative criminal justice system known as Restorative Justice, which is gaining popularity worldwide. This system treats a crime primarily as an offence against the victim and prioritises reconciliation between victim and offender, which brings emotional healing to both parties. It “aims to restore the well-being of victims, offenders and communities damaged by crime, and to prevent further offending” (Liebmann 2007: 25).

Under this system, the preference of restitution over imprisonment allows the victim to be compensated for his material loss. In most cases there is actually no need for an offender to be imprisoned, which is usually cruel, inhuman and degrading (cf. United Nations 2007). Hence this system embodies love and upholds justice, for the victim as well as the offender. It is thus more in line with the idea of a covenant community. And since it treats a crime primarily as an offence against the victim and not the state, it is also more in line with the idea of a constitutional government.

Chapter 18

Covenant and Nationhood

In our exposition of Genesis 10 on Nationhood and Nation-building (Chapter 4), we adopted the definition of a nation as “a community of people, whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture, a national consciousness” (Seton-Watson 1977: 1). And “national consciousness,” at the least, is the awareness that one is part of something beyond one’s race or ethnicity. This awareness includes the sense that all the people in one’s country share a common destiny as well as have a share in building up that destiny (Fanon 1966: 162-63).

This definition of “national consciousness” upholds the Golden Rule to treat one’s neighbor the way one would like to be treated. Unless one’s conscience has been corrupted by racism, one could and would readily acknowledge that this is what a nation should be. It is then not difficult to see that the definition of a nation that we have adopted matches the concept of a covenant community—a group of people who have consented to be obligated to one another to uphold the Golden Rule by doing justice and loving mercy.

In other words, the concept of a covenant community is not just about God’s will for what a nation should become, it can also be incorporated into the very definition of a nation. And human con-

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science would not argue against it. We can therefore elaborate on God's will for nationhood by elaborating on what a nation is like when it becomes a covenant community. We have already presented a covenant community in terms of the seven influential spheres of a nation (Figure 3, Chapter 17). What needs to be done is to elaborate on each of these spheres.

Family I

God's will for a nation is a covenant community. The family is the basic unit of a community. What then is God's will for the family? Since a covenant community is one that upholds justice, God's will for the family is one that upholds justice in their relationships with one another as well as with those outside the family. And just as justice is to be built into the structure of the nation, justice is also to be built into the structure of the family. In our exposition of Genesis 1-2 on *The Suitable Helper* we have already emphasized the oneness between a man and a woman when they become husband and wife, as well as elaborated on their equal status and complementary roles within that oneness (see Chapter 1).

In terms of their contribution to the Creation Mandate to build a civilization that is consistent with God's will and in fellowship with Him, we have also highlighted that as father and mother they are *both* responsible in raising their children to ensure their well-being as adults and their success in life (cf. Proverbs 1:8; 6:20). What needs elaboration here is their contribution to the Creation Mandate as a whole, and not just with respect to parenting.

Since women are also made in God's image with God-given abilities to complement men, both husband and wife are to participate in productive work beyond raising children. This is confirmed by the description of a "perfect wife" (Proverbs 31:10-31), who participates even in commercial business (verses 16 and 24). Hence the contribution of the wife is also not limited to the sphere of the family.

Therefore God's will is for both parents to raise their children together and at the same time have economically productive work. This was possible before industrialization changed the structure of the economy and thus the family. Before the nineteenth century the

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economy was mainly agricultural, supported by cottage industry. So most people, even if they did not live on farms, basically “worked from home,” as we would say today. So husband and wife could work in a common enterprise and raise their children together.

Hence the idea of a mother (or, for that matter, a father) working away from home is relatively recent. And the idea that the father goes out to make a living while the mother stays home to raise their children is not Biblical. Neither is it Biblical that both parents go out to work and leave their children with baby-sitters. But in today’s economy, for most couples, there seems no other option. Industrialization has so restructured the economy that it is most hostile to marriages and families. And the painful consequences are evident everywhere.

Nancy Pearcey (1990), writing in the American context, presents cogently the case for “recreating the economic base of the family,” just like it was in traditional societies. She recognizes that life in traditional societies was “often a life of arduous and backbreaking labor. Yet in terms of family relations, it had distinct advantages over modern life. Families benefited from an integration of life and labor rare in our fragmented age—an integration sought by modern couples who recreate home-based businesses.”

A home-based business can indeed recreate the integration of economically productive work and child-rearing responsibilities for both husband and wife. Not every couple is able to recreate home-based businesses; but every couple can do something to minimize the harmful effects of today’s economy on their marriage and family. Writing as a Christian, Pearcey (2004: 345-46) says,

Christian organizations ought to be ... on the forefront in offering practical alternatives for reintegrating family responsibilities with income-producing work—through such things as home-based work, part-time work positions with prorated benefits, flexible hours, and telecommuting....

At the same time, Christians must not fall into the trap of assuming that paid employment is the only thing that will give women a sense of dignity.... Instead Christians need to challenge the prevailing ideology of success by insisting that individuals are most fulfilled when they enjoy a sense of calling or vocation—

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whether paid or unpaid work. We all long for a sense that we are contributing to something larger than ourselves, to a greater good, to God's purposes in the world.

This then brings us to consider God's will for the spheres of education and economy as they relate to calling or vocation and the Creation Mandate. And after surveying all the seven spheres, we will return to the sphere of the family in terms of the role of parents in raising children who would do God's will in and through their occupation (read: vocation).

Education

Our concern here is the education that prepares and equips a person for a secular occupation to contribute to nation-building beyond the sphere of religion. Currently, for all practical purposes, such an education increasingly serves the Market. Edmund O'Sullivan (1999: 45) puts it succinctly:

The global marketplace is now the centrepiece of our current educational ventures and we are being asked to restructure our schools to help students to become competitive in that emergent global sphere. This is the newest version of educational reform. It has an old ring to it; the linking of schools directly to the needs of industry and business. The only difference is that, today, the yardstick is now stretched to global proportions.

An increasing number of thinkers, especially those with New Age inclinations, are preaching against education serving the Market. O'Sullivan continues, "We have seen this business-education marriage. It has been a marriage that has contributed to the detriment of our natural world and habitat." He then proposes

the thesis that the fundamental educational task of our times is to make the choice for a sustainable global planetary habitat of independent life forms over and against the global competitive marketplace. We are now living in a watershed period comparable

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to the major shift that took place from the medieval into the modern world.

He adopts Thomas Berry's criteria for assessing educational institutions: "All human institutions, programs, and activities must now be judged primarily by the extent to which they inhibit, ignore or foster a mutually enhancing human-earth relationship" (43).

In light of the ecological crisis brought by industrial capitalism, all this sounds innocent enough until we read what Berry says in his forward to O'Sullivan's book (xiv):

Every profession and occupation of humans must establish itself within the integral functioning of the planet. The earth is the primary teacher in economics, in medicine, in law, in religion. ... Ecology is not part of economics. Economics is an extension of ecology. Human Economy is a sub-system of the Earth Economy. So too all the other professions and occupations.... So with [even] religion. Religion is an expression of ecology.

In other words, education, including religious education, is to serve "Mother Earth." This is certainly moving education away from serving the Market. However, whether we are aware of it or not, whatever our education serves is what we serve and worship, and is an expression of our basic belief-system.

Recall that Genesis 1:1, which affirms theism, serves as a polemic against materialism and pantheism. Serving the *Market* is an expression of materialism as industrial capitalism assumes that all that matters or exists is the material. Serving *Mother Earth* is an expression of New Age pantheism, which treats the earth as a goddess. But if one believes in theism, education has to serve the *Maker*, so that it contributes to fulfilling the Creation Mandate. This, we have seen, will care for the earth without worshipping it.

Since education prepares and equips a person for a secular occupation, it has to be market-sensitive, but not market-driven. In the context of a market economy, there are three ways to view and use one's occupation (a neutral term for the work that occupies us, whether it is paid or not).

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One's (paid) occupation is a *job* when it is viewed and used as a means merely to make a living. This is true of low-income people. But for professionals in the marketplace, their middle-class income is far beyond making a living. How then do they view their occupation?

They usually take for granted that their occupation is their *career*. This is so prevalent that even dictionaries define "career" as "occupation." But an occupation need not be a career. According to sociologist Robert Bellah and his colleagues (1996: 119), what it means to be "middle class" is "summed up in another new term that only gained currency in the middle and later nineteenth century: *career*, in the sense of 'a course of professional life or employment, that offers advancement or honor.'"

Psychologist Roy Baumeister (1991: 122) puts it bluntly: "The 'career' definition of work is mainly concerned with the record of success, achievement, and status.... For the careerist, work is a means of creating, defining, expressing, proving, and glorifying the self." Hence, one's occupation becomes a career when one views and uses it for self-advancement in terms of money or prestige, or both. Is the idea of a career really so loaded with self?

The meaning of a word can be evaluated by observing what word or words tend to go together with it. We *do* our job, *fulfill* our calling, but we *pursue* our career (for self-advancement). One's career can "take off" but not one's occupation. We do not say, "His job has taken off," unless we mean he is retrenched. There are "career paths" (to success) but not "occupation paths."

We can also evaluate the meaning of a word by observing what word or words can replace it in the same context. Both the major English dailies in Malaysia, *The Star* and the *New Straits Times*, reported on the same speech given by the then Youth and Sports Minister Azalina Othman Saad (14 May 2004). *The Star* report was given the title, "Azalina: Many youths want career shortcuts." The report in the *New Straits Times* carried the title, "There are no short cuts to success, Azalina tells youth." Hence the words "career" and "success" can be used interchangeably and people do attempt to take career short-cuts to instant success.

As already indicated above, the third way to view one's occupation is that of a *calling* or vocation. This is how the *Collins Cobuild Eng-*

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lish Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2001) defines a vocation: “If you have a vocation, you have a strong feeling that you are specially suited to a particular job or role in life, especially one that involves serving other people.” Hence when we view our occupation as a calling, it becomes a means to use our talents (God-given abilities) to serve humanity (out of love and a sense of justice); promotions are then gratefully accepted as means to serve better. This view is thus consistent with our being made in God’s image and with God’s will for a nation—a covenant community.

God’s will for education then is to prepare and equip people to fulfill a calling or vocation. And since occupation is so integral to the economy, and vice-versa, it needs to be considered in light of God’s will for the economy.

Economy and Business

We have already seen the economic (and ecological) implications of the Sabbath Commandment, which is not just about the Sabbath Day, but also the Sabbath Year and the Jubilee Year (Chapters 1, 10 and 13). We have also seen that this commandment embodies the Golden Rule to love one another as oneself. Hence the laws that apply this commandment, when translated into our context, will give us a good idea of God’s will for the economy. We will highlight the Jubilee Year (Leviticus 25:8-55) as the principles it embodies provide a Biblical alternative to capitalism and communism.

On the Jubilee Year agricultural land that was sold would be returned to the original owner. So the selling price of the land would be calculated based on the number of years left before the next Jubilee Year. When implemented consistently, few if any would covet his neighbor’s land, which in an agricultural economy is the basic means of economic production and constitutes the basic wealth of a family.

Communism does not work because there is hardly any incentive for people to work hard and smart. This is because not only is there no private ownership of the means of economic production, but also the economic rewards are not commensurate with one’s abilities and diligence. Capitalism is the exact opposite. But it does not have the moral imperative nor economic mechanism to effectively curb covet-

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ousness, which has resulted in a host of devastating economic and ecological problems so much so that there has been a cry for an alternative to both capitalism and communism.

The Jubilee system provides such an alternative. Since it was part of the Mosaic Law, it represents God's will for the economy. Under this system not only is there private ownership of the means of economic production, this ownership is not concentrated in the hands of the few (the "capitalists") but is democratized. And naturally, economic rewards will be commensurate with one's abilities and diligence. So the question of a lack of incentive to work hard and smart does not arise. And since covetousness is curbed, it would not result in the excesses of capitalism and the ensuing problems.

In other words, this alternative ensures adequate incentive to work hard and smart, yet does not allow the incentive to become unrestrained covetousness. This requires the political will to implement and enforce such an economic system. And it also pre-requires a community that is agreeable to upholding the Golden Rule in the economy. We are not suggesting it is possible to implement and enforce such a system today, especially in the context of the globalized economy. In fact even Israel failed to put the Jubilee Year into practice. Hence there may be no large-scale solution possible, given fallen human nature and the current set-up of the global economy.

However individual families can put the spirit of the Jubilee Year into practice in their economic life. This happens when they minimize covetousness in their heart and learn to view and use their occupation as a vocation or calling instead of a career. This involves practicing the Golden Rule to love their neighbors as themselves. In other words, they are motivated to work hard and smart not for economic rewards but because of their love for people. In practice this is not easy unless their love for people is an expression of their love for God. To show that this approach to life makes sense even economically, we will look at business as a calling.

The usual dictionary definitions of "business," such as "trade" or "commerce," are not helpful. For when we think of business as trade or commerce, it is not easy to see the purpose of business beyond profit-making. And how can making a profit be loving your neighbor (customer) as yourself? What then is business?

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The economy can be defined as the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services to meet the needs and wants of people. In a subsistence economy, business, which involves the selling and buying of goods and services, is not essential. But in a market economy, it is essential because most of the goods and services we need or want have to be sold and bought. Thus business is the production and distribution of goods and services beyond subsistence to meet the needs and wants of consumers. Understood this way, it is not difficult to see how we can do business to love our neighbors as ourselves, especially since business has become indispensable in meeting people's needs and wants.

For whether we like it or not, if we want to make a profit, the goods or services we produce or provide must meet the needs and wants of people. In other words, we must serve them. The better we serve them, the more profit we can make. The question is whether we serve them wholeheartedly out of love, or merely for the sake of making a profit. If making a profit is the focus, sooner or later it will affect the quality of our service. Even if not, we miss the opportunity to experience the deep sense of meaning that comes with serving people from the heart. So when we focus on loving the people who pay for our goods or services, not only doing business will contribute to the meaning of life, but also profits will be added to us.

This approach to business may sound quaint to people for whom the Golden Rule is a principle to be applauded but not applied. But in the belief-system of the Bible the Golden Rule sums up how we ought to live. And this approach to business has been empirically confirmed to be viable. Based on interviews with 85 Christian CEOs and top executives, Laura Nash (1994), who used to teach at the Harvard Business School, discusses how Christian CEOs who integrate their faith with their business resolve the potential conflicts between the demands of the capitalistic marketplace and the demands of their Christian calling. She summarizes the potential conflicts into seven basic tension points (37):

1. The love for God and the pursuit of profit
2. Love [for people] and the competitive drive
3. People needs and profit obligations

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4. Humility and the ego of success
5. Family and work
6. Charity [concern for the poor] and wealth
7. Faithful witness in the secular city

She calls these points “creative tensions,” for she discovered that when the Christian CEOs sought to bring their faith to bear on the tensions, they often found creative solutions and experienced win-win outcomes. And she observes that “Some of the solutions, innovative at the time they were instituted, conform to what would be regarded today as top management practices. Other solutions are a creative step ahead of even current practices” (149).

Many of the CEOs use their business to serve God through serving people (74). They provide their customers with quality services or products at fair prices (76-78). They seek “to personally treat employees as human beings rather than as cogs in a money machine (the attitude), and to dignify employees by providing them opportunities to develop skills to accomplish meaningful jobs (the actions)” (131). Thus they uphold the Golden Rule in all aspects of their business.

Religion

Before we can consider God’s will for religion, we need to consider what we mean by “religion.” The word, as used to refer to one of the seven influential spheres of culture, can mean at least three things.

The first and most common meaning is that of organized religion, such as Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam and Judaism. They are each an expression of a belief-system that has eternal implications and consequences. But an expression of such a belief-system need not be “organized” to be considered a religion. So New Age religion, which is not an organized religion, is a religion in this second meaning of the word. For it is an expression of pantheism. Thus the theory of evolution is also a religion insofar as it is an expression of materialism, which also has eternal implications and consequences.

However, our focus here is on the third meaning: innate religion, the religion that exists in every human heart. This religion is the fear of God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14), usually expressed through the con-

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science (Romans 2:14-16; cf. 1:32). Every human being has a conscience and hence has the innate ability to discern what is just and what is not. People we consider “God-fearing” are those who are exceptionally conscientious, who habitually (though not perfectly) seek to do justice and love mercy. Hence what Indian sociologist Shankar Rao (1995) considers as distinct but “closely interrelated” (470) are actually inseparable: “Both religion and morality prescribe and control human behaviour. The prescribed form of behaviour is obeyed by internal urges or pressures. In religion, this internal pressure is ‘*fear of God*’ and in morality, it is the ‘*pressure of conscience*’” (469).

All organized religions are in some ways expressions of innate religion. But a “religious” person may not be God-fearing if he does not practice his (organized) religion from the heart or if his (organized) religion itself in some ways supports injustice. Hence even blatant evil may be perpetrated in the name of a religion. On the other hand there are even atheists, despite their professed unbelief, who are God-fearing (conscientious) because they are also made in God’s image. The term “God-fearing” can also be applied to them because, like conscientious believers of God, they would do what is right and not what is wrong according to their conscience even when no one (except God) is watching or holding them accountable.

In fact there is a book by evolutionary biologist and political scientist Dominic Johnson (2016) with the title *God Is Watching You: How the Fear of God Makes Us Human*. Drawing on new research from anthropology, evolutionary biology, experimental psychology, and neuroscience he confirms that the fear of God is innate in everyone: “Whether you are a believer, an agnostic, or an atheist, this book is about *you*” (97). He reminds us that often,

precisely when we do not want to be watched, such as when we are doing something selfish, self-indulgent, or wrong ... we cannot help feeling that even though we may be alone—or perhaps especially *because* we are alone—some kind of higher power is watching us and marking up our ledger (6).

What then is God’s will for religion (the fear of God)? The obvious answer—to keep His commandments to love one’s neighbor as

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oneself by doing justice and loving mercy—has already been considered repeatedly, most recently as the defining characteristic of a covenant community. In other words religion has a crucial role in forming and sustaining a covenant community. Hence any civilization that somehow undermines the fear of God is heading towards self-destruction. As we have seen, a case in point is modern civilization, where the physical environment and way-of-life incarnate materialism and thus promote a way-of-thinking that denies the existence of God.

In view of widespread agnosticism and atheism, which happens only in modernity, Harvard child psychiatrist Robert Coles' (1990) extensive research with children is significant:

During our regular encounters with children we couldn't help but be impressed with the constant mention of religious matters....To be sure, we talked with a lot of children whose specific religious customs and beliefs came under discussion; but we also talked with children whose interest in God, in the supernatural, in the ultimate meaning of life, in the sacred side of things, was not by any means mediated by visits to churches, mosques, or synagogues. Some were the sons and daughters of professed agnostics or atheists; others belonged to "religious" families but asked spiritual questions that were not at all in keeping with the tenets of their religion (xiii, xvii).

Coles' modernist background in psychoanalysis had actually biased him against religion and spirituality:

Thanks go to my wife ... for long ago prodding me to recognize the ideological underpinnings of much secular thought, and for making me aware of a good deal that I chose for a long time not to recognize. She was the one who noticed, early in our ... work, spiritual interests and yearnings among children not conventionally religious, and she kept challenging me to press on toward the years of research we eventually did ... [which] finally, helped me see children as seekers, as young pilgrims well aware that life is a finite journey and as anxious to make sense of it as those of us who are farther along in the time allotted us (xviii, xvi).

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More recently, Oxford cognitive psychologist Justin Barrett (2012: 9) has written a well-documented book on how ongoing research in cognitive psychology supports similar conclusions:

Regardless of culture and without need for coercive indoctrination, children develop with a propensity to seek meaning and understanding of their environments. Given the way their minds naturally develop, this search leads to beliefs in a purposeful and designed world, an intelligent designer behind the design, an assumption that the intentional designer is superpowerful, superknowing, superperceiving, and immortal. This designer does not need to be visible or embodied, as humans are. Children readily connect this designer with moral goodness and as an enforcer of morality. These observations in part account for why beliefs in gods of this general character are widespread cross-culturally and historically.

Barrett's recounting of experiments with children on how their mind works as they observe their environments supports what Paul said concerning even people who willfully suppress the truth about God: "For what can be known about God is evident within them.... For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes—His eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse" (Romans 1:18-20; cf. Psalm 19:1-6). According to Dominic Johnson (2016: 132-33),

In modern societies, the fact that supernatural beliefs are so natural and common in children but then frequently absent among adults suggests a powerful role for social and cultural factors in fostering *atheism* rather than religion—especially western secularism and science education.... Atheism has to be learned, but supernatural beliefs are part of human nature.

In other words, strictly speaking, innate religion includes active belief in God as well. But in view of how easily this belief is sup-

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pressed, we have reduced “innate religion” to simply “fear of God,” which even atheists recognize when rephrased as conscientiousness.

Recall that the Creation Mandate, as originally given to Adam and Eve and applied to ancient Israel in the form of the Mosaic Covenant, is to build a civilization that is both consistent with God’s will and in fellowship with Him. We have elaborated at length the role of religion in building a civilization that is consistent with God’s will. Having now shown that belief in God is actually natural to the human mind, we now highlight the role of religion in building a civilization that is in fellowship with God.

We will look at Old Testament religion in this regard as Israel was called to be a model for all nations. Central to the Mosaic Covenant is the requirement to keep God’s commandments and to seek forgiveness of sin through the Sacrificial System whenever they failed to do so. Otherwise they could not remain in fellowship with God as God is holy. However, in practice, only the genuinely God-fearing among them would do so consistently. The fear of God would not only constrain them to do what is right and restrain them from doing what is wrong, but also prompt them to repent and seek forgiveness from God when they sinned against Him.

In other words, the purpose of religion is not only to cause us to obey God but also to seek His forgiveness when we fail to do so. In fact, by definition, if someone does not at least have a guilty conscience when he has done wrong, he is not a conscientious or God-fearing person, whether he believes in God or not. As for conscientious atheists, no matter what they do to find relief from their guilt feelings, they will not find the kind of relief that can only come with knowing that God has forgiven them. This is especially so when they feel guilty over a wrong that no one, except God, knows about. Hence God’s will for religion applies to them too.

Though modernity undermines religion, it has not been and will not be able to eradicate belief in God. One important reason is that “God so works that men (people) should fear Him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). In other words human experience is designed to point people to God. One way to appreciate this truth is to consider how the arts interpret reality and recreate the experience of it.

Arts and Entertainment

The arts can be grouped into three categories: visual arts (such as painting), performing arts (such as music) and literary arts (such as poetry). Our concern here is God's will for the arts in terms of how they contribute to building a civilization that is consistent with God's will and in fellowship with Him. In other words, we are concerned with the role of the arts in enhancing the fear and worship of God.

In fact renowned Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy not only considers good art as that “which conveys to others the artist's experience of the feeling of the good, so that they become infected by the same feeling,” he also “defines the good in contradistinction to the beautiful: ‘The good is the eternal, the highest aim of our life. No matter how we understand the good, our life is nothing else than a striving towards the good—that is, towards God.’” (Pevear 1995: xviii).

We know that God has such a spiritual role for the arts because we have seen how the architectural design (visual art) of the Tabernacle was central to recreating the sense of God's holiness. Also the psalms, which are lyric poems (literary art), played a central role in worship at the Tabernacle (later the Temple). And they were sung accompanied by musical instruments (performing art).

And Israel's worship of the Golden Calf (visual art) with dancing (performing art) also affirms the unique role of the arts in worship, though it is idolatry or false worship in this case. The arts and worship tend to go hand in hand. This is because by their very nature, the arts are uniquely suited to promote worship, whether true or false, for they appeal to our imagination and emotion.

The arts can reasonably be defined as aesthetic creations that delight and nourish the soul (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:10). So we expect every piece of art to not only engage but also feed the soul; but in practice this is often not true. To appreciate why a piece of art may fail to feed the soul, we differentiate arts that interpret reality from those that do not. What Laurence Perrine (1983: 4) said about literature in his classic textbook on fiction is true of the arts in general:

ESCAPE LITERATURE is that written purely for entertainment—to help us pass the time agreeably. INTERPRETIVE

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LITERATURE is written to broaden and deepen and sharpen our awareness of life. Escape literature takes us *away* from the real world: it enables us temporarily to forget our troubles. Interpretative literature takes us, through the imagination, deeper *into* the real world: it enables us to understand our troubles. Escape literature has as its only object pleasure. Interpretive literature has as its object pleasure *plus* understanding.... A story becomes interpretive as it illuminates some aspect of human life or behavior. An interpretive story presents us with an insight—large or small—into the nature and conditions of our existence. It gives us a keener awareness of what it is to be a human being in a universe sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile. It helps us to understand our world, our neighbors, and ourselves.

Since the artistic design of the Tabernacle enables us to perceive God's holiness, interpretive arts also help us to understand God, and in a way not otherwise possible. This is because the arts appeal to our imagination and emotion in a way not otherwise possible.

This then helps us not only to fear God more as we understand Him better, but also to have closer fellowship with the invisible God as we relate to Him through our imagination and emotion, like when we meditate on the psalms. Furthermore, as the arts also help us to express ourselves to God through our imagination and emotion, as in the singing of hymns, we can better worship Him with our whole being. All this explains why the arts are necessary to help us fear God and worship Him aright.

We now come back to why a piece of art may not feed the soul. Unlike interpretive arts, escape arts—pleasure without understanding—only entertain us. It is only when a piece of art interprets reality and interprets it correctly, that it feeds our soul—with insights into reality (“food for thought”).

Take for instance the movie *Bordertown* (Nava, Lopez and Fields 2006), in which an up-and-coming American journalist played by Jennifer Lopez was sent to investigate a series of rape-cum-murders near the American-owned factories in a Mexican bordertown. One girl managed to survive after being raped and left to die. The journalist was able to befriend and interview her. In a thoughtful scene the

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girl asked the journalist how many children she had. The journalist replied that she was not even married because she had a “career.” She then explained that a “career” is an occupation for which one would sacrifice everything, only to be disillusioned. To her, a career is not what one envisions it to be, and in pursuing it, one will end up having “no life.” Yet she like many others cannot help but pursue it.

We have highlighted earlier that the purpose of education today is mainly to equip people to pursue a career rather than to fulfill a calling. We have also shown that the dictionaries usually fail to define the idea of a career properly. The scene in *Bordertown* not only interprets correctly the reality of what a career is, but also recreates the experience of what it means to be driven to pursue one. The scene is not only thoughtful but also insightful.

The experience of being driven to pursue a career is recreated in a more soul-searching and touching manner in *Theme from Mahogany* (Goffin and Masser 1975), the theme song of the movie *Mahogany* (Ballard, Cohen, and Gordy 1975). The movie is about a young woman played by Diana Ross leaving everything behind, including her boyfriend whom she truly loved, to pursue a promising career in a foreign land. She succeeded in becoming a famous fashion designer. But she faced a loveless future. The song, also known as *Do You Know Where You’re Going To?* is sung by Diana Ross herself.

It begins and ends with a series of questions that was once asked of her. She was effectively asked: Do you know where you are heading? Do you like what is happening? Will you ever find what you are looking for? Do you even know what you are looking for? In between this series of questions, the song reveals how she had dismissed them, only to discover in retrospect how haunting these questions actually were, and how she regretted that we are so slow to recognize how sad the answers to those questions can be. In the movie she eventually gave up her career and returned to her boyfriend.

The sad answers bring us back to Ecclesiastes 3:14, which teaches that human experience is designed to point us to God. When a piece of art interprets reality, and interprets it correctly, it will illustrate this truth in some way. In this case God so works that people who are driven to pursue a career will eventually come to realize that they are actually pursuing things in this world to meet needs that nothing in

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this world can meet. Though they may reject the idea, their experience indicates that they need God.

Arts that feed our soul with insights into our spiritual predicament are only appetizers for the main course—the solution. No matter how soul-touching the appetizers may be, without the main course we are still left unfulfilled. A hymn entitled *Fill My Cup, Lord* (Blanchard 1988), if it interprets reality correctly, presents to us the main course. The lyrics of this hymn may indeed be a testimony based on the author’s personal experience and that of many others. But Bible-believers recognize that it interprets reality correctly because it is a lyrical exposition of John 4:13-14 (cf. Ecclesiastes 6:7, 9).

This Biblical text is about a promise Jesus gave to a woman whom He met at a well. She had hitherto been using the things of this world (relationships with men) to quench the thirst of her soul. Like the water she drew from the well to quench her physical thirst, people who use the things of this world to quench their spiritual thirst will thirst again. Jesus offered her, and still offers us today, “living water” that will quench the thirsting of our soul. The hymn is a confession of a person who identifies himself with the woman’s *past* (before she met Jesus), *present* (when she believed in Jesus), and *future* (when she bore witness to Jesus and invited others to Him).

Since our concern is God’s will for the arts, we will not consider the question of the arts wrongly interpreting reality, whether deliberately or otherwise, and as a result recreating experiences not consistent with truth. But given the power of the arts to shape imagination as well as mold perception and emotion, and the human tendency to reject truths we do not like, we can imagine how dangerous it can be when the arts are not used according to God’s will.

We now turn to consider the sole objective of escape arts—entertainment. We begin with some sobering words of A. W. Tozer (2015: 37), who was called “a 20th century prophet” because of his penetrating insights concerning God and humanity:

A German philosopher many years ago said something to the effect that the more a man has in his own heart the less he will require from the outside; excessive need for support from without is proof of the bankruptcy of the inner man.

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If this is true (and I believe it is) then the present inordinate attachment to every form of entertainment is evidence that the inner life of modern man is in serious decline. The average man has no central core of moral assurance, no spring within his own breast, no inner strength to place him above the need for repeated psychological shots to give him the courage to go on living. He has become a parasite on the world, drawing his life from his environment, unable to live a day apart from the stimulation which society affords him.

Tozer was not opposed to entertainment itself. For he added (38),

No one with common human feeling will object to the simple pleasures of life, nor to such harmless forms of entertainment as may help to relax the nerves and refresh the mind exhausted by toil. Such things if used with discretion may be a blessing along the way. That is one thing. The all-out devotion to entertainment as a major activity for which and by which men live is definitely something else again.

To be entertained is to experience pleasure. But there is a difference between pleasure and enjoyment. Pleasure may or may not become enjoyment. Enjoyment is pleasure that satisfies. We may be richly entertained by a wonderful movie that takes us away from reality for two hours. But when we return to the real world after the movie, our heart may feel as empty as ever if not more so. If this is the case, we cannot really say we enjoyed it. When entertainment (pleasure) is one of the things we seek (in vain) to quench the thirsting of our soul, it cannot become enjoyment.

We have phrased this influential sphere of culture as “Arts and Entertainment” because this is true of the experience of people in general. It should actually be phrased as “Arts and Enjoyment.” But this is only true for those who no longer need to pursue entertainment or anything in this world to quench the thirsting of their soul. In view of God’s will for the arts, the arts have a great deal more to offer than what most people have ever experienced.

Government

In our earlier exposition on Nationhood and Nation-building (Chapter 4), we have defined a state as “a legal and political organization with the power to require obedience and loyalty from its citizens” (Seton-Watson 1997: 1), and to claim “the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within [its] territory” (Weber 1991: 78). And though, strictly speaking, the State corresponds to all the citizens, the term is often used to refer to just the sub-group that exercises this power, the Government. Our focus here is on the nature and scope of that power.

We have already seen that God’s will for a nation is to have a constitutional government with three independent branches: the executive, the judiciary and the legislature. The power of the government is thus constitutional, that is, it is circumscribed by the constitution. Thus the government has no power to act beyond what is permitted in the constitution. Given fallen human nature, this form of government is most consistent with a covenant community.

Power, according to the most widely accepted definition by Max Weber, “is the ability to control the behaviour of others, even in the absence of their consent” (Rao 1995: 141). And power can be broadly divided into three types: charisma, coercion and authority.

Charisma is the power to influence the behavior of others due to the clout of one’s personality, reputation or even qualifications. A leader with charisma has this additional, though not necessary, source of power to lead. Since charisma can be independent of one’s character, it can be, and is in fact often, abused to achieve personal and selfish agenda.

Coercion is the use of force to control the behavior of others against their will. A totalitarian government is an extreme example of a regime that governs through coercion, that is, illegitimate force. Such a use of force is no different from a criminal subduing its victim. But, as we shall see, coercion may be legitimate as in the case of the police subduing the criminal.

Of particular interest to us here is *authority*, the power vested on a person because of the office he holds as in the power vested on a policeman in uniform to stop traffic. This power, being vested, is re-

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moved when the person no longer holds the office, and is re-vested on the next person who holds that office. By definition, authority is power consented to by the people; otherwise it is coercion. Thus this power is circumscribed in such a way that it upholds justice.

Constitutional power is thus a form of authority. The exercise of authority may involve coercion as in the case of the police subduing the criminal. This is legitimate power because it upholds justice in the spirit of the constitution, which has the consent of the people.

What then is the scope of the power of the government in relation to the other spheres of the nation? The power of the government over the nation enables it to ensure that no sphere violates the constitution. It plays the role of upholding intra- and inter-sphere justice, that is, justice *within* and *between* spheres. When there is child abuse (within the sphere of the family), the government needs to act to uphold intra-sphere justice. When a newspaper (media) slanders a company (economy and business) causing it to lose money, the victim can appeal to the government to uphold inter-sphere justice.

The power of the government also enables it to uphold extra-sphere justice, that is, justice *beyond* all the spheres, such as defending the nation from internal and external threats as well as providing other essential services that cannot be provided by any of the other spheres. There are also essential services that are the extra-sphere responsibilities of the government but these services can also be provided by businesses and non-government organizations. The question is whether they should be, to what extent, and by whom. One such service is health-care. Whichever is the case, to uphold justice in the nation, in one way or another the government needs to ensure that everyone has access to adequate health-care.

The Noahic Covenant, which is binding on all nations, requires humanity to build a civilization that is consistent with God's will. This means, beyond upholding the constitution, each of the seven influential spheres of a nation must also be consistent with God's will in ways specific to each of them. Nation-building then involves building (or rebuilding) each of these spheres accordingly.

This requires all the spheres of a nation to be free from the interference of the government to become what they are supposed to be. Recall that it was through the Noahic Covenant that "the principle of

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formal government was introduced” (Elazar 1995: 111). And this means, when God first instituted government to uphold justice in a nation, He also had in mind that every other sphere of the nation would fulfill His will in ways specific to each of them.

This further explains why the power of the government is circumscribed—so that its sovereignty over the nation does not violate the freedom due each of the other spheres. This idea is depicted in Figure 3 (Chapter 17) in that each of the spheres answers directly to the constitution, and not to the government. In other words, *each of the spheres has a sovereignty of its own*, which the government must recognize and respect.

We have just introduced a concept known as “sphere sovereignty,” a phrase coined by Abraham Kuyper, a Dutch pastor-theologian, journalist and statesman who served one term as the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. Though he did not derive this concept from the Mosaic Covenant as an application of the Creation Mandate, he came to virtually the same conclusion concerning the different spheres of a nation and how they relate to the Government (or State). This is well expressed in his famous speech to inaugurate the Free University of Amsterdam (Kuyper 1998: 467-68):

The cogwheels of all these spheres engage each other, and precisely through that interaction emerges the rich, multifaceted multififormity of human life. Hence also rises the danger that one sphere in life may encroach on its neighbor like a sticky wheel that shears off one cog after another until the whole operation is disrupted. Hence also the *raison d’être* for the special sphere of authority that emerged in the State. It must provide for sound mutual interaction among the various spheres, insofar as they are externally manifest, and keep them within just limits. Furthermore, since personal life can be suppressed by the group in which one lives, the state [*sic*] must protect the individual from the tyranny of his own circle.... Thus the sovereignty of the State, as the power that protects the individual and defines the mutual relationships among the visible spheres, rises high *above* them by its right to command and compel. But *within* these spheres that does not obtain. There another authority rules, an authority that de-

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scends directly from God apart from the State. This authority the State does not *confer* but *acknowledges*. Even in defining laws for the mutual relationships among the spheres, the State may not set its own will as the standard but is *bound* by the choice of a Higher will, as expressed in the nature and purpose of these spheres. The State must see that the wheels operate as intended.

If the government holds all the other spheres accountable to the constitution, who then holds the government accountable to the constitution? And who ensures that the government recognizes and respects the respective sovereignty of the other spheres? The answer is obviously the modern counterpart to the prophets in ancient Israel—the media.

Media

We have identified the media as the modern counterpart to the ancient prophets because the work of journalists and their editors by nature amounts to holding the government accountable to good governance. And the best governance is one that observes the Golden Rule, which should be embodied in the constitution of a nation. When the media thus holds the government accountable to the constitution, like the prophets, it is holding the government accountable to God. For we have shown that not only the Golden Rule, but also the very idea of a constitution, has divine origin and sanction.

Furthermore the media is uniquely empowered to accomplish what Walter Brueggemann (2001: 3) calls “the task of prophetic ministry,” which is, “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.” In other words, the media has the power to shape or reshape people’s consciousness and perception for the better (or for the worse, for that matter). What then is the media and why does it have such power?

The prophets fulfilled their ministry mainly through preaching. The shaping or reshaping of people’s consciousness and perception is thus accomplished through *communication*. The prophets were God’s *human* mediums of communication. They also fulfilled their ministry

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by putting their preaching into writing, which became the Prophetic Books. And writing is the earliest form of technology used as a medium of communication. In other words the task of prophetic ministry can also be accomplished through *technological* mediums of communication. Even preachers today use technological mediums of communication such as the microphone.

A technology is a human invention that can be used to extend or enhance human ability, including the ability to communicate. So writing is a human invention that extends the human ability to communicate by recording a person's words so that he can communicate with a distant and even a future audience. And the microphone enhances the ability to speak in that the speaker can address a large audience. The telephone, another technological medium of communication, extends this ability in terms of speaking to a distant audience.

The word "media" (Latin plural for "medium") basically means mediums of communication. But unless qualified it refers to the mass media, that is, the print and electronic media such as newspapers and the television. Thus it refers to technological mediums of communication that can *greatly* enhance and extend the human ability to communicate in that they reach a very large and wide audience. This enables media like newspapers and the television to shape or reshape the consciousness and perception of the masses.

Since communication technologies only enhance or extend, no matter how greatly, and not replace the human ability to communicate, by themselves they are powerless without the people who use them as mediums of communication. Thus the term "media" refers also to the people behind the contents communicated through these mediums. Hence it is still human beings who are behind the power of the media. So it makes sense to talk about the media being held accountable to the constitution, as well as the media holding the government accountable to the constitution.

However, by itself the media cannot effectively hold the government accountable. In a modern democratic nation it is the citizens who hold in their hands the ultimate (non-violent) means of holding the government accountable—free and fair elections. But their consciousness and perception must first be consistent with reality on the ground. They must first be adequately informed by the media about

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the true state of the nation and of the government. So a free and responsible media, accountable to no one except the constitution, is equally crucial. Like the prophets, the media need to fear God so that in communicating the truth they do not fear even the government.

The “democratic” role of the people in holding the government accountable was found even in ancient Israel, supposedly a “theocracy.” For the people did play a role in supporting and endorsing a newly appointed king. Even David, who was already appointed king by God and anointed by the prophet Samuel, had to be supported and endorsed by the people, with the input of the prophet.

After Saul died, David did not immediately become king of Israel. He ruled over the tribe of Judah at Hebron for seven and a half years before becoming king over all Israel (2 Samuel 5:5). 1 Chronicles 11-12 records (not in chronological order) the process of David gaining support from the people even before Saul’s death. 1 Chronicles 11:1-3 records that all Israel came to David at Hebron to request him to be their king, which led to the elders anointing David as king of Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 5:1-3). The fighting men from each of the tribes had come to Hebron “with undivided heart to make David king over all Israel” (12:38a, summarizing 12:23-37); and likewise “all the rest of Israel” (12:38b). The oft-quoted verse concerning the sons of Issachar “who understood the times” is found in this context (12:32); they had “knowledge of what Israel should do,” that is, to support and endorse David.

The prophet Samuel played a key role in the whole process, for the elders anointed David “according to the word of the LORD through Samuel” (11:3). And the fighting men from the various tribes came to Hebron “to turn the kingdom of Saul to him, according to the word of the LORD” (12:23). Also the heads of David’s own fighting men supported him “according to the word of the LORD concerning Israel” (11:10).

And when David passed the throne to Solomon, he had to win the approval of the people by convincing them that Solomon was God’s choice to replace him (1 Chronicles 28:1-8).

An interesting contrast was Rehoboam, the successor of Solomon. Because he refused to lighten the oppressive demands of his father Solomon, the northern ten tribes broke away and the kingdom

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was divided (1 Kings 12). Led by Jeroboam, the ten tribes did not accept and endorse Rehoboam because he refused to do what was just. And the prophet Ahijah was involved—he told Jeroboam about God’s intention to split the kingdom of David and give the ten tribes to him (1 Kings 11:29-37). So again we see the people working hand in hand with the prophet in holding the king accountable to God.

In other words, just as the prophet Samuel could not make David king without the people, and the prophet Ahijah could not split the kingdom without the people, the media cannot effectively hold the government accountable to the constitution without the citizens. Hence we see that even though there were no elections in ancient Israel, the people did play an equivalent democratic role in partnership with the prophets.

Therefore the democratic idea of the people holding the government accountable is also taught in the Bible. This makes sense because God’s will for a nation—a covenant community—is not only one where the people consent to who rules over them, but also one where the people are obligated to uphold the Golden Rule by ensuring that whoever rules over them upholds the constitution. And if the constitution does not already embody adequately the Golden Rule or the elections are not free and fair, they need to respond accordingly. Since the people depend on the media to guide them, this further shows how important it is for the media to be free and responsible.

We have mentioned earlier that a nation that consents to adopt a constitution to form a covenant community might still lack the culture needed to uphold the constitution by interpreting and implementing it in the spirit of the Golden Rule. In this case the power of the media to shape or reshape the people’s consciousness and perception is needed to create the necessary culture. For this purpose, the media need to draw on the power of the arts to shape imagination and emotion. This means, the arts, which are culture shapers, have to play an active role in this regard. And their power can be enhanced and extended through the media.

The government holds the media accountable to the constitution. But who holds the media accountable to fulfill its unenviable calling to hold the government accountable to the constitution? The ancient prophets were individually called by God and were thus accountable

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directly and only to Him. Today, in order for God's will for the media to be done, we need an adequate number of media professionals who are truly God-fearing, who strongly feel called to this profession, and who are adequately educated to fulfill their calling.

Although the concept of calling has been promoted also by people who do not even believe in God, it assumes the existence of God. For when someone feels called to a profession, who called him? This explains why a person with a deep sense of calling feels that it is not up to him to decide whether to give up what he feels called to do. Hence when a person's fear of God and sense of calling are deep enough, he has what it takes to fulfill his calling even under the most trying circumstances.

Such God-fearing media professionals can still fulfill their calling even when the mainstream media—newspapers and television—are neither free nor responsible. For the alternative media available through the Internet, which merges and democratizes the powers of both newspapers and the television, has been reaching more and more people.

Where then do media professionals who are God-fearing come from? For that matter, where do God-fearing professionals in the spheres of government, economy and business, arts and entertainment, education and even religion come from? The need for God-fearing business owners who see business as their calling to serve humanity must be highlighted here. For even professionals in the arts and the media mostly work for business owners. Also, political parties often receive funds from them. This brings us back to the sphere of the family.

Family II

The sphere of (secular) education plays the role of educating people to fulfill their calling. As for (intentionally) raising up an adequate number of them who are truly God-fearing, we need to look to God-fearing families. We have seen in our exposition on the sphere of religion that not only the fear of God, but also active belief in God, is natural to the human mind, and also that human experience is designed to point people to God. This means there will always be God-

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fearing families, and raising up God-fearing children is actually doing what is natural to human experience. It seems un-natural in modern civilization, especially in the cities, only because modernity incarnates the idea that there is no God, with the result that God no longer seems or feels real.

God's instructions given through Moses on how the Israelites should raise their children are then all the more needed today. We will look at Deuteronomy 6, an important passage on this subject.

First of all, the parents themselves must "love the LORD your God with all your heart, soul and strength" and the commandments of God must be "upon your hearts" (verses 5-6). As a result of such a wholehearted commitment to God and His commandments, they would be able to speak from first-hand experience that the commandments are "for our good always" (verse 24).

They are then able to teach God's commandments to their children with credibility and conviction. They are to talk about the commandments "when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you get up" (verse 7). As Craigie (1976: 170) puts it, "The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to end of the day. In summary, the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of man."

Hence parents must allow the commandments to permeate their thinking, feeling as well as acting in every aspect of their own life, and thus influence their children to do the same. This means parents need to have an adequate understanding of how the commandments are to be applied in every aspect of their life. This is one reason our exposition of the Mosaic Covenant pays special attention to applying the Ten Commandments to every aspect of modern life.

God also instructed them to bind the commandments "as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontlets on your forehead" (verse 8). Based on parallels elsewhere (Exodus 13:9, 16 and Proverbs 3:3, 22) this is to be understood figuratively. It means the commandments must shape their reflection and guide their action, basically saying the same thing as the above, but in a more vivid way.

The text goes on to say that they were also to "write the commandments on the doorposts of your house and on your (city) gates"

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(verse 9). This means the commandments must permeate not only what goes on in the home but also what happens in the city. In other words, children are to be raised in a context in which the commandments that are taught and practiced in the home are also recognized as normative in the community at large.

In a premodern town it is not unusual to find the last six of the Ten Commandments—from honoring parents to dishonoring covetousness—assumed as normative in the community at large. So meeting this last requirement would not be that difficult. But in a modern city this is usually not the case. In fact, in a consumer economy covetousness is tacitly accepted as good. What then can be done?

The spirit of this last requirement can be met as long as the children can see that the commandments taught and practiced in their own families are also taught and practiced in some other families. The bottom-line is that the children are aware that their own families are not alone in embracing and practicing the commandments, and that they are part of a community, no matter how small, that values these commandments.

The task of nation-building thus begins with parenting.

Chapter 19

Covenant and Revelation

In our effort to apply the Mosaic Law to the contemporary world we have looked at the “task of prophetic ministry” (Brueggemann 2001: 3) in terms of the media, today’s counterpart to the ancient prophets. We now need to consider the prophetic institution itself in order to have a better understanding of the Biblical view of God and of reality.

Like most words, the term “prophet” has different meanings, even within the Old Testament. Abraham was called a “prophet” (Genesis 20:7), but our concern is limited to the prophetic institution that began with Moses, the first prophet of his kind (cf. Kaufmann 1972: 212, 222). For it is this kind of prophets who not only received revelation from God but also were called to fulfill the task of prophetic ministry—to shape or reshape the consciousness and perception of a community.

In Deuteronomy 18:9-22 Moses warned the people against imitating the Canaanites by practicing their “detestable things” such as divination and sorcery (magic). Divination, such as astrology, is the practice of discovering one’s fate through interpreting signs and omens. When the outcome is unfavorable, one can seek to manipulate supernatural forces through magic to “circumvent one’s fate” (Lawson

1994: 34). Evidently in view of the uncertainties of life (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8), this was, and is, an attempt to feel secure concerning the future. But uncertainties of life are designed to point people to God, for “God so works that men should fear Him” (Ecclesiastes 3:14). So divination-magic amounts to defying God and His purpose.

Israel was to put their complete trust in God and to hear from Him instead of consulting diviners and sorcerers. So God promised that He would raise up for them “a prophet like me [Moses]” from among their own people, that is, the prophet would be an Israelite (verses 15, 18). God would speak through him and hence they must listen to whatever he said to them in God’s name (verse 19). However they were not to accept anyone who claimed to be a prophet.

Public Confirmation of Prophet

God gave them two tests to identify a true prophet. The first is that whatever he says in God’s name must come true (verses 20-22). This means God would enable a prophet to make predictions so that he could be *publicly* confirmed as a prophet. We have indications in the Old Testament that this actually happened in the history of Israel. The best example is the case of Samuel: “And as Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him, and let none of his words fail. So all Israel ... knew that Samuel was confirmed as a prophet of the LORD” (1 Samuel 3:19-20; see also 9:6). While in exile in Babylon, Ezekiel was eventually confirmed as a prophet so that from then on his fellow Jews in exile would take him seriously (Ezekiel 2:5; 33:33).

The words of a true prophet would never fail because when he spoke in God’s name, he was absolutely certain that he had heard from God what he was to say. The prophet Micaiah predicted that King Ahab would die in the battle he was intent on going into. The false prophets had predicted favorably. When Ahab ordered him to be imprisoned, Micaiah said with full confidence: “If you indeed return safely, the LORD has not spoken through me,” and pointedly added, “Take note, all you people!” (1 Kings 22:28). To thwart the fulfillment of the prophecy, Ahab disguised himself. “But a certain man drew his bow at random and struck the king of Israel between the joints of the armor.... So the king died” (1 Kings 22:34-37).

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The second test is given in Deuteronomy 13:1-5. It was not enough that one who claimed to be a prophet could perform a sign such as making a prediction that came true. For if he then urged the people to worship a god they had never known, which means his view of God contradicted what Moses had already taught them, he would still be a false prophet. Why then would God allow a false prophet to deceive them through a miracle? It was to test whether they truly loved Him. For one who truly loves God would not abandon Him or the truth about Him just because a false teacher could perform a miracle.

With these objective safeguards, we can have the assurance that believers of God in ancient Israel would not, and did not, accept any teaching, whether oral or written, that they could not ascertain was consistent with what God had already revealed through Moses. This means writings that were included and are preserved in the Old Testament have been filtered so that it excludes false teachings. This gives us confidence in the Old Testament as divinely inspired Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Public Confirmation of Moses

All this begs the question: How was Moses himself confirmed as a true prophet of God in the first place? Since Moses laid down the foundational teachings to evaluate all future teachings, as well as the tests to evaluate all future prophets, it was imperative that the people knew beyond a shadow of doubt that Moses was indeed a true prophet. How did they know?

Deuteronomy 18:16 spells out that God's promise to raise up for them a prophet like Moses was in accord with their request made at Mount Sinai not to hear directly from God because that would be life-threatening. God had descended upon Mount Sinai in fire and smoke and the mountain quaked violently (Exodus 19:18-25). Then out of the fire God spoke the Ten Commandments to them as they stood at the foot of the mountain (Deuteronomy 5:22-23). So they heard the very voice of the living God, and the whole experience was so awesome that they not only trembled but were also surprised that they were still alive. They were then afraid that if this were to happen

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again, they would not survive and therefore made the request that God speak to them through Moses (Deuteronomy 5:24-27; cf. Exodus 20:18-21).

From then on God spoke to them (only) through Moses, who thus became God's prophet to them. So the making of the Mosaic Covenant was initiated in Exodus 19 with God speaking directly to the people, then continued in Exodus 21-23 and concluded in Exodus 24 with God speaking to them through Moses as mediator (Keil and Delitzsch 1981b: 320).

Evidently "Moses' special prerogative [as mediator] is planned from the outset and does not arise because of the subsequent fear of the people" (Childs 1974: 354). For prior to God's coming upon Mount Sinai, Moses was already acting as mediator (Exodus 19:1-15). And God informed Moses ahead of time that He would come down upon Mount Sinai and would speak with him in the hearing of the people so that they would "also believe you forever" (Exodus 19:9). So the people heard God speaking with Moses before they heard God speaking to them. The whole awesome experience was to confirm Moses as God's prophet. God allowed them to hear Him directly so that they would fear Him all the days of their life and teach their children what He said (Deuteronomy 4:10; cf. Exodus 20:20).

After this encounter with God, given the background that Moses had already performed a series of miracles before arriving at Mount Sinai, would the people have any doubt at all that Moses was indeed God's prophet? Hence, like the subsequent prophets, Moses was confirmed as a prophet publicly. God did not expect His people to be gullible.

We have so far assumed that the Exodus account in general, and the Sinai account in particular, reflect what actually happened. Modernists will reject this assumption because their presupposed belief-system (materialism) cannot accept the supernatural elements in the account. But we have shown at the outset that the theism of Genesis 1:1 is intellectually credible, and that to understand the Bible we need to presuppose it, at least temporarily. We will then have no good reason to reject the Exodus account as historically unreliable (cf. Provan, Long and Longman 2003: 102-104; 127-37; Hoffmeier 2005: ix-xi).

Uniqueness of Biblical Monotheism

In fact we have good reasons to accept in particular the Sinai account as historically reliable. First of all the Biblical belief-system (theism) was unprecedented and unique in the ancient world. And the Sinai account shows that it was in the process of making the Mosaic Covenant with Israel that God introduced this belief-system to them through the revelation of Himself and the Mosaic Law. Otherwise the belief-system would have to emerge naturally out of the culture of the time. To appreciate how unlikely this is, we now look at the uniqueness of this belief-system.

Since polytheism was the dominant and virtually the exclusive belief-system of the ancient world, for our purpose here, we label the Biblical belief-system by its alternate name—(Biblical) *monotheism*, the belief that there is only one God, as opposed to *polytheism*, the belief that there are many gods. But in essence the difference between the two is not in number (one versus many); they are different in kind altogether (see below). In fact one can actually be a “polytheist” in practice without believing in the multiplicity of gods.

In preparing the second generation of Israelites to hear afresh the Ten Commandments and the laws that followed, Deuteronomy 4 expounds on “the nature and purpose of the law ... so that the obedience that is called for will not be blind obedience, but an obedience based on understanding” (Craigie 1976: 129). Thus Moses explained to them that the unprecedented and unique event of God taking for Himself a nation (Israel) out of another nation (Egypt) through a series of miracles, and then allowing the new nation to even hear His own voice (at Mount Sinai), was to show them that “the LORD is God; there is no other besides Him” (verses 32-35). For “the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below; (so) there is no other” (verse 39). In the Song of Moses, God Himself says, “And there is no God except Me” (32:39; see verses 17 and 21). This clearly affirms monotheism (cf. Lundbom 2013: 60; contra MacDonald 2003; for a critique of MacDonald, see Bauckham 2004: 188-96; for a succinct defense of monotheism in Deuteronomy, see Wright 2006: 80-83).

So the generation of Israelites who first received the Mosaic Law received it through an unmistakable encounter with the living God,

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and so when they or their descendants were to obey it, they could have the full assurance that it would not be blind obedience.

Earlier on, in this same context, Moses indirectly reminded them of the Golden Calf incident, which violated the Second Commandment. For he stressed that when they heard God speaking to them from Mount Sinai, “you heard the sound of words, but you saw no form; there was only a voice” (verse 12). So they were to be careful not to worship any idol or repeat the sin of worshipping the Golden Calf, which they had intended to represent God Himself. This means even if all the polytheistic gods, which were represented by images, are reduced to just one god, this one god is still not the Biblical God, who (unlike the “monotheistic” god of Pharaoh Akhenaten) cannot be represented by any image. So the difference is not in number but in kind (cf. Kaufmann 1972: 226-27, including footnote 6).

This categorical difference is better seen in how the monotheistic God relates to creation in contrast to how the polytheistic gods relate to the world. The discussion of Jewish Biblical scholar Yehezkel Kaufmann on this issue, though more than seventy years old, is “still unsurpassed” and “remains compelling” (Sommer 2009: 166, 269; contra Levenson 1994: 3-13, who denies that Genesis 1 teaches creation out of nothing; for a defense of Kaufmann, see Sommer 2009: 165-72 and endnotes, especially 106).

Echoing Genesis 1, Kaufmann (1972: 29, 69) sums up the Biblical belief-system as follows: “The mark of monotheism is ... the idea of a god who is the source of all being, not subject to a cosmic order, and not emergent from a pre-existent realm.” In other words, the monotheistic God “is supreme over all. There is no realm above or beside him to limit his absolute sovereignty” (60). In contrast, the distinguishing mark of polytheism is

the idea that there exists a realm of being prior to the gods and above them, upon which the gods depend, and whose decrees they must obey. Deity belongs to, and is derived from, a primordial realm ... out of which the gods have emerged and within which they operate. Their actions actualize the infinite, mysterious powers that inhere in this realm (21, 25).

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In other words, if all the polytheistic gods are reduced to just one god, this one god is not in control of the universe. The difference in kind cannot be more clear.

Who, or what, then is in control of the universe in polytheism? It is Fate, the impersonal force behind the realm above and prior to the gods, which “apportions lots to the gods as well as to men” (22). But since Fate is impersonal, it cannot think, feel nor make decisions. So its “control” of the universe means that everything that happens has already been predetermined or fated from eternity.

But this does not mean polytheists accept fatalism, the pessimistic view that whatever happens is inevitable and so whatever we do or not do will not make a difference. For this belief in Fate comes with the practice of not only divination but also magic (sorcery), the manipulation of impersonal forces to change one’s fate through prescribed rituals. As Jack Lawson (1994: 92) puts it:

Given that one’s fate could be prognosticated through various means of divination, the next pressing question for [one] who receives an ill omen would be “What can be done about it?” To learn of one’s fate—and particularly an ill fate—with no recourse to change it would be worse than having no foreknowledge at all.... [So] often-complex rituals evolved to ward off the evil predicted by omens

Thus divination-magic is an outworking of the polytheistic view of reality. Given the uncertainties of life people are tempted to know the future, which to polytheists is fated. Divination is then needed to read into Fate since Fate, being impersonal, cannot speak. In contrast, the monotheistic God, the supreme Lord of the universe, speaks. And the Biblical claim that a nation heard the voice of such a God, and upon this historical reality the prophetic institution was established, was and is unparalleled. Biblical prophecy then is clearly the monotheistic counterpart to divination (cf. Kaufmann 1972: 93-101). The words of some of the ancient prophets were written down as Scripture so that God can continue to speak to future generations.

As for magic, which is based on the belief that rituals have intrinsic efficacy, we have stressed in our exposition on the Sacrificial Sys-

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tem that Biblical rituals have no intrinsic efficacy. We highlighted there that under polytheism, rituals have intrinsic efficacy because they “were founded on the [polytheistic] premise that there was a material force that was superior to the gods, a force that was impersonal and could be manipulated by impersonal [magical] means” (Hartley 1992: lix, drawing on Kaufmann 1972: 23-24). Under Biblical monotheism, even prayer and fasting are useless if offered without faith in God that is evident from a repentant way-of-life (Isaiah 58:1-59:15).

Hence the difference between the two belief-systems is distinctly expressed through actual practices as well. Another Biblical practice that demonstrates distinctly the monotheistic view of reality, in sharp contrast to the polytheistic view, is found in the Psalms (such as Psalm 44) where a God-fearing believer questions God over a gross injustice (see Chapter 30). Why question God? This practice makes sense only when one believes that a personal God, and not impersonal Fate, is in control of the universe. When a person who professes polytheism or even atheism questions God over an injustice, even if only in his heart, he is not behaving as a polytheist or an atheist but as a human being made in God’s image. We have seen that though often suppressed, belief in a God who is all-powerful is natural to the human mind (see Religion in Chapter 18).

Another good reason to accept as historical the Sinai account that the Mosaic Law was revealed by God, and is hence distinctly superior to other legal systems, is the claim that if the Israelites kept it, other nations would say of them, “Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people” (Deuteronomy 4:6). This claim has been confirmed to be true in modern times. For we can now confidently affirm how wise and understanding and blessed a nation will be if and when it embodies the spirit of the Mosaic Law, and thus becomes a truly covenant community with a truly constitutional government (see Chapters 17 and 18).

Hence the outworking of the difference between the two belief-systems is rather distinct as well as far-reaching and pervasive. Borrowing the words of Nahum Sarna (1986: 149),

If it be further remembered that the concept of a national covenant between God and an entire people, the insistence on the ex-

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clusive worship of one God, the thoroughgoing ban on representing God in any material or corporeal form, and the emergence as a national institution of the messenger-prophet ... are all innovations of the same period, then the conclusion becomes inescapable that we are faced with a revolutionary religious phenomenon, a sudden and new monotheistic creation the like of which had not hitherto existed and the characteristic ingredients of which were not to be found on the contemporary religious scene.

How likely is it then for Biblical monotheism to have evolved from polytheism, or developed out of a polytheistic culture? If God did not reveal it, it would have to be a sudden human invention out of a cultural vacuum. It is thus so sensible to believe that God did reveal it, unless one's presupposed belief-system, which can neither be proved scientifically nor philosophically, has ruled it out even before looking at the evidence.

Modern people tend to reject monotheism with the excuse that it is "pre-scientific" as though only ancient people would have no problem with it (adapting Wright 2003: 10; for a clarification that the modernist belief-system is also ancient and thus "pre-scientific" see Wright 2013: 16-20; cf. Sedley 2007: 133-66). But ancient polytheists, like modern ones, would have problems with it. Even for the Israelites, God had to speak to them audibly to convince them. And even then they strayed soon after that in the Golden Calf incident.

The dominant belief-systems of the world, whether modern or ancient, are significantly different from Biblical monotheism precisely because fallen human nature is significantly resistant to it (Romans 1:18-32). So to understand it adequately and practice it faithfully requires a consciousness and perception contrary to that of the dominant culture. To form and sustain such a consciousness and perception, we have seen, is the task of the prophetic ministry.

Christ and Biblical Revelation

Last but not least, Deuteronomy concludes with these words: "Since then [the death of Moses] no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses,

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whom the LORD knew face to face, in terms of the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt ... and all the mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel” (34:10-12). This remarkable comment was obviously appended to Deuteronomy towards the end of the Old Testament era to give an update that until then a prophet (exactly) like Moses never came.

However it does not mean the prophets that came after Moses were not at all like Moses as a prophet. They certainly were like Moses in that God also revealed Himself to and through them. The comment specifically says they were not like Moses in that God knew Moses “face to face” and sent him to perform unparalleled miracles. God did clarify that Moses would be in a class of his own (Numbers 12:6-8). For God would speak to the prophets through dreams and visions, but Moses could see “the form of the LORD” and God would speak with him “mouth to mouth,” that is, converse “face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend” (Exodus 33:11).

In other words, the remarkable comment recalls God’s promise to raise up “a prophet” like Moses in Deuteronomy 18 and “makes it clear that this prophet was to be understood as a particular individual and not merely signifying the office of prophecy in a general sense, as might be argued from Deuteronomy 18 alone” (Sailhamer 2009: 49). And it affirms that as far as the Old Testament was concerned, this particular promised individual had not yet come.

This explains why in the time of Jesus Christ the Jews were waiting for “the Prophet” (John 1:21; 7:40). And Peter identified Jesus as *the* awaited Prophet like Moses (Acts 3:22-23). Based on the Gospel accounts of His life in general, and His resurrection in particular, Christ certainly (and more than) met the requirements to be that Prophet (cf. Hebrews 3:1-6). These accounts can be trusted as historically reliable (see Strobel 1998) unless our presupposed belief-system has ruled this out. In fact Christ’s resurrection has been specifically shown to be historically credible through meticulous research using methodologies acceptable to even scholars who do not believe in miracles (Wright 2003; Licona 2010; 2014).

And Christ has given not only a backward endorsement of the Old Testament (Luke 24:25-47; John 10:35), but also a forward en-

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dorsement of the New Testament, as the divinely inspired Word of God (cf. Geisler and Nix 1986: 89-91). For He promised the apostles that the Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their remembrance what He had taught them (John 14:26). This is pre-endorsement of the Gospels. Also, the Holy Spirit would teach them new truths that Christ did not reveal to them, as well as disclose to them what was to come (John 16:12-13). This is pre-endorsement of the Book of Acts and the Epistles as well as the Book of Revelation.

Part V

The Davidic Covenant

Joshua

Judges

Ruth

1 and 2 Samuel

1 and 2 Kings

Ezra

Nehemiah

Esther

Haggai

Zechariah 1-8

Malachi

1 and 2 Chronicles

Psalms

Chapter 20

Israel Occupying Promised Land

As we move on to the books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth, we move on with the Israelites into the Promised Land. The Book of Joshua recounts the conquest and occupation of Canaan under the leadership of Joshua. Judges and Ruth give an account of the condition of the nation after Joshua died. This condition prevailed until the time of the prophet Samuel. He was the last judge of Israel, who also served as priest. As prophet, Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel as well as David, who replaced Saul. God then made a covenant with David that unilaterally promised that kingship over the nation would remain with his descendants forever (2 Samuel 7:8-17).

In other words, the history of Israel as depicted in the books of Joshua, Judges and Ruth covers a period when the nation was not yet a kingdom nor a state (without a king). These three books explain not only why kingship was needed in Israel but also why God made the covenant with David. Our exposition of these books will highlight this central theme.

Nation Without King

We already know that for Israel to enter and remain in the Promised Land the nation must observe the Mosaic Covenant. To do so they needed to have complete trust in God. So in Deuteronomy Moses not only reaffirmed Joshua as his successor but also prepared the nation to trust in God. Now in the Book of Joshua we will learn that a God-fearing leader whom the people feared was needed to lead the nation in trusting God and observing the Mosaic Covenant.

After Moses died, God commanded Joshua to lead the people into Canaan (Joshua 1:1-9). He promised to be with Joshua as He had been with Moses. On Joshua's part he needed to be strong and courageous and be careful to observe the Mosaic Law himself. To ensure this, God commanded Joshua to meditate on it "day and night."

Joshua as God-fearing Leader

When Joshua assumed leadership over the nation, the people pledged that they would obey him just as they had obeyed Moses, but added, "only may the LORD your God be with you as He was with Moses" (1:17). To demonstrate to them that He would be with Joshua as He was with Moses, God performed a miracle through Joshua similar to one that He had performed through Moses (Joshua 3:7-4:24). Joshua commanded the nation to cross the river Jordan into Canaan at a time when it was overflowing its banks. But as soon as the priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant touched the edge of the water, the waters in the river were cut off allowing them to cross over, thus reminding them of how the nation had crossed the Red Sea under the leadership of Moses. As a result the people feared Joshua all the days of his life as they had feared Moses (4:14).

The first city to be captured was Jericho. God commanded Joshua to take the city through an extremely abnormal, in fact ridiculous, means (see Joshua 6). They would not have to fight at all. Joshua obeyed God and the people obeyed Joshua. When they captured Jericho, they could not claim any credit at all; it was God who quite literally handed the city over to them. Subsequently the people had to fight to capture a city. What then was the purpose of this one-off abnormal means against Jericho?

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Prior to crossing Jordan God fed them with manna. But when they arrived in Canaan and ate some of the produce of the land, the manna stopped (5:12). Recall that God's feeding them with manna was to teach them to live by (depend on) God's word and not only "by bread" (the normal means of making a living). This was so that when they used normal means, which God expected them to unless He instructed otherwise, they would still trust in God and not in the means. Similarly, the capture of Jericho without a fight was to teach them to trust in God and not in their fighting ability. This was to ensure that when they had success, whether in terms of a good harvest or victory in a battle, they would continue to trust and obey God.

To reinforce this lesson, God caused them to be defeated the first time they tried to capture the second city, Ai (Joshua 7). For someone had secretly taken a spoil in Jericho, which was forbidden by God for the capture of that city. This was obviously to test whether they would obey God completely before allowing them to take spoils in the capture of subsequent cities. They were able to capture Ai only after the culprit was discovered and dealt with (Joshua 8). This would have impressed upon them more deeply that even when they used human means, it was God who gave them success. And the deception by the Gibeonites (Joshua 9) would have also impressed upon them that even with a God-fearing leader, they still needed God's counsel, which in Israel was usually given through a prophet.

When they had captured enough cities throughout Canaan (Joshua 10-12), and when Joshua was advanced in age, the Promised Land was officially divided among the tribes (Joshua 13-22). The individual tribes had to complete the task of taking possession of all the land within the territory allotted to them. God had promised that anywhere within the Promised Land that they set foot on would be theirs (1:3). It was now up to them to trust in God and occupy the land that remained to be possessed.

Before Joshua died, he gathered the nation twice (Joshua 23-24). The first gathering, which involved only the leaders of each of the tribes, was held (presumably) at Shiloh (Woudstra 1981: 332), where the Tabernacle was then located (18:1; 21:2; 22:9). Joshua reminded them of God's faithfulness and exhorted them to remain faithful to the Mosaic Covenant.

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The second gathering was held at Shechem, where the nation had previously observed a ceremony to fulfill a command given by Moses (8:30-35; cf. Deuteronomy 27). This time it involved all the tribes together with their leaders. It was essentially a covenant renewal ceremony. Joshua challenged the people to “choose for yourselves today whom you will serve,” and added, “as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD” (24:15). On that day the people renewed their commitment to serve God and obey His voice.

On the whole we can say that under the leadership of Joshua the people obeyed God, and the political vision of Deuteronomy, with a constitutional form of leadership, was put into practice in Israel (McConville 2006: 116-17). This political accomplishment demonstrates that Joshua represented the kind of leadership needed to ensure the nation remained faithful to the Mosaic Covenant. This conclusion becomes painfully obvious when we look at the condition of Israel after Joshua died. For this we turn to the Book of Judges.

Israel’s Spiritual and Moral Corruption

Judges 2:6 picks up the account of what happened after Joshua had dismissed the people from the second gathering (Joshua 24:28). We read that, “And the people served the LORD all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who outlived Joshua, who had seen all the great works of the LORD which He had done for Israel” (2:7). But when that generation passed away, “there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD, nor the works which He had done for Israel” (2:10).

In other words, the impact of Joshua’s leadership outlived him for a while. But soon, the nation lacked the kind of leadership needed to keep Israel faithful to God. The outcome was that the people repeatedly fell into the temptation to worship foreign gods. Whenever this happened, as already forewarned in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, God would allow a foreign king to oppress them. When they could no longer bear the oppression, they would cry out to God, who would then raise up a “judge” to deliver them (Judges 2:11-16).

Gordon McConville (2006: 121-22) has clarified what the term “judge” really means. The Hebrew word for the noun “judge” is de-

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rived from a verb that “may mean ‘judge’, ‘rule’ or ‘deliver’, depending on the context, and the noun has corresponding meanings.” This semantic range of the verb “corresponds to political actuality, since administrative [rule], military [deliver] and judicial [judge] roles were closely linked in the ANE [the world of the Old Testament], and often embodied in the king.” Though the military role (3:9-10) is highlighted in the Book of Judges, the administrative (10:2) and judicial (4:4-5) roles are also indicated.

After being delivered by a judge, the people would experience peace for the rest of the judge’s lifetime. But after the judge died, they “would turn back and become more corrupt than their fathers” (2:18-19), which means, not only is the whole cycle repeated, but also each time they would become more corrupt than in the previous cycle (Block 1999: 132). We have enough details on only six out of the twelve judges named in the book for us to evaluate them. The spiritual and moral decline of the nation is reflected in the decline in the quality of these six judges.

In the first cycle the judge was Othniel (3:9-11), Caleb’s nephew. In contrast to the accounts of the subsequent five cycles, nothing is said that implies anything spiritually or morally negative about Othniel. The second judge was Ehud (3:15-30). He served God by delivering Israel through deception. This indicates a decline in the moral condition of the time.

Ehud was followed by Deborah (4:1-5:31). Deborah was a God-fearing and faithful woman. But the fact that a woman had to become a judge, whose responsibility included leading an army into the battlefield, indicates a decline in the spiritual condition of the time. Sure enough, when it was time for the judge to go into battle, God had to call Barak to go in her stead. The battle was humanly impossible for Israel to win. But God promised victory. Barak refused to go unless accompanied by Deborah; he was not able to claim God’s promise on his own.

Gideon (6:1-8:35), the next deliverer, was raised in a family that outrightly worshipped idols. God had to teach him to trust in Him step-by-step. This indicates a further decline in the spiritual condition of the time. And after delivering Israel with the army God raised, Gideon used the army for personal revenge. In the process he also

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physically abused fellow Israelites who did not support him and his army when he pursued his personal agenda. Compared to Ehud, whose moral fault was using deception against the enemy, Gideon thus represents a further decline in the moral condition of the time.

Then came Jephthah (11:1-12:7). He was a gangster when the elders approached him to fight the Ammonites, who were oppressing Israel. Though the Spirit of God had already come upon Jephthah, he vowed to God that if God would grant him victory, he would offer as a burnt offering “that which comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace” (11:29-31). It has been argued that Jephthah had in mind specifically human sacrifice because only a human being would come out to receive a returning conqueror (Block 1999: 367-68; Webb 2012: 329-30).

Even if not, since it was his daughter who came out and he became extremely grieved and eventually “did to her according to the vow that he had made” (11:39), he did not exclude human sacrifice in his vow. Hence his view of God had been corrupted by the Moabites and the Ammonites, who were known to sacrifice their children to their gods (Leviticus 18:21; 2 Kings 3:27; cf. Judges 10:6). Jephthah represents the lowest point in the spiritual condition of Israel.

Finally, Samson was called to deliver Israel from the Philistines (13:1-16:31). He is known for his tremendous strength and for being a compulsive womanizer. Gideon and Jephthah, though also flawed morally or spiritually, were at least intentionally doing God’s work when they fought the enemies. But when Samson delivered Israel, he was only thinking of taking personal revenge against the Philistines. As a judge, he represents the lowest point in the moral condition of Israel. The fact that the Spirit of God came upon even these three judges (6:34; 11:29; 15:14) and used them mightily, shows that we cannot evaluate an individual’s faithfulness to God and His word on the basis of his success in doing God’s work.

The Book of Judges ends with two accounts that illustrate respectively what the lowest points in the spiritual and moral conditions of Israel were actually like. In the case of Micah (17:1-18:31) his mother said, “I truly dedicate the silver . . . to the LORD for my son to make a graven image and a molten image [as objects of worship]” (17:3). She and her son did not seem to realize that what they were doing

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was an abomination to God. And Micah not only had a private shrine full of idols but he also consecrated one of his sons, who was not even a Levite, let alone a descendant of Aaron, as priest. He later hired a Levite to become his private priest and said, “Now I know that the LORD will prosper me, because I have a Levite as my priest” (17:13). This Levite turned out to be a descendant of Moses (18:30). This is not even the whole story, but enough to show how low the spiritual condition was.

In the last two chapters of Judges an attempted homosexual gang rape of a Levite was averted, but this was only achieved through sacrificing the Levite’s concubine as a substitute. Thus the offenders were actually able to have sexual relations with women but had given in to their perverted lusts to cross the line to commit not just a homosexual act, but a homosexual rape. The death of the concubine from the brutal assault led to a civil war that almost decimated the Benjamites, the offenders’ tribe. There is no need to recount the tragic details of the story. It is hard to imagine a lower moral condition than that depicted here.

The narrator repeated the theme of Judges four times when recounting these two tragic stories, which illustrate the theme so vividly: “In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (17:6; 21:25; cf. 18:1; 19:1). Considering Ehud, Gideon, Jephthah and Samson, even the judges themselves did what was right in their own eyes! Read against the backdrop of Joshua this implies that a God-fearing king was needed.

Nation Awaiting King

The Book of Judges depicted the overall declining condition in Israel. But this is not the complete picture. Because the fear of God is innate in the human heart and God so works that people should fear Him, there were evidently pockets of exceptions even during that overall dark period.

The historical setting of the Book of Ruth is spelled out as “the days when the judges ruled” (1:1). The delightful love story told here is part of the family history of David, Israel’s model king. It recounts how a God-fearing Israelite man (Boaz) and a virtuous Moabite

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woman (Ruth) met, got married, and had a son who became the grandfather of David. And the narrator makes it clear that God was behind the twists and turns in the plot of the story.

For “at two key points [one at the beginning and the other at the end of the story] the narrator posted signposts to signal God’s guiding presence over the tale” (Hubbard 1998: 69). We are told at the beginning that the widow Naomi returned from Moab to Israel with Ruth, her widowed daughter-in-law, because she had heard that God “had visited His people by providing food for them” (1:6). Without this particular move of God, Boaz and Ruth might never have met. And after they got married, it was God who “enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son” (4:13). This is the narrator’s way of saying God was involved from the beginning to the end.

It then comes as a surprise when the narrator highlights that it was completely by chance that Ruth walked into Boaz’s field to glean, the crucial turning point in the plot that resulted in them meeting each other (2:3). What this means is that God often works out His plan through what appears to us as sheer chance. And in this case, it was through a mundane activity—Ruth was just making a living as a widow through a means provided for in the Mosaic Law. And this means God often works out His plan through what we consider mundane chores.

Boaz not only allowed Ruth to glean in his field, but he also instructed his workers not to mistreat her. He himself treated her with exceptional kindness, having heard how she was exceptionally kind towards her mother-in-law. He asked her not to go elsewhere to glean; she had every reason not to. All this contributed to the eventual outcome of their unplanned encounter—marriage.

What interests us most is that the text ends with a genealogy linking David to Perez (4:18-22). This genealogy extends the one in Genesis 46:12, which links Perez to Judah. David is thus a descendant of Judah. Why link David to Judah? We have seen that in Genesis 49:8-10 God promised through Jacob that kingship over Israel would remain with the descendants of Judah until the coming of the Messiah. This promise is the basis for the Davidic Covenant.

During the dark period of the judges, God-fearing Israelites would ask, “Why is God not doing anything?” God was actually

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working behind the scene to fulfill the promise He made through Jacob. This would provide a short term (kingship) as well as the long term (Messiah) solution to the problem highlighted in Judges. Since the Davidic Covenant was indirectly promised (way back in Genesis) even before Israel became a nation, kingship in Israel was therefore not an afterthought.

We appreciate why kingship was anticipated when we recognize that, given fallen human nature, a nation without a king was not a viable option. This is the message of the Book of Judges though it does not expressly promote kingship as an option. Though the Book of Ruth shows that even without a king, there would still be some people who would do what is right in God's eyes, the Book of Judges shows that most people would do otherwise. Taking a cue from Joshua that a God-fearing leader whom the people fear is needed, we can see why (constitutional) kingship is needed.

God's Answer to the Problem

While clarifying the somewhat enigmatic text of Judges 2:16-19, Barry Webb (2012: 144) comments that in their role as deliverers "the judges were successful, liberating Israel from foreign oppression *all the days of the judge* (v. 18). However, a different role, in which the judges were less successful, is implied in verse 17a: 'the Israelites *did not listen ... to their judges.*'" In other words, the people honored their judges as deliverers but did not fear them as rulers.

The people feared Joshua because God performed a miracle through him that was similar to one that God had performed through Moses (Joshua 4:14). But God did not repeat this process every time a new leader was needed. Thus there was a need for a political institution that the people would fear because it had the power to uphold justice without fear or favor.

We have noted that God introduced through the Noahic Covenant the institution of the state or government (Genesis 9:6), which Paul acknowledges as a servant of God called to punish what is evil and praise what is good (Romans 13:1-7; cf. Proverbs 24:21-22). By definition the state has the power to require obedience through the legitimate use of physical force. However, given fallen human nature,

Chapter 20: *Israel Occupying Promised Land*

the state is known to abuse its power. But we have seen in Deuteronomy how the Mosaic Law prescribes a constitutional government that is required to uphold the Golden Rule (Chapter 17). Together with a God-fearing king or head-of-state, this political system would ensure that justice is upheld in the nation without fear or favor. So kingship in ancient Israel was specifically designed to be not abusive.

Israel is often viewed as a “theocracy,” which has a rather negative (abusive) connotation. This term, when applied to Israel, needs to be qualified. For the political vision of “Deuteronomy knows nothing of an authoritarian priestly rule” (McConville 2006: 86); instead, it knows only of an equivalent of what we now call the “rule of law,” to which even the king is subjected. God’s rule in the “theocracy” of Israel was expressed through “the rule of the Mosaic Law,” which embodied (within the context of ancient Israel) God’s will for humanity and the nation. This “subjection of the whole life of a nation under God [through the Mosaic Law] leads, not to tyranny, but to a wholly different type of society.... The nationhood imagined in Deuteronomy describes the freedom that precisely repudiates the ‘slavery’ of Egypt” (98).

Chapter 21

The Holy War

Murder involves intentionally killing a human being. And the Ten Commandments prohibits murder. But not every case of intentionally killing a human being is murder. We have seen that killing in self-defense (Exodus 22:2-3) and the (proper) implementation of the death penalty (Genesis 9:6) are two such cases. We now consider killing in war, in particular the battles involved in Israel's exodus from Egypt and the conquest of Canaan (which actually stretched beyond the time of Joshua to that of David, who also subdued neighboring nations to ensure that the Promised Land was secure). We call this series of battles the Holy War, and in so doing limit the concept of a "holy war" to a specific, non-repeatable, historical phenomenon.

Purpose of the Holy War

Recall that the Abrahamic Covenant was God's plan to redeem the world. This plan involves forming a nation from the descendants of Abraham, which turned out to be the Israelites, so that through Israel all the nations of the world would be blessed (Genesis 12:1-3). Israel would then need a piece of land to become the nation God intended it to be. So God promised Abraham that his descendants would pos-

sess Canaan (Genesis 15:18-21). But before Abraham's descendants (through Jacob) could possess the Promised Land, Jacob's family needed to be fruitful and multiply into a nation (Genesis 35:11-12). To ensure that this happened in the shortest time possible, they needed the secure haven that Egypt could provide (cf. Exodus 1:7).

We saw that it was God who worked in and through Joseph to bring Jacob (renamed Israel) and his whole family into Egypt, where they multiplied into a nation. In view of God's promise to Abraham that his descendants would possess Canaan, it was necessary to take the nation of Israel out of Egypt. And their eventual oppression and enslavement in Egypt made the Israelites willing to leave.

In fact the Exodus and subsequently the Conquest were the fulfillment of a specific promise God made to Abraham:

Know for certain that your descendants [Israelites] will be (resident) aliens in a land not theirs [Egypt], and they will be enslaved and oppressed for four hundred years. But I will judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.... Then in the fourth generation they will return here [Canaan], for the iniquity of the Amorites [inhabitants of Canaan] has not yet reached its full measure (Genesis 15:13-16).

Hence the Exodus and the Conquest were ultimately for the redemption of the world. In other words, to fulfill His purpose for Israel and hence the world, God gave Israel temporary occupation of a piece of land within Egypt and later permanent occupation of the land of Canaan. The Exodus involved killing many Egyptians and the Conquest involved destroying the Canaanites. We will soon address the ethical problem this mass taking of human lives poses. The immediate issue is God unilaterally assigning or reassigning the use of land in Egypt and in Canaan.

Basis for the Holy War

This brings us back to Genesis 1:1, which we have presupposed from the very outset. If we bear this in mind, there is no issue at all. For if God created the universe, every piece of land on earth belongs to

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Him. In fact the law that on the Jubilee Year agricultural land that had been sold must be returned to the original owner, was based on the premise that God owns the land (Leviticus 25:23). And after all, God's plan for Israel was ultimately to bless the whole world.

As for the mass taking of human lives, again it is crucial to presuppose Genesis 1:1. For we have seen that if we accept Genesis 1:1, at least temporarily, we should have no problem accepting the Biblical teaching that all life, including human life, is created by God. Hence human lives belong to God. Also (eventual) death for all human beings is God's judgment on sin. Therefore life and death, including untimely death, is God's prerogative (Ecclesiastes 3:1-2). This is not to say that God would take away life without just cause or valid reason; God cannot violate His own holiness.

If we reject the teaching that our lives are in God's hands, it does not change the reality that people do die and some die prematurely. But if we accept the teaching, it enables us to make sense of the certainty of death and the uncertainties of life (Ecclesiastes 3:2-8), which are intended to cause us to fear God and thus believe in Him (Ecclesiastes 3:14; Chapter 34). And when we believe in Him, the idea that our life is in God's hands is reassuring.

In the case of the taking of Egyptian lives through the tenth plague and the destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, the Egyptians not only enslaved and oppressed the Israelites, Pharaoh also defied God by stubbornly refusing to let them leave. Pharaoh could not give the excuse that he did not know he was defying the living God. For after the third plague his own magicians said to him, "This is the finger of God" (Exodus 8:19).

The fact that God gave Pharaoh six more opportunities to repent through six more plagues before He unleashed the tenth plague as the last resort demonstrated God's mercy. This deadly plague did result in Pharaoh relenting (but not repenting) and the Israelites leaving with great possessions. As for the subsequent destruction of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, it was the consequence of Pharaoh's renewed defiance of the living God and his continued attempt to thwart God's redemptive plan for Israel and the world. His intention was to further enslave and oppress the Israelites.

Ethics of Blanket Killing

The thorniest ethical problem in the entire Bible remains the reported blanket killing of not only men but also women and children in Canaan, which is specifically said to be in accordance with God's instruction given through Moses (Joshua 10:40; 11:14-15). In fact, just prior to Joshua leading the Israelites into Canaan, God appeared to him in the form of a warrior and said, "I have now come as the commander of the army of the LORD" (Joshua 5:13-15; cf. Numbers 22:22-35). This means "the Lord will fight for Joshua and Israel as long as they maintain the proper priorities" (Howard 2002: 155). To understand all this we need to consider it in the context of the Mosaic Covenant as well as God's promise to Abraham to bring his descendants back to Canaan after 400 years (Genesis 15:13, 16).

The Mosaic Covenant was God's plan to form a model nation, one that is in fellowship with Him. Thus the Promised Land was to become the Holy Land because the Holy God would dwell tangibly in their midst through the Tabernacle. At times His holiness (glory) even filled the Tabernacle, making His tangible presence in the land and with the people unmistakable. As such the nation must be holy and be a civilization that is consistent with God's will.

In our exposition on the Tabernacle (Chapter 11) we caught a glimpse of the holiness of God (what follows assumes familiarity with the exposition there). And we saw that the holiness of God is such that it consumes those in His presence who are morally or ritually defiled. When this does not happen or is delayed, it is only because of His mercy. So before the land of Canaan could become the Holy Land for a holy people serving the Holy God, it must be cleansed of whatever that is morally or ritually defiled. And the wickedness of the Canaanites included not only religious prostitution (cf. Deuteronomy 23:17-18) but also child sacrifice (cf. Leviticus 20:1-5). This was the main reason the Canaanites and their altars had to be destroyed (see Deuteronomy 7:1-6).

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19 shows that entire cities could be consumed by God's holiness when the wickedness of the people reached an intolerable level. God's holiness is a double-edged sword. On the one hand it means that God would

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not take away lives without just cause or valid reason. On the other hand it also means that He would do just that when there is just cause or valid reason unless His mercy stops or delays Him. Otherwise God is violating His own holiness.

In other words, the Canaanites already deserved to be destroyed because of their wickedness regardless of whether God needed to clear and cleanse a piece of land for Israel. Moses reminded the Israelites that God was giving them the land not because they were righteous but because the Canaanites were wicked (Deuteronomy 9:4-5). In fact God specifically told Abraham that his descendants could possess Canaan only after 400 years because the inhabitants of Canaan were then not yet wicked enough (did not yet deserve) to be destroyed (Genesis 15:16). This was the explicit reason why the Israelites had to be in Egypt for 400 years though the implicit reason was that they also needed a secure haven in Egypt to grow into a nation before possessing the Promised Land.

When God revealed the Mosaic Covenant to the Israelites at Mount Sinai, He also demonstrated His holiness in a spectacular way (Exodus 19). We have just seen that the Conquest of Canaan and the destruction of the Canaanites were a consequence of God's holiness and the outworking of the Mosaic Covenant. Hence if one accepts the Conquest account, one must also accept the Sinai account, which we have shown bears witness to the existence of the Holy God and to His holy purpose for Israel (see Chapter 19). Why would anyone accept one Biblical account but reject the other, which provides the context specifically needed to understand it? One may choose to deny that the Holy God exists, but one may not choose to deny that if He exists, He has the moral prerogative to do what we read in the Conquest account. To take the account of the destruction of the Canaanites out of its Biblical context and then use it to paint an ugly picture of the God of the Bible is blatant dishonesty.

And the frequent charge that the destruction of the Canaanites was "genocide" or "ethnic cleansing" is really unwarranted. For God also warned the Israelites that if they followed the ways of the Canaanites, they would also suffer the consequences. In fact a further reason why the Canaanites needed to be destroyed was so that they might not influence the Israelites "to do according to all their abomi-

nable things that they have done for their gods” (Deuteronomy 20:17-18), which included religious prostitution and child sacrifice. Hence the judgment on the Canaanites had nothing to do with their race or ethnicity. It was because of their wickedness, which transcends race and ethnicity. And it turned out that because the Israelites failed to eradicate the Canaanites, they were indeed influenced and suffered the horrible consequences, including the Exile.

God in fact commanded Israel through Moses that if the inhabitants of an Israelite city had indeed been influenced to worship foreign gods, they should do to the inhabitants of that city just as they were commanded to do to the inhabitants of the Canaanite cities (Deuteronomy 13:12-18). When moral and ritual defilement had taken root and became widespread in a city, the inhabitants were to be destroyed. This was because within the Holy Land the Holy God dwelled in their midst in a tangible manner. Again, if we have problems with this, it simply means we have not understood adequately the holiness of God. But at least it is clear that the charge of genocide or ethnic cleansing is utterly baseless.

Ethics of Killing Infants

What about the killing of “innocent” infants? Sparing them while destroying their parents would not be a practical option. And given the extremely wicked culture of the Canaanites, which included child sacrifice, it would actually be better off for Canaanite infants to be spared the misery of growing up and living in such a morally depraved and self-destructive world (cf. Ecclesiastes 4:1-3).

There is also an issue in the Second Commandment to consider. Though it is an issue that concerns only the Israelites, what it reveals about God is also relevant to understanding God’s treatment of the Canaanites. This commandment spells out that God would punish idol worshippers to the third and the fourth generations because they “hate Me” (Exodus 20:5; Deuteronomy 5:9). Thus children would be punished together with their idolatrous parents. Again, this must be understood within its Biblical context. The reference to the third and fourth generations means the entire household of an idol worshipper would be punished. For a household consists of three to four genera-

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tions. And it was God who “visits the iniquity,” that is, it was God Himself who took the initiative to exact the punishment.

Actually God took the initiative to punish an entire household for other forms of rebellion against Him as well. In the case of Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who rebelled against God by challenging the God-ordained leadership of Moses and Aaron, the earth opened up to swallow them and their households (Numbers 16:20-35). In the case of Achan, who rebelled against God by taking a spoil in Jericho, God alerted Joshua to the rebellion, singled out the culprit and authorized the execution (Joshua 7:10-15, 24-26). There was no human initiative involved at all.

And we have clear evidence that when God thus punished a household, He did not do so indiscriminately. If we read only Numbers 16:20-35, we would assume that the entire household of Korah perished. But Numbers 26:11 qualifies that the sons of Korah did not die in the event. And their descendants were even credited with the composition of a number of Psalms (for instance Psalm 84). They, and presumably their wives and children if they had any, were not standing with their father when God opened up the ground to swallow the guilty. Thus the God-fearing sons of Korah distanced themselves, even physically, from their father and his rebellion against God. In the case of the Canaanites, Rahab and her household were spared because she truly feared God and demonstrated it through risking her life to protect the Israelite spies (Joshua 2:1-21; 6:22-25).

Redemption and Judgment

It would take up too much space, and distract us from the theme of this exposition, to explain every text in the Old Testament that seems to suggest blatant injustice on God’s part. As we have shown in the exposition on Old Testament Religion (Chapter 14), when properly understood, laws in the Old Testament that seem unjust are actually not so. Similarly, the Holy War, which seems blatantly unjust when taken out of context, actually demonstrates the absolute holiness of God when understood in context. Again, what this means is that when reading a text that seems to suggest that God is unjust, we need to give God the benefit of the doubt.

Labelling a war “holy” may seem inappropriate. For wars necessarily involve the mass taking of human lives. How can the brutal taking of human lives be holy? We have retained the use of the term “holy war” as applied to the Conquest (and the Exodus) partly because it is actually appropriate to do so in this (and only this) case, and partly to redeem the term from inappropriate use.

We now reiterate that the Holy War refers to a specific, non-repeatable, historical event. It involved God’s *redemption* of Israel as well as God’s *judgment* on the Egyptians and the Canaanites. Given the historical realities, the event necessarily involved the taking of human lives. How else could Israel leave Egypt? And how else could Israel possess Canaan? The historical event was holy because the goal was to set-apart (make holy) a nation and a land so that the holiness (glory) of God could be manifested in the land and through the nation (redemption). And the impetus was God’s consuming holiness against wickedness (judgment). So the war was holy not just because it was unmistakably God’s war (cf. Exodus 15:3; Joshua 5:13-15).

The Holy War was thus integral to God’s redemption of Israel under the Mosaic Covenant. But, as we shall see, God’s redemption of the Church under the New Covenant does not involve forming a holy people in a holy land where God dwells in a tangible manner. Rather, God dwells within a holy people (the Church) through the Holy Spirit, regardless of where they are located. Hence the phenomenon of a holy war as presented above has no relevance to Christians and the Church.

The concept of a “holy war” must not be confused with that of a “just war,” which is not about fulfilling God’s redemptive plan. It is beyond the scope of this exposition to discuss the just war theory (for a discussion on the just war tradition with emphasis on anticipatory military activities, see Bzostek 2008: 83-99). Suffice it here to affirm that the Biblical principle of killing in self-defense (see Exodus 22:2-3) applies beyond the individual level. And in principle, an offensive war amounts to state-sanctioned mass murder, without ruling out possible exceptions in cases of preventive self-defense that must be judged on their own merits (cf. Van den Hole 2003: 105-106).

Chapter 22

Israel Becoming a Kingdom

The period of the judges, when “there was no king in Israel [and thus] everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25), continues into the Book of 1 Samuel. Here we encounter Samuel, the last judge of Israel. Having previously encountered Samson, who was morally and spiritually the lowest of all the judges, Samuel is a storm of fresh air (see 1 Samuel 7:3-6; 12:3-5). How could such a morally and spiritually dark period produce such a bright star as Samuel? It was not by accident.

Samuel the King-maker

Samuel’s mother Hannah was barren. The stigma she thus bore was severely aggravated by the provocations of her husband’s other wife. This drove Hannah to pray to God and vow that if God would give her a son, she would give him back to God (1 Samuel 1:9-11). God answered her prayer, and when Samuel was weaned, she fulfilled her vow by giving him over to Eli the High Priest (1 Samuel 1:24-28). So Samuel lived with Eli and grew up at the sanctuary in Shiloh.

Unlike the five other barren women mentioned in the Bible, the narrator did not exactly say Hannah was barren. He instead stressed

(twice) that God “had closed her womb” (1 Samuel 1:5, 6; cf. Genesis 20:18). In other words, the narrator is highlighting that God was personally involved in Hannah’s barrenness, implying that her barrenness was part of God’s plan to fulfill a specific purpose. This purpose is clearly expressed in the plot: Hannah’s barrenness and the consequent provocations caused her to pray and make that vow, so that Samuel would be given to God as a child.

If it was God who caused Hannah to bear the stigma and suffer the provocations so that Samuel would be given to Him as a child, was God then being unfair to Hannah? Given the greatness that Samuel achieved (Jeremiah 15:1), any mother would in retrospect feel privileged to be called to do what Hannah did. Also, in place of Samuel, whom she had “entrusted to the Lord” (Tsumura 2007: 158), God “visited Hannah” and blessed her with three other sons and two daughters (1 Samuel 2:20-21).

Exceptional Spiritual Upbringing

The reason God wanted Samuel as a child is apparent when we contrast his case with that of Samson. Samson was called to be a judge to deliver Israel even before he was conceived (Judges 13:1-5). His mother was also barren, but God enabled her to conceive. Samson was raised by his own parents and, under the circumstances during the time of the judges, he turned out to be what he was. In contrast Samuel “grew up in the presence of the LORD” (1 Samuel 2:21); in fact as a boy he was already serving God as an apprentice priest under Eli (1 Samuel 2:11, 18). In other words, Samuel was also called to serve God before he was conceived, but in his case, to ensure that he would not turn out to be another Samson, God wanted him to grow up in His presence. So He closed Hannah’s womb.

Another reason was so that Samuel could be apprenticed from young to succeed Eli as priest. For though Eli was apparently a God-fearing man, he was a failure as a father—his two sons were utterly corrupt as priests. And God had planned to destroy them. Samuel not only became judge and priest, but was also called and, as we have seen, publicly confirmed as a prophet (1 Samuel 3:19-4:1; 9:6). In other words, even in the spiritually and morally darkest period of a

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nation, God in His sovereignty can still raise up the man or woman needed to fulfill His purpose.

God called Samuel as a prophet when he was still a boy (1 Samuel 3:1-21). In fact God called him by name. But Samuel repeatedly failed to recognize it was God calling him because at that time he did not yet know God, nor had God's word yet been revealed to him. It took even Eli a while to realize that God was calling Samuel because in those days, word from God was rare as prophetic visions were infrequent. Together with prophetic dreams, visions were God's usual means of revealing His word to the prophets (Numbers 12:6). So even Eli did not immediately realize God was calling Samuel because God was not expected to speak in those days. The calling and subsequent confirmation of Samuel as a prophet demonstrate that in times like these, when it feels like God is not there, He is still real.

Samuel's role as judge is recounted in 1 Samuel 7, where he led the Israelites to repentance from idolatry (verses 3-6) and subsequently delivered Israel from the Philistines (verses 7-11). At that time the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of God's presence, had not been in the sanctuary for twenty years. The two corrupt sons of Eli had taken it out to war against the Philistines (1 Samuel 4:2-11). The ark had actually struck fear among the Philistines. But the Israelites still lost the battle. Both the sons of Eli were killed and the ark was captured by the Philistines. The ark created so much havoc for the Philistines that they returned it to the Israelites (1 Samuel 5-6). But it was not returned to the sanctuary.

Even without the ark Samuel delivered Israel easily; God "thundered very loudly against the Philistines ... and threw them into confusion" (1 Samuel 7:10). This account clearly underscores the monotheist belief that even the ark, Israel's holiest object, had no intrinsic efficacy. God could work with or without it. But the two corrupt sons of Eli were treating it as a talisman; they were behaving like the surrounding polytheists. Fallen human nature has a bent towards attributing intrinsic efficacy to religious rituals and objects (see 2 Kings 18:4; cf. Numbers 21:9). This bent is so natural that even one who professes a monotheist faith may not realize he is treating a ritual or an object as though it had magical powers.

Unique Calling as God's Prophet

Samuel was better known for his role as a prophet, particularly as king-maker. When he was old, the elders of Israel used the excuse that his two sons were not upright like him to request for a king over Israel, so that Israel would be like the other nations (1 Samuel 8). Like a judge, a king was a deliverer as well as a ruler (verses 19-20). But unlike a judge, a king would have a standing army and the power to compel compliance (verses 11-17; cf. Judges 2:17; 6:33-35). The elders were insistent on having a king like the nations even after Samuel reminded them that such a king would be a tyrant (verse 18).

In fact God had anticipated not only the need for a king over Israel (Genesis 49:8-10), He had also anticipated their request for a king like the nations and thus laid down in advance through Moses laws governing kingship (Deuteronomy 17:14-20). For Israel indeed needed a human king to enforce God's rule (Judges 21:25). Samuel as well as God responded negatively to their request because of their wrong motive—they wanted to be ruled by a king *like other nations* rather than by God (1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12). So God told Samuel to give in to their request and subsequently instructed him to anoint (privately) Saul as king over Israel (1 Samuel 9:16; 10:1).

Later, after Saul was publicly chosen as king at Mizpah (see below), Samuel announced to the people “the rights and duties of kingship” (NIV), wrote them down, and placed the document in the sanctuary (1 Samuel 10:25). Now these are rules made by God's prophet and placed in God's presence. Hence the king's powers were circumscribed by rules sanctioned by God. Although Samuel had warned the elders that a king like the nations would be a tyrant, he did not envision Saul to be such a king (cf. Baldwin 2008: 101).

In fact we can infer that the content of the document would be consistent with the laws governing kingship that God had already given through Moses (Deuteronomy 17:14-20; cf. McConville 2006: 138-40). And we have seen, unlike that of the nations, kingship as envisioned in Deuteronomy is constitutional. This inference is later confirmed in the narrative. For after the people had formally installed Saul as king in God's presence at Gilgal (1 Samuel 11:14-15), Samuel warned the nation that if *both* the people *as well as* the king do not fear

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God and obey Him, God would be against them (1 Samuel 12:14-15). This clearly implies constitutional kingship, which proscribes tyranny.

Furthermore, in line with the Mosaic Covenant and thus Israel as a covenant community (see Chapter 17), which was unique in the ancient world, God ensured that the people would gladly consent to who will rule over them as king. In their context, this means they needed the assurance that Saul was indeed God's choice for them.

God gave them that assurance before they formally installed Saul at Gilgal. Firstly, Samuel was publicly confirmed as a prophet so that they would accept him as God's spokesman. Secondly, though Samuel had already anointed (privately) Saul as king on God's instruction, he did not simply announce God's choice to them. He gathered the people by their tribes and by their clans at Mizpah so that God Himself could reveal His choice to them through the casting of lots (1 Samuel 10:20-21; though casting of lots is divination in a polytheistic culture, Proverbs 16:33 teaches that it is consistent with monotheism if it is not viewed as having intrinsic efficacy). For "the new ruler will not necessarily be welcomed on Samuel's say-so, and the process of election by lot will have to be undergone so that there will be no doubt as to whom God favours" (Gordon 1986: 119).

Even then there were some who despised Saul saying, "How can this one deliver us?" (1 Samuel 10:27). So thirdly, when the Ammonites were besieging an Israelite city, God empowered Saul and enabled him to raise an army (1 Samuel 11:1-13). The victory was so decisive that those who had despised him would be put to shame. It was this victory, after which all the people gladly accepted Saul as king, which led to the formal installation at Gilgal. And "Saul and all the men of Israel rejoiced greatly" (1 Samuel 11:15).

Hence God did not exactly give them what they (wrongly) requested—kingship like the nations—but something far better, kingship according to His will, which God Himself had anticipated.

Saul the Rejected King

When Samuel anointed Saul, he told him that he would later encounter three separate signs, each in a different place, that would assure Saul that he was indeed called by God to be king over Israel (1 Samu-

el 10:2-8). The third sign was to happen in a place where the Philistine garrison was located (verse 5). And it involved the Spirit of God coming upon him in a tangible manner, and he would be “changed into another man” (verse 6), that is, “equipped with power to play a new role as Gideon and Jephthah did when the spirit of God came upon them (Judg. 6:34; 11:29)” (Tsumura 2007: 288). All these came to pass (1 Samuel 10:9-13).

Samuel instructed Saul that “when these signs happen to you, do what your hand finds, for God is with you” (1 Samuel 10:7). The phrase “do what your hand finds” is an idiom that means do what needs to be done that is within one’s capacity (cf. 1 Samuel 25:8; Judges 9:33). But the instruction need not be limited to acting in just one or a particular occasion (Leviticus 12:8; Ecclesiastes 9:10). It can even refer to one’s calling in life or vocation, which by definition involves meeting needs for which one is particularly equipped.

In Saul’s case, it need not mean he had to do something right after the three signs happened to him. But since the last sign happened in a place where the Philistine garrison was located, it does imply that what Saul needed to do with his Spirit-empowered capacity was to deliver Israel from foreign nations like the Philistines. This was part of his calling as king. The first occasion came when he soundly defeated the Ammonites (Gordon 1986: 118).

After that decisive victory, the people said to Samuel to put to death those who had despised Saul. But Saul intervened and said it was God who had accomplished the deliverance (1 Samuel 11:12-13). Hence Saul started well as king over Israel. Unfortunately, he did not end well. Twice Saul disobeyed God in a significant way. Because of the first disobedience Saul’s descendants would not inherit his kingship (1 Samuel 13:13-14). The second disobedience resulted in Saul himself being rejected as king (1 Samuel 15:26-28). To better understand God’s will for kingship (or government) we now look at the nature of these two incidences of disobedience.

Disobedience to God’s Instructions

The first incidence was Saul’s failure at Gilgal to wait for Samuel to come to offer sacrifices to God (1 Samuel 13:8-12). As soon as Saul

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had finished offering a burnt offering, Samuel arrived. Samuel rebuked Saul for having acted foolishly by not keeping God's commandment. What was this commandment that Saul failed to keep? The obvious answer is that it was about making the offering without Samuel. There is no need to assume that Saul personally made the offering (cf. Tsumura 2007: 347-48); he had a priest with him (1 Samuel 14:3). But whether he made the offering personally or through another priest, Saul had usurped the prerogative of Samuel the priest. In other words, he had usurped authority over a priestly matter. Under the Mosaic Covenant the king cannot do such a thing (cf. 2 Chronicles 26:16-21). We have seen that this would uphold religious freedom as it means that the sphere of religion is to be independent from the sphere of the government (Chapter 17).

In the second incident Saul failed to execute everything that God specifically commanded him concerning the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:1-25), who had attacked the Israelites when they were on their way to Mount Sinai after leaving Egypt (Exodus 17:8-16). After defeating them, he disobeyed God by allowing the king to live as well as allowing his people to take the best animals as spoils. What is particularly significant is that Saul confessed that he had disobeyed God by allowing spoils to be taken "because I feared the people and obeyed their voice" (verse 24). Apart from delivering the nation from enemies, the primary role of the king was to hold the people accountable to God and His commands. And Saul had no excuse for not acting as the anointed king to enforce God's commands, for God had confirmed his calling through the three signs after Samuel anointed him.

Obviously Saul disobeyed God at other times and in other ways. The fact that these two incidences were so consequential to Saul's kingship shows that for a king these kinds of violations could not be tolerated. Put in today's terms, it means a government cannot compromise on religious freedom as well as on upholding justice (holding the people accountable to God's commands) without fear or favor.

Derogation of Prophetic Authority

Since God's specific commands to Saul came through Samuel the prophet, Saul's disobedience also means he did not wholeheartedly

recognize prophetic authority. This kind of violation is also significant. For even after Saul was formally installed as king, God publicly worked a miracle through Samuel that “all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel” (1 Samuel 12:18). As Robert Gordon (1986: 129) comments, “more important than the momentary awe [from witnessing the miracle] is the lesson that even under the monarchy there can be no derogation of prophetic authority.” Since today’s counterpart to the prophetic institution is the media, the role of the media in holding the government accountable to the constitution also cannot be compromised (see exposition on Media in Chapter 18).

We have highlighted in our exposition on the Media that just as the prophet cannot effectively hold the king accountable to God without the people, the media cannot hold the government accountable to the constitution without the citizens. This democratic role of the people is well illustrated in an episode recorded in 1 Samuel 14, which provides a more complete perspective on the king (or government) fearing the people and listening to their voice.

Practical Polytheist at Heart

The excuses Saul gave for not waiting for Samuel to arrive to offer the sacrifices were that the Philistines may attack anytime and the 3000 men with him were deserting him. (They were then in preparation for a battle and Saul was eventually left with only 600 men.) When the Philistines actually began to make a move (1 Samuel 13:23), it was Saul’s son, Jonathan, who responded without informing his father. Together with his assistant he made a counter-move. Unlike his father, who earlier became desperate when his army was dwindling, Jonathan said to his assistant, “nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few” (1 Samuel 14:6). God honored his faith; acting on what he considered a sign from God Jonathan and his assistant killed 20 Philistines. This encounter, together with a timely earthquake, resulted in panic among the Philistines.

It was after discovering that the Philistines were in confusion that Saul decided to make a move with his men. When he arrived, he witnessed the Philistines killing one another. And Israelites who had previously defected to the Philistines came out to side with Saul and

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Jonathan. Also, Israelites who had been hiding in fear of the Philistines came out and joined in the battle in pursuit of the Philistines who were fleeing. The Philistine army was far superior in size and in equipment (1 Samuel 13:5, 22). Israel won the battle because Jonathan believed in his God.

The Israelites could have done more to cripple the Philistines if Saul had not foolishly put his people under oath to fast until the battle was won (1 Samuel 14:24). When moving across a forest, the Israelites found a large supply of honey. The honey would have refreshed the exhausted army but none of them ate the honey because of the oath, except Jonathan, who was not there when Saul made the oath. When told of the oath, Jonathan criticized “his father for having brought disaster to the country by his impractical oath. While Saul was stubbornly religious, Jonathan was, by contrast, practically God-fearing” (Tsumura 2007: 373).

When the oath expired, the people rushed greedily upon the spoils and began eating the animals with blood still in them, which was not permitted under the Mosaic Law. This was the consequence of Saul’s oath, which had kept his men hungry and weary. Saul himself intervened to stop them from “sinning against the LORD.” When Saul later sought guidance from God whether to pursue after the Philistines, God did not answer him. Saul put the blame on Jonathan when he discovered that his son had (unknowingly) violated his oath by eating the honey. Saul was determined to put Jonathan to death, but his own men rescued Jonathan. For they swore in God’s name that Jonathan, “who has brought this great deliverance in Israel” because “he has worked with God this day,” must not be harmed (1 Samuel 14:45).

The folly of the “stubbornly religious” Saul becomes more obvious when we compare him with David, his successor, in a similar situation (1 Samuel 25:18-35). For “David did not keep his oath to kill Nabal and his men when Abigail pointed out the wrong of it, and so at least it was considered that an oath to sin could be broken” (Tsumura 2007: 381). Saul’s determination to put his own “practically God-fearing” son to death reveals much about the religion he actually practiced, which is evidently not consistent with what God revealed through Moses.

Chapter 22: *Israel Becoming a Kingdom*

In the first place, why did Saul make that oath since it made no sense for his men to fast when going out to battle? Kyle McCarter (1980: 249) has presented the most sensible reason: “Saul imposes a fast upon the army in an attempt, apparently, to influence Yahweh [the LORD] by a grandiose gesture of self-denial” (cited in Tsumura 2007: 370). This makes sense as Saul, who was left with only 600 men, cared about numbers, unlike Jonathan. He was certainly desperate for divine help. But a fast, like prayer, needs to be from the heart and thus cannot be imposed. This shows that Saul, knowingly or unknowingly, believed that a ritual like fasting had intrinsic efficacy (cf. Isaiah 58:3-4). We have shown that this is polytheism and not monotheism (Chapter 19).

This explains why Saul was so careful about his men observing a ritual like not eating the animals with blood in them, but was so careless about shedding the blood of his own son, who was innocent because he did not know about the oath and who had worked with God to bring about the deliverance. Ironically, the law against eating blood was meant to cultivate the sense that human life is sacred. Saul’s behavior indicates that he sought to observe the letter, but not the spirit, of the law and his oath. He was misguided not only in making the oath, but also in implementing it. Being a polytheist at heart, he cared more about the form rather than the substance of his monotheist religion. This was the root of his downfall.

If not for his men, Saul would have unjustly put Jonathan to death. What Saul’s men did was consistent with Israel being a covenant community ruled by a constitutional king. For they refused to comply when the king was blatantly unjust. In this situation they did not need a prophet to help them see what they should do. Now these 600 men did not desert Saul when 2400 others had done so. Therefore their opposition to Saul means that Saul was indeed unjust and their loyalty to their king was not blind. By opposing Saul they had actually done Saul and the nation a favor.

Hence a king (or government) should fear the people and obey their voice when the people are upholding justice, but must neither fear nor obey when the people are perpetrating injustice.

Chapter 23

David the Model King

When Samuel announced to Saul that God had removed kingship from his family, he added that God had sought out and appointed as the next king “a man after His own heart” (1 Samuel 13:14). This man turned out to be David. It has been understood that David was a man after God’s own heart in the sense that he pursued after intimacy with God. David was indeed such a man. This is clear from the psalms attributed to him (for the reliability of the Psalm titles, see VanGemeren and Stanghelle 2012: 281-301).

However this is not what “after His own heart” means. In this context the Hebrew preposition translated “after” means “according to, ... expressing conformity to a standard or rule” (Brown 1979: 454). The translation “after” is correct as the word can mean “in accordance with” though this meaning is lesser known. David was “a man according to God’s own heart,” that is, he met the standard of what God desires in a human king.

Not Perfect but Repentant

In other words, David was a model king. This is not to say he was a perfect king. The Old Testament does not cover up David’s failings

as a king. How then did David meet God's standard for a king? In contrast to Saul, who had "not kept what the LORD commanded you" (1 Samuel 13:14), David would "do all My will" (Acts 13:22). No doubt, "do all My will" is God's desire for every human being. But David would do God's will even as a king. Any human being who would do God's will is already remarkable. Given Lord Acton's proven dictum, "Power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely," a king in the ancient world who would do God's will is exceptionally remarkable.

God's will for every human being, even a king, is to love God with all one's heart, and to love one's neighbor as oneself. But since the Fall, no human being, let alone a human king, can do God's will perfectly. God's will for fallen humanity then includes repentance from and confession of sin. Hence David, though he did sin by abusing his power as king, can still be considered a king who did God's will because unlike Saul, he was repentant and confessed his sins. So his failings did not disqualify him from being a king after God's own heart—a model king. This is confirmed when after his death God held him up as a model for future kings (1 Kings 3:14; 2 Kings 22:2).

The account of David's life stretches from 1 Samuel 16 all the way through the whole of 2 Samuel to 1 Kings 2. The narrative is not only long but also rich in details as well as in teaching. For our purpose here we will only highlight how David did God's will in terms of loving his neighbor as himself and loving God with all his heart, as well as how he repented and confessed his sin when he failed.

Exemplary Love for Neighbor

After God had rejected Saul as king, God did not remove him from the throne immediately. Saul remained king of Israel until he died in a battle against the Philistines (Jonathan and Saul's two other sons also died in that battle). Instead God removed His Spirit from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14) and also instructed Samuel to anoint David as the new king, with the result that "the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward" (1 Samuel 16:13). By thus "transferring" the Spirit from Saul to David, God had virtually replaced Saul with David.

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And the account indicates that the flow of the events that culminated in David actually becoming king of Israel was a consequence of God transferring the Spirit from Saul to David. Most significantly, because of the empowering Spirit, David could accomplish feats like defeating Goliath (1 Samuel 17:31-54), which caused Saul to notice him as a warrior (1 Samuel 17:55-18:5), and the rest is history. Now that the Spirit was with David and no longer with Saul, David was much more successful in battle, which won him the favor of the Israelites (this was later instrumental to the Israelites accepting David as king). David's popularity then caused Saul to become jealous and suspicious of him (1 Samuel 18:6-9).

This became so serious that Saul repeatedly tried to kill David, resulting in David running for his life. David, empowered by the Spirit, was the only one who could consistently defeat the Philistines. By driving David away, Saul had effectively set himself and his three sons up to die in that battle against the Philistines. And Saul's only surviving son did not have the capability to rule as king. This paved the way for David to take his rightful place as king over Israel.

Before this happened, on two separate occasions (1 Samuel 24:1-22; 26:1-25) when Saul was in fierce pursuit of him, David and the men who were with him had the opportunity to kill Saul. But David refused to do so on both occasions, going against the wishes of his men who were risking their own lives for him. Under the circumstances, David had every right, humanly speaking, to take Saul's life in self-defense and claim the throne.

In Saul's final battle, to avoid capture and torture after a crushing defeat, Saul asked his armor bearer to kill him (1 Samuel 31:1-6). When his assistant was too afraid to do it, Saul committed suicide. An Amalekite who witnessed what happened reported Saul's death to David (2 Samuel 1:1-27). But he distorted the story and lied that he had killed Saul, thinking that David would reward him. Instead of rejoicing and commending the Amalekite, David mourned, wept and fasted and had the Amalekite executed on the basis of his own testimony. This shows that David indeed loved Saul as himself.

The narrative also makes it clear that David did not usurp the throne after Saul's death. God instructed David to go to Hebron in Judah, one of the cities of David's own tribe. Then the men of Judah

came voluntarily to anoint David as king over Judah (2 Samuel 2:1-4). Ishbosheth, Saul's remaining son, became "little more than a puppet king" (Alter 1999: 203) over the rest of Israel (2 Samuel 2:8-10). He was assassinated by two of his own commanders, who then brought his head to David in anticipation of a reward. But David executed them upon their own testimony (2 Samuel 4:5-12). This shows that David consistently repudiated "that wrongful means of acquiring the throne" (Gordon 1986: 222).

Then all the other tribes came voluntarily to David in Hebron affirming that he was one of them (2 Samuel 5:1-5). They then "acknowledged that, even when Saul was king, David had been Israel's foremost military leader" (Gordon 1986: 225), thus indirectly revealing that David's success in battle was instrumental to their accepting him as king. They also acknowledged that God had said to David that he would be king over Israel. So all the elders of Israel made a covenant with David and anointed him as king over all Israel. David later moved his capital from Hebron to Jerusalem after capturing the city from the Jebusites (2 Samuel 5:6-10).

Failure to Love Neighbor

We now turn to consider the most glaring case of David failing to love his neighbor as himself: his infamous adultery with Bathsheba and his failed attempt to cover it up, which drove him to murder her husband by deliberately getting him killed in battle (2 Samuel 11:1-27). If God had not sent the prophet Nathan to confront David of his secret sins, we may never have known about them (2 Samuel 12:1-15). God had entrusted David with the power to rule His people with justice and mercy. But God was not ashamed to let the whole world know that His own handpicked servant, a man after His own heart, had abused that power and committed hideous sins.

To his credit, David did God's will by repenting immediately. His fear of God was unmistakable. To appreciate how incredible this is, we must pause and recognize that David was a *powerful* king in the *ancient* world....

God went further than just exposing David's sins. He also pronounced a judgment: there would be evil against David from within

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his own household. So we read about Amnon's rape of his half-sister Tamar and the consequent murder of Amnon by Absalom, Tamar's full-brother (2 Samuel 13-18). And because David was so heart-broken over Amnon's death and was thus slow to forgive Absalom completely, the alienated Absalom rebelled and David became a fugitive all over again. When Absalom was finally defeated and killed, David wept bitterly for the loss of another son.

That moment of illicit pleasure was certainly not worth it. When confronted, David repented immediately from the evil he had committed against the very people he was entrusted and empowered to serve and protect; we even have two Psalms to bear witness to his wholehearted repentance (51), and to God's forgiveness of his sins (32). So why did David still have to suffer that severe judgment?

Normally God's judgment is not executed through what we call a "divine intervention." God has created the world such that, at least in the long run if not in the short term, there will be painful consequences to evil deeds (and pleasant consequences to good deeds). This is clearly taught in the Book of Proverbs (see Chapter 32). For how can a Holy God do otherwise? It is still God's judgment because He created and sustains this order. And God's forgiveness of sins does not normally override the working of this created order.

Hence, because of his repentance and God's forgiveness, David re-established fellowship with God and experienced again "the joy of Your salvation" (Psalm 51:12; cf. 32:5). But he still had to suffer the consequences of the evil he had committed because of the out-working of God's created order. In the case of David, the evil against him from within his household, though explicitly a judgment of God, was actually implicitly a consequence of his adultery with Bathsheba.

How then was Amnon's rape of Tamar related to David's adultery with Bathsheba? We need to begin with David's violation of God's command that the king must not multiply wives for himself (Deuteronomy 17:17). Being a God-fearing man, David would be as conscientious about keeping God's commands concerning sexual morality as he was about keeping God's other commands if he had not been morally compromised by multiplying wives and concubines (2 Samuel 5:13). He would then not have so easily fallen into the temptation to commit adultery with Bathsheba. And given that he

was thus a bad example to his sons in this regard, it is not surprising to witness what his eldest son Amnon became. Also if David had only one wife, all his children would have the same mother and the incestuous rape and its consequences would not have happened. There are thus painful consequences to violating God's commands.

In other words, David did not get away with violating God's command against multiplying wives, which was an "occupational hazard" for kings. To be fair, but not to justify what David did, he began practicing polygamy before he became king, under circumstances that made it expedient for him to do so (1 Samuel 25:39-44). He was married (only) to Saul's daughter Michal before he ran for his life without her, whom Saul then gave to someone else. As a fugitive, with the view of becoming the next king of Israel, David needed political ties with as many groups within Israel as possible as well as to build adequate economic support (cf. 1 Samuel 21:1-6). After all, he had already been anointed by Samuel to replace Saul. In the ancient world the standard means for building such ties was through marriage. This explains why he would take Abigail as wife after the death of her rich husband even though he already had another wife, Ahinoam, with him, and would later reclaim Michal and thus his ties with the royal family (cf. Walton, Matthews and Chavalas 2000: 316). And in the case of Abigail, it was the need for economic support that first brought David into contact with her (1 Samuel 25:2-35).

As a God-fearing man David did not set out to violate God's command. But he succumbed to the pressure of political and economic expediency through polygamy, deemed necessary then. This laid the trap for him to literally multiply wives and concubines beyond the purpose of political consolidation to that of sexual gratification. Consequently, though he was on the whole a God-fearing man, he had little moral defense against a sexual temptation in the form of a naked woman as desirable as Bathsheba. The lesson for us is that what is expedient for now, even for a good cause, but violates God's will, may come back to haunt us in a devastating way; even a king, and a God-fearing one, was not spared this out-working of God's created order.

For the holiness of God ensures that nobody gets away with violating His righteous commands. If a man treats another man unjustly

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and seems to “get away with it,” unless there is genuine repentance, the flawed disposition behind that act of injustice will express itself again and again in other unjust acts. One or more of these acts will eventually get him into trouble. Even Paul says, “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7). David’s family woes illustrate this principle well.

Exemplary Love for God

As for David’s relationship with God, David not only feared God, he also loved God. This is unmistakable from the psalms attributed to him. In Psalm 8 David recounts an experience he had that would cause anyone to love God. When he looked into the universe and marvelled at the moon and the stars, he was over-awed by the majesty of their Creator. And when he recalled the care and concern this awesome Creator has for humanity, he was overwhelmed with what can only be described as love for God. In Psalm 23 David recounts vividly the care and concern he had personally experienced. It needs no further explanation why he desired to “dwell in the house of the LORD forever.”

It was due to this desire and his love for God that David eagerly brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and subsequently planned to build a temple to house it instead of the “tent curtains” (2 Samuel 7:2). But God did not permit David to build the Temple because in the line of duty David had killed many people; his successor, who would reign in a time of rest from all enemies, would build it instead (1 Chronicles 22:8-10). It does not mean David was morally unfit for this holy task (this was before he committed adultery and murder) but he was ritually unfit to build the holy Temple. Recall that holiness is about moral as well as ritual purity.

It was in response to David’s plan to build the Temple that God unilaterally made the Davidic Covenant, which promises that, unlike the case of Saul, kingship would never be taken away from David’s family and be given to someone else (2 Samuel 7:8-17). If his descendant violated the Mosaic Covenant and refused to repent, that descendant would be disciplined; he would even be exiled. But the throne would remain in David’s family.

Chapter 23: *David the Model King*

This covenant is the basis for the Davidic Messiah, which we shall see is a prominent theme in the Psalms and the Prophetic Books. We have seen that this was already promised through Jacob as a development of the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 49:8-10; cf. 46:12 and Ruth 4:18-20).

One's love for God is reflected in how one treats a fellow human being (1 John 4:20-21). In fact loving God is a powerful motivating force in loving human beings made in God's image. On both the occasions that David refused to kill Saul when he had the opportunity, the reason he gave was that Saul was "the LORD's anointed" (1 Samuel 24:6; 26:11; cf. 2 Samuel 1:16). In other words, since God placed Saul on the throne, David would leave it to God to remove Saul from the throne, to honor God out of love for Him.

Love for God is also expressed through trusting in Him, thereby seeking to obey His commands. By refusing to kill Saul and claim the throne, besides honoring God, David was also trusting in God to protect him till he became king. In a summary of David's victories in battle as king of Israel, we read that he hamstringed most of the chariot horses that he had captured (2 Samuel 8:4). This is to be understood in light of God's command that the king must not multiply wives nor horses for himself (Deuteronomy 17:16-17; cf. Joshua 11:6).

This prohibition was to ensure that the king would trust in God and God only for victory in battle, and so honor Him for it (Psalm 20:7). In fact, to love (and trust in) God with "all your heart" is to love (and trust in) God and God only (cf. 1 Samuel 7:3), not trust in God plus idols or any other object of trust, like horses. David not only loved God but did so with "all his heart" as he was never guilty of worshipping (God plus) idols; God Himself testified that David's heart had been "wholly devoted to the LORD his God" (1 Kings 11:4). This is remarkable in view of what happened to Solomon, his immediate successor, and most of the future kings.

Failure to Love God

David's most glaring failure to love God with all his heart by trusting in Him only was in his taking a census of his fighting men to assess his military strength towards the end of his life (2 Samuel 24:1-9).

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This does not mean taking a census of the fighting men was in and of itself wrong. Moses did it twice on God's instruction (Numbers 1 and 26). God's people are to use human means, without which no human being can live, but not to trust in human means due to a failure to trust in God only. In the case of David's census he had crossed the line from *using* military strength to *trusting* in it. This was an issue only because David had the privilege of knowing the living God through the Mosaic Covenant.

To David's credit he recognized, without the intervention of a prophet this time, that he had sinned, and did God's will by confessing his sin to God (2 Samuel 24:10). When the prophet Gad gave him three options for his punishment, David replied, "I am in great distress. Let us now fall into the hand of the LORD, for His mercies are great, but do not let me fall into the hand of man" (2 Samuel 24:14). He thus chose pestilence for three days, the option that avoided human agency. Even in accepting punishment from God David would still take "refuge" in Him. David's love for (and trust in) God shines through even in this situation.

And David's love for his people also shines through here. For when he saw the people dying from the pestilence, he appealed to God that since it was he who sinned, let God's hand (only) "be against me and against my father's house" (2 Samuel 24:17). He sought to bear the responsibility of his own failure, which in this case would mean the destruction of him and his immediate clan, so that the nation would be spared the calamity.

David, as a king under the Mosaic Covenant who accepted prophetic authority over him and chastisement for his sins, is the equivalent of a constitutional government today that on the whole seeks to uphold justice for the nation. Whenever it fails to do so, it is willing to repent and bear the responsibility, with or without the intervention of the media. And when its own failure or lack of competence is destroying the nation, repentance also means the willingness to be removed so that the nation may be spared calamity. Though not a perfect government, would this not be a government after God's own heart, a model government patterned after God's model king?

Chapter 24

Solomon the Lapsed King

Solomon, who succeeded David as king over Israel, is known for his exceptional wisdom (1 Kings 4:29-34; cf. 3:16-28; 10:1-10). It is then often asked, If Solomon was so wise, why was he so foolish as to multiply not just wives (like his father), but *foreign* wives, who led him to worship foreign gods (1 Kings 11:1-8)? This is a serious question as Solomon's idolatry resulted in the kingdom of Israel splitting into two after his death: the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah).

Solomon's idolatry was also a great disappointment given that he began exceptionally well as king over Israel. He was magnanimous to forgive his oldest (surviving) half-brother Adonijah, who had proclaimed himself king over Israel without their then bedridden father's knowledge or permission (1 Kings 1:5-10, 49-53). Solomon and his mother Bathsheba would have been executed if Adonijah had succeeded. This attempt to seize the throne was thwarted by the prophet Nathan, who not only informed Bathsheba about it but also instructed her on what to do (1 Kings 1:11-14). Adonijah was executed after David's death but only because he made what could be interpreted as another attempt to usurp the throne (1 Kings 2:13-25).

Exceptional Wisdom from God

Before David died, he charged Solomon to observe God's commandments with all his heart so that God would keep His promise that David would not lack a descendant to sit on his throne (1 Kings 2:1-4). But this does not mean Solomon need not be politically prudent to ensure that his throne will be established. This explains why David also warned Solomon about Joab and Shimei, the two other men besides Adonijah who could destabilise his reign (1 Kings 2:5-9; cf. Provan 1995: 34). So when the occasion arose, Solomon executed them as well (1 King 2:28-46a).

David's warning and Solomon's action may be interpreted as ruthless if we disregard the narrator's own comment: "So the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon" (1 Kings 2:46b). In other words the narrator, who was in a better position than us to understand the situation, interpreted the warning and action as necessary. For given the reality of politics in the ancient world, such actions may be needed to preserve peace and prevent the loss of innocent lives (cf. 1 Kings 2:26-27, where Abiathar's life was spared though "you deserve to die," implying that he was no threat at all).

Furthermore the narrator also presents Solomon as wise and God-fearing (not ruthless) at this stage of his reign. He even says Solomon "loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father" (1 Kings 3:3). And when God appeared to Solomon in a dream to give him a blank check, Solomon asked for wisdom because he felt he was too inexperienced to rule God's people justly (1 Kings 3:5-14). God was very pleased that Solomon asked for wisdom instead of wealth, long life or the death of his enemies. So God gave Solomon not only wisdom but also riches and honor. Solomon was thus God-fearing and wise enough to have asked for wisdom to rule justly. That would have made him an exceptionally good king.

Exemplary Faith in God

God had said to David that his successor, specifically naming Solomon, would reign in a time of rest from all enemies so that he could build the Temple instead of David himself, who was a man of war (1

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Chronicles 22:8-10). So it is not surprising that the narrator, after highlighting how Solomon removed internal threats to peace, and before recounting Solomon's works on the Temple, informs us not only that Solomon ruled over all Israel (1 Kings 4:1), but also that he "ruled over all the [surrounding] kingdoms," which "brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life" (1 Kings 4:21). This also contributed to Solomon's tremendous wealth.

The narrator presents a relatively detailed account of Solomon's works on the Temple, his own palace and other building projects (1 Kings 5:1-8:11; 9:10-28). But our concern here is Solomon's understanding of, as well as his commitment to, God and His will at this stage of his reign. This is best seen in his prayer to God and his benediction upon the people at the dedication service of the Temple (1 Kings 8:22-61).

Of particular significance is his confession that "there is no God like You in heaven above or on earth below" (verse 23), and "heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain You, how much less this house which I have built" (verse 27). This is another unmistakable confession of monotheism. For the God affirmed and defined here not only is unique in the universe, but also is beyond the universe (transcendent) as well as within the universe (immanent). God is thus in a category of His own. So even if, for the sake of argument, we accept that the "gods" referred to in the Bible were believed to be real divine beings, they are still not like and are therefore not the God affirmed and defined here (cf. Bauckham 2004: 211-14). Hence Solomon clearly confessed that there is only one God.

In view of Solomon's confession, the idea of God "dwelling" in the midst of Israel through the Tabernacle, and then the Temple, needs to be qualified (cf. Isaiah 66:1-3). It was God's "Name," which stands for who God is and what He does, that dwelt in their midst. This means God effectively but not actually "dwelt" in their midst. And God manifested Himself and was thus "present" in the Temple so that anyone who "prays [in faith] *toward* this place" could be assured that he was praying to God and thus would expect Him to hear and answer him (see verses 29-30). Thus there was actually no need nor any real advantage in praying within the Temple itself, let alone at any sacred location outside the Temple (cf. Provan 1995: 79).

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This is consistent with monotheism, which in contrast to polytheism, denies that rituals have intrinsic efficacy. Hence the location where one prays does not matter. Even the direction of prayer toward the Temple was only because God's Name was located there; it helped them to focus so that they could pray meaningfully to an invisible God who cannot be represented by any image. But for New Testament believers, even the direction does not matter (cf. John 4:20-21). For they themselves are the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 6:19). God's "presence" is thus so real to them (John 14:16-23) that they do not need the prescribed "visual aids" of the Old Testament to pray meaningfully to Him.

Also significant in Solomon's prayer (verses 41-43) and benediction (verses 59-61) is his exhortation that their heart "be wholly devoted to the LORD ... to keep His commandments" and thus be blessed. This was "so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God, there is no other (God)" and hence also "know Your Name, to fear You, as do Your people Israel" and so be blessed as well. This is a forthright confession that Israel's mission was to be a light to the world so that all the nations of the earth may be blessed, just as God promised in the Abrahamic Covenant.

After Solomon had completed building the Temple, his own palace as well as "all that Solomon desired to do," God appeared to him a second time (1 Kings 9:1-9), and assured him that He had heard his prayer and had indeed consecrated the Temple. God also warned Solomon that if he or his descendants should turn away from following Him and from keeping His commandments to serve and worship foreign gods, Israel would be exiled and the Temple would be destroyed. This was actually a reminder of what God had already warned the nation through Moses before they even entered and possessed the Promised Land.

Momentous Fall into Idolatry

In view of Solomon's magnificent confession that there is no other God in the universe and that all the nations are therefore to turn from idolatry to worship this one and only God, how is it possible that Solomon, who began so well, and with his exceptional God-

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endowed wisdom, ended up denying the truth of this confession by worshipping the idols of the nations?

When we cited the narrator's comment that Solomon "loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father," we left out the qualifying statement, "except that he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places" (1 Kings 3:3). This is an explicit criticism of Solomon. The "high places" were places where the Canaanites practiced their idolatry. So Solomon worshipped God in places associated with idolatry. In view of Solomon's future idolatry, this criticism highlights a root-cause of his downfall.

And the narrator also mentions that at the beginning of his reign, Solomon married an Egyptian princess to seal a political alliance with the Pharaoh (1 Kings 3:1). In view of the narrator's later comment that "Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh," who led Solomon in his old age to worship their native gods (1 Kings 11:1-8), this is an implicit criticism that highlights another root-cause of his downfall (cf. Provan 1995: 44-46).

It cannot be overstated that both these root-causes were planted in Solomon's life *before* God appeared to him in that dream, that is, before God endowed him with the exceptional wisdom. Thus there were pre-existing "blind spots" in his life that pre-empted the effectiveness of his exceptional wisdom in these already-compromised aspects of his life. Solomon had presupposed that it was acceptable for him as king to marry foreign women for political reasons as it was the practice in the ancient world. And he had also presupposed that it was acceptable for him to worship God in places associated with foreign gods, as he was worshipping God and not idols. When he lived out both presuppositions, and lived with so many foreign wives, he was immersed in the temptation to follow them in worshipping their gods. It was then a matter of time before he was persuaded to take the next step. The synergic combination of these questionable presuppositions thus proved deadly.

We have recognized from the outset of this exposition that our presuppositions, which we are often unaware of, affect not only what we see and what we do not see, but also how we interpret what we do see. The experience of Solomon shows that even a person who fears and loves God and has seen and confessed the truth about God

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and His will, and who is exceptionally wise, is not spared the blinding effects of false presuppositions. This is why we did not move ahead in our exposition of the Old Testament until we had considered the credibility of Genesis 1:1, which lays down the basic presuppositions upon which the entire Bible is built. We need to be aware of our presuppositions and weigh them carefully.

Israel Splits into Two Kingdoms

The immediate consequence of Solomon's subsequent idolatry was the splitting of the kingdom into two after his death (1 Kings 11:9-13): the Northern Kingdom (Israel) and the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Thus though the northern ten tribes were taken away from David's family, Solomon's descendants still ruled over Judah (and Benjamin). This was because of God's mercy on David's family in view of His promise to David that kingship would not be taken away from his family.

God had not only informed Solomon of this consequence of his idolatry, but He also revealed it to Jeroboam, the man who would lead the ten tribes to secede and thus become the first king of the Northern Kingdom (1 Kings 11:26-40). It is clear from the narrative that the split was God's direct judgment on Solomon's idolatry. But what actually caused it to happen?

After Solomon died, he was succeeded by his son Rehoboam. When the nation gathered at Shechem to formally make Rehoboam king, the northern ten tribes were represented by Jeroboam, who said to Rehoboam that "we will serve you" if the king-designate would "lighten the hard service of your father and his heavy yoke which he put upon us" (1 Kings 12:4). Solomon had not only failed to love God with all his heart when he practiced idolatry, he had also failed to love his neighbor as himself when he placed oppressive demands on his people.

When Rehoboam consulted the elders who had served his father, they replied, "Today if you will be a servant to this people and serve them, and give them a favorable answer, then they will be your servants forever" (1 Kings 12:7). Thus the elders advised Rehoboam to practise the "servant leadership" that Jesus also taught His disciples

(see Mark 10:42-44). But Rehoboam rejected their wise counsel and consulted the young men he grew up with who served him. They advised him not only to reject the petition but also to say that he would significantly “add to your yoke” (1 Kings 12:10-11). This was the actual cause of the secession of the ten tribes.

Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Thus Rehoboam was directly responsible for the split. Solomon was also responsible for having oppressed his people in the first place. In other words, though the split was a judgment of God (divine sovereignty), Solomon and Rehoboam were responsible for making it happen (human responsibility). This expresses particularly well a paradoxical teaching that undergirds both the Old Testament and the New Testament: God is sovereign over whatever happens, yet human beings are responsible for what they do or fail to do. This is a paradox because the teaching seems logically inconsistent. For if God is sovereign, as Paul puts it (Romans 9:19), who can resist His will? How then can we be responsible?

This paradoxical teaching is also expressed in God’s choice of Saul, a Benjamite, to be the first king, with the view that if Saul had not violated God’s commandment, “the LORD would have established your kingdom over Israel forever” (1 Samuel 13:13). It is paradoxical because God had already promised through Jacob that kingship would remain in the tribe of Judah until the coming of the Messiah (Genesis 49:10). In other words, even long before Saul became king, God had effectively decided that kingship would be taken away from his family to be given to David’s family (divine sovereignty). However it was Saul’s disobedience that actually made it happen (human responsibility).

Yet another significant expression of this paradoxical teaching is God’s choice of Jacob over Esau, his older twin-brother, to inherit the Abrahamic Covenant. Even before they were born, God had said “the older shall serve the younger” (Genesis 25:23). But Esau was responsible for making it happen: he sold his birthright to Jacob (Genesis 25:29-34; cf. Hebrews 12:16-17). In this case it can be argued that God simply said what was going to happen on the basis of

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His knowledge of the future; so it was not about God's sovereignty in choosing Jacob over Esau. However the apostle Paul confirms that God had sovereignly chosen Jacob over Esau when they "were not yet born nor had done anything good or bad" (Romans 9:10-13; cf. Malachi 1:2-3).

This paradoxical teaching is so pervasive that unless we accept it, at least temporarily, we will have problems understanding what the Bible has to say to us. But does it make sense to accept, even temporarily, paradoxical teachings in the Bible?

Paradoxical teachings, by definition, *seem* logically inconsistent. But this creates intellectual problems for us only when we have presupposed that our created mind can *fully* understand the uncreated God and His ways. In this exposition we have presupposed Genesis 1:1, which teaches that God, as confessed by Solomon, is both transcendent and immanent. In other words, though God is infinite, He has revealed Himself in our finite world in a manner that our finite mind can understand Him and His ways, but not fully. So a God whose ways we can fully understand is not the God presented in Genesis 1:1 (for a thorough defense of the rationality of paradoxical teachings in the Bible, see Anderson 2007).

In fact, unless we accept both divine sovereignty as well as human responsibility, we cannot even talk about the meaning of history. For history is story-shaped. Just as in the case of a story, history has no meaning unless it has a meaningful ending (see further the exposition on Experiencing the Meaning of History in Chapter 34). The Old Testament recounts not only how this world began but also how it will end meaningfully. But unless God is sovereign, we have no assurance that this world will end just as the Old Testament says it will, which involves an ultimate judgment on unrepentant wickedness.

This view of history presupposes that God is sovereign—there will certainly be an ultimate judgment. It also presupposes that human beings are responsible for what they have done or failed to do—unrepentant wickedness deserves to be punished. Our conscience (sense of justice) does not deny that this has to be the case if history is to end meaningfully. The alternative is to affirm that history has no meaning, which would mean human life has no ultimate meaning.

Chapter 25

Israel Exiled from Promised Land

Solomon died in 931 BC. The Northern Kingdom (Israel) had 19 kings before it was conquered by the Assyrians in 722 BC. The Southern Kingdom (Judah) also had 19 kings before it was conquered by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Both the Assyrians and the Babylonians practiced exiling the peoples they conquered from their homelands. It was Solomon's idolatry that planted the seeds for the eventual exile of God's people to foreign lands.

The basic cause for the Exile was that, other than a few exceptions in Judah, the kings failed to keep the Mosaic Covenant themselves, let alone lead the nation to keep it. So the nation failed to be a covenant community, and thus failed in its calling to be a light to the world. God's purpose for bringing them out of Egypt could not be fulfilled. Something new was needed—another Exodus to replace that accomplished through Moses. But this required the Exile so that God could start all over again.

Both kingdoms lasted longer than they deserved because of the Abrahamic Covenant, which promised the people occupation of Canaan (2 Kings 13:23). And the Southern Kingdom lasted even longer

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because of the Davidic Covenant as well, which promised David that he would have a descendant on the throne (1 Kings 11:36; 15:4; 2 Kings 8:19; 19:34). Hence justice based on the Mosaic Covenant was tempered with mercy based on the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants. But there are limits to mercy, and both kingdoms were so stubbornly unrepentant that the limits were exceeded.

Jeroboam Introduced Idolatry into Israel

God had promised Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, that if he would keep God's ways, God would give him a lasting dynasty like David's (1 Kings 11:38). However, Jeroboam quickly fell into the idolatry Aaron committed at Mount Sinai. He made two golden calves for the people to worship: one at Bethel in the south and another at Dan in the north. He even repeated what Aaron said: "Behold your God, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (1 Kings 12:28). He also built a temple in Bethel with a priesthood made up of non-Levites, as well as instituted a feast of his own invention, to rival the worship in Jerusalem (1 Kings 12:31-33; cf. Provan 1995: 110-11).

All this violates what God had commanded. Jeroboam did it to keep his people from going down to Jerusalem in Judah to worship God, fearing that if they did so, they would kill him and return to Rehoboam. This means he disregarded what God had promised him out of political expedience. So Jeroboam led Israel into idolatry. Since this development was a result of the split of the nation into two kingdoms or states, it was also a consequence of Solomon's idolatry, which resulted in the split.

God considered the development so serious that a prophet came from Judah to Bethel to denounce the idolatry there (1 Kings 13:1-10). He made a prediction that a future descendant of David, Josiah by name, would burn on the altar the bones of the priests who had burned incense there; and to authenticate this long-term prediction, he made another prediction that was immediately fulfilled (verses 2-3). The long-term prophecy was fulfilled 300 years later (2 Kings 23:15-20). This is one of the two cases in the Old Testament where a long-term prediction specifically names the person concerned; the other case is the prediction concerning Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28; 45:1).

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However Jeroboam refused to repent and when he stretched out his hand to order the prophet seized, his hand dried up. Out of desperation Jeroboam asked the prophet to pray to God for healing; the prophet did and Jeroboam was healed. Even then, Jeroboam did not repent of his evil way. So God pronounced through the prophet Ahijah a judgment on Jeroboam that would affect not only his house—he would not have a dynasty and every male in his house would be wiped out (1 Kings 14:10), but also Israel—because of the idolatry that he introduced into Israel, the people would eventually be exiled to Assyria (1 Kings 14:14-16).

Like Jeroboam, all the other 18 kings after him were evil in God’s eyes. The worst was Ahab, who inherited the throne from his father Omri, who was hitherto the most evil king (1 Kings 16:25, 30). Ahab not only practiced the sins of Jeroboam, but also married Jezebel, a foreign princess who led him to worship Baal, thereby introducing Baal worship into Israel (1 Kings 16:29-33). It even came to a point that “Jezebel killed the prophets of the LORD” (1 Kings 18:13)!

Elijah’s Response to Israel’s Idolatry

Into this extremely desperate situation came the prophet Elijah, the most powerful prophet since Moses in terms of miracles. On the basis of God’s warning through Moses that if God’s people worshipped foreign gods, God would withhold the rain (Deuteronomy 11:16-17), Elijah prayed that there would be no rain in Israel (James 5:17). Elijah then declared in God’s name to Ahab that “there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except by my word” (1 Kings 17:1).

Then God instructed Elijah to go and hide himself by a stream where there was no food supply, adding that he shall drink from the stream, and as for food, God said He had commanded the ravens to provide for him there (1 Kings 17:2-7). Miraculously the birds brought him food twice a day. And when the stream dried up as a result of God answering Elijah’s prayer for no rain, God redirected Elijah to a foreign land nearby, saying that He had commanded a widow to provide for him there (1 Kings 17:8-16). When he arrived, the widow was about to prepare her last meal for herself and her son from her last handful of flour and supply of oil so that they “may eat

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it and (wait to) die” (verse 12). It would require another miracle for her to provide for Elijah. Sure enough God multiplied the flour and the oil.

What was God’s purpose in sending Elijah to the stream and then to the widow? It was not just to hide Elijah from Ahab, who was indeed scouring everywhere hunting for him as “the troubler of Israel” because of the drought that Elijah had predicted. There is significance in sending Elijah to a stream away from civilization and then to a *foreign* widow.

God had explained through Moses to the nation just before they entered the Promised Land that the prior 40 years of living on manna in the wilderness was meant to teach them that “man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Deuteronomy 8:3). As noted before, this means obedience to God’s word is more basic than even food. And this implies that “if the command of God directed the people to do something or go somewhere, the command should be obeyed; shortage of food or water, lack of strength, or any other excuse would be insufficient, for the command of God contained within it the provision of God” (Craigie 1976: 185).

Thus Elijah’s experience by the stream and with the widow demonstrates vividly the reliability of God’s word, specifically in terms of God’s provision for our material needs. So there is no excuse whatsoever for violating any commandment of God. In fact God’s warning about withholding rain was in the very context of God’s promise that if they obeyed Him, He would provide rain so that they would be not only economically secure but also prosperous (Deuteronomy 11:8-17). They were tempted to worship Baal basically because it was believed by the Canaanites that in Canaan, Baal was the source of economic security and prosperity. To counter that, even before they entered Canaan, God taught them that His word could be trusted even for economic security and prosperity. In other words, Elijah’s experience not only confirmed this truth, it also expressed the message God’s people needed to hear then.

In view of what was going to happen later at Mount Carmel, Elijah himself needed to grow in his faith with respect to praying for miracles. Praying for no rain was only the first step. And when the

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stream dried up, it confirmed to him that God had answered his prayer. This would have strengthened his faith in this respect. And if the ravens could provide for him, obeying God by going to the widow was hardly faith-stretching. When God multiplied the flour and the oil, this by itself would not have increased his faith in God. But the miracle happened to a foreign woman in a foreign land. This means God was not only the God of Israel, but also the God of the nations. This gave him the basis to trust in God to challenge the prophets of Baal.

Having learned from personal experience that God's power is applicable beyond God's people, Elijah still needed to grow in praying for miracles more difficult than a drought. So it happened that the widow's son died and Elijah found himself in a situation where he was made to trust in God for the unimaginable: bring the boy back to life (1 Kings 17:17-24). When God answered Elijah's prayer, Elijah was ready for the challenge ahead of him.

After three years of drought Elijah resurfaced to challenge the prophets of Baal to a contest at Mount Carmel in the presence of Ahab and the people to determine who was really God—Baal or the LORD (1 Kings 18:20-40). The contest was about who could send down fire to consume a sacrificial ox in answer to prayer; the one who answers is God. Before the contest Elijah challenged the people: "How long will you waver between two opinions? If the LORD is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him." It is significant that Elijah's name in Hebrew means "The LORD is God" (verse 21).

The prophets of Baal went first. In spite of 450 of them calling on the name of Baal for hours, even to the extent of cutting themselves, Baal did not answer. When it was Elijah's turn, he made the challenge more difficult. After building an altar of stones he made a large trench around it and then drenched the sacrifice and the wood beneath that he had placed on the altar, to the point that the trench was filled with water. Then all Elijah did was pray briefly to God, acknowledging who He was and asking Him to answer his prayer so that the people may be turned back to Him. Fire came down and consumed not only the sacrifice but also the wood, the stones and the dust, as well as licked up the water in the trench. The people bowed down and cried out, "The LORD, He is God; the LORD, He

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is God” (1 Kings 18:39). Elijah then instructed them to destroy the 450 false prophets, after which he prayed for rain, and God answered with a heavy downpour.

When Ahab told Jezebel “all that” had happened, she swore in the name of her gods to have Elijah killed within 24 hours (1 Kings 19:1-2). If even such a public and conclusive demonstration that “the LORD is God” could not convince her of the truth, nothing would. This shows she was “impervious to evidence” (Provan 1995: 144), another classic case of one’s presuppositions or pre-commitments blinding one to the truth. It was also another case of one’s vested interests, whether in terms of social prestige, political power or economic privilege, causing one to reject the truth, no matter how convincingly it is presented.

As for Elijah, being human, his immediate reaction was to run for his life. When he reached Beersheba in southern Judah, he left his assistant there and went into the wilderness. Alone in the wilderness he asked God to “take my life, for I am no better than my fathers” (1 Kings 19:4). Why, after such a resounding victory, did Elijah feel so defeated to the point of wanting to die? Granted that he was then exhausted to the point of depression, there must be a cause that triggered his desperate words. We now infer the cause based on the narrative that follows.

God’s Response to Israel’s Idolatry

Later in a cave at Horeb (Mount Sinai), God asked Elijah why he was there. Elijah replied that he had been very zealous for God because the people of Israel had forsaken Him to the point of killing His prophets, and he mistakenly claimed that “I alone am left” (1 Kings 19:10). This means his battle against the prophets of Baal at Mount Carmel was driven by such a zeal for God that it could not be satisfied until the situation was reversed. So by having the prophets of Baal destroyed, Elijah had in mind the eradication of Baal-worship in Israel. Now that “they [still] seek my life,” it shows that in spite of his miraculous success at Mount Carmel, his mission to reverse the situation and thus change Israel’s history had failed—God’s prophets were still not safe.

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In response, God told Elijah to stand up before Him. And he witnessed God “passing by” outside the cave (1 Kings 19:11-13): first there was a storm, followed by an earthquake, then a fire, and finally a whisper. After each of the first three manifestations, which reminded Elijah of what had happened at Mount Carmel, we are told that God was not in it. It was in the whisper that Elijah detected God. In view of what God told Elijah to do next, the meaning of what Elijah witnessed is that even when God is involved, history is not changed through a supernatural intervention, but through natural historical developments, where God is hardly discernible, as in a whisper (cf. Provan 146-47).

This teaching about how God works in history is more clearly seen in Isaiah 18:3-5—God looks at a nation “quietly” and acts accordingly until the nation receives what it deserves, just like how the “shimmering heat in sunshine” and “a cloud of dew” act imperceptibly on crops until they are ripe for harvest. Thus “As in Elijah’s ‘still small voice’ (1 K. 19:12), the Lord asserts that his work [in history] will be quiet and unassuming, but nevertheless complete” (Oswalt 1986: 362). Those who expect otherwise will be disappointed.

When God asked Elijah again why he was there, Elijah gave the same reply. This time God told Elijah that “you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram; and Jehu ... as king over Israel; and Elisha ... as prophet in your place” (1 Kings 19:15-17). Then God said that those who would escape Hazael’s sword would not escape Jehu’s; and those who would escape Jehu’s would not escape Elisha’s. As we shall see, after Ahab’s death, Jehu used the sword in a coup to change the history of Israel.

In other words, in that cave God revealed and explained to Elijah that His intended means of changing the history of Israel in response to Ahab’s idolatry was through natural historical means and not through the supernatural demonstration of His power at Mount Carmel. So the cause of Elijah’s despair is that he had expected otherwise and was thus disappointed that after years of preparation to perform the dramatic miracle that soundly defeated the prophets of Baal, he had only won a battle but not the war to eradicate the worship of Baal in Israel. He needed to realize that this was not his war.

Elisha's Extension of Elijah's Ministry

In obedience to God's command, Elijah found Elisha and threw his mantle on him (1 Kings 19:19-21), signifying his "anointing" of Elisha as his successor, as it served the same purpose as anointing with oil (cf. Brueggemann 2000: 238-39). And it turned out that Elijah had nothing to do with Hazael or Jehu. It was his anointed successor Elisha who did something that can be considered as "anointing" Hazael and Jehu respectively.

This is not a problem; Elisha's ministry was unquestionably an extension and continuation of Elijah's ministry. For when Elijah departed from this world, Elisha's request for a "double portion" of Elijah's spirit was granted him, which means, "the spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha" (2 Kings 2:9-15). Elisha inherited Elijah's mission to the extent that he could even duplicate Elijah's miracles, including healing Naaman a foreigner (2 Kings 5:8-14) and bringing back to life the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4:32-35).

However, Elijah did personally pronounce God's judgment on Ahab's house and Jezebel, which was later carried out by Jehu (1 Kings 21:17-24; cf. 2 Kings 9:33-37; 10:17). This was in response to what Ahab and Jezebel did to Naboth (1 Kings 21:1-16). Ahab coveted Naboth's vineyard, but when Naboth refused to sell it to him, he sulked over it. So Jezebel ordered in Ahab's name that Naboth be executed for cursing God and the king on the false testimony of two "worthless men." Ahab then took possession of Naboth's land.

This case expresses well the teaching that idolatry (failure to love God with all of one's heart) and injustice (failure to love one's neighbor as oneself) go hand in hand. As Iain Provan (1995: 158) puts it,

Abandonment of God (Exod. 20:1-6) inevitably leads to abandonment of righteousness; we see the reality of this in 1 Kings 21—in this society given over to idol-worship, covetousness (21:1-6; cf. Exod. 20:17) leads on to false testimony, murder, and theft (1 Kgs. 21:13-19; cf. Exod. 20:13, 15-16).

For the very nature of idolatry, that is, worshipping anything other than the living God, is such that one's fallen human nature is neither

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constrained nor restrained adequately by the fear of God to do justice and love mercy.

How then did Elisha “anoint” the Aramean Hazael as king of Aram? When Ben-Hadad, king of Aram, was sick, he sent Hazael to inquire of Elisha whether he would recover (2 Kings 8:7-15). Elisha said to Hazael to tell the king that he would surely recover, “but the LORD has shown me that he will certainly die ... [and] that you will be king over Aram” (verses 10, 13b). Hazael returned to Ben-Hadad and told him that he would surely recover, and on the next day assassinated him and became king in his place. As Walter Brueggemann (2000: 374) explains, “It is the prophet who has evoked the coup of Hazael. The narrative never says so, but we are left with the impression that becoming king was a new idea for Hazael, an idea upon which he acted promptly and violently, at the behest of the prophet.” Thus Elisha “anointed” Hazael as king of Aram.

As for the case of Jehu, Elisha sent a prophet to anoint Jehu (with oil) as king over Israel and to instruct him to do to Ahab’s house and Jezebel according to God’s judgment pronounced through Elijah (2 Kings 9:1-10). This happened during the reign of Jehoram, son of Ahab. Jehu did more than what he was explicitly told. For he not only assassinated Jehoram and Jezebel as well as every male in Ahab’s house, he also eradicated Baal worship in Israel (2 Kings 9:14-10:28), thus accomplishing what Elijah mistakenly thought was his mission at Mount Carmel.

God’s Last Warning to Israel

What then was the point of the spectacular demonstration of God’s power at Mount Carmel? God was bearing witness to His reality. And He would still have done it even if it would not bear any fruit. For God bears witness to Himself in one way or another so that everyone is without excuse (Romans 1:20). In this particular case, the spectacular means God used was due to the desperate situation in Israel. And the people did acknowledge that “the LORD, He is God” though this change of heart may not have lasted. Nevertheless, now that they were without excuse whatsoever, no one could question God for sending them into exile if they persisted in any form of idolatry.

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Though Jehu eradicated Baal-worship, he persisted in the idolatry of Jeroboam, “which he had caused Israel to commit” (2 Kings 10:29-31). Even then, because Jehu did well in accomplishing God’s will with respect to Ahab, God promised him that he would have a descendant on the throne of Israel up to the fourth generation. It was as though God was looking for any conceivable basis to allow the idolatrous people to remain longer in the Holy Land. And God used Hazael to oppress them (2 Kings 10:32-33; 13:22-23; cf. 8:12), to remind them that they had sinned against God.

Jehoash was Jehu’s descendant on the throne in the third generation, during whose reign Elisha died (2 Kings 13:14-21). Jehoash was then succeeded by his son Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:16-29). During his reign, which was a time of material prosperity, the prophets Amos and Hosea preached against idolatry and social injustice in Israel and called them to repentance, as well as declared that they would go into exile because of their refusal to repent.

Jeroboam II was succeeded by a son who was on the throne for only six months before he was assassinated and replaced by someone from another family (2 Kings 15:8-12), thus fulfilling God’s word to Jehu that he would have a descendant on the throne up to the fourth generation. After that, the situation in Israel returned to that before Omri (Ahab’s father), where kingship kept changing from family to family through assassination.

The last king of Israel was Hoshea, in whose reign “the king of Assyria captured Samaria and exiled the Israelites to Assyria” (2 Kings 17:6). To help us better appreciate why God had to send them into exile, the narrative gives a relatively long description of the sins of Israel, including child sacrifice (2 Kings 17:7-18).

Chapter 26

Judah Exiled from Promised Land

Unlike the case of Israel, all the kings of Judah were descendants of David. This is in line with the Davidic Covenant. And unlike the kings of Israel, not all the kings of Judah were evil in God's eyes. Two (Ahaz and Manasseh) were exceptionally bad and two (Hezekiah and Josiah) were exceptionally good; the rest of the kings fell somewhere in between.

We have already considered Rehoboam and his folly that caused the split of the nation into two kingdoms (Chapter 24). As pointed out by Provan (1995: 121), "each king is evaluated in terms of his commitment to the LORD as evidenced by his religious policies." However in the case of Rehoboam, it says "And Judah [instead of Rehoboam] did evil in the sight of the LORD" (1 Kings 14:22). We know that Rehoboam himself did evil in the sight of God because Abijam, his son and successor, "walked in the sins of his father" and was not like David (1 Kings 15:3). In the period of the judges the people repeatedly did what was right in their own eyes because there was no king (Judges 21:25). It implies that it was the king's responsibility to ensure that the people kept God's commandments. It also

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implies that when the king himself did evil in God's eyes, the people would be doing the same, if not more so. Hence it makes sense that, as a rule, the focus was then on the king.

Blatant Idolatry after Solomon's Death

An exception was made in the case of Rehoboam to highlight the crucial development after the death of Solomon. For we are told that the people sinned against God "more than all that their fathers had done" because "they also built for themselves high places" to worship foreign gods (1 Kings 14:22-23). This implies that blatant worship of foreign gods did not exist among the people during Solomon's reign; it was confined mainly to Solomon and his foreign wives toward the end of his life (1 Kings 11:4-8). Since it happened so soon after Solomon's death, Solomon was responsible for it. For even if Rehoboam, whose idolatrous mother was an Ammonite (1 Kings 14:21; cf. 11:7-8), did not influence the people to worship foreign gods, they were simply following Solomon's example.

And in describing the idolatry of Judah, the narrator adds that, "they did according to all the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites" (1 King 14:24). If the nations deserved to be dispossessed for those abominations, it implies that Judah more than deserved to be exiled even then. This is because God held His people to a higher standard than the nations (Amos 3:2). As already pointed out, Judah survived much longer than it deserved only because of the Davidic Covenant.

Surprisingly King Asa, the great-grandson of Solomon, did well. He was even rated as "like David" (1 Kings 15:11), for "the heart of Asa was wholly devoted to the LORD all his days" (1 Kings 15:14b). He reformed Judah to quite an extent (1 Kings 15:12-15). For he not only "removed all the idols his fathers had made," he even removed his own idolatrous mother as queen mother. He also removed the high places used to worship foreign gods (2 Chronicles 14:3-5). However he did not remove the high places used to worship the LORD (1 Kings 15:14; 2 Chronicles 15:17), which we saw contributed to Solomon's eventual idolatry. No Davidic king, not even the pious Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:43b), who succeeded Asa, did anything

to these high places until Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:22; cf. Petter 2005: 416-17). Nevertheless the significant reforms of Asa warranted God's mercy, especially in view of the Davidic Covenant.

Jehoshaphat's Faith and Momentous Folly

Jehoshaphat was also "like David" in that "he walked in all the way of Asa his father" (1 Kings 22:43a). Also like David, Jehoshaphat was not perfect. He made a serious mistake with deadly consequences—his alliance with Ahab and his house. Since the split of the nation into two kingdoms, the two states had been hostile to each other and were frequently at war. But Jehoshaphat "made peace with the king of Israel" (1 Kings 22:44). In itself this is good, for both states were actually still one nation. But the end did not justify the means, especially since it involved Jehoshaphat's son Jehoram, who succeeded Jehoshaphat as king, marrying Ahab's daughter Athaliah.

Jehoshaphat's alliance with Ahab almost cost him his own life (1 Kings 22:29-33; cf. 2 Chronicles 19:1-2). For in his staunch support for Ahab he almost died in the battle in which Ahab was killed. And it also almost resulted in the death of the Davidic dynasty. Though in theory Jehoram's wife Athaliah was not a "foreign woman" as she was the daughter of Ahab, in practice she was (she may even be Jezebel's daughter). For in spite of the orthodox faith of both Asa and Jehoshaphat, Jehoram "walked in the way of the kings of Israel, just as the house of Ahab had done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife" (2 Kings 8:18). This implies worshipping Baal (cf. 2 Kings 11:17-18). And Jehoram's successor Ahaziah, who was Athaliah's son, followed after him (2 Kings 8:27).

When Jehu assassinated the other Jehoram, the king of Israel, Ahaziah was visiting this royal uncle of his (2 Kings 8:29). Jehu killed Ahaziah as well (2 Kings 9:27-28). Seeing that her son Ahaziah had died, Athaliah assassinated all (except one) of the princes and thus usurped the throne (2 Kings 11:1-3). This violated the Davidic Covenant. By the providence of God baby Joash, son of Ahaziah, was saved by his aunt and then hidden in the Temple.

After six years, Jehoiada the High Priest, with the help of the military, managed to stage a coup and reclaimed the throne for Joash;

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Athaliah was executed and Baal worship was removed (2 Kings 11:4-21). On the one hand, this tragic episode shows that no political development, no matter how unfavorable, can thwart God's purpose, which in this case is that David would have a lasting dynasty (divine sovereignty). On the other hand it shows that piety and good intentions, as in the case of Jehoshaphat, cannot replace political prudence in personal as well as in national affairs (human responsibility).

Joash "did right in the sight of the LORD all his days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him" (2 Kings 12:2). He even ordered the Temple repaired (2 Kings 12:4-5). However, after the death of Jehoiada, Joash was influenced by the officials of Judah, and they forsook God and worshipped idols, thus returning to the way of Ahab (2 Chronicles 24:17-18). God sent prophets to bring them back but they would not listen. Joash even had the prophet Zechariah, son of Jehoiada, executed (2 Chronicles 24:17-22).

The positive king-priest relationship between Joash and Jehoiada expresses well the kind of state-religion relations God has in mind for a nation. Though Jehoiada instructed Joash and thus influenced his kingship, the king was not subservient to the High Priest. For Joash not only ordered the priests to repair the Temple, when they failed to do so, he also summoned Jehoiada and the priests and held them accountable (2 Kings 12:4-7; cf. 2 Chronicles 24:4-7). However this did not mean the king had sovereignty over the High Priest concerning religious matters. For as in the case of Saul's disobedience (Chapter 22), the attempt of Uzziah (also known as Azariah), Joash's grandson, to usurp priestly prerogatives was punished by God (2 Chronicles 26:16-21; cf. 2 Kings 15:5). Even in the repairing of the Temple, Joash intervened only after the priests had said they would not undertake the work by themselves (2 Kings 12:8-16; cf. 2 Chronicles 24:8).

Lesson on State-Religion Relationship

All this is relevant to the controversial issue of state-religion relations today. In the case of Joash and Jehoiada, both the king (state) and the priest (religion) were to observe the Mosaic Covenant by each independently submitting to the Ten Commandments (constitution) and the laws based on it. Jehoiada's instruction of Joash was thus limited

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to guiding him in observing the Mosaic Covenant. And Joash's authority over Jehoiada was limited to holding the priest accountable not to Joash himself but to Jehoiada's calling as priest as outlined in the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant was applicable only to ancient Israel as a holy nation occupying the Holy Land. All other nations, including secular nations today, are accountable to God in terms of the Noahic Covenant. We have seen how a secular nation today can observe the Noahic Covenant in practical terms by drawing relevant principles from the Ten Commandments (see especially Chapters 17 and 18).

To help us better understand state-religion relations under the Noahic Covenant in today's context we need to first differentiate a *secular* state from a *secularist* state. The word "secular" refers to the temporal or the here-and-now as opposed to the eternal or the here-after. And it is neutral with respect to any particular religion or to religion in general. So it is non-religious, but not anti-religious. The term "secularism," from which we derive "secularist," however is the view that the secular is all that exists or matters, just as materialism is the view that the material is all that exists or matters (cf. Sproul 1986: 29-41). It is thus anti-religious. There has been an effort to promote secular politics and religious freedom which involves (unnecessarily) restricting the meaning of "secularism" to something that is non-religious but not anti-religious (Berlinerblau 2012). We retain the anti-religious meaning of secularism because this view is still a dominant force in modernity. Hence unlike a *secular* state, a *secularist* state, such as one under communism, is not neutral in terms of religion.

We have also seen that, under the Noahic Covenant, the power of the state is to be circumscribed by a constitution that adequately embodies the Golden Rule. And since the Golden Rule is taught by virtually every religion and is recognized by even atheists, such a constitution and the laws based on it can be secular (religiously neutral) and acceptable to all. In other words the state can be a secular state. And just as Joash was instructed by Jehoiada to uphold the Ten Commandments, even the politicians in a secular state are to be instructed by their respective religions to uphold the (secular) constitution. Thus religion has a necessary role even in a secular state. A religion that does not or cannot play this role has violated God's pur-

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pose for religion. Atheists and agnostics would have to live by a non-religious ethical system that can help them uphold the constitution.

And since even under the Mosaic Covenant the priests (religion) were independent of the king (state), under the Noahic Covenant religion must be independent of the state. Hence all citizens must have the freedom to practice a religion of their choice, or no religion, as long as they do not violate the Golden Rule embodied in the constitution. In other words, the constitution and the laws based on it must be religiously neutral (secular). For how then can there be religious freedom otherwise? This means, under the Noahic Covenant, the state not only *can*, but in fact *should*, be a secular state. But since the constitution and hence the state are secular, and not secularist, a particular religion can even be officially given a ceremonial role in the state, as in the case of the United Kingdom and Malaysia.

Both religious as well as non-religious people often confuse the concept of a secularist state with that of a secular state, thereby unnecessarily perpetuating the controversy over state-religion relations.

How then can the Bible, an explicitly religious book, be teaching that the secular state is to be the norm for the world today? We shall answer this question directly when we consider how the Creation Mandate is to be reapplied under the New Covenant (Chapter 42). We will then see better why the Bible is relevant not only to people who accept it as God's inspired Word but also to those who do not.

Ahaz's Folly and the Aftermath

Coming back to the kings of Judah, the three kings after Joash (Amaziah, Uzziah and Jotham) "did right in the sight of the LORD, yet not like David" (2 Kings 14:3; 15:3, 34). They started well but became unfaithful to God in some significant ways (2 Chronicles 25:14-16; 26:16-19; 27:2). When we come to Ahaz, son of Jotham, we encounter the worst king of Judah until that time.

To say that Ahaz was not "like David" would be an understatement. For he not only "walked in the way of the kings of Israel," he "even made his sons pass through the fire (child sacrifice), according to the abominations of the nations whom the LORD had dispossessed before the Israelites" (2 Kings 16:2-4). The indictment that

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God's people practiced the abominations of the nations whom God had dispossessed, which means they more than deserved to be exiled, was first given at the very beginning of the account of Judah. Its repetition here—when Judah had its worst king so far—is ominous.

However God did not decide to exile Judah despite Ahaz's sins. This is not surprising, for Hezekiah, Ahaz's son and successor, turned out to be the best king Judah had until that time. In response to the prophet Micah's warning that "Jerusalem will become a heap of ruins" Hezekiah and the people repented (Micah 3:12; Jeremiah 26:18-19). Such a positive response to the preaching of a prophet was rare. And Hezekiah "did right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father David had done" (2 Kings 18:3). In his religious reforms Hezekiah went beyond all previous efforts. He not only removed the high places used to worship foreign gods as well as those used to worship the LORD, but he also destroyed the bronze serpent Moses made because the people were worshipping it (2 Kings 18:4, 22). And in terms of faith in God no king of Judah, whether before or after Hezekiah, was like him (2 Kings 18:5-6).

Unfortunately, Hezekiah's successor Manasseh was even worse than his grandfather Ahaz, making him the worst king of Judah. He went even further than Ahaz in that he introduced idolatry into the Temple itself (2 Kings 21:3-7). And "Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he filled Jerusalem (with it) from one end to the other" (2 Kings 21:16). We are again reminded that idolatry and injustice go hand in hand. Also the people were influenced by Manasseh "to do evil more than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the Israelites" (2 Kings 21:9). This indictment is even more ominous than that associated with Ahaz. This time God decided to exile Judah (2 Kings 21:10-15).

Amon, who succeeded Manasseh, followed his father's example. He was assassinated by his own servants after reigning for only two years (2 Kings 21:20-24). His son Josiah was only eight years old when he became king in his place.

Josiah "did right in the sight of the LORD and walked in all the way of David his father" (2 Kings 22:2). It is difficult to decide whether Hezekiah or Josiah was a better king in God's eyes. We noted that Hezekiah had greater faith in God, but Josiah's devotion to

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God was deeper. For no king before nor after him was like him “who turned to the LORD with all his heart ... according to all the Law of Moses” (2 Kings 23:25). This is reflected in his reforms, which was “already far more all-encompassing than Hezekiah’s” (Provan 1995: 274) even before he reinstated the Passover in a way that “no such Passover had been observed since the days of the judges who judged Israel” (2 Kings 23:21-23; cf. 2 Chronicles 35:18).

In other words, Josiah’s faithfulness to the stipulations of Deuteronomy outstripped not just Hezekiah but “even David himself” (Provan 1995: 274). Evidently he was deeply affected when the then recently discovered “book of the law,” presumably Deuteronomy, was read to him; he repented immediately (2 Kings 22:8-13). Such a response to hearing Scripture is exceptional, especially for a king.

Actually faith in God and obedience to Him are inseparable. Hezekiah’s *faith* stands out because he rose to the occasion in trusting God in the face of the massive Assyrian invasion where only God could save Judah (see below). Josiah’s *obedience* stands out because he rose to the occasion in response to hearing God’s word read to him and realizing how far Judah had departed from it.

In spite of Josiah’s exceptional faithfulness, Judah still had to be exiled as decided by God on account of Manasseh’s sins (2 Kings 23:26-27). However, in recognition of Josiah’s penitent heart, God said that it would not happen within his lifetime (2 Kings 22:18-20). Even then, this promise was fulfilled through Josiah’s untimely death in a battle against Neco, the Egyptian Pharaoh (2 Kings 23:29). Judah was exiled in three stages, almost immediately after Josiah’s death.

Josiah was succeeded by Jehoahaz, who “did evil in the sight of the LORD” and reigned for only three months (2 Kings 23:31-35). For Neco replaced him with his older brother Jehoiakim, and later took him to Egypt. Jehoiakim also did evil in God’s eyes (2 Kings 23:36-37). During his reign the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Assyrians (in 605 BC) and replaced them as the dominant power in the Old Testament world. In the same year, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and took Daniel and his three friends as well as other Jewish youths of nobility to Babylon to be trained to serve in the Babylonian court (Daniel 1:1-7; cf. 2 Kings 24:1-4). This was the beginning of the Exile.

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Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, who was also evil in God's eyes. Jehoiachin reigned for only three months before Nebuchadnezzar returned in 597 BC and deported to Babylon not only him but also his mother, his wives, his officials, the craftsmen and smiths, as well as others who were in Jerusalem "except the poorest people of the land" (2 Kings 24:10-16). The prophet Ezekiel was also taken to Babylon at this time (Ezekiel 1:1-3).

Nebuchadnezzar made Jehoiachin's uncle Zedekiah king in his place (2 Kings 24:17-20). Zedekiah was also evil in God's eyes. So finally in 586 BC, because Zedekiah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonians destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple (2 Kings 25:1-12). Zedekiah was blinded and brought to Babylon after witnessing the slaughtering of his sons. Most of the rest of the people who were left in Jerusalem were taken into exile. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah, not a descendant of David, as governor (not king) over the people who remained in Judah (2 Kings 25:22).

So even the exceptional faithfulness of Josiah and his unprecedented reforms could not avert the judgment God pronounced on account of Manasseh's sins. In fact, Josiah himself had to be taken out of the way so that there was no delaying of God's judgment. Mercy is deserved when there is repentance. Granted that Manasseh was more evil than Ahaz, why was it that God's mercy could no longer accommodate Judah even when Josiah's repentance was deeper than Hezekiah's (see also 2 Chronicles 33:10-13)? This calls into question not only God's mercy but also His justice.

God's Last Warning to Judah

The answer can be found in the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 BC. This single historical event, which is given exceptional attention in the Old Testament (2 Kings 18:13-19:37; Isaiah 36-37; 2 Chronicles 32:1-23), is unmistakably corroborated in Assyrian sources (Millard 1985 and Laato 1995, based on extra-Biblical sources, argue that the Biblical record is historically reliable; cf. Matty 2016: 8-9, 11-13). In this event the Assyrian king Sennacherib "attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them" (2 Kings 18:13), but failed to capture Jerusalem in spite of the large army sent against it (2 Kings

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19:35-36). Jerusalem would have fallen if not for God's miraculous deliverance in response to the prayer of Hezekiah (2 Kings 19:14-34), whose monotheist faith was unmistakable (verses 17-19).

Of particular significance is that God, through the prophet Isaiah, had not only foretold this invasion as well as His intervention, but also forewarned Judah not to trust in Egypt but to trust in Him for deliverance (Isaiah 7:17-19; 8:5-8; 31:1-9). And more importantly God had specifically prepared Hezekiah to trust in Him for deliverance in this particular crisis. Some time before the invasion Hezekiah became sick, and God sent Isaiah to tell Hezekiah that he would die and not recover (cf. Young 1969: 507-508, 532-33). This caused Hezekiah to plead earnestly with God. In response God said He would heal Hezekiah and give him another 15 years to live, adding that "I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria; I will defend this city for My own sake and for My servant David's sake" (2 Kings 20:6; cf. Isaiah 38:6).

The unexpected promise of a future deliverance was not out of place because Sennacherib's invasion would come within 15 years. If God did not deliver him and the city, God's promise of another 15 years of life would have failed. When Hezekiah asked for a sign that God would heal him and give him another 15 years, and by implication deliver him and the city, God performed an unmistakable miracle (2 Kings 20:8-11; cf. Isaiah 38:7, 22). Being human, when the crisis finally came, initially Hezekiah wavered in his faith in God (2 Kings 18:13-16), but through further assurance from God, he rose to the occasion and God delivered him and the city (2 Kings 19:1-7; 14-36; Isaiah 37:1-7; 14-37).

All this means that the Assyrian invasion had special significance in God's plan for Judah. Sure enough, after God's miraculous deliverance, Isaiah recounted the near decimation of Judah because of their sins (Isaiah 1:7-9; cf. 8:8) and warned Judah that unless they repent, they would go into exile (Isaiah 1:18-20). In other words, after Ahaz's sins, which included child sacrifice, God gave Judah a final warning through the Assyrian invasion, which brought the nation to the brink of collapse. No further warning could be more drastic than this. So from then on, if they would persist in violating the Mosaic Covenant, they would have to be exiled. The Exile would thus be the

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very last resort. Hence when Manasseh not only practiced child sacrifice but also introduced idolatry into the Temple itself, the Exile became a forgone conclusion (divine sovereignty).

But this did not mean that the kings after Josiah suffered purely on account of Manasseh's sins. There were themselves all evil in God's eyes and thus deserved what they got on account of their own sins (human responsibility). As we shall see, the prophet Jeremiah, who prophesied in Jerusalem from the time of Josiah until the fall of the city, explained that Judah went into exile for their own sins.

Exile Points to the Messiah

There is still a loose end to be tied up. For we saw that the message of the Book of Judges is that Israel needed a king to ensure that the nation observed the Mosaic Covenant. Now that even with kings the nation still failed to observe the Mosaic Covenant to the point of being exiled, what then is the message? The message is that the nation needed not only a king, but a good king. We saw how good kings like Hezekiah and Josiah could reform the nation and lead the people to keep the Mosaic Covenant. However, bad kings like Manasseh and those following Josiah could undo everything in the very next generation. The message then is that the nation needed not only a good king, but a good king who would not be replaced. Since the Davidic Covenant is still valid, 1-2 Kings points to a future Davidic king that would be good and would not be replaced (cf. Genesis 49:10).

Chapter 27

Israel Restored to Promised Land

The promise of restoration from the Exile was repeatedly made through the prophets as reflected in the Prophetic Books. Even without any explicit prophetic promise, the Restoration is implicitly promised in the Abrahamic Covenant, which assures the nation of Israel unconditional, though not necessarily uninterrupted, occupation of Canaan. It is also implicitly promised in the Davidic Covenant, which assures the descendants of David unconditional, though not necessarily uninterrupted, occupation of the throne of Israel.

The interruption caused by the Exile was due to the nation's unrepentant violation of the Mosaic Covenant. But we have seen that God had already promised that if the nation would repent while in exile, they would not only return from captivity, but God would also restore them (eventually) to a better covenant, that is, the New Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-6; cf. Jeremiah 31:31-34).

The return was made possible when in 539 BC the Persians under Cyrus overthrew and replaced the Babylonian Empire. The Persians reversed the policy of the Assyrians and the Babylonians, and allowed the deported peoples to return home (Ezra 1:1; Jeremiah 29:10; 33:7-

13). Like the Exile, the return from the Babylonian captivity also took three stages. Each stage involved an explicit mission to be accomplished that was authorized by the Persian king.

By considering the mission of each of the stages and the consequent developments we can sketch how the nation was reformed, and to what extent it became a covenant community with a constitutional government. It can be affirmed at the outset that the returnees began with a clean slate as far as idolatry was concerned. In fact the worship of literal idols never became an issue again in Israel.

Fulfilling the Creation Mandate

The first stage was the return under Sheshbazzar (Ezra 1:8-11; cf. 5:14-16) and then Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1-2; 3:2), each of whom was appointed governor by the Persian king. Serving with Zerubbabel was the High Priest Joshua (spelled Jeshua in many translations). The purpose of the return was to rebuild Jerusalem (Isaiah 44:28; 45:13), and the immediate mission was to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 1:2-4), “the first and most important step in the rebuilding of the city” (Young 1977: 202). However, after building the altar and laying the foundation for the new temple, the work stopped due to opposition from the people who were already there (Ezra 4:24). Though the returnees continued to offer sacrifices on the altar, the work on the Temple did not resume until almost 20 years later.

The work resumed as a result of the preaching of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah (Ezra 5:1-2; Haggai 1; Zechariah 1:1-6; 8:9-15). This time, though there was opposition again, under the continued preaching of Haggai and Zechariah, the work was completed and the Temple was dedicated (Ezra 6:14-18). In fact they even observed the Passover (Ezra 6:19-22). Thus, in line with the Mosaic Covenant as an application of the Creation Mandate, they succeeded in laying the foundation for a nation that would be in fellowship with God within the Holy Land. What was left to be seen was whether they also succeeded in laying the foundation for a nation that would be consistent with God’s will.

The prophet Haggai preached a message that would help ensure that the people would not repeat an error of their ancestors: practic-

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ing their monotheist faith as though rituals had intrinsic efficacy (like magical talismans), which we have seen is an expression of polytheism. For Haggai highlighted that though ritual impurity was contagious, ritual holiness was not (Haggai 2:10-14). In other words, one could become defiled by touching an unclean object, but one could not become holy by touching a holy object. The immediate application was to explain why, before they resumed work on the Temple, they were experiencing economic problems (see 2:15-17; cf. 1:6-11). But the far-reaching implication is that “just working on the temple would not make the people holy The only hope the nation had for divine approval and acceptance was the grace of God. The temple would not be a magical talisman” (Longman and Dillard 2006: 481).

The next stage was the return under Ezra, a priest who was a “scribe skilled in the Law of Moses” (Ezra 7:6-8, 21-24). It is amazing that in Ezra 7:14-16, “Ezra is commanded by the king and his counsellors to go to Judah and see if the Jews there are living in accordance with the law of God, that is, the law which Ezra had at his disposal—we may presume the Pentateuch” (Fensham 1982: 105). Ezra was even authorized to “appoint magistrates and judges that they may judge all the people,” and to ensure that all the people knew the laws of God by which they would be judged, anyone ignorant of them were to be taught (Ezra 7:25-26). Hence the foundation for a nation that would be consistent with God’s will was also laid.

Becoming a Covenant Community

Whether the nation would indeed fulfill God’s will by becoming a covenant community with a constitutional government now rested on how they built on the foundations laid. It is thus significant to note the kind of teacher (of the Law) that Ezra was. We read that he “had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD and observe it, and to teach His statutes and ordinances in Israel” (Ezra 7:9-10). Ezra’s commitment to study and observe the Law gave him more than the *academic credibility* and *moral authority* to teach it. For putting the Law into practice would enable him to understand it better through personal experience. And he would then know first-hand its truthfulness and reliability, enabling him to teach it with *spiritual conviction*.

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In fact, without a prior commitment to observe the Law, Ezra may even misunderstand it. We have already stressed that our pre-commitments constrain not only what we see and what we do not see but also how we interpret what we do see. People who are not already committed to do God's will may have difficulty accepting anything taught in the Bible that they do not like, and thus may not see it or find ways to explain it away (cf. John 7:17).

Ezra the priest was thus an ideal interpreter and teacher of the Mosaic Law. But there was still the need for a political leader vested with the power to hold the people accountable to it. Since Judah was just a province of the Persian Empire, the leader would be a governor and not a king (cf. Nehemiah 6:6-7). Would Judah get a governor who would be committed to practice the Mosaic Law?

Role of Governor

This brings us to the third stage, the return under Nehemiah, who was appointed governor of Judah (5:14), to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem (Nehemiah 2-6). His mission as governor was actually to complete rebuilding Jerusalem into a city as an ancient city was incomplete without a city wall. And since a city is not a city without a relatively dense and diverse population, Nehemiah repopulated Jerusalem by conscripting one out of ten people in Judah to join the leaders already living in Jerusalem (Nehemiah 7:4-5; 11:1-4). Also the rebuilding of the wall and the repopulation of Jerusalem "clearly were designed to provide the physical and political infrastructure for a successful capital and province within the Persian Empire" (Boda 2005: 722). In other words, Nehemiah was rebuilding not only a functional city but also a functional nation.

Nehemiah managed to mobilize the people to rebuild the wall. Like the rebuilding of the Temple, this work also faced opposition from enemies. When the opposition reached the level of possible violence, Nehemiah prayed to God and called on the people not to fear but to trust in Him, even going as far as saying, "Our God will fight for us" (Nehemiah 4:20). He also armed the people; half of them would stand guard while the other half, who were also armed, did the work (Nehemiah 4:16-18).

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Why take such elaborate precautions when “Our God will fight for us”? We need to revisit the Biblical teaching concerning divine sovereignty and human responsibility. We begin with comparing Nehemiah’s return to Jerusalem with that of Ezra. Both could claim that the “good hand” (favor) of God was upon them (Ezra 7:9; Nehemiah 2:8). Ezra and the returnees with him fasted and prayed for God’s protection on the precarious journey instead of requesting the king for troops and horsemen (Ezra 8:21). But Nehemiah returned with “officers of the army and horsemen” (Nehemiah 2:9).

Was Nehemiah faithless? Ezra himself said he did not request help from the king because, having confessed to the king that God’s favor was on those who seek Him, he was ashamed to ask the king for help (Ezra 8:22). Nehemiah was not in such a predicament. In other words, under normal circumstances Ezra would have sought the king’s help. So Nehemiah was just being prudent; the question of faithlessness does not yet arise.

We need to distinguish between faithlessness and prudence. Believing in divine sovereignty (“Our God will fight for us”) does not mean we neglect the human responsibility to be prudent (do what is necessary to protect ourselves). Since one can be prudent and have faith at the same time, believers in God can function effectively in the real world. Ezra’s example shows that they may encounter *exceptional* situations where they, by faith (in God), need to do what would be imprudent under normal circumstances. This reminds us of God sending Elijah to live by the stream and then with the widow.

As for Nehemiah we are not in the position to judge whether the measures he took to protect themselves were more than necessary to be prudent, thus revealing faithlessness, because we were not there to assess the seriousness of the threat. We can however evaluate Nehemiah in this regard by considering his life as a whole and look for evidence that shows unmistakably whether he was a man of faith.

When the rebuilding of the wall was almost complete, and after a failed attempt to assassinate Nehemiah, the enemies sought to discredit Nehemiah through deception. They bought over a (false) prophet to lure Nehemiah into the Temple by warning him that “they are coming to kill you at night” (Nehemiah 6:10). Nehemiah refused to hide in the temple and then realized “God had not sent him”; for

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as a layman, and possibly a eunuch, it would be a sin for Nehemiah to do what was suggested (Nehemiah 6:12-13). So the plot failed and the wall was completed and duly dedicated (Nehemiah 6:15; 12:27-30). Nehemiah's refusal to take the precaution because it would be wrong for him to do so shows unmistakably that he was a man of faith. In other words, he would also do what Ezra did when the situation required it.

While they were still rebuilding the wall, there was an outcry of the people against fellow Jews, thus causing a disruption to the work (Nehemiah 5:1-5). To meet their financial obligations, they had to sell their children (into slavery) and their land to creditors, who took advantage of their predicament by charging them interest, which was against the Mosaic Law (Nehemiah 5:6-7; cf. Deuteronomy 23:19). When Nehemiah heard their outcry, he was "very angry" and sought a solution immediately. This was a delicate situation as he still needed the cooperation of the creditors to help rebuild the wall. Yet he needed to confront their injustice to fellow Jews.

Nehemiah succeeded in getting them not only to return the interest but also to cancel the debt by appealing to them to fear God, taking the lead himself as he himself had also given out loans (Nehemiah 5:8-13). Nehemiah was successful in such a difficult task also because of his exceptional selflessness as governor. For unlike previous governors he had not burdened the people with even the food allotted to him as governor (Nehemiah 5:14-19). And he paid for the expenses of a governor, including entertaining foreign dignitaries, with his own resources. He did all this out of the fear of God in view of the need of the people; he sought recompense only from God.

Nehemiah was thus a man of faith who was committed to observe the Mosaic Law, even sacrificially living out its essence to love one's neighbor as oneself. So he had both *legal and moral authority* in holding the people accountable to the Mosaic Law. Thus Nehemiah was the ideal governor to build not only a functional nation but also a covenant community in which the Golden Rule is upheld. Since he himself was subject to the Mosaic Law, his was a constitutional government. We see in Nehemiah a person whose faith in God (religion) enabled him to excel in fulfilling his calling as a governor (state).

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Role of Priest

We now turn to Ezra's role as priest in nation-building. Soon after his arrival in Jerusalem it was reported to him that through intermarriage, "the people of Israel, including the priests and the Levites, have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations," and the worst culprits were the leaders themselves (Ezra 9:1-2). This intermingling of the holy people (literally, "holy seed," often translated "holy race") with those who practiced abominations in God's eyes was prohibited under the Mosaic Law, explicitly for religious and not racial reasons (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3-4).

Ezra was extremely distressed and publicly confessed to God this sin of the people (Ezra 9:6-15). The passion expressed out of his own conviction concerning the Mosaic Law caused the people who gathered around him to be deeply convicted of this sin. Led by their own leaders, they decided to send away their foreign wives together with their children (Ezra 10:1-44). This may sound harsh, but it was necessary given their context (cf. Fensham 1982: 123-45). For how could a holy people, set apart to serve the Holy God, be extensively interrelated through marriage with those who practice what were abominations in the sight of this God?

Also we have seen what happened to Solomon; what Jezebel did to the Northern Kingdom; and what Athaliah did to the Southern Kingdom. The seed of the Exile was planted through intermarriage with idolatrous women, and now God's people had just returned from exile to start all over again! It is significant that when Nehemiah dealt with this problem, he warned them using the example of Solomon being led to sin by his foreign wives (Nehemiah 13:23-29). When the prophet Malachi addressed this problem, he highlighted that some of them even divorced "the wife of your youth," who became "your companion and your wife by covenant," to marry foreign women (Malachi 2:10-16).

Insofar as intermarriage with idolatrous foreign women would eventually lead to idolatry (failure to love God with all of one's heart), and thus lead to injustice (failure to love one's neighbor as oneself), what Ezra did was to ensure success in building and sustaining a covenant community.

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Ezra's effectiveness as a teacher of the Mosaic Law is seen from the effects his ministry had on the people. On a festive occasion on the first day of the month, when all the people gathered in Jerusalem, they requested Ezra "to bring the book of the Law of Moses, which the LORD had given to Israel" (Nehemiah 8:1). Ezra then read it to them while a group of Levites explained the meaning to them.

It is not clear exactly how this was done, but it had a profound effect on the people. Though it was supposed to be a joyous occasion, the people wept because they were convicted of their sins. Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites had to tell them to stop mourning and weeping (Nehemiah 8:9). Instead they were told to celebrate that day with joy, "for the joy of the LORD is your strength"; and with the help of the Levites they did (Nehemiah 8:10-12).

The next day, Ezra led a Bible study for the heads of household, the priests and the Levites. This led to their celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles *as prescribed* in the Mosaic Law, which had not been done in this way since the day of Joshua, who led them into Canaan (Nehemiah 8:13-18). Later that month the people gathered to fast with sackcloth (a sign of mourning) and confessed not only their sins but also the iniquities of their ancestors (Nehemiah 9:1-4).

This unexpected and "sudden change from joy to confession of sins" can be explained by the fact "that the Israelites were already weeping and mourning on the first day of the month after they had heard the law," which was interrupted by the call to be joyful, followed by the celebration of a feast. They did not have the opportunity to release the burden of sins in their heart by confessing them accordingly. So "after this feast it would be natural for them to think again of their sins and iniquities" (Fensham 1982: 222).

The elaborate confession (Nehemiah 9:5-37) led to their making a written covenant on a sealed document (Nehemiah 9:38-10:39). In so doing they renewed the Mosaic Covenant by taking "an oath to walk in the Law of God that was given through Moses" (10:29). Significantly, the first of the signatories of the sealed document was Nehemiah himself (10:1). Thus Ezra's teaching ministry led to a formal recommitment of the nation to be a covenant community under a constitutional government.

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Role of Prophet

The prophet Malachi also played a crucial role in nation-building. We are not sure specifically when this post-exilic prophet preached, but many of the problems he faced were similar to those Nehemiah had to deal with. Walter Kaiser (1984: 16; cited in Longman and Dillard 2006: 498) highlights five:

1. Mixed marriages (Mal. 2:11–15; cf. Neh. 13:23–27)
2. Failure to tithe (Mal. 3:8–10; cf. Neh. 13:10–14)
3. No concern to keep the Sabbath (Mal. 2:8–9; 4:4; cf. Neh. 13:15–22)
4. Corrupt priests (Mal. 1:6–2:9; cf. Neh. 13:7–9)
5. Social problems (Mal. 3:5; cf. Neh. 5:1–13)

This shows that the prophet (whose counterpart today is the media) complemented the government in holding the people accountable to the Mosaic Law (or in today's context, a secular constitution).

Anticipating a Better Covenant

However, given fallen human nature, we do not expect the nation to remain faithful to God for very long. Unsurprisingly, when Nehemiah was away in Persia for a period of time, a number of serious transgressions happened (Nehemiah 13:4–29). This was why God had promised through Moses that the nation would (eventually) be restored to a covenant better than the Mosaic Covenant. Thus when God instructed the prophet Zechariah to conduct a symbolic ceremony in which Joshua the then High Priest was crowned as king (Zechariah 6:9–15; cf. 3:8), it pointed to a new beginning with a new hope. But this symbolic act would be puzzling without the broader context of the New Testament.

This is because under the Davidic Covenant kingship belongs to the descendants of David, from the tribe of Judah. And the use of the Messianic title “Branch” (Zechariah 6:12; cf. Jeremiah 23:5; 33:15) in this connection confirms that the Davidic Covenant is in view here. But as High Priest, Joshua was, and had to be, from the tribe of Levi. So it is not surprising that “Christian interpreters have

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traditionally seen in this passage the blending of the offices of priest and king in the Messiah” (Longman and Dillard 2006: 494). For in view of how Jesus matches the anticipated Messiah in terms of His person and work, this is the most sensible interpretation of the text (see Hebrews 5:5-10; 7:11-8:13).

And God’s purpose cannot be thwarted by even the most vicious plot. This is clearly taught in the Book of Esther, which recounts an episode that happened in the Persian capital some time before Ezra’s return to Jerusalem. The account clearly demonstrates God’s providence even when He seems absent. For even though God’s name is not mentioned in the book, evidently God’s hand is everywhere in the narrative. In fact the book “is the most true-to-life biblical example of God’s providence precisely because God is absent from the story.... The complete absence of God is the genius of the book from which hope and encouragement flow” (Jobes 2008: 167-68). For it teaches us to see God’s hand in what is secular (non-religious) as well as in what is secularist (anti-religious), which characterize most of modern life.

In our exposition on Joseph and leadership development (Chapter 8) we outlined the three means of divine providence, one of which is through a series of coincidences. This means is most clearly taught in Esther. The book is about how God delivered the Jews throughout the Persian Empire from destruction by using Queen Esther, a Jew, to thwart the wicked plot of Haman the Prime Minister. The meaning of the narrative is well presented in Longman and Dillard (2006: 221):

[The] story is built on an accumulating series of seeming coincidences, all of which are indispensable when the story reaches its moment of peak dramatic tension at the beginning of chapter 6. How “lucky” the Jews were that Esther was so attractive, that she was chosen over other possible candidates, that Mordecai overheard that assassination plot, that a record of Mordecai’s report of the assassination plans was written in the royal chronicles, that Esther had concealed her [Jewish] identity, that the king would have seen her without having called for her, that the king could not sleep that night, that he asked to have the annals read, that

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the scribe read from that incident several years earlier concerning Mordecai, that the king was wide awake enough to inquire as to whether he had rewarded Mordecai. ... Luck indeed! What the writer of Esther has done is to give us a story in which the main actor is not so much as mentioned—the presence of God is implied and understood throughout the story, so that these mounting coincidences are but the by-product of his rule over history and his providential care for his people.

God had sovereignly placed Esther in the palace even before Haman became Prime Minister. Hence God provided the solution even before the problem arose. This is reflected in Mordecai's word to Esther that encouraged her to risk her life: "And who knows whether you have not attained your royal position for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:14). If God had not delivered the Jews, there would not be a Jewish nation to be restored, let alone a return under Ezra or Nehemiah. God's promise of restoration to the better covenant would then not come to pass. The Book of Esther thus provides concrete encouragement that everything God has promised through His prophets will eventually come to pass.

Chapter 28

The Kingdom of God

We saw that 1-2 Kings presents the history of Israel in a way that explains why the nation went into exile, as well as points to a future Davidic king who would be good and would not be replaced—the Messiah (Genesis 49:10). We will now see that 1-2 Chronicles, which re-presents the history of Israel, points further in this direction.

1-2 Chronicles is clearly divided into two parts. The first part is basically a list of genealogies. It traces the ancestry of Jews who had returned from exile and resettled in Jerusalem all the way back to Adam (1 Chronicles 1-9). This means 1-2 Chronicles was written with these Jews and their concerns in mind.

The second part is a historical narrative beginning with the death of King Saul all the way to the Exile and the initial return from captivity (1 Chronicles 10-2 Chronicles 36). In other words, 1-2 Chronicles re-presents history from the Book of Genesis to the beginning of the Book of Ezra. It selects and adapts materials found in these books, especially 1-2 Samuel and 1-2 Kings, as well as materials not found in any of them.

History in Light of Davidic Covenant

Why is there a need for this re-presentation? 1-2 Kings had already answered the question why the Jews went into exile. So 1-2 Chronicles was written to answer questions beyond the Exile. One such question would be the validity of the Davidic Covenant, which was supposed to be unconditional. Did the Exile nullify the validity of the Davidic Covenant? No, for God did not promise David's descendants uninterrupted occupation of the throne. But there was still no sign of a Davidic king even after they had returned from the Exile. For even Zerubbabel, who was a descendant of David, was only a governor under the Persian Empire.

We know this was indeed a concern because God Himself had to assure the Jews that David would one day have a descendant on his throne. For God declared symbolically that, "On that day ... I will take you, Zerubbabel, son of Shealtiel, My servant [representing the house of David] ... and make you like a signet ring [here signifying kingship], for I have chosen you" (Haggai 2:23; see Jeremiah 22:24).

The Chronicler has a similar message but expressed through a different means—a list of genealogies followed by a historical narrative. This is evident because 1-2 Chronicles has an unmistakable focus on the tribe of Judah and the family of David, both in the genealogies and in the historical narrative.

The list of genealogies enables the Chronicler to cover the whole sweep of history from Creation to the Jews' return from the Exile so that he can place the historical narrative in its proper context. Thus he is re-presenting the history not only of Israel but also of the world. This means, like Genesis-2 Kings, 1-2 Chronicles is relevant to the Jews as well as to all humanity.

The genealogies (1 Chronicles 1:1-9:44) can be neatly outlined under the four most pivotal names in the list:

- Descendants of Adam (1:1-9:44)
- Descendants of Noah (1:4-9:44)
- Descendants of Abraham (1:28-9:44)
- Descendants of Israel (2:1-9:44)

By excluding descendants of Adam that did not survive the Noachic Flood the Chronicler is clearly presenting only materials that are directly relevant to people still alive. What then is the meaning of this long list of names, with its narrowing focus from Noah (all nations) to Israel (one nation)?

The four pivotal names correspond to the Creation Mandate, which was given to Adam, who represents all humanity; the Noachic Covenant; the Abrahamic Covenant; and the Mosaic Covenant, which was made with the nation of Israel. Hence each name represents something that is significant in itself, and taken together, they reaffirm God's purpose for humanity (Genesis 1:26-28; 9:6-7) as well as His redemptive plan for the world through a nation descended from Abraham (Genesis 12:1-3).

Hence among other things, the long list of genealogies affirms that the Exile did not change God's calling for the nation of Israel when He took them out of Egypt (cf. Haggai 2:5-9). What could be more meaningful than this to the Jews who had returned from exile to rebuild their nation virtually from scratch in accordance with the Mosaic Covenant?

The genealogies of Israel take up eight out of nine chapters, and give exceptional attention to the tribe of Judah (2:1-4:23), especially to David and his family (2:9-3:24). This narrowing focus reaffirms the Davidic Covenant. We will see in the historical narrative that this covenant is given a new significant meaning in light of the Exile, one that involves the whole world.

The tribes of Levi (6:1-81) and Benjamin (7:6-12; 8:1-40) are also given more attention than the other tribes. This is partly because most of the returnees from the Exile were from the tribes of Judah, Levi and Benjamin (9:1-34). Some from the other tribes also returned though they formed the minority (cf. Pratt 1998: 19-23). They were most likely those who had defected to Judah before the Exile (see 2 Chronicles 11:14; 15:9; 31:6; 35:17-18). The Chronicler mentions specifically returnees from the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (1 Chronicles 9:3). He also takes note of those who had not (yet) returned (see 1 Chronicles 5:26).

Another reason for the special attention given to Levi is the hereditary calling of this tribe to serve in religious work such as the

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priesthood. However the main reason will become clear in the historical narrative. As for the tribe of Benjamin, the special attention given to them was also because Saul, the first king of Israel, was a Benjamite. In fact Saul is given two genealogies, one as part of the genealogy of Benjamin and one stand-alone just before the historical narrative (8:33-40; 9:35-44).

Having thus given due recognition to Saul as the first king of Israel, the historical narrative begins abruptly with the defeat and death of Saul and his three sons in that battle against the Philistines (1 Chronicles 10:1-12). With a quick transition explaining why Saul died in that battle and reaffirming that it was God who gave the kingdom over to David (1 Chronicles 10:13-14), the narrative moves on to recount how David was accepted and endorsed by the people as king over all Israel (1 Chronicles 11-12). We have considered the contemporary significance of this account as part of our exposition on the role of the Media in nation-building (Chapter 18).

This is a clear sign that the Chronicler's interest is in the kingdom of David only; this is confirmed by his leaving out the history of the Northern Kingdom in his account of the history of the nation after the death of Solomon. Evidently this is because of his focus on the Davidic Covenant.

The rest of the long narrative on David's reign is basically about David's attention to the Ark of the Covenant and then the Temple that Solomon was going to build (1 Chronicles 13-29). Since the narrative begins with the death of Saul, the account of David's life in 1-2 Samuel before he became king over all Israel was left out. However even the account in 2 Samuel on David's adultery with Bathsheba and the consequences is also left out.

Is this to suppress the negative aspects of David's life in order to portray him as an ideal king? If this was the case, the Chronicler did not do a good job. For he mentions David's polygamy (1 Chronicles 14:3), which we saw was the root cause of David's adultery with Bathsheba (Chapter 23). And he also included the account of David's other major sin—taking the census of his fighting men (1 Chronicles 21). Furthermore the Chronicler would have known that his audience were already familiar with David's life in 1-2 Samuel. It would thus be futile to suppress anything.

This highly selective account of David's reign is the result of the Chronicler's near exclusive focus on David's attention to the Ark of the Covenant and then the Temple to house it. The account of the census is needed to explain the choice of the location of the Temple (1 Chronicles 21:18-22:1; 2 Chronicles 3:1).

1 Chronicles 22-29 is entirely unique to 1-2 Chronicles. It recounts how David prepared for, and instructed, Solomon to build the Temple, as well as how he got the leaders to support Solomon. The preparations included obtaining the materials and making the plans needed for the building, as well as organizing the Levites to play their respective roles in the Temple. This is the main reason for the special attention given to the Levites in the genealogies.

Why then this heavily lopsided focus on the religious side of David? The heart of 1-2 Chronicles is the narrative covering the reigns of David and Solomon (1 Chronicles 11-2 Chronicles 9), "which contains two words from God which are of fundamental theological significance" (Selman 1994a: 27). The first is God's word to David concerning the Davidic Covenant (1 Chronicles 17:1-15). The second is God's word to Solomon in response to his prayer at the dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 7:11-22).

David's Kingdom Is God's Kingdom

We will now consider God's word to David to see why the Chronicler focussed on the Temple in his account of David's reign. This will require us to first understand how he viewed the Davidic Covenant in light of the Exile.

The Davidic Covenant as recounted in 1 Chronicles 7:1-15 is basically a reproduction of 2 Samuel 7:1-17, but it is reinterpreted. Of particular significance is that the phrase "your house and your kingdom" (2 Samuel 7:16) is changed to "My house and My kingdom" (1 Chronicles 17:14). This means David's kingdom was actually God's kingdom. This change is not limited to this passage. The words of the queen of Sheba to Solomon, "the LORD your God ... placed you on the throne of Israel" (1 Kings 10:9), is changed to "the LORD your God ... placed you on His throne as king for the LORD your God" (2 Chronicles 9:8).

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The idea that David's kingdom was God's kingdom is also repeatedly found in passages unique to 1-2 Chronicles. In his speech to the leaders of the nation to get them to support Solomon, David said God "has chosen my son Solomon to sit on the throne of the kingdom of the LORD over Israel" (1 Chronicles 28:5-6; see also 1 Chronicles 29:23; cf. 1 Kings 2:12). In this very speech, David acknowledged that his kingdom was God's kingdom by charging the leaders and commanding Solomon to obey God (1 Chronicles 28:8-9). Abijah referred to "kingship over Israel" based on the Davidic Covenant as "the kingdom of the LORD" (2 Chronicles 13:5, 8).

The idea that David's kingdom was actually God's kingdom would be particularly meaningful to the Jews who were concerned whether the Davidic Covenant was still valid. For if David and his sons were only ruling on behalf of God, and God's kingdom cannot be destroyed, David's kingdom was only temporarily derailed by the Exile. As already explained in 1-2 Kings, this derailment was actually according to God's will. Now that they had returned from the Exile, the kingdom of God expressed through the Davidic dynasty would thus have to be restored, in accordance with the Davidic Covenant.

God's Kingdom and the Messiah

In 2 Samuel 7:14 God had said to David concerning his successor: "I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men." This means God would love him like a father, and God would discipline him as a father would a delinquent son (cf. Gordon 1986: 239-40). Originally this "son" refers to Solomon, but it could be applied to any Davidic king (cf. Selman 1994a: 179). In fact the idea of God adopting a Davidic king as son is also found in Psalm 2:7.

However in 1 Chronicles 17:13 the Chronicler omits the warning "when he commits iniquity ..." implying that after the Exile, it is no longer relevant. In view of 1-2 Kings pointing to a future Davidic king who would be good and would not be replaced, this omission is significant. For it points further in this direction by implying that this future king would be so good that the question of him committing iniquity would not even arise. This means the Davidic Covenant as

presented in 1 Chronicles 17 points beyond Solomon and all the Davidic kings before the Exile. It has to point to the Messiah. For the goal of the Davidic Covenant is the Messiah as the covenant is based on God's promise that kingship would remain with the tribe of Judah until the coming of the Messiah (Genesis 49:10). And God has reassured His people through the prophet Ezekiel that this very promise remains valid despite the collapse of the Davidic kingdom following the Exile (see Ezekiel 21:27).

The author of the New Testament book of Hebrews picks up this reinterpretation of the Davidic Covenant and replaced Solomon with Jesus (Hebrews 1:5b). In fact in the same verse he also equates the Davidic king in Psalm 2:7 to Jesus (Hebrews 1:5a). In this case it is more obvious why he does it. For God says to the Davidic king, "Ask of Me, and I will give the nations as your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as your possession" (Psalm 2:8). It is a promise that the Davidic kingdom will one day become a global kingdom. This promise was never fulfilled in David or any Davidic king before the Exile. This has to be the case because the promise on which the Davidic Covenant is based spells out that "the obedience of the nations" belongs only to the Messiah (Genesis 49:10). Hence the kingdom of David (read: kingdom of God) will be restored through the Messiah and it will be the ultimate Kingdom of God.

In other words, the author of Hebrews recognizes that the Davidic king in Psalm 2:7 can only be Jesus the Messiah as only He fits the description in Psalm 2:8. And the same is true for 1 Chronicles 17:13 as Jesus is the only son of David who is so good that the warning "when he commits iniquity" is not relevant (Hebrews 4:15), and who will not be replaced (Hebrews 7:16). So it makes sense for him to replace Solomon with Jesus. And he was taking the cue from the Chronicler, who made the first move in this direction.

In any case, after the Exile there was no Davidic king on the horizon until the angel Gabriel said to the virgin Mary that God would give to Jesus "the throne of His father David" (Luke 1:32). This means after the Exile the Davidic Covenant has no further application apart from Jesus. Hence 1-2 Chronicles re-presents the history of Israel (and the world) to prepare Israel (and the world) to anticipate the coming of Jesus and to receive Him. Now that Jesus has

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already come, when readers immerse themselves in the story of 1-2 Chronicles, it serves to re-create that experience of anticipation. And when they then immerse themselves in the Gospels, this sense of anticipation will enable them to encounter Jesus as though they were there with Him in the first century.

God's Kingdom Through the Temple

The idea that David's kingdom was God's kingdom explains the lopsided focus on the Temple in the account of David's reign. This is because God was enthroned above the Ark of the Covenant (1 Chronicles 13:6; cf. Psalm 99:1), which was to be housed in the Temple (1 Kings 6:19; 2 Chronicles 5:7). So if David's kingdom was God's kingdom, the Temple would have focal place in the kingdom. The Chronicler expresses this idea formally through his near exclusive focus on the Temple. And his narrative "repeatedly associates the temple with the kingdom of God, as in David's affirmation on completing his preparations for the new building, 'Yours, O LORD, is the kingdom' (1 Ch. 29:11)" (Selman 1994a: 48; see also 56-59).

For the same reason the account of Solomon's reign (2 Chronicles 1-9) excludes most of the materials in 1 Kings not related to the Temple. So what is excluded may be negative—Solomon's idolatry (1 Kings 11:1-40), or it may even be positive—Solomon's wisdom as expressed in his judgment concerning the two women who each claimed to be the mother of a baby (1 Kings 3:16-28). Six out of nine chapters are given exclusively to Solomon's construction and dedication of the Temple (2 Chronicles 2-7). Substantial references to the Ark of the Covenant, the Tabernacle or the Temple are also found in the other three chapters (2 Chronicles 1:3-6; 8:11-16; 9:10-11)

We now turn to God's word to Solomon in answer to his prayer at the dedication of the Temple. God basically affirmed that He had heard Solomon's prayer and consecrated the Temple, as well as reaffirmed the Davidic Covenant to him (1 Kings 9:3-9; 2 Chronicles 7:12-22). Of particular significance is that 1 Kings 9:3 (one verse) is expanded into 2 Chronicles 7:12-16 (five verses). In the three verses unique to 1-2 Chronicles, God assured Solomon:

If I shut up the heavens ... or command the locust ... or send pestilence ..., and (if) My people, who are called by My name, humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, forgive their sin, and heal their land. Now My eyes shall be open and My ears attentive to prayer offered in this place (2 Chronicles 7:13-15).

This assurance is actually what Solomon specifically asked of God (see 2 Chronicles 6:26-31). The meaning seems clear, but we need to recognize that “The activities of ‘humbling, praying, seeking and turning’ should be understood as four facets or aspects of the [same] act (or even process) of biblical repentance” (Hill 2003: 400). And it is about the devastated “land” (physical and economic health) of a nation being “healed” as a result of the nation’s repentance of her *own* sins which caused the devastation. Therefore the prayer is not a prayer *for* (seeking) spiritual revival, but a prayer *of* (expressing) spiritual revival (repentance).

Hence in its original context, 2 Chronicles 7:14 is a call to the nation of Israel *as a whole* (“My people” in the Old Testament) to repent and pray for themselves. When applied to the Church (“My people” in the New Testament), it is not a call to believers to repent as individuals and then pray for their respective nations, but a call to believers to repent *corporately* and pray for themselves. There is certainly a need for believers to repent as individuals as well as to pray for their nation and their government (1 Timothy 2:1-3), but 2 Chronicles 7:14 is about honestly considering whether they have sinned corporately and then repenting accordingly. When they pray for a just government, do they *corporately* seek to “do justice and love mercy” among themselves and to others? It is often easier to see the problems “out there” than the problems “in here.”

God’s word to Solomon in these verses shows in a tangible way the close connection between God’s kingdom and the Temple. The Hebrew word for “kingdom” refers to the kingship or reign of a king and where his reign is recognized or manifested. And since God was enthroned over the Ark of the Covenant, the Temple was where He executed His reign—in this case, in hearing and answering petitions (cf. Psalm 3:4). However, as has been emphasized before, God could

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dispense with either the Ark or the Temple or even both (cf. Psalm 103:19), as neither had any intrinsic efficacy and both were merely “visual aids” to help believers in the Old Testament to relate meaningfully to an invisible God who is everywhere and thus cannot be represented by any image whatsoever.

As for believers in the New Testament, who are themselves “God’s temple” (1 Corinthians 3:16), the close connection between God’s reign and the Temple means that when they become believers, they have explicitly or implicitly accepted God’s reign into their life. This then is the benchmark for responding to the call of 2 Chronicles 7:14 to repent and pray.

God’s Kingdom Manifested in Judah

The idea that the kingdom of David was the kingdom of God executed through the Temple also shapes the Chronicler’s accounts of the kings of Judah after Solomon. For it is evident from materials not found in 1-2 Kings that he pays special attention to the kings’ recognition of the reign of God (such as in 2 Chronicles 11:3-17), or the lack of it (16:7-10), and the respective consequences, as well as to their activities or reforms (if any) that involved the Temple (30:1-27).

We will consider three significant accounts unique to 1-2 Chronicles that demonstrate vividly God’s kingdom or reign in Judah. We begin with Abijah, who is classified as (overall) a bad king in 1 Kings 15:3-6. While the Chronicler does not say Abijah was a bad king, neither does he say Abijah was a good king. So he is not contradicting 1 Kings when he elaborates on Abijah’s war against Jeroboam (2 Chronicles 13:3-19; cf. 1 Kings 15:7b), which puts Abijah in a positive light (cf. Selman 1994b: 377-78).

In the Chronicler’s account, as noted above, Abijah confessed explicitly that David’s kingdom was God’s kingdom (2 Chronicles 13:5, 8). Abijah also claimed that he and his people, unlike Jeroboam and his people, had recognized God’s reign by not forsaking Him; they were faithful in ministering to God through the services of the Temple (13:10-11). And Abijah had victory over Jeroboam “because they relied on the LORD” (13:18), thus demonstrating God’s reign beyond Judah.

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Then there is the amazing account of Jehoshaphat seeking God because he was afraid when Judah was invaded by a “great multitude” (2 Chronicles 20:1-19). So he proclaimed a fast throughout Judah resulting in the people from all over Judah gathering in Jerusalem to seek God. He then prayed to God in an assembly at the Temple. God responded in a prophecy through the Levite Jahaziel. God commanded Judah and Jehoshaphat not to be afraid and assured them of victory because “the battle is not yours but God’s” (20:15).

As instructed by God, who promised to be with them, the next day the army went out to the wilderness to face the enemies. Jehoshaphat exhorted them to trust in God and His prophets, and then placed a choir of Levites before the army to lead them in worshipping God (cf. Selman 1994b: 428). And “when they began to sing and praise, the LORD set ambushes” against the enemies (20:22). So just as God had promised, Judah won the battle without a fight. This victory confirms Jehoshaphat’s confession when he prayed to God in the Temple: “You are Ruler over all the kingdoms of the nations [and not just Israel]” (20:6). Thus unlike his father Asa, Jehoshaphat’s wholehearted trust in God enabled him to experience what Asa did not: “For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth to give strong support to those whose heart is completely His” (2 Chronicles 16:9).

Most surprising of all is the account of the repentance and restoration of Judah’s worst king—Manasseh (2 Chronicles 33:10-17). Because of his sins God caused him to be captured with hooks and bound with chains by the Assyrians and exiled to Babylon. This led him to repent, and in keeping with God’s promise in His word to Solomon, God forgave him and restored him to Jerusalem. Manasseh’s sins resulted in his exile to Babylon, and his repentance resulted in restoration; this demonstrated God’s reign over even the most powerful nation of the time. As a result, “Manasseh knew that the LORD was God” (33:13). Manasseh demonstrated his repentance by undoing the idolatry he had put in place in Judah, including removing the idols he had placed in the Temple (33:15-16).

This significant account is excluded in 2 Kings for the obvious reason that it is not appropriate there as the purpose of 1-2 Kings was to explain why Judah went into exile. But it is most appropriate

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here, for the Jews who had returned from exile needed the assurance that God had indeed forgiven the nation and that the Davidic Covenant was still valid. Recall that it was Manasseh's sins that sealed the fate of Judah so much so that even Josiah's exceptional faithfulness could not avert the Exile. So it would be most reassuring to know that Manasseh himself had actually repented and was thus personally forgiven and restored by God. Hence there was even less reason to doubt that the Davidic Covenant was still valid.

To sum up, 1-2 Chronicles prepared the first century Jews, and gives Bible readers today the proper historical and theological context, to understand Gabriel's words to Mary: "The Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David, and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His [global] Kingdom will have no end" (Luke 1:32-33). And a proper understanding of this text is crucial to a proper understanding of the rest of the New Testament.

The last two verses of 2 Chronicles is a partial duplication of the first four verses of the Book of Ezra (36:22-23; cf. Ezra 1:1-4). And it ends abruptly with a truncated quote of the written edict of Cyrus, which allowed the Jews in exile to return to the Promised Land. Why is this duplication with an abrupt ending necessary?

The text highlights that "in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD [Himself] stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia" so that he not only proclaimed the edict but also put it in writing. Even if the Chronicler's intention in this partial duplication is otherwise, the implication of the text is that God Himself will ensure that whatever He has promised will surely come to pass (cf. Selman 1994b: 550-51).

Hence an account of the history of the world and of Israel that looks forward to the fulfillment of God's promise to David through the coming of the Kingdom of God ends abruptly with an assurance that God will keep what He has promised. So when Jesus preached, "The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel" (Mark 1:15), it would strike a responsive chord in the hearts of the Jews.

Chapter 29

Kingdom Worship

After looking at 1-2 Chronicles it is most appropriate to consider the Book of Psalms. For this book also teaches that the kingdom of David was actually the kingdom of God, and in a way that points even further and unmistakably to the Messiah as the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant. We already had a foretaste of this when we considered how the author of Hebrews, taking a cue from the Chronicler, reinterpreted the Davidic Covenant in light of Psalm 2.

And in stressing that David's kingdom was God's kingdom the Chronicler pays exceptional attention to the Temple, where God executed His reign. He also presents snapshots of how Israel recognized God's reign through temple worship—the singing of psalms accompanied with musical instruments (see 1 Chronicles 6:31-32; 16:7-36; 2 Chronicles 7:3-6; 29:25-30; 30:21-22). The Psalms presents a more complete picture on how faithful Israelites would act out their recognition of God's reign through worship at the Temple and through meditation at home.

In other words the Psalms complements 1-2 Chronicles in our understanding of the kingdom of God. Actually the Psalms is too rich in teaching to be reduced to just this encompassing theme.

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However in view of our focus on the meaning of history, we will do just that, which will take us far beyond a mere historical interest.

The Psalms Recited as Prayers to God

The psalms are to be acted out, that is, sung, or at least recited, from the heart as *prayers to God* both corporately and individually (Wenham 2012: 11-25). This is significant. As Gordon Wenham (2005: 177) puts it, “worshippers’ central beliefs are expressed in their prayers... , for it is in prayer that people give utterance to their deepest and most fundamental convictions.” For if we really believe we are talking to the all-knowing God, we would not say anything that is not from our heart. Thus when we pray the psalms to God, the words that are “put on our lips in worship affect us profoundly: they teach us what to think and feel, the more effectively when they are put to music, so we can hum them to ourselves whenever we are inclined.”

This means “the rhythms of music, song [and thus the words] ... get implanted in us as a mode of bodily memory” (Smith 2009b: 171). And because music affects our imagination and emotion more powerfully than even literature, it empowers the words that we sing and hum to ourselves to shape how we think and feel in a way not otherwise possible.

Hence the songs people sing and the music they listen to have an impact on their convictions. What convictions then would be formed and reinforced in believers when they pray the psalms? Since the encompassing theme of the Psalms is the kingdom of God, these convictions will relate and contribute to their recognition of God’s reign in their life. The Book of Psalms thus complements 1-2 Chronicles in helping believers understand God’s kingdom both cognitively and experientially. We will focus on how this book shapes the convictions of believers in this regard.

Living in God’s Story of Redemption

As creatures of space and time, all human beings live within an imagined narrative or story. We have stressed in our exposition on the Sabbatical System the importance of believers living within the story

of God's redemptive plan (see Chapter 13). For this gives them the necessary context to recognize the meaning of history in a way that gives shape and direction to their life that is consistent with God's purpose for humanity. Otherwise they are in danger of being absorbed into whatever story that is shaping the wider culture, and allowing it, instead of Scripture, to give shape and direction to their life (adapting Bartholomew and Goheen 2004: 12).

The psalms, with their powers to shape imagination and emotion, would enable believers to sense deeply that they are living within the narrative of God's redemptive plan. For the Psalms also recounts the history of the world and of Israel from Creation to the Exile and the Restoration from exile, including all the major turning points in the history of Israel (Bullock 2001: 99-118).

All the psalms are poems to be sung, or at least recited; numerous are narrative poems which use poetry to recount history. Though these historical psalms are not necessarily arranged together or in the proper sequence, taken together they present an overarching narrative that tells the story of God's redemptive plan. This narrative then provides the context for the rest of the psalms, which in turn enrich the meaning of the story.

When believers participate in this recounting of God's redemptive plan through narrative poetry set to music, they allow the combined powers of narrative, poetry as well as music to shape their imagination and emotion and thus form and reinforce their convictions concerning God and His kingdom.

To help capture this poetic vision of the history of the world and of Israel, we will survey Psalms 104-107, which together cover the whole span of that history. In the process we will also include some other psalms to fill in the gaps so as to present a more complete picture of God's purpose for Israel and for humanity.

Psalm 104 is a poet's interpretation of Genesis 1 (cf. Grogan 2008: 173-75), which takes advantage of poetic license to stretch our imagination and shape our perception to worship the Creator with emotions that better accord with who He is. Consider his rendering of God's creation of the heavens: "stretching out the heavens like a (tent) curtain" (verse 2b). This is a simple example of how "The transcendent majesty and effortless power of the LORD are graph-

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ically described. The ‘heavens’ are no more difficult for him to put in place than hanging a curtain within a tent” (Davidson 1998: 339).

In this poetic rendering of Creation the psalmist focuses on God’s care and provision for the needs of not only humanity but also the birds, the land animals and the sea creatures (verses 5-30). Put to music, this psalm enables a believer to “sing to the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being” (verse 33).

As for God’s purpose for humanity, Psalm 8 praises God for creating humanity in His image, thus enabling humanity to rule over the earth and all that it contains. It is a reference to the *Creation Mandate* to build a civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will (Genesis 1:26-28).

Humanity’s failure to fulfill this mandate because of the Fall is then graphically pictured in Psalm 82. In an imaginary trial God condemns the “gods” for failing to uphold justice. This is a reference to God holding the rulers of the world accountable to the *Noahic Covenant* (see Isaiah 24:5, 20-21), through which God instituted government specifically to uphold justice (Genesis 9:6-7). The use of the term “gods” here is appropriate because under the Noahic Covenant the government is authorized to “bear the sword” with powers over life and death (Romans 13:1-7), a prerogative of God that is delegated to rulers.

Psalm 105 moves the plot to God’s election of Abraham to initiate God’s redemptive plan for the world (Genesis 12:1-3). It focuses on the *Abrahamic Covenant* in terms of the Promised Land (verses 8-15, 42-44) in a way that accords with God’s promise to Abraham when He formalized the covenant (Genesis 15:12-21). God promised Abraham that his descendants (Israel) would be resident aliens in a foreign land (Egypt) for 400 years, and that they would leave with many possessions to possess Canaan. So most of Psalm 105 narrates how this was fulfilled: how God brought them into Egypt through Joseph and how God brought them out through Moses.

The poem ends with why God gave them the Promised Land: “so that they might keep His statutes and observe His laws” (verse 45). This refers to the *Mosaic Covenant* and God’s purpose for the nation to be a covenant community as a model for the nations. For this reason, in Psalm 101 the king is to pledge to God that he himself

(verses 2-4) and those in his government (verses 6-7) would live and rule with integrity and blamelessness and that justice would be upheld in the nation (verses 5 and 8).

This poetic rendering of the formative history of the nation stresses God's providence by highlighting His reign or sovereignty. We read that it was God who "called for the famine" (105:16) that led to Jacob and his family moving to Egypt. This happened because God had "sent a man before them, Joseph, who was sold as a slave" and had made him "lord" and "ruler" over Egypt (105:17, 21). When sung or recited from the heart, this narrative poem not only enables the believer to dwell within the story of God's redemptive plan, but also helps to form or reinforce the conviction that God is faithful to His promise and is committed to His purpose.

Psalm 106 takes it further by stressing God's faithfulness in the face of Israel's faithlessness. Most of the verses are a poetic reiteration of the nation's repeated failures to trust in and thus obey God, beginning with their leaving Egypt to their possessing Canaan (verses 6-39). They even served the idols of Canaan to the point of sacrificing their own children to them. So God "gave them into the hands of the nations" to oppress them; but He would look upon their distress and hear their cry; He would remember His covenant (with Abraham) and relent according to His unfailing love; He would even cause them to be pitied by those who held them captive (verses 40-46).

This review of God's faithfulness despite Israel's faithlessness reminds us of a truth well illustrated in, but not limited to, the Book of Judges. This remembrance of God's unfailing love led the psalmist to ask God to save them and "gather us from among the nations" (verse 47; cf. 27; Psalm 79). So this brings the plot to the Exile as the petition "arises from the situation of the people of God that is exiled and dispersed throughout all nations" (Kraus 1989: 322).

Psalm 107 then is a celebration of God's answer to this petition and thus moves the plot further to the Restoration from exile (Kraus 1989: 327). For it calls upon the "redeemed of the LORD" (cf. Isaiah 62:12) whom God has "gathered from the lands, from east and west, north and the sea," to give thanks to Him (verses 1-3). And it presents (verses 4-32) four images of Israel in exile drawn from Isaiah (especially chapters 40-55)—wandering in the desert, imprisonment,

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sickness and battling a storm at sea—and recounts how God delivered them when they cried to Him (Goulder 1998: 116-27).

The rest of the poem (verses 33-42) extolls God's reign over creation ("turns a wilderness into a pool of water") and over humanity ("pours contempt upon [unjust] princes") to show that "the sovereign Lord can provide people with all of their needs ... [and that the] future of the upright is secured, and the wicked are left speechless" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner 2014: 813). It ends with calling the wise to "give heed to these things" and "consider the un-failing love" of such a God (verse 43).

Hence Psalms 105-107 present a moving account of God's trustworthiness, especially God's faithfulness and commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant. Just reading, let alone singing, these narrative poems would move believers to think and feel that God would surely fulfill all that He promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. And significantly this covenant concerns not just Israel but ultimately "all the families of the earth" (Genesis 12:3).

Celebrating Fulfillment of Abrahamic Covenant

In fact when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, he assigned some Levites to sing a psalm of thanksgiving that celebrates this very aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant (1 Chronicles 16:8-36). For the first 15 verses (8-22) of this psalm are almost the same as Psalm 105:1-15, which is about the Abrahamic Covenant and begins with a call to give thanks to God and "make known His deeds among the *peoples*," so as to fulfill the ultimate concern of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The next 11 verses (23-33), which are virtually the same as Psalm 96, specifically celebrates this fulfillment: "Sing to the LORD, *all the earth*" (23a); "Declare His glory among the *nations*, His wonderful deeds among *all the peoples*" (24); "Ascribe to the LORD, O *families of the peoples*, Ascribe to the LORD glory and strength" (28); "Tremble before Him, *all the earth*" (30); "And let them say among the *nations*, 'The LORD reigns'" (31).

The psalm ends with a petition on behalf of Israel (verses 35-36) that is similar to but not the same as Psalm 106:47-48; unlike the lat-

ter it is not a reference to the Babylonian Exile (see Keil and Delitzsch 1982b: 218). In other words, when the Ark, the seat of God's reign, was brought to Jerusalem, the seat of David's reign, thus indicating that David's kingdom was actually God's kingdom, the main concern was the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. But why is this the case?

Celebrating Fulfillment of Davidic Covenant

We saw that Psalm 105 ends with a reference to the Mosaic Covenant. Psalm 78 begins with this covenant (verses 1-8) and covers the same historical ground of Psalm 106 (except the Exile), but fills in an important gap by ending with God's election of Jerusalem as His dwelling place and of David as king of Israel (verses 67-72), thus making a reference to the *Davidic Covenant*.

According to Gerald Wilson (2005: 234), Psalms 2, 72 and 89, three key psalms on the Davidic Covenant, together

sketch out a thematic movement concerned to reflect on the rise, continuation and collapse of the hopes of the Davidic monarchy. Ps. 2 describes the inauguration of the Davidic dynasty Ps. 72 (attributed 'to/for' Solomon) articulates the hope for successive Davidic monarchs to 'endure for ever ... as long as the sun' (72:17). This happy hope of eternal blessing comes crashing down at the end of ... Ps. 89, [which,] after beginning with the exalted expectations grounded in the inviolable word of God himself, turns swiftly to agonized confusion over the destruction of kingdom and monarch in the exile. God is called to task for his failure to protect his people as promised, and the psalm concludes with a demand that God remember his 'servant David' (cf. v. 20) and act to restore the kingdom (vv. 49-51).

God's covenant with David is eternal and inviolable. Like 1-2 Chronicles, the Book of Psalms reaffirms the validity of the Davidic Covenant in light of the Exile by stressing that David's kingdom was actually God's kingdom. Psalms 93-100 is a series of psalms on the kingdom of God, with four of them even proclaiming explicitly that

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“the LORD reigns” (93:1; 96:10; 97:1; 99:1). And Psalm 99 specifically says God executed His reign over the nations, and over Israel at the same time, from the Temple in Jerusalem as He was “enthroned above the cherubim” there (verses 1-2; cf. 1 Chronicles 13:6). This means the national kingdom of David was actually that part of the international kingdom of God where His reign was most recognized (through the Mosaic Covenant) and exceptionally manifest (He dwelt within the Promised Land on the basis of the Mosaic Covenant).

So when David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem, which means the focus shifted from David’s kingdom to God’s kingdom, the attention would naturally be on God’s international reign. This explains why the main concern then was the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, when God’s reign would be equally recognized in all nations.

Now this coincides with the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant, when the Messiah rules over all nations (Genesis 49:10). This is because the Davidic Covenant is a means to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant (the other means being the *New Covenant*). But how is this going to happen?

No psalm explains it better than Psalm 110, which opens with, “The LORD says to my Lord, ‘Sit at My right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” The “LORD” refers to the Creator God, and “my Lord” refers to the Davidic king. We have seen that the author of Hebrews rightly understands the Davidic king in Psalm 2 to be the Messiah because only He can actually ask God for the nations as His inheritance. So the Davidic king in Psalm 110 all the more has to be the Messiah. For in this psalm the king is said to be given not only the nations but also privileges that no earthly Davidic king could ever claim.

For “No king of Israel was ever so close to God that he could normally be described, even metaphorically, as sitting at God’s right hand”; and “This ‘king’ embodies an eternal priesthood (110:4), whereas legitimate kings in the line of David came from the tribe of Judah, and not the tribe of Levi, from whom priests had to descend”; also God “is said to be at this king’s right hand ... as if God and the king were interchangeable!” (110:5); and “Finally, this monarch will do what God alone is described elsewhere as doing: judging the na-

tions and crushing the rulers of the whole earth (110:6)” (Blomberg 2007: 83, drawing on Davis 2000).

In other words unlike other Messianic psalms, Psalm 110 is “purely Messianic” in that it was composed specifically with the Messiah in mind. In fact, Jesus affirms that this psalm is a prophecy of David spoken “by the Holy Spirit” (Mark 12:36; cf. 2 Samuel 23:1-7). And it points to the Messiah’s divinity (cf. Isaiah 9:6-7). Not surprisingly it is the most quoted psalm in the New Testament. Jesus used it to show that the Messiah had to be more than a human descendant of David in order to silence the religious leaders who were seeking to trap Him (see Matthew 22:41-46).

So the author of Hebrews legitimately identifies “my Lord” in Psalm 110:1 as Jesus (Hebrews 1:13). And on the basis of Psalm 110:4 that this Lord will be a king-priest like Melchizedek, Hebrews develops an in-depth teaching of the priesthood of Christ that is unique in the New Testament (Hebrews 5:1-10; 7:1-10:25). It is a profound exposition on the Messiah being “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

Celebrating Fulfillment of Creation Mandate

Psalm 8:4-6, as understood by the author of Hebrews, also explains how the Abrahamic Covenant would be ultimately fulfilled. As noted above, the psalmist was referring to the Creation Mandate given to Adam before the Fall (Genesis 1:26-28). So, as it stands, the “man” in “What is man that You are mindful of him?” (verse 4) originally refers to pre-Fall humanity represented by Adam. But Hebrews 2:5-10 reinterprets it and equates the “man” to Jesus. What is the basis for doing this?

After the Fall the Creation Mandate as *originally* intended by God could no longer be fulfilled by Adam and fallen humanity. Since God’s purpose cannot be defeated, we expect the original intention of the mandate to be given a new life. So when the author of Hebrews applied Psalm 8:4-6 to Christ, thus replacing Adam with Christ, he was recognizing a truth that was staring at him: Jesus the eternal Son of God is the new Adam who came to reclaim the pre-Fall mandate for humanity (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:22, 45).

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This principle—reinterpreting a promise or plan of God in the Old Testament and reapplying it to Jesus in view of Him having fulfilled its *original* intention, which the original recipient failed to fulfill—is often used in the New Testament when it cites or alludes to the Old Testament. Recall that it is the same principle Hebrews uses to reinterpret the Davidic Covenant in 1 Chronicles 17 in light of Psalm 2 (see God’s Kingdom and the Messiah in Chapter 28).

Hence Hebrews legitimately teaches that the Psalms foresees Jesus as the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant as well as the Creation Mandate. By thus reinterpreting the Creation Mandate and the Davidic Covenant, Hebrews reinterprets the history of Israel and of the world in terms of Christ. History becomes His Story. Hence praying the Psalms helps believers dwell within His Story—from the creation of the present heavens and earth to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant, which involves the deconstruction of the present heavens and earth and the reconstruction of the New Heavens and the New Earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; cf. Revelation 21-22).

The New Testament teaches not only that the Messiah has already come once in the person of Jesus to inaugurate the *New Covenant* (Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13), but also that He will come again to complete everything promised about Him in the Psalms and the rest of the Old Testament. In His first coming, His priestly role was more prominent (He came to save). In His second coming, His kingly role will be more prominent (He will come to judge). We shall elaborate on this when we come to the Prophetic Books.

Psalm 96 teaches that true worship is about ascribing to God “glory and strength, ... the glory due His name” (verse 7-8). This involves offering praise and thanksgiving in response to who He is and what He has done and will do as narrated in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation as His Story. In fact we would not know who God is without knowing what He has done and will do. Hence Biblical worship as expressed through the Psalms is His-Story-shaped.

For through narrative poetry the Book of Psalms embodies a summary of the truth of who God is as well as what He has done and will do. Hence praying the Psalms will help believers not only live within His Story but also know God in a way not otherwise possible. For narrative poetry, especially when set to music, shapes our imagi-

nation, perception, emotion, and hence convictions, in a way not otherwise possible. Drawing on the whole of Scripture, the Psalms serves as an indispensable means through which the formative and transformative powers of Scripture are unleashed.

In the context of the New Covenant this exposition on kingdom worship is incomplete without considering the role of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is given as a “down-payment” (Ephesians 1:14) so that believers can confidently anticipate the Second Coming of Christ to consummate His Story and thus fulfill everything God has promised.

The apostle Paul specifically exhorts New Covenant believers to “be filled by the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody from your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:18-19). This means when believers “allow the Spirit to have the fullest control that they are conscious of in their lives” (Lincoln 1990: 345), it produces heartfelt worship through singing which, in the context of congregational worship, amounts to “teaching and admonishing one another ... through psalms and hymns and spiritual songs” (Colossians 3:16b; cf. O’Brien 1982: 207-209). For when we sing the lyrics from the heart, it is as if we are teaching and admonishing others (see the lyrics of Psalm 100). This happens even when admonition is not spelled out in the lyrics. For just a proclamation of who God is already has built-in implications on how we are to respond (see Philippians 2:5-11, where Paul draws out an admonition implied in the lyrics of an early Christian hymn).

This mutual teaching and admonishing is to “Let the word (teaching) about Christ dwell richly *among* you” (Colossians 3:16a; cf. O’Brien 1982: 206-207). We remember best what we teach and admonish others, and when this is done through singing, “the rhythms of music, song [and thus the words] ... get implanted in us as a mode of bodily memory” (Smith 2009b: 171). Hence the word (teaching) about Christ will also dwell richly *within* us. So heartfelt congregational worship through singing lyrics that express sound Biblical teaching involves “a deep and penetrating contemplation that enables the message to have transforming power in the life of the community” (Moo 2008: 286). And when this worshipful singing is an outflow of being filled by the Spirit, “the encouragement of the Scriptures” comes “in the power of the Holy Spirit” (see Romans 15:4, 13).

Chapter 30

Kingdom Spirituality

We have seen how believers can act out their recognition of God's reign in worshipping God through the Psalms, and how formative and transformative the experience can be. We now take a closer look at what actually happens in this regard when they sing or recite the psalms as prayers to God.

In the Biblical context, what is really involved when people pray to God? Recall that “worshippers’ central beliefs are expressed in their prayers” (Wenham 2005: 177). What then are some central beliefs that are involved when believers truly pray?

Prayer and Commitment to God's Word

Firstly, when believers pray, they assume that God is all-present, otherwise He may not be able to hear their prayer. Secondly, they assume that God is all-powerful, otherwise He may not be able to answer their prayer. Thirdly, they assume that God is all-loving, otherwise He may not want to answer their prayer. Can they then really believe, to the point of assuming, that God is all-powerful, all-present and all-loving, and yet not recognize that He reigns over everything and cares for everyone? Can they thus be consistent if they do not

commit themselves to seek first God's kingdom and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33)?

Therefore in the Biblical context genuine prayers require believers to have an attitude or intention that is implicitly a commitment to recognize God's reign in their life. Now this is already the case in the very act of praying, even when beliefs about God that implicitly require believers to recognize God's reign are only assumed and not (yet) verbalized. What more when they prayerfully sing or recite words from the psalms that directly or indirectly express the encompassing theme that "the LORD reigns"?

Since God rules through His Law as summarized in the Ten Commandments, this commitment to recognize God's reign leads to righteous living. Conversely, as a rule, implicit in a denial of God is an attitude or intention that is contrary or even hostile to the Ten Commandments. This is affirmed in Psalm 14: "The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' They are corrupt, they have committed abominable deeds; there is no one who does good" (verse 1). The claim that immorality does lead to unbelief has been documented and explained (see Spiegel 2010).

Since the encompassing theme of the Book of Psalms is God's kingdom, it is not surprising that God's Law and a commitment to obey it is prominently highlighted in the book (Psalms 1, 19 and 119). The Hebrew word for "law" is *torah*, and it basically means instruction or teaching. And God's *torah* or teaching is found throughout Scripture, including the Psalms. In fact *torah* can refer to any portion of Scripture, especially Genesis-Deuteronomy, or to the Scripture as a whole. So God's Law means much more than the Mosaic Law, which is only the formalized expression of God's Law.

Centrality of God's Word in Godly Living

To appreciate how central and encompassing God's Law is in the life of believers, we will consider it in the context of the Mosaic Covenant as embodied in the psalms. Recall that the Mosaic Covenant, which God made with Israel at Mount Sinai, was an application of the Creation Mandate at the national level. Israel was thus called to build a national civilization that is in fellowship with God and is con-

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sistent with God's will. And both prongs of this calling are inseparable. For the nation could not dwell with God and be in fellowship with Him without being consistent with God's will. How then would this work out in the life of faithful Israelites?

Psalms 15 and 24 complement each other in describing the kind of person who can dwell with the Holy God, that is, live in fellowship with "the King of glory" (24:7-9). Basically one must "have clean hands and a pure heart" (24:4), which means being consistent with God's will not only in action but also in attitude and intention. Thus one has to be pure in thinking, feeling, willing and acting, that is, one who "walks uprightly and works righteousness" as well as "speaks truth in his heart" (15:2). He "honors those who fear the LORD" and "keeps his word [including what he sings or recites from the psalms] even when it hurts" (15:4). So believers cannot sincerely sing or recite Psalm 15 or 24 without an attitude or intention that is implicitly a commitment to be God-fearing.

How then does one even begin to dwell with God? One has to know God. Psalm 19, which is about how one should respond to God's revelation of Himself through creation (verses 1-6) as well as through His Law (verses 7-10), "teaches that the Creator can be known *about* through creation, but the torah is the only way that one can *know* the personal God of Israel. And once one knows this God through torah, one can pray to God in a relational way" (DeClaissé-Walford, Jacobson and Tanner 2014: 204). The relational prayer (in verses 11-14) highlights the psalmist's fear of deliberately or unknowingly violating God's Law, which he regards as "more desirable than gold" and "sweeter than honey" (verse 10).

This brings us to Psalm 1, which presents a poetic vision of how "blessed" or happy is the one who, having come to know God through His Law, keeps his heart pure and his hands clean. Because he delights in God's Law and so "meditates in it day and night," he does not yield to ungodly peer-pressure ("counsel of the wicked"). This keeps him from living a life that is contrary to God's Law ("way of sinners") and then joining the "fool" of Psalm 14 by becoming one who is hostile towards God ("seat of scoffers").

The Hebrew word translated "meditate" in Psalm 1:2, also translated as the "plotting" of the nations in Psalm 2:1, does not mean

“silent activities” but “speaking out loud”; meditating in the *torah* day and night here means habitually “singing or reciting the psalm[s] from memory” (Wenham 2012: 81-82). We have repeatedly seen how necessary it is for believers to be singing or reciting the psalms. The first psalm thus sets the stage for all the psalms. However in a literate culture where printed Bibles are easily available, meditation need not be limited to singing or reciting from memory. And it should not be limited to the Book of Psalms (see Joshua 1:8).

Psalm 119, the longest psalm, is an elaboration on Psalms 1 and 19 combined. It also balances up the teaching of Psalm 1 by affirming that, though as a rule those who love and keep God’s Law would prosper in every area of life, one does experience exceptions to this rule. But even in the face of undeserved adversities the psalmist would continue to love God’s Law and seek to observe it (see for instance, verses 153-160).

Throughout Psalm 119 the psalmist makes commitments to keep God’s Law, even saying, “I have promised to keep Your words” (57). And he pleads with God to enable him to do so. For he repeatedly asks God to teach him God’s Law (12, 26, 33, 64, 68, 108, 124, 135). In one stanza of the poem he begins with, “Teach me, O LORD, the way of your statutes, so that I will observe it to the end” (33). He wants God’s Law to be taught to him in such a way that he will not violate it. So he asks God to “give me understanding so that I will observe Your Law ... with all my heart” (34). The understanding he asks for is one that will “make me walk in the path of Your commandments” (35), for it will “incline my heart to Your testimonies and not to selfish gain” (36) and “turn away my eyes from looking at vanity, and revive me in Your ways” (37). He then asks God to work in his life in such a way that it will cause him to fear Him and honor His Law (38-39). He concludes by affirming his longing for God’s Law and to be revived in God’s ways (40).

In other words, the psalmist is praying for an “understanding” of truth as expressed in God’s Law that affects not only his *cognition*, but also his *affection*, *volition* as well as *action*. Insofar as an understanding of truth should affect all these four dimensions of our life, we have not really understood a truth unless and until it changes how we think and feel as well as how we make decisions and act, that is it changes

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what we truly love (cf. Smith 2009b: 24-27). Otherwise the “truth” that we have “learned” remains as what is commonly called “head knowledge” (strictly speaking it is “head information”; in the Bible the word “knowledge” refers only to “experiential knowledge,” the kind of knowledge the psalmist is here praying for).

Psalms 119 thus expresses a serious and uncompromising intention to live according to God’s Law. We have so far only noted how praying the psalms requires believers to have an attitude or intention that is an implicit commitment to recognize God’s reign. What we have just seen in Psalm 119 is an attitude or intention that is an *explicit* commitment to recognize God’s reign, and to do so even in the face of adversity (see for instance 145-152).

Living in God’s Story as Participants

This means praying the psalms involves living within His Story as narrated in Scripture from Genesis to Revelation not just as an observer but also as a participant. For personal commitments are being made, both implicitly and explicitly, while immersed in His Story. And since His Story is world history viewed through Biblical lenses, living within His Story as both observer and participant amounts to living in the real world as perceived through the Biblically-shaped imagination. Hence we have already begun to live a life that recognizes God’s reign in this world while praying the psalms from the heart. Worshipping God through the psalms in this manner is an important means to allow Scripture to change what we truly love (cf. Smith 2009b: 32-34). So it not only trains our imagination to live in His Story even in our daily life, but also shapes our perception and affection to live out God’s reign in every aspect of our life.

There are believers who are not yet ready to sing or recite words that explicitly obligate them to obey God unconditionally. This is not just because the words do not yet represent their attitude or intention, but also because they still resist making such a commitment. So when a psalm like Psalm 119 is used in congregational worship, they may, out of integrity, abstain from singing or reciting it. But even then they would experience a godly peer-pressure that could shape their thinking and feeling. For what they abstain from singing or re-

citing is Scripture, which the conscience of believers would not argue against or reject.

Hence genuine worship through words inevitably leads to genuine worship through attitude, intention and action. Only then can one dwell with God. What then is it like to dwell with God?

Psalm 23, an all-time favorite, guides our imagination and emotion to experience the security a believer enjoys when God is his shepherd. To help us feel how secure he really is, the psalmist stretches the metaphor of the shepherd and turns him into a generous host who prepares a feast for his sheep in the very presence of its enemies. Imagine securely enjoying a feast while those who want to harm us can only helplessly stand and watch. This is just one picture of what it means to dwell with God; there are others (such as Psalm 34). No wonder the psalmist wants to “dwell in the house of the LORD forever” (23:6).

This does not mean that everything will be smooth-sailing once a person has come to know God as his shepherd. Even King David, who wrote Psalm 23, suffered a major spiritual crisis when he sinned against God by committing adultery and then murder. Before he repented and confessed his sins, “my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long” (Psalm 32:3). When he confessed his sins, he recognized that it was not just the specific transgressions but also his very (sinful) nature that needed forgiveness and cleansing (Psalm 51:4-7). With a broken spirit and a contrite heart, he pleaded with God to “create in me a clean heart” and “cast me not from Your presence” (51:10-11). This is an unmistakable expression of repentance as praying for a clean heart expresses the intention of not wanting to sin, and praying to be in God’s presence expresses the desire to return to God. And Biblical repentance is about turning away from sin and returning to God (Isaiah 55:6-7).

Having thus been restored to God and to the joy of His salvation, David proclaimed how “blessed” it was to be forgiven by God (32:1-2). It is a blessedness that makes one eager to share it by teaching others how to experience it (32:8-11; 51:13). Hence kingdom spirituality recognizes the need for repentance and confession of sin to continue dwelling with God. Psalms 32 and 51 are there to remind and guide believers. This is not limited to kingdom spirituality under the

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Mosaic Covenant, but applies also to kingdom spirituality under the New Covenant (see 1 John 1:5-10).

However sin is not the only cause of spiritual crises. Psalm 73 recounts the experience of a God-fearing believer who found himself envying ungodly people. For they seemed to prosper in their ungodliness, while “I have been stricken all day long” (verse 14). So he felt that he had kept his heart pure and his hands clean for nothing. He could not even talk about it as this would stumble others. He found no relief until he went into the Temple and began to see things from God’s perspective (cf. Psalm 48:9). Psalm 37, which exhorts believers to “be not envious of wrongdoers ... [but] delight yourself in the LORD, and He will give you the desires of your heart” (37:1, 4), elaborates on how to look at it from God’s perspective and respond accordingly. Recognizing his earlier senselessness and ignorance, the psalmist in Psalm 73 confesses, “Whom have I in heaven but You? And besides You, I desire nothing on earth” (73:25). Though the situation did not change, he again enjoyed the nearness of God (73:28).

Living Through Experiences of Suffering

However there are times of adversity that even Psalm 73 would be inadequate to guide believers through them; resources available through other psalms are needed. We begin with Psalm 103. This is a poem praising God, who is “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in unfailing love” (103:8). The focus is on God’s compassion toward “those who fear Him” (11, 13, 17): “As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him” (13). This means those who fear God can confidently expect to experience God’s compassion. However people who are God-fearing (conscientious), but do not know God through the Scripture, may not realize this truth and thus do not relate to Him accordingly. We now look at how believers who fear God can relate to God during times of extreme adversity.

In Psalm 44, a psalm of lament, the psalmist questions God for allowing suffering to come upon him and his nation. He begins by praising God for His faithfulness to Israel in the past (1-3) and petitioning Him to give victory to Israel, affirming that he still trusts in

God (4-8). He then questions God for rejecting them with the result that they were defeated by enemies and some of them were even taken captives to foreign lands (9-16). This is not referring to the Exile because he confesses that the disaster happened even though they had not violated God's covenant (17-22). So he tells God how he really *feels* toward Him (23-26): "Wake up O LORD! Why are You sleeping? Arouse Yourself! Do not reject us forever!" (23).

There are times when God-fearing believers find themselves in adversities so painful that they cannot help but become impatient or even angry with God. When this has happened, it is not more spiritual for believers to hide their true feelings. In fact they can then no longer have true fellowship with God. And hiding their true feelings amounts to denying who God is. For God knows our true feelings; hiding them amounts to denying that God is all-knowing. The psalmist feels this way toward God only because he believes that God reigns—He could have prevented the disaster, but He did not. By telling God how disappointed he is with Him, the psalmist is actually acknowledging that God is all-powerful. And by being daring to be this honest with Him, the psalmist is also acknowledging that God is all-loving. This accords with the teaching of Psalm 103 that God is compassionate toward those who fear Him like a father to his children. Thus being honest with God means believing and confessing what Scripture says of Him—all-powerful, all-knowing and all-loving.

There are also times of extreme adversity when God-fearing believers cannot help but feel bitter toward the people who caused them the suffering. The "imprecatory psalms" are there to guide them in expressing their bitter feelings to God (and *not* to the perpetrators). An "imprecation" is defined as "an invocation of judgment, calamity, or curse uttered against one's enemies, or the enemies of God" (Laney 1981: 35; cited in DeClaissé-Walford 2011: 78). Take for instance a sample from Psalm 109: "Let his days be few; let another take his position. Let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow. Let his children wander as beggars; let them search for food far from their ruined homes" (verses 8-10).

Should God-fearing believers "curse" their enemies in their prayers? Since they are to love their neighbors (and even their enemies) as themselves, they need to forgive even those who have harmed them

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severely. But in cases where they are already overwhelmed by bitter feelings toward the perpetrators, they cannot forgive them from the heart. And they cannot pray to God even if they would (cf. DeClaissé-Walford 2011: 88-89). Sooner or later those feelings will cause them to take revenge in one way or another. To avoid that, out of the fear of God, they need to let the feelings out by telling God how they really *feel* toward the perpetrators. In asking God to punish the perpetrators they are recognizing that God reigns and vengeance belongs to Him alone. In the process they are handing their bitterness, including any urge for revenge, over to God and thus leaving the matter entirely to Him. They will thus experience healing and a closure that sets them free to love and forgive the perpetrators (cf. Fee and Stuart 2003: 220-22; McCann 1993: 112-17).

It is significant that imprecation is not limited to the Psalms. It is also found in other parts of Scripture uttered by God-fearing believers: Moses (Numbers 10:35); Deborah (Judges 5:31); Jeremiah (Jeremiah 18:21-23; Lamentations 1:21-22); Nehemiah (Nehemiah 4:4-5); Paul (Galatians 1:8-9). Imprecatory prayers clearly has a place in the life of God-fearing believers (see further Wenham 2012: 167-79; DeClaissé-Walford 2011: 84-92).

The imprecatory prayer in Psalm 137 is different from that of Psalm 109 in that it is in response to a remembrance of a past atrocity (Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem). Clinton McCann (1996: 1228) comments in reference to Psalm 137 (cited in Sadler 2014: 449):

In the face of monstrous evil, the worst possible response is to feel nothing. What *must* be felt—by the victims and on behalf of the victims—are grief, rage, and outrage. In the absence of these feelings, evil becomes an acceptable commonplace. In other words, to forget is to submit to evil, to wither and die; to remember is to resist, to be faithful, and to live again.

Thus imprecatory prayer can emerge from an abhorrence of evil coupled with the belief that God reigns and upholds justice. And abhorrence toward evil is basic to being human, what more being God-fearing. Hence God-fearing believers who have not personally experienced atrocity can still utter an imprecatory prayer like that in Psalm

137 by witnessing or remembering atrocities like the Holocaust and so feel the grief, rage and outrage that the psalmist feels. This experience is particularly formative and transformative because “if in prayer we denounce certain acts and pray for God to punish them, we are in effect inviting God to judge us if we do the same” (Wenham 2012: 57), which will then cause us to all the more want to have a pure heart and clean hands.

This is reflected in Psalm 139, a poem about God being all-knowing because He is all-present, which can be comforting or dis-comforting depending on one’s current attitude and intention. After uttering an imprecatory prayer that ends with “I hate them [God’s enemies, the wicked] with extreme hate; I count them my enemies” (19-22), the psalmist wants to ensure that he himself is and will not be guilty of the same thing. So he prays, “Search me, O God and know my heart ... and see if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way” (23-24). Hence this psalm also teaches that one may not be innocent just because one can say with sincerity, “my conscience is clear” (see 1 Corinthians 4:4).

All this means, as Hassell Bullock (2001: 50) sums it up so succinctly and eloquently,

The Psalms are for those who walk the joyful paths of life and need a word that will release their tongue and unbind their spirit to praise the God of life. The Psalms are for those who pace the corridors of suffering and sorrow and need a word to unleash their spirit which despair threatens to suffocate.

The Psalms and Emotional Healing

In our exposition on kingdom worship we emphasized praise because this is what we usually associate with worship. In our exposition here on kingdom spirituality we emphasize despair because the test of one’s spirituality is how one responds during such times. But in actual experience kingdom worship and kingdom spirituality are both sides of the same coin.

In the context of congregational worship believers need to be able to pray a psalm expressing either praise or sorrow. When we are

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joyful, it is not too difficult to identify with those who are sorrowful and prayerfully sing or recite a psalm of lament. However when we are sorrowful, we may not be able to identify with those who are joyful and prayerfully sing or recite a psalm of praise. This is when we need to turn to the psalms in private worship for emotional healing.

Investigative reporter David Chagall (1996: 3-4) recounts an unusual psychiatric treatment at Pennsylvania's Coatesville Hospital. A patient, Peter, had tried to kill himself and others but was unresponsive to various forms of conventional treatment. He was brought to music therapist Adam Knieste (for an introduction to the history and practice of music therapy, see Bunt 1994). As soon as the aides left, Peter turned violent. Adam played a very loud piece of music. "Peter froze. The music was wild, just like Pete's emotions, and that got his attention. From there I gradually moved the mood, tempo, and intensity to calmer sounds until, after forty-five minutes, I was into some harpsichord things." That was when Peter, who had not spoken one rational word in over eight months, walked over to Adam, asked for a cigarette and sat down to talk.

Adam explains that the worst thing to do is for depressed people to listen to happy music. "To benefit from mood changes, you have to start right where that person is and establish musical rapport. Depressed people need depressing music. Angry people need angry music. You tell me what kind of music a person listens to and I'll tell you that person's state of mind."

It is well recognized that every human emotion is represented in the Psalms. So in view of Peter's amazing recovery, we can imagine the healing powers of the psalms. Hence a believer may even begin with an imprecatory psalm and gradually end with Psalm 150, which praises God in every line of the poem.

We have been considering kingdom spirituality in the context of the Mosaic Covenant. In the context of the New Covenant, with the regenerative power and empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:25-27; Romans 8:4), all the more "In praying the psalms, one is actively committing oneself to following the God-approved life" (Wenham 2012: 76), and in a way that surely leads to joyfully living out such a life.

Part VI

The Noahic Covenant II

Proverbs
Song of Songs
Ecclesiastes
Job

Chapter 31

The Fear of God

We have seen that God relates to humanity as a whole, and vice-versa, through the Noahic Covenant. We shall see in the Prophetic Books how this covenant has been and will eventually be enforced by God in this world. For now we consider how humanity as a whole is to relate to God (and to one another) as taught in the Wisdom Books: Proverbs, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Job.

Fundamental to the relationship between humanity and God is the fear of God (Genesis 20:11). Though this “fear” can be and has been suppressed to varying degrees (Romans 1:28-32), it is innate in all human beings (Romans 2:14-16). We have so far defined it as conscientiousness, that is, doing what is right and not what is wrong according to our conscience even when no one (except God) is watching us or holding us accountable (see especially Judgment on Adam in Chapter 2). We now take a closer look at what this involves.

The Book of Job spells out why people “fear” God: God is not only all-powerful (He can do whatever He wants) but also absolutely just and righteous (He will never pervert justice), and thus absolutely impartial in meting out justice (see Job 37:23-24). Imagine a judge in a court of law who is absolutely incorruptible. Any guilty person, even the President or Prime Minister, would “fear” him when tried in his court. Further imagine that this judge somehow has access to all

the evidence needed to convict the guilty. Yet this picture is still only a faint reflection of God as the Judge of this world. We have no need to fear God only if we have not done, and will never do, anything wrong whether in deed or in thought.

Certainly an innocent person may fear a judge who is corrupt. Such a judge is feared because he is clearly unjust and unrighteous. But God is feared precisely because He is absolutely just and righteous. This contrast is crucial to avoid misunderstanding the meaning of the fear of God. In the ancient world, people “fear” the gods who are perceived as capricious. Hence the term “the fear of God” has come to bear negative connotations. This may be one reason Bible translators tend to avoid translating the Hebrew word as “fear” when God is the object, and replaced it with “revere” or “reverence.” This has led to the concept of the fear of God being downplayed among Bible believers.

The Bible itself affirms that the fear of God is like the fear of governing authorities who faithfully enforce the law (see Proverbs 24:21-22; Romans 13:3-5). Just as we feel no fear in the presence of the police unless we have committed a crime or are planning to do so, we do not feel the fear (of God) if we have neither done nor are planning to do wrong (but cf. the “fear” of God felt under exceptional circumstances such as those in Acts 5:1-11). This is because we have already yielded to the fear by doing what is right and not what is wrong even when no human being is watching or holding us accountable. It is like sitting in a boat on a flowing stream. We do not feel the force of the flowing water when we allow it to carry the boat downstream. We only feel it when we go against it by rowing the boat upstream. In contrast, the “fear” of a corrupt judge or of supposed capricious gods is felt even when one is truly innocent.

The fear of God is also like the fear children should have towards their parents (see Leviticus 19:3). Just as children can feel the love of their parents and love them in return and at the same time fear (and thus obey) them, one can feel the love of God and love Him in return and at the same time fear (and thus obey) Him. Hence fear of God and love of God are not incompatible.

Since the fear of God is fundamental to how *every human being* relates to God, it is crucial to not only the Noahic Covenant, but also

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the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant. The difference is that under the Mosaic Covenant, in addition to the fear of God, the people were also motivated to keep God's commandments by their love for God (Deuteronomy 10:12-13). They were to love God and thus keep His commandments because of God's love for them expressed through their miraculous redemption from Egypt (Deuteronomy 7:8; 11:1). In other words Israel as a nation had more empowerment to do God's will than the other nations.

However the Exile shows that even then, given fallen human nature, the nation as a whole failed to fear and love God. Thus there was the need to replace the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant. In addition to the fear of God and the love of God (2 Corinthians 5:11, 14), the New Covenant empowers believers through the Spirit of God to do God's will (Ephesians 5:15-21). In fact a consequence of being filled (empowered) by the Spirit is "submitting to one another in the *fear* of Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). For when one is filled by the Spirit, the "fear" of God springs also from the "fear" of grieving the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30; cf. Isaiah 63:10), through whom one experiences God's love and hence loves God in return.

If the fear and the love of God are thus inseparable, why then does John say, "There is no fear in love; but perfect love drives out fear" (1 John 4:18)? The context shows that he is referring to the fear (of God) that "involves punishment," particularly "in the Day of Judgment." This fear is *felt* by those "not perfected in love," that is, those who do not know and believe in God's love revealed through Jesus the Son of God. So they do not "abide (live) in love" for God and for one another, and thus lack evidence that they live in God, who is love, and God in them. Therefore they lack "confidence in the Day of Judgment" and so fear the punishment. But not so for those "perfected in love," who are thus "like Him (Jesus) in this world." And though they do fear (and thus obey) God, the fear is all the more *not felt* because they love God and thus gladly keep His commandments (cf. John 15:10). In other words, John is referring to the "fear" (of God) that is felt by people who have no assurance that their sins are forgiven and thus have not experienced the love of God.

As we shall see, the fear of God is fundamental to appreciating and applying the Wisdom Books. Though these books are part of

Israel's Scripture—in fact three of them refer to “the LORD,” the God of Israel, and three are associated with Solomon king of Israel—they are clearly not grounded in the Exodus and the Mosaic Covenant. They are grounded in Creation and the Noachic Covenant as they are directly relevant to humanity as a whole.

Hence their teachings are expected to be obeyed by all nations through fearing God. They are part of Israel's Scripture, and the nation was required to obey their teachings through fearing God because Israel was part of humanity. And as we have seen, the goal of the Mosaic Covenant is for Israel to become a model for *human* civilization. The same can also be said of the Church and the New Covenant. Certainly the Church, empowered by the Spirit to fear God, is all the more equipped to appreciate and apply the teachings of the Wisdom Books, to which we now turn.

Chapter 32

The Beginning of Wisdom

The Book of Proverbs explicitly states that “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), which is also expressed verbatim in a wisdom psalm (Psalm 111:10) as well as expressed more forcefully in the Book of Job: “Look! The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom” (Job 28:28). The Hebrew word translated “beginning” can be paraphrased as “foundation” as the fear of God is “the prerequisite of wisdom and trains a man for it” (von Rad 1972: 67). Hence the fear of God is the foundation of wisdom and is thus fundamental to appreciating and applying the wisdom teachings of the Bible. We now look further into Proverbs to understand what this involves.

Nature of Wisdom

We begin with the meaning of the Hebrew word translated “wisdom.” Its basic meaning is skill in general, which includes engineering skill (Exodus 36:1). But in English we do not associate wisdom with technical skill. However even in English, wisdom is still a skill, as can

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be seen from this spectrum: computing skill (not “wisdom”); cooking skill; business skill (involves some “wisdom”); parenting skill; counseling skill (“wisdom”). Hence in English, “wisdom” is limited to skill in living. Though the Hebrew word covers the whole spectrum of skills, the wisdom discussed in the Wisdom Books is also about skill in living.

In Biblical thinking, wisdom does not stand alone. It comes together with understanding and knowledge: “And he [Hiram] was full of wisdom (skill), understanding, and knowledge for doing all work in bronze (literal translation of 1 Kings 7:14b). In other words, to have the *wisdom* for doing any work in bronze Hiram must have had the *knowledge* gained through *understanding* the properties of bronze and the processes needed to work with bronze. This insight is particularly significant for appreciating wisdom (skill in living) in the Bible.

Proverbs 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *knowledge*; fools despise *wisdom* and *instruction*” summarizes Proverbs 1:2-6 and introduces Proverbs 1-9 as well as the whole book. And Proverbs 9:10, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of *wisdom*, and the *knowledge* of the Holy One is *understanding*” summarizes Proverbs 1-9 as well as the whole book. Taken together, these theme verses show that wisdom (skill in living) comes together with not only knowledge and understanding, but also “instruction.” The Hebrew word translated as “instruction” can also be translated as “discipline.” “Fundamentally, it has to do with teaching/learning by exhortation and example, with warning as to the consequences of disobedience, and with the application of penalty following failure to adhere” (Merrill 1997: 480-81).

Thus the Hebrew word can refer to “instruction in wise behavior” (Proverbs 1:3) that warns against disobedience by highlighting its painful consequences (Proverbs 24:32-34), or to “discipline” (chastisement) as a consequence (penalty) of disobedience (Proverbs 3:11; 23:13). If we take the meaning of the English word “discipline” to include instruction that disciplines (trains) a person against disobedience, then “discipline” can be used to translate the Hebrew word as an equivalent that can carry either meaning. A wise person then is one who is “disciplined” (both meanings) to do what is right and not what is wrong under all circumstances.

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This explains why “to know wisdom and discipline” (Proverbs 1:2), which is the purpose and goal of Proverbs, also involves “righteousness, justice and equity” (1:3), as well as other qualities listed in Proverbs 1:2-6, such as prudence and discretion (cf. von Rad 1972: 26-27). Hence a truly wise person is so disciplined that he is not only prudent and discreet but also just and righteous. This is actually obvious as one who lacks prudence and discretion or who is unrighteous and unjust is destroying himself and therefore cannot be considered a wise person. This comprehensive understanding of wisdom has far-reaching implications, from how we raise children to how we train leaders.

Nature of Knowledge

Though our focus is on “wisdom,” insofar as “knowledge” is also said to be grounded in the fear of God, we need to take a closer look at what “knowledge” really is and how it relates to wisdom.

First of all, we need to distinguish knowledge from information. An engineer may put his knowledge (expertise) into a book. But what we read in his book is not (yet) knowledge (to us) but (only) information. It becomes *knowledge* if and when we *understand* it to the extent that we can actually use it (*wisdom*—technical skill). What we call “head knowledge” (as opposed to “experiential knowledge”) is not knowledge at all, but only information in the head instead of in a book. The first time the Hebrew word for “know” occurs, it is used to describe the most intimate “knowing” (experience) between two human beings: “Adam knew [made love to] his wife Eve” (Genesis 4:1). In the Bible knowledge is always experiential. Even in English we intuitively distinguish knowledge from information. For there is “information technology” but not “knowledge technology” as what we download from the Internet is information, not knowledge.

This is why wisdom is inseparable from knowledge and understanding. To have the skill in working with bronze Hiram needed the knowledge concerning bronze. To have the skill in living in this world what then is the corresponding knowledge needed?

Understanding God's Created Order

Proverbs teaches that inherent in this world is an order (system) created and implanted by God, and it is structured by wisdom (Proverbs 3:19-20; 8:22-31). And this created order and its workings can be experienced and thus observed (cf. von Rad 1972: 90). Proverbs asks, "Can a man carry fire in his bosom and his clothes not be burned?" (6:27), and then concludes, "So is he who goes into another man's wife; none who touches her will go unpunished" (6:29). Hence this order affects not only the physical realm (one gets burned by fire), but also the moral and social realms (one gets "burned" by adultery).

Therefore this world is governed by natural laws, not only in the physical but also in the moral and social realms, that are built into the created order. And we cannot violate any of them without harming ourselves. To navigate the created order, we need wisdom to guide and empower us to obey its laws. In other words, "whoever abandons wisdom runs against the very structure by which the world was made" (Garrett 1993: 83; cf. Curtis 2017: 25-26).

Expressed proverbially, this means, "Whoever sows injustice will reap calamity" (Proverbs 22:8; cf. Job 4:8), that is, when we sow what is evil, we will reap what is evil. And it is implied that when we sow what is good, we will also reap what is good. This is because in agriculture as well as in human life, "You reap what you sow" (cf. Galatians 6:7). In other words, while there are painful consequences to violating the created order (folly), there are pleasant consequences to obeying it (wisdom).

The use of the agricultural imagery of sowing and reaping to describe this "act-consequence relationship" is significant because it implies that the consequences of our acts, whether painful or pleasant, generally take time to be effected, except in cases (mainly in the physical realm) like carrying fire in the bosom. It is based on the

widely-spread concept of an effective power inherent both in good and in evil and subject to specific laws ... [that is,] by every evil deed or every good deed a momentum was released which sooner or later also had an effect on the author of the deed. To a great extent, therefore, it lay within his own power whether he

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exposed himself to the effects of disaster or of blessing (von Rad 1972: 128).

Wisdom (skill in living) then involves applying knowledge of the created order and its laws gained through an understanding of its workings in terms of the act-consequence relationship. This form of wisdom, which is practical, we call proverbial wisdom as it is readily and usually expressed through proverbs.

True knowledge based on a correct understanding of the created order recognizes that proverbial wisdom is about *describing*, and not *prescribing*, how the order works. Take for instance, “The righteousness of the blameless will clear his path, but the wicked will fall by his wickedness” (Proverbs 11:5). It describes (based on repeated observation), not prescribes (based on divine revelation), what will happen. Consider a more obvious example, which seems to contradict the previous one: “A bribe is a charm to its owner; wherever he turns, he prospers” (Proverbs 17:8; but cf. 19:6, where the gifts are clearly not bribes). Certainly the righteous God does not prescribe such a (short term) pleasant consequence to bribery (cf. 17:23).

This means proverbial wisdom, whether in Proverbs or in the Psalms (Psalm 1; cf. 111:10-112:10; 119:49-56), describes the workings of the created order, which God declared “good” (Genesis 1), in the context of fallen humanity, who “have sought out many (evil) schemes” (Ecclesiastes 7:29). In fact the proverb “You reap what you sow,” insofar as it is based on repeated observation of the world as we know it, assumes a fallen world. But it still asserts that the divine scheme of the created order will eventually overrule the evil schemes of fallen humanity (cf. Ecclesiastes 8:11-13).

Hence proverbial wisdom describes the consequences of good and evil not necessarily in the short term, but inevitably in the long run. As such, in the meantime, the righteous may suffer and the wicked may prosper (Ecclesiastes 8:14), and thus “You reap what you sow” may then seem to have failed. Proverbs, a book of practical wisdom, does not address this problematic issue, which is left to Ecclesiastes and Job, the two books of philosophical wisdom.

However Proverbs does recognize the issue though it does not resolve it. For it describes and affirms that, “There is a way that

seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death. Even [in the meantime] in laughter the heart may ache, and the rejoicing may end in grief” (Proverbs 14:12-13). “In other words, the appearance of getting away with crime is belied by a justice that is not obvious [the heartache and grief suffered in silence] or quick [“its end” may not be soon] but is certain” (Garrett 1993: 143).

The recognition that proverbial wisdom is descriptive and not prescriptive affects how we understand and apply certain affirmations in Proverbs that do not concern righteousness or justice, but do teach prudence and discretion in the fallen world. Take for instance, “He who is surety for a stranger will surely suffer for it, but he who avoids such commitments is safe” (Proverbs 11:15). It is foolish, though not immoral, to be a surety, especially when it involves a stranger. The wisdom here concerns prudence, not righteousness.

This also means, unlike moral instructions (such as Proverbs 14:20-21), an instruction against being a surety (Proverbs 22:26-27) is not to be taken as a divine command, and there are situations where becoming a surety to someone in need is actually being righteous. Proverbs itself assures us that there are situations in which we need not follow a non-moral instruction. For the instruction, “Do not answer a fool,” is immediately “contradicted” by, “Answer a fool” (Proverbs 26:4-5). Based on repeated observation of the respective consequences, in some situations it is wise to answer a fool but in others, it is otherwise. The wisdom here concerns discretion, not justice. We thus need discernment, another expression of wisdom, even in understanding a proverb (Proverbs 1:2b).

Likewise we should avoid seeing a “promise” where there is none. Consider, “Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old, he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6), which seems to have failed even some godly parents. This proverb does not prescribe (promise) what will happen when we “train up a child,” but only describes what will likely happen based on repeated observation. Also, since the training of a “child” in Proverbs involves warning against visiting prostitutes, “train up a child” implies successful training past adolescence, when the training is the most difficult. The “child” will then more likely remain true to his upbringing all his life.

Monotheism and Created Order

The created order and its workings as described by Biblical proverbial wisdom can also be experienced and observed, and thus recognized, by non-Israelites. For instance, the ancient Egyptians had the concept of *ma'at*. It is compatible with Biblical wisdom teaching (only) insofar that it is

a divine order, established at the time of creation; this order is manifest in nature in the normalcy of phenomena [governed by physical laws]; it is manifest in society as justice [social laws]; and it is manifest in an individual's life as truth [moral laws] ... and [in] that those who move against it are doomed (Frankfort 1961: 63, 117).

So it is all the more not surprising that an anthology of proverbs in Proverbs (22:17-24:22) seems to have been “modeled on the Egyptian teachings of Amenemope” (Garrett 1993: 193).

Proverbial wisdom, whether it is of the Israelites or the Egyptians, or any other nation, is actually based on the observation and interpretation of the same created order. However, the process of observing and interpreting reality does not happen in a cultural vacuum but is informed and shaped by a presupposed belief-system. Thus, consistent with Egyptian polytheism, *ma'at* was personified and worshipped as the goddess Ma'at, “who represented the divine harmony and balance of the universe” (Teeter 2001: 319).

In contrast, Biblical proverbial wisdom, though personified as Lady Wisdom for a pedagogical purpose (Proverbs 1:20-33; 8:1-36; cf. 9:13-18, where folly is also personified as Lady Folly for the same purpose), is an outright expression of the monotheism revealed to the Israelites at Mount Sinai through Moses, which we saw is unique to the Bible (cf. von Rad 1972: 5).

For Biblical proverbial wisdom is not only informed and shaped, but also supplemented, by Biblical monotheism. For what it teaches clearly “surpasses any objective material knowledge in so far as it is dealing with perceptions which have been acquired in connection with a truth [monotheism] for which one has already decided” (von

Rad 1972: 64). Take for instance, “Whoever is gracious to the poor lends to the LORD, and He will repay him for his deed” (Proverbs 19:17; see also 14:31). This proverb clearly surpasses what can be objectively observed. Though it is still based on the observation and interpretation of an act-consequence relationship (people who sow genuine kindness reap what is truly good), the whole process is informed and shaped, and the final product supplemented, by (monotheistic) revelation concerning God and His ways.

In fact the proverb, “The eyes of the LORD are everywhere, watching both the evil and the good” (Proverbs 15:3), cannot be based on observation at all. And, “Where there is no (prophetic) vision [divine revelation], the people are unrestrained, but blessed is he who keeps the Law” (Proverbs 29:18), goes so far as to acknowledge that monotheistic revelation is indispensable. This pair of proverbs brings us naturally to the question of why the fear of God is foundational to both wisdom and knowledge.

Fear of God and Created Order

A person who fears God is one whose conscience is so disciplined that when he is tempted to do what is wrong, he will feel a force within him restraining him from doing so and constraining him to do otherwise. And he will also yield to the force and do what is right and not what is wrong even when no one (except God) is watching him or holding him accountable; otherwise he is not really God-fearing.

Hence a God-fearing (conscientious) person assumes, whether consciously or unconsciously, that God is “watching both the evil and the good,” which thus empowers him to act wisely. So “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil” (Proverbs 8:13), which is wisdom.

The fear of God is also the foundation to knowledge because without it, we may even memorize the entire Book of Proverbs but not put it into practice. For what we have gained is only information and not knowledge. The information cannot become knowledge until we put it into practice and thus “get to know” (experience) it. And lack of knowledge also means lack of wisdom.

In fact when there is no prior commitment to do what is right and not what is wrong due to a lack of the fear of God, we may not

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even want to recognize a truth that is staring at us because it requires us to do what we do not want to do. A common strategy to avoid such a truth is to refuse to understand what it really means and then distort it.

Thus, “Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek the LORD understand it fully” (Proverbs 28:5; cf. Psalm 119:97-104), which leads to the instruction, “Do not reprove a scoffer, or he will hate you; reprove a wise man, and he will love you. Instruct a wise man, and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning” (Proverbs 9:8-9). Jesus puts it more bluntly, “If anyone is willing to do His will, he will know whether the teaching is from God or if I am speaking on My own” (John 7:17).

Therefore, while it is true that, “Without (prophetic) vision [a word from God] the people are unrestrained [from violating the Law],” without the fear of God the people may not even want to recognize that it is a word from God. Biblical wisdom teaching will thus need to address this problem by also seeking to instill the fear of God. While this is more effectively addressed in Ecclesiastes, it is not ignored in Proverbs.

Based on the observation and interpretation of the created order, we can rightly conclude that the act-consequence relationship built into the created order has a life of its own. God has “obviously delegated ... so much” of the running of this world, including in the realm of politics, both national and international (Proverbs 8:15-16; 14:35; 24:6), to the created order (adapted from von Rad 1972: 92).

Since the act-consequence relationship is established by God to serve Him, when we fear the consequences of our actions and so do what is right, it is already an (indirect) expression of fearing God. However, since the created order is impersonal, people may decide that they need not fear it when they are certain that no human being is watching and so think they can get away with the wrongdoing.

Instilling the Fear of God

To counter this scheme of fallen humanity, Proverbs not only teaches that “the eyes of the LORD are everywhere” to help instill the fear of God, but also teaches that the impersonal created order, though hav-

ing a life of its own, does not function independently of God. This is in line with Biblical monotheism. To begin with, God has to sustain the workings of the created order, which He created “in wisdom,” so that it continues to work as intended (Psalm 104:10-24; cf. Colossians 1:16-17; Hebrews 1:3).

In other words the eyes of God are also watching over the created order and its workings. And He not only sustains, but at times also adjusts and even supplements, the workings of the created order. In fact, to ensure that “You reap what you sow” works adequately in the context of fallen humanity, God had under the Noahic Covenant made a major adjustment to the created order by instituting formal government to punish evil and praise good (Proverbs 20:26; 24:21-22; 31:1-8; cf. Genesis 9:6; Romans 13:1-7).

For otherwise it cannot be said that, “The LORD works out everything for His purpose, even the wicked for the day of disaster. [And thus,] The LORD tears down the house of the proud But He hears the prayer of the righteous” (Proverbs 16:4; 15:25a, 29b). Paul puts it more bluntly: “Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap” (Galatians 6:7).

Furthermore, God not only watches “the ways of a man” but also “directs his steps”; even “The king’s heart is ... in the hand of the LORD; He turns it whichever ways He chooses” (Proverb 5:21a; 16:9b; 21:1). So all the more there is reason to fear Him and so be able to “Commit your works to the LORD, and your plans will be established” (Proverbs 16:3; cf. 3:5-7).

How then does God actually work in the world today to fulfill His purposes? Recall how God worked in fulfilling His purpose for Joseph to become the Prime Minister of Egypt (Chapter 8). He used *ordinary* means (through the jealousy of Joseph’s brothers and of Potiphar), *extraordinary* means (supernatural dreams to the two servants of Pharaoh and then to Pharaoh himself), and *extraordinary-ordinary* means (divinely aligned “coincidences” of ordinary events).

This means God ordinarily works in the world by sustaining “You reap what you sow,” which was built into the created order and later enhanced through the institution of formal government. By making ad-hoc adjustments to the workings of the created order through realigning ordinary events, God can specify exactly what the

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consequences will be as well as make them happen sooner than they otherwise would.

This is why God could prescribe exactly what would soon happen to David and his household as a consequence of his adultery with Bathsheba even though He would only work through the created order (Chapter 23). This case warns believers that, though God will forgive their wrongdoing when they repent in faith and thus their fellowship with God will be restored, they may still have to suffer some painful consequences because “You reap what you sow” is built into the created order.

Also, we have seen (in Chapter 27) how an uncanny chain of “co-incidences” of ordinary events in the Book of Esther led to the villain quite literally fulfilling “Whoever digs a (concealed) pit (for others) will (himself) fall into it” (Proverbs 26:27; see Esther 7:10). And, as in the case of Joseph, God may even supplement the workings of the created order with an extraordinary intervention.

This explains why “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the *knowledge of the Holy One* is understanding” (Proverbs 9:10). For since the workings of the created order are not independent of God, and can even be supplemented by Him, there is also the need to know God and how He works, in addition to knowing the created order and how it works. While the Wisdom Books pay special attention to the latter (but does not ignore the former), the Prophetic Books pay special attention to the former (see Jeremiah 9:23-24).

Biblical proverbial wisdom also helps to instill the fear of God by teaching prudence and discretion to prevent us from falling into circumstances where it would become difficult to fear God and keep His commandments. Thus Proverbs addresses seemingly non-moral matters, such as the indiscretion of laziness, which leads to poverty (Proverbs 6:6-11), because they do have outright moral consequences. This is clearly expressed in this prayer: “Give me neither poverty nor wealth; feed me with the food I need; otherwise, I may have too much and deny You and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God” (Proverbs 30:8b-9). And so unlike prophetic exhortation, proverbial wisdom addresses not just matters of justice and righteousness, but also those of prudence and discretion.

In other words, if we take the created order seriously, we will also take prudence and discretion seriously. And since it is God who delegated so much of the running of the world to the created order and will ensure that it fulfills its purpose, faith (in God) and prudence thus not only are compatible but can in fact be complementary. Thus Nehemiah, though he believed that “Our God will fight for us,” responded to the threats of the enemies with prudence by requiring his men to carry weapons while rebuilding the Jerusalem wall (Nehemiah 4:15-20; also discussed in Chapter 27).

So Biblical proverbial wisdom, because it is grounded in Creation and the Noahic Covenant and is thus fundamental to all humanity, was indeed integral to the life of believers under the Mosaic Covenant, and should also be to believers under the New Covenant.

Wisdom and God’s Commandments

Actually the very statement, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction,” (Proverbs 1:7) already implies that Biblical proverbial wisdom is an expression of Biblical monotheism. For it is the “fear of the LORD,” the God of Biblical monotheism, rather than the generic “fear of God,” that is the foundation of knowledge. Also this statement is placed immediately after the presentation of the purpose and goal of the Book of Proverbs—to teach knowledge and hence wisdom (Proverbs 1:2-6). So it is saying that the fear of the God of Biblical monotheism is needed to learn from the book.

Furthermore, the very claim that the fear of the LORD is the foundation (starting point) of knowledge implies that monotheism was already, and should be, presupposed as the starting point in the observation and interpretation of the created order. Hence Biblical proverbial wisdom is cast within a monotheistic mold.

Though Biblical proverbial wisdom is thus an expression of the monotheism revealed at Mount Sinai when God gave Israel the Ten Commandments, only the last six commandments are directly referred to in Proverbs: honoring parents (6:20; 15:20); murder (1:10-19); adultery (6:27-35); theft (11:1; 22:22-23); bearing false witness (12:17-22); covetousness (6:25; 12:12).

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This is evidently because proverbial wisdom is based on direct observation and interpretation of the created order. Human beings and how they should relate to one another (the last six commandments) are part of Creation and are thus governed by this observable created order. However, references to God and how we should relate to Him (the first three commandments) cannot be made based on direct observation of the created order because God is invisible and transcends Creation. Though the first three commandments are not referred to in Proverbs, they are still relevant to proverbial wisdom since God sustains and governs Creation. We saw that these commandments are given specifically because “I am the LORD your God” (Exodus 20:2; Deuteronomy 5:6). Hence one cannot really fear “the LORD” and break any of these commandments.

The Fourth (Sabbath) Commandment shows up in Proverbs only indirectly in terms of its observable economic and ecological implications. Commenting on Proverbs 27:23-27, Michael Fox (2009: 815) explains: “Providing food is an ongoing task and requires persistence and diligence, but the resources are renewable and the profit is great. This shows an awareness of an ecosystem.” And since this commandment is intended to curb covetousness, it is also represented in proverbs about greed (3:27-28; 15:27).

Thus insofar as the Sabbath Commandment is against exploiting human beings, animals and the earth to the detriment of their ability to sustain a healthy economy, it is also about obeying the physical dimension of the created order (see also 3:7-8; 17:22). Actually Hiram’s “wisdom” (technical skill) in working with bronze is based on his understanding and knowledge of the physical dimension of the created order, in his case, with respect to bronze.

We have seen (in Chapters 1 and 2) how the abuse of science (“knowledge”) and technology (“wisdom”) due to a lack of the fear of God has created the ecological crisis (for a succinct discussion on how the fear of God was foundational to even the birth of modern science, which “arose within a culture saturated with Christian faith” and “in no other,” see Pearcey and Thaxton 1994: 17-42).

In other words, the last seven commandments sum up how we live with the laws built into the created order, and one who disobeys them “runs against the very structure by which the world was made.”

The first three commandments sum up how we live with “the LORD,” and thus empower us to obey the last seven. Hence Biblical proverbial wisdom teaches us how to relate to every dimension of the created order for our own good.

Cultivating Knowledge and Wisdom

Proverbs teaches us to perceive (get to know) the created order and its laws not only directly, but also indirectly. Proverbs 1-9 and Proverbs 30-31 are a series of lectures expressed through proverbs, and they teach us primarily through the direct means, that is by understanding and practicing the content of the proverbs. It is like learning the vocabulary and grammar of a language by understanding and practicing what the textbook teaches about that language.

Proverbs 10-29 are anthologies of proverbs covering a wide variety of topics, and they teach us primarily through the indirect means. That is, just as a child can learn the vocabulary and grammar of a language indirectly by listening to a sufficient number and variety of sentences in that language, we can also learn the “vocabulary and grammar” of the created order indirectly by reading (with understanding) a sufficient number and variety of proverbs.

For taken together the proverbs “reflect on the anthropocentric [man-centered] and theocentric [God-centered] dimensions of the world to offer a fundamental moral vision that (re)constructs the addressee’s perception of reality and shapes his character” (Ansberry 2010: 125). The indirect means of acquiring this perception is particularly needed because knowledge of the created order and its laws, like our knowledge of the vocabulary and grammar of a language, is essentially “tacit knowledge.” It is knowledge that we may not even be aware of and yet have taken for granted. That is why, “we can know more than we can tell” (Polanyi 2009: 4). Such knowledge cannot be adequately acquired without indirect learning, which also includes associating with people who embody and live out Biblical proverbial wisdom (Proverbs 12:26; 13:20). However the direct means of learning is still needed to ensure accuracy in the indirect learning.

The “vocabulary and grammar” of the created order thus acquired will enable us to keep learning from our own observation and

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interpretation of the created order, and thus be better equipped to handle every situation in life, including those not directly addressed in Proverbs. Wisdom is skill in living in all kinds of situations, including what is unique to us. However all this is possible only when there is the fear of God, the foundation of knowledge. Without the fear of God we may not even learn from our own painful experiences, let alone learn from observing those of others.

Chapter 33

The Beginning of Love

Proverbs teaches skill in living in general. Song of Songs focuses on skill in living in a specific aspect of life—the exquisite “love” between husband and wife. This love is exquisite because it is beautiful as well as delicate, for due to fallen human nature it is easily “broken” though “reparable.” This is why wisdom is particularly needed here. Since the fear of God is the “beginning” or foundation of wisdom in general, it is also the foundation of wisdom in love. It will soon become clear why the fear of God is the foundation of love.

This kind of love is unique. Even the love between parent and child, though as strong and deep in terms of relational intimacy, is still of a different kind. For marital love is consummated through sexual intimacy, which is unnatural and forbidden between parent and child. So sexuality is integral to the love between husband and wife. We have seen that marriage is even defined by God Himself as a man and a woman becoming “one-flesh” (Genesis 2:24; see *The Suitable Helper* in Chapter 1). Thus marital love has a built-in sexual expression, which we call “sexual love,” a term that is particularly useful when we need to distinguish it from “sexual lust.”

The need to make this distinction is real because even marital sex may be based on lust rather than love. This is due to “the inability to

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[truly] love [even] the one you desire.... Some people throw away the possibility to have what they say they want most—sexual excitement *and* true love—because they find it hard to love the person they’re in lust with” (Resnick 2012: 11). So Song of Songs is all the more needed to supplement Proverbs because of the reality of sexual lust even in a marriage.

Celebration of Human Sexuality

Traditionally the Song has been understood as an allegory of the love between Yahweh (“the LORD”) and Israel (for the Jews), or the love between Jesus and the Church (for Christians). This allegorical interpretation has been rejected by most Biblical scholars, and replaced by a natural interpretation that reads the book plainly as a song about the love between a man and a woman. The discovery of ancient Egyptian love songs (see samples below) demonstrates that there was indeed a distinct literary genre in the Old Testament world that expresses the love between a man and a woman. We can therefore be confident that Song of Songs is *a love song that celebrates human sexuality in an explicit and erotic way*.

It *celebrates human sexuality*, but this is somewhat veiled in translation. For instance, right at the beginning of the Song we read, “May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your *lovmaking* [translated as ‘love’ in Bibles] is better than wine” (1:2). The Hebrew word translated here as “lovmaking” occurs with this meaning only eight times in the Old Testament, five of which are in Song of Songs itself (1:2, 4; 4:10a, 10b; 7:12; Proverbs 7:18a; Ezekiel 16:8; 23:17). Note that lovmaking is compared to intoxication (with wine), which is also the case in the Egyptian love songs (Simpson 1973: 311):

I kiss her,
her lips open,
and I am drunk
without a beer.

This brings us to a similar comparison in Proverbs, which confirms that the lovmaking that is “better than wine” in Song of Songs

is not limited to kissing: “And rejoice in the wife of your youth [and] let her breasts satisfy you at all times, be intoxicated always with her love [and not] be intoxicated with an adulteress, and embrace the bosom of an outsider” (Proverbs 5:18-20).

Another indication that the Song celebrates human sexuality is the occurrence of poems called *wasf* (Arabic word meaning “description”), in which the beauty of the body of the lover is sensually described through figurative speech (4:1-7; 5:10-16; 6:5-7; 7:1-9; also found in Egyptian love songs). Two of the poems even include “your two breasts” in the description (4:5; 7:3). And the term *wasf* was originally used to refer to traditional wedding songs of Syrian peasants similar to the four poems in the Song. These are “songs where the groom and the bride would describe one another’s physical beauty as a prelude to lovemaking” (Longman 2001: 140-41).

A book that celebrates human sexuality is not out of place in the Bible. For sexuality is not incompatible with spirituality. We have just seen that even Proverbs, which teaches how to live in the fear of the LORD, exhorts a man to celebrate sexual enjoyment with “the wife of your youth.” And it teaches that God, who created human sexuality, has so designed it that a (God-fearing) man is able to be so “intoxicated” with his wife that he does not even have appetite for adultery. This then protects him from violating the Eighth Commandment and thus from being destroyed because of it.

To ensure that all this happens, Proverbs on the one hand “disciplines” a “(male) child” to recognize the blessing of being a God-fearing man and the blight of being an adulterer. On the other hand it instructs him to recognize the blessing of marrying a God-fearing woman (Proverbs 31:10-31) and the blight of marrying one who is not (Proverbs 14:1; 25:24). And it gives the most appropriate warning in this regard: “Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain, but a woman who fears the LORD, she is to be praised” (Proverbs 31:30). Hence Proverbs already indicates that the fear of God is the foundation of love, which also means, as designed by God, spirituality is fundamental to sexuality.

Also, inherent in the reference, “the wife of your youth,” is the teaching that sexual enjoyment within marriage can last long after the honeymoon (in their youth), even after both have become grandpar-

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ents. Therefore it is only natural that there be a wisdom book that teaches a man and his wife how to be, and how to stay, in love. Hence a love song that celebrates human sexuality is entirely “in-place” in the Bible.

Song of Songs celebrates human sexuality *in an explicit and erotic way*, but it is neither vulgar nor obscene. This is achieved through the use of imageries to describe lovemaking. We have seen how intoxication with “wine” is used to describe the ecstasy involved in lovemaking. The word “vineyard” may refer to a literal vineyard or figuratively to the woman’s body (see 1:6; 8:11-12). Likewise the word “garden” is repeatedly used to refer to her body (for instance, 4:12). Descriptions of activities in the “garden” are therefore figurative descriptions of activities of lovemaking. This poetic way of describing sexual intercourse explicitly and erotically is also found in Egyptian love songs (Simpson 1973: 308-309):

I am your best girl:
I belong to you like an acre of land
which I have planted
with flowers and every sweet-smelling grass.
Pleasant is the channel through it
which your hand dug out
for refreshing ourselves with the breeze,
a happy place for walking
with your hand in my hand.

Are explicit and literal references to “breasts” in the Song (for instance, 4:5; cf. Proverbs 5:19) then obscene and vulgar? Some readers may feel uncomfortable, but it is only a matter of cultural sensitivity which is relative. Consider these lines from an Egyptian love song (Simpson 1973: 298):

Take then my breast:
for you its gift overflows.
Better indeed is one day in your arms ...
than a hundred thousand [anywhere] on earth.

There are writings in the Biblical world that are indeed vulgar and obscene by any standard. However, this Egyptian love song may still not be considered vulgar or obscene in the culture that produced it because the explicit and literal description of sexual activity here is relatively tame. In Song of Songs even a sexual description this mild would still be couched discreetly through imageries. Explicit and literal descriptions of lovemaking in the Song do not go beyond kissing.

The question then arises: Is there really a need at all to describe lovemaking in an explicit and erotic way? This was undoubtedly the main reason for the avoidance of the natural interpretation and the preference for the allegorical interpretation.

Explicit description (or depiction) of sex that is vulgar and obscene, as in pornography (which as a rule is not about sex within a happy marriage), may actually be repulsive rather than erotic (arouses sexual feelings). Even when erotic, it will be sexual lust rather than sexual love that is being aroused. Since even sex between husband and wife may still be a gratification of lust and not the consummation of love, we need an authoritative source that tastefully recreates the feeling of sexual love through poetry to distinguish it from sexual lust, in order to teach how to cultivate it in a marriage.

Is Song of Songs then for singles too? This may be debatable in a premodern, sexually conservative, culture. But in modernity, even teenagers can benefit from an exposure to what sexual love feels like, to counter the sexual lust that they have been exposed to. Unlike the feeling of sexual lust, the feeling of sexual love does not pressure one to gratify it immediately. “Lust can’t wait to get, whereas love can wait to give” (Kendall 2013: 211). For love prioritizes intimacy, not gratification. Thus one may “fall” into the temptations of sexual lust, but not into the “temptations” of sexual love. A single person who has had a feel of how exquisite sexual love is may make a commitment to wait, so as to “make-love” only in the context of marriage.

Anticipation of Sexual Intimacy

The Song has only two characters, supported by a Chorus (“Daughters of Jerusalem”): the man, referred to as King Solomon; and the woman, referred to as the Shulammitite (6:13). The man is depicted as

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the king as well as a shepherd. This is normal for this kind of literature—“pastoral love poetry” (Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman 1998: 806). Hence the “abrupt shifts in theme and a lover’s immediate persona [such as between king and shepherd] do not necessarily point to literary incoherence or multiplicity of characters” (Murphy 1990: 47). So the Song is not about a love triangle involving the king, the woman and her shepherd boyfriend.

It is a series of poems celebrating sexual intimacy between the two characters as husband and wife. Commentators who see premarital sex in the Song fail to, or do not, recognize the book as Hebrew Scripture. Daniel Estes (2010: 295) argues,

In fact, if the Song were to celebrate premarital sexual activity, it would fly in the face of the rest of the OT, in which such behaviour is proscribed. Schwab (2002: 132) observes rightly, “The attitude of the Hebrews towards virginity and marriage would prejudice a reader of the Song of Songs to see in it a celebration of wedded bliss, not of premarital sex.... The loss of virginity outside of marriage is not something that the Hebrews would have celebrated.”

And it is actually not difficult to read the Song as a celebration of wedded bliss, not of premarital sex. All it takes is the *willingness* to recognize that descriptions of sexual activity prior to the wedding scene (3:6-11) are expressions of anticipation and not descriptions of participation. After all the Song begins with an outright expression of anticipation (of the wedding night): “May he kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! ... Take me with you and let us hurry! The king *has brought* me into his chambers. We will rejoice in you and be glad, we will extol your lovemaking more than wine” (1:2-4). As will be explained below, the perfect tense, “has brought,” does not here describe something that has actually happened; like the expressions just before it (“May he ... Take me ... let us ...”), it is also an expression of desire and hence anticipation (cf. Barbiero 2011: 57).

Note that before any description of sexual activity begins (in 2:4), the Song describes poetically how the couple adore each other and how she longs for intimacy with him (1:5-2:3; cf. Estes 2010: 308-20).

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It would then be natural for expressions of this longing and thus of anticipation to follow.

Consider then the first description of sexual activity (prior to the wedding scene):

He has brought [perfect tense] me to the “house of wine” [place for (sexual) intoxication; “his chambers” in 1:4], and his *look* [usually translated ‘banner,’ something we *look* at] on me is (sexual) love. Sustain me with raisins, refresh me with apricots [both were considered aphrodisiacs], for I am sick with love. His left hand is under my head, and his right hand embraces me [a love-making position] (2:4-6; cf. Hess 2005: 78-79).

This is an elaboration of the above “perfect-tense” anticipation of the wedding night (1:2-4).

Further along we read: “Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn (to me), my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the split mountains” (2:17). The context leading up to this verse (2:8-16) indicates that it describes sexual activity and the “split mountains” refer to her breasts (Garrett 1993: 393-96). Though lovemaking is indeed described before the wedding,

It should be remembered, nevertheless, that Song of Songs is lyric poetry, and it must be read as such. It is not a historical narrative employing realistic description; rather, it uses poetic imagery to communicate its message through allusion. As poetry, it aims to re-create an experience in the reader rather than simply report the experience... [so that] the reader will vicariously enjoy what the characters in the book actually experienced (Estes 2005: 396).

This means not only is poetry more concerned with recreating feelings than with recounting facts, but it also has “poetic license” to describe what does not happen as though it does. This explains the perfect tense above. So the poetic descriptions of sexual activity before the wedding, unlike those after, may be intended to recreate in the reader the characters’ experience of longing for sexual intimacy, and not their experience of engaging in sexual relations (not even in

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their imagination, as this would mean fantasizing about something prohibited). Thus “sexual activities” that the characters “experience” before the wedding may actually be the feeling of anticipation, and not the realization, of sexual intimacy.

Consider what happens when we fail to recognize poetic license in Isaiah’s speech which quotes God saying that “I have appointed [perfect tense] watchmen” to keep reminding Him day and night, thus giving Him “no rest,” until He fulfills what He has promised (Isaiah 62:6-7; Keil and Delitzsch 1982c: 434, 437; Motyer 1993: 504-507 argues that the speaker is actually the Messiah, who in the context of Isaiah is God Himself). We will then read it woodenly as God confessing (through recounting facts) that He is an absent-minded compulsive procrastinator! So though expressed through the perfect tense, what is described did not actually happen, not even in the imagination (of God). God is actually reassuring His people (through recreating feelings) that He will not fail to fulfill what He has promised. So if sensitivity to poetic license is necessary even when reading a (prophetic) *speech*, how much more when reading a (wisdom) *song*?

Hence, “The [poetic] language in chapters 1-3, though it certainly expresses their intense longing for sexual intimacy [especially when they anticipate their wedding], does not require the consummation of their sexual relationship prior to their wedding night” (Estes 2010: 295). On the other hand recognizing that Song of Songs is Hebrew Scripture does require that no consummation happened then. In any case, compared to the description of lovemaking after the wedding scene, the language in chapters 1-3 gives the impression of describing the foreplay only, which serves perfectly the purpose of expressing the characters’ feelings of anticipation.

Thus Song of Songs, a celebration of sexual intimacy between husband and wife, can then be outlined as follows:

Before Wedding: Anticipation of Sexual Intimacy (1:2-3:5)

Wedding: Consummation of Sexual Intimacy (3:6-5:1)

After Wedding: Continuation of Sexual Intimacy (5:2-8:4)

Children’s Wedding: Retrospection on Sexual Intimacy (8:5-14)

Consummation of Sexual Intimacy

The wedding scene (3:6-11) marks the key turning point in the love relationship between the man and the woman. Just prior to this, we read a recurring dream of the woman in which she loses and finds her beloved and then would not let him go (3:1-4). It expresses her (perhaps unfounded) fear of losing her beloved as the wedding draws near, which shows how much she desires him and intimacy with him (cf. Genesis 3:16). While the focus here is relational intimacy, sexual intimacy is surely on the horizon (3:4; cf. 8:2-3, 5) as both come in the same package for a man and a woman who are looking forward to their wedding.

The first *wasf* (4:1-6) occurs (only) right after the wedding scene and is indeed a prelude to lovemaking. Following this *wasf* the man (groom) continues to praise the beauty of the woman and repeatedly (five times) calls her his “bride” (4:7-15). And he refers to her not only as a “garden,” with all its sexual connotations, but also as a “spring” (4:12; cf. 4:15), undoubtedly a parallel reference to her as a source of sexual intoxication (and satisfaction as well) to the man (cf. Proverbs 5:15-20).

It is significant that the groom refers to his bride as “a *locked* garden” and “a *sealed* spring” (4:12). Recognizing Song of Songs as Hebrew Scripture, this can only mean that as a “garden” and a “spring” she has so far been inaccessible, even to her beloved. For “The point is not that she is locked to all others but open to him. Rather, it is that she is as of yet still virginal and out of even his reach”; so now on their wedding night, by stressing how sexually inaccessible she has been, “He [indirectly] appeals to her to open herself to him” (Garrett and House 2004: 196).

So she gives the invitation: “Let my beloved come to his garden and eat its choicest fruits” (4:16). Consummation of the marriage and thus of sexual intimacy follows: “I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice, I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey, I have drunk my wine with my milk” (5:1ab). And the Chorus exclaims: “Eat, friends! Drink, be intoxicated, Oh lovers!” (5:1c).....

Continuation of Sexual Intimacy

This climax of the Song is followed by two extended passages on the continuation of sexual intimacy, which takes up most of the rest of the Song. The first passage highlights how exquisite (focus: delicate) love is (5:2-6:13). It begins with another dream in which the wife symbolically “loses” and cannot “find” her husband, and gets “beaten up” instead. The cause of her predicament—not physical separation but painful alienation—is friction in the marriage (whether mere misunderstanding or outright conflict) that led to disruption in both relational and sexual intimacy. This highlights how delicate love is, but broken love is reparable. So he is eventually “found”—joyful reconciliation and thus continuation of both relational and sexual intimacy (cf. Estes 2010: 367-71; 378-80; 388-90).

The second passage highlights how exquisite (focus: beautiful) love is (7:1-8:4). It begins with a *wasf* which contains “the most explicitly erotic” verses in the Song (Estes 2005: 429). Consider this description: “Your stature is like a palm tree, and your breasts are like its clusters. I said, ‘I will climb the palm tree and lay hold of its fruit.’ Oh may your breasts be like clusters of the vine, and the fragrance of your breath like apricots” (7:7-8).

The entire passage is summed up by the wife’s declaration: “I am my beloved’s, and his desire is for me” (7:10; cf. 2:16; 6:3). We have seen her strong desire for him and intimacy with him before the wedding (3:1-4). Now, as their love matures following painful alienation and joyful reconciliation, the focus is on his “desire” for her and intimacy with her.

Recall that the Hebrew word here for “desire” occurs only three times in the Old Testament. The first occurrence refers to Eve’s “desire” for *intimacy* with her husband despite the pain of childbirth, and even though because of sin there would be no marital oneness as he would “rule over” her (Genesis 3:16). The second refers to Sin’s “desire” for *control* over Cain, which in this case led to murder (Genesis 4:7-8). What then is the implication of the third use of the word here? “By electing to use this rare word, this verse in the Song is really redirecting the [application of the first] Genesis text and completely transforming it” (Lavoie 2000: 79; cited in Estes 2005: 432).

This means desire for intimacy is God's design for both husband and wife, to be reclaimed from the effects of sin through the fear of God. This then highlights how beautiful love is when the oneness God intends for husband and wife is reclaimed through fearing Him.

Retrospection on Sexual Intimacy

The Song concludes with retrospection on sexual intimacy. This final passage (8:5-14) begins with, "Who is this coming up from the wilderness?" (8:5a). It repeats verbatim the question that introduced the wedding scene (3:6). In both cases the "who" refers to the woman (Hess 2005: 109). There the "question" served as "a rhetorical device for an exclamation at her dramatic entrance on the [wedding] scene" (Estes 2010: 339; drawing on Bloch and Bloch 1995: 159). Here, its verbatim repetition serves as a rhetorical device to recall the wedding scene. In fact she is now "leaning on her beloved," which "may well be a charming picture of the couple in old age reminiscing about their journey together to intimacy" (Estes 2010: 407).

The description of sexual intimacy that follows (8:5b), in which she describes how she "awakened (sexually)" her husband, is thus a recollection of their (first) lovemaking on their wedding night. In our outline of Song of Songs this section is labelled *Children's Wedding* because it is natural for a couple still in love to reminisce about their own wedding and journey to intimacy on the wedding night of their children. And she recalls that when they consummated their marriage, she passionately expressed her desire:

Place me as a seal over your heart, as a seal on your arm, for love is strong as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave; its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the LORD. Many waters cannot extinguish love, nor can floods drown it. If a man were to give all his wealth for love, it would be utterly scorned (8:6-7).

In the ancient world a seal is used to identify its owner. Therefore,

A seal is a highly valued, precious item from which the bearer would never want to part. The Shulammite wishes to be perma-

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nently over his heart, the seat of his affections, and on his arm, the source of his strength. Just as death does not let go of those it has claimed, so the lovers possess each other forever” (Davidson 2007: 592).

This commitment has seen them through painful alienation and joyful reconciliation as their inextinguishable love matures in their journey together to intimacy.

Before the Song ends with the finale, there is a flashback further into the woman’s younger days (8:8-12). Her brothers were concerned whether she would behave as a “wall” (sexually inaccessible) or as a “door” (sexually accessible) before marriage (Estes 2010: 411-13). And she assured them that she would be a “wall,” and we saw that she did remain a “locked garden” and a “sealed spring” until her wedding night. The unexpected inclusion of this story in the reminiscence of their journey to intimacy implies that chastity is crucial to future sexual intimacy with one’s spouse, especially for the woman.

Finally, in the finale (8:13-14) we hear the man saying to his beloved wife: “let me hear it (your voice).” This means even in old age “he finds delight in conversing with the woman he loves.” He still longs for relational intimacy with his wife. And she responds: “Come quickly, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag on the mountains of spices” (cf. “on the split mountains” in 2:17). This is an invitation to sexual intimacy as it “synthesizes [and repeats] the language [and sexual imageries] of 2:17 and 4:10 [where ‘spice’ parallels ‘wine’]” (Estes 2010: 417).

It does not feel like a finale unless we recognize its implication: “Human love knows no definitive consummation, no absolute fulfillment. Loving relationships are never complete; they are always ongoing, always reaching for more. Regardless of the quality or frequency of lovemaking, there is always a measure of yearning present” (Bergant 2001: 105; cited in Estes 2010: 418).

Celebrating Sexual Intimacy

How then is this kind of love nurtured, and this kind of intimacy cultivated? In other words, How is human sexuality celebrated?

Human sexuality is celebrated in the context of an *abiding commitment*, which means, a secure marriage. This is clear from our exposition of the Song. Insofar as God Himself defines marriage as a man and woman becoming “one flesh,” in His design, there is no such thing as pre-marital or extra-marital sex. All sex is marital. Song of Songs has shown how important it is to observe God’s created order in this regard. Not surprisingly, it has been reported, “A University of Chicago survey of 3,432 Americans ages 18 through 59 found that monogamous married couples reported the highest sexual satisfaction, while singles and marrieds who have multiple partners registered the lowest” (Shalit 1999: 171).

There is a conspicuous refrain in the Song of Songs that unifies the Song: “Do not arouse or awaken love until it pleases” (2:7; 3:5; 8:4). Every occurrence of this refrain follows a description of lovemaking (we have looked at 2:4-6 and 3:4; 8:2 is even more explicit than 3:4, while 8:3 repeats 2:6 verbatim). Hence the “love” that is aroused or awakened refers to sexual love and its consummation. As a matter of fact, the word “love” can even be used in parallel with the word for “lovemaking”: “Come, let us drink our fill of *lovemaking* until morning; let us delight ourselves with *sexual relations* [literally, *loves*]” (Proverbs 7:18).

The refrain thus sounds the warning that “The joys of physical love and the arousal to that ecstasy are not to be toyed with.... The full appreciation of the joys of physical love can happen only when love comes at the appropriate time with the partner that love chooses” (Hess 2005: 82-83). This is to ensure that sexual intimacy is the consummation of *marital* love. So the first two occurrences are in the context of anticipation of sexual intimacy to warn against consummation before marriage.

The third occurrence, which is introduced and worded (in the Hebrew) differently (cf. Longman 2001: 205-206), is in the context of celebrating the maturation of sexual intimacy within marriage. And it is followed immediately with the reminiscence about the wedding night (8:5-7), when the woman “awakened” (same Hebrew word as in the refrain) her husband for the first time. They thus experienced the intoxication of sexual love to the full as well as the joys of its consummation at the appropriate time with the partner “it pleases.”

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Hence the repetition of the refrain here confirms, based on experience, the wisdom of heeding the warning.

Therefore human sexuality is also celebrated in the context of *legitimate arousal*. In fact much exposure to illegitimate sexual arousal (sexual lust) can weaken a man's physical response to subsequent sexual stimulation and his enjoyment of sex. In the extreme case of addiction to Internet pornography, he can even lose his capacity to have sex (see Wilson 2014, which also provides proven answers on how to reverse the addiction and its effects).

Since sexual intimacy is the consummation of marital *love*, human sexuality is further celebrated in the context of *mutual adoration*. This is so evident throughout the Song that it needs no further comment. The Song focusses on expressing how beautiful marital love is without suppressing how delicate it is. For it recognizes the times it will be broken, resulting in painful alienation, and thus will need repair, resulting in joyful reconciliation. The capacity for making repairs assumes the willingness to accept non-moral imperfections and to forgive moral transgressions of each other. This requires the commitment to obey God in loving one's [most intimate] neighbor as oneself. It is due to the lack of mutual acceptance and forgiveness that married couples, who obviously adored each other on their wedding day, begin to hate each other after the honeymoon.

The three contexts for celebrating sexual intimacy—abiding commitment, legitimate arousal and mutual adoration—involve observing moral, social as well as physical laws built into God's created order (cf. Proverbs 30:19; Longman 2001: 49). Without the fear of God, we are not likely to commit ourselves to observe them, and to repent whenever we fail to do so. The fear of God is thus indeed the beginning of love.

Chapter 34

The Meaning of Life

Biblical wisdom can be practical: How to live life, which deals with the means to successful living. We have seen that Proverbs addresses practical wisdom in general while Song of Songs addresses practical wisdom in one delicate aspect of life—sexuality. Biblical wisdom can also be philosophical: How to live with life, which deals with the meaning of life. We will see that the Book of Ecclesiastes addresses the meaning of life in general while the Book of Job addresses the meaning of life in one intricate aspect of life—suffering.

Ecclesiastes is a persuasive speech. The implied, even if not actual, speaker is Solomon (1:1, 12), who has the “credentials” to say with authority all that is said in the speech. The expressed purpose of the speech is to persuade its audience to “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:13a). Hence it aims at instilling the fear of God and thus promoting a God-fearing way of life as taught in not only Proverbs and Song of Songs, but also the rest of the Bible.

We will begin with an exposition of the basic argument of this profound speech before looking at how it addresses the question of the meaning of life.

Encountering the Realities of Life

The speech proper, which takes up most of the twelve chapters of the book, begins and ends with the somber declaration, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity!” (1:2; 12:8). This is the theme of the speech. The speech argues that in light of the theme, “The end [conclusion] of the matter, (when) all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments, for this is (the essence of) every person” (12:13).

Why is it that because “all is vanity” (theme), we are to “fear God and keep His commandments” (conclusion)? Ecclesiastes is a speech, not a treatise; the logical flow of the argument is thus not necessarily presented linearly. When this is recognized, the logical connections between “All is vanity” and “Fear God” can be readily discerned.

The Hebrew word translated “vanity” literally means “breath” (Isaiah 57:13) or “vapor,” that is, condensed breath (Proverbs 21:6). Just as condensed breath is transitory, the word is often used figuratively to refer to something fleeting, which is the case in a number of contexts in Ecclesiastes (3:19; 6:12; 7:15; 9:9; 11:10).

However in the context of the theme of the speech, the figurative meaning takes on the further nuance of “vanity.” For the theme is also expressed as, “What profit is there?” (1:3; 3:9; 5:16; 6:11). In fact the opening declaration—literally, “Vapor of vapors, all is vapor!” (1:2)—is the expected answer to the rhetorical question, “What profit is there? [No profit!]” (1:3). Hence “All is vapor (transitory)” in this context means “All is vanity (profitless).” As James Crenshaw (1987: 35) puts it, “This unforgettable refrain unifies the entire book: from first to last nothing profits those who walk under the sun.”

The Certainty of Death

This is because the theme is about the worth of temporal things in light of the certainty of death. For the opening declaration, “All is vapor” (1:2), is followed by a poem which makes vivid the idea that though “one generation goes [death] and one generation comes [birth] ... there is nothing new [no net gain or profit] under the sun” (1:4-9). And the closing declaration (12:8) that “All is vapor” follows a poem which makes vivid the reality of old age leading to death (12:2-7). So since we can take nothing with us when we die, every-

thing we work for in this world is transitory like vapor, and thus ultimately profitless or worthless (5:15-16; cf. 2:13-16). In fact life itself is transitory like vapor to begin with (6:12; cf. Psalm 144:4). In other words, in view of death, “all is vanity and a pursuit of wind, and there is no profit under the sun” (2:11; cf. 1:3).

The phrase “under the sun,” used twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Bible, refers to this temporal world as opposed to the netherworld (see especially 4:15, where “the living” are described as “those who walk under the sun”; and 9:5-6, where “the dead” are said to “have no longer a share in all that is done under the sun”; cf. Seow 1997: 104-106). Hence there is no (ultimate) profit in this (temporal) world. It is thus futile for people to pursue temporal things as though the reality were otherwise.

Therefore in view of the reality that “All is vanity,” it does not make sense (is meaningless) to pursue the things of this world and in the process fail to enjoy what we already have (4:4-8). Hence the most sensible (meaningful) thing to do is to enjoy our life (2:24-26; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 6:6; 7:14; 8:15; 9:9; 11:7-10). But to truly enjoy our life, we must avoid not only physical pain but also emotional anguish (11:10), so as to have a relatively care-free disposition (5:20). For how can we enjoy our life when we are full of cares?

Now even covetousness—violation of the Tenth Commandment—in and by itself already robs us of the carefreeness needed to enjoy our life (5:10; 6:7, 9). For a covetous heart is a restless heart. How much more when it also leads to cheating, stealing, adultery or even murder? In other words, because “All is vanity,” the most meaningful thing to do in life is to fear God and keep His commandments.

The Uncertainties of Life

When the theme expressed as “What profit is there?” is repeated for the first time (3:9), it sums up a poem with fourteen pairs of opposites which highlights not only the certainty of death but also the uncertainties of life: “There is ... a time to be born, and a time to die ... a time to weep, and a time to laugh ... a time for war, and a time for peace” (3:1-8). The pairs of opposites show that what we gain in a positive experience (“a time for peace”) may be lost in a negative

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experience (“a time for war”). And life is so uncertain that we may even lose everything we have before we die, and we may even die before we grow old. Thus “All is vanity” is to be viewed in light of not only the certainty of death but also the uncertainties of life. So this somber reality is relevant to even a young person in good health.

Since death and uncertainties are sovereignly appointed by God (3:1, 11), there is another logical connection between “All is vanity” and “Fear God,” and it also involves carefreeness and thus enjoyment of life. For “God so works that people should fear Him” (3:14b). This means, the certainty of death and the uncertainties of life, which result in “All is vanity,” are designed by God to goad us (12:11) to fear Him and keep His commandments (12:13).

The certainty of death and the uncertainties of life have this goading effect because they burden us with cares that can only be relieved by trusting in a God who is watching over us. And this God must be all-powerful and thus in control of everything that happens (3:1, 11) as well as be just and fair and thus will not pervert justice (3:17, 12:14). For only then can we have the assurance that no bad things can happen to us unless God allows it. And when He allows it, we have the assurance that it is for a just (and thus meaningful) purpose. The New Testament even assures believers that “all things work together for good to those who love God, who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28). Also in all circumstances God’s grace is sufficient for them (2 Corinthians 12:9) so that they can bear with whatever that might happen to them (Philippians 4:13). Hence they can feel secure about the uncertain future and thus be carefree.

However to be able to trust in such a God, we must first wholeheartedly believe that He exists (cf. Hebrews 11:6). And when we wholeheartedly believe in the existence of a God who is all-powerful and will not pervert justice, and that He is *watching* (over) *us*, we will fear Him—keep His commandments even when no one (except Him) is watching us (cf. Job 37:23-24). Otherwise we are living as though He does not even exist; how then can we trust in Him and feel secure? Thus the uncertain future goads us to trust in God and to fear Him. But why has God designed the world in this manner? Why is it necessary to “fear God and keep His commandments”?

The Certainty of Judgment

Two reasons are given in the speech. Firstly, “this is every man” (literal translation of 12:13b). The “this” refers to “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:13a). But “this is every man” makes no sense in English. The construction of this expression is similar to that of “I am prayer” (Psalm 109:4). According to Michael Fox (1999: 362), “The effect of this construction seems to be an intensification of the equation: Not only am I prayerful, I am prayer itself” (cf. Goldingay 2008: 279). Similarly, “this is every man” means that “*this*—the fear of God and obedience to his commandments—is the substance ... of every person” (Fox 1999: 362; cf. Enns 2004: 136).

So “this”—fear God and keep His commandments—is the essence of humanity, the reason for human existence and thus the purpose of human life. This leads to the second reason why we need to fear God and keep His commandments: “For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil” (12:14). This judgment, based on God’s commandments, covers “every deed” ever done, even “every hidden thing” (cf. Romans 2:16) that is “good” (cf. 2 Corinthians 5:10). And it is declared after a poem on impending death (12:2-7). It has to refer at least partly, if not solely, to “a judgment after death” (Ginsburg 1861: 478).

Hence it will involve the final judgment at the end of history revealed in the Book of Daniel: “Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some [the wise and righteous] to everlasting life, while others to shame and everlasting contempt” (12:2; cf. Isaiah 66:22-24; Revelation 20:11-21:8). So *the end of life in this world is not the end of the whole story*. Since “there is not a [wise and] righteous man on earth who (continually) does good and never sins” (7:20), this judgment takes into account God’s forgiveness of sins for repentant believers under the Mosaic Covenant then, and now under the New Covenant. Otherwise no one “shall awake ... to everlasting life.”

Experiencing the Meaning of Life

Turning now to the question of the meaning of life, note that the speech is the product of an investigation into human life based on personal experiences (2:1-23) and general observations (for instance,

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4:1-16). And since Ecclesiastes is Scripture, like Biblical proverbial wisdom, monotheistic revelation would have informed and shaped the interpretation of the experiences and observations as well as supplemented the composition of the speech. This assumption is corroborated when we see how the profound insights of this speech uncannily address the question of not only the meaning of life but also the meaning of history in the most satisfying way. In fact 12:9-11 claims that wisdom teaching like this speech is “given by one Shepherd,” which for this reason all the more can only refer to the God of Israel (cf. DeRouchie 2011: 12-15; Whybray 1989: 172).

The investigation itself is “to inquire and to explore by wisdom everything that has been done under the heavens” (1:12). It is thus a comprehensive philosophical investigation to understand what human life everywhere in this world is all about. And this is “a grievous preoccupation that God has given to the children of man with which to be preoccupied” (1:13; cf. 3:10). Since not all “children of man,” but only some philosophers, would be preoccupied with such an investigation, it is actually an expression of a more basic God-given preoccupation that affects all humanity: the “relentless quest for meaning” propelled by the innate drive to “make sense of our world” (McGrath 2002: 11, 13).

In his book, *The Unheard Cry for Meaning*, renowned psychiatrist Viktor Frankl (1978: 31) attests, “Man is always reaching out for meaning, always setting out on his search for meaning.” His idea that, “Man’s search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life” (Frankl 1984: 121), has developed into a flourishing meaning-oriented approach to psychology that involves “empirical research on meaning of life and its vital role in well-being, resilience, and psychotherapy” (Wong 2012: xxvii).

The quest for the meaning of life is “a grievous preoccupation” because people are looking for it in the wrong places; a comprehensive philosophical investigation to find it will only end in “much grief” and “increasing pain” (1:12-18). The most common means people use, usually unconsciously, to express the grievous preoccupation is through the pursuit of pleasure and leisure (2:1-11), or of wealth and success (2:12-23), which may include power and popularity (4:13-16), or a combination of these. All these laborious pursuits

are found to be futile in terms of finding the meaning of life. No matter how one expresses the preoccupation, sooner or later one realizes the grievous reality about human existence and earthly experience. And one will then have to come to terms with the inevitability of vanity in this world.

What then is the meaning of life and how does one experience it? We will begin with answering the second part of the question. For the thrust of Ecclesiastes is to teach us how to meet the two key conditions for experiencing the meaning of life.

Fulfilling the Purpose of Life

When the question “What is the meaning of life?” is asked, it usually means, “What is the purpose of life?” It is a common human experience that our temporal life makes sense (has meaning) only if and when there is a worthwhile purpose to live for. This key condition is affirmed by even atheist philosopher Paul Edwards (2005) in his classic essay on the meaning and value of human life.

Ecclesiastes teaches *the*, not just *any*, worthwhile purpose to live for—fear God and keep His commandments. It is *the* purpose of life because we have seen that it is God’s purpose for humanity, and that one day God will judge humanity on that basis. It is the most *worthwhile* because of the eternal consequences of that judgment. And it is not difficult to see that fearing God and keeping His commandments is actually the essence to fulfilling God’s purpose for humanity expressed in terms of the Creation Mandate: to build a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and thus consistent with His will. People living according to *any* “worthwhile” purpose that is short of *the* worthwhile purpose may experience some measure of meaning in life, but it is not as meaningful as the meaning of life (Tan 2016: 271).

Even in material terms, fearing God and keeping His commandments matters as it enables us to be carefree and thus come to terms with the reality that “All is vanity” through enjoying our life. Consider what happens when we fail to come to terms with this reality. Fox (1989: 31) translates the theme of Ecclesiastes as, “Everything is absurd,” and explains why: “In other words, ‘toil’ may be futile, but *the fact that* toil is futile is absurd” (his own emphasis). So he recognizes

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that the Hebrew word he translates as “absurd” (when applied to toil) in and of itself does not mean “absurd,” but rather “futile” or profitless. However *the fact that* toil is profitless evokes the response that it is absurd.

Why is there such a response? Because the reality that (in view of death) toil is profitless is not acceptable to people who put their hopes in this world, which means most people living in modernity. They thus have a *pessimistic* response to the reality that “All is vanity” because they are unable to come to terms with it. People living in modernity, especially in somber moments, do find life meaningless if not absurd. In fact, translating the theme as “Everything is meaningless” strikes a responsive chord in the heart of most people.

Ecclesiastes however teaches us to have a *realistic* response to the somber reality—enjoy our life through fearing God and keeping His commandments. This is as far as an Old Testament book can take us.

The New Testament teaches that there is such a thing as “laying up treasures in Heaven” by living for Christ (Matthew 6:19-21). This requires one to overcome the pressure to “lay up treasures on earth” (pursue temporal things), which in modernity is very difficult to resist. It requires a radical conviction concerning the vanity of temporal things that will set one free to “lay up treasures in Heaven.”

Henry Martyn, a nineteenth century missionary known for “forsaking all for Christ” (Henry 2003), once prayed: “May I have Christ here with me in the world; not substituting imagination in the place of faith; but seeing outward things as they really are, and thus obtaining a radical conviction of their vanity” (Sargent 1868: 227-28; cited in Bridges 1960: 7). Ecclesiastes is God’s answer to this prayer. Hence to people like Henry Martyn, the reality that “All is vanity” is most meaningful! Therefore an *optimistic* response to this somber reality, in addition to the realistic one, is also possible. Translating the theme as “Everything is meaningless (or absurd),” though it speaks to most people in modernity, preempts these two meaningful responses.

Perceiving Coherence in Life

Besides having a worthwhile purpose, there is another key condition for experiencing the meaning of life. As philosopher Keith Ward

(2000: 22) puts it, “When people complain that life is meaningless, they often mean that they cannot see how the events that happen to them fit into any overall pattern. To see the meaning of a human life would be to see how its various elements fit into a unique, complex, and integrated pattern.” Ecclesiastes confirms that even a comprehensive philosophical investigation *in and by itself* will not find “the key that will unify the whole of life” (Wright 1972: 149).

In other words, to experience the meaning of life not only must we have a truly worthwhile purpose to live for, but we must also be able to perceive how the different aspects of life, including the painful ones, cohere with one another and with that overall purpose. And Ecclesiastes (together with Job)—informed, shaped and supplemented by monotheistic revelation “given by one Shepherd”—provides the most satisfying teaching on how to meet this condition of perceiving coherence in life.

Every experience in temporal life, whether positive or negative, is represented in the poem that highlights the certainty of death and the uncertainties of life (3:1-8). For what is named in each of the fourteen pairs of opposites represents a range of events. For example, “a time to weep” refers not only to weeping itself, but also to the different painful events that make us cry. And “a time to laugh” includes not just laughing, but also all sorts of events that cause us to rejoice. Also, as already noted, the poem shows that what is gained in a positive experience can be lost in a corresponding negative experience. Even if not, everything gained since birth will be eventually lost in death. Hence everything is ultimately profitless (3:9).

Thus every aspect of life coheres with one another resulting in “All is vanity.” Ecclesiastes teaches that the most sensible (consistent and thus coherent) response to “All is vanity” (theme of the speech) is to enjoy our life through cultivating a carefree disposition by fearing God and keeping His commandments (conclusion of the speech). Therefore (contra Wright 1972: 140) God has already provided the key to perceive how every aspect of life coheres with one another as well as with the worthwhile purpose of life: fear God and keep His commandments.

Furthermore Ecclesiastes also addresses head-on the thorny issue of undeserved suffering, which we saw was already recognized in

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Proverbs. Life is so uncertain that often “You reap what you sow” may seem to have failed, for even the righteous may suffer the consequences of the wicked (7:15; 8:14; cf. Job 1-2). And it is difficult to perceive how undeserved suffering coheres with any worthwhile purpose of life. This requires special attention.

The teaching that “God so works that people should fear Him” (3:14b) does apply specifically to undeserved suffering. This means God allows undeserved suffering so that humanity would (truly) fear Him. Thus undeserved suffering does cohere with God’s purpose for humanity. But Ecclesiastes by itself does not enable us to explain why the reality of undeserved suffering is needed to cause people to truly fear God. For that we need to wait till we come to Job (Chapter 35). So a complete teaching on perceiving coherence is still pending.

Ecclesiastes does however teach how to respond sensibly to the uncertainties of life, including the thorny issue of undeserved suffering. Mid-way through the speech, after summarizing the theme and sub-themes (6:10-12), the speaker begins the next half on how to respond to uncertainties of life with an anthology of proverbs relevant to the matter (7:1-14). He is indirectly saying that in view of inevitable uncertainties, we need to live by proverbial wisdom, which we saw describes the *likely* consequences to our chosen way of life—“You reap what you sow.” This is the most sensible or consistent response. For if bad things can already happen to us no matter how we live, we will increase the likelihood of painful experiences if our chosen way of life by itself will likely bring painful consequences. The speech then moves on to focus on undeserved suffering (7:15-8:17), which is most often the consequence of human wickedness inherent in fallen humanity (7:29), before addressing how to thus live prudently in the social, political as well as economic contexts (9:1-11:6).

The first half of the speech focuses on being carefree by recognizing *divine sovereignty*. But being carefree does not mean being careless, for bad things can happen to even good people. So the second half focuses on being careful (but not full of cares) by exercising *human prudence* (7:11-12; 8:5-6; 9:10-11:6). Hence Ecclesiastes teaches how to live with the Biblical paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility (see Chapter 24). Biblical wisdom thus has no rival when it comes to helping us perceive coherence in life.

Coming back to undeserved suffering, since “You reap what you sow” is not an ironclad formula, it is not wise to go to the extreme of strenuously trying to be righteous to attain prosperity and avoid adversity (7:15-16) and in the process fail to enjoy our life (8:14-15). On the other hand, it is also not wise to go to the other extreme of allowing our inherent wickedness (7:20) to go unchecked and thus increase the likelihood of disaster (7:17). Living by proverbial wisdom out of a genuine fear of God will help to avoid either extreme (7:18). Thus the teaching on how to respond to the uncertainties of life in general applies specifically to undeserved suffering as well.

To sum up, Ecclesiastes teaches us how to live sensibly and consistently, and thus coherently, in (realistic) response to “All is vanity,” and so experience the meaning of life.

Experiencing the Meaning of History

We have so far only considered the two key conditions—having a worthwhile purpose and perceiving coherence—for experiencing the meaning of life and how both are met in “fear God and keep His commandments.” But we have not actually answered the question, “What is the meaning of life?” That is, What is life really all about? And this involves making sense of our life taken as a whole, from birth to death, not just making sense of it in terms of the different aspects of life, which is what we have done so far. Is fearing God and keeping His commandments still the answer?

Our life taken as a whole is one extended story-shaped event that is part of a very much larger story we call history: “A generation goes and a generation comes, yet the world remains as ever” (1:4). To answer the above questions we need to consider the meaning or significance of our individual live-story (from birth to death) as an event. And “To ask about the meaning or significance of an event is to ask how it contributed to the conclusion of the episode [or story, of which the event is a part]” (Polkinghorne 1988: 6). This is why the meaning or significance (if any) of a scene in a movie depends on how the movie ends. In fact the focus of Ecclesiastes is on the meaning or significance of events in our life in view of how our life ends in this world; the answer turns out to be, “All is vanity.” But since

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death in this world is not the end of the whole story, “All is vanity” is not the final verdict on the meaning of one’s life; for that we need to wait till the end of history.

Contributing to Purpose and Goal of History

In other words, the meaning of life is found in how our individual life-story contributes to the purpose as well as to the goal of human history. And needless to add, as far as Ecclesiastes is concerned, “human history” is the history of the world as presented in the Bible—from the creation of the present universe (Genesis 1-2) to the (re)creation of the New Heavens and the New Earth (Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21-22). In fact the speaker assumes this history as a backdrop to his speech. For he alludes to the *beginning* of the world and the Fall of humanity as taught in Genesis 1-3: “God made (hu)man(ity) upright, but they have sought out many schemes” (7:29). And we saw that he also alludes to God’s final judgment of humanity at the *end* of history as revealed in Daniel 12. In fact he uses this judgment as a basis for exhorting his audience to “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:13b-14).

Since Ecclesiastes teaches that “God so works [in history] that people should fear Him” (3:14b), the *purpose* of history is so that people of all nations would fear Him and keep His commandments (cf. Matthew 28:18-20). And we have seen how this purpose has been and will be worked out in history through God’s fulfilling the Creation Mandate and the various covenants (see further the chapters on the New Covenant in Part VII and the Postscript). So by fearing God and keeping His commandments, our life-story coheres with and thus contributes *passively* to the purpose of history. And if we seek to help others to also fear God and keep His commandments, our life-story contributes *actively* to the purpose of history.

We have also seen that the *goal* of history is the establishment of the New Heavens and the New Earth, “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13; cf. Revelation 21:27). This means, when the goal of history is reached, God’s purpose for humanity to fear Him and thus become righteous through keeping His commandments will be perfectly accomplished. Therefore by fearing God and keeping

His commandments, our life-story also contributes *passively* to the goal of history. And our life-story likewise contributes *actively* to the goal of history if we seek to help others to also fear God and keep His commandments.

Hence, the admonition “fear God and keep His commandments” is the key to how our life-story contributes, whether actively or passively, to both the purpose as well as the goal of history. Obviously a life-story that contributes not only passively but also actively to the purpose and goal of history is more meaningful than one that contributes only passively. And one that does not even contribute passively (does not fear God) is out-of-sync with both the created order (and so suffer temporal consequences; see Chapter 32) as well as the flow of history (and so suffer eternal consequences). Thus it does not make sense (is meaningless) for a life-story to disregard this admonition. Hence the admonition is not just about how to experience the meaning of life; it also expresses the very meaning of life itself. No wonder, to “fear God and keep His commandments” is the essence of every human being. It is what humanity is really all about.

Now the purpose and the goal of history together answer the question, What is history all about? Thus they constitute the meaning of history (cf. Löwith 1949: 5-6; Nash 1998: 38-39). In other words, the meaning of life is intertwined with the meaning of history. And “fear God and keep His commandments” is indispensable to experiencing not only the meaning of life but also the meaning of history.

Experiencing a Sense of Closure to History

The meaning of history and thus of life taught in the Old Testament is the most satisfying to the human heart. For like human life, human history is a story-shaped narrative. And “the *ending* of a narrative, or the presence of *closure*, is especially important to [the understanding] of the narrative *as a whole*.... [However a] narrative can end without closure. Perhaps it ends in a way that is unsatisfying, and thus the sense of closure we seek fails to obtain” (Seachris 2009: 11, 22). This means, to be meaningful, not only must history have an ending, but the ending must also bring a satisfying or meaningful closure to human life in this world.

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Now the reality in this world is such “that there are righteous people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the wicked, and there are wicked people to whom it happens according to the deeds of the righteous” (8:14; cf. 7:15). Even blatant injustice perpetrated by the wicked may not seem to be corrected at the ending of their life in this world: “Thereupon I saw the wicked brought to the grave, and they proceeded from a holy place; and they were praised in the city where they had done such [unjust] things” (8:10; first half of verse follows Seow 1997: 284). So if death in this world is the end of the whole story, then human life in this world lacks closure.

Thus the human heart cries out for a final accounting beyond this world for all that is done in this world. Then what kind of ending to history will bring the most satisfying closure to how human beings treat or mistreat one another, other than that taught in the Bible? Unless in the end righteousness is vindicated and wickedness incriminated, our God-given sense of justice is violated. If history is like a movie that ends with the villain vanquishing the hero, or even with the hero perishing together with the villain, life does not make sense. Only with an assurance of a final and just accounting as taught in the Bible can we have the assurance that every individual life-story will eventually find a closure after death that is the most satisfying and thus most meaningful. Only then do we know the true significance or meaning of what we do, or fail to do, in this temporal world.

However since no one can perfectly fear God and keep His commandments, as “there is not a righteous man on earth who (continually) does good and never sins” (7:20), no “righteous person” can have the hope that he “shall awake” at the end of history “to everlasting life” in the New Heavens and the New Earth unless he has the assurance of God’s forgiveness of his sins (now provided for through Christ under the New Covenant). Without this hope, he has no assurance that even his own individual life-story will eventually find a closure after death that is the most satisfying and meaningful. So no matter how much he seeks to fear God and keep His commandments and help others do the same, without this hope his experience of the meaning of life is incomplete and thus is still not as satisfying as it could and should be.

Chapter 35

The Meaning of Suffering

Suffering as a consequence of not fearing God and keeping His commandments is deserved: “You reap what you sow” (Galatians 6:7), as taught in the Book of Proverbs. Fearing God and keeping His commandments is God’s purpose for humanity (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Therefore deserved suffering is the consequence of violating the very purpose of human life. And Ecclesiastes also teaches that God so works, such as instituting deserved suffering in this world, specifically so that humanity should fear Him and thus keep His commandments (3:14). This means deserved suffering is actually intended to keep us from violating God’s purpose for humanity. In other words, deserved suffering fits coherently into the purpose of life, and is therefore never meaningless.

Problem of Undeserved Suffering

However, Ecclesiastes recognizes that a righteous person may suffer the consequences of an unrighteous person (8:14). This “innocent” or undeserved suffering is meaningless unless it also fits coherently into the purpose of life. Does it? The teaching that God *so works* that humanity should fear Him includes God permitting undeserved suf-

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fering in this world. This means that even undeserved suffering somehow fits coherently into God's purpose for humanity. The question is, How?

This is where the Book of Job comes in. This wisdom book is divided into three distinct parts: prologue (1:1-2:13), dialogue (3:1-42:6), and epilogue (42:7-17). The prologue and epilogue, written in prose, spell out that Job suffered tragic calamities—he lost his children, his wealth and even his health—not because he had sinned. It was a classic case of undeserved suffering, and an extreme one. The dialogue, written in poetry, must be read in this light.

Constituting the bulk of the book, the dialogue consists mostly of three rounds of debates between Job and each of his three friends respectively: Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar. It ends in a deadlock—Zophar does not even enter the third round—because while Job's three friends unrelentingly argue that Job must have sinned to suffer such calamities and must thus repent, Job keeps on defending his innocence, unyieldingly insisting that his suffering is undeserved. We as readers know from the prologue and epilogue that Job's three friends are all wrong. Essentially they stubbornly believe that the proverb "You reap what you sow" is a rigid mechanical formula that admits no exception, not even in the case of Job, who is reputed for his exceptional righteousness.

Humanity Has No Answer

According to Eliphaz, he has come to this belief based on his (selective) observation of human experience (see 4:7-9). Bildad has (blindly) accepted it as an authoritative time-tested tradition (see 8:8-10). As for Zophar, his belief is based on (sheer) assumption that the formula has been in operation without exception since the creation of humanity (see 20:4-5). Though he admits that the wicked may prosper for a "brief moment," it is too brief and momentary to suggest that there are really exceptions (Hartley 1988: 304).

Job on his part has been patient, despite his physical and emotional pains. He even rebukes his wife for telling him to curse God and die, asking her rhetorically, "Shall we accept good from God and not accept adversity?" (2:10). However Job himself also believes in

“You reap what you sow” and so can neither understand nor accept that God, whom he firmly believes knows that he is indeed innocent, would treat him so unjustly, as though he has sinned to the extent of deserving such extreme suffering. Thus he also suffers philosophical turmoil, which then leads to spiritual torment, because the God whom he worships has apparently become his enemy. So he curses the day of his birth (3:1).

His suffering is severely aggravated by his three friends, who heartlessly keep accusing him of having sinned and being stubbornly unrepentant. In response, Job protests not only against them (see for example, 6:24-30), but also against God even when he is supposed to be responding to his friends (see for example, 10:1-7). In defending his innocence, Job even argues that “You reap what you sow” does not always work by highlighting that the wicked do prosper (see for example, 21:27-34). However, even in the midst of protesting against God for His apparent injustice against him, Job still has faith in Him (see for example, 19:25-27). “His genuine faith is grounded in his conviction that God is just and merciful despite the evidence to the contrary” (Hartley 1988: 372).

God Has to Answer

Following the deadlock in the three rounds of debate, we find a beautiful hymn on wisdom which points the way to breaking this deadlock (Job 28). For the hymn, though it recognizes human ingenuity as expressed in the ability to mine metals even from the depths of the earth, denies that humanity has the ability to do the same in finding wisdom. This is an apt commentary on the lack of wisdom in the three rounds of debate, which produced so much heat and no light. The hymn then affirms that only “God understands the way (to wisdom), and it is He who knows where it is found” (28:23), that is, wisdom belongs to God alone (see the words of Job in 12:13, which means, the hymn could have come from Job; otherwise it is the work of the narrator; cf. Andersen 1976: 223-24). It ends with a supposed word from God to humanity on how to attain wisdom: “Look! The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding” (28:28). In other words, “The attainment of Wisdom is not

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a quest but a response [fear God]” (Garrett 1993: 106, drawing on Kidner 1964: 77).

In this context, the affirmation that wisdom belongs to God alone implies that humanity does not independently have the wisdom needed to unravel the mystery of undeserved suffering, and thus even the long-drawn debate between Job and his three friends cannot break the deadlock. The disproportionate space given to this debate serves to drive home this truth as well as warn against similar debates. Philosophers using human reason alone (unaided by Scripture) to argue that in view of undeserved suffering God does not exist, as well as those who in the same manner defend the existence of God, will come to a similar deadlock. And the affirmation here that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom alerts us that undeserved suffering indeed has something to do with God’s purpose for humanity—fearing God and keeping His commandments.

All this means the hymn on wisdom is saying that only God has the wisdom needed to break the deadlock. Thus it is not surprising that the plot moves forward with a final impassioned speech by Job in which he brings to the climax his demand for God to respond in order to break the deadlock (Job 29-31). In the speech Job confidently swears an oath of innocence disavowing a long and impressive list of sins (31:1-34, 38-40), and then makes an audacious challenge to God to respond to him (31:35-37).

Prelude to God’s Answer

Then unexpectedly, Elihu, a younger man who evidently has been there all along, speaks up in response to the deadlock and to Job’s challenge to God (Job 32-37). He avoids, but does not break, the deadlock by not assuming that Job had sinned prior to his calamities (cf. Hartley 1988: 485-86). He implies that Job’s calamities are intended to discipline Job to prevent him from committing a sin so serious that it brings a consequence as severe as premature death (33:12-22). He then warns Job that, while he may not have sinned prior to his calamities, he has now sinned in challenging God (34:5-9). Hence he exhorts Job to repent (34:31-33) to avoid divine retribution (36:10-14).

Chapter 35: *The Meaning of Suffering*

Earlier Eliphaz had mentioned in passing the disciplinary role of suffering (5:17-18). But since he had assumed that Job had sinned, he implied that Job was disciplined for his sin, a view that Elihu does not support. As a general principle, Elihu's view that God allows undeserved suffering to save us from experiencing a more severe (deserved) suffering is a sensible answer to the question of undeserved suffering (cf. Hebrews 5:8; 12:4-11). Such undeserved suffering does fit coherently into God's purpose for humanity as it disciplines (or trains) us to fear God and keep His commandments. However it is questionable whether it can be applied to Job's case. For Job's suffering is already so severe that it looks more like the deserved suffering to be prevented than the undeserved suffering intended to train him.

Nevertheless Elihu's four speeches do prepare Job for God's two speeches that follow. Since he does not accuse Job of having sinned prior to his calamities, Job is likely to be open to his repeated accusation that in challenging God, Job has spoken out of ignorance (34:35; 35:16), from which Job needs to repent. And as we shall see, this is exactly God's verdict, in response to which Job eventually repents. Elihu also repeatedly defends God's justice (34:10-15; 35:5-15). In his final speech, after demonstrating God's exaltedness and majesty by alluding to God's wisdom and power displayed in His creation, Elihu concludes correctly that it is specifically because the all-wise and all-powerful God does not violate justice that humanity fears Him (36:24-37:24). This anticipates God's own speeches where God defends His justice by also demonstrating to Job His wisdom and His power as displayed in His creation. The fact that Elihu, a human being, was able to anticipate God's response implies that God's answer to Job would strike a responsive chord in human hearts.

God's Answer to Sufferer

When God finally speaks "out of the tempest" (38:1), what He says is "not what Job has asked for. He has requested either a bill of indictment, with specific charges which he is prepared to answer, or else a verdict from his Judge which he confidently expects to be a declaration of his innocence. Neither is forthcoming" (Andersen 1976: 268). This does not mean that what God says does not answer to Job's

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needs. In fact, as we shall see, God's two speeches are exactly what Job, or any believer of God in his situation, needs to hear.

God Is All-wise

God begins with announcing His verdict that Job has spoken out of ignorance by asking rhetorically, "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" (38:2). He then supports His verdict by first overwhelming Job with a sense of His incomparable wisdom. He asks Job, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?" and challenges him to "Tell me, if you have understanding," before asking him a series of questions on the design and working of the earth and the cosmos, all of which Job cannot answer (38:4-38). Since Job already believes it was God who created and designed the working of the earth and the cosmos, it would have powerfully dawned on him how extremely ignorant he is compared to God.

Before Job can respond, God asks him another series of questions, all of which Job also cannot answer (38:39-39:30). This time it concerns the design and working of the animal world. Suffice it to look at this one: "Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars, spreading its wings toward the south?" (39:26). It refers not only to the instinctive ability of the hawk to fly but also to its "migratory instinct" to fly south (Clines 2011: 1131). Unlike scientists today, Job may not even understand the aerodynamics involved in how birds can fly. But even if he does, God's question goes deeper: "Did you implant the instinctive 'understanding' in the hawk so that it 'knows' to fly and to migrate south?" (paraphrase of 39:26). Engineers today can design aeroplanes that not only can fly, but also "knows" how to autopilot itself. However before the invention of aeroplanes, even modern people, let alone people as ancient as Job, could not believe this was possible. So this series of questions would have again overwhelmed Job with a sense of God's incomparable wisdom.

Recall the confession of Bill Gates (1996: 228) that even the most advanced computer software that human beings have ever written is "far, far" inferior to the genetic code in human DNA, which even atheist Richard Dawkins (1996: 17) acknowledges is "uncannily computerlike." If Job were Gates, God would have asked a different

question like, “Is it by your understanding that a human embryo grows into a foetus and eventually into a human being who can write computer software?” In other words, “Did you design and implant the genetic code, or ‘understanding,’ into a human embryo so that it ‘knows’ to develop into a human being who can write computer software?” If even the best human mind cannot write a computer software that rivals the human DNA, it is mind-boggling that evolutionists like Dawkins can believe that the computer-like genetic code in human DNA could have evolved mindlessly.

After the second series of questions, God invites Job to respond: “Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who accuses God answer Him” (40:2). Job has spoken against God as though he fully understood the design and working of God’s created world. Recognizing by now how little he actually knows, and so realizing that he has spoken against God out of ignorance, Job confesses that he is too insignificant to even reply to God and thus chooses not to answer Him (40:3-5). Job’s response falls short of repenting of his earlier presumptuousness in challenging God.

God Is All-powerful

God then continues with another speech to open Job’s eyes to how presumptuous Job was. In order to justify his innocence, Job had effectively accused God of unjustly violating “You reap what you sow” and thus perpetrated injustice against him. God’s question, “Will you annul my judgment (literally, justice)?” (40:8),

means that he has correctly heard Job’s speeches as not merely a demand for personal vindication but, more far-reaching, a critique of God’s government of the world and as demanding an alternative world-order. Now Job has had two separate criticisms to make of the world-order he experiences: the one is that a righteous man like himself may suffer unjustly; the other is that the wicked, who ought to be punished, often prosper. Yahweh [the LORD] takes up only the latter point here, but no doubt it stands also for the former (Clines 2011: 1180).

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So having convinced Job that he does not know enough to speak the way he did, God begins this speech with asking Job whether it is just for Job to question His justice in order to justify himself. Since Job has spoken as though he could do a better job than God in governing the world, especially in implementing “You reap what you sow,” God asks Job rhetorically whether he, like God, has the power needed to govern the world (40:9).

To drive home the point God further asks Job to act as though he were given the responsibility to govern the world, and to do so according to his sense of justice, which God has supposedly violated (40:10-14). So God asks Job to implement his vision of “You reap what you sow” and punish wickedness accordingly. And God adds that if Job could indeed do this, He would praise Job and Job would then have the power to save himself, and thus would have no need for God to save him. Since Job has no doubt that only God has the power to govern the world and only He can save him, it must have dawned painfully on him how powerless he is, and so how much he needs God on his side and thus needs to repent from having spoken presumptuously against Him.

To further help Job come to terms with his undeserved suffering, God continues to overwhelm Job with a sense of His incomparable power. God highlights two powerful animals, labelled as Behemoth (40:15-24) and Leviathan (41:1-34), both of which God says are under His control but are beyond human ability to control. Scholars are divided whether these refer to real or mythical animals, or both (Hartley 1988: 521-22). If real, the closest match would be the hippopotamus and the crocodile respectively. If mythical, they symbolize cosmic powers. More specifically, it has been argued that, “Behemoth and Leviathan, while containing elements drawn from physical characteristics and habits of animals, [are] embodiments of the powers of death and evil [respectively]” (Fyall 2002: 128-29).

In either case, what God says would overwhelm Job with a sense of God’s incomparable power, more so if the intended references are to mythical monsters. And there are valid reasons to understand that this may indeed be the case. Firstly, we know that within Job’s vocabulary Leviathan may refer to the mythical sea-monster (3:8; cf. Isaiah 27:1) also known to him as Rahab (26:12-13; cf. Isaiah 51:9-10,

where it refers to the power embodied in Egypt as the evil oppressor of the Israelites). Secondly, God began this speech with asking whether Job had power like God so that he could rule the world and punish wickedness according to his sense of justice. This amounts to asking whether Job had the power to control the cosmic forces symbolized by Behemoth (Death) and Leviathan (Evil).

Sufferer Accepts God's Answer

Having thus been overwhelmed by a sense of God's incomparable wisdom and then of God's incomparable power, Job confesses that he is the one "that hides counsel without knowledge" and "have uttered that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know" (42:3). God's speaking to Job out of the tempest, though it neither answers what Job has requested nor explains why Job suffers, leads Job to testify, "I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You" (42:5). That is, Job has an existential encounter with God that meets the deepest longing of his heart—to "see" the living God with his own eyes (19:25-27; Hartley 1988: 537). So he gladly retracts what he had said and repents of his ignorant presumptuousness (42:6).

Hence what a believer of God in Job's situation really needs is not to have his questions answered or even understand why he is suffering, but to have his heart filled with the sense that the God he worships is both all-powerful and all-wise. For when he has such an existential assurance that God, who does not violate justice, is not only all-power (He can deliver him) but also all-wise (He knows what He is doing), he is able to leave his situation to God and bear patiently with the suffering.

God's Answer to Atheists

Actually the twin idea that God is all-powerful and all-wise is also all one needs to respond intellectually to the popular atheistic argument that the existence of evil, and thus of innocent suffering, proves that the God of the Bible does not exist. For it is argued that, if God is all-powerful, He *could* remove evil and prevent innocent suffering;

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and if He is all-loving, He *would* remove evil and prevent innocent suffering. And since evil and innocent suffering exist, either God is not all-powerful (so He could not remove evil even if He would), or He is not all-loving (He would not remove evil even if He could), or even both. This then proves, to the atheist, that an all-powerful and all-loving God does not exist.

This argument, which uses a simplistic formula that dictates how God, if He exists, should behave, is like that of Job's three friends. For they also used a simplistic formula that dictates how God should behave: He must implement rigidly and mechanically the proverb "You reap what you sow," which then means innocent suffering does not exist. Thus they also conjectured a God that can easily be shown from actual human experience to be non-existent. In response to their foolish argument, God said to Eliphaz, "My wrath is kindled against you and your two friends, for you have not spoken of Me what is right" (42:7). But God was merciful to forgive them when they repented (42:8-9).

Unlike Elihu, and contrary to his warning of divine retribution, God did not actually rebuke Job for expressing how he felt about Him, let alone punish Job for doing so. God gently but firmly exposed Job's ignorance to relieve him of his philosophical turmoil and spiritual torment. God even said that Job, unlike his three friends, had in fact spoken "of Me what is right" (42:7). For "Job has been genuinely groping for the truth, but the friends have spoken falsely in their attempt to defend God ... [and] their counsel would lead Job away from the true worship of Yahweh" (Hartley 1988: 539).

Hence like the psalms of lament where the psalmist questions God over undeserved suffering (such as Psalm 44, where the psalmist even accuses God of sleeping on the job), the Book of Job teaches that believers of God who experience severe undeserved suffering are allowed, in fact encouraged, to express to God how they actually feel about Him when they are going through the ordeal. They can then draw strength and comfort from God's response to Job and get to know God better. We have seen how questioning God over undeserved suffering is consistent with the monotheism of the Bible as it involves affirming that God is in absolute control of whatever happens in the universe.

It is significant that God filled Job's heart with the sense that He is all-powerful and *all-wise*, instead of the sense that He is all-powerful and *all-loving*. What we consider as the "loving" thing to do, like parents doting on their children, may sometimes not be the wise thing to do (cf. Proverbs 13:24). In fact it takes more love to do what is wise when what is wise is an "unloving" thing to do. Recall that when Joseph did not do the "loving" thing of revealing himself to his brothers when they came to him to buy food, but instead accused them of being spies in order to do the wise thing of testing them, "he turned away from them and wept" (Genesis 42:24).

Therefore, when it comes to the question of evil or innocent suffering, we can be confused when we think of God as being all-powerful and all-loving, instead of God being all-powerful and all-wise. The question then arises: What is so wise about God allowing undeserved suffering?

Reason for Undeserved Suffering

This brings us back to the teaching of Ecclesiastes 3:14—"God so works that people should fear Him"—and to the prologue of Job, where we read about Satan's rhetorical question: "Does Job fear God for nothing?" (Job 1:9). In other words, Satan was making the accusation that Job or any human being would fear God not because of who God is ("for nothing"), but only because of what God gives ("for something"). So God allowed Job to suffer to demonstrate that Job did indeed fear God for nothing, which means it is possible for a human being to fear God solely for who God is and not for what God gives. And the example of Job has been a tremendous blessing to believers.

Satan's accusation and Job's experience show that to truly fear God one has to fear God for nothing. When people "fear" God for something, it is no longer the fear of God. Ecclesiastes 3:14 should therefore be understood as, "God so works that people should fear Him (*for nothing*)."

Imagine what happens if God guarantees that everyone who fears Him will always be blessed in temporal and material terms. Given fallen human nature there will then be few, if any, who truly fears God. So God has to do the wise though painful thing of

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allowing some righteous to suffer and some wicked to prosper to avoid tempting people to “fear” God for temporal and material gains. We have seen (in Chapter 34) that Scripture even uses the reality of undeserved suffering to warn against going to the extreme of strenuously trying to be wise and righteous to attain prosperity and avoid adversity (Ecclesiastes 7:15-16), and in the process fail to enjoy our life (Ecclesiastes 8:14-15).

However the fact that eventually Job was blessed not only spiritually (with a close encounter with God), but also temporally and materially (42:10-17), affirms that “You reap what you sow” indeed works, especially in the long run, though not necessarily in the short term (cf. Ecclesiastes 8:12-14). A righteous God could not have created and designed a world that is otherwise. There is thus motivation to fear God, but not temptation to do so for selfish gains.

Hence Job’s undeserved suffering also fits coherently into God’s purpose for humanity: Fear God (for nothing) and keep His commandments. Therefore even such suffering is not meaningless. The fact that apart from the psalms of lament, Scripture has an entire book in Job that meets the needs of believers who experience undeserved suffering shows how much God cares for them. It takes an all-loving God to do what is wise but painful for the welfare of humanity—to allow even extreme undeserved suffering in some people. Why then did God not explain to Job the reason he suffered? When someone is still suffering, telling him the truth actually aggravates the problem: “But why me?” It takes an all-wise God to respond to Job exactly the way He did.

Hence the Bible does not conceal, but in fact reveals, that the God we are called to believe in is a God who uses undeserved suffering for His purpose (for the ultimate good of humanity). So the reality of undeserved suffering is consistent with the truthfulness of the Bible. The real question then is whether to accept or reject such a God. If we reject God, it does not mean undeserved suffering will go away. And much undeserved suffering is caused by human wickedness unrestrained by the fear of God. So when a culture rejects God and does not fear Him, undeserved suffering will only increase.

For as we have seen in our exposition on Religion (Chapter 18), (innate) religion (fear of God) and morality (pressure of conscience)

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are inseparable and are thus fundamental to restrain wickedness. As Indian sociologist Shankar Rao (1995: 445) puts it, “Laws, customs, conventions and fashions, etc., are not the only means of social control. Overriding them all, are *religion* and *morality* which formulate and shape them all. They are not only the most influential forces of social control, but also *the most effective guides of human behaviour.*”

In other words, rejecting God only means rejecting the very source of strength and comfort in times of suffering, whether deserved or not, when we can turn to no one else except God. Job, even when he was still vehemently accusing God of blatant injustice against him, was fully aware of this truth.

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Part VII

The New Covenant

Isaiah

Jeremiah

Lamentations

Ezekiel

Daniel

Hosea

Joel

Amos

Obadiah

Jonah

Micah

Nahum

Habakkuk

Zephaniah

Zechariah 9-14

Chapter 36

The Prophetic Ministry

In our exposition on Covenant and Revelation (Chapter 19) we discussed the origin and nature of the prophetic institution that began with Moses. And the prophets were called to “the task of prophetic ministry,” which is, “to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us” (Brueggemann 2001: 3). Some of the prophets left behind inspired writings—the Prophetic Books—that have become Scripture. They are called the writing prophets and their inspired writings continue to do the task of prophetic ministry today.

The writing prophets can be classified as pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic, depending on when they ministered with respect to the (Babylonian) Exile. Most of the Prophetic Books are pre-exilic; Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel are exilic; Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi are post-exilic; it is debatable whether Joel is pre- or post-exilic.

While the focus of the ministry of the prophets was the nation of Israel, they did address foreign nations. Our concern here is to consider the basic teachings of the Prophetic Books taken as a whole, which contribute significantly to our understanding of the meaning of history. We shall see more clearly how God works in history through the covenants to accomplish the *purpose* of history—that Is-

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rael and the nations would fear God and keep His commandments—so as to achieve the *goal* of history to establish, in perfect fulfillment of the Creation Mandate, a global civilization perfectly in fellowship with God and perfectly consistent with His will.

The task of prophetic ministry may be accomplished through miracles but mostly through prophecy, which may be accompanied by symbolic actions. A prophecy is an inspired speech based on direct revelation from God, usually received through dreams and visions (Numbers 12:6). It may be forth-telling (speaking forth God's word into a current situation), or fore-telling (predicting or revealing the future). And it is often expressed through poetry to appeal to the imagination and emotion to shape consciousness and perception; even when expressed through prose, it is often filled with imageries for the same reason.

The most important consciousness and perception the prophets seek to nurture, nourish and evoke is summarized as follows:

Thus says the LORD, “Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not the rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises unfailing love, justice and righteousness in the earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the LORD (Jeremiah 9:23-24).

To really perceive who God is and what He delights in, we need to clearly perceive what God hates, which is sin expressed through injustice and unrighteousness. This is because the more we perceive how deeply God hates these things and at the same time perceive how readily He forgives sinners who repent, the more we perceive the breadth and depth of God's unfailing love, expressed through His mercy and grace.

The prophets were particularly suited for the task of prophetic ministry. According to Jewish Biblical scholar Abraham Heschel (2001), “The significance of Israel's prophets lies not only in what they said but also in what they were” (xxi). They were people who were exceptionally sensitive to evil:

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The things that horrified the prophets are even now daily occurrences all over the world. ... To us a single act of injustice—cheating in business, exploitation of the poor—is slight; to the prophets, a disaster. To us injustice is injurious to the welfare of the people; to the prophets it is a deathblow to existence; to us, an episode; to them, a catastrophe, a threat to the world (3-4).

For instance, Ezekiel considers an injustice like charging interest on a loan to a needy neighbor as “bloodshed” (Ezekiel 22:1-7, 12). Is this a case of exaggeration through poetic license? Ezekiel is here speaking in prose and not poetry to begin with. “What seems to be exaggeration is often only a deeper penetration, for the prophets see the world from the point of view of God, as transcendent, not immanent truth” (17). Thus the prophets see as the Holy God sees.

They themselves have this consciousness and perception of injustice because “the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet’s reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos” (31). Thus they feel as God feels and so speak as God speaks. So “In speaking, the prophet reveals God. This is the marvel of a prophet’s work: in his words, *the invisible God becomes audible*” (27).

To enable the prophets to see and feel as God does, God often gave them unusual experiences. When Isaiah was called, he was given a spectacular glimpse of God’s holiness so that he could see how sinful he and God’s people were (Isaiah 6:1-7). And consider how God often made the prophets carry their message in and through their own lives. The most conspicuous was the experience of Hosea. He was commanded to marry and love a prostitute and suffered the consequent heart-breaks to enable him to feel what it was like for God to love and be “married” to idolatrous (spiritually adulterous) Israel (Hosea 1-3). He was called to be gracious to the prostitute so as to experience what it was like for God to be gracious to Israel.

Jeremiah was commanded not to marry nor have children so that he could feel the imminence of the Exile (Jeremiah 16:1-4), and yet he was commanded to buy a field, which would soon become worthless in view of the Exile (Jeremiah 32:6-15). What he was asked to do

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made sense only in view of God's promised Restoration. So buying the field required him to develop the conviction that God would keep His promise to bring His people back to the Promise Land. Most tragically, God took Ezekiel's wife from him (she died) as a sign that God had taken the Jerusalem Temple from His people (it was destroyed). This was to enable Ezekiel to experience how much God's idolatrous people loved (and trusted in) the Temple instead of God Himself, so he could see and feel why God had to allow the Temple to be destroyed (Ezekiel 24:15-27).

Thus through the words of the prophets we hear the voice of the living God. As a result we sense not only how God feels about injustice but also how He feels for the victims (and so seeks justice for them) as well as for the perpetrators (and so extends mercy to them).

The basic message of the prophets can be summed up into two categories: *condemnation* through forth-telling by enforcing the Mosaic Covenant (in the case of Israel) as well as the Noahic Covenant (in the case of the nations), and *consolation* through fore-telling of future blessings (the New Covenant) on the basis of the Abrahamic and Davidic Covenants (for both Israel and the nations). Though our focus is on prophetic consolation, we also need to consider prophetic condemnation as both contribute to the meaning of history.

Chapter 37

Enforcing the Mosaic Covenant

All the prophets before the Exile, except Jonah, prophesied within the Promised Land and mostly with reference to God's people. When the king or the nation violated the Mosaic Law and refused to repent, the prophets through their inspired preaching would hold them accountable to the Mosaic Covenant (2 Kings 17:13). The condemnation not only expressed how God felt about His people and their disobedience but also often involved reminding them of the consequence God had warned them before through Moses: they would be exiled for refusing to repent even after experiencing a series of lesser calamities intended to goad them into doing so. This condemnation climaxed into an outright prediction of exile.

Reasons for the Exile

Even a century before the Exile, God had expressed through Isaiah His utter disappointment with His people by contrasting them with an ox and a donkey, which are considered dumb animals (Isaiah 1:2-3). For unlike these animals, which recognize their owner as master and respond accordingly, God's people rebelled against God their Master. This shows that even an ox or a donkey was smarter than

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them, for unlike these animals they failed to understand that their welfare depended entirely on God.

This disappointment climaxed when God described the rebellious nation as a vineyard planted with the best seeds on the best land and given the best care but yet produced worthless grapes (Isaiah 5:1-7). Nothing can be done to such a vineyard except to destroy it: “Therefore My people go into exile for the lack of knowledge” (Isaiah 5:13). It was by the mercy of God that the nation lasted another century.

Unrepentant Violation of Covenant

Israel rebelled against God by violating the Ten Commandments (and refusing to repent), which means, they failed to love God with all their heart and did not love their neighbor as themselves.

The most conspicuous expression of this lack of love for God was their worshipping foreign gods in the form of idols. Not long before the Exile God expressed through Jeremiah how sorry He felt for them: “They have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, to hew for themselves cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (Jeremiah 2:13). They forsook God, the spring of fresh water, for idols that they themselves made, which proved to be broken cisterns that could not even hold stale water. What a pitiful contrast!

The most conspicuous expression of the lack of love for their neighbor is that the rulers, called to uphold justice, were oppressing the people. How God felt about injustice is best expressed through Micah, a contemporary of Isaiah. He considers unjust rulers as horrifying as cannibals: “who tear off their skin from them, and their flesh from their bones, ... and chop them up as flesh for the pot, and as meat in a cauldron” (Micah 3:2-3). Equating injustice with mere bloodshed (as in Ezekiel 22:1-7, 12) was thus relatively mild.

Idolatrous Trust in Temple

Though they had forsaken God for the idols and were unrepentant in perpetrating injustice, they had not, and would not, forsake the Temple and its services. They would even trust in the very existence of the Temple in their midst, even apart from its services, to save them from disaster (Jeremiah 7:4). And God explicitly said through Isaiah

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that He rejected even their sacrifices offered at the Temple because they were unrepentant, insisting that they should first “Learn to do good; seek justice, relieve the oppressed; defend the orphan, plead for the widow” (Isaiah 1:10-17; cf. Amos 5:21-24).

In other words they treated the Temple and its services like they did the idols as though these had intrinsic efficacy or magical powers to serve their interests. Hence in practice they had become polytheists. God warned them that He would allow them to remain in the Promised Land only if they repented from their idolatry and injustice, and that otherwise He would even do to the Temple (destroy it) like what He did to the Tabernacle at Shiloh because of the wickedness of the people then (Jeremiah 7:5-15).

Exile: Reaction of False Prophets

However even after King Jehoiachin and most of the leaders had already been taken into exile to Babylon in 597 BC, there were false prophets both in Jerusalem and Babylon assuring the people that the disaster God had warned them through the (true) prophets would not happen; it was even predicted that those taken into exile to Babylon would return within two years (Jeremiah 28:1-4; cf. 29:15-23).

So Jeremiah wrote a letter to those already exiled telling them that they would be there for seventy years, adding that when the Exile had done its redemptive work on them, they would repent and seek God with “all your heart,” which means, seek God and God only (Jeremiah 29:10-14), and not God plus the foreign gods (1 Samuel 7:3).

For only then would God be found by them and would bring them back from exile and restore their fortunes. For when they sought God plus the idols, the “God” that they had in mind was not the all-wise, all-powerful and all-loving God. If their faith had been in the all-sufficient God, they would have seen no need to worship anything else. This was why their worship of “God” was in practice actually worship of the Temple and its services. The Exile was thus needed to change their consciousness and perception of God to give them a future and a hope. Hence God’s plan, though it involved calamity, was not for calamity but for welfare (Jeremiah 29:11).

Exile: Reactions of True Prophets

However it was not easy for God's people to accept the Exile. Even the prophet Habakkuk, who had complained about God not punishing His people for committing "violence" (injustice), objected to God's plan of using the Babylonians (a more wicked people) to discipline His people (a less wicked people). In His response God said, "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Habakkuk 2:4b). This statement, as it stands, is pregnant with meaning and can be understood in different ways in different contexts.

In its original context it implies that Habakkuk and those like him who were righteous should continue to trust in God and so submit to Him and His plan, recognizing that God is all-wise (He will not use such a plan unless necessary), all-powerful (His plan will accomplish His purpose), as well as all-loving (His purpose is for welfare). As for Habakkuk he submitted to God and His will by confessing that though the impending disaster should come, "Yet I will exult in the LORD, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation" (Habakkuk 3:18).

However, the fact that the Hebrew word translated "faith" in Habakkuk 2:4b can also mean "faithfulness" reminds us that faith (trust) in God and faithfulness to God (righteousness) are inseparable. That is why God could reckon Abraham's faith as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Hence the statement, "the righteous shall live by his faith," can mean that one who lives by faith is already righteous—a righteousness that comes *from* faith (Galatians 3:6, 11). Or it can mean one who is righteous will then live by faith—a righteousness that leads *to* faith (Habakkuk 2:4b; Hebrews 10:38). It can even mean a combination of both—a righteousness that is "*from* faith *to* faith" (Romans 1:17; cf. Robertson 1990: 181-83).

Ezekiel was one of those who were taken into exile to Babylon together with King Jehoiachin. While Jeremiah was ministering in Jerusalem until the eventual fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple in 586 BC, Ezekiel was ministering to fellow exiles in Babylon. He was preparing the exiles for the fall of Jerusalem as well as the destruction of the Temple. For God gave Ezekiel a remarkable vision to be shared with the exiles. God revealed to him the blatant idolatry shamelessly practiced within the Temple itself, and how the

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Glory of God would depart from the Temple as a consequence (Ezekiel 8:1-6; 9:3; 10:18-19; 11:22-23).

The vision graphically signaled that the Temple was going to be destroyed—God had abandoned it and thus would not defend it. And when the Temple was destroyed after Jerusalem fell, it exposed the fallacy of their polytheistic trust in the Temple as a talisman—without God’s presence the Temple was just another building, which had no intrinsic power to protect itself, let alone the city.

The Famine of the Word

There were at least two occasions when elders came to Ezekiel to inquire from God, but God refused to be inquired by them because they had “set up idols in their heart” (Ezekiel 14:1-3; 20:1-3). God had said that He would be found by them only when they searched for Him with “all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13), which could not be the case when they had idols in their heart. They were still rebellious, “who have eyes to see but do not see, ears to hear but do not hear” (Ezekiel 12:2). The redemptive work of the Exile on their heart might not even have begun as Jerusalem had not yet fallen and the Temple was not yet destroyed.

The experience of these elders was a form of the “famine ... of the hearing of the words of the LORD” that Amos prophesied in reference to the impending fall of the Northern Kingdom to the Assyrians and the people exiled to Assyria (Amos 8:11). When people need to make sense of their life, especially after a tragic experience, they need to hear from a truly authoritative source. They need to hear from God; people who do not believe in God will have to turn to the best human opinions available.

There are two forms of famine of the hearing of God’s word. One is that God’s word is no longer available. This was the case of the exiles from the Northern Kingdom in Assyria (cf. Niehaus 1992: 475-76). When God’s word was available to them, they rejected it. In exile they finally realized with regret that they needed, and so longed to hear, God’s word, but they could not find it anymore (Amos 8:12; cf. Lamentations 2:9). The very idea of “famine” implies that God’s word is as essential to the soul as physical food is to the body.

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The other form of famine is the case of the elders in Babylon. God's word was still available to them, however they had "ears to hear but do not hear." Ezekiel, God's prophet in Babylon, not only was available to them to inquire of God, but was in fact already preaching God's word to them. But due to the idols in their heart, it was not what they wanted to hear and so they did not hear it. Instead they tried in vain to inquire of God hoping to hear what they wanted to hear. This made them vulnerable to the preaching of the false prophets, and hence the need for Jeremiah's letter to them. A variation to this form of famine today is when the Bible is available but it is either ignored or abused, and hence the soul remains impoverished.

Exile: Reactions of God's People

The basic problem of those already in exile in Babylon as well as those still remaining in Jerusalem is that they refused to acknowledge that they had sinned against God to the extent that they deserved to be exiled (Jeremiah 16:10). They blamed their misfortunes on the sins of their forefathers (Jeremiah 31:29-30; Ezekiel 18:2-3; cf. Deuteronomy 24:16). It was easy for them to do that because it is true that God sovereignly decided to exile the Southern Kingdom to Babylon because of Manasseh's sins (2 Kings 21:10-15; 23:26-27). But God made clear through both Jeremiah and Ezekiel that the calamity fell upon them because of their own sins. They needed to accept responsibility for the calamity so that they would repent and turn to God with all their heart. This was needed for God's people to be restored to the Promised Land and to a better covenant (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). In fact the mission of Ezekiel, who was called and confirmed as a prophet while in exile (Ezekiel 1-3; 24:1-27; 33:21-33), was to help bring the exiles to repentance.

This is another case of the paradox of divine sovereignty and human responsibility that we discussed in our exposition on Solomon the lapsed king (Chapter 24). For on the one hand God said through Jeremiah that the Exile was a foregone conclusion because of Manasseh's sins, and that even the prayers of Moses and Samuel would not change His mind (Jeremiah 15:1-4); on the other hand God also said through Jeremiah that if His people would repent, the calamity would

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be averted (Jeremiah 18:5-12), and then declared that the calamity would surely come “because they have stiffened their necks so as not to heed My words” (Jeremiah 19:15; cf. Jeremiah 26:1-15).

The Book of Lamentations consists of five poems lamenting the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple. It poignantly captures the intensity of the suffering of the inhabitants of Jerusalem as well as the severity of God’s judgment on them, which reflects how much God hates sin. It also recreates the sense of the spiritual and emotional devastation of those who survived the calamity. Like the laments in the Book of Psalms, these inspired poems have the power to bring about spiritual and emotional healing.

Lamentations recognizes the sovereignty of God behind the suffering (see 1:12-15). Since the suffering is the consequence of unrepentant violation of the Mosaic Law, the poet, traditionally believed to be Jeremiah, leads the people to repent in confessing their sins (1:18-20), as well as to pray for God’s mercy to restore their fortunes (5:1, 19-22). In this prayer we see again the recognition of both divine sovereignty and human responsibility: the calamity is due to the sins of their forefathers (5:7) as well as their own (5:16).

The recognition of God’s sovereignty and mercy reaches its climax in the third and longest poem. Here the emotion of the poet rises from despair to hope when he recalls: “The LORD’s unfailing love indeed never ceases, for His compassion never fails; they are new every morning, great is Your faithfulness” (3:22-23). This sublime confession of hope is all the more remarkable when uttered in the midst of intense lamentation of despair.

The Day of the LORD

The poet’s hope and his prayer for restoration are based on not only who God is, but also what God has specifically promised He would do. This is clear from the imprecatory prayer against nations that had rejoiced over the calamity. The imprecation specifically asks God to “bring the day that You have announced, that they may be like me [Jerusalem],” which means, “Let all their wickedness come before You, and deal with them as You have dealt with me for all my transgressions” (1:21-22).

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The “day that You have announced” is the “the Day of the LORD,” a significant theme in the Prophetic Books. It is in fact the theme of the books of Joel (1:15-2:11) and Zephaniah (1:1-2:3). Simply put, this “day” refers to the times, and not a particular day, when the Holy God manifests Himself in the way He is expected to: disciplining sins and unrepentance in Israel by enforcing the *Mosaic Covenant* (Joel 2:12-17; Zephaniah 3:1-8); punishing evil in the world by enforcing the *Noahic Covenant* (Joel 3:1-3; Zephaniah 2:1-15); and bringing salvation to Israel and the world in fulfilling (ultimately) the *Davidic and Abrahamic Covenants* (Joel 3:17-21; Zephaniah 3:9-20).

It is worth noting that for the third (salvific) aspect of the Day of the LORD, there is a significant difference in focus between Joel and Zephaniah. Zephaniah focuses on the fact of worldwide salvation (3:9-10); Joel focuses on the means: “I will pour out My Spirit on all humanity” (2:28-32; cf. Acts 2:17-21).

Therefore the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Temple were a fulfillment of the first aspect of the Day of the LORD. This fulfillment would have given the lamenting poet expectations that the other two aspects of the Day of the LORD would also be fulfilled, which energized his imprecation against the nations as well as his supplication for Israel’s restoration. This then explains why his emotion could rise from the deepest lamentation of despair to the highest celebration of hope.

The Day of the LORD is an answer to skeptics who question the existence of God in view of the persistence of evil and suffering in the world. This skepticism arises because God does not seem to manifest Himself in a way He is expected to. But God has revealed through the prophets that there had been, and will be, times when God would, according to His purpose, manifest Himself as expected. Skeptics expect God, if He exists, to manifest Himself on their, not God’s, terms. They do not recognize that if God were to manifest Himself on their terms, they would not be around to talk about it.

Even believers may question why God allows calamities in the world. As a result some may even question whether the Bible is true. But we have seen above that God uses calamity for His purpose. And we have also seen in our exposition of Job (Chapter 35) that God uses even undeserved suffering for His purpose. Reiterating a point

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made there, the Bible does not conceal, but in fact reveals, that the God we are called to believe in is a God who uses calamity. So calamities are consistent with the truthfulness of the Bible.

This is most clearly seen in the Book of Daniel. No book of the Bible teaches the sovereignty of God as forcefully as Daniel. Daniel makes it explicit that the sovereignty of God over even kings and kingdoms does not mean that God's people will never suffer persecution from those who hold political power in this world. And it teaches that there are actually three possible outcomes when God's people face persecution. The first is that they will be delivered *from* the persecution. Daniel and his three friends were granted favor so they could avoid eating the king's prescribed food, and were thus spared an otherwise inevitable persecution (Daniel 1:8-16).

The second is that they will be delivered *in* the persecution. Daniel's three friends were thrown into the "furnace of blazing fire" for refusing to worship the statue of Nebuchadnezzar. They were not delivered from, but in, the furnace (Daniel 3:8-27). In their case they were not spared the persecution but their lives were spared; they were even spared material loss. The same thing happened when Daniel himself was later thrown into the lion's den for upholding his integrity (Daniel 6:6-24).

The third possibility is that neither of these will happen, but God's people will die for their faith and faithfulness. God revealed through Daniel that in the future a Greek king (who turned out to be Antiochus Epiphanes) would desecrate the Temple in Jerusalem (which happened in 168 BC). There would be Jews who would give in to him, but those "who know their God will stand firm and act (accordingly)" and would "fall by the sword and by flame, or be captured and plundered" (Daniel 11:32-33).

The real question then is whether to accept or reject God as He is revealed in the Bible. If we reject Him, it does not mean calamities will go away. In fact many calamities are due to human wickedness, including those caused by the ecological crisis due to human covetousness. So when a culture rejects God and does not fear Him, calamities will only increase.

In other words, rejecting God only means rejecting the very source of strength and comfort in times of calamity, when we can

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turn to no one except God. God's word to Habakkuk and his generation of faithful believers still holds: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (2:4b). In anticipating the calamity, the prophet was able to rise from fear to faith. In lamenting the calamity, the poet was able to rise from despair to hope.

Scripture assures us that in the ultimate fulfillment of the Day of the LORD, which Paul calls the Day of Christ (Philippians 1:6, 10; 2:16; cf. Romans 2:5), what faithful believers look forward to will certainly come to pass: no more evil and no more suffering, not even tears, in the New Heavens and the New Earth (2 Peter 3:10-13). In fact Daniel promises those who would die resisting Antiochus Epiphanes that they would be rewarded with the prospect of resurrection to everlasting life (in the New Heavens and the New Earth) and "shine like the brightness of ... the stars forever and ever" (Daniel 12:2-3). This shall silence forever and ever the skeptics. Meantime the righteous will live by his faith.

What all this means is that kingdom worship (Chapter 29) and kingdom spirituality (Chapter 30) require a consciousness and perception of God that has to be nurtured, nourished, and evoked by Scripture, both the Old Testament and the New Testament.

Chapter 38

Announcing the New Covenant

The fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC was the most drastic turning point in the history of Israel. We will now see that it was also a major turning point in God's redemptive plan for the world. Prior to this devastating calamity, God not only promised that He would restore the fortunes of Israel (Jeremiah 30:1-3), but also announced that He was going to replace the Mosaic Covenant with the New Covenant (see Jeremiah 31:31-34). In other words the nation would be restored to another, a new and better, covenant.

God's Circumcision of the Heart

What is new about the New Covenant was actually already revealed through Moses when the Mosaic Covenant was renewed at Shittim with the generation of Israelites that entered the Promised Land. God had known even then that the nation would fail to circumcise their own heart as commanded (Deuteronomy 10:16; cf. Jeremiah 4:3-4), and thus become unrepentant in breaking the Mosaic Covenant. So in anticipation that they would eventually be exiled, God promised that if, when in exile, they would repent and return to Him with all their heart, not only would He restore their fortunes but He

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Himself would circumcise their heart (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). What does this mean?

Under the Mosaic Covenant God's Law in the form of the Ten Commandments was inscribed on two tablets of stones, which were placed in the Ark of the Covenant at the Temple. In announcing the New Covenant God said it would not be like the Mosaic Covenant specifically in that "I will put My Law within them [not the Ark] and on their heart [not tablets of stones] I will write it" (Jeremiah 31:33).

This contrast with the Mosaic Covenant is radical. First of all the location of God's Law is changed from the Ark in the Temple to the human heart. But this does not mean that under the Mosaic Covenant God's Law was just an external code that would not strike a responsive chord in their heart (cf. Deuteronomy 30:11-14; Wright 1996: 290-91). For otherwise it would be unjust for God to require them to circumcise their own heart, which means, obey God from the heart, and then hold them accountable for failing to do so.

As the apostle Paul affirms, God's Law has already been written in some way on every human heart (Romans 2:14-16). The evidence is that the conscience of even a person who has never heard of the Ten Commandments can still testify to what is morally wrong as though he has these commandments in his heart. We have already noted that even atheists recognize the Golden Rule, which summarizes the Ten Commandments.

However the writing of God's Law on the heart under the New Covenant refers to something new and different from what Paul says about every human heart. A word or phrase can have different meanings in different contexts, as in: "Demas *loved the* (present) *world*" (2 Timothy 4:10) versus, "God so *loved the world*" (John 3:16). What more a figure of speech like writing something on the heart, which certainly can have different meanings in different contexts. In the context of the New Covenant it refers to a specific operation of God on the heart of New Covenant believers ("circumcise" it). What then does this mean?

Note that, "I will write My Law on their heart" goes hand-in-hand with, "I will give them a heart to know Me" (Jeremiah 24:7). Hence under the New Covenant a believer's heart not only actively recognizes God's Law but also knows God personally. In other

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words Paul is referring to the heart every human being is born with, while Jeremiah is referring to the heart every believer will be “born again” with (John 3:7).

After the fall of Jerusalem, God elaborated on the nature of this heart: “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from you and give you a heart of flesh” (Ezekiel 36:26). In other words, the conscience we are born with to nudge us to do good and to avoid evil (the “writing” of God’s Law in every human heart) is regenerated with a new intention (“new heart”) and a new motivation (“new spirit”) towards obeying God’s Law (the “writing” of God’s Law under the New Covenant). Paul calls such a “born again” person a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17; Galatians 6:15).

God’s Indwelling Through His Spirit

God then added, “I will put My Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in My statutes and be careful to obey My ordinances” (Ezekiel 36:27). Hence not only the location of God’s Law is changed from the Temple to the human heart, even the dwelling place of God Himself is changed from the Temple to the human person, making believers the “temple of the Holy Spirit” (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19; 2 Corinthians 6:16; cf. Romans 8:9-11). This means God’s people can be scattered throughout the world and not be confined to a Holy Land, which will no longer be needed at this stage of God’s redemption plan. This makes it possible for the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant—all nations shall be blessed through Israel.

Of particular significance with respect to God’s Law is that, on top of giving believers a new heart (intention) and a new spirit (motivation), God will put His Spirit within them particularly so as to “cause you to walk” in His Law. This refers to God’s empowering presence within believers to actualize the new intention and new motivation to observe God’s Law. This is obviously to address the weakness of the Mosaic Covenant.

In other words, the New Covenant is specifically designed to enable believers to observe God’s Law already revealed through the Mosaic Covenant. Paul elaborates on this theme saying that believers

“who walk according to the Spirit” would have “fulfilled [through obedience] the requirement of the Law” (Romans 8:4; cf. Philippians 2:12-13; Schreiner 1998: 405-407). And the “requirement” (singular in the Greek text) of the Law is, “love your neighbor as yourself,” the Golden Rule (Romans 13:8-10; cf. Galatians 5:13-24).

“They Shall All Know Me”

Turning now to the new heart with respect to knowing God, unlike under the Mosaic Covenant, “they shall no longer teach, each one his neighbor or brother, saying, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know Me For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more” (Jeremiah 31:34).

Under the Mosaic Covenant, though anyone born an Israelite was automatically a member of this covenant, he did not automatically know God. He still needed to be taught to know God through understanding God’s Law. This involved circumcising his own heart and thus living a life of repentance from sin and faith in God. In practical terms, this meant having a positive attitude and intention towards keeping God’s Law, as well as seeking forgiveness through offering an appropriate sacrifice at the Temple to atone for one’s violation of God’s Law. And God made it clear through Jeremiah (22:15-16; cf. 9:23-24) that one who truly knew Him would seek to live according to His Law (cf. Allen 2008: 15). It turned out that only some of the people, but not the nation as a whole, knew God.

Under the New Covenant one does not automatically become a member of the covenant through physical birth. One needs to be “born again” through a spiritual birth, which results in one’s heart being circumcised by God. Once a member, he knows God because the circumcised heart is one that knows God. The new birth involves forgiveness of sin received through repentance from sin and faith in God in response to the teaching of Scripture concerning the New Covenant, especially the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah (see Chapter 40). This is obviously a better covenant, and one which ensures that the goal of the Mosaic Covenant will be reached.

However though every true member of the New Covenant knows God, not everyone who professes to be a member of the New

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Covenant knows God. For it is possible for a person to intellectually accept what Scripture teaches about the New Covenant and then “by faith” claim the benefits promised (such as “eternal life”) without truly repenting from his sin; his “faith” is not in God Himself but only in something that God has promised in the New Covenant.

We have elaborated on what it means to have faith in God, which is the same throughout Scripture, as opposed to faith in a promise of God in our exposition on Abraham and faith development (Chapter 6). In practice one cannot have this kind of faith without also repenting from sin, which is also the same throughout Scripture—a change in one’s attitude and intention towards sin resulting in a change in attitude and intention towards God’s Law. For one cannot have faith, or trust, in the Holy God, who hates sin, and be indifferent towards sin and His Law.

Having now highlighted the difference, or discontinuity, between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, we now highlight the similarity, or continuity, between them.

We have just noted the continuity in terms of the means to experience the benefits of each covenant: repentance from sin and faith in God. And we have stressed earlier how the New Covenant will enable God’s people as a whole to do what the Mosaic Covenant could not: fulfill the requirement of the Mosaic Law, which is to love their neighbor as themselves. So both covenants share the same goal. Also in our exposition on Covenant and Grace (Chapter 15) we have elaborated on the continuity in terms of God’s grace expressed in and through each covenant.

However, we have not yet considered properly a theme in the Old Testament which shows clearly why the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are both *necessary* applications of the Abrahamic Covenant: the Covenant Formula (for a systematic treatment of this theme, see Rendtorff 1998). It will show that the continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant is actually *systemic*.

Continuity of the Covenant Formula

The Covenant Formula in its full form, “I will be their God, and they shall be My people” (and its equivalents), is integral to the New Cov-

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enant as expressed in the three prophetic texts considered above, thus formally unifying them all (see Jeremiah 24:7; 31:33; Ezekiel 36:28). The formula may also be expressed in one of its partial forms: “I will be their God”; “They shall be My people”; or their equivalents. We now retrace the history of Israel to see its development.

The first time the formula occurs is in Genesis 17, in the context of God reaffirming the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12:1-3) as an everlasting covenant to Abraham and his descendants. And it spells out for the first time God’s intention for the covenant hitherto not yet revealed: “to be God to you and to your descendants after you” (verse 7). Only the partial form, the equivalent of “I will be your God,” is introduced here because, as explained below, at this point God could not have said, “and they shall be My people.”

This particular reaffirmation of the Abrahamic Covenant highlights God’s promise that He would give the land of Canaan to Abraham’s descendants as an everlasting possession. And the promise is here coupled with a repetition of the Covenant Formula: “I will be their God” (verse 8). This means God would be God not to all of Abraham’s descendants, but only to those who would eventually possess the Promised Land, that is, the Israelites.

This brings us to Exodus 6, where the Covenant Formula occurs next, in the context of God calling Moses to lead the Israelites out of bondage in Egypt to form in Canaan the “great nation” God had promised Abraham. God specifically said it was through this exodus of the Israelites from Egypt to Canaan that “I will take you for My people, and I will be your God” (verse 7).

This is the first occurrence of the full form of the Covenant Formula, here with emphasis placed on the equivalent of “you shall be My people.” This full form “could not appear earlier because it is only now that Israel has become a people” (Rendtorff 1998: 17). So God could not have said, “you shall be My people” in Genesis 17. And God made it clear that He took Israel as His people because He remembered the covenant with Abraham to give them the land of Canaan (verses 5 and 8).

In other words the Covenant Formula, which expresses God’s unique relationship with Israel, is based on the Abrahamic Covenant, which we have seen was made with Abraham by grace. And it is im-

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portant to note that, at this (earlier) stage of God's redemptive plan, God's people forming a nation in Canaan was integral to the formula.

Hence Israel became God's people and was called to form a nation in Canaan by grace (unconditional). However it did not mean they could then build their nation and live anyway they liked. For God said, "I am the LORD, who brought you up from the land of Egypt, to be your God; therefore you shall be holy for I am holy" (Leviticus 11:45; see also 19:2). In fact we can surmise that the whole point of giving them Canaan was so that they could become an independent nation in their own land with the freedom to become what God called them to be, that is, a holy nation, so that they could indeed be God's people, and God would indeed be their God. This explains why the Promised Land was integral to the Covenant Formula under the Mosaic Covenant.

Therefore though Israel became God's people by grace, she must be holy because her God is holy. This is all the more so because for Israel to be truly God's people, and for God to be truly her God, the Holy God will not only dwell in her midst (Exodus 29:45-46) but "will also walk among you" (Leviticus 26:11-12), thus rendering the Promised Land the Holy Land. And to be holy as God is holy involves both moral and ritual purity (see Leviticus 19:1-37). Recognizing this is important to understanding not only the Mosaic Covenant but also the New Covenant as they share the same goal.

God made the Mosaic Covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai and required them to observe the Mosaic Law in order that they would be holy both morally and ritually (see Exodus 19:4-6), warning them that if they became unrepentant in violating it, they would have to be exiled (Leviticus 26:27-33). However God assured them that when in exile, despite their soul having previously abhorred and rejected His Law, "if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled and they then make amends for their iniquity" He would "remember" His covenant with Abraham to be their God as well as remember the land, and so restore them accordingly (Leviticus 26:40-45).

As highlighted above, this assurance was later reiterated in Deuteronomy when the next generation renewed the Mosaic Covenant with God at Shittim prior to their entering the Promised Land, with the additional promise that God Himself would then circumcise their

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heart (30:1-6). This then brings us to the New Covenant, which is about God circumcising the heart of His people. This is to rectify the weakness of the Mosaic Covenant because God promised to “remember” His covenant with Abraham to be their God, which was made by grace for the sake of Abraham’s descendants (and ultimately the world). So the New Covenant was given to replace the Mosaic Covenant on the basis of God’s covenant with Abraham to be their God so that they would be God’s people. This explains why the Covenant Formula is integral to both the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, and thus their systemic continuity, which further explains why both covenants share the same goal: God’s people be holy as their God is holy (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:15-16).

In our exposition on the Sacrificial System (Chapter 12) we have already considered how, under the New Covenant, God’s people are to be *ritually* pure in view of God dwelling within them (wherever they are in the world) instead of within the Temple (in the Promised Land). What needs further elaboration is how God’s people (who will no longer be living within a Holy Land) are to be *morally* pure under the New Covenant in a way that fulfills the goal of the Mosaic Covenant in *all* its dimensions—spiritual, moral, social, economic and political. We will pick this up when we consider the New Covenant in terms of the New Exodus.

For now, to help us see a more complete picture of the systemic continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, we will consider why God, in anticipation that they would fail to keep the Mosaic Covenant, would even promise them in advance the New Covenant. This implies that should the Mosaic Covenant fail, replacing it with the New Covenant was a given.

Inviolability of the Covenant Formula

We have seen how seriously committed God was to fulfill everything He promised Abraham when He swore the oath by His own name that He would surely uphold the Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 22:15-18; Hebrews 6:13-18). This means the Covenant Formula—God’s promise to be God to Abraham’s descendants and they His people—was an inviolable divine promise, regardless of what hap-

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pens to them. This is most dramatically expressed in the words of Jeremiah following the announcement of the New Covenant:

Thus says the LORD, who gives the sun for light by day, and the fixed order of the moon and the stars for light by night, who stirs up the sea so that its waves roar—the LORD of hosts is His name: “If this fixed order departs from before Me,” declares the LORD, “then shall the offspring of Israel cease from being a nation before Me forever” (Jeremiah 31:35-36).

So it was a given that should the Mosaic Covenant, which was the means God used then to help actualize this inviolable promise, failed to reach its goal of helping God’s people to be holy, it must be replaced by a new and better covenant, one that would ensure that the goal will be reached. But this is not the only reason for the certainty.

God said to the exiles: “It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went” (Ezekiel 36:22; cf. Isaiah 48:11). This was to help them see it was their violation of the Mosaic Covenant that landed them in captivity, as well as believe they would certainly be restored to the New Covenant, thus encouraging them to repent from their iniquity and turn to God with all their heart.

God’s holy name was profaned among the nations because, though their captivity in foreign lands was due to their iniquity, it gave the nations the impression that their God was not able to protect them from falling into the hand of their enemies. For in the thinking of their time, it meant the gods of the conquering nations were more powerful than the God of Israel (cf. Isaiah 36:18-20). Today it is akin to agnostics and atheists, and even some believers, asking in the face of a calamity, “Where is God?” (cf. Psalm 115:1-2).

For the sake of His holy name, God would not only restore Israel to the Promised Land, but also (at the end of history) demonstrate to the nations that it was never the case that He could not protect His people (Ezekiel 38-39). “And the nations shall know that the house of Israel went into exile for their iniquity because they acted treacherously against Me, and I hid My face from them and gave them into the hand of their enemies, and they all fell by the sword” (39:23).

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Since Jeremiah and Ezekiel ministered to the nation of Israel in the context of her actually experiencing the Exile, Israel's own restoration was the focus of their attention. So these two prophets did not pay attention to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant—all the nations of the world will be blessed through (the restored) Israel. It was mentioned in passing by Jeremiah that the restoration of Israel would lead to the nations being blessed (Jeremiah 4:1-2; cf. 3:17); Ezekiel, who was called to be a prophet when he was in exile and whose prophetic ministry was entirely in exile, was silent on this subject (cf. Wright 2006: 351-52; but see Ezekiel 47:21-23).

As we shall see, the prophet Isaiah, who had much to say about the New Covenant without calling it as such and who did mention God's Spirit being "poured out from on high" as an integral blessing (Isaiah 32:15; cf. 44:3; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8), paid much attention to the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. This is evidently because he prophesied a century before the Exile and was thus not constrained in any way by the immediate concerns of the people in exile. And Joel clarifies that under the New Covenant God's Spirit will be poured out on "all humanity," not just Israel (Joel 2:28-32).

In other words, taking the Prophetic Books as a whole, God will certainly restore Israel to the New Covenant also for the sake of the nations as well. This means, under the New Covenant the inviolable Covenant Formula based on the Abrahamic Covenant is extended beyond believers from Israel to those of all nations. Hence the continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant is systemic even with respect to the nations. So the (national) goal of the Mosaic Covenant in all its dimensions, from the spiritual to the political, becomes the (international) goal of the New Covenant. As already indicated above, we shall see the far-reaching implications in terms of the New Exodus (especially in Chapter 42).

All this then begs the question: Why did God not give Israel the New Covenant at Mount Sinai instead of the Mosaic Covenant? This would have saved them from the Exile, and all the nations of the world would have begun to be blessed through them sooner. This question shall be answered in the Postscript. For now we will move on to consider the Messiah and how the New Covenant would be fulfilled through Him.

Chapter 39

Announcing the Messiah

We have so far assumed that the Seed of the Woman, whom God promised would crush the head of the Serpent (Genesis 3:15), thus redeeming humanity from sin, would be the same Person as the Ruler from the tribe of Judah to whom belongs the obedience of the nations (Genesis 49:10). And we have been referring to Him as the Messiah (or Christ).

The term “Messiah” means the “Anointed One” in Hebrew and it is from its Greek equivalent that the term “Christ” is derived. Though originally the Hebrew term refers “primarily to someone anointed by Yahweh [the LORD] into a specific role as a prophet, priest or (especially) king, [it] is also applied more widely to cover a hoped for redeemer figure who emerges in the OT and whom Christians affirm finds fulfillment in Jesus” (Firth 2012: 537).

What then is the basis for the assumption, given that the Seed fulfills a spiritual goal while the Ruler plays a political role? And the implication of the assumption is far-reaching: The Messiah would then be both Lord and Savior, whose salvation for humanity would be both spiritual and political, which naturally extends to the social and the economic as well.

The Immanuel Prophecy

In 735 BC King Ahaz of the Southern Kingdom of Judah was tempted to trust in Assyria instead of God when he faced a serious threat from the Northern Kingdom of Israel and Syria, the kingdom north of Israel (Isaiah 7:1-2; cf. 2 Kings 16:5-9). God assured Ahaz through Isaiah that the evil plan of the two kingdoms he feared “shall neither stand nor come to pass” (Isaiah 7:7). God then commanded Ahaz to trust in Him, offering to give him a sign, whatsoever sign of his choice, to help him believe. When Ahaz refused the offer, God gave to the house of David a sign of His own expressed through the well-known Immanuel prophecy (see Isaiah 7:14-16).

This prophecy concerns a boy about to be born, whose name is to be called Immanuel (which means “God with us” in Hebrew). The Gospel of Matthew identifies this boy with Jesus, born of the virgin Mary (1:23). We will not dispute here that the Hebrew word for the woman in Isaiah 7:14 does not actually mean a virgin but a young (marriageable) woman who is not yet married (cf. Young 1965: 287-89). Suffice it to say, in that historical context, such a woman was most likely, though not necessarily, a virgin. And since she turned out to be the virgin Mary, in retrospect, it is appropriate to translate the word as virgin.

This assumes that, even in its original context, the prophecy was already referring to Jesus, as is traditionally understood by the Church. However there are objections raised by even Christian scholars today that in its original context the prophecy could not be referring to Jesus, but to a boy to be born in Ahaz’s time. Some claim he was Maher-shalal-hash-baz, Isaiah’s son in Isaiah 8, others believe he was Hezekiah, Ahaz’s son who succeeded him as king of Judah.

Necessity of Messianic Interpretation

The traditional understanding, still held by many Christians but in recent years by relatively few Christian scholars, must be defended. For in light of the thematic unity and narrative flow of Isaiah 7-12, the boy yet to be born in Isaiah 7:14 is also the son prophetically announced to have been born in Isaiah 9:6 (cf. Motyer 1993: 86), and is the man presented in Isaiah 11:1-5 as one who would be anointed by

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the Spirit of God (cf. Isaiah 61:1). Thus the Immanuel prophecy extends to Isaiah 9 and 11. So if in the original context the boy in Isaiah 7:14 cannot be Jesus, then the son in Isaiah 9:6 and the man in Isaiah 11:1-5 also cannot be Jesus.

And we will not be taking Scripture seriously if we deny that, even in its original context, the son in Isaiah 9:6 has to be Jesus. For the complex “name” that he is called includes “Mighty God” and “Everlasting Father,” and according to Isaiah 9:7 there will be *no end* to the increase of the government that rests on his shoulder and to peace as he reigns on the throne of David to establish and uphold his kingdom with justice and righteousness from then on and *forevermore*. When read plainly, the text cannot be referring to anyone who is merely a human being.

Naturally scholars who do not accept the New Testament teaching that Jesus is the incarnation of God will find ways to avoid this plain reading of the Hebrew text (for a discussion see Brown 2000: 44-47). Again it is a matter of one’s presupposed beliefs.

Hence the boy to be born in Isaiah 7:14 has to be, first of all, a descendant of David who would eventually become king (cf. Isaiah 8:8, which implies that Immanuel has to be a Davidic king). This rules out Maher-shalal-hash-baz. And more importantly, this Davidic king has to be more than human, thus ruling out also Hezekiah, as well as anyone other than Jesus. This then explains why this Davidic king would be supernaturally conceived and born of a virgin and his “name” would be called Immanuel, “God with us.”

Further it implies that, like the complex name in Isaiah 9:6 the name “God with us” refers to who the boy really is, and not how he is actually called. So there is no contradiction when the angel Gabriel told the virgin Mary to name her son “Jesus,” to whom God would give the throne of His father David, and that His kingdom would have no end (Luke 1:32-33), just as Isaiah 9:7 predicted.

Defense of Messianic Interpretation

Why then do Christian scholars who accept the truthfulness of Scripture and believe in predictive prophecy object to the traditional Christian understanding that, even in its original context, Isaiah 7:14

was primarily referring to Jesus? And then argue instead that Jesus is only a secondary fulfillment of the prophecy?

The most common objection raised is that if the prophecy originally referred to Jesus, who was born more than 700 years later, how could it be a sign relevant to Ahaz? First of all, the text explicitly says it was a sign given “to you” (plural), the house of David, which would include Ahaz as well as his immediate and future descendants. So its relevance transcends the time of Ahaz and his generation. Even then, as we will now see, the sign was relevant to Ahaz and his immediate descendants.

For this we turn to the most serious objection raised: Isaiah 7:16 specifically says, before the boy “knows to refuse the evil and choose the good,” that is, before the age of moral discrimination, “about age thirteen” (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000: 593), the land of the kings of Syria and Israel will be forsaken (that is, the respective kingdoms will have collapsed and its population exiled). This means that the boy in Isaiah 7:14, still in his mother’s womb at the time of the prophecy, has to be born at least 13 years before both these separate events have happened. This seems to create an insurmountable problem for identifying Immanuel with Jesus.

First of all, not only the wording but also the grammar of Isaiah 7:14 are similar to what the “Angel of the LORD,” who was a manifestation of God in human form, said to (the already pregnant) Hagar: “Behold, you *are* with child, and you shall bear a son, and you shall call his name Ishmael” (Genesis 16:11, 13). This means, unless the context indicates otherwise (as in the case of Judges 13:3), Isaiah 7:14 is to be read in the present tense: “The virgin *is* with child, and not: becomes with child” (Hengstenberg 1956a: 47). Hence, assuming she was already nine months pregnant, within 13 years from the time of the prophecy (735 BC), Israel and Syria would be forsaken.

The good news is that Syria fell under the Assyrians, and the people exiled, in 732 BC (3 years later), followed by Israel in 722 BC (13 years later), thus accurately fulfilling the prophecy. The bad news is that, if the woman was already nine months pregnant in 735 BC, how could she be the virgin Mary, the mother of Jesus?

The great Old Testament scholar E. W. Hengstenberg (1956a: 44) has long provided an explanation. He argued that “the Virgin is pre-

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sent to the inward perception of the Prophet—equivalent to ‘the virgin there.’” This makes sense because God spoke to the prophets in dreams and visions. In other words, Isaiah saw in a vision a pregnant woman about to give birth (cf. Young 1965: 286-87, 289, 293-94). So when he said, “Behold, the virgin is with child” he was referring to an unknown young and unmarried woman whom he saw only in his vision (Young 1965: 287). This woman turned out to be the virgin Mary more than 700 years later.

Whether Isaiah realized that she was actually a woman from the future, is irrelevant. As far as his prophecy was concerned, he was referring to her as though she existed then, and she was about to give birth to a son. So Isaiah used his (supposed) impending birth as a point of reference as to when Syria and Israel would be forsaken.

To appreciate what Isaiah was saying to the house of David, we need to imagine ourselves there with them in 735 BC hearing these prophetic words: “Look, there is a young and unmarried pregnant woman about to give birth to a son.... Before the boy turns thirteen, the lands of the two kings Ahaz feared will be forsaken.” In other words, Isaiah was actually saying, “Look, within thirteen years from now the kingdoms of Syria and Israel would no longer exist.” This then was the sign given to the house of David.

This is the *only* interpretation of Isaiah 7:14-16 that satisfies the two conditions: Immanuel had to be more than human, and within 13 years from his “birth,” Syria and Israel would be forsaken. And the *only* objection raised is that this interpretation requires us to suppose that Isaiah did indeed speak as though the woman he saw *in his vision* already existed then (see Alexander 1992: 166-73, especially 172). But raising this objection amounts to precluding, against the evidence, even the possibility that Isaiah did actually speak in this manner. And “Who are we to set limits upon the categories and devices which the prophet might employ?” (Young 1965: 294).

What then was the purpose of this sign to the house of David? Immediately following the Immanuel prophecy Isaiah predicted a massive Assyrian invasion of Judah (Isaiah 7:17-19), which later turned out to be the Assyrian invasion under Sennacherib in 701 BC during the reign of Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:13-19:36; Isaiah 36-37). So when Syria and Israel fell within 13 years, Judah could be certain that

this invasion was coming. In its context the prediction of a massive Assyrian invasion served as a devastating rebuke to Ahaz for seeking to trust in Assyria instead of God. So the sign to authenticate this prediction could not be more relevant to Ahaz and his descendants.

The Maher-shalal-hash-baz Prophecy

Following the Immanuel prophecy and the prediction of the Assyrian invasion of Judah, Isaiah gave another prophecy concerning Syria and Israel. This time it involves his own wife giving birth to his son Maher-shalal-hash-baz, which means “swift is the plunder, speedy is the prey” in Hebrew (Isaiah 8:3). According to this prophecy, “before the boy knows to cry out ‘My father’ or ‘My mother,’ the wealth of Damascus (capital of Syria) and the spoil of Samaria (capital of Israel) will be carried away before the king of Assyria” (Isaiah 8:4).

Since a child learns to call his parents within one to two years of age, both these events must happen within two years. So unlike the previous prophecy it cannot be referring to the forsaking of both Syria (732 BC) and Israel (722 BC), as this pair of events happened ten years apart.

What then is this prophecy about? It explicitly says that it was about the taking of wealth and spoil from Syria and Israel to Assyria, which may or may not coincide with the collapse of the respective kingdoms. Syria fell in 732 BC to the Assyrians, and its wealth would naturally be taken to Assyria. Before that, “In 733 [BC] the Assyrians greatly reduced the territory of Israel, leaving only the capital, Samaria, and its environs. The remainder of the country was annexed” (Walton, Matthews & Chavalas 2000: 593; see 2 Kings 15:29), and naturally spoil would be taken to Assyria. Since this pair of events happened within two years, they accurately fulfilled the Maher-shalal-hash-baz prophecy.

Just as in the case of the Immanuel prophecy, immediately following this prophecy, Isaiah again predicted the Assyrian invasion of Judah. This time he highlighted that because of Ahaz’s refusal to trust in God, the overflowing waters of Assyria would flood the breadth of Judah, reaching “even to the neck” (Isaiah 8:5-8). As we have seen in our exposition on the Davidic Covenant with respect to the exile of

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the Southern Kingdom (Chapter 26), this prediction was accurately fulfilled by Sennacherib, who with a large army managed to conquer the entire land of Judah except Jerusalem, thus quite literally flooding Judah “even to the neck,” since Jerusalem was the capital (or head) of Judah and it was located on a hill.

The Maher-shalal-hash-baz prophecy thus served as another sign to the house of David concerning Sennacherib’s devastating invasion, which we saw was the final warning to Judah to repent of her sins before her exile to Babylon.

Prophecies Sealed for Authenticity

Significantly, God told Isaiah to write down the Maher-shalal-hash-baz prophecy on a big tablet (Isaiah 8:1). And this was to be witnessed by two trustworthy persons, who “would be able to testify that the prophet had written and exhibited the prophecy a long time before its fulfillment” (Young 1965: 302). This was evidently in view of the unbelief of the people, who, when the prophecy comes to pass, may say Isaiah wrote it after it has happened. This is exactly what modernist scholars, whose belief-system (materialism) cannot accept the supernatural, have been saying about predictive prophecy recorded in the Bible.

And after predicting the Assyrian invasion following the Maher-shalal-hash-baz prophecy, Isaiah had “the testimony” and “the law” bound and sealed up among his disciples (Isaiah 8:16). Like in the case of the big tablet, this was to secure “Isaiah’s message against any accusation that he did not say this or that and against subsequent tampering or addition by others” (Motyer 1993: 95-96). What was bound and sealed would have included the predictions above.

This means that by 701 BC, when all the above predictions have been fulfilled, Isaiah would have been publicly confirmed as a true prophet of God. This authentication of Isaiah is particularly important because even in the prophecies we have seen above, there were still predictions that were not fulfilled within his lifetime, what more predictions in the prophecies that we will be seeing in Isaiah 40-66? For even the pregnant woman Isaiah saw and prophesied about as though she existed then turned out to be the mother of Je-

sus. So she was actually also a subject of prediction and a sign not fulfilled within Isaiah's lifetime. This justifies the future tense (in the original Greek) in Matthew's citation of Isaiah 7:14.

Also, the prophetic announcement in Isaiah 9:6 that the son that is born is God Himself is so mind-boggling that in comparison, even the shocking idea of a virgin birth seems mundane. God does not expect His people to be gullible, or even seen to be gullible. So the bearer of this mind-boggling message had to be confirmed publicly as a true prophet of God.

Public Fulfillment of Prophecies

The announcement in Isaiah 9:6 is part of a prophecy that begins with, "The people who walk in darkness have seen a great light; those who live in a dark land, the light has shone on them" (Isaiah 9:2). Who are the people referred to and where is this dark land? And what or who is the great light that shines on them? Since the reason for this rejoicing is Immanuel having been born, the great light refers to Him (cf. John 1:5).

Though anyone who does not live according to the "testimony and the law," that is, God's revelation, is said to be in darkness (Isaiah 8:20-22), Isaiah 9:2 is referring specifically to those who live in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali, "Galilee of the Gentiles" (Isaiah 9:1). This region was captured by Assyria in 733 BC (2 Kings 15:29), eleven years before the rest of Israel in 722 BC, just as Isaiah predicted (Isaiah 8:3-4). Isaiah 9:1 also says that Immanuel will honor this place in the future. Being the first to be humiliated, this place and its people would be compensated by being the first to receive the great light of Immanuel. Matthew takes note that Jesus fulfilled this aspect of the prophecy when He began His public ministry not in Judea as we would expect, since He was baptized there, but in Galilee "in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali" (Matthew 4:12-17). This is another reason for Matthew to identify Immanuel with Jesus.

The rest of Isaiah 9 and the whole of Isaiah 10 are about God using Assyria to discipline Israel and Judah, and God's judgment on Assyria for her unrighteousness. Then Isaiah 11 looks forward to the anointing of Immanuel by the Spirit of God. This anointing com-

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pletes and confirms His calling as the Messiah, “the Anointed One,” the “hoped for redeemer figure that emerges in the OT” as early as in Genesis 3:15 (the Seed) and Genesis 49:10 (the Ruler).

Though Matthew does not cite Isaiah 11:2, he does provide evidence that Jesus fulfilled it by recounting that at the baptism of Jesus, the Spirit of God descended like a dove on Him, followed by “a voice out of the heavens, saying, “This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well-pleased”” (Matthew 3:16-17). This baptism scene, which reveals the involvement of a divine Person other than the Messiah and the Spirit of God when Isaiah 11:2 is actually fulfilled, alerts us that implicit in Isaiah 7-12 is already a nascent form of the doctrine of the Trinity—God the Father, Son and Spirit.

The Trinity is not self-contradictory. For there is contradiction only if it affirms that there are three Gods in one God, but not so when it only affirms that there are three Persons in one God (cf. White 1998: 168-71; for a more nuanced discussion see Frame 1995: 65-71). People who see a contradiction presuppose that God is like human beings: there can only be one person in one human being. But God is not a human being. Who are we to say that there cannot be three Persons in one divine Being?

Introducing the New Exodus

Isaiah 11-12 gives a preview of the Messiah’s mission that will be elaborated in Isaiah 40-66. The Spirit-anointed Messiah “will not judge by what His eyes see, nor execute justice by what His ears hear” (11:3), that is, unlike human judges, He does not need to hear testimonies nor see evidence to determine the truth of a case. Justice even for the poor and oppressed is thus assured.

And under His reign, “It will be the very opposite of what now is found in human kingdoms. All enmity will disappear, not only from among men, but even from among beasts, and even between men and beasts all will be in harmony” (Young 1965: 388, commenting on 11:6-9). And the nations will be drawn to Him (11:10; cf. 2:2-4).

To inaugurate His reign, He “will again extend *His hand a second time* to recover the remnant of His people” who are in exile all over the world (11:11-16). No doubt this refers to the Restoration of the

nation, but we need to take note of the choice of words used in this statement. For “The Lord’s ‘hand’ is a primary exodus motif (see Ex. 3:19-20; 6:1; 13:3; Dt. 6:21). *A second time* emphasizes the thought of a repeated action and deliberately contrasts the coming act with the Lord’s classic act at the exodus (*cf.* verse 16b)” (Motyer 1993: 125-26).

In other words, this is the second Exodus. And since it refers to how the New Covenant will be fulfilled through the Messiah, it is better to call it the New Exodus. As the New Covenant has the same goal in all its dimensions as the Mosaic Covenant, the New Exodus has the same goal in all its dimensions as the old Exodus, only much more glorious, which will be elaborated in Isaiah 40-66. The systemic continuity between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant justifies presenting the mission of the Messiah as another Exodus.

Isaiah 12 assumes that the New Exodus has already come to pass and expresses how grateful God’s people will then be to God. It anticipates that “In that day” God’s people will sing a song not only thanking and praising God for what He has done, but also calling one another to make known His deeds to the nations. For “The words *In that day* (1, 4) link the song to the day when the old exodus will be superseded by the new (11:10-11). And just as the old exodus occasioned individual (Ex. 15:1) and communal (Ex. 15:21) song, so will the coming exodus (1-2, 4-5)” (Motyer 1993: 127).

What is particularly significant is that the term “salvation” is repeatedly used to refer to what the New Exodus will accomplish (verses 1-3). And this “salvation” involves God’s anger (because of sin) having somehow been turned away, revealing its spiritual nature. Yet like the old Exodus, the New Exodus is also about social, economic and political redemption. This is not surprising as “the Hebrew semantic field [range of meaning] of ‘salvation’ includes deliverance ‘from every type of danger and distress, physical, spiritual and psychological’” (Schultz 2009: 124; citing Sawyer 1972: 46). This then provides a preview to the basis for assuming that the Messiah is both the Seed and the Ruler.

Chapter 40

Announcing the New Exodus

Having seen in Isaiah 11 that the mission of the Messiah is the New Exodus, which affects not only Israel but also the nations, we now turn to Isaiah 40-66 to take a closer look at this mission. Isaiah 40-66 presupposes that the Babylonian Exile predicted in Isaiah 1-39 has already happened and addresses God's people who have been in exile for some time.

Isaiah 40 begins with words of consolation, declaring that the Exile has come to an end because their suffering has led to their iniquity having been removed (Isaiah 40:1-2). It is clarified in Isaiah 27:7-9 that the suffering in itself did not bring atonement of sin, but only brought them to repentance resulting in forgiveness, which then bears "full fruit" in terms of their destroying the pagan altars and idols (Smith 2007: 463). Taking Isaiah 40-66 as whole, it is "abundantly clear that God is the one who blots out the guilt ... when people repent of their sins. God sweeps away their sins because he is the one who redeems them (44:22) through the servant of Isaiah 52-53" (Smith 2009a: 94-95). In fact, the very next verse (Isaiah 40:3) begins to unveil this redemptive work of God.

The immediate implication of these words of consolation is that the time has come for them to be restored to the Promised Land (cf.

Jeremiah 29:10-14). What follows is an elaboration of all that these words entail, which goes way beyond their return to their homeland.

God and the New Exodus

Isaiah 40:3 onwards announces (in advance) *what* will happen, as well as explains *why* they can believe that it shall happen and exhorts them as to *how* they should respond. We will now focus on the “what,” leaving the “why” and “how” till later (Chapters 41 and 42).

It all begins with the prophecy that (one day) “A voice is calling” to prepare the way for the coming of “the LORD ... our God” (40:3-4; cf. Malachi 3:1; 4:5). This voice thus announces the coming of God Himself, and it is to reveal His “glory” so that “all humanity shall see it together” (40:5). And Jerusalem, called to be a “bearer of good news,” is to declare, “Here is your God!” (40:9). One gets the distinct impression that this coming of God will be an unprecedented manifestation of God in human history.

And it is “good news” because not only will God “come with might, with His arm ruling for Him,” but also “His reward is with Him” in that “in His arm He will gather the lambs” and “like a shepherd He will tend His flock” (40:10-11; cf. Ezekiel 34:11-16). In view of how blessed it is to have “the LORD” as “my shepherd” (Psalm 23), this announcement creates a sense of exuberant expectation.

The Gospels identify the “voice” as John the Baptist, who, by calling the people to repentance, prepared the way for the coming of Jesus to publicly begin His mission (Matthew 3:1-3; Mark 1:3-4; Luke 3:2-6; John 1:23). Hence Jesus is identified as “the LORD ... our God” who was expected to come. This manifestation of God is certainly unprecedented. Having considered Isaiah 9, which announces the birth of a divine Messiah, this identification is not surprising. We will now confirm this identification based on Isaiah 40-66 itself. To savor the richness of Isaiah’s prophecies concerning the Messiah we need to make the effort to read what follows thoughtfully.

What or who then is God’s “arm” that will be ruling for Him, and how is God’s “glory” to be revealed to “all humanity”? The answers to these two questions are spelled out in Isaiah 49-53.

God's Servant and the New Exodus

The term “servant” in Isaiah 40-55 generally refers either to the nation of Israel as a servant of God (41:8-9; 42:19; 43:10; 48:20), or to the Servant of God, the person who will restore Israel to God (42:1; 49:3-6; 52:13; 53:11). It is significant that in the very text (49:3-6) that clarifies that the Servant will restore Israel to God (verse 6), and hence cannot be referring to the nation of Israel, the Servant is also called “Israel” (verse 3). This clarification allows for Him to be called “Israel” without being confused with the nation.

Why then call Him “Israel” at all? We have seen that the nation of Israel was called to be a model nation, a light to the nations (Deuteronomy 4:5-8; 1 Kings 8:41-43, 59-61). But Israel failed, which was why they ended up in exile, and needed God’s forgiveness of sin. The Servant of God is called to replace the servant of God (Israel) and take over her mission (light), as well as her liability (sin). So in this sense He has become “Israel.”

And Isaiah 49:6 spells out that the mission of the Servant is not only to restore Israel to God but also to be “a light to the nations, so that My salvation may reach to the end of the earth.” In Isaiah 42:1, where God says “I have put My Spirit upon Him,” the Servant’s mission is described as, “He will bring forth justice to the nations” (a similar idea is repeated twice in 42:3-4). Since this mission is also described as “a light to the nations” (42:6), it is the same as that in Isaiah 49:6—God’s “salvation” reaching the end of the earth. Hence “salvation” reaching to the end of the earth also means bringing forth “justice” to the nations. In other words the salvation referred to is social, economic as well as political.

How then can “salvation,” which is often understood as salvation from sin, be the same as bringing forth justice? As John Oswalt (2003) says, the Hebrew word translated “justice,” which often parallels the Hebrew word translated “righteousness,” is in many ways the antonym of “chaos,” and thus “is much more than mere legality, as ‘justice’ has come to connote in English. Rather, it has the idea of ‘right order.’” (472). The fact that “salvation” in Isaiah 49:6 corresponds to “justice” in Isaiah 42:1-6 “helps to amplify the meaning of ‘justice’ to divine order.... For God to ‘save’ the world means to

bring it into the order he intended, and for God to bring about that order it is necessary for him to save it from the bondage sin holds over it” (547-48).

This points to the Messiah in Isaiah 11-12, whose mission is also about “justice” and “salvation” (which is also spiritual in nature), and where it is also said that God’s Spirit will come upon Him to anoint Him (11:2; cf. 61:1). And the idea of spiritual salvation points to Isaiah 53, which is about the Servant bringing salvation from the bondage of sin, so that “justice” is possible. To confirm that the Servant in Isaiah 49-53 is indeed Immanuel, the Messiah in Isaiah 7-12, we will now see how His mission is also expressed in terms of a second Exodus, the New Exodus.

God’s “Arm” and the New Exodus

Isaiah 50 begins with God explaining that they went into exile because of their sins and ends with calling those who fear God to “trust in the name of the LORD and rely on his God” (50:10). Isaiah 51 continues in the same vein, addressing those “who pursue righteousness, who seek the LORD,” that is, those in exile who are repentant, to “look to Abraham ... and to Sarah” (51:1-2). This means, remember the Abrahamic Covenant, which is the basis for their restoration to the Promised Land and the words of consolation (51:3) that begin to flow in Isaiah 40:1.

The text then highlights the mission of the Servant: “I will establish My justice for a light to the peoples,” which is here elaborated as, “My righteousness is near, My salvation has gone out, and My arms will judge the peoples; ... and for My arm they will wait in hope” (51:4-5). In other words the focus here is on the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant—all nations being blessed by God (Genesis 12:3). This is also the mission of the Messiah (Genesis 49:10; Isaiah 11:10)

The repeated reference to God’s “arm” in relation to the Servant’s mission to bring justice-salvation to the nations needs elaboration. We have noted in relation to Isaiah 11:11-16 that God’s “hand” is a primary Exodus motif. So is God’s “arm” (see Isaiah 63:12; cf. Deuteronomy 4:34; 2 Kings 17:36; Psalm 136:12), especially when

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used in the context of Isaiah 49-53. This is unmistakable when the “arm of the LORD” is addressed as the Person who “in generations long ago ... cut Rahab in pieces ..., who dried up the sea, ... who made the depth of the sea a pathway for the redeemed to cross over” (51:9-10; cf. 30:7, where “Rahab” explicitly refers to Egypt). So likewise, because of who the “Arm” is, the “ransomed of the LORD will return, and come with joyful singing to Zion [Jerusalem]” (51:11). However unlike the Exodus from Egypt, “you shall not go out in haste, nor shall you go out in flight” (52:12; cf. Deuteronomy 16:3).

This confirms that the mission of the Servant is also the New Exodus, thus confirming that the Servant of Isaiah 49-53 is indeed the Messiah of Isaiah 7-12.

The Messiah and the New Exodus

We have just introduced the idea that God’s “arm,” a symbol of His power to save, here refers to the Person “who dried up the sea” (and in Isaiah 40:10 to the One who will be “ruling for Him”), that is God Himself. In view of this identification of God’s arm with God Himself, the revelation of God’s “arm” in Isaiah 53:1 (cf. 52:10) “is indeed a revelation of Yhwh [“the LORD”], but it is a revelation of a part of Yhwh in some sense representing Yhwh and distinguishable from Yhwh” (Goldingay and Payne 2006: 298). The rest of Isaiah 53 further identifies the Arm of God as the Servant of God (see especially verses 2 and 11; cf. Motyer 1993: 427-28).

Recall that like in the case of the Messiah in Isaiah 7-12, it is also said that God’s Spirit will come upon the Servant to anoint Him to fulfill His mission (42:1; 61:1). And like in Isaiah 11, this reference to the LORD, God’s Arm the Servant, and God’s Spirit as though they are distinguishable divine Persons, again implies a nascent doctrine of the Trinity. This is more clearly seen in Isaiah 63:7-14: Though it was “*the LORD*” Who “became their Savior,” it was actually “*the Angel of His Presence*” Who “saved them.” Later “He turned and became their enemy” because “they rebelled and grieved *His Holy Spirit*,” Who had earlier “caused *His glorious Arm* to go at the right hand of Moses, Who divided the waters” (cf. 51:9-10) and thus saved them.

All-Israel and the New Exodus

When we consider how the New Exodus reclaims the pre-Fall Creation Mandate, we shall see the far-reaching implications of expressing the mission of the Messiah as another Exodus (Chapter 42). So it is appropriate to elaborate here that the concept of the New Exodus is not limited to Isaiah (see Watts 2012). For instance, the prophet Hosea, another contemporary of Isaiah, prophesied the same idea but in reference to the Northern Kingdom of Israel.

Before Israel was exiled to Assyria, God explained to them through Hosea that it was because of their unrepentant idolatry and injustice. Hosea's use of symbolic language and actions in his prophecies is most graphic. We will focus on how the restoration of Israel is expressed in terms of the New Exodus.

God instructed Hosea to name his third child, "Lo-ammi," which means "Not-my-people," because "you are not My people and I am not your God" (Hosea 1:9; cf. 1:10 and 2:23, which describe their restoration). This reversal of the Covenant Formula (see Exodus 6:7) implies that, in sending them into exile, God has nullified the Mosaic Covenant (at this point with respect to the Northern Kingdom only). And though the people would actually be exiled to Assyria, God said they would "return to Egypt" (8:13; see also 9:3 and 11:5, 11). This means their exile to Assyria amounts to a "return to Egypt," that is, as though the Exodus never happened (cf. Kwakkel 2009: 143-45).

So when they are restored, it will be the Exodus ("out of Egypt") all over again (see 11:10-11). This inference is confirmed by how their restoration is described: "I will allure her, and bring her *into the wilderness* Then I will give her ... a door of hope. And she will respond ... as in the day when she came out *from the land of Egypt*" (2:14-15). How then do we know that this "exodus" refers to the New Exodus of the Messiah? As a consequence of the restoration, "the children of Israel will return and seek the LORD their God and David their king" (3:5; cf. 1:11; Amos 9:11-15). This can only mean they will turn to the Messiah, the ultimate fulfillment of the Davidic Covenant.

Recognizing the concept of the New Exodus, evident even in Hosea, enables us to appreciate what Matthew means when he quotes Hosea 11:1, "out of Egypt I called My son," which originally refers to

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Israel, and applies it to Jesus (Matthew 2:13-15). This seems to be a classic case of the New Testament quoting the Old Testament out of context. But this fails to read Hosea 11:1 as part of a prophecy (Hosea 11:1-11) to be fulfilled by the Messiah through the New Exodus.

This prophecy is saying that God had called His “son” (Israel) “out of Egypt” (the Exodus) to fulfill a purpose—to be a light to the nations (cf. 4:6; Exodus 19:6). But Israel has failed because she kept forsaking God; thus she herself has to be exiled to Assyria—“return to Egypt” (11:5; cf. 9:3). However God’s purpose can only be derailed, not defeated. So when the Exile has done its work, God will repeat (figuratively) the act of “out of Egypt I called My son” (11:10-11) in order to fulfill His unchanging purpose (Deuteronomy 30:1-6). This is the New Exodus of the Messiah.

In other words, Hosea 11:1 recalls not only the historical act of Israel’s leaving Egypt, but also its original purpose, which will now be fulfilled by the Messiah. Since Jesus the Messiah did in fact come out of Egypt, Matthew uses the occasion to say that Jesus, God’s Son, was literally (and not just figuratively) called “out of Egypt” to fulfill the *intention* of the original Exodus. This then reaffirms a principle we have already established in our exposition of the Psalms (Chapter 29): a plan of God in the Old Testament (Hosea 11:1) can be reinterpreted and reapplied to Jesus in view of Him having fulfilled its *original intention*, which the original recipient failed to fulfill.

Atonement and the New Exodus

We now move on to consider further the New Exodus. To avoid confusion we need to be aware that though the New Exodus includes and builds on Israel’s physical restoration to Jerusalem made possible by Cyrus, which we will see is the focus of Isaiah 41-48, the focus in Isaiah 49-66 is the ultimate fulfillment of the Abrahamic Covenant. In other words, the physical restoration (Deuteronomy 30:1-5) is only a prelude to, and a symbol of, a spiritual restoration (Deuteronomy 30:6) that affects not only Israel but also all nations.

We begin with the answers to the two questions posed above: God’s “arm” that will be ruling for Him is the Messiah. And God’s “glory,” expressed through the “light” that the Messiah brings (9:2;

42:6; 49:6), is revealed to “all humanity” when “the LORD has bared His holy Arm in the sight of all nations, that all the ends of the earth may see the salvation of our God” (52:10). We have considered the “justice” aspect of this salvation. We now consider the “freedom from sin” aspect of the salvation. So we turn to Isaiah 53, which we have seen identifies the Arm of God as the Servant in Isaiah 49-53.

A plain reading of Isaiah 53 clearly shows that the Servant will suffer and die as a substitute on behalf of sinners to atone for their sins (cf. Allen 2012; Jeffery, Ovey and Sach 2007). He will be offered up as a Guilt Offering (verse 10), and “the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all” (verse 6) so that “He was pierced for our transgressions ... [and] the punishment for our wellbeing (*shalom*) was upon Him” (verse 5). This teaching is so clear that Otfried Hofius (2004), even though he objects to it, confesses that “The idea of substitution or place-taking [is] *evident* in Isaiah 53” (170; emphasis added). However he not only considers the teaching “outrageous,” but also argues (based on Exodus 32:30-34 and Ezekiel 18:20) that it is impossible “that *God* transfers the guilt of one person to another person or persons” (168-69).

As noted by Hofius himself, Isaiah 52:13-15 warns us that Isaiah 53 will reveal “things previously ‘never told’ and ‘never heard’ (v. 15b)” (168) and will thus astonish us. So it is normal to find the teaching of Isaiah 53 outrageous, but is it also impossible? Actually what is really outrageous is not the idea of substitutionary atonement in itself, but the idea that the substitute is God Himself, which many scholars, having rejected a plain reading of Isaiah 7-12 and 49-53, do not recognize. But when we do recognize that the Servant is God, we will see that the idea of substitutionary atonement is not only possible but in fact necessary.

Necessity for Substitutionary Atonement

It is indeed impossible that the guilt of one person be transferred to an innocent third party. But the Servant, being God Himself, is not a third party at all. He is the party humanity sins against. And only the party we have sinned against can forgive our sin, by himself bearing the consequence of our sin and thus letting us go scot-free. As theo-

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logian James Buswell (1963: 76) puts it succinctly, “The guilt of one individual’s sin against another *can* morally be borne *either by the sinner* (as in the case of justice without forgiveness . . .) *or by the one sinned against* (as in the case of forgiveness . . .).” This explains why only God can forgive sins (Luke 5:21), by Himself bearing the consequence of sin (Isaiah 53:12).

Therefore the question is not whether substitutionary atonement can happen, but whether it has happened. We have seen how the portrayal of the birth and life of Jesus in the Gospels matches the portrayal of that of the Messiah in Isaiah 7-12. And it is not difficult to see how the portrayal of the death and resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels matches that of the Servant in Isaiah 53. For even the resurrection of Christ is anticipated in Isaiah 53—after He offered Himself up as a Guilt Offering, “He shall see His offspring, and He shall prolong His days, and the will of the LORD shall prosper in His hand” (verse 10). This can only mean that, after “He poured out His life to death” (verse 12) as an atoning sacrifice, He would come back to life (cf. Barry 2010).

Hence, on the basis of Isaiah 53 alone, the early Church could confidently confess “that Christ died for our sins *according to the Scriptures*, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day *according to the Scriptures*” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Furthermore, echoing Isaiah 53:5 (“He was pieced for our transgressions”), God promised through Zechariah that those who, in repentance and faith, “will look on Me whom they have pierced [He will] cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zechariah 12:10-13:1; cf. McComiskey 1998: 1214-18). And the apostle John identifies Jesus as the “Me whom they have pierced” (John 19:37). Though “whom they have pierced” refers to what happened to Christ at His crucifixion, the prediction that “they will look on Me” will eventually be fulfilled at His Second Coming (Revelation 1:7; cf. Beale 1999: 196-99). Thus the atoning death and resurrection of Christ are implicit in this prophecy of Zechariah.

However Jews today take for granted that the “servant” in Isaiah 53 refers to national Israel. But according to Michael Brown (2003: 60), a Jewish scholar who believes in Jesus as the Messiah, the traditional Jewish interpretation of Isaiah 53 is that the “servant” refers to an individual, usually the Messiah. It was only in the eleventh century

AD that Rashi introduced the idea that the “servant” refers to (the righteous remnant of) Israel. A century later, Ibn Ezra, who read Isaiah 53 with the assumption the “servant” is Israel, commented, “This is an extremely difficult passage.” In response Brown writes, “But when we read it with reference to Yeshua [Jesus], it is not difficult at all. Rather, it is wonderfully clear, giving the reader the distinct feeling that the chapter was written [as though] *after* the Messiah’s crucifixion and resurrection.”

Reality of Two Comings of the Messiah

The most serious objection to identifying Jesus as the Messiah is that He did not fulfill everything that the Old Testament says about the Messiah and the New Exodus.

We have seen in our exposition on 1-2 Chronicles and the Book of Psalms that the Messiah, being the fulfillment of Genesis 49:10, will reign over all nations and thus bring in the (ultimate) Kingdom of God. And this teaching is echoed in the Book of Isaiah (“His Arm ruling for Him”), which also introduces the idea that the Kingdom of God (“Your God reigns”) that comes with the New Exodus is the “Good News” (or Gospel) that announces “peace” (*shalom*) and “salvation” (52:7). The Gospel of the Kingdom is thus also the Gospel of salvation. However up till now the “kingdom” and “salvation” that Jesus brings do not seem to involve Jesus ruling over the nations, let alone bringing about global peace that results from the justice and righteousness that comes with this salvation.

Also, as we shall see, Isaiah clarifies that in the New Exodus the Jerusalem that God’s people will be restored to (Isaiah 62), which is the Jerusalem that the nations will be drawn to (Isaiah 2:1-4), is actually not the Jerusalem the exiles returned to. This further explains why the restoration through Cyrus is only the prelude to and a symbol of the New Exodus, which is really about salvation in the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and the New Earth that God will create (65:17-25; 66:10-24). This involves a recreated universe that will replace this present universe. So the Kingdom of God, which comes with the New Exodus, is not of this present world. How then can we say the Messiah has already come in the person of Jesus?

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Jesus Himself announced, “The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the Gospel” (Mark 1:15), and later said, “Look! the Kingdom of God is in your midst” (Luke 17:21). This means the Kingdom of God has come with Jesus. Yet Jesus also taught His disciples to pray, “Your Kingdom come,” and then to “seek first the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 6:10, 33). Also Jesus explicitly promised His disciples that He will come again, specifically to consummate history and bring in the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and the New Earth (Revelation 21-22).

Therefore the Kingdom of God has come, is coming, and will come. Hence the New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of God is both “already and not yet” (cf. Ladd 1993: 68-78). In other words, though the Kingdom of God is not of this world, it is already in this world (adapting John 17:14-16). We shall see how this is true when we consider how the New Exodus reapplies the Creation Mandate (see Chapter 42).

The New Testament itself recognizes that Jesus has not yet fulfilled everything prophesied about the Messiah and the New Exodus. However, by fulfilling Isaiah 9 and 53 through His birth, life, death and resurrection, Jesus has given us enough evidence that He is indeed the Messiah. This means that the prophecies concerning the New Exodus tend to collapse the two comings of the Messiah and their respective outcomes into one event. Accordingly, the New Testament considers the entire period covering both comings of Jesus as the “last days” prophesied in the Old Testament (Acts 2:17; Hebrews 1:2; cf. Isaiah 2:2).

So the world is again anticipating, wittingly or unwittingly, the coming of the Messiah, the Second Coming of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 41

Anticipating the Messiah

When Isaiah announced the New Exodus to the exiles, he declared with full confidence that the “glory” of God would be revealed to “all humanity,” that is, the New Exodus would certainly happen. He could be so confident because he was announcing what “the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (Isaiah 40:5). And most of Isaiah 40-48 is a defense of the absolute trustworthiness of what God has spoken.

In Isaiah 40:12-26 he argues that God is absolutely unique in the universe and so there is nothing, certainly not the gods of the nations, that can even be compared to Him. Hence there is absolutely nothing, not even military might, that can stop God from fulfilling what He has spoken. In other words, “The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever” (40:8).

Then in Isaiah 41-48 Isaiah presents a powerful polemic against the “gods” of the nations, which were represented by idols (44:17; 46:1; cf. Psalm 96:5). Through this polemic he provides irrefutable evidence for the absolute uniqueness of God and the trustworthiness of His word, and thus exhorts not only Israel but also the nations to trust in God and His word. This answers the question why the Israelites could believe that the New Exodus would certainly happen.

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We now know that the New Exodus involves two comings of the Messiah. Isaiah's argument here that the New Exodus would certainly happen is then valid for both comings. Hence just as his argument would enable the Israelites to confidently anticipate the (first) coming of the Messiah, it will also enable us to confidently anticipate the (second) coming of the Messiah.

Absolute Uniqueness of God

In his polemic Isaiah makes use of imaginary scenes in a court of law where God Himself presents His case to demonstrate that He alone is God and that the so-called "gods" of the nations are not gods at all. These "gods" are in fact challenged to present their case to show that they are indeed gods and not just deaf and dumb idols, merely objects of worship made by human hands (as mocked in 44:9-20).

In the case of Elijah against the prophets of Baal, the test for who was indeed God was who had the power to send down fire to consume a sacrifice (see Chapter 25). In Isaiah's case the test is who can consistently predict the future. Either test is adequate as the living God is not only all-powerful but also all-present and all-knowing.

God's case is centered on the exiles themselves having witnessed that, since the formation of the nation of Israel, He has predicted a series of events that have come to pass (44:6-8). The focus is on God's prediction through Isaiah that He would use the Persian king Cyrus to restore them from Babylon back to the Promised Land (44:28-45:7). And now that all these "former things" have come to pass (46:9-11), God says He is going to declare "new things" that will happen (42:9), which have never been made known before (48:6-7).

He challenges the "gods" to do what they need to do, but obviously cannot do, to prove they are indeed gods—predict future events as well as declare past events that they successfully predicted (41:21-24). God dismisses them as nothing but idols (44:9-20) and are thus "not gods" (37:18-19); for unlike the case of Israel and her God, the nations cannot produce witnesses that their gods have predicted the "former things" that have come to pass (41:25-29; 43:8-10).

God is saying to the exiles that His prediction concerning Cyrus, one of the "former things" that He declared long ago (cf. Keil and

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Delitzsch 1982c: 247-48), is being fulfilled right before their eyes (41:25; 43:10). This means Isaiah 40-66 is specifically addressed to them when Cyrus has already emerged as a threat to Babylon. At this time, this prediction is only still *being fulfilled* because Cyrus has not yet captured Babylon and allowed the exiles to return to Jerusalem. How then can God say that it is one of the “former things” that have already come to pass (42:9)?

Cyrus was named twice (44:28; 45:1) in Isaiah’s prediction 150 years in advance as the future Persian king who would conquer the then still future Babylonian Empire. Since the prediction is so specific, when a king named Cyrus indeed emerges as a threat to Babylon, and at a time when Babylon is vulnerable (Arnold 2004: 99-105), the entire prediction concerning him is as good as having been fulfilled. This is not the only case where a prophetic prediction is so specific. Before Isaiah, another prophet made a prediction, confirmed by a sign, concerning what a future Davidic king specifically named Josiah would do in Bethel (1 Kings 13:1-6). The prediction came to pass 300 years later (2 Kings 23:15-20).

On the basis that the exiles themselves “are My witnesses” that God has fulfilled predictions in general (44:7-8), and the prediction concerning Cyrus in particular (46:10-11), God says they “are [thus] My witnesses” that “before Me there was no God formed, and there shall be none after Me” (43:10). In other words they are witnesses that, “I am God, and there is none like Me” (46:9), because “I am the First and the Last, and there is no God besides Me” (44:6; see also 45:5). This means God is absolutely unique in the universe as He alone is God, who created the heavens and the earth (45:18) and can declare the end from the beginning (46:10).

God challenges even “the fugitives of the nations, [who] pray to a ‘god’ that cannot save [and is thus not really god]” (cf. 44:17b), to acknowledge that it is He, and not the idols they worshipped as gods, who long ago predicted the rise of Cyrus. Therefore God declares to them that “there is no God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior,” and thus calls them to “turn to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other” (45:20-22).

All this is unmistakably another explicit declaration of monotheism (cf. Clifford 2010; contra MacDonald 2009), first introduced in

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Genesis 1:1. This means when the term “god” or “gods” is used in statements like “You shall have no other gods before Me” (Exodus 20:3), it refers to what people consider as gods without affirming that these are actually gods (cf. 2 Samuel 7:22-23; Grogan 2008: 240; for a thorough study demonstrating this conclusion see Wright 2006: 136-63). As in the case of Genesis 1:1, in its original context, Isaiah’s polemic is against polytheism; in today’s context it is also a polemic against materialism (and thus atheism) as well as pantheism.

Reliability of Isaiah’s Prophecies

The fulfillment of the prediction concerning Cyrus also served the purpose of “confirming the word of His servant” (44:24-28), here referring to Isaiah and his prediction concerning Cyrus. In other words though Isaiah was already confirmed as a true prophet within his lifetime, he was confirmed again 150 years later when the prediction concerning Cyrus came true. This was in view of the “new things” (see below) that God would announce through him.

Isaiah’s argument ends with God’s explanation to the exiles why “I declared the former things long ago” and then “suddenly I acted and they came to pass” (48:3). It is so that when the “former things” have come to pass, they will not be able to say, “My idol has done them” (48:5). In other words, if God had not declared in advance long ago concerning Cyrus, when they returned from the Exile, they would not recognize it was God who kept His promise to bring them back to the Promised Land. God had to pre-empt this eventuality “because I know that you are obstinate” (48:4).

Now that the former things have come to pass, thus again confirming Isaiah as a true prophet, God says, “From this time I announce to you new things, even hidden things which you have not known” (48:6). This is in view of the tendency of God’s people not to recognize His work in their midst, “because I know you are very treacherous; and you have been called a rebel from birth” (48:8). God had to do all this so that at least some of God’s people will take the “new things” seriously and recognize them when they come to pass.

This rhetorical strategy of Isaiah 40-66 may be compared to that of an aging grandfather with prophetic foresight who needs to warn

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his baby grandson against his (future) choice of location for his honeymoon (adapting from Chisholm 2002: 14). Realizing that he will not live to see his grandson's wedding, he writes him a letter and seals it with the words, "To be opened on your wedding day." Imagine the rhetorical impact when on his wedding day the grandson reads: "Congratulations grandson! You have made the right choice in marrying the mayor's daughter Jemimah ['How did grandpa know that!?!']. But you have made a wrong choice in going to Phuket for your honeymoon. On the day of your scheduled arrival, a spectacularly huge wave will ramp into the island killing many people." The grandson may have made all the necessary reservations but he is not likely to take his bride to Phuket.

The spectacular fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy by itself would have caused the exiles to recognize and preserve the Book of Isaiah as Scripture, regardless of whether they grasped the outrageous teaching of Isaiah 9 and 53—God will become a man to die for sinners.

What then are the "new things" that God will announce? We have already considered them when we looked at the details of the New Exodus spelled out in the chapters following Isaiah 41-48: the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah (52:13-53:12), and the creation of the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and the New Earth (65:17-25). We now know that the first "new thing" has come to pass in the first coming of Jesus the Messiah and the second "new thing" will be fulfilled in His second coming.

When the "former things" came to pass, God said to the exiles, "You are my witnesses" (Isaiah 44:8; cf. 43:10). This enables them and their descendants to believe that both the two new things would certainly come to pass. When Jesus came, He clearly fulfilled the first "new thing" by dying on the cross and rising from the dead (Luke 24:45-46). But most of the Jews then (the "treacherous" descendants of the exiles, to whom the prophecies of the "new things" were actually intended) rejected Him precisely because He died on the cross (thus fulfilling Isaiah 53!); they were too preoccupied with the Messianic scenario associated with the second "new thing."

However there were at least 120 who accepted Jesus as the Messiah (Acts 1:15). And to His immediate disciples, reapplying Isaiah 44:8, Jesus said, "You are witnesses of these things" (Luke 24:48).

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The “these things” Jesus refers to here also include the prediction that “repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Luke 24:47). This additional thing was indeed predicted by Isaiah as part of the New Exodus (see for instance, Isaiah 55:1-7), but it was not yet fulfilled when Jesus said they were witnesses of it. In fact Jesus later commanded them to fulfill this very thing after receiving power from the Holy Spirit by being “My witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8; cf. Pao 2002: 91-93).

It is like God saying to the exiles that they were witnesses of the fulfillment of the “former things” concerning Cyrus when he appeared as a serious threat to Babylon, but before Cyrus fulfilled what was actually predicted about him. In other words, Jesus fulfilled Isaiah 53 in such a spectacular way that the rest of the first “new thing” predicted by Isaiah—the proclamation of the message of Isaiah 53—was as good as having been fulfilled. And this will enable the immediate disciples of Jesus, and those who accept Jesus as the Messiah on the basis of their witness, to believe that the second “new thing” will certainly come to pass.

Authenticity of Isaiah’s Prophecies

The rhetorical power of Isaiah’s argument is completely lost on scholars who have ruled out the possibility of predictive prophecy because of their presupposed materialist belief-system. To them Isaiah 40-66 simply could not have come from Isaiah. In view of the recent development that even scholars who claim to believe in predictive prophecy are denying that Isaiah wrote Isaiah 40-66, we need to address this unwarranted denial (cf. Schultz 2004; 2012). We will ignore imaginary problems raised and focus on the only real problem.

It has been argued that, because God says to the exiles living in the *sixth* century BC that the “new things” are “created now and not long ago, and before today you have not heard them” (48:7), Isaiah 40-66 could not have been written by Isaiah in the *eighth* century BC. It thus has to come from an unnamed and unknown exilic “prophet” in the sixth century BC. However, this inference is not consistent with what we actually read in the Book of Isaiah.

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First of all, Isaiah 1:1 indicates that the Book of Isaiah, including chapters 40-66, is a collection of prophecies based on revelation Isaiah received from God over a period of 50 years. Isaiah had prophesied that God's people would eventually be exiled to Babylon (5:13; 39:5-7). So with prophetic foresight he wrote Isaiah 40-66 to address those in the future Exile as though he was there with them. Why he had to do this, which was certainly unusual, is already made clear in the above exposition of the argument for the absolute uniqueness of God in response to their being "obstinate" and "treacherous."

Also, it is not possible to attribute the prophecies concerning Cyrus to a sixth century BC "prophet": these prophecies "expressly and repeatedly affirm that the rise of Cyrus was an event foreknown and predicted by the God of prophecy" (Keil and Delitzsch 1982c: 248-49). And both the logic and the force of Isaiah's argument in Isaiah 41-48 take for granted that the exiles are themselves witnesses that the rise of Cyrus was predicted long ago, which thus confirms again Isaiah as a true prophet of God. So if these prophecies did not come from Isaiah, Isaiah 41-48 does not make sense. "One cannot escape this logic" (adapting Oswalt 1998: 192). In fact it is unimaginable that a sane person in the sixth century BC would have said what we read in Isaiah 41-48. And if an insane person said such things, it is unimaginable that Isaiah 41-48 would be accepted and preserved as part of Holy Scripture.

However, since the "new things" are said to be intentionally predicted only after the expiration of the "former things" in the sixth century BC (Keil and Delitzsch 1982c: 248), how could they have come from Isaiah, who lived 200 years earlier in the eighth century BC? The Book of Isaiah was composed based on prophecies that were already made known ("former things") as well as those that were not yet made known ("new things"). It is like a scholar today collecting together his previously published articles to form a book. But to make it specifically relevant to his new intended audience, he adds to the book new and previously unpublished articles.

Also recall that to prove the authenticity of Isaiah's prophecy predicting the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 BC, it was once bound and sealed until the time the prediction was fulfilled (Isaiah 8:16; cf. 8:1-2 and Daniel 12:4). This was evidently to ensure that

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when the prediction came true, no skeptic could say it was written after the predicted event had happened. This precedent alerts us that to make sense of Isaiah 41-48 we need to infer that the Book of Isaiah, like the grandfather's letter to his grandson, was for this same reason bound and sealed until the rise of Cyrus. After all it is expressly affirmed that the prediction concerning Cyrus was made long ago so that when it came to pass, the "obstinate" Jews in exile could not deny that God had made the prediction as well as fulfilled it, and thus became His witnesses to this truth. So the never heard before "new things" remained unheard until the "former things" had come to pass. And since Isaiah wrote chapters 40-66 as though he was there with the exiles, he could write in advance that the "new things" are "created now" (cf. Keil and Delitzsch 1982c: 249).

To enable His people to better anticipate and recognize the Messiah when He comes, God also made predictions concerning where and when He would be born.

Micah on the Place of Messiah's Birth

Micah prophesied that it will be out of Bethlehem in Judea that shall come forth One "who is destined to be ruler" in Israel (Keil and Delitzsch 1982d: 479), and who shall be great even to the ends of the earth and shall be their *shalom*, or "peace" (Micah 5:2-5). Matthew records that when Herod asked the Jewish religious leaders where the Messiah would be born, they immediately replied, "Bethlehem of Judea," citing Micah 5:2 as basis (Matthew 2:5-6). And Luke reveals how Jesus almost failed to fulfill this prophecy. For when Mary was nine months pregnant, she was living in Nazareth in Galilee. It was a government census that made her travel with Joseph on a journey of at least a week all the way to Bethlehem in Judea, and she gave birth to Jesus while they were there (Luke 2:1-7; for a discussion on the historicity of this account see Bock 1994: 903-909).

Daniel on the Time of Messiah's Death

The Book of Daniel, written by about 530 BC, laid out in advance the historical time-frame within which the Messiah would come.

Through dreams given to Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 2) as well as to Daniel (Daniel 7 and 8), God revealed that the Babylonian Empire (2:38) would be subsequently replaced by the Medo-Persian Empire (8:20; cf. 5:28), the Greek Empire (8:21), and an unnamed fourth kingdom, which we know from history to be the Roman Empire.

It is specifically revealed that the Kingdom of God would come during the fourth kingdom to replace all earthly kingdoms (2:44-45). And this would happen when “one like a Son of Man” is given “dominion ... and a kingdom, that all the peoples, nations and languages should serve Him” and whose “dominion is an everlasting dominion” and whose “kingdom is one which shall not be destroyed” (7:13-14; cf. Matthew 28:18). In other words, the Messiah would come during the Roman Empire.

Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks

To further narrow down the time during the Roman Empire when the Messiah would come, God gave Daniel what is popularly known as the Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks (see 9:24-27). This marvellous prophecy has been subjected to numerous interpretations, even among scholars who believe in predictive prophecy. We will adopt here the traditional Messianic interpretation presented by E. J. Young (1977: 191-221) and modified by David Lurie (1990) as it fits best the Biblical as well as historical data.

This is how the prophecy came about. In the year following Cyrus’ conquest of Babylon, Daniel was reading the prophecies of Jeremiah concerning “the number of years ... for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years” (9:2; cf. Jeremiah 25:11; 29:10). Recognizing that this means the Exile was basically over according to God’s promise, Daniel prayed for the restoration of his people Israel and his city Jerusalem.

In response God said, “Seventy weeks (literally, ‘sevens’) are decreed for your people and your holy city, to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin, to atone for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint a Most Holy” (9:24). Since this involves atoning for sin and bringing in everlasting righteousness, based on what we read in Isaiah 40-66, it has to

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refer to the Messiah and His mission (cf. Young 1977: 198-201), whose death, which makes efficacious the New Covenant (Young 1977: 213), is actually highlighted later in the prophecy (9:26-27). A plain reading of the text clearly shows that it is a Messianic prophecy.

To ensure that the Jews under the Roman Empire would take Daniel and this Messianic prophecy seriously, God also gave a series of detailed predictions concerning the preceding Greek Empire, from the rise and fall of Alexander the Great (Daniel 11:3-4) to the desecration of the Jerusalem Temple in 167 BC by Antiochus Epiphanes (Daniel 11:31). The fulfillment of this series of predictions was so uncanny that modernist scholars have to assume that the Book of Daniel must have been written in 165 BC, that is, after this series of events had already taken place (for a discussion demonstrating how unlikely this is, see Beckwith 2008: 355-58, 414-17).

The Messianic prophecy specifies that the period of the “seventy sevens” begins with “the issuing of the decree to restore and rebuild Jerusalem” (9:25). This has to be the decree issued by Cyrus (Isaiah 44:28; 45:13; Young 1977: 201-203), which highlights specifically the rebuilding of the Temple (Ezra 1:1-4) “because that was the religious center of the city, that which distinguished it as the holy city of the Jews” (203), and thus rebuilding it was “the first and most important step in the rebuilding of the city” (202). The prophecy further divides the period of “seventy sevens” into three sub-periods: 7 sevens, 62 sevens, and 1 seven, each with its own significance.

We will not get into the intricacies of discussing the meaning of the Hebrew term “sevens” and its implication on the chronology of the “seventy sevens” (for which, see Lurie 1990). We will just summarize the significance of each of the three sub-periods:

The termination of the first is indicated by the completion of the work of rebuilding the city; that of the second by the appearance of an Anointed One, a Prince; and that of the third by the completion of the covenant with the many, for whom the blessings of salvation pointed out in ver. 24 [cited in full above], as connected with the termination of the entire period, are ultimately destined” (Hengstenberg 1956b: 85).

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Regardless of how we understand the term “sevens,” of particular relevance here is the prediction that the Messiah (the “Anointed One” of 9:25) would die (be “cut off”) before the destruction (again) of Jerusalem and the Temple (9:26), which happened eventually in AD 70. Jesus died in about AD 30, thus fulfilling this prediction as well. This is particularly significant because it pegs the time of the Messiah’s coming to a recognized historical event.

Before AD 70 Jews and Gentiles who accepted Jesus as the Messiah did so without the benefit of this additional piece of evidence from Daniel to help them identify Him as the Messiah. But for people living after AD 70 this prophecy adds further weight for identifying Jesus as the Messiah, the Servant of Isaiah 53, whose death is said to make atonement for sin. For God not only reaffirmed through Daniel the atoning death of the Messiah, He also specified that this would happen before AD 70. And no sane scholar would ruin his reputation by saying that Isaiah 53 or Daniel 9:24-27 was written after Jesus’ death on the cross. If they reject the obvious conclusion that Jesus fulfilled these prophecies, they would rather do so by avoiding a plain reading of the respective texts.

Nevertheless the fact remains that the death of Jesus uncannily matches a plain reading of these texts. To dismiss this fact as just an incredible “coincidence” exposes one’s prejudice. We noted previously the caveat that Jesus did not fulfill everything said in the Old Testament about the Messiah and the New Exodus, and explained why it does not matter (Chapter 40). Daniel’s prediction that the Messiah had to come before AD 70 has rendered the caveat all the more a non-issue as no one else who emerged before AD 70, except Jesus, matched what is said about the Messiah and the New Exodus.

Furthermore the prediction that Jerusalem and the Temple would be destroyed even after the Messiah had come, already indicates a historical break between the first “new thing” of Isaiah 40-66 (the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah) and the second “new thing” of Isaiah 40-66 (the New Jerusalem and the New Heavens and the New Earth). For if the New Exodus, which covers both the “new things,” were to be fulfilled in one coming of the Messiah, there would be no room for another destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. In retrospect, Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks is

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clearly one Messianic prophecy that does not collapse the two comings of the Messiah and their respective outcomes into one event.

Likewise, the post-exilic prophet Zechariah prophesied that after the (first) coming of the Messiah—the Good Shepherd (cf. Ezekiel 34:23-24; John 10:11)—the restored nation would suffer desolation under a foreign oppressor, which turned out to be the Roman Empire (Zechariah 11:1-17; 13:7-9). This is because, except for a believing remnant, the nation would reject the Messiah and have Him put to death, resulting in God “revoking My covenant which I had made with all the peoples” (11:10), that is, withdrawing His protection over the nation from being desolated by foreign nations (see Baron 1918: 375-418; 473-86). And the desolation involved the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple, which Daniel had predicted and Christ Himself later confirmed would happen because of the Jews’ rejection of Him (see Matthew 23:37-24:2 and 24:15; cf. France 2007: 882-89 and Carson 2010: 561-63 respectively).

In line with the Abrahamic Covenant and the inviolability of the Covenant Formula (see Chapter 38), Zechariah also prophesied that God’s withdrawal of His protection over Israel would one day be reversed (12:1-9)—the nation would be “impregnable,” as in David’s time (McComiskey 1998: 1212). Also the nation *as a whole* would, in repentance and faith, “look on Me whom they have pierced” (12:10) and He would thus “cleanse them from sin and impurity” (13:1). So one day “all Israel will be saved” (Romans 11:26). This means the Messiah will have to come a second time.

Hence Daniel’s Prophecy of the Seventy Weeks and Zechariah’s prophecy on the Good Shepherd show that even in the Old Testament there is already a hint that the Messiah will come twice. In fact the idea of two separate entrances of the Messiah into this world, once as an infant (Isaiah 9:6-7) and once as an adult (Zechariah 14:4; cf. Acts 1:9-12), is already implicit in the Old Testament. So what is said about Him and the New Exodus that is not yet fulfilled will be fulfilled in the Messiah’s Second Coming. This gives believers even more confidence that the New Heavens and the New Earth will certainly come to pass. And that the world is indeed anticipating, wittingly or unwittingly, the coming again of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 42

Experiencing the New Exodus

Having considered why we can believe that the New Exodus will surely come to pass in its fullness, we now consider how we are to respond to participate in it. We will pick up from where we left off in our exposition of the New Exodus in Isaiah 49-53, which focusses on the Servant-Messiah, whose atoning death (and implied resurrection) redeems humanity from sin so that His mission to bring justice to the nations may be accomplished.

Immediately following Isaiah 53 the nation of Israel is exhorted to “Sing with joy” because not only will they be restored but they will also “spread abroad to the right and to the left” to “dispossess nations and resettle the desolate cities” (54:1-3). This and other statements (11:14-16; 14:1-2; 49:22-23; 60:10-14; 61:5-6) that seem to suggest Israel’s domination of the nations are not factual descriptions (see Chapter 1 on the non-factual description of 56:6-8). Recall that in the language of the New Exodus, the mission of the Messiah is described using *imageries* reminiscent of the old Exodus, which concluded with the conquest and occupation (domination) of the land of Canaan. In its New Exodus context, the statement just means that as a consequence of the atoning mission of the Messiah the Kingdom of God will encompass the nations (cf. Amos 9:12 with Acts 15:17).

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How then do Israel and the nations participate in the New Exodus and thus enter the Kingdom of God?

Repentance from Sin

On the basis of the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah the invitation is given: “Hey! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost” (55:1). Couched obviously in figurative language, this invitation is to “Seek the LORD while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near. Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon” (55:6-7).

So the invitation is to accept the atoning mission of the Messiah and thus receive freely God’s salvation from sin when the opportunity is still available. Though salvation is free (by grace), it must be received with repentance, which is here defined as *forsake* one’s wicked way and unrighteous thoughts and *return* to God. Hence Biblical repentance is not about “turning over a new leaf,” and not even about just turning away from sin. It involves both turning away from sin as well as returning to the Creator, against whom all humanity have sinned and thus from whom all humanity have turned away.

Faith in God

One cannot “return to the LORD” without faith in Him and His word. Conversely one cannot have faith in God and His word without repentance. Faith and repentance are two sides of the same coin. This explains why in the New Testament, salvation is sometimes said to be received through faith, sometimes through repentance, and sometimes both. For this reason, integrated into God’s word concerning the New Exodus (Isaiah 40-66) is the powerful argument for the trustworthiness of God and His word (Isaiah 41-48). So the New Exodus will surely come to pass because “the mouth of the LORD has spoken” (40:5). This is to help one believe in God and thus in the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah, and so repent.

To recap, after the powerful argument for the trustworthiness of God and His word, Isaiah presents God's word on the atoning mission of the Messiah, followed by the invitation to thus repent and receive God's salvation. Now this invitation ends with a strong reaffirmation that God's word concerning the New Exodus will certainly come to pass. For God's word, "which goes forth from My mouth ... shall not return to Me empty, without accomplishing that which I purpose, and succeeding in that for which I sent it" (55:11). This means one is to assume that the New Exodus will happen (55:12-13; cf. 12:1-6). And this includes the nations turning to God, so much so that one day "to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear allegiance" (45:22-23; cf. Romans 14:11; Philippians 2:10-11).

Bearing Fruit of Repentance

Isaiah 56-59 then elaborates on the theme of repentance before concluding with a preview of the (ultimate) fulfillment of the New Exodus in Isaiah 60. Isaiah 56 begins with a direct call to "Preserve justice, and do righteousness, for My salvation is about to come, and My righteousness (about) to be revealed." Here again we see God's salvation and His righteousness presented as though they are synonymous (cf. 51:5). To better appreciate its significance, we first consider the distinction between repentance and the fruit of repentance.

Repentance involves forsaking one's wicked way and one's unrighteous thoughts. Now "unrighteous thoughts" include thoughts that lead to covetousness (intention to do wrong) and covetousness itself, which in turn leads to the "wicked way." Repentance then involves turning away from sin by changing one's thoughts concerning sin and so change one's intention towards sin (forsake it), as well as returning to God by changing one's thoughts concerning God and so change one's intention towards Him (trust and obey Him). As a matter of fact the Greek word for repentance in the New Testament literally means "change of mind." This involves changing one's thoughts as well as one's intention as the Greek word for "mind" actually means "heart-and-mind."

This does not mean that a repentant person will never sin again, but it does mean his intention is to not sin anymore, with the result

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that he will increasingly bear the fruit of repentance (cf. 1 John 3:4-10, which is not talking about sinlessness). And whenever he sins, his repentant heart-and-mind will cause him to confess it and trust in God to be set free from it. Repentance in itself is thus not (yet) “good works.” So when we receive salvation by repenting, no “good works” is involved (yet). But genuine repentance will surely bear fruit in “good works.”

When God calls Israel to “Preserve justice, and do righteousness,” it is about the fruit of repentance. Historically it was through John the Baptist that God made this call in view of the imminent coming of His salvation and the revelation of His righteousness. And it is also through John the Baptist that the distinction between repentance and the fruit of repentance is highlighted and elaborated. When some religious leaders came to him to be baptized, he doubted their sincerity (to repent). So he challenged them to “Bear fruit in keeping with repentance” (Matthew 3:8; Luke 3:8; cf. Acts 26:19-20).

When different groups of people asked him what they should then do, John said those who had more than what they needed should share with those who lacked; tax-collectors should not collect more than what they were told to collect; soldiers should be content with their pay and not abuse their power (Luke 3:10-14). Hence repentance has social, economic and political implications.

In other words, genuine repentance will bear fruit in righteousness. We have seen in our exposition on Abraham’s faith development that genuine faith will also bear fruit in righteousness (Chapter 6). Since salvation is received through faith and repentance, it will surely bear fruit in righteousness. This is especially the case in the context of the New Covenant. For with the circumcision of the heart by God Himself, together with the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit (Ezekiel 36:26-27), bearing the fruit of repentance is not only certain but also quickened. Therefore God’s salvation and (human) righteousness are inseparable (see 62:1-2).

Receiving the Righteousness of God

We now consider why God’s salvation and His righteousness seem synonymous. Actually in Isaiah 40-66 the word “righteousness” has

three meanings. For it can refer to human “righteousness” (meaning 1) as above, or to God’s “righteousness” (meaning 2 or 3). In Isaiah 59:16 God’s righteousness refers to His righteousness which upheld or supported Him in the work of salvation. This means God’s salvation is an expression of His “righteousness” (meaning 2). This is in part because He has promised salvation even as early as in Genesis 3:15; He would be unrighteous if He does not fulfill His promise.

More significantly, in Isaiah 46:12-13 God says He will “bring near My righteousness,” and will “grant” “My salvation,” to people “who are far from righteousness.” This means God’s righteousness here refers to His “righteousness” (meaning 3) that comes as a gift together with His promised salvation for humanity. As E. J. Young (1972: 229) puts it, “God manifests His righteousness [meaning 2] in the salvation of His people, and also in the fact that in this salvation His people receive His own perfect righteousness [meaning 3].” Thus God’s New Exodus people, though they are still *in practice* “far from righteousness [meaning 1],” are *in position* reckoned as righteous with God’s own righteousness (meaning 3).

In fact Isaiah 53:10-11 specifically reveals that the righteous Servant “will provide righteousness [meaning 3] for the many” (Motyer 1993: 441), that is, “justify” those who are saved, through bearing their iniquities as a Guilt Offering. Since this is revealed in the context of the (implied) resurrection of the Servant, it gives the New Testament the basis to develop the teaching that salvation and thus justification are based on not only the death but also the resurrection of Christ (Romans 4:25; 1 Corinthians 15:16-17).

Hence God’s salvation is inseparable from His “righteousness” (both meanings 2 and 3). And since in Isaiah 40-66 human “righteousness” (meaning 1) as a fruit of repentance is also inseparable from God’s salvation, all three meanings of “righteousness” are inseparable (one implying the other two) even though in a particular context the focus is only on one of the three meanings.

Coming back to Isaiah 56:1, God says “My *salvation* is about to come, and My *righteousness* (about) to be revealed.” In Romans 1:16-17, Paul declares that in the Gospel, which is “the power of God for *salvation*,” “the *righteousness* of God is revealed.” Obviously he is affirming that what God promised in Isaiah 56:1 has come true. And

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he evidently has God's gift of "righteousness" (meaning 3) in mind. For in Romans 4 he refers twice to Abraham's faith being reckoned by God as righteousness (verses 3 and 22; cf. Genesis 15:6) in his argument that, like Abraham, believers in Christ are "justified" (reckoned as righteous) by faith alone. It does not matter what the "righteousness" of God in Isaiah 56:1 actually refers to (meaning 2 or 3). For even if the focus here is God's righteousness in bringing His promised salvation, the gift of His righteousness is also implied as it comes with this salvation. Hence it would still be correct for Paul to say that in the Gospel, God's gift of righteousness is revealed.

Confessing Actual Sins

Having highlighted the need for repentance, Isaiah then reproduces prophecies against the nation previously delivered in Jerusalem when they were still in the Promised Land, so as to review the sins the nation had committed there (56:9-58:12). This is to give the immediate audience a better idea of what they specifically needed to repent from so that they could participate in the New Exodus.

Isaiah begins with the failure of the prophets ("watchmen") and the rulers ("shepherds") to hold the people accountable to God; in fact the rulers themselves were corrupt (56:9-12). As a result idolatry and injustice were rampant and blatant among the people (57:1-58:12). Idolatry went as far as religious prostitution and child sacrifice (57:5-8). They did not love God with all their heart. However God said that though He is the high and exalted One, He will dwell with the contrite of spirit to revive their heart and restore them (57:14-21). This is to assure the audience that if they would repent, they will dwell with God again in the Promised Land.

As for injustice, Isaiah highlights a case related to the Sabbath. On God's holy day, the people would fast and expect God to answer, and yet "on the day of your fast you do as you please and oppress your workers" (58:3). Even on God's holy day, they did not love their neighbor as themselves. However God said if they would repent and honor the Sabbath, they will be richly blessed (58:13-14).

Isaiah then goes as far as to identify with Israel in confessing the past sins of the nation (59:9-15), as well as in confessing God's gift of

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salvation through the atoning death of the Messiah (59:16; cf. 53:12) for those who fear Him and thus repent, whether they be Israelites or foreigners (59:19-20). But just before the confession, Isaiah emphasized that “the LORD’s hand is not too short to save, nor His ear too dull to hear, but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden His face from you so that He does not hear” (59:1-2). This would prod the audience to join Isaiah in the confession of sins as well as in the confession of God’s salvation through the Messiah.

In response to the confession, God says, “this is My covenant with *them*”: “My Spirit who is on *you*, and My words that I have put in your mouth, will not depart from your mouth, nor from the mouth of your children, nor from the mouth of your children’s children, from now on and forever” (59:21). The “them,” with whom is God’s “covenant,” refers to those who fear God and thus repent (59:19-20), and the “you” (singular), upon whom is God’s Spirit, refers to the Messiah, who is thus empowered to execute the New Exodus (11:2; 42:1; 61:1; cf. Smith 2009a: 605). The “children” then refers to the “them,” on whom is also God’s Spirit and in whose mouth are also God’s words (cf. Acts 1:8). Hence the “covenant” refers to the New Covenant. Isaiah has already revealed that in the New Exodus, God’s Spirit will also come upon His people (32:15-20; 44:3), which is a key New Covenant promise (Ezekiel 36:27).

In other words, Isaiah 56-59 is designed to teach the audience what they must do to accept the invitation to participate in the New Exodus (Isaiah 55), and thus experience the blessings of the New Covenant made possible through the atoning death and resurrection of the Messiah (Isaiah 53). The focus on bearing the fruit of repentance shows how central repentance is to salvation.

To preview what is in store for those who repent, Isaiah 60 describes, in the language of the New Exodus, a Jerusalem that is glorious, so much so that “nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (verse 3; cf. Revelation 21:24). This is the New Jerusalem, which will be a part of the New Heavens and the New Earth (65:17-25; cf. Revelation 21:1-22:5), “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13), for the people will all be righteous (60:21). It is where “the former things [even the best memories of life

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in the previous world] will not be remembered or come to mind” (65:17), for they shall all be occupied with gladness and rejoicing (65:18-19). It is where every human longing is fulfilled and every human fear is no more (65:20-25). It is Heaven.

Creation Mandate Reapplied Fully

Isaiah 60 previews what is *ultimately* in store for those who repent. This is the “not yet” aspect of the Kingdom of God. Except for saying that God’s Spirit will be on His people and His words will remain on their lips and thus shape the community of believers from generation to generation (59:21), Isaiah essentially skips over what is *immediately* in store for believers in this world. To consider this “already” aspect of the Kingdom of God, we now return to the Creation Mandate, God’s purpose for humanity.

This purpose—to build a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will—was derailed, though not defeated, because of the Fall. We have seen that in the post-Fall world the mandate is reapplied *partially* through the Noahic Covenant and *nationally* through the Mosaic Covenant. In our exposition of the Psalms (Chapter 29) we saw that Christ has reclaimed the pre-Fall Creation Mandate for humanity (Hebrews 2:5-10; cf. Psalm 8:4-6). We will now see that in the post-Christ world it is reapplied *globally*, as originally intended, through the New Covenant.

In view of the Creation Mandate it is particularly significant that salvation under the New Covenant is couched in terms of another Exodus. This means the goal of the New Exodus is the same as that of the Mosaic Exodus, and the nature of salvation under the New Covenant is similar to that under the Mosaic Covenant, which is not merely spiritual, but also social, economic and political.

We have already seen (Chapter 38) that salvation under the New Covenant involves God’s circumcision of the heart as well as the empowering presence of the Spirit to enable believers to fulfill the requirement of the Mosaic Law (Romans 8:4), which is to love one’s neighbor as oneself (Romans 13:8-10).

And the purpose of the Mosaic Law was to enable Israel to achieve the goal of building a national civilization that would be in

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fellowship with God and consistent with His will. So the goal of the New Exodus is the same except that the civilization now extends to all nations. This is reflected in the New Exodus mission of the Messiah to bring justice-salvation to all nations (a global civilization consistent with God's will), and in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in New Covenant believers of all nations (a global civilization in fellowship with God).

When Jesus the Messiah ascended to Heaven, His mission was delegated to His disciples (Acts 13:47; cf. Isaiah 42:1, 6; 49:6). He actually charged them to fulfill His mission in what is known as the Great Commission (see Matthew 28:18-20; cf. Isaiah 66:18-21). As we look at what happens when the Great Commission is fulfilled, we will see that *the Great Commission is actually the post-Christ version of the Creation Mandate.*

The Great Commission is about the apostles, Christ's immediate disciples, making disciples of all nations, who will then make even more disciples, to form a growing global community of believers (the Church). And Christ promised to be with them (through the Person of the Holy Spirit) "even to the end of the age." This global community thus constitutes the temple of the Holy Spirit and becomes *a global civilization that is in fellowship with God.*

Christ's disciples eventually became known as Christians (Acts 11:26). And they are taught to live out in every area of their life "everything I have commanded you," which is summed up as loving God with all their heart and thus loving their neighbor as themselves (Matthew 22:37-40). They are to seek first the Kingdom of God in and through their lives (Matthew 6:33) by seeking God's will done on earth as it is in Heaven (Matthew 6:10). By seeking God's will done *in* their lives so that their lives attract others to God, they are being "light of the world"; by seeking God's will done *through* their lives so that their lives influence others to do God's will, they are being "salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13-16). And seeking God's will done on earth certainly involves upholding justice in and through their lives, and they thus become *a global civilization that is consistent with God's will.*

Hence the Great Commission has the same outcome as the Creation Mandate. And as we have repeatedly emphasized, just like salvation under the Mosaic Covenant, salvation under the New Covenant

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is not just spiritual (forgiveness of sin), but also social, economic and political. So those who repent and participate in the New Exodus will experience spiritual as well as social, economic and political salvation, even in the present world. We now consider how this actually happens as an outcome of the Great Commission.

We just saw that repentance will bear fruit in social, economic and political terms. Hence *within* the growing community of believers, who are repentant and thus love their neighbor as themselves, we expect no political oppression (see Luke 22:24-26 and Colossians 4:1); no economic deprivation (see Acts 4:32-37 and 2 Corinthians 9:6-15); and no social discrimination (see James 2:2-4 and 1 Corinthians 12:12-26).

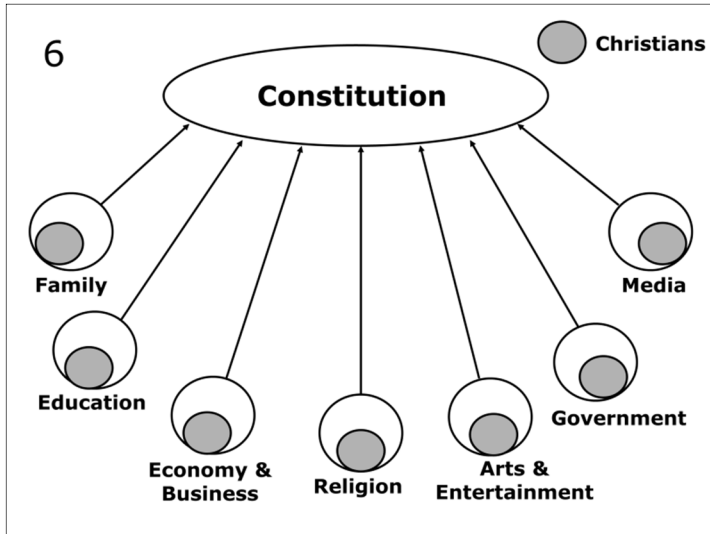
In other words when a person repents and believes in Christ, he becomes part of a community *within* which he will experience social, economic and political, in addition to spiritual, salvation. If we do not see this happening, it is partly because too many within the group concerned have not actually repented (cf. Matthew 13:24-30), and partly because most of those who have repented are still immature in their faith (cf. Hebrews 5:11-14).

To see better how the Great Commission is actually about building a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will, we now return to where we left off in our exposition on Covenant and Constitution (Chapter 17).

God's will for a nation is depicted there in Figure 3, which shows each of the seven influential spheres of civilization subjected directly to the constitution of the nation. We saw that insofar as the constitution of the nation embodies the Golden Rule, upholding the constitution amounts to submission to God and His will to uphold justice. Hence when a nation adopts such a constitution with the intention to uphold it, God's reign or kingdom and thus justice for the nation, has taken root.

We also saw that constitutionalism developed out of the covenant tradition of the Old Testament, which spread beyond ancient Israel in tandem with the growth of Christianity. Now the growth of Christianity was the consequence of the Great Commission. So it can be said that Christ's mission to bring justice to the nations has already borne fruit in the form of the constitutions of the nations.

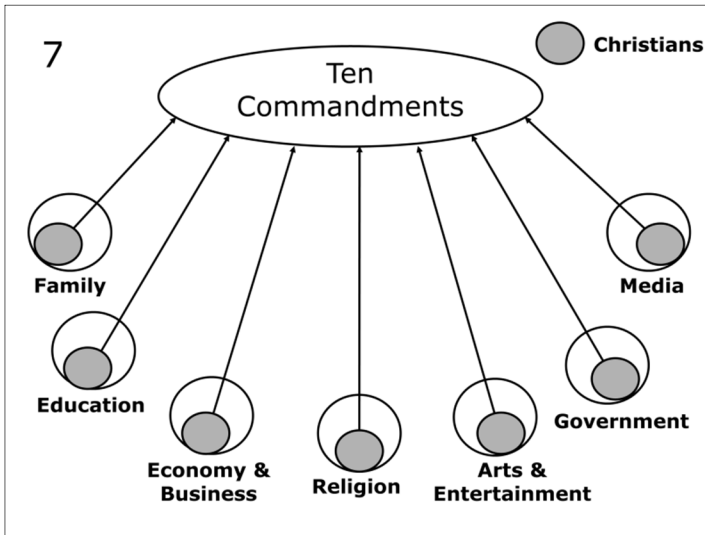
And Christianity has spread to the point where there are now Christians in virtually every nation, and perhaps even in every sphere of most nations (Figure 6):



Together with those in other nations, Christians in a nation form a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with God's will. Unlike others in the nation, they submit not just to the constitution of their nation (Figure 6), but ultimately to the higher constitution—the Ten Commandments itself (see Figure 7).

So they are to love God with all their heart, which thus motivates them to love their neighbor as themselves, that is, uphold the Golden Rule by upholding justice in the nation and within their respective spheres. They will then seek God's will for the respective spheres (discussed in Chapter 18) to be done in their lives as light of the world, and through their lives as salt of the earth. By being light they stimulate the conscience of others to recognize God's will and thus open their eyes to see how they have fallen short and why they need God. By being salt they also inspire and instruct others to do God's will, and in the process even lead some of them to become disciples of Christ. The cycle then repeats itself.

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In this way, the shaded circle in each of the spheres grows and thus a global civilization that is in fellowship with God and consistent with His will continues to be built. Hence through the Great Commission Christians are gradually transforming their respective nations, and thus the world, by being salt and light in their respective spheres as well as in their nation as a whole. They are thus directly contributing to nation-building.

However, it is crucial to recognize that transforming a nation is only a *by-product* of fulfilling the Great Commission, and is not in any way an attempt at “Christianizing” the nation, a devastating error that the premodern Church fell into after the Roman Emperor Constantine embraced Christianity in AD 312.

In other words, even when the head of Government and all of his cabinet members happen to be Christians, the model for the nation is still Figure 6 above; Figure 7 is meant only for the Christians in the nation (even then the Ten Commandments is not enforced on them through legal means; for a discussion on how Christians relate to the Ten Commandments, see Postscript). It does not matter to the Church whether the world would be completely transformed by her being salt and light. She only needs to be faithful to the Great Commission, recognizing that there is still the coming of the “not yet”

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aspect of the Kingdom of God—the New Heavens and the New Earth. So there shall be a complete transformation of the world, which involves the complete transformation of the universe, when the Messiah returns to consummate His New Exodus mission.

Chapter 43

Enforcing the Noahic Covenant

Beginning with our exposition of the Abrahamic Covenant, our focus has been the nation of Israel and then the Messiah and His mission, which involves all nations. We now focus on the nations and consider how God relates to them and what happens to people of all nations who do not accept the Messiah.

Recall that the Noahic Covenant, which is applicable to all nations, reapplies the Creation Mandate partially in that it is about building a global civilization that is consistent with God's will, but without the provision for it to be in fellowship with Him (Chapter 4). To this end God instituted formal government to uphold justice. We saw that the Mosaic Covenant reapplied the Creation Mandate fully, but only to Israel (Chapter 9). And we have just seen that it is only through the New Covenant, inaugurated by the Messiah, that the Creation Mandate is being reapplied fully to all nations. For people in the world who are not part of the New Covenant, God relates to them only through the Noahic Covenant.

All Nations Accountable to God

The most explicit statement that God holds the nations accountable to Him through the Noahic Covenant, and thus enforces it upon them, is found in Isaiah: “The earth is defiled by its inhabitants, for they have transgressed laws, violated statutes, broken the everlasting covenant” (24:5). This “everlasting covenant” has to be the Noahic Covenant, for it is the only covenant God made with every human being, and it is specifically called “the everlasting covenant” (Genesis 9:16; cf. Childs 2001: 179).

The mention of laws and statutes in this context does not mean that it has to be the Mosaic Covenant, which was only applicable to Israel and was not an everlasting covenant (cf. Seitz 1993: 180-81). For even Abraham, who lived long before the Mosaic Covenant, is said to have obeyed God and kept “My statutes and My laws” (Genesis 26:5). This is in line with Paul’s teaching that even people who have never known the Mosaic Law already has it written on their hearts (Romans 2:14-16). This explains why even atheists know in their conscience that murder, adultery, theft, lies, and even greed are morally wrong.

So it is not surprising that three prophetic books (Obadiah, Jonah and Nahum) are each about a foreign nation, and most of the other prophetic books include prophecies against the nations. We will focus on those in Isaiah.

Isaiah 13-27 concerns the entire world. Isaiah 13-23 is a series of prophecies against specific nations because of their wickedness and is about God holding the nations accountable to Him *throughout history*, whereas Isaiah 24-27 consists of prophecies against the world as a whole and is about God holding the world accountable to Him *at the end of history*.

Judgment Throughout History

The judgment of God on the nations throughout history is basically disasters that would befall them. In some cases, like the case of Babylon (13:17-22), the nation would suffer defeat and then cease to exist as a nation. In the case of Tyre (23:15-18), it would be a temporary

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collapse (cf. Ezekiel 26:19-21, which gives a longer view as it also predicted that Tyre would cease to exist eventually). As for Egypt (19:1-10), it would suffer internal political and economic collapse, as well as be ruled by foreigners.

The books of Jonah and Nahum both concern Assyria. The Book of Jonah shows that God would spare a wicked nation if the people would repent from their wickedness (3:10). This is because, as Jonah puts it, “I knew that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abounding in unfailing love, and One who relents from sending disaster” (4:2). It is precisely because of this knowledge of God that Jonah had earlier refused to go to Nineveh to warn the people of the impending disaster, for he did not want the Assyrians to be spared. Most interpreters fail to appreciate Jonah’s dilemma and thus do not sympathize with him: the fearsome Assyrians were a serious threat to Israel and were extremely cruel to the peoples they conquered (Hays 2011: 11-15; Bleibtreu 1991).

The Book of Nahum, which prophesied the eventual destruction of Assyria because of its wickedness (3:1-7), then shows that God’s sparing a nation because it repented would only be a temporary reprieve if the nation becomes wicked again. For even though “the LORD is slow to anger,” He is “great in power, and ... will never leave the guilty unpunished” (1:3; cf. Numbers 14:18). Thus there is a limit to the Holy God being “slow to anger,” and unless a nation not only repents but also remains repentant, it would eventually have to face the judgment of God. The case of Assyria is representative—it is not possible for a nation of fallen human beings to repent and remain repentant for long. Hence, like Israel, the nations need to accept the Messiah and participate in the New Exodus and thus experience God’s circumcision of the heart under the New Covenant.

Judgment at the End of History

As for God’s judgment of the world at the end of history, it would be total in every way. Because humanity has so defiled the earth, the whole earth would be “utterly laid waste and utterly despoiled” (Isaiah 24:3). And God would “punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity” (26:21). Isaiah 24 speaks of “an ending of the earth and

all its nations (v. 13)... The poet has offered a coming judgment in which nothing will be safe, protected, or immune. The poem strains to be unqualifiedly comprehensive” (Brueggemann 1998: 192).

Isaiah highlights that in the process, “the LORD will punish the host of the heavens above and the kings of the earth below” (24:21). In the Old Testament “the host of the heavens” may refer to the sun, moon and the planets (Psalm 33:6) or to angelic beings (1 Kings 22:19). In this context, since they are to be punished together with human rulers, presumably because of the wickedness they have unleashed on the earth, they must be the fallen angels “who have influenced the rulers on this earth to turn against God and to transgress His laws” (Young 1969: 178).

The idea that there are spiritual forces behind, and expressed through, the powers that be helps us understand the enigmatic poem in Isaiah 14:12-21 (also that in Ezekiel 28:12-19). Though the reference here is obviously to the king of Babylon (king of Tyre in Ezekiel 28), the description is so clearly Satanic in nature that many interpreters have concluded that it is a description of Satan. In other words, the king was so influenced by Satanic forces that he is practically an incarnation of Satan, and the poem identifies him with Satan.

Judgment on Systemic Evil

How then do angelic forces influence human rulers? In the New Testament the apostle Paul explains it in terms of the “principalities and powers” (cf. Young 1969: 178-79), which is an intricate subject (for a succinct discussion, see Stevens 1997: 795-801). We get a sense of what we are really encountering when we are faced with a social, economic or political problem so intractable, that we realize that we are not merely dealing with human beings, and “find ourselves confronted with ‘the system’—with frozen tradition, with intractable institutions, with deeply engrained social patterns that resist us, and, finally, with the world of spiritual beings and forces. What makes life difficult is systemic evil” (795).

In other words not only “the system” has a life of its own, it is shaped by evil angelic forces; even people who have hitherto been men or women of integrity tend to be corrupted when they become

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part of it. As Paul puts it, “our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens” (Ephesians 6:12). In encountering “the system” and its hold on “flesh and blood” we are encountering an expression of the principalities and powers.

Interestingly Walter Brueggemann (1998: 188) summarizes Isaiah 24-27 as: “Yahweh’s [the LORD’s] judgment on the power of evil in *the world system* and the prospect of new well-being for the remnant of Israel.” At the end of history not only the physical world, but also the corrupted world-system, will be destroyed. To appreciate what this system involves we now look at three main idols in the world.

We have seen that God desires His people to boast in knowing who He is rather than in wisdom, might (power) or wealth (Jeremiah 9:23-24). For when people neither know God nor trust in Him, they will trust in wisdom, power and wealth, which thus become corrupted as their idols. Given fallen human nature, lack of trust in God will in itself result in lack of restraint towards evil, let alone when compounded with trust in these idols, especially wealth. For “the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Love of money then leads to trust in and abuse of power, and even wisdom, as means to pursue wealth, and abuse of fellow human beings in the process. With the influence of evil angelic forces, evil in the fallen world becomes pervasive as well as systemic.

The power that nations trust and glory in is political and military might; this is exemplified by Babylon (Isaiah 14:4-6, 11-12), “whose might is their god” (Habakkuk 1:11). Note that since true religion is the fear of God, which eschews the use of force of any kind for the sake of religion, an offensive war in the name of religion is an expression of trusting and glorying in political and military might.

Tyre, a prosperous harbor, “a market of nations” (Isaiah 23:3), and whose king says, “I am a god” (Ezekiel 28:2), exemplifies trusting and glorying in wealth. God’s judgment on Babylon and Tyre serves as a warning to all nations against trusting and glorying in political and military might as well as in economic power.

Egypt was renowned for its wisdom (1 Kings 4:30), and exemplifies trusting and glorying in wisdom. When God’s judgment fell on

Egypt, “the wisest counselors of Pharaoh give stupid advice” (Isaiah 19:11), resulting in internal political and economic collapse (19:1-10). Trusting and glorying in human wisdom is self-defeating.

Nations today still trust in political and military might, economic power, as well as intellectual prowess, especially in terms of technological “know how.” Worshipping these three forms of idols is integral to the evil world-system we encounter. Without trust in God and God only and drawing on His resources, it is impossible to break free from the bondage to these idols and overcome systemic evil (see further 2 Corinthians 10:3-5; Ephesians 6:13-20).

With the punishment of even the “host of the heavens,” God’s judgment in Isaiah 24-27 will thus be total, affecting “all of heaven and all of earth. This poem [Isaiah 24] anticipates a judgment wrought by Yahweh against all of creation. The poem exhibits the creator at the work of undoing and dismantling the creation” (Brueggemann 1998: 190).

Redemption at the End of History

On the positive side, in “a remarkable counterpoint that anticipates newness for the faithful community, . . . 25:6-10a and 26:19 . . . [together] asserts that Yahweh will destroy ‘the last enemy,’ death (cf. also 27:1). In 25:6-9 death is ‘swallowed up.’ In 26:19, the dead rise [physically!], no longer held by death” (189).

So in Isaiah 24-26 not only creation, but also death, will be undone (see 1 Corinthians 15:26, 54; cf. Daniel 12:2). Then Isaiah 27 begins with “Yahweh’s victory over Leviathan, the great sea monster who embodies the autonomous, recalcitrant force of evil that lies beneath the surface of the earth and that endlessly threatens the stability of creation” (210).

Then Israel becomes a new vineyard, which unlike the old one in Isaiah 5, “shall take root, . . . blossom and sprout, and fill the whole world with fruit” (verse 6). In view of what happens prior to this scenario—the undoing of the old creation, death and evil—the new vineyard, which fills the whole (new) world with fruit, has to be referring to the New Heavens and the New Earth, the ultimate fulfillment of the New Exodus (cf. 2 Peter 3:10-13).

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In other words, God's *judgment* (undoing) of the world is an indispensable means to God's *redemption* (redoing) of the world. This teaching is expressed dramatically and more comprehensively in Isaiah 61-66. It begins with the words of the Messiah, saying, "the Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is upon Me, because the LORD has anointed Me to bring good news to the poor; ... to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor, and the day of our God's vengeance; to comfort all who mourn" (61:1-2). Jesus, soon after He was anointed by the Spirit of God at His baptism, read publicly these two verses in a synagogue in His hometown Nazareth (Luke 4:16-19). He then said to the people gathered there, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (Luke 4:21).

Thus Jesus publically proclaimed Himself the Messiah (cf. Luke 19:29-39, which records Jesus *deliberately* riding a donkey into Jerusalem with "a whole multitude" of His disciples cheering Him as King; by thus claiming to fulfill the Messianic prophecy of Zechariah 9:9-10, Jesus again publically proclaimed Himself the Messiah, this time in Jerusalem). It is significant that in reading Isaiah 61:1-2 at the synagogue He stopped at "to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor," and thus left out "and the day of our God's vengeance." Evidently this was because executing the day of God's vengeance was not part of His mission in His first coming, but it certainly will be in His second coming to consummate history.

Isaiah 61-66 ends with a description of the eternal destiny of people (of all nations) who have accepted the Messiah and thus participate in the New Exodus—jubilation in the New Heavens and the New Earth (65:17-66:24), and the eternal destiny of those who have rejected Him—destruction on the day of God's vengeance. On that fearsome day, the Messiah is depicted as coming from Edom, having executed a bloody massacre there (63:1-6), and leaving behind corpses, whose "worm shall not die, and their fire shall not be quenched" (66:24). Jesus associates this scenario with Hell (Mark 9:48).

Isaiah 34, which provides another depiction of the massacre on God's day of vengeance (verse 8; cf. 63:4), makes it clear that not only Edom, but "all the nations" and "all the host of the heavens" (34:1-4; cf. Psalm 110:5-6) will face the destruction. Hence in Isaiah 63:1-6 (and 34:5-6), "Edom is mentioned as a representative of the

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powers that oppose God, and in its destruction we see their destruction” (Young 1972: 476).

This inference is confirmed by the Book of Obadiah, which is a prophecy against Edom for its “violence” (injustice) against Judah (Obadiah 10-14). Though the focus is God’s judgment on Edom in history—it would be overthrown and cease to exist—the prophecy concludes with God’s judgment on all the nations on “the Day of the LORD” (Obadiah 15-21). We know that this judgment will be at the end of history because not only is it comprehensive (“all the nations”), but also it is at the conclusion of the New Exodus (see especially verse 21).

We have seen that “the Day of the LORD” refers to the times when God executes His justice in a way that we expect Him to: disciplining sins and unrepentance in Israel; punishing evil in the world; and bringing salvation to Israel and the world (Chapter 37). In the context of the end of history it involves the second and third aspects. Isaiah’s “day of God’s vengeance” (which Paul calls “the Day of Christ”) thus refers to the final manifestation of “the Day of the LORD” at the end of history (cf. 2 Peter 3:10). And God frames this judgment against the world as, “Just as you [Edom]... all the nations will...” (Obadiah 16; cf. Isaiah 63:6), thus affirming that Edom is representative of the nations.

Why then is Edom representative? The Edomites were descended from Esau, the brother of Jacob, from whom the Israelites descended. As all humanity descended from Noah, all nations are ultimately related to the Israelites, but the Edomites were their closest relatives. So when even your closest relative or “brother” takes advantage of you (Obadiah 10; Amos 1:11), it reveals how unrepentant fallen humanity is, and therefore the world deserves God’s judgment at the end of history.

Coming back to Isaiah 63:1-6, it is explicitly stated that “the day of *vengeance*” is also “My year of *redemption*,” when “My own Arm brought *salvation* to Me, and My *wrath* upheld Me” (verses 4-5). Hence “vengeance” and “wrath” go hand-in-hand with “redemption” and “salvation.” Thus God’s judgment of the world, motivated by His wrath against wickedness, is a means to God’s redemption of the world. But how can God judge the world and save the world at the

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same time? God's judgment will fall only on people from every nation of the world who did not repent, in order that people from every nation of the world who did repent will be saved.

A Glimpse of the New Jerusalem

Why then is God's judgment on the unrepentant necessary to God's salvation of the repentant? And how can God's wrath be instrumental to His redemption? The redemption we are talking about is salvation in the New Heavens and the New Earth. To appreciate how necessary God's judgment is in order to accomplish this redemption, we need to catch a glimpse of what the New Jerusalem is like.

In his vision of the New Heavens and the New Earth, the apostle John saw the city of the New Jerusalem in the form of a large cube (Revelation 21:10-27). Like the Tabernacle and the Temple, the city has the Glory of God shining in it (verse 11). But there is no more temple in the city, "for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple." The Glory of God fills the city as its source of light and so there is no need for even the sun or the moon (verses 22-23; cf. Isaiah 60:19; Zechariah 14:6-7).

There are twelve gates bearing the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, three on each of the four walls (verses 12-13; cf. Ezekiel 48:30-35). And the walls of the city have twelve foundation stones bearing the names of the twelve apostles of Christ (verses 14, 19-20). The city is thus the eternal home of not only every member of the true Church of the New Testament but also the (repentant) remnant of Old Testament Israel. This is expected because of the systemic continuity between the grace and salvation under the Mosaic Covenant and the grace and salvation under the New Covenant (Chapter 38).

We do not suppose the New Jerusalem is literally as described in Revelation 21:10-27. No human language can really describe what the eternal home is like (cf. 2 Corinthians 12:2-4). The fact that the city is depicted as a cube with twelve foundation stones bearing the names of the twelve apostles reminds us of the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle, and later the Temple (Hebrews 8:5). This is because the Holy of Holies, where God's presence was manifested, was a cube; once a year the High Priest would risk his life and enter it, wearing a

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breastpiece with twelve stones representing the twelve tribes of Israel (Exodus 28:17-21; 39:8-14).

The fact that God is present in the New Jerusalem, a cube like the Holy of Holies, already shows that the city is the equivalent of the Holy of Holies (cf. Beale 2011: 639-44). The corresponding two sets of twelve stones, representing respectively God's people under the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant, give us a better glimpse of the New Jerusalem.

Under the Mosaic Covenant only once a year on the Day of Atonement, with all the attending cleansing rituals, the nation of Israel, represented by the High Priest bearing the twelve stones, could enter into God's presence in the Holy of Holies (Leviticus 16). When Christ died on the cross as the ultimate Sacrifice for sin, the veil that separated the Holy of Holies and the Holy Place in the Temple was torn apart, signifying that under the New Covenant God's people have free and direct access into God's presence (cf. Gurtner 2007: 199-201). This explains why in the New Heavens and the New Earth, there is no need for a temple with three compartments; all that is left is the equivalent of the Holy of Holies—the New Jerusalem.

Unlike the twelve stones on the breastpiece of the High Priest representing Israel, those representing the Church are fixed within the New Jerusalem. This means the Church will dwell permanently with God in the equivalent of the Holy of Holies! In fact the Church can “already” draw near to God by faith and enter into His presence “within the veil” (Hebrews 10:19-22). However this “already” experience of God's presence is for now only spiritual in nature and partial.

As we saw above, the dead will be raised physically. According to Paul the new body of believers will be like that of the resurrected Christ—immortal and sinless (1 Corinthians 15:20-24, which also indicates that Christ's resurrection guarantees believers' resurrection). Thus the salvation through the New Exodus is also ultimately physical—the “not yet” redemption of the body (Romans 8:23). This means believers will eventually dwell with God in the New Jerusalem with their (resurrected) bodies; the “not yet” experience of God's presence will therefore be ultimately both spiritual and physical.

If the “already” experience of God's presence “within the veil” and of worshipping God now “in the splendor of His holiness”

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(Psalm 96:9) is already so splendid, with longing anticipation believers can marvel at their “not yet” encounter with the living God in the New Heavens and the New Earth.

Now God’s wrath, which is a manifestation of His absolute holiness, consumes all that is ritually and morally impure. Since the New Jerusalem is the equivalent of the Holy of Holies, how then can there be any trace of unrepentant fallen humanity in the New Heavens and the New Earth, “in which righteousness dwells” (2 Peter 3:13) and where “nothing unclean nor anyone who does what is detestable or deceitful shall ever come into it” (Revelation 21:27)?

In other words there can be no Heaven (redemption) without Hell (judgment), which is depicted as the “Lake of Fire” in Revelation 20:11-15. Daniel reveals that at the end of history not only the righteous, but also the unrighteous, will be resurrected physically; the difference is that the righteous will be raised “to everlasting life,” whereas the unrighteous to “disgrace and everlasting contempt” (12:2). Thus just as eternal life in Heaven involves both body and soul, so does eternal death in Hell, the “second death” (Revelation 20:14; cf. Matthew 10:28).

Hence the depiction in Isaiah 63:1-6 of the final judgment of unrepentant humanity in the form of a bloody massacre, which involves only physical death, is not to be taken literally. In line with the Messianic redemption being portrayed as the New Exodus, this depiction is reminiscent of the redemption through the Mosaic Exodus in terms of the Holy War under Joshua (see Chapter 21), which we have shown was about *judgment* on the wicked Canaanites (destroy them) so as to accomplish *redemption* for the Israelites (dwelling with God through the Tabernacle in the Holy Land).

Also, we read in Isaiah 63:5 that God’s salvation, which presupposes God’s destruction of the unsaved, is “upheld” or supported by God’s wrath. Depicting the judgment as a relentless massacre thus helps to create graphically the sense that the judgment is an expression of God’s wrath.

However we must not overlook the fact that not just destruction, but also salvation, is said to be supported by His wrath. What does this mean? Now salvation, especially one as splendid as that in the New Jerusalem, is an expression of God’s unfailing love. Hence inso-

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far as this salvation requires destruction (an expression of God's wrath), God's wrath is instrumental to salvation (an expression of God's love). This means God's wrath is a function of God's love (cf. Heschel 2001: 378-80) even when it comes to destruction in Hell.

Hence, "Cruel though the wrath of God be, yet it is transcended by His love" (379). Unlike God's love, God's wrath is not "an attribute, ... a basic disposition ... inherent in the nature of God" (381); it is the manifestation of His holiness when mercy is withheld. God's wrath is thus "suspended love," and may even be "prompted by love" (378), as in the case of His disciplining His people for their good through the Exile.

Last but not the least, the New Jerusalem is also depicted as a city with "a river of the water of life" flowing in it (Revelation 22:1-5; cf. Zechariah 14:8-11). And on each side of the river is the Tree of Life, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations (verse 2; cf. Ezekiel 47:12). Hence the conclusion of the New Exodus is reminiscent of Eden, and the New Jerusalem is depicted as the New Eden. Since the original Creation Mandate is about expanding Eden to cover the whole earth, this depiction means the New Exodus will accomplish the pre-Fall Creation Mandate even in terms of a place perfect for human inhabitation.

Therefore in the New Heavens and the New Earth the Creation Mandate will be perfectly fulfilled, with a global civilization that is perfectly in fellowship with God and perfectly consistent with His will. This is how history will end, and ends most meaningfully.

Postscript

Why the Mosaic Covenant?

God promised the coming of the Messiah as *Savior* of the world as early as in Genesis 3:15. God also promised the coming of the Messiah as *Ruler* of the world in Genesis 49:10 as part of the promise through the Abrahamic Covenant that all nations of the world would be blessed. So the Savior God had in mind would also be Ruler. As we have seen, it turns out that redemption through the Messiah under the New Covenant would be not only spiritual, but also social, economic, political, physical as well as ecological, as even the earth and the cosmos would be transformed. This is how the nations would be blessed through the Abrahamic Covenant.

Hence God had in mind the New Covenant all along when He made the Promise through Abraham. In fact the apostle Paul goes so far as to say: “Now the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the Gospel ahead of time to Abraham, saying, ‘In you all the nations shall be blessed’” (Galatians 3:8). In other words, the Promise was already the Gospel—salvation through faith in Christ.

As highlighted in *Announcing the New Covenant* (Chapter 38), this begs the question: Why then the Mosaic Covenant, which seems to interrupt the coming of the Gospel after the giving of the Promise,

especially since God foreknew that it would be broken, resulting in Israel being exiled? Why would God thus delay the coming of the Messiah and the redemption of the world by another 1400 years?

The Function of Law

Paul, having argued that God's Promise through Abraham was fulfilled through Christ apart from the Mosaic Covenant, and that it is received by faith in Him apart from the Mosaic Law, anticipated the question: "Why then the Law?" (Galatians 3:19).

Paul's own answer is two-fold. Firstly, the Law "was added because of transgressions" (Galatians 3:19), "that is, in order that there might be transgressions, the conscious disobeying of definite commandments" (Bruce 1982: 175, citing Cranfield 1964: 46; concerning whether it was the purpose of the Law to increase transgressions, see Esler 1998: 196-97, 240-43, who argues that even in Romans 5:20-21 the increase in transgressions is the *result*, not the *purpose* of the Law).

Revelatory Role

In other words, the Law played a *revelatory* role in making Israel consciously aware that they were sinning against God by transgressing explicit commandments of God. For without the Law, though people are sinning against God, these are not violations "in the likeness of Adam's transgression," that is, doing something God definitely said they should not do (Romans 5:14; cf. Hosea 6:7). So they may not be consciously aware that they are sinning against God. Without the Tenth Commandment, people may not even realize that covetousness—intention to do wrong—is itself wrong, let alone a sin against God (cf. Romans 7:7). And without a conscious awareness of sinning against God, people will not see the need for God's forgiveness.

This is not to say that without the Law people would have no awareness whatsoever that they have sinned. Paul himself said that even Gentiles who do not have the Law do know in their conscience that they have done wrong (Romans 2:14-16), and deserve to be punished (Romans 1:32). But the Law enabled Israel to become consciously aware that their sins are specifically sins against God. This

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was to cause them to repent and seek forgiveness from God through the Sacrificial System, which was itself a part of the Mosaic Law.

Regulatory Role

Secondly, the Law served as a custodian that confined Israel under it until the coming of Faith, that is, salvation through faith in Christ (Galatians 3:23-24; Longenecker 1990: 145-48). Hence it played a supervisory and thus *regulatory* role in a Law-centered nation, where national as well as personal life revolved around observing the Law (“nomism”). This was not meant to gain God’s favor or acceptance *by works* (“legalism”), but having received God’s favor and become accepted as God’s people *by grace*, they needed to be holy by observing the Law because God is holy (Leviticus 19:2; cf. 1 Peter 1:14-16).

Traditionally it has been understood that, as custodian, the Law also played a *preparatory* role, in educating and thus preparing Israel for the coming of the Messiah. The relevant clause has then been translated accordingly as, “the Law was our custodian *to lead us to Christ*” (Galatians 3:24a). Recently most scholars reject this interpretation and translate the clause instead as, “the Law was our custodian *until Christ (came),*” which expresses only the temporariness of the Law as a custodian.

Granted that this may indeed be the case, we need to recognize the limited concern of Paul here. According to New Testament scholar Richard Longenecker (1990: 176-77), Paul was arguing against both *legalism* (observing the Law *in order to gain* God’s favor and acceptance) and *nomism* (observing the Law *after freely receiving* God’s favor and acceptance). Paul’s focus here is the temporariness of the custodial role of the Law, which has been terminated when Christ came. What he needed to make clear to the Galatians was this: now that Christ has come, even nomism (a legitimate purpose of the Law in the Old Testament), let alone legalism (not the purpose of the Law even in the Old Testament), should no longer be the way-of-life of God’s people.

This is not to say that the Ten Commandments, the heart of the Law, is no longer relevant to believers in Christ. In our exposition and application of the Mosaic Law we have shown how it is relevant

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to the Church as well as to the world today. But the relevance is not that Christian living is to be supervised or regulated by the Ten Commandments; that would be nomism.

Christian living is not “Law-centered” but “Christ-centered” (adapting Longenecker 1990: 176). This means, even though believers in Christ are being taught (how) to observe everything Christ has commanded (Matthew 28:20a), which covers the Ten Commandments (John 13:34; cf. 1 John 2:7-11; Matthew 22:37-40), their corporate and individual life still revolves around knowing Christ (Philippians 3:3-11)—who He is (“Lord”) and what He has done (“Savior”)—and living accordingly. It does not revolve around observing what He has commanded, which will be taken care of when their life is thus centered in Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit, who manifests Christ and not Himself to the believer (see John 14:21-23 and 15:26; cf. Matthew 28:20b; Colossian 1:27b).

First of all, if Christ is Lord who died for us who do not deserve it at all, we will want to love and trust in Him and thus wholeheartedly serve and obey Him. This is how the statement, “Christianity is not a religion of do’s and don’t’s, but a relationship with Christ,” should be understood.

And in the very context of stressing the temporariness of the Law as a custodian (“until Christ came”) and that believers “in Christ” are thus not “under the Law,” Paul highlights that they are “all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus,” with the Spirit dwelling in their hearts (Galatians 3:23-26; 4:5-7). Elsewhere Paul stresses that true “sons of God” are “led by the Spirit of God” (Romans 8:14). So when they are thus “filled by the Spirit” (Ephesians 5:18) and “walk according to the Spirit,” they will “fulfill the requirement of the Law” (Romans 8:4). And this requirement is “love your neighbor as yourself,” which sums up the whole Law (see Romans 13:8-10; Galatians 5:13-14; cf. Matthew 7:12).

This is because, insofar as the Spirit of God animates the Word of God in the life of the believer, being led by the Spirit also involves being guided by the Scripture (compare Ephesians 5:18-20 with Colossians 3:16-17; and Romans 15:4 with 15:13). In fact, what the Scripture says is actually what the Spirit says (see Hebrews 3:7-11; Psalm 95:7-11). Hence when believers thus “walk by the Spirit,” they

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will not yield to the “desires of the flesh” and so violate the Ten Commandments, but instead bear (through their Spirit-regenerated heart) “the fruit of the Spirit,” which is, “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; *against such things there is no law*” (Galatians 5:16-26). This means, in a Christ-centered life, unlike in a Commandment-centered life, observing the Ten Commandments is a *by-product* of a Spirit-led life.

There is thus a world of difference between being supervised and regulated by the Ten Commandments, even when observing it from the heart in a Law-centered life, and being led by the Spirit in a Christ-centered life which fulfills the requirement of the Law from a Spirit-regenerated heart (cf. Romans 7:6, which is elaborated in 8:2-4). This difference follows from the difference between the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant with respect to meeting the requirement of the Law: the “circumcision” of one’s own heart under the Mosaic Covenant (Deuteronomy 10:16) in contrast to God’s “circumcision” of one’s heart through the indwelling and empowering Spirit under the New Covenant (Deuteronomy 30:6; Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:26-27; cf. Colossians 2:11).

People who profess to be believers in Christ but do not understand the liberating truth of being led by the Spirit and thus fail to experience the freedom of a Christ-centered life, may be tempted to swing from bothersome nomism, which readily degenerates into burdensome legalism, to antinomianism—the belief or practice that even the Ten Commandments has no more relevance.

Preparatory Role

We now pick up from where we left off on the custodial role of the Law. Due to Paul’s limited concern, he did not pay attention to the preparatory role of the Law, which we will now consider in view of our broader concern of why the Mosaic Covenant was necessary in the first place.

Actually Paul does allude to the preparatory role of the Law. He spells out that the end result, if not the “ultimate purpose” (Longenecker 1990: 149), of God giving the Law is “so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe” (Galatians

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3:22b), that is, “so that we might be justified by faith” (3:24b). Thus the Law somehow prepared the way for the coming of Faith.

Was it really necessary for the Law to prepare the way for Faith? Even Christians, especially those who accepted the Gospel message readily, may not realize how difficult it actually is for a person to come to genuine faith in Christ. For to do that he needs to not only acknowledge that he is a sinner and repent of his sin, but also accept by faith that Christ is Lord (God) who died for him, which means he also needs to acknowledge that no amount of good works at all can save him.

The first part about sin and repentance may not pose a problem to religious people. But the second part, which requires one to believe that God was born a baby and died for him, and that salvation is by grace only and not by works at all, stumbles even religious people. Every non-Biblical religion teaches that we have to do good works to earn salvation; even cults of Christianity teach the same thing. People with no religion assume that they can solve their own problems. And furthermore, the idea that the man who died a criminal’s death on the cross was the Creator Himself is not only mind-boggling but also outrageous to the extreme.

So it is not surprising that the Jews, who were prepared by the Scripture for the coming of the Messiah, only asked for miraculous signs to prove that Jesus was indeed the Messiah; but the Greeks, who pride themselves in their “wisdom” (reason) and were not similarly prepared, asked for logical proofs (1 Corinthians 1:22). Like the Greeks, people today who trust in reason (unaided by God’s revelation) consider the Gospel “foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23).

How then did the Law prepare Israel for the coming of the Messiah so that when He came, sufficient people, enough to found a Messianic community (the Church) that would eventually become global, would receive Him?

The most obvious is the revelatory role of the Law, through which they learned that they could not obey God perfectly and hence recognize that they could not be accepted by the Holy God through their own efforts, and thus needed God’s forgiveness for their sins. Built into the Law is the need to offer sacrifices for sins committed. This would teach them that there is no forgiveness of sin without the

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shedding of blood on behalf of sinners (Hebrews 9:22). And the sinner must *repent* of his sin and the sacrifice must be offered with *faith* in God (Psalm 51). This would prepare them to appreciate and apply the message: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

As for the regulatory role of the Law, which confined them under bothersome nomism, and which at least for some of them had degenerated into burdensome legalism (cf. Hagner 2012: 372-73), it would prepare them to welcome the Gospel and thus be freed from the confinement of a Law-centered way-of-life.

It was primarily to people wearied or burdened by the “yoke” of Law-centeredness (Galatians 5:1), especially “the unreasonable [legal and ethical] demands of the scribes with their excessive concern to regulate people’s behavior” (France 2007: 448), that Jesus said: “Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30; cf. 23:4).

This is not to say that the Law-centeredness under the Mosaic Covenant was meant to be bothersome, let alone burdensome. As the psalmists testify, to those who truly feared and loved God as taught in Deuteronomy and could see that the Law was indeed for their well-being (*shalom*), the commandments of God “are more desirable than gold ... and sweeter than honey” (Psalm 19:10). However, such Israelites were a small minority. To most Israelites the confinement of Law-centeredness was at least bothersome. In contrast, the freedom of Christ-centeredness under the New Covenant is available to *all* believers (cf. 1 John 5:3). What is true of the psalmists is to be true of all believers in Christ.

The 850 years of living under the Mosaic Covenant culminating in the 70-year Exile shows how burdensome the Law was to the nation of Israel as a whole. But the Exile, which God foreknew would happen, also helped prepare Israel for the Messiah. It showed Israel that even nomism (Law-centeredness after having been accepted by God) will not work, what more legalism (Law-centeredness to become accepted by God). It is thus a powerful polemic against seeking salvation through good works.

Also the Exile provided the occasion for the Messianic prophecies we read in the Prophetic Books, which gave Israel the Messianic hope, and thus prepared them for the coming of Christ. We saw for instance how Isaiah prophesied that the Messiah would be more than human (Isaiah 9) and would die for sinners and be raised from the dead (Isaiah 53).

When Paul preached to the Jews, most of them rejected the Gospel. But unlike most Jews, those in Berea were “more open-minded . . ., for they received the word [Paul preached] with all eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see if these things were so. Therefore many of them believed” (Acts 17:11-12; cf. 17:2-3). In other words, anyone, not just Jews, who would read the prophecies concerning the Messiah with an open mind could see that Jesus has uncannily fulfilled them.

The Fullness of Time

Strictly speaking the Messiah could have come when Israel was restored to the Promised Land under the Persian Empire. In fact Isaiah 40-55 gives the impression that the Messiah would come then, but we saw that Daniel clarifies that He would come during the Roman Empire. And Paul also says, “when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son” (Galatians 4:4; cf. Mark 1:15). This means God had pre-planned the time of the coming of Christ. But why did God in His pre-planning delay Christ’s coming by another 550 years?

We have seen how God used each world power in the Biblical world for His purpose concerning Israel, beginning with Egypt (to enable Israel to grow into a nation), then Assyria (to exile the Northern Kingdom), Babylon (to exile the Southern Kingdom), as well as Medo-Persia (to restore His people from exile). How then did God use the last two, Greece and Rome, to prepare for the coming of His Kingdom in the Person of Christ?

We only need to highlight the major contributions of Greece and Rome. The Greeks unified the empire through the Greek language and culture, while the Romans unified the empire with a network of roads and brought peace to the Greco-Roman world (for a substantial discussion on the conditions in the first century AD favorable to

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the birth of Christianity, see Green 2004: 29-49; also Cairns 1996: 39-48). As New Testament scholar David Lim (1997: 354) puts it,

Though maintained by military force, the *pax Romana* (“Roman peace”) provided an atmosphere of order, plenty and well-being. A network of roads was kept in good condition for fast and relatively safe travel and communication. The Greek language with its developed philosophical vocabulary was widely used in the Mediterranean region, thus facilitating communication across various ethnic groups.

For these reasons, unlike modern missionaries, Paul could travel safely throughout the relatively peaceful Greco-Roman world to preach the Gospel to the nations without having to obtain visas or learn new languages and understand new cultures. Thus, though Paul did face persecution from the Jews, it is difficult to deny that “no period in the history of the world was better suited to receive the infant Church than the first century AD” (Green 2004: 29).

In other words, God not only prepared Israel for the coming of the Messiah, but He also prepared the Greco-Roman world for the spread of the Gospel to the nations. And even the Exile indirectly prepared the Gentiles to receive Christ. It was mainly because of the Exile that, “By the first century A.D. there were significant Jewish communities throughout the Greco-Roman world” (Trebilco 1997: 287-88). And a Jewish community would establish a synagogue, “the center of religious life where the sabbath service was held,” which involved “the reading and study of Scripture” (292). This enabled Gentiles to interact with Jews and encounter their faith in a way not possible before the Exile.

There were Gentiles who were thus converted to Judaism and became “proselytes.” But many Gentiles who were attracted to Judaism opted to remain “‘God-fearers’ who were formally associated with the Jewish community, [and] were involved in at least some facets of synagogue life ... without becoming proselytes” (292). Hence, like the Jews and the proselytes, they were taught the Old Testament; the key factor they lacked was circumcision—“a painful disincentive to conversion as a proselyte” (Barnett 1999: 271).

Postscript: *Why the Mosaic Covenant?*

Thus the initial spread of the Christian faith to non-Jews was facilitated by “the presence of a ready-made audience of some Gentiles in Jewish synagogues, and therefore their preparedness for examining the Christian gospel” (McKnight 1997: 390), which does not require them to be circumcised. And “For a Gentile God-fearer, who was uncircumcised and who did not offer sacrifice in Jerusalem but who heard the law read in the synagogue and praised the God of Israel, it was not a huge step to move to the ‘synagogue’ of Jesus the Christ” (Barnett 1999: 271).

The Book of Acts shows that there were many synagogues throughout the Greco-Roman world, and Paul used them as his base for preaching the Gospel (Acts 13:5, 14; 14:1; 17:1, 10, 17; 18:4; 19:8). Except in Berea, the response of most Jews was negative. The case of Thessalonica, where only some of the Jews but “a large number of God-fearing Greeks” accepted Paul’s message (Acts 17:4), confirms the relative readiness of God-fearers to accept Christ.

Certainly the spread of the Christian faith was not dependent only on Paul and the other apostles, especially beginning with the late first century as all of them except John would have died. When the Gospel spread widely to Gentiles other than the God-fearers, Gentile Christians eventually formed the majority of the Church and carried on the mission of preaching the Gospel to all nations.

The Jews’ rejection of Jesus as the Messiah specifically because He claimed to be God and died on the cross, in spite of Isaiah 9 and 53, confirms how difficult it is for human beings to accept the truth that God Himself was born a Man to die for their sins. How then was it possible that so many Gentiles who did not even have a prior exposure to the Old Testament, unlike the God-fearers, accepted Christ so readily?

As Church historian Alan Kreider (2008) puts it, “The church grew in its early centuries ... because it was attractive” (170). What was it about the early Christians that attracted the non-Christians? In a nutshell (summarizing and adapting Kreider 2008: 171-76),

1. Non-Christians observed that the Christians, even at their weakest, embodied a spiritual power that could be construed as divine in origin.

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2. The Christians' distinctive behavior, especially in the ways they addressed common and unusual problems of society, exemplified Christian integrity.
3. The Christians' practice of community, which transcended race, sex, social status and geography, expressed Christian love.

In other words, the answer lies in the transformed life of the early Christians, who lived out the Spirit-led and empowered Christ-centered life under the New Covenant.

When there were no existing believers in Christ, it took God hundreds of years of Mosaic Law to prepare Israel for His coming, with the result that when He came, enough Jews believed to found the Church. But when those who had believed began to bear witness to the truth by their transformed life, even people who were never exposed to the Old Testament began to believe. In fact they received Christ more readily than those whom God had prepared through the Mosaic Law to receive Him. People are more likely to believe who Christ is and what He has done for them when they can first see the truthfulness of the Gospel lived out before them.

People who accept Christ readily usually do so because the life-witness of believers has affected them so that they are ready for the Gospel. So often we hear that someone who used to be resistant to the Christian faith accepted Christ because of a positive experience with professing Christians. Equally often, we hear that someone is resistant to the Christian faith because of a negative experience with professing Christians.

Hence in reaching the nations beyond Israel with the Gospel, the Spirit-empowered life-witness of Christ-centered believers not only replaces the hundreds of years needed to prepare Israel, it is in fact the more effective means in bringing people to Christ.

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The meaning of history is about the purpose and goal of history. According to the Old Testament this involves redeeming humanity and transforming civilization toward an eternal hope of a world in which every longing is fulfilled and every fear is no more.

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T. F. Leong has been studying the relevance of the Old Testament to the Church and the world for over twenty years. He has an M.A. in Old Testament Studies from Wheaton College Graduate School and a Ph.D. in (ancient) Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from the University of California, Los Angeles.

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