



**New Creation Teaching Ministry**

**1996 PASTOR'S MONDAY STUDY GROUP NOTES**

**1996 Study Titles**

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# The Giving of God: God the Giver

## INTRODUCTION: THE GIVING OF GOD

In this year of 1996 I propose to take up the theme under the same heading as LFS 3, *The Giver, the Gifts and the Giving* (NCPI, 1976). My reason for doing so is the fact that worship, which contains both praise and thanksgiving, is based on the nature of God. This is the preoccupation of all celestial creatures and of created terrestrial things, and ought to be the preoccupation of all mortals, but this is not always the case. He is worthy to be praised, honoured and blessed. Giving to God in worship and service does not mean anything is added to God, but that what he is, is recognised, acknowledged and applauded, and the adoring spirit of the worshipper is edified. Thus the creature itself and himself is lifted to the heights of communion. Of rebellious Man it was said, 'He did not honour God, neither was thankful'. Thankfulness, gratitude and thanksgiving elevate Man to his highest level of experience.

The simple hymn lines which say, 'Count your blessings, name them one by one, and it will surprise you what the Lord has done', teach us that recognition of God's gifts edifies us. Yet it is not possible for us to quantify or enumerate these gifts. What enriches us is the recognition of the giving heart of God. In this first study we will simply seek to see the nature of God as Giver. Our motive is not utilitarian, but the fact is that knowing the nature of God as Giver will bring rich dividends, such as 'taking no thought for the morrow', confidence that our needs will be supplied, that the measure of God's giving is 'commensurate with his riches in glory'—and so on. This will mean a lack of worry on our part, and the settling of gratitude in our hearts. This seems to be the primary message of the Sermon on the Mount. It will also teach us the principle Paul gave to the Philippian church, 'I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound; in any and all circumstances I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and want'. Surely he was saying that God knows best how to give to a person, that God's giving is not willy-nilly, but that he knows the way of giving according to the person's needs, exclusive of what the person wants.

This present study will seek to cover the fact of God as the Giver, and the following studies to cover Creation as the Receiver—including Man as a special receiver—and then the nature of the gifts which we might roughly call 'natural' and 'supernatural', or 'creational' and 'spiritual'.

### A Purpose to Our Series on 'The Giver, the Gifts and the Giving'

Man, living in selfishness—often denying his gifts are from God, or demeaning those gifts and thus demeaning himself, misusing and abusing them, denying the love that would give him the use of gifts where he needs such use, and so making him without true purpose and so without true hope in life—needs to see what we have so briefly stated, that 'Every good giving and every perfect gift is . . . from the Father of lights'. If we add to this that God 'gives to all men generously and without reproaching', and 'everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected', for God 'richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy',<sup>1</sup> then to oppose what is the ontological reality of God's giving nature is to have a burden on one's conscience. The refusal to respond to Divine giving, and the Divine expectation of our giving to others, as well as thanksgiving to him—God—means that we have a key into some of the existential misery of Man, to say nothing of our own when we act in like manner. The purpose, then, of our series on the matter of giving is for us to see afresh, and even in a fuller

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<sup>1</sup> James 1:5, 17; 1 Tim. 4:4; 6:17.

way than ever, the amazing nature of the God who withholds not his only Son but offers him up freely for us all. With Paul, we exclaim, 'will he not also give us all things with him?' Learning of life and having the spirit of receiving and giving makes us better able to have pastoral ministry to others.

### A Difficulty in Communication

Many times we have noted that, whilst we may seek to communicate a truth, nothing can be successfully communicated where there is not willing hearing. What we have to see is that Man—humanity as a whole—is creaturely. That is, Man is wholly dependent upon God for his being, and every part of his living. As Paul put it to the Athenians, 'The God who made the world and everything in it, being Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything, since *he himself gives to all men life and breath everything*'. Under the Christian doctrine of providence or preservation we see that 'all flesh is but grass' and is wholly dependent upon God for its continuing existence. This is what fallen Man is not prepared to admit or accept. Hence his delusion that he, unaided, hunts, cultivates, manufactures and creates that which will keep him alive. He generally believes that he can—given the time—conquer most diseases. He admits he cannot conquer death, but rationalises this in the way that it is part of life and as such inevitable. He has not wholly given up on trying to conquer this. Humanism has been with the human race since the primal couple's fall in the Garden.

We have a difficulty, also, in communicating our theme to some people who believe in God and know that he has made a covenant with Man. The difficulty here is that many believers consider God's gifts—and giving—to be contractual. That this is not so is shown clearly from Matthew 5:43–48. Supportive of this is Psalm 104. God is seen by some as giving, but on certain terms, which, if they are not observed will close God's hand. God's statements about judgments for covenant—law—breakers are not the punitive part of a contract. Such judgments are for those who abuse the free giving of God. If, to begin with, we think all giving of God is contractual, then we never really see him as pure Giver, and his work of grace is likewise interpreted as conditional. He who receives contractually also gives contractually.

Perhaps the greatest practical difficulty in communicating the idea of Divine pure giving and human true giving, is that in most cultures such giving is almost wholly unknown. Often there is elaborate giving, but it is done on the principle of *quid pro quo*. This is serious business. To receive and not to give back at least the equivalent is to deceive the first giver. It is understood that all giving is in the nature of a bribe, however disguised this may appear to be. Many cultures do not have the term 'thank you', and the Western ways of giving which have sprung from the gospel are looked upon with great suspicion. In the West children have always been taught to say, 'Thank you', for no child has ever said that naturally. Thus most cultures understand their gifts and sacrifices to deities as bribes of sorts. It was this sort of approach to gifts and sacrifices against which the prophets in Israel warned.<sup>2</sup> It is this sort of view that many have in mind in their strong objection to the substitutionary atonement as set forth in the New Testament.

We ought also include the fact that only God gives. The idols cannot give. Thanksgiving to an idol is a hollow mockery, and it conditions the worshipper cynically. He may be held by superstition and fear but eventually the idol will be exposed. Giving is at the heart of God, for he loves his creation. The cynicism found in people outside the hearing of the gospel explains why they find it so difficult to believe in the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In passing we may consider how different is the concept of giving and thanksgiving to those caught in pagan cultures. It helps us to understand their suspicion of a God who gives and does not take bribes.

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<sup>2</sup> There is an excellent article by C. W. Emmet in the one volume *Dictionary of the Bible* (2nd. ed., T. & T. Clarke, 1963) pp. 329–330.

## GOD IS THE GIVER

Whatever we discover and come to know about God is truth which can help us to understand Man as God created him. Man, being in the image of God, certainly reflects the nature of God. God alone can radiate himself, but man can reflect him. To discover that God is by nature the perfect Giver is for Man to realise that giving is an essential part, also, of his own humanity. Fallen Man is not exempted from the *knowledge* of giving, even though his acts of giving may be imperfect. It was to such human beings that Jesus said, 'If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children . . .' 'Good gifts' here must mean 'gifts that are good for children' as against gifts that are not. One easily gathers from a general reading of the Scriptures that God gives. Even so, since giving is an uncertain kind of exercise in human experience, we need to discover the kind of giving it is that belongs to God.

James stated, 'Every good endowment and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change'. The lights of whom God is Father are, seemingly, those of the heavens—the sun and the moon and the stars. These, by their movements, cast shadows and their light waxes and wanes. Not so with God: his giving is perfect and without false motivation. He never seeks to bribe Man. Human motivations for giving are often questionable. James is claiming that the acts of giving—endowments—and the actual gifts are both perfect. This is not the way all human beings see the gifts of God. To many theologians human giving is an analogy of God's giving, and since analogies originate at the human level, they cannot convey God's perfection. The analogy of faith is the only valid analogy that can be used because of God's revelation of himself, within what is called 'the mystery of God'.

### The Godhead: the Fountain That Flows and Overflows

The aggregation of many Scriptures which state the fact of God as Giver may be of certain value, but they may just be taken as statistical. Since it is given to those who believe to penetrate and live within the 'mystery of God', then it is there we need to start. The equivalent of living in God through the revelation of himself by his word, his Son and his Spirit is the unveiling of his glory. Stephen said, 'The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham when he was in Mesopotamia before he lived in Haran'.<sup>3</sup> God gave a revelation of himself to Abraham and he came to know God. In the New Testament John claimed of the apostles—and perhaps others, too—'We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'. Our simple point is that God has always been revealing himself, and certainly from our vantage point in history we can see God as the Triune One, maintaining that he has always been such, but that without the revelation of his glory we could not know that Godhead.

### The Giving of the Three Persons: The Giving of God

According to one reckoning we can speak about the internal giving of the Persons (*ad intra*) and the external giving (*ad extra*). The eternal generation of the Son by the Father really speaks of *God giving wholly to his Son*. So the Son incarnate speaks of 'the glory which I had with thee before the world was made', and adds, 'my glory which thou hast given me in thy love for me before the foundation of the world.'<sup>4</sup> In John chapter 17 Jesus fourteen times uses the verb 'to give', and eleven of these refer to what God has given him and three to his own passing on the gifts to his disciples. Most, if not all, seems to have been given to him 'before the foundation of the world'. The fact that the Father loved him before creation says it all. 'To

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<sup>3</sup> In Romans 9:4 'the glory' is nominated as a gift, but at this point we will not be treating it as such. In a later study we will take up the matter of 'the glory' as a gift of God which is innate in his 'everlasting covenant'.

<sup>4</sup> John 17:5; 24.

love is to give': biblically this is an immutable axiom. In Colossians 1:13 he is called 'the Son of his (the Father's) love.'

Our view of the Son's giving to the Father *ad intra* is not from explicit references, so much as recognising his filial obedience. This is seen in his work in creation as 'the Word' (John 1:1–3; Heb. 1:2; Col. 1:15–17; cf. I Cor. 8:6). Likewise the 'Spirit of life' gives of himself in that same creation, creation being a Triune work. The Three Persons incohering in their intrasubjectivity constantly act in the *perichoresis*. As One they give to each other.

Some theologians see *ad intra* as a fountain flowing over and expressing itself as *ad extra*, so that when it is said that 'the Father loves the Son and has given all things into his hand' (John 3:35; cf. Matt. 11:27), then the giving may not be so much *in* the incarnation as *for* it, and so prior to it. We refer to the special passage of John 5:19–38.

Jesus said to them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of his own accord, but only what he sees the Father doing; for whatever he does, that the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that you may marvel. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. Truly, truly, I say to you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment'.

Some elements here are nominated as in the world, that is at the time of his incarnation, 'in the days of his flesh'. The glorifying of the Son spoken of often in John's Gospel, and in the Synoptics at the baptism and the transfiguration, are the Father giving glory to his Son, and yet the Son's desire and endeavour is to glorify the Father. Glorifying is giving. Thus when the Spirit does not glorify himself but the Father and the Son (John 16:12–15), then the Spirit is giving. The Father's glory raises Jesus, but so also does 'the Spirit of holiness', by whom the Son offered himself at the Cross.

We shall have occasion, later, to advert to this giving–receiving action of the Three Persons, but we have said sufficient to show that in himself God is by nature *the Giver*. He is the fountain of all giving. We now have the basis for looking at God's giving to Man and creation.

## GOD GIVES TO MAN AND CREATION

The first of the gifts God gives to Man is *creation*, that is,

- (i) life to Man to be Man, and
- (ii) life to all creation from which Man draws his sustenance to go on living. By the breath of God's mouth all things were created, and should he withdraw this breath all things will perish. 'He gives to all men life and breath and everything'. He 'breathed into [man] the breath of life; and man became a living being [soul]'. The same breath sustained all sentient creatures but—unlike Man—they were living animals and not 'living souls'.<sup>5</sup>

Because, later, we are enlarging on the gift of creation—a gift wholly non-contractual—we will simply see it here as embracing all creatures for all time, and not excepting the non-creatural. What we want to indicate for this moment is that Man, made in the image of God, will have the indispensable propensity to receive and to give. Selfish Man does not so much receive as take, and give so much as withhold or bargain for a return when giving. 'If you being evil know how to give good gifts

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<sup>5</sup> This is not to suggest Man is not an animal, but he is not only animal, but is a creature with a soul, with the gift of intelligence and personal identity.

to your children', does not mean that this kind of giving always obtains, and in any case 'your children' may well be a part of an ego-system.

### **The Scope or Expanse of Creational Gifts**

Genesis 1:28 is the mandate God gave Man for his place and work in creation: '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'. God then went on to say, 'Behold, *I have given you . . .*' Then follows the list of what has been given to man for food and for use, as also for ruling, that all things might benefit from Man's stewardship; a point we will expand in our next study.

I Peter 4:19 advises us that we can 'entrust [our] souls to a faithful Creator', that is, that he will not act falsely within the creation he has established. Following the Fall humanity deteriorated into such corruption and violence that it was said of him that, 'every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually', and even though God judged the whole race by means of the Flood, he established that covenant which had been for all mankind and which was, so to speak, reiterated for the whole creation 'with you and your descendants after you, and with every living creature of all flesh that is upon the earth'. So then, 'While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease'. Thus God is the 'faithful Creator', always giving his gifts. In the Psalms of Israel, Man with all creation, including sentient and non-sentient elements, are called upon to give worship and thanksgiving to God. In some Psalms it is clear that this is what they are doing. Having received they now give. 'Thanksgiving' presupposes God's giving. We can say that through creation and the covenant of God there is an ontological pressure upon all things to be thankful for the gifts given, and we suppose this a powerful proof of the fact of the gifts. We are also stimulated to see Paul's statement is true; 'The gifts and the calling of God are without recall'. However much Man and rebellious celestial creatures may abuse and misuse the gifts they are not recalled.

### **God Redeems Man and Creation**

Our following Pastors' Study (No 2), *The Gift of Creation*, will explore more widely the nature of gifts which Man, as created, possesses and uses in both good and evil ways. Since we are formulating a bird's-eye view of God's giving, from Creation itself and through to the New Creation, we will not here enter into the particulars of God's redemption of Creation. This, of course, includes the redemption of sinful Man, but often our theology has led us to think that Man is primary, and that God has little thought for the creation which, for some, is merely as a backdrop to Man's being and his saga of history. How deficient is that Man-centred view! If we see creation was born in and with the covenant of God, and that it-creation and the covenant of God together-pertained not only to Man but to all creatures and the whole of the elements of creation, then we can see that God's plan of redemption, formulated even before the creation was brought into view, must in some way be inherent in his covenant. Then, also, we can see something of the meaning of 'God so loved the world' Whilst Genesis speaks of the ground being cursed for Man's sake, it does not state explicitly that there was any *moral* curse on the earth. The *effects* of the curse were on Man. Romans 1:18-32 speaks of Man's rebellion against God and the futility into which he delivered himself. Romans 8:18-25 speaks of the creation being subjected to futility (vanity, emptiness) and that with the glorification of Man, the creation will be freed from its bondage to corruption and participate in 'the glorious liberty of the children of God'. Thus we see God's love for the whole of creation: he is redeeming the gift of creation, freeing it from elements resulting from the fall of Man.

## GOD'S POWERFUL GIFTS IN REDEMPTION

By listening to Christ's words about his relationship with the Father and the Spirit we can gather much of the *ad intra* relationships—the inter–personal giving, receiving, honouring and serving of the Three Persons. Probably we will never probe the depths even of that which is written for us, and then these will have to be known in living within the mystery. Clearly revealed to us are the gifts God gives for human redemption. All are contained within the gift of his love. As Father he gives his Son, delivering him up for the sins of the world. John 3:16 and I John 3:16 are the classic references to this. He gives all things pertaining to salvation into the hands of his Son.<sup>6</sup> For example, he gives him honour at his baptism and transfiguration. He gives him glory and he gives authority in regard to forgiveness and the Sabbath. He gives him the Holy Spirit to help him fully enact the Fatherly will. He gives him a body which is to prove the perfect sacrifice. He gives him the gift of a unique priesthood. From the passage of John 5:19–29 we can see what powerful matters God has given into the hands of his Son.

### The Gifts Which are the Fruit of His Redemption

The primary gift is eternal life. When Paul exclaims, 'Thanks be to God for his unspeakable gift!' he is undoubtedly speaking of Christ,<sup>7</sup> but he is also speaking of eternal life, indeed of the *charis* which has wrought these things in the atonement which includes the resurrection. In his earthly ministry Jesus was always offering eternal life to believers. At the same time the life of the Godhead alone is eternal, and God is offering repentant, believing Man participation in this life. In this sense, 'He that has the Son has [eternal] life'.

Eternal life is gained through the gifts of faith, repentance and conversion. Each of these is designated as a gift. With their exercise come forgiveness, purification, regeneration, sonship (adoption) and sanctification. All of salvation comes gift–wise.

The body which the Father prepared for the Son and which the Son gave for the sins of the world, now becomes the risen, reigning, ruling, proclaiming body, and in that sense 'is his body, the church'. It is this church—now his Bride—through whom he works as he brings the nations to submit to him. He gives the church his fullness. Perhaps we could say, incorporates her in himself as he works. The fullness is that of various gifts and weapons of warfare. She worships the Father in gratitude, is under the Lordship of the Son and no less the Lordship of the Holy Spirit.

### *Spiritual Gifts*

We see, too, that Christ offered a share of the spoils when he overcome the 'strong man' (Luke 11:21–23), and was possibly referring to Isaiah 53:12, 'he shall divide the spoil with the strong'. Paul uses Psalm 68:18 in Ephesians 4:8, 'When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men'.<sup>8</sup> These gifts certainly resulted from his death and resurrection, and are 'the gifts of Christ'. In Ephesians they would seem to be part of Christ's fulness (*pleroma*), all of which he gave to the church (1:23). These might be called 'ministry gifts', being 'apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers'. Some of these gifts—called *domata* in Ephesians 4:8<sup>9</sup>—are among the *charismata* of I Corinthians 12:28. The *domata-charismata* all flow from the *dorea* of Christ and can be said to constitute his fulness, so far as the church, his body, is concerned.

<sup>6</sup> When he gives all things into the hands of his Son these things are not limited to the redemption of the world.

<sup>7</sup> The word here is *dorea* and not *charisma*. In Romans 6:23 eternal life is God's *charisma*.

<sup>8</sup> Psalm 68:18 says, 'Thou didst ascend the high mount, leading captives in thy train, and receiving gifts among men, even the rebellious, that the Lord may dwell there'.

<sup>9</sup> In Ephesians 4:7 'the gift of Christ' is called *dorea*. The use of *charis* with this term leads us to think that God gives grace (*charis*) for the enabling of the members to work within the gift of Christ, and to utilise the gifts given by him.

To sum up; Christ is the gift of the Father—his unspeakable gift—and Christ wins (perhaps retrieves from the ‘strong man’ the gifts filched from Man at the Fall) the gifts which he gives to the church. These gifts—constituting the fulness of Christ—are called ‘spiritual gifts’ or ‘the spirituals’, and they are distributed in the body of Christ to all members by the agency of the Holy Spirit.<sup>10</sup> In this sense there is a Trinitarian gifting of the church. Such gifts can only be used effectively in love since all true giving is from the love of God, and the use of these gifts is intended to be the action of God’s love (I Cor. 13:1–5).

### ***Weaponry Gifts***

With the gifts of Christ are also his weapons. These come as gifts for the spiritual warfare in which all Christ’s members are involved. The idea of this armour is found in Isaiah 59 where the Warrior King intervenes (intercedes) for his people, since no one else will stand in the breach. It is a picture of Christ who now stands in the breach in intercessory prayer (intervention) and bids all put on the armour *in* him. We need not here seek to explore this set of gifts which are for those who wrestle not ‘against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places’. They are to do with the clash of two kingdoms; that of Christ and that of Satan. The weaponry of the first is spiritual, of the second it is ‘carnal’ or ‘worldly’, i.e. of Satan’s Kingdom.

### ***The Gifts for Christian Living***

Faith, hope and love are a triad of gifts which are, by nature of the case, inseparable. They are always found together, and the Christian person cannot live without them. Faith, hope and love are not abilities which one can sum up from one’s self. Each is designated, Scripturally, as a gift.

We conclude, then, that the church with its several members, is plentifully gifted, and sufficiently equipped for the ministry it shares with its Lord. It is no wonder that thanksgiving is an integral part of its life and its worship.

## **THE PROFOUND MATTER OF THANKSGIVING**

In our studies this year we will traverse this ground time and again, that is, of creation and redemptional gifts—to say nothing of the eschatological gifts and the eternal blessings. Thanksgiving is closely linked with giving. As we remember ‘they did not honour him as God or give thanks to him’ was the immediate result of Man’s rejection of God, so thanksgiving is the immediate response of those who wittingly receive great gifts from God. Under the Mosaic covenant thanksgiving was mandatory and prescribed because the Lord was their covenant God, the creator of the world and of Israel, and the Redeemer of the people once enslaved in Egypt. In the New Testament, during the few years of Jesus’ ministry, praise and thanksgiving breaks out by those who see the wonderful works of God which Jesus executes. The joy shown at the realised resurrection of Jesus, the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost, again bring praise and thanksgiving for ‘the wonderful works of God’.

Our subject that this point is not so much thanksgiving as the giving of God, but the dynamic effects of God’s giving now show themselves in the lives of the new believers:

And all who believed were together and had all things in common; and they sold their possessions and goods and distributed them to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they partook of food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Here we make the point but do not press it, that Man at creation was in possession and use of gifts which we now might think are supernatural, or, perhaps, occultic. Perhaps Christ as Jesus the man used these gifts because they were part of true, obedient humanity. These ideas appear to be speculative, but they might have substance. Satan may have filched and Christ may have restored.

<sup>11</sup> Acts 2:44–47.

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need. Thus Joseph who was surnamed by the apostles Barnabas (which means, Son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, sold a field which belonged to him, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet.<sup>12</sup>

The rest of the Book of Acts, to say nothing of the Apostolic Epistles, show us that thanksgiving towards God showed itself in giving towards others. A key thought is, 'No one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own'. Quite a remarkable statement when pondered. It reminds us of Paul's injunctions; 'Let each of you look not to his own interests but to the interests of others', and 'count others better than yourselves'. The statements are preliminary to showing this was what Christ did in his *kenosis*, his self-emptying for our sakes. This is giving at his richest, most profound action, just as the Father abandoning his Son up to the Cross is another expression of *kenosis*. The causes for thanksgiving in worship can be found in the Book of the Revelation, as also in the Gospels and Epistles, and these we may discuss at another time, but the love of God, the grace of salvation, and the restoring of Man in the image of God, as he participates in the full image and radiation of God-Jesus Christ-give us cause for thanksgiving. Thanksgiving in the forms of gratitude and doxology are many, and we close this section with a few injunctions for the same. Of course, we have just touched on the edge of the subject. What we lack here will be amply supplied by a concordance.

Always and for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father (Eph. 5:20).

Have no anxiety about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God (Phil. 4:6).

May you be . . . giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light (Col. 1:11-12).

And whatever you do, in word of deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him (Col. 3:17).

Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you (I Thess. 5:18).

### CONCLUSION: THE GIVER, THE GIFTS AND THE GIVING

If this study has any value it is as a witness to the vast subject we have undertaken for the year. In particular it witnesses to the goodness of God in his giving, and to the response it draws from that part of his creation which is grateful because it is within the mystery of God, as also the mystery of Man, and understands the nature of God and is grateful for his goodness. For us as pastors, elders and workers in the church, it may have provided a refreshing of the memory and even come as a strong reminder that, if we are lacking in thanksgiving, it is because we have grown dull in comprehending the God who is the loving, giving One. A renewal in thanksgiving will not come by direct effort in that direction, but by a renewed looking at the one who is the Giver, and in whom we need consciously to live and move and have our being, tasting his delights, being sustained by his giving, and using the gifts he has placed at our disposal for the edification and salvation of others.

All of this will prove to be good training for the day when the holy things of the eschaton and the *telos* will induct us into God himself, as they do into our eternal inheritance.

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 4:32-37.

# The Giving of God: The Giving of Life

## INTRODUCTION: THE GIVING OF GOD IN CREATION

In pursuing our theme of 'Gifts and Gratitude' I have come to see the magnitude of the subject. An unusually strong impression was made upon many by our first Study. Then, in discussion, it seems we have struck a strongly significant note, which is also a key to the heart of all things. I think our venture into giving—giving to God and to Man—and receiving—receiving gifts from God and Man—is going to take us on an adventure of high importance. The question is, 'How much have we fortified ourselves against the action our theme requires of us, in love?' That is, how do we look at first securing ourselves before we give gifts? Jacques Ellul says:

Let me give a very simple example. How to overcome the spiritual 'power of money'? Not by accumulating more money, not by using money for good purposes, not by being just and fair in our dealings. The *law of money* is the law of accumulation, of buying and selling. That is why the spiritual 'power' of money is to give our money away, thus desacralising it and freeing ourselves from its control. And these benefits accrue not only to us but to all men. To give away money is to win a victory over the spiritual power that oppresses us. There is an example of what the fight means. It requires us to give ourselves and to use specific weapons that only Christians know of and are able to use.<sup>1</sup>

### The Gift of Creation is the Gift of Life

To enter into the matter of God's gift of creation we need to understand what is the gift of life. Strangely enough this is something which we believe universally that we know, yet is a matter very few comprehend.

When 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', we who hear these words are being told that Man in his life is other than, and higher than, all sentient creatures in their life. Every creature has, according to Genesis 7:22, *neshema*, that which God breathed into Man (Gen. 2:7). All have *ruach* (breath, spirit, etc)—perhaps synonymous with *neshema*. Ecclesiastes 3:18–21 has the Preacher writing:

I said in my heart with regard to the sons of men that God is testing them to show them that they are but beasts. For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down to the earth?

In this passage it would seem that there is no difference between an animal and a human being. This is not the case, except in the fact that from them both the *ruach* which keeps both living is withdrawn by God and returns to God. However, when God breathed *neshema* into Man then Man became a living being or soul (*nephesh*), which is not said of the animals for (i) God did not breathe into them as he did into Man, and (ii) animals are not described as souls (*nephesh*). In Ecclesiastes 2:24; 4:8; 6:2–3, and 7:28 a man is described as a soul, and perhaps more correctly, as being a soul.<sup>2</sup> Whilst the animals and humans turn to dust at death and the *ruach* (spirit)

<sup>1</sup> *Violence* by Jacques Ellul (Seabury Press, 1969) p. 166.

<sup>2</sup> The AV and RV translate 'soul' in these references but the RSV and NRSV do not. It seems a pity to have made a freer translation in the latter versions.

goes to God, the Ecclesiastes text does not tell where the *nephesh* goes because its principle at this point is simple: ‘Better a live dog than a dead lion’. Even so we must note the distinction of Man and creatures. Man is a living being. *Nephesh* almost stands for ‘person’ or ‘personality’.

It is precisely this matter of *being* that Man accepts without question, and assumes as a kind of inalienable right that he thus *be*. That his being a *being* and having life is an extraordinary reality scarcely seems to enter his thinking. True, in religion and philosophy he often discusses the matter in order to rationalise it, but that God has made him and given him as the gift of himself, and the creation around him also as a gift, is something he either does not wish to believe or cannot afford to believe. Abraham had seen God’s glory and so his belief was in ‘the LORD God Most High, maker of heaven and earth’. This was not just monotheism as such, since one can believe in *one* God without believing in him as Creator, Redeemer, and so on.

### WHAT IS LIFE, PARTICULARLY HUMAN LIFE?

To ask such a question may seem foolish and to answer it may seem a Gargantuan task and an impossible one. We know from Scripture that ‘God gives to all men life and breath and everything’. That is, Man lacks nothing that is essential to his being and living. ‘Life, breath and everything’ all go together. Yet while God breathes into man the breath (*neshema*) of life (*chayyim*) so that he is a soul (*nephesh*) he describes what that life–being is. It is a creature made in the image and likeness of God. No other creature—whether celestial or terrestrial—is the image of God or like God as Man is. So we see Man reflects all that God is whilst yet being nothing that God is, God having deity and Man being human. That Man has unique affinity with God, and so unique relationship, tells us all we need to know. This is what human life is, and what it is about. When Jesus said that to *know* God and Jesus Christ was, in itself, *eternal* life, he was speaking about life that was even more than the life Man would ordinarily have known had he not fallen.

We can arrive at one conclusion, ‘Life is having relational being with God and thus acting in conformity with that knowledge, with that relationship, involving as it does having true relationships with all other members of humanity, and with the entire creation’. This would, of course, involve many things, and these are spelled out in the first couple of chapters of Genesis—as having lordship over the creation, as being fruitful and multiplying, as naming the creatures, as keeping the garden of Eden and tending it, as having the Sabbath rest of God, as being one flesh as man and wife—so that relationship with God would mean relationship with all things. This could be described as life. In the same breath it could be called ‘worship’, that is, acknowledging the worth of God—as do the celestial creatures in heaven—and serving him in the paradise in which he placed them—Eden.

The last paragraph needs to be unpacked. We are concentrating on matters of unspeakable joy and delight, of serenity and vocation, which need manifesting to the mind of Man who is fallen, and who requires these elements to be spelled out in the richest of vocal and literary terms. His own gift of art in all its forms—a gift given by God—sometimes falters in its endeavours to spell out the beauty of the universe, the colours, the sounds, the loveliness, the glory. Great art, in the forms of painting, sculpting, music, writing and the like, is often intense in its communication of the metier of creation in which we live. The mystery of Man himself keeps us spellbound when described by those who seek to penetrate its depths, and the brilliance of technology today indicates that the wonders of science will never be finally encapsulated.

When it comes to the understanding of God via his intention to reveal himself and doing this by his actions and all forms of revelation, then we know that life is knowing God, Man

and creation, but that such manifestation/s of himself are teleological in intention. By this we mean that the climaxing of all creation in the holy things of the end, all of which are with a view to true worship, is the goal which, in some way or another, has always been present to Man since the creation and the formation of Eden, the place of primal worship.

So then, we must not quickly pass over Man's relationship with the Creator *and* the creation. In Genesis 1:26–31 we see

- (i) the fact and working reality of Man as the image of God, and
- (ii) the things God has given to Man:

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.

So we see the nature, vocation and environment of Man, all of which go to show us what life is, so far as Man is concerned. We ask then, 'Is not Man's life an extraordinary matter, ought he not be filled with endless doxology and thanksgiving for the gift of life?'

### **MAN'S EVALUATION OF HIS LIFE**

What is quite clear is that Man, even fallen Man, values his own personal life most highly. This does not mean he values the life of other people as highly, or, in many cases, at all highly. It is interesting how we often equate 'a life' with 'a person'. This tends to support our view that life has to do with relationships, practice of acts, recognition of vocation, environments and, most all, worship. Whilst we talk of biological life (*bios*) we also have the idea of life (*zoe*).<sup>3</sup>

For a moment we can talk about this evaluation. In Psalm 8 the Psalmist is amazed that God should give such regard to Man that he is always minding him and caring for him.<sup>4</sup> He sees the immensity of creation and figures that, comparatively speaking, Man is infinitesimal. Why should God regard him? The answer lies in the fact that God has virtually put Man over all things, given him high honour. In the New Testament Paul says, 'We will judge angels', and this is consonant with 'You have made him a little less than God'. In Psalm 144:3 David repeats the words of Psalm 8:4. We note that Man is conducted to the evaluation of his life via God. The Psalmist sees the value as God places it upon Man.

Many ideas crowd into the mind such as Elijah's complaint, 'They seek my life to take it away'. Paul's statement, 'We were so utterly, unbearably crushed that we despaired of life it–self'. Then the rather wonderful description of the saints, 'They loved not their lives even unto death'. We remember David pouring out the water of Bethlehem to the Lord rather than drinking it because it had almost cost the lives of his soldier–friends. He said, 'Shall I drink the blood of the men who went at the risk of their *lives*'. David thus reminds us of the common phrase 'drinking the blood' which was often said of persons. To drink their blood was never literal.<sup>5</sup> It was to *take life*. Leviticus 17:11 reminds us that 'the life of the soul is in the blood'.

<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis had built his doctrine of life on these two Greek words, seeing *bios* as 'biological life' and *zoe* as a quality of living which is not confined to its biological elements.

<sup>4</sup> In Job 7:17–21 Job repeats the thought that God never takes his eyes off Man. For him this is painful, but the fact is he can speak to God in a way no other creature does.

<sup>5</sup> There is a prohibition against eating the blood of animals (cf. Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10–14; 19:26; Deut. 12:16; 15:23). References to drinking blood—meaning causing the death of—are found in Numbers 23:24; Deuteronomy 32:42; cf. I Chronicles 11:19; Revelation 16:6; 17:6; 18:24.

Blood was highly sacred in Israel and never a word for jesting. In the New Testament drinking the blood of Christ was never literal since ‘the blood of the grape’ was to be drunk, but it pointed to the death given in sacrifice, rather than being an entity of life taken in by the one drinking it. The life of the animal was a substitute for the offerer and was highly respected. The ‘blood of Christ’ is always related to the fact of his death which was powerful to *give* life.

When we consider the injunctions against killing, we are faced with the fact of the value of life. So far as we know Cain had not been explicitly told his murder of Abel would call for the killing of himself, but there seems to be ontological awareness of this fact. After the Flood the injunctions regarding murder are given, and these are reinforced in the laws of Israel, down to the difference between murder in hot blood and cold blood.

We do not need to go further than our own thinking to know that we value life and fear death. Even suffering in the extreme does not, generally, make us want to surrender life. We have the matter of suicide but it is regarded as foolish and wrong, even if, sometimes, the suicide of a person from fear, shame, pain and other such matters seems partially to justify it.

Whilst we have been discussing life as against the threat of death or the possibility of suicide—death by another’s hand or one’s own hand—we may miss the reason we value life. Behind it is the ontological concept of life fulfilling vocation, life being rich because of relationships, the pleasures of the mind and body, the delight of arts, the use of one’s own life for others and for valuable actions. It is true that comparatively few of humanity have these rich pleasures, and some have them at the expense of others, but even degraded living is preferable for most of us rather than face death. The extents to which we go to ensure life is lived to its last limit is a proof that we value it highly.

### **The Anti-Gift Mentality**

As we have hinted a person may kill or murder with a view to saving his or her own life. Where there is not direct killing there may be such cruelty and violence as to merit the term killing. Some people live at the selfish expense of the fullness of life of those they oppress or manipulate. This is well-known in the annals of human history. This is ‘drinking blood’ without immediately the letting of blood, that is, slaying. It is this which denudes the ‘life’ of those seeking to live. True wisdom is knowing ‘things as they really are’, and living in accordance with these principles. Only when a human being sees another—and others—through the evaluation of God, can that one recognise that the lives of all are to be lived without exploitation and domination. Seeing another through God’s love shows that one’s own life is valuable, and the lives of others no less. Only then does one ‘not look to his own interests but to the interests of others’ and ‘account others better than himself’, that is, to be considered even before oneself.

In Jude 10–13 is a powerful passage which has the phrase ‘the way of Cain’:

But these men revile whatever they do not understand, and by those things that they know by instinct as irrational animals do, they are destroyed. Woe to them! For they walk in the way of Cain, and abandon themselves for the sake of gain to Balaam’s error, and perish in Korah’s rebellion. These are blemishes on your love feasts, as they boldly carouse together, looking after themselves; waterless clouds, carried along by winds; fruitless trees in late autumn, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars for whom the nether gloom of darkness has been reserved for ever.

We might think that ‘murder’ is the way of Cain but in fact it is not just that. It is ‘the way of worship’ and in Cain’s case, false worship. Whilst it does not seem so at first sight we realise that Cain murdered his brother over a matter of worship. Worship was to be one with God, have fellowship with him, offer propitiation for sins,<sup>6</sup> and to give thanksgiving, all of

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<sup>6</sup> In previous studies we have seen Wenham’s comment on ‘If you do not well, shall you not be accepted’, as meaning ‘shall you not be forgiven’. The sacrifice, then, was in part, propitiation. Cain must have seen no need for this or thought his gift of sacrifice ought to have been sufficient.

which included serving God and not one's self. Cain believed he should have been accepted for his worship, and he was violently against 'Abel's way'. There are many ways of looking at this since we know Abel was a prophet, the first mentioned as being a child of God and a person of faith. Cain had a 'works righteousness' and Abel a 'by-faith righteousness'. It may be difficult for us to see worship—that is, differences in worship—as the cause of violence and murder, but this is so, and we need to interpret much of violence and killing with this key to its cause.<sup>7</sup>

'The way of Cain' includes 'looking after themselves', that is, preserving their own life. People of faith perceive God as the Giver, giving in love, and so they voice thanksgiving. Those not in faith see nothing of this, and indeed, do not wish to see things in this way. They wish to see life as coming from themselves and as always depending upon themselves, and any demand for thanksgiving and free giving is the cause of violent reaction. This is of course the Adamic autonomy insisting on its own way and wisdom. Romans 1:19–25 shows how all this is developed in rejection of God, his honour, and worship of him, in favour of worship of the idols and 'the worship of the creature'.

### The Anti-Gift Mentality and Violence

God has created all things and finds them to be 'really very good'. The root of violence is violent reaction to any portrayal of God through the image of God, and through creation, to say nothing of the incarnation of the Son of God. Hence Cain's slaying of Abel. At this point we can insert a brief note on vandalism, graffiti and blasphemy. These elements are of the one nature and always directed against that which is beautiful, good and fine: they are 'bad-mouthing'. Genesis shows that Cain's violence was increased in volume by Lamech, who—it would seem—expected multiple vengeance to be executed for him in killings he might do. Genesis chapters 6 to 9 carries the story of increasing violence and corruption—'Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight, and the earth was filled with violence'. The judgment of the Flood was visited because of this violence and its concomitants. After the Flood directions are given regarding violence and murder, the heart of it being that all acts against the image of God—Man—are acts of violence done to God. Again we need to look at Romans 1:18–32 to see that Man sought refuge in the idols against the ontological confrontation of the Holy God himself, and Paul shows the three times or stages of evil to which God, in personal judgments, gave Man up:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonouring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed for ever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to dishonourable passions. Their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural, and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameful acts with men and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error.

And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a base mind and to improper conduct. They were filled with all manner of wickedness, evil, covetousness, malice. Full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity, they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's decree that those who do such things deserve to die, they not only do them but approve those who practice them

(Rom. 1:24–32)

If we add to that I Timothy 1:8–11 we see the capacity of evil in its most ghastly forms—violence to others and violence towards oneself:

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<sup>7</sup> One thing is certain, that when we attack cultures we attack the cause and heart of culture, namely the *cultus*, the worship core which gives rise to cultural mores and practices. Probably cultures should be seen as peoples going their own ways as against the giving of pure worship to God. This is not to say that cultures are thoroughly wrong but that nothing is gained by attacking them.

Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, immoral persons, sodomites, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

So then violence is of many kinds; cruelty, gossip, malignity, and towards God, blasphemy and worship of idols. Self-killing is self-violence and is forbidden on the principle that God alone is the Determiner of the cessation of the gift of life. Of course suicide is impossible in the sense that one cannot destroy one's self; only one's body. Bonhoeffer observes, 'Suicide is the ultimate and extreme self-justification of man as man, and it is therefore, from the purely human standpoint, in a certain sense even the self-accomplished expiation for a life that has failed'.<sup>8</sup> Violence against self is, like all other forms of evil, that which is 'contrary to sound doctrine'. It is not in God's order of things. In the Bible wisdom is knowing 'things as they are', as God has created and appointed them to be and to function. Knowing these things and living in conformity with them is wisdom.

### THE FEAR OF DEATH AND THE JOY OF LIFE

It is certain that when Man has his mind fixed on rejecting the gifts as coming from God, and when he seeks to devise all things after his own mind, and when he loses the joy of gratitude—especially when he sees it as a cursed, legal obligation—then he is inevitably caught in the fear of death. His fear comes from what he has done against the Creator when he has acted against the creation. He has 'suppressed the truth in [acts of] unrighteousness' and his Creator is rightfully wrathful; since creation is the apple of his eye, his whole purposeful action as God. Man is therefore all his life in the fear of death. He torment comes from the fear of punishment, and as well in feeling the wrath which is always upon him.<sup>9</sup> So Man is driven on to make the most of creation, to get out of it all he can, especially by aid of the idols he devises and whose slave he becomes. This dread of death is a mere smog in which humanity lives, and it seeks to devise its own antidote in pleasure, lust, and the incredible perversion of the use of each of the gifts of creation

Koheleth, the writer of Ecclesiastes, skilfully shows the anger of a person who builds his great bulwarks of wealth, possessions and power, and is enraged when he realises he will lose it all at death and it will go to some squandering fool. To such a person, and to others of his ilk, all of life—that is, all of creation, vocation, relationships and the rest—seem vanity or 'a striving after wind'. True, because this person looks at 'all things under the sun', all things as being on a horizontal level. No one has accomplished a viable philosophy or religion of the horizontal. The vertical is as ontologically part of God's *schema* as is the horizontal and they are both of the one entity, the creation of God. Koheleth avers that 'the whole of Man is to fear God and keep his commandments'. That is, Man is to be Man under the kindly aegis of God, and God's law is his own way of life given to man to exercise in his [God's] creation.

For those who see it this way Koheleth has joyous news which is scattered throughout his writing. One example is:

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the man who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to

<sup>8</sup> See *Ethics* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (SCM, 1955) p. 142 (see pp. 123–128).

<sup>9</sup> Hebrews 2:14–15; I John 4:18; Romans 1:18ff.; cf. Psalm 7:11; Ecclesiastes 8:11–12.

dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the sons of men to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time; also he has put eternity into man's mind, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end. know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; also that it is God's gift to man that every one should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil. I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has made it so, in order that men should fear before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already has been; and God seeks what has been driven away (Eccles. 2:24–3:15).

And another:

Behold, what I have seen to be good and to be fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life which God has given him, for this is his lot. 19 Every man also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and find enjoyment in his toil—this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart (Eccles. 5:18–20).

It was Jesus who spoke most powerfully on the joy of life. Indeed the Sermon on the Mount is really the way of joy and peace. One has to be amongst the 'blessed ones' to realise this joy and serenity. It is to creation that Jesus points when he enjoins trust in the Heavenly father and his creational doings:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Matt. 6:19–21).

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink, nor about your body, what you shall put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O men of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek all these things; and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well (Matt. 6:25–33).

The apostolic writers of the Epistles exhort and encourage in the same metier. James is the one who tells us of the Father giving gifts in all purity, and is liberal to those who ask for wisdom about how to live in this world. Paul speaks of wonderful gifts and they are not all simply 'spiritual' as we might be tempted to name them. Leaving aside in this Study the spiritual gifts of which Paul speaks, we hear him say, 'The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it'. Therefore God is the only Giver. Paul takes up the vexed question of eating meat offered to idols; or simply the one of a person of weak conscience being a vegetarian, and another of strong conscience eating meat. He is gentle in this matter. Some do not have the freedom to eat all things: let not 'the strong ones' be contemptuous of 'the weak ones', nor for that matter let the weak ones be contemptuous of the strong ones. One, because of fallenness, has to learn how to use the creational gifts.

Even so, there is a principle in using the gifts. 'Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbour'. This is the same as 'Look not only to [your] own interests but also to the interests of others', and 'Count others better than [that is, before] yourselves'. In this case no one will think any of his possessions is his own. At the same time 'God . . . richly furnishes us with everything to enjoy'. Every tree of the garden (Eden) was 'good for food' and 'pleasant to the sight'. Creational blessing is on a vast scale: only selfishness has led to

selfish worship, and selfish possessing of things, to preserving oneself as far as possible against death, and doing so at the expense of others.

Enjoying God's gifts is a matter of principle. As we have said, if we do not see the vast table he has set before us then there will be no thanksgiving. In a sense it is to the degree we see the dimensions of God's giving in love—and giving *as* love—that we become doxological. If preserving life takes away the joy of life, then thanksgiving will be absent, and in its place a continuous anger that life has to be this way! So Paul's principle is, 'So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God'.

Paul also warns us against those who would demean God's gifts, making them morally evil; things such as marriage, and 'foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth', that is, the truth of creation and the Creator God—the ontology of all things. Paul explains, 'For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer'. This must mean that there is no deficiency in anything God has created. It is 'good', that is, functionally good, and not made impure by any action of humans or demons. If, then, we are to 'eat or drink, or whatever we do, do all to the glory of God', we need to acknowledge that it comes from God, and this is the essence of thanksgiving. So we *receive* it with thanksgiving, and with this 'the word of God and prayer' consecrate it. 'The word of God and prayer' can mean the prayer of thanksgiving, but if it is to be used to God's glory then the food and the act must be in the form of worship; only that which is holy may be used for worship, so that now food is made or categorised as holy.

In this simple act of worship, Man is one with God as Creator and one with God's creation. This is the true worship offered by Abel, the action according to true doctrine, the act arising out of the authentic life God had breathed into Man. This is worship in which there is thanksgiving, the acknowledgment that 'all things come from thee, and of thy own have we given thee'. This is the principle of glorifying God by praise and thanksgiving, and this is utter enjoyment of God's good gift of life. Only in this act do all the biblical passages concerning creation's joy in God and its delighted worship make sense.

In the light of the above we understand the wisdom of creation. Often we are told that God made all things in wisdom, that is, that all is functional and purposive and nothing is out of kilter or evil. The wise man knows this and lives in accordance with the creation. He recognises alien elements within the creation, such as the serpent and its breed, fallen humanity that refuses to glorify God for the gifts he has given and withholds thanksgiving which would give him delight in the Creator–Giver. God is seen as an enormity, a grim contractor, a severe spoilsport, and so much a withholder of delight and pleasure, that Man must somehow—especially with the aid of the gods—make his own pleasure, be his own hedonist–god, and this by making bawdy all that is pure, perverting all that is holy and blaspheming all that God is. In his own twisted way, fallen Man, following the way of Cain as against the way of Abel, will offer his sacrifices with a mean and miserable spirit, and become violent when his offering is rejected. Nor does he see the enormity of his violation of God's holiness and the rejection of his grace and mercy which have been his nature before even the world was created.

### **CONCLUSION: THE GIFT OF LIFE AND ETERNAL LIFE**

The most we know is that God breathed into Man the gift of life, making Man 'a living being' or 'soul'. We know that if Man had eaten of the tree of life he would have lived for ever. He ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and death came to him. Christ came as the incarnate Son of God offering eternal life to all who believe in him. This indescribable gift is not the subject of this Study but of coming ones. Its essence is 'knowing God the Father and [his Son] the Lord Jesus Christ'. In Eden, Man knew all he needed to know of God, whatever that may have been. The peerless life God gave him should have been the source of utter joy,

delight and satisfaction, as undoubtedly it was, until through the serpent, he chose death in the face of life.

Thus began on the one hand 'the way of Cain' and on the other—via the mighty grace of God—'the way of Abel'. The first is mean, twisted, miserable, full of hatred, homicidal, whilst the second is filled with acceptable and holy worship. Both operate within a creation which is essentially good, but 'to the pure all things are pure' whilst to the unbelieving 'all things are corrupted and defiled'. One has the privilege of thanksgiving and the other the ascribing of all evil to the Creator. We ask ourselves in no mean spirit, and with no deadly legalism, 'How is my thanksgiving and what forms does it take?' This may drive us back to the rich and lovely revelations God has given us of himself, of the creational blessings which he has not rescinded but which have become sour in the mouths of many. Ingratitude destroys the spirit of Man and brings *accidie* of the worst kind. By ingratitude Man swells in ego and shrivels in reality. Thanksgiving is the sign of healthy life and the delight which takes us through the worst of suffering, which, too, is one of the great gifts of God.

# God's Blessings and Cursings–I

## INTRODUCTION: THE MEANING OF BLESSING

In pursuing our idea of God giving to Man and his creation, the term 'blessing' arises early in the Scriptures, such as in Genesis 1:22, 28; 2:3, 5:2; 9:1; and 12:1–3. In a moment we will examine these passages with a view to understanding the term 'blessing'.

Word studies are not always effective in themselves since it is often difficult to trace the origin and then the continuing use of a word. Even so, we have a fair idea of what a word means. The word 'blessing' conjures up the ideas of delight, security, peace and happiness, and these are always linked with the blesser who gives something the recipient could not have were it not given. In Hebrew two main words are used, *barak* and *asher*. The first is thought to have its origin in knee-bending<sup>1</sup> and perhaps receiving from another, or the giving of praise as a response to the blessing. This is the main word used, the second being *asre* or *asher* which is generally translated in terms of happiness, of having received something which makes one rejoice and have a sense of well being. It is mainly found in the Psalms and Proverbs. Glancing down a concordance will help to see the contexts in which both are used. For example, in Genesis we have over 80 words with the root *brk* and none from the root *asre*. In the Psalms we have 46 from the root *brk* and 19 from the root *asre*. Blessing (*brk*) is something given, whereas *asre* is to do with the state of the person blessed.

In the New Testament, roughly speaking, the *brk* words are translated by the verb *eulogeo* and the adjective *eulogetos*, whilst *makarios* is linked with the Hebrew *asre* and is used to describe the state of those who are happy, having been blessed. Having said all this we cannot wholly divide the use of the words. We simply know that God blesses things of his creation, and the proper response to such blessing is to bless God for his actions.

## BLESSING AT THE BEGINNING

The first mention of blessing is in Genesis 1:22 when God blesses the creatures of the sea and the birds of the land. In verse 1 he had created the heavens and the earth. The use of the verb *barah*, 'to create', is used sparingly, referring only to the heavens and the earth, the creatures of the seas, the birds of the air and Man. In 1:22 it is linked with the sea-creatures and the birds being fruitful and multiplying. With our modern view that all creatures naturally reproduce themselves, we will not understand the need of blessing. This would be the case of 1:28 when man and woman are told to reproduce themselves, likewise, and fill up the earth. We would again think of this as 'natural'. The Genesis reference is saying that they cannot do without blessing. Blessing is, therefore, the special power and enablement given to Man and the creatures mentioned to go on reproducing their kind and increasing their number. From this we gather that blessing, generally speaking, is *that power given by God for creatures to go on being what they are by creation and so fulfilling their function in creation*. To be blessed, then, is to be normal as a creature. Doubtless the creature or Man would feel some ontological wellbeing, and this could be included in blessing.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> One idea is that blessing is always connected with fertility and that the power of fertility was located in the knee.

<sup>2</sup> Noel Due in a paper entitled 'The Biblical Idea of Blessing', quotes C. Westermann in *Elements of New Testament Theology* (p. 103) as saying, 'Blessing is a working of God which is different from saving insofar as it is not experienced as the latter in individual events or in a sequence of events. It is a quiet, continuous, flowing, and unnoticed working of God which cannot be captured in moments or dates. Blessing is realized in a gradual process, as in the process of growing, maturing, and fading. The Old Testament does not just report a series of events which consists of the great acts of God. The intervals are also part of it . . . One received from God's hand one's whole life, especially in its daily unobtrusiveness in which nothing particular happens. The blessing is a matter not of extraordinary times when, e.g. one experiences deliverance, but rather of the daily flow of daily life.'

This may cause us to pause and consider that God's blessing is for the fulfilling of the mandates given to creatures<sup>3</sup> and Man. Without such blessing creation would not go on obtaining as creation. It is clear that all humanity has been blessed in order to fulfil its function according to the creational mandate: in one sense this is its *raison d'être*. The blessing was given once for all (Gen. 1:22, 28; 5:2) and its action ever continues. We might well conclude that continuing in blessing is continuing in fulfilling the mandate. Isaiah 24 tells us of the condition of all things when that blessing is removed, and when its opposite obtains; namely, there is a curse upon the earth,<sup>4</sup> the curse being the opposite of the blessing. As we will see there is never blessing without a blesser, and our gratitude to *the* Blesser should express our thanksgiving to him, as blessing should not be taken for granted.<sup>5</sup> All of us have had experiences of a lag in the fullness of creational blessing—that is, when we seem unable or are unwilling to go on fulfilling the mandate which is true living of true life. Blessing ensures and begets life, whilst refusing the blessing, or attributing it to our own origination and devising, means the blessing must diminish and the pride increase.<sup>6</sup> When we refuse to acknowledge God as the source of the creational blessing, we are drawn to the 'way of Cain' where he attributed his sacrifice to his own resources. The 'way of Abel' was the attribution of blessing to God, not only in creation as a gift, but grace as a remedy for human fallenness.

### The Matter of Covenant and Blessing: A Note

There can be no doubt from Genesis 6–8 and 12:1–3 that for humanity, and especially fallen humanity, blessing is linked with covenant, God's covenant. If we take God's covenant to be creational, that is, innate in creation because innate in the nature of the Triune creating God, then the grace–blessing to fulfil the creational mandate will be inherent in covenant. If blessing is restored by a covenant being given to Noah, and in greater measure to Abraham at a later date, then we have the problem to reconsider of the blessing given to Man and the animals at creation. Was that blessing withdrawn? It would not appear so. The means of life are shown in Psalm 104 to cover *all* creation, and our Lord's words of Matthew 5:43–48 show that he does not withdraw the blessing of creation from the evil and the unjust. He has his means of dealing with their sinfulness which we will see in the curse, part of which is being under God's judgment, and part of which is in the deprivation of communion with God which results from the Fall. The blessing may be mitigated because Man does not recognise its non–withdrawal, and this in the sense that man will be ontologically unfulfilled. Creational blessing contains the elements of the mandate and so is linked with fruitfulness, lordliness in ministry, security, deriving *shalom* from the Sabbath rest of God—and so on.

## THE NOAHIC COVENANT AND BLESSING

It is clear from a reading of Genesis chapters 6–9 that the Flood was a curse on a fallen race which had gone deeply into violence and corruption. In 8:21 God said, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man'. This does not rescind the curse on the serpent (Gen. 3:14f.), nor the ground for Adam's sake (Gen. 3:17), but promises the world will not again be cursed by flood. After the

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<sup>3</sup> We may be driven to ask, 'What of the other animals such as those in 1:24–26, and why are plants and trees not also given the mandate. The answer may partly be in the mandate given to Man which is over all things, and the fact that each day God saw things as 'good' and when Man was created 'very good', so that, in fact, all things were blessed. A passage such as Isaiah 24:1–13 speaks of the nature of the earth when it is cursed and this includes the soil, the vegetation and the animal life.

<sup>4</sup> Here we are not referring to the Adamic curse as such. In Isaiah 24 there is a general curse, and it has to do with Israel's disobedience to God. In one sense disobedience in this case may be in doubt in that (i) God, in giving the covenantal blessing to Noah, has restored the creational blessing, (ii) he has especially blessed Israel in the Mosaic covenant, and (iii) he has saved Israel from the effects of the curse that comes with disobedience (cf. Exod 34:6–7). Certainly in Isaiah 24 there is a catastrophic situation.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 103:1–5 is blessing God for a mixture of God's blessing elements; namely, he forgives iniquity, heals diseases, redeems from the Pit, crowns life with steadfast love and mercy, satisfies the person with good as long as he lives, so that his youth is renewed like the eagle's. Here we see creational blessing and redemptive blessing.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this study we will refer to creational blessing, having in mind that God does not withdraw it, but the experience of its fullness depends upon the ontological obedience of the recipient.

Flood we see Noah and his family blessed for a renewal of the creational mandate, and, whilst some differences can be detected, God is making—or reiterating—a covenant ‘with you [Noah] 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’. The blessing had been turned to cursing for all who insisted on violence and corruption. They had forfeited their gift of creational blessing and it was replaced by the curse, the taking away of perpetual reproduction and the passing on to successors the life and dynamics which constituted God’s original blessing. Now a new era is to begin, a fresh start, as it were, for creation. In order to understand that era fully we now need to open up the subject of blessing and cursing, seeing the two states together. Meantime, what we must keep in mind is that, without the creational blessing, the life of Man and creatures could not go on.

### **The Matter of Blessing and Cursing**

So far we have only spoken of the blessing God gave to the creatures and Man at creation, and a renewal of this following the Flood. We have mentioned the curse upon the serpent and the land at the time of Adam’s sin. We now need to see that blessing takes many forms, and have already hinted that these are often linked with covenant.<sup>7</sup> The promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob really encompass the whole world and all its richness, and the reward of Abraham is God himself, and his inheritance will ultimately be all the nations. In these blessings creation, covenant, salvation and ultimate holiness are brought together. Whilst we cannot here deal with these we can contrast them with the curse that comes through the Fall, and the cursings which are the result of continuing opposition to God.

What we have not yet included in our reckoning has been (i) the seventh day which had also been blessed and hallowed for the creation, and Man in particular (Exod. 20:11), and (ii) the bliss, joy and peace of Eden. God blessed Man—the primal couple—*before* he put them in the garden he had made for them, and for which he had made them. Partaking of the Sabbath rest, knowing the *shalom* of God and living by it, whilst being God’s regent over all creation, must have been rich enough; but to be placed in the paradise of God, which was the place of true worship, of communion with God, of enjoyment of vocation and marriage, must have been blessing beyond description. Blessing beyond this did not have to be envisaged. They knew the joy of God in his creation, and they knew the God of this joy, living as they did in communion with him. It has been suggested that Eden was the place of training for the wider field of God’s intentions—the whole world which would become, so to speak, an extended Eden under the lordship of Man, and so all would become, as it were, the ever-expanding sanctuary of God and so of true worship. Only against the sense that the protological was moving towards the eschatological—the ultimate *telos*—can we understand the loss of blessing and the making of the curse. Benediction was to be replaced by malediction. The garden was to be replaced by the soil that was appalled by the foul action of Man in seeking to be as God himself, so that only by the sweat of his brow would Man earn his bread.

So the curse becomes a terrible interdiction as Man is ejected from the holy sanctuary and faces the world which will be more difficult now to bring into subjection.

### **A Curse for the Curse**

Whilst we have yet to see Cain’s being turned away from the land that cried out against his foul deed, as though it were polluted by the human corpse buried there, yet the curse was not full and final. The golden proto-evangel of Genesis 3:15 was given to the primal couple. God’s grace was shown in the moment of their worst pride and evil. The serpent would be crushed under the heel of the Bruiser, though the Bruiser himself be bruised in the encounter. Later Paul was to say that God made Christ to be curse for us, that we might be free from it and that the blessing of Abraham might come upon us, even the gift of the Spirit (Gal. 3:14). Justification from the curse, and the gift of the living Spirit, were to be the grace of God for those upon whom the curse had come through Adam. We can add

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<sup>7</sup> Here we are thinking that the covenant of God began, for Man, with and in creation. At this point we are introducing soteriological and eschatological ideas, but they surely must have been inherent in God’s creational covenant.

the thought that all who took the way of Cain knew the curse, and all who took the way of Abel knew the blessing. This does not mean that God did not give blessing that was essential for life, for we have already seen from Psalm 104 and Matthew 5:43–48 that some measure of blessing is always given to Man, and Acts 17:24 says of God, ‘he himself gives to all men life and breath and everything’. Blessing now is by grace, and not only by the gift of creation.

### **THE RESTORATION OF LOST BLESSING—AND MORE!**

We have seen that the way of Cain was the way of the rejection of that propitiation which would have restored him. The proto–evangel is ignored by Cain and his like, but the ‘by faith’ people are the children of God, and offer worship within the limits of the world into which they have been ejected and in which they must work out the mandate. They can more fully know the reality of the creational blessing for they have discovered the way of faith and grace.

It is not long before we come to Abraham of the tribe of Shem, and the covenant which is now—so to speak—tied to him. We must not forget that he was called from idolatry, had God’s glory disclosed to him, and believed God. We must not forget that he worshipped God by faith, that he looked from the vantage point of a city, lost to mankind in the ejection from Eden but given as a vision for eschatological hope, now a city whose builder and Maker was God himself. We must remember that Abraham was ministered to by the high priest, Melchizedek, and most of all we must remember the incredible blessings he was promised by God and, by faith, received. These were not to be his alone, but he was to be the father of a great multitude and to them would come the blessings. Just as God was father to Abraham his son, so Abraham and Sarah would represent the true family of God to the world. A great inheritance would be passed down through Isaac and Jacob until Israel’s sons would inherit the land of Canaan as their own possession and it, in turn, would become the figure and reality of the true City, the holy Sion, the sanctuary of the human race.

### **THE SUBSTANCE OF ABRAHAMIC BLESSING AND CURSING**

We come to the nub of the matter in Genesis 12:1–3 where the terms ‘bless’ and ‘blessing’ are mentioned five times. We need to keep chapter 11:1–9 in mind, that is, the building of the tower of the Babel where Man was seeking autonomy in building a vast city, making a name for himself, having a watch and defence tower, and building a defence against spreading across the face of the earth: in other words was refusing the creational mandate. God confused this dangerous monolithic humanism by the multiplication of tongues, thus multiplying cultural differences. God’s ancient way of covenant was now to be developed in Abraham and his family. Here we need to examine the text closely:

Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves”.<sup>8</sup>

The *families of the earth* have been described, but a *nation* appears to be a much larger and more significant unit, as his family is to grow to a people too numerous to be reckoned. It can probably be traced to God’s final people, ‘a multitude such as no man can number’. Abraham has always been in God’s mind. He elected this people before time, yet God’s people have not been confined to blood descendants of this patriarch, as Jesus, John the Baptist and Paul point out in the New Testament. For Paul all persons of faith are the children of Abraham. What occupies us here at this moment are the five mentions of ‘bless’ and ‘blessing’.

First there are three commands: (i) go from your country, (ii) go from your kindred, and (iii) go to

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<sup>8</sup> Note the repetition of the covenant which involves the world in Genesis 18:18; 26:4; 28:14; Galatians 3:8; cf. Psalm 72:16; Isaiah 4:2.

the land I will show you. Hebrews 11:8 says, 'By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place which he was to receive as an inheritance; and he went out, not knowing where he was to go'.

**The promises then are:** (i) 'I will bless you', (ii) 'I will make your name great', (iii) 'so that you will be a blessing', (iv) 'I will bless those who bless you', (v) 'him who curses you I will curse', and (vi) 'and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves [or, "be blessed"]'.

We are now talking about something more than the blessing given in and for the creational mandate. It may be that we can relate it back to the creational covenant of God, but its blessings are made very clear in the Old Testament. We only have to look to the promises given to Abraham which were fulfilled in his time of wealth, power and position in the society in which he moved. great flocks, and so on. We might call these creational blessing. Isaac received these blessings and they were added to, so that when Jacob went to live with Laban—having obtained the blessing by deceit—Laban and Jacob both flourished and Laban was loath to allow Jacob to depart, because of the blessing he drew from Jacob's presence and toil. Jacob could give blessing to Esau, as though restoring what he had cheated his brother of, thus tempering the anger of his brother.

Even with the covenantal blessing he had deceitfully obtained, Jacob wanted a special blessing from God. Why should this be so? Had not God told Rebekah that it would be Jacob who would receive the blessing? The answer lies in the very moving story of Genesis 32:22–32. Ahead Jacob will meet Esau who might kill him for bitter revenge because he has stolen the (covenantal) blessing. Behind him was Laban with whom he had had to struggle to retain the blessing God had given him. Way back in the past he had had to deceive his father to get the blessing. What, then, happens in this story of the struggle at the brook Jabbok?

The element of biblical mystery is not absent. Only if we fight as did Jacob—so to speak—do we understand the importance of blessing. In some way Jacob was battling that blessing might come to him directly from God and so be genuine and authentic. If he could face God and prevail, then he need have no fear of facing Esau, and indeed—most important of all—of facing his own conscience. Surely, then, the blessing he had previously received was assurance enough that he was the true covenant head within his family and for his people. It was not: he needed a blessing directly from God. Who knows what inner struggles Jacob had had over the years because of the way in which he had obtained and used the blessing. Now his proper possession of it was sealed by the transformation of himself as he moved from being Jacob—'Deceiver', to 'Israel'—the one who has fought with and prevailed with God himself.<sup>9</sup> From 'twister' to 'prince' was the transformation the blessing brought. The story is of immense importance to the whole subject of blessing. No matter what the election of God is in the receiving and possessing of blessing, all is a matter of faith. Hebrews 11 testifies to that fact, telling us that none, in full, received the promises. The blessing was real enough but was always eschatological. It awaited the climax when we would, together, receive the eternal blessing of the Father.

### The World and Abraham

Whatever the continuity to mankind of the creational blessing, something radically new appeared in the world in God's action with Abraham. The blessing of the patriarchs, and through them, the promised people, meant that every nation now related to Abraham whether it desired this or not. Abraham was the source—whether he wished it or not—of benediction and malediction, of blessing and cursing, and there is no question that the prophets took this matter up. God heard the cries of misery of Israel in Egypt and remembered his covenant with Abraham, and the promise became wholly soteriological, wholly the blessing which delivered them, taking them on the long journey through the wilderness and bringing them into the Promised Land. His blessings to them were many, but the prime one was his Presence in their midst; the gift of the cultus, the worship of the free people, the giving of authentic nationhood to them, gifts never to be revoked. What must be seen is that,

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<sup>9</sup> When we ask how often it is that a person—anyone—is roused enough to struggle with God, as did Jacob, then we receive no easy answer. Westermann's description of creational blessing leads us to think how quiet and gracious it is, but how many live in such blessing? Man's deepest need of redemption disturbs the seeming serenity and the soul is on its quest for redemptional blessing in which alone creational blessing may resume its way of peace.

whilst Genesis 12:1–3 still stands for the nations, yet Israel has become the expression of that covenant. The world of nations must now look to Israel, and doubtless Exodus 19:5–6 is significant in this regard; Israel was to be the priest–nation amongst all the nations. It will also become clear later, that when Christ the Blessed One comes in the name of the Lord, his blessed people, the church, now becomes the priest–nation to the world (I Pet. 2:9–10; cf. Rom. 15:6) and are, presently, ‘the true Israel of God’.

### **ISRAEL THE BLESSED PEOPLE: GOD’S ELECT NATION**

Long before Israel had been delivered from Egypt into the Promised Land, Jacob, the blessed one of God,<sup>10</sup> had blessed Joseph and prophesied of the coming of the blessing:

Joseph is a fruitful bough,  
 a fruitful bough by a spring;  
 his branches run over the wall.  
 The archers fiercely attacked him,  
 shot at him, and harassed him sorely;  
 yet his bow remained unmoved,  
 his arms were made agile  
 by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob  
 (by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel),  
 by the God of your father who will help you,  
 by God Almighty who will bless you  
 with blessings of heaven above,  
 blessings of the deep that couches beneath,  
 blessings of the breasts and of the womb.  
 The blessings of your father  
 are mighty beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains,  
 the bounties of the everlasting hills;  
 may they be on the head of Joseph,  
 and on the brow of him who was separate from his brothers.  
 (Gen. 49:22–26)

They were the blessed, people for blessing was not confined to Joseph’s descendants, and so their priests and Levites were to pronounce the Aaronic blessing of Numbers 6:22–27, a blessing which calls for close scrutiny and rich understanding. Rich and helpful as was the blessing to continually remind the people that their God was the God of covenant blessing, yet they, the people, were to live according to God’s way of blessing as set out in Deuteronomy 28:

The LORD said to Moses, ‘Say to Aaron and his sons, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,  
 The LORD bless you and keep you:  
 The LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you:  
 The LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.  
 ‘So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them’.  
 (Num. 6:22–27)

It was when they entered the land (Deut. 27), that they were to go to Mt Gerizim and Mt Ebal. On Gerizim the tribes of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin were to stand and bless the people, whilst on Mt Ebal, Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali were to stand ‘for the curse’. In the latter case the Levites declared clearly the curses which would come, and all the people assented to this fact by saying ‘Amen’ to the statements.

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<sup>10</sup> We need to keep in mind that the covenant promises were given first to Abraham, but then reiterated to Isaac, to Jacob and then to Moses and later to David. Had all these leaders lived in the fullness of the covenant blessing, it seems there would have been little need for them to be reiterated. At the same time the promises had universal connotation, and so have always been the key to the true movements of history.

Deuteronomy 28 commences with the blessings God will give to Israel. Verses 1–14 speak of these. It would be good for us to look at the promises closely:

And if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments which I command you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, and the fruit of your ground, and the fruit of your beasts, the increase of your cattle, and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading-trough. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.

The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you; they shall come out against you one way, and flee before you seven ways. The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns, and in all that you undertake; and he will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you. The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God, and walk in his ways. And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD; and they shall be afraid of you. And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your body, and in the fruit of your cattle, and in the fruit of your ground, within the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. The LORD will open to you his good treasury the heavens, to give the rain of your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. And the LORD will make you the head, and not the tail; and you shall tend upward only, and not downward; if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you this day, being careful to do them, and if you do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you this day, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

As we see here, no part of the life of Israel was apart from the blessing. We might say that the community had the creational blessing in its richest form, and that the soteriological blessing assured them of the *shalom* of God which always derives from his own Sabbath rest. Henceforth, then, they were the blessed people, and the nations had to deal, in their thinking and action, with this nation which had its origin and fulfilment of blessing from Abraham. Domestic branch it may presently be—in the age of the Messiah come in Jesus, torn from the olive tree—but it is God's people in history. Blessing it knows in its obedience, malediction from its God through its prophets and his judgemental acts of history, but nothing has changed; because God is its Blessor, it is the blessed people. 'So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them'.

The people—the true ones, the prophets and the faithful—such as were to be epitomised in Zechariah, Simeon, Anna and John the Baptist—knew that the Aaronic blessing was to be made universal, as universal as God's own covenant, and that it needed the coming of the Blessed One who was in the flow of Abraham but was yet greater than Abraham and Moses and the prophets; for the blessing of God could only become universal in this way. The Sion of Israel was protological of the Holy Universal Sion of God, the Holy City, Holy Temple and Holy Paradise.

### **THE INVIOABILITY OF GOD'S BLESSING. BLESSING IS ELECTION AND ELECTION IS BLESSING**

One incident in the history of Israel shows us clearly that the giving of blessing and the making of cursing are in no other hands but those of God. This puts an end to superstition about both. It is the story of Balaam and Balak as found in Numbers 22:1–24:25. Briefly, the story is that Balak, king of Moab, sends to Mesopotamia for Balaam the Midianite prophet whom he will remunerate largely to curse Israel, believing such cursing will be effective. Balaam has many experiences and eventually the situation is set up on three following occasions for him to curse Israel. When it comes to the point he is unable to curse Israel. Indeed he cannot but bless it. On the first occasion he says in the face of Balak:

From Aram Balak has brought me,  
the king of Moab from the eastern mountains:  
'Come, curse Jacob for me, and come, denounce Israel!'  
How can I curse whom God has not cursed?

How can I denounce whom the LORD has not denounced?  
 For from the top of the mountains I see him,  
 from the hills I behold him;  
 lo, a people dwelling alone,  
 and not reckoning itself among the nations!  
 Who can count the dust of Jacob,  
 or number the fourth part of Israel?  
 Let me die the death of the righteous,  
 and let my end be like his!

On the second occasion he says:

Rise, Balak, and hear;  
 hearken to me, O son of Zippor:  
 God is not man, that he should lie,  
 or a son of man, that he should repent.  
 Has he said, and will he not do it?  
 Or has he spoken, and will he not fulfil it?  
 Behold, I received a command to bless:  
 he has blessed, and I cannot revoke it.  
 He has not beheld misfortune in Jacob;  
 nor has he seen trouble in Israel.  
 The LORD their God is with them,  
 and the shout of a king is among them.  
 God brings them out of Egypt;  
 they have as it were the horns of the wild ox.  
 For there is no enchantment against Jacob,  
 no divination against Israel;  
 now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,  
 'What has God wrought!'  
 Behold, a people! As a lioness it rises up  
 and as a lion it lifts itself;  
 it does not lie down till it devours the prey,  
 and drinks the blood of the slain.

On the third occasion Balaam gives a long prophetic discourse in Israel's favour, the conclusion of which is:

God brings him out of Egypt;  
 he has as it were the horns of the wild ox,  
 he shall eat up the nations his adversaries,  
 and shall break their bones in pieces,  
 and pierce them through with his arrows.  
 He couched, he lay down like a lion,  
 and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?  
 Blessed be every one who blesses you,  
 and cursed be every one who curses you.

Of course Balak is enraged, saying to the prophet 'I called you to curse my enemies, and behold, you have blessed them three times', to which the prophet replies with a further prophecy in which the defeat of Moab, Edom and Amalek is foretold.

The story is not merely a success fable but embodies the truth of election. Karl Barth uses Psalm 90 to show that before creation God had Israel in mind, and so why should his blessing not go down through many generations?<sup>11</sup> We see the principle of the firstborn disregarded in the interests of

<sup>11</sup> Quoting Psalm 90:1-2, 'Lord thou hast been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever the earth and the world were made, thou art God from everlasting, and world without end', he then adds, 'No violence is done to the text if we then emphasise v. 3: "Thou (who wert our refuge from one generation to another, and God before the world was made) turnest man to destruction; again thou sayest, Come again ye children of men." ' He then adds, 'Yahweh has been the refuge of Israel and of all Israelites from generation to generation. This massive historical reality is the form of the God who was before man was, before ever the earth and the world were made . . . He was Israel's refuge before man was . . . The true way to put it is that in the first place Yahweh is Israel's refuge, and only then and as such the God who was before all the world'. See Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 3, Part 2 (T. & T. Clark, 1960) p. 578.

election. Isaac and not Ishmael is given the covenant blessing; Jacob and not Esau obtains it. Malachi 1:2 is clear enough; I have loved Jacob but I have hated Esau—words which are to be seen in the sense of election. Deuteronomy 7:6–9 makes it clear that nothing in Israel qualified them to be the elect nation:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his own possession, out of all the peoples that are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love upon you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples; but it is because the LORD loves you, and is keeping the oath which he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Know therefore that the LORD your God is God, the faithful God who keeps covenant and steadfast love with those who love him and keep his commandments, to a thousand generations.

God is determined the blessing will come to his covenant people, and to them only, but then, through them, to all nations, which will bless them; and we cannot but draw the conclusion that the nations that bless them must also be God's elect. Let us remind ourselves afresh that the people outside the covenant may well have the creational blessing which gives them impetus and power to live and reproduce, but they do not have the communion with God, the rich worship cultus, and the *shalom* which goes with God, and his rest that the covenant people know.

When we come to the New Testament we find election to be covenant people is the same. I Corinthians 1:26–31 shows there is nothing in those whom God has chosen which fits them to be the elect:

For consider your call, brethren; not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth; but God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong, God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption; therefore, as it is written, 'Let him who boasts, boast of the Lord'.

Ephesians 1:3–14 states the elements that are in that election, such as being made holy before God, predestined unto sonship, redeemed by the forgiveness of sins through Christ's blood, being to the glory of his grace, knowing the sum of all things and being to the praise of his glory; this including the hope and the inheritance. This is the covenantal blessing, 'the full spiritual blessing in the heavenly places', and as the writer of Hebrews would aver, surpasses even the covenantal blessing Moses' people knew. This blessing is a return to the creational blessing, blessing beyond the redemptive that Moses' people knew and David was promised for Israel, but note, *it was all elective*. If not elective then grace is not grace, and there is no assurance and perseverance of the saints. In footnote 11 we have quoted Barth's conviction that the God of Israel was with them as his elect before even the world was created. This is what Paul is saying, and no less, in Ephesians chapter one, and other places such as Romans 8:28–30, chs 9–11, II Timothy 1:9. True, the New Testament writers with Christ himself have the church in mind; Christ's 'those whom thou hast given me'. Overall, however, it is the whole 'Israel of God' which is in view, 'the great multitude which no man could number'. Yet we must keep in mind such election is not simply to salvation—however much it may include that—but it is to the end—things, the eschatological, the things of the telos. From creation to the new creation the plan of God is for all his people, for the nations, for his eternal love to take its shape in the ultimate holy things.

## THE COMING OF THE BLESSED ONE TO BLESS

At Jesus' entrance into Jerusalem they cried, 'Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!' (Matt. 21:9); 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that is coming!' (Mark 11:9–10); 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord! Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!' (Luke 19:38; cf. 15:35); 'Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord, even the King of Israel' (John 12:13). Mary was called 'Blessed among women' because she was to be the mother of the Lord who himself was to be the Blessed One—a name virtually equivalent to that of God. The Song of Zechariah opens with the blessing of the Lord God of Israel for his visitation by the incarnation, and the fruit of which will be the 'knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God'. God is to be blessed for this blessing.

Jesus is spoken of as the one who was sent 'to you [Jews] first, to *bless* you in turning every one of you from your wickedness'. Peter says, in this context (Acts 3:25), 'You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God gave to your fathers, saying to Abraham, "And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed"'. We gather then that Jesus comes as the fulfilment of the Abrahamic promise and is greater than Abraham, for of him Jesus had said, 'Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad'. We are saying that, whereas Abraham was covenant head, the head of the New Covenant is Christ. Abraham was blessed by Melchizedek the High Priest, but here is one who is made forever a priest after the order of Melchizedek, and in this sense needs none to bless him. As surely as he is the blessed of God, he is the Blesser of all the world. We note his blessing of the children (Mark 10:16) and then, at his ascension, his blessing of his apostles (Luke 24:50–51). He (Mark 14:61) was 'the Son of the Blessed', but as we see he was the blessing of God himself—'the fulness of the blessing of Christ' can be none less than 'the whole spiritual blessing in the heavenly places *in* Christ Jesus'.

In Galatians chapter three Paul builds up the fact that all persons of faith are children of Abraham. In Abraham all the nations of the earth shall be blessed (3:8). Now it is that 'in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God through faith'. Christ, then, is now the centre of faith, not Abraham, for Christ is the fulfilment of the covenant. All have been under the curse of the law but:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law having become a curse for us—for it is written, 'Cursed be every one who hangs on a tree'—that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The blessing God promised to Abraham, and to the nations through Abraham, has now come to people of faith through Christ. There is the general blessing promised to Abraham, which is linked with the creational blessing and the inclusion in the 'great multitude' which receives the eternal inheritance. At the same time, the destruction of the curse means the inclusion of believers by justifying faith in the soteriological people of God, and the outcome of all this experience of faith is the gift of the Holy Spirit. Now this is one place where we may—perhaps beyond others—understand 'the fulness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29): (i) Christ is the embodiment of the Abrahamic covenant, and so has all the blessing of Abraham, (ii) he is thus the one by whom all the nations of the earth shall be blessed since he is the true covenant seed, (iii) he is the soteriological fulfilment of the covenant by his propitiatory work of the Cross, by which he gives forgiveness of sins and justification, the soteriological blessing of covenant, and (iv) the blessing of Abraham is one with the giving of the gift of the Spirit. *The fullness of the Spirit is the fullness of the blessing of God, and, fully seen, is the equivalent to 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ'*.<sup>12</sup>

To this amazing revelation we could add other elements, mainly those drawn from the Epistle to the Hebrews, such as the new covenant head, and the blessing of the true High Priest who breaks

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<sup>12</sup> This sentence really requires a full soteriology of Christ and a full pneumatology of the Spirit, but at least, in Galatians 3, the revelation of the work of the Cross—'Christ crucified'—shows that the Spirit is received in all his fullness with the revelation of the Cross. The 'promise of the Father'—the Holy Spirit—is a great theme of the New Testament and should be pursued in all its details and richness.

through the tabernacle of Israel to liberate his people into the holy of holies, thus making of them a true priestly nation worthy of incorporating all the Kingdom as the nation God had promised Abraham he would make them. Not only does the writer of Hebrews give us a rich Christology and soteriology, but he also speaks of having received a kingdom which cannot be moved. He introduces us to a worship unprecedented since Eden and he speaks of the things of which Eden was protological, including the fulfilment of all the promises which the saints, hitherto could not receive without us who were to follow.

### **THE BLESSED PEOPLE: THE PEOPLE WHO BLESS**

Man as created was blessed, and this in the context of the mandate. He lived in the bliss of Eden with his vocation set for him, and the Sabbath rest of God as his support. Creational blessing meant the fullness of life and the rich enjoyment of the creation, his fellow humanity and God. In the Fall all of this was not rescinded, but, as we shall see, there are certain conditions under which the will gladly operates<sup>13</sup> and so the blessing is full. Abuse of the blessing or accrediting it to oneself means diminution of the blessing and practice of 'the way of Cain'. God may preserve life and allow procreation, but the thrilling and sustaining heart of the blessing has gone where there is the curse.

We have seen that God's covenant always obtained, that blessing and cursing would always be according to the attitude of Man, but in a special way Noah and his family were blessed, and then Abraham and his people came under special covenant blessing. This became clear in the history of Israel, yet the prophets spoke of a new covenant and a richer time of blessing, not only for Israel but all the nations.

The new covenant people are the true people who are blessed. Jesus not only blessed children who came to him, but also ordered his disciples to invoke blessing upon the homes of those they visited.<sup>14</sup> In Matthew 25:31–46 Jesus said he would one day say to his true disciples, 'Come, O blessed of my Father', as they would be called to inherit the Kingdom. Contrariwise he would call others 'you cursed' and would send them into 'the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels'. Thus the people of Christ are the 'blessed of my Father', and the others the cursed of him. This is the story of the nations who have been blessed, and those who have been cursed; all of which brings us back to Genesis 12:1–3.

In Ephesians 1:3–10 we have Paul attributing every kind of blessing—that is full blessing—to the new people of Christ:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. He destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace which he freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

As we have previously indicated, the substance of this passage is that, notwithstanding the blessing God had given to Israel, he has blessed his elect in Christ with every spiritual blessing. The term 'every spiritual blessing' (*pase eulogia pneumatike*) has been translated 'all spiritual blessings', 'every kind of spiritual blessing' and 'the full spiritual blessing'. The last translation is that of Markus Barth who says:

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<sup>13</sup> Most of the references in the Old Testament with the root *brk* point to the person or thing being blessed. Those with the root *asre* point to the happy condition of the person. Having been blessed he is now happy and contented, being in a state of *shalom*. There are also conditions in which that blessing remains alive and enjoyable, but it must be seen that these conditions do not bring blessing but are observed as the result of blessing. For example Psalm 1:1 where the happy man delights in the law of the Lord. He is blessed and delights in the law. This principle seems to obtain wherever the beatitudes are mentioned.

<sup>14</sup> Where people would not receive the blessing of the gospel the disciples brought then they were to recall the invocation of blessing upon those houses.

the interpretation has to avoid any shade of doubt that the blessing may be a composite of many parts. There is no hint that God's one full blessing should be split up into several distinct parts. The blessing given 'in Christ' and described in the following eleven verses is an indivisible and perfect whole. If any of its aspects or dimensions were missing, it would not only be incomplete but distinct from the blessing [given] 'in Christ'.<sup>15</sup>

Since 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ' is Christ himself, the covenant head, he brings no less than was promised in Abraham, and in Romans and Galatians Paul develops this in relation to the inheritance that is in Abraham and Christ. For the moment Romans 9:4–5 covers the blessing given to Israel, and that given to the new covenant community is no less:

They are Israelites, and to them belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship, and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

Because the church is wholly blessed, the idea of getting blessed is virtually absent from the Acts, Epistles and the Revelation. Christ having become the curse for us means no cursing can again prevail against us. In one sense we are not inspired to imprecatory psalms or prayers, since we live only in blessing.<sup>16</sup> There is, however, the idea of blessing that is of the saints blessing others, even those who are their enemies. In Luke 6:27–31 (cf. Matt. 5:43–48) we see the true attitude to those who constitute themselves our enemies; we are to *bless* where they curse us. Paul takes this up in Romans 12:18–21 in regard to seeking revenge. His readers are to overcome evil with good. In I Corinthians 4:12 Paul says, 'When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure'. Peter also has advice: 'Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing'.

We note that in the new community there is nothing of a blessing that parallels the Aaronic blessing. This falls in line with the fact that all blessing has come to us in Christ. In this study we are not out to speak of the inheritance which is very much part of the Abrahamic and Mosaic blessing, and indeed a large part of the new covenant blessing. We have also avoided developing the theme of the Old and New Testaments that the nations of the world will come to Mount Zion, the Holy City and find their ultimate blessing there. This is a deep-seated teaching of the whole Bible and it gives substance to our proper understanding of 'the blessing of God'. Something of this on the personal level is found in the passage we discussed in Matthew 25, where the King shall say to his true disciples—be they persons or nations—'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world'. Something of this is also in Revelation 14:13 where John reports:

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, 'Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth'. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!'

### **THE BLESSED BLESS THE BLESSER**

We have only now to look at the fact that it is the people who have been blessed who bless God. James (3:9) speaks of the tongue with which we bless God and sees it inconsistent to curse men with the same tongue. Paul points out the principle of our blessing God when he says, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places'.<sup>17</sup> Whilst he does not explicitly demand that we bless God the Father because he has

<sup>15</sup> *Ephesians 1–3* by Markus Barth (*The Anchor Bible*, vol. 34, Doubleday & Co., 1981) p.78.

<sup>16</sup> In this paper we cannot fully deal with 'The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?' (I Cor. 10:16; cf. 11:23–33). The cup is God's blessing to us and we bless it accordingly. We may speak of it as one of the means of grace, by which we do not mean that we utilise the cup to obtain grace, but that it is one of the ways in which God gives his grace to us. This subject calls for wider treatment.

<sup>17</sup> The references in the Epistles which refer to God being blessed are Romans 1:25; 9:5; II Corinthians 1:3; 11:31; Ephesians 1:3; I Peter 1:3. We might think such references are very few, but the doxologies are many, so that we do not need to be obsessed by the times a word such as 'blessing' is used, or not used!

blessed us in Christ, we can see it is the natural thing to do. We have before observed that blessing God—a well-established custom in the Old Testament—adds nothing to God, but being blessed begets the desire in the heart to bless God.

We may count it strange that in the Book of the Revelation, where so many powerful ascriptions of praise are made to God, we do not often see God being blessed in word. Of course he is continually blessed, although the word 'blessed' does not appear. Even so it is only on two occasions the word is used; firstly in Revelation 5:12f., and then in 7:12. What is interesting is that these ascriptions of blessing come where *the redeemed are present*. Certainly it is to the Lamb that was slain that the blessing is ascribed in the first case, and in the second case it is the multitude which no man can number who ascribe blessing, in which the initiative of God is acknowledged.

### **CONCLUSION: OUR PRESENT LIFE, WHICH IS HID WITH CHRIST IN GOD, IS THE BLESSING OF GOD**

In Part II of this study, in which we will deal primarily with the beatitudes of which there are many in the Old and New Testaments, we will be looking at the *states* of the blessing which human beings, creatures and the creation can know when blessed of God. This will move us to see even more clearly and deeply, the nature of God as Blesser and our desire to bless him in all fullness

Presently our life is hid with Christ in God, and whilst we cannot fully articulate what this means, we sense that life enough to know it is present participation in the fullness of the blessing of Christ, and with this we are more than satisfied. This blessing has within it the dynamic of hope of the eschatological and so is alive. Of course the richness of the blessing is not in doubt, but the degree to which we partake of it is the degree to which the will desires and grace enables. Rightly understanding the blessing, we ourselves are constantly doxological.

# The Fullness of the Blessing of Christ

## PAUL AND THE STATEMENT 'THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST'

Paul uses this term in Romans 15:29, and in order to put it reasonably into context we will include the text from verse 22 to 33:

This is the reason why I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem; they were pleased to do it, and indeed they are in debt to them, for if the Gentiles have come to share in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings. When therefore I have completed this, and have delivered to them what has been raised, I shall go on by way of you to Spain; and I know that when I come to you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

I appeal to you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God on my behalf, that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints, so that by God's will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. The God of peace be with you all.

Two things are evident: (i) Paul has no doubt whatever that he will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. He says, 'and I *know* that when I come to you I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ', and (ii) he is assured there will be such a thing as the blessing of Christ<sup>1</sup> in the fullness of which he will come.

Doubtless we can gather some idea of what this fullness is from the context. For example, in 15:19–21 he speaks about the powerful way in which he has always preached the gospel, and describes the fruits of that preaching. One of the elements concerned with that preaching is that he will not proclaim the gospel where it has already been proclaimed. We might gather that he has always ministered in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. I am sure that this has been the case. A study of Paul, his life first as an opponent of the gospel, then his dynamic conversion and his immediate and continuous proclamation of the gospel, indicated surely, that he has never been apart from the fullness of the blessing of Christ, in the sense that Christ acted dynamically upon him, and that fullness which then came to him never waned. We could reasonably conclude that this fullness of blessing is the gospel itself, in that first it had acted upon him, and he had ever after been 'eager to preach the gospel'.<sup>2</sup> In fact, old authorities have inserted in verse 29 words to that the text so that it reads 'the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ'. This insertion is discounted by all modern translators and I am sure they are right in doing so. Even so, the principle still obtains. From Christ he had received the blessing of the gospel, which was no less than Christ himself.

Paul, in our quoted Roman passage, could be saying that whereas he had been hindered from coming to Rome before, he will soon come in the fullness of Christ's blessing once he has been through Spain, once he has fixed up the matter of 'the collection' for the poor at Jerusalem from the saints of the churches in Macedonia and Greece. He could mean, 'Having

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<sup>1</sup> This study follows on—because it is built upon—the April study of the Monday Pastors' Study Group, entitled 'The Blessing and Cursing of God—I'. It presupposes certain things which constitute 'the blessing of God'. We do not intend to repeat all this material in this study but to draw upon certain elements of it.

<sup>2</sup> See Romans 1:14–15 which shows that Paul regarded himself as under a debt always to preach the gospel, and the reality, power and quality of it helped to make him eager to be about that business.

gotten these things out of the way I will come with a freedom which will enable me to minister in all fullness'. Included in this may be the statements in chapter 1 of Romans, such as verse 11, 'For I long to see you, that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to strengthen you', and in verse 15, 'So I am eager to preach the Gospel to you also who are in Rome'.

He may even be relating this fullness of the blessing to 15:30–32, where he asks prayer that he may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, his service being acceptable to the saints, so that he may come with joy and be refreshed in their company—this joy and refreshment helping to constitute the fullness of the blessing. It may well be that all of the elements may help to constitute this blessing, or it may be that they are simply in juxtaposition to what for Paul is some special state of being; some special possession of a rich endowment from God.

In order to allow us to examine the opinions of creditable commentators on the letter I am quoting them in the passages below. These comments are not in order of ideas, for by nature of the case, to accomplish that would be most difficult. A reader may be disposed to take one or other of the explanations, or, perhaps, put them all together as adding up to that blessing. We will then seek to come to some conclusion regarding 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ':

'I shall come to bring and a find a full measure of the blessing of Christ'. **C. K. Barrett** who comments, 'By this somewhat vague language Paul probably means to suggest that both sides, he and his hosts, will share in the blessing: Compare 1:11f.'<sup>3</sup>

**Sanday and Headlam** comment: 'St. Paul feels confident that his visit to Rome will result in a special gift of Christ's blessing'.

**H. P. Liddon**: 'Encouraging conviction about his *visit to Rome (oijda ver. 29)*, He knows that it will be accompanied by a full measure of Christ's Blessing . . . [Obs. 2 This expression of confidence in the Blessing from Christ which would attend his visit forms a natural transition to the exhortation which follows (vers. 30–32)]'.

**Cranfield** comments: 'Paul's firm confidence ("And I know"—it is not a matter just of hoping but of knowing) that, when he at last comes to Rome, he will come with the fullness of Christ's blessing. The thought behind *pleroma* ["fullness"] here is probably that Christ's blessing on his visit will be pure blessing, without any admixture of something other than blessing, a blessing altogether unambiguous and reliable. Something of what Christ's blessing might be expected to bring with it may be learned from v. 24, and still more from 1:11f, 13 (the last clause) and 15'.

**John Murray** comments: 'But the *certitude* pertains to the blessing with which he would come if God so willed. This is the blessing which Christ imparts and Paul is convinced that his presence in Rome would be accompanied by the *fullness* of this blessing. No term could more appropriately express the full measure of the blessing anticipated. We are liable to think of the rich blessing which would *accompany* his ministry. This is without doubt in view. But we may not restrict the thought thus. The term indicates that he will come thither in the possession of the fullness of Christ's blessing. He evinces the confidence of Christ's abiding presence in the plenitude of his grace and power. And it is also the key to the boldness with which Paul had planned his journey to the seat of empire and to the limits of the west. Although we may not press the terms of the sentence to convey this meaning, nevertheless we cannot exclude from Paul's total thought (cf. 1:12; 15:24) the assurance that the fullness of Christ's blessing would also be imparted to the believers at Rome'.

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<sup>3</sup> *The Epistle to the Romans* by C. K. Barrett (A. & C. Black, 1962), p. 279. *The Epistle to the Romans* by Sanday and Headlam (T. & T. Clark, 1911), p. 414. *Romans* by H. P. Liddon (reprint James and Klock, 1977), p. 290. *Romans*, vol. 2, by J. A. Emerton and C. E. B. Cranfield (ICC Series, T. & T. Clark, 1979), p. 775. *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans*, vol. 2, by John Murray (Eerdmans, 1965). *The Epistle to the Romans* by Leon Morris (Eerdmans, 1988), p. 522. *Romans* by Everett F. Harrison (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 10, Regency, Zondervan, 1976), p. 159. *St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans* by James Denney (*The Expositor's Greek Testament*, vol. 2, 1951), p. 716. *Romans* by H. C. G. Moule (*Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges*), p. 22. *Romans* by Gerald R. Cragg (*The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 9, Abingdon Press, 1954), p. 652. *Romans* by John Calvin (*Calvin's Commentaries*, trans. by John Owen, Eerdmans 1948), p. 537. *Romans* by Robert Haldane (Banner of Truth, 1963), p. 628. *Romans 9–16* by James D. G. Dunn (Word Biblical Commentary 38b, Word, 1988), p. 877. *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* by Martin Luther (Zondervan, 1960), p. 204. 'Romans' in *Alford's Greek Testament*, vol. 2, by Henry Alford (reprinted Guardian Press, 1976), p. 464. *Commentary on Romans* by Ernst Kasemann (Eerdmans, 1980), p. 402f.

**Leon Morris** comments: ‘Paul closes this part of his letter on a note of quiet certainty (*I know*); his certainty is one of faith, but none the less certain for that. He looks to the time when he will come to the Romans, and he expresses his confidence that that will be *in the full measure of the blessing of Christ*. He was engaged in the service of a Christ who was faithful, one on whom Paul could place the utmost reliance. So whatever happened, he was sure of the blessing of the Lord . . . It is not quite clear whether Paul thought that the blessing in question would rest on him or whether he meant that the work he would do would be as blessing to the Roman Christians. Probably neither is out of mind and there is truth in both’.

**Everett Harrison** comments: ‘He looks forward to it as a time when the blessing of Christ will be poured out on all. It will be a time of mutual enrichment in the Lord’.

**James Denney** comments: ‘When he comes he will bring blessing from Christ to which nothing will be lacking’.

**Handley Moule** comments: ‘He is sure he will come attended by the “the fullness”, the full range and variety of “Christ’s benediction” which would so rest on the visit as to make it *in every way* happy and helpful both to the Romans and the Apostle’.

**Gerald R. Cragg** (exposition *Interpreter’s Bible*) comments: ‘The rendering of KJV emphasises the cumulative heaping up of spiritual benefits which follows when a man allows his life to be the instrument by means of which Christ works . . . It suggests for one thing, the many-sided completeness of the gift that Christ brings to men. . . . Only when men bring to us a thin and attenuated gospel is there any inconsistency between Paul’s words and our actual experience’.

**John Calvin’s** commentary is as follows: ‘These words may be explained in two ways: the first meaning is,—that he should find a plentiful fruit from the gospel at Rome; for the blessing of the gospel is, when it fructifies by good works: but to confine this to alms, as some do, is not what I approve. The second is, that in order to render his coming to them more an object of desire, he says, that he hopes that it would not be unfruitful, but that it would make a great accession to the gospel; and this he calls *fullness of blessing*, which signifies a full blessing; by which expression he means great success and increase. But this blessing depended partly on his ministry and partly on their faith. Hence he promises, that his coming to them would not be in vain, as he would not disappoint them of the grace given to him, but would bestow it with the same alacrity with which their minds were prepared to receive the gospel’.

*Note: The translation by Ross Mackenzie (Calvin’s New Testament Commentaries, vol. 8, Eerdmans, 1979) has, ‘The second explanation is that for the purposes of whetting their appetite for his arrival, Paul expresses the hope that it would not be unfruitful, since it would greatly increase the Gospel by what he calls the fullness of the blessing of Christ, ie the full blessing of Christ’.*

**Haldane** comments against Calvin: ‘Calvin’s view of the passage which he mentions as the general one, cannot be approved. He prefers the interpretation that makes Paul express the conviction that he will find the Christians at Rome abounding in good works.’

*Note: In the light of Ross Mackenzie’s translation this is scarcely fair. In the light of John Owen’s translation it is reasonably founded.*

**James D. G. Dunn** comments: ‘Paul was very confident of his commissioning—that it was Christ and used by Christ (1:11, 13, 15)’.

**Luther** comments: ‘It is the blessing of the Gospel to make Christians abound in progress and (cause them) to grow in the knowledge of the Lord . . . the Apostle does not promise to bring the blessings of temporal gifts, but only the Gospel’.

**Henry Alford** comments: ‘The fullness of the blessing of Christ imports that richness of apostolic grace which he was persuaded to impart to them. So he calls his presence in the churches a *charis*, II Corinthians 1:15’.

**Kasemann’s** full comment (p. 402f.) is worth reading. The following is truncated:

‘The emphasis is on the fact that the apostle, freed both inwardly and outwardly from an obviously heavy burden, believes that he can come to Rome with all the power that he has been given and hence, with the fullness of the gospel. The restricted statements of the proem [introduction] are thereby surpassed here, as are those of v. 24. The bearer of the gospel will not deny his mandate even in the capital’.

It is interesting to note that many commentators do not feel the need to comment on the phrase at all, and scarcely anyone makes comment on 'I know'. Karl Barth does not mention the phrase in his two commentaries on Romans. However in his *Church Dogmatics* (vol. 3, pt 2, pp. 580–583), he has a powerful essay on the biblical theme and meaning of *blessing*. In this essay he mentions the very few times Christ's person was linked with blessing, especially in the Epistles. He simply quotes Romans 15:29 in passing and does not exegete it. On the whole, Calvin's comment on the verse brings us nothing special. Kasemann is worth reading from pages 402 to 406. He discusses the special issues that would confront Paul at Rome, especially those of Jew and Gentile–ethnocentricity—and the place of the gospel in bringing the nations to the obedience of Christ. There is the suggestion that Paul would need a special power or fullness of blessing to comprehend these and similar problems in this capital city of the Roman Empire and bring illumination concerning the same. On the whole, however, 15:29 is exegeted to a great extent in terms of 1:11, with some reference, also, to 1:15.

### **The Gospel Enough to Overcome Elements Which Divide the Human Race**

What Kasemann says about the problem of ethnocentricity—the matter of differing cultures—may well be true, but one gathers the impression from Paul that he always thought the gospel was *per se* sufficient to overcome the difficulties of race, gender and class.<sup>4</sup> On this score we might quote Galatians 3:27–28, and, indeed the whole third chapter of that Epistle. Other references are I Corinthians 12:12–13 and Colossians 3:9–11.<sup>5</sup> These all speak of the power of the gospel to overcome what we might today call 'discriminatory differences'.<sup>6</sup> One can scarcely believe that the fullness of the blessing of Christ was a special endowment Paul believed he would possess when he reached Rome, or, to put it another way, Paul never believed that he, at any time, lacked this fullness of Christ's blessing.

### **PAUL AND THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST**

I believe it is reasonable to deduce from the Acts and the Pauline Epistles, that Paul at no time lacked this fullness. I believe proof of this comes from a number of factors.

#### **Paul Received the Fullness of Christ at and Around the Time of His Conversion**

Galatians 1:11–17 should be closely studied:

For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. For you

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<sup>4</sup> We might note here that, generally speaking, culture arises from *cultus*; that is, the worship pattern is at the core of any people, although this may not always be clearly apparent. The gospel alters the *cultus*, by nature of the case, and so ethnocentricity falls away.

<sup>5</sup> I am aware that the references quoted have eschatological connotation, and that Paul saw the process of reconciliation taking place interculturally, but the scale on which it was happening, though remarkable qualitatively, was not remarkable quantitatively. Along with all the promises of universal reconciliation there is a present process which will climax at the point of the *telos*. Some theologians take the view that we should develop a *praxis* from the theology which is eschatological, the quicker to bring about that climax, but the apostles saw the spread of reconciliation coming from the gospel, whilst the Book of the Revelation sees universal conflict and universal judgment before this desired *telos* can take place.

<sup>6</sup> I am aware that culture and cultural differences very much occupy the minds of missiologists, as well as more secular approaches being worked out in multicultural societies. Whilst there is no doubt the matter confronted Paul, I doubt that Kasemann is correct in saying it may have been so large a problem that it demanded—as it were—such a fullness of blessing for Paul so that he could overcome it. I Corinthians 9:19–23 makes it clear that Paul was aware of cultural differences, so much so that he was prepared to understand the socio-cultural situation of all to whom he preached, and indeed became 'all things to all men that I might save some', but his confidence was in the gospel to accomplish this. He did not require 'cross cultural contextualisation', as such, to effect communication and conversion.

have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it; and I advanced in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Here Paul is saying that the gospel he preaches came to him neither from men nor through them. It is a direct revelation of Jesus Christ which came to him from God (cf. I Tim. 1:12–17). It is interesting that Paul can call the gospel, ‘the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ’, ‘the Gospel of God’, and ‘my gospel’. We need to clear our minds of the idea of the gospel being simply an evangelising set of teaching and converting techniques. Paul says, ‘But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and had called me through his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles . . .’ Unfortunately the text here says ‘reveal his Son *to* me’, whereas the Greek has it ‘*in* me’. The whole truth came to Paul in the person of Jesus Christ and was therefore innate to him.

It is true that in I Corinthians 15:1–4 Paul says:

Now I would remind you, brethren, in what terms I preached to you the gospel, which you received, in which you stand, by which you are saved, if you hold it fast—unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what *I also received*, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.

The gospel has form, but these are the living, saving acts of Christ—those of the Cross and the Resurrection. The New Testament is filled with injunctions to believe *in* the Lord Jesus Christ and not just about him. Believing is a relationship with Jesus Christ and so ‘receiving all the benefits of his death and passion’.

In Galatians 1:16–17, Paul concluded his account of Christ’s apprehension of him on the road to Damascus:

[God] was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not confer with flesh and blood, nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia; and again I returned to Damascus.

Paul is not told that God simply converted him for conversion’s sake but ‘that I might preach him among the Gentiles’. That is, he was already equipped with the gospel; already Christ was revealed in him.<sup>7</sup> His commission now was to preach him amongst the nations, and Paul set about doing that, beginning at Damascus.

### **A Fallacy About Paul’s Stay in Arabia and His Acceptance at Jerusalem**

We must clear up the fallacy that Paul stayed for three years in Arabia and there pondered the gospel until it all became clear to him. Nothing could be further from the truth; he knew the whole gospel the moment God’s Son was revealed in him. It may well be he was left for three days in the darkness of blindness for these things to come fully clear to him, but Acts 9:20–22 indicates that cleared of his blindness and filled with the Spirit:

And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, ‘He is the Son of God.’ And all who heard him were amazed, and said, ‘Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests.’ But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

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<sup>7</sup> Doubtless Paul already knew the ‘form’ of the gospel which the Christians had been preaching. It was the radical nature of their claims as to the person and work of Christ which enraged him and caused him to persecute them. There was no way Paul could demand recantation unless he knew of what they were to recant. Meeting Christ brought all that knowledge he had gained into living reality and proper perspective. When in I Corinthians 15:1–3 he talks about what he received, we need not exclude the knowledge of the gospel prior to that meeting.

The statement of Galatians 1:15–18, when properly read, amounts to something like this; ‘When God, who called me even from my birth, gave me the rich experience of his Son being revealed within me, I knew I must go the nations—whatever my responsibility might be towards my own people, the Jews. So sure was I of the nature of the gospel that I felt no responsibility to go up to the apostles at Jerusalem and have my version of the gospel checked out. I had begun to preach at Damascus but there was a conspiracy against me,<sup>8</sup> and I went away into Arabia, and again returned to Damascus’.

The mistake about Paul’s so-called three years in Arabia—around which some romantic theories have been woven—has happened because verse 18 is misunderstood. ‘Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem’. That is, ‘three years after I returned to Damascus from Arabia’. Damascus is close to the border of Arabia and Paul may have been away for a very short time. Certainly he had not needed to check out the gospel—‘the fullness of the blessing of Christ’—with the apostles.

Again, Galatians 2 shows that it was after another fourteen years<sup>9</sup> Paul went to Jerusalem: ‘*I went up by revelation*; and I laid before them (but privately before those of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain’. Some commentators argue that ‘at last! Paul was checking out his gospel’. Not so: *Paul went up by revelation*—otherwise he would not have gone up—and Paul talked about his gospel quietly with the leaders rather than have an open, public discussion. The apostles’ not demanding the circumcising of Titus was one evidence that the apostles present in Jerusalem thought Paul’s gospel to be proper. Even the opposition of ‘false brethren . . . who slipped in to spy out our freedom’ did not prevail. Paul says of the apostles; ‘When they saw the grace which was given to me they gave me the right hand of fellowship’, that is, the apostles recognised the special ministry of Paul to the Gentiles. Doubtless they also recognised that Paul had accomplished a mighty work in such a ministry. We might comment that such a work could not be done without the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

Note that the reason we have taken so long in arguing that Paul never pondered the gospel in Arabia and never felt the need to check out what he was preaching with the recognition that he had a commission to the Gentiles is all proof of ‘the grace that was given to me [him]’. That is, at no time was Paul without ‘the fullness of the blessing of Christ’. From the beginning he knew the whole gospel. From the beginning he was filled with the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

### **Paul Filled with the Fullness of the Blessing of the Spirit**

In Acts 9:10–18 we have the account of a disciple at Damascus named Ananias being told to go to Paul who was sitting, blinded, in Straight Street. His commission is a strong one: ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name’.

Ananias undertook the commission and went to Paul:

*So Ananias departed and entered the house. And laying his hands on him he said, ‘Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus who appeared to you on the road by which you came, has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit’. And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes and he regained his sight. Then he rose and was baptised, and took food and was strengthened.*

We note the fact that Paul was filled with the Holy Spirit. His period of three days of pondering (as against the supposed three years in Arabia!) was fully resolved. With the filling simultaneously came the total forgiveness of sins.<sup>10</sup> Now look at the immediate effects:

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<sup>8</sup> See II Corinthians 11:32–33.

<sup>9</sup> It is not clear whether ‘after fourteen years’ means 17 years from his conversion or 14 years, but it was long enough for Paul to have preached the gospel confidently to both Jew and Gentile.

<sup>10</sup> We know not only from Paul’s teaching in Acts—e.g. Acts 13:38–39 and 15:1–3—but his powerful testimony in I Timothy 1:12–17, and especially verse 15, stresses the fact of the forgiveness of sins. His Epistles also stress the primary truth.

For several days he was with the disciples at Damascus. And in the synagogues immediately he proclaimed Jesus, saying, 'He is the Son of God.' And all who heard him were amazed, and said, 'Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem of those who called on this name? And he has come here for this purpose, to bring them bound before the chief priests.' But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Christ.

The facts are: (i) in the synagogues he immediately preached Christ as the Son of God, and (ii) he increased all the more in strength. Is this not saying he was in the fullness of the blessing of Christ? What was it then which gave him this immediate fullness of blessing? The answer must be (i) the forgiveness of sins, and (ii) the infilling of the Holy Spirit. These two come together in Acts 10:44–48 in the account of the Spirit being outpoured on the Gentiles when Peter went to the house of Cornelius. Without these two there is no fullness of the blessing of Christ, but with them there is. Paul himself makes this clear in Galatians 3:1–3. There the showing forth of the Cross and the response to it brings the gift of the Spirit. On the day of Pentecost Peter's message to the multitude who witnessed the outpouring of the Spirit was, 'Repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'.

### ***The Holy Spirit and Fullness***

Surely, then, a person receives the fullness of the blessing of Christ when forgiveness and the gift of the Spirit come to him or her. We have every indication that without the Spirit's coming there could be no conviction of sin, righteousness and judgment, and no revelation of the Father and Christ and their work. John 16:7–11 tells us that. The gift and fullness of the Spirit<sup>11</sup> is something which comes to a person in the *ordo salutis*, the act of salvation. The Spirit does first a prevenient work in terms of John 16:7–11, in the act of new birth—regeneration—and then empowers the new believer for a life of holiness and witnessing. In the New Testament all believers are witnesses.

In Acts 1:8, the words of Christ are directed primarily to the apostles, 'You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem and all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth'. We can draw no other conclusion than that for them to be filled with the Holy Spirit is for them to be filled with power; that is, the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Thus the fullness of the Spirit is likewise the fullness of Christ and all his blessing.

One interesting phenomenon regarding the fullness of the Spirit is that on special occasions where what we might call 'habitual Spirit fullness' obtains, there would seem to be an affusion of the Spirit for a special task. In Acts 4:8, Peter 'filled with the Holy Spirit', speaks to the Sanhedrin. In Acts 7:55, Stephen is said to be 'full of the Holy Spirit' and he cries in the Sanhedrin, 'Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God'. In Acts 13:9, Paul is described as 'filled with the Holy Spirit' as he confronts Elymas the magician.

In all this we do not conclude

- (i) that Peter, Stephen and Paul were not already filled the Spirit, anymore than we would deny they had a special affusion, and
- (ii) that we may never conclude that the initial infilling of the Spirit automatically proceeds and remains as 'fullness'.

Injunctions to 'walk in the Spirit', 'be led by the Spirit', 'go on being filled with the Spirit', 'be aglow with the Spirit', 'do not grieve the Holy Spirit', show us that certain conditions must obtain by which we remain 'aglow with the Spirit'. Paul's word to Timothy to 'stir up the gift of God that is within you' is surely directed to a renewal in the Spirit for that young

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<sup>11</sup> There is no such term in the New Testament as 'the fullness of the Spirit', but many mentions of persons being filled with the Spirit. For more details of this matter of infilling and fullness see my *The Day of the Spirit* (NCPI, 1985).

man, as also for us. For a gift to be fanned to a flame requires the active presence of the Holy Spirit.

### The Fullness of the Blessing of Christ in the Life of Paul

(a) I think we have shown that the fullness of the blessing of Christ came to Paul at his conversion, the washing away of his sins and the infilling of the Holy Spirit. See his statement of Ephesians 1:3; ‘Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places’. I now quote from the April study *God’s Blessings and Cursings–I*, the following observation:

As we have previously indicated, the substance of this passage is that, notwithstanding the blessing God had given to Israel, he has blessed his elect in Christ with every spiritual blessing. The term ‘every spiritual blessing’ (*pase eulogia pneumatike*) has been translated, ‘all spiritual blessings’, ‘every kind of spiritual blessing’, and ‘*the full spiritual blessing*’. The last translation is that of **Markus Barth** who says:

‘the interpretation has to avoid any shade of doubt that the blessing may be composite in many parts. There is no hint that God’s one full blessing should be split into several distinct parts. The blessing given ‘in Christ’ and described in the following eleven verses is an indivisible and perfect whole. If any of its aspects or dimensions were missing, it would not only be incomplete, but distinct from the blessing [given] in Christ’.

The initiator of this blessing is the Father. The blessing is ‘in Christ’. Paul’s great teaching of being ‘in Christ’ shows that all that we have and are as new creations are only *in Christ*. The ‘in Christ’ teaching is so vast that we cannot deal with it here. We assume—rightly, I believe—that Paul constantly had this truth before him and lived in it, hence he always lived in the fullness of the blessing of Christ, Christ being the blessing.<sup>12</sup> As for Paul, so for us, the full status of living in Christ assures us of the fullness of his blessing.

(b) Just as in Genesis 1:22, 28, and 5:2, the blessing was for the purposes of being fruitful, multiplying—and so on—so that the blessed were now active in that for which they were blessed, and so they lived practically in the blessing; so, here in Ephesians 1:3ff., we live in blessing because blessed. For example, in Luke 24:46–51, Christ first explained the events of his death and resurrection, stating that these must be preached among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem; he then lifted up his hands and blessed the commissioned disciples. The blessing was—and is—for the work of proclamation, just as proclaiming will, in itself, be blessing. No matter how much we are blessed it is with a view to the *action* of fulfilling

- (i) the creational mandate, and
- (ii) the redemptional mandate.

I Thessalonians 1:2 – 2:14 shows us Paul in proclamation, and the blessing which followed from the *substance* of what he taught and the *manner* in which he taught it.

(c) Living in the fullness of the blessing of Christ is related to being one with Christ in all things. In Acts 9:15–16, Jesus tells Ananias, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; for I will show him how much *he must suffer* for the sake of my name’. In Colossians 1:24, Paul can talk simply about the fellowship of his (Christ’s) sufferings, and can claim that, ‘Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I complete what is lacking in Christ’s afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church’. In Romans 8:18 he says, ‘I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us’. He told Timothy, ‘They that live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution’.

In II Corinthians 4:7–15, Paul shows that it is impossible to preach the gospel unless one

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<sup>12</sup> If we look at Ephesians 1:3–23, we will find the blessing has the following elements: (i) the gift of holiness, (ii) the gift of sonship, (iii) the gift of the forgiveness of sins, (iv) the elect now being to the glory of God’s grace, (v) the understanding of the mystery of Christ, that all things will be gathered into one in him, and (vi) the gifts of calling, of inheritance, the power working to and in us, the Lordship of Christ over his church and all things.

suffers, the suffering that is ‘carrying in the body the death [killing] of the Lord Jesus’. II Corinthians chapters 6 and 11 give us a description of some of Paul’s suffering, but the principle obtains for all believers—we ‘must suffer many things’ is a criterion for living and acting in the fullness of the blessing of Christ.

(d) Proclaiming the full counsel of God is what flows from the fullness of the blessing of Christ. Acts 20:17–36 is a powerful description of *what* Paul taught, as well as the *manner* in which he taught. When he claimed he taught the whole counsel of God, he had described what that was in substance. He also taught it with tears. Firstly the whole counsel of God had gripped him—we assume at his conversion—and so he had taught the whole range of it. In many places he claims the purity of what he taught and the full motivation of love.<sup>13</sup> Wesley once said, ‘I live by preaching the gospel’, and this is what Paul is indicating. He saw the commission as the whole reason for his living, and in I Corinthians 9:16 he cries, ‘Woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!’

(e) Paul was always a man of the Spirit. Not only does a rich doctrine of the person and work of the Spirit come through his teaching in Acts and his epistles, but we assume that he lived in accordance with what he taught. He went on being filled with the Spirit and so was led by the Spirit, walked by the Spirit, lived in the Spirit, produced the fruit of the Spirit, prayed in the Spirit, lived in Christ and the Father by the Spirit, and proclaimed the gospel in the power of the Spirit. In this way the fullness of the blessing of Christ was richly upon him.

(f) Our exposition of Paul and his life as an apostle who had the apostolic truth might seem to make him a hero, a triumphal and powerful proclaimer, but Paul gives many disclaimers to this. He recognises human weakness. For example, in Romans 7 he sees that sin, *of itself*, is more powerful than Paul is, *of himself*. Part of the message he preaches is to do with the grace which liberates him from bondage and enables him to live in freedom from the domination of sin and guilt, but he shows that no person can accomplish this *of himself or herself*. He recognises that it is the work of the Cross which has delivered him from the power of Satan and the world. Most of all, he had learned that only when he is weak is he really strong, for God’s power is made perfect in his—Paul’s—weakness. We know Paul had the strong pressures of opposition, human temptation, and fallibility. No wonder he told his converts, ‘Receive not the grace of God in vain’, that is, ‘in an empty way’, because he had to live in the fullness of that grace.

### **CONCLUSION: LIVING THE LIFE IN THE FULLNESS OF THE BLESSING OF CHRIST**

We are driven to conclude that, from the moment of his conversion right until he wrote Romans 15:29, Paul had lived in the fullness of the blessing of Christ. The blessing may be seen in many ways—as blessings galore; as beatitudinal states; as experiences in the Father, the Son and the Spirit—but the blessing of Christ was what Christ had given to him in the gospel, and was thus the gospel and the resident living of Christ in him, as he in Christ. It particularly was dynamical in the actual proclamation of the gospel; for in that sense God’s salvific blessing was proclaimed, which in its original form was that of creation itself, but creation that was covenantal. The ‘blessing of Abraham’ was designed for the elect, and was incarnated in Christ, saving from the curse of sin, and being ‘the whole blessing’ God had given in Christ as he gave Christ to his elect people, and his elect people to Christ.

In the New Testament there are 34 beatitudinal states—‘blessed are’—and in the Old Testament some 20 beatitudinal states; some 70 invocations of blessing—‘blessed be’—as

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<sup>13</sup> Examples of this are I Corinthians 4:1–5; 9:15–27; II Corinthians 2:14–17; 4:1–2; 5:14ff.

also a number in the New Testament; but no one has the blessing of God except the Lord confer it. It is through the proclamation of the gospel that it is conferred, and what we see is that no blessing is contracted with God, but it is that which is given by grace. To be able to preach the gospel is a blessing, and the blessing, so to speak, is strengthened and guarded by continuous proclamation.

We conclude then that when Paul said 'I know I will come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ', he was not conditioning himself to come in a certain state. He knew that was how he would always come and go. The facts as we know them were that he was sent as a prisoner to Rome, that he went through torrid experiences on the way, such as being shipwrecked and having a viper hanging from his hand. Is this the way to come in the fullness of the blessing of Christ?! Yes, blessing does not always mean a fine set of circumstances which encourage the person. Paul—as we—was to suffer many things. Yet he certainly arrived in the fullness of the blessing of Christ and preached the Kingdom of God to the Jews who came to question him. He was a blessing to all who visited him in his new situation. If some of the Letters which are called 'the prison letters' are linked with his imprisonment with Rome, then they are filled with the joy of a man who was living in a state of blessing.

## God's Blessings and Cursings–II

### SOME ASPECTS OF GOD'S BLESSING IN THE SCRIPTURES

We need to review our last two Studies to catch a bird's-eye view of the idea of blessing in Scripture. Even those two Studies are lacking in fullness. As a review the following points need to be considered.

#### The Blessing of God

- (a) God blesses the sea creatures and the birds (Gen. 1:22; cf. 9:8–17). Note that blessing Noah is in the context of a restorative covenant.
- (b) God blesses Man in the giving of the mandate (Gen. 1:28, 52; cf. 9:1ff., the latter being in covenant context).
- (c) God blesses Abraham, and through him those nations which will bless themselves by Abraham.
- (d) The blessing is given to Abraham, then Isaac and then Jacob, and Jacob passes it on to his sons, especially Joseph. This blessing is named and given afresh through Moses, Aaron, Joshua, David and Solomon.
- (e) So far as Israel was concerned Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 must be read to see the nature of blessing God will bring to his obedient, covenant people. (*Note*: these blessings need to be traced through the centuries.)
- (f) In the New Testament the blessing of Abraham is linked with Christ's coming (Luke 1:68–75; Gal. 3:13–14).
- (g) In Christ God blesses his people with 'the whole blessing' (Eph. 1:3). This is 'the fullness of the blessing of Christ' (Rom. 15:29).
- (h) All creational blessing is to do with the wellbeing of creation—creatures, land, and Man – and to this end the blessing of God is upon all.
- (i) All covenantal blessing has, as its end, the same purpose. If we take creational covenant and creational blessings, then they are the one, coalescing, so to speak. Thus creational and covenantal blessings are likewise eschatological.
- (j) Thus the first two chapters of Genesis must be read protologically of the *telos* to come, and so the blessing proceeds to the fulfilment of things eschatological in the *telos* (see 'Conclusion' of this Study).

#### The Heart of the Cursing of God

- (a) The earth is cursed because of Man's original sin.
- (b) The earth experiences the nature of curse in the murder of Abel and his blood in the soil.
- (c) The whole earth knows the curse of the Flood, but, this having happened, God will no more curse the earth in this way.
- (d) Cursing is linked with the Abrahamic covenant. Nations who name Abraham are blessed and those who do not are cursed.

- (e) Israel affirms God's rightful blessing and cursing according to the conduct of the people. Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 need to be read closely. The Book of Lamentations needs to be studied closely to see Jeremiah's confession that Israel deserved the terrible cursing God brought upon it. In principle the land, its vegetation and its creatures feel the effects of the curse when Israel is disobedient to Yahweh the Covenant God (cf. Isa. 24), and the worst of the cursings are the judgments of exile. Such cursings are intended to bring back God's covenant people to blessing.
- (f) Much of the Old Testament describes (i) the condition of people from the Fall to the Flood; (ii) designates the nations which derive from Ham, Shem and Japheth—Noah's sons—and Noah's cursings and blessings on his sons; (iii) the nations who are under judgment such as the Amorites (Gen. 15:16); (iv) the nations in good relationship with Israel or against her; (v) the various 'burdens' or 'oracles' which show God has not ignored the nations through some—imagined—preoccupation with Israel, some of these portending judgments and some having certain praise; and (vi) prophecies concerning nations coming to Jerusalem and Israel and being joined in worship with Israel. Isaiah 25:6–9 is an especially beautiful one of these, particularly as contrasted with a state of curse in Isaiah 24.
- (g) Much of the New Testament is given over to the matter of the nations and God's will to bring them into the Kingdom: (i) Christ speaks of these nations in Matthew 25:31ff. where some are goats and have everlasting judgment, whilst others are sheep and have everlasting joy in the Father's presence. These latter are called 'Blessed of my Father'; (ii) Christ sees those who think they are in the Kingdom being cast out whilst those of the other nations (Gentiles) enter the Kingdom; (iii) the import of the gospel is to bring in all nations who will respond to the gospel; and (iv) at the end the nations that respond will bring their glory into the Holy City. God has always been the God of the nations, both for blessing and cursing. Cursing may simply be the absence of blessing, but blessing is more than the absence of cursing.
- (h) What cursing there is in Genesis 3 is protological of the ultimate curse which shall wipe out all evil when it has been defeated, judged and the execution of judgment effected. What is evil can never again interrupt the blessing. The conflict of blessing and cursing occupies most of the text of the Book of the Revelation.

### **The Heart of the Principle of Blessing**

- (a) God is the one who blesses.<sup>1</sup>
- (b) The creation, including Man, are blessed by him.
- (c) The blessing of God on Man evokes blessing on God by Man. The Psalmist in Psalm 103:1–5 calls on his soul (i.e. himself) to bless the Lord (Yahweh) for the blessings he has given. In verses 20–22 he calls on 'you his angels', 'all his hosts, his ministers that do his will', and 'all his works, in all places of his dominion', ending with another demand on his soul to bless the Lord.
- (d) Human beings bless human beings, such as Melchizedek, God's high priest and King of Salem who blessed Abraham who was already blessed by God. The Aaronic blessing is *through* the priesthood *from* God, and is not one human being blessing another. Blessing another is almost a ritual, it being the best one can do for another. However stereotyped such blessing of another may be, it springs from the original wish to have God bless

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<sup>1</sup> It is interesting how many comments there are on 'God the superior, blesses man the inferior, and then Man the inferior blesses God the superior'. I think it is a pity that these two words are used. It is the goodness of God that he blesses Man, but it is not simply from a superior position but a position of his Covenant Fatherhood, his love for Man, his creatures and the remainder of creation.

another as he had blessed the recipient himself, or herself. This invocation of blessing is quite widespread in the Old Testament.

### The Nature of God's Blessing

If we seek to know what is the substantial nature of God's blessing, that is to say, what it produces and what continually obtains from it, then we commence with the blessing to the water-creatures and the birds in Genesis 1:22. In principle it is fruitfulness and multiplication of numbers, helping to fill the earth. For Man, in Genesis 1:28, 5:2, and 9:1ff., it is multiplication of offspring, Lordship over all things, and the subduing of them under that Lordship. Whilst God's command which follows his act of blessing is 'Be fruitful and multiply', it is implicit that God is giving the ability to do so, and therefore that the blessing is constantly active, and the sense of the state of the blessing is found in following the command. The command is really the giving of the ability to fulfil it. It has been said that whilst the term 'blessing' is not always used, wherever there is a promise the prospect of it is *in* the promise.<sup>2</sup>

In Genesis 17:5ff., although the word 'blessing' is not present, the promise is to Abraham of innumerable descendants as well as the future possessing of the land of Canaan. In the same chapter (vv. 15ff.) the blessing of Sarah is explicit: she shall be the mother of many nations. In 17:18, Abraham virtually asks a blessing for Ishmael and God answers, 'As for Ishmael, I have heard you; behold, I will bless him and make him fruitful and multiply him exceedingly'. In 22:15–18, the promise of 12:1–3 is virtually repeated, and included is the multiplication of Abraham's descendants and the nations being blessed when they refer themselves to Abraham's seed. In 25:11, Isaac is blessed after his father Abraham dies. Part of this blessing is referred to in 26:12 as it relates to fruitfulness and possessions, and in verse 24 God appears to Isaac and reiterates the covenant blessing he had given to Abraham. Thus the substance of the covenant blessing is 'giving vitality, prosperity, abundance or fertility'.<sup>3</sup> In 49:25–26, the blessing Jacob gives to Joseph has to do with fecundity, possessions and so on. It would seem that the idea of 'spiritual blessing' is not delineated, but we have to keep in mind that Man was blessed by being created, given the creational mandate and put into Eden, the paradise, the sanctuary, the place of communion with God including all that is Edenic; all of which is protological or proto-historical of the eschatological and gives a sense of wellbeing to Man as *shalom* which, in turn, derives from the rest of God (Gen. 2:1–3; Exod. 20:11; etc.).

With the Fall, the loss of Edenic bliss, worship and communion with God means that whilst the blessing is not revoked, there is the presence of the curse. Often it seems that the very blessing of God goes counter to the curse and keeps Man, by grace, in a true state of being with God. The essence of covenant blessing is the promised Presence of God. 'I will be your God and you shall be my people', is more than the physical blessing of multiplication of offspring and growing success in crops and cattle and riches. Even so, these are not foreign to, but part of the blessing of God's Presence.

We are now more in a position to see what a person experiences in the state of blessing which is assured by creation-covenantal blessing. What is clear is that, with the giving of blessing, God expects gratitude and obedience; not as one might demand for a 'hand-out' but as a Creator-Covenant Father might require of people who live in true blessing, in his *shalom*. It is interesting to read Genesis 26:1–5, where God appears to Isaac to warn him against going down to Egypt, and promises again the blessing of the covenant given to Abraham his father because of Abraham's obedience.

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the former famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. And the LORD appeared to him, and said, 'Do not go

<sup>2</sup> cf. the article on *brk* by O. Schilling in *The Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans 1975, pp. 279–316).

<sup>3</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 294.

down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and will bless you; for to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath which I swore to Abraham your father. 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.'

Note the, 'because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws'. God is passing on to Isaac the blessing given to his father because Abraham was obedient. Note that there is no element of contract here, but obedience is the logical outcome of being given, and living in, the blessing. It would be puzzling to know how one could possess *shalom* if one were disobedient.

## THE BEATITUDES OF GOD

Now we come to the heart of this Study—what it means to be in a *state* of blessing. We have pointed out that whilst *barak* and *asher* in the Old Testament are somewhat synonymous, *brk* is primarily the *root* of blessing, being blessed, giving blessing to others, whereas *asr* is linked with the *state* of the possessor of blessing. So in the New Testament, generally speaking, the verb *baraka* is translated by *eulogia* and *asher* by *makarizo* (used only in Luke 1:48 and James 5:11), and is found mainly in the adjectival forms *makarios*, *makaria*, etc.

I think it would be good to quote fully the passages which are to do with the blessed in both Old and New Testaments. It will be good to see what are the various states. If what we have said above regarding the substantial nature of the blessing as (i) fruitfulness, fecundity, and fulfilling God's creational mandate, and (ii) living in the rest of God, being in communion with him, hence worshipping and blessing him in thanksgiving, then we should see that a *state* of blessing does not arise from what we *do*, so much as what we *do* arises from the *state* of blessing, which in turn is based upon the actual blessing with which God endows us.

It is important that we grasp this principle otherwise we will fall into the error of seeking to do certain things in order to obtain blessing, and so unfortunately the contractual principle will be affirmed.

Of course, those who are under God's covenant of creation, but who have subverted it and live in a state which is not pure, are still given blessing. Even so, those who are given blessing are open to the curse and cursing, and need to repent, come to God, and from the heart come under the cover of his covenant which is now one of grace. Such a person who sincerely seeks the blessing of God will find it, but his obedience will be consequent upon his redemption, and so his obedience will be his response to grace and by no means the cause of it.

We could conclude, then, that he who is blessed will act in certain ways, and will know delight, peace, joy, happiness, security—in short, *shalom*—as in conformity with the blessing his behaviour is right in the sight of God. Seeing what certain folk do who are blessed can be a paradigm for us by which we can recognise whether we are living, or not living, in a state consonant with the blessing God has already given us in Christ. Where we see elements which are missing in us, then we can rectify them in fresh obedience, not in order to increase the blessing, but to live consonant with it, always remembering that there is no such thing as a blessing which is apart from union with the living God, 'from whom all blessings flow'. This emphasises the powerful principle that we do not seek to evoke blessing from God, but simply seek to live appropriately within 'the whole blessing' already given.

### Beatitudes of the Old Testament

**Psalm 1:1f.:** Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinner . . . but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

**Psalm 2:12:** Blessed are all who take refuge in him.

**Psalm 32:1–2:** Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man to whom the LORD imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

**Psalm 33:12:** Blessed is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage!

**Psalm 34:8:** O taste and see that the LORD is good! Happy [blessed] is the man who takes refuge in him!

**Psalm 40:4:** Blessed is the man who makes the LORD his trust, who does not turn to the proud, to those who go astray after false gods!

**Psalm 41:1:** Blessed is he who considers the poor! The LORD delivers him in the day of trouble.

**Psalm 65:4–5:** Blessed is he whom thou dost choose and bring near, to dwell in thy courts! We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, thy holy temple!

**Psalm 84:4:** Blessed are those who dwell in thy house, ever singing thy praise!

**Psalm 84:12:** O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man who trusts in thee!

**Psalm 89:15:** Blessed are the people who know the festal shout, who walk, O LORD, in the light of thy countenance.

**Psalm 94:12–13:** Blessed is the man whom thou dost chasten, O LORD, and whom thou dost teach out of thy law to give him respite from the days of trouble, until a pit is dug for the wicked.

**Psalm 106:3:** Blessed are they who observe justice, who do righteousness at all times!

**Psalm 112:1:** Praise the LORD. Blessed is the man who fears the LORD, who greatly delights in his commandments!

**Psalm 119:1–2:** Blessed are those whose way is blameless, who walk in the law of the LORD! Blessed are those who keep his testimonies, who seek him with their whole heart.

**Psalm 128:1:** Blessed is every one who fears the LORD, who walks in his ways!

**Proverbs 8:32:** And now my sons listen to me: happy [blessed] are those who keep my [wisdom's] ways.

**Proverbs 8:34:** Happy [blessed] is the man who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

**Isaiah 30:18:** Therefore the LORD *waits* to be gracious to you; therefore he exalts himself to show mercy to you. For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all those who *wait* for him.

**Isaiah 32:20:** Happy [blessed] are you who sow beside all waters, who let the feet of the ox and the ass range free.

**Isaiah 56:1–2:** Thus says the LORD: 'Keep justice and do righteousness, for soon my salvation will come, and my deliverance be revealed. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil.

**Daniel 12:12:** Blessed is he who waits and comes to the thousand three hundred and thirty–five days.

*Note:* a most profitable exercise would be to adduce the numerous principles of human action in which the states of blessing obtain.

### Beatitudes in the New Testament

**Matthew 5:3:** Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 5:4:** Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

**Matthew 5:5:** Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.

**Matthew 5:6:** Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

**Matthew 5:7:** Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.

**Matthew 5:8:** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

**Matthew 5:9:** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**Matthew 5:10:** Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

**Matthew 5:11–12:** Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

(Note: for the Lukan version of Matthew 5:3–12, see Luke 6:20–23. For Matthew 24:46–47, see Luke 7:23; cf. 12:42–43. For Matthew 13:16, see Luke 10:23–24.)

**Matthew 11:6:** Blessed is he who takes no offence at me.

**Matthew 13:16–17:** But blessed are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear. Truly, I say to you, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.

**Matthew 16:16–17:** Simon Peter replied, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' And Jesus answered him, 'Blessed are you Simon Bar-Jona! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven.'

**Matthew 24:46–47:** Blessed is that servant whom his master when he comes will find him so doing. Truly, I say to you, he will set him over all his possessions.

**Luke 14:13–14:** But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed because they cannot repay you. You will be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

**John 20:29:** Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.

**Acts 20:35:** . . . the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'

**Romans 4:7–8:** Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not reckon his sin.

**James 1:12:** Blessed is the man who endures trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life which God has promised to those who love him.

**Revelation 1:3:** Blessed is he who reads aloud the words of the prophecy, and blessed are those who hear, and who keep what is written therein; for the time is near.

**Revelation 14:13:** Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord henceforth. 'Blessed indeed,' says the Spirit, 'that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!'

**Revelation 16:15:** Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!

**Revelation 19:9:** Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.

**Revelation 20:6:** Blessed and holy is he who shares in the first resurrection!

**Revelation 22:7:** Blessed is he who keeps the words of the prophecy of this book.

**Revelation 22:14:** Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates.

## THE UNUSUAL NATURE OF THE BEATITUDINAL STATES

It is noticeable that almost none of the beatitudinal states is final and fixed. For example, the Matthean beatitudes speak of being poor in spirit, mourning, being meek, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, being merciful, pure in heart, being peacemakers and being persecuted. These states are somewhat like those found in the lives of the men and women of faith in Hebrews 11. They lived by the promises but in this life did not receive their fulfilment. He, therefore, who would covet beatitudinal peace and joy must be exposed to many difficulties as he lives in obedience to God and love to all neighbours and brethren. He must participate with God in the anguish of the human scene, yet without guilt and shame of evil. His is a life filled with hope, with anticipation of the holy *telos*.

## THE NATURE OF THE STATES OF CURSING, OF JUDGMENTAL SUFFERINGS

We have seen the differences which obtain in 'the way of Cain' and 'the way of Abel'. The first is enmity to God and man, and self-justification springing from a false 'knowledge of good and evil'; the second from love to God and Man, and trust in God's true knowledge of good and evil, namely the pursuit of God's will in his law and his purpose for history. To be

on the wrong side of God's law and his will is no light matter. Nothing will escape the divine judgment.

### **CONCLUSION TO 'GOD'S BLESSINGS AND CURSINGS—II'**

The Studies we have done so far in the gifts of God, in giving, receiving and thanksgiving and the matter of blessings and cursings, all encourage us to think that God is the Giver, and that for us who receive, the greatest blessing lies in giving to others what we have received from God. At the same time there is a knowledge of God's will which is 'the knowledge of his will in all insight and wisdom', namely that as Creator he placed man in Eden, in a Paradise where he would train him to spread the life and principles of that Paradise across the whole world. This is what God has pursued in creation, in blessings that are congruous with his creational covenant, and with cursings on those who would refuse that covenant and replace it with their own devisings. Thus through the covenants God has not only kept alive the paradisiacal purpose but is bringing it to its *telos* through all history. Thus the last chapters of the Revelation speak of the ultimate cursings, the judgments which deal in finality with the evil which began with 'that old serpent, the devil'—who sought to subvert God's plan in Eden—and his end in the lake of fire. Along with him all cursings are completed with the judgments at the great white throne. The last chapters of the Revelation deal with the climax and completion of the blessings in the New Temple, the New-Holy-City, the 'profound mystery' of the Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, and the Paradise which is the Holy City, in which the River of Life flows, and the Tree of Life is fruitful in every month of the Holy Year, and whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. In this great Sanctuary God and the Lamb are worshipped in the fellowship of the Holy Spirit.

This is the true blessing and all experience the beatitudinal blessing in the beatific situation 'in the city of the Great King', the New Jerusalem.

# The Gift of Holiness—I

## THE MEANING OF HOLINESS IN THE SCRIPTURES

When we want to understand the meaning of a biblical word we generally seek to find the meaning of it as verbs and substantives in the Old Testament and the New Testament, and we will first try the method of examining some of its uses in their contexts. For example, in Hebrews 12:8–10, the writer says that human fathers discipline us as they see fit. God, the writer says, disciplines us ‘that we may share his holiness’. Note, we do not obtain holiness, even as a gift, but we can share in it.<sup>1</sup> The Scriptures speak of God’s attributes such as goodness, truth and righteousness, these being part of his nature.<sup>2</sup> Even so, holiness and love are his very Person. ‘God is light’ and ‘God is love’ are two distinct descriptions of him. We may be sanctified by God, that is, declared holy, and he may assist us to live in a holy manner, first by cleansing us from impurity and guilt, but without his aid we cannot live a holy life. Once accepting the biblical fact ‘God alone is holy’, we will not think of our sanctification as a gift we receive and develop by utilising it, but as a category declared of us by God, and his aid in helping us to live the life of holiness. Our sanctification and sanctity lie in God, and in this sense they come to us gift-wise.

In Isaiah 6 we have a wonderful chapter which partly explains the idea of holiness. The prophet Isaiah was technically a sanctified person because he was a member of the holy people, Israel.<sup>3</sup> It is only when he has a vision of God in his holiness that he realises his own impurity and profanation. Uzziah the king, who had died, had been made a leper because of his attempt to offer sacrificial worship, which was alone a priestly function. Isaiah saw the Lord in his holiness in the temple at Jerusalem—but it was in fact a hall, a royal palace<sup>4</sup>—and he sat upon a throne, which showed his Kingship of the whole universe and which transcended the earthly temple. The celestial seraphim showed their worship of Yahweh by their powerful crying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory’.<sup>5</sup> This could also be translated, ‘The whole earth is the fullness of his glory’. A. J. Motyer says, ‘Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness’.<sup>6</sup>

The outcome of this sight of holiness was that the prophet cried that he was lost, that he

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<sup>1</sup> II Peter 1:3–4 says, ‘His divine power has granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who called us to his own glory and excellence, by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world because of passion, and become partakers of the divine nature’. Here we are participators (sharers) in the Divine Nature, but we do not have what is God’s nature itself. We cannot be creators when he is Creator. It is always in dependence that we receive from him. Of ourselves, we are not holy, love, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Herbert W. Richardson, in *Theology For a New World* (SCM, London, 1968), pp. 132–33, says:

For, as we have previously argued, the distinguishing characteristic of God is a property not of His nature but of His person, viz., holiness. Someone can know things *about God* by knowing characteristics of His nature (e.g., truth or love or happiness). But one can only know God Himself, i.e., know God insofar as He is God, by experiencing the holiness that is the distinguishing property of His existence. Since holiness is inseparable from the person of God, we can only know God in Christ by experiencing Jesus of Nazareth as the Holy One in person.

Richardson seems to make holiness alone the person of God, making it one with God’s glory. I John 4:8, 16 make love not merely to be an attribute, but as with holiness the very Person of God. So what I have set out above.

<sup>3</sup> See Deuteronomy 7:6; 14:1–2; Exodus 19:5–6; Leviticus 11:44, where Israel is named as a holy people and commanded to live consonant with its calling.

<sup>4</sup> See Psalms 11:4; 18:7; 29:9.

<sup>5</sup> A correct translation would be, ‘The whole earth is the fullness of his glory’, and this must mean on Motyer’s statement—‘Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness’—that the creation is the fullness of his holiness. This raises questions in regard to the creation, or the correctness of Motyer’s statement.

<sup>6</sup> *The Prophecy of Isaiah* by Alex Motyer (IVP, 1993) p. 77. Herbert W. Richardson in his *Theology For a New World* (SCM, 1968) p. 119f. has a valuable section titled ‘Holiness, the Glory of God’.

was a man of unclean lips and dwelt in the midst of a people of unclean lips. God, the ‘holy One of Israel’, is often called ‘Your Redeemer’. So here, at his bidding, Isaiah is purified by a live coal from the altar of sacrifice, and is told, ‘Behold, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away, and your sin is forgiven’. Isaiah would have had, otherwise, to go through cleansing sacrifices at the altar in order to be personally sanctified, or, perhaps we should say, ‘to be brought back to be consonant with his sanctification as an Israelite’.<sup>7</sup>

### **The Use of Verbs, Nouns and Adjectives in the Old and New Testaments**

The Hebrew *qadas* is ‘to set apart, consecrate, hallow, sanctify, treat as holy’. The noun is *qodes* and the adjective, *qodos*. The idea of these is to separate, be separated. The Greek verb *hagiazerein* carries much the same idea. The noun *hagiasmos* is used in contexts which speak of sanctification as a work of God for Man, and in other contexts is applied to the way of life of the sanctified person. The adjective *hagios* is used in similar contexts. All these words in Hebrew and Greek speak of separation from the worship and culture of those who are not Israelites or Christians.<sup>8</sup>

### **Things Holy, Common, Clean and Unclean**

In Leviticus 10:10–11 Aaron was told, ‘You are to distinguish between the holy and the common, and between the unclean and the clean’. G. J. Wenham comments:

Everything that is not holy is common. Common things divide into two groups, the clean and the unclean. Clean things become holy, when they are sanctified. But unclean objects cannot be sanctified. Clean things can be made unclean, if they are polluted. Finally, holy items may be defiled and become common, even polluted, and therefore unclean.<sup>9</sup>

Israel was made to be a holy people in line with God’s covenantal promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The tabernacle, its furniture and worship objects, including its priests and Levites, all had to be sanctified by the use of blood. Likewise the altar sanctified the offerings made upon it, whether animal or vegetable. On the Day of Atonement all things of the sanctuary had to be cleansed by blood, and thus were kept in the category of things sanctified. No less the priests had first to be purified by blood before they could carry out their holy office of sacrifice and worship.

In Ezekiel 44:23 this charge is repeated for the Levites in the new temple of which the prophet wrote. In 22:26 God, in speaking of the old temple has said:

Her priests have done violence to my law and have profaned my holy things; they have made no distinction between the holy and the common, neither have they taught the difference between the unclean and the clean, and they have disregarded my sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them.

Many times in Ezekiel are the people of Israel said to have ‘profaned my holy name’, a quite serious matter.

‘Unclean’ seems to represent that which was clean but has become unclean, or that which was pronounced as unclean by God in the cultus of Israelite life and worship. Profane seems

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<sup>7</sup> Note that Isaiah’s restoration to the sanctification which had always been his as an Israelite and a prophet, was in order that he might take God’s prophetic word to the nation—the message of judgment, and of the remnant, the holy seed.

<sup>8</sup> For a more extensive explanation and use of the words see *Possessed by God* by David Peterson (Apollos, 1995) pp. 139–142.

<sup>9</sup> *The Book of Leviticus* by G. J. Wenham (The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1979) pp. 18–25. John Kleinig’s *Sharing in God’s Holiness* (self-published, 1984) is an excellent treatment on holiness.

to represent that which is in opposition to what is holy so that it profanes it. The state of cleanness seems to be the common, normal state of all things until they are pronounced holy, or unclean by God.

## CREATION AND HOLINESS

### The Seventh Day, the Blessed, Sanctified Day of God's Rest

It has been pointed out that, with one exception, the verb 'to sanctify' is not used in Genesis, and is not met until God delivers his law to Israel and institutes the tabernacle and its worship. The one exception was 'The seventh day and its sabbath rest'. If we maintain, as some do, that the creation itself was not holy but clean, that is, it was 'very good' but not necessarily holy, yet creation is faced with the fact of the sanctification of one thing, the Sabbath. Genesis 2:1–3 states:

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.

Note that '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'. His work was not completed until the seventh day. The following quotes give us something of the significance and power of that day. **William Dumbrell** comments:

The account of creation finds its conclusion and climax in the activity of the seventh day (Gen. 2:1–4a). God declares his work complete and, by implication, invites human beings to enter into the special situation of rest which the seventh day has brought into being. We are left with the distinct impression that the account of the seventh day leaves the continuity of Genesis 1 and enters a more open-ended situation. The seventh day is not an ordinary day. Unlike the other days, no mention is made of a morning or an evening. Though the noun *Sabbath* does not occur in this section, the verb from which it derived occurs twice, and Exodus 20:8–11 points to the creation account as the warrant for Sabbath observance. God blesses the day (i.e., endows it with the potential to be the day which God had intended for human experience) and then hallows it (i.e., makes it his own day). The links that Exodus 20:8–11 forges encourages us to see in the episode of the seventh day in Genesis 2 a model of what the later Sabbath was to represent. Humankind in direct fellowship with God in an unbroken relationship, living in harmony with the earth from which they were drawn and with the animate world with which they are placed in direction relationship, is the message of Genesis 2.<sup>10</sup>

Ezekiel 20:12 confirms what Dumbrell has just said, namely:

Humankind in direct fellowship with God in an unbroken relationship, living in harmony with the earth from which they were drawn and with the animate world with which they are placed in direction relationship, is the message of Genesis 2,

because in Ezekiel 20:12, God says, 'Moreover I gave them [Israel] my sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that they might know that I the LORD sanctify them'. If God gives Israel the sabbaths and then sanctifies the people, then it is reasonable to argue that the sabbath of creation sanctifies all of the human race who participate in it. It is true that for Israel the sabbath has first its creational significance and then redemptive significance, but redemption restores to what was/is creational.

**Karl Barth** opens up the meaning and significance of the day by saying:

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<sup>10</sup> William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Apollos, 1992), pp. 18–19.

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 to 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. It is the covenant of the grace of God which in this event, at the supreme and final point of the first creation story, is revealed as the starting-point for all that follows. Everything that precedes is the road to this supreme point . . . It leads to the point where God rested on the seventh day after the creation of man and prior to any human activity. 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. This is what we have to bear in mind from the very outset in the first creation saga.<sup>11</sup>

Saying that 'this event, at the supreme and final point of the creation of the first creation story, *is revealed as the starting point for all that follows*', makes the seventh day eschatological. It is at once protological and eschatological, and so figures throughout the history of creation and mankind as essential to its true being and action. Gerhard Hasel also shows this significance:

The 'seventh day' sabbath is 'blessed' as no other day and thereby imbued with a power unique to this day. God made this day 'holy' by separating it from all other days. Rest-day holiness is something which God bestowed onto the seventh day. God manifested himself in refraining from work and in rest as the divine Exemplar for humankind. The sequence of 'six working days' and a 'seventh [sabbath] rest-day' indicates universally that every human being is to engage in an *imitatio Dei*, 'imitation of God', by resting on the 'seventh day'. Man (*adam*), made in the *imago Dei*, image of God' (Gen 1:26–28) is invited to follow the Exemplar in an *imitatio Dei*, participating in God's rest by enjoying the divine gift of freedom from the labors of human existence and thus acknowledging God as his Creator'.<sup>12</sup>

Speaking of the sabbath ordinance as being a sign of the covenant with Israel, he adds:

Its 'sign' signification is *commemorative* of God as Creator and Redeemer where the sabbath-keeping community confesses its continuing relationship to its covenant Lord; it is also *prospective* in signification in that it is a 'sign' of the covenant history moving forward to its appointed goal; it is at the same time a 'sign' signifying the believer's *present* posture vis-à-vis God with physical, mental, and spiritual renewal taking place in each sabbath celebration.<sup>13</sup>

The thesis of Herbert W. Richardson in his book is given as, '*The goal of my undertaking, therefore, is to show that God's end in creation is the sanctification, or spiritualization of the world*'.<sup>14</sup> He then adds, 'Now, in fact, keeping of the Sabbath holy is nothing other than the way man lives to the glory of God. For *Sabbath holiness and the glory of God are one and the same thing*'.<sup>15</sup>

Having argued that holiness and glory are the one thing, he asserts:

Since, therefore, God created the world for Sabbath holiness, He must personally enter the world and dwell therein. There mere time and space of the Sabbath is the formal and material precondition for God's personal coming. By His personal coming God sanctifies the Sabbath. *The Sabbath is, so to say, the world's aptitude for the incarnation* [emphasis mine].<sup>16</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (vol. 3, pt 1), pp. 98–99.

<sup>12</sup> Gerhard F. Hasel's article 'Sabbath' in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (vol. 5, Doubleday, 1992) p. 851.

<sup>13</sup> op. cit., p. 852.

<sup>14</sup> Herbert W. Richardson, *Theology For a New World* (SCM, 1968), p. 112.

<sup>15</sup> op. cit., p. 119.

<sup>16</sup> op. cit., p. 126. In our next Study we will examine the necessity for the incarnation of the Son of God, not only for the redemption of the world, but, even more, for its sanctification.

Whilst the last sentence of our quote is pre-empting much we need to see regarding holiness, it does indicate that the incarnation of Christ is linked with the redemptive and eschatological view of the Sabbath. We may surely draw the conclusion that for created Man to live in God's sabbath as given in creation was to be sanctified. Not to live in that holiness was to profane the Sabbath rest and so to profane God, in whose image Man was made, and for whom the Sabbath was to mean *participation in God!*

### THE HOLY PLACE, EDEN

When then we pass to the matter of Eden we are to recognise it as the given sanctuary of God, the place of his presence, the place in which Man was placed that he might tend and keep it. The word 'till' (*abad*) has worship connotation, whilst 'keep' (*shamar*) has guardian connotation, as Genesis 3:24, 'to guard [keep] the way to the tree of life', makes clear. The second account of the creation in Genesis 2 is in some sense pre-empted by Genesis 1:26–31, in that Adam was created, and then Eve and both were given the mandate, which means that mandate must have come to them in the garden of Eden. It is clear from 2:8–9 that Adam was created outside of the garden and then placed in the garden, and the events which then take place were all in this sanctuary–garden. There can be no question that Eden was holy, sanctified of God by his presence, nor can it be questioned that within it the primal couple participated in the seventh day sabbath rest. Thus Herman Hoeksema observes:

... creation is an image of recreation or of the regeneration of all things. The earthly is image of the heavenly. The temporal is image of the eternal. The first man, who is of the earth, earthy, is indeed the lord of the earthly creation under God, servant of the Lord, His covenant friend: prophet, to know Him and proclaim His virtues, to declare and glorify His name; priest, in order to love Him from the heart and with all His powers; and king, in order to rule over all creatures in His name and under Him. But he is also an image of Him that was to come, of the Lord out of heaven, through Whom man, recreated in Him, will presently rule in heavenly glory. *The first paradise is image of the eternal paradise of God that will presently be revealed in the new heavens and the new earth. And the tree of life in the first paradise is an image of the eternal tree of life that is in the midst of the paradise of God. Thus the whole creation is a revelation of God... but... it also points to the final accomplishment of the counsel of God in eternal glory* [emphasis mine].<sup>17</sup>

He later adds, 'The malefactor on the cross receives the promise that he shall be with Christ in paradise that very day, which is quite different from a promise that he should fall asleep'.<sup>18</sup>

Gordon J. Wenham, in his commentary on Genesis 2, has the following to say:

So it seems likely that this description of 'the garden in Eden in the east' is symbolic of a place where God dwells. Indeed, there are many other features of the garden that suggest it is seen as an archetypal sanctuary, prefiguring the later tabernacle and temples. But the mention of the rivers and their location in vv 10–14 suggests that the final editor of Gen 2 thought of Eden also as a real place, even if it is beyond the wit of modern writers to locate.<sup>19</sup>

Graeme Goldsworthy sees Eden as the Kingdom of God:

We first see the Kingdom of God in the Garden of Eden. Here Adam and Eve live in willing obedience to the word of God and to God's rule. In this setting, the Kingdom is destroyed by the sin of man—and the rest of the Bible is about the restoration of a people to be the willing subjects of the perfect rule of God.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> *Reformed Dogmatics* by Herman Hoeksema (Reformed Free Pub., 1976), pp. 174–75.

<sup>18</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 199.

<sup>19</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1, Genesis 1–15* (Word, 1987), pp. 61–62.

<sup>20</sup> Graeme Goldsworthy, *Gospel and Kingdom* (Crossroad, Rydalmere, 1994), p. 47.

Goldsworthy sees this limited Eden as the Kingdom and paradise to be extended to the ends of the earth. The ‘be fruitful and fill up the earth’ of Genesis 1:28 is seen to be the expansion—so to speak—of the Kingdom to the end of the earth. Goldsworthy takes the Fall as the great impediment and so the covenant with Abraham is really the beginning of that expansion, going on as it does through Israel, the covenant with David for his kingdom, which is then fulfilled by Christ—‘great David’s greater son’—and ultimately in the eschaton by Christ’s Messianic Kingship which shall establish the Paradise and Kingdom of God as universal. Mark Strom follows much the same idea:

At first, the vision seemed hazy and incomplete, and was built mainly around analogies like Canaan as a bigger but imperfect Eden. This is certainly how the Israelites understood what God had done for them in the Exodus from Egypt. They believed that the Lord had created them as his new people and that he was leading them into a new land which would be a sanctuary like Eden had been for Adam and Eve (see e.g., Deuteronomy 8:6–9).<sup>21</sup>

William J. Dumbrell views Eden from the point of view of covenant, but also with the connotation of God’s Kingship and Man’s vice–regency of that Kingship:

Here we note that it seems to be the intention of the writer in 2:8 to indicate that man was created outside of Eden and then placed within the garden. The garden is presented as a centre of world blessing. In it arose the world river which divided outside the garden into four systems. The garden also operates as a divine sanctuary, the point where the immediacy of the divine presence was encountered and enjoyed. In short, created in the world with dominion over it, man is immediately abstracted from the world and placed directly in the divine presence. What is said in all this is surely how the dominion mandate was to be exercised. What is stressed is that the command of Gen. 1:28 can function only within the set of divine/human relationships which chapter 2 proceeds to construct. Thus in Gen. 2 we are offered a model of how man thereafter is to regulate the world over which he has been set. Man’s abstraction from the general world does not thus vitiate 1:28; rather it makes it [sic] implementation possible. The complete congruity between man and his garden environment (cf. 2:19) as well as the idyllic male/female relationships to which the latter half of the chapter points, function as illustrations of the manner in which dominion over ordered nature was to proceed.<sup>22</sup>

He [man] is placed in the garden which God had made, and in this setting God is experienced directly. It seems to follow that humans will exercise dominion and authority over their world only when they are directly and centrally related to God. The first man is appointed to ‘till’ and to ‘keep’ the garden (v. 15). The verb *till* later occurs frequently in the technical sense of worship. This usage, together with the priestly and royal allusions to original man in Ezekiel 28:11–19, encourages us to see man in the garden as a royal figure exercising also a priestly function. This dual and interconnected role strikingly anticipates the call offered to all Israel in Exodus 19:3–6. It also implies that the garden is a world sanctuary. Indeed, the presence of God there in the manner depicted in the account would make it so. The notion of a world center from which all revelation emanates and to which all the world defers is a concept through the fabric of the whole Bible. It plays a prominent role in Israel’s prophetic hopes concerning Jerusalem and is the theme upon which the Bible concludes (see Rev. 21:9–22:5, the so-called Jerusalem appendix) . . . The remainder of the account in 2:18–25 establishes an order . . . The chapter concludes with an aside by the author indicating that it is within the marriage relationship that the expectation of fellowship between man and woman is supremely met and experienced (vv. 24–25).<sup>23</sup>

Hoeksema sees Eden as an image of the eschatological paradise, and Goldsworthy, Strom and Dumbrell see it is the beginning of the end, as they see the fulfilment as the end of the beginning. N. T. Wright concentrates on Israel as God’s Adam. Like the other writers he sees the fulfilment of God’s purposes coming through the Abrahamic covenant, but his emphasis is on the final people of God being the true Israel, or as Dumbrell would call it, ‘the New Israel’. He refers to the extra-biblical writing of the intertestamental period as pointing strongly to Israel being Adam. He says, ‘For them, Adam has become embodied

<sup>21</sup> Mark Strom, *Days are Coming: Exploring Biblical Patterns* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 28.

<sup>22</sup> W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster Pr., Exeter, 1984), pp. 35–36.

<sup>23</sup> W. J. Dumbrell *The Faith of Israel* (Apollos, 1992) p. 19–20.

already in Israel, the people of the Torah, and in her future hope'.<sup>24</sup> His view, then, is as follows:

What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham. They will inherit the second Eden, the restored primeval glory. If there is a 'last Adam' in the relevant Jewish literature, he is not an individual, whether messianic or otherwise. He is the whole eschatological people of God. If we take the 'Adam' language out of this context we do not merely distort it; we empty it of its basic content. And if we are to use this material at all for understanding Paul—as I believe we must—we cannot ignore its emphases, or imagine that Paul ignored them, but must ask what he did with them . . .

In this section, then, I shall suggest that Adam—theology, where it occurs in the Old Testament and intertestamental writings, fulfills a specific purpose. It either advances, or develops, a claim about the place of Israel in the purposes of God. It is another way of saying that the world was made for the sake of Israel, or that Israel is, or is to become, God's intended true humanity.<sup>25</sup>

Thus at key moments—Abraham's call, his circumcision, the offering of Isaac, the transitions from Abraham to Isaac and from Isaac to Jacob, and in the sojourn in Egypt—the narrative quietly makes the point that Abraham and his family inherit, in a measure, the role of Adam and Eve. The differences are not, however, insignificant. Except for 35.11f., echoed in 43.3f., the command ('be fruitful . . .') has turned into a promise ('I will make you fruitful . . .'). The word 'exceedingly' is added in ch. 17. And, most importantly, possession of the land of Canaan, and supremacy over enemies, has taken the place of the dominion over nature given in 1.28. We could sum up this aspect of Genesis by saying: Abraham's children are God's true humanity, and their homeland is the new Eden.<sup>26</sup>

### **The Significance of Creation, Eden, and the Seventh Day Rest, in the Light of God's Sanctification**

Whilst nothing is said of the sanctification of the primal couple, yet their being in the sanctuary of Eden gives us indications of holy living. We know little of 'that ancient serpent the devil' who is the serpent, who is more subtle (wily) than any beast of the field. He was able to be in this Eden. We do know the Fall brought separation so that any 'sharing in the holiness of God' was now ended. In some sense we can only speculate about the worship by Man of God from that point onwards.

Cain and Abel, as we have seen, worship with knowledge of the nature of worship. Cain's offering is an impure and God-profaning one, whilst Abel's is by faith. It is acceptable. 'If you do well shall you not be accepted?' God asks Cain, which Wenham translates, 'Shall you not be forgiven?', implying that there was a strong propitiatory element in that sacrifice of Abel which was accepted. The human race needed to offer acceptable sacrifice. Would those sacrifices cleanse them? Undoubtedly.<sup>27</sup> Was their offering place not a sanctuary of God? Presumably. At the cessation of the Flood Noah's sacrifice was wholly acceptable to God, and a new era began. Idolatry quickly manifested itself, Abraham being an idolater in Mesopotamia. God's showing of his own glory made Abraham his covenant friend, and Abraham offered acceptable sacrifice to God. The story of Melchizedek speaks of a holy king-priest, and a holy sacrifice offered by him. Later we find much the same in relation to Jethro the priest of Midian and Moses' father-in-law. Moses and Aaron were virtually blessed by Jethro, as was Abraham by Melchizedek. Yet, in all this there was no indication of Eden, no Kingdom of God expanding to the ends of the earth, filling it up, and no Eden doing the same, making this world the true Paradise of God.

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<sup>24</sup> N. T. Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant* (Fortress Pr., Minneapolis, 1993), p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> *op. cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>26</sup> *op. cit.*, pp. 22–23.

<sup>27</sup> There is an interesting statement in Ezekiel 11:16: 'Though I removed them far off among the nations, and though I scattered them among the countries, yet I have been a sanctuary to them for a while [in small measure] in the countries where they have gone'. This appears to indicate that no matter where God's people are, there he is present and is their sanctuary.

## Israel and Sanctification

Here we see the gifts of God which Paul later named, ‘the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises’, and these in the context of ‘the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, the Christ’. In other studies we have seen that everything in Israel was ‘holy to the Lord’, that is, the people, the tabernacle and its furniture, the priests and Levites, the sacrifices, the prophets. They were God’s Kingdom and his holy sanctuary. They were Eden. As a priest–nation they were to be the holy nation among all the nations, and intended to witness to them of God. All provisions for the unclean being made clean, and the clean being sanctified were present. They were to be no less than sanctified. Sacrifices properly offered brought cleansing, but cleansing was but the restoring of them to their sanctification already given by God. The gifts we have named above were all indispensable each to all others. When the law was flouted and the sacrifices polluted, God’s holy prophets, ‘which have been since the world began’, were there to bring to them the truth of covenant, kingdom, holiness and worship. They were to live consistent with their Edenic calling, mandate and the purpose of Yahweh, their covenant–making King.

### *Israel’s Failure to be a Holy Nation*

The election of Israel was no safe cover for their rebellion, their idolatry, their uncleanness. They were to come under judgment. Hence the dire warnings of the prophets, the dreadful judgments that came to the land, and the judgments of exile, and the loss of their Edenic holy land. If we do not understand Israel’s high calling to promote God’s plan, and to be the priest–nation among all the nations, then God’s warnings of judgment, and his execution of judgments cannot be understood.

The prophets knew that decimation of the nations would be the end of Israel, and they perceived that the land of Canaan, with Mount Zion as its worship centre, was a figure and icon of the Eden and eternal Paradise yet to come. The Kingdom of David was to be greater than David or Solomon had known. It was to be a kingdom which would cover the earth. The glory of the Lord and also, the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, was to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.<sup>28</sup>

The temple of Zion was to be universal, ‘the house of prayer for all nations’. So we have prophecies regarding covenant, kingdom, and the Eden of the ‘new heavens and the new earth’. With them would come a universal experience of God’s sabbath rest. The following prophecies are but a little of what the prophets said about the glorious future.

### **The Gentiles Who Keep the Sabbath (Isa. 56:6–8)**

And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD,  
to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD,  
and to be his servants,  
every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it,  
and holds fast my covenant—  
these I will bring to my holy mountain,  
and make them joyful in my house of prayer;  
their burnt offerings and their sacrifices  
will be accepted on my altar;  
for my house shall be called a house of prayer  
for all peoples.  
Thus says the LORD GOD,  
who gathers the outcasts of Israel,  
I will gather yet others to him  
besides those already gathered.

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<sup>28</sup> If here we were to take A. J. Motyer’s statement, ‘Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness’, then God’s glory covering the earth would be the total revelation of God’s holiness. All the world would be sanctified.

**When Israel Keeps the Sabbath (Isa. 58:11–14)**

And the LORD will guide you continually,  
 and satisfy your desire with good things,  
 and make your bones strong;  
 and you shall be like a watered garden,  
 like a spring of water,  
 whose waters fail not.  
 And your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
 you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
 you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
 the restorer of streets to dwell in.  
 If you turn back your foot from the sabbath,  
 from doing your pleasure on my holy day,  
 and call the sabbath a delight  
 and the holy day of the LORD honorable;  
 if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
 or seeking your own pleasure, or talking idly;  
 then you shall take delight in the LORD,  
 and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
 I will feed you with the heritage of Jacob your father,  
 for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.  
 (cf. Jer. 17:19–27; Ezek. 20:12ff.).

**The New Heavens and the New Earth—the New Eden (Isa. 65:17–25)**

For behold, I create new heavens  
 and a new earth;  
 and the former things shall not be remembered  
 or come into mind.  
 But be glad and rejoice for ever  
 in that which I create;  
 for behold, I create Jerusalem a rejoicing,  
 and her people a joy.  
 I will rejoice in Jerusalem,  
 and be glad in my people;  
 no more shall be heard in it the sound of weeping  
 and the cry of distress.  
 No more shall there be in it  
 an infant that lives but a few days,  
 or an old man who does not fill out his days,  
 for the child shall die a hundred years old,  
 and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.  
 They shall build houses and inhabit them;  
 they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
 They shall not build and another inhabit;  
 they shall not plant and another eat;  
 for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be,  
 and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.  
 They shall not labor in vain,  
 or bear children for calamity;  
 for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD,  
 and their children with them.  
 Before they call I will answer,  
 while they are yet speaking I will hear.  
 The wolf and the lamb shall feed together,  
 the lion shall eat straw like the ox;  
 and dust shall be the serpent's food.  
 They shall not hurt or destroy  
 in all my holy mountain,  
 says the LORD.  
 (cf. Rev. 21:1–22:5; Isa. 66:22–23; 25:6–9).

## CONCLUSION TO ‘THE GIFT OF HOLINESS—I’

We close with two quotes from Herbert W. Richardson which direct us to two facts: (i) that God created the world in order to sanctify it in its ultimate *telos*, and (ii) that sanctification of the world would be brought to pass, but not apart from the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. This second point will be the heart of our next Study.

Since, therefore, God created the world for Sabbath holiness, He must personally enter the world and dwell therein. The mere time and space of the Sabbath is the formal and material precondition for God’s personal coming. By His personal coming God sanctifies the Sabbath. *The Sabbath is, so to say, the world’s aptitude for the incarnation* [emphasis mine].<sup>29</sup>

For, as we have previously argued, the distinguishing characteristic of God is a property not of His nature, but of His person, viz., holiness. Someone can know things *about God* by knowing characteristics of His nature (e.g., truth or love or happiness). But one can only know God Himself, i.e., know God insofar as He is God, by experiencing the holiness that is the distinguishing property of His existence. Since holiness is inseparable from the person of God, we can only know God in Christ by experiencing Jesus of Nazareth as the Holy One in person.<sup>30</sup>

Thus we are thinking of sharing God’s holiness and so participating in his divine nature. In this great mystery we have creation, God’s seventh day holy rest, the covenant of creation which is forever, the kingdom of God and God’s Eden. As we have indicated, to counter the Fall and bring man to the true Eden requires the incarnation of God, and the act of redemption to bring the sanctification of the whole creation. What we will more fully see in the next Study is that God has persisted with Man, creating him for Eden and for Eden’s greater Eden; through Adam to Noah; from Noah to Abraham; from Abraham to all Abraham’s children—all people of faith—firstly with Israel, and then Israel transcending its Eden of the Holy Land, until it is ‘the true Israel of God’ in which are those of old Israel after the faith and then the Gentiles who have come into faith; until there is one people, one body, one multitude such that no man can number, one Holy Marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, one Holy City, that is, one Holy Paradise, in which there is no temple such as there has been, but in which the Holy Temple is God and the Lamb.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> op. cit., p. 126.

<sup>30</sup> op. cit., pp. 132–133.

<sup>31</sup> Note that in Eden, which we have said was the sanctuary of God, there was no nominated temple. Would it not be, then, that in Eden, God, even the Triune God, was its temple?

## The Gift of Holiness—II

### THE DIRECTION AND GOAL OF THE SANCTIFICATION OF MAN AND THE CREATED WORLD

These two parts of our Study on 'The Gift of Holiness' could be summed up as meaning, 'Sanctification is God's gift to all creation that will make it a holy new heaven and a holy new earth, both to be as one, so that all within it can be holy and so worship and serve for ever the living God who created it and ultimately sanctified it for its perfection and eternal glorification'. This is a view which tells us in other words that all things will share, that is, participate, in the very holiness of God'.

#### Revision of Part I

In our previous Study we saw that Man as created was placed in the sanctuary of Eden, the *place* of Covenant, Kingdom, bliss, worship because of God's presence, the beautiful union of Adam and Eve, and participation in the state of holiness, the seventh day of rest.<sup>1</sup> The Fall ejected Man from Eden, and only by faith could Man live with God and participate in worship and the seventh day (Sabbath) rest. Genesis 3:15 is the beacon light showing fallen Man his way through to defeat of evil, of evil's 'knowledge of good and evil', and to some implied restoration from Man's sinful fallenness to true being and the success of the creational mandate.<sup>2</sup> If we take Eden as the place of Man being in God's holiness in true worship, marital love, then ejection from there is the loss, for Man, of the sanctified environment.

Our thesis in this Study II, is then, as follows: Adam's Eden which was lost to fallen Adam, is to be replaced,<sup>3</sup> in effect, by Adam (Man) living in the whole of the earth in accordance with the mandate (Gen 1:28).<sup>4</sup> At present, Man—so to speak—is split into two groups: (i) those following the way of Cain, and (ii) those following the way of Abel. Serpentine wisdom triumphed, only to be met with the Flood; and the everlasting covenant—inherent in creation—was reiterated after Noah's true sacrifice of worship. Abraham was drawn into this covenant and made its earthly head. All nations were to know blessing by Abraham's covenant, or cursing by it, according to their proper or improper attitudes to Abraham.<sup>5</sup> This covenant was ultimately to (i) embrace all nations, and (ii) to issue in the sanctification of the world. In pursuance of this, Israel—the elect seed of Abraham—was to be the holy priest—nation, to live in holy (priestly) ways, and to be God's holy Presence in the world, amongst all nations, witnessing to them of God. All within Israel were holy (sanctified) people and were to live according to prescriptions for worship and righteous conduct.

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<sup>1</sup> It could be argued that Man is not commanded to avail himself of God's rest but it is implied and is part of the whole situation for created Man. Later we see that the sabbath rest is the sign and promise of creation, and the sign and seal of redemption. The promised rest is prior to the Fall, the promise and action posterior to it.

<sup>2</sup> The goal of the mandate is the whole earth becoming the fullness of the Kingdom; the fullness of Eden; the true sabbath rest; all things celestial and terrestrial being sanctified through redemption from the serpentine effect, the death and power of sin, yet through the 'seed of woman', i.e. through the New/Last Adam who will suffer as he defeats the serpent.

<sup>3</sup> 'Replaced' is not a good word. Nor can we use the word 'restored' because we are talking of a localised situation in history which does not geographically now obtain. We can only envisage what was Eden now being renewed in principle, linked with the matter of the regeneration of the entire creation (cf. Matt. 19:28; Rom. 8:18–25).

<sup>4</sup> We noted in Part I that Eden being the true Sanctuary and the true Kingdom of God was, by the mandate, to be expanded to cover the whole earth. The Fall prevented this happening, and the incarnation of the Son of God for redemption and sanctification had to be anticipated.

<sup>5</sup> See Genesis 12:1–3; cf. Galatians 3:13, 14, which speaks of Christ becoming the curse, that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles by faith, that they might receive the promised Holy Spirit.

In the long run Israel failed, and was brought under judgments (cursings) for their sin of idolatry and breaking of the Abrahamic–Sinaitic Covenant. The prophets spoke of the coming days when the ‘new’ David, head of the ‘renewed’ covenant–kingdom promises, would come and Israel would be renewed, the nations flowing into it and Israel (cf. Abraham, Rom. 4:13) being head over the nations of faith, God judging the nations worthy of cursing, obliterating them. Thus what would obtain was to be a holy people composed virtually of Israel and all who have come into her, her law, her worship, and so, her covenant—now Abrahamic, Davidic, and New under the new head of Messiah.

This happening would be, ostensibly, the fulfilment of the world’s sanctification.<sup>6</sup> It would equate with the eschatological, prophetic promises of the Old Testament, and with the prophetic–fulfilment teaching of the New Testament.

### **THE THESIS OF PART II OF ‘THE GIFT OF HOLINESS’**

What we now want to look at, in essence, is God’s action and completion of the sanctification of (i) the corporate people of God, (ii) the persons within that corporate group, and (iii) the entirety of creation, that is, the heavens and the earth, so that they may be called ‘new’. This would all comport with the creational mandate to Man and all the fulfilment of the everlasting covenant.

We note here that in that Creational–Noahic–Abrahamic–Mosaic–Davidic–New Covenant,<sup>7</sup> there are so many elements of promise which are not—by nature of the case—revealed explicitly in the creational mandate and the covenant promises that followed.<sup>8</sup>

In our thesis we will need to see that:

- (a) Abraham and Sarah, in effect, are as a new Adam and Eve, newly worshipping God in the context of a covenant which is to affect all the nations.
- (b) The ‘seed of Abraham’—Christ<sup>9</sup>—will first bring redemption to his people, including ‘people’ as persons, and so sanctify what he redeems.
- (c) The historical people, or congregation (*qahal*) of God, namely Israel, will have their flow-through to the New Covenant people, that is, the Church (*ecclesia*) who will be the people who ‘worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness’ as the prophetic, priestly and royal community, proclaiming to the nations the wonderful works of God.
- (d) Their sanctification—as also their justification and redemption—will be through the incarnation, the atonement (the death and resurrection of Christ).
- (e) The sanctification which will purify the whole people of God, and persons constituting that community, will enable the Church and persons to live in holiness consonant with God’s demands for holiness.
- (f) The ultimate Sabbath rest, constituted of the End events, will climax God’s plan for his entire creation, and will bring his people to be ‘kings and priests unto their God’, so that ‘they will reign on the earth’ for ever.

We will now seek to present and amplify the six points stated above.

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<sup>6</sup> For indications of these elements of my claim see the quotes and remarks at the close of Part I of this Study.

<sup>7</sup> We mean by this long, hyphenated, adjectivised covenant the one everlasting covenant of God.

<sup>8</sup> cf. I Corinthians 2:7–13, where the Spirit alone can reveal the ‘secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’. Such wisdom and its fulfilment is beyond human conception. In II Corinthians 12:3–4, Paul (we believe) was caught up into heaven and he ‘heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter’. Likewise in Revelation 10:1–7, John hears seven thunders but is forbidden to write down what was uttered. Somewhat in the same vein in Daniel 12:5ff. the prophet hears words he cannot understand, and is told they are ‘shut up and sealed until the time of the end’. These show us that much lies in the *eschaton* and the time of the *telos* that cannot be comprehended in the present.

<sup>9</sup> See Galatians 3:16; Genesis 12:7.

## THE SANCTIFYING OF GOD'S PEOPLE AND THE ENTIRE CREATION

### (i) Abraham and Sarah Are, in Effect, as a New Adam and Eve, Newly Worshipping God in the Context of a Covenant Which Is to Affect All the Nations

We have in some measure dealt with this in the last Study. Paul argues from the Old Testament that all people who have faith in God, through Christ, are the children of Abraham. Abraham left idolatry to serve and obey Yahweh, who promised him the new Eden of Canaan, and that ultimately all the nations would find their destiny—as blessing *or* cursing—through Abraham. This means that through grace, that which was lost in Eden would come afresh to humanity through Abraham's seed.

### (ii) The 'Seed of Abraham'—Christ<sup>10</sup>—Will First Bring Redemption to His People, Including 'People' as Persons, and So Sanctify What He Redeems

N. T. Wright says, 'What God intended for Adam will be given to the seed of Abraham. They will inherit the second Eden, the restored primeval glory'.<sup>11</sup> Whilst this seed of Abraham will be the descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob, yet it will also be single and will be the Seed of woman (Gen. 3:15), who in the New Testament proves to be Christ Jesus.<sup>12</sup> This Christ proves to be 'the last Adam' who is contrasted with 'the first man Adam'. 'In Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive'. The first man was a man of dust by created nature, but the second man was from heaven and was life-giving. The first man fell in Eden, the last Adam brings justification by his death, thus overcoming sin and bringing sanctification to those in him.<sup>13</sup>

#### *Paul and Christ's Sanctification*

It is here we need to expand the work of Christ. Paul speaks of that work for the sanctification of God's people. I Corinthians 1:30 says, 'He [God] is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption'. This may be understood that Christ is God's wisdom in righteousness (justification), sanctification and redemption. Christ's work of the Cross<sup>14</sup>—the wisdom of God—brings these three things. I Corinthians 6:11 states, '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>15</sup> All three elements are effects, that is, they have been completed. 'Washed' must mean cleansed of the guilt and pollution of sin. 'Sanctified' must mean inclusion in the people of God, Christ's community, the *ecclesia*. 'Justified' must mean accounted righteous before God. Hence Paul can call the Corinthians 'saints', saying they are 'sanctified in Christ Jesus' (I Cor. 1:2). In Ephesians 1:3f., he asserts that such sanctification was planned before creation, and in 5:25–27, says it was the work of the Cross by which Christ effected the sanctification of the church—'Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word'.

<sup>10</sup> See Galatians 3:16; Genesis 12:7.

<sup>11</sup> *The Climax of the Covenant* (Fortress Pr., Minneapolis, 1993), p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> Read Galatians 3:6–29, especially verse 16.

<sup>13</sup> See I Corinthians 15:22, 45–47; Romans 5:17–19.

<sup>14</sup> Note that the conclusion of Paul's argument from I Corinthians 1:17–29 is that of verses 30–31, namely that the wisdom of the Cross is what brings justification, sanctification and redemption, the three overlapping and being inseparable.

<sup>15</sup> See also I Thessalonians 4:1–8, II Thessalonians 2:13–14, and II Corinthians 6:14–17, for other statements by Paul on sanctification. Paul is emphasising both the calling of God into the sanctified community, and the way of living in it, i.e. in what the Puritans called 'experimental holiness'.

On the whole Paul sees sanctification as so purifying and redeeming the elect that God can thus include them in his people, yet whilst their sanctification is his act of grace, yet his sanctified ones should proceed in life consonant with the category of holiness they have been granted. In looking at sanctification in particular, we should not marginalise the powerful work of the Cross in which Christ is ‘made to be sin’, being ‘put forth as a propitiation’, so that faith in his blood brings justification from sin. Nor should we fail to see that Christ had always in mind the sanctified community—his beloved Bride, the Church.

### ***The Book of Hebrews and Sanctification***

The writer of this Book aims to show his Hebrew Christian readers the full import of the gospel they have accepted, but from which they are in danger of drifting. He shows that Jesus is the Creator—Son of God, and is greater than angels, Moses, Aaron and all others, being the Mediator of the New Covenant. Sanctification, through the work of Christ on the Cross bringing forgiveness and redemption, plays a large part in his exposition. The heart of the matter is stated in 10:10, 12, and 14:

And by that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all . . . But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God . . . For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified.

In this passage the writer asserts that the sanctification of ‘the children God has given me’ (2:13) has now, through the Cross, been completed. In 2:11, he had written, ‘For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin’. Here it is Christ who sanctifies.<sup>16</sup> Throughout the Epistle, the writer is speaking of forgiveness, purification, sanctification, perfection and glorification, and asserts that the action of these works flows from the Cross.<sup>17</sup>

One of the elements concerning sanctification is the self-sanctification of Christ.<sup>18</sup> In Hebrews 10:5–10, Christ speaks of a self-consecration to fulfil the will of God, namely the sanctification of God’s elect. The high priest must have ‘something to offer’ (8:3). It is this body prepared for him that he offers (10:10), whereby his people are sanctified. Hence the writer in regard to Christ, can speak of ‘the blood of the covenant by which he [the believer] was sanctified’.<sup>19</sup>

Having established the fact that sanctification has been accomplished, the writer shows the practical ways in which the community needs to live consonant with its members having received definitive sanctification. Ways of doing this are shown clearly in chapters 12 and 13. In the midst of these practical injunctions the writer says, ‘Follow peace with all men, and holiness without which no man shall see the Lord’. This saying would equate with the view of the other apostolic writers who saw holiness of life issuing from the category of sanctification, keeping in mind that holy action is such in the context of the entire sanctified community. The sanctified are pure, and only the pure in heart shall see God. To ‘pursue holiness’ is not only a fine idea; it is indispensable to being with God in the ultimate.

We have taken only Paul and the writer of Hebrews in this brief paper, but Peter, John, James and Jude also have rich teaching on the subject. Even so, we can conclude on the two principles, (i) that the community of Christ is sanctified by his death, and (ii) that those sanctified are called to practical holiness of living.

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<sup>16</sup> In the Old Testament it is Yahweh who sanctifies. See Exodus 31:13; Leviticus 20:8; 21:15; 22:9, 16, 32; cf Ezekiel 20:12; 37:28.

<sup>17</sup> Note that all these elements are effected by the blood of the Cross. Perfection is the consummation of the believer and the community. Glorification of the sons (2:10–11) is the ultimate revelation of perfection. In 10:10, Christ perfects those who have been sanctified. Likewise there is no sanctification without purification, and we can assume that there can be no forgiveness and purification which does not issue in sanctification.

<sup>18</sup> John speaks of the Father sanctifying the Son (John 10:36), ‘. . . him whom the Father consecrated and sent into the world’. In 17:19, Jesus says, ‘And for their sake I consecrate myself, that they also may be consecrated in truth’.

<sup>19</sup> Hebrews 10:29; cf. 9:13–14; 13:20.

**(iii) The Historical People Or Congregation (qahal) of God, Namely Israel, Will Have Their Flow—Through to the New Covenant People, the Church (ecclesia) Who Will Be the People Who ‘Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness’, as the Prophetic, Priestly and Royal Community, Proclaiming to the Nations the Wonderful Works of God**

We have seen that the beginning of holy worship is in Eden and is part of the eternal covenant of God—sometimes called ‘the covenant of creation’—and so ejection from Eden meant worshipping would follow either the will of the disobedient—false worship—or by faith, that is, the will to be obedient under the grace of God. We cannot here give the entire story of Old Testament worship, but we can say that the sanctified people of God were bound to worship in faith, and, as in Israel, to live according to holy prescription. In John 4:19–26, Jesus tells the woman at the well that a new form and spirit of worship is, as it were, on the doorstep. That this worship was to be ‘in spirit and in truth’, points to a transcendence of the ritual worship as it had been. It likewise points to the Holy Spirit and the truth as Christ himself is, and has come to reveal it, namely as the gospel.

Such worship as we have seen above cannot obtain until the work of Christ is completed up to the point of his ascending and reigning. It is not surprising, then, that part of this worship commences with Christ’s ascension (Luke 24:50–53), but the fullness of this worship comes at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit is present in power, and the truth of Christ is proclaimed with power and great effect. Here those of Israel who believe on their Messiah and are thus baptised receive forgiveness of sins and the gift of the Holy Spirit. Later Paul speaks of the new people being ‘the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit [cf. *NRSV*] and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh’.

This worshipping community has come primarily from Israel ‘after the flesh’, but is now comprised of Jews and Gentiles. Of them Peter can say in I Peter 2:9–10:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that you may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. Once you were no people but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy but now you have received mercy.

In this same chapter he has exhorted them to see themselves as being God’s temple:

Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God’s sight chosen and precious; and like living stones be yourselves built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

There can be no doubt that Peter is pointing back to Israel, God’s sanctified people, and, in particular to Exodus 19:5–6:

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.

Without doubt this new people ‘worship the Lord in holy array’.<sup>20</sup> They are the true holy, worshipping community. They constitute ‘the Israel of God’, as Paul calls them in Galatians 6:16. Ultimately they will be the ‘great multitude which no man could number from all tribes and peoples’, described by John in Revelation 7:9–14. They will also be ‘a kingdom, priests to his God and Father’ (Rev. 1:6). Are they, then, ‘the Israel of God’? Yes!<sup>21</sup> Already celestial and terrestrial worship mingle as one, if we read Hebrews 12:18–29.

<sup>20</sup> There are many Pauline and Petrine passages which describe the Christian worship, and likewise Hebrews has a broader presentation than any other book. These passages confirm the fact of the new worshipping community.

<sup>21</sup> N. T. Wright’s essay, ‘Christ, the law and the people of God: the problem of Romans 9–11’ in his *The Climax of the Covenant*, pp. 231–257, makes out the case for an exegesis of Romans 9–11 which shows that ‘all Israel will be saved’ means that Jews and Gentiles alike who believe in Christ constitute God’s Israel.

**(iv) Their Sanctification—as Also Their Justification and Redemption—Will Be Through the Incarnation, the Atonement (the Death and Resurrection of Christ).**

Our mind is now turned to the fact that the plan of God is to sanctify the world, that is, to create ‘new heavens and a new earth,’ so that ‘the former things shall not be remembered or come into mind’.<sup>22</sup> In ‘(ii)’ above, we have seen that the work of Christ accomplished the justification, redemption and sanctification of the people of God through the Atonement. We remember, also, that nations will know the blessing of God through their association with Abraham, or will know the cursing of God by refusing that association. In Galatians 3:13–14, we saw that Christ became curse for us that the blessing of Abraham might come, through him upon the Gentiles, ‘that we might receive the promise of the Spirit’. The curse being banished by the Cross, Man is free to believe and receive the blessing. We must recognise that *all that was/is evil was taken up into that Cross and received its death knell*. Satan, the world of principalities, powers and evil human beings, the entire sin, guilt and pollution of Man, the flesh–fallen humanity—were all crucified. Indeed no human person or evil power was absent from that act of crucifixion. Thus all that is evil was dealt with at the Cross.<sup>23</sup>

It is patently clear that all evil has not been annihilated or obliterated, even though it is said to be ‘destroyed’ (cf. Rom. 6:6; Heb. 2:14–15).<sup>24</sup> I Corinthians 15:24–28, and Hebrews 10:12–13, show that the finished work of the Cross has nevertheless to be worked out from the time of the Cross happening until the end of history. In Hebrews 10:12–14, Christ is content to sit at the right hand of God until the outworking is complete. Even so, Revelation chapter 5 shows us Christ as the Lion of Judah and the Slain Lamb. This one has the power of all history in his hands and this power is shown in his opening of the seven seals, working the seven trumpets and the seven vials of wrath to bring judgment to the earth and to destroy all evil from the earth, thus depolluting it, as indeed it will be purified, so nothing but that which is sanctified ultimately remains.

**(v) The Sanctification Which Will Purify the Whole People of God and Persons Constituting That Community Will Enable the Church and Persons to Live Presently in Holiness Consonant With God’s Demands for Personal Holiness**

We might make the mistake of thinking that, because we have been sanctified by the work of Christ through the Cross, we can rest easy in that knowledge and not feel we are called upon to live in holy ways. Indeed, we even consider that an idea such as that will be but a fleshly striving for a holiness already given. No: in fact the category of sanctification is the spur to a practical life of holiness. The injunction of Hebrews 12:14 to ‘pursue holiness’ does not mean we are not yet sanctified, but that we are<sup>25</sup> and now do not need to take it lightly, but give deliberate emphasis to the life of holy living.

We remember that God’s covenant with Abraham is called ‘holy’, and that holiness was demanded on God’s covenant people.<sup>26</sup> Israel was given prescriptions for holy worship, holy living and holy witness to the nations.<sup>27</sup> The writer of Hebrews delights to show that the

<sup>22</sup> cf. Isaiah 65:17; 66:22–24; cf. Revelation 21:1 – 22:5.

<sup>23</sup> This statement of the crucifixion of all evil can be substantiated by statements in the NT such as John 3:14; Hebrews 2:14–18; 10:10–14, 26; Colossians 2:14–15; Galatians 1:4; 2:20; 3:10; 5:24; 6:14; II Corinthians 5:21; I Peter 2:24; 3:18; Romans 3:24–25; 6:1–14. There is a work-out of these Scriptures in my *Christ’s Cross Over Man’s Abyss* (NCPI, 1987) and Gustaf Aulen’s *Christus Victor* (SPCK, 1978).

<sup>24</sup> The word ‘destroyed’ can be translated, ‘put out of action’, ‘paralysed’, ‘made ineffective’.

<sup>25</sup> Hebrews 2:11; 9:14–15; 10:10–14, 22, 26ff. all show that we have been sanctified, yet there is no place for complacency in living the spiritual life.

<sup>26</sup> See Luke 1:72, et al.

<sup>27</sup> In all our present Study we have not taken up the idea of law as the way of living in holiness. Prejudice against law as producing legalism rather than delighted—and delightful—obedience can only be countered by seeing the law not simply from God, but as being the law (*torah*) of God himself. See my book, *Sweeter Than Honey, More Precious than Gold* (NCPI, 1996).

outcome of sanctification is the internalised law of God in the heart, and he can proceed to give injunctions for a holy life. In somewhat similar ways the other apostolic writers teach and write much the same.<sup>28</sup> It is not our purpose to enlarge on the matter of practical holiness, but to show that (i) we cannot hide under the category of sanctification given, but (ii) we must realise that such sanctification calls for, and is the way to, holy worship, holy service and holy witness. I Peter 2:4–10 would exemplify this.<sup>29</sup> Again, the sanctified bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:21–33 is Christ's helpmeet, and—having been given his fullness—works with him in history. He wills not to achieve his work without her fellowship and cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

**(vi) The Ultimate Sabbath Rest, Constituted of the End Events, Will Climax God's Plan for His Entire Creation, and Will Bring His People to be 'Kings and Priests unto Their God, So That 'They Will Reign on the Earth', for Ever.**

The writer of Hebrews has sanctification in mind from the beginning of his letter. Explicit in 2:11–17, it is brought to our notice in the necessity for obedience to God's stated will in chapters 3 and 4. Obedience is with a view to the *rest* God had promised Israel. Israel had never received that rest, but 'we who have believed enter into that rest' (4:3).<sup>31</sup> This is God's rest, as stated in Genesis 2:1–3, but has eschatological connotation, as we have discussed in the first Section of this Study (July 1996, pp. 3–5, 7–9) which ought to be read again at this point. I also recommend the reading of Herbert Richardson's *Theology For a New World*, and from which I repeat three passages already quoted:

The goal of my undertaking, therefore, is to show that God's end in creation is the sanctification, or spiritualisation of the world.

Now, in fact, keeping of the Sabbath holy is nothing other than the way man lives to the glory of God. For Sabbath holiness and the glory of God are one and the same thing.

Since, therefore, God created the world for Sabbath holiness, He must personally enter the world and dwell therein. There mere time and space of the Sabbath is the formal and material precondition for God's personal coming. By his personal coming God sanctifies the Sabbath. The Sabbath is, so to say, the world's aptitude for the incarnation.<sup>32</sup>

What, then, is this rest which has been since the world began and is also an eschatological resting place? Of the first it has been said, 'God's own repose, which precedes and stands outside human history',<sup>33</sup> whilst of the latter it must be said that God created the world not simply to redeem it but to bring it to his eternal rest, the sanctification which will for ever spiritualise all things.<sup>34</sup> Said in another way, it means 'the regeneration of the world', the purification of the old heavens and earth so that there be new heavens and a new earth, that is the Holy City coming down out of heaven, the wedding feast of the Bride and the Bridegroom, the City in which God and the Lamb are its light and its temple. All, indeed

<sup>28</sup> See also I Thessalonians 4:1–8; II Thessalonians 2:13–14; II Corinthians 6:14–17; Hebrews 13:1–18; cf. 12:14; I Peter 1:2, 13ff.; 3:14–16; II Peter 3:11ff. Such passages need close study for they are based on the OT tenet, 'Be you holy for [as] I am holy'.

<sup>29</sup> See also I Corinthians 3:16; 6:19; II Corinthians 6:14–7:1.

<sup>30</sup> This is a subject on its own, going beyond the parameters of this Study, but it should be noted that holy living is not a passive matter. Nor is simply domestic. Holy living by the Church is the 'strategy' and 'power' which Christ uses to bring all things to their holy climax. This is seen in part in the Epistles and quite explicitly in the Book of the Revelation.

<sup>31</sup> Recommended is the reading of the exegesis of 4:3–8 in William Lane's 'Word Biblical Commentary', vol. 47A, *Hebrews 1–8* (Word, Dallas, 1991), pp. 99–101.

<sup>32</sup> SCM, London, 1968, pp. 112, 119, 126.

<sup>33</sup> William Lane, op cit, p. 99.

<sup>34</sup> See Richardson, op cit, pp. 130–131.

constitute the Holy Eden, the sanctuary of celestial worship and the ministry of the Israel of God, the kingdom of priests and their holy worship.<sup>35</sup>

This is the rest into which created Man was placed, but which he aborted. It was the rest all people of faith have known, though in part, for its utter completeness comes only at the end, the holy *telos*.

### **THE PASTORAL POWER OF THE GIFT OF HOLINESS**

We live in a world in which the moral lines are very much blurred and need to be cleared. Though this is not, in itself, something we can accomplish, the preaching of holiness as a designation of grace, and a life of power for living in the richness and delight of law, is something we can communicate, especially when we, ourselves, have become subject to it. The true fear of the Lord and love for him issues from this atoning act of the Cross, and the life and power of the Spirit in the Church. A church which worships genuinely in the beauty of holiness is one which can speak powerfully into our contemporary situations and be steady in its own domestic life.

### **CONCLUSION TO ‘THE GIFT OF HOLINESS’**

The importance of this gift among the ‘all things that pertain to life and godliness’ cannot be overstressed. To be sanctified by faith is to be in Adam the New Man and to draw from him power for present, personal and active holiness in faith, hope and love. This is the present glory of the life in Christ, in whose image we are being ‘created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness’, that is, being restored to that which we lost by the Fall. To be in the Last Adam is to be fitted for, and drawn to, the ultimate Eden; the Last Adam himself being the Bridegroom of this Last Eve of the new Paradise.

To be sanctified and to live the life of holiness means we look to the end when all things shall be sanctified, and we shall live out this sanctity without impediment of evil. The utter freedom to worship God without shame, to see him as Father—Holy Father—and to be inducted into the ultimate worship as kings and priests unto our God, gives us present hope that we shall never be confronted by the accusations of conscience. We shall see God face to face, being in the likeness of His Son and sharing that glorious filial liberty for ever. Such hope of that which is coming strengthens us for living in that which already is. Let us then now ‘follow . . . holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord’, and by which we shall share in the Sabbath rest of God, for in this rest alone subsist all those marvellous elements of the new, holy creation.

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<sup>35</sup> Matthew 19:28; II Peter 3:11–13; Revelation 21:1 – 22:5.

## God Alone is Holy

The *trishagion* of Isaiah 6:3 and Revelation 4:8 are really saying 'God alone is holy'. The 'Holy! Holy! Holy!' are not so much trinitarian as an intensification of the term holiness—the holiness which is Yahweh himself. When we ask what 'holy' means, we realise that the term 'holy' is used with regard to deities, idols and customs. For a thing to be 'holy' means it is *tabu*: it is forbidden. It belongs to the deity or place to which it is dedicated. In Israel there was horror at the thought that any other than Yahweh could be deemed to be holy. *Only* God is holy. Moses was told that the ground on which he was standing was holy and he quickly assumed the worship mode. Isaiah in the temple or hall heard the powerful—even terrible—*trishagion* of the seraphim. Psalm 99:1 says, 'He sits among the cherubim'. In fact **Hans-Joachim Kraus** says:

Yahweh is a God of justice and not a deity of being. The holiness of Israel's God is the power that makes justice and righteousness prevail. It is not an attribute of a numen [a deity], but the signature of a name (Ps. 99:3), that establishes justice.<sup>1</sup>

This is a good statement which shows us there are *no* deities and Yahweh is not just *a* deity but *the* One who shows himself by what he does.

Psalm 99, therefore, is a psalm profitable to be read. It shows God's exaltation over the nations, and as such is holy. He is 'Mighty King, lover of justice', has established equity, has executed justice and righteousness in Israel, hence we should worship him for he is holy. Verses 6–8 speak further of his work in Israel and rightly conclude with the words, 'Extol the LORD our God, and worship at his holy mountain; *for the LORD our God is holy.*'<sup>2</sup> We conclude, then, that God is holy and *acts*, and that in his *action* is his *holiness*. Exodus 15:11 bears this out, for the people of Israel sing at the deliverance of the Red Sea:

Who is like unto thee, O Lord among the gods?  
Who is like unto thee, majestic in holiness,  
terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?<sup>3</sup>

'Majestic in holiness', 'glorious deeds', and 'doing wonders', is God's holiness. It is his majesty pervading the whole earth, such as seen in the cry 'Holy! Holy! Holy! The whole earth is full of his glory'. Glory is God's all-present holiness.<sup>4</sup> It may sound naive to say that God is holy before he creates, but it is his holiness which is his majesty, out of which he creates the earth and steadfastly maintains his ruling majesty. Man as created in the image of God was intended to communicate in his *acts* the holiness of God, since he was 'created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness'.<sup>5</sup> Isaiah 57:15 shows that the transcendent holiness of God is also a holiness which dwells in the heart of the right-minded (humble) person, with a view to reviving it. Holiness is, then, active power which manifests itself in deeds, and not only in purity of being.

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<sup>1</sup> Theology of the Psalms (translated by Keith Crim, Augsburg, 1986) p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> The idea here is that God *alone* is holy. The 'holiness' accorded to other (so-called) deities must be false, since they cannot do the deeds which are the expression of holiness.

<sup>3</sup> The multitudinous 'gods' produce exactly nothing, and if by reason of psychic and occultic acts, then nothing that is holy.

<sup>4</sup> J. A Motyer in *The Prophecy of Isaiah* (IVP, 1993) p. 77, says, 'Holiness is God's hidden glory; glory is God's all-present holiness.'

<sup>5</sup> This verse of Ephesians 4:24, refers in fact to the renewal of fallen but now redeemed Man. Even so, it shows the nature of the original *imago dei*.

# The Several Gifts of Israel

## ISRAEL AND THE EIGHT GIFTS

I am speaking the truth in Christ, I am not lying; my conscience bears me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the **sonship**, the **glory**, the **covenants**, the giving of the **law**, the **worship**, and the **promises**; to them belong the **patriarchs**, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the **Christ**. God who is over all be blessed for ever. Amen.

In Romans 9:1–5, Paul addresses himself to the whole matter of Israel, a matter he pursues for three chapters. Sincerely describing his anguish, claiming that in the Holy Spirit his conscience is pure and so he does not lie, but would, like Moses of old, wish himself accursed for Israel's sake.<sup>1</sup> This, of course, could not be possible, and Paul is part of Israel, that is as Paul would call it in Galatians 6:16, 'the Israel of God.' In 11:11–14 he will say that he wishes to provoke his brethren to jealousy by exalting his apostolic ministry. Having become jealous they will join him in the gospel of God and so no longer simply be of Israel after the flesh, but—as we would say in later theology—'Israel of the Triune God, the elect people of God'. Here, in Romans 9:1–5, he is showing how Israel had been blessed with the gifts ranging from adoption, the glory, the law and the worship, to the patriarchs and Christ himself. It is clear that he is sorrowing for his kinsmen—the Jews who have not accepted Jesus as their Messiah. Until the end they will be his kinsmen, but they must come to that obedience which will ensure they are in the true Israel.

He sees them as Israelites, and as such they should be regarded as the authentic people of God. The thrust of Romans chapters 9–11 emphasises that they are not of the people of God, not anyway until their election is fulfilled. In 1:15 – 3:31, Paul has argued that true Israelites are those who act spiritually according to Israel's tenets. A Gentile by race can be a Jew (Israelite) by appropriate spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Not that Paul is taking up the argument specifically to include Gentiles in the people of God. In chapter 4 he pursues this further. Even so, here in 9:4, he is saying these kinsmen are Israelites, but rather with the emphasis that they are in the people of God until they reject Christ. This is because they are God's elect ones. Consistent with being of the people of God they are required to believe on Jesus by faith since he is one of the 'gifts', that is, 'according to the flesh is the Christ.'

We could nominate **eight** gifts if the term 'gifts' would cover them— (i) the adoption, (ii) the glory, (iii) the covenants, (iv) the giving of the law, (v) the worship, (vi) the promises, (vii) the patriarchs, and (viii) the Christ.

What we may not see immediately is that these eight gifts constitute the very life and being of Israel. In one sense they are all inseparable one from the other. Any reader of this Pauline passage who is familiar with the Old Testament will recognise that fact without difficulty.

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<sup>1</sup> The old matter is present which has haunted Israel down through the centuries and which is the curse on the nation for its apostasy, as declared in Deuteronomy chapters 27 to 30. In 28 the principle of obedience to the covenant brings blessing whilst disobedience will have the curse come upon them and overtake them. Chapter 30 is the climactic chapter which says that God will break through the curse with his elective love. He will, so to speak, force them with his love to repent of their apostasy and recant of their disobedience because, 'The Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live' (Deut. 30:6). Until then the gifts of God are without recall.

<sup>2</sup> We are not here discussing the whole substance of the three chapters nominated. 3:27–31 asserts that believing is the way for both Jew and Gentile to come to justification, that is, belief in the propitiatory work of Christ nominated in 3:24.

### Israel Without Discontinuity

Paul's argument in chapters 9–11 commences overtly at 9:6 when he says, 'But it is not as though the word of God had failed'. He argues that 'it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned as descendants.'<sup>3</sup> We cannot here enter into the general Pauline argument which goes something like this:<sup>4</sup>

When the Jewish critic of God's method of the gospel accuses the word of God as having failed, he does not understand that much which some might call 'failure', is indeed God's own action in establishing the 'all Israel' which shall be established. The gospel of God and of Christ is the power of God for salvation for all who believe. By it both Jew and Gentile are justified. They are also sanctified, that is, are effectively included in the one people of God which is the true Israel. God has fulfilled his promises to Israel, including the truth stated by the prophets. At Pentecost thousands of Jews were assured of their being in true Israel.<sup>5</sup> There was no entrance into the people of God—the Israel of God—but by baptism. In this sense Pentecost assured both continuity and discontinuity. The Sanhedrin had officially rejected Jesus as the Messiah. So Paul argues that God has his plan in their rejection of Christ and the gospel, but that all who are elect—the Jews first and then the Gentiles—will ultimately 'come in'. Note in 11:25 that he says a hardening has come upon *part* of Israel until the full number of the Gentiles come in. This hardening is not on *all* Israel, because that would mean within Paul's argument everyone would be hardened. This is because, in his mind, all who are Christian believers *are* Israel (Gal. 6:16). When all the elect Gentiles 'come in', then—in this manner—*all* Israel will be saved. This means that 'all Israel' will have in it the believing members of Israel—firstly Israelites 'after the flesh', and then Israelites in the 'true Israel of God' by belief in Christ—and the Gentiles who have come in. Together they will constitute 'all Israel'.

### To Whom Came the Gifts?

Our question is, 'Who, then, possess the eight gifts?' The answer must be, 'The true Israel of God', or 'The people of God'. It is important that we see this because the gifts were certainly always possessed by Israel prior to Christ, and whatever their function and significance to those of Israel 'after the flesh' but not yet in Christ, is not stated. It may even be that Paul's sorrow for his brethren lay in the fact that they were a people asymmetric, out of focus, unable to realise these gifts in their experience.<sup>6</sup>

If the gifts were always with obedient Israel—and they were—then Paul must be saying, in some way that it is the continuing true Israel of God which no less possesses the same gifts. It is difficult to see how it could be otherwise, although the nature of their operation may have changed. For example, glory in Israel and glory in the church may have differing aspects. Law being common to both the old *qahal* and the new *ecclesia* would nevertheless be different aspectually.<sup>7</sup> The same would go for worship and adoption.

It is essential, then, as we look at these several gifts, that we understand their nature first in

<sup>3</sup> After a slightly different manner Paul argues this in Galatians 3:6–29.

<sup>4</sup> I am not saying that this is Paul's particular or full polemic, but what is here presented is roughly the apostolic understanding.

<sup>5</sup> In Acts 2:14–36, Peter preached the gospel of Christ and climaxed it by saying, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off, every one whom the Lord our God calls to him'. And he testified with many other words and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this crooked generation'. So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls. And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers' (Acts 2:38–42).

<sup>6</sup> It may sound strange to say that the gifts were not recalled (cf. 11:29) and yet were not effectual because of the disobedience of Israel 'after the flesh'.

<sup>7</sup> Israel live. 10:4). See my treatment in *Sweeter Than Honey; More Precious Than Gold* (NCPI, 1996).

the Old Testament, and then in the New Testament. In doing so we should keep in mind the continuity and discontinuity of Israel. By this we mean that whilst Christ is said to be with Israel in the Old Testament era, yet it is only as he establishes the New Covenant that he appears overtly—this by incarnation—and this speaks much in regard to the gifts.

### **Why Did the Gifts Come to Israel, the Israel of God?**

We ask this question in order to show that the gifts were indispensable to Israel being Israel. Undoubtedly the gifts were the means of grace, the means by which the covenant people of God existed. Without them there would not even be the shreds of covenant, and in particular the absence of the gift of adoption of sons, would mean no comprehension of the mystery of God as Father and no participation in that mystery.<sup>8</sup> When we have in mind that God was bringing a renewed revelation of himself to the world, and that his intention was to do so via Israel his redeemed and sanctified people, and especially by the Abrahamic (single) seed within Israel—the Second Adam, the last Adam—then we can see that without participation in these gifts Israel would have been as any other nation,

### **THE GIFT OF SONSHIP, OR ‘ADOPTION AS SONS’**

Paul is asserting in Romans 9:4 that to Israel belonged the sonship.<sup>9</sup> Whatever Paul understood by that—and we think Romans 8:1ff., Galatians 4:17, and Ephesians 1:5ff., lead us to some thoughts he had—he was claiming Israel to be either a son as adopted by God, or that Israelites were the children not only of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but of God. Israel had no nominated practice of adoption as generally known by us today. It certainly existed within cultures contemporary with Israel, but some concept must have been understood for Paul’s words to have made sense to his readers. Especially this would have been so regarding that event when God told Pharaoh, ‘Israel is my first-born son, and I say to you “Let my son go that he may serve me”; if you refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay your first-born son’ ” (Exod. 4:22–23).

In a sense Sarah was adopting the fruit of the womb of Hagar (Gen. 16), but the term ‘adoption’ was not used or even conceived. The child belonged to the husband’s true wife; in this case to Sarah. Moses could well be said to have been adopted, there is no law regarding such a custom as adoption if it ever existed in Israel. God was revealing to Pharaoh that he had a son, Israel. Later Luke in his genealogy of Jesus was to reveal that God had a son, Adam. Paul who knew the story of this son was to tell the churches that there was a Second Adam who was really the Last Adam, the only begotten Son of God who became incarnate for the salvation of his Son, Israel, and all Israel was to be in that Son. Paul, at the same time could tell the Athenians that all human beings—humanity *en bloc*—originated in that one Man, Adam, and as such all persons should see themselves as the children of God, and cease making false and incongruous icons of the living God, who in reality is Father.

If in the Old Testament there are few literal references to Yahweh as ‘Father’, there are nevertheless some references. So Yahweh is Father to all in Israel. Deuteronomy tells them, ‘You are the sons of the Lord your God; you shall not cut yourselves or make any baldness on your foreheads for the dead. 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’ (Deut. 14:1–2). This powerful statement is to be linked with Exodus 19:5–6 and Leviticus 11:44. Israel is the holy family of the household of God of which Jesus spoke in John 8:34 (*passim*), and to which the writer of Hebrews (3:1–7) referred.

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<sup>8</sup> In Romans 11:25, Paul says the hardening which has come in part upon Israel is a ‘mystery’. Mystery is understandable to those to whom it is shown by God, and cannot be understood otherwise.

<sup>9</sup> Whatever difficulties we may have in seeing ‘the sonship’ of Israel as a gift of God, it nevertheless was. Paul reported it to be so, and this is the apostolic assertion so that ‘sonship’ certainly was a gift to Israel.

## FATHER FROM FIRST TO LAST

### The Old Testament Revelation of the Mystery of Fatherhood and So of Adoption of Sons

It was before the foundation of the world that '[the Father] destined us in love to be his sons<sup>10</sup> through Christ Jesus'. The first son of God was Adam and his was the task of fulfilling the creational mandate in the context of the creational covenant, but to this command he was disobedient. Has there, then, been no anguish in the human spirit, no chasm of terror, no abyss of fear for the loss of fellowship with the one who is innately 'one God and Father of us all; who is above all and through all and in all'? The truth is that the martyred son of Adam, Abel, is declared by John the Apostle to be one of the (many) children of God, those whom the writer of Hebrews calls 'the people of faith'. In the stream of history Abraham is turned from the futile idols to turn and serve the living God, and himself being Abram—'exalted Father'—to Abraham, 'Father of a multitude' [of nations].

This is Yahweh, the Yahweh concerning whom Moses asked the people, whether God was not indeed their Father.

Do you thus requite the LORD,  
you foolish and senseless people?  
Is not he your father, who created you,  
who made you and established you?  
Remember the days of old,  
consider the years of many generations;  
ask your father, and he will show you;  
your elders, and they will tell you.  
When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance,  
when he separated the sons of men,  
he fixed the bounds of the peoples  
according to the number of the sons of God.  
For the LORD's portion is his people,  
Jacob his allotted heritage (Deut. 32:6–9).

In Isaiah 1:2, God addresses Israel as 'Sons I have reared and brought up, but they have rebelled against me'. Later, in the midst of suffering from their disobedience, they cry out:

We have all become like one who is unclean,  
and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment.  
We all fade like a leaf,  
and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away.  
There is no one that calls upon thy name,  
that bestirs himself to take hold of thee;  
for thou hast hid thy face from us,  
and hast delivered us into the hand of our iniquities.  
Yet, O LORD, thou art our Father;  
we are the clay, and thou art our potter;  
we are all the work of thy hand.  
Be not exceedingly angry, O LORD,  
and remember not iniquity for ever.  
Behold, consider, we are all thy people.  
Thy holy cities have become a wilderness,  
Zion has become a wilderness,  
Jerusalem a desolation.  
Our holy and beautiful house,  
where our fathers praised thee,

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<sup>10</sup> NRSV has, 'He destined us for adoption as his children, through Jesus Christ according to the good pleasure of his will'.

has been burned by fire,  
and all our pleasant places have become ruins (Isa. 64:6–11).

It is to him they turn on the basis of his Fatherhood:

Look down from heaven and see,  
from thy holy and glorious habitation.  
Where are thy zeal and thy might?  
The yearning of thy heart and thy compassion  
are withheld from me.  
For thou art our Father,  
though Abraham does not know us  
and Israel does not acknowledge us;  
thou, O LORD, art our Father,  
our Redeemer from of old is thy name (Isa 63:15–16).

Long ago he had told them:

Fear not, for I am with you;  
I will bring your offspring from the east,  
and from the west I will gather you;  
I will say to the north, Give up,  
and to the south, Do not withhold;  
bring my sons from afar  
and my daughters from the end of the earth,  
every one who is called by my name,  
whom I created for my glory,  
whom I formed and made (Isa 43: 5–7).

It was to these he once said through the prophet Jeremiah, ‘Return O faithless children . . . 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’ (Jer. 3:14–19).<sup>11</sup> To cap these Old Testament ‘Father’ statements is the one of 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?’

As we have suggested, in the fact of God’s relational, covenantal Fatherhood, ‘the adoption’ means that the hearts of God’s children—Israel—had access to inner fullness of his *chesed*, his steadfast love, his familial, paternal love. Without this, Man is not truly Man. In one sense all humanity awaited the full revelation of the Divine Fatherhood.

### **The New Testament Revelation of the Mystery of Fatherhood and So of the Adoption of Sons Through Christ Jesus**

We have seen that before creation God predestined his elect in love that they should be his sons, to the praise of the glory of his grace, and to the praise of his glory. As Isaiah 43:6–7 put it, ‘bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made’. This Father is the One ‘for whom and by whom all things exist,’ who, ‘in bringing *many sons to glory*, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering’.<sup>12</sup> Being sons in glory is a grand hope, so well stated by Paul in Romans 8:14–30 and by John in I John 3:13, and to which we shall shortly look.

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<sup>11</sup> These references add up to one thing; whether God is regarded metaphorically or ontologically as Father—God is Father to Israel. From Adam onwards all may be regarded as his children. It is in the New Testament that we know the proper response of our humanity, of being Adam the original Son; it is to cry ‘Our Father!’ When a person cries, ‘Oh Father!’, he or she does not think the expression is metaphorical.

<sup>12</sup> Hebrews 2:9–10.

## **THE SON'S REVELATION OF THE FATHER: THE FATHER REVEALING THE SON**

With the coming of the Word to be incarnate, the revelation of the Father is brilliant and fine tuned. No: there are no shadows about Yahweh as Father. 'No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known'. 'We have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father'.

So the Son opens the life he had with his Father before the foundation of the world, when the Father had glorified him, had loved him, and had prepared him for the revelation he would give of his, the Father's, Fatherhood. Thus Jesus could talk about the Father loving the Son and giving everything into his hands. He talked about the great love of the Father for the whole world, shown in giving his Son for the life of the world, so that none who believes should perish but have eternal life. He talked to the woman at the well about the new form and power of worship which was to be evoked by the Father, and be for the Father 'in Spirit and in truth'. The Father has everything by reason of his perfections, but these he gladly passes on to the Son that as he, the Father works, so may the Son. The nature of the Father is seen in the Son, by looking at that Son and seeing his actions, because not one of them arises initially from the Son but from the Father. To see the Son is to see the Father.

The term, 'your heavenly Father'<sup>13</sup> is used liberally in Matthew's Gospel, especially in the Sermon on the Mount. Here a rich intimacy between the Father and his children is indicated. So much a mystery is the Father-Son relationship that only the Father can show the Son, and the Son show the Father. Otherwise the mystery is never revealed. Perhaps this is why God's fatherhood could only partly be shown in Old Testament times and writings—because the Son was not seen as incarnate, and because the Father could not indicate their relationship.

The greatest of the Father-revealing events is the Atonement. Christ himself and the Epistles make much of the Son's portrayal. In John 17 we have the Son seeking active and functional Fatherhood at the Cross, in order that the Son being shown as wholly Filial, may awaken history to the momentous event. In Hebrews 2:9–10 the Son is glorified similarly<sup>14</sup> that he might bring many sons into glory, the glory of which Isaiah often speaks, and Paul exhibits as one of the great purposes of creation. It is a great matter to John 'that we should be called the children of God, and so we are!' Sonship is given to us!

There are many other elements in the New Testament, especially those of the Letters and the doctrines of regeneration (new birth) and adoption. That God is 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ' is now apparent. We might even read back a later credal term that they are of 'the one substance'. Even so, God is the Father not only of his Son, Jesus, but of us who are now made his children by regeneration and/or adoption. The latter term is literally 'the sonship', and so one must not lock out adoption ideas, or lock out the regenerating action of the Father, via the Spirit which results in Man's proper filiation.

## **ISRAEL AND THE UNIVERSAL GRACE OF FILIATION**

Keeping at the back of our minds that God purposed our sonship before time, we will see that

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<sup>13</sup> In Matthew 6:7–14 (cf. Luke 11:1–4), the disciples are commanded to pray and enjoined to address God as Father. Less than this is not sufficient. Karl Barth in his *The Christian Life (Church Dogmatics, vol. 4, part 4)*, has a long Essay on 'The Children and Their Father', in which he deals with the fact of this imperative, but shows the indescribable power of the vocative, with all its relational ontology involving him as Father, his Son, his children, his family, and all the outcome of this ontology flowing in action. It seems to me that we are blinded to a biblical revelation which could be the healing of the world, and one which is not ideological. Again the key to operation is participation in the Divine Nature, 'a sharing in God's holiness'.

<sup>14</sup> It is at the Cross that God's glory is shown supremely in his Son, that is, in his giving of the Son, and the Son's giving of himself. I John 4:9–10 shows this to be supremely the act of love. Doubtless incarnation is the demonstration—and actuation—of God's love, but without the redeeming, sanctifying work of the Cross and Resurrection, the purpose of incarnation is not revealed nor effective.

this era is the era of Fatherhood, Sonship and the sonship of those in the Second/Last Man or Adam, Jesus Christ. In Galatians 4:1–7 we see that Israel’s sonship was of an immature nature. Now they must come to adult sonship. This cannot happen until Christ is ‘born of woman, born under the law, to redeem them who were under the law, that we might receive adoption as sons’. In other words the rich outcome of Christ’s death and suffering was the birth of many sons, all now of the true Israel of God. The outcome is that the Spirit causes the believers to articulate, ‘Abba! Father!’, that is, ‘Dear Father!’ This is an intimacy born not merely of figurative language or ideas, but of the true Father–Son relationship. The sons or children of God are inducted into this intimate relationship of the Father and the Son, participating in it.

In Galatians 3:26–29, being baptised into Christ, through faith, makes us the children of God. That is, we partake of the Son’s Sonship. His Sonship is ours. Lest there seem to be a minimal understanding of this relationship, ‘the Spirit of his Son’ is sent into our hearts, crying ‘Abba! Father!’, and we are led to cry that also. What we might call ‘conscious sonship’ is then established and with it the rightful inheritance once promised to Abraham in covenant. In Romans 8:14–30, we have a magnificent repetition of much we find in Galatians chapters 3 and 4, and even more, but also the work of the Holy Spirit in shaping us up into filial fullness. Indeed, we may say, into that glory which was always part of the life and experience of the people of God. This is the inheritance promised to Abraham (cf. Rom 4:13) and which gives a charge of meaning to the term ‘Father of glory’, and Paul’s injunction to recognise that his family is ‘the glory of his inheritance in the saints’.

### **THE FATHER AND HIS FAMILY**

We need to keep in mind that the adoption of the community of Christ, the Israel of God, has in view the practice of ‘family’. In the Epistle to the Ephesians, all the materials are laid out for a fascinating study of the Father, the Son, the Spirit and God’s Family, within which domestic paranetics are set out. So we look at 1:2, 5ff., 17; 2:11–22; 3:14–19; 4:1–6; 5:1–2, 21–33; 6:1–9, 23, and see the Father, the Son and the family. When we understand the church (*ecclesia*) as the family (*patria*, deriving from *pater*, father), then the whole Epistle, including all its paranetics, may be seen as related to family, that is, truly domestic.

Before we draw our conclusions to the gift of adoption there are numerous elements we need to consider. The first set we may term ‘affectional’ after Jonathan Edwards’s use of the word. Human fatherhood–sonship, human parenthood–childhood, are not true analogues of the Divine. Even so, it is acknowledged that these relational ties are the strongest of human relationships. Husband–wife relationships are, of course, very strong. The use of the term ‘emotion’ is often decried but there is an ontological desire for affectional relationships; by them we are emotionally fulfilled. To speak of God being Father; to speak of him being Love; to speak of him being ‘the Holy Father’, is to introduce us to the whole range of affections. To see the family as having fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, is to use Johannine terms and thinking. ‘Brotherly love’ is a powerful factor within the family. ‘We love because he first loved us’, opens the wide world of enriching and affectional relationships. To say we love God—as well Cain may have thought he did—is to be a liar, since—as Cain undoubtedly was—according to I John 4:21, not to love one’s brother is not to love God, but to hate him.

We are tempted here to diverge from theological commentary and enter psychological commentary. The matter of the emotions, the affections, the negative emotions and affections, the break of relationships, the denial of ontological domesticity and the fragmentations of society including the conflict of nations, can be discussed within the widest understanding of ‘family’. Even so, we must resist ideology. Just the one, heartfelt, uttered cry ‘Abba!’ is enough to place us in the heart and depths of the Holy Fatherhood, Holy Sonship, and via the Holy Spirit, the Family of God.

## **ESCHATOLOGICAL FAMILY AND ADOPTION**

We have seen that the whole creation is waiting for the unveiling of the sons of God so that it may be liberated from its bondage to corruption into 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'. All sons will be in the likeness of the Son. Suffering in this world is the way to sonship and its concomitant glory in the next. The band of sinful children shall become the 'multitude which no man can number', who have been redeemed. It will be the gathering in the holy city, of the glory of the nations. There shall be one family and 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all'.

Even so, the suffering of the family is portrayed vividly in the Book of the Revelation. In 7:1ff. the 144,000 are sealed from untoward harm. In 14:1–5, the seal is shown to be the name of the Lamb and of the Father written on every forehead. In 22:5 this seal still obtains. This must not be treated as mere facticity since it is a most dynamic sealing for God's possession.

Whilst the seal speaks of election and protection, it speaks primarily of relationships between the Father, the Lamb and the family. Thus when in Revelation 21:1–8 the blessed and the cursed are spoken of, God proclaims, 'He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son'. 'He who conquers', takes us back to the mandate of Genesis 1:28 where Man is to conquer and rule. It reminds us of Genesis 9:1ff. where Man is again enjoined to conquer and rule, and it brings us into the whole stream of covenantal injunctions –with promises–regarding the everlasting covenant and the everlasting Kingdom of God.

In turn we are reminded of Psalm 2 and the Messiah–Son, as the nations kiss his feet; of Psalm 110 where the Messiah–Priest has the nations placed under his feet. All the power for 'family' is in God's gift of adoption which will, at the last, mean the resurrection, 'the redemption of the body' and the glorification. Linked with this is the teaching of the first Adam having failed and gone to dust, the Second and Last Adam offering his obedience for the disobedience of Adam, and 'bringing many sons to glory'. More than that, the eschatological life and growth of the church is within this Second and Last Adam. As the first Adam was to be a subduer of the creation and lord over it, but failed, yet the New Adam—who encompasses all the old—subdues all things under his feet. He is the conqueror not only of Genesis 1:28, but of I Corinthians 15:24–28 and of Revelation 1:7. The life of the church and of the members of that body are all in that one who is now 'King of kings and Lord of lords', in whose Sonship is ours and in whom we grow to the measure of the stature of the fullness of him.

Then shall be seen that 'one God and Father of us all, who is above all, and through all and in all', and then shall be seen the conquering people who are 'a kingdom, priests unto their God'. This is Family!

## **CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL POWER OF ADOPTION**

This gift was essential in the protology of the first Adam, in the witness of his son Abel, in the moving history of the patriarchs and in Israel where it blossomed. Disobedience to the covenant is the misuse of adoption in Israel. In the New Testament the revelation of what we may call 'the mystery of adoption' is essential for the true nature and practice of the church. Whilst it is true that the Father of glory has raised his Son to be head over all things for the church—hence his being Lord of the church—yet the Father is the one 'who is above all, and through all and in all'. In the mystery of Fatherhood lies the mystery of Sonship, and in both, the mystery of adoption. In 'the adoption of sons' lies the power and life of the Family, and in the Family lies the rich resources for human family living.

Our understanding must be in depth. It commences with the husband and the wife, with the parents and the children, with families and society, with societies and nations, and with the international family of the first Adam, now being transformed by the Last Adam. Beyond this family there is none other. God's predestining of sons will have been completed.

## The Several Gifts of Israel–II, Glory

### THE CHURCH AND THE SEVEN GIFTS

In our last study, we saw the principle that the Church is Israel continuing to be ‘the Israel of God’ (Gal. 6:16)–whatever might be the destiny of ‘Israel according to the flesh’. Not only has the Church come under the Abrahamic Covenant in that it is in the New Covenant and the Kingdom of God–Christ being the Mediator of the New Covenant, and the new King of the Kingdom–but Pentecost ensured the continuity of Israel, and made way for those ‘who were afar off’. Along with this principle, we saw that the seven or eight gifts as nominated in Romans 9:4–5 were indispensable to Israel being Israel,<sup>1</sup> and are indispensable to the Church being the Church. The movement of God’s glory in Israel was most remarkable, but no less remarkable in the Church of Jesus Christ. We shall therefore seek to see glory in both Testaments and gather some of its significance for Israel before Christ and the Church from its inception and forward to the *telos* of God for creation.

*Note:* The amount of material available for studies on glory is too vast to encapsulate in this one study, nor does it warrant two studies in this our present Series. It is one of the most self-evident of the gifts, covering God, Man and creation, being protological, historical and eschatological. For this reason, much of the material will be stated without commentary.

### THE MEANING AND NATURE OF GLORY<sup>2</sup>

We are advised, of course, to seek the etymological derivations of the word, but without here spending time on the various words–apart from the Old Testament word *kabod*, and the New Testament word *doxa*–the synonyms, though important, do not have the full significance of these two. *Kabod* comes from the idea of heaviness, substantiality; even wealth, honour, possessions and status–those things which command respect and indicate status–but linked also are the ideas of beauty, radiance and a special state of being. Paul does not give any adjective for glory in Romans 9:4, but the Scriptures certainly speak of the glory of God, the glory of Man and the glory of creation. It is clear from Exodus 33:20 and other related passages, that no one can see God’s face–God’s glory–and live. ‘You cannot see my face . . . and live.’ Yet in Revelation 22:4, it is stated that ‘they shall see his face’. I John 3:1–3 (cf. Romans 8:22, 28–30) tells us that to see God as he is, is to become fully glorified, to be truly in his image. Somewhere–ontologically, we may say–is the truth of I Timothy 6:15–16, ‘. . . the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has ever seen or can see’. Paul may be speaking from an historical and not an eschatological point of view.

When we ask, ‘In actuality what is God’s glory?’, there are many answers. John Calvin said, ‘The glory of God is when we know what he is’, and Bengel writes, ‘The Glory is the Divinity manifest.’ In short, ‘God’s glory is what he is, and is known to us when he chooses to manifest himself’. John could say of the Son, ‘. . . full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’.

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<sup>1</sup> See section below, ‘Israel and the Glory’.

<sup>2</sup> I would suggest reading my LFS 47, *The Glory of God, Man and Creation* (NCPI, 1980), the articles on ‘Glory’ in the *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. Two*, ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Zondervan, 1975), and *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Eerdmans, 1982).

## A Plain Understanding of Glory and Its History

Without doubt, the word ‘glory’ brings to our minds all the things we have spoken of above. Any person might have a reasonable and useful understanding of glory. Even so, there is a history and, we might say, a plan of glory. It can be put as simply as this: God made all things that they might glorify him—celestial creatures, Man and the creation—and the day will come ‘when the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the LORD as the waters cover the sea’. This will amount to *perceived* glory. We could say that history is really the history of glory. All things began in glory, and all things glorified God. Even so, linked with the Fall, much of that glory was lost. Man had to be renewed in glory—in seeing it and living in it—hence we have a statement such as ‘the God of glory appeared to our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia’, and the various theophanies in which something of God’s glory was shown. Even so, it is with Israel that the LORD becomes the LORD of glory—a point we will later take up.

With the coming of the incarnate Word, Christ, ‘. . . full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’. Christ was the Father’s glory, and all his doings are connected with glory, even his eschatological appearing—his parousia—when he will come in the clouds in glory, in what has been called the *shekinah*—the glory of his presence, often shown in cloud form. With the end climaxing of all things, there is nothing left without glory. All God’s people—his sons—will be brought to glory, planned before the world, a plan of glorification.<sup>3</sup>

### An Understanding of the Link Between Holiness and Glory

In Isaiah 6:3, the *trishagion*—‘Holy! Holy! Holy!’—is linked with the glory of God; ‘the whole earth is full of his glory’, or ‘the whole earth is the fullness of his glory’. In respect of this, J. A. Motyer says:

Isaiah is here the normative Old Testament man. This transcendent holiness is the mode of God’s immanence for *the whole earth is full of his glory!* ‘that which fills the whole earth is his glory’, i.e. it is not only the one thing that is capable of filling everything but the thing which actually does so. Holiness is God’s hidden glory; glory is God’s all-present holiness.<sup>4</sup>

J. D. W. Watts says:

But the seraphim claim *his glory* to be the *fullness* of the entire earth. The *holiness* of God seems opposite to physical nature . . . holy denotes God’s *innermost* nature, while ‘his glory’ describes the appearance of his being. God is known through his work.<sup>5</sup>

In regard to glory and holiness, it is interesting to note that in Revelation 4:8–11, where the *trishagion* is used by the celestial creatures, it is linked with the act of creation and the creation, and so God is worthy to receive glory and honour and power because of this. This must mean, at least in part, it is the creation which inspires the celestials to glorify God in this way.

It is notable that when Isaiah entered the temple it was the glory of God which he saw—‘my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts’. God’s holiness was not consciously seen, but his glory was. The seraphim then proclaimed in powerful song—the *trishagion*—the holiness of God. When the *glory* was seen, then Yahweh’s holiness was realised by the prophet, the seraphim’s song being necessary to that full understanding of the glory. We could say that when the glory was present, then the holiness which is God’s hidden glory was also present. We rightly conclude that when we speak of God’s glory, then it must be bound up in what we say is the liturgical declaration of his holiness.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> We will later amplify this but at this point we can examine Isaiah 43:1–7; I Corinthians 2:7ff.; Hebrews 2:9–10.

<sup>4</sup> *The Prophecy of Isaiah* by J. A. Motyer (IVP, 1993) p. 77.

<sup>5</sup> *Word Biblical Commentary* vol. 24, ‘Isaiah 1–33’, by John D. W. Watts (Word, 1985), p.74. Some theologians see God’s immanent glory as a general glory; whilst theophanies and such phenomena as the *shekinah*, or theophanies, as his special glory.

<sup>6</sup> H. Ringgren in his *Israelite Religion* (SPCK, 1966) p. 74, says, ‘Yahweh is frequently connected with light and brilliance. His glory (Heb. *kabod*) is clearly associated with light phenomena (see, for example, Ezek. 1—2), and at least Isaiah 6:3 sees a close association between holiness and *kabod*.’

Later we will see that eschatological glory and eschatological holiness will be bound together in the *telos* since it is God's intention not only to *glorify* all things, but *also to sanctify them*.<sup>7</sup> This certainly gives meaning to Motyer's statement, 'Holiness is God's hidden glory; glory is God's all-present holiness'. In the ultimate, glory would be terrifying were Man and creation not sanctified. Man is sanctified and glorified simultaneously<sup>8</sup> in the *telos*, in the ultimate purpose God has for Man and the rest of creation.

With the coming of the incarnate Word, Christ, 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son, from the Father'. Christ was the Father's glory, and all his doings are connected with glory, even to his eschatological appearing—his *parousia* when he will come in the *shekinah*, of the Father. With the end climaxing of all things, there is nothing left without glory. All God's people—his sons—will be brought to glory, planned before the world, a plan of glorification.<sup>9</sup>

## CREATION AND THE GLORY

### Creation is the Fullness of God's Glory

If the earth (creation) is *filled* with God's glory, or *is* the fullness of God's glory, then this is surely a way of saying that, whilst creation has *kabod*, creation itself *is not kabod*. In fact, the earth being the fullness of God's glory surely means he is King over all the world, over all of creation. This can be seen from Psalm 8, where, when Man is crowned with honour and glory, all the creation is subjected to him. Glory is not an abstraction, but something tangible; God, so to speak, in active form, tangible but not physical. It is true that, in some cases, Man's soul is his *kabod*, such as in Psalms 16:9 and 30:12, so that everything has its glory in this sense; but such glory is derived, is something given by God. By it, Man can relate to God's holiness as though 'soul' were such a faculty, but neither glory nor holiness are inherent in Man, or what we call nature. Idolaters would have invested their idols with glory and holiness; that is, they would have invested them with what only God has intrinsically, and he will not give this glory to another. Creation is not creation in its ontological norm, apart from God filling and possessing it. In the ultimate, we can say that we can see God's glory—even 'his power and deity'—*in* the things that are made, but not *by* them. That is, we see the active working of God in his various ways in the living creation, which also includes Man.

### Creation Declares the Glory

Psalm 19 insists that the heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament shows his handiwork. Psalm 8 twice says, 'how majestic is thy name in all the earth!' Psalm 148 says that all things celestial and terrestrial give God glory in praise, and Psalm 150 urges 'let everything that breathes praise the Lord'.<sup>10</sup> Paul, in Romans 1:19–20, says that:

What can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.

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<sup>7</sup> J. A. Motyer's statement, 'Holiness is God's hidden glory: glory is God's all-present holiness', needs to be linked with J. D. W. Watts' comment, 'God is by definition "holy." But he reveals his "holiness" by his decisions and his acts.'

<sup>8</sup> Hebrews 10:10–14 and related passages show that Man is sanctified through the Cross, and his sanctification is a present category in which he seeks to live out practical holiness. All such categories are received by faith, but at the end, hope will be fulfilled when present sanctification will become final and irreversible.

<sup>9</sup> We will later amplify this, but at this point we can examine Isaiah 43:1–7; I Corinthians 2:7ff.; Hebrews 2:9–10.

<sup>10</sup> The rather wonderful, yet intriguing, Psalm 29 tells us of the *action* of God's glory in what we call 'nature', but is better called 'creation'. Psalm 19 says 'The heavens are telling the glory of God', whilst in Psalm 29 'The voice of the Lord makes the oaks to whirl and strips the forest bare; and in his temple all cry, "Glory!"'.

In spite of what has happened at the Fall, the seraphim can still proclaim, ‘The whole earth is the fullness of his glory’, and Paul would seem to be saying something like this: that, were Man to desire to know God, creation could tell him, if, of course, he were to desire to read it aright—something Paul seems to deny that Man, unaided, can now do.

### Creation and the Hope of Glory

As in all biblical mystery, we can only debate about the present state of nature. For example, we take it by nature that ‘the earth is the fullness of his glory’. Paul shows clearly that creation was subjected to futility by him who subjected it in hope—the God of glory. There is hope in creation of escape from this bondage of corruption at the *telos*, but meanwhile, creation can still praise God in marvellous ways. Creation exists in hope, and creation is the fullness of the glory of God. We have to proceed with these twin pieces of knowledge, but at the same time we are aware that evil powers represented by ‘that ancient serpent, who is called the Devil’ are seeking to twist and distort and to demean the creation of God. It is God’s glory they attack, but God has said that his glory he will not give to another, neither to a god nor a man.<sup>11</sup>

### MAN, PART OF THE CREATION IN GLORY

I Corinthians 11:7 has been much debated. Its statement, ‘For man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man’, must certainly arise from Genesis 1:26 (cf. 5:1–3; 9:1ff.). It is not said in Genesis 1:26–27 that God made Man in his (God’s) own image *and glory*, but Psalm 8:5–6 says:

Yet thou hast made him little less than God, and dost crown him with glory and honour. Thou hast given him dominion over the works of thy hands, thou hast put all things under his feet,

so this is little less than what is said in I Corinthians 11:7, Man ‘is the image and glory of God’. Doubtless here it is referring to Adam, but this does not exclude Eve being in the image of God, as she is not said to be in the image of the man, but only to be his glory.<sup>12</sup> Some indication is given that fallen Man has failed to reach the glory of God—‘fall short of the glory of God’ (Rom. 3:23)—and this appears to indicate that, prior to the fall, he was not short of it; hence his was the glory of the image.

There is also a sense in which it can be said that a person has a glory of himself/herself. As we mentioned above, in the Old Testament the word which has on a few occasions been translated in English as ‘soul’ is in the Hebrew—on those few occasions—that person’s ‘glory’.<sup>13</sup> Certainly Man, whether fallen or not, has a glory when it comes to his hierarchical position in creation. What we need to reiterate is that, when Man fell, the creation was at that point subjected to futility or limitations in its operations, and that when Man is rehabilitated, there creation will also be rehabilitated to its pristine situation, and will be granted glorification.

In the Old Testament, though not in the New Testament, certain buildings—the tabernacle first and then the temple/s—are sanctified and have a physical glory.<sup>14</sup> Furniture too, has its holiness and

<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 42:8; 48:11.

<sup>12</sup> Some theologians contest the fact that man *is* the image and glory of God. They contend that he is *in* the image and likeness of God and contend that only Christ *is* the image and glory of God. Whatever the case, Man at best reflects the image and glory of God, whereas Christ radiates the glory (cf. Heb. 1:3; *apaugasma*). In this Corinthian context the woman *is* the glory of man. Whether Adam simply reflected the glory of God is a matter open to debate. God does not give his glory to another, but it seems he gives *of* his glory is open question. Each time we are faced with such questions, we are helped by seeing these things as a mystery, without using the term as a retreat from examining the theology of glory.

<sup>13</sup> See Genesis 49:6; Job 29:20; Psalm 4:2; 7:5; 16:9; 30:12; 57:8; 108:1. One can also speak of ‘the law (*torah*) of a person, and so, perhaps ‘a law’ and ‘a glory’ may be reasonable epithets. The NRSV sometimes translates ‘soul’ (*kabod*) as ‘glory’ (*kabod*). Normally soul is *nephesh* or *leb* in Hebrew. We find no parallel in the New Testament where *psyche* is translated ‘glory’.

<sup>14</sup> In the ark there was a glory and a holiness expressed. I Samuel 4:21f. shows that there was a loss of glory when the Philistines captured the ark; so much so, that Eli’s daughter-in-law said, ‘[Ichabod] the glory has departed from Israel’.

glory, and the robes of the priests are exceptionally glorious. We might, then, observe in passing that Man has sought to establish, as male and female, certain beauty which signifies glory, certain assets and status which indicate glory. We could develop a whole subject of Man trying to make up with visible elements for his Fall from the original beauty of glory and holiness which was inherent in creation.

When we consider the matter of God's glory, and Man's glory prior to the Fall, or their glory when Man-in-grace-and-in-covenant relates to God, then we see the glorious prospect which is before both. Here God is one with Man who is one with the creation, and so 'in his temple all cry, "Glory!"' (Ps. 29:9). This is the eschatological prospect for God, Man and creation, and it is incredibly beautiful, giving rise to 'the hope of glory' which motivates man with powerful anticipation. When Man sees no glory of God and himself in union, then he is locked into himself and away from others. In modern terms, he disesteems and even demeans himself, for his self-image is stripped of its created glory and he is 'without hope in the world'. So powerful, then, is the glory God gave to Man in creation and which he restores to him in salvation.

In a more collective sense, we read, 'In a multitude of people is the glory of a king, but without people a prince is ruined'.<sup>15</sup> Likewise we think of 'glory in the church' and 'the glory of the kingdom'; phrases which have collective connotation.

### GLORY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In some sections above, we have covered much of this, and have taken it for granted that Man knew God in his glory and worshipped him prior to the Fall. He, properly speaking, lived in God's Sabbath and thus knew God as holy and glorious, and worshipped in accordance with this. In his disobedience, he fell short of that glory. Stephen, before the Jewish Sanhedrin, speaks of 'the God of glory' appearing to Abraham in Mesopotamia where Abraham was an idol worshipper. The revelation of his glory caused Abraham to become a person of faith in Yahweh, the covenant God, and in his covenantal promises. True worship is a recognition of the holiness of which the glory is the outshining. From that point onwards we see God's glory in his appearances (theophanies) vouchsafed to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, reiterating and confirming the covenant.

#### The Glory That Was in Israel

Perhaps the most powerful of glory manifestations was that of the burning bush, when Moses saw the phenomenon of the bush burning, but did not recognise it as glory-holiness shown forth—and had to be warned. From that point onwards, the birth of the nation of Israel by reason of God's signs in Egypt, the liberation of the slave people, their journeyings through the wilderness, their entrance into Canaan and the establishment of the nation.

The brilliant phenomenon of what might be called 'special glory' was manifested to Moses when he requested to see *all* God's glory.<sup>16</sup> At Sinai, God's glory had been manifested, as indeed it had been in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, always attendant on Israel. God would also meet with Moses in the tent of meeting, the cloud descending upon the tent, standing at its door, and causing all Israelites to worship at their doors. *God's glory is God manifest!* In Exodus 33–34, God shows but a little of his glory in what we take to be a manifestation of light, but God's innate glory—his glory towards Israel—is revealed by words, the wonderful words of Exodus 34: 6–7:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and

<sup>15</sup> This should be compared with Revelation 21:24–25, where the Holy City is shown to be all light, 'and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it'. This may mean 'bring their peoples into it'. John repeats, 'they shall bring into it the glory and the honour of the nations' (cf. Ps. 78:61; Isa. 17:3; 21:16).

<sup>16</sup> He recognised the fact that glory meant enablement, and if God's glory was not sufficient for so difficult a task, then he dared not attempt to take them to Caanan.

transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

Other appearances of God's glory were his glory–presence at the dedication of the tabernacle (Exod. 29:43; cf. 40:34ff.). At times of grumbling or rebellion (such as those of Dathan, Korah and Abiram) in the wilderness, the glory of God appeared and acted appropriately in each situation.

Again, at the dedication of Solomon's temple the glory of the Lord was identified with the *shekinah* cloud:

When the priests came out of the holy place, a cloud filled the house of the LORD, so that the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD (I Kings 8:10–11).

Most powerful is the manifestation of God's glory in Ezekiel. Ezekiel is a book filled with manifestations of God's glory in visionary form, though not in a material state. In chapter one, we have the mystery of the creatures, the wheels and their action, and even though we cannot particularly analyse the sequence and meanings of the appearance, it is summed up for us in 1:28:

Like the appearance of the bow that is in the cloud on the day of rain, so was the appearance of the brightness round about. Such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD. And when I saw it, I fell upon my face . . .

In this book, the glory of the Lord is the same as the presence of the Lord (cf. 9:3) and the working of the Lord, but, from Israel's side, there is the terrible matter of idolatry and impurity and abominations. From the beginning, God had spoken against idolatry. Calvin has said, 'As often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie'. God had commanded in the strongest terms the rejection of idolatry, telling Israel that when they heard his words at Sinai '[they] saw no form'. To even compare God with anything in creation is to say that in some way he is part of the creation. This he is not: he fills creation, but is nothing of creation, otherwise he would in some sense be created. Immanence does not mean participation. So, in Ezekiel 11:22ff. the glory of the LORD—that is, the LORD—departs from the temple. It is true that Israel is promised the future presence and the sight of the glory of the LORD (43:2ff; 44:4). In Haggai 2:3, 7, 9, glory was promised to those building the 'second' house of the LORD. The glory manifested at Solomon's temple would be less than at the second temple. In Isaiah 40:5, it was prophesied in a more general, more universal way, 'And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken'.

### Universal Glory Prophesied

With the promises given to Israel of the return of the glory of the Lord and of God's presence remaining with them forever we read such statements as 'Over all the glory there will be a canopy and a pavilion' (Isa. 4:5). In the meanwhile, God will destroy the glory of the nations. Isaiah 66:18–21 speaks of the drawing in of the nations to God's glory, to see it and share in it:

For I know their works and their thoughts, and I am coming to gather all nations and tongues; and they shall come and shall see my glory, and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations, to Tarshish, Put, and Lud, who draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the coastlands afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the nations. And they shall bring all your brethren from all the nations as an offering to the LORD, upon horses, and in chariots, and in litters, and upon mules, and upon dromedaries, to my holy mountain Jerusalem, says the LORD, just as the Israelites bring their cereal offering in a clean vessel to the house of the LORD. And some of them also I will take for priests and for Levites, says the LORD.

Interpreted, this must mean that all nations have lived on the whole earth which is God's glory, but they have misinterpreted it. They have given their gods, lords and idols the suzerainty of it, and God's *kabod* to them. God's glory, however, moves amongst the nations, judging and punishing them—until

the time comes, via these judgments and his mercy—that God will ‘gather all nations and tongues’; a dynamic principle played over, time and again, in the Old Testament, and worked out through the gospel in the New Testament, that is, ‘to the uttermost parts of the earth’.

Again, in Ezekiel 39:21, we have a repetition of Isaianic prophecies which have God’s glory destroying the glory of other nations in order to instate them in the ultimate glory which shine over all nations: ‘And I will set my glory among the nations; and all the nations will see my judgment which I have executed, and my hand which I have laid on them’. It is in the midst of these prophecies that God says more than once, ‘My glory will I not give to another,’ meaning ‘to another nation, other than Israel whom I keep for my glory’. Even so, Isaiah 43:1–6, comporting with other nations, appears to be a universal call of God’s people—Israel or Gentile nations—to come to God’s fulfilment, the making of sons and daughters created to show forth his glory. So, also, in Isaiah 11:10, ‘. . . him shall the nations seek, and his dwelling shall be glorious’ (11:10; cf. 56:1–8; 24:23).

We conclude, then, that the glory which Israel possessed was indispensable for God’s purposes for it and the other nations. Prophecies of the glory of the Lord covering the earth as the waters cover the sea become clearly intelligible. In those days, the ‘general’ glory of God will become a special glory to all the nations. God will reveal himself through the Suffering Servant, ‘A light for revelation to the Gentiles [nations] and for glory to thy people Israel’. Israel awaits the day of Messiah and his kingdom of glory. Romans 9:4, in saying that to Israel belongs the glory, is making a richly significant statement.

## GLORY IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

### Christ and the Glory

In the New Testament we are met with many references to God’s glory. All the time we have to keep in mind the truth of God’s glory as it is presented in the Old Testament. It is perhaps best to see Christ as the glory incarnate, ‘And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father’,<sup>17</sup> He was an historical person who bore witness to the Father’s glory. Indeed he was filled with it. In John 17:1–5, 24, it is clear that he had received this glory from the Father, a gift of his love from the beginning,<sup>18</sup> which may be said to be that gracious act of *perichoresis*. Likewise, exegesis of I Peter 4:14 shows the Holy Spirit to be the Spirit of glory.<sup>19</sup> We must keep in mind, however, that whilst that glory was shown at special times, such as at the birth, and the transfiguration, it was still unseen to eyes that did not believe. Only at, and after, Pentecost did the glory show forth to believers. Paul, who was shown the glory on the road to Damascus, is one of the rare exceptions.

We must recognise that Christ’s glory shows through in his acts. In John 2:11, it is said of the miracle of changing water into wine, that Jesus ‘manifested *his* glory: and his disciples believed on him’. Seeing and believing go together in John’s Gospel, and believers saw his glory. Glory in that sense redeems. Likewise, in 11:40, Jesus tells Martha, ‘Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?’ Here belief precedes seeing the glory. Jesus’ glory was in fact the Father’s glory (John 1:14)—glory from the Father—and he sought to glorify the Father (5:41; 7:18; 8:50).

Most powerfully, Jesus’ death is described as glory in action. In 17:1–5, Jesus prays for the Father to glorify him with his (the Father’s) glory, so that he might glorify the Father as Father.<sup>20</sup> In John 7:39 the events of the Cross and Resurrection are pointed to as Christ’s glorification. Indeed, Hebrews 2:9 indicates he was glorified *for* the death, and not only *because* of it.<sup>21</sup> Certainly he died

<sup>17</sup> Some exegetes see this as exactly the parallel of Exodus 34:6–7.

<sup>18</sup> In John 5:41, Jesus says he does not receive glory from men, inferring such was only from God

<sup>19</sup> In John 16:12–14 the Holy Spirit is the one who glorifies the Father and the Son to the minds of men and women.

<sup>20</sup> It is worth noting here that, in I Corinthians 2:8, Paul says the rulers of this world would not have crucified Christ had they known he was ‘the Lord of glory’.

<sup>21</sup> I am aware that there are two possible interpretations; (i) the one I have described above, and (ii) that he was glorified because of his death.

thus in order to bring many sons into glory (cf. Isa 43:1–5). He was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father (Rom 6:4). This raising was in order that we, raised in him, ‘might walk in newness of life’. Perhaps it is both the Cross and the Resurrection which the disciples remembered ‘when Jesus was glorified’ (12:16), and certainly in 12:28–31, the Father and the Son are referring to the Cross which glorifies both Jesus and the Father.

Jesus came in the divine glory when the angels sang at his birth and glory burst through to the shepherds.<sup>22</sup> He died and rose in the glory of God, and he prophesied his coming again in glory, indeed in the *shekinah*—the cloud of his presence as the Presence of the Father (Matt. 26:64)—and he will sit on his throne of glory (Matt. 19:28). The statement in Acts 1:9, that ‘a cloud took him out of their sight’, is surely the ascension in the *shekinah*, the cloud of glory.<sup>23</sup>

## GLORY IN THE CHURCH AND IN CHRIST JESUS TO ALL GENERATIONS

Ephesians 3:20–21 is a doxology—a glorifying of the Father and the Son—when it says:

Now to him who by the power of work within us is able to do more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations.

It is the church which is filled with his glory and which ascribes glory to the Father and the Son. Just as David at the assembly of Israel had said, ‘Thine O LORD is the greatness and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty’, so Paul is giving a similar ascription, but this time he is seeing the glory in the church. Why is this? It is because the church is to be the helpmeet of Christ, the Bride of the Bridegroom, and is to be at work to bring *sight* and *action* of the glory of God to all the nations, so often prophesied in the Old Testament. Thus, I Corinthians 15:24–28 describes the triumph of Christ over the enemies of God and Man, and the handing over to the Father the Kingdom whose elements of evil have been defeated by him. In one sense he is returning the glory back to the Father—that glory which had enabled him to triumph—so that God may be ‘all in all’; that is, the all glorious One whose glory has triumphed throughout creation.

When Christ gave his fullness to the church (Eph. 1:23), he gave all that he was and had, so that those in the church worked from his glory. We take it that Romans 9:4, with its mention of glory, is maintaining that, in ‘the Israel of God’, this gift obtains and of course works in the proclamation of the gospel and the building up of the people of God ‘to the uttermost part[s] of the earth’. Hence the doxological ascription of Ephesians 3:20–21. II Corinthians chapter 3 is a marvellous comparison of the glory that belonged to the old dispensation of Israel, and the new dispensation of Christ’s grace and the Spirit by which God continues his work. We will not undertake at this point to describe the distribution and effectual workings of this ‘glory of his grace’.

## ESCHATOLOGICAL GLORY

From both the Old Testament, and what we have seen to this point in the New Testament, we have been shown that the ‘end–glory’—although the glory never ends—is the triumph of God’s glory in the establishment of his Kingdom throughout the earth. What we have called ‘general glory’, interlaced as it has been with ‘special glory’—light, brilliance and dynamic evidence of the presence and working of God—is now shown as *total* glory, in that the glory always pervasive in all the earth is now triumphant in the winning and subduing of all nations and the destruction of all evil. That glory

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<sup>22</sup> We must keep in mind that God’s glory was fully in Christ. As Moses could not have accomplished the Exodus without the aid of that glory, so Jesus could not be the Second Moses who was to accomplish an Exodus at the Cross (Luke 9:31). Indeed this statement was made in his special glorification at the Transfiguration. Yet all the time he was testifying to, and being filled with, ‘the glory of the Father’. The Cross was to be the source of making the glory of God cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. This glory must be shared amongst his followers who are to be part of this accomplishment.

<sup>23</sup> Note that after Jesus had been raised, God gave him the glory (I Pet. 1:21). He was ‘taken up in glory’ (I Tim. 3:16) and Stephen saw him in glory at God’s right hand—the fulfilment of Psalms 2 and 110.

is apparent to all, and it takes, so to speak, two forms; the first being the glory that triumphs over all, and the second the glory with which God invests his people, ‘the Israel of God’.

### Christ and the Coming Glory

Regarding the first expression of that glory, we see the Son of Man coming in the *shekinah*, in ‘the glory of the Father’.<sup>24</sup> We saw in Isaiah 40:5 that God would reveal his glory to all, and this he does in the *parousia* of his Son, and the triumph already achieved. Christ, then, shall come ‘on the clouds . . . with power and great glory’ (Matt. 24:30). He shall sit on his throne of glory (Matt. 25:31; cf. Dan. 7:13f.). In II Thessalonians, Christ will be glorified in his saints, which reminds us of Proverbs 14:28 ‘In a multitude of a people is the glory of a king’. His will be ‘a great multitude which as no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes . . .’. This is indeed the glory that covers the earth, the triumph of glory. All of this explains the eschatological action of Christ in bringing all things to their glorification. Hence the universal doxologies to the Lamb in Revelation 5:11–14 and 7:9–12:

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!’ And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all therein, saying, ‘To him who sits upon the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might for ever and ever!’ And the four living creatures said, ‘Amen!’ and the elders fell down and worshiped.

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, ‘Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!’ And all the angels stood round the throne and round the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, ‘Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God for ever and ever! Amen.’

### Christ, Man and the Coming Glory

We remember the glory of Man before the Fall, seeing all things under him. Hebrews 2:5ff. is a rerun of this truth, but this time Christ is in our sights, and he is about to be crucified, thus being the Son of man under whom all things will be subjected by virtue of his Cross, and by which he will ‘bring many sons to glory’—the promise of Isaiah 43:1–6.

Paul speaks of a mystery, ‘But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification’. The rulers of the world did not understand this mystery, or they would not have crucified ‘the Lord of glory’ (I Cor. 2:7–8). That Christ is ‘the Lord of glory’ means not only his practical use of glory, but also that the glorification of his people was his task. Thus Paul says that as we behold him, we are being changed from one stage of glory to another (II Cor. 3:18), and elsewhere Paul shows that Christ is the true image and glory of God and that we, being renewed in the Spirit of our mind, are being renewed in, and by that image (II Cor. 4:4; Ephs. 4:24; Col. 3:10; cf. 1:27–29),

This New Man, Christ, as the Last Adam, is a life-giving spirit, hence we will have a new eschatological body for ‘we shall bear the image of the man of heaven’, and not be in the image of the man of dust, Adam (I Cor. 15:43ff.). Hence Paul says:

But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself (Phil. 3:20–21).

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<sup>24</sup> We need, now, to realise the eschatological work of the Three Persons of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit who is ‘the breath of his mouth’—the mouth of the Father and the Son—will judge and destroy all evil. The Father has given the authority of judgment to his Son, yet will, with the Son, judge all things. Likewise, the glory of God is the glory given by the Father to both the Son and the Spirit, the Spirit being the one who glorifies both Father and Son.

In this we see Christ's 'body of glory' as the most desirable thing a human being can know, hence Paul's other statement, 'awaiting our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ' (Titus 2:13).

The reason we 'love his appearing' is that already Christ is our hope—'Christ in you, the hope of glory' (Col. 1:27). As we have seen, he is already transforming us from one stage of glory to another, and he is our actual hope, and actually dwells in us and among us. The same thought is repeated in greater measure in Romans 8:17–25, where 'the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed [*in us and*] *to us*'. That will be the time when Christ will show his everlasting glory to us (John 17:24), and, as we shall see him (I John 3:1–3), we shall become like him. Paul, in Romans 8, speaks of the whole creation being liberated from its bondage to corruption when we shall enter 'the liberty of the glory of the children of God'. Both in this chapter and in II Corinthians 4, he shows us that the present life of ministry involves immense suffering, but it is comparatively a light thing when we realise it is building up for us, and in us, 'an eternal weight of glory'.

### CONCLUSION: THE GLORY OF GLORY

In II Peter 1:16–18, the writer says:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, 'This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,' we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

What is apparent from the above quote, is, namely, that the Son has all the glory of the Father, that at the Transfiguration the three apostles heard the voice borne to Christ 'by the Majestic Glory', so that the Son's mission was not only authenticated, but also empowered. All of this seems to be the nature and purpose of glory. The glory of God—Father, Son and Spirit—is ever in action, whether we care to call it 'general' or 'special'. In reality there is no general or special glory: there is only glory, which is God's very Being in action. He is *actus purus*, not merely having a potential, but being ever in action according to his purpose and plan. Without this, creation would not subsist. Without this, God's plan for creation could not be fulfilled. Without this, the glories of the eschaton, such as the marriage of the Bride and the Lamb, the Holy City, the New Temple, the Paradise of God, could not reach their fulfilment. Nor would Man be glorified and divinised, and so made fit to be inducted into the Triune God.<sup>25</sup>

We may say, then, that the glory which Israel possessed was God's glory, which, when out-worked, was the glory that was Israel. Likewise, in the Church, under the New Covenant, nothing could be accomplished in winning the nations, defeating the enemy, and fulfilling God's plan for creational glory and the glorification of all things. No wonder Moses felt he needed to know the dimensions and power of that glory, and no wonder Israel had to be taught the same. It is no less a wonder for the Church, for it must see not the things which are transient but the things which are unseen.

So we close our study with relief and gratitude that the gift of glory is ever with 'the Israel of God' and is never recalled. If the church has a heyday, it has it by virtue of God's glory, holiness and love. If it has times of desperation, then it needs these in order to recover and go on until all things are glorified, until God is 'all in all' and 'everything to everyone'.

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<sup>25</sup> We are speaking here of Man *participating* in the Divine nature, not *being* in it. The sanctification of Man and his glorification can never be apart. There is no glory without holiness, no holiness without glory. What is so for God is likewise so for us. Not that we have glory or holiness *of ourselves*. These are gifts, and used in the way that dependent humanity would use them.

# The Several Gifts of Israel—III, The Covenants

## THE CHURCH AND THE SEVEN GIFTS, THEN AND NOW

In looking at the gifts we do so from what they signified for Israel and what they signify for the Church or the ongoing 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:18). We see how they influenced the thinking and prophetic anticipation of Israel, and the thinking of the Christian *ecclesia* since its inception at Pentecost, its continuity in and with the household of God. If these several gifts are not understood, then neither the life of Israel as we have it in the Old Testament, nor the Church as we have it in the New Testament, can be properly contended. We note that Romans 9:4 speaks of 'the covenants'. Some exegetes suggest it should be in the singular but most that the harder reading in the plural is the correct one. In one sense it does not matter, seeing all covenants ultimately constitute the one, namely, 'the everlasting covenant'. Directly, Israel was concerned with the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic and the Davidic covenants. Yet this is not to say they were not concerned with a creational covenant which, in turn, could be linked with an Adamic and Noahic set of covenants.

## THE CREATIONAL AND NOAHIC COVENANTS

So far as night and the day are concerned, God has something of a covenant with them, a covenant which is unbreakable. Thus, in Jeremiah 33:19–26, we have information of this:

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: '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.'

The word of the LORD came to Jeremiah: 'Have you not observed what these people are saying, "The LORD has rejected the two families which he chose"? Thus they have despised my people so that they are no longer a nation in their sight. 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.'

Thus covenant is inherent in creation: the sun rules by day and the moon by night (cf. Genesis 1:14). Genesis 9:8–17 shows that with Noah, God made a covenant not only with him and his family, but with all mankind and all creation:

'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.’

The question then is, ‘Did not God have a covenant with Man and creation at the time and act of creation?’ Was it not implied to Man that, if he did not eat of the tree of the knowledge and good and evil, he would live, and if he ate of the tree of life he would live forever? That he did not destroy Man in the day of the Fall must speak of grace; that he destroyed, virtually, all but Noah’s family is surely speaking of an original covenant of relationship and obligation through covenant, though not of contract, as such.

### The Linguistic Argument for a Creational Covenant

We know that from the beginning God had cared for Man and creation. Only as the Fall brought into being ‘the sons of God’ and the ‘daughters of men’, that is, the faithful from Seth’s generation and the evil from Cain’s, did corruption commence and compound with the coming together of these two. Because of that violence and corruption, God caused the judgment of the Flood. Most English translations speak of God *making* a covenant with Noah, as though that were the first covenant which had been made with creation and Man. It has been claimed by some commentators<sup>1</sup> that the use of *heqim berith* in Genesis 6:17–18 and 9:8ff.—‘to establish a covenant’<sup>2</sup>—is not the same as *karat berith* which is ‘to cut a covenant’. The writers quoted in our footnote, William Dumbrell and Gordon Wenham—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. Our conclusion is that God made a covenant with Man at creation.

When we come to the Abrahamic covenant which was cut by God, we are in a dynamic renewal of covenant which now relates particularly to Abraham’s descendants, but generally to all the nations, so that, in this sense, it is still universal (cf. Gen. 12:1–3). Finally, then, we ask, ‘Would a covenant made in sinful human history be more in

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<sup>1</sup> See William Dumbrell’s *Covenant and Creation* (Paternoster, 1984), pp. 11ff., 25–26); Gordon Wenham *Genesis 1–15* in the *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1 (Word, 1987), pp. 174–175). Palmer Robertson (quoted below in these notes) takes the covenant of creation for granted. On pages 67ff., he outlines the elements of that covenant.

<sup>2</sup> Reference may be made to Exodus 6:1–9, where was God 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.

content than one we take to be inherent first in the nature of God and so in the nature of creation which declares the glory of God, in whose image and glory Man is made?’

### **The Theological Argument for a Creational Covenant**

This would commence with our knowledge of the Triune God, that the Three Persons are One and are unitary Love. Man is created in the image of this unitary Love and is one with God. Thus, he has a relationship which makes him one with God. Doubtless, at the Fall he broke this relationship with God, but God did not break his relationship with Man. It is reasonable to say that God granted Man to be a covenantal being in Himself. If we recognise

- (i) that man was not created in grace, but love-wise was gifted with and by creation, then no contractual element will be present as often it is in other views of a covenant with the first couple;
- (ii) this would constitute the same covenant established—that is, reiterated—with Noah and all creation, the difference being that this covenant would be out of grace, unilateral and again, not contractual.

### **Israel and the Creational and Noahic Covenants**

It is interesting that some commentators think of ‘the covenants’ of Romans 9:4 as only the Abrahamic, Sinaitic and Davidic, including, perhaps, the New covenant as promised in Jeremiah 31:31–34 and other passages. This view is taken by such writers because they fail to see that Israel believed its history began with the creation, that it was indeed begun in Adam. In this view the covenant with Noah was most important, and, in any case, Israel traced its descent directly from Noah, to say nothing of Adam. It would appear that a good case could be made out for Creational covenant and its reiteration to Noah to be regarded by Israel as the principle of creational covenant pertaining primarily to it. Israel thought in terms of the whole history of the human race, and saw itself in perspective central to it.

## **THE PRINCIPLE OF COVENANT**

Thus far we have not discussed the nature of covenant, although we have hinted that, from the first, it comprises God’s relationality with Man’ and Man’s relationality with God. ‘Covenant’ 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 with 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 there 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.

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>3</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*<sup>4</sup> 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 Ezek. 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 rikstate*, "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.

If we commence with the Hebrew word used for covenant, namely *berith*, we are faced—as immediately above—with a number of opinions as to its derivation. Even so, the nature of the covenant is fairly apparent in the Scriptures. Whilst admitting that contemporary customs such as 'covenant' may influence people such as Israel to think along these lines, yet we must also remember that Israel knew God and had its ideas of covenant which went back to Noah, if not to Adam at creation.

### 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.

<sup>3</sup> O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Presbyterian & Reformed, Phillipsburg, 1980) p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> M. Weinfield, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, vol. 2 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1975), p. 4.

### **All God's Covenants are Unilateral and Non-Contractual**

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. We must avoid thinking that God makes parity agreements, for the elements of covenants which appear to begin with Noah and continue into the New Covenant are covenants somehow or another linked with grace.<sup>5</sup>

### **THE MATTER OF 'THE COVENANTS'**

We have two choices in thinking of the plural—'the covenants'—and they are (i) Paul was thinking only of the covenants which pertained to Israel which would be the Abrahamic, the Sinaitic and the Davidic, with a possible keeping in mind of the prophesied New Covenant; (ii) he was thinking of the Covenants as being related to the creational or Adamic covenant, and thus that the Noahic covenant was universal and everlasting, that the Abraham covenant was the Creational covenant coming into view by God's treaty with Abraham, and was the continuance of the initial everlasting covenant. Thus the covenant with Abraham explained God's saving of Israel from Egypt and his special covenant with them at Sinai. The Davidic covenant would be a particularising of the Creational covenant, linked with the matter of the Kingdom of God and possibly being at one with a coming New covenant.

In this study we would take the latter view, much as the position of '(i)' could be strongly held to be biblical. Our problem with a special grace covenant for all creation (the Noahic) and then a more directly soteriological covenant (the Abrahamic) is that no covenant of any kind exists from creation to Noah, and no soteriological covenant from Adam to Abraham.<sup>6</sup>

We take it that if we have read aright 'the covenants' then we have a continuum from creation to the new creation—the *telos*—so that the Creational covenant ultimately achieves the purpose God had for it. Theologically it makes sense to know God is always the Covenant-God. We will now look briefly at the covenants.

#### **1. The Creational Covenant**

In this God makes full relationship with Man and creation, so that being at One in his own unitary love and its *perichoresis* he can give all to Man within creation, and enable him with the inflow to him of the Divine *perichoresis*.

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<sup>5</sup> We must grasp the fact that, since God's covenants are primarily relational and not contractual, they are not legal agreements. The agreement is that God will bless where the covenant is observed and curse where it is broken. The Book of Deuteronomy spells this out repeatedly. Especially in Chapters 26–30 we see that blessing follows obedience and cursing follows disobedience. Even so, God prophesies that he will eventually break the hard heart, circumcise it and—so to speak—force Israel to love him.

<sup>6</sup> Genesis 3:15 poses a problem here. Here is soteriological promise, but seemingly without a covenant context. To speak of a contractual covenant made by God with Adam destroys the creation as a *gift* to Man. Man's freedom is thus impaired. That he misused his freedom and that it broke a creational covenant does not affect the *giftness* of creation. Man's sin is seen as deep because he misused and abused his freedom of will.

## 2. The Covenant with Noah

Because Man has broken the Creational covenant, God gives the proto–evangel of Genesis 3:15, causes the birth and continuance of a blessed faith–and–love family, and a cursed people who refuse his grace. Noah, after the cursing has taken place, sacrifices appropriately to God and has the Creational Covenant reiterated, that is, established afresh, for ever.

## 3. The Abrahamic Covenant

God establishes a grace covenant with Abraham and all his descendants. His choice of Isaac as against the first born Ishmael<sup>7</sup>, and of Jacob instead of Esau shows his determination to have a covenant people of his own will. Genesis 12:1–3 and other references show this was to prove to be a universal covenant. All nations who blessed Abraham—that is, the God of Abraham—would be included in the Abrahamic blessing (cf. Gal. 3:10–14). Whilst this covenant pertained to possession of Canaan, its goal was far beyond that (cf. Heb. 11:9–10; Rom. 4:13). In the New Testament we see that persons of faith are the children of Abraham (Gal. 3).

## 4. The Covenant With Israel

Without doubt, God made a covenant with Israel at Sinai. See Exodus chapter 24. Whilst the covenant ritual took place at the foot of Sinai, God’s covenant with them had been in action prior to this. Exodus 2:23–25 links Israel with the Abrahamic covenant:

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.

Then, of course, God’s acts against Egypt and the saving of his son out of Egypt (Hos. 11:1; cf. Exodus 12), with the defeat of Pharaoh’s army at the Red Sea, together with the sacrifice of the Passover, all showed God was Israel’s Covenant Head. Exodus, then, is a sealing sacrifice of the covenant which has been in action before that ritual.

Any commentary on this covenant needs to be a long and detailed one since Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy spell out its character, its action and its significance. For example the holiness of God, his Presence, the manner of worshipping him, the adoption, law and glory were all unique in history and highly significant. No other nation has such a history. We may say, simply, that the covenant was all–revealing of the grace of God and, indeed, all his nature. Israel was to be the priest–nation among, and to, all the nations.

We cannot speak of it as ‘a success’ but there was no failure on God’s part. Not only was the nation warned regarding disobedience, but that disobedience and its consequences of judgement and exile had been prophesied. The key to God’s nature and his glory was—and is—Exodus 34:6–7:

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for

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<sup>7</sup> Ishmael cannot be counted as authentically the first born since he was born of the slave Hagar (cf. Gal. 4:23), not being born of the Spirit nor being the child of the covenant promise.

thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.'

The effects of God's covenant with Israel are innumerable and, ultimately, indescribable. How much that nation and the nations of the world have been shown in history. Israel is still a special nation, one around whom much pivots. Students of her being have endless revelations of the nature and purpose of God.

## 5. The Davidic Covenant

The prophets began to speak of the Covenant with David which we find mentioned primarily in II Samuel 7:8–17, where Nathan the prophet delivered God's message:

'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>8</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 repeat 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

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<sup>8</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.

more references and they all point to the importance of this covenant. Palmer Robertson observes:

The prophetic expansion of the Davidic promise fits into this same pattern. As the kingdom crumbles all about them, these seers anticipate 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>9</sup>

Ahead of Israel lies this Davidic Kingdom linked with this David Covenant, and both merge into the New Covenant, and the Kingdom of God both come and coming in Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God. That is where we leave the Israel of the Old Testament, meeting her again in the Gospels, but also find the nation as a whole not prepared for Messiah and 'the Mediator of a better covenant' to come in the way he does. That is the sad story of Israel not recognising her own Deliverer.

## 6. The New Covenant

Now we come into a new world altogether. This time we are thinking in terms of 'the Israel of God' (Gal. 6:18) and God's Covenant with his people. In Luke's Gospel Zechariah is recorded as saying,

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel,  
 for he has visited and redeemed his people,  
 and has raised up a horn of salvation for us  
 in the house of his servant David,  
 as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets from of old,  
 that we should be saved from our enemies,  
 and from the hand of all who hate us;  
*to perform the mercy promised to our fathers,*  
*and to remember his holy covenant,*  
*the oath which he swore to our father Abraham,* 74 to grant us  
 that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies,  
 might serve him without fear,  
 in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

Anyone reading the Gospels, along with the proclamation of the gospel in the Acts and Epistles, will be struck by the enormous difference between what is known as Judaism and Christianity. This is marked out in the Pauline Epistles of II Corinthians and Galatians, and especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The primary term for covenant in the Old Testament is *berith* and, via the LXX use of the term it is *diatheke* in the New Testament, which relates to a testament or will. Even so, it brings into continuity the use of *berith*. In Hebrews 9:15ff., the writer does use the idea of a will or testament which cannot be authentic in action without the death of the testator, and points to Christ being the one whose death makes the testament/covenant effective.

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<sup>9</sup> op. cit., p. 251.

## THE EFFECTS OF THE COVENANT FOR THE CONTINUING 'ISRAEL OF GOD'

At this point, omitting the Pauline theology of the new covenant, we insert a statement<sup>10</sup> on the matter of Christ and the Covenant in the Epistle to the Hebrews chapters 1 – 10. It is quite detailed, but its beauty is that it compares God's covenant in the setting of Israel as shown in the Old Testament, and as now in the Israel of God seen in the New Testament. We take it that the early church understood covenant in this way and so it is helpful for us today.

### The Epistle to the Hebrews, the New Covenant and Christ its Mediator

#### *(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>11</sup>

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 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>12</sup> This is because he is a 'high priest, holy, blameless, unstained, separated from sinners, exalted above the

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<sup>10</sup> This is, in fact extracted from *The Covenant of God*, a series on covenant done by G. Bingham for the NCTM Thursday Morning Class 25/5/95. Its title is 'Christ the Mediator of the New Covenant'.

<sup>11</sup> Note in 5:1–10 that Psalms 2 and 110 are conflated in the pointing to Christ as the true High Priest.

<sup>12</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).

heavens'. So high a High Priest! As appointed, he is one who is 'made perfect for ever'.<sup>13</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>14</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>15</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 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>16</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>17</sup> *not by the blood of goats and*

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<sup>13</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>14</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>15</sup> A great theme of the New Testament is that God is known as Love by forgiveness.

<sup>16</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>17</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.

*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>18</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>19</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 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>20</sup>

The writer brings his readers to the triumphant conclusion that the old system of worship, which, so to speak, moves 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,

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<sup>18</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>19</sup> See 7:18–19.

<sup>20</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.

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>21</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: THE EFFECTS OF THE COVENANT IN HISTORY**

What we have not included in this Study is the essence of my book *Love’s Most Glorious Covenant*, namely that in the Creational Covenant there are the basic elements of the mandate for creation, the matter of the marriage which is protological of Yahweh and his Bride, Christ and his Church, and the third element, namely the perpetual sabbath rest of God. These figure largely in the whole of Scripture. They are essential to true living in all mankind, and are vital in the working of covenant as seen in Israel and the church—‘the Israel of God’.

The liberating effects of the covenants of grace must be seen in the light of the climax of the covenant, namely the *telos* of God when God’s grace in sanctification and glorification of all creation will be seen.

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<sup>21</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.

## **Addendum to November Study: The Present Impact of the Covenants Upon the Churches**

We did not consider largely in our Study on 'the covenants' what they meant to the early church and so to our churches today and our pastoral practice. All the gifts Israel possessed had determined how they thought and practiced their life and godliness. The effects in [the Church would naturally go beyond the Israel of their day as it developed into the wider 'Israel of God' (Gal. 6:18). Some of the effects are as follows.

1. Under the New Covenant the whole of worship would be changed. It grew into a new kind of worship, since it was worship of the New covenant, depicted by Christ as changed from that of Jerusalem. It was to be universal (John 4:23); it was to have the Father (John 4:23) to be the initiator (John 4:23); the Son to be the 'minister in the sanctuary' (Heb 8:2) 'having led to the Holy of holies' (Heb. 10:19–22), and worship would be by the Spirit (John 4:24; Eph 5:17–20; Phil. 13; Acts 2Aff). 1 Corinthians 14 speaks of the use of the Spirit's gifts in worship. See especially 14:23–25 for the use of prophecy. This worship would be on earth but at the same time in the heavenly sanctuary. Worship would not, strictly speaking, be liturgical, as such. There was no prescription for such—though see 1 Corinthians 14:26–32—but the Son would be the Intercessor at the right hand of God on the throne of grace for those who came for prayer and help in time of need (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 4:16), whilst the Spirit was Intercessor within. The Levitical type of worship (sacerdotal) would give way to the Melchizedekian under Christ, the Israel of God being that of a Kingdom of priests (1 Pet. 14–10; cf. Rev. 1:4(b)).

2. The Communal situation would be that of a fellowship (**koinonia**) now participating in 'all things given pertaining to life and godliness' (1 Pet 1:4); also being the Family under the Father (Eph 3:14–19; 4:6), the Brotherhood and Lordship of the Son, and the Spirit of Fatherhood and Sonship (Matt 10:20; Gal 4:4–6; Rom 8:14–17). Brotherly love would be the order of the **koinonia**, dynamic in its true **agape**.

3. The church would be a community of proclamation. All living 'in the fullness of the blessing of Christ' would be in the ministry of proclaiming the gospel, looking thereby to effect 'the obedience of faith of the nations', since there would be no ethnocentricity. no regards for rich or poor, male or female, slave or free—as such. The covenant was the receiving of the which was the life of the Triune Godhead now pouring into the life of the church, and so out into the world, that is, redeeming love.

4. The eschatology of the church. through covenant would be the dynamic of the church, since its life was motivated by this powerful hope, as by both love and faith, all one as the driving force of the life of the church. Present sanctification in the covenant, always pointed to ultimate sanctification not only of (the church but the whole creation. Linked with practical sanctification, was present sanctification via the interiorised law of the covenant, the law of Christ, the law of love (cf. Jer 31:31–34; Ezek. 36:24–26; cf. Rom 8:1–4; Gal 5:22–24). Most powerful would be the wider and rich view of history which came to them through the revelation of the mystery of God and the component mysteries which made for a dynamic present and powerful eschaton.

## The Several Gifts of Israel–IV, The Giving of the Law

### INTRODUCTION: LAW IN GENERAL

We note that in Romans 9:4 ‘the giving of the law’ is what is spoken of law and no other of the gifts. ‘The giving of the law’ certainly means a special giving to Israel. The question is, ‘Was there law before it was given to Israel, and if so, was the law given to Israel a different one?’ The answer to that must lie in Jesus’ use of the well-known term, ‘the law and the prophets’. ‘The law and the prophets’ constitute the whole of the Old Testament, that is, not simply from Sinai to the end of the Old Testament history, but from what is contained in Genesis to Malachi. This will entail knowing the principle and practice of ‘covenant’. As we pointed out in our last study, this will require us to see all God’s covenants are of grace, and are necessarily unilateral. Whilst law or ‘charter’ are always inherent in covenant, it is not law which is *contractual*, but *obligatory* in the light of grace and its motivational dynamic.

### THE LAW OF GOD

The term ‘law of God’ can be seen with its preposition being either objective or subjective. If objective, then it is the law which proceeds from God and comes to Man, or if the preposition is subjective, then it is the very law of God himself. That law existed before Sinai is very clear. Genesis 26:5 states, ‘because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws’. Such are not explicitly stated in prior chapters, but it is notable that they are all within God’s covenant. At the same time both Pharaoh and Abimelech reproach Abraham for letting them think Sarah was unmarried and available to them. They tell Abraham they could have suffered judgment for immorality.

The law of God must have had both subjective and objective connotation. It is not our point here to explicate the subjective, but the whole of Scripture brings us to the truth of the Triune God, and that the Three Members live mutually in love relationship. Jesus’ summary of ‘the law and the prophets’ being contingent upon the two great commandments–‘Love to God and love to neighbour’–surely issues from the Fount of love, the Godhead. Thus we are saying that the whole law known as ‘moral’ and encapsulated in the Decalogue is subjectively the very law of God himself, and objectively the law for all the human race.

Another point needs to be raised, namely that of what has been called the Creational Covenant. This is not to be confused with the theological idea of a Covenant of Works given at the time of creation. The Creational Covenant is the principle that God being within himself covenantal, brings through in creation that covenant to Man when he is made in his–God’s–image. Thus the Creational Covenant is inherent in Man and exists from the beginning. If what we have said above is so–that law is inherent in covenant–then the law was present at the time of creation. Romans 5:12–21 seems to indicate this.

Our final thought in this section is that the subject of law–as indeed that of authority, judgment and punishment–is a difficult subject for discussion, since all born of Adam have an inbuilt prejudice against law and command. The most that some can concede is that it is a necessary evil because of the Fall. Such people would argue that law is not ontological but provisional, and that this lends weight to their belief that grace banishes law. ‘Free from law’ means freedom to do anything.

## THE GIVING OF THE LAW TO ISRAEL

Any examination of the law outside the context of the other gifts of Romans 9:4–5 denudes the law of its true meaning and glory. If we commence the study of the giving of the law we could start at Hebrews 12:18–21:

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers entreat that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, ‘If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.’ Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, ‘I tremble with fear.’

This passage accords with Exodus 19:12–25, but we shall look only at verses 16–25:

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God; and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. And the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the LORD said to Moses, ‘Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to gaze and many of them perish. And also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out upon them.’ And Moses said to the LORD, ‘The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for thou thyself didst charge us, saying, “Set bounds about the mountain, and consecrate it.”’ And the LORD said to him, ‘Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them.’ So Moses went down to the people and told them.

This is indeed a fierce introduction to the giving of the law, but then an understanding of the holiness of God, and the seriousness of the law was at stake. More beautifully stated by the aged Moses in giving his last words, is Deuteronomy 33:1–5:

This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. He said,  
The LORD came from Sinai,  
and dawned from Seir upon us;  
he shone forth from Mount Paran,  
he came from the ten thousands of holy ones,  
with flaming fire at his right hand.  
Yea, he loved his people;  
all those consecrated to him were in his hand;  
so they followed in thy steps,  
receiving direction from thee,  
when Moses commanded us a law,  
as a possession for the assembly of Jacob.  
Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun,  
when the heads of the people were gathered,  
all the tribes of Israel together.

The giving of the law, in this sense, was unique. No other nation was given such a law.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land which you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them; for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day? (Deut. 4:5–8).

Nor was any other nation given a law after the mode of God’s direct utterance to the people (4:10–14):

... the LORD said to me, ‘Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live upon the earth, and that they may teach their children so.’ And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom. 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; 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 (Deut. 4:10–14).

We should note especially that (i) the Lord spoke directly to the people, (ii) there was no form seen but a voice heard, and (iii) the covenant was declared ‘which he commanded you to perform’, that is ‘the ten *words*’, for the term is not ‘commandments’. In Deuteronomy 5:6 (cf. Exod. 20:1–3) those ten words are introduced by, ‘I am the LORD your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage’. What we further need to note is that God in speaking directly to the people revealed himself so that they would know who was speaking, and through the covenant would be in communion with him. Whilst the law was written on the stone and may be called ‘hard copy’, yet it was God directly speaking. Only the word that is spoken directly from God can be true law. ‘Hard copy’ is not the law in the truest sense. So then, whereas the primal couple were in *creational communion* with God when He spelled out the creational mandate and the prohibition to eat the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, so here Israel is in *covenantal communion* with God. Only in communion does the true nature of law come through. God’s special mode of giving and Israel’s covenantal receiving are essential for true law understanding.

### THE COVENANTAL AGREEMENT

In Exodus 24:3–8, the people were bonded in covenant to God: they were bonded in and by blood. The book of the covenant was read by Moses, and the reading was simply God declaring himself afresh. At the end of the reading, in the midst of the ritual of blood, the people said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient’.

In this sense the law was given by God and received by the people. They knew the nature of God in grace, and they received him as the word revealed him. Later, God was to reveal his glory to Moses, or at least that sight of his glory that Moses was able to sustain. The revelation of God is always essential to the true knowledge of law. Thus in Exodus 34:6–7, God reveals himself and Israel has to walk in this revelation all the days of its being. Since the law is the word (‘the ten words’) of God, it must be known in personal relationship with God. The moment we detach the law from God we make it not his word, but a block of rules which is an entity of its own and a formidable entity at that.

The LORD passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.

Now that Israel is God’s people and he is uniquely their covenant God, and since they are in communion with him and he dwells amongst them, the nature of law is shown as relational both in its content and intent. There is no question of Israel obeying God in a cold legal way, any more than of disobeying him as a god far removed from them and impersonal in his law. As for the use of the law as the way of self-justification and right standing before God—the concept that developed in later Judaism—that was a principle which did not obtain in the Mosaic covenant of grace. His revelation of himself to Moses in the above words was to stand by Israel in its worst days. Because of what he was—and is—Israel could understand His law. As Moses told the nation (Deut. 10:12–15) the law was given to them ‘for your good’ (v. 13). It was a functional law which worked for their good:

And now, Israel, what does the LORD your God require of you, but to fear the LORD your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments and statutes of the LORD, which I command you this day for your good?

### **‘I Am the Lord Your God’**

This is the basis of all things, and in particular the basis of the covenant of grace and the law itself. God had delivered Israel from Egypt by mighty signs and wonders and by his Fatherly hands upon Israel his ‘first-born son’. As we keep saying, it was Yahweh who spoke directly to his people from his character of Creator and Redeemer; who remained in their midst, so that his Presence was unmistakable by the pillar of cloud and fire, the tent of testimony and his continuing deeds on their behalf. No wonder that the law was to be understood in relational terms, and to be obeyed from the heart. Should disobedience come, then God’s mercy would circumcise their hearts and give them, afresh, a heart to love him (Deut. 30:6).

### **A Voice But No Form**

Moses told the people:

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 . . . Therefore take good heed to yourselves. Since you saw no form on the day that the Lord spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire, beware lest you act corruptly by making a graven image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female, the likeness of any beast that is on the earth’ [etc.] (Deut. 4:12–18).

In disallowing God to be represented by anything which he made, the transcendence of God is preserved. God could speak, otherwise there would be no word, but not even the image of God–Man–suffices to indicate his true transcendent nature. The creature can never be as the Creator.

This leads us on to a valuable comment by J. A. Motyer,<sup>1</sup> who says:

Man is the personal image of God; the law is the written preceptual image of God. The intention of Leviticus 19 is declared at the outset, ‘You shall be holy, for I the Lord our God am holy’ (vs. 2). The Lord longs for his people to live in his image, and to that end he has given them the law.

Here, it would seem, Motyer is speaking of something we will later enlarge upon, namely that the law of God—the principle which obtains in the Triune Godhead—is given to Man to be and to do in creation. In our Deuteronomic context it would seem that we might speak of the law as ‘the spoken preceptual image of God’. Certainly when Man hears and obeys he is fulfilling his being as the image of God. By this it can be seen how horribly demeaning is idolatry when it claims its forms to be the image of God, and indeed, God!

The giving of the law, then, was a wonderful action of God, but, as we have observed, the law must not be seen except in the context of the other gifts—the sonship, the glory, the worship, the promises, the covenants, and the Messiah. Law is only intelligible in the light of them, as they in the light of it.

### **ISRAEL’S APPRECIATION OF THE LAW: THE MEANING OF TORAH**

In the New Testament we could be forgiven for thinking the Mosaic law was something of a disaster. Paul speaks so much of its lethal nature—a matter we will later pursue. Rightly

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<sup>1</sup> His article ‘Law’ in the *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter E. Elwell (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 1984, p. 624).

understood, Paul is not presenting the law as intrinsically formidable, but it seems this way only because in later Judaism some saw the law as a way of self-justification. Even so, we have the problem of understanding the primary Jewish term for law—*torah*—because when translated into the Greek via the LXX the word becomes *nomos*, and when translated from the Latin, through the Vulgate, it becomes *lex*, and these two words have a more legal connotation, often referring to legislated law. For our part, we have to read the Old Testament continuously to pick up the idea of law (*torah*) as it was known in the Mosaic covenant. For example, Israel was God's 'first-born son' (Exod. 4:22), and Israelites were 'sons' (Deut. 14:1f.), and so God was in that sense 'fatherly' towards his people. Israel, too, could be thought of as 'the household of God' (cf. Heb. 3:1–6). The covenant people would not think of the law as onerous, but there were always those who reacted to any kind of law, those who were covenant breakers, and especially those who hankered after a colourful idolatry. Such would have a hostile view of law.

We need, then, to understand that the Books of the Law, the Former and Latter Prophets, the Wisdom Literature and the Psalms all constitute 'torah'. From perusing these we gather the rich meaning of *torah*. James A. Sanders (*Torah and Canon*, Fortress, 1972, pp. 2–3) says:

The larger sense [Old Testament revelation generally] of the word Torah is older. Within the Old Testament use it denotes bodies of instruction or teachings of priests, prophets and sages, and even of parental advice to children; but it appears that the oldest and most common meaning is something approximate to what we mean by the word 'revelation'. Priestly and prophetic oracles of the oldest vintage are called torahs. And in the case of the prophets, whole collections of oracles or systems of thought (as in Isaiah) are called torahs . . . Recognising the non legalistic aspect of the use of the word Torah is an aid to understanding how even the Pentateuch is basically a narrative, a story, rather than a code of law. A growing emphasis on the Pentateuch or Torah as a revealed set of laws forever binding—even when the social, political and cultic institutions in which they were originally operated were destroyed or significantly were transformed—is in a sense the history of the origins and development of postexilic (after 540 B.C.) Judaism.

We need to keep recognising that if we see *torah* only as an inflexible set of rules we will surely miss its true nature. The fact that Moses told the people, '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', must mean

- (i) that they did not necessarily practice all—if any—of these statutes prior to going to the land, and that
- (ii) these elements might change with change of location, such as in the Exile.

It is good, then, to see how the *torah* was taught by parents (Deut. 6:4–9), interpreted by priests (Jer. 18:18; Ezra 7:6, 10;<sup>2</sup> cf. Neh. 8:2ff.) and prophets, for example Micah 6:8, where the law is known to all, and Amos 2:4ff. and Isaiah 1:27–28 where Israel is in apostasy to the law. The prophets do not make new law—demands, but new demands concerning the *torah*. The prophets even predict the law will spread to the Gentiles (Isa. 2:1–4; Micah 4:1–3). Israel's punishments in breaking the law were already mentioned in the Deuteronomic code, and so no judgments of God which Israel experiences down through its history—especially its history of idolatry—are 'unlawful', that is, arbitrary. The blessings and the cursings of the law are overtly stated. All of this is, then, *torah*. Calvin, commenting on Psalm 119:153 ('Look on my affliction and deliver me, for I do not forget thy law') says, 'Under this one word—"law"—there is no doubt but that David comprehended the sum of all the doctrine which God gave to his church'. In that sense, all that God commands, and to which he calls in covenant is *torah*. We might add to Calvin that where *torah* is *dabar* (word)—'Thy word is very pure: therefore they servant loveth it' (Ps. 119:140, AV)—then certainty comes to the lover of the law.

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<sup>2</sup> For Ezra had set his heart to study the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach his statutes and ordinances in Israel' (Ezra 7:10).

## **COMING TO KNOW GOD'S TRUE LAW**

That law was given in grace we have already seen, for the preamble to the stating of the 'ten words', as found in Deuteronomy 5:6 and Exodus 20:2, shows. This preamble is filled out when we look at all the saving acts of God for his people in delivering them from being a slave race in Egypt to a free people in Canaan. The Feast of the Passover was intended to be a dynamic reminder of grace which preceded the giving of the law, and for that matter, other festivals might be called celebrations of grace. The giving of the law did not in any way neutralise or cancel grace, since the whole *torah* contained within itself the sacrificial system which was the way of grace for sinning members of the covenant. Rightly understood, there was daily sufficient provision for the uneasy or wounded conscience.

## **LAW WAS—AND IS—COVENANT STORY**

We better understand the law of the Mosaic covenant when we see it as 'story', since it grew out of the rich events of the covenant with the fathers or patriarchs, known to us as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Deuteronomy 4:5–14 makes the point that 'your wisdom and your understanding' will come from *doing* the law, and the nations around will say:

'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people'. For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?'

Walter Brueggemann in his book *The Creative Word* (Fortress Press, 1982), points out in a chapter entitled 'The Disclosure of Binding' (pp. 14–39) that the knowledge of the law came to children when they asked questions and the answers were given (Exod. 12:26f.; 13:8, 14; Deut. 6:20–25; Josh. 4:6f.; 4:21f.). The story—or stories—of Israel constituted the answers to the questions. This was a rich way of pedagogy or teaching. The rituals of the feasts were also stories that taught. Thus the law was related to Israel's daily living, and was authoritative, not because it was a set of legislation but because it brought the harmony which accorded with the functional and moral way of life. The modern idea of 'situational ethics', or working our way through ethical situations by a sense of what is 'good' or 'not good', was foreign to those under law. They had the assurance of being properly directed. Whilst their knowledge of the law was existential, yet their decision regarding what they should do was not.

## **CONCLUSION TO THE LAW IN THE OLD TESTAMENT: THE LAW ROOTED IN THE NATURE AND PERSON OF THE LIVING GOD**

Certainly Psalms 1, 19, and 119 show that men and women under the covenant loved the law of God. If anyone were to question love of the law by believers in Israel, then they should give many months to the study of these Psalms. We could say that the law, being functional, human beings would be more at ease in obeying than disobeying it. In the former case they would find deep pleasure in obedience and in the latter case they would be 'going against the grain', living life perversely.

If we would be attracted by the law as the mind and will of God for his people with whom he was in communion, then the reading of Psalms 1, 19, and 119 will indeed be a good aid. Just to love God with all one's being, is surely to walk in his law.<sup>3</sup> We come to know

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<sup>3</sup> Here we repeat what we have said above regarding the law being the functional image—so to speak—of the living God. We quote again J. A. Motyer in his statement, 'Man is the living, personal image of God; the law is the written preceptual image of God' (op. cit., p. 624). By this he means that Man is fulfilling his true image by obedience to the law, and such is really obedience to God, yet it is also more in that Man is acting according to the image in which God has made him (cf. Col. 3:9–10). This explains the joy of obeying the law, for the person is thus being renewed in knowledge after the image of him who created him.

the *torah* of God and desire to live by it. Another way to know the law and love it is to see the attitude of the New Testament writers to it. This we will later proceed to do, but the Old Testament accounts of blessings received in Israel when it obeyed and cursings when it did not, tell us of the dynamic nature of law. It is primarily relational

- (i) towards God,
- (ii) towards others, and
- (iii) towards all the creation as one meets it.

Otto Weber comments:<sup>4</sup>

The law characterises life in the covenant as life in obedience and thus as historical life. The fundamental ‘I am’ of the decalogue is inseparable from the corresponding ‘Thou shalt’ of the commandments. If the ‘I am’ were isolated, then Yahweh would no longer be acknowledged as the Lord who commands in his grace, nor the covenant the gift which obligates: the covenant with Yahweh would have become Israel’s own possession and would have thus been broken. If the ‘Thou shalt’ were isolated, then the commandments would have become abstract statements of norms which would be subject to ethical investigation. Everything depends on ‘I am’. Historically we see that in Israel both the social and legal order deteriorated when Yahweh was made into an idol or his sole lordship denied in practice. But this ‘I am’ is never separate from the ‘Thou shalt’. The prophets, as defenders of the pure ‘I am’ of the God of Israel, were as such, the attackers of the legal, moral and social decay in Israel.

In all of this matter of covenant and law there is no question raised that obedience shall be other than *by faith*, and certainly self-justification by doing works of the law is totally absent, even as a concept. At the same time, there is no question that the ‘ten words’ and their concomitant ‘statutes and ordinances’ were in the imperative, albeit given on the basis of liberating love and continuing grace (*chesed*). With these ideas in mind, we come to the New Testament to see the relationship of faith in regard to obedience, an obedience which is in no way nomistic, and which—as with Israel—is faith that springs from the salvation of God.

## THE NEW TESTAMENT AND THE LAW

As in previous studies we have tried to show the indispensability of the gifts to both Israel and ‘the Israel of God’, so now we need to look at the law and ‘the Israel of God’—the *ecclesia*. Our understanding of it in the Old Testament, especially as we have outlined it in the paragraph immediately above, should be helpful in our understanding it in the New Testament; namely, that law is rooted in covenant, the covenant is rooted in God’s nature, and the law is obeyed only through faith, whilst faith is always dependent upon *chesed* as constantly forgiving grace. How much richer is the law under the richer New Covenant of wholesome grace!

### The Law of Christ in the Gospels

It is essential, then, that we understand Christ’s relationship with the law, or, better still, his relationship with ‘the law and the prophets’. It has been pointed out by many commentators that the Sermon on the Mount is a fine exposition of the law of God in its true, essential being. Whilst it may be a true criticism that the Pharisees and others had developed a legalistic view of the law, in fact they were virtually antinomian, at least in the sense that they reduced the law from its true nature to a humanised version, one which they could pursue and achieve. It was not that Jesus lifted the law above what it had been, or ridiculed it by saying, ‘It has been said to you of old, but . . .’, for he was revealing the true spirit of the law. The introduction—if we may call the Beatitudes that—set the understanding of true law, one that demanded a certain spirit of being in approach to obedience to the Father. It set it also in the context of the Kingdom of God, a Kingdom which Paul later calls ‘the kingdom of the Son of his love’ (Col. 1:13).

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<sup>4</sup> *Foundations of Dogmatics*, vol. 1 (Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1988), p. 295.

The *torah* of Christ has to do with the Kingdom and, in one sense has to do with nothing else. Thus we can rightly speak of ‘the law of the Kingdom’. We also observe that, since the Father is mentioned so many times and in connection with so many actions regarding life in the Kingdom, that the Sermon must be of ‘the law of the Father’, as it is ‘the law of Christ’ in the sense that he had taken it to himself. If the Sermon on the Mount is the key to understanding love for God and neighbour as set out in the Decalogue, then the Decalogue is the key to understanding the Sermon on the Mount.

We cannot here take the Sermon step by step, but we can observe that Jesus did not see himself as derogating the law of the Mosaic covenant, but rather unveiling its riches and reality. He said:

Think not that I have come to abolish the law and the prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them. For truly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the law until all is accomplished. Whoever then relaxes one of the least of these commandments and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but he who does them and teaches them shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.

This is, indeed, ‘the law of Christ’: not only the law that he kept, but the law that he expounded in the name of God. That is, the law of love, and especially in the relational sense, can be seen in Matthew 5:43–48. That his words are true *torah* and *dabar* can be seen by 7:21–27, where Jesus reveals his place of authority as judge on ‘that day’ (vv. 22–23):

Not every one who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.’

Verses 24–27 reveal that he has not only been making a commentary on the *torah* of God, but that what he has said *is*, in fact, that very *torah*—the *torah* of God, the *torah* of Christ and the *torah* of the Spirit, even the *torah* of the Triune God.

Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.

There can be no doubt that Jesus is claiming his word is as the *dabar* (command) of the *torah*, and in that sense, though Jesus is not here indicated as the new Moses, he is that, and even more than a new Moses. The people had not previously heard such words, nor witnessed such authority. Verses 28–29 indicate this:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

### ‘THE LAW OF CHRIST’ IN THE EPISTLES

The two explicit mentions of ‘the law of Christ’ are found in I Corinthians 9:21 and Galatians 6:2. In the first Paul says, ‘To those outside the law I became as one outside the law—not being without law towards God but under the law of Christ—that I might win the weak’. He says clearly he is not lawless—‘not being without law toward God’—but that he is ‘under the law of Christ’: that is, he is ‘enlawed’ to Christ. To Paul the idea of being without law was unthinkable. In the context of his utterance, his being under the law of Christ, or under the law to Christ, relates to his desire to ‘that I might by all means save some’. He is not under the law only

in order to save some, for that would mean his being enlaved to Christ was utilitarian. No: all his life was lived passionately in the law of Christ, a law he would understand to be no less the law of God the Father, or the law of the Holy Spirit.

In the second reference (Gal. 6:2) he says, ‘Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ’. This must equate with the law of love. In Galatians 5:13–14, he has said, ‘through love be servants one of another. For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself”’. This accords with Romans 13:8–10:

Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law. The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery, You shall not kill, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,” and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence, “You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

‘He who loves his neighbour has fulfilled the law’ is the principle. Note the use of the verb ‘to fulfil’ (*pleroo*) in both the Galatian and Roman passages. Linked with Romans 8:4 and Galatians 6:2 (*anapleroo*), the statements in all references speak of the law being fulfilled in us rather than us fulfilling the law, and this is an important point. In Romans 8:4 and Galatians 5:16ff., the fulfilling of the law arises from walking in the Spirit, for to live in the Spirit is to experience the fulfilling of the law within us. It could not be otherwise.

There is a further reference to ‘the law of Christ’ which, though not explicit, is thinking of law as ‘Dominical’, that is, as the mind of Christ, out of his *torah*. In I Corinthians 7, Paul is giving advice in regard to marriage, the possible separation of spouses and the states of unmarried persons. For the most part he proceeds as though what he is saying is evidently correct, and that the basis for such advice is that it has already proceeded from Christ, the Lord. In verses 10 and 12, he says he is giving a certain charge, ‘To the married I give charge, not I but the Lord’, ‘To the rest I say, not the Lord’, and these statements do not mean that Paul is speaking from his own mind, but really from the mind of the Lord. It is just that Christ had not given explicit pronouncements, but Paul being an apostle could speak *as* the Lord.

There can be no question about the law of Christ being the law of God. What we distil from the Gospels is a review and a conclusion of what we have seen above, namely,

- (i) Jesus in no way denigrated law: he insisted that it must be fulfilled;
- (ii) Jesus did not bring a higher law—as such—but an interpretation of the law which raised it higher than that presented by the lawyers, scribes and Pharisees;
- (iii) *All law in Jesus’ view had—and has—to do with the Kingdom of God* (of heaven). Just as in Israel it had to do with covenant and kingdom—Israel was a theocracy—so in Jesus’ teaching. This is clear in the Sermon on the Mount; and
- (iv) Paul’s Epistles speak of ‘the law of Christ’ (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2). This could refer to (a) *the commands which Jesus gave* (cf. John 13:34; 14:15; 15:12–13; Matt. 28:19–20; Acts 1:2); (b) *the law which Jesus followed and fulfilled in his flesh*, or (c) *the law of love* (Rom. 13:8–10; Gal. 5:13–14; cf. James 1:22–25; 2:8, 12) which was virtually the Decalogue which Jesus summarised as love to God and love to one’s neighbour.

### **PAUL ON LAW AND GOSPEL: THE LAW AS LETHAL**

One of the problems regarding law in the New Testament is that many start off in the dialectic of Law and Gospel without first seeing the relationship of Christ to the law. Because Paul points out that sinners are universally under the condemnation of the law (Rom. 1:18 – 3:23; cf. Gal. 2:16ff.; 3:10–20; Phil. 3:8–10) and this means the curse of death on them, some readers and scholars have taken the point that the law is a bad thing. If anything is bad it is not the law—which Paul says is ‘holy’, ‘just’, ‘good’, and ‘spiritual’ (Rom. 7:12–14)—but the sinner, the one under the condemnation of the law. The law in condemning sinful Man is not ‘bad’, but it is the sinner who is bad.

Law and gospel are separate entities, but not unrelated ones. Whilst they must never be merged so that they are considered to be the one, yet they must not be opposed the one to the

other. They are contrastive but not opposites. Paul makes it clear that it is our *view* of the law as sinners which makes us hostile to it, or causes us to believe we can—and do—keep it. In Galatians 3:19–23, Paul shows that the law was added *after* the covenantal promises given to Abraham, and one reason was to increase the transgression (cf. Rom. 4:15, where the law brings wrath). The law could not bring life to the nomist, but God uses the law to imprison all under the power of sin so that the way of faith is shown to be the only way of coming to life, that is, to justification. With the coming of faith there is no longer any point in seeking to use law for self-justification. Thus the law leads to Christ, so that it is not an enemy but a custodian or disciplinarian whose aim is to lead us to Christ. Romans 8:3 (cf. 2:26) suggests that the law did want to help us to do something, namely fulfil the ‘just requirement’ it had demanded.

That the law is lethal to sinners is clear from the passages we have quoted above, and if we take just the Pauline view of the law, then we see that it is no basis for justification (Gal. 2:16); brings the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:19); incites sin, increases the trespass (Gal. 3:19; Rom. 7:5); brings wrath (Rom. 4:15); brings the curse (Gal. 3:10ff.); and gives power to evil forces (cf. Col. 2:14–15). At the same time it proves to be that custodian which brings us to Christ. Without the law, the idea and experience of grace could never happen, since the law brings death (Gal. 2:19–21).

### LAW AND GOSPEL

Law and gospel are brought together in Romans 8:1–11. Because of the need for brevity we will look at the first few verses of this chapter, since they tell us we are freed by Christ, through the gospel, and by means of the law of the Spirit, to fulfil the *dikaïoma* or the ‘just requirement’ of the law, thus vindicating the law as ‘the law of God’.

The statement of verse 1, ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’, could be linked to 7:1–6, for it would carry on naturally from there since that passage speaks of a person always being under law, but then released from such legal bondage to the law of the husband by the death of Christ—‘discharged from the law’—so that the person may now be married to Christ ‘to bear fruit for God’. Once a slave under the old written code, the person is now a slave ‘in the new life of the Spirit’. Thus the statement of ‘no condemnation’ would make sense. At the same time it seems natural to follow on from the text of chapter 7, so that the plain statement of 25b—that one is a slave to the law of God with the mind, to the law of sin with the flesh—shows nothing has changed in one’s justification. Thus verse 2 fits both 7:6 and 7:25b, that is, one is set free from the law of sin and death. The law of sin and death is ‘the written code’ which, although in itself was ‘holy’, ‘just’, ‘good’ and ‘spiritual’ (7:12, 13, 14; cf. I Tim. 1:8), yet became the law of sin for two reasons:

- (i) the person wishing to justify himself by means of it was sinning, since this autonomous act was sinful, being of the human ego and not of God (Gal. 3:10–11; cf. Lev. 18:5), and
- (ii) the transgressing of the precepts of the law (Gal. 3:10; cf. Deut. 27:26) was the occasion of sinning. It became the law of death to him since the outcome of sin is death. In 7:13, sin works death in the person by means of the law, and in 7:5, 10 and Galatians 2:19, Paul speaks of dying by the law.

Even so, we are now in Christ and in him there is no condemnation. How, then, does this happen to be? It is because—verse 2—‘the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set [us] free from the law of sin and death’. What is the ‘law of the Spirit of life’? Since this law of the Spirit (*nomos*) obtains only ‘in Christ Jesus’, then it must be the gospel as brought to us by the Spirit. Just as in 7:6 we were ‘discharged from the law’—being unable to discharge ourselves—so here this ‘law of the Spirit’ set us free for we could not set ourselves free. So, then, the law of the Spirit is the Spirit taking the gospel and setting us free from law—bondage by means of that gospel. Yet the Spirit not only sets us free *from* the law as a death—dealing regime but also liberates us *into* a new law, which is not the gospel, but the Spirit himself

comes to us via the gospel. We are thus emancipated from again attempting self-justifying action through the ‘written code’, because we live life freely in the Spirit and in Christ. It is difficult to conceive of a ‘new law’, for it might seem merely an exchange for the old one, so that we may soon set about justifying ourselves by a new law when in fact there is no new law. It is the law or command of God called ‘the law of God’ (8:7) and ‘the law of Christ’ (I Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2), and both of these comport with ‘the law of the Spirit of life’. What is primary in this verse is that believers have come into a new aeon, a new era, a new way of living, utter freedom from nomistic burdens, self-justifying pressures, and all of it by the presence and action of the Spirit, and all of it ‘in Christ’. ‘In Christ’ is the only place and situation in which the Spirit works.

Verses 3–4 take us on further for, whilst the law could not do what it would do because of human fleshliness, God was able to so do by sending his Son in the likeness of sinful flesh. That is, God judged sin in Christ’s flesh and so judged it in ours at the same time (II Cor. 5:14b, 21; cf. Gal. 2:20) in order that being set free from condemnation ‘the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us’. What was it that the law could not do? It could not assist us to attain to that place where we could have the ‘just requirement’ of the law *fulfilled* in us. Of course the law could not so judge sin that it could set us free, since only God in Christ could do that. Christ received our condemnation in his flesh, so that now, in the presence of the Spirit and by his power, ‘the just requirement of the law can be fulfilled in us’. Note that we do not, unaided, fulfil the just requirement of the law. We are not freed from law’s condemnation so that we may, *ourselves*, fulfil the just requirement of the law. We must realise that we are never put on to fulfil the law *from* or *of* ourselves. Romans 7:13–25 reminds us of the impossibility of such fulfilment. Even so, the ‘just requirement’ of the law stands to be fulfilled. It is fulfilled by us when God is working within us, as in I Corinthians 15:10; II Corinthians 3:5–6; Ephesians 1:19; Philippians 2:12–13; I Thessalonians 2:13; and Hebrews 13:21.

### **CONCLUSION: THE PASTORAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE LAW**

We can see that since the law is rooted in the nature of God, then we must understand the reality of the Triune Godhead, the interpersonal relationships of the Three Persons, and the law of love which is in action between them, that law which we call ‘the law of God’; the preceptual image of God which Man, being made in the image of God, must of necessity obey since it is the truly functional, ontological way of living and behaving. It is wholly the law of love. For nomism or antinomianism to be allowed to be our principle of life must mean tragedy within the community of Christ. That which can be called ‘the law of the Father’, ‘the law of Christ’, and ‘the law of the Spirit’, must be taught and given full play in ‘the Israel of God’. Just as it was always at the heart of Israel, so now it must be—in the context of all the other gifts—the true way of life. It cost the Cross to bring it into full and joyous play.