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# 1

## A THEOLOGY OF THE PENTATEUCH

EUGENE H. MERRILL

### INTRODUCTION

A theology of the Bible, or of any of its parts, must give careful consideration to the setting of the original composition—time, place, situation, and author—and to the matter of final canonical form and function.<sup>1</sup> This is especially true of a theology of the Pentateuch, for it is universally regarded by both the Jewish and Christian traditions as being foundational to whatever else the Old and New Testaments say theologically. Attention to the background of the Pentateuch, in which such elements of setting are addressed, is of utmost importance.

The position of the Pentateuch at the beginning of every known arrangement of the biblical canon is in itself a confirmation of the premise that these five books

1. For a careful argumentation connecting the genesis, transmission, and creative synthesis of the biblical texts and the theological relevance of each of these stages, see Gerhard Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate*, 3d ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), pp. 169-83.

EUGENE H. MERRILL, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D., is professor of Old Testament studies at Dallas Theological Seminary.

are the fountainhead of theological inquiry.<sup>2</sup> The very order of the books—Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy—is, according to every tradition, intrinsic to original Mosaic composition as well as final canonical shape.

A theology of the Pentateuch must, then, take cognizance of the historical circumstances in which it was created and, more important, the theological concerns that motivated both its divine and human origination, and its precise form and function. Until such prolegomena are understood, it is impossible to understand and correctly articulate the theological message of the writing of Moses.

#### HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Bible affirms (e.g., Ex. 17:14; 24:4; Num. 33:1-2; Deut. 31:9; Josh. 1:8; 2 Kings 21:8) that the Pentateuch was the creation of Moses, the great Exodus liberator, who communicated to his fellow Israelites the revelation of God concerning Himself and His purposes for His recently redeemed people. This took place on the plains of Moab, forty years after the Exodus, on the eve of Israel's conquest of Canaan and establishment as a national entity in fulfillment of the promises to the patriarchal ancestors.<sup>3</sup> Though there no doubt had been an unbroken oral (and perhaps written) tradition about their origins, history, and purpose, it was not until Moses gathered these traditions and integrated them into the corpus now known as the Torah that a comprehensive and authoritative synthesis emerged. The significance of the Exodus and of the Sinaitic Covenant in light of the ancient patriarchal promises became clear. Beyond this, the role of Israel against the backdrop of creation and the whole world of nations took on meaning. In short, the setting of the Pentateuch was theological as much as it was geographical and historical. It became the written expression of God's will for Israel in terms of His larger purposes in creation and redemption.

#### THE PENTATEUCH AS LITERATURE

The name *Pentateuch* reflects the size of the composition—it consists of five scrolls. A more accurate and informative term is used in the Jewish tradition itself, namely the *Torah*, which means “instruction.” This name suggests that the purpose of the Mosaic writings was to educate Israel regarding the general meaning of creation and history and regarding its specific function within that cosmic framework.<sup>4</sup> Where did the people originate? Why were they called by Yahweh? What was the meaning of the covenant? What were God's requirements for His redeemed people in civil, moral, and cultic regulations? What were (and are) His purposes for

2. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), pp. 128, 359.

3. For detailed support of this milieu, see Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), pp. 21-25.

4. Michael Fishbane, “Torah and Tradition,” in *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament*, ed. Douglas A. Knight (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), pp. 275-76.

them in the future as related to the nations of the earth?

The unfortunate translation of “law” for *tôrāh* gives the impression that the Mosaic writings are essentially legal texts. Such texts in the corpus are well recognized, but they by no means predominate. Genesis is narrative and genealogical for the most part. Exodus 1-19 is mainly narrative, with the remainder divided between “legal” prescription and its implementation. Leviticus is basically cultic instruction, legal in the sense of prescribing regulations for worship. Numbers is of mixed genre, most of it clearly narrative with only a few chapters devoted to law. Deuteronomy is cast in the form of major Mosaic addresses delivered to Israel as a farewell speech just before Moses’ death and Israel’s conquest of Canaan. Form-critically Deuteronomy has come to be seen as a long covenant text including parenthetic comments on various elements of its constituent documents.<sup>5</sup> The “law” in Deuteronomy is, then, the stipulation section of a treaty text that regulates the behavior of the vassal Israel toward Yahweh the Sovereign.

Thus the Pentateuch is a collection of diverse writings. But this does not vitiate the traditional understanding of the collection as Torah, or instruction. By story, poem, genealogy, narrative, prescription, and exhortation the theological message is communicated with one single objective: that Israel might be instructed as to her meaning and purpose. Literary form, as helpful as it might be in specific instances, has little to say about the fundamental character of the Pentateuch as theological literature.

#### ASSUMPTIONS IN A THEOLOGY OF THE PENTATEUCH

Though one might wish for a totally objective, unpreetermined approach to biblical theology, this is an impossibility, as all theologians freely confess.<sup>6</sup> One can never come to his task with no preconceptions as to the shape and conclusions of his endeavor. Yet the goal is to engage in an inductive study of the literature so that it may yield its own categories and results. Even granting this as an indispensable methodological principle one still must make certain assumptions about the raw material under his purview and the stance from which he will examine it. The following assumptions undergird the present approach to the theology of the Pentateuch.

*Assumptions about God.* God exists and is unified, self-consistent, and ordered. It is clearly impossible to do anything other than a “history of Israel’s religion,” or “descriptive theology,” unless one concedes the existence of God. One must also concede that God’s purposes are noncontradictory and comprehensible at some level of human understanding.

God has revealed Himself in Scripture. This revelation is unified, consistent

5. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1974), pp. 17-21.

6. John Goldingay, “The Study of Old Testament Theology: Its Aims and Purpose,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 26 (1975): 37-39.

with Himself, and systematic. If theology is to be done, it must be done with data revealed by God for it to claim any authenticity and authority. God's self-revelation, moreover, was given in human terms, that is, it was communicated in such a way as to conform to human thought processes and verbal formulations.

God has a purpose for all He does and that purpose, granting its divine origination, must be noncontradictory, self-consistent, systematic, and knowable. This is not to say that all God's purposes are intelligible to human beings or even are communicated to them but that those purposes incumbent on them must be so.<sup>7</sup>

*Assumptions about revelation.* The purpose of revelation is to reveal God and His purposes. The need or desire to communicate obviously presupposes the mechanism for communicating as far as God's objectives are concerned. It is unthinkable that God has requirements for His creation that He would not reveal in meaningful terms.

Revelation must express the purpose of God propositionally. If all that is in view is the noun (i.e., God), it may be that one could glean something by general revelation alone, for "the heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1; Rom. 1:18-23). If, however, verbs (i.e., God's purposes) are to be revealed, they must be clarified in verbal statements, for mere isolated acts and events—or even patterns of events in a historical continuum—are at worst meaningless and at best ambiguous. "Event" must be accompanied and interpreted by "word" if it is to be revelatory.<sup>8</sup>

The revelation of purpose may be derived either inductively from the text (by abstraction of a principle or a theme) or deductively (from a purpose statement) or both. In fact, the two are mutually informing and must continually be held in tension. A purpose statement that cannot be sustained in light of the total biblical witness is of course an invalid theological starting point.

*Assumptions about purpose.* Creation must from the outset be conceded as integral to the purposes of God, for though He could have existed forever independently and yet with purpose, creation has taken place and with it an implied purpose. If purpose, then, is bound up with creation (or vice versa), the statement(s) of creation's purpose should be in chronological and canonical proximity to the creation event itself. This naturally leads to the Pentateuch and specifically to the earliest portion of Genesis.

The statement(s) of purpose should be such that it can be validated by subsequent revelation as a whole, is adequate to accommodate the variety of biblical revelation, and is specific or restricted enough to make a meaningful statement

7. This is what Brueggemann means by a theology of "coherence and rationality" (Walter Brueggemann, "A Shape for Old Testament Theology, I: Structure Legitimation," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 47 [1985]: 41).

8. John Goldingay, *Approaches to Old Testament Interpretation* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1981), pp. 74-77; James Barr, "Revelation through History in the Old Testament and in Modern Theology," *Interpretation* 17 (1963): 197.

about God (subject) and His purposes (predicate).

The statement(s) of purpose must suit the canonical structure of the entire Bible. Regardless of one's view of inspiration and revelation, the present canonical shape of the Bible clearly reflects the theological stance of the communities that received and molded it under the direction of the Spirit of God.<sup>9</sup> Again, therefore, because it stands at the head and source of the canonical tradition, one would expect Genesis to yield the fundamental statements of purpose.

*Assumptions about theological method.* Within the present canon, whose arrangement reflects broad theological method and concerns (namely, the Torah, the Prophets, the Writings, and the New Testament), one must attempt to discover chronological order so that the progress of revelation might be discerned and brought to the service of more narrow theological interests. In the case of the Pentateuch this is an easy matter because universal tradition attests to the priority of the Pentateuch and the canonical form places Genesis first.

Once the purpose statement (also now to be construed as the center) has been determined, one must read the biblical revelation in that light, a reading based on proper attention to (1) well-established principles of hermeneutics, (2) literary/rhetorical criticism, (3) form criticism, (4) historical/cultural background, and (5) detailed exegesis.

The purpose statement must then be reevaluated to see if it still meets the criteria listed in the above purpose section.

Proper method for the Christian requires that the New Testament be viewed in continuity with the Old Testament and that both Testaments be seen as mutually informing. This does not mean that one can read the New Testament back into the Old, but that one must recognize that the two Testaments are indivisibly parts of the same revelation of the one God and that nothing in the Old Testament can in any way contradict the revelation of the New.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE SEARCH FOR A CENTER

The foregoing discussion suggests that the revelation of Scripture is a unified, purposeful, self-consistent phenomenon reflecting the purposes of a self-consistent God who wishes to disclose His intentions to His creation. It has been argued that these intentions can be reduced to a statement to be expected at the beginning of the historical and canonical process. Unfortunately it is impossible here to trace that statement and its implications throughout the entire Bible because this chapter is concerned with the theology of the Pentateuch alone. But it is precisely in the

9. Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), pp. 15-16.

10. See the excellent discussions by T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), pp. 79-93; A. A. Anderson, "Old Testament Theology and Its Methods," in *Promise and Fulfillment*, ed. F. F. Bruce (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1963), pp. 12-13.

Pentateuch that such a statement must first appear if the foregoing set of assumptions is to have any validity at all.

Though there may be an overarching, comprehensive statement of divine purpose (hereafter, center), there may be minor, secondary statements that are essential to the achieving of the one grand objective.<sup>11</sup> The very occasion of the composition of the Pentateuch is a case in point. Clearly Moses prepared the written Torah as instruction on the origin, purpose, and destiny of the people Israel. The Exodus and the covenant relationship certified at Sinai were sufficient to prove beyond any doubt that whatever purposes God had for creation and all the peoples of the earth, these purposes somehow were to be served by the election of Israel to a position of special responsibility.

*Exodus 19 and the theological center.* The Sinai Covenant, made possible historically and practically by the miracle of the Exodus, is of central concern to the Old Testament. The text of that covenant is introduced in Exodus 20:1 and continues through 23:33, but its purpose is outlined in 19:4-6, a passage that is crucial to the understanding of the function of Israel and of the Sinaitic Covenant in biblical theology. It is so important that it could well be considered the central purpose statement concerning God's election and redemption of Israel.<sup>12</sup>

After rehearsing His chastening of Egypt (Ex. 19:4a), His mighty act of Exodus deliverance (v. 4b), and His bringing of His people to Himself in covenant fellowship (v. 4c), Yahweh challenged them to be obedient to His covenant requirements so they could be His own special possession (v. 5), a kingdom of priests (v. 6). The redemptive prerequisite to covenant relationship is unconditional—God delivered them and brought them to Himself at His own initiative. What was conditional was their success in achieving His purpose for them, that they be a priestly kingdom, a holy nation.

Many theologians view this complex of events itself as the primary focus of Old Testament theology.<sup>13</sup> Because the bulk of the Old Testament revelation is concerned with Israel and with Yahweh's relationship with Israel, it is argued that that must be the central concern of God's revelation. But theological significance cannot be measured by lines of text alone. There must be careful attention to exegesis, to literary and theological context. Granting that Exodus 19:4-6 is a fundamental statement about the divine plan for Israel, is there anything in this passage to suggest that God's purposes are limited to Israel? Or is there any suggestion as to the role Israel was to play, a role that in itself would lead to a far more comprehensive understanding of God's objectives?

The answer is to be found in the very nature of priesthood. Whatever else might be said of the office, the fundamental notion that comes to mind in consid-

11. For various approaches to the search for a center, see Hasel, *Old Testament Theology*, pp. 117-43.

12. W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), pp. 80-81, 90.

13. Jakob Jocz, *The Covenant* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968), pp. 31-32.

ering the ministry of the priest is that of mediation and intercession. A priest stands between God and a person (or persons) who is in need of making contact with God. So Israel must be viewed as bearing a mediatorial responsibility, of serving as an intercessor between a holy God and all the peoples of the earth. But this suggests that Israel itself and its covenant relationship to Yahweh cannot be the focal point of biblical theology. Israel's role is not an ultimate objective but merely a means of facilitating that objective—that God and the peoples of earth might have unbroken communion. Israel's importance, then, is functional. For just as the priest did not serve for his own sake but only as a means of bridging the gap between the worshiper and the worshiped, so Israel was made a priestly nation to achieve communion between man and God. As will be emphasized later, even the form of the Sinaitic Covenant—a sovereign-vassal treaty—points to this functional meaning of Israel's existence.

If Exodus 19 is not a statement of *ultimate* theological purpose but only one outlining the *role* of Israel, is there a statement elsewhere that would satisfactorily explain the reason for the election and covenant responsibility of Israel in the first place? In line with the previous discussion of chronological and canonical indicators, it is proposed that the search for such a statement of center must begin precisely at the beginning—in the earliest parts of Genesis.

*Genesis 1:26-28 as the theological center.* Unquestionably the underlying purposes of God for man are bound up in His creation of the heavens and the earth, which provide the arena of His activity.<sup>14</sup> One would naturally expect the Bible, as a historical and theological treatise, to commence its story with creation, the earliest possible event. If, however, there were theological concerns that transcended creation and its purposes, one could have every right to expect the inspired record to begin with these because the canonical shape is not always exclusively sensitive to chronological concerns. Therefore, the very priority of creation *both historically and canonically* should point to its theological centrality.

There are two complementary accounts of creation; Genesis 1, which is cosmic and universal in its scope; and Genesis 2, which is decidedly anthropocentric. This canonical structure alone suggests the climactic way the creation of man is viewed. He is the crowning glory of the creative process. This is clearly seen even in Genesis 1, for man is created last, on the sixth day of creation.

A mere description of the divine creative activity is not sufficient, however, to communicate the theological message involved, for there must be statements of motive to give the act intelligent and intelligible meaning. The fundamental question that must be asked of the creation accounts is, "So what?" Answers to this question are not long in coming. Following the creation of light, God said that it was good (Gen. 1:4). Similarly He endorsed the appearance of the dry land (v. 10), the

14. Eugene H. Merrill, "Covenant and the Kingdom: Genesis 1-3 as Foundation for Biblical Theology," *Criswell Theological Review* 1 (1987): 295-308.



emergence of plant life (v. 12), the placement of the heavenly bodies (v. 18), and the creation of marine and aerial life (v. 21) and of earthbound creatures (v. 25). The whole is summarized in verse 31: “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.”

The judgment that all these things were “good” is of course a statement of purpose. It suggests that creation serves aesthetic ends at least.<sup>15</sup> But aesthetics alone is an insufficient basis on which to build the eternal, divine objective. To see that objective in more concrete and specific terms one must ascertain the particular purposes attached to the creation of man, because it is man who is the image of God and for whom the rest of creation provides a setting.

This leads to Genesis 1:26-28, the first and foundational text to articulate the functional aspect of the creation of man. The formal, anthropological aspect is found in Genesis 2.

The first part of the statement of purpose is that man is made in the image and likeness of God (1:26a), a purpose reiterated as having been accomplished with the added nuance of gender distinction (v. 27). In line with recent scholarship, it is argued here that the translation of *b<sup>e</sup>šalmēnū* (“in our image”) and *kidmūtēnū* (“according to our likeness”) ought to be “as our image” and “according to our likeness” respectively.<sup>16</sup> That is, man is not *in* the image of God, he *is* the image of God. The text speaks not of what man is like but of what he is to be and do. It is a functional statement and not one of essence.<sup>17</sup> Just as images or statues represented deities and kings in the ancient Near East, so much so that they were virtually interchangeable,<sup>18</sup> so man as the image of God was created to represent God Himself as the sovereign over all creation.

This bold metaphor is spelled out beyond question in Genesis 1:26b, which explains what it means for man to be the image of God: “Let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all creatures that move along the ground.” The mandate to accomplish this follows in verse 28: “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

The key words in this statement of purpose are the verbs “rule” (1:26, 28) and “subdue” (v. 28). The first verb appears in the jussive (“let them rule”) and imper-

15. Von Rad suggests that the word “good” contains “less an aesthetic judgment than the designation of purpose, correspondence” (Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1961], p. 50).

16. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

17. Only Christ is the image of God in an ontological sense. Man is such representationally or functionally. See Peter T. O’Brien, *Colossians, Philemon*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 44 (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1982), pp. 43-44.

18. For a full discussion of this view (which he does not accept), see Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984), pp. 151-54.

ative (“rule ye”) of the Hebrew *rādāh* (“have dominion, rule, dominate”).<sup>19</sup> The second occurs also in the imperative plural, the Hebrew verb being *kābaš* (“subdue, bring into bondage”).<sup>20</sup> Both verbs carry the idea of dominion. Both may be traced back to the verbal root meaning “to tread down.” Hence, man is created to reign in a manner that demonstrates his lordship, his domination (by force if necessary) over all creation.

Two principal passages in the Old Testament provide glimpses of what human domination under God entails. The first is Genesis 2:15 (cf. v. 5), 19-20, and the second is Psalm 8.

As noted earlier, Genesis 2 gives the account of the creation of man in which he appears as the climax of the creative process, almost its *raison d’être*. In this account, described in highly anthropomorphic terms, the Lord formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, making him a living being (v. 7). He then placed man in the garden “to work it and take care of it” (v. 15). This must be seen in light of verse 5, which points out that before the creation of man no shrub or plant had sprung up because there was as yet no rain and, more significantly, no man to “work the ground.” Clearly, then, a major purpose for the creation of man was that he should “work the ground.”<sup>21</sup> Work by itself was not a curse; indeed it was the very essence of what it meant to be the image of God. To work the ground is one definition of what it means to have dominion.

A second definition may be found in Genesis 2:19-20, which states that man was given the responsibility of naming the animals. As is now well known, in the ancient Near East to name could be tantamount to exercising dominion.<sup>22</sup> When Yahweh brought the animals to Adam “to see what he would name them,” He was in effect transferring from Himself to Adam the dominion for which man was created. This of course is perfectly in line with the objects of human dominion listed in the pivotal text of Genesis 1:26: fish, birds, livestock, and “all the creatures that move along the ground.”

The second major Old Testament passage that clarifies the meaning of man’s function as sovereign is Psalm 8. The entire hymn deserves detailed discussion but only two points can be made here. First, a clear reference to the *imago dei* is conveyed by verse 5: “You made Him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned Him with glory and honor.” As the NIV suggests in the footnote, “heavenly beings” may be translated “God” (Heb. *’ēlōhîm*). This in fact is the better

19. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1962), p. 921.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 461.

21. Manfred Hutter, “Adam als Gärtner und König,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* 30 (1986): 258-62.

22. Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 81. For a careful nuancing of this, however, see George W. Ramsey, “Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50 (1988): 24-35.

translation in view of the well-established fact that this psalm is a commentary of Genesis 1:26-28. As God's image and viceroy, man himself is a king crowned with glory and honor.

What that kingship means is clear from Psalm 8:6-7, where man has been appointed ruler (causative of *māšal*) over all creation, with everything "under his feet." This image is reminiscent of the fundamental meaning of "have dominion" (*rādāh*) and "subdue" (*kābaš*) in Genesis 1:28, namely, to tread upon. The objects of the dominion are exactly the same (though in different order) as those of the Genesis mandate: flocks and herds, beasts of the field, birds of the air, and fish of the sea (Ps. 8:7).

## A THEOLOGY OF GENESIS

### THE COVENANT MANDATE AND ESCHATOLOGY

If the purposes of God are bound up in His act of creation and dominion, one would expect these twin themes to prevail throughout the biblical revelation, and indeed they do. The devastating interdiction of sin necessitated adjustment of the implementation of those purposes, however, so that the ability of man to fulfill the terms of the mandate was seriously impaired and required modification. But what became submerged in the course of human history will reemerge in the eschaton when man's full covenant-keeping capacity will be restored. This is crystal clear from an examination of several passages in the prophets.

Nowhere is the restoration to the pristine conditions of the original covenant statement more brilliantly unfolded than in Isaiah. In Isaiah 11:6-9, a messianic passage especially oriented to the millennial age, the prophet predicts the following:

The wolf will live with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the goat,  
The calf and the lion and the yearling together;  
and a little child will lead them.  
The cow will feed with the bear,  
their young will lie down together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.  
The infant will play near the hole of the cobra,  
and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest.  
They will neither harm nor destroy  
on all my holy mountain,  
For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord  
as the waters cover the sea.

The docility of the animals, particularly their noncarnivorous nature, clearly speaks of the paradisaical conditions before man's Fall (cf. Gen. 9:2-3). Moreover, the verb used to describe the leading of animals by a child in Isaiah 11:6 (*nāhag*) is

one that speaks of leadership or headship,<sup>23</sup> a most appropriate synonym for dominion.

Another remarkable passage is Hosea 2:18. There the prophet speaks of a day when Yahweh “will make a covenant for them [i.e., Israel] with the beasts of the field and the birds of the air and the creatures that move along the ground.” There is an unmistakable allusion here to the covenant mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 although, to be sure, it is Israel specifically that will be involved in its implementation.<sup>24</sup>

#### THE COVENANT MANDATE AND THE LIFE OF JESUS

The apostle Paul described Jesus as the Second Adam, an epithet associated with His salvific and redemptive work and with His role as the “first Man” of a regenerate community. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22; cf. 15:45; Rom. 5:12-17). Although this redemptive aspect of Jesus as the Second Adam cannot be emphasized too much, it may be instructive also to view the *life* of Jesus as the life of the Second Adam, and to note that Jesus came not only to die but also to live. And the life He lived demonstrated by its power and perfection all that God created Adam and all men to be. In other words, Jesus fulfilled in His life the potentialities of unfallen Adam just as by His death He restored all mankind to those potentialities.

A few examples from the gospels must suffice. On one occasion Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee when a furious storm overtook the boat and threatened to swamp it. Jesus, awakened by the disciples, rebuked the winds and waves, and so startling were the results that His friends asked, “What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!” (Matt. 8:23-27). Although one could easily argue that Jesus worked this miracle because of His deity, that does not seem to be the conclusion of those who witnessed the event. Of particular interest in the account (see also Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:22-25) is the disciples’ sense of Jesus’ sovereignty over creation. Jesus spoke to the elements as their lord and they obeyed Him. Is this not akin to the dominion to which Adam was appointed?

A similar incident may suggest even closer affinities to the domination over creation enjoined by the Adamic Covenant. Matthew 14:22-23 (cf. Mark 6:45-51; John 6:16-21) relates the story of the disciples who again were in the grip of the angry sea when suddenly they saw Jesus walking on the water. Emboldened by this, Peter asked Jesus to allow him to walk on the waves as well. Successful at first, Peter lost his confidence and began to sink and only the strong arm of the Lord preserved him.

Certain features stand out and give evidence of theological themes and antecedents that provide a rationale for the event. First, there is the concept of the chaotic waters that must be dominated, a concept seen in the narrative of Matthew

23. Brown, Driver, and Briggs, p. 694.

24. Hans Walter Wolff, *Hosea* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), p. 51.

8 was well. Here, however, Jesus did not speak to the waves; instead he trod them underfoot. This is in keeping with the fundamental idea of *rādāh* and *kābaš* in Genesis 1:28, namely, to tread or trample on. Second, Peter himself apparently saw in the mastery of the elements by Jesus a warrant for his own mastery. For him to imagine that he could emulate Jesus as God would be nothing short of blasphemy. To emulate Him as the Second Adam would, however, be only what God intended him and all men to do.

A third example of Jesus' lordship over creation is that of the extraction of the Temple tax from the mouth of a fish (Matt. 17:27). When Peter inquired as to how the penniless disciples were to pay their tax, Jesus instructed him to catch a fish and in its mouth would be the exact amount needed. Though again one might plead miracle here, it could equally as well be explained as the natural consequence of the sinless Man invoking the privilege of the original creation covenant in which He was to have dominion over "the fish of the sea."

A fourth incident is that of Jesus riding into Jerusalem triumphantly on the first day of Passion week (Matt. 21:1-11; Mark 11:1-10; Luke 19:29-38). What must be noted here is that He did so on an animal—as Mark and Luke were careful to point out—"upon which no one has ever ridden" (Mark 11:2). This comment is generally overlooked, but in the context of the triumph of the Lord, which was being celebrated by the throngs, it is particularly significant that that triumph is specifically focused on His dominion of the animal world, in this case the unbroken colt. Jesus entered Jerusalem as King, a role He fulfilled not only as the Lord God but also as the Second Adam and the Son of David.

#### SIN AND THE INTERRUPTION OF COVENANT PURPOSE

The origin of sin is a mystery that remains undisclosed in biblical revelation. What is clear is that sin is a reality and that it followed hard on the creation of man and his covenant between God and man, and between them and all other creatures. The remainder of the biblical story is the plan of God whereby that alienation can be overcome and His original purposes for man—that he have dominion over all things—can be reestablished.

The God-man relationship was of a sovereign-vassal nature. God had created man for the express purpose of conveying to him the status and function of image, that is, man was to represent God in his dominion over all creation. Such a privilege entailed also responsibility, chief of which was unqualified loyalty and obedience. In a sinless world it is impossible for obedience to be tested and authenticated, for a sinless world is one with no options. This perhaps explains the existence of Satan, who appears as the antagonist and accuser, the one who gives man a choice of sovereigns and courses of action.<sup>25</sup> His role as alternative lord is already presupposed by the limitation placed on the man in the garden. "You are free to eat

25. Gustave F. Oehler, *Theology of the Old Testament* (1883; reprint, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), pp. 158-59, 448-51.

from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

This prohibition is the reverse side of the statement of covenant purpose. Positively man was to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28). Negatively he was to refrain from one part of that creation, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Whatever that tree might convey by its fruit, it symbolized the principle that in covenant-keeping there are "shall nots" as well as "shalls." To have dominion over all things is not a blanket endorsement for man to do as he will. Human dominion must be exercised within the framework of the permissions and prohibitions of the King of whom man is only the image.

The tree serves, therefore, as the testing point of man's covenant fidelity. To partake of it is to demonstrate false dominion, a hubris in which man has become in some mysterious sense like God. "The man," God says, "has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:22). By attempting to reverse roles and assert his independence of limitations, man became a marred and defective image, one who no longer could represent his sovereign in an unhampered and perfect way. Sin had introduced an alienation that affected not only the God-man relationship but also made the man a dying creature who could never hope to fulfill the covenant mandate as long as he remained in that condition.

The alienation extended also in a horizontal direction: man became alienated from woman and vice versa. The covenant statement had said, "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27). Man is male and female and both genders are the image of God. Both men and women, therefore, represent God on the earth and are the agents through whom He exercises dominion.<sup>26</sup>

This statement of covenant purpose is qualified by the account of covenant function in Genesis 2, which delineates further the male-female relationship. The Lord Himself observed that "it is not good for the man to be alone," so He determined to "make a helper suitable to him" (v. 18). This is followed by the "making" of a woman from man's side and the pun to the effect that she is woman ('*iššāh*) because she was taken out of man ('*îš*) (v.23).

No idea of superiority/inferiority with respect to the sexes can be found here. That woman was taken from man no more implies the inferiority of woman to man than the taking of man from the ground ('*ādām* from '*ādāmāh*) implies the inferiority of man to the ground. Nor does the term "helper" connote subordination. This is clear from the context in which the need is for man, like the animals, to have a mate, a partner who would complement or correspond to him. Man as male is only half of what God wants him to be as the image of God. It is, moreover, important to note that the Hebrew term for "helper," '*ezer*, is frequently used of the

26. Walther Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967), 2:126-27.

Lord Himself as man's Helper (Deut. 33:7; Pss. 33:20; 115:9-11; 146:5; Hos. 13:9). A helper then is not necessarily dominant or subordinate but one who meets a need in the life and experience of someone else.<sup>27</sup>

Sin, however, radically altered the man-woman relationship just as it did that between God and His creation. The woman, having been tempted by Satan, yielded and encouraged her husband to join her in her violation of covenant prohibition. As a result, Satan, the woman, and the man fell under divine condemnation and became subject to a covenant that now incorporated stipulations appropriate to a universe no longer in willing compliance to its Sovereign. The old demand to "be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it" was still in effect, but it could hereafter be carried out only partially by unredeemed humanity and imperfectly even by those God would restore to Himself in saving grace. Sin and history must run their course before the perfect conditions of covenant fulfillment can come to pass.

Meanwhile, it is important to explore the man-woman relationship and God-man relationship in their functional aspects as a result of the alienation caused by sin. The covenant statement relative to these matters is preceded by the glorious redemptive promise that though the offspring of Satan would strike the heel of the Descendant of the woman that Descendant would in turn crush the head of the evil line (Gen. 3:15). The messianic character of this promise is almost universally recognized, though, of course, the specificity of the woman's offspring cannot be established in this text alone.

More immediately relevant to the question of male-female relationship within the context of covenant fulfillment in a fallen world is Genesis 3:16. There the woman is assigned the curse of painful child-bearing, and there it is said that "your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." The setting of this statement is human society in a fallen world. Whatever the curse might involve, it is not relevant to the original status of man and woman nor indigenous to their creation as coregents of the dominions of the Lord. Nor will it endure beyond the confines of history, for the eschaton ultimately is a restoration of all things as they were and as they were intended.

The problematic phrase is that in which the man is said to move beyond the role of coregent with his wife to that of lord over her. That this is not merely predictive of what the future would hold but prescriptive of the man-woman functional relationship from that time forward is clear from apostolic teaching on the matter. To cite one or two texts only, Paul forbade women to speak in the churches because they "must be in submission, as the Law says" (1 Cor. 14:34). To the same church he pointed out that "the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God" (1 Cor. 11:3; cf. Eph. 5:23-24; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1; etc.). One would not, of course, gather from this that God (the Father) is superior in essence to Christ, but only in function. Likewise all that is being

27. Westermann, *Genesis*, p. 227.

avowed by the apostle is that man is superior to woman in a functional sense, in man's role in the hierarchical structure of kingdom domination.<sup>28</sup>

More difficult still is the phrase "your desire will be for your husband" (Gen. 3:16). The Hebrew construction of the verse reflects poetic parallelism in which the first line of the couplet carries the same meaning as the second. The second ("and he will rule over you") requires that the "desire" of the woman for her husband also convey the idea of domination. The word translated "desire" (*těšūqāh*) occurs also in Genesis 4:7, which says that sin "desired to have you [Cain], but you must master it." Interestingly the same Hebrew verb translated "master" (*māšal*) here was translated "rule" in Genesis 3:16. This suggests that the woman will turn to the man for her dominion and that his rule over her will come to pass.<sup>29</sup> As a rule, then, the headship of the man will be the pattern as long as the fallen world of history remains.

The alienation brought about by sin not only affected the God-man and the man-woman relationship; it also disrupted the harmony between man and creation. These three relationships may be described as the vertical-above, the horizontal, and the vertical-below, respectively. Man was created subordinate to God, coordinate to the woman, and dominant over all other creatures. He had been charged with the task of "working" the ground (Gen. 2:15), bringing it and all other things into his service and under his dominion as the vice-regent of God.

Now, however, sin has intruded, and fallen man has forfeited his untrammelled mastery of his environment. He had listened to his wife, thereby submitting to her authority, so now the ground he was created to work would be resistant to his husbandry. His toil now would be painful, the earth would produce worthless and annoying brambles and weeds, and the ground from which he was taken and over which he had been set would conquer him as he was laid beneath its soil in death (Gen. 3:19).

The immediate repercussion was the permanent exile of the man and the woman from the garden, an exile that symbolized their fallenness and exclusion from the privileges of the covenant stipulations for which they had been created. Life outside the garden spoke of life apart from the intimacy of relationship with God, with one another, and with the created order. Such an exile was a repudiation of all the purposes of God for creation, however, so a means of undoing the curse of sin and ultimately its very existence must be set in motion.

#### COVENANT PURPOSE AND SOTERIOLOGY

The curse of alienation requires an act of reconciliation, and it is this act, both as event and process, that is the definition of biblical salvation.<sup>30</sup> Soteriology,

28. So, for example, F. L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians* (1899; reprint, Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1977), p. 539.

29. Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), pp. 204-6.

30. Claus Westermann, *Elements of Old Testament Theology* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), p. 45.



then, is obviously a major theme of biblical theology, though it clearly is not *the* central motif. This is evident in that salvation implies deliverance *from* something to something and is thus a functional rather than a teleological concept. In other words, salvation leads to a purpose that has been frustrated or interrupted and is not a purpose in itself.

Many scholars' attempts to see salvation as a central theme even in the creation account are not convincing because such attempts draw most of their support from pagan mythology in which creation occurs as a result of the subjugation of primeval chaotic waters by the gods.<sup>31</sup> There is no hint of such a thing in the Old Testament except in passages where such mythic themes may be used as poetic illustration of Yahweh's victory over His enemies, who are at times likened to chaotic and destructive floods.

The earliest reference to salvation is obviously identified with its earliest need, namely, in response to the disruption of covenant purpose occasioned by man's sinful rebellion against his God. Genesis 3:15 describes the ultimate conquest of evil by the seed of woman. Also relevant, as has been noted throughout the history of interpretation, is the clothing of man and woman with animal skins provided graciously by the Lord. Although one must be cautious about unwarranted theological conclusions based on such a laconic text, there can be no question that the covering of nakedness, first perceived after man's sin, cannot be achieved by the fig leaves on his own making (3:7) but requires divine initiative (3:21).<sup>32</sup>

The need for salvation is a persistent theme of biblical history, for that history is one of continuing and increasing spiritual and moral defection. For every act of divine grace there is a human counteract of sin. Following every expression of God's covenant purposes there is a human word and deed of rebellion against it. Created to be the image of God and thus to manifest the sovereignty of God in all areas of life, man has become a marred and misshapen vestige of the image who, without the intervention of redemptive and reconciling grace, is unable to serve the purposes for which he was created.

This is seen in such examples as the murder of Abel by his brother Cain (Gen. 4:1-15), an act of brutality followed by the vengeful boast of Lamech, the descendant of Cain, that whoever attempted to avenge Cain would himself be avenged many times over (vv. 23-24). This narrative shows not only the continuing horizontal alienation of man from man but a proud assertion by Lamech that the preservation of Cain by the Lord (v. 15) is inadequate and its perceived inadequacy must be remedied by human intervention.

Similarly the intermarriage of the sons of God and the daughters of men was indicative of a waywardness that prompted the Lord to comment that man's wicked-

31. See, for example, Gerhard von Rad, "The Theological Problem of the Old Testament Doctrine of Creation," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: SCM, 1984), esp. pp. 142-43.

32. Franz Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, Commentary on the Old Testament, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 106.

ness was great and that “every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time” (Gen. 6:5). Contextually it seems that intermarriage speaks of an intercourse between angelic and human beings, an illegitimate bridging of divinely segregated orders of creation that produced the monstrous “Nephilim,” the “heroes of old, men of renown” (v. 4).<sup>33</sup> Again man, the image of God who was commissioned to rule over all things, placed himself in subjection to demonic powers over which he should have been master.

#### NOAH AS A “SECOND ADAM”

Man’s sin in Noah’s day was grievous and painful to the Lord, who regretted He had created man in the first place. He therefore determined to bury man beneath the waters of the sea just as He had buried Adam beneath the surface of the ground. The chaotic waters that had yielded submissively to the hand of the Creator so that dry land appeared would be unleashed now by the Creator as an instrument of His vindictive wrath. But even so the original creative purposes would not be stymied and curtailed because God would begin again with another Adam, another image who would maintain the mandate of sovereignty. This “Adam” of course was none other than Noah.

Noah, though righteous and blameless, was nonetheless chosen not because of his upright condition but as an object of the elective grace of God (Gen. 6:8). That election clearly had salvific overtones—he was saved from the Flood—but beyond that and most fundamentally it was election to the covenant arrangement for which Adam had been created. Noah was to be the beginner of a new undertaking of covenant commitment, a new vice-regent through whom the sovereign purposes of God could find fruition.

Beyond question, this is the meaning of Genesis 6:18: “But I will establish my covenant with you.” “My covenant” can refer only to something antecedent and the only possible antecedent is that covenant implied by Genesis 1:26-28.<sup>34</sup> The old Adamic Covenant would be established (*hēqîm*) with Noah, and all that the Lord had entrusted to and required of Adam would devolve on Noah and his descendants.

When at last the watery judgment was over, Yahweh articulated the significance and specifications of the covenant terms. This was prefaced by the solemn promise that never again would Yahweh “curse the ground” because of man nor would He destroy all living creatures so long as human history ran its course (Gen. 8:21-22). The Bible goes on, however, to attest to an ultimate destruction and renewal of the earth by fire, a destruction that will mark the end of time and the commencement of the eternal and uncursed kingdom of God (2 Pet. 3:3-7).

The covenant text itself is spelled out in Genesis 9:1-7, a unit bracketed by the

33. Willem A. Van Gemeren, “The Sons of God in Genesis 6:1-4,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 43 (1981): 343.

34. Dumbrell, p. 26.

familiar Adamic Covenant statement “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth” (vv. 1, 7). The next part of the command to Adam—“subdue it [the earth]” and “rule over the fish,” and so forth—is, however, radically different in its Noachic form because now the earth was cursed and alienation had fractured the harmonious structures of sovereignty that attended the pre-Fall creation. “Subdue” and “rule” now have come to be expressed as follows: “The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea” (v. 2). The domination by Adam (exemplified by Jesus) that was effected by the spoken word alone must now be enforced by man’s superior intellectual and rational powers. Voluntary subservience in the animal world has been replaced by coercion, and man and animal live in uneasy coexistence. So violent is the bifurcation and so drastic the effects of the Fall that animals not only must submit by force to the dominion of man but they may be slain by him to provide his nourishment (v. 3).<sup>35</sup>

The line must be drawn again at the horizontal level, however, for man cannot take the life of his fellow any more now under Noah than he could before under Adam. The reason is clearly stated: “for in the image of God has God made man” (9:6). That fundamental fact has never changed, the sin of the Fall notwithstanding. To attack and to destroy man is tantamount to attacking and attempting to destroy the sovereign Himself, of whom even fallen man is the image.

The text of the Noachic Covenant is followed by the promise of the Lord that the earth will never again be destroyed by a flood (Gen. 9:9-11) and by the pledge of that promise, the rainbow. The rainbow, in fact, became the sign of the covenant itself, a sign that far transcends in its significance the promise of preservation from flood and that speaks of the intactness of the dominion mandate given to mankind from the beginning.<sup>36</sup> He who sees the rainbow can rest assured that the purposes of God from creation are in full effect and will some day reach their predestined, perfect accomplishment.

The history of the covenant transmission following Noah may be traced in the Genesis genealogies; in fact, the very purpose of the genealogies is to disclose the ever-narrowing focus of covenant development that finally finds its center in Abraham and his descendants.<sup>37</sup> Like Adam, Noah had three sons, only one of whom was the agent of covenant descent. Seth, the third son of Adam, was progenitor of Noah, a “second Adam.” Shem, the third son of Noah, was likewise chosen to be the heir of the covenant promise. His genealogy (Gen. 10:21-31; 11:10-26) included Eber, the patronymic of the Hebrew people, and Peleg, in whose days the earth was divided (10:25), and culminated in Abram, the youngest of the three sons of Terah.

35. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954), p. 64.

36. Dumbrell, p. 29.

37. Gerhard F. Hasel, “The Meaning of the Chronogenealogies of Genesis 5 and 11,” *Origins* 7 (1981): 69.

## THE TOWER OF BABEL

The importance of the Tower of Babel lies in its interruption of the implementation of the covenant mandate, a feature it shares in common with the account of the intermarriage of angels and men in Genesis 6:1-4. That act of rebellion resulted in the catastrophe of the Flood, following which the offspring of Noah “were scattered over the earth” (Gen. 8:16). Similarly, as a result of the Lord’s preempting the tower construction, He “scattered them over the face of the whole earth” (11:9). The language is too formulaic and precise to be considered coincidental. The two stories themselves must be addressing common themes and interests in addition to the general idea of disobedience of the Adamic Covenant.<sup>38</sup>

What is fundamentally at work in the story of the angels and men is the demonic attempt to frustrate the purpose of God that man should “be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen. 1:28), for the narrative begins by observing that the intermarriage commenced precisely “when man began to increase in number” (6:1). Whatever else the “sons of God” and “daughters of men” might mean, their illicit relationship resulted in the crippling of that aspect of the mandate. Perhaps they had begun to produce a race of monsters genetically incapable of reproduction, thus leading to an end of humanity.

The Tower of Babel story reveals unmistakably that the tower builders had one objective in mind: “that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth” (Gen. 11:4). That is, they refused to obey the second element of the Adamic mandate, to “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28). The two episodes then combined to present a full portrayal of covenant disobedience.

Not without importance, because it is common to both stories, is the reference to the “heroes of old, men of renown” (Gen. 6:4) and to Nimrod, “a mighty warrior on the earth” (10:8). The connection between Nimrod and the Tower of Babel is evident from the chronological priority of Genesis 11 to Genesis 10 and the fact that one of the centers of Nimrod’s kingdom was Babylon (i.e., Babel). Quite likely Nimrod himself was one of the tower builders. In any event his description as a “mighty warrior” is based on the Hebrew *gibbôr*, the very word translated “heroes” in 6:4. Moreover, these heroes were “men of renown” or, literally, “men of the name.” It is surely worthy of note that one of the desires of the Babel tower builders was that they might “make a name” for themselves.

Clearly then these two stories of covenant violation point to the same root problem. Man, charged as the image of God to be His vice-regent on the earth, was dissatisfied with that high and holy calling and rebelled against his sovereign with the end in view of supplanting His lordship and assuming it for himself. He want-

38. D. J. A. Clines demonstrates clear thematic strands in Genesis 1-11 (a theme he describes as “creation–uncreation–re-creation”) in his “Theme in Genesis 1-11,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 38 (1976): 499-502.

ed to be like God or, to put it in the biblical language itself, “the man has now become like one of Us” (Gen. 3:22) and “nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them” (11:6).

The divine response to this insubordination took the form of judgment (the Flood and the dispersion) and covenant renewal (with Noah and with Abraham).

#### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

The tenor of the biblical narrative suggests that the call of Abram to covenant service was as much an act of divine elective grace as was the creation of Adam and the choice of Noah, his two most illustrious covenant forebears. He was told to leave Ur, his homeland, and go to a land that God would show him. Obedience to this call would result in his being made a partner with Yahweh in the process of blessing the world and bringing it back in line with its Creator’s intentions.

Though Abram’s opportunity to participate in the covenant privileges was obviously conditioned on his leaving Ur and going to Canaan, the subsequent covenant itself was unconditional. As most scholars now recognize, the covenant and its circumstances were in the form of a royal (land) grant, a legal arrangement well attested in the ancient Near East.<sup>39</sup> This type of organ was initiated by a benefactor such as a king who, for whatever reason, wished to confer a blessing on a subject. It was often construed as a reward for some service rendered by the subject, but many times there was no expressed rationale. The grant was a boon explicable by nothing other than the sovereign pleasure of the benefactor. And just as its bestowal was unconditional so was its maintenance. The covenant could stand, regardless of the behavior of its recipient. All that could be affected positively or negatively by the response of the grantee was the enjoyment of the benefits of the grant and their continuation.

Thus the Abrahamic Covenant, along with its Adamic and Noahic predecessors, must be viewed as an unconditional grant made by Yahweh to His servant Abram, a grant that was to serve a specific and irrevocable function. Much more expansive and variegated than the other two statements, the Abrahamic, nevertheless, is built squarely on them in all its essential elements. Yet there is a dimension that goes beyond the earlier covenant mandate, for the Abrahamic Covenant not only reiterates in its own way the Genesis injunction to “be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it,” but it also incorporates the strategy by which that purpose might be achieved.

This is immediately apparent in Genesis 12:1-3, the initial and programmatic statement of the covenant. Abram was told that he would be made into a great nation that would be the means by which Yahweh would bless all peoples on earth. God’s concern was still clearly universalistic, but the *means* of addressing that concern was very specific—the nation of Abram.

39. Moshe Weinfeld, “The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90 (1970): 184-203.

Subsequently Abram learned that the land in and from which the reconciling people would minister to the world was Canaan itself (Gen. 12:7; 13:14-17). Then, in a second expression of the covenant promise, Abram learned that the promise of descendants is valid even though he had no children (15:2-5), and the land would be his even though it was then populated by others (15:7-21). Abram trusted Yahweh in all this, so Yahweh considered him to be in perfect covenant compliance (15:6).

When after the passing of many years the promise of seed had not yet been fulfilled, Yahweh appeared once more to Abram with a remarkable exposition and amplification of the original promise. He was to become the father not only of a nation but of many nations (hence the name change to Abraham) and kings (Gen. 17:4-6). The covenant, once more affirmed as eternal, would be certified by the sign of circumcision, a physical token of the special status of the covenant people.

Careful attention to the major themes of these various expressions of the covenant with Abraham reveals that they affirm in every respect the covenant mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, with the special proviso that Abraham and his descendants were to serve as models of, as well as witnesses to, the implementation on the earth. That is, the Abrahamic nation would become a microcosm of the kingdom of God and would function in that capacity as an agency by which God would reconcile the whole creation to Himself.

The first part of this promise—that Abraham's offspring would become a great nation (Gen. 12:2; 15:5; 17:4-5)—is a reflection of the command to mankind in 1:28, "Be fruitful and increase in number." The sovereignty aspect is clearly seen in references to the kings who were to emerge in the line of Abraham (17:6, 16). These kings would exercise dominion over that nation (and others) that God would raise up as a model of His creation purposes. Thus a direct connection to 1:28 again must be admitted: "fill the earth and subdue it [and] rule."

The second part of the promise finds no antecedent in the Genesis 1 mandate but is nonetheless to be understood in reference to it. This is the role the Abrahamic nation was to play as the touchstone in reference to which the peoples of the earth are to be blessed or cursed: "I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you"<sup>40</sup> (Gen. 12:3; 18:18; cf. Gal. 3:8). This suggests a mediatorial function for this chosen nation, a responsibility to stand between the sovereign God of heaven and earth and His fallen creation and to minister His salvific grace.

This dual aspect of the Abrahamic Covenant must be kept carefully in view if the centrality of the creation mandate to biblical theology is to find consistent validation throughout the biblical revelation. To understand the covenant as only a continuation of the Adamic-Noahic is to deny Israel its crucially important place as a servant people. However, to understand it only as a preparation for the Sinaitic

40. For justification of this passive rendering of the verb "to bless," see O. T. Allis, "The Blessing of Abraham," *Princeton Theological Review* 25 (1927): 263-98.

Covenant is to deny the transhistorical, universalistic concerns that transcend the narrow confines of a chosen people. This duality will continue to inform this discussion and will properly locate Israel in the theological as well as historical purposes of God.

Transmission of the Abrahamic Covenant continued as it had begun, by divine elective grace. Isaac, son of Abraham and Sarah's old age, was chosen rather than Ishmael (Gen. 17:18-19). To him was given almost verbatim the same promises and privileges enjoyed by his father (26:3-4, 24). And to him also would be given a son who would inherit the covenant responsibility.

This son was Jacob, younger son of Isaac and Rebekah. And so Jacob too, like Isaac, was chosen in contradiction to the norms of filial succession. Before his birth it was said of Jacob that he would rule his older brother (Gen. 25:23), a promise that eventually came to pass with Israel's domination over Edom. The central covenant text, however, is Genesis 27:27-29, which recounts to Jacob the blessing of his dying father. There Isaac prayed that Jacob may exercise regnal power over nations and even over his own brothers. He then asserted in the style of blessing that those who curse Jacob will be cursed and those who bless him will be blessed (v. 29). On subsequent occasions the covenant pledge was confirmed by Isaac (28:3-4) and by Yahweh Himself (28:13-14; 35:9-15; 46:2-4). The unbroken thread throughout is the promise of nationhood, kings, land, and most important, the ministry of Jacob (=Israel) as the means of blessing all the earth.

Tokens of the nature and function of the Abrahamic Covenant, the full expression of which came to pass only after the Exodus deliverance and Sinaitic Covenant, may be found throughout the patriarchal narratives of Genesis and indeed may be the principal thrust of those narratives. Attention first may be addressed to the significance of land.

Land is essential to any meaningful definition of dominion and nationhood. The very creation of the heavens and the earth, in fact, was to provide a locus in which the reigning purposes of God for mankind would be carried out. The Garden of Eden then became the microcosmic expression of kingdom territory, the place where God dwelt on earth in a unique way and where He had fellowship with His image, His vice-regent. This is surely the background against which the eschatological descriptions of the eternal kingdom as a paradisaal garden find their source.

The violent disruption and alienation occasioned by sin resulted in man's expulsion from the garden, but it did not terminate either the Adamic mandate or its need for a geographical arena in which to function. Adam had been told that though the center of his covenant activity was the garden, he was to move beyond that narrow base and fill the earth with his descendants. The garden, then, was the hub but not the exclusive realm of man's existence. It bespoke the divine intention to inhabit certain places that by His very presence would then be holy, but it did not suggest that He was limited by them.

With this in mind, it becomes easier to understand the importance of the land promises attached to the Abrahamic Covenant. The patriarch was told to "go to

the land I will show you” (Gen. 12:1). Having arrived in Canaan he heard further, “To your offspring I will give his land” (12:7). The definition of the land, “from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates” (15:18), further specifies both its historical and geographical reality and its extent.

Canaan thus became the focus of God’s redemptive and reigning activity on the earth. This explains why the patriarchs and their Israelite descendants hallowed the land and valued it as a theological *sine qua non*.<sup>41</sup> Testimony to this is the erection of altars at significant sites, places that Yahweh particularly invested with His presence (Gen. 12:7; 13:18; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1, 7). The patriarchal desire (still alive in pious Judaism today) to be buried in the Holy Land also attests to its special association with the dwelling place of Yahweh. The biblical witness is that Israel is inconceivable without land, whether in historical or eschatological times.

The promise of multiplication of descendants also is part and parcel of the Abrahamic Covenant and is in fulfillment of the original command to “be fruitful and increase in number.” Just as the patriarchal seed was to be as numerous as the stars (Gen. 15:5), the dust (13:16), and the sand of the seashore (22:17; 32:12), so the whole earth would be overspread by humanity in accord with the purpose of God.

Evidence of the twin problems (and blessings) of land and population is seen early on in the struggle between Abraham and Lot over grazing lands. “The land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were . . . great” (Gen. 13:6). As a result they separated and Abraham was assigned “the length and breadth of the land” (13:17). Later Abraham bought a burial spot at Machpelah (23:18-20) where his wife (23:19), he himself (25:9), his son Isaac (49:31), and his grandson Jacob (49:29-30) were buried. The blessing of great population came to pass, however, not in Canaan but in Egypt. The seventy of Israel who descended there grew to a mighty host so numerous as to threaten the security of mighty Egypt itself (Ex. 1:1-7, 9, 12, 20, etc.). All through preexilic times Israel enjoyed the benefit of land and people, and only when it became apparent that she had forfeited her covenant privileges were both so violently and irretrievably taken from her.

The third element of the patriarchal covenant—that Abraham’s seed would be the occasion of blessing or cursing of the nations—also may be traced in the historical account. As noted, this functional aspect of the covenant corresponds to the mandate to “fill the earth and subdue it” and to rule over all things. Israel as the seed, then, served as the reigning agent of Almighty God in the sense at least of dispensing His blessing on the one hand or judgment on the other.

Patriarchal dominion and intercessory ministry are clear from Genesis 12. Pharaoh “treated Abram well for [Sarah’s] sake” (12:16), and yet Yahweh inflicted Pharaoh with all kinds of maladies for Sarah’s sake (v. 17). In the account of the

41. Though Brueggemann surely exaggerates when he says that “land is a central, if not *the central theme of biblical faith*” (italics his), it clearly is a dominant Old Testament theological motif (Walter Brueggemann, *The Land* [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977], p. 3).



kings of the east, Abraham prevailed (14:13-16) because of divine intervention (v. 20). In his encounter with Yahweh at Mamre, Abraham interceded on behalf of Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-21), a plea that God heard because He would not hide from His chosen one what He planned to do (v. 17).

The Philistine Abimelech also came to know the alternation of cursing and blessing from his contact with Abraham (Gen. 20:3, 7, 17). He recognized that God was with Abraham (21:22), and he benefited from the friendship the two of them solemnized by covenant (21:27-34). Later on Abimelech came to know Isaac and envied him for his success and prosperity (26:12-17). Wherever Isaac dug wells he found water, the refreshment of which was enjoyed also by the Philistines.

The Jacob stories are rich in allusion to the blessing that was possible through friendly association with the patriarch. Laban, devious to the end, had to confess that Yahweh had blessed him on account of Jacob (Gen. 30:27). Jacob himself enriched his brother, Esau, for Yahweh had blessed him beyond measure (33:11). Jacob's son Joseph clearly was the source of blessing for Egypt in time of catastrophic famine. Even before his elevation to great power, Joseph was perceived by Potiphar to be the explanation for his remarkable success. "The Lord blessed the household of the Egyptian because of Joseph" (39:5).

#### GENESIS IN THEOLOGICAL RETROSPECT

The book of Genesis, written presumably on the eve of Israel's conquest of Canaan, serves at least two clear canonical and theological purposes. First, it satisfies Israel's immediate need to know of her origins, her purpose, her prospects, and her destiny. These questions are explicitly or implicitly addressed in such a way as to leave Israel in no doubt that she came into existence in fulfillment of divine purpose and promise. But that purpose and promise are hinged to a more ultimate design, an overarching plan of which Israel is not the object but the means: namely, the creation and domination of the earth and all other things by God through His image, the human race. Israel thus came to see herself as important to the purposes of God but not coextensive to those purposes. Man, having sinned and so having forfeited his privileges as regent, was brought back to fellowship with God by sovereign grace so that he could resume his privileges as spelled out in the Adamic mandate. In that condition, with its liabilities and imperfections, the believing remnant community would model before the world the meaning of dominion and would proclaim and mediate the saving blessings of the Lord to it. The patriarchal seed, Israel herself, was that remnant, a nation that would exist as a microcosm of the kingdom of God and the vehicle through which the messianic king would come to reign over all creation (Gen. 49:10).

### A THEOLOGY OF EXODUS

#### THE EXODUS AS ROYAL ELECTION

The choice of Israel as a servant people was already implicit in the patriarchal covenant statements (Gen. 12:1-3; 15:13-21; 18:18; 22:18; 26:3-4; etc.), but not until