

# **The Eternal & Present Covenant**

Geoffrey Bingham 1999, Christies Beach, South Australia

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## Study One: The Matter of Covenant—I

### INTRODUCTION: THE COVENANT OF GOD

For the moment we will take the simplest description of covenant, which is a relationship of union of God and Man set out by God. It is unilateral; that is, God makes covenant and not Man. Whilst it is not a contract, there is an obligation on the part of the recipient to respond with obedience to God, but that expectancy is perfectly reasonable and logical, and in no sense an imposition. In our following Studies we will try to define and explain the matter of Covenant, but what we are pressing now is that all of Scripture *is* Covenant. If we do not understand covenant, then we do not really understand Scripture as we should, and could, if we were prepared to examine the nature of covenant, the Covenant of God. At the beginning, then, we need to explain what we mean by the term 'the Covenant of God'.<sup>1</sup>

By this term we mean that God brought a covenant to Man when he created him, that such a covenant was—and remains—universal. This means that every person born into this world from Adam to the end of the history of Man—that is, the end of the age—is under covenant to God. As we will see, it does not mean that everyone is conscious of such a covenant, or that people generally obey such a covenant, but that all human beings are responsible to God to be in covenant relationship with him. In fact they are, from God's point of view, in that relationship, whether they like it or not. As we shall see, Man by reason of the Fall has repudiated the Covenant of God and his relationship with God. Even so, the Covenant of God remains and Man is responsible to abide by it.

### THE COVENANT OF GOD IS THE COVENANT OF CREATION

Some theologians speak of a Covenant of Redemption made by the Father with the Son before creation, and also of a Covenant of Creation, by which they mean a Covenant of works which God made with Adam and Eve, the primal couple. They mean that God told Adam and Eve that they must obey His commands, in which case they would remain in Eden and would not perish because of disobedience. It is clear that no such Covenant is explicitly set forth in the early chapters of Genesis. Arguments for such a Covenant of works are mainly that the Covenant is implicit in the text. The argument goes that God has created Man and given him good things. In return he should obey God's commands and this obedience will be counted to him for righteousness.

Whilst this seems to be quite close to the truth it is in fact quite a distance from it. In later studies we will argue that creation was a total *gift* from God. It was not by grace, in that almost all through Scripture the word 'grace' refers to restorative measures that God makes where Man has failed. In creation there can be no thought of a 'welfare handout', or that Man receives something he does not *deserve*. The ideas of deserving and not deserving are absent. It is difficult for fallen human beings to believe that in the gift of creation there were no strings attached.<sup>2</sup> The Reformed teaching of 'the Covenant of works' seemed originally to have some

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<sup>1</sup> See William Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation*, Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1984, pp. 11ff., 25–26; Gordon Wenham's, *Genesis 1–15* in the 'Word Biblical Commentary', vol. 1, Word, 1987, pp. 174–75. O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants*, Presbyterian and Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980, p. 4. (who will sometimes be quoted in these notes), takes the covenant of creation for granted. On pp. 67ff. he outlines the elements of that covenant.

<sup>2</sup> It could be argued from Romans 1:21 that pre-Fall Man was to be thankful to God, and surely this was the case. Gratitude for the gift of creation does not imply that creation was of grace, but that it was of love, and love responds to love in gratitude. Something of our fallenness is always present in us, militating against a pure acceptance of love's gift.

justification in Hosea 6:7, 'But at Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me' (*RSV*). The old translation was, 'But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt treacherously with me' (*AV*). Most commentators think 'Adam' was not a person but a place and does not refer to the man Adam.

### **WAS—AND IS—THERE A COVENANT OF GOD RELATING TO CREATION?**

The answer must be, 'Yes'. Whilst there is some textual justification the most powerful justification is theological. Jeremiah 33:19–25 is a helpful passage. We must now look at this text. In it the two statements, 'my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night', and 'my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth', certainly speak of a Covenant at the time of creation and one which was not limited to Man. In Isaiah 24:4–6 the scene is one of primal desolation. In this case it is for the breaking of the everlasting covenant which brings desolation—the *bohu* and *tohu* (chaos and formlessness) of the original creation.

The earth mourns and withers,  
the world languishes and withers;  
the heavens languish together with the earth.  
The earth lies polluted  
under its inhabitants;  
for they have transgressed the laws,  
violated the statutes,  
broken the everlasting covenant.  
Therefore a curse devours the earth,  
and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt;  
therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched,  
and few men are left.

There are other helpful references in Genesis 6:18 and 9:9–17 which refers us to the fact and order of that covenant. It is not only a covenant with Man but with 'every living creature of all flesh'; that shows its universal nature. Exodus 6:1–9 could be a fruitful passage to point back to covenant being in existence from the beginning.<sup>3</sup>

The above, then, is some of the textual support for a covenant of creation which we call 'the Covenant of God'. Now we look at what we might call the theological evidence.

The fact that God is God, that He is Triune, that the Three are One, must mean that true Covenant is inherent in God, and, indeed, is the *way* of God. For God to create, and for Man to be in His image, must mean that creation is only intelligible and authentic in the Covenant of God. We will bring out this point more clearly in later studies, but for now we must simply see that God is Covenant, and creation and history must be Covenant also. The relationship between God and Man is such that there must always be Covenant, for God will never be apart from the people He has created.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Reference may be made to Exodus 6:1–9, where God was speaking not of 'cutting a covenant' with Abraham, although he did do this, but of 'establishing' the covenant with the patriarchs, and it is in the light of this established covenant that he now proposes to liberate Israel from Egypt.

<sup>4</sup> cf. Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ONE**

1. Discuss the simplest description of a covenant as an agreement, and then ask why biblical covenants are called unilateral and not contractual.
2. What revelation of God is it which comes through grace and non-contractual provision of covenant?
3. What is generally meant by 'a covenant of creation (a creational covenant)'?
4. What should be understood by the idea that creation is not a matter of grace but of gift? What are the differences here, and what do they imply?
5. In fact, what is grace? Could creation be the gift of love; that is, could life be the gift of love, and not necessarily of grace? When would life be the gift of grace?

## Study Two: The Matter of Covenant—II

### INTRODUCTION

A biblical study of covenant can often be seen as technical and dull, even to the point of being boring. It is a word we use more in law-language today than in general conversation and thought. The fact of life is that we live in many covenants, not only legal ones, but in interpersonal ones. We have agreements, spoken or unspoken, concerning relationship. If, as some theologians claim, a covenant is a bond, or it involves 'bonding', then the idea of covenant comes to life. Today we talk of 'bonding' as an intimate, relational thing—a mother bonding her baby, and a father sharing in that bonding: in this sense it is relevant. Marriage in the Bible is sometimes called a covenant, and is of course intimately relational. We can think of nothing more bonding than man and woman becoming 'one flesh'. In the Bible we have covenants between Abraham and Abimelech, Isaac and Abimelech, Laban and Jacob, Jonathan and David; indeed they are many, sometimes being in the forms of varying treaties, even treaties with the land, with things and even with death. The covenant of David and Jonathan has that quality of two souls being knit together—a beautiful bonding indeed.

### THE MEANING OF COVENANT IN THE SCRIPTURES

The *fact* of covenant is so evident in the Scriptures that we can say that biblically speaking it is a named reality with which we have to contend and without which the Scriptures would make little sense. O. Palmer Robertson defines a covenant as:

... a bond in blood sovereignly administered. When God enters into a covenant relationship with men, he sovereignly institutes a life-and-death bond. A covenant is a bond in blood, or a bond of life and death, sovereignly administered.<sup>5</sup>

Generally speaking this definition holds well, but when we ask whether this was always the case we face some problems. Whilst, in some cases, covenants do involve bonding, yet the origin of the primary covenant, the one we call 'the covenant of creation', issues from the creational relationship of God and Man rather than from some ritual or agreement which is intended to make them one. We need, at the same time, to have a reliable understanding of covenant, and M. Weinfield in his article on *berith* has the following valuable note:

The most plausible solution seems to be the one that associates *berith* with Akk. *biritu*, "clasp," "fetter" (cf. the Talmudic *byryt*). This is supported by the Akkadian and Hittite forms for treaty: Akk. *riksu*, Hitt. *ishiul*, both meaning "bond." The concept of a *binding* settlement also stands behind Arab. *'aqd*, Lat. *vinculum fidei*, "bond of faith," *contractus*, "contract," and is likewise reflected in German *Bund*. This etymology might support the reading *ma'asoreth habberith* in Ezk. 20:37 ("I will make you enter into the *bond* of the covenant"), suggested long ago. The Greek terms for covenant, *syntheke*, *harmonia* (*Iliad* xxii.255), *synthesia* (ii.339), and *synemosyne* (xxii.261), also express the idea of binding/putting together. The "bond" metaphor explains the use of "strengthening" or "fastening" to convey the idea of the "validity" or "reliability" of the treaty. Thus we find in Akk. *dunnunu riksate*, "to fasten the bonds" (= to validate the treaty), or *riksu dannu*, "strong persistent bond" (= a valid and reliable treaty), and similarly in Aram. *lethaqqaphah 'esar*, "strengthen the bond" (Dnl. 6:8). The Greek term for annulling the pact is *lyein*, "to loosen," which also points to the understanding of the treaty as a bond.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980).

<sup>6</sup> M. Weinfield, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975) p. 255).

If we commence with the Hebrew word used for covenant, namely *berith*, we are faced with a number of opinions as to its derivation. Even so, the nature of the covenant is fairly apparent in the Scriptures. There are also descriptions of covenant (*berith*) which are contemporary with the patriarchs and the times of Israel, so that some theologians see Israel as deriving its ideas of covenant from those systems, whilst yet others note elements which are significantly different, unique to Israel. It can be debated as to whether the idea of covenant is basic to what may be called natural law, that is, that the idea of covenant is innate in all humanity but takes its various forms according to its cultures. The study of contemporary forms of covenant may be quite helpful, but those may not necessarily have been influential in forming what we now call loosely 'biblical covenants'.

For our part we will look primarily at the matter of covenant as we find it in Scripture. What immediately strikes us is that no covenant is explicitly mentioned until the 6th and 9th chapters of Genesis, where a covenant with Noah is made which affects the whole of creation. Later we see covenants made with Abraham, Moses, David and then the New Covenant in the New Testament of which Christ is called 'the Mediator'. In amongst these covenants are many others of lesser nature; one which could be called 'Levitical', another 'a covenant of peace'—and so on. The idea of 'the everlasting covenant' is one which constantly presents itself and, to say the least, is intriguing: what does it mean, how could all the covenants mentioned above be everlasting?

We can conclude that, generally speaking, covenant is by no means uninteresting, outdated, or outmoded and so irrelevant to us and non-significant. It is highly significant. We have used the term 'the wonder of covenant' and a unique wonder it is as we shall shortly see. We may discover that without realising it, we have, in fact, always lived under covenant. Coming to realise it may cause life to take on a different hue altogether.

### **THE WAY GOD APPROACHES COVENANT**

There are a number of terms in the Old Testament which give us certain views of the covenants God makes. Various translations use equivalent terms such as 'league', 'treaty', 'compact', 'solemn compact', 'agreement'. The bonding, then, is no light thing. The mode of covenant is also defined. *Karat berith* is 'to cut a covenant'. *Heqim berith* is 'to establish a covenant'. *Natan berith* is 'to grant a covenant', *sim berith* 'to set down' and *siwwa berith* 'to command' a covenant. In their contexts the use of the various verbs is understandable. Linked with covenant are ideas of God having commanded His law, His statutes and the mention of His judgments which related to Israel's transgressing, breaking, sinning against and rejecting His covenant. The bond between God and Israel is not to be taken lightly, for breaking the covenant brings cursings, just as keeping it brings blessings. In one sense, as we shall further see, the covenant of God and the law of God are virtually one: they are as synonymous.

### **ALL GOD'S COVENANTS ARE UNILATERAL**

Whilst we have spoken of human covenants which have elements of the contractual, this cannot be said of God's covenants. They are by His initiative and must be seen as such. When God commands a covenant then He also places a covenantal obligation to obedience in response to His goodness, for such covenants are for blessing. The obligation is simply for the continued obtaining of blessing and as a way of avoiding cursing. What we must avoid thinking is that God makes parity agreements. Certainly the elements of covenants which appear to begin with Noah and continue into the New Covenant are covenants somehow or another linked with grace.

## **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY TWO**

1. What do we normally understand by bonding, and what should we understand regarding covenantal bonding? Is there such a thing?
2. Is covenant primarily a legal bonding? Can you have covenantal binding that is not relational? What bonding exists in the Triune Godhead of the Three Persons?
3. Do you think that we should rely heavily upon what is called 'contextual setting' in order to see how Israel came to its idea of covenant being a treaty? Should covenant be understood mainly by such contextual material, or is it likely that Israel had the idea of a grace-covenant from the time of Abraham, and even perhaps from the covenant some say was always there between God and Man?
4. What should we understand is at the heart of covenant? What would be the purpose of covenant?

## Study Three: The Matter of Covenant—III

### INTRODUCTION: THE COMMENCEMENT OF COVENANT

Where do we sight the first covenant in the Scriptures? Some Reformed theology speaks of a covenant of redemption between the Father and the Son before time, so that covenant precedes creation. Some Reformed theologians also speak of a covenant of works between God and Adam at creation. In fact no covenant is explicitly mentioned in relation to the creation and we would be hard-pressed to agree that the first covenant which appears explicitly in Genesis is that between God and Noah, or, we may have to say, between God and creation. Generally then, the exposition of covenants has proceeded along the lines of the first covenant being the Noahic one, and the next with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and with Israel—including the Davidic Covenant. The final covenant is the New Covenant made in the blood of Christ, the covenant of which he is the mediator. Even so, this traditional view has been challenged. It has been claimed by some commentators that the use of *heqim berith* in Genesis 6:17–18 and 9:8f.—‘to establish a covenant’—is not the same as *karat berith* which is ‘to cut a covenant’. The writers quoted in our footnote, William Dumbrell<sup>7</sup> and Gordon Wenham<sup>8</sup>—amongst others—point out that God did not ‘cut a covenant’ with Noah but simply ‘established’ or ‘affirmed’ the covenant already in place. This would have to be the covenant of creation.

It could be argued linguistically that *heqim berith* and *karat berith*, whilst technically different, may yet be equivalents. God is simply making a covenant with Noah and does not have to cut it. His word is as good as any ritual. If, however, ‘establishing the covenant’ contains a truth of great significance, then the argument may not stand on linguistic grounds when the strongest use of the linguistic is *for* the covenant of creation. This would appear to be the case theologically also, as we shall seek to prove.

### THE COVENANT OF CREATION NOT DIRECTLY NOMINATED AS COVENANT

When we ask why a covenant of creation is not explicitly stated, the answer could be that there was no call for that. If it is fair to say that the establishment of the covenant with Noah and the new form of it is one of *grace* and that thereafter covenants are those of grace, then it must be said that the covenant of creation was *not* one of *works* but one of *gift*.

Some Reformers had to see a covenant of works in creation. Other theologians, realising the covenantal grace revealed in the agreement with Noah and the creation—as well as later covenants of grace—had to read back, redemptive grace into the work of creation. It should be noted that God simply planned creation. Whilst His planning certainly had grace in view, for example Ephesians 1:3–14, yet grace always has the idea of restoration from some fallen position of a person or nation. *Chen* as favour, and *chesed* as loving kindness in restorative and supportive actions, really add up to *charis* in the New Testament. Exodus 34:6–7 shows the nature of God as grace, and some commentators link the Exodus statement with John 1:14 ‘full of grace and truth’.

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<sup>7</sup> W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1984.

<sup>8</sup> G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Word Books, Waco, 1987.

## CREATION COMES GIFTWISE TO ALL THAT IS CREATED

The idea that creation is the action of God to create Man does not have the flavour of grace. There is not 'God initiated, unsolicited, unmerited favour' here, but sheer gift. Statements such as in Psalms 8 and 104 and Paul's 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving', and 'God who richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy', tell us that creation is not 'a handout'. No wonder the creation spells out the nature of God and no wonder Man should be filled with thanksgiving. It is gratitude for being created, and not for some divine welfare arrangement! It is also believing that God has given everything required for Man's wellbeing—elements which we shall shortly consider.

If this is seen—and fallen Man finds it hard to believe God is so good—then to speak of a covenant of creation is to see it is primarily non-contractual. Nor, in one sense, does it require grace to live in it. We are not ruling out the element of obligation, but the word 'obligation' should not be considered in the light which sinful persons may view it.

## THE KEY TO PRIMARY COVENANT IS CREATIONAL RELATIONSHIPS

If we can take Weinfield's 'most plausible solution'<sup>9</sup> to the meaning of *berith*, as 'binding' and 'the bond of faith' as an authentic meaning of the word, then to speak of covenant as involving relationships is to lead us to *the* relationships which are not just legal and contractual, but to those which are creational and which give us the essential key to the covenant of creation. *The covenant of creation is the natural relationship of God with His entire creation, and in particular with Man.* Within this statement are dimensions which, with difficulty, we even begin to compass.

I would like to make the point clearly that the terms 'bond' and 'bonding' may be misleading.

First we must come back to the Genesis account of creation with the light that the whole of 'the law and the prophets' and the New Testament shed on the nature of God. The statement, 'Let us make man in our image after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over the earth, and over everything which creeps upon the earth', must be seen as the most intimate of all relationships that God can have with, and from, the innate unity of the three Persons in Trinity. This bonding must be seen in the light of full intimacy and communion. When we grasp something of this 'bonding' of the three Persons—if we be permitted that word—then we understand something of Christ's high-priestly prayer in John 17:20–26 where he speaks of himself being in the Father and the Father in him, as one, and of desiring the children God has given him to be in the Father and the Son, and the Father and the Son to be in them.

Certainly one of the keynotes of God's covenants with Abraham and Israel is 'I will be their God and they shall be my people and I will dwell in their midst'.<sup>10</sup> On this basis—but never apart from it—can we understand any covenant, and in this case, creational covenant. What we hope to see is that the creational covenant is the universal covenant that covers all creation, including the entire human race, and which finds its teleological fulfilment in the new heaven and the new earth, in the holy city the New Jerusalem, and the voice from the throne saying:

Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things are passed away.

Nothing more intimate or more bonding in communion can go beyond this *telos* or climax.

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<sup>9</sup> M. Weinfield, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 255.

<sup>10</sup> cf. Jer. 11:4; 24:7; 30:22; 32:38; Ezek. 11:20; 14:11; 36:28; 37:23; Zech. 8:8.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY THREE**

1. What do you think of the claim of some commentators in regard to the difference between 'cutting a covenant', and 'establishing or confirming a covenant'?
2. Discuss together the nature of God's creation as unconditional in regard to God's giving. What does 'freely giving' mean—looking to references under 'Creation Comes Giftwise'? Suppose God's creation of us were conditional upon our obedience—what would that signify?
3. What difference would you see between 'the obligation of love' and the contractual demand for obedience? How would this affect the relationships between God and His covenant people?
4. Discuss the last paragraph of the study with the idea of us being in the image of the Triune God.

## Study Four: The Nature of the Covenant of Creation

### INTRODUCTION: KNOWLEDGE OF GOD: GOD'S WORDS TO THE PRIMAL PAIR

The word *berith* does not appear nor does any dynamic equivalent term in the creation account.<sup>11</sup> The relationship of the Man to God must be seen from the fact of him being the image of God. Paul later calls the male person 'the image and glory of God' (I Cor. 11:7) and the female person 'the glory of the man'. Together they constitute the full image of God—'Male and female created he them and called them Man'. Created Man knew—and can know—God simply by His communion with him. God and Man have a relationship which involves first the words of God and then Man's response to those words. His being in the image of God determines his deep relationship with God—Man knowing God as Man has need to know.

This image of God which Man is, has been variously described down through the ages, and we cannot here enter into all these explanations. One must be that Man reflects the glory of God.<sup>12</sup> Another must be that he acts with God in His dealings with creation and its history. William Dumbrell emphasises the visibility of Man, 'By creation, man is then the visible representative in the created world of the invisible God', which is a good description, and which Dumbrell then proceeds to link with God's kingship in the light of the creational mandate given in Genesis 1:28 (cf. Ps. 8:3–8) for Man to have dominion over the earth. Because God is King—as the Scriptures well bear out—then Man as His image is regal, displaying that Kingship in his rule of the world.

Whilst all that is true enough, yet it is not all of the image—the *imago Dei*. Since Man is the reflection of all that is God because he is made in the image of the Triune Godhead, then incorporated in Man's dominion must be the matters of marriage, of fruitfulness, and of vocation as set out as components of the creational mandate. Then, too, there is the important factor of sharing the sabbath rest of the Creator as set out in Genesis 2:1–3. These are the practical components which constitute the life and action of the creational covenant so far as Man is concerned. If we take the principle included in our first footnote concerning the way in which God has covenant with 'the regular succession of day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth' which were established at creation (Gen. 1:5; 8:22), then in J. A. Thompson's words

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<sup>11</sup> There is what might be called an oblique reference in Jeremiah 33:20–22:

Thus says the LORD: If you can break my covenant with the day and my covenant with the night, so that day and night will not come at their appointed time, then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken, so that he shall not have a son to reign on his throne, and my covenant with the Levitical priests my ministers. As the host of heaven cannot be numbered and the sands of the sea cannot be measured, so I will multiply the descendants of David my servant, and the Levitical priests who minister to me.

Again in Jeremiah 33:25–26:

Thus says the LORD: If I have not established my covenant with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth, then I will reject the descendants of Jacob and David my servant and will not choose one of his descendants to rule over the seed of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For I will restore their fortunes, and will have mercy upon them.

J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (The New International Commentary of the Old Testament, Eerdmans Grand Rapids, 1980) p. 603, comments:

The regular succession of day and night was established at creation (Gen. 1:5; 8:22). It was part of the nature of things. It is here described as Yahweh's *covenant (berit)* with day and night which could never be *broken*'.

<sup>12</sup> Later we will see that Christ is 'the visible expression of the invisible God', however he is not simply the reflection of God but 'the radiance of God's glory', contrary to the way some translations of Hebrews 1:3 have been rendered. Man *reflects* that radiance but is *not* that radiance, otherwise he would have deity. Christ, 'the man from heaven', is 'a life-giving spirit', but Man as created was of the earth, earthy, but sufflated by the breath of God and given personal being (*nephesh*). He received life but could not give it.

(cf. Jer. 33:20, 25), 'It was part of the nature of things. It is here described as Yahweh's *covenant (berith)* with day and night which could never be *broken*'.<sup>13</sup>

What we are maintaining here is that vocation (mandate), marriage and living in God's sabbath rest are the ways in which Man participates in the covenant of creation. In thinking this way we must dismiss ideas of a 'covenant of works' and even the idea of a time of probation for Man. We must never let go of the understanding that creation set Man universally in a covenant which is everlasting, and which continually embraces the entirety of the human race.

### **THE EVERLASTING, UNIVERSAL COVENANT**

It is not our intention here to deal with the dozen or so mentions of the term 'the everlasting covenant' in the Old Testament along with the mention of 'the eternal covenant' in Hebrews 13:20, except to say that in whatever contexts it is used, it ultimately transcends even the bounds of what we may call Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic covenantal concepts and promises, whilst including those covenants and more fully expressing itself in the New Covenant, but yet being from of old the covenant of creation fulfilled in the eschaton and telos. In short, it is the covenant that covers all creation from its inception to its goal, and includes all humanity within itself. This is by no means to claim that all humanity responds to the regimen of that covenant, but it does say that human beings' final destiny—whether of redemption or of judgment—is determined by their response or rejection to the work of the Creator-God who, in the pursuit of His covenantal purposes, established afresh the covenant of creation following the Flood and led to the covenants of grace with Abraham, Israel and the New Covenant.

### **THE ELEMENTS OF THE COVENANT WHICH DETERMINE THE LIFE AND ACTION OF CREATED MAN**

We have spoken above of two factors:

- (i) Man innately knows God because he is made in His image and as the image has conversation with God, God informing, directing and aiding him to do His will, and
- (ii) Man proceeds within the covenant in the **three** components of vocation, marriage and living in God's Sabbath rest.

These latter three matters also happen to be the elements which the serpent sets out to attack and defame by tempting man to autonomy of being; something which is incomprehensible within the context of covenant and incongruous with it. It is here, as we have said, that the words of God have great significance. Those words uttered by God are the only principles by which Man lives as created, namely the spelling out of the mandate of vocation, the invitation to enjoy all things of the garden, the man to keep that garden and—by inference—the man and the woman to work together within their communion with God and their mutual communion as the 'one-flesh' entity.

### **THE OBLIGATION OF MAN IN THE COVENANT OF CREATION**

If, as we assert, Man was created in the action and gift of God, and if there was no covenant of works, then as God made a covenant with the day and night and the heavens and the earth to work at their appointed times (Jer. 33:20; cf. Gen 1:14–18), then Man was to be what God created him to be and to do. We use the term 'obligation' rather than point to a works-contract, or minimise the glorious gift of life, of superb vocation, mutual male–female unity and the enjoyment of Edenic pleasure with the whole earth in view as the scene of humanity's familial life and ultimate destiny. To use the word 'obligation' here is to take away any sense of a heavy legal imposition to be, as it were, the slave-servant of God.

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<sup>13</sup> Thompson, *ibid*, p. 603.

### GOD'S WILL AS MAN'S LIFE

Finally, in this section, we need to see that the way in which Man was to live as a race, as God's created people, was to live by the divine law, the law of social and vocational being which was the life of the Triune God, the way of love of the three Persons.<sup>14</sup> The law of God is simply the way of life and purpose which is exercised within the Godhead, and outwardly towards the creation. It is the law of love which is not something with a being (*hypostasis*) of its own, under which the three Persons live, but is the very law of their being, by which they subsist. The Father who is called *fons divinitatis*—'the Fountain of Godhead'—is love; the Son is 'the Son of his love', being eternally generated by and from the Father; and the Spirit is 'the Spirit of love', ever proceeding from the Father and the Son and being the Spirit of them both.

This law of love is what enables Man as a community to know what to be and how to live. It devolves into Man loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, and his neighbour as himself. All that was to come following Man's fall in Eden, his ejection from the Garden and his life from then to God's ultimate *telos* (goal) for him, could be called 'the law and the prophets', and those two—as one—were to constitute a transcript of the divine law. As one writer has put it, 'Man is the personal, living image of God and the law is the written preceptual image of God'.<sup>15</sup>

Had Man, out of responsive love and gratitude to God for being created and given rich life, responded to the law which was written preceptually in his heart by reason of creation, then he would have followed the divine transcript and most naturally have lived within the covenant of creation. As it was, the serpent was determined to destroy the same covenant, demean Man and denigrate the loving Creator. What the serpent could not—or would not—understand, was that he who is Creator is also Redeemer and determined Glorifier of His people. He could not understand that Man could, should and would 'trust his soul to a faithful Creator'.

God's covenant of creation was and is the assurance that all things foreshadowed in the original creation will have their ultimate fulfilment in the new heaven and the new earth, the goal and outcome of that initial and universal covenant.

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY FOUR

1. Before answering the first question look at footnote 1. Read the passages contained here and see whether you think the idea of 'a covenant of creation' is a valid one. Discuss.
2. In the third paragraph of this chapter three matters are discussed: (i) the creational mandate, (ii) the seventh day rest of God, and (iii) the marriage of the primal couple. Would you consider these to be part of what we might call 'the inherent creational covenant', and if you think they are, what supports your idea?
3. It is clear that the serpent—later called 'that old serpent the devil'—is out to wean many away from the three elements of the covenant. Discuss that nature of the temptation and what would happen—and will happen—if the tempter succeeds.
4. Discuss Man and the will of God. What does it mean for Man to do the will of God? What are the best conditions for doing that will; that is, what motivates us to submit to God's will and seek to carry it out as though we were covenant-partners with God?

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<sup>14</sup> For a fuller treatment of this see my book *Sweeter than Honey: More Precious than Gold*, NCPI, 1995, which is an exposition of the delightfulness and substantial relational nature of the law of God.

<sup>15</sup> J. A. Motyer, in his article 'The Biblical Concept of Law', *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1984, pp. 623–24.

## **Study Five: The Breach of the Covenant**

### **INTRODUCTION: GOD DOES NOT CUT THE COVENANT OF CREATION**

We have seen that God neither 'establishes' nor 'cuts' the covenant of creation. All that comes from His hand is 'good', and, at the last, 'very good'. Every work of His hand is pure and is beautiful in its pristine state. The covenant is not spoken, except in the heart of the great Creator. Every tree of the garden in which Man had been placed was usefully fruitful, pleasurable to sight and taste, and for the good of the human creature. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil was not for Man to eat lest he die. Such 'knowledge of good and evil' would prove to be lethal, no matter what other word—the word of the serpent—contradicted the word of the covenant God.

Man had enough to do with his labour, in tending and keeping the garden, in contemplating the mandate for ruling the earth, and giving names to the beasts of field and jungle. There was also the tree of life, should he wish to eat of it. The natural elements of creational covenant were his way of life and 'the one-flesh union' the joy-capping wonder of God's eternal agreement. The cutting of a covenant was unnecessary. Grace, in this sense, was not called for. Sealed promises were not required for peace and assurance in the heart. The word of God was enough for all.

### **BREACHING THE COVENANT**

Man, as the man–woman 'one-flesh' unity, could not have had more blessedness and bliss than in being created by God and having fellowship with Him in innocence, and enjoying the delights of Eden, and no threats had been made to hold the primal couple in this joy and serenity. All of it would have been hopelessly idyllic without responsibility—responsibility for the whole creation, or, as it has been put, 'covenant-relationship'. Unspoken, but not unfelt, covenant brought with it its own natural obligation, but then the divine transcript of the law of social being and living was implanted in the heart of Man by the God in whose image he had been made. Moral rectitude presupposed moral choice.

Later, in Israel, the people at the blood ceremony which bound them to God in covenant promised to keep the commanded covenant. They were to 'do it', and 'remember it', and to 'walk in it'. They were warned against breaching it, and told of the blessings which would obtain when they lived in it, and the curses which would come when they breached it—which they so often did.<sup>16</sup> The closest we have to such a warning in the creation-Eden account is in Genesis 2:17, the warning that death would follow any eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The serpent, we are told, was 'subtle' or 'crafty'. Innumerable descriptions and explanations have been given of his part in drawing the primal couple on to breach the covenant. The essence of the temptation was to separate Man from God, to convince him that humanity could be autonomous, that it could have a knowledge of good and evil which will virtually make it 'God', or 'as God'. The suggestion is present that God has withheld from Man that which is rightfully his, the power to go beyond being Man-as-a-creature to becoming Man-as-a-God. Man must have his eyes opened and see what, in innocence, he never had seen. Certainly something of this order happened when the woman was beguiled and seduced, and when the

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<sup>16</sup> These blessings and cursings are spoken of vividly in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy chapters 27–28.

man knowingly sought such Godhead, conscious that he was breaching the trust of the covenant.

Whilst they achieved something of what the serpent promised—knowing good and evil—they did not achieve it as promised. Knowing good and evil apart from God is a terrifying matter, as they soon discovered. Paul later said, 'Therefore as sin came into the world through one man and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all men sinned', and showed that the entire human race was affected by what has been called 'original sin'. The dreadful terror of fear of death and the reign of sin cannot be computed, so awful it was and is. Far from achieving life apart from, and in the face of, the eternal covenant of creation, Man was plunged into death. 'You shall surely die', certainly met its fulfilment that day. Man died relationally to God,<sup>17</sup> losing the communion that had made him glow as the *imago Dei*.

Ahead, we will see that not only was God not 'surprised' by this event, but that He had determined before time that the coming of grace into the covenant of creation would defeat the serpent and bring His elect into renewal of the covenant of creation. Yet that great work should not detract from us seeing the horror and evil of Man's rebellion against God and his asserting himself to be as God, knowing good and evil, determining for himself what these two things are, and separating his conscience from God in that he refused the communion which made him one with God and the three great components of the covenant of creation—vocation, marriage and the Sabbath rest of God.

### **ALL WAS NOT LOST IRREVOCABLY, IRRECOVERABLY**

To protect the primal couple from a permanent state of such existence God drove them from Eden, protecting them against eating of the tree of life.<sup>18</sup> It is clear from Hebrews 11:4ff. and I John 3:10ff. that the human race was not left to die on its own. These two passages show us that from the beginning, especially from the time of Abel, there have been men and women who have been called 'people of faith' and 'children of God'. The grace of God began immediately to liberate many from the deceit of the serpent,<sup>19</sup> and so there were on the one hand 'the sons of Cain' and on the other, 'the sons of God'.

God had told the woman that from her would come a 'seed', a male child<sup>20</sup> who would crush the heel of the serpent. Thus the woman who had eaten the fruit was called into battle with the serpent.

### **SOME AFFECTS AND EFFECTS OF THE BREACH OF COVENANT**

The three elements of the creational covenant were not negated but the fulfilling of them was deeply affected. As Genesis chapters 4 – 6 show us, the original sin led to such attitudes and acts of violence and corruption that 'The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually',

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<sup>17</sup> For the change the other way see II Corinthians 5:14–15, when Man, through redemption comes alive to God relationally, in communion and in holiness in the fullness of covenant, the New Covenant which is the covenant of creation come into its own.

<sup>18</sup> I am interested in the suggestion that the couple had probably eaten of this tree prior to the Fall. To me there seems to be some weakness in such a claim. Surely they would have lived for ever, even in the face of the temptation to the Fall.

<sup>19</sup> In the New Testament especially the 'ancient serpent, the devil who goes out to deceive the whole world', comes in for adverse treatment. According to Hebrews 2:14–15 and Colossians 2:14–15, he holds people in thrall through fear of death, but that fear of death has been defeated in every way by 'perfect love' (I John 4:18), which is primarily the love of God shown in forgiveness—a forgiveness based in old times on acceptable, bloody sacrifice, and ultimately and totally in the sacrifice of Christ in the Cross.

<sup>20</sup> The pronoun relating to this seed is 'he', and in Revelation 12:5 it is written, 'she brought forth a male child; one who is to rule the nations with a rod of iron'. It is interesting that the literal translation here should be 'a male son' (*huion arsen*).

and that even after the Flood that 'the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth'. Thus the carrying out of the vocational mandate was—and is—certainly greatly impeded. The relational differences that came into the marriages of the primal and succeeding couples certainly changed much of the pure love and fellowship of that one-flesh union, and as for God's Sabbath rest, the wicked became like the tossing sea, casting up mire and dirt, there was—and is—no rest for the wicked (Isa. 57:20–21).

In saying these things and in seeing the terrible state of Man under God's wrath for 'suppressing the truth in unrighteousness', as well as perceiving that 'in Adam all die',<sup>21</sup> we must nevertheless assert that nothing has changed in the covenant of creation.

### **THE IMMUTABLE COVENANT OF CREATION**

We are sometimes tempted to think of 'the covenants of grace' such as the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New covenants and see unbelieving humanity outside those covenants and so utterly bereft of covenant.<sup>22</sup> None is outside the covenant of creation, by nature of the case. It is this covenant which defines whether we are covenant-observers or covenant-breakers. It is the basis for final blessing or final judgment. It means that God is concerned for all the nations and for all persons. If we can understand this principle then it will help us to have a full theology, cosmology and (biblical) anthropology.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY FIVE**

1. Discuss what the term 'breaching the covenant' must mean.
2. It has been said that God is not the object of theology, but 'God in relationships'. Discuss this in regard to covenant and breaching.
3. What part did personal evil—the serpent—have in this breaching?
4. What is to happen, personally, to evil because of what the serpent has done?

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<sup>21</sup> cf. Romans 1:18ff. and I Corinthians 15:22.

<sup>22</sup> This would appear so when we read Romans 9:4, Ephesians 2:11–14, and similar passages, yet other passages condition our thinking, such as John 3:16, I John 2:2, and 4:14; and whilst these certainly do not point to universal salvation they do point to the love of God for all humanity (cf. Matt. 5:43–48), even if some members of the race prove to be finally impenitent and so finally unredeemed.

## Study Six: The Grace of the Covenants

### INTRODUCTION: MAN IN SIN AND GRACE

We have noted that from the time of the Fall, something—perhaps we should say, much—of the grace of God has appeared in that many born of Adam have appeared as 'people of faith' and 'children of God', the two of course being synonymous. The poison of the serpent has not destroyed the human race but made it an applicant for redeeming grace. Genesis 3:14–15—often called 'the proto-evangel'—was highly significant, in that it did not leave the primal couple, and hence all humanity, in the doldrums of death. God's words to the serpent were:

Because you have done this,  
cursed are you above all cattle,  
and above all wild animals;  
upon your belly you shall go,  
and dust you shall eat  
all the days of your life.  
I will put enmity between you and the woman,  
and between your seed and her seed;  
he shall bruise your head,  
and you shall bruise his heel.

For some theologians this was the beginning of the covenant of redemption, or at least its emergence in time, given that it was planned prior to creation, but a better way of looking at it may be that God, at this point, was acting on the basis of creation, that is, being 'a faithful creator'. That is, just as His wrath is being revealed from heaven upon all human creatures who suppress the truth that is functional in creation, so His wrath is upon the serpent—the figure of the devil<sup>23</sup>—and as Creator and not even as Redeemer He is determined to preserve Man and creation.<sup>24</sup> Without doubt grace, because of the Fall, has entered into the matter of the covenant of creation, but it has emerged from that covenant, rather than turned it to a covenant of grace, nor has it devised and demanded other covenants such as the Noahic and Abrahamic. As we shall see, all covenants are ultimately related to the covenant of creation, and have the re-creation and *telos* of that covenant in mind. It is interesting to see that whilst the Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New covenants have redemption as part of their being, what is in view is not primarily redemption, but the restoration of their members to creational fullness.

If we miss the fact that the covenant of creation obtains from creation to the new creation, and in the new creation is simply the covenant of God come to fulfilment, then we have missed the significance both of creation and of covenant. So then, the immediate onslaught upon the serpent is one with the fact of redemption which faces Man, and, as we have observed, it calls for the woman to be pitted against the serpent, and, of course, no less the man. The seed of the woman will be a man, and whilst the woman brings forth the seed that cannot be without the man, and in fact the seed comes from the corporate human race, whatever the origin of the seed of the serpent may be supposed to be.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> cf. Revelation 12:1–12.

<sup>24</sup> Of course the two go together. What we are emphasising is that since there was a covenant of creation, preserving that creation would be part of it. We see God's redemptive activity as innate to creation—inherent in it—but the action of redemption is primarily of grace, and in that sense God is wholly the subject of redemption: He is not 'bound' to redeem!

<sup>25</sup> In Revelation 12 and 13 the red dragon who is 'that ancient serpent . . . the Devil' has a 'seed' in the beast, who is its clone—a 'son-beast' so to speak. Chapter 13 reveals a 'foul trinity' in the dragon, the first beast and the second beast ('false prophet' in II Thess. 2).

## GRACE OBTAINING FROM ADAM TO NOAH

At this point we repeat the fact that the death which came to Man via the Fall did not leave all human beings wholly dead because grace was working faith in some of the children of Adam, namely those in whom grace evoked the response of faith. So by faith Abel offered up a better sacrifice than Cain and he, being dead, yet lives. Whilst Paul could speak of the human race as dead in sin<sup>26</sup> and under the power of the serpent—called by Paul 'the prince of the power of the air'—yet creation, through the God of creation, proved and proves stronger than the Adamic death. Whilst some theology—that which presupposes a covenant of redemption planned before creation—traces the history of a covenant of redemption from Genesis 3:14–15, it is better to see that creation was with a view to redemption and that redemption is not layered on creation, nor is creation merely its 'backdrop', but the reality is that creation is all about redemption, since it is the one God who is Creator and Redeemer.

If this is true then the whole of creation is involved, and the whole of humanity—as part of that creation—is also involved. Whilst the covenant with Abraham is certainly concentrated upon him and his seed, yet Genesis 12:1–3 shows us that it is linked with the destinies of the nations. Indeed it is oriented towards all the peoples of the world. As for the creation, Paul shows us in Romans 8:18–25 that its liberation from the present futility to which it is subjected will occur when redeemed humanity is unveiled in its glory, and that creation will share in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. On this reasoning creation and the humanity which is joined as part of that creation is always significant in its being. It is always confronted with, and by, the reality of the Creator, to say nothing of His being as Redeemer, but it is not left to itself. The saying of the Greek poet quoted by Paul, 'In him we live and move and have our being', is perhaps as potent and theological an extra-biblical statement as the world has ever known.

Thus, without the explicit pronouncement of a particular covenant of redemption, grace has obtained with the human race since the Fall. Whilst chapters 4 and 6 of Genesis show the lethal working of sin, and the spread of violence and corruption across the face of the earth, yet this does not represent a triumph of the serpent so much as it does God's mercy in not destroying mankind in its corruption. Of course, all was heading towards the Flood which can be seen no less as a judgment than anything else. Whilst it diminished sinful mankind to seven people living under grace, it also revealed the wrath of God upon evil. What concerns us is its outcome—the determination of God not to curse the earth because of Man's sin, but to establish afresh its rhythm of life and seasons, and to persevere with Man himself, making him afresh to be the lord of that creation, albeit 'the imagination of [his] heart remained evil from his youth'. Because of Man's evil the dread of him would be over all sentient creatures, but the rudiments of the covenant of creation remained unaltered. In all this we see 'the faithful Creator'.

## THE COVENANT WITH NOAH

We have noted, in accordance with good exegetes, that the covenant with Noah uses the term *berith*, but that no covenant is cut because it is simply the establishment of the covenant of creation, which is not hitherto named explicitly as just that. There is no question of any grace of moral salvation, but there is the question of Man and the creatures continuing in the covenant of creation. The passage of Genesis 9:8–17—quoted immediately below—tells all the details. Doubtless we can speak of covenantal grace introduced to maintain the creation in the face of human sinfulness, but we are not speaking explicitly of conflict with the serpent, but rather the grace which enables Man in his sinfulness to exist and be active, as also

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<sup>26</sup> See Ephesians 2:1, 5; Romans 5:12ff.; and cf. II Corinthians 5:15.

the creation to pursue its way in spite of the fact that through the Fall it was still subjected to futility. Its subjection 'in hope' may well tell us how it persists down through the ages. We repeat, the Noahic covenant is one of creation with Man, with all living creatures and the earth:

Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him, 'Behold, I establish my covenant with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the cattle, and every beast of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.' And God said, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations: I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds, I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.' God said to Noah, 'This is the sign of the covenant which I have established between me and all flesh that is upon the earth.'

### **CONCLUSION: THE GRACE OF COVENANT COMMENCES WITH THE CONFIRMING OF THE COVENANT OF CREATION WITH NOAH**

We have concluded that God did not cut a covenant with Noah but confirmed the one already existing, the covenant of creation. Our heading above might lead us to think we would here deal with all covenants, but that we cannot do until we see more of the nature of the covenant of creation. We will, of course, deal later with the covenants called 'Abrahamic', 'Mosaic', 'Davidic' and 'New'. What we have established is that fallen Man cannot—were he ever so inclined—fulfil the covenant of creation.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY SIX**

1. Assuming there is a general, creational covenant which is universal, what happened between Adam and Noah to bring judgment upon the people of Noah's generation? Discuss the basis on which God destined the Flood to happen.
2. What prophetic word was uttered in Genesis 3 which spoke of salvation to come? How does this relate to the action of the Flood?
3. Discuss the covenant with Noah, especially the point of 'making' or 'establishing' the covenant.
4. What are we to make of the fact that God establishes His covenant with all the world, with every creature? Is it possible it is a repeat of the creational covenant which is not mentioned in the early chapters of Genesis?

## Study Seven: The Covenant of Creation and Vocation

### INTRODUCTION: THE INNATE DEMANDS OF THE COVENANT OF CREATION

When we use the term 'demands' we have to take into consideration how certain words sound to fallen Man and what meanings and values he gives to them. This is an almost impossible task: at the best we can only suggest certain ideas in order to somehow counter such prejudices. The words 'authority', 'law', 'commands', and 'demands'—among many of their synonyms—sound unattractive, hard, and even heavily legal where humans—even redeemed humans—are concerned. So the word 'demand' as a law-and-authority concept, does not have the same value as, say, when two infatuated lovers 'demand' kisses from one another! Thus when we use this term 'demand' it inevitably imports a note which is contractual, 'Do this—or else', and that is not the spirit of the covenant of creation. Rather the idea is, 'This is the way life goes when Man—the one-flesh man and woman—were, and are, created'. Three basic elements of that covenant of creation emerge which are principles of living in creation, *coram deo*—before God. They are

- (i) the **vocation** of fulfilling the mandate;
- (ii) the profound mystery of **marriage**; and
- (iii) living in the **Sabbath rest** of God.

### THE GRACE REQUIRED FOR THE COVENANT OF CREATION

We have claimed that Man being in the image of God, having the gift of created life, living in communion with the Triune Community of God and having implanted, by nature, the law as a transcript of the life of the same Community, would by nature, that is naturally, live in accordance with the three components or principles set out above.<sup>27</sup> The Fall, however, has made a great difference to the spirit of man and to the natural exercise of his will in conformity with that of God. Nothing but the grace of God can free him from the spirit-distorting effects of original sin, and the guilts of the continuing acts of sin he commits.

If fallen persons refuse to become people of faith and likewise refuse to live as children of love, then the demands of the covenant of creation will seem onerous and unattractive. At this point we also have to say that sinners are those who 'suppress the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness' and upon them 'the wrath of God is revealed from heaven' and they 'have a consciousness [conscience] of sin' which means they have the overlay of active guilt which, itself, acts as the wrath of God in the human conscience.<sup>28</sup> Thus there will be no desire to fulfil the principles of being creatures of God.

We make the further point that there is an ontological pressure of 'oughtness'—perhaps the one Kant called 'the categorical imperative'—which is resident in all humans. By this we mean that the human conscience works in each as it is trained by that person and especially by the cultural mores in which he or she lives. Fallen human beings devise their own images of God, Man, creation and law, and they live by these. The conscience works primarily by these elements,

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<sup>27</sup> We need to keep seeing that these three elements were not contractual. The living out of them may be said to be implicitly an obligation, but it is better to see them as ontological in Man by nature of creation and so his true way of living. The matter of choice did not arise. Man's natural freedom would obtain in such living, and that freedom would carry its own incentive for such living.

<sup>28</sup> See Romans 1:18 for suppressing the truth, for being given up to their sin (sins) and the accompanying guilt of the same, and Hebrews 10:2, 22 for 'an evil conscience'.

and such elements are devised in order to make life easiest for the person to carry it out. The system of ethics, for example, is generally aimed at the level of possible accomplishment. So we speak of 'natural law' and 'natural theology' and so of 'natural morality'. In all of this there is a morality which is more or less common to most tribes and cultures. Thus fallen human beings may roughly approximate in their endeavours to live according to the three creational principles of vocation, marriage and Sabbath rest.

The catch in all this is that the pressure of the ontological—things as they really are—is always there, even beyond (above or below) the way in which the sinner seeks to live out life according to his images of God, Man, creation and law. His conscience is never fully at ease with its taught, acculturated mores. This is the unease which is deeply in human beings, and which brings *angst* and the dread which accrues with guilt.

All of these elements show the need of grace in order to be a person of faith and a child of love, and then, in the face of the sinfulness of the human race, to pursue the demands of the covenant of creation, namely the will of God. Man, as creaturely, always needed the power for holy action which came—gift-wise—to him as the *imago Dei*, and as in full communion with God. Fallen, as are all humans, he needs grace to live as the demands of ontology present themselves.

### **THE FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE IMAGE OF GOD AND THE CREATIONAL MANDATE: VOCATION**

When we look at that mandate set out in the passage of Genesis 1:26–31 then we realise its many elements and how demanding they would prove even to a person living in innocence:

Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.' So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.' And God said, 'Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.' And it was so. And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day.

Present as a primary factor is the blessing of God, 'God blessed them, and God said to them'. This blessing would have been the enablement for fulfilling the mandate. Fruitfulness and multiplication would have involved marriage, would have called for all contributions of labour, gifts, talents, abilities, trades and professions, and for the life of a loving community. Bringing the dynamic creation under human lordship would have entailed the thoughtful, wise and firm natural dominion over all sentient creatures and what we call the vegetable and mineral worlds, to say nothing of the meteorological elements. The idea of filling the earth to completion has some sense of a future goal which is to be reached. A replete and complete world would mean a vocation with a future, and with what we might almost call 'hope'.

When we further look upon the vastness of world life as we know it today we wonder at the high calling given to Man in the mandate. Without the fallenness into which Man came the task would have been simpler—no deceit, self-seeking, self-assertion, rivalry, chicanery, nepotism, the complications of homicide, genocide, immorality, ethnic and racial rivalries, and the like. In saying this we are talking almost as those who rave. Yet we must consider what it would have been to have had personal vocations within the general, communal vocation of the human race, especially as the law of God would be extant, communion would obtain, and the desire to fulfil the best would have been the driving motivation.

## **DEPRAVITY AND DEPRIVATION**

Not to fulfil the vocation will always bring existential guilt, in the sense that persons will know themselves to have failed in the purpose for which they have been created. There will be the unavoidable fact, background and effects of original sin, and the objective guilts of their sins of commission and omission. No one would deny the joys humans experience when they accomplish something, when they devise great works of culture and when they succeed in commerce, industry, social endeavours and family building. However much depravity mars the perfection of the achievement, it is, nevertheless, satisfying to a great degree. Those of utopian and perfectionist bent dream of what could be, given ideological fulfilment. The whole human race is somehow involved in the vocational mandate and much of its pleasure comes in the exercise of it.

Deprivation of the exercise of the full image of God is, however, a deterrent to genuine rest and satisfaction in this life. By deprivation we mean the loss of that full communion which by creation Man has with God, with one another and with the creation in which the primal humanity lived. We live with so little of genuine love-life and emotional fulfilment, and there is so much pain, shame, disfigurement, loss of self-esteem, unrequited longing for friendship and intimacy, that life does not prove wholly satisfying. That yearning of the inner being for consummation of friendship with God and Man is an ontological reality, a constant emotional pressure which not even the vast resources of art in all its forms—literature, music, painting, sculpture—can fulfil. Our innumerable industries which seek to compensate us for the substantial loss in this life of love, joy and peace, work hard to supply antidotes to misery and palliatives for suffering, though with little lasting effect.

Perhaps most miserable of all are those who cannot rise to any kind of vocation. On the one hand they may be the most angry amongst us, and on the other the most pathetic and listless, those who suffer for accidie and crass-mindedness. Whether we see these as states of judgment or not we humanly need to have compassion and sympathy for all. The antithesis of such a state is that of compulsive activism which allows the conscience no time for rest: or is it the conscience, badly taught, which will not allow that rest? Guilt has strange ways of working and the compulsive operator has no true rest.

The Christian will recognise that to the creational mandate is added the command of Christ for his followers to take the proclamation of redemption to all the world. Whilst this is a new mandate it is nevertheless to do with the creational mandate, for its aim is to restore human beings to fullness under the covenant of creation, something only grace can achieve. The Christian person—and community—will recognise that what we may call the redemptive act of God is effective within the New Covenant, but then that covenant is within the covenant of creation, with its purpose as we have suggested above—the renewal of men and women in the universal covenant.

## **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY SEVEN**

1. Keeping the covenant of creation in mind, why should grace be necessary for those who have breached that covenant?
2. What should we understand by 'natural law' or 'natural knowledge of morality'? Do you think this is something which is somewhere seated in human memory? Is it possible that we have 'ontological pressure' to work by a universal morality?
3. Discuss the nature of human vocation, as given in the quoted passage in Genesis.
4. Articulate your understanding of 'depravity' and 'deprivation'.

## Study Eight: The Covenant of Creation and the Rest of God

### THE SECOND PRINCIPLE OF THE IMAGE: THE SABBATH REST OF GOD

#### *Introduction: The Rest of God an Important Part of Creation and Its Covenant*

The primary passage referring to God's rest, which in fact is not literally called 'God's sabbath rest', is Genesis 2:1–3:

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work which he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all his work which he had done in creation.

Linked with this passage are Exodus 20:8–11, 23:12, 31:12–17, and Deuteronomy 5:12–15:

**Exodus 20:8–11:** Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, your manservant, or your maidservant, or your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates; for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it.

**Exodus 23:12:** Six days you shall do your work, but on the seventh day you shall rest; that your ox and your ass may have rest, and the son of your bondmaid, and the alien, may be refreshed.

**Exodus 31:12–17:** And the LORD said to Moses, 'Say to the people of Israel, "You shall keep my sabbaths, for this is a sign between me and you throughout your generations, that you may know that I, the LORD, sanctify you. You shall keep the sabbath, because it is holy for you; every one who profanes it shall be put to death; whoever does any work on it, that soul shall be cut off from among his people. Six days shall work be done, but the seventh day is a sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the LORD; whoever does any work on the sabbath day shall be put to death. Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the sabbath, observing the sabbath throughout their generations, as a perpetual covenant. It is a sign for ever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed."'

**Deuteronomy 5:12–15:** Observe the sabbath day, to keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. Six days you shall labor, and do all your work; but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; in it you shall not do any work, you, or your son, or your daughter, or your manservant, or your maidservant, or your ox, or your ass, or any of your cattle, or the sojourner who is within your gates, that your manservant and your maidservant may rest as well as you. You shall remember that you were a servant in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out thence with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day.

The context of the first passage is really that of Genesis chapter 1, but in particular 1:26–31 where Man is created and creation is completed, Man being the zenith of the creation. When all things are created God sees the creation as 'very good'. Within this completeness Man is given his mandate of vocation, but the beginning of that vocation—part of the creational covenant demand—is linked with the 'rest' of God. God completes all in the six days, and only when He has completed all and because He has completed all does He rest, that is, does He desist from further acts of creation. It is clear that, creation having been completed, God expects Man to live in and use the creation, and then on the seventh day to rest from such labour.

### *God and the 'Rest'*

Certain elements emerge from these passages: (i) the completion of works in which God rejoices, and their completeness is sealed, so to speak, by the fact of the seventh day, the day of rest; (ii) it is for God a day of rest; (iii) God is spoken of as being refreshed by the rest; (iv) God blessed the day, and whilst blessing is given to Man prior to, and related with, the mandate, blessing is not generally spoken of as relating to things such as a day. This must mean the day is a source of blessing, and makes sense of God's being refreshed; (v) God makes it holy, not that that infers the previous six days were not holy, but the seventh day is made holy for ever as it relates to the way God and Man should be; (vi) God gives the day as a sign forever to Israel of the fact that He created all things; and (vii) it is a rest to be observed especially by Israel because that nation was once in Egypt and had to work seven days without any rest.

It would seem that since in Genesis 2:1–3 the seventh day does not conclude as do the other days—'and there was evening and there was morning, a seventh day'—that the seventh day is still proceeding. Thus the period of all history is God's rest day, and so Man, being in the image of God, will likewise do as his Creator does and (i) do all he should do in six days, and (ii) rest from such work on the seventh day. What must be seen is that Man should be at rest because of creation, and that his own inner rest, should be that of God Himself. We mean all men were virtually commanded to know the very rest of God. It was the gift of creation.

We have seen that because of the Fall Man lost his peace, his *shalom*, his rest. Not at peace with God he is not at peace with himself and with others. He now has a restlessness. This powerfully effects the way he goes about vocation, the rest, and marriage, and so much so that God says (Isa. 57:20–21):

But the wicked are like the tossing sea;  
for it cannot rest,  
and its waters toss up mire and dirt.  
There is no peace, says my God, for the wicked.

If we can speak of 'the rest of God' as being His nature, that is, that He has rest within Himself,<sup>29</sup> then we see what Man is by creation as the image of God. It is Man's nature also to be at rest. At the same time Man is commanded to fulfil his vocation, and he may think he should launch from this into a time of busyness, so to speak, but as God has rested from His work, Man must know God's continuing rest and do his work within that and by means of it; for example, 'He that believeth shall not make haste'. There is no conflict between vocation and rest. The works of God in vocation are done in the midst of rest. As we have seen immediately above, Man's break with God gives him a false view of vocation,<sup>30</sup> rest and marriage. Fallen he lives in perpetual restlessness: he is not really partaking of the covenant of creation.

We gather from the Epistle to the Hebrews that there is an eschatological rest, the indication being that such rest will be the ultimate reality for all creation. Here the passage of Hebrews 3:7 – 4:10 should be studied closely. It shows that rest lies in doing the will of God. Israel was promised it would have rest in the Promised Land, but it did not achieve it because of disobedience. David gave a certain rest to the land,<sup>31</sup> but it had to be Jesus who said, 'Come unto me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls'.

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<sup>29</sup> For example, if we compare God's nature with that of the wicked person of whom God says, 'There is no peace for the wicked', for 'the wicked are like the restless sea; for it cannot rest, and its waters toss up mire and dirt' (Isa. 57:20–21).

<sup>30</sup> Note the curse speaks of increased labour to have a living from the soil. Even so, Man-in-faith (cf. Heb. 11:4–38) could have the rest of God, as for example it appears that Enoch walked with God.

<sup>31</sup> See II Samuel 7:1; I Kings 8:56; I Chronicles 22:9. Through David God gave Israel rest from its enemies. Solomon was to be the man of peace, as God said, 'I will give peace [rest: *menuchah*] and quiet to Israel in his day'.

There is a rest ahead for the true people of God, and that will be when all things are reconciled at the time of the *telos*.

What we have said in the above passage is not to pre-empt what we would later say about the restoration of the principles of creation, but we simply wish to show, by comparison, that Man is not in that sabbath rest of God. What rest he has ever had has been when, being at one with God by God's love, he worships Him. It is always in the sanctuary that true rest comes.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY EIGHT**

1. Understanding that Man being created in the image of God will naturally represent him in the world, show how this links with sabbath resting. We are not suggesting 'sabbatarianism' but sabbath resting.
2. What importance does the Pentateuch place upon sabbath observance?
3. Discuss Man's loss of personal and societal peace, the incursion of turmoil and conflict, and the grace which brings rest to the human spirit.

## Study Nine: The Covenant of Creation and Marriage—I

### THE THIRD PRINCIPLE OF THE IMAGE: THE PROFOUND MYSTERY OF MARRIAGE

In Genesis 1:28–30 we have the mandate God gave to Man. Having created Man as male and female together, 'God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it"', so that vocation cannot be fulfilled apart from the man and woman. Without marriage they cannot be fruitful and participate in the vocation. Properly speaking, as Man they are one, and are not simply two separate entities brought together and joined together. In Genesis 2:18–24 we see the following:

- (a) Man was created without a mate;
- (b) he named the creatures and saw their unions as male and female;
- (c) God said that it was not good for man to be alone and so created the woman from the man;
- (d) when God brought her to the man—who was now no longer in himself 'Man'—the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man';
- (e) the conclusion of all of this is stated, 'Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh'.

For Man to be in the image of God and to be truly Man, reflecting the glory of God, he must be husband and wife together. As we have already said, God did not create a male and a female as two separate entities and then join them—a thing biologically possible, but relationally impossible. No: he created the woman out of the man so that now Man is the man and the woman as one.

One way of attempting to understand this is first to understand that the Triune God—of whom Man is the image—is constituted of Three Persons who are One. The Father is spoken of as *fons divinitatis*, that is 'the fountain of Godhead'. The Son is eternally *generated* from him, and in one sense we can say that he is 'from the Father',<sup>32</sup> whilst the Holy Spirit is said to *proceed* from the Father and the Son, and in that sense can be said to be 'from the Father and the Son'. So then, because the woman was drawn from the man, the man and the woman are constitutionally one. Animals cannot be said, in the same sense, to be constitutionally one.<sup>33</sup>

### Christ's View of Marriage

In Matthew 5:32; 19:1–12; Mark 10:1–12; and Luke 16:18 we have our Lord's view of marriage.<sup>34</sup> Whilst recognising Mosaic legislation (Deut. 24:1–4) in going about divorce,

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<sup>32</sup> The Nicene Creed has it, 'God of God, Light of Light, Very God of very God, Begotten, not made', which should be understood, 'God *out* of God, Light *out* of Light, Very God *out* of very God, Begotten, not made'.

<sup>33</sup> Today we have the idea in feminism and masculism, that we virtually have two races—one female and the other male. Instead of the woman realising her being is derived from Man, she is gender-conscious, thinking she is a complete being in herself. Likewise the masculist holds this idea for his gender. Gender-consciousness, and confining oneself to one's gender, is a straining against the creational order of things: the male and female are one together, and, as such, Man.

<sup>34</sup> See my treatment of this in my book *The Profound Mystery*, NCPI, 1995, and especially the comprehensive bibliography which shows the wide reading and wide differences in dealing with the subject.

Christ quotes Genesis 2:24 and categorically states on the basis of it, 'What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder'<sup>35</sup>. He recognises the innate unity of the couple in marriage. Later we will have need to refer to this, for Christ himself as *the* Bridegroom is joined to his wife *the* Bride, who is, herself, the Church. Here the idea of a divorce of the two is utterly impossible.

### *Marriage is a Profound Mystery*

In Ephesians 5:21–33 Paul speaks of marriage. In the course of his disquisition Paul quotes Genesis 2:24 and says, 'This mystery is a profound one, and I am saying that it [Gen. 2:24] refers to Christ and his church'. We note the word 'mystery' which in the Greek is *mysterion* and is sometimes translated 'a secret'. A mystery in the New Testament is a secret which is disclosed to the initiated and which is closed off from the uninitiated.<sup>36</sup> More particularly, understanding of it is given by God. Christ told his disciples, 'To you it has been given to know the secrets [the mysteries] of the kingdom of heaven but to them it has not been given'.

Paul, then, is saying that the joining together of a man and a woman in marriage is a mystery. A mystery is not a puzzle to be solved but something to be lived in. Paul is saying that the union referred to in Genesis is a mystery in that it refers not generally to a man and woman being thus joined, but to Christ and the Church and their marriage. This means that Genesis 2:24 in speaking of the marriage of the first couple is saying that marriage is protological. By this we mean that it is the beginning thing pointing to the end thing, and the end thing is the consummation of what it prophetically indicates. The 'end thing' we call 'eschatological'. In this case 'the end thing' is the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb. Thus the marriage of the primal couple is not the mystery as such, but that which it pointed to, as we say, protologically.

### *Marriage, the Image, and the Covenant of Creation*

We have seen for Man to be Man is for him to be in the image of God, and to accept and fulfil the vocation God has given him in the creational mandate. It is also for him to live in the sabbath rest of God. We must now see that it is for him to fulfil his relationship with God in the covenant of creation by the union and communion of marriage. The serpent saw this fact and sought to prise Man away from his relationship with God, and insofar as it succeeded—in the event of the Fall—it succeeded in fracturing the relationship of the man and the woman. In turn this affected Man's approach to his vocation and to living in the sabbath rest of God. In other words, Man as the *imago Dei* was deeply affected; he became out of kilter with his own essential being, and therefore with all that he was to be and do. He was going against the covenant of creation.

### *The Covenant of Creation and the Covenant Creator–Father*

We have been seeing that although Man broke the intimate relationship that was his with God by virtue of creation, that is, the union–communion he had with God, yet God did not abandon Man.

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<sup>35</sup> 'When a man takes a wife and marries her, if then she finds no favour in his eyes because he has found some indecency in her, and he writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, and she departs out of his house, and if she goes and becomes another man's wife, and the latter husband dislikes her and writes her a bill of divorce and puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house, or if the latter husband dies, who took her to be his wife, then her former husband, who sent her away, may not take her again to be his wife, after she has been defiled; for that is an abomination before the LORD, and you shall not bring guilt upon the land which the LORD your God gives you for an inheritance.'

<sup>36</sup> We have Christ telling Nicodemus that he cannot *see* the kingdom of heaven unless he is born from above. Likewise Paul says 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him', and John in his First Epistle says—amongst many other things—that no one can know God without new birth.

Whilst pure relationship must be mutual yet one can hold to his or her side of a (relational) covenant even though there is no response from the other member. 'He is not very far from any one of us', and 'In him we live and move and have our being', remains true. Some theologians have spoken of 'general grace', meaning God persists with Man, holding him back from the full, natural outcome of his fallen being. Whatever term may be given to God's action it is true that he does this. It is also true that from Abel onwards there have been those called 'people of faith' and 'the children of God'. These things ensure that marriage is not impossible because of the Fall. Good marriages are experienced by human couples, even though none is perfect. God gives some kind of grace to human beings if they will use it. Marriage as an institution has survived for millenniums. The rejection or perversion of it in the world of modernity will not destroy it: the present phase will also pass. The enormous anger that men and women have from experiences of marital disloyalty is more than matched by the anger couples have with disloyalty in *de facto* relationships. This would appear to indicate that human marriage is ontological in essence. By 'ontological' we mean of the order of what is essentially true—of 'things as they really are'.

### **Marriage Should Be Understood and Lived in the Light of Its being 'The Profound Mystery'**

If we are concerned with vocation and living in God's sabbath rest as the true way of life and the living out of the image of God, then we will also be concerned with marriage on the same score. Yet what should be understood is that vocation is protological. It is a mystery in that it is the beginning thing that looks to the end thing—its consummation when Man will have accomplished his vocation and been rewarded, and will go on to the vocation of being 'kings and priests unto God', reigning on the earth for ever. Likewise God's sabbath rest is something Man should now live in, since it is protological of the end thing, which is the ultimate rest in the holy city, in the holy temple which will be God Himself. Thus in living out the image in these two ways, Man is reflecting God as His image. By the same token, marriage being the mystery, is likewise the reflection of God's glory and His plan for the people of His covenant. It is protological of the end (the eschatological) consummation. It is to this thought we give ourselves in our next study.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY NINE**

1. Discuss the creation of Man as Adam—yet without the woman, Eve—and then Man constituting both the man (Adam) and the woman (Eve).
2. Is marriage primarily a biological matter and sexuality simply essential for such procreation, or is it more than this? If so, how?
3. It is said that God is not a solitary being as Father, but we must always think, 'The Father and . . .' Discuss this.

### *Family Covenant in Israel*

Israel had been taught by God that it had been chosen in love, that He was their Covenant-Father, they His covenant-children (cf. Deut. 7:6-11). They were to worship Him as both their Father and their Husband (cf. Jer. 31:32; Hosea 2:19; c.f. Jer. 2:26, etc.). Worship was, then, both marital and familial. In marriage the man and the woman worship one another, and thus God as Husband and Israel as wife are the basis of true love, so that the family live together in the right order of things. . When we see this principle we understand a lot of the Old Testament Text. Without repeating all the teaching we have shared on covenant let us go to the story of Malachi Chapter Two. This chapter portrays Israel as the family of God. It has within it a number references to covenant as a principle. Presupposed is the Sinaitic covenant, which in Israel's thinking was always seen within the wider covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. 2: 10). Specifically it refers to a covenant with Levi, to the 'covenant of our fathers', and the human marriage covenant. The covenant with Levi is scribed as 'a covenant of life and peace' (cf. Numb. 8:45; 18:21f.). Israel is not the family under the true Father because it violates the altar. Levitical priests walked in integrity and holiness, 'True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.' This principle was not adhered to at the time of Malachi's prophecy (cf. Neh. 5:3-7). God's Covenant always provides priestly ministry to its members, as also it has God's law which is the covenantal way of life.

Malachi 2:13-16 appears to do with the marital conduct of families where husbands are divorcing wives in favour of marrying daughters of a foreign god. This brings the whole principle of marriage in Israel to the fore. Because of this faithlessness to primary marriage God will not respect or accept the altar offerings of Israel, The text of verses 14—16 explains why. 'You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring. So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.'" With this text we should read Proverbs 2:16-19 where 'the loose woman' is a wife who 'forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God'. She forgets the Covenant God has made with Israel and the covenant which she has made in marriage.

We gather then that within the covenant of Israel all relationships are covenantal. Marriage is a covenant before God and witnessed to by God under peril of judgement if a spouse or spouses revoke the covenant of marriage, ie. 'I hate divorce', is what God says, as also He hates 'covering one's garment with violence' which means there is violence in the marriage in respect to going through to divorce. If we ask why God should be so vehement about the matter we must realise that God is married to Israel. He is her Husband by covenant (**jer. 31:32**). The first two chapters of Hosea, the sixteenth chapter of Ezekiel, and Isaiah chapter fifty four-amongst other passages-attest to this marital bond or covenant. It is at the heart of all covenant. Covenant-breaking is looked upon, as a dreadful violation of the relationship God has with His people. .

**Bingham. 22<sup>nd</sup> March 1999.**

### *Jesus' View of Marriage and Divorce*

Jesus' thinking about marriage carries with it his whole view of God as Father, His Family and human family relationships. Thus in Matthew 5:27-32 we see that Jesus does not abruptly introduce the matter of marriage, divorce and remarriage but speaks firstly of the purity of mind which looks at human sexuality, secondly of the inviolate nature of marriage, and thirdly of the impossibility of remarriage even if a divorce be granted for porneia.

"It was also said, 'Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.' But I say to you that every one who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, makes her an adulteress; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

In our language, Jesus was going back to the creation ordinance regarding marriage.

In Matthew 19: 1 ff, the Pharisees approached Jesus with a view to testing him regarding the matter of marriage, and divorce.

And Pharisees came up to him and tested him by asking, "Is it lawful to divorce one's wife for any cause?" He answered, "Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this **reason** a man shall leave his **father** and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder." They said to him, "Why then did Moses command one to give a certificate of divorce, and to put her away?" He said to them, "For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so. And I say to you: whoever divorces his wife, except for unchastity, and marries another, commits adultery."

Jesus reply was simple, divorce was not part of the creation ordinance. That should have been sufficient as an answer, but they virtually disregarded it, citing the injunction of Deuteronomy 24:1-4, to which he replied that Moses had made a *provision* but not a *law* for divorce only because of 'their hardness of heart'. It is sufficient for us to note the point that Jesus did not see divorce as part of the creation ordinance, and as a part of the Primal Law. Mark 10:2-10 confirms this, whilst Luke 16:18 does not even consider the Deuteronomy passage. The following passage (Matt. 19: 10-12) was an 'in house' discussion (cf. Mark 10: 10- 12).

The disciples said to him, "If such is the case of a man with his wife, it is not expedient to marry." But he said to them, "Not all men can receive this saying, but only those to whom it is given. For there are eunuchs who have been so from birth, and there are eunuchs **who** have been made eunuchs by men, and there are eunuchs who have **made** themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. He who is able to receive this, let him receive it."

It bears out the fact that the disciples had grasped the radical nature of Jesus' view of marriage which was that marriage was inviolate, permanent, and there should be no divorce and remarriage was inadmissible: it could only cause adultery. His references to being eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven lifted the whole matter on to the highest plane-that of the kingdom of God, and did not leave it on the lowest plane, that of the kingdom of Man. It seems that the apostles had grasped Jesus' view of marriage and would have seen it as related to the creation ordinance, which, in turn in Paul at least has its wider soteriological and eschatological connotations. In regard to Jesus' view of marriage we are shut up, apostolically, to the Old Testament *prophetic* understanding of the inviolability of marriage, the matter of no divorce and no remarriage as shown in Jesus' own exposition of these things. Of course this biblical view has to meet men and women where they are today in their marital affairs. The question is not an easy one to solve, but every effort should be made to save a marriage, no matter what the case. Each marriage is a prophetic witness to Christ and his marriage to the Bride. This is how important it is.

**G. Bingham**

## Study Ten: The Covenant of Creation and Marriage—II

### SOME COMMENTS ON 'THE PROFOUND MYSTERY'

In using these comments we are trying to contemplate Paul's idea of 'the profound mystery', and this may complicate the matter for some of us. The quotations need thoughtful penetration and comprehension. What they say also jumps ahead of what we will be trying to develop in future studies. Even so, grasping these insights should be a useful exercise.

Geoffrey W. Bromiley, in speaking of marriage says:

In creating man—male and female—in his own image, and joining them together so that they become one flesh, God makes us copies both of himself in his trinitarian unity and distinction as one God and three persons and of himself in relation to the people of his gracious election. Analogically, what is between Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and what ought to be and is and shall be between God and Israel and Christ and the church, is also what is meant to be in the relation of man and woman and more specifically of husband and wife. Neither the intratrinitarian relationship nor the union between the heavenly bridegroom and his bride is a good copy of a bad original. Earthly marriage as it is now lived out is a bad copy of a good original . . . It is simpler, however, because God himself took the initiative at the level of both original and copy. At the level of the original the deserted husband lovingly went to look for the erring bride and bought her back. He did this by offering himself, in the person of the divine Son, as the price of redemption.<sup>37</sup>

Helmut Thielicke's comment is:

On the basis of this 'symbolic' character of marriage, Ephesians 5:32 speaks of a 'mystery' . . . In the New Testament the term 'mystery' is always used in the sense that a visible, earthly reality or process becomes a similitude of the transcendent sphere of salvation, that 'nature' thus points to the 'supernatural'. . . This kind of pointing or reference is called a 'mystery' because it cloaks and reveals at the same time: the mystery reveals itself to faith, whereas unbelief cannot understand it; 'to him who has, will more be given . . . , but from him who has not, even what he has will be taken away' . . . Because marriage points to the order of creation and redemption it is a similitude of this kind and it also exhibits the same double meaning: for those who stand in faith within the order of redemption it *has* this symbolic character, whereas for others it can be merely a contract, a biological phenomenon, or at most a human bond. This is why the letter to the Ephesians calls it a 'mystery'.<sup>38</sup>

Karl Barth, speaking of Genesis 2:24 says:

. . . as this whole second account of creation . . . is permeated by the reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion . . . it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife . . . In the New Testament Yahweh and Israel are Christ and His Church . . . Indeed, now that its prototype—Christ and the community—has emerged as a historical reality, it [marriage] can and must receive quite a new consecration . . . as a representation of what is its essence according to Gen. 2:18–22.<sup>39</sup>

Barth is saying that the account of Genesis 2:18–24 is prototypical of God and Israel, and so of Christ and the church. He agrees that it has direct reference to the first couple, but that it is not confined to it.

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<sup>37</sup> Bromiley, *God and Marriage*, pp. 77–78.

<sup>38</sup> Thielicke, *Theological Ethics: Sex*, vol. 3, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1964, pp. 125–26.

<sup>39</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 4, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1969, pp. 142–43.

Andrew Lincoln speaks along much the same lines:

'Mystery,' therefore, is not *any* deeper meaning of an OT text but precisely *this* meaning of Christ and the Church posited by this writer. Similarly, the mystery is not any marriage or marriage itself, but the special marriage relationship of Christ and the Church. This is not a denial of the straightforward reference of Gen 2:24 by any means. Indeed, as we have seen, that interpretation of Gen 2:24 underlies the exhortation to husbands in vv 28–30. But even that use of Gen 2:24 depended for its force on the ultimate reference the writer believed it had to the archetypal union between Christ and the Church . . . It was because the Church was Christ's body which was one with him, a relationship which was the model for human marriage, that wives could be seen in terms of their husband's bodies.<sup>40</sup>

Andrew Lincoln then shows exegetically it is Paul who is claiming that Genesis 2:24 is protological:

The emphatic *ego* and the particle *de* in v 32b make clear that the writer is stressing that this particular interpretation of Gen 2:24 as a reference to the profound mystery of the union between Christ and the Church is his own. If, in fact, it also originated with him, then presumably he reached it through a typological exegesis, resting on a correspondence between creation (Gen 2:24) and redemption (Christ and the Church). Christ has already been seen in Adamic terms in Eph 1:22 (the church is his body), and so a text that refers to Adam's bodily union can now be claimed for Christ's union with the Church. *ego de lego* 'but I am speaking,' occurs also in the antitheses of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5, where it serves to introduce an interpretation contrary to the generally accepted interpretation of the Scripture passages in view.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, on the matter of the 'profound mystery' we hear from Markus Barth:

Rather Christ's union with the church has effected an unprecedented situation: the new creation leaves no room for a dialectic tension or wavering between creation and redemption. Marriage is no longer explained as a 'creation order,' but as an expression of renewal of all things through Jesus Christ. Indeed, according to Paul, the supreme love and the first work and effect of Christ were announced, promised, and guaranteed as early as the creation story. But creation itself, viz. the creaturely existence which God gave to man in the beginning, was only an intimation of marriage, not its ontological and ethical ground. Only Jesus Christ's coming, his love, his death, his dominion are the final, solid basis and model.<sup>42</sup>

In regard to Genesis 2:24 Barth comments:

. . . that even such parts of the 'Law' that had evoked legal, legalistic, and at times casuistic debates and interpretations (the so-called *halacha*) were in actuality Prophetic in nature: 'A man will leave . . . will be joined . . . the two will become one . . .' The substance of this promise according to Paul is not only marital bliss: it is Christ's love for the church. Therefore what Gen 2:24 says about union in 'one flesh' is for Paul a prophecy more than anything else. Marriage stands under the sign of God's promise; it is not at the mercy of human traditions, laws, and their interpretation.<sup>43</sup>

Robert Jenson in his brilliant book on Jonathan Edwards has mined precious mineral out of Edwards' *Miscellanies*:

Edwards' answer takes us finally to the center of his systematic reflection, to—'as it were'—his notation of the universal melody's fugal structure: 'To this I say, that the Son is the adequate communication of the Father's goodness . . . But yet the Son has also an inclination to communicate *himself*, in an image of his person that may partake of his happiness: and this was the end of the creation, even the communication of the happiness of the Son of God. . . . Therefore the church is said to be the completeness of Christ.' It is as and only as a factor in the plot of the triune God's inner life,

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 42, Word, Dallas, 1990, p. 381.

<sup>41</sup> Lincoln, *Ephesians*, p. 382.

<sup>42</sup> Markus Barth, *Ephesians: Translation and Commentary on Chapters 4–6*, Doubleday & Co., New York, 1981, p. 731.

<sup>43</sup> Barth, *Ephesians*, p. 732.

that God has a need to overflow. In the *Miscellanies*, Edwards is beautifully simple: 'The end of the creation of God was to provide a spouse for his Son Jesus Christ, that might enjoy him and on whom he might pour forth his love. . . . ' [H]eaven and earth were created that the Son of God might be complete in a spouse.' The church is *with* Christ the object in the triune love and so the purpose of creation.<sup>44</sup>

Jenson comments, carrying Edwards' thoughts further:

Christ is the agent and beneficiary of all events from creation to fulfillment; 'as Mediator [Christ] rules all events . . . so as to conduce to the good of his church, and to bring to pass the ends of his mediation,' for since 'God created the world to provide a spouse . . . for his Son,' so 'the spiritual marriage of the spouse to him, is what the whole creation labors . . . to bring to pass.' And Edwards does mean 'whole creation,' for the material universe is, we must remember, but the intersubjective field of the community of spirits that makes history. Thus he can, with supreme sophistication and naïveté, say, 'the whole course of nature . . . [is] subservient to the affair of redemption,' or again, 'Every atom in the universe is managed by Christ so as to be most to the advantage of the Christian.' . . . It emerges in the discovery not of God's good in ours but of our good in God's. And that is to say, the God the soul enters is the triune God, so that the soul can be one with God while yet God works his own will that is not necessarily ours; and the universality the soul appropriates is the encompassing fact of Christ's history rather than of the soul's own religious aspiration. I must quote one more piece of Edwards' beloved spouse-mysticism, of a drastic Christianity I am not sure is elsewhere found: 'There was, [as] it were, an eternal society or family in the Godhead, in the Trinity of persons. *It seems to be God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife* [emphasis mine]'.<sup>45</sup>

### **CONCLUSION TO 'THE COVENANT OF CREATION AND MARRIAGE'**

As I suggested in the introduction to this study the quotations we have usefully used deal with material we will be expanding in later studies. Even so, the emphasis on Genesis 2:24 being 'the profound mystery' in that it is protological of the end consummation—the eschatological — helps us to see that the image of God is not a mediocre reflection of all that God is, and what He is doing in and through His covenant of creation. Rather it is a dynamic reflection.

From the practical point of view it also ties us down to the actional reality of the image of God in Man, or Man as the image of God. In the elements of vocation, living in God's sabbath rest and in marriage, Man is intended to reflect fully the glory of God.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY TEN**

1. What is meant generally in the Bible by 'a mystery'?
2. Why does Paul in Ephesians 5:32 speak of marriage as 'a profound mystery'?
3. Having read study 10, share your insights on what you have gathered about the nature of marriage.

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<sup>44</sup> Robert W. Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1992, p. 42. Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies a-500*, Yale U.P. (., 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Jenson, *America's Theologian*, pp. 42-43.

## Study Eleven: The Covenant with Abraham

### INTRODUCTORY NOTE

The next three studies of this second term follow the order in the book *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, but we omit four transition studies from the Old to the New Testament, from the covenant of Moses to the covenant we call 'New'. It would be good for us to get the book and fill in this valuable material. Even so, we can go directly to the covenants with Abraham, Israel, David and of Christ.

### THE GRACE OF COVENANTS

If we take the covenant of creation—which we have called 'God's Covenant'—to cover all who are born into this world, although not all such ones accept or adhere to that covenant, then we will need to find a place for the covenants called Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New. Whilst it certainly takes grace to assist people to accept and live in the covenant of creation, that covenant was based upon the reality of creation itself, and not, as such, upon grace.

What, then, was the purpose of the covenants we have just named above? In order to give ourselves the answer we will need to look at each of these covenants. We have five elements common to them all: (i) they are of grace; (ii) they are primarily personal, to bring Man back to union and communion with God; (iii) they are—in the ultimate—universal in that they are intended to incorporate all the nations; (iv) they are related to the world which was created for Man; and (v) they are everlasting.

### THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

#### *Out of Idolatry into the Land of Promise*

The history of Abraham (Abram) needs to be considered. Stephen said, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia'.<sup>46</sup> Joshua spoke of Abraham's father and family worshipping other gods.<sup>47</sup> It is clear that they were to go to Canaan, but stopped short of doing this and dwelt in Haran.<sup>48</sup> In Genesis 12:1–3 we see God's command to Abraham (Abram) to move out of Haran and to go where God wanted him to go. In Genesis 12:3 Abraham was given a promise that God would make his name great, and that those who blessed Abraham would be blessed and those who cursed him would be cursed.<sup>49</sup> Even so, this promise was not, as such, a covenant. It was a calling with a promise that was universal, which, as we have said, related to all the nations upon the earth.

Following this, Abraham journeyed to Canaan and there God promised the land to Abraham (Abram). Abraham then travelled to Egypt, and after a disastrous encounter with Pharaoh, travelled again to Canaan. Near Bethel, God once more promised Abraham the land, adding to this promise the one that Abraham's seed would be in number as the dust of the earth, for ever.

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<sup>46</sup> Acts 7:2.

<sup>47</sup> Joshua 24:2.

<sup>48</sup> See Genesis 11:26–32.

<sup>49</sup> The matter of blessing and cursing in relation to the Abrahamic covenant is quite a subject. Likewise it is so with the Sinaitic covenant.

In Genesis 14 we have the story of the battle of the kings in which Lot was made captive and the spoil of Sodom and Gomorrah taken by the victors. Abraham went after the army of the victorious kings and defeated them. Then the incident happened where Melchizedek, King of Salem, brought bread and wine to Abraham and blessed him saying, 'Blessed be Abram by God Most High, maker of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand!' (Gen. 14:19–20). The king of Sodom offered the recaptured spoil to Abraham who refused it. Melchizedek's appearance as the priest of the Most High and his blessing have rich significance which we will later discuss in connection with the New covenant.

### *The Affirmation and Cutting of the Covenant*

Following this significant incident, in which God appeared and told Abraham that he—God—would be Abraham's shield (protector) and reward, that he would give him a son and that the descendants through this son would be in number as the stars of heaven, Abraham believed all that God had told him and was accounted righteous because of his belief. His belief was not just that God was, and is, but that He was the One who had promised him innumerable children, land and inheritance.<sup>50</sup> To believe God is to be accounted as righteous.

Abraham then asked God how he would know that he was to possess the land of Canaan. It was then that God set out the manner of a ritual involving a heifer, a she-goat, a ram, a turtledove and a young pigeon. The animals were cut in two, each half being laid over against the other, but the birds were left intact. Birds of prey came down upon the carcasses but Abraham drove them away.

Following this a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and a 'dread and great darkness' also. These two elements have been variously debated but the whole event is solemn and significant. It is in this state that God reveals afresh the promise of the land, and of his descendants possessing it. The action of a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passing between the severed portions of the sacrifice has also been variously interpreted, but it is clear that it is 'cutting the covenant'. We may think of the covenant having been given from the first point of the narrative in 12:1ff. (cf. Josh. 24:2f.), but here, without doubt, that covenant is cut, and in that sense sealed.

## **THE EVERLASTING COVENANT**

We saw in Genesis 9:16 that God called the covenant he affirmed with Noah 'the everlasting covenant'. As such it did not begin with Noah but with creation. Many times in the Old Testament the covenant with Abraham is called 'an everlasting covenant'. On the one hand it is a covenant made with Abraham and his descendants, but then as the New Testament shows us, it is not confined to his blood descendants. On the other hand it is really the continuation of the everlasting covenant of creation, in that it is for all the nations that God has made covenant with Abraham.

## **SOME ELEMENTS OF THE COVENANT**

### *The Renewed Relationship of the Creational Covenant*

Without doubt the original relationship God had with Man by means of, and by virtue of, creation is confirmed and established by the covenant with Abraham. This assumes belief in God,

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<sup>50</sup> The matter of land and an inheritance are the one, as various passages indicate. God calls him out of his homeland (Gen. 12:3) with a promise. He shows him the land he will possess (13:14–18), and this is reiterated in chapter 15 where cutting the covenant is both an affirmation and a sign.

and especially as the God of covenant, so that worship is the life of Abraham in that intimate relationship, and is undoubtedly the rest of God Abraham knew.

### ***The Renewed People of God***

In Genesis 11:1–9 the nations are scattered by reason of the inauguration of languages. In 11:10ff. we have the new people of God formed from Shem and his descendants. The promise of this great nation is seen in 12:3; 15:5; 17:4; 18:18 and 22:17.<sup>51</sup> All the nations of the world are linked with Abraham and his people (12:3; 18:18; 26:4; cf. 26:26–31). In 28:14 this prophecy of universal blessing is given to Jacob. In the New Testament the blessing of Abraham is extended to all people of faith (cf. Acts 3:25; Gal. 3:8, 14, 29). Thus the 'great nation' is composed of Abraham's blood descendants who are people of faith and those Gentiles who bless themselves by Abraham, his children by faith.

### ***The Inheritance***

Without doubt Canaan is the promised inheritance. The covenant has to do with land, and innumerable times from the Pentateuch to the Prophets it is referred to as the inheritance the Lord has given through Abraham to Israel. Sometimes, too, Israel is called the Lord's inheritance. In Psalm 2:8 the Messiah King is to receive the nations for his inheritance, so that the covenant of creation comes again into sight. The Song of Zechariah in Luke 1:68–79, and Simeon's Song in Luke 2:29–32, include the Gentiles in the light of God, as was prophesied in Isaiah 42:6 and 49:6. In Matthew 5:5 the meek shall inherit the earth, and in Romans 4:13 it is Abraham who is promised he shall inherit the earth, so that the inheritance Abraham was promised did not terminate with his blood descendants. Again it is the covenant of creation which is in view, especially in the light of the doctrine of inheritance in the New Testament, where all believers inherit the Kingdom of God, eternal life and all that is laid up for them. They are 'fellow heirs' with those promised the inheritance, Israel. The culminating statement in Revelation 21:7 is that those who conquer will inherit all things, namely the new heavens and the new earth. Nothing of the covenant of creation could be set forth more powerfully than this.

The New Testament portrays Abraham as looking 'forward to the city, which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God'. It is made clear that this is the holy city. Four hundred years were to pass before Abraham's children would inherit Canaan, so it was not immediately Abraham's inheritance. All within the covenant of creation who are faithful look for the new heavens and the new earth as their inheritance.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY ELEVEN**

1. What is so wrong about idolatry when we look at God's covenant with Man?
2. What is it that changes a person from being an idolater to being a true worshipper of God?
3. Describe and discuss God's covenant with Abraham.
4. What is so important about inheritance?

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<sup>51</sup> The promise is continued with Jacob in Genesis 28:14; 32:12; 35:11; and 46:3 (cf. Zech. 8:13, 19).

## Study Twelve: The Covenant with Israel

### INTRODUCTION: THE COVENANT WITH ABRAHAM AND ISRAEL

The covenant God made with Israel was the same as He made with Abraham. In Genesis 15:13–16 God spoke of Abraham not immediately possessing the land:

Then the LORD said to Abram, 'Know of a surety that your descendants will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and will be slaves there, and they will be oppressed for four hundred years; but I will bring judgment on the nation which they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for yourself, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'

Abraham's children were to wait four hundred years, which they did. During that time they went through many vicissitudes, finally becoming a slave people under the Pharaoh of the time. Exodus 2:23–25 tells us that God had the Abrahamic covenant in mind:

In the course of those many days the king of Egypt died. And the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God saw the people of Israel, and God knew their condition.

God was about to fulfil that covenant and bring His people into the promised land of Canaan. In Exodus we have the account of His liberating of the people of Israel from Egypt and setting their faces towards Canaan. Their experiences in the wilderness do not here concern us so much as God's renewing of His promises to Abraham, the same as he passed on to Isaac and Jacob. We now look at the covenant which is variously called 'the covenant with Israel', 'the covenant with Moses', 'the covenant at Sinai', or 'the Sinaitic covenant'.<sup>52</sup>

### THE NATURE OF THE MOSAIC COVENANT

Whilst there is no question that the covenant is one of law, yet it must be said it is not *only* one of law. It surely begins by being a covenant of redemption from Egypt and has within it its own system of societal love and God's forgiveness. In Romans 9:4 Paul speaks of the gifts God had given to Israel and these include, besides the unique law, the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the worship, the promises, the patriarchs and Christ. Whilst law is highly significant in this covenant it has its place in the wide context of these other elements. Thus God remembers His covenant in Exodus 2, and then delivers Israel from Egypt, loyal to His promise to give the land of Canaan to the children of Abraham. Much happens before they come to Sinai and the giving of the law.

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<sup>52</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980, pp. 167ff.), designates this covenant as 'The Covenant of Law'.

In Exodus chapter 19 we have the account of Israel camping before Sinai and Moses going up at the call of God. God first reminds that leader of His redeeming Israel from Egypt and bringing them safely through the wilderness to this point. He then pronounces the position of Israel as a nation before Him:

And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him out of the mountain, saying, 'Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.'

In one sense God has made no covenant with Israel, for they are within the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. In a way it is simply affirming the Abrahamic covenant. In Exodus 6:4–8 this is made clear:

I also established my covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land in which they dwelt as sojourners. Moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold in bondage and I have remembered my covenant. Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment, and I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob; I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.'"

Thus in Exodus 19:5–6 these elements emerge:

- (a) Israel is God's special possession;
- (b) Israel is God's priestly nation among all the nations;
- (c) the nation is, and will be, as a priestly nation, holy.

If the parallel of I Peter 2:9–10 is read it can, perhaps, throw light back from where it is onto this passage in Exodus. The term 'for all the earth is mine' with 'among all the nations' has the flavour of the Abrahamic covenant. Israel is not segregated from the nations, and in some way they are linked with its priestly ministry.

## COVENANT AND LAW

In Exodus 19:5 God says, 'If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession'. 'Obey my voice' is significant of God speaking to His people. Deuteronomy 4:12–14 says of the event of Sinai and the giving of the law:

Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire; you heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice. And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments [words];<sup>53</sup> and he wrote them upon two tables of stone. And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and ordinances, that you might do them in the land which you are going over to possess.

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<sup>53</sup> Note that the text does not literally have 'commandments' but 'the ten words' (*NRSV*, footnote).

What we could easily miss here is the fact that God *spoke* to the people. He did not merely *give a law*. Of course it was His law but the word 'law' has been prejudiced in human thinking since the Fall. We think of it in terms of 'hard copy' rather than 'soft copy'. It was said by God as Divine Subject to human subjects, that is, in an 'I-Thou' relationship. That is the whole point: Israel is His special possession (*segullah*)—an intimate term, he is speaking to his beloved. It was *the voice* they heard before ever they saw the writing of it on the tablets.<sup>54</sup> They heard 'the ten words' (*dabar*): the words of themselves being dynamic.<sup>55</sup> God faced Israel as its Redeemer, and He faced it as its Creator. The law was given in the context of grace—'I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'—but whilst revealed love would motivate Israel to obey, yet that love was, itself, the law—the words—of love. Hence the eulogies of law in Psalms, 1, 19 and 119.

We note that 'he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform', so that the ten words and covenant are tied together. That is why some say it was the covenant of law. Even so, law is not something new. From creation it was so, and the covenant of creation most naturally calls for obedience, because in it Man was in full relationship with God. Genesis 26:4–5 also has its roots in obedience in the covenant with Abraham, as when God spoke to Isaac:

I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven, and will give to your descendants all these lands; and by your descendants all the nations of the earth shall bless themselves: because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.

### CUTTING THE COVENANT IN EXODUS 24

Moses alone can be mediator of the covenant, as later Jesus alone could be the mediator of the New covenant. Moses told the people what God had said, and their reply was, 'All the *words* which the Lord has *spoken* we shall do'. This confirms our point about 'soft copy'. These words are formalised into 'the book of the covenant', Moses builds the altar and twelve pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel.<sup>56</sup> The 'young men' who offered the sacrifices were the firstborn until later replaced by the Levites (Num. 3:41). Burnt offerings and peace offerings carried the idea of forgiveness of sins, and so the blood as appointed by God was caught in basins. Moses threw half against the altar and the other half on the people, after which he read the book of the covenant, and the people cried, 'All that the Lord has spoken, we will do, and we will be obedient'. When Jesus later spoke about 'the blood of the new covenant' and said it was for remission of sins, we can gather something of the significance of the ritual.

This ritual was followed by seventy elders being called up into the presence of God, where they ate and drank without being destroyed by the One who revealed Himself to them. Some see this as a covenant ratification meal.

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<sup>54</sup> It is not our place here to pursue the whole idea of law being that relational way by which the Three Persons subsist within the Triune Godhead, and thus is innate to Man made in the image of God, possessing the transcript of God's law in his heart.

<sup>55</sup> All words are dynamic. God's words are especially dynamic.

<sup>56</sup> Compare Exodus 23:23–24 where worship pillars are evil.

## **ELEMENTS OF THE COVENANT OF CREATION REFLECTED IN ISRAEL**

The three elements which constitute Man as the image of God, working with God as covenant partner, can be found in the covenant of Sinai. The vocation of Israel is shown in Exodus 19:5–6<sup>57</sup> to be God's possession, his covenant people being the priest nation amongst the nations. The sabbath rest of Genesis 2:1–2 is enjoined in Deuteronomy 5:12–15 and it referred to Israel's deliverance from Egypt where the people had had to work seven days; but more is spoken of the covenant bringing the nation into rest, a point later mentioned by David in Psalm 95 and taken up by the writer of Hebrews. Israel was to have rest from her enemies, and so, rest.<sup>58</sup> As we have observed before, true rest lies within the sanctuary of God. Israel as a nation was the sanctuary of God (cf. I Pet. 1:4ff.), but in particular the tabernacle, and later the temple, were the places of God's rest. Thus the worship system worked towards the rest of Israel.

The third element in the image and its practical outworking was that of marriage. In some ways the history of God's dealing with Israel is that of His being the Husband to His bride, Israel. Passages such as Isaiah 54:1–10, Jeremiah 3, Ezekiel chapters 16 and 23, and the prophecy of Hosea all show that.

## **CONCLUSION TO THE COVENANT WITH MOSES**

Admittedly our treatment of this covenant has been sketchy, but the main points have been picked up. The elements Paul mentions in Romans 9:4 which constituted the life of Israel, plus the great law which was the envy of other nations, and the life of the people, show us it was a great covenant. We must still see it as within the Abrahamic covenant and so within the covenant of creation. The writer of Hebrews shows its inadequacies to be that covenant or system which would broaden out to be universal, for all the nations. Even so, the note of that principle is by no means absent in the Old Testament writings which constitute the law, the wisdom and the prophets. The blossoming out of this covenant into the New Covenant, and so the covenant of creation is a theme we have to pursue.

## **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY TWELVE**

1. What were the substantial elements of God's covenant with Abraham?
2. Why did He not immediately give the land of Canaan to Abraham, in his day?
3. What does God's covenant with Israel imply and demand?
4. Is it true to say that the covenant with Israel was one only of law?

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<sup>57</sup> William Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1984, p. 89) sees this passage as 'a virtual restatement of Genesis 12:1–3'.

<sup>58</sup> See Deuteronomy 25:17–19 (cf. Deut. 3:20; 12:9; 28:65).

## Study Thirteen: The Covenant with David

### INTRODUCTION: THE HISTORICAL, PROPHETIC MAKING OF THE ROYAL MEDIATOR, THE MESSIANIC PRIEST-KING

The writer of Hebrews—as we shall see under our studies relating to the New covenant—has a strong point to make, namely that Jesus is Priest-King, and we will deal with this when we come to that covenant. The key to understanding this universality of Jesus and the New Covenant is

- (i) the Davidic Covenant God made in Israel with that king, so that the universal reign of this Messianic King would be that of the Priest-King, and
- (ii) the fulfilment of the covenant of creation would be the reign and ministry of this Messianic Priest-King.

In order to see these matters in perspective we need to remind ourselves again that:

- (a) All covenants of God are within the covenant of creation, the covenant with Noah being the establishing or confirming of the covenant of creation, it being spoken of as 'everlasting' and its scope being the whole of creation.
- (b) The Abrahamic covenant being the covenant 'cut', yet was to be universal, affecting all the nations of the earth, and so was intended—as seen in the New Testament—to embrace all nations, and was everlasting.
- (c) The covenant with Israel—the Mosaic covenant—issued from and was part of the Abrahamic covenant, had universal connotation and was everlasting. Its universal connotation is particularly strong in that within Israel God made His covenant with David.
- (d) The Messianic Davidic covenant can be seen to proceed beyond the covenant made with Israel, and yet is one with it. It is a universal covenant and is everlasting, and as such is a fulfilling of the covenant of creation.
- (e) The Abrahamic and Davidic covenants are linked with the New Covenant which is itself the fulfilment of the Abrahamic and Davidic covenants and so becomes the culminating covenant by which the covenant of creation is fulfilled, reaching its *telos*, that is, the eschatological fulfilment of elements found in all the covenants which are protological and prophetic of that *telos*.

As these elements come together they assist us to see that the Son is prophesied the Davidic King, so that he is in reality the Priest-King whose universal ministry has to do with all humanity. Thus

- (i) two realities of the New Covenant and the kingdom of God are, in fact, one of two entities inseparably joined, or the one; so that
- (ii) the covenant of creation—God being 'faithful creator'—the mystery of the plan of God, is to join, reconcile, unify, fulfil, harmonise and summate all things in Christ.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The material written below owes a lot to the treatments of the Davidic Covenant in William Dumbrell's *Covenant of Creation* (Paternoster Pr., Exeter, pp. 127–63); O. Palmer Robertson's *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980, pp. 229–69); and the essay 'The Blessing of David: The Charter for Humanity' by Walter C. Kaiser Jr in *The Law and the Prophets*, ed. John H. Skilton (Presbyterian and Reformed, USA, 1974, pp. 298–318). All three show the immense significance of covenant and kingdom being the one, and the transition of Mt Zion and the universalising of the kingdom of Israel into the kingdom of God. Kaiser's essay is particularly powerful in showing that the covenant of David is really nominated by God as 'The Charter for Humanity', a law and a way of life for all humanity.

## THE MAKING OF THE DAVIDIC COVENANT

Undoubtedly the primary text of this covenant is II Samuel 7 and in particular the message God sent to David through Nathan—verses 8 to 17:

'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.' In accordance with all these words, and in accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.<sup>60</sup>

This passage is clear enough. Also there is the parallel passage of I Chronicles 17:3–15 which contains some simple differences. At first sight, in both these passages, we might not think of God's promise to David, of establishing for him an everlasting dynasty, as a covenant, but many Scriptures indicate it was a covenant. Isaiah 55:3 speaks of 'an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David', a statement confirmed in Acts 13:34—speaking of Jesus as 'great David's greater son'—'And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he spoke in this way, "I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David"'. When we come to Psalm 89, the whole of which is an exposition of the Davidic covenant, verses 3 and 4 speak of II Chronicles 7:16, 'Thou hast said, "I have made a covenant with my chosen one, I have sworn to David my servant: I will establish your descendants forever, and build your throne for all generations"'. Psalm 132:11–12 repeats the thought and word of 'covenant'. In II Samuel 23:5 David says, '... he has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and secure'. Jeremiah 33:19–26 places the covenant with David amongst the unbreakable covenants, those God has made with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and with the Levites. There are many more references and they all point to the importance of this covenant.

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<sup>60</sup> The history of all Israel can be said to pivot around the Davidic covenant, that is, it leads up to this promise of God and then on to the coming of the Davidic king—Jesus of Nazareth, Son of God—and so to the proclamation and establishment of his universal kingdom, he at the same time being 'the mediator of a better covenant', for in him kingdom and covenant meet.

## COVENANT AND KINGDOM

Exodus 19:5–6 speaks in covenantal terms of Israel being a 'kingdom of priests', thus making Israel the priest nation amongst all the nations. I Chronicles 29:10–13, amongst many other passages, certainly shows that Israel saw God's kingdom as universal, but Israel saw God's covenant with it as everlasting, and itself as the kingdom of God in a special way, and that other nations were not that kind of kingdom. Even so, it is with the pronouncement of the Davidic covenant that Israel now sees the promise to Israel of its being the centre of the Kingdom of God, of Mount Zion as having an importance, not simply as a localised divine royal throne, but in the widest—and deepest—sense the spiritual centre of all the world, the throne of the Messianic Davidic King. First, however, it should be seen that God does not allow David to build the temple, for this is not fitting until David's dynasty is established, for the temple must be in juxtaposition with the covenant. David's conquests have brought 'rest' to Israel and the temple to be built will be the sanctuary which is God's rest for Israel, but this must be in the right order—the Davidic covenant, and its outcome the temple in Israel. Yet in the wider prophetic context, the new temple (to be) will be built by Solomon, but then, beyond that the New Temple which the 'old' temple prefigures, which, again is the New Jerusalem and which will be the fulfilment of the Davidic Covenant, and from our point of view the fulfilment of the covenant of creation.

O. Palmer Robertson says:

The prophetic expansion of the Davidic promise fits into this same pattern. As the kingdom crumbles all about them, these seers anticipated the greater day. A greater occupant of David's throne shall come. He shall sit on the throne of his father David forever. He shall rule the whole world in righteousness. He shall merge God's throne with his own, for he shall be Immanuel, Mighty God, God himself.<sup>61</sup>

Dumbrell, Robertson and Kaiser all go to great lengths to show the Davidic Covenant is rooted in the covenant with Abraham, if not in the covenant of creation. They trace the history of Israel; the leadership first of Moses, then of Joshua, then of the Judges and Samuel and finally the formation of the monarchy, and the fortunes of all Israel under David and Solomon. Also there are the judgments on the nation in the division into two kingdoms, and the destruction of both kingdoms, and the teaching of the prophets. Indeed, the literary-theological structure of the Old Testament has to be understood as leading to, and climaxing in, the Davidic Covenant with its Messianic connotation, thus making way for the coming of 'great David's greater son', the son of God who is to be king over all the earth and, as such, the mediator of a better covenant.

Kaiser<sup>62</sup> has a special point to make from II Samuel 7:19 which is often translated misleadingly, the RSV saying 'thou hast shown me future generations', though adding, in a footnote, 'Heb *this is the law for man*', whilst the NRSV has 'May this be instruction for the people'. Kaiser discusses the Hebrew which he translates in its literal form 'this is the law of man' and concludes that:

Since the 'this' of II Samuel 7:19 refers to the content of the promise, more specifically, the 'seed' of Abraham, Israel, and David, which is to live and reign forever and be the Lord's channel of blessing to all the nations of the earth, the law in this context is a principle by which all mankind is to be blessed. The genitive, then, is an objective genitive and David's response

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<sup>61</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 251.

<sup>62</sup> Dumbrell following Kaiser has a clear exposition of this verse (*op. cit.*, pp. 151–52).

is one of pleasant astonishment as he grasps the fact that the promise just given to him is to be 'the Charter for Humanity.' We call this *tôrah* a 'charter' because it is the plan and prescription for God's kingdom whereby the whole world shall be blessed with the total content of the promise doctrine. It is a grant conferring powers, rights, and privileges to David and his seed for the benefit of all mankind . . . So the ancient promise of blessing to all mankind would continue; only now it would involve David's dynasty, throne, and kingdom. Indeed it was a veritable 'charter' granted as God's gift for the future of all mankind.<sup>63</sup>

### CONCLUSION TO 'THE DAVIDIC COVENANT'

We can see that in one sense the Davidic covenant is the bridging covenant between the Mosaic and New covenants. Yet it is really the amplification of the Mosaic covenant in which it has its genesis and its root. At the same time it is the rationalisation of Israel as God's kingdom,<sup>64</sup> it in turn being the adumbration of the kingdom of God as revealed by the prophets and the New Testament, especially in Christ the King. Thus in the Davidic covenant the ideas of covenant and kingdom are brought together. In its broadest and deepest sense all creation is the kingdom of God, so that the covenant of creation can, in that sense, be said to be the covenant of the kingdom.

Thus, inevitably we are led on to the New Testament and especially the Gospels in which John the Baptist and Jesus announce that the Kingdom of God is on the doorstep and men and women are to repent and be baptised with a view to the remission of sins. Also, equally inevitably, this leads to Jesus' explanation of his death—that his blood is that of the New Covenant for the forgiveness of sins. Finally his resurrection proclaims him not only as Saviour but as Lord, and as King of kings and Lord of lords—the fulfilment of the Davidic covenant.

#### *Questions for Study Thirteen*

1. What are the links between the Abrahamic, Sinaitic and Davidic Covenants?
2. What is the nature of the Davidic Kingdom?
3. Can you see links in the prophecies of the Davidic Covenant and the Davidic Kingdom? If so, how do they merge and become one, whilst still retaining their identities?

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<sup>63</sup> Kaiser (op. cit., p. 315) then examines the parallel passage in I Chronicles 17:17, and translates it 'and thou are regarding me according to the upbringing *tôrah* of mankind, O Lord God!'

<sup>64</sup> cf. Exodus 19:5-6.

## Study Fourteen: Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant

**Transition Note:** In the book *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* we have 4 chapters which deal with the prophecies in the Old Testament of the New Covenant, the principles of the Mosaic and New Covenants, and other material in the New Testament concerning the New Covenant. We have not the time nor space to deal with this here, and so we proceed directly to take up the theme of the writer of Hebrews who says in the following references—7:22; 8:6–7; 9:15; 12:24; 13:20—that Christ is the Mediator of a better covenant. We will now proceed to see that although the New Covenant is really the fulfilment of God's covenant in the Abrahamic, Mosaic and Davidic Covenants, it is special because Christ is its Mediator, and salvation and eternal life are uniquely offered in it.

### INTRODUCTION: THE EPISTLE TO THE HEBREWS, AND CHRIST THE MEDIATOR OF A BETTER COVENANT

#### *Hebrews Chapters 1–10*

Up to the incarnation of the Son, God has spoken by the prophets. In the last days he has spoken by the Son, the one by whom He created all things, and by whom He upholds all things. This is the Son who radiates the glory of God. The Son is higher than the angels for, having completed his work on earth, he is now seated at the right hand of God and all his enemies are being subjugated to him. God's intention was completed by Christ, namely to suffer on the Cross and taste death for every human being, thereby pioneering the salvation by which many sons may enter into the glory of God. He became truly human in order to 'become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people'.

The history of the Son is that he built the 'house of God' in which Moses was the prime servant. This house was no less than Israel, but the Letter reveals it was much more—it was, and is, all that God has created *through the Son*. Whilst Israel rebelled against God in the wilderness and lost the promised rest of God, nevertheless God has provided a way for all human beings to enter into His rest. It is by means of 'a great high priest who has passed through the heavens'.

This high priest is the most significant of all human creatures, far transcending the priests of the former covenant. He is one in the *likeness* of the Melchizedekian order but is not *in* that order, as say a Levitical priest was *in* the order of the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek was a king-priest of an order superior to that of Aaron, since Aaron in Abraham's loins paid homage to him. This Melchizedek *resembled* the Son of God but was not him or over him. No earthly priest has a right to appoint himself to the office of priesthood. Nor did Christ appoint himself. He was appointed by the Father.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Note in 5:1–10 that Psalms 2 and 110 are conflated in the pointing to Christ as the true High Priest.

One should remember that the priests of the Levitical order carried out their ministry and died. This new Melchizedekian priest—Jesus—has the power of an endless life. His is of such an order and an office that—beyond what the Levitical priesthood could accomplish—'he is able to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them'.<sup>66</sup> This is because he is a 'high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the heavens'. So high a High Priest! As appointed he is one who is 'made perfect for ever'.<sup>67</sup>

In 8:1ff. the writer is taking Christ's priesthood as accomplished. Now he is seated at the right hand of God, and now he is 'a minister [*leitourgos*] in the sanctuary', that is, the heavenly sanctuary. The heavenly sanctuary is God's eternal sanctuary and not the one 'set up by man'. This latter was the copy of the heavenly, the one dictated to Moses for building in Israel. Now, the writer asserts, 'Christ has obtained a ministry which is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises'.

It is at this point the author of Hebrews contrasts the old and new covenants. If the old had been sufficient—'faultless'—then a new one would not have been needed. It was needed and it was prophesied in the words of Jeremiah 31:31–34. The prophecy calls for an understanding of its details:

- (a) The new covenant will primarily be with Israel.<sup>68</sup>
- (b) Even so, it will not be like the old covenant made with Israel when God delivered them from Egypt.
- (c) It will be a covenant which will make innate to all hearts the holy law of God.
- (d) Knowledge of God will not have to be taught to anyone or by anyone, because all shall know the Lord 'from the least of them to the greatest'.
- (e) The rich outcome of the covenant will be God's forgiveness of sins. It is by the forgiveness of sins they will truly know God.<sup>69</sup> Israel had a vast body of sins to be forgiven and no longer to be remembered. Its history of idolatry, uncleannesses and lawlessness was so vast as to be indescribable, so that the promise of forgiveness is remarkable in the view of the dimensions of guilt and evil that it must cover.

The prophecy makes the former covenant obsolete. The writer then scans the worship of the former covenant and asserts that, apart from the annual offering of

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<sup>66</sup> We will later see that his intercession consists of (i) the act of his offering himself as an oblation at the Cross, and (ii) the continuing effects of that oblation in his intervening in the lives of his people (cf. Rom. 8:33).

<sup>67</sup> One of the fascinating elements of the Epistle is to see how the writer outlines the development of Jesus as the High Priest. In 2:17, 'Therefore he had to be made like his brethren in every respect, so that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in the service of God'. In 5:7–10 the elements of essential suffering are introduced by which 'being made perfect he became the source of eternal salvation to all who obey him, being designated by God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek'. In 2:10 it is said he was made 'perfect through suffering', and it would seem in this verse that the Father withheld nothing of the suffering of the sins of humanity, so that in that sense his action is 'perfect' or 'complete'.

<sup>68</sup> The general tenor of Hebrews does not allow forgiveness to be limited to Israel, but certainly we should note that it is for Israel.

<sup>69</sup> A great theme of the New Testament is that God is known as Love by forgiveness.

the atonement which permitted the high priest to enter the Holy of Holies, there was worship which extended only from the altar up to the dividing curtain between the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies. That old system of priesthood never opened the curtain to the worshippers. In the 'copy-tabernacle' (9:9) as also in 10:1 he asserts that the worshippers could not be made perfect by that limited worship. 'Perfect' in the writer's later terms must mean, 'wholly forgiven, wholly purified, wholly sanctified'. By contrast:

... when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come,<sup>70</sup> then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the Holy Place,<sup>71</sup> not by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered the sanctuary once for all and secured a deliverance that is everlasting' [RSV, 'securing an eternal redemption'].

The writer having revealed the completeness of Christ's priesthood and the total efficacy of his blood shows that these actually purify the worshippers so that they are purged from dead works to truly worship the living God. Thus he can say boldly that in this way Christ is the Mediator of a new covenant. It is his death by blood-shedding which has sealed the covenant, that is, by that death secured the testament and by which he now has appeared in the true sanctuary 'on our behalf'. He has appeared to put away sin for all time: he has been offered *once*<sup>72</sup> to bear the sins of man.

The final chapter—chapter 10—on the person and work of the Mediator, is powerfully conclusive. In the first few verses the writer shows that whilst blood washes away sin the blood of animals cannot, and the Levitical priesthood had nothing to offer but animal blood. This takes us back to a remarkable verse in 7:12, 'For when there is a change in the priesthood, there is necessarily a change in the law as well'. 'The law' here must stand for the Mosaic system, rather than for the moral law, or as we understood it, 'the law of God'. That is unchangeable since it is the very law of God Himself.

What the writer must mean is that the system of sacrifice under the Levitical priesthood changes when the High Priesthood of Christ is exercised. Christ is not only *the* High Priest. He is also '*the* offering' or what we call 'the oblation'. God has prepared for him a body in order to offer himself as the oblation for our sins. In support of this we say that 'the law made nothing perfect', and that in Christ 'a better hope is introduced, through which we draw near to God'.<sup>73</sup> We must also keep in mind that in one sense Christ is the altar, that is to say that the Cross is the true altar in the true sanctuary. All that Christ does, and is, is authentic and efficacious. All systems of

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<sup>70</sup> Most translations have 'the good things to come' in accordance with 10:1, 'the good things to come'. In 6:5 we have 'the powers of the age to come'. The question in 10:1 is whether 'the good things to come' were salvific ones of Christ's work of the Cross (propitiation) or the general eschatological ones of which the New Testament constantly speaks. I would opt for the latter.

<sup>71</sup> To this point we follow the text of the RSV, but from this point other translators and exegetes differ from the RSV, and rightly so. I have derived the text that follows from W. H. Montefiore's commentary *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (A. & C. Black, London, 1964, p. 151, with commentary following). Most translations have 'through his blood', that is, 'by virtue of his blood'. The idea of Christ taking blood into the heavenly sanctuary scarcely makes sense.

<sup>72</sup> Now the terms 'once', 'once for all' and 'a single sacrifice' begin to appear to show the conclusiveness and completeness of the salvific work of Christ. 'Once for all' means 'never to be repeated', 'never having to be repeated' and 'sufficient in itself'. It is out of this that the believer has assurance and boldness.

<sup>73</sup> See 7:18–19.

worship cease to have significance when it comes to 'eternal redemption' and 'entering into the Holy of Holies'.

In 10:5–22 the writer concludes his argument powerfully. Christ's body is prepared as the oblation which is to satisfy and fulfil the will of God. The whole system of sacrifice as known in the Mosaic covenant is thus abrogated. The will of God for the New Covenant and in the New Covenant, has led to the sanctification of the people of God through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ 'once for all'. Christ has 'offered for all time a *single* sacrifice for sins'. By this *single* sacrifice 'he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified'. The writer takes the unusual step of saying that by the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31, 'the Holy Spirit bears witness to this'. He means that the New Covenant prophecy of Jeremiah 31:31–34 has borne witness to the whole action of God in bringing the forgiveness of sins by Christ being oblation and High Priest in the efficacious sacrifice of the Cross.<sup>74</sup>

The writer brings his readers to the triumphant conclusion that the old system of worship, which so to speak from the altar to the curtain in the Holy Place, has been transcended. Now from the altar to the Holy of Holies there is a 'new and living way'. Before it had been the way of dead victims, animal blood and Levitical ministry, so that, in a sense, it can be called 'the dead way'. Now the blood of Jesus—the death of the Cross—has become the 'new and living way'. He has opened the curtain through his flesh.<sup>75</sup> The house of God, over which Jesus has leadership as the true High Priest, is now open to all who would come to God through his intercession on the Cross, and now his continuous intercession at the right hand of God.

### **CONCLUSION TO HEBREWS CHAPTERS 1–10**

Thus the writer of Hebrews has authentically set forth Christ as the Mediator of a better covenant, and the covenant has been proven better because it brings God's people into God's presence, forever. Such the former (Mosaic) covenant could not effect. Now the believer has his 'heart sprinkled from an evil conscience'. His conscience, utterly purified from dead works and so, far from being a 'conscience of evil', allows him to enter into the presence of God Himself. Man can know nothing more wonderful, more personal and more intimate than to be, at last, utterly one with the living God. In this remarkable way He is shown to be the God of all covenant, for the heart of covenant is that God will dwell with His people, and they with Him.

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<sup>74</sup> The promise of the forgiveness of sins in Jeremiah's prophecy is thus linked with Christ's sacrifice. Otherwise such forgiveness would appear to be gratuitous, not related to the Mosaic Covenant and not having a sacrificial basis. It does have that basis in Jesus' death.

<sup>75</sup> It could be that the flesh of Christ had always veiled the God whom he had come to reveal, but by being rent was now revealing God to men and women, especially by taking them into the inner, heavenly sanctuary, or it could mean that at his death—as the Gospels record—he had rent the veil or curtain which had hitherto prevented access into the presence of God. Whatever the exact meaning of the text, the reality of his opening the way into the Holy of Holies has been effected by his death. That is what matters.

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY FOURTEEN

1. Discuss the point the writer of Hebrews constantly makes, that 'Jesus is better than . . .' Why does he do this?
2. Sift through the study to see the material related to Christ's being *incarnated*, *trained* and *appointed* to be *the* High Priest above all high priests, and showing how he was not just another High Priest but the only one who could save to the uttermost. What makes him to be thus?
3. What was there about his oblation of himself—the offering of his own body—which outmoded the old sacrifices, and did a work of redemption unique in history?
4. Discuss the ideas of 'once', 'once for all', 'a single sacrifice'. What does this sort of talk do for personal assurance in the faith of Christ?

## Study Fifteen: The Spirit of the New Covenant

### INTRODUCTION: THE SPIRIT OF THE COVENANT OF GOD

We have said that the covenant is innate to God Himself, that is, it is itself the very Triune relationship of the Three Persons. In this sense, the covenant of God is innate to creation, Man being the image of God, and as such, covenant-partner with God. When we say that the Spirit is the Spirit of the New Covenant, we are first saying he is the Spirit of the covenant of God—that which we have called 'the covenant of creation'. As all God's works are Trinitarian<sup>76</sup>—creation, redemption and the ultimate glorification of all things—then we would expect the Spirit to be in the work of creation. This is exactly the case. In the Genesis creation account the Spirit is said to have been moving across the face of the waters. The Word and the Spirit combined to bring form and order into creation. This dynamic act is borne out by other Old Testament references to the first creation. Elihu said to Job, 'The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life'. The Psalmist said, 'By the breath of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host by the breath of his mouth'. Another Psalmist said, 'When thou sendest forth thy Spirit they are created; and thou renewest the face of the ground'. The action of the Word is seen, also, in Psalm 148:5–6, 'He commanded and they were created, and he established them for ever and ever'.

All, then, that we know of the Spirit in creation is linked with the creative Word, and this is the case in regard to God's covenantal dealings with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David.<sup>77</sup> We cannot think of these covenants without the attendant ministry of the Spirit in his various aspects of work. He was certainly the Spirit of all of these covenants, particularly as they were within the covenant of creation.

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE NEW COVENANT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Second Peter 1:20–21 says:

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God.

The writer of Hebrews certainly distinguishes between God speaking through the prophets in the Old Testament days and speaking through Christ in the New Covenant time: 'In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son'. What we are asserting is that, just as the Spirit was always the Spirit of prophecy and of actions in all covenants, so he was nonetheless in regard to the New Covenant.

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<sup>76</sup> The works sometimes called *ad intra*.

<sup>77</sup> For the general work of the Spirit in the Old Testament times see II Peter 1:20–21; Hebrews 1:1. For Noah see Genesis 6:3; for Abraham and the other patriarchs see Galatians 3:14; 4:29; for Moses see Numbers 11:24–30 (cf. Heb. 9:8; Deut. 34:9; Isa. 63:10–11); for David see Isaiah 11:1ff.

This is clear when we bracket together the 36th and 37th chapters of Ezekiel. In 37 we are presented with slain Israel in the desert. Israel is only dry bones—'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are clean cut off'. When the prophet does as he is commanded and prophesies to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath,<sup>78</sup> and breathe upon these slain, that they may live', then the dead army comes to life. Ezekiel is told, regarding this vision, that it is the bringing together of the two separated kingdoms into one, and 'I will save them from all the backslidings in which they have sinned, and will cleanse them and they shall be my people, and I will be their God'.<sup>79</sup> Whilst this is the fulfilment of God's covenant with Israel, it has something of an eschatological nature. It is future: it is different. It is, we shall see, of the essence of the New Covenant.

Ezekiel 36—which of course precedes 37—is a promise of the restoration of Israel, especially in verses 24–28:

For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleannesses, and from all your idols I will cleanse you. A new heart I will give you, and a new spirit I will put within you; and I will take out of your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to observe my ordinances. You shall dwell in the land which I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Here the purification of Israel is predicted, but the renewal of Israel is by the outpouring of the Spirit—as in chapter 37. As there, so here, is the forgiveness of sins. As in chapter 37, so here, is the covenant theme, 'you shall be my people, and I will be your God'. This purification reminds us of Hebrews 1:3, 9:14, and 10:22. The New Covenant with its doctrine of the universal forgiveness of sins claims this passage for its own. Especially do Paul's words come to mind, 'But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God'.<sup>80</sup>

Both these passages take their place with others in the Old Testament concerning the coming outpouring of God's Spirit. In chapter 16, God had already pursued the fact of the covenant with Israel:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD (Ezek. 16:59–63).

We have discussed the prophecy of the New Covenant in Jeremiah 31:31–34, and the fact that Jesus aligned this with his death for the remission of sins. In Jeremiah's prophecy the forgiveness of sins and the law in the heart are similar elements to those in the three Ezekiel passages, but in the Jeremiah passage there is no mention of the Spirit. In Hebrews 10:15 the writer says, 'And the Holy Spirit also bears witness to us; for

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<sup>78</sup> 'Breath' (*ruach*) is of course 'spirit' and so, 'the Holy Spirit'.

<sup>79</sup> The latter saying, 'and they shall be my people, and I will be their God', is the statement of true covenant.

<sup>80</sup> See I Corinthians 6:9–11.

after saying, "This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, says the Lord: I will put my laws on their hearts, and write them on their minds," then he adds, "I will remember their sins and their misdeeds no more".

We are surely justified in bracketing the Ezekiel and Jeremiah prophecies together, especially when we see the substance of the work of the Spirit in the New Testament.

### **THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE NEW COVENANT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

In II Corinthians 3 Paul contrasts the two covenants—the Mosaic and the New—and calls the former 'the dispensation of death' and the latter 'the dispensation of the Spirit'. He says, '[God] has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not in a written code but in the Spirit; for the written code kills, but the Spirit gives life'. The New Covenant is really the covenant of the Spirit. This accords with a bringing together of the Ezekiel and Jeremiah passages, especially as we view the first 11 verses of Romans chapter 8:

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But if Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you.

Here, undoubtedly, 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus', is the gospel. By liberating men and women from condemnation via this gospel, the Spirit brings them to the place where 'the just requirement of the law' is fulfilled in them. This is surely the law which in the Jeremiah prophecy of the New Covenant is written on the heart and inner parts of the regenerated person. Thus to have the Spirit indwell is to have Christ indwell.

Pentecost was surely the time when the Spirit was outpoured in Israel, and in a sense on 'all flesh'. The outpourings on the Gentiles at Caesarea and the Samaritans in Samaria means the 'dispensation of the Spirit'—that is, the New Covenant—is universal, so we may observe authentically that the covenant of God can now be seen in its universal aspect. The gospel is to be preached among all nations, and the Spirit is for them all—it is for 'all flesh'.

### **THE NEW COVENANT, THE CHURCH AND THE KINGDOM**

Without doubt the atmosphere in the New Testament justified Paul in comparing it with the Mosaic Covenant—'the dispensation of death'—and concluding that in the presence

of the Spirit the gospel is alive and dynamic, and so are God's people. Forgiveness is, then, the primary experience of those who believe. Justification and sanctification constitute the life of the people in Christ. The Old Testament passages are fulfilled in a way which could not have been imagined. There can be no question that the kingdom of God—which we have already linked with the Davidic covenant promise—is paramount in the life and teaching of the church, which itself is not the kingdom, though it proclaims it.

Life in the New Covenant is altogether different from life within the Mosaic Covenant. The sacrifice of the Cross is at the heart of all New Testament teaching and living, yet we may conclude that it is not Pentecost with its outpouring of the Spirit which is central, but it is Calvary which requires the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost to bring the reality of that Cross to the hearts of the new community of Christ—the true covenant community.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY FIFTEEN**

1. Why do we claim that the Holy spirit is the Spirit of covenant?
2. What is the continuity of the work of the Spirit in both Old and New Testaments, and how does this relate to covenant?
3. Show how in the New Testament the Spirit is the Spirit of the New Covenant, and of grace.
4. Show in Acts 1:1–11 how the Spirit was to be the Spirit of the Kingdom, and how that would all relate to covenant.

## Study Sixteen: The Father and the New Covenant

### INTRODUCTION: GOD IS COVENANT FATHER

If we were to ask what was the richness of the covenant of creation—the covenant of Man is that he was wholly one with God. He was in total communion. He knew the fullness of God. Paul, in a remarkable passage, draws our minds back to this point. In Ephesians 3:14–19 he says:

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with might through his Spirit in the inner man, and that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may have power to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

We need not fully exegete this passage. What we see is that Paul bows his knees before the Father—an act of utter submission and devotion. Every family in heaven and on earth derives its being from the Father.<sup>81</sup> The Spirit is the one who prepares the heart for Christ to dwell in, so that the believer becomes rooted and grounded in love and comes to know the dimensionless dimensions of God,<sup>82</sup> and thus the love of Christ and so proceeds to be filled unto all the fullness of God. In this case 'the fullness of God' has to do with God being Father and believers constituting His family. The fullness comes through Christ and the Spirit indwelling the believer.

There can be no doubt that in the New Testament the text is redolent with God's Fatherhood,<sup>83</sup> His Fatherhood of the Son, that is, of the incarnate Christ, and thus of the family which is His in Christ. The question we need to ask is whether His Fatherhood has to do with covenant, and of course it does. It does have to do wholly with covenant. We will see this in both the Testaments.<sup>84</sup>

### COVENANT FATHERHOOD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

Perhaps the most pertinent of passages in the Old Testament is Malachi 2:10, 'Have we not all one father? Has not one God created us? Why then are we faithless to one another, profaning the covenant of our fathers?' Some commentators argue that 'one father' means either Abraham or Jacob, but the use of God as Creator here argues in favour of Him being Israel's Father, if not Father of all who are created. Father–Creator is also a theme of Isaiah 64:8, 'Yet, O Lord, thou art our Father; we are the clay and thou art our potter'. In Isaiah 63:16 'For thou art our Father . . . our Redeemer from of old is thy name'. In Jeremiah 3:19 the covenant inheritance—the land of Canaan—and Fatherhood are in the one breath:

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<sup>81</sup> There are various translations such as 'the whole family in heaven and on earth', as though there is but one family. Again, 'the Father after whom all fatherhood takes its name', and 'the Father of whom all fatherhood is named' are translations which indicate an archetype and an ectype.

<sup>82</sup> Some commentators see these dimensions as those of God Himself, and others as those of the love of Christ.

<sup>83</sup> We do not enter here into the argument that sonship is metaphorical of God's metaphorical Fatherhood, a view I cannot accept. I have tried to work this matter through in a number of my books. It seems to me in the light of Luke 4:38, Acts 17:28–29, and the fact of God's nature as Father, that Man is ontologically son to the Father, and that regeneration restores what is lost, whilst God's eschatological intention for Man is a sonship in Christ, the true image that makes believers one with the Son himself, and so causes them to be true sons of the Father.

<sup>84</sup> See my *I Love the Father* (NCPI, 1990).

I thought how I would set you among my sons, and give you a pleasant land, a heritage most beautiful of all nations. And I thought you would call me My Father, and would not turn from following me.

When in Deuteronomy 14:1–2 Moses tells Israel, 'You are the sons of the LORD your God', he is certainly speaking in a covenantal context. He adds, 'For you are a people holy to the LORD your God, and the LORD has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth'. In Deuteronomy 32:6 Moses asks in similar covenant context, 'Is he not your Father who created you, who made you and established you?'

Israel is also known as God's son in a collective sense as He told Pharaoh, 'Israel is my first born son, and I say to you, "Let my son go that he may serve me"'. Hosea 11:1 has it, 'When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son'.<sup>85</sup> Certainly, from a covenantal point of view, God is the Father of Israel. When we use the phrase 'covenantal point of view', we must not think Divine Fatherhood is simply metaphorical. As Father He was Creator, and as Creator He was Father. This gives point to Acts 17:28–29, where Paul quotes a pagan poet as saying, 'We are indeed his [God's] offspring'.<sup>86</sup> If we hold the view that as Creator, God is covenant maker, then in both senses He is our Father—the Father of us all. We are His children.

### COVENANT FATHERHOOD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

As we have often explained, if we take God's Triune Being as the covenant *being*, then what He creates from His being is covenantal in the broadest sense. If He is Father to Man, then that Fatherhood is covenantal, and it seems that Ephesians 3:14–15 bears this out. Most New Testament readers are struck by the fact that a richer presentation of God as Father emerged in the New Testament. Jesus, particularly in John's Gospel, showed himself to be the Son of the Father. He came as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth. He revealed the Father, and in this sense was—and is—the way to the Father. All that he does is really the Father doing that in him and through him. He is never alone for the Father is always with him. The Father loves him and gives all things into his hands. Finally, through the work of the Cross he glorifies God as Father by being the glorifying Son, that is, by being the very glory of the Father. This glory shines most powerfully in the work of the Cross.

Even so, it is not only John's Gospel which shows forth his Sonship. The Synoptic Gospels also show this in his baptism and his transfiguration. Matthew powerfully gives us the teaching of God as Father and Jesus as His Son in the Sermon on the Mount, where the word 'Father' is used more than any other word. Again, the statement of Matthew 11:25–27 is almost Johannine in its structure and content:<sup>87</sup>

At that time Jesus declared, 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to babes; yea, Father, for such was thy gracious will. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and any one to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.'

Paul in his Epistles proclaims the message of God as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and of Him as Father to His children. Passages such as Romans 8:14–17, Galatians 4:4–6, and Ephesians 1:3–7 speak of the Son and the Spirit bringing sinners into 'the adoption as sons'.

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<sup>85</sup> cf. Matthew 2:15 where the quote refers to Jesus.

<sup>86</sup> See also Luke 3:38. The question is, 'How can one ontologically be a son of God if one was not created as one?' We are really asking, 'How can one *not* be a son of God if one was created as one?' This is a matter for biblical anthropology.

<sup>87</sup> cf. John 6:46, 65. In John, the Father draws a person to see the Son, the Son is the way to the Father (John 14:6), and the Holy Spirit reveals and glorifies both the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15).

This message presupposes and brings into focus the community of Christ as the children of the Father. Paul also speaks of the Father conforming these children to the image of His Son, that His Son may be 'the first-born among many [such] brethren'. The climax to history is that these brethren of Christ enter into 'the glory of the liberty of the children of God'.

John the apostle, in his First Letter, has a similar teaching. He traces back 'the children of God' to Abel, denoting all such as Abel as the children of God, whose distinguishing marks are that they 'do righteousness and love the brethren'.<sup>88</sup> John sees such children as born of the new birth, and loving the brethren with the love that comes through propitiation (I John 4:9–10). His doctrine is that to dwell in the Father is to have the Father's love in one's self and so with that love to love others. What we must not miss in the Johannine writings is that the children indwell the Triune God and the Triune God indwells them. This takes us to Paul's doctrine of being filled with 'all the fullness of God', for it is eternal life to know God, and eternal life is God, is 'covenant God', is living in covenant as at the beginning.

The writer of Hebrews also pursues the doctrine of God's Fatherhood, Man's sonship, and Christ's Sonship of the Father and his Elder Brotherhood of the children of God—the children God has given him.<sup>89</sup> It is God's intention, through Christ, to 'bring many sons to glory'—exactly the doctrine Paul and John teach.<sup>90</sup>

The Book of the Revelation also has references to God's Fatherhood. In 7:3 the 144,000 are sealed from harm. In 14:1 this is the name of the Father written on their foreheads, and in 22:4 all who are in the Holy City have the name of the Father written on their foreheads. This is the culmination of the covenant. John 11:51–52 speaks of the necessity of Jesus dying for the people so as to make it possible 'to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad'. This is really the essence of Hebrews 2:9–10, where the death of the Cross brings 'many sons into glory'.

### **CONCLUSION: THE FATHER IS COVENANT HEAD WHO WILL BRING HIS COVENANT TO ITS CULMINATION—THE ESCHATOLOGICAL GATHERING IN OF THE FAMILY**

We have seen that Christ the Son is the Mediator of the New Covenant, and indeed, as such, is the mediator of the covenant of God, the covenant of creation. The Holy Spirit is 'the Spirit of covenant' and, as such, the Spirit of the covenant community. The Father is the Father of this community which is His Family. This was His intention from before creation to bring His family together through His Son.

We are given to understand that through us indwelling God and God indwelling us, we come into possessing 'all the fullness of God' and being possessed by the same. Whilst such indwelling is now by faith and not by sight, yet it is so, and in the *telos* it will be by true sight. What is most pertinent to us, now, and most important also, is the fact that the covenant people are truly family. This is the freedom the children of God know in time. This is covenant freedom, and being so now, will also be forever, since the covenant is 'the everlasting covenant of peace'.

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<sup>88</sup> Note that the writer of Hebrews in chapter 11 speaks of 'the people of faith' and he uses Abel as his starting point for this community.

<sup>89</sup> See 2:9–17, 12:3–11.

<sup>90</sup> Here I John 3:13 is relevant. 'We shall be like him', is the key to what we shall be.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY SIXTEEN**

1. Do you think it would be reasonable to say that 'God was the covenant-Father of Israel in the Old Testament'?
2. Can we talk about God's Fatherhood in the New Testament with reference to covenant? In what ways does the Son guarantee this?
3. Discuss the matter of God's Fatherhood and the Son's sonship, and the climax of the end-time.

## Study Seventeen: God's Covenant Culminates— The End of the Beginning

**Transition Note:** In our book *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* we have two chapters on 'The Covenant and the Images' showing that Man, made in the image of God, should have conformed with the covenant of God, but did not. Christ as the true image of God does not merely reflect God—as did created Man—but he radiates the glory of God. In these two images much of the meaning of God's covenant comes to us. Linked with the fulfilment of God's covenant is the redemptive promise of Genesis 3:15. We now proceed to see its fulfilment in Christ.

### INTRODUCTION: THE HOLY SEED OF WOMAN CONCLUDING THE COVENANT

We saw in Genesis 3:15 that the seed of woman was to be set against the serpent's seed.<sup>91</sup> The 'seed of woman' is Christ, and in Revelation 12:1–6 the woman and her offspring are referred to apocalyptically in connection with the 'great red dragon' who is nominated as 'the ancient serpent, who is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world'. The seed born to the woman is called, literally, 'a male child' (12:5). This is the one 'who is to rule all the nations with a rod of iron', a reference to Psalm 2:6–9 of the Messiah–Son–King. We must note here the widest perspective of the nations, because all nations are under the covenant of God. God is always concerned with the nations, however His grace and judgments are concerned intimately with persons. The prophets had, from time to time, uttered God's burdens or oracles to the nations.<sup>92</sup> The nations were never allowed to go their own way without reminders of God's sovereignty over them, along with His judgments and even certain promises of blessing. In the Book of the Revelation, Christ is 'King of kings and Lord of lords' and this means he triumphs over the nations that rage against the Lord and His Anointed (Ps. 2:1–2). The 'ten kings' of Revelation chapter 17 (cf. Dan. 7:24) may well be the ten diadems on the head of the beast, but in any case they represent the nations over whom God and His Christ are King.

Another way of saying this is that the cursings and the blessings of God, which must result from the way the peoples of the earth had related to or rejected the covenant of God,<sup>93</sup> are

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<sup>91</sup> What 'seed' does the serpent have? It could be 'the man of lawlessness...the son of perdition' of II Thessalonians 2:3, or 'the beast' of Revelation 13:1ff. who is strikingly similar to the red dragon who is 'that ancient serpent the devil and Satan'. The reference to Satan's seed could mean, as in II Thessalonians 2:3, an actual human person who has come under Satan's control, a sort of counterpart to Immanuel—God manifest in the flesh. The 'man' of Isaiah 14 and of Ezekiel 28 may refer respectively to the king of Babylon and the king of Tyre, or it may refer more broadly to the principle of Satan, or to those who are 'the children of the devil'. Strict interpretation is not called for. In general, God has 'the woman and her seed' as a corporate human body of 'the people of God' or 'the children of God', and in particular Jesus, the seed of Mary. We may draw a Satanic parallel from this matter of seed.

<sup>92</sup> See, for example, the burdens or oracles against Babylon, Moab, Damascus, Egypt and Tyre in Isaiah chapters 13 to 24. These are the nations who have set themselves against Israel and in effect against Abraham, and so meet their due punishment in accordance with Genesis 12:1ff. At the end of Isaiah 24 we read that God will 'punish the host of heaven, in heaven, and the kings of the earth, on earth'. It is in chapter 25 that the nations are delivered from judgment—'the former times of their ignorance'—and the veil that has been spread over the nations will be removed, and resurrection to true life will come.

<sup>93</sup> When we say 'the covenant of God', the creational covenant, we are also thinking of the covenants with Abraham, Israel and Jacob, as also the New Covenant.

completed. In Revelation the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven bowls of wrath, describe the ways in which the judgments of God come upon the nations, the peoples of the earth, and even affect the creation itself.<sup>94</sup>

### **THE DEFEAT OF THE SEED OF EVIL BY THE SEED OF WOMAN**

The apocalyptic passages in the Gospels, the Epistles and the Book of the Revelation show that opposition to the covenant of God is finally quelled. Whilst on the one hand Satan and his forces of evil seem to have the uppermost hand in history, yet the final denouement shows this not to be the case. The red dragon and his clone the beast, as also the second beast or false prophet, all terrify the nations. The kings of the earth are impressed by the beast and join with him in his opposition to the people of God. The 'great harlot', the impressive Babylonian system, is one with the beast, in that she rides upon him. She is one with him in persecuting and destroying the saints. John is told, 'The waters that you saw, where the harlot is seated, are peoples and multitudes and nations and tongues'. The beast has arisen from this sea, as the second beast has risen from the earth, 'the kingdoms of this world'.

The seeming triumph of these evil forces is ephemeral. In one day Babylon is destroyed and the saints slain by her are avenged. This filthy counterpart to the Holy City is utterly decimated. The rider on the white horse, Christ, 'judges and makes war'. He defeats the beast and the kings of the earth and the false prophet, and casts them into the lake of fire. Likewise at the appropriate time—the time when Gog and Magog under Satan seek to vanquish the camp of the saints—fire comes down from heaven and consumes the earthly powers who fight God. The Devil is cast into the lake of fire.

At this point the great white throne, from which had issued the judgments upon the nations in the seals, trumpets and bowls of wrath, becomes the throne of judgment. All the dead,<sup>95</sup> great and small, are arraigned before the judgment seat of God, and punishment appropriate to the evil committed will be meted out. Those whose names are not written in the Lamb's book of life will be cast into the lake of fire.

### **RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT AND PUNISHMENT**

What we need to note is that whilst the judgment for righteous and unrighteous deeds is set before us in Revelation 20:11–15, it should be seen that such deeds are not simply acts of sinful commission and omission—though they are certainly that—but that the evil of evil lies in its refusal to know and love God, and gladly to do His will. Judgment is personal. That is,

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<sup>94</sup> Isaiah 24 is significant in that it shows the relationship between human sin and the condition of the creation. When Man is sinful the creation takes on a sorrowful and suffering aspect. It is to do with this that Paul speaks in Romans 8:17–25. The sufferings of this present age, both in Man and the creation, are somehow essential to the final outcome of the glorification of Man and the creation in their deliverance into 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. We must not look on the judgments as unessential, any more than we should miss the giving of spiritual blessings to all the people of God, as in Ephesians 1:3–14.

<sup>95</sup> Some see 'the dead' mentioned in Revelation chapter 20 as those who have died without Christ. Those who have shared with Christ in the first resurrection have no need to stand before the throne. Others see this great white throne as also being 'the judgment seat of Christ' (II Cor. 5:10). To me it would seem that since there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:1), those who are alive in Christ do not require a judgment. Of course the principle of I Corinthians 3:12–15 obtains. Some saints will be saved 'as through fire', that is, the dross of their lives will be consumed. Matthew 25:31ff. is also clear. The nations who have received Christ will enter into the joy of the Lord, and others into eternal perdition. In that sense there is a continuous judgment, the process of which will cease at the ultimate climax.

the Father has given the Son authority to judge, to be the Judge.<sup>96</sup> Revelation 20:11–15 should be understood in the light of Matthew 25:31–46. The central figure in this passage is Christ. All the nations are judged by their attitudes and actions towards him. He is called both 'Lord' and 'King'. From the perspective that we have been speaking he is Head of the covenant of God. The attitude and actions of the nations towards Abraham, Israel and the Davidic King determine their cursings and blessings. So also the same attitude towards this 'Son of man'<sup>97</sup> who sits on his glorious throne; 'as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me', is this Judge's criterion of judgment, whether for the good or for the evil amongst the nations.

As we have said before and now reiterate; all who have violated the covenant of God in Adam, by their unrighteous deeds, must suffer God's judgments in history and finally face the great white throne. This, then, is the triumph of the Seed of the woman, the victory of Christ himself. The despite done to God's covenant is finally judged and the judgment is executed. This, then, is true theodicy; this is the true explanation of the presence and conflict of the powers of evil—Satan and his celestial and human forces—and the conflict and victory of Christ and his forces. In the end it is the Head of the covenant, the Builder of God's house who is triumphant. Christ with his Father reigns over all.

### **GOD AND MAN IN THE FULFILMENT OF THE COVENANT OF CREATION**

We have talked about the cursings and the judgments, even to the final judgment. Now it is for us to speak of the blessings of God in His covenant with all creation. When Paul said he 'has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing<sup>98</sup> in the heavenly places', he was speaking of creational blessings, of the present blessings which come through redemption, and of the ultimate blessings which are coming in the *eschaton* and are completed in the *telos*—the climax of the covenant. As we have said, all things which were created were protological of the eschatological; the beginning demanded the end, and the end is the completing of the beginning, just as the beginning is the beginning of the completion. We have also seen that all these things are theocentric; they have their genesis and completion in the will of God, the counsel of God, and constitute 'the mystery of God'. At the same time they are all effected in Christ, and so may be called Christocentric. In this sense they are personal and intimate.

In saying all this we are thinking in terms of Man's original intimacy with God, his communion with the Triune God as he was created in his image. We are thinking of the three elements connected with the image, namely the mandate which constituted Man's vocation, the Sabbath rest of God in which Man was to participate and the marriage which was to be the special relationship between man and woman, but was at the same time the mystery of God and his Bride, Christ and his church.<sup>99</sup> We may now look to seeing the fulfilment of the three elements as described in the overall unity of the Scriptures.

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<sup>96</sup> That Christ has been appointed to be Judge is clear from John 5:21–29; Acts 10:43; 17:30–31; I Corinthians 5:10.

<sup>97</sup> Jesus describes himself in Matthew 25:31–46 as 'the Son of man'. This title surely issues from Daniel 7:13 and context, where the Son of man is given dominion over the nations, and with dominion, judgment. Incidentally the 'ten kings' are mentioned here as they are in the Book of the Revelation. Their fate in Daniel is no less than in the Revelation.

<sup>98</sup> This can be translated 'with every kind of spiritual blessing' because in Christ are hidden 'all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'. 'Spiritual blessings' include what we may call 'material blessings'. No blessing can ultimately be abstract.

<sup>99</sup> Here we are not saying that the primal couple understood the 'profound mystery' of these three elements, yet we must not deny that they could have understood them, since they were in communion with God.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY SEVENTEEN**

1. What is the place of Woman in history, especially the history of the covenant? Is she not prominent in the battle against the serpent and all evil?
2. Why do we use the phrase, 'the end of the beginning'? Why is it significant in the whole history of the world?
3. The Son that the Woman brings forth is judge of all humanity and all history. He controls history. How does he do this? Is he just one force amongst many?
4. What, then, is 'the end of the beginning'?

## **Study Eighteen: The Culmination of the Vocation and Rest**

### **THE CULMINATION OF VOCATION**

We have seen that God in creating all things had His plan which has been described as 'the mystery of the plan'. It was to head up all things in Christ, reconciling that which has become separated and divided by the Fall and Man's consequent sins. We saw that created Man was to be a covenant-partner with God or a house-servant in the house which the Son had built as Creator. In the Fall, Man denied his vocation in the covenant of creation. Through the incarnation, and especially the work of the Atonement, Christ had created a new humanity. He had given the gift of the Atonement to those who would come to him. They were incorporated in his body, the church. Afresh, they undertook to fulfil the vocation.<sup>100</sup>

The creational mandate was not superseded by Christ's mandate to his people to preach the gospel in all the world<sup>101</sup> to every creature and to bring the nations to 'the obedience of faith', for in fact, proclamation of the gospel was God's way, in Christ, of bringing about the fulfilment of that creational mandate. In this sense the two mandates are the one, for they are both given in regard to God's covenant. The church as Christ's Body is involved in covenant vocation. Paul says that God 'made him the head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him that fills all in all' (Eph. 1:22–23). In Ephesians 4:10 Paul said, 'He who descended [Christ] is he who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might *fill* all things'. We have seen that to *fill* all things is the same as to *unify* or summate all things, as also to *reconcile* all things. So the church has been given Christ's fullness (*pleroma*) which is there to consummate God's plans. That is why Paul can speak of the church as 'God's fellow workers'.

The church, then, is at work in Christ and by his Spirit to bring about 'the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations'. It is involved in proclamation of the gospel, and in building up the work of God. The outcome of all this is the culmination of the covenant in the things shown us symbolically in the last chapters of Revelation.

In these figures we see the church as part of the army of Christ, always battling against the evil of Satan and his forces, so that the gates of Hades (Death) cannot prevail against the Rider on the white horse and the armies of heaven which follow him. On the other side we see all the people of God as the Bride of Christ, who is the Holy City descending out of heaven—the new heaven. This Holy City is of incomparable beauty and purity, and her gates are never closed for into her stream the nations—'the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it . . . they shall bring into it the glory and honour of the nations'.

This means the creational and redemptional mandates—both being the one—are now fulfilled. To each saint is said personally, 'Well done, you good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your Lord'. This is what Hebrews calls 'the recompense of the reward' and is what Paul refers to when he speaks of 'the crown of righteousness, which the Lord,

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<sup>100</sup> In all of this we keep in mind the fact that those called 'the people of God' (cf. Heb. 11:4ff.) and those called 'the children of God' (cf. I John 3:10ff.), were all the time covenant-partners and house-servants. We need also to keep in mind the fact that there has always been 'the natural law' and so humanity has generally kept to the plan God is working out. Deliberate and unswerving rejection of God and His plan are the marks of the essentially reprobate spirits.

<sup>101</sup> We must keep remembering that Christ died for the sins of the whole world; that he was the bread come down from heaven which was to be life for the world; his flesh was to be given for the whole world; he did not come to condemn the world but that the world through him might be saved. He did not want to closet his followers from the world but to send them into the world even as he had been sent into the world. We must keep remembering that the covenant of God is a covenant for the whole world.

the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing'. Revelation 14:13 promises that the saints' deeds do follow them, whilst 21:7 speaks of the promise that, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage [the new heaven and the new earth], and I will be his God and he shall be my son'.

### THE CULMINATION OF THE REST

Karl Barth writes on the matter of the divine rest on the seventh day:

It is not man who brings the history of creation to an end, nor is it he who ushers in the subsequent history. It is God's rest which is the conclusion of the one and the beginning of the other, i.e., God's free, solemn, and joyful satisfaction with that which has taken place and has been completed as creation, and His invitation for man to rest with Him, i.e., with Him to be satisfied with that which has taken place through Him. The goal of creation, and at the same time the beginning of all that follows, is the event of God's Sabbath freedom, Sabbath rest and Sabbath joy, in which man, too, has been summoned to participate. It is the event of divine rest in face of the cosmos completed with the creation of man—a rest which takes precedence over all man's eagerness and zeal to enter upon his task. Man is created to participate in this rest . . . Everything that precedes is the road to this supreme point. The connection and sequence of the individual events in the history of creation, and these individual events themselves—each in its own place and manner—all point to this last event, to this positive and yet limiting relation of God's Sabbath rest to the man striding forward to the work for which he is prepared. . . . It leads into a sphere where it cannot be overlooked that whatever may happen the truth of the relationship between God and man will be the divinely instituted covenant of the wholly sufficient and wholly sovereign grace of God.<sup>102</sup>

William Dumbrell, quoting Claus Westermann, speaks similarly when he says:

What is peculiar to the holy day in the course of everyday happenings is that it points to the goal of the creature which God has created in his image. The work which has been laid on man is not his goal. His goal is the eternal rest which has been suggested by the rest of the seventh day.<sup>103</sup>

In study 8 we noted that the Sabbath rest was a sign of the covenant of God. Exodus 31:17 seems to speak of both a creational and a covenantal sign with Israel. In Exodus 20:11 it is said, as in Genesis 2:3, that God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it. Man's resting on this day was to be his sharing in this element of the nature of God. Later, for Israel, it was nominated precisely as this, and a sign of the redemption God had wrought for Israel in bringing it out of the land of seven days a week slavery. The verb *sabat* means 'to cease' or 'to rest'.<sup>104</sup>

In the Genesis account it seems that Man was created outside of Eden and then placed in it—'The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it'.<sup>105</sup> In life, in the world, and in history, Man was to work out the mandate but he was to do it in the rest of God. Eden was the protological Paradise. It was the place of peace and joy and love. It was also the place of worship. Service—the outworking of the mandate—is, at the same time, worship. Eden was the sanctuary of God, the place of work and worship, since service is worship and worship is service, especially when the offerer does all in the spirit of rest. We have also seen that having cast Man out of Eden, God was nevertheless present to all humanity. He was especially present wherever there was the sanctuary. Where Cain and Abel offered their sacrifices he was present, but Cain profaned the altar by his offering, whilst Abel's offering was sanctified by the altar.

This is the history of Man. Wherever he offered in faith there was the altar and so the true Presence of God. Thus many cairns were erected, many memorials—those places which were

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<sup>102</sup> *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 1, T. & T. Clark, 1970, pp. 98f.

<sup>103</sup> *Covenant and Creation* Paternoster Pr., 1984, p. 35.

<sup>104</sup> cf. Exodus 16:30; 23:12; 31:17.

<sup>105</sup> Perhaps we should not make too much of this point.

genuine sanctuaries. In them there was rest for the faithful. In Israel there was the Tent of meeting, the Tabernacle of testimony—God's testimony of his own presence. The earthly Tabernacle was a copy of the heavenly. As the Temple it was the place of God's presence. In the New Covenant Jesus was Immanuel, 'God with us', walking amongst the people. He was the new Temple in himself. He alone could offer rest.<sup>106</sup> God had offered Israel rest in Canaan but it never achieved it because of its rebellion. David prophesied of an eternal rest to come, and the writer of Hebrews also spoke of it.<sup>107</sup> After he ascended, Christ's people—his Body—became the New Temple, the Temple of the New Covenant. This Temple was throughout the world, never restricted to the temporal Mount Zion, but had become for the world the true heavenly Mount Zion to which the world was to flow:

The word which Isaiah the son of Amoz saw concerning Judah and Jerusalem.  
It shall come to pass in the latter days  
that the mountain of the house of the LORD  
shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills;  
and all the nations shall flow to it,  
and many peoples shall come, and say:  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,  
to the house of the God of Jacob;  
that he may teach us his ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth the law,  
and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isa. 2:1–3).

To which Isaiah added in chapter 25:

On this mountain the LORD of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of fat things, a feast of wine on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wine on the lees well refined. And he will destroy on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death for ever, and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth; for the LORD has spoken.

It will be said on that day, 'Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, that he might save us. This is the LORD we have waited for him; let us be glad and rejoice in his salvation.'

Finally we come to the culmination of the Temple, the place of rest, but it is marvellously one with Mount Zion, the Holy City, the place where God dwells with His people. Thus John the Seer describes it to us:

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away.'

The eternal Holy Zion has been prepared for the culmination of the covenant of God. The place of worship is the place of rest and it comes down out of heaven to the earth, and it is the Holy City as it is also the Bride of the Lamb. John tells us more, incredibly more. He says:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.

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<sup>106</sup> As we have seen, his invitation in Matthew 11:28–30 was to come to him for rest. The wicked are like the restless sea, casting up mire and dirt, but Jesus can give peace through 'the blood of his cross'. He is the Great High Priest in the true sanctuary of God. He is the 'minister in the sanctuary'.

<sup>107</sup> In Hebrews chapters 3 and 4 the writer speaks of a rest which is undoubtedly the rest of heaven. The true rest will come in the true Sanctuary.

By its light shall the nations walk; and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it, and its gates shall never be shut by day—and there shall be no night there; they shall bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. But nothing unclean shall enter it, nor any one who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

To say, 'And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb', is to say that God Himself is the temple, and His people are one with Him for they too, were—and now are—the Temple. This unspeakable holy communion and holy intimacy is the ultimate place of rest. This is Sabbath rest of God come to full fruition. This—rest-wise—is the culmination of the covenant of God. That is what history has all been about. To be part of the Holy City and to live in it—this is Sabbath rest which God ordained *for* His people, and *unto* which He ordained them.

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY EIGHTEEN

1. What is the vocation inherent in the covenant, and how does it work to its fulfilment?
2. Why is the matter of sabbath observance and sabbath rest so widely discussed and required in the Old Testament.
3. What is its importance and outworking in 'the end of the beginning'?

## Study Nineteen: The Culmination of Marriage

### MARRIAGE, THE THIRD ELEMENT OF THE IMAGE OF GOD AND HIS COVENANT INTENTION<sup>108</sup>

In our previous study we saw that God's mandate of vocation for Man was at once part of the outworking of the covenant of God and of Man being active as the image of God. The Sabbath rest of God is also the outworking of the covenant, and Man resting as the activity of his being in God's image. We come to our third element—that of marriage—and we see here that it is, again, the outworking of the covenant of God, and is the action of Man as the image of God. That is, the three elements are covenantal and constitute Man as the active image of God. What is both interesting and significant is that both God and Man are involved in these three things—Vocation, Rest and Marriage. We can say that in God these elements are archetypal, and in Man they are ectypal. That is, God is the living Pattern from which the human copies of vocation, rest and marriage are made.<sup>109</sup> Our point in repeating what has been said in previous studies regarding vocation, sabbath rest and marriage, is that these three Divine elements are earthed in the human ones. They are part of our everyday, human existence.

We now have to observe that marriage, as also vocation and rest, are never now seen or experienced as perfect. They were this prior to the Fall, and will be this in the consummation of the world in the new heavens and the new earth, but for the present we have to live with the imperfections. Then, when Man will be glorified as the image of God, he will shine perfectly.

### HUMAN MARRIAGE IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE

We saw previously that Paul, in referring to Genesis 2:24, spoke of marriage as 'a profound mystery'. By this he meant that Genesis 2:24 was referring primarily to the marriage between Christ and his Church, and only secondarily to the primal couple and all couples following them. In this sense we may say that the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb—Christ and the Church—is the archetype of which marriages are ectypes.<sup>110</sup>

This means we must read both Old and New Testaments most carefully or we will miss the importance of human marriage in its relation to the Divine-human marriage of God the Husband of Israel, his wife; and Christ the Husband of the Church, his wife. It will be helpful, here, to quote Karl Barth commenting on marriage from the second account of creation in Genesis 2:18–25:

It does, of course, point to the divine basis of love and marriage as the due fulfilment of the male-female relationship. But as this whole second account of creation, without prejudice to the concreteness of its statements in their direct sense, is permeated by reference to God's gracious covenant with Israel as the internal basis of creation itself, the same is true of its conclusion. Beyond its direct statements it envisages the most important Old Testament relationship in which Yahweh is represented as the faithful Lover, Bridegroom and Husband of this people, and the latter as the equally unfaithful beloved, bride and wife.

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<sup>108</sup> It would be greatly helpful for us to refresh ourselves by re-reading studies 9 and 10 of this present series. Greatly helpful, also, would be to read my book *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995).

<sup>109</sup> In studies 9 and 10 we dealt with the whole matter of marriage, not only at the time of creation, but throughout history. We saw that Bromiley made the point, 'Earthly marriage is now lived out as a bad copy of a good original'. Originally, before the Fall, human marriage was a good copy of the original.

<sup>110</sup> At this point we observe that the more a human marriage is 'in Christ' then the richer it will be, and the better copy it will be of the original.

It also envisages the perfect form of the relationship to be brought about by Yahweh, an imminent betrothal between Yahweh 'in righteousness, and in judgement, and in lovingkindness and in mercies' (Hos. 2:19), in which the faithfulness will not be one-sided but mutual. To be more precise, Gen 2:24 regards the male-female relationship in the light of this great theme running through the whole of the Old Testament. Therefore when a man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife, becoming one flesh with her, this takes place because God in His election of Israel and covenant with it has bound Himself so recklessly with this people, making Himself one with it so unreservedly and with such promise . . . And it should now be clear that if we take into account this equation and therefore this fulfilment of Gen. 2:24 and the rest of the Old Testament history of promise we are inevitably led to a different evaluation of the relation between man and woman.<sup>111</sup>

We thus see that human marriage is not an analogue or figure of the Divine-human marriage, but that human marriage derives from the Divine-human marriage which is consummated at the end-time, as set out in Revelation 19:6–9 and 21:1–27.

We need then to look briefly at human marriage in the Old Testament and the marriage bond of God and Israel. Then we will also briefly look in the New Testament at the approaches of Christ and Paul. The understanding we will get of marriage will help us to appreciate the ultimate marriage of the Bride and the Lamb as the consummation of God's covenant. It will also help us to enrich our own marriages.

### **THE DIVINE-HUMAN MARRIAGE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: GOD AND HIS LOVE, ISRAEL, IN HER TENDER, YOUTHFUL LOVE**

As in Jeremiah 2:2 God says to Israel, 'I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown'. Israel was 'holy to the Lord', so it seems that Israel was a devoted wife. In Ezekiel 16:8–14 there is a moving passage which describes how God who had saved the baby girl from perishing, now prepares her for marriage. He says, 'I plighted my troth to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became mine'. There follows the description of her beautification for her nuptials, closing with, 'And your renown went forth among the nations because of your beauty, for it was perfect through the splendor which I had bestowed upon you'. The outcome of the marriage is disastrous. Israel becomes idolatrous and adulterous. Even so, God will not give Israel up. He will retain the marriage. Certainly he will judge Israel, but in the end she will know His forgiveness. Even in that judgment the incredible marital love of the divine Husband can be seen as in verses 59–63:

Yea, thus says the Lord GOD: I will deal with you as you have done, who have despised the oath in breaking the covenant, yet I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish with you an everlasting covenant. Then you will remember your ways, and be ashamed when I take your sisters, both your elder and your younger, and give them to you as daughters, but not on account of the covenant with you. I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall know that I am the LORD, that you may remember and be confounded, and never open your mouth again because of your shame, when I forgive you all that you have done, says the Lord GOD.

It does not seem out of place to indicate here that for persistence in love with an adulterous spouse, God the True Husband is the paradigm, and also—if we may use the term—the archetype for the human ectype. The provision in Deuteronomy 24:1–4 for divorcing a spouse for 'indecent' seems to pale in the light of such marriage-*agape*. Forgiveness within the marriage banishes the matter of divorce. God will never divorce Israel, so spouses in a marriage likewise must not divorce. 'I hate divorce', God says.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, pt 4, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1961, pp. 142–143.

<sup>112</sup> Much of this material is derived from *The Profound Mystery*, pp. 70–76.

### *The Covenant of God and the Covenant of Marriage*

The truth of marriage is called a covenant in Proverbs 2:16–17 where the writer speaks of the promiscuous woman who 'forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant<sup>113</sup> of her God'. Likewise in Malachi 2:14 the prophet says, 'Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant'.

So it is that the first prophet to show, under the figure of marriage, the faithfulness of God in the midst of Israel's unfaithfulness as a wife, was Hosea in the 8th century. It is Hosea's theme that is reflected in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and even Malachi. Hosea's lover has been, or becomes, a prostitute.<sup>114</sup> Her children are not fathered by the prophet. In the figure God the Husband of Israel hates the children, for they are not His own. Even so, God will not abandon her. Whilst she has lived in promiscuity and wrongly attributes her 'good things' to the Baals, God will so hedge her around that she will ultimately be shut up to her first husband, 'Then she shall say, "I will go and return to my first husband, for it was better with me than now"'. God will denude her of all things, bring her to shame and desolation. Having done that God will have, as it were, a new day of wooing and betrothal.

Not only will Israel be His newly wooed and betrothed bride, but her children will be accepted and made the very children of God. What needs to be grasped is that God views His marriage with Israel seriously. It must be a 'holy marriage', conforming with the revelation of the man–woman 'one-flesh' union of Genesis 2:24, and the revelation through the 'Ten Words'<sup>115</sup> confirming the holiness of marital love and the family it brings into being.<sup>116</sup> When there is infidelity such as Israel shows, there must be judgment. That judgment must bring repentance, and when repentance comes—then and only then—restoration can be truly effected.

## **THE DIVINE–HUMAN MARRIAGE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**

### *The Views of Jesus and Paul*

As to Christ's own view of marriage, it can well be argued from his statements of Matthew 5:32, 19:1–12, Mark 10:1–12, and Luke 16:18, that he rejected both divorce and remarriage. Certainly the use of the antithesis in Matthew 5:31–32 radicalises the law and restores its pristine nature in regard to marriage. In the light of the Old Testament prophets we have studied above, Christ could never have envisaged marriage as other than inviolable.<sup>117</sup>

Paul's view, most would argue, was the same as that of Jesus, and what we must keep in mind was Paul's background thinking of 'the profound mystery'. For example, one has to read I Corinthians 7 in the light of Ephesians 5:21–33.

When it comes to the new covenant, William Dumbrell, speaking on Jeremiah 31:31–34 comments:

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<sup>113</sup> O. J. Baab in his article 'Marriage' in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, vol. 3, Abingdon, p. 284, says:

In the Bible marriage is regarded as a covenant entered into by two families who thereby form an alliance through their representatives, the bridegroom and the bride. So marriage is both personal and communal. Our justification for using the word 'covenant' derives in part from the use by biblical writers of the figure of marriage to describe the covenant relation between Yahweh and Israel, and in part from the place of the covenant in social contracts of the biblical community.

<sup>114</sup> Whether she was this before or after marriage is not quite clear from the text.

<sup>115</sup> That is, the holy law of God's own being is revealed at Sinai both by God's direct speaking 'the Ten Words' and by His giving them as 'hard copy' written on the two tablets.

<sup>116</sup> Note in Jeremiah 31:31–34 that God claims that at Sinai He was a husband to Israel. Some see Sinai as a marriage, and the feast with God of the seventy elders on Sinai to be a marriage feast, protological of 'the marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb'.

<sup>117</sup> See *The Profound Mystery*, pp. 77–83, for a fuller picture of Christ's view of marriage. Also see the Bibliography for a more extensive treatment.

The indivisibility, however, of the covenant from the divine point of view is referred to in v. 32 by its depiction in marriage terms. Yahweh has been a 'husband to them'. The use of this marriage imagery, so extensive in Jeremiah as a figure for Israel's apostasy, ought to be carefully noted in this New Covenant section. It is saying that by its very nature the covenant arrangement could not be sundered. Divorce on the divine side could never be contemplated. Within the human situation in the Old Testament divorce within the marriage relationship was possible, since the hardness of the human heart necessitated that (cf. Deut. 24:1-4) . . . In short the element which will characterise, and thus render it 'new' will be its irrefragability.<sup>118</sup>

His reasoning fortifies the New Testament emphasis on what Dumbrell calls 'the irrefragability' of marriage, that is, the indestructible nature of the covenant union. Seeing this is the emphasis both of the Old and New Testaments, we can now look at the purpose and intention of God to bring the Divine-human marriage to fulfilment.<sup>119</sup>

### *References to Christ as Bridegroom in the Gospels*

John the Baptist referred to Christ as the Bridegroom and himself as 'the friend of the bridegroom' (John 3:28-30). In Matthew 9:15 (cf. Mark 2:19) Jesus certainly referred to himself—even if only figuratively—as the bridegroom who was present. The rejoicing of Matthew's friends at the feast was likened to a marriage celebration. Two parables of the Kingdom are used in Matthew 22:1-14 and 25:1-13. The first is almost fierce in its insistence that guests come and when they come that they appropriately present themselves. The father-king gives a marriage feast for his son. His 'everything is ready' is echoed in Revelation 19:6-10 where 'his Bride has made herself ready', and 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb'. Without elaborating, the Matthew 22 parable tells of the Father preparing the Bride, and it appears that the Messianic feast Jesus speaks of is one with the Wedding feast.<sup>120</sup> The Matthew 25 story of the wise and foolish virgins again needs no elaboration. It is eschatological, with the warning of preparing for the joy.

### *The Triune God Working towards the Wedding Feast and Its Outcome*

If the parables speak of the Father's work for His Son, then in John's Gospel (6:46, 65; cf. Matt. 11:25-27) it is the Father who reveals His Son and draws men and women (the Church, the Bride) to Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Revelator of both Father and Son (John 16:12-15), and he brings the saving gospel to the elect people of God, the true Bride. Through the power of the Cross the same Spirit sanctifies the Bride (cf. II Thess. 2:13-14; I Pet. 1:2; I Cor. 6:11), but then it is Christ who is called the Saviour of the Bride (Eph. 5:25; cf. I John 4:14). In whatever condition he finds her,<sup>121</sup> he gives himself for her and so works that he sanctifies her, 'having cleansed her by the washing of the water with the word'. She is made splendid ('glorious'; cf. Rev. 21:11ff.) and fit for her spouse. In the metonymy of Ephesians 5:21-33, the spouse has reverence for her husband, and the fear which is at the same time respect, obviously for what he has done for her. Bit by bit we are being admitted into the ontology of marriage, into a relational praxis that is so valuable for paranetics and pastoral help.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Covenant and Creation*, pp. 177-78.

<sup>119</sup> I can think of no better 'spouse mysticism' than that which Jonathan Edwards put forward, and at which we looked in study 10. Yet it is even clearer in a sermon preached by Jonathan Edwards entitled 'Sermon II: The Church's Marriage to Her Sons and to Her God'. It is found in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 2, which was first published in 1834 and reprinted by the Banner of Truth Trust in 1974.

<sup>120</sup> The explanation here is perhaps a little too complicated for us to undertake in so short a paper. We need to view all references to the wedding feasts, and the messianic victory feasts. They seem to be the one.

<sup>121</sup> Do we here think of God as Husband to Israel, and of Hosea's prophecy and that of Ezekiel 16 and 23 in regard to the church?

<sup>122</sup> The term 'paranetics' is intended to cover the ethical conduct demanded of believers. Members of the New Covenant are exhorted to fulfil these precepts and principles.

**To continue:** it is God the Father in Revelation 19 and 21 who prepares the ultimate Marriage feast of the Bride and the Lamb. The Warrior Bridegroom returns from his victory over all evil powers to usher his Bride into the fit home he has been preparing for her (cf. John 14:1–10), but then the Bride must go through certain preparatory rituals;<sup>123</sup> 'made herself ready', 'clothed with fine linen pure and bright', 'prepared as a bride adorned for her husband', so that she now has 'the glory of God'. In all this the Holy Spirit has been working as one with her until the point when 'The Spirit and the Bride say, "Come"', and all the elect, hearing this also say, 'Come', for that has been the church's cry through the preparatory ages, 'Maran-atha: Lord, Come'. It seems 'God's design to admit the church into the divine family as his son's wife', is now to take place. Had the Son not become incarnate he could not have had a human Bride, and he could not have conducted her to the Godhead, and so inducted her into the mystery of that same Godhead. Now humanity is joined to marvellous Deity and the plan for history has reached its *telos*.

### THE CULMINATION OF THE COVENANT IN MARRIAGE

The marriage of the Bride and the Lamb culminates all marriage throughout all time. Man as the Bride–wife of God is ultimately taken into the Godhead through the Son who has become man in order to wed himself to the bride.<sup>124</sup> Thus the marriage supper of the Bride and the Lamb has been the holy intention of God from the beginning. Human marriage which was at once ontological, typological, protological and so eschatological is the situation into which humankind comes at the end. All eternity is the bliss and fruitfulness of the holy Couple, the induction of humanity into the inner fellowship of the Triune family. In this way the Father's plan for His Son, His 'daughter-in-law', and His eternal family comes, to its fulfilment.

### QUESTIONS FOR STUDY NINETEEN

1. Why is marriage looked upon as the third element in the image of God and so the outworking of the covenant?
2. What is unique about Israel as the Bride of Yahweh?
3. What principles of marriage are set up in the New Testament, and what view do we find there in relation to divorce and remarriage? In the light of the 'End Marriage' how are we to view present marriages on earth?

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<sup>123</sup> These rituals are seen in the Old Testament, especially in the *Book of Esther* and in *The Song of Songs*, but they happen in all thoughtful contemporary wedding preparations.

<sup>124</sup> For a fuller treatment of the Divine–human marriage and the human marriage, see my book *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995).

## **Study Twenty: The Covenant with Creation**

### **THE ONE COVENANT FOR THE WIDE WORLD**

In the New Testament we find an opening out of covenant to the wide world. This is how it ought to have been, for the covenant of God was with all creation. We saw in Jeremiah 33:19–26 that God has made His covenant 'with day and night and the ordinances of heaven and earth'. In this context also we saw that God stated firmly His intention to fulfil His covenant with David—one we know to involve the Messiah–King's rule over all the earth. Again, in this context, there is reference back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and we know the covenant with them involved all nations, as Genesis 12:1–3 well shows. In Genesis 9 we see that the covenant of creation is renewed, established and confirmed, for:

*This is the sign of the covenant which I make [establish] between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations . . . When the bow is in the clouds, I will look upon it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth.*

### **IN CREATION IS AN IRREVERSIBLE COVENANT FOR THE WHOLE WORLD**

We have seen that the covenant of God was with all the creation by virtue of His act of creating all things. God within Himself is covenant, the inner relationships of the Trinity being of the nature of unity, communion and love. In this sense there was no need to talk explicitly of a covenant, and Genesis 1:28 and 9:9 tell us that God confirms or establishes what was innate to creation. In the light of all this we saw the dreadful violation of God's gift and His nature by reason of the Fall. Man was rejecting God as his natural habitat, his true home. He was rejecting the true Presence in his life. Absolute freedom from the Creator seemed to him to be a heady thing, when in fact it was fearful bondage. Man violated the covenant, breaching it in order to be 'like God, knowing good and evil'. It never turned out that way.

### **THE EVIL OF COVENANT-BREAKING AND CONSEQUENT LAWLESSNESS IS JUDGED**

The rapid growth of violence and corruption was certainly linked with the alternate systems primeval Man created. So the Flood came as a judgment upon all evil, yet at that very time the covenant was, so to speak, reiterated. Man had violated the covenant of God, cutting himself off, but God did not cut Himself off from Man. The making of a covenant with Abraham, as we have seen, had universal connotation. Likewise the covenant with Israel, and with David. The New Covenant also had worldwide connotation.

Paul, in Romans 1:18–32, gives us a broad sketch of what happened to Man. In rejecting God he needed objects of worship to fill his innate need for adoration and service. Hence the invention of idols which on the one hand gave him some satisfaction, and places of worship such as shrines and temples. In objectifying God as Man wished God to be, that is, in the form of idols, Man helped to tide himself over difficult periods of human living, but such idolatry could never be satisfying by nature of the case. In addition there were other forces at

work besides God's wrath on Man for his covenant-breaking, namely the powers of evil. Satan and his system, with celestial and earthly powers in his grasp—'the whole world is in the power of the evil one'—made matters infinitely worse. The further breaking up of a human monolithic unity by the introduction of tongues at the tower of Babel further intensified the divisions of culture, race and worship.

### **THE COVENANTS WITHIN THE COVENANT ARE ESSENTIALLY UNIVERSAL AND ETERNAL**

The covenant with Abraham, we have seen, was really a continuation of the worldwide covenant of God. Abraham was called out of the midst of idolatry to know the 'Lord God, Most High, maker of heaven and earth', as he professed him to Melchizedek. Abraham had a universal view of God and Man, and the writer of the Book of Hebrews picks up this principle. Abraham looked to a city to come, whose builder and maker was God. Abraham was not the first person of faith for Abel is abominated as such, and following him throughout history there have been such persons of faith, living under the covenant of God and sharing with him in the outworking of his plan.<sup>125</sup> These have known, at least in part, 'the mystery of God'.

We have seen this universal view was innate to the covenant with Israel, although not all members of that commonwealth saw it as such. The concept of a universal action of God was certainly vastly expanded in the covenant with David. We saw that in Israel, as it developed to be a nation notable amongst other nations, the sense of local and geographical dimensions gradually changed, and under the prophets the principles of the holy city of Jerusalem and the holy temple of the city began to move towards a universal symbolism, a richer way of understanding God as King over all the nations, and in His sovereignty dealing with them.

### **THE NEW COVENANT LEADS TO THE END**

So far as Israel was concerned, the judgments of God had shaped it into a nation in which idolatry had ceased. Outwardly that was certainly so, though Stephen in his speech before the Jewish Sanhedrin<sup>126</sup> charged them with perpetual and chronic idolatry. The word of direct prophecy from God had ceased for hundreds of years, but prior to the birth of Jesus there was, in part of Israel, great expectation of the coming of Messiah. The prophecies and angelic visitations surrounding the birth of Jesus bring us into a new atmosphere. The attestation at Jesus' baptism by God that this man is the Son of God, sets the scene for Jesus' three years of ministry and the remarkable events that happened. Jesus teaches the fact of his impending death and indicates its immense significance, especially in regard to it being the New Covenant sealed in his blood. The immense amount of material taught concerning the meaning of his death, resurrection, ascension and the sending forth of the Spirit to bring the church into being and proclaim the life-giving gospel, is set before us and proclaimed to the world. In all of this the risen and ascended Christ is present as the one who is ever interceding for his people and for the whole world.

### **GOD'S COVENANT WITH THE WORLD IN CHRIST JESUS HIS SON**

In the final chapters of the Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark and Luke—the commission given to the disciples is to preach the gospel in all the world, to teach it not only to every person,

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<sup>125</sup> See Hebrews 11:4ff., and I John 3:10ff.

<sup>126</sup> See Acts ch. 7, and in particular vv. 38–53.

but also to all the nations with a view to bringing them—as nations—to the feet of Christ.<sup>127</sup> In these commands we see the gospel is for all the world.<sup>128</sup>

It is this matter—'the gospel is for all the world'—which we now briefly trace in John's Gospel. It is the flavour of Christ's compassion for the world which moves us. A brief survey of Jesus' use of the word 'world' shows clearly how much the thought of the world was in the mind of Jesus. There were various aspects he revealed concerning it, namely that the world was that system opposed to God, and so to him, and which would always hate and persecute him and his followers. At the same time the created world with all its inhabitants was God's world, and He so loved it that He had given His Son to redeem it. In the course of redeeming it Christ was to oppose the worldly system of Satan which had great power within the created world, and to topple it by his death and resurrection. Jesus' use of the term 'world' (*kosmos*) seems to oscillate between the world of God's creation and the system of evil which had captured even many of the Jewish leaders. In some cases the world is those Jewish leaders who would destroy him and yet Jesus envisages an even wider community, the world which the Holy Spirit will convict of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. It is difficult to define 'the world' in one paragraph, but in a sentence we may say, 'The world is that system of evil headed up by the Devil, in whose power and under whose sway are fallen celestial creatures and those humans who oppose—wittingly or otherwise—the covenant of God'. We should understand that the created world—as such—is not meant when John says, 'the whole world is in the power of the evil one'. He is speaking of an evil system which is working within the created world.

### **JESUS' MISSION TO AND FOR THE WORLD**

John records that the light that enlightens every man was coming into the world.<sup>129</sup> Often he spoke of himself as the light that was come into the world to lighten it. John attested that Jesus was the Lamb of God come to take away the sin of the world, and the world's judgment was that it refused the light, choosing rather to love darkness. Whether Jesus or John spoke the words of John 3:16–21, the fact is that God so loved the world that He gave His only Son. God did not send His Son into the world to condemn it, but that through him it might be saved. The Samaritans saw and declared that Jesus was the Saviour of the world. Jesus declared that he was the bread of heaven sent down from heaven to give life to the world. Indeed, being that living bread he was giving life to the world by giving his flesh for the life of the world—obviously a reference to his saving death. He reiterated a number of times that he was the light of the world, an enormous claim to make, for he was saying that apart from him all was darkness. The prince of this world—Satan—was the ruler of darkness. Christ said he had come to unseat this prince and to judge this world. His death on the Cross would cast out this evil ruler, and the coming Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin and righteousness and judgment. The disciples would suffer from the persecution

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<sup>127</sup> The discipling of the nations is clearly set out in Matthew 28:18–20. That it is to all nations is clear from Luke 24:44–49 and Mark 16:15–20. Acts 1:8 also indicates the universal intention of Jesus, namely the gospel being sent to Israel, Samaria and the Gentiles—the other nations.

<sup>128</sup> Paul saw this so clearly, and perhaps even beyond the understanding of the other apostles, though we have no sure proof to assert this. In Romans 1:5, 15:18–21, and 16:25–26, the apostle to the Gentiles makes it clear that through the gospel God intended to bring all the nations to the feet of Christ. This is borne out in I Corinthians 15:24–28, in the Epistle to the Hebrews where the nations are made the footstool of Christ, and powerfully in the Book of the Revelation, which in one sense is a rich commentary on I Corinthians 15:24–28, and which shows all the nations falling under the rod of Christ by the sword which goes forth from his mouth. The fact that Christ is the Judge of all nations means that ultimately their judgment is in the light of the mercy of the gospel and the response or rejection of it by the nations. Certainly a multitude such that no man can number is the number of the redeemed elect.

<sup>129</sup> References used above are John 1:9, 10, 29; 3:16, 17, 19; 4:42; 6:14, 33, 51; 8:12, 23, 26; 9:5, 39; 10:36; 11:9, 27; 12:19, 46, 47; 14:27, 30, 31; 15:18, 19; 16:11, 20, 21, 28; 17:6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 18, 21, 23, 25; 18:36, 37. A glance at a concordance will reveal our Lord's understanding of and approach to the world as the creation loved by God, the sinful humanity as part of it and the evil system opposed by him.

of the world, but they should keep in mind that their Master had overcome the world. In his last prayer, on the night of his betrayal, he prayed that they would be kept from the world into which he was now sending them as, indeed, the Father had sent him into that same world. He also prayed for such unity between the disciples and those who would believe on him—Christ—because of their word, that the world would know God had sent him into the world. His last word on the world was to tell Pilate that his—Jesus'—kingdom was not of this world.

### *The Passion of the Triune God for the World*

What we should perceive in all this recorded material of John is that God loves the world. He so loved it as to send his Son into the world to be the Saviour of the world, and Jesus so loved it that he was one with the Father in his intention to save it. So Jesus gave his life in death for the world. As John recorded later, 'He died, not for our sins only, but for the sins of the whole world'. Great literature has been written about this marvellous love and act of God. Poems and lyrics have been written and songs have been sung about this unspeakable love of God. It is at the climax—so to speak—of human history that we see God truly as the great covenant God. This was the spirit the disciples and apostles caught, and they travelled the then known world with their powerful message.

It remains then for us, we who write as I have done in this study, to admit that in our feeble particularising of the covenant of God—in which lie the covenants Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New—we live only at the edge of this great and wonderful truth. It is not only that the material is beyond human encompassing, and that one's abilities are limited in their power to survey this grand theme of all the Scriptures, but it is that grace baffles us even whilst it enlightens us.

This much is true: God has shown us He loves the world which He created. His wrath is on those who would defile and destroy it. His anger is against those who would rule it to their own benefit and comfort. His grace is for those who have been made aware of His creating and redeeming love, and His high intention to glorify His elect along with the creation itself.

So we are given the high view of the culminating events of God's history, namely the beautiful Bride of Christ who descends to the earth as the Holy City, which is the pure spouse of the Father's Son. We see the utter purity of true worship of the Triune God, of the God as the eternal sanctuary and the place of tranquil rest. Within this sanctuary is the river of life and the tree of life whose leaves will have healed all nations. The redeemed world settles at the feet of its Creator-Redeemer and gazes into His face, knowing at last the fullness of covenant love, knowing that its long history has always been with this glorious goal in mind. No wonder it bursts into rhapsodic adoration of the truth that Man has become one with God, and that Man as the wedded Bride to the Son is inducted into the mystery and the fullness of fellowship with God.

No wonder, too, that one theologian has said, 'Ultimately it will all be music, it will be all music'.

Meanwhile the people of God are filled with anticipation of these glories of which they have been told. There is a constraint on them to tell these things to the whole world. As certain lepers once said, 'This day is a day of good news; if we are silent and wait until the morning light, punishment will overtake us; *now, therefore come, let us go and tell . . .*'

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY TWENTY**

1. Discuss the nature of one, universal covenant. What does that mean for every inhabitant of this world, from the beginning to the end?
2. Discuss the covenant with Abraham in the light of a universal covenant. Was this a renewal of the creational covenant, and how did it involve the whole world?
3. Remembering the line of covenants—Abrahamic, Sinaitic, Davidic—how does the New Covenant link with these and culminate all history at the End?
4. Discuss the matter of Jesus as the Mediator of the New Covenant, and his commission to the disciples to go to the ends of the earth. How does that link with the universal, creational covenant?

## **Study Twenty-One: God's Covenant and Man's Response**

### **INTRODUCTION: THE COVENANT IS PRACTICAL**

In our last study we saw the fulfilment of God's plan in regard to the creation; namely, that He has ever loved what He created—and this includes all human creatures—and that He has shaped things to be the very best when they come to their conclusion in what we call the *telos*, or the end goal as it is fulfilled. Now we need to see our present place and participation in the matter of covenant, especially the New Covenant.

### **GOD'S COVENANTS AND THE NATIONS**

We have used the plural term, 'covenants', whilst we hold in mind the fact that all the covenants with which we have dealt are parts or components of the covenant of God, or, as we have sometimes called it, 'the covenant of creation'. Covenant, we saw, was—and is—inherent in creation. Established afresh with Noah, it meant that the nations which grew from Noah—Shem, Ham and Japheth—were also under this covenant, firstly by virtue of the covenant of creation, and then by the covenant with Noah. Genesis chapters 10 and 11 cover the developments of the nations. We note that each section—Japhethic, Hamitic and Shemitic<sup>130</sup>—finishes with the following kind of conclusion, 'These are the sons of Japheth [Ham, Shem] in their own lands, each with his own language, by their families, in their nations'.<sup>131</sup> We conclude that they are, by the covenant of God, covenant peoples.

In Acts 17:22–31 Paul reminds his Athenian hearers of the nature of God and says that this true God 'gives to all men life and breath and everything'. He then delivers his understanding of the unity of the human race:

And he has made from one [Adam; man; blood] every nation of men to live on all the face of the earth, having determined allotted periods and the boundaries of their habitation, that they should seek God, in the hope that they might feel after him and find him'.

Paul is saying that God has His purpose in setting 'allotted periods' and 'boundaries of their habitation'.

That Paul has something special and significant in mind is shown in his Epistles where he speaks of Christ as being over all the nations, of summing up 'all things', of reconciling 'all things', and shows that through the Cross all nations were brought together, particularly under the categories of

- (i) Israel, and (ii) the Gentiles, that is, 'the nations'.<sup>132</sup> He also shows that the categories of gender, race and social position pose a hindrance to this total unity of the human race.<sup>133</sup> When these facts are linked with the worldwide commission to the apostles to

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<sup>130</sup> Note that in Genesis 10:6–14 the descendants of Ham are nominated, and then in verses 15–20 the Canaanites are spoken of, Canaan being a son of Ham. In 10:27 Canaan seems to stand for Ham, as he is referred to perjoratively. It is obvious that the writer of this chapter wishes to draw attention to the outcome of Ham's irreverent treatment of his father Noah.

<sup>131</sup> Genesis 10:32 concludes all three branches of the nations to be the sons of Noah, that is it represents them as one large family which was spreading across the face of the earth after the Flood.

<sup>132</sup> Ephesians 1:9–10, 21–23; 2:11–22; Colossians 1:19–21. Note in Romans chs 9–11 Paul takes up the question of Israel and the nations coming into Christ's salvation.

<sup>133</sup> I Corinthians 12:12–13; Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11.

make disciples of the nations and baptise them into the Triune Name, then the coming together of the nations is seen to be in accordance with the principle of covenant.<sup>134</sup> John, in the Book of the Revelation, shows Christ as King of kings and Lord of lords; depicts the nations as ultimately entering the Holy City; and Christ as the one who smites the nations with the sword of his mouth, so that in being smitten they either respond to him or come under judgment for refusing to do so.

We can sum up, then, the action of God in history as a winning of the nations in the light of the covenants we have discussed; namely the Noahic, Abrahamic, Mosaic, Davidic and New. Since the Davidic King shall 'smite the nations' with the rod of his mouth or the sword of his mouth, then Christ as the Mediator of the New Covenant acts in this cosmic way, with cosmic results.

### **CHRIST THE KING—PRIEST OF ALL THE NATIONS**

It is the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews who expands our view of Christ as the King—Priest 'after the order of Melchizedek'. In terms of Psalms 2 and 110, not only does Christ transcend the old Levitical or Aaronic priesthood—and the more particularistic mediatorship of the covenant with Israel—but the promises of the New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31–34 also have universal application. Thus the saving ministry of Christ at the Cross, and the intercessory ministry of the ascended Lord, are for the nations. In other words, the New Covenant cannot be limited to some future situation which has to do only with Israel. We are now concerned with the universal nature of the New Covenant.

### **THE RESPONSE OF MAN TO THE COVENANT OF GOD**

We now come to what we might call the practical response of Man to the covenant of God. The primal couple knew the covenant of God and knew it to be unilateral, by nature of the case of creation, but they refused to acknowledge the *obligation* to obey the God of that covenant. A contractual covenant cannot be a unilateral covenant.<sup>135</sup> It is on the basis of this reasoning that we claim all God's covenants demanded obedience on the basis of obligation. It was obligation which was consequent upon God's goodness. In the case of creation, it was God's goodness of creation.<sup>136</sup> In spite of Man's evil prior to the Flood, God affirmed His covenant with all creation, following the Flood. Abraham is undoubtedly shown to have observed the obligation to obedience within the covenant, and Israel promised such obedience at the time of 'cutting the covenant'.<sup>137</sup> The Davidic Covenant carried with it the obligation to obedience, and the New Covenant also implies obedience from the heart.<sup>138</sup>

### ***The Covenants and the Law of God***

Linked with this matter of covenantal, obligatory obedience is the whole matter of the law of God. The law was—and is—the law of God's nature, and hence is the way of life for Man

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<sup>134</sup> In all this we are not saying that all the nations, willy-nilly, come to Christ. Matthew 25:31–46 speaks of *nations* being either sheep or goats, and that they will be judged according to these two categories. The Book of the Revelation also speaks of 'the [ten] kings of the nations' which links them with Daniel ch. 7. Judgment will come to the nations, but 'every knee should bow . . . and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father'. All will be submitted, perforce because of the conviction of the truth.

<sup>135</sup> Some theologians argue that, because covenants contemporary with Israel were contractual and ones of suzerainty, the covenants in Israel must be similar because they would have derived from them. The uniqueness of God's unilateral covenant is not necessarily contravened by any contemporary custom.

<sup>136</sup> In Romans 1:18–32 Paul traces the rebellion of Man against the goodness of God as shown in the goodness of creation. He then outlines the disastrous effects of having repudiated God and His goodness.

<sup>137</sup> Genesis 26:4–5; Exodus 24.

<sup>138</sup> II Samuel 7:14ff.; Jeremiah 31:31–34; cf. Hebrews 8:7–12; 10:16–17; Matthew 26:27–28.

who is made in the image of God. Without doubt the law is primarily for life, and is the very way of life. Only when it is broken does it appear in the light of condemnation and curse. Noah was a righteous man in his generation and found grace in the eyes of the Lord. He lived according to the creational covenant of God. Abraham obeyed all God's law and ordinances and commandments.<sup>139</sup> Israel was set to obey God's commandments because of His deliverance of them from Egypt (cf. Exod. 20:2f.; Deut. 5:6f.). God spoke 'the ten words' to Israel, personally and intimately, and these constituted the law of God. We have seen that innate to the Davidic Covenant was the idea that the covenant was to be 'the charter of the nations' or 'the charter for the nations'; that is, it was to be the way of life for the nations. The New Covenant, like other covenants, evoked the response of obedience to God's law. Our last study has shown that the Man as the image of God has, by the grace of God, fulfilled the three elements of the image—vocation, sabbath rest and marriage—and in this sense has fulfilled 'the just requirement of the law' (*to dikaioma tou nomou*).

### **TRUE COVENANTAL OBEDIENCE**

We have spoken of covenant—Man as being obedient, out of love in response to the love of God in covenant—which comes to mean love in creation, in salvation and in ultimate glorification. Leaving aside the mystery of predestination and the response which comes only from the elect, the very fact of response to the revealed goodness of God in creation and His grace and mercy in covenant can be seen as a matter of commonsense for Man to respond to God. Given that the mystery of the Godhead and of the gospel is opened to him by revelation of the Word and the Spirit, he can surely do nothing else.

The New Testament is filled with the matter of God's holy law, shown in many paracletics, paranetics,<sup>140</sup> and other clear forms of commands and ethical injunctions. These presuppose that the hearers of them are saved and that, in Christ, have recourse to the power of the Spirit and his gifts. The Book of the Revelation shows that the saints are those who keep the commands of God and bear witness to Jesus. We take this to mean, *in toto*,

- (i) obedience to the law of God as inherent in creation,
- (ii) the elements of the image of God being fulfilled in vocation, rest and marriage, and
- (iii) participation in the will of God regarding the proclamation of Christ and the gospel to the nations. This all is 'keeping the commands of God and bearing witness to Jesus'.

### **ALL RESPONSE IS TO THE TRIUNE GOD**

Response is a gift of God, leading to the taking up of responsibility. Again, we do not take up the matter of calling and predestination, but it is only in the light of these that we know the people of God will live in the obligatory obedience of love. In the light of the Fatherhood of God, the Lordship of Christ in salvation, in his being Head of the church, and in his work with the Father amongst the nations, we can see that we are empowered to participate in God's will. The power of the Spirit and his revelation of the Father and the Son, as also his unifying power within the church and creation, encourage us to continue in the law and will of God.

All this action of God, in which we are invited to take up partnership, is in the context of covenant. Outside of this there is nothing. In that sense, nothing is unrelated to covenant. As we have seen, the Father is Covenant-Father, the Son is the King—Priest of the covenant, and the Spirit is the Spirit of the covenant. This fact and knowledge makes us, then, irretrievably the people of the covenant, the people amongst whom God dwells and who dwell in the Triune God.

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<sup>139</sup> Genesis 26:4–5.

<sup>140</sup> Paracletics and paranetics are ethical exhortations to holy living, and as such constitute the true law of God.

Ultimately the Triune God will be our home and this expectation keeps us strong in covenant-response and covenant-obedience.

### **QUESTIONS FOR STUDY TWENTY-ONE**

1. Discuss the whole matter of God, covenant and the nations.
2. Show how the office of Christ as King–Priest has to do with his Lordship in ruling the nations.
3. Discuss again the differences between a unilateral covenant of creation, covenants in grace, and the mistaken idea that God’s covenants are contractual.
4. In the light of question 3 (above), show how law is a matter of obligatory obedience in love, and is understood and obeyed from the freedom grace brings.
5. What do we mean by saying, ‘All response is to the Triune God’? Show the nature of relational, covenantal living.

## Comprehending the Covenant Family—1

### GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

All human beings have been linked with the idea of a family since their birth. Even an orphan knows what is the fact and principle of family. Perhaps the fact of being an orphan even more makes the idea of family stand out. I once read a book called—if I can recall the title correctly—*The Death of the Family*. I had the feeling that the author, brilliant as he was, and intelligent in his reasoning, was an angry man. He had the family in his murderous sights. Having said—and correctly I am sure—that all our ills and spills come from the family, he added a postscript in which he said he had come into a wonderful experience of family. I think it was a particular family which deeply moved him. He said he would have to rethink his whole book and its ideas. Even so, he made his point: our ills and spills do come from families. It is perfectly logical. Ills and spills would have to come from families, just as joys, delights and pleasures, would also come from families. There really is no other place from which both sorrows and joys can come. The human race we can say is a large family, and anyway, it is composed of innumerable families.

The idea of the family, when we think about it, is fascinating. It is the social unit into which we are all born, in which we grow and develop—either for good or otherwise—and relationships are really the substance of human living. It is poignantly moving to see adopted children seeking out their blood relatives and they seem to have no peace until they know who they are. Whilst contemporary society does not seem to be over concerned with the thirty million or so abortions per annum, it is very concerned if, in the history of a person, child abuse can be uncovered. This seems to amount to a terrible, unforgivable sin. It is as though there is a natural law written in us all which says the born child should have the opportunity to grow, unmolested, in order to take its place in society when it matures. The matter of 'lost generations' bulks largely in our thinking. We seem to be saying that a child should have the right to grow up in its natural family, even if the conditions under which that family lives are far from ideal.

The aim of this Study is not to cover all elements of the family for those could fill large volumes, but to get the spiritual idea of the family from the Christian point of view. By 'Christian' we do not mean 'religious'. Religion and faith can be two very different matters. Nor can this small book cover all the injunctions, stipulation's and wisdom which go with family living, and are set out in the entire Scriptures. By 'Christian', then, we mean the relational inheritance and wisdom which we have from the family as it is set out in the entire Scriptures, including family life in the patriarchal period, the period of Israel's being as a nation, and the Christian church's experience as in the New Testament and two thousand years of Christian history.

We will soon discover that I see God, the Trinity, as the Holy Family, and that God is in Himself covenantal, that He has intimate relationships as Father, Son and Spirit which are the relationships we should have in our human families. The reader will also realise that I think the humanity has been designed to live in the way that God lives. On the human level Man is designed to live as the Trinity does on the Divine level. God, as Father, has His intention of humanity being made to be His large family, and knowing the ways in which to live as family. Thus what we call the personal family which can be what we call 'nuclear' or 'extended' is the proper place for the birth, growth and development of its members. It is the one place which can be called 'home'.

The riches of family are often not recognised these days, and things outside the family are made to appeal to the senses of children, and even to older people. Yet, I believe, the richest

living is that within the family. In good cultures no member of the family is rejected from it, even to old age and dying. If illness brings geographical removal of members, yet the true family gathers around the separated ones and gives to them the best of all things, family love and continuing relationships.

I think there is one condition under which we should read, and that is that we realise we all know much less of the subject than we should, that it is perhaps the most fascinating theme on earth, and that not all the theologians and sociologists have exhausted the subject. Yes, the family is with us, for good or ill, and the many prophecies that it is disappearing or will ultimately come to an end, cannot by nature of the case, be true analytical predictions. We need family so let us explore it to the greatest depths possible.

### **THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES FOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

I have thought it useful in this Study to go to the aetiology—the causes and beginnings—of the family. What is a family? What are its function and its goals? What is the structure of the family? From what does it derive? What are the patterns of behaviour which are the true ways of action of the family? These are useful principles to discover when they come as answers to our questions. Of course the Jewish and Christian faiths derive from revelation rather than empirical research, but the principles of family are rooted in the very nature of humanity, and humanity which is touch with God, the Creator of the universe. Since we do not formulate the principles of the family, it is a legitimate exercise to enquire biblically what they are and how they operate. For this we have the Word of God and the revelation of the mystery of the family by the Holy Spirit. Given that our understanding of the mystery requires humility in listening and receiving the Spirit's revelation, and granting also that our own communication of it to others—as in this very book—may be to some degree deficient, yet we ought to try to communicate what we believe we have come to know, for 'family' is enormously important in the human scene and to true relational living.

### **INTRODUCTION: THE DIVINE FAMILY**

The aim of our Studies is to see what is the nature of the human family and its relationships. We must look at the Divine Family, and seeing it, recognise that the human family derives from the Divine. Its relationships will be as those of the Divine Family. The Divine Family is the Triune Godhead. The Father is Father to the Son and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Father. The Son is the Son of the Father and the Spirit is the Spirit of the Son. Every family has its own special character or *torah* or ethos. The Spirit is the Spirit of the Family. If we wish to know what fatherhood or sonship or family spirit is then we must look to the Godhead. All human fatherhood comes from the Divine; all human, filial being comes from the Divine Son, and all family being comes from the Divine Family Spirit.

We can say that the Father is the Father archetype, the human father being its ectype. Likewise with the Son being the archetypal Son and the human son the ectypal son, the Spirit being the archetypal Family Spirit of the human family spirit which is ectypal. We must see these archetypes as being not only paradigms, but as also the source of all the relationships we have stated.

### **DIVINE AND HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

In order to understand the relationships which exist in Man—humanity as a whole—we must first understand the Divine relationships. We must work down to the human from the Divine

and not vice versa. The Father is love (I John 4:7–12), the Son is 'the Son of His love' (Col. 1:13) and the Spirit is the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5; 30).

Next we must distinguish between *agape* and *eros*. *Agape* is Divine love, self giving, not demanding returns, and by creation *eros* in origin was the same—love derived from God—but in the fall of Man *eros* changed and became giving with a view to returns. The first love—*agape*—is for others, the second—*eros*—is now for itself. Some have said that *eros* is 'fallen *agape*' or love that was selfless but has become selfish. All love was originally *agape*. There is nothing to suggest that *eros* which is sexual is necessarily wrong. It is the motivation which determines *eros*—making it other than true *agape*.

## THE MATTER OF THE COVENANTS OF GOD AND MAN

In the Godhead is covenantal life. The Three Persons coinhere one another, are *for* one another, and are perichoretic. That is, the Three Persons honour, serve, give to one another and receive from one another. All covenant is of love relationships, all relationships are of love (*agape*). All relationships are 'I-Thou' relationships. When 'I-Thou' relationships are mutual then we have union and communion on the Divine level. This was how Man was created for he was made in the image of God. God is Himself-in-communion. He is God in communion with Man, in the 'I-Thou' mode. Man as created was in communion with God, receiving the perichoretic flow of God and returning it with total love, that is, in worship, in serving, in receiving from God and giving to Him of what had been given from God. Total love had to do with total worship. Man's own relationships distributed in the whole body of humanity were *agape* relationships, 'I-Thou' relationships, perichoretic relationships *with* others, *for* others, being other-persons centred.<sup>141</sup> The relationships of God to Man and the bond of love we call 'the everlasting covenant' and 'the covenant of creation'. God's covenant is non-contractual because it is *agape* love.

## THE HUMAN FALL INTO SIN AND THE CHANGE IN RELATIONSHIPS

In receiving the word of the serpent in Eden Man rejected the word of God. He thus came into the realm of death as he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This death was a covenantal one for he broke the covenant relationship with God, though God did not break it with Man. Man breached the covenant, losing the joy, peace and true communion. He came to see the covenant then as contractual, whereas before, to have been in the relationship of love. Any love he may have felt he, being human ought to give, would then be contractual and thus not love. *Eros* is contractual and so is calculated in its actions and not naturally spontaneous. *Agape* by nature of the case is non-contractual and is involuntary. The old theologians said, 'disinterested' meaning not self-motivated.

**Forenote:** The opposite to self-concerned living is seen in II Corinthians 5:14, 15, 'For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.' It was to take the work of the Cross to renew man to his pristine state of relationships, covenantal and *agapitic*. Only because God has given His Son in true love do we—being forgiven in the New Covenant—come to love God and have true relationships with Him and others.

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<sup>141</sup> This is a great doctrine of the New Testament. To be the one who serves is to be great. Philippians 2:1–11 shows that we are to think on the things of others, and consider others better than ourselves, which is to put them first, and to empty ourselves for them. The use of gifts *for* others is our way of being perichoretic, for to love is to give (John 3:16). To be *for* others is to be 'other-persons centred'. To live first to God is to live, then, *for* all others.

### *Agape, Eros, and the 'I-Thou' and 'I-It' Relationships*

When, then, it comes to the matter of all human relationships, we see and fully realise that the human scene is dominated by *eros* relationships, that is, by contractual relationships. A state of death is in all such relationships. When relationships are betrayed, denied or not required then anger is born, and the stage is set for violence, cruelty, rape and murder. Selfishness may not take these outward manifestations but it is certainly present. This wrong state generally begins within the human society—the corporate family—and within the nuclear and extended families of which we are members.

Fallen Man takes the 'I-It' relational attitude to God (cf. Cain, his sacrifice, murder and punishment) but where grace is operative and effective Man takes the 'I-Thou' relationship with God and with his fellow creatures. We must not fail to see that from the beginning (Gen. 3:16) part of the human race has lived in love (I John 3:10–11) and in faith (Heb. 11:4ff.), and so it has 'I-Thou' relationships with God and fellow-Man. That is why covenantal life and relationships has been possible for people under God's grace and has been lived in contrast to the other part of the human race which has lived outside the Divine covenantal order in contractual living which is 'I-It' in nature. This latter part of humanity has the illusion it is loving because of mistaking *eros* for *agape*. We may rightly say that all mankind has the moral law somehow in its inner being, but law is seen either in the light of *eros* or of *agape*. *Eros*-law is construed as contractual, and carries a great legalistic weight and terror. *Agape*-law is understood as the law of love and inspires Man under grace to acts of love-obedience. Indeed it is the way of God's love.

### **THE TRUE FAMILY OF GOD IS COVENANTAL: LIKEWISE THE FAMILY OF MAN IS COVENANTAL**

If our reasoning is biblical and so correct, then the Holy Family—the Triune God—is the Divine Family, the Source and Paradigm of, and for, all true familyhood. It means that when God created humanity He created one human family. All humanity is one family (cf. Acts 17:26–31), 'for "In him we live and move and have our being"; as even some of your poets have said, "For we are indeed his offspring."'

If all humanity had continued in its original righteousness and the natural *agape*-love, then we would have had beautiful families then and today. As it is we have had those human beings of love and faith (by grace), and those of self-centredness and contract (by sin). Cain and Abel set forth, in principle, the two streams. Since all human beings are sinful by birth, the danger of moving from *agape* to *eros* is always present, and families are confused when their families contain both. The confusion is enormous. Even so, this helps to explain much of the relational problems and difficulties of human living following the Fall.

### *The Families of the Human Race*

Biblically we see that (i) all humanity is the family of God (Acts 17:28); (ii) all who live by love and faith are true covenant-family under their Father, God; (iii) Israel was particularly the family of God under special covenant; and (iv) all who are genuinely members of Christ are truly the church and the church is the family of God in the New Covenant. Those who live against God are still His children (Acts 17:28), but they do not acknowledge Him as their Father, nor live the true filial way of relationships. It takes the re-generation of covenant-breakers to bring them back to true love-relationships with God and fellow-Man. We would conclude that all who live in the family of God are motivated to have their own families live after the manner of the Divine family. The whole family of the faithful is composed of faithful families, seeking to live after the nature of the Divine family. Of course we keep taking into account the sinfulness of Man, even of Man living under grace and love. Also family living is

subject to evil's opposition. Satan seeks to be the 'father' of the 'family' of covenant-breakers (cf. John 8:34–44). For him any image of the Holy Family in human relationships is anathema.

## A STORY CONCERNING COVENANTAL FAMILY LIVING

We can take any patriarchal family, or family in Israel and see the nature of it and the outworking of the Divine pattern in it. We note that much of the text of the Old and New Testaments is given over to the matter of family living. In trying to understand family life in Israel we must almost completely forget the later, modern 'nuclear' family as we know it, for it is so far away from the earlier style of the covenantal family of the Patriarchs and Israel.

The family of Israel—as also the families in Israel—lived covenantally. They would have been lost as to how to live, otherwise. All pagan cultures lived covenantally by and with their gods. They had covenants with the gods which were contractual. Societal and familial life was based on such agreements. They may have had an 'I-It' approach to their deities but living in *eros* they would probably see their worship as an 'I-Thou' matter. God's great complaint against Israel was when it forsook God as Father and made covenants with the gods and idols and idolatrous nations. This was covenant-breaking with a vengeance.

### *Family Covenant in Israel*

Israel had been taught by God that it had been chosen in love, that He was their Covenant-Father, they His covenant-children (cf. Deut. 7:6–11). They were to worship Him as both their Father and their Husband (cf. Jer. 31:32; Hosea 2:19; cf. Jer. 2:26; etc.). Worship was, then, both marital and familial. In marriage the man and the woman worship one another, and thus God as Husband and Israel as wife are the basis of true love, so that the family live together in the right order of things. When we see this principle we understand a lot of the Old Testament text.<sup>142</sup> Without repeating all the teaching we have shared on covenant<sup>143</sup> let us go to the story of Malachi chapter 2. This chapter portrays Israel as the family of God.

The chapter has within it a number of references to covenant as a principle. Presupposed is the Sinaitic Covenant, which in Israel's thinking was always seen within the wider covenant of God with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (cf. 2:10). Specifically it refers to a covenant with Levi, to the 'covenant of our fathers', and the human marriage covenant. The covenant with Levi is described as 'a covenant of life and peace' (cf. Num. 8:45; 18:21f.). Israel is not the family under the true Father because it violates the altar. Levitical priests walked in integrity and holiness, 'True instruction was in his mouth, and no wrong was found on his lips. He walked with me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many from iniquity. For the lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts.' This principle was not adhered to at the time of Malachi's prophecy (cf. Neh. 5:3–7). God's covenant always provides priestly ministry to its members, as also it has God's law which is the covenantal way of life.

Malachi 2:13–16 appears to do with the marital conduct of families where husbands are divorcing wives in favour of marrying daughters of a foreign god. This brings the whole principle of marriage in Israel to the fore. Because of this faithlessness to primary marriage,

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<sup>142</sup> For the actual structure and working out of Israel's typical household-family in all its cultural elements we require not only a study of the Old Testament but also of the family life of surrounding nations, as Israel did not practice family life out of theological perfection.

<sup>143</sup> Here we mean teaching such as is given in my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (NCPI, 1997), W. J. Dumbrell's *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster, 1984), and other similar teaching on God's covenant. The Bibliography should also be helpful.

God will not respect or accept the altar offerings of Israel. The text of verses 14–16 explains why. 'You ask, "Why does he not?" Because the LORD was witness to the covenant between you and the wife of your youth, to whom you have been faithless, though she is your companion and your wife by covenant. Has not the one God made and sustained for us the spirit of life? And what does he desire? Godly offspring.'<sup>144</sup> So take heed to yourselves, and let none be faithless to the wife of his youth. "For I hate divorce, says the LORD the God of Israel, and covering one's garment with violence, says the LORD of hosts. So take heed to yourselves and do not be faithless.'" With this text we should read Proverbs 2:16–19 where 'the loose woman' is a wife who 'forsakes the companion of her youth and forgets the covenant of her God'. She forgets the covenant God has made with Israel and the covenant which she has made in marriage.

We gather then that within the covenant of Israel all relationship are covenantal. Marriage is a covenant before God and witnessed to by God under peril of judgment if a spouse or spouses revoke the covenant of marriage, that is, 'I hate divorce'<sup>145</sup> is what God says, as also He hates 'covering one's garment with violence', which means there is violence in the marriage in respect to going through to divorce. If we ask why God should be so vehement about the matter we must realise that God is married to Israel. He is her Husband by covenant (Jer. 31:32). The first two chapters of Hosea, the 16th chapter of Ezekiel, and Isaiah chapter 54—amongst other passages—attest to this marital bond or covenant. It is at the heart of all covenant. Covenant-breaking is looked upon as a dreadful violation of the relationship God has with His people.

### *Family Covenant in the New Testament: The People of the Church*

Without doubt, and beyond all argument, the early church was an evident family. Relationships and family action are clearly the way of life of the new community which sprang up on the day of Pentecost. Israel had always been known as the *edhah* or *qahal*. These terms in Hebrew roughly approximate with the term *ecclesia* (church) in the New Testament. They have to do with :

- (i) the community as a whole being the people of God, and
- (ii) the people coming together for what we might called 'gathered worship' in the great festivals which celebrated God's deeds amongst them in their history. This included the sanctification of the tabernacle and the first and second temples. Thus Stephen talks about Israel as 'the congregation [*ecclesia*] in the wilderness' (Acts 7:38).

The physical reality on the day of Pentecost was that the new community showed its immediate love in extraordinary relationships, caring for the widows and the poor, selling possessions in order to have a daily distribution of food and necessities. Most touched was the wonderful unity, and the family-nature of the community's living. In history Christians, reading these events, have been moved to develop communities, but the first community (*ecclesia, koinonia*) lived in the society of their days and were not monastic or separated from their fellow human beings. Families constituted that one community and were strengthened by being in the community as the community was also strengthened by its constituent families.

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<sup>144</sup> We need to see here that marriage is always with a view to fruitfulness and other elements of the vocational mandate of Genesis 1:28f. 'Be fruitful and multiply' was the order. Jesus taught fruitfulness to his disciples in John chapter 15. In Romans 7:4 Paul makes the point that believers have been married to Christ 'that we may bear fruit for God'.

<sup>145</sup> This is probably the only place in the Old Testament which says explicitly that God hates divorce. This does not mean that its statement cannot stand for the whole of the Old Testament text, which seems to say 'I love marriage'. That God loves marriage cannot be debated. Some scholars point to Deuteronomy 24:1–24 as God's permission to divorce and even to remarry. This is a tall claim and can scarcely be verified by the text itself. I suggest a reading of my little book *The Profound Mystery* (NCPI, 1995) for some commentary on this present text as well as God's love of marriage.

**CONCLUSION TO THE MATTER OF COVENANT AND  
THE RELATIONSHIPS OF GOD AND MAN**

What we have said up to this point is necessary for us to understand all matters of Divine and human relationships. It is the foundation for all human activities of vocation, marriage and the sabbath rest of God, that rest into which we enter daily in our need for serenity, peace and strength for operations.

## Comprehending the Covenant Family—2

### THE FUNCTIONAL MEMBERS CREATED FOR FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

#### *Introduction: The Family Action—Its Matter and Its Business*

In any studies on Covenant we would need to note that the three primary elements of the everlasting covenant were, (i) [the vocational command](#) (Gen. 1:28f.); (ii) [the principle of marriage](#) (Gen. 2:24; cf. Eph. 5:31–32); and (iii) [the Sabbath rest of God](#) (Gen, 2:13; Exod. 20:11).<sup>146</sup>

The early chapters of Genesis show us that Man is under the everlasting covenant and so these three elements are at the heart of it for true observing and living in the 'everlasting covenant'. All of these three elements and matters linked with them is what family is for. In his vocational action Man is covenant-partner with God in His plan. This plan is for His creation in history, bringing it to its designed goal (*telos*).

If a family does not see God's mandate as its true vocation to and in creation, but utilises vocation for itself, then it misses the joy and intention of vocation and limits its relationships with both God and Man. Likewise if a family is turned in on itself and sees itself as its own proper end, then it is no longer serving God and others. If it sees marriage as a thing apart from God's plan for all humanity and it turns in on marriage as a thing in itself, then the outgoing love of marital relationships will be deadened and unfruitful. If it ignores God's Sabbath rest as something purely to do with God and not itself, then it is neglecting the one resource which can give it tranquillity, renewal in life and action.<sup>147</sup> History has seen the perversion of Sabbath-keeping in rigid sabbatarianism of the legalistic kind, but that does not mean humanity does not essentially need the Sabbath rest of God. God's Sabbath rest is shown in Matthew 11:28–30 (cf. Heb. 3:7 – 4:11) where Jesus offers this rest to the heavy laden. Sabbatarianism is of *eros* and not of *agape*; at most it becomes contractual: at worst self-centred. This goes also for legalism in vocation and in marriage.

The way we must look at things is that the family of Mankind and several families within that family are here for a purpose. The vocational mandate of Genesis 1:28f. tells what the family is created for in history. Adam was to be the father of all living, and Eve the mother of all living. When we say 'father' and 'mother' then we mean that all that we are taught is true fatherhood and motherhood. Abraham was covenanted to be 'father of a multitude of nations' (Gen. 17:1–6) and Sarah was to be 'mother of many nations' (Gen. 17:16). Israel was covenanted to be the priest nations among all nations (Exod. 19:5–6). The church of Christ was to be Christ's helpmeet to gather in all the nations of the earth into one so that the family of the Father might be completed.

What we have seen is that if the family ever becomes the goal of the family, then it will atrophy because it will be selfish, *eros* will be its mode of love and it will have the 'Us-They' or the 'I-It' relationship with God and the world. Innate in 'the family for itself' are the old Greek and Chinese singular views that their nations had different origins, that they were not of the same source as other nations. Kipling spoke sardonically of the arrogant British view of 'the lesser breeds without the law'. We see this arrogant nationalism where nations clash today for territory and name. Likewise we saw the same haughty principle in Hitler's 'pure Aryan race' heresy. It was this iron-bound nationalism keeping the nations—the families—apart that Christ came to destroy. The New Testament speaks of the reconciliation of all people

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<sup>146</sup> See *Love's Most Glorious Covenant* (op. cit..) or expanded material on this theme.

<sup>147</sup> This study is not the place to expound the biblical view of Sabbath-keeping. This has been done in my *Love's Most Glorious Covenant*, pp. 47–52. Vocation and Marriage are also dealt with regarding their working principles and their culmination in the eschaton, the final age.

through the breaking down of the wall of partition between Jews and Gentiles, so that the true Family is 'all one in Christ Jesus'. This is a powerful and persistent theme in the New Testament.<sup>148</sup>

In passing we should note that to come back into covenantal relationship with God is to have restored to us the beauty and the joy of authentic relationships. We cannot compute the relief we have from the guilt that is innate in us all when we are 'for ourselves' and against 'the others'. My name for it is 'ontological guilt' because it goes against what is essentially the nature of God, Man and the creation. Now, in Christ, Divine relationships can be—and are—worked out by the renewed human family on the level of this world. Of course they are not perfect, but the day of their perfection is coming.

### **ICONS, ARCHETYPES AND ECTYPES OF FAMILIAL MEMBERS**

We should first establish the principle that because all creation is under the eternal covenant, that all relationships are covenantal. That is, they stem from the God Who is Covenant within Himself, the members living in *agape* love, coinhering one another, being *for* all others, other-Persons centred within the Trinity and thus in all creation. When we speak about icons, we mean images, the way we image (imagine) other persons and things. Archetypes are the essential (ontological) types from which derive ectypes, that is, the copies of the archetype. Thus God is the archetypal Father, and human fathers are the ectypes. In another sense Adam, Abraham and Christ are human archetypes from which other humans derive their ectypal nature.

Many of us will know that often the icons we have, come from the system in which we have been enculturated. They are more of culture than they are of the enlightenment by the Holy Spirit of the true word of God. Also they are strongly entrenched. We may not think consciously in terms of 'archetypes' and 'ectypes' yet the truth is they are there. As I have said elsewhere, we should be humbled under the Almighty hand of God and let the Spirit enlighten us as to them, and their eternal reality.

#### **The Archetypal Members of the Trinity**

God is the first Member of the Trinity because He is Father of the Son, and He is this in creation because He created all as His offspring (Acts 17:28). The Son is the archetypal Son under and with the Father because he is eternally generated from Him. He then becomes the archetypal Son from which humanity becomes ectypally filial. The Holy Spirit is the archetypal Spirit of family, by which families are ectypally formed. Ectypes cannot form themselves; they are derived from the archetypes. They are dynamically created. Whilst living in covenant and thus in *agape* they are effective. When they live apart from covenant and so in *eros* they are not properly effective. Ectypes derive their living, operative beings and power from the archetype. It is not that human members of God's Covenant simply imitate Him, but that the power of these true relationships flows into members of the human race from God that they be true husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, parents and children, families and nations living together as members of the father's true Family. All of this constitutes true human living.

The kind of statement we have just made above may seem lofty and detached from our everyday living. This is not so. At the heart of creation these archetypes are personal and Divine, and their ectypes human and functional. We need to hear them, come to know them, and then heed them.

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<sup>148</sup> See, for example, I Corinthians 12:13–14; Galatians 3:28–29; Colossians 3:11; cf. John 17:11, 21. Most important is Ephesians 2:11–15.

### ***Transforming All Icons: The Dynamics, Tyranny and Transformation of the Icons***

In time we come to see that we live life and work its actions by the icons we have within us—our ways of seeing God, persons and things. Whenever we think and act it is by our perception of these icons: they determine our choices, unless we can stand even against such icons. Were we born wholly Edenic then we would have exactly the icons that our first parents, in innocency possessed. That is, we would see God as He really is, as love. All actions of God would be seen in love. The Fall changed that. Henceforth humanity could only see God through the eyes of their guilt, through the ruling of their consciences. That, we assumed, was how Cain saw God and his ilk, thereafter. Abel saw him through the eyes of faith and had a different icon of God. Cain's self-icon would have been vastly different from Abel's. Cain had no confidence in God and henceforth in himself. So all who are born into this world appear to arrive with an icon more or less firmly settled. The icon of God and one's self-icon determine one's approach to God, humanity and creation. It seems that nothing can radically change these icons. *Only God's revelation of Himself can!* That revelation has to come through Christ, 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known'. In I John 4:9–10 the Apostle says that God reveals Himself as love, 'In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation [propitiation] for our sins.' Only when we see, by the power of the Spirit working in us, the enormous and high cost of love as it works through the propitiation of Man's sins by Christ's death on the Cross, is our view of God radically changed. Our icon—of a distant, perfectionist and demanding Deity Who judges all and consigns the failures to terrible punishment—is suddenly and radically changed. We now see Him as love, as the loving One, as our Father, as the only one who cares for us intimately, and liberates us from all bondages by His lavish grace. We ourselves are warmed within ourselves and we find that our own self-icon changes as radically as the God-icon has changed.

Then it is that all icons change, icons of parents, of husband and wife, of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of human beings, of creation. This is because we have become new creations, ourselves. Our thinking has changed because icons are no longer fixed after the old mode, and they no longer determine our attitudes as formerly, but a transformation has taken place. If this transformation has not taken place then there will be little joy in what we are about to see under the heading just below, 'The Relational Members of the Human Family'.

## **THE RELATIONAL MEMBERS OF THE HUMAN FAMILY AND FAMILIES**

### **The Father, Divine and Human**

All that is said of God—that He is covenant Father, all families in heaven and earth get their name (derive) from Him; He is above all things, through all things and in all things—provides for the human fatherhood what is required for its substantial office and task. Adam the primal and primary father was given Eve to be mother of all living. She was not created parallel with him but from him and so is the helpmeet as the wife of her husband and the mother of their children. Christ is the Son who brings human beings—male and female—to the Father, and they become sons of God—as humans—and have filial relationship with Him and the goal of being fully formed sons of God. Every father derives his character and life-power from the Eternal Father. Every son likewise has his being in the Father.

### ***The Son, Divine and Human***

What we have said above tells us that the Son is generated eternally from the Father. He is the true, archetypal Son. Only he truly knows the Father (Matt. 11:27; John 1:18; John 14:6). He comes into the world to show the Father. Knowing him and the Father means life eternal (John 17:3). Thus we become sons of the Father in the Son (Gal. 4:1–7; John 1:12–13). We are also aided by the Holy Spirit who is called 'the Spirit of his Son'. He brings the sense and assurance that we are truly sons of God. This is a most dynamic reality for it means communion with God as Father. Beings sons means being in God's family and helps us to be more sons of our parents. We take our place in our human families. Christ told stories about sons and fathers which are powerful in describing the relational dynamics which exist—sometimes for good, sometimes for sorrow—between fathers and sons (Luke 15:11–32; Matt. 21:28–32).

### ***The Son is the Archetypal Brother***

Not until he was ascending did Jesus speak of others as his brethren, 'I am ascending to your God and to my God, to your Father and to my Father'. He told Mary Magdalene to tell this to his *brethren* (John 20:17; Matt. 27:10). Hebrews 2:10–17 shows that through the Cross many sons were drawn into glory, and that he was the brother of all that were, for he and they were 'all of one origin'— 'of one Father' (Heb. 2:11–12; cf. Ps. 22:22). Note the word spoken about the Son in Isaiah 9:6, 'a son . . . the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father'. The Son is the one who carries the nature of the Father in both his Sonship and his Brotherhood.

Brotherhood in a family was a serious matter. Being the elder brother meant that one was next to the father, had responsibility to watch over the family in the absence of the father, and care for the family. Because he was the first-born he received a double portion of the family inheritance. Christ's brotherhood is of far reaching power and value. A lack-lustre brother is not the true guardian of his brothers and sisters and does not aid in their growing to maturity.

Again, the matter of 'brotherly love' is a strong theme of the Old and New Testaments. To hate a brother is a matter of spiritual and personal darkness in living. It is to be as a murderer. To love the brother and care for him is to be a true lover of the father of the family.

### ***The Woman—Mother, Wife, Sister***

As Adam was first the husband of Eve, she was the human archetype of all wives. As Adam was the father of all living, so Eve was the mother of all living. She was to be fruitful in accordance with the creational mandate of Genesis 1:28f. and she was also to bring forth the seed which would crush Satan (Gen 3:15). The figure of the woman is a strong one in every way, as is seen in Eve, in Sarah, and has become in Israel the figure of the wife of God. In the New Testament she is the church, the wife of Christ, and the Woman of Revelation 12 who brings forth the male son (Christ) who is the Seed that destroys the ancient serpent of Eden, Satan the red dragon. She is the true Jerusalem above, the mother of us all. She is the true Woman as against the false (imitation) woman, Babylon the mother of harlots. The true Bride of Christ is pure 'the mother of true women'. So all women are of this ilk and ethos, and show their femininity in the family as mothers, wives, sisters, aunties, etc. The woman as helpmeet aids Christ in his ministry as Lord over all. Like Eve in the original intention of God she is the queen of creation, to God's new Adam, Christ, the King of all creation.

### ***The Spirit of the Family—the Holy Spirit***

The Spirit is the Spirit of the Father and the Spirit of the Son. He is the Spirit of love (Rom. 5:5; 15:30, *agape*). He is the Spirit of Covenant. He glorifies the Father and the Son

(John 16:14, 15). He is the Spirit of unity, fellowship, worship and prayer and so is the Spirit of family. No one comes to the Son except the Father draw him. No one knows the Father except through the Son. No one knows the Son and the Father except through revelation by the Spirit. Thus the Spirit brings the family together in unity as at Pentecost, Samaria, Caesarea and Ephesus. The human 'spirit of the family' which is required for all families is the ectype of the archetypal Spirit.

The day of Pentecost shows the Spirit at work generating this new family, the Church. The unity and love of this family is unique in human annals. The ministry of the Spirit is spread across the family in the use of ministries, workings and gifts (I Cor. 12:4–13). This is why the Holy Spirit needs to fill out human families and members of the families.

### **The Family Together**

Some of us used to sing a song:

We are heirs of the Father,  
We are joint heirs with the Son,  
We are children of the Kingdom,  
We are family, we are one.

This brings us to the fact that God created all humans beings to be His sons (Acts 17:28). This was under His eternal covenant, hence 'You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers' (Acts 3:25). This principle is born out in Isaiah 43:1–7. All the children were to be as His only Son, whom we call Jesus (Rom. 8:28–30). Before time He predestined His elect into this family (Eph. 1:5). Because He is essentially Father He will have His family. He will have the Bride for His Son, the same community as the Family. The sons will be conquerors and inherit the new heavens and the new earth (Rev. 21:7). The 'liberty of the glory of the children of God' tells us what it will be to be in the ultimate Family of God. Here that experience can at least be reflected in godly families. 'This liberty of the glory' is spoken of by John as the family going to the many mansions of their Heavenly and Eternal Father, or as spoken of by Paul the things 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived'. Jesus told the dying and repentant thief, 'This day shalt thou be me with in Paradise', that is, 'in a Garden'. Back to the garden, and on to the Garden God has prepared for them that love Him—the true Family.

### **THE PRESENT FAMILY ON EARTH**

Having mustered up all the icons, archetypes and ectypes we can, and having seen the paradigms and sources of each member of a family such as father, mother, children, brothers, sisters, grandparents, uncles and aunts, we are faced with the fact of the family in its contemporary setting. We think, continually of the way we should be going about 'family'. Much that is valuable has been said in the Scriptures, in the Old and New Testaments. All of this we cannot include in this small Study.

In the time of the patriarchs we see the ways of families. Small nuclear families scarcely existed. Most families were what we know as 'extended', taking in all relations, often living together, and being a good context in which children were born, grew and matured. Reverence for ancestors was instilled in the child, and the older categories of great-grandparents, and grandparents gave wisdom to the family-community. 'Honour your father and your mother', meant that conflicts with parents were not normal practice. An incorrigibly rebellious child could be stoned by the community as a menace to that society. Honouring of parents both in the Old and New Testaments has its own inbuilt reward of longer, more healthy life. The Wisdom books enjoined familial obedience in ways of healthy commonsense.

There were roles for the various members of the family which ensured the discipline and development of members was shared by all. It also ensured that all had vocation by which to live.

The matter of chastity in children and the young unmarried was enjoined and guarded. The primal marriage was a paradigm. There was no 'leasehold marriage', no *de facto* marital relationships. All was *de jure* since marriage was a societal matter. This ensured a good 'cleaving' was accomplished because chastity was preserved, and this was an excellent foundation for long married life. Israel had its many protective injunctions for the sexual and social life of the community. The Ten Commandments were—and are—peerless in respect to these and the Holiness Code was unique amongst all tribes and communities. Each aspect of community life was preserved and strengthened by all other factors which had been enjoined. This principle seems common to both Old and New Testaments. From the day of Pentecost the Christian community had its societal and ethical practices because it drew upon the way of life of Israel. Whilst it was not a matter of regulations, the new community lived by the dynamics of *agape* and covenant, with the law of God—the law of love—written on the inner being.

As we have seen true marriage was covenantal and was the figure of God and His people, Christ and his church. All relationships in marriage and families were covenantal from the oldest to the youngest—that is, love relationships based on faith and trust.

The husband was to take the role of leadership<sup>149</sup> in the vocation of the married couple, and the wife was to be the helpmeet, so that only as being one together would the marriage proceed. The husband would be the father in the family with his role recognised, the mother's role also recognised and the children while being subject to the parents lived in security. Young women, and even young men, did not leave the family to do for themselves. The present 'liberty' of young people was unknown and yet it is doubtful how much genuine freedom has come from the present changes. At the point of marriage the new husband would leave his parents and cling to his wife. All children had graded responsibility within the family-community. One interesting window—one among many others—into the life of the Christian community can be seen in I Timothy 5:1–22, part of which we include here (vv. 1–8).

Do not rebuke an older man but exhort him as you would a father; treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are real widows. If a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn their religious duty to their own family and make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. She who is a real widow, and is left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day; whereas she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command this, so that they may be without reproach. If any one does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his own family, he has disowned the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

We have only given the merest sketch of family life but it is enough to show that even in a world which has its sin and tragedy, godly family life can be an environment in which it is pleasing to live. We have not sketched the family situation as it is given in Romans 1:28–32 and which is a dreadful travesty of true family life. Families are not perfect but the resources are there to use and the persistence of members of the family can accomplish remarkable results, no matter what the society. We remind ourselves that the use of the icons, paradigms and godly resources is imperative if the family is to live, secure itself and produce genuine fruit in any society in which we live.

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<sup>149</sup> We recognise that when we speak of roles it would seem that all members of a family were locked into a responsibility which hindered the personal freedom of those members. This was not how it was supposed to be or seen to be. Modern ideas of personal liberty have yet to be vindicated, and the rejection of roles—as such—have not improved the lot of families. The so-called 'sexual freedom' is sowing an horrific tornado for modern society.

## **ESCHATOLOGICAL AND HEAVENLY FAMILY**

We have seen in Isaiah 43:1–6 and many other places that the prophet speaks of God creating the world and creating His children for His own glory, but this means, too, that He has created them for their glory. Their glory glorifies Him. Obviously their glory is that they are children of the living God, children of the Father. When we speak of 'the eschatological and heavenly Father', we are speaking of the family God is presently forming which is the family of the last days, in contradistinction to the family of former times—the times of the patriarchs and Israel. It is bound to be different, or extended from what it was because of the incarnation, the person and work of Christ which are his incarnation, ministry, the Cross, Resurrection, Ascension, Reigning and the movement in history towards his coming again. Just as there is no true family without the Father, so there is none without the Son and the Elder brother, without the Husband from whom is created the Bride by the Father. All that is Christ makes the family after Pentecost so much more family than before it. Because this process of maturity is enhanced and accelerated in the last times—Christ giving all that he has all the time to his Bride, so the prospect of the completed church—the heavenly one—gives the great dynamic of hope to strengthen the church amidst its battle with secularity, the opposition of evil, and the attempts to obtain human righteousness apart from Christ, apart from the church.

Another mark of the church in the eschaton is its understanding of its own frailty and the relational contradictions it experiences within its community. Seen from a world-wide perspective the members of the church are counted in increasing millions. We are warned against trying to assess the faith or otherwise of all those within its visibility. Any endeavour to purify the church which does not stem from Christ himself, who is Lord of the church must be resisted and abandoned. At the same time the visible reality of the millions may give us a false sense of security. The church only exists and lives by continuous grace.

It is the fallibility of the members of the church which often troubles us. This is partly because the power of Christ is working discontent at that which is less than perfect, but sometimes it is a perfectionism which dogs us like a dark shadow. Instead of glorying in the grace which keeps us, we want a family without flaws. It is then we are in danger of idolatry. The very nearness of the time of climax and completion gives us sensitivity to the church's responsibility in the world to bring all into the wonderful family of God. We want all to share the being of Christ and the relationships of the Holy Family, of the Trinity in which we are submerged. Humility will keep us as does nothing else.

Forenotes, foreviews and foretastes of the heavenly church are given to us in the sacred text all the way from Eden to the final and most beautiful form of the Holy City, the Holy Paradise prepared for the church as God's lovely mansions for His beloved family. In Revelation chapter 7 we find this multitude such as no man can number and it is formed out of every tribe and people and nation and tongue, and it is adoring the God and Father of us all along with the Lamb who was slain for it. The Lamb is then shown as the Good Shepherd who leads his sheep in good pastures and to the springs of living water, where nothing shall harm or hurt them. We see them also alive with joy because they have been called to the Marriage Supper of the Bride and the Lamb. They share in the thundering of the Hallelujah Chorus, but then the Chorus grows into the New Song, firstly sung by the 144,000 on Mount Sion, but then by all, by the whole family of God in heaven and on earth, because they stand before the Father and His Son, the Lamb, and it is all music; it is all singing and it is all glory.

This family is at one with the Father and the Lamb, for their Names are inscribed on the foreheads of the Family members. In delight we ask, 'Where is there any other family like unto this Family, any father like unto its Father, any son and elder brother like unto its Son and Elder Brother?' This is the unique Family to which God has ever been drawing His elect children. This is what is 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God' and it is greatly to be prized and sought, and it is that which strengthens hope, enlarges hope and expands our

experience of the Divine love. Faulty our present experience of family may be seen to be, but it is only for a moment, and will be more than swallowed up and forgotten in the reality of the heavenly Family which will dwell on earth and reign in it, for ever.

### **CONCLUSION: WE HAVE ALL THE COVENANT, TRUE LOVE, MEMBERS, MATERIALS, ICONS FOR FULL HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS**

We cannot compute the immense work of the Triune God in human relationships, not only through creation, but also through the regeneration which comes through redemption. God's Fatherhood is 'above all, and through all, and in all', and so families are brought into being and wholly Fathered by Him. Fathers are supplied with fatherhood. Likewise we are sons through the Son, and we ever draw on his supplies to be sons in the face of those who hate fathers and have abandoned their families. The Spirit of sonship, brotherhood and familyhood is present to bring the sense of family where it has been deficient. Christ as Husband and Brother fills up these relationships, and the Church as mother and wife and sister fills up these equivalent relationships.

We may buy manuals on human relationships, but unless they have the biblical understanding of relationships they will not be of major benefit. We can share our experiences of Divine and human relationships and help one another. When we know God's covenant, and when we are flooded with His love, then we can go to those passages in Scripture—and there are many—which help us to know how to act. We have already suggested that God as Father, the Son as Son, the Spirit as family Spirit, the true Man as Bridegroom—Christ, the true Eve, his bride, can all help us in the particular relationships in which they are involved. The mystery of marriage, the true courtship and the bliss of union and communion, as also the practices of married life, being husband and wife, being parents, being children, all come from our union and communion with the Godhead. The Old and New Testaments are filled with guiding principles and rules for all relational living and we should try to learn these.

One thing we must keep in mind, namely that everything needful for human relationships is already in the Divine and *all this has been given to us*. We have been blessed with the whole of spiritual blessing and He has given us all things that pertain to life and godliness. We are not earners, fillers of ourselves as though each is an empty receptacle, but participators in what has been given to us—'All things are yours'. Thus, we can go straight to covenantal, agapitic relationships and these will be alive and well and active as we live in the Father, in the Son and in the Holy Spirit. Doubtless we will have many failures, but grace releases us from these, deals with all guilts and renews us in love. This is the love—God-sourced and God-given—which bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things. Good health, then, to Divine *agape* working in the family of God.

There can be no 'death of the family' for then it would mean the Trinity is really dead, and the human race is reserved for unspeakable horror. In fact it is set for unspeakable joy and glory.

*G. Bingham, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1999.*