	TOPIC	pg		TOPIC	pg.
1	**The Gospel of the Kingdom** • John the Baptist and Jesus • Introduction & Overview	1	**8**	**The Journey of the Ark** • Samuel-Saul-David • The Ark Narrative	123
2	**Terminology: What is a Kingdom?** • Rule or Realm? • Heaven or God?	17	**9**	**I Have Set My King…on Zion** • The Ark Comes Home • The King on Zion's Hill	140
3	**Order From Chaos** • In the Beginning: *Chaos* • *Cosmicization*	32	**10**	**The Songs of the King - Psalms**	157
4	**The Garden Kingdom** • Garden as Order • *Axis Mundi*	49	**11**		
5	**Man as Coregent** • Created to Rule • The Dominion of Man	67	**12**		
6	**Leviathan** • Subjected to Futility • Trajectory of Subjugation	82	**13**		
7	**Paradise Regained?** • A Kingdom of Priests • Moses to Samuel	106	**14**		

Chapter 1 – The Gospel of the Kingdom
Text: Matthew 4:12-25

"As I began to study the kingdom,
I grasped that it was the thread that stitched the entire canon together."
(Patrick Schreiner)

Jesus came preaching, "Repent! For the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"[1] After His temptation in the wilderness, the Lord began His earthly ministry with the proclamation of the 'gospel of the kingdom.'[2] Certainly the first implication of this fact is that the kingdom, or the concept of the kingdom, was somehow central to the purpose for which Jesus came into the world. Donald Guthrie notes: "One of the most prominent features of the teaching of Jesus in the synoptics was his emphasis on the kingdom of God. This teaching must be considered as a major contribution to our understanding of the mission of Jesus."[3] Thomas Schreiner adds: "The Synoptic Gospels make it immediately apparent that the kingdom of God is central to Jesus' teaching."[4] This reality will certainly form a major component of this particular study as we continue the Biblical Theology series with an intense investigation of the concept of the Kingdom. But what is significant in the reference to the centrality of the kingdom in Jesus' earliest preaching and teaching is that His audience did not challenge Him; they did not counter, 'What are you talking about?' This lack of a call for clarification, and the fact that the kingdom forms the earliest content of Jesus' preaching (as it did John before Him) can only mean that Second Temple Israel was both aware of the kingdom as to its meaning, and expecting the kingdom as to its arrival. Again, Schreiner:


Thomas Schreiner (*b.* 1954)

[1] Matthew 4:17
[2] Matthew 4:23
[3] Guthrie, Donald *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 1981); 409.
[4] Schreiner, Thomas R. *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2008); 45.

> Those hearing Jesus did not ask for a definition of the kingdom. They understood him to be proclaiming the dawn of a glorious new era in which Israel would be exalted and the nations made subservient to Israel's God. The Lord would reign over the whole earth, the son of David would serve as king, and the exile would be over. The new covenant would be fulfilled. God's people would keep his law, and the promised new creation would become a reality. The Lord would pour out his Spirit on all flesh, and the promise to Abraham that all nations would be blessed, to the ends of the earth, would become a reality.[5]

Schreiner is perhaps a bit sanguine regarding what Jesus' first audiences understood concerning His preaching on the kingdom, but what is undeniable is the sense of expectation, which itself indicates a sense of a corporate awareness that there was such a thing as the kingdom of God, and that it was coming. As it turns out, and as this study will attempt to elaborate, the concept of the kingdom of God is perhaps the most fundamental theme throughout the entire arc of biblical revelation. This statement will upset some, as it is normally orthodox to claim that the fundamental theme of the Bible is Jesus Christ. Indeed it is, but we must also note that the culmination of Jesus' earthly mission, including His death, resurrection, and ascension, is that of *kingship*, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the universally recognized sovereign of the universe. Therefore, it is no detraction from the centrality of Jesus in Biblical Theology to claim that the canonical Scriptures unfold from start to finish the concept of the kingdom of God. In this concept, this prophetic and eschatological reality, we see both the Creation thread and the Covenantal thread of biblical revelation consummated and culminated in Jesus Christ – the Second Adam and the Seed of Abraham. This is why the first content of Jesus' teaching and preaching, and the central topic of His parables, was the kingdom of God; this is what He was sent to be and to do: "You say correctly, I am a king."[6]

What, then, is the kingdom? If we could answer that question succinctly in one chapter, this would be a very short study. In one respect, however, there is a simple answer: a kingdom is the realm over which a king rules. Thus the kingdom of God must be the realm over which God reigns as King. But when the kingdom is God's, there is a

[5] *Idem.*
[6] John 18:37

conceptual problem to consider: God is Sovereign over the entire universe; there is no created place or time over which He does not rule and His will does not have complete sway. Therefore we must conclude that the biblical meaning of the kingdom of God is more nuanced; indeed, so nuanced that it flows in and out of the biblical stream of redemptive history, now visible, now hidden, from Genesis through Revelation.

Furthermore, when considering the biblical kingdom, there has been a great deal of debate as to just *where* this kingdom lies. Jesus famously stated: "the kingdom of God is within you."[7] But He also, and equally famously, prayed: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."[8] Is the kingdom only spiritual (within you) or is it temporal and political (on earth)? Or both? Theologians have vacillated between two aspects of a kingdom: *rule* and *realm*. The former has to do more with the act of being a king (or, from the other perspective, the act of being a subject) whereas the latter emphasizes the physical extent of that rule. Guthrie represents much of modern evangelicalism when he writes: "It is now generally agreed that it means not so much a domain, as a reign; not so much an area over which the king reigns, as the activity of reigning."[9]

As Guthrie notes, this is the prevailing view among contemporary evangelical scholars, but is it the correct one? Is there no temporal or physical component to the kingdom of God? This emphasis on 'reigning' versus 'realm' stems largely from two historical events – the Crusades and the Second Great Awakening. The notorious Crusades of the Middle Ages were largely derived from the concept of 'Christendom' and the doctrine of the Two Swords promulgated by Pope Gelasius I in the 5th Century. The idea, drawn from the teachings of Romans 13 and Ephesians 6, conceived of an earthly kingdom of God in which the civil sword of the emperor would be subordinate to the spiritual sword of the pope. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the doctrine except to say that it applied a very strong geographical component to the concept of the kingdom of God, viewing Europe as Christian land and motivating the conquest

[7] Luke 17:21
[8] Matthew 6:10
[9] Guthrie; 409.

of the 'Holy Land' for the Lord Jesus Christ.[10] During the Reformation, this union between the civil and the ecclesiastical powers continued, with the 1555 Peace of Augsburg which ended (temporarily) hostilities between Catholic and Lutheran realms with the Holy Roman Empire. The formula, *cuius regio, eius religio* – 'whose realm, his religion' – determined that the realm of a prince or king would be the geographical area of the religion – Protestant or Catholic – to which he adhered. This was perhaps the epitome of the union of Church and State, a union that would progressively dissolve over the ensuing centuries. Still, these historical events and eras represent a powerful geopolitical element in the Church's understanding of the kingdom of God.

The Second Great Awakening was about as different from the Crusades as any two historical eras could be. Separated geographically as well, as the Second Great Awakening occurred almost entirely with the adolescent United States of America. The influence of the latter event was also the exact opposite of the medieval and early modern eras. As the latter were heavily 'top down' – ecclesiastical settlement on the basis of the sword – the former was preeminently a 'grass roots' movement – changing society and culture through changing individual hearts and minds. The emphasis of the evangelistic message during the Second Great Awakening was on a conversion manifested through visible works, evidences of a changed life. These works would develop in subsequent years into what became known as the 'Social Gospel,' with church-driven movements to abolish slavery, alcohol consumption, child labor, to promote public education, women's suffrage, and public benevolence. One may argue the general merits of each of these causes, or at least the responsibility of the Church in their advancement, but the point here is merely to show the impact of a strong temporal ('now') element on many modern believer's understanding of the kingdom of God.

Very few, if any, modern evangelicals wish to revive the medieval concepts of the Two Swords or the Crusades, and within Reformed evangelical circles, the Social Gospel is also taboo. Reaction against these precedents has driven thought concerning

[10] There is an element of this concept of the two swords in the title and plot of the 2005 historical drama centered on the life of King Baldwin IV of Jerusalem, the 'Leper King.' The movie is entitled *Kingdom of Heaven* and is set within the overall context of the Crusades.

the kingdom of God inward, spiritualizing the concept and individualizing it to the goal of inward faith and obedience, inward sanctification; in short, the rule of God within an individual believer's life. While this attitude may answer to Jesus' words in Luke 17 – 'the kingdom is within you' - it does not encompass the model desire of the disciple: "Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

In what is commonly known as the Lord's Prayer – though it is more accurately described the Disciples' Prayer – Jesus incorporates the coming of His Father's kingdom into an overall rubric that is powerfully current, even daily: "Give us this day our daily bread." This places the disciple's desire and expectation for the kingdom on an immanent basis no less than the disciple's daily expectation of provision from the Lord. The phrase 'as it is in heaven' also seems to indicate much more than individual spirituality and sanctification. A 'this age' perspective will also become manifest when we investigate the 'Parables of the Kingdom' in Matthew 13 and elsewhere. It is certainly undeniable that Jesus' disciples, along with most of Second Temple Judea, anticipated a 'here and now' kingdom and not an inward, spiritual reign of God in their lives. This, of course, does not meant that Jesus' fellow Israelites were correct – there were wrong on many issues – but their source of understanding and anticipating the kingdom was the Hebrews Scriptures, our 'Old Testament,' so it behooves us to begin our study of the kingdom of God there. This we will do in the next chapter.

This chapter, then, will serve as both an introduction and an overview of the topic. Central as the kingdom was to the initial and ongoing teaching of Jesus, it must be the case that the kingdom is also central to the entire biblical arc of revelation. This means that the kingdom must be both creational and eschatological – that is, it must factor into the very foundation of God's purpose and plan for Creation and, therefore, must also be preeminently the goal toward which all history – redemptive and cosmic – is tending. Yet it is also the case that the kingdom of God is one of the supreme examples of progressive revelation in Scripture: the phrase as such is not used in the Old Testament, yet the concept was woven into the progressive narrative of God's creative and

redemptive acts. It would not be too much to say that, insofar as we can comprehend it, the purpose of God in Creation was to manifest His sovereignty through His kingdom.

As with most aspects of a conservative, biblically-based worldview, this idea of God manifesting His sovereignty as King over Creation has taken a hit in modern thought, due both to Enlightenment philosophy and Evolutionary science. The rationalism of the Enlightenment as well as the progressive development of Evolution combined not only to 'demythologize' the biblical account of Creation, but to reconstruct the biblical narrative as the product of human institutions raised to the level of the divine. In other words, modern an has recreated God and Creation in his own image. An example of this phenomenon as applied to the universal sovereignty of God is found in "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament' by Francis Denio, an example of New England liberalism at the turn of the 20th Century. Denio illustrates well the attempt of liberal scholars to straddle the fence between rationalism and faith, commenting with regard to the kingdom of God: "The origin of this idea was partly due to revelation. It is said, partly because there is a basis in human thought for this idea."[11] Denio, along with liberal scholarship in general, grounds the concept of the kingdom of God as an extension and elevation of the concept of human kingdoms, which he maintains is an idea that originated not with God, but within human society. He theorizes that with the evolution of the idea of gods, it became necessary, or at least advantageous, to associate these gods with a human representative within the subject human society: the king. Drawing from the documented history of ancient pagan societies, Denio writes: "It must be observed that the rulers of the nation rather than the subjects were believed to be in intimate relationship with the deity. The ruler was the representative of the god, and in some sense his embodiment."[12]

Denio does not specifically address which aspects of the biblical representation of Yahweh as original Sovereign are due to 'revelation.' It appears from his article, however, that the idea of a 'righteous' king within the Israelite religion may have de-

[11] Denio, F. B. "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament" *The Old Testament Student* Vol. 6, No. 2 (Oct., 1886); 55.
[12] *Idem.*

rived from revelation, at least in his opinion. With regard to the pagan relationship between the king and the national deity, Denio writes: "In no case that I have noticed is righteousness regarded as a ground of connection between god and man, and rarely is anything like righteousness necessary to secure the favor of the deity."[13]

This is classic liberalism: to put the cart of human social development in front of the horse of divine creation and order over and within human society. Rather than ask where Man derived the idea of a king, liberals assume that human notions of divine kingship derive from human experience of human kings. In keeping with this mental paradigm, Denio does not see biblical evidence for the kingdom of God until the Exodus and, in particular, the gathering of the twelve tribes at Mt. Sinai: "The real beginning of the kingly rule was when Yahweh bound the tribes of Israel into a community by the formation of a legal covenant. This covenant was the constitution of the kingdom of God…The family of Abraham had been enlarged to a tribe – to a race; the furnace of affliction in Egypt and the wonderful deliverance under the guidance of Yahweh made the race a nation; the preparation was completed; the kingdom was inaugurated, for a fullness of time was reached."[14] To be sure, the gathering of Israel at Sinai was an important stage in the progressive revelation of the kingdom; but it was not the beginning of the concept.

"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."[15] The very act of creating itself created a kingdom and constituted the Creator God as a sovereign. J. C. O'Neill comments: "God is, of course, a special case. He is king, always has been king, and always will be king. He reigns, even though some angels and some human beings do not acknowledge his sovereignty. As soon as he created anything, he had a territory."[16] This is the fundamental basis of all biblical and human history and the unalterable foundation of the kingdom of God. The arc of revelation begins with a king and a kingdom, and ends with a king and a kingdom. There is no essential loss of divine sov-

[13] *Ibid.*; 56.
[14] Denio, "The Kingdom of God in the Old Testament, II" *The Old Testament Student* Vol. 6, No. 3 (Nov. 1886); 71.
[15] Genesis 1:1
[16] O'Neill, J. C. "The Kingdom of God" *Novum Testamentum* Vol. 35, Fasc. 2 (Apr. 1993); 131.

ereignty in between, though a great rebellion has taken place first in the heavens and then on earth. In a significant respect, the story of revelation is the story of the restoration of this primeval kingdom, the reestablishment of the rightful sovereignty of God over His Creation. This, of course, parallels or overlays the promise of the Redeemer the Seed of Woman who would not only crush the serpent's head but would also restore divine kingship on earth to its rightful possessor, as Paul intimates in I Corinthians 15.

> *Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*
>
> (I Corinthians 15:24-28)

It is along this trajectory of divine revelation that we find the development of the kingdoms of Man, and also their inveterate hostility to the kingdom of God. Contrary to the liberal position, mankind derives its sense of authority, and in particular the singular authority of a king, from the order established in the beginning when the Creator God created and established for Himself a co-regent: Adam. All subsequent forms of human hierarchy can be said to derive -though usually in corrupted form – from this initial order, with the human regent subjected to the authority of the Creator King. When man rebelled against the rightful sovereignty of God and shifted his allegiance treacherously to the angelic usurper, Satan, this framework of order was transmuted into the kingdoms of Man, what Augustine famously described as the 'City of Man.' The ebb and flow of human history must be seen as the progressive development and eventual corruption and destruction of every human attempt to claim on earth the absolute sovereignty that belongs only to the Creator God. This is what Paul is talking about in his discourse with the philosophers on Mars Hill in Athens, acknowledging that even some of the pagans grasped their origin in the divine order of things.

> *And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring.'* (Acts 17:26-28)

In spite of Man's rebellion and the continual establishment of human kingdoms, the Creator God remains sovereign, each and every kingdom subjected entirely to His will. Furthermore, and definitely contrary to much of the history of human thought (including thought within the Church), the kingdom of God will not derive from any kingdom of Man. This is a major component of biblical revelation and hence a major theme in Biblical Theology: the kingdom of God both predates and infinitely transcends the kingdoms of Man. Speaking of the kingdom of God, O'Neill writes: "It is not to be one of the kingdoms of this world, but will come from heaven to replace the kingdoms of this world."[17] Thus the kingdom of God becomes an underlying theme throughout biblical revelation and subsumes all of human history under the metanarrative of the restoration of God's kingdom and sovereignty 'on earth as it is in heaven.'

This reality of revelation is bookended by the first eleven chapters of Genesis on the one hand, and the book of Revelation on the other, illustrating the comprehensive perspective of Biblical Theology. The former moves from the creation of Man to his rebellion and eventual destruction – due to the magnitude of his corruption – in the Flood. The surviving family of Noah is then traced to the separation of the descendants of Shem, Ham, and Japheth at the Tower of Babel. This section of Scripture closes significantly with the Table of Nations, establishing the 'world' from which Yahweh will call Abram and create for Himself a people.

On the other end of both biblical revelation and human history, in the book of Revelation, we read of the culmination of God's creative and redemptive plan: to call to Himself a people 'from every tongue, tribe, and nation.'[18] It is easy to lose this perspective as one reads the Old Testament, focused as it is on just one nation, Israel. But as we

[17] O'Neill; 135.
[18] Revelation 5:9, 13:7, 14:6

have seen in the earlier installments of Biblical Theology, Israel was not formed for its own purpose; it was part of the divine plan, not the end goal. Thus, when we read in the Old Testament of Israel's relationship with the surrounding nations, both large and small, we must keep in mind the overarching paradigm of the kingdom of God, typified but by no means culminated in the reigns of David and Solomon. The Davidic dynasty, the capital and temple city of Jerusalem, the whole concept of Zion – all must be seen within the kingdom rubric if they are to be understood, both in their historical setting and as pointers to the messianic fulfillment in Jesus Christ.

Along this Creation line of revelation, the kingdom of God seems to lie just beneath the surface as an ideal and a future hope. To be sure, the calling of Israel as a nation – a royal priesthood – at the base of Mt. Sinai, established on Torah, was to be a microcosm of the kingdom of God in the midst of the kingdoms of Man. To be sure, Israel failed in this mission. But this historical reality did not divert the purpose and plan of Israel's God to eventually bring in the kingdom, and it gave ample opportunity for Yahweh to explain – through positive precepts and negative judgments – just what constituted the kingdom of God. Israel's king, always to be subordinate and obedient to Israel's God (the true King), was intended to model a royal power wholly unlike what was common to the nations. The Bible speaks to many issues; the use and misuse of power is certainly one of its more significant themes. The contrast between the vaunted power of earthly kings and the settled omnipotence of Almighty God is poetically revealed in Psalm 2, a very important passage with regard to the kingdom theme.

> *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?*
> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,*
> *Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,*
> *"Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."*
> *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; The Lord shall hold them in derision.*
> *Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:*
> *"Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion."* (Psalm 2:1-6)

This passage, perhaps more succinctly than any other in Scripture, encompasses the discussion so far with regard to the conflict between the kingdom of God and the

kingdom of Man. Psalm 2 joins together the two major strands of biblical revelation – the Creation strand and the Covenant strand – and relates them both to the concept of the kingdom of God. True, the phrase is not used in the psalm, but one can hardly think otherwise when one reads: 'Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion.' The 'yet' is adversative: do what they may, the kings of the earth can not prevail, nor can they in any way derail the divine purpose to establish God's own King on the throne. Zion here is probably intended in its broadest possible sense: that of Jerusalem, the City of David, but also that of the center of God's activity in the world from which salvation is to flow to all the nations. It is of Zion that the prophet Isaiah speaks in a glorious eschatological passage, one that ties in directly with Psalm 2.

> *Now it shall come to pass in the latter days*
> *That the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains,*
> *And shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it.*
> *Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD,*
> *To the house of the God of Jacob;*
> *He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths."*
> *For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*
> *He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people;*
> *They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning [a]hooks;*
> *Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.*
>
> (Isaiah 2:2-4)

As Eden's loss and restoration lies at the heart of the Creation line of biblical revelation, so Zion is at the center of the Covenant line of revelation, the line that lies within the Creation line and hones the purpose of God to a fine point. At this point is a people selected from within Adam's race – not an alien people created *ex nihilo*, nor an angelic race wholly unrelated to Man. – to become the repository on earth of Yahweh's redemptive grace both for themselves and, purposefully, for the whole world. It is with this nation, created and formed by God in similar manner and terminology as the original Creation, that would become the visible and typological manifestation of God's

kingdom on earth.[19] Israel was to be a unique sort of nation in its time, a nation whose king is her God and whose social and civic structure was to be oriented around the place where that God was to be worshipped.

From a biblical theological point of view, however, Israel presents us with a conundrum. On the one hand, Israel was to be a people whose king was Yahweh. This is perhaps not explicitly stated except in the negative, when the nation badgered the judge Samuel to anoint a king over them, 'to judge us like all the nations.'[20] Samuel resisted until finally the LORD told him, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."[21] Throughout the period of the judges, Israel as a nation was unified (inasmuch as it was unified, with was not much) around the tabernacle which had come to rest after the wilderness wanderings, in Shiloh. The judges were not priests, however, but rather chosen by God from among the tribes to govern the nation and to lead its army to war. It also appears that the judges were often more tribal than national, as were the armies they led. It was not a good situation, to be sure, a time when 'there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.'[22] Here is part of the conundrum, the book of Judges ends with almost an admission of civic defeat – or at least disorder, we might even say, chaos: 'there was no king.' But there was a king; Yahweh was king.

Yet on the other hand of the historical narrative, there was always to be a king, a human king of the tribe of Judah. To be sure, as we read the narrative of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness and the history of the early prophets in Joshua and Judges, there is no mention of what would become such an immense edifice in Israel's later history: the Davidic throne. The Christian 'Old Testament' anticipates the ending somewhat by placing the book of Ruth, the ancestress of David, immediately after the book

[19] *Cp.* Isaiah 43:1 where the term *bara* (created) and *yatzer* (formed) are used with reference to God's work in calling Israel as a people and nation. These are the same words used with respect to the creation of Adam in Gen. 1:27 (bara)and 2:7 (*yatzer*).
[20] I Samuel 8:5
[21] I Samuel 8:7
[22] Judges 21:25

of Judges, whereas the Hebrew Bible places Ruth amidst the Writings (*kethuvim*) with Judges in the Early or Former Prophets (*naviim*). From a literary standpoint, the Christian order of Judges-Ruth is a 'spoiler'; the reader is not supposed to know about David this early in the narrative as there is much struggle yet to come before he ascends the throne.

Yet the Jewish reader would still know that there is to be a king from among the tribes of Israel, a king who, like Adam, was to be co-regent with Yahweh, Israel's true king. There are two earlier events that were intended to cast a prophetic shadow (or light?) over the ensuing history and drama of Israel in the wilderness and in the Promised Land. The first dates from the patriarch Jacob, who prophesied over his twelve sons just prior to his own death. Of Judah, Jacob's fourth son, we read the coming of a royal personage called 'Shiloh.' The word 'king' is not mentioned, but the office is unmistakably described.

> *Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise;*
> *Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;*
> *Your father's children shall bow down before you.*
> *Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up.*
> *He bows down, he lies down as a lion; and as a lion, who shall rouse him?*
> *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet,*
> *Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.* (Genesis 49:8-10)

We must understand this passage not merely as a father's blessing (indeed, for some of the sons it was hardly a blessing), but as a prophetic word concerning the future of the twelve sone who would become the twelve tribes of Israel. As divine prophecy, Jacob's words concerning the tribe of Judah – of which, of course, we find the lineage of David – the inevitability of a king and a kingdom is assured by divine purpose. But God's purpose is rarely reflected in the hearts of men, even of those chosen by God as His peculiar people. The inevitability of a king does not mean that Scripture is being disingenuous in the I Samuel 8 passage; Israel *had* rejected God as their king and was not hounding Samuel for a king on account of the ancient prophecy. Indeed, their first choice to be king over them was Saul, who was from the tribe of Benjamin. Of Benjamin

Jacob prophesied very unpromisingly: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."[23]

The second ancient prophecy concerning a future king over Israel is found during the wilderness journeys of Israel. The context is was the fear of Balak, the king of Moab, concerning the seemingly invincible Israelites who had just destroyed an Amalekite army. Balak brings in a hired gun, Balaam the prophet, to curse Israel, but the prophet was unable to say anything other than the LORD gave to him to say, which on three occasions, to Balak's chagrin, constituted blessings. On the fourth and final attempt, Balaam is given a lengthy prophecy concerning Israel that was far from what the Moabite king was looking for, and indeed looked far into the future. It is here that we find the promise of a 'Star' and a 'Septer,' tying back to Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah, dealing with the near-term future regarding Israel's relationship to Moab, and looking farther into the mist, promising the eventual Messiah.

> *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near;*
> *A Star shall come out of Jacob; A Scepter shall rise out of Israel,*
> *And batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.*
> *And Edom shall be a possession; Seir also, his enemies, shall be a possession,*
> *While Israel does valiantly. Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,*
> *And destroy the remains of the city.* (Numbers 24:17-19)

It is of the nature of progressive revelation that such early prophecies are vague, though the terminology connecting the prophecy of Jacob with that of Balaam should not be missed or mistaken. We conclude that it was Yahweh's intention to be king over Israel, but as with Adam over Creation, to rule His covenant people through an Israelite king from the tribe of Judah. The Israelites who demanded a king from the last judge, Samuel, did not have Yahweh's interests in mind, they did not consider the ancient prophecies concerning Judah. Yet this did not, as it never does, thwart the purpose and plan of God. Biblical Theology is able to trace the promise of a king/kingdom from the

[23] Genesis 49:27

establishment of Eden in the beginning, to the covenantal call of a people., during the era of the patriarchs and the Exodus.

From there the biblical literature focuses quite powerfully on this concept of a kingdom – first, the kingdom of David and its tortuous path through history; then, to and through the Exile when the Davidic dynasty has crumbled, all that is left is a stump of Jesse. The hope of a kingdom does not die with the house of David, however, since the promise to David was an everlasting covenant monergistically established by God (as was the covenant with Abram). As we have seen, and will see in greater detail in later chapters, the apparent failure of the people - whether Adam or Israel or David's descendants - does not interrupt the overarching purpose of God. From the desolation of the Exile we move into the Second Temple era, a time of prophetic silence and messianic hope. The exilic and post-exilic prophets, including Daniel, though he is not listed among the Hebrew prophets, not only refuse to give up on the Davidic king and kingdom, but expand its future status into a messianic, worldwide scope. This is the iteration of the kingdom revelation that first John, then Jesus, came preaching as 'at hand.' Thus the kingdom theme moves from a cosmic, universal dominion of God in Creation – with Man as co-regent – to a cosmic, universal dominion of God in the New Creation – with the God-Man, the last Adam, as co-regent. Israel's history and its Scripture lie in the middle of this progression, as a living parable of what is meant by 'the kingdom of God.'

There are many definitions and descriptions of the kingdom of God in both Jewish and Christian literature; it will not be our purpose to list and critique even a small sampling. Rather it is the goal of this study to listen to the arc of revelation as it unfolds, defines, and ultimately consummates the kingdom of God, all the while remembering that, as Jesus says at the start of His ministry: it is 'Good News.'

Chapter Summary:

There is perhaps no other concept in Scripture that has been subjected to cultural manipulation than that of the 'kingdom of God' or 'of heaven.' The restructuring of Eu-

rope after the fall of the Roman Empire saw the Doctrine of the Two Swords, an attempt to unite the civil sword of the Emperor under the spiritual sword of the Pope in an all-encompassing 'kingdom of God' on earth or, at least, in Europe. The Crusades were a by-product of this mentality, a kingdom largely political with a veneer of Christianity applied for good measure. Europe exhausted itself in wars over these centuries, many of which were fought under the banner of Christianity – on both sides of the battle. In the early modern period the 'White Man's Burden' fueled colonization, in which the Christian religion was often advanced no longer by the sword, but by the musket and rifle. Under this political paradigm, the 'kingdom' was largely considered as coextensive with the Church, though for much of this period the Church herself was not united.

Modern reaction against both the spirit of the Crusades and of Colonization. Coupled with Enlightenment rationalism, this aversion led to an internalizing and spiritualizing of the kingdom: the reign of God within an individual's heart and not the visible rule of a Christian king or government. This spiritual perspective may or may not also leave room for an eschatological manifestation of a visible, even 'political' (in the right sense of that word, if there is one) kingdom at Christ's Second Coming. But the important consideration for the hear and now is to 'put Jesus on the throne of your heart' as is encouraged by much of modern, Western evangelism and discipleship.

What is needed is a more biblical, and more thorough-going *biblical theological* analysis of the kingdom of God. This certainly must begin with the recognition that many common views of the kingdom are far more influenced by culture, or by the sins of mankind's past (particularly the sins of the Church's past), than by the revelation of the kingdom in Scripture. Such a study must self-consciously limit itself to what has been said about the kingdom in the Bible. In doing so, the kingdom of God will show itself a multi-faceted reality – existing past, present, and future, encompassing all of Creation and more particularly the community of God's elect, foreshadowed in one Man and fulfilled – and one day consummated – in a second Man.

Chapter 2 – What is a Kingdom?
Text: I Corinthians 15:20-28; Colossians 1:9-18

"The kingdom is always an earthly hope,
although an earth redeemed from the curse of evil."
(George Eldon Ladd)

The concept of a kingdom may be difficult for modern American evangelicals to fully comprehend, since ours is perhaps the most famous nation to have thrown off the 'yoke' of royalty, two hundred fifty years ago. It is woven into the fundamental law of our nation that an aristocracy, with its assumed royalty at the head, is forbidden in our land. The United States Constitution makes this prohibition explicit in Article I.

> No Title of Nobility shall be granted by the United States: And no Person holding any Office of Profit or Trust under them, shall, without the Consent of the Congress, accept of any present, Emolument, Office, or Title, of any kind whatever, from any King, Prince, or foreign State.[24]

The American Revolution set the stage for the eventual demise of the great monarchies and empires that ruled essentially by fiat two hundred fifty years ago. By the end of the Great War (now called World War I), the dynasties of Europe were either in shambles or had been swept away by revolution. Today, many European nations have retained their monarchs as 'heads of state,' which is a polite way of saying 'figureheads' as they have no political power or influence. Except for the totalitarian rule of some Asian monarchs, and the ever-present dictatorships here and there throughout the world, most nations today operate under some degree of republicanism, many of which are patterned after the United States and many after Britain's parliamentary system. Kingdoms, where they exist, are a hollow replica of their former power and glory.

From a hermeneutical perspective, it must be admitted that we read, and interpret what we read, in a manner conditioned by our culture – both our present culture and our cultural heritage. Certainly Western Christianity's concept of the kingdom of

[24] United States Constitution, Article I, Section 9, Paragraph 8. Full Text of the U.S. Constitution | Constitution Center. Accessed 13July2026.

God over the millennia has been thus culturally conditioned, and rarely in a profitable way. But even with the best of intentions, it is difficult not to conceive of a 'kingdom' – whether of God or of men – apart from both our current and our historical experience. In this we are hardly alone: the Jews of the Second Temple era, including Jesus' disciples, were anticipating a kingdom along the lines of what their cultural experience dictated. They were looking for a political kingdom that would militarily overthrow the Roman oppressors and reestablish the Davidic dynasty in Jerusalem. They expected the Messiah to raise Israel up to world power status; was this not what the prophecies foretold?

We can look back from the perspective of two thousand years, and it seems ridiculous that the disciples (and the majority of Second Temple Israel) thought that the kingdom of God would consist of Israel as world power on par with Rome. But at no point in Christian history has the Church entirely escaped the same notion: that somehow the kingdom of God means tis-worldly political power, often forged and maintained by the literal sword. We have already considered the Crusades and the doctrine of the Two Swords promulgated by Pope Galasius, but can we maintain that the modern attitude of political activism is of a different nature? Does it not merely differ in degree? Modern theologians who have recognized the error of a militaristic or political kingdom have often swung to the opposite side of the pendulum, viewing the kingdom of God as entirely spiritual and inward, 'the reign of God in the human heart.' Adolf von Harnack, a liberal German theologian of the late-19th and early-20th centuries, was influential in taking the eschatological reality out of the biblical doctrine of the Kingdom of God. Harnack was a key proponent of FOGBOM – the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man – as the essence of both pure religion and the kingdom that Jesus preached. Following his influential lead, "Many scholars have understood the Kingdom primarily in terms of personal religious



Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930)

experience – the reign of God in the individual soul."[25] These two perspectives – the Kingdom as earthly political power versus the Kingdom as inward religious experience – represent the two poles of the interpretive spectrum with regard to the Church's historical exegesis of the biblical concept. But do either even approximate the actual biblical teaching? Indeed, is there any place along the spectrum between these two extremes that comes close to the biblical teaching? To offer a preliminary answer, hopefully then backed up by the content of this study: No. What is needed is a paradigm shift in our understanding of 'kingdom' as it is both used in Scripture and applied to the rule of God in Christ. Such a paradigm shift is possible if the Kingdom of God is investigated in a manner conducive to Biblical Theology.

Word Studies

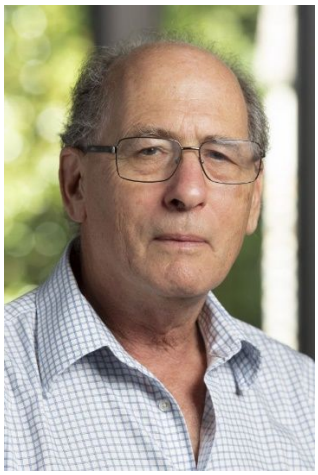
Scholars have attempted to defend their preference between the two views mentioned above by appealing to the meaning of the Greek or Hebrew word, or word group, most frequently translated 'king' or 'kingdom.' The problem with this approach is the limited nature of the word selection: there is only one word group in the Hebrew, and one corresponding word group in the Greek, and with such a limited vocabulary, the meaning of the word's usage in any given context will largely depend on that context. Here is a tabular summary of the primary words used in relation to 'rule' or 'reign.'

	Verb – 'to rule'	**Noun – 'ruler'**	**Abstract Noun – 'reign'**
Heb.	*malak*	*melek*	*malkut*
Grk.	*basileuein*	*basileus*	*basileia*

Scholars argue that the Hebrew or Greek word family 'always' signifies a concrete dominion of a king's rule, or 'always' signifies the abstract concept of ruling or reigning, and 'never' that of a geographical domain. But words in any language rarely 'always' or 'never' mean this or that, and while each side of the debate can line up

[25] Ladd, George Eldon *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1974); 58.

Scripture references in support of either the abstract or the concrete sense of the words, they must each ignore a body of other biblical texts that argue the opposite view. Joel Marcus, Emeritus Professor of New Testament and Christian Origins at Duke Divinity School, notes the tendency of modern scholars: "many twentieth-century interpreters have claimed that the predominant meaning of *malkûtā*/*basileia* in Jesus' teaching is 'reign,' 'rule,' 'sovereignty,' 'dominion,' 'kingly power,' rather than 'realm.'[26] But it seems that this modern consensus is at least partially based on several *a priori*s. The first has already been touched upon: the desire to distance the Christian concept of the kingdom of God from its lamentable history of Crusades and Colonization. The idea of a politically or militarily advanced kingdom in this age is abhorrent to modern Western thinking and so the idea of a geographically extended kingdom fell largely by the wayside. Coupled with this reaction against a politically-aligned Christianity is the 19th Century liberalism of Schleiermacher, Ritschl, and von Harnack – German theologians powerfully influential in turning Christianity into a moral and ethical lifestyle rather than a regenerated life. This facilitated later theologians like Bultmann (also German) to reimagine the kingdom of God as the existential experience of God in one's heart, and the associated renewal of morality and ethics both individually and within the social sphere. These extracurricular philosophical have arguably had a much more powerful influence on the modern interpretation of the kingdom, than can be derived by the Hebrew and Greek words used in the biblical text.



Joel Marcus (*b.* 1951)

However, even accepting that context is more important than word study does not immediately lead to a biblical 'definition' of the kingdom of God. This is due to the fact that the phrase is used in several different ways even within the teachings of Jesus.

[26] Marcus, Joel "Entering into the Kingly Power of God" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 107, Np. 4 (Dec. 1988); 663-64.

Marcus lists five categories into which the sayings of Jesus concerning the kingdom can be classified:

> Most of the sayings about the kingdom of God attributed to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels can be divided into five categories…(1) those which directly imply the kingdom's movement; (2) those about entering the kingdom; (3) those about being in the kingdom; (4) those which speak of the kingdom as a possession; and (5) parables which use the formula 'the kingdom is like.'[27]

This sort of Linnaean classification of the sayings of Jesus is of doubtful use to our understand of the Lord's perspective on the kingdom of God, mainly because what He had to say concerning any one category is woven in with all of the others throughout His discourses. Separating them for individual analysis no more clarifies the picture than isolating all of the colors of a Rembrandt sheds any light on the portrait. However, Marcus' list does illustrate the point that even context fails to give a definitive explanation of the kingdom. But as with the portrait, so also with the biblical teaching regarding the kingdom. It is better to seek to grasp the entire work of art rather than get lost in the brushstrokes or colors. We may view these categories, if they are of any use at all, as merely different facets of a gem, which reflect the beauty of the same stone differently as the light hits them. Geerhardus Vos makes the excellent point that Jesus never *defined* the kingdom: "The first thing to be noticed in the synoptical passages…is the absence of every attempt at a definition of what the kingdom of God means. Jesus occupies historic ground from the outset. It is *the* kingdom, the well-known kingdom, with which He presupposes familiarity, not merely on His own part but also on the part of His hearers."[28]



Geerhardus Vos (1862-1949)

[27] *Ibid.*; 663.
[28] Vos, Geerhardus "The Kingdom of God" *Redemptive History and Biblical Interpretation: The Shorter Writings of Geerhardus Vos* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 1980); 304.

This lack of specificity in Jesus' teaching matches the overall biblical revelation concerning the kingdom, whether the phrase 'kingdom of God' is used or the concept described. The difficulty that confronts readers, ancient or modern, Jewish or Christian, is the apparent disconnect between the concept of a kingdom under divine rule and the condition of the world as mankind experiences it. We will see that this conflict is also recounted both explicitly and implicitly in Scripture: it is the warfare that has existed from before time between the 'ruler of this world' – the devil – and the Almighty Creator of all things.[29] The tendency, therefore, is either to externalize this battle or to internalize it. That is, to recognize that the forces of angelic rebellion are behind the human kingdoms and empires of history, and to see the kingdom of God as standing in political opposition to them, or to give over the world system to these evil forces, and to see the kingdom as the inbreaking of divine grace in the human heart. Defended eloquently and biblically, each of these views finds a certain plausibility and even sanctity, though neither is sufficient to the topic of the kingdom of God. Patrick Schreiner correctly diagnoses the majority of evangelical treatments of the kingdom as suffering from 'reductionism': "They take a part of the whole and place it in the center."[30] Schreiner's own assessment of the topic focuses on three p's – 'people,' 'power,' and 'place' – in an attempt to incorporate holistically the biblical teachings on the kingdom as both an inward and an outward reality. He provides a preliminary summary of his position: "So, expanding beyond the abstract notion of the kingdom as mere sovereignty, I will use the following definition of the kingdom in this study: *The kingdom is the King's power over the King's people in the King's place.*"[31] This is a useful rubric, though it also suffers from some reductionism in that it seems to limit the scope of God's kingly reign to His *people* as opposed to the *entire cosmos*, the whole of Creation. Additionally, both 'power' and 'place'



Patrick Schreiner (*b.* 1974)

[29] John 14:30. *Cp* Ephesians 2:2 where Paul refers to Satan as 'the prince of the power of the air.'
[30] Schreiner, Patrick *The Kingdom of God* (Wheaton: Crossway; 2018); 15.
[31] *Ibid.*; 18.

can be viewed too abstractly to be definitive. Nonetheless, the threefold framework of power-people-place does lend itself to a more balanced assessment of the kingdom between the two poles of the concrete and the abstract, the political and the spiritual.

Nicholas Perrin, acknowledging the paucity of clear definitive statements concerning the kingdom of God in Scripture, suggests approaching the investigation in the manner of a detective, asking the five W's (and an H):[32]

1. *What* is the kingdom? What is its essence and its formal features? What's the best way to describe it?
2. *Who* is involved in initiating the kingdom? To whom does the kingdom belong?
3. *When* did the kingdom arrive? Or, if it is not already here, when will it arrive?
4. *Where* does the kingdom extend? In what spaces or spheres of reality?
5. *Why* do we have a kingdom? Why would God be so interested in establishing this kingdom, and why would Jesus be so interested to talk about it?
6. *How* does the kingdom function? How does one live in the kingdom today?

Perrin himself admits that this is not an investigation from ground zero; many theologians have sought to explain the kingdom of God and even the structure of Perrin's questions presupposes many of the conclusions, or at least the direction of such conclusions, of these scholarly investigations. These questions also overlay, to some extent, Schreiner's threefold rubric of power, people, and place. Furthermore, the questions themselves are not hermetically sealed but interact with one another. For instance, the *where* and the *who* are largely coextensive, as are the *what* and the *how*. It may be that all of the questions will ultimately be summed up in the *why*. God's reason for instituting a kingdom, by the very nature of His being God, will define the other five questions in due course.

This is not reductionism. Nor is it intended to avoid the other important questions. It is rather to recognize that the purpose of God is the essence of what He has done. It is a characteristic of modern biblical studies, both liberal and conservative, to rush to the realm of application – the *how*. What does this teaching mean to me? How am I to live in light of the kingdom of God, having come or coming? But this is the

[32] Perrin, Nicholas *The Kingdom of God: A Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan; 2019); 28.

wrong way around: the *why* is the foundation, and any *how* that is not in conformity with the *why* will be merely philosophy, moralism, or religion. George Wright, in *God Who Acts*, summarizes this truth:

> Can the Divine self-disclosure by means of historical acts of grace and judgment be reduced to a philosophy of values? In other words, the proclamation of what God has done, whence it is inferred what he is, is the central concern of the Bible, apart from which a true understanding of the teaching is impossible.[33]

At first glance it may appear that Wright is emphasizing the *what* – the acts of God throughout history. But the short clause, 'whence it is inferred what he is' – is the heart of the issue, for it is by God's acts that God Himself is revealed, not least the purpose, the *why*, of His acts. As it is the goal of Biblical Theology to trace God's acts through His self-revelation in Scripture, and to do this in order to discover God's purposes and God's will, it stands to reason that this will be the best manner in which to investigation the kingdom that is His. It should also become evident that this investigation cannot start where many modern scholars start their analysis of the kingdom – *i.e.*, at Sinai – but rather must start where and when Scripture itself begins: at Creation.

The Breaking In of the Kingdom

There is one more dichotomy to discuss in this general overview of the kingdom of God: the sense in which the kingdom is 'Now,' and that in which it is 'Not Yet.' These two characteristics are each well attested in Scripture, the first representing the *historical* and the second the *eschatological* features of the kingdom of God. Per Schreiner's comments quoted above, to focus on one of these aspects to the exclusion of the other, constitutes reductionism and will not lead to an accurate definition of the kingdom. Joel Marcus summarizes Perrin's treatment on this score, noting that Perrin "divides Jesus' use of the term 'kingdom of God' into two main senses: (1) God's decisive intervention in history and human experience, (2) the final state of the redeemed, to

[33] Wright, G. Ernest *God Who Acts* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company; 1952); 18.

which this intervention is designed to lead."[34] These two perspectives – historical and eschatological – occupy the lion's share of the biblical record concerning the kingdom, but there is one further perspective that is touched upon here and there in Scripture, particularly in the poetical works: the *pre-historical* or eternal.

To paraphrase the 4th Century heretic Arius, who wrongly believed Christ to be a created being, 'there was a time when Creation was not.' This statement is biblically and historically true. As there was once no Creation, there was once no 'kingdom of God.' Yet there was never a time, to speak creaturely, when God was not Sovereign. In this we might say that there was eternally a King, even before there was a kingdom. This may seem obvious, but the point not only brings us back to the all-important question - *why* a kingdom? - it also firmly grounds the historical progression of revelation concerning the kingdom in the eternal. In other words, as George Eldon Ladd puts it: "while God *is* the King, he must also *become* King, i.e., he must manifest his kingship in the world of men and nations."[35] This is an important thought, for otherwise we are likely to do as many have done, and that is to start our investigation of the kingdom at a certain point in history – for instance, the gathering of Israel at Mt. Sinai – or to limit the scope of the kingdom to that of the Davidic Covenant, given, annulled (so it seemed), and restored. But even the poetry of the kingdom, mostly found in the Psalms, has a far broader scope, both in time and in extent, in which the King of Glory will reign.



George Eldon Ladd (1911-82)

It must be admitted, however, that the creation/formation of Israel from among the nations of the world, and the later establishment of the Davidic dynasty, form the core of biblical teaching regarding the kingdom of God. But this is the case typologically; that is to say, the Israel/David narrative represents both a historical manifestation of

[34] Marcus; 664.
[35] Ladd, George Eldon *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1974); 61.

the concept of the kingdom as well as a powerful image or type of the kingdom in its fulness. The key, however, to understanding the kingdom as it is revealed in Israel/David will be to keep in mind both its prehistory in the Eden/Adam motif and its inaugural fulfilment in the Church/Jesus motif. Ultimately, the entire arc of revelation as it pertains to the kingdom begins and ends with and in God. And in this arc we find both meanings of the *malkut/basileia* word families represented and explained: the *act* of reigning as well as the *scope* of the realm, the concrete as well as the abstract. As an introductory snapshot of what this will look like, consider the following table:

Revelation	**Realm**	**Ruler**
Creation	Eden	Adam
Israel	Temple/Land	David
World	Church/Nations	Jesus
Cosmos	Universe	God

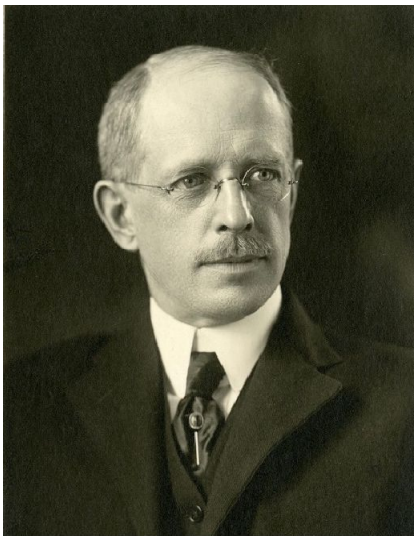
Each of these periods within the revelatory history of the kingdom represents an in-breaking of God, a bowing of the heavens so that Yahweh might come down.[36] As such, these will mark the basic divisions of this study. This is not to say that there will not be some reciprocal reference and allusion across the four periods, but rather to lay out the main trajectory of both the biblical revelation concerning the kingdom and, consequently, the trajectory of this study. Each begins with the King of the Universe, Yahweh the Creator/Redeemer, entering into human history in both a gracious and holy manner. In each there is an element of redemption – even Creation is a redemption from the 'formless and void' chaos that is presented to us in Genesis 1 – and an element of judgment – Creation itself can be viewed as judgment upon chaos and the forces that brought it into being. Israel's formation at Sinai, and the Advent if Jesus Christ preaching the gospel of the kingdom, are more obvious examples of the grace/judgment paradigm associated with God's intervention in human history. These are progressive, as would be expected if biblical revelation is understood typologically as well as historical-

[36] Psalm 144:5

ly. Each act of divine breaking-in is a stage in both the revelation and the realization of the kingdom of which God is alone Sovereign. The final intervention is, of course, the Second Coming, or *Parousia*, of Jesus Christ, at which time the fulness of the kingdom will be consummated, as Paul teaches in I Corinthians 15. In this passage the apostle powerfully illustrates the 'Now and Not Yet' character of the kingdom, for Jesus reigns and will reign in the presence and Name of the Father.

> *Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.*
>
> (I Corinthians 15:24-28)

The Consummation of the Kingdom



Lewis Sperry Chafer (1871-1952)

The eschatology of the kingdom is something more familiar to many American Christians than the idea of a kingdom inaugurated in the work of Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection and ascension. In short, the 'Not Yet' is more commonly the perspective than the 'Now.' This is due largely, if not exclusively, to the influence of Dispensational teaching on the 'End Times,' to which the kingdom of God/heaven is consistently assigned. The flow of redemptive history outlined above – with the consistent and progressive interventions of God into human history, is diametrically opposed to the classic view of Dispensationalism, especially regarding the current age, the age of 'inaugurated eschatology.' Lewis Sperry Chafer, co-founder of Dallas Theological Seminary and a leading Dispensational teacher, begins the section of his Systematic Theology dealing with the kingdom by saying: "Over against this idealism is the fact which alone conforms to the Word of God, that thee world program as determined by God is consummated in the

age to come, the present age being an intercalation – a period thrust in which is wholly unrelated to that which went before and to that which follows."[37] It should be said that Sperry's comment about a view 'which alone conforms to the Word of God' is to be explained according to the Dispensational hermeneutic, in which the stages of divine revelation are distinct and unrelated to one another. Chafer's statement begs the question, as one must first prove that the Dispensational hermeneutic is the correct one. In this series, of course, that hermeneutical method has been rejected.

In any event, the influence of Dispensationalism over the past several generations – in preaching, in popular literature, and even in movies like the *Left Behind* franchise – has placed the kingdom of God as something entirely future in the minds of many believers. The challenge for Biblical Theology in the current generation is to layout the biblical basis for recognizing the 'Now' of the kingdom, and also correcting many unbiblical misconceptions of the 'Not Yet.' Again due to the influence of Dispensationalism, the eschatological kingdom is often viewed as a revivification of the nation of Israel in its ancestral land, and a reinstitution of the Mosaic and Levitical worship system. In a word, the kingdom is a Jewish kingdom. Vos rejects this expectation: "The doctrine of the eschatological kingdom must not be confounded with the ordinary Jewish expectations of the coming age. The latter were national, political, sensual."[38] This expectation, largely adopted by Dispensationalism, was the mistaken view of Jesus' disciples in spite of the Lord's teaching and even after His resurrection. Before His passion, the disciples argued over who would be the greatest, and who would sit on the Lord's right hand and left hand in the kingdom. In response to His disciples bickering, Jesus set forth the uniqueness of the kingdom in comparison to the kingdoms of the world, and in contrast to what the disciples were anticipating.

> *And when the ten heard it, they began to be greatly displeased with James and John. But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so*

[37] Chafer, Lewis Sperry *Systematic Theology: Volume IV* (Dallas: Dallas Seminary Press; 1974); 167.
[38] Vos; *Redemptive History*; 308.

> *among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.* (Mark 10:41-44)

Understanding the eschatological kingdom requires understanding the nature of the kingdoms of this world age, and further understanding Jesus' work vis-à-vis those world kingdoms. In terms of the days of His ministry, His enemy was never Rome as it was with so many of His fellow Jews. Again Vos comments: "What forms the contrast of God's kingdom in Jesus' mind is never any political power, e.g., Rome, but always a superhuman power, vis., that of Satan."[39] That this was Jesus' perspective, and Jesus' warfare, is evident in His statement on the night He was betrayed:

> *And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father, and as the Father gave Me commandment, so I do. Arise, let us go from here.* (John 14:29-31)

And later that night, as Jesus was being arrested:

> *Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness."* (Luke 22:52-53)

Chapter Summary

What, then, is a kingdom? Or better put, what then is a kingdom when it is the kingdom of God? This chapter has mostly been about misconceptions, by Jesus' disciples, by Second Temple Judaism, by the medieval and early modern Church, and by modern evangelicals. In one respect, the definition of the kingdom of God is self-evident: it is the realm in which God alone is sovereign, and in which all subjects are willingly bound, heart and soul, to fealty unto God as their only King. Vos writes: "The kingdom means the subjection of all temporal affairs, or all ethical activities, of all spiritual experiences to a transcendent life-purpose in God."[40] But does this statement do

[39] *Idem*.
[40] *Ibid.*; 311.

any more than acknowledge what a kingdom ought to be in terms of the obedience of the king's subjects? Certainly from the perspective of the *king's* desires, it does, though there has never been a kingdom in which all of the king's loyal subjects submitted to this extent. Be that as it may, Vos' definition fits better on the abstract, spiritual spectrum, as it could be said to require no actual, physical realm. Therefore, we add to this definition the reality of a kingdom realm, a physical dominion that was established at Creation, was typified in the ultimate conquest of the Promised Land, was prophesied in Daniel's vision, and fulfilled via the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That realm is and must be 'the heavens and the earth.'

> *I was watching in the night visions,*
> *And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!*
> *He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.*
> *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,*
> *That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.*
> *His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,*
> *And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

> *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*
>
> (Matthew 28:18-19)

Chapter Summary:

Jesus opened His earthly ministry by proclaiming the advent of the kingdom of God. No one asked Him what He was talking about, nor did Jesus offer a definition of the kingdom, the gospel of which He was preaching. Indeed, as one reads through the Synoptic Gospels, it almost seems that Jesus talked around the kingdom – using mighty acts of healing and deliverance, allusions to Old Testament persons and events, and homely parables – without ever explicitly saying what exactly the kingdom was. This reality has led to a vast field of speculation as to the identity of the kingdom, especially in the centuries since the Enlightenment. One school of thought internalizes and spirit-

ualizes the kingdom: The reign of God in one's heart. Another maintains the political and social kingdom that was largely anticipated by Second Temple Judaism and most certainly by Jesus' disciples. The term used by Patrick Schreiner – 'reductionism' – is an accurate description of much of modern scholarship on the subject of the kingdom of God: taking an aspect or characteristic of the kingdom in biblical literature, and making it the sum total of its essence. This can only be done if much of the biblical evidence is left aside either in support of an abstract, spiritual kingdom, or in defense of a concrete, physical kingdom – reign or realm. There is sufficient support for both in the biblical text.

As controversial as the scope of the kingdom is its time, or timing. Most scholars today recognize the 'Now and Not Yet' of the kingdom, but many still tend to see its commencement, in typological language, as the formation of Israel at Mt. Sinai. While it is true that the nation of Israel, and then the Davidic dynasty, form the great visible type of the kingdom of which the advent of Jesus Christ and His completed work form the antitype, we must once again resist the temptation to take a part for the whole. God is King in all eternity, and the commencement of His kingdom was not when He thundered forth from Sinai, but rather when He spoke into the chaos and said, 'Let there be Light.'

Chapter 3 – Order From Chaos
Text: Genesis 1:1-2; II Corinthians 4:6

"The world does not exist for its own sake,
but as a revelation of God."
(James B. Jordan)

A popular style of Christian theological writing appears in the latter decades of the 20th Century. Four authors each contribute their take on a gnarly exegetical topic, like the meaning of the Millennium (an actual title of one such book). After each author's essay, the other three offer responses. It is like a debate or panel discussion in written form. *Reading Genesis 1-2 – An Evangelical Conversation*, is just this sort of a book, only with the twist that there are more contributors than usual. The emphasis of the book is on the various ways in which the first two chapters of Genesis – known familiarly as the First Creation Account (Genesis 1) and the Second Creation Account (Genesis 2) – have been read across Chrisitan exegetical history. The essayists focus on such topics as literal versus figurative days, the place of the 'two accounts' within the milieu of ancient cosmologies, and reading from a literary perspective. These topics have occupied the attention of evangelical scholars and believers for the past one hundred plus years, ever since the popularization of the theory of Evolution, culminating in the Scopes Trial of 1925. As valuable and interesting as these discussions can be, we should realize that, to a large extent, the scholarly efforts of Christianity in the area (Creation) have been directed by 'Science.'

This science-oriented focus of much of modern evangelical study of Genesis 1-2 is admitted approvingly by one of the contributors, Tremper Longman. He writes of himself and the other authors: "All of the participants in the present Genesis discussion agree that the Bible is true. We disagree about what God intends to teach us in Gen. 1-2…Since the Bible does not tell its readers how God created


Tremper Longman (*b.* 1952)

the world and humanity, it is perfectly acceptable and even reasonable to turn to the sciences to explore that question."[41] This seems very much like a subtle way of sliding Evolution into the Genesis picture, and that is something that must be rejected on theological grounds, if not scientific ones. But the overall impetus of recent scientific 'discoveries' on the exegesis of Genesis 1 & 2 is fundamentally flawed from a canonical perspective.

We have maintained throughout this series on Biblical Theology, that the first two chapters of the Bible are foundational for the entire balance of revelation. As interesting as discussion about origins and science may be, there are of little value if the overall canonical importance of these two chapters is missed. They were never intended to be debate fodder between creationists and evolutionists, though the concept of Evolution is much older than Charles Darwin. This is not to say that one's view on the literal or figurative reading of the 'days' is unimportant. It is rather to say that the reading of the parts must be guided by the meaning of the whole, and Genesis 1 & 2 form the bedrock of all biblical revelation, and the lodestone of Biblical Theology. It is not too much to say that the entire content of revelation is contained in the kernel of these two chapters. With no biblical theme is this fact more important and evident than with the discussion of the kingdom of God. This awareness of the centrality of the Creation Account(s) to the biblical concept of the kingdom of God is captured in the title of Meredith Kline's book, *Kingdom Prologue*, for that is what Genesis 1 & 2 comprise: a Prologue to biblical revelation, and most certainly to the kingdom of God. Kline makes it clear that all studies of the kingdom of God must start 'in the beginning':

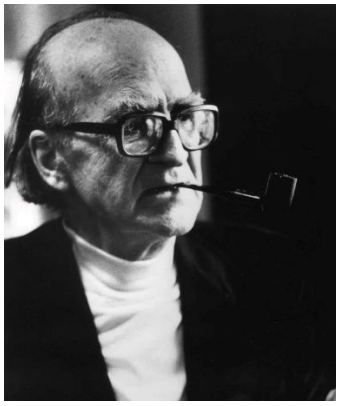


Meredith Kline (1922-2007)

[41] Charles, J. Daryl, ed. *Reading Genesis 1-2: An Evangelical Conversation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers: 2013); 103.

> At the center of this creation-kingdom, on the mountain of Eden (archetype of Zion, its redemptive restoration), God was revealed in his royal Glory. This holy mountain of God …was the vertical cosmic axis of the kingdom, extending from earth to heaven.[42]

This is essentially the *axis mundi* discussed in our second series on Biblical Theology: *Exodus, Exile, and Eschatology*. In ancient thought, there was a place where heaven and earth touched, usually located in the cultic temple. This was the 'axis of the world' or universe, the pivot, as it were, of all things. From the earlier notes, speaking in reference to the tabernacle in the Wilderness: "But the placement of the tabernacle in the center of the camp most likely also bears out the ancient concept of sacred space as *axis mundi* – the center of the world (and, frequently, the universe). In ancient thought, the *axis mundi* was the location where the cosmic contacted the mundane. For the Israelites, the classic example of this was Bethel, where their forefather Jacob beheld the ladder to heaven and heard the voice of God reiterating to him the covenant made with Abraham."[43] The concept of an *axis mundi* was popularized by the Romanian historian of religion, Mircea Eliade. Although by no means universally accepted within the religious studies field, Eliade's view has merit, and helps to further define the underlying meaning tying together such biblical concepts as Eden, the tabernacle in the Wilderness, and Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem. Mounts Sinai, Moriah, and Zion also fit into the complex of thought known as the 'sacred realm' or the 'center of the earth' – the *axis mundi.*



Mircea Eliade (1907-86)

Essentially, Eliade's concept, derived from his studies of Ancient Near Eastern religious sites (especially Sumerian and Babylonian), is that certain places were established within ancient cultures as point contacts, so to speak, between the upper and nether realms (heaven and hell in modern terminology) and the earth itself. These sacred places – often temples, mountains, pillars, or trees in the ancient literature – were

[42] Kline, Meredith G. *Kingdom Prologue* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers; 2006); 49.
[43] Plumbline *Biblical Theology Part II – Exodus, Exile & Eschatology*; 201.

qualitatively different from the surrounding area, and only those who were specially selected and trained were permitted to approach them. The idea of 'axis' comes from the concept of a center point of the world (and universe) connecting the three realms. Eliade considered these places as representative within ancient cultures of the creation of the world by the heavenly power or powers. Frank Korom summarizes Eliade's view.

> For Eliade, the act of establishing and constructing a center is an act of cosmogonic value; it is equivalent to the creation of the world. As such, each act of construction and consecration is a repetition of a cosmogonic act, a continuous creation of the world from the inside…For Eliade, every holy place that bears witness to an incursion of the sacred into profane space is regarded as a 'center,' and thus an *axis mundi*.[44]

Typically the concept of *axis mundi* is applied in the ancient world to a temple site or to a holy mountain, a place viewed in a particular culture to be the point of connection between heaven and earth. To this place, in any ancient culture, one must go to approach the resident deity. But of course, not just anyone can approach; only the elite priesthood has access. In any event, and quite like the arrangement of the various tribal camps of Israel in the wilderness, this sacred site was considered to be not merely the center of the culture, but the very center of the world. Joseph Schultz summarizes the connection between sacred mountains and temples (often built either on the highest place or to be the highest place – *i.e.,* ziggurats) and the *axis mundi*:

1. The sacred mountain where heaven and earth meet is also part of the sacred center.
2. Every temple or palace and by extension every sacred town and royal residence is assimilated to a sacred mountain and thus becomes a center.
3. The temple or sacred city, in turn, as the place through which the *axis mundi* (the center of the earth) passes, is held to be a point of junction between heaven, earth, and hell.[45]

[44] Korom, Frank J. "Of Navels and Mountains: A Further Inquiry into the History of an Idea" *Asian Folklore Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (1992); 107-8.
[45] Schultz, Joseph P. "From Sacred Space to Sacred Object to Sacred Person in Jewish Antiquity" *Shofar* Vol. 12, No. 1 (1993); 28.

The point of this discussion on the *axis mundi* in terms of the Creation Account as the true origin of the kingdom of God, is the contention that Eden was not only an *axis mundi*, it was the prototype, the pattern, of all future *axes mundi*, including the tabernacle, the Temple, and, ultimately, the kingdom of God that arrived with the Son of Man. Though most attention is focused on the gathering of Israel at Mt. Sinai – and the construction of the tabernacle – as the beginning of the kingdom, at lease in concept, Psalm 24 takes us further back, to the beginning and to Creation. The first section of the Psalm glorified the God of Creation, while the second part emphasizes the difficulty of approaching the sacred place; finally, the last part speaks of the entrance of the Glorious King; the association between Creation and Kingdom ought to be clear.

> *The earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness, the world and those who dwell therein.*
> *For He has founded it upon the seas, and established it upon the [a]waters.*
>
> > *Who may ascend into the hill of the LORD? Or who may stand in His holy place?*
> > *He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol,*
> > *Nor sworn deceitfully. he shall receive blessing from the LORD,*
> > *And righteousness from the God of his salvation.*
> > *This is Jacob, the generation of those who seek Him, who seek Your face. Selah*
>
> *Lift up your heads, O you gates! and be lifted up, you everlasting doors!*
> *And the King of glory shall come in.*
> *Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty, the LORD mighty in battle.*
> *Lift up your heads, O you gates! Lift up, you everlasting doors!*
> *And the King of glory shall come in.*
> *Who is this King of glory? The LORD of hosts, He is the King of glory. Selah*
>
> (Psalm 24:1-10)

This psalm is foundational to any study of the kingdom of God, for it combines the elements in the Old Testament that testify to the origin, and hence the underlying meaning, of that kingdom. First, the kingdom is predicated on the identity of Yahweh as Creator, who authority to supreme and universal rule is established by the very fact of Creation. Second, the holiness of this King is established by the fact that He 'dwells in unapproachable light'; a fact historically revealed first though the Aaronic priesthood

and ultimately by the One who alone has seen God.[46] Finally, the psalm ties everything together, from Creation to Consummation, with the coming of the King. The 'gates' that are lifted up are lifted up for the entry of the Great King. These gates would have been, in David's day, the gates of Jerusalem. They have also been tied to the entrance of the Temple in Jerusalem, but they could also refer to the gate created to prevent admission of Man to the Garden of Eden after the Fall. However they are applied, the entrance of the King speaks of the incursion of the Almighty Creator God into His realm, a realm He created *in the beginning*.

The reason this association of the kingdom of God with Creation, with Eden, is that it establishes the kingdom as wholly different – not just in degree but in kind – from all other kingdoms that have been experienced in history. Kline notes: "The peculiar kind of kingdom established in Eden at the beginning (and later redemptively renewed) differs radically from other kinds of world kingdoms that arise after the Fall…Whatever analogies exist between the theocracy and the other kingdoms, however many falsely proclaimed theocracies there may be, there is only one genuine theocratic kingdom under the special rule of the living God. And in the beginning it was the only kingdom on earth."[47]

Kingdom as Realm

We saw in the previous chapters that the modern scholarly debate over the kingdom of God tends to divide along the meaning of words: Does 'kingdom' in the Hebrew and Greek languages mean 'reign' or does it mean 'realm.' To a non-scholar this would seem a rather silly debate (and it is); no one envisions a 'reign' that does not encompass a 'realm.' To be sure, during the Second World War several rulers set up 'governments-in-exile' in Great Britain – most notably the Norwegian monarch, King Haakon VII, who bravely and barely escaped ahead of the German invasion of his realm. But even then there was never a time when the Norwegian government (which, by the

[46] I Timothy 6:16; John 1:18
[47] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*; 49.

way, was a constitutional monarchy and by no means representative of an ancient kingdom) transfer its realm to Great Britain; it remained among the Allies, the recognized 'reign' over the 'realm' of Norway and was reestablished as such when the war ended.

The scholarly debate is also misguided for another, more biblical reason. The reign of God as King began with the creation of His own kingdom: "In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."[48] At the end of the previous chapter we saw from both Daniel 7 and Matthew 28 that this kingdom *realm* has always consisted of the same domain, the same physical extent, as the originally created universe. Kline, who associates the kingdom of God with the only true theocracy, writes: "Theocracy implies an external realm. It does not refer to a spiritual reign of God in the hearts of his people by itself, but includes the geopolitical dimension."[49] That this realm constitutes the heavens and the earth is confirmed by the LORD in Isaiah 66, in a passage reminiscent of Psalm 24.

> *Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool.*
> *Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?*
> *For all those things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD.*
> *But on this one will I look: On him who is poor and of a contrite spirit,*
> *And who trembles at My word.* (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Passages like Isaiah 66 and Psalm 24 should be clear in their assertion that all manmade temples and kingdoms are at best mere replicas of the original and, since the Fall, no human kingdom or temple has ever been even a reasonable facsimile. The closest must be the tabernacle in the Wilderness, for even the great Temple in Jerusalem was corrupted by the wickedness and perfidy of both priesthood and people. As the temple, so also the kingdom. From the time of David the kingdom of Israel declined, first into rebellion and division and, ultimately, into defeat and exile. There is little to be learned about the kingdom of God or the true theocracy by looking at the kingdoms

[48] Genesis 1;1
[49] Kline; 49.

and temples of Man, even those of God's redeemed people, Israel. We must begin at the beginning, the kingdom of Creation itself.

While neither the title 'king' nor the term 'kingdom' show up in the two Creation Accounts of Genesis 1 & 2, the language of sovereignty and lordship is unmistakable. Though it is moving a bit ahead of ourselves, we must also note that part of the task assigned to Adam was 'to rule' over Creation.[50] The role of Man in the original kingdom of Creation will be addressed later in this chapter as well as throughout this study. The important point here is to recognize that Creation *ex nihilo*, Creation by divine fiat, was entirely Creation of a kingdom of which God was Lord. Thomas Schreiner writes: "God's creation of the entire universe communicates his sovereignty and lordship for the creator of all is Lord of all…The creator of all is also King of all, and his lordship is extended over a place – a realm…Therefore, the creation of the universe demonstrates that God is the Lord of the whole world, and that his lordship will not be limited to Israel."[51] This last comment about Israel will prove very important to our overall analysis of the kingdom of God.

Modern critical scholarship has all but unanimously allocated the two Creation Accounts to different sources; Genesis 1 & 2 differ too much to possibly be from the same source. However, and once again, the argument could be used that any self-respecting redactor would have smoothed the transition between the two chapters, or otherwise blended the texts to avoid the appearance of being unrelated. One may argue that the text is merely a stitched together compilation of ancient creation myths (as many do argue), but the burden of proof lies with the critic and not the text. Certainly if there is a better explanation than the interposition of a ham-fisted editor, we ought to favor that. There is no denying that the first two chapters of Genesis present Creation from what appears to be completely different, if not opposed, perspectives. Yet given that no obvious attempt was made to smooth the transition, then in all fairness to the text we ought to look at the two accounts as the same account from different perspec-

[50] Genesis 1:28; the New King James version renders the Hebrew word, 'have dominion over.'
[51] Schreiner, Thomas *The King in His Beauty*; 4.

tives. Further given the plethora of ancient archaeological data now available concerning kingdoms and temples and gardens from the Ancient Near East, there remain no valid reason not to do so. When we do so, and when we consider the two accounts along the Biblical Theological lines of Creation and Covenant, we discover that Genesis 1 sets forth the first, and Genesis 2 the second, of these two revelatory threads. They do not contradict one another; rather they complement each other, while each lays a foundation for the two overarching paradigms that will carry the reader through the rest of Scripture: Creation and Covenant.

From Chaos to Cosmos – the Kingdom and Genesis 1

Most current conversation regarding the first Creation Account seems to focus on the meaning of the word 'day' – as in literal, figurative, epochal, etc. As noted earlier, scholarly investigation of Genesis 1 seems largely to be directed at controversy generated by modern science (and by 'modern science' we mean, of course, Evolution). This discussion is good and necessary in its place, and if done biblically and theologically. But the heavy emphasis on Creation vs. Evolution has drawn the attention of modern readers away from the narrative of Genesis 1 itself, and especially the scene that the narrative portrays. Certainly from a canonical perspective, we must conclude that God created everything in six literal days and rested on the seventh; that is the testimony of divine revelation and need not be doubted on the basis of scientific hypotheses.

But what was Creation like? We say that God created *ex nihilo* – 'out of nothing' – and maintain with the writer of Hebrews that "By faith we understand that the [c]worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible."[52] Furthermore, it is a basic tenet of Christian belief that Creation was not only by the Word of God, but that this Word of God is none other than the eternal Logos, Jesus Christ: "All things were made through Him,

[52] Hebrews 11:3

and without Him nothing was made that was made."[53] This centrality of Christ in Creation is reiterated comprehensively by Paul:

> *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.* (Colossians 1:15-17)

We have already commented that Creation was the ultimate in divine incursion, for by it God made a universe in which to enter, to intervene. Theologians have pondered this event for millennia: Why did God create? The simple yet final answer is that He created for His own purposes, according to His own will. There is no more ultimate answer than this, but are there proximate answers? Is there anything in the revealed text that helps us understand something of that divine purpose? This is especially significant if indeed Creation represents the primal (and purest) form of the kingdom, for all other instances of the kingdom of God in Scripture will of necessity follow this pattern. It is the contention of this study that God did indeed establish a kingdom on the mountain/garden of Eden and that the form and function of this kingdom is the divine blueprint to that which was typified in the Davidic dynasty and fulfilled in the kingdom inaugurated by Jesus Christ.

George Eldon Ladd writes concerning the basic nature of the kingdom: "while there is considerable diversity in the description of the Kingdom in the Old Testament, it always involved an inbreaking of God into history when God's redemptive purpose is fully realized. The Kingdom is always an earthly hope, although an earth redeemed from the curse of evil."[54] But how can Creation be viewed as a redemptive incursion of God? What 'form of evil' pre-existed? There are two perspectives on this question. The first, maintained by Kline, is that Creation was a purely constructive act with no measure of militancy or divine triumph. The second, to which Kline also alludes in a discussion on the origin of angels, is that while there was no material universe, there was yet

[53] John 1:3
[54] Ladd, *Theology of the New Testament*; 61.

preexistence of evil. This is not to say, by any means, a coexistence of evil alongside the ternal God. Rather it is to attempt to deal with the opening scene in Genesis 1, a scene that should give the reader pause. Kline writes: "we maintain that Genesis 1:1 is an independent statement, not however one that summarizes what follows but rather one that refers to the 'beginning' time which preceded the history recorded in verses 2 ff."[55]

Kline's approach to the opening verse of the Bible is an attempt, as many have done before and after him, to account for the existence of angels and the rapid appearance of Satan so early in the Genesis narrative. It must be granted that no information is provided in the text with regard to how much time elapsed between the creation of Man and the temptation of Man. Nonetheless, the narrative seems to indicate that not a great deal of time had passed, and it must be insisted upon on theological grounds, that the temptation and fall of Man happened prior to the birth of the first child. Of the angelic host and the fall of Satan there is no information at all, neither of their creation nor their rebellion; it is presupposed that such events preceded the narrative beginning in Genesis 1:2. This is, at any rate, the context of Kline's comments.

Beyond the question of the origin and rebellion of the angelic beings, is what the opening verses of Genesis actually say, the 'condition,' as it were, of everything before God began to speak.

> *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.* (Genesis 1:1-2)

Two characteristics described in this scene are troublesome: the phrase *formless and void* and the darkness that covered the deep. Indeed, the presence of the deep itself is troublesome, since throughout Scripture (as well as ancient literature) the deep represents wickedness and death. It is into this milieu that God speaks the seminal words of Creation: "Let there be light." But rather than moving quickly on to the six days, we need to pause and consider what it was God was speaking into: the darkness and the

[55] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*; 25.

chaos. It is in these two verses that we find the redemptive aspect of God's first incursion into history, at the very beginning of history.

To begin with the darkness: did God create it? On the one hand, darkness is not presented in Scripture as either independent of God's sovereignty or excluded from His control. Indeed, we read in Isaiah 45 that God is the origin of both darkness and light.

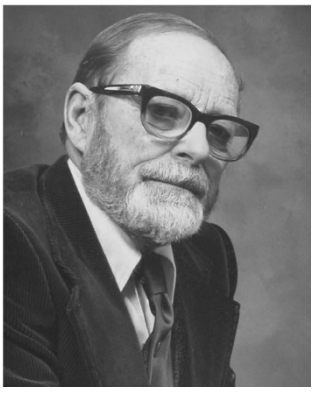
> *That they may know from the rising of the sun to its setting*
> *That there is none besides Me. I am the LORD, and there is no other;*
> *I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity;*
> *I, the LORD, do all these things.* (Isaiah 45:6-7)

Before we conclude decisively that, on the basis of this verse, God created the darkness of Genesis 1:2, we need to examine briefly the context of Isaiah 45. This is the Cyrus prophecy, the amazing prediction that God would use King Cyrus as an instrument of His deliverance of Israel from the Exile. The purpose of this Isaianic passage is therefore not to say that darkness came from the hand of the LORD *in the beginning*, but rather to assert that the world's ups and downs, so to speak – its prosperity and calamity – are all under the sovereign control of God Almighty. Even a pagan king, as Cyrus most certainly was, is but an instrument in the divine hands. Darkness in this passage, as everywhere in Scripture, is symbolic of judgment and catastrophe, which ultimately come from the same source as blessing and prosperity: God. The psalmist reminds us that darkness if no hindrance to God, for "The darkness and the light are both alike to You."[56] The usage of darkness in these passages fits within the underlying symbolism of light and darkness: blessing and judgment, prosperity and calamity, the presence of God in grace and His presence in condemnation.

Furthermore, the darkness that is spoken of in Genesis 1:2 precedes the creation of day and night, so we cannot merely interpret it as the absence of light. God has not spoken Light into being, at least in terms of the Creation (God is Light; it is an eternal attribute of His nature). So the nature of the darkness in Genesis 1:2 is itself problematic, for it seems ominous and unnatural. The Hebrew word is the same used for the

[56] Psalm 139:12

darkness that fell upon Egypt in the ninth plague.[57] The word used is the Hebrew *choshed* (חֹשֶׁךְ), and while too much weight should not be put on any individual word, it does seem to carry a pejorative, even judgmental, connotation. It is the same word used in Isaiah 9 to speak of those who walked in darkness before the light of Messiah shines upon them (*cp*. Isaiah 9:1*f*). It is interesting and probably significant that those who walked in darkness were delivered by a great light, certainly echoing Genesis 1:3. The Greek translation of Genesis 1:2 uses the word *skotos* (σκότος) which is also used in Matthew 27:45 to speak of the darkness that fell over the land while Christ was on the cross. The Hebrew and Greek words are not in themselves decisive, but the common symbolism of judgment and desolation attached to them so often in Scripture, makes the presence of darkness in Genesis 1:2 something to consider. What does it mean?


Arthur Custance (1910-85)

The Canadian anthropologist Arthur Custance concluded, as Meredith Kline seems also to conclude, that what we read in Genesis 1:1-2 is a situation that results from divine judgment and not the original condition of Creation. Custance points out that after the creation of Night and Day, the Hebrew word for 'night' differs from that used for 'darkness.' He writes; "For this reason, we have tried to convey the idea of something other than merely nighttime by introducing the word *pall*, which I think very nearly recovers the original meaning."[58]

More disturbing, however, than the presence of the darkness of judgment in Genesis 1:2 is the phrase 'formless and void' or, as Custance renders it: 'a ruin and a desolation.'[59] The Hebrew phrase is *tohu v^{a}bohu* (וָבֹהוּ תֹהוּ) which is only ever used in the Old Testament as indicative of great desolation resulting from divine judgment. Custance writes: "So much has been written about the Hebrew words *tohu* and *bohu*, and so generally is their meaning agreed upon, that little need be said except to sum up the

[57] Exodus 10:21-29
[58] Custance, Arthur C. *Hidden Things of God's Revelation: Doorway Papers Voume VII* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House; 1976); 288.
[59] *Ibid.*; 287.

conclusions of Hebrew scholars by pointing out that the words are used to describe, nt an incoherent mass waiting to be brought to order, but rather something that has fallen under judgment."[60] The words are only found together in two other passages, both in the prophets and both within the context of divine judgment.

> *I beheld the earth, and indeed* ***it was without form, and void****;*
> *And the heavens, they had no light.*
> *I beheld the mountains, and indeed they trembled, and all the hills moved back and forth.*
> *I beheld, and indeed there was no man, and all the birds of the heavens had fled.*
> *I beheld, and indeed the fruitful land was a wilderness, and all its cities were broken down*
> *At the presence of the* LORD*, by His fierce anger.* (Jeremiah 4:23-26)

> *For it is the day of the* LORD*'s vengeance, the year of recompense for the cause of Zion.*
> *Its streams shall be turned into pitch, and its dust into brimstone;*
> *Its land shall become burning pitch.*
> *It shall not be quenched night or day; its smoke shall ascend forever.*
> *From generation to generation it shall lie waste; no one shall pass through it forever and ever.*
> *But the pelican and the porcupine shall possess it, also the owl and the raven shall dwell in it.*
> *And He shall stretch out over it the line of confusion* (*tohu*) *and the stones of emptiness* (*bohu*).
> (Isaiah 34:8-1)

In considering the condition that we are presented with in Genesis 1:2, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the earth was not what it was meant to be, that something terrible had happened to it, and that occurrence was the result of divine judgment. Without speculating as to the prehistory of the darkness, formlessness, and emptiness – in a word, chaos – of the world, the text leaves us no alternative but to conclude that this was the condition into which Yahweh said, "Let there be light." This statement represented a divine incursive act of ordering, a royal decree spoken into chaos to bring about cosmos.

This act – what Eliade calls *cosmicizing* – becomes the seminal act of human religion in the cosmology of human societies. In other words, the formation of a human society has as its integral foundation the 'creation' of order, always associated with a god or gods, and most often also associated with a great king. Kingdom forming is the

[60] *Idem.*

bringing of order out of chaos. Eliade points out that whenever a territory, whether inhabited or not, is brought under the control of a new suzerain, the act is usually followed by a religious ritual in which the new territory is brought from chaos to order, chaos being any situation different from the new dominant society and religion. The Spanish and Portuguese explorers did not simply claim new territory in the name of their respective king, but also in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, for the conquistadors were brining *cosmicization* – the more common term used then and now is *civilization* – to the benighted peoples. This act of subjugation was commonly ritualized into what constituted an act of re-creation. "But the meaning of the ritual is far more complex, and if we consider all of its ramifications we shall understand why consecrating a territory is equivalent to making it a cosmos, to *cosmicizing* it."[61]

Thus the act of extending the royal domain – an act of subduing and ruling in the words of Genesis 1:28 – is a royal act not merely of brining a different culture to bear upon a foreign people. Viewed from the perspective of the dominant religion, hegemony is an act of *cosmicizing,* of brining order out of chaos, and has been generally viewed throughout human history as an essential part of any culture's identity. This explains why humanity has forever been expansive and intolerant – the 'others' of our race are part of the darkness and chaos; they must be *cosmicized*. Eliade points out that this process could be as benign as cultivating new ground or as violent as conquering a neighboring people. Each act would be followed in the ancient (and well into the modern world, in more secular forms) with some sort of consecrating ritual. Eliade writes: "Whether it is a case of clearing uncultivated ground or of conquering and occupying a territory already inhabited by 'other' human beings, ritual taking possession must always repeat the cosmogony."[62]

This process has brought great devastation and oppression upon the earth, but it has also brought increased fruitfulness and advanced technology to much of the planet. The point of this discussion is not to pass judgment on the process, but to recognize it

[61] Eliade, Mircea *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion* (Boston: HarperOne; 1987); 30.
[62] *Ibid.*; 31-32.

for what it is: a ritualistic recreation of the earth, a cosmology—in-history that finds its ultimate exemplar in the first two verses of Genesis 1. The material into which God spoke, 'Let there be light,' was chaos – *tohu v*^{a}*bohu* – and darkness. How it came to be that, and why, are questions beyond the data's scope, but the textual description is clear enough. God's first act of kingdom building, of subduing a realm under His rule, was to create order out of this primordial chaos. What God did *in the beginning* was to create a realm consisting of both space and time, a realm that was to be subjected to His gracious and beneficent rule, and a realm that was to be demarcated throughout by the propagation and spread of His image. It would appear that things did not go as originally planned in that God's own image-bearer, Adam, rebelled against the sovereignty of his proper King. Subsequent revelation and history, however, will show that even this was according to the divine plan, for 'One like the Son of Man' would one day appear before the Ancient of Days to receive that original and reclaimed kingdom, and to rule forever in the Divine King's Name.

The process of this recreation will occupy the remainder of biblical history and will be presented both as historical and typological. For the dominion of God is not merely a physical realm, though it is that; it is also the spiritual reign of God in the human heart. In this second application God recreates (literally) the first act of *cosmicizing*: He speaks light into darkness, and forms order out of chaos. Custance writes: "for God undertook a work of reordering the earth's surface as He undertakes the work of reordering a man's ruined life."[63] Paul, as we would expect, puts it best:

> *For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*
>
> (II Corinthians 4:6)

Chapter Summary:

Largely due to the heated debate between believers in Creation and advocates of Evolution, the emphasis of both reading and study of the Creation account has been on

[63] Custance; 298.

the meaning of the 'days' of creation. Little attention has been paid to the condition of things prior to that powerfully creative pronouncement, 'Let there be light' in Genesis 1:3. But the state of things as 'formless and void' (*tohu v^{a}bohu*) and the presence of the 'deep' in the midst of great darkness speaks volumes concerning the nature of that act by which God brought order out of chaos. The source of that primal chaos is both beyond the data of the first Creation account and beyond the scope of this study. However, the historical reality of such conditions – conditions that are elsewhere consistently associated with divine judgment – indicates the nature of the divine creative voice as regal: bringing order out of chaos being an essential function of a king.

This transformation is nothing less than the cosmic shift from darkness to light, and incorporates all that this metaphorical imagery suggests. It is both literal – God literally spoke light into darkness at the beginning – and spiritual – God speaks Light into the heart of fallen man through regeneration. If we accept that the true, biblical and chronological beginning of the kingdom of God is at no other point than when God created the heavens and the earth – His realm – then we see that the uniform characteristic of the kingdom of God is order as opposed to chaos, and the restoration of that kingdom over the course of both redemptive and human history, is pictured in just such transformative terms. We may also say that, though there has never been a human king or kingdom that can be considered analogous to the kingdom of God, it has remained nonetheless the singular purpose of all human government to bring order out of chaos. Failure to do so, even uniform failure to do so, does not remove the responsibility.

Chapter 4 – The Garden Kingdom
Text: Genesis 2; John 18-20

"The man and the woman are referential creatures,
existing in and for relationship to God, to each other,
and to the ground."
(Stephen Dempster)



Robert Estienne (1503-59)

The chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles are, as everyone knows, not inspired. The chapter divisions were added in the 13th Century by the famous Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, and the verse numbers were added by 16th Century French theologian and Bible printer, Robert Estienne. Both modifications were intended for convenience: the former for reading, the latter for printing. That these alterations to the text of Scripture are uninspired is sometimes evident even to the untrained reader – chapter divisions, especially, sometimes just seem out of place. This is the case with the transition from the first to the second Creation account, from Genesis 1 to Genesis 2. On the basis of literary analysis of both the transition passage and the whole of the Book of Genesis, it would seem that the second chapter actually begins with our Genesis 2:4, transferring the first three verses back into chapter 1.

There are two features that serve to confirm this correction. The first is the fact that the narrative of the seventh day, though in Chapter 2, logically goes with Chapter 1. The second reason is even more convincing: the presence in Genesis 2:4 of the standard marker used by Moses to separate the major sections of the whole book: 'These are the generations of…' In the Hebrew, the phrase is just one word, *toledōt* (תּוֹלְדוֹת) and the verse literally reads: "These are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created." Had the chapter division been done more accurately, there may not have been so much ink spilled concerning the evident differences between the two Creation accounts. The consistent presence of *toledōt* as a section marker in Genesis shows that the body of the book starts with our Genesis 2:4, and the previous text, Genesis 1:1

– 2:3, serves as a Prologue or Overview to the whole book (and, indeed, to the whole Bible).

The upshot of this rearrangement of the chapter division is that the reader may recognize that the beginning of the covenantal account of the history of the world coincides with the *planting of a garden*. This is not the start of a different account of Creation, as modern liberal scholarship insists, but rather the introduction of the Garden of God, the epicenter of Creation and the place where God would dwell with Man in the midst of the created order. Indeed, there is hardly a word in human vocabulary that more comprehensively summarizes the transition from chaos to order than 'garden.' The English word derives from Old French and German and the essential meaning is that of an enclosure in which cultivated plants are raised, This is also the root meaning of the Hebrew word in Genesis 2:8, *gen* (גַּן), which Keil and Delitzsch define literally as 'a place hedged round.'[64] The idea, then, of a garden is that of a place separated from wilderness for the purpose of supervised cultivation, or, in words more in keeping with this study, a place of order carved out of chaos and protected therefrom.

The idea of garden does have this twofold connotation: cultivation, yes, but also protection. Certainly there was no need of protection for the original garden, but the typology of the Garden of Eden presupposes a long era in which God's planting will indeed need to be protected from dangers from without, both natural and human. Indeed, when the time came for judgment to be meted out upon God's people Israel, the language of the prophets was that of tearing down the protective walls around God's unique vineyard/garden. This is the sad end of Yahweh's vineyard in Isaiah 5,

> *And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard:*
> *I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned;*
> *And break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down.*
> *I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, but there shall come up briers and thorns.*
> *I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it.* (Isaiah 5:5-6)

[64] Keil, C. F. & Franz Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament, Volume I* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1980); 80.

The mention here of cultivation and of rain speaks of a reversal of the pristine Garden of Genesis 2, where God caused the dew to rise and placed Man in the garden to 'tend and keep it.'[65] In the original we have the covenantal idea of God establishing a safe and fertile place and then placing His people within it. This is, of course, what He promised to do for the descendants of Abraham, and although the terminology is of a vineyard instead of a garden, this is the context of Isaiah 5.

> *Now let me sing to my Well-beloved a song of my Beloved regarding His vineyard:*
> *My Well-beloved has a vineyard on a very fruitful hill.*
> *He dug it up and cleared out its stones, and planted it with the choicest vine.*
> *He built a tower in its midst, and also made a winepress in it;*
> *So He expected it to bring forth good grapes, but it brought forth wild grapes.*
>
> (Isaiah 5:1-2)

Included in this reminiscence is the effort that Yahweh put into bringing order out of chaos, so that His precious vine would have every chance of prospering. The passage is allusive to Genesis 2, where Adam indeed had every opportunity given to him for success in the Garden.[66] Frank Thielman writes: "The rest of this first part of the story is told to emphasize the lavish way that God provided for humanity's well-being. God provides a home for the man in a special enclosed area within the land of Eden."[67] The idea is the same in both passages as with both historical events: God prepares a place for His people, sets His people in that place, and intends for His people to 'be fruitful.' The failure of each – Adam and Israel – to fulfill the terms of the arrangement, so to speak, is not evidence of the primacy of human free will over the eternal purpose of God. Rather, it is the foreshadowing of the One Man, the Son of Man and Son of God, who would fully complete in Himself what God intended for mankind. This is the meaning of the passage in Hebrews, quoted from the Greek of Psalm 40, in which a *body* instead of a garden or vineyard, is prepared for the One whom God is sending.

---

[65] Genesis 2:15
[66] It is also significant, from a typological perspective, to remember that when Noah left the ark, the first thing we are told that he did was that of planting a vineyard (*cp*. Genesis 9:20).
[67] Thielman, Frank *The New Creation and the Storyline of Scripture* (Wheaton: Crossway; 2021);21.

> *Therefore, when He came into the world, He said:*
> *"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me.*
> *In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure.*
> *Then I said, 'Behold, I have come – In the volume of the book it is written of Me –*
> *To do Your will, O God.'"* (Hebrews 10:5-7)

This apparent mixing of metaphors is by no means arbitrary. It is, as we should expect, the coming together of various lines of typological and prophetic history. The Garden of Eden was prepared for Adam – Man. The vineyard was prepared for Israel – God's Son.[68] Throughout the Ancient Near East, both temples and royal palaces were often associated with gardens as places that represent *par excellence* peace and repose as well as wealth and power. The garden of ancient kings, emperors, or high priests was not, to be sure, the typical backyard vegetable patch. They were elaborate, often elevated as if on a mountain, and provided with manmade sources of water if natural supply was unavailable. Scottish archaeologist David Stronach writes of the ancient garden that was "a suitable complement to the temple, either as a location for outdoor rituals or, more importantly, as a bounteous ambience in which a god would wish to 'walk abroad.'"[69] This is, of course, very reminiscent of Genesis 3:8 which recounts the habit of God to walk in the Garden of Eden 'in the cool of the day.' This feature of the garden-temple is also central to eventual banishment of Man from the Garden as a consequence of his rebellion.


David Stronach (1931-2020)

Genesis 2 is particularly important within the full arc of revelation in setting forth the habitation of Man as a Garden, a place of security and fertility that is also a place where Man could walk with God in unmediated intimacy. This makes the Garden a Temple and establishes the first such *axis mundi* in the world: the place where heaven and earth met. The imagery of Eden woven into the tapestry and depicted by

[68] Exodus 4:23
[69] Stronach, David "The Garden as a Political Statement: Some Case Studies from the Near East in the First Millennium B. C." *Bulletin of the Asia Institute* Vol. 4 (1990); 171.

the furnishings of both the tabernacle and Solomon's Temple has already been noted, and is uniformly recognized by both rabbinic and Christian scholars across the ages. What is often not noted, or at least not developed, is the fact that the Garden was *east in Eden*; in other words, the Garden and Earth were not coextensive. It appears both from what Adam was commanded to do and from Cain's response to his banishment, that the land beyond Eden was still very undeveloped, perhaps even 'chaos.' Thus we are to see the Garden-Temple as sitting within the overall creation, as the tabernacle was set in the midst of the camp and as the Temple stood in Jerusalem, in the midst of Israel. This geographical relationship between the Garden and the rest of Creation alludes to a second feature of the Garden: that of a Throne. This feature will be developed a bit further on in this chapter.

The Garden of Eden is the conspicuous backdrop for the drama of Genesis 3, as well as a conspicuous motif in the Gospel of John for the narrative of the Lord's passion. This was undoubtedly intentional by the authors (John and the Holy Spirit) of the fourth Gospel, and central to the garden motif of the arc of revelation. Considering the opening verses of John's Gospel – verbatim from the Greek opening of Genesis, 'In the beginning…' – it should come as no surprise that the entire Johannine narrative has structural overtones to the first three chapters of Genesis, not least the frequent mention of a 'garden.' Nicolas Wyatt writes: "The whole work is a complex interweaving of ancient royal and more recent messianic themes, mor a poetic meditation on the incarnation than a straightforward account of the impact Jesus made on his contemporaries."[70] Within this tapestry, Jesus' final hours are explicitly associated with a garden: His betrayal, crucifixion, and burial & resurrection are all mentioned by John as having occurred in a garden. These are not passing references, but strong allusions to Genesis 2 – 3. "[W]e should not dismiss it as a mere geographical aside or the evangelist, a snippet of information which the synoptics did not know."[71] Jeannine Brown adds: "Given that John is the only evangelist to provide this particular setting for the crucifixion and res-

[70] Wyatt, Nicolas "Supposing Him to be the Gardener (John 20,15) – A Study of the Paradise Moti in John" *ZNW* 81 (1990); 36.
[71] *Ibid*; 37.

urrection, and that he reminds the reader of the setting at a number of points (18:1, 26; 19:41; 20:15), the author 'invited comparison with another garden.'"[72]


Jeannine K. Brown (*b.* 1961)

John's reference to a garden, very likely the same garden as He frequented during His ministry, does not constitute a quoted citation of the Old Testament, of course, and probably should be viewed somewhere on the spectrum between allusion and echo. For the fourth evangelist, the opening chapters of Genesis form the epistemological atmosphere in which he organizes the data of Jesus' life and the impact of Jesus'work. John is 'thinking Creation & Fall' as he writes about 'New Creation & Recovery.' Brown notes: "The creational theme in John is used to emphasize continuity between God's purposes for creation, including humanity, and the mission of Jesus the Messiah."[73]

Perhaps the most poignant and powerful allusion to the Garden in John's account of Jesus' passion and victory, is Mary's 'mistaken' identification of the risen Lord as the gardener.

> *Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"*
> *She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."* (John 20:15)

This is normally read as an innocent mistake on the part of Mary, but if the underlying theme of Creation/New Creation is truly present in the Fourth Gospel, then it is more likely a case of Mary speaking more than she knew (a not uncommon trope in John's Gospel). It would have been just as easy for John to relate the fact that Mary did not recognize the man as her Lord, but he specifically notes that she thought He was the gardener, and this in the midst of numerous references to a garden in the Passion account. Again, perhaps this is no more than an echo, but in combination with the other

[72] Brown, Jeannine K. "Creation's Renewal in the Gospel of John" *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 72, No. 2 (April 2010); 279-80.
[73] *Ibid.*; 276.

passages n these three chapters of John, it becomes a reverberating, resounding echo. "Jesus *is* the gardener, and this implicit message connects Jesus to that first gardener, Adam. At this point in the narrative, John implies an Adam Christology." This association by John between Jesus and Adam is foreshadowed earlier by Pilate, who also speaks more than he knows when he presents Jesus to the hostile crowd and announces: "Behold! The Man!"[74]

The Royal Garden

Jesus' Passion, taking place in a garden, brings to mind the failure of the first Man, also in a garden. The entire garden motif in the Hebrew Bible is thereby fulfilled and given new life through Jesus' self-sacrifice and victory in His garden; the Fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden is reversed, and a new vine is being planted by God.[75] Here is where the metaphor of the garden and that of the kingdom combine in the Person of Jesus Christ, for in the ancient world the garden was a special enclave of the king, a notable statement of the blessing of the god(s) upon his reign, as manifested in the fecundity of his garden. Stronach notes that an Ancient Near Eastern monarch "can be seen to have turned to the creation of a great park or garden in order to underscore the accomplishments of his reign."[76] The point of this exercise was not merely to provide a nice place for the king to relax or to enjoy a new hobby of gardening, but to more fully encompass the approbation of the deity – not merely through military victory, but also through evident and successful control over nature itself. Fertility of the soil as well as fertility of the body, were ascribed to the various national deities, and the presence of a vibrant garden or park was a strong argument that the god(s) favored the king. Stronach credits Assurnasirpal II (883-859 BC) as being "one of the first monarchs…to view the garden as a potent vehicle for royal propaganda."[77] But it is likely that he was merely one of the first to make note of this in extant writings. The principle of natural

[74] John 19:5
[75] *Cp.* John 15:1*ff*
[76] Stronach; 171.
[77] *Idem*.

fertility as a sign of the approbation of the gods is quite ancient, predating Assurnasirpal II probably by more than a millennium. The concept was familiar to the pagan mind: "this same fruitfulness [*i.e.,* that of the garden], and the king's association with it, may have been meant to underline another aspect of the monarch's public persona: namely, his cosmic role in assuring the fertility and fruitfulness of the land as a whole."[78]

Modern critics argue that the garden motif associated in ancient times with both pagan temples and royal palaces constitutes source for the biblical data. But when the Old Testament speaks of a garden, it is generally Yahweh's, generally referring to Israel, and generally disappointing. The kings of both the united and the divided monarchy were not renown for their palatial gardens, perhaps because Israel was itself the Garden of God, or at least it was intended to be. Thus there is little evidence that the writers of the Hebrew Bible borrowed royal garden language, even as metaphor, from their pagan neighbors. More likely, however, is the postulate that the pagan nations actually borrowed from the primeval memory of the primeval Garden, and both the King who created it and the first Regent who was the royal gardener. It should not be surprising either that the garden would come to represent the life-giving fruitfulness of the earth not that this fruitfulness should be associated with divinity. It was so at the beginning.

Therefore, for pagan kings the great park or garden was full of meaning, meaning that derived from mankind's remotest memory. In practical, political terms, the great garden was representative of the blessing of the god(s) on two levels. The first already mentioned, was the fecundity of the ground grandly displayed in both the multitude of plants and trees common in such a garden, and the menagerie of animal life also often associated with the royal garden. Gardens were, above all other places, *living*. A second statement that the grand garden undoubtedly made was that of settled power and its associated wealth. Kings at war (or kings in debt) do not build grand gardens.

[78] *Ibid*.; 171-72.

One of the most famous royal garden in the Ancient Near East was, of course, Nebuchadnezzar's 'Hanging Gardens' in Babylon, reputed as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. The gardens are legendary, and perhaps even mythical as there is no contemporary witness to them. They are, however, portrayed as having been built in many tiers, like a mountain in the plains of Babylon, with flowing water and waterfalls – a sone might portray the Garden of Eden having read Genesis 2. Most artistic renderings of the Hanging Gardens, for what they're worth, depict a ziggurat-arboreum, with a multitude of trees. Again, this is very reminiscent of the description of Eden: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat…"[79] It also calls to mind the description in the Book of Revelation of the New Jerusalem, the consummated kingdom that comes down out of heaven, having within it the River of Life, flanked on both sides by the Tree of Life:



Depiction of the Hanging Gardens

> *And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.* (Revelation 22:1-2)

If the Hanging Gardens of Babylon really did exist, and if they were built by King Nebuchadnezzar, then they would be an apt monument to king's hubris, recorded for us in the Book of Daniel. Iin relating the famous account of his humiliation and later restoration, Nebuchadnezzar notes his prosperous situation at the time: "I, Nebuchadnezzar, was at rest in my house, and flourishing in my palace."[80] This is certainly the circumstance – 'flourishing in my palace' – in which an ancient king would contemplate the building of a lavish garden park. Though the dream that Nebuchadnezzar relates (and Daniel/Belteshazzar interprets) does not specifically mention a garden, the dream-

[79] Genesis 2:16
[80] Daniel 4:4

metaphor is a mighty tree. Nebuchadnezzar did not heed the interpretation of his dream, but a year later would exalt himself in his palace, perhaps even looking out upon the wondrous gardens that he had commissioned.

> *All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"*
>
> (Daniel 4:28-30)



Stephen Dempster (*b.* 1952)

It may be a stretch to associate this passage in Daniel with the king's famous (but maybe mythical?) gardens, but it is no myth that grand gardens were a source of great pride and renown for Ancient Near Eastern monarchs. Nor is it mythical that the very first earthly kingdom began in a garden and that the messianic kingdom was inaugurated in a garden. Reading Scripture according to the evident hermeneutic of typology not only traces the arc of 'garden' in the divine plan, but also sheds light on contemporary human (royal) history as well. When, therefore, we return to Genesis 2, it is not merely to a Garden, but also to a Throne, or a throne room. Man as viceregent was established in the Garden in security and prosperity – the royal garden came at the *beginning* of Adam's reign, not after having won countless battles. To rule over Creation was the Creation Mandate underlying the very creation of Man, and Adam was to do so from Eden, the Garden of God. Stephen Dempster is therefore correct in saying, "the garden of Eden [was], the throne-room, as it were, of the kingdom."[81]

This introduces what is to many a new line of thought within the messianic paradigm: the King as Gardener. Yet the idea of Eden as a throne-room and Adam as a King-Gardener is not without precedent in both biblical and pseudepigraphical writings. Ezekiel 28, for instance, speaks in glowing terms of the king of Tyre, referencing

[81] Dempster, Stephen G. *Dominion and Dynasty: A theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2003); 62.

Eden as the location of his throne. The language is either hyperbolic or is typological in reference to Adam himself.

> *Moreover the word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD:*
> *"You were the seal of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.*
> ***You were in Eden, the garden of God;***
> *Every precious stone was your covering:*
> *The sardius, topaz, and diamond, beryl, onyx, and jasper,*
> *Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.*
> *The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes*
> *Was prepared for you on the day you were created.*
> *"You were the anointed cherub who covers;*
> *I established you; You were on the holy mountain of God;*
> *You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.*
> *You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created,*
> *Till iniquity was found in you."* (Ezekiel 28:11-15)

There can be no doubt that the language here is referential to the original garden, which was by implication located on a mountain. This is evident because Tyre was by the sea, and there was no mountain there. That Eden was on a mountain is also evident from the original description in Genesis 2, for from it runs a river that then divides into four – and water flows downhill. We continue to see how biblical typology works: not every descriptive element needs to be explicitly stated in every passage along a particular arc or theme of revelation. No mention of a mountain is found in Genesis 2, but the complex of typological imagery that subsequently unfolds in Scripture reflects back upon Eden, confirming the conclusion that it was, in fact, a mountain. This fact is then further reflected also in human history, as mountains become prime religious real estate in every culture. Even those whose terrain is devoid of mountains tended to create their own, manmade ziggurats and pyramids, 'mountainous' structures that were also cultic centers. Garden, trees, mountain, river thus form the typological lexicon for both the pristine original of Creation and the promised consummation of Paradise. This complex manifests the reciprocal nature of biblical allusion and echo: historical events and places

are loaded with typological meaning that projects forward into new events and places, which in turn echo the previous.

All of this ought to elevate our view of Eden as more than the primeval garden in which Adam and Eve first dwelled, and where they first sinned. Keeping in mind that consequent to that sin, the first couple was no longer fit to dwell in the garden and was expelled with the entrance afterward guarded against their return by angelic beings. Eden, later reflected in the Holy of Holies of the tabernacle and Jerusalem Temple, was nothing less than the presence of Yahweh, on earth as in heaven. Eden becomes the first heaven/earth nexus, the place where heaven touches earth and where God sets foot, so to speak, in this planet. Dempster writes: "The presence of cherubim later in the narrative (Gen. 3:24), and the description of the garden as the place where the Lord God walked (Gen. 3:8), all contribute to understanding it as a cosmic mountain where heaven and earth are united and from which the divine rule is exercised."[82]

What would a kingdom look like if Man had never fallen? It was discussed earlier that there is no true analogy to the kingdom of God among the many kingdoms of man over the millennia since Creation. This is entirely due to Adam's rebellion and, as we shall see in Chapter 6, the kingdoms of fallen man are built on bloodshed. What can a human king claim other than he, or some distant ancestor to whom he owes his crown, successfully fought off and killed his rivals? Bloodshed did not long follow the Fall, and bloodshed became the nursing milk of the kingdoms of Man. So how would we depict a kingdom *not* founded on bloodshed? Could we do better than a Garden? Adam did not have to conquer and kill a rival for the throne prepared for him; hence his original dominion was a fertile garden, and his kingly responsibilities were to 'tend and keep' it. Later we will meet the Shepherd-King; in Eden we meet the Gardener-King. Both are pacific, neither is a warrior. It was in Eden as it should be, and as it will be.

Where, then, do we again meet blood in a garden? Gethsemane, of course. When the Shepherd-King Messiah came to the garden, He rode forth, as it were, to battle. On-

[8282] Dempster; 62.

ly his battle was not against flesh and blood, but against the powers of darkness and the usurper prince of this age, Satan. And He rode forth to conquer death itself through the willing shedding of His own perfect blood. Perhaps we can say that the kingdom of God is in truth founded on bloodshed, but the momentous difference is that the blood that was shed was the willing, sacrificial blood of the Lamb who was also the Lion of the tribe of Judah. What better place for the denouement of Messiah's mission than in a garden?

No doubt we will have many opportunities to recount John's narrative of Christ's Passion, and the evangelist's unusual emphasis on the geographical location in a garden. What is important to establish here is the connection – the intertextuality, if you will, or the allusion/echo – between Christ's garden and Adam's garden. And as well, to realize that *both* represented thrones: one that was graciously given and then lost, the other that was reconquered and maintained. It is fitting, then, that that which was lost in a garden should be reclaimed in a garden. It seems appropriate in closing this chapter to join Christ in the garden – whether of Gethsemane, the garden of the cross, or that of the tomb (if they are not one and the same) and listen for the echoes of the original gardener and the original Garden.

The Garden of Gethsemane

When Jesus had spoken these words, He went out with His disciples over the Brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which He and His disciples entered. And Judas, who betrayed Him, also knew the place; for Jesus often met there with His disciples. Then Judas, having received a detachment of troops, and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, came there with lanterns, torches, and weapons. **(John 18:1-3)**

The famous garden of Gethsemane is named only in Matthew and Mark; John here simply mentions it as a garden across the Kidron that Jesus used to frequent with His disciples. John does not record Jesus' earnest prayer that the cup of wrath that He was about to drink should pass from Him, accompanied by His resolve: "Not My will, but Yours be done."[83] John focuses on the encounter that would lead to Jesus' crucifix-

[83] Matthew 26:39

ion, in which the agents of Jesus' adversary – Satan – entered the garden as their master did the Garden of Eden to bring about Adam's fall. John himself confirms that Jesus knew who His enemy was even before entering the garden: "I will no longer talk much with you, for the ruler of this world is coming, and he has nothing in Me."[84] John's recording of Jesus' statement is proof that Jesus understood His upcoming Passion to be a battle royal, a battle for the reconquest of the kingdom once abdicated by the first Adam, now to be reclaimed by the last Adam.

It seems reasonable to conclude that in this first narrative of a garden with respect of Jesus' Passion, John is evoking the temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.[85] In the primal temptation, it was the first Man who stood as coregent to the divine King and ought to have both rebuked the serpent and protected his wife from deception and destruction; he, of course, willfully failed to do either. Jesus has already sent Satan packing during the temptation in the wilderness at the beginning of His ministry. This time He will, as Isaiah puts it, go 'as a sheep before its shearers,' without a whisper of protest.[86] Later in John's account, as Jesus stands before Pilate, the Lord will make His royal authority unmistakably known. But here, in the garden, His purpose is to submit Himself to His Father's purpose, which means to His own sacrificial death. "Now My soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour. "[87]

Garden of Crucifixion and Resurrection

John's narrative moves from the garden across the Kidron, through the various stages of mock-justice at the hands of the Jews and Romans, and returns again to a garden. As noted earlier, John is the only evangelist to note that the place of the crucifixion as well as the burial (and hence the resurrection) of Jesus was a garden.

---

[84] John 14:30
[85] In spite of the serpent's conversation exclusively with the woman, it is apparent from the text that Adam was alongside his wife, for when she had eaten of the fruit, 'she gave it to her husband who was with her.' (Gsn. 3:6)
[86] Isaiah 53:7
[87] John 12:27

Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby. **(John 19:41-42)**

Jesus prayed in a garden, was crucified and buried in a garden, and hence rose from the grave in a garden. Afterward, Mary mistook Him for the gardener, though her mistake was only apparent, as we will see. This summary, however, should be enough for John's readers to catch his drift and, at least, to ask themselves why the garden location was so important to him. Again, these are details omitted by the Synoptic writers. The opening line of John's Gospel takes the reader back to the opening line of Genesis, and the evangelist's Passion account returns us to the original garden, at least in symbolic memory. Jeannine Brown notes: "[T]he theme of creation in light of the Johannine story of Jesus emphasizes Jesus completing creation's purposes and Jesus bringing creation's renewal."[88]

Modern aversion to allegory has taken exegesis of these passages far away from the connection made in both the Patristic and the Medieval eras between the cross of Christ and the Tree of Life – two trees in two gardens, an association that John certainly seems to be making. That the cross was viewed as a 'tree' is established by Paul's reference to Deuteronomy "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed *is* everyone who hangs on a tree")"[89] John undoubtedly recognized the same connection, though he notes the locale of the crucifixion in a garden as the typological correspondent to the original garden, and the Tree that stood in the midst of it: the Tree of Life. At least that is how Christian exegetes from the second century on through the Middle Ages read it. The only apparent disagreement among the early writers was whether the cross should be viewed as the antitype of the Tree of Life, or of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil – the former being, of course, a tree that yields immortality; the latter bearing the fruit of death.

As an example of the former association, Gregory Nazianzus (AD 329-90), one of the three 'Great Cappadocians,' writes: "He is lifted up and nailed to the Tree, but by

[88] Brown; "Creation's Renewal"; 276.
[89] Galatians 3:13, *cp.* Deuteronomy 21:22-23.

the Tree of Life He restoreth us; yea, He saveth even the Robber crucified with Him."[90] Cyril of Jerusalem (AD 313-86), a contemporary of Gregory, illustrates the second view – connecting the cross with the 'Tree of Death' through an imaginative conversation with the redeemed thief next to Jesus:

> What power, O Robber, led thee to the light? Who taught thee to worship that despised Man, the companion on the Cross? ...Very speedily I passed sentence upon Adam, very speedily I pardon thee. To him it was said, *In the day wherein ye eat, ye shall surely die*, but thou to-day hast obeyed the faith, to day is thy salvation. Adam by the Tree fell away; thou by the Tree art brought into Paradise.[91]

Mark Edwards, in his essay "The Tree of Life in Early Christian Literature," discusses the connection between the Tree of Life in Eden and the Cross of Christ in Calvary as a common theme in early Christian hymnody and poetry. He writes: "The replanting of the tree of life on Calvary is the subject of a canticle on the victory of the cross by the greatest of Byzantium's liturgical poets, the melodist Romanus (*c.* 490 – *c.* 556)."[92] The canticle is a dialogue between Satan and Hades concerning the crucifixion, with Satan initially vaunting in triumph and Hades lamenting that the death of Christ will be the release of Adam and Eve; the effect of the second tree undoing that of the first. By the end, Hades has convinced Satan of his serious strategic and tactical error, though it is now too late as Christ has risen and the Tree of Death has become the Tree of Life. The theme moves forward through Christian lyrics in the present time, as the chorus of the Integrity Music song *O Mighty Cross*, shows in a much simpler format that Byzantine melody.

> His sacrifice, on Calvary,
> Has made the Mighty Cross a Tree of Life to me.[93]

---

[90] Gregory Nazianzus, Oration 29.20 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers; Volume VII,* Philip Schaff, ed. (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 1978); 309.

[91] Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lecture XIII.31* Shaff, Volume VII; 90.

[92] Edwards, Mark "The Tree of Life in Early Christian Literature" in The Tree of Life, Douglas Estes, ed. (Leiden: Brill; 2020); 224.

[93] Don Moen - O Mighty Cross Lyrics & Meaning. Accessed 15August2026.

The association of the cross with the Edenic Tree of Life pervades Christian literature well into the modern era, ranging from the allegorical writings of Origen to Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and peppering the 'more sober' exegetical writings of every age. Modern readers may find the connection a bit too imaginative, too allegorical, for modern sensibilities, but one can hardly ignore John's unusual emphasis on the topographical data concerning Christ's Passon. "In addition to the commentaries and sermons, there was a vast tradition in medieval legend, literature, and art whereby the Tree of Life was associated with the cross."[94] It should not be too much of a stretch to conclude that John was reading the story of the Garden, in all its perfection and its tragic ending, into the narrative of Christ's ultimate victory of Satan and the grave.

One further reference to a garden remains to be analyzed from John's Passion Narrative, the 'mistaken' identification by Mary Magdalene of the risen Lord with the gardener.

Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?" She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away." Jesus said to her, "Mary!" She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher). **(John 20:14-16)**

Nicolas Wyatt, in his article "Supposing Him to be the Gardener," notes that Mary's (mis)identification of Jesus as the gardener – again, only recorded by John among the four evangelists – is an example of someone speaking more than they realize, a not uncommon trope in the Fourth Gospel, as John records both the High Priest Caiaphas and the Roman Procurator Pilate as doing. The reason it strikes modern readers as just an example of Mary's grief-driven confusion is that the modern mind has long lost the common ancient association between a garden and a throne, and between a gardener and a king. Wyatt notes that the idea of a king as a gardener would have been a familiar one in the Ancient Near East. "This appears to have been an important cult-title of the king in Mesopotamia. Many reliefs show him tending the tree of life in

[94] Grossman, Ann "The Use of the Tree of Life in 'Paradise Lost'" *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, Vol. 65, No. 1 (Oct. 1966); 684.

the sanctuary, the epitome of his role as the mediator of fertility, and an analogue of his role in the sacred marriage."[95]

To be sure, Mary did not recognize her Lord until He spoke to her. The point of the exchange is to show that John understood the risen Jesus as the True Gardener, the righteous claimant to the sovereignty of the Garden, the New Creation. John's consistent allusion to the original garden leaves little doubt that he viewed the entire Passion event – from prayer to resurrection – as the restoration of all that the first man lost, including the New Creation of the Garden. Wyatt summarizes his own thesis by commenting: "[T]he royal connections both of the garden and of the Man who inhabits it, was widespread knowledge among the Jews who expected the Messiah and expressed their hopes in the pseudepigraphical literature. And there is abundant evidence that this literature was enormously popular among the early Christians."[96] John, therefore, is representative of the Messianic hope that existed in the Second Temple era, a hope that was rooted in the first three chapters of Genesis coupled with the earnest expectation that Israel's God would soon set all things to rights.

> As I read him, he fully intends that the cross be in Paradise, as the tree of life from which the first Man had been driven awa. As the first Man had been raised from the dust as the primordial King, now the second Man, also raised from the dust in resurrection, took up his rightful place in the garden. Indeed, he now resumed the task, as gardener, of tilling the soil and caring for Eden, from which the first Man had been banished.[97]

[95] Wyatt; 35.
[96] *Ibid.*; 38.
[97] *Idem.*

Chapter 5 – Man as Co-Regent
Text: Genesis 1:26-27, Daniel 7:13-14, Matthew 28:18-20

"If we pay attention to the text,
the focus is on human beings as the vice-regents of creation."
(Thomas Schreiner)

Modern science textbooks classify humans as mammals. From the perspective of Evolution, this makes sense: humans have hair (and not scales or feathers), give birth to live offspring (and not eggs), and nurse their young. Kingdom: Animalia (humans are not plants, fungi, or bacteria); Phylum: Chordata (all humans have a backbone, though some lack one in a figurative sense); Class: Mammalia; there you go, human classification at the top three levels. But is this an acceptable description of *Homo sapiens* for a believer? Is it of no concern that the Church accept the scientific classification without reservation? Is it adequate that Christianity adopt the scientific definition of Man as the most highly developed form of mammal and then throw a veneer of spirituality on it? Or is the scientific definition fundamentally flawed? Obviously these are leading questions, to which the implied answer is 'No,' and perhaps with an exclamation point. The prevailing view of Man as Mammal has had an insidious effect on biblical anthropology, which in turn has greatly diminished our understanding of God's overall plan.

Scientists point to the ability of animals to gather into societal, even familial, units, to apparently make plans and assemble rudimentary structures, and even to work with hand tools. All of these things are fascinating, but from a biblical as well as a historical point of view, we must insist that the difference between *Homo sapiens* and the next 'highest' specie within Mammalia is qualitative and not just quantitative. It is not that Man is merely more advanced along the evolutionary spectrum; Man is qualitatively different from all other creatures on this planet. To put matters much too simply for any evolutionary scientist to accept, animals have *intuition*; Man has *intelligence.* While there is certainly a gradation along the intuitive scale of animals – and mankind has known this since animals were first domesticated – human beings exist on a completely different scale altogether. At the very heart of the matter for believers is the fact that to

classify Man as Mammal is to abandon the biblical record of Man as *imago Dei*. The implications of this are far greater than many professing believers realize: it strikes at the very heart of the biblical message.

It cannot be a coincidence that the greatest attacks that have been levelled at Scripture throughout the ages, have been aimed at the first three chapters of Genesis. The origin of the Universe and of Man, the entrance of sin and death into the world, and the promise of eventual restoration, together constitute a narrative that is abhorrent to modern man. So intense has been the onslaught since the 18th Century that much of professing Christendom in the West has succumbed and all but admitted the victory of 'science' and 'rationalism.' As Evolution is largely accepted as 'proven science,' so the opening chapters of Genesis are ascribed to the realm of myth and legend. They are 'unscientific' and therefore untrue. But we must count the cost of this abdication of biblical revelation, and realize that the cost is far too high. Throughout this study we have maintained the importance of reading Scripture as literature while at the same time recognizing that it is not just literature. Even though the Scriptures are majestic literature, with a consistent plot development spanning over a thousand years and across multiple genre, they remain no less divine revelation for all that. And the foundation of it all is laid in the first three chapters of Genesis. "Creation is not merely a bookend of Scripture but the substance of its plot and message."[98]



Edward Klink (*b.* 1975)

At the root of the matter is the identity, the essence, of *Homo sapiens*. At stake is not only the only tenable foundation for human *rights* but also the solid foundation of human *responsibility*. As the Kingdom is at least one of the central themes within the arc of revelation, if not *the* central theme, so also is the King. Once again, and as with the kingdom idea, we have the question as to where the 'king' begins. Foro the Jew of the

[98] Klink, Edward W., III *The Beginning and End of All Things: A Biblical Theology of Creation and New Creation* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press; 2023); 81.

Second Temple era, the most common answer would direct all attention to the house of David and its prophesied restoration. Ezekiel would come to mind, written as it was while Israel was suffering the 'death' of the Babylonian Exile, an exile that had not ended even though the Jews were restored to the Land. The promise of full restoration is tied to the restoration of David in terms and in context that speak powerfully of resurrection. Two particular passages come to mind: Ezekiel 34 and 37, both within the complex of prophetic thought redolent of the Gospel (*cp.* Ezekiel 36). The first passage speaks of the return of David as the shepherd of Israel, though he is called a prince in the passage; the second is more explicit as to David as the restored king.

> *Therefore thus says the Lord GOD to them: "Behold, I Myself will judge between the fat and the lean sheep. Because you have pushed with side and shoulder, butted all the weak ones with your horns, and scattered them abroad, therefore I will save My flock, and they shall no longer be a prey; and I will judge between sheep and sheep. I will establish one* ***shepherd*** *over them, and he shall feed them — My servant David. He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the LORD, will be their God, and My servant David a* ***prince*** *among them; I, the LORD, have spoken.*
>
> (Ezekiel 34:20-24)

The context of this prophecy is, again, disorder. The community of God's people is in disarray, with the strong butting the weak to the sides, denying them sustenance. The community is 'like sheep without a shepherd,'[99] so God promises to restore a shepherd to them, even the shepherd David. But as the restoration prophecy in Ezekiel continues, we find that the disorder and chaos is of a far greater intensity than just conflicts and oppression among the sheep: the community was as if dead, and no greater biblical disorder can be imagined than death itself.

> *David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. Then they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob My servant, where your fathers dwelt; and they shall dwell there, they, their children, and their children's children, forever; and My servant David shall be their prince forever.* (Ezekiel 37:24-25)

[99] Matthew 9:36

Again, these prophecies of the restoration of the Davidic kingdom are couched in a section of Scripture that is one of the most Gospel-oriented in the whole Old Testament, with the possible exception of Isaiah 53. In the Ezekiel 37 passage, the restoration of David as king accompanies a situation in which God's people 'observe His statutes' and 'dwell in the Land.' These are the results of the new heart and indwelling Spirit form the previous chapter, Ezekiel 36.

> *Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you shall be clean; I will cleanse you from all your filthiness and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will keep My judgments and do them. Then you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; you shall be My people, and I will be your God.* (Ezekiel 36:25-28)

Even though the phrase 'kingdom of God' is not used in any of these passages from Ezekiel (or, for that matter, in any other prophetic passage of the Old Testament), it would be ridiculous not to recognize that these words point forward to the advent of that same kingdom. But how are we to interpret the reference to Davd? By that question, we do not mean to inquire whether or not 'David' here is the literal son of Jesse, king of Isrrael from the 10th Century BC. That is indeed a valid question, and is a matter of hermeneutics – literal or typological – discussed in the first in this Biblical Theology series. At issue here, however, is whether the kingdom – and especially *the king* – finds its first biblical pronouncement with the rise of David to the throne. There should be no doubt that the period of Davidic rule forms an important part of the trajectory of the kingdom of God through Scripture, but this all did not begin with David.

It is interesting to note that David was not the first king of Israel, Saul was. At first glance this seems to be a matter of little importance, as Saul failed in his role as Israel's king and consequently God Himself intervened and anointed, through Samuel, the youngest son of Jesse to eventually replace Saul. But if we investigate the narrative through the lens of Biblical Theology, we find the whole story to be a microcosm of the relationship of God and Man throughout redemptive history. In this chapter, therefore,

we will work backward from David to Saul and eventually to Adam, and then work forward to the promised Anointed One – the Son of Man in Daniel 7 – to the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, hopefully the reverberating echoes of the promised King will be clearly heard.

We Will Have a King

The narrative of the Davidic dynasty does not begin with the house of Jesse but that of Kish, not the tribe of Judah but that of Benjamin, and not the purpose of God but the rebellious will of Man. Yet in this narrative we see a repetition and a microcosm of mankind's ongoing attitude toward the Creator God: "They have not rejected you, but Me from being king over them."[100] The dialogue between Israel and her last judge, Samuel, must be seen in light of Adam's original rebellion, for he, too, rejected God from reigning over him. And thus has the history of mankind repeated itself throughout the ages and the kingdoms and the empires. The key to Israel's attitude lies in the content of their demand: not for someone to lead them in the worship and obedience of Yahweh, but someone to lead them in battle, to be a king like the kings of the pagan nations surrounding them.

> *Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations"… Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, "No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles."* (I Samuel 8:4-5, 19-20)

"That we may be like all the nations," is the heart cry of man in rebellion against God, man refusing to have God as king over him. In this dialogue there are powerful echoes of Genesis 10 and 11, the 'Table of Nations' and the Tower of Babel:

> *Then they said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They had brick for stone, and they had asphalt for mortar. And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a*

[100] I Samuel 8:7

> *city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."* (Genesis 11:3-4)

Though there is no mention of a kingdom or a king in this passage, there is a significant mention of a city – a political entity that factors heavily in both biblical and ancient history. We may assume on the basis of history, that the call to build a city and a tower (*i.e.*, a mountain-replica) was not a universal cry from the masses but was rather a call to arms, so to speak, by the leaders of the tribes. Evidence of such singular or oligarchic leadership may be found both before and after the Tower incident. We may not read the title 'king' in the text, but it is hard not to see a character like Lamech, in the seventh generation from Adam, as a ruler; indeed, a tyrant. Lamech's boasting to his wives is a song of defiance by a man who broached no higher authority than himself, not even, we may assume, God.

> Then Lamech said to his wives:
> "Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; wives of Lamech, listen to my speech!
> For I have killed a man for wounding me, even a young man for hurting me.
> If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, then Lamech seventy-sevenfold."
> (Genesis 4:23-24)

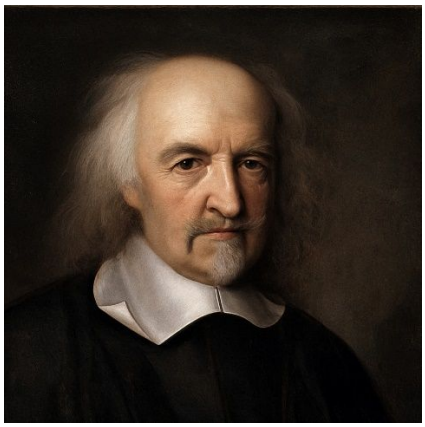
This speech appears to be without context, at least in the immediate vicinity. It is, however, a marker passage and personality, showing the degradation of mankind as a consequence of sin. A contrast is being established between the 'sons of God' and the 'sons of Man,' and Lamech is presented last in this mini-genealogy of Cain, the father of the sons of Man, as representative of the nadir of human rebellion. Immediately after we read of the birth of Seth and must not thereby conclude that Seth was not born until Lamech was around. We have here the classic trope of parallelism, in which the genealogy of Cain is set against the genealogy of Seth, which follows.[101] Note especially the seventh from Adam along the lineage of Seth: Enoch, who 'walked with God, and was not, for God took him.'[102] Scripture is establishing what Augustine would much later

[101] That Seth is the father of the 'sons of God' is hinted at by the phrase associated with his birth: "Then men began to call upon the name of YHWH." (Gen. 4:26)
[102] Genesis 5:24

refer to as the City of Man contrasted with the City of God. The kingdoms of Man will follow both the lineage and the attitude of the Cain-Lamech line, a lineage that will be taken up by Noah's son Ham, after the flood. And in that line we find the post-Deluge correspondent to Lamech: Nimrod. Nimrod picks up where his antediluvian ancestor left off, and moves even farther beyond, establishing an explicit kingdom that approaches the boundaries of empire.

> *Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).* (Genesis 10:8-12)

This brings us back to the plains of Shinar and the Tower of Babel. Certainly it is not a stretch to see Nimrod as a key player in the drive for 'one world order,' and certainly we may assume that he would have been a primary beneficiary of the labor of history: ancient kingdoms invariably are expansionist and tyrannical, seeking always to move from kingdom to empire. This trend continues through Ancient, Classical, Medieval, Early Modern, and Modern eras of history. It is a pattern ingrained in the psyche of fallen man that colors the very nature of the kingdoms of Man and, in fact, all human government. The political paradigm of a strong sovereign ruling over a vast realm was codified in the 17th Century by the English political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, in his famous work, *Leviathan*. Written during the English Civil War, *Leviathan* is an unashamed advocacy of a strong monarch as necessary for the peace and well-being of a society. Hobbes relied not on biblical testimony, but on the 'laws of nature,' so it is little wonder that his conclusions coincide so well with the pattern of human kingdom throughout the ages. He has often been viewed as a founder of modern political theory, but it seems rather that Hobbes was a throwback to the ancient Nimrods and Lamechs



Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679)

of tyranny. Be that as it may, the progression of the kingdom of Man is important enough to the arc of revelation to warrant a separate chapter in this study.

Returning to the era of Babel, we can also pick up the lineage of Enoch, so to speak, through Noah's son Shem. Genesis 11 is immediately followed in Genesis 12 by the call of Abram. Abram did not 'walk with God' as Enoch had; his heritage was the paganism of Ur.[103] However, God intended to make from Abram a new nation, a people for His own possession. First, however, he made Abram/Abraham a king. True, the biblical text never refers to Abraham as a king. Nonetheless, the patriarch is portrayed as having an army and as going forth into battle during the War of the Kings recorded in Genesis 14. What is significant about this narrative as it pertains to our discussion, is the very different attitude of Abraham contrasted with the warring kings. His foray into battle was only to liberate his nephew Lot, not to increase either his own wealth or territory. Two events associated with this period of warfare establish the 'godly king' from the ungodly kings of this world. The first is Abraham's refusal of the gift offered by the King of Sodom, the second is the blessing Abraham receives from Melchizedek, the King of Salem and priest of God Most High.

> *Now the king of Sodom said to Abram, "Give me the persons, and take the goods for yourself." But Abram said to the king of Sodom, "I have raised my hand to the LORD, God Most High, the Possessor of heaven and earth, that I will take nothing, from a thread to a sandal strap, and that I will not take anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich'."*
> (Genesis 14:21-23)

> *Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said:*
> *"Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth;*
> *And blessed be God Most High,*
> *Who has delivered your enemies into your hand."* (Genesis 14:18-20)

These are kingdom passages within the arc of revelation, illustrating the development of the two parallel but opposing kingdoms of Man and of God. Abram is, as it were, another 'Adam' – the father of a new humanity taken from the midst of the old.

[103] *Cp.* Joshua 24:2

This is not eisegesis, since the 'new humanity' that God creates from Abraham – the nation of Israel – is called God's Son, even His firstborn.[104] Perhaps it would be better to say that Abraham is found in the typological lineage that runs from Adam to Jesus Christ, but also in such a manner as to illustrate the character of the kingdom of God. Abram rules his kingdom, as it were, as coregent to God and not as the pagan kings surrounding him. Therefore he can refuse the gift of the King of Sodom and receive the blessing from the King of Salem. It is as if Abram could say, "My kingdom is not of this world."[105]

The Abraham narratives reflecting the patriarch's relationship with the surrounding peoples have the backdrop of kingdom. But in Abrahams's case it is a kingdom rule without a realm, and that is a central point in the narratives. A garden was prepared for Adam and he was placed within it; a land was promised to Abram and he, to, was placed in it. But Adam had authority under God over the Garden of Eden; Abram possessed no territorial dominion at all. The similarities are accentuated by this difference. Why was 'king' Abram not given a realm? The apparent or surface answer is that 'the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete.'[106] But this surely is a coordinate statement and not a causal one. In other words, God did not mess up His timing – calling Abram too early, while the Amorites were not yet ripe for expulsion.

No, the call of Abram and his placement in a land not yet his own (nor to be his own in his lifetime) has as its basic meaning the principle of 'walking with God.' This Adam did, until he rebelled. This Enoch did, until he was taken up by God. This Abram must learn to do before a kingdom could be physically established. Perhaps this is a provisional answer to the earlier discussion about whether the kingdom of God is about *realm* or about *reign*. One must *rule* before one is given a *realm*. If echoes of Daniel 7 and Matthew 28 are heard at this point, then the principle of Biblical Theology is taking root. Abram/Abraham's sojourn in a land not his own, establishes the basic principle of rule as a co-regent with God, as the *imago Dei* in the world: walking by faith.

[104] Exodus 4:22
[105] *Cp.* Hebrews 11:8-16
[106] Genesis 15:16

Abram showed in the War of the Kings that he was by that time one whose liege lord was Yahweh, the true King, and from this came Abram's complete independence from the worldly kings surrounding him. His reign-without-a-realm was victorious because it was blessed by God Most High. Adam was given a realm to rule; Abram was given a reign with no realm. This actually makes sense when one considers that the redemptive plan of God is, in effect, a re-covery operation, a work of restoration. Thus the order of the kingdom is reversed, and One must prove worthy to reign, before 'all authority is given in heaven and on earth.'



Alexandre Vinet (1797-1847)

19th Century Swiss Reformed theologian Alexandre Vinet puts this truth quite succinctly: "To serve God is to reign."[107]

This phrase seems to capture the essence of the purpose of Man's creation: to reign over Creation through serving the Creator. Or, perhaps better, to serve the Creator by reigning over Creation. Either way, the principle is established that the fundamental purpose and calling of Man is to act as the vice-regent of God over His Creation. Hence, Adam's sin was not only rebellion, it was also abdication. Abram's call begins the reversal of the effect of this abdication, and it does indeed include the concept of the kingdom of God. But it is not a kingdom that 'lords it over' the nations. Rather it is a kingdom through which 'all the nations of the earth will be blessed.' The promise of a kingdom, or at least of kings, is integral to God's changing Abram's name to Abraham.

> *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you a father of many nations. I will make you exceedingly fruitful; and I will make nations of you, and kings shall come from you.* (Genesis 17:5-6)

When Abraham's descendants petitioned Samuel for a king, the narrative makes it quite clear that the type of king desired was after the pattern of the world and not the pattern established in the Garden, the pattern to which the patriarch himself was called.

[107] Vinet, Alexandre *Pastoral Theology* (New York: Tyson, Blakeman, Taylor, & Company; 1871); 54.

Israel's criteria – 'like the nations around us' – is not a cry for peace and security (though they certainly thought it was) but a cry of rebellion both against God and against His dominion. Yet we need to be careful not to jump to conclusions concerning the LORD's response to Samuel: "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them."[108] This might sound like Yahweh never intended for Israel to have a king; that He would directly rule over the nation, perhaps through a continuation of judges, perhaps through the priesthood. But two prior prophecies make it clear that Israel was intended to have a king – Genesis 49 and Numbers 24.

> *The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet,*
> *Until Shiloh comes; and to Him shall be the obedience of the people.* (Genesis 49:11)

> *I see Him, but not now; I behold Him, but not near;*
> *A Star shall come out of Jacob; a Scepter shall rise out of Israel,*
> *And batter the brow of Moab, and destroy all the sons of tumult.* (Numbers 24:17)

From the perspective of Biblical Theology and a typological reading of Scripture, Israel's demand that Samuel give them a king is parallel to the original fall of Adam and Eve. Obviously the two situations are more different than they are similar – Adam and Eve sinned from a status of sinlessness; Israel was no less a community of sinners for having been created and formed by Yahweh. The similarity, however, lies in the temptation to have what God always intended to give, but to grasp for it ahead of God's timing. Just as it is a mistake to conclude that God did not want Adam and Eve to know 'good and evil' – indeed, this was the substance of the serpent's charge against God – so also it would be a mistake to conclude that God never wanted Israel to have a king. By eating from the forbidden tree, Adam and Eve rejected God from being king over them. By demanding a king like the nations around them, Israel rejected God from being king over them. The primal act of rebellion recurs more often that we realize, culminating in the national rejection of the very king promised in the two prophecies quoted above.

[108] I Samuel 8:7

What Manner of King?

The LORD intended a king for Israel – from the tribe of Judah, and the family of Jesse. But Israel failed its probation just as Adam failed his (we remember the biblical allusions of the Land as the Garden). Yahweh instructed Samuel to explain to the people what manner of king they would get, just as He Himself warned Adam what would happen if he disobeyed the prohibition against the forbidden tree. In both cases, the warnings went unheeded. This is not to say that had Israel patiently waited for God's king (and they would not have had to wait very long), then all would have gone swimmingly, happily ever after. Again, the parallel breaks down in terms of the prototype being original, the later event being post-Fall. Still, it is evident that Israel had no desire for the manner of king that Yahweh intended, as they seemed to give no regard to the prophecy of Genesis 49 and chose a man from the tribe of Benjamin. At the very least, the people's choice would not in any way fulfill either Jacob's prophecy or Balaam's (Numbers 24).

God intended a king for Israel because God originally intended His Creation to be governed by Man as vice-regent. Isreal, as God's Son, was to manifest His dominion to the nations by their obedience to His commandments.[109] In turn, David and his descendants were to be Yahweh's vice-regents within Israel. But what manner of king did the LORD intend for Israel? The answer is to be found in the two Creation accounts of Genesis and lies within the meaning of four operative words, two from each account. In the first, Man is charged with 'subduing' and 'ruling over' or 'exercising dominion over' the earth. In the second account, he is charged to 'tend and keep' the Garden. Together, this complex of verbs defines the manner of the divine vice-regent and, by extension, the nature of the kingdom of God.

The first couplet is more general in meaning, more overarching, as it applies to the whole of Creation and not merely the Garden. It comes immediately after the divine

[109] Deuteronomy 4:6

intent to create Man in the divine image and thus serves as the commission of Adam with regard to the rest of Creation.

> *Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over [a]all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that [b]moves on the earth."*
> (Genesis 1:26-28)

This is Man's coronation. The purpose for which God created Man is first stated in verse 26 – 'and let him have dominion' – and is expanded in verse 28 – 'be fruitful and multiply…subdue and have dominion.' These verbs start and end with the same word: *rādâ* (רָדָה), to 'have dominion' or to 'rule.' 'Being fruitful' and 'multiplying' are to be taken essentially as synonyms and serves as the method by which Man's coregency will spread over the face of the earth: procreation. Thus the instrumentality by which Man will exercise dominion over the earth is that of procreating. But that leaves the verb 'subdue' to explain what it is Man will be doing as he spreads out from Eden. The Hebrew word is *kābas* (כָּבָשׁ) and it used in the Bible in conjunction with *rādâ* to signify "any action in which man reduces something to his use through the application of fore."[110] This is an interesting command, for it indicates that the original establishment of Creation was not yet 'subdued.' What can this mean?

> *The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed…Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.*
> (Genesis 2:8,15)

Before attempting to answer this question, let us look at the second couplet in Genesis 2, with reference to the Garden of Eden. In the Garden Man is charged to 'tend and keep' that which God has planted. If we consider that Eden was not coextensive with the whole of created earth, it appears by deduction that Man was to do with the

[110] Dempster; 60.

rest of the earth what God had already done with Eden. *Eden* was prepared for Man to live in, but *the earth* was awaiting Man's spread and dominion. In this interpretation, 'tend and keep' modify 'subdue and have dominion' and indicate the manner by which Man's co-regency is to be exerted over Creation. As Adam was to tend and keep the garden, so mankind is to tend and keep the earth. As incongruent as it may sound, the created earth was not yet fruitful; that was so far reserved for Eden. But had Adam not rebelled, Man would expand from Eden and eventually cover the earth, creating Edenic conditions as part of mankind's created purpose as co-regents with the Creator. "Being made in the image of God signifies humans exercising dominion *as God's viceregents of creation.*"[111]

The phrase 'tend and keep' in English correspond nicely with a garden and the concept of agricultural care and husbandry. It was part of 'tending and keeping' that Adam named all of the animals God had created.[112] And it was to help Adam 'tend and keep' the Garden that God formed Eve out of the man's side, not merely to be the instrument of procreation. All of this is known theologically as the Creation Mandate of Work – that mankind was not created for idleness, that the earth itself required the efforts of Man in order to realize its full potential. The earth was designed to 'yield up' her abundance at the instigation of Man's 'tending and keeping'; it was the consequence of Man's rebellion that an adversarial relationship came to be between Man and the ground.

> *Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life.*
> *Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you,*
> *And you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread*
> *Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken;*
> *For dust you are, and to dust you shall return.* (Genesis 3:17-19)

Adam's Fall, of course, had a massive impact on the manner of Man's co-regency of Creation. The status of Man as the *imago Dei* did not change, but that image was now

[111] Dempster; 59. Dempster is quoting H. Wildberger (1965); italics original.
[112] Genesis 2:20

defaced, the viceregent now a traitor, and the entirety of Creation thrown into turmoil or, as the apostle Paul puts it, Creation was 'subjected to futility.'[113] Not only is the ground at enmity with Man, but so are all of the animals, and also now with one another. As the Genesis narrative quickly shows, mankind is now at enmity with one another, and the second recorded sin will be fratricide: brother murdering brother. To 'tend and keep' remains the Creation Mandate, but now the heart of Man has been altered from Tiller to Tyrant, and the manner by which mankind will 'subdue' the earth shifts to a new and horrible trajectory.

Chapter Summary

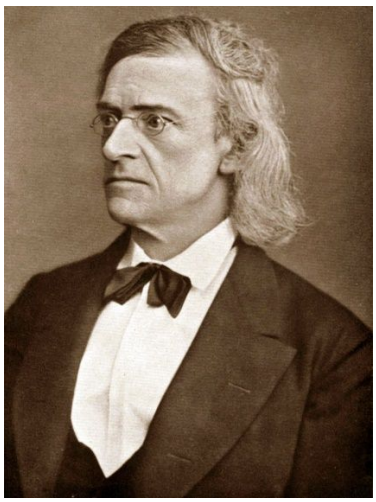
The Creator always intended that His Creation should be under the viceregency of the Man that He had made in His own image. The dominion of Man over the earth and its other inhabitants is an undeniable biblical paradigm, though many today rail against the abuse that mankind has perpetrated against the environment. What has gone wrong? The issue has never been whether or not Man should have dominion, but the manner of that dominion, the nature of that rule. It all seems to hinge on the word 'subdue' in Genesis 1:28, a word that throughout history has had nothing but negative connotations. While the word does signify the superimposition of one will over another, it does not necessary require that the two wills be original in conflict. In the created order that God spoke into existence, the Garden that He planted for Man to 'tend and keep,' there was no primal enmity: the animals were not antagonistic either to Man or to one another, the fish of the sea did not pose a dark threat to those who sailed upon the waters, and the ground was willing to yield up its produce to Man's superintending efforts. This is how it was all supposed to be, and this is how the prophetic word goes on to describe the New Earth. In between we find the process of restoration culminating in the Last Adam, the One who is 'the human king *par excellence*.'[114]

[113] Romans 8:20
[114] Dempster; 61.

Chapter 6 – Leviathan: The Kingdom of Man
Text: Genesis 4:16-24; 10 – 11, Psalm 2, Daniel 7

"For the good make use of the world in order to enjoy God,
whereas the evil make use of God in order to enjoy the world."
(Augustine)

On August 24, AD 410, the unthinkable happened. The Eternal City, Rome, was breached and sacked by a Visigoth army under their king, Alaric. The ancient world was a violent place, and cities were conquered and looted all the time. But not Rome. Not since the days of the Republic – 387 BC, to be precise – had Rome been sacked, long before the era of Sulla and Marius, Julius Caesar and Pompey, and the Empire. For almost 800 years Rome built up a reputation unparalleled even by ancient Babylon as 'the mistress of the world.' Jermoe, the Latin scholar living at the time in Bethlehem, wrote upon hearing the news: "The city that had taken the world has herself been taken."[115] It was a traumatic event for the world of the Mediterranean.


Theodore Mommsen (1817-1903)

Yet in hindsight, one may wonder why. Rome was no longer even the imperial capital of the Western Empire. Constantine I had moved the main capital to Byzantium where he built a glorious city and named it, humbly, Constantinople. Rome was old and decrepit and subject to floods and epidemics. The Western emperors, subordinate to the Eastern emperor in Constantinople, first moved the Western capital to Milan and then to Ravenna, where it was when Alaric's forces sacked Rome. So why the fuss? And why mention it in this study? For two reasons: one, because it was *Rome*, and two, because the event, and the aftermath of commentary, provoked Augustine to spend thirteen years analyzing its meaning in what would become both his *magnum opus* and an immortal classic of Chrisitan literature: *De Civitate Dei* or, *The City of God.* Theodore Mommsen, a 19th Century German scholar, notes with regard to this magiste-

[115] Jerome, *Letter CXXVII Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers.* Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers: Series II/Volume VI/The Letters of St. Jerome/Letter 127 - Wikisource, the free online library. Accessed 25August2026.

rial work by Augustine: "In view of the impact this work has had upon the development of Christian thought, it can certainly be said that the fall of Rome in the year 410, which motivated its composition, marks a momentous date in the intellectual history of the western world."[116]

Rome, in fact, did not fall. Or, it may be said, Rome had already certainly fallen from its earlier glory and power. But Rome the city still stands, sixteen centuries after Alaric showed up. But then as now, Rome stands for something more than just the city along the Tiber River. Perhaps more than any other city in human history, with the possible exception of Babylon, Rome represents the City of Man *par excellence.* Rome reached the apex of worldly power and, in a manner closer than Nimrod at Babel, reached into the heavens. Mommsen points out in his article that many leading Christian scholars of the time were deeply enamored at Rome's luster, though much faded, and closely associated the growing power of Christianity with the Eternal City. This was, remarkably, in spite of the horrible persecutions that Rome had carried out against believers for several centuries. It was common, of course, for pagan authors to write the praises of Rome, but by the year 400, so too were many Christian writers. Mommsen quotes the Christian theologian Lactantius illustrating a common view of the importance of Rome:

> The fall and ruin of the world will shortly take place, although it seems that nothing of that kind is to be feared as long as the city of Rome stands intact. But when the capital of the world has fallen…who can doubt that the end will have arrived for the affairs of men and the whole world?[117]

The adoption of Christianity by Constantine I – adopted, that is to say, as a legal religion within the empire and his personal favorite – a strange marriage developed between the formerly persecuted religion and the imperial power that persecuted. From the court-bishop Eusebius in the early 4th Century to the great Ambrose, Bishop of Mi-

[116] Mommsen, Theodore "St. Augustine and the Christian Idea of Progress" *Journal of the History of Ideas* Vol. 12, No. 3 (Jun. 1951); 346.
[117] *Ibid.*; 349.

lan later in that century, Christian writers consistently praised the Roman emperors as the guarantors of peace and stability and the official propagators of the Christian religion (with the notable exception of Julian the Apostate, whose moniker indicates how imbedded Christianity had become in the Roman world by the turn of the 5th Century). Much was made of the chronology of the empire – begun, it was maintained, by Caesar Augustus in 27 BC – and the birth of Christ, which occurred during the reign of that emperor. Eusebius records Constantine uniting his empire to the religion of Christianity after his victory at Milvian Bridge (AD): "From many fact it appears…that the lawful recognition and observance [of the Christian faith] has bestowed the greatest success on the Roman name and singular prosperity on all affairs of mankind, blessings which were provided by the divine beneficence."[118] After more than two centuries of chronic and brutal persecution, it seemed a new age of cooperation was birthed with the accession of Constantine I, and with it a visible and material manifestation of the kingdom of God. The consolidation of the empire under Augustus and the adoption of Christianity by Constantine were together seen by the likes of Eusebius as a divine confirmation of the truth of monotheism, Mommsen writes,

> Eusebius saw a close parallel between the victory of Christian monotheism and the growth of the Roman monarch. Thus he states in his *Theophanaia* (3.2): 'Two great powers sprang up fully as out of one stream and they gave peace to all and brought all together to a state of friendship: the Roman empire, which from that time appeared as one kingdom, and the power of the Saviour of all, whose aid was at once extended to and established with everyone.[119]

Then Rome was sacked. Advocates of a close working relationship between the imperial government and the Christian church were dumbfounded. Pagans, and there remained many in the empire and in Rome, blamed Christianity for the disaster, the abandonment of Rome's ancestral gods bringing about their retribution in the sack of the Eternal City. Into this maelstrom of public commentary and debate waded the Bish-

[118] *Ibid*.; 359. The night before the battle, Constantine saw a vision in the sky of the Cross of Christ, with the inscription *"In hoc signo vinces"* – in this sign, conquer. The story is told in the Eastern churches with the phrase in Greek: *"en touto nika."* Constantine won the battle, and attributed his victory to the Christian God.
[119] *Ibid.*; 361-62.

op of Hippo Regius, Augustine, though by no means precipitously. *De Civitate De* was not published until AD 426, sixteen years after the Sack of Rome and thirteen years after Augustine began work on it. Augustine's work is notable for the sheer size and scope of its contents, but should also be remembered for the fact that in it the Latin theologian totally disagreed with the prevailing view regarding the relationship between Christianity and all world kingdoms, including Rome. Augustine recognized that the commonly held perspective was what we would term today, 'Christian Nationalism,' though at the time it might have been called 'Christian Imperialism.' In any case, *De Civitate Dei* was the first shot across the bow of the wrong-headed view that the kingdom(s) of Man can ever be allied or in any way associated with the kingdom or city of God. The wisdom of this work has stood the test of time.

Augustine's primary adversary was not, however, his Christian brethren, though the perspective he elaborates in *De Civitate Dei* differed immensely from theirs. He was primarily responding to the pagan attacks on Christianity, the claims that the abandonment of Rome's gods for Christianity's crucified God was the manifest cause of Rome's disgrace. After publishing *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine clarifies his motives in writing the work in his *Retractions*, a work of self-examination in which he did not retract the necessity and justification for writing the great book.

> Meanwhile, Rome was destroyed as a result of an invasion of the Goths under the leadership of King Alaric, and of the violence of this great disaster. The worshipers of many false gods, whom we call by the customary name pagans, attempting to attribute its destruction to the Christian religion, began to blaspheme the true God more sharply and bitterly than usual. And so, "burning with zeal for the house of God,"! I decided to write the books, On the City of God, in opposition to their blasphemies and errors.[120]

In his *De Civitate Dei*, Augustine does spend some time refuting the claims of the pagans, that the empire's turn toward Christianity has offended the ancient gods of Rome and, as a consequence, exposed Rome to defeat and desecration. The counterargument is obvious and it was not only Augustine who pointed it out: Rome and the

[120] Augustine, *Retractions* in *The Fathers of the Church*, Mary Inez Rogan, trans. (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press; 1968); Book 2, Chapter 69, Paragraph 1.

empire suffered many setbacks, defeats, and disasters long before even the advent of Christ, much less the rise of Christianity. The Battle of Cannae, fought in 216 BC during the Second Punic War, was emblazoned on Roman memory throughout its generations. The Carthaginians under Hannibal lured the Romans into a battle in which upwards of 80,000 Romans were killed or wounded against around 8,000 of the enemy. Hannibal did not breach the walls of Rome, to be sure, but that was small consolation in the face of such an utter and humiliating defeat. Where were the ancient gods in AD 9, when three entire legions were trapped in the Teutoburg Forest by the German general Arminius and annihilated? Closer to Augustine's own time, in the century before Constantine I legalized the Christian religion within the empire, no less than twenty men claimed the imperial purple as the empire was wracked by destructive civil war. Again, Rome's wall were not breached, but neither was the empire manifesting any favor from the ancient gods. The charges made by the pagans after the Sack of Rome were indeed historically groundless, but proving that was not Augustine's primary purpose.

The event motivated a deeper look into the two lineages of Genesis 4 and 5 than perhaps any Christian theologian had made up to that time. Augustine sees in the Genesis narrative not merely two distinct lineages, but two distinct races of mankind: the sons of God and the sons of men, represented in his work as two cities. "My task is to discuss, to the best of my power, the rise, the development, and the destined ends of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, the cities which we find…interwoven, as it were, in this present transitory world, and mingled with one another."[121] Augustine recognized in the chapters following the narrative of Adam's Fall, the biblical development of two segments of humanity, represented by the genealogies of two of Adam's sons: Cain and Seth. He recognized in this section of Genesis the insuperable chasm between the sons of God and the sons of Man, and between the 'city who Builder and Maker is God' and the cities built by men.[122] "We see then that the two cities were created by two kinds of love: the earthly city was created by self-love reaching the point of

[121] Augustine, *City of God Book XI, Chapter 1* (New York: Penguin Books; 1984);430.
[122] Hebrews 11:10

contempt for God, the Heavenly City by the love of God carried as far as contempt of self."[123]

In response to the Sack of Rome, Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* followed the line of exposition that he had already employed in his commentary on Psalm 45, a psalm that many of his near contemporaries interpreted as referring to the *Pax Romana*, the 'peace' brought about by the might of the Roman Empire. With this view Augustine vigorously disagreed. "In Augustine's opinion, external peace was not yet achieved and, in fact, it would not even matter if it actually had. Only that peace matters which, through divine grace, man finds in himself by his complete submission to the will of God…The theologically untenable identification of the Messianic ideal with the historical reality of the *Imperium Romanum* could not have been rejected more radically than was done by Augustine in his commentary."[124] It is important to note that the politico-religious environment in which Augustine lived and wrote was not all that different from other eras in Christian history, including our own. The tendency in his day was to ally Church and State, so to speak, and to see prophetic fulfillment in political events. From the ascension of Constantine I to the imperial throne onward, this tendency to unite the kingdoms of Man and of God has waxed and waned, depending on the nature of the political climate at any particular time.

Eusebius, the famous church historian, was Bishop of Caesarea Palestina and court-bishop to Constantine I. He was also a primary advocate of the interpretation of Scripture combining the messianic hope with the Roman hegemony, the interpretation that Augustine refuted in his commentaries and in *De Civitate Dei*. In his *Ecclesiastical History* he has Constantine attributing the prosperity of his empire to the 'lawful restoration' of the true religion, Christianity: "Many facts combine to prove that the sad neglect of religious observances, by which the highest reverence for the most holy, heavenly Power is preserved, has brought great dangers upon the community, and that the lawful restoration and preservation of the same has conferred the greatest good fortune

[123] Augustine; 593.
[124] Mommsen; 364.

on the Roman name, and wonderful prosperity on all mankind."[125] Though allegedly the words of Constantine, the sentiment was shared by the vast majority of theologians of that time: the approbation or disapproval of God are manifest through current political events, determined and interpreted by whether this or that event was successful or not. The alliance of the Roman Empire with the Christian Church became the conventional wisdom of the 4th Century, no less than in Victorian England of the 19th Century, or evangelical America in the 21st. "According to Prudentius, God had assigned the Romans the task of conquering the world and establishing a universal empire so as to pave the way for the spread of the universal religion. The mission of the Roman empire was to become finally the Christian empire."[126]

Augustine's essential position in *De Civitate Dei* is that the two cities established at the time of Man's Fall do indeed run parallel tracks, tracks that appear at times even to be overlapping. But he roundly denies that the two have any communion or commonality either in nature or in purpose. Augustine recognizes the unmerited grace of the Creator God in preventing a portion of mankind from the well-deserved 'second death, which has no ending.'[127] He elaborates the resultant bifurcation of the human race under the rubric of the 'two cities.'

> Now the reign of death has held man I such utter subjection that they would all be driven headlong into that second death, which has no ending, as their well-deserved punishment, if some were not rescued from it by the undeserved grace of God. The result is that although there are many great peoples throughout the world, living under different customs in religion and morality and distinguished by a complex variety of languages, arms, and dress, it is still true that there have come into being only two main divisions, as we may call them, in human society, and we are justified in following the lead of our Scriptures and calling them two cities. There is, in fact, one city of men who choose to live by the standard of the flesh, another of those who choose to live by the standard of the spirit. The citizens of each of these desire their own kind of peace, and when they achieve their aim, that is the kind of peace in which they live.[128]

[125] Eusebius, *The History of the Church* 10.7.1 (New York: Dorset Press; 1965); 407.
[126] Mommsen; 367. Prudentius (AD 348-413) was a Roman Chrisian poet.
[127] *The City of God*; XIV.1; 547.
[128] *Idem.*

The Kingdom of Fallen Man

In this chapter we will focus on just one of Augustine's (and the Scripture's) two cities: the City of Man. The establishment of this lineage is not surprising, and occurs in the biblical narrative immediately after the account of the Fall whereas the lineage of the City of God is slightly delayed until Genesis 5, and then only for a brief interval. In other words, from the fall of Adam in Genesis 3 through the destruction of the world in Genesis 9, to the dispersion of the nations in Genesis 11, the primary topic is the development of fallen mankind and the manner of life within fallen humanity. This narrative will then continue onward through Scripture, though not in a continuous thread, emphasizing the oppressive power of the ancient empires as well as the inveterate wickedness of ancient peoples. Within that milieu we find, beginning in Genesis 12, the calling of a people by God and for His own possession.

This particular arc within biblical revelation is grounded in two genealogies, that of Adam through Cain and that of Adam through Seth. We begin the analysis of the text by noting the most striking contrasts between these two lineages. What is most notable is that the lineage that is traced through Cain lacks any element of time. Contrary to the presentation of Adam's posterity through his 'third' son, Seth, the lineage of Cain fails to mention either how old the father was when the son is born, or how long the father lives overall. This feature is, of course, a very familiar one in the second genealogy, as it has often stirred debate as to the longevity of the generations of mankind prior to the Flood, the 'antediluvians.' This contrast between the two lines is certainly not because the family of Cain failed to develop birth and death certificates, while the lineage of Seth had such documentation. The distinction in recording is significant with regard to the *kind* of humanity being recorded: the one represents the true inhabitants of this fallen earth; the other a lineage of sojourners and pilgrims. Of the first family it is recorded *what* they did during their lives; of the second only *how long* they remained on the earth. Furthermore, the occupations of the lineage of Cain are noted, with nothing said regarding the lineage of Seth as to what they did or what they contributed to civilization.

> *Then Lamech took for himself two wives: the name of one was Adah, and the name of the second was Zillah. And Adah bore Jabal. He was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock. His brother's name was Jubal. He was the father of all those who play the harp and flute. And as for Zillah, she also bore Tubal-Cain, an instructor of every craftsman in bronze and iron.* (Genesis 4:19-22)

The point of this summary of the sons of Man is not to imply that the sons of God were free-loaders, contributing nothing to the development of human society. It would be an odd and unjust interpretation to conclude that generations of the descendants of Seth simply sponged off of the efforts of the sons of Cain. Rather it is the case that Moses is establishing the *horizons* of the two lines of Adam's offspring: one looked only to the earth and to what would sustain and what would improve Man's condition on the earth. The nature of Man as a creator – for both lineages equally bear the *imago Dei* – has at all times and in all cultures manifested itself through invention and technology, as well as the arts and architecture. That these occupations are associated with the lineage of Cain does not mean that there is any evil within such pursuits, only that they constituted the limit of the horizon for the sons of Man. To the contrary, the lack of such occupations mentioned among the descendants of Seth does not mean that these men failed to provide for their families, to till the ground and shepherd flocks, to develop instruments both occupational and musical, and in all ways to merely sit around and await their departure. Rather, this lack of any detail as to their occupation, along with the unique mention of length of years, speaks to the higher horizon toward which they walked by faith.

Cain, of course, is paradigmatic for his posterity. He is the first murderer, having killed his brother, Abel. He is the first outcast and outlaw, the first to be driven from the presence of God and, not surprisingly, the first to complain about his sentence.

> *And Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is greater than I can bear! Surely You have driven me out this day from the face of the ground; I shall be hidden from Your face; I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond on the earth, and it will happen that anyone who finds me will kill me."*
> (Genesis 4:13-14)

It is important to note Cain's initial reaction to his banishment. It was not repentance, but rather a vigorous intention to create for himself a stable realm, a presence for himself in the world, though no longer before the face of God. Cain married, procreated, *and built a city*.

> *Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD and dwelt in the land of Nod on the east of Eden. And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch. And he built a city, and called the name of the city after the name of his son – Enoch.* (Genesis 4:16-17)

Much is implied from this summary statement, as it speaks of a city with little or no population. We may reasonably assume that a great deal of time transpires in the midst of these two verses. Additionally, we may also assume that many, if not most, of the other sons and daughters of Adam and Eve will walk the path of the sons of Man, following Cain's example and perhaps even his leadership. From a literary perspective, this passage corresponds to a similar narrative in Genesis 10 concerning the lineage of Noah's son Ham and showing that the Flood did not eradicate either the sons of Man or their propensity to build cities. Indeed, with respect o Nimrod we see the development of city building into empire building, a trend that will continue both in human history and in the biblical narrative itself.

> *Cush begot Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one on the earth. He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, "Like Nimrod the mighty hunter before the LORD." And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went to Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth Ir, Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah (that is the principal city).* (Genesis 10:8-12)

The advance of Nimrod over Cain is significant, especially since Nimrod was not of the lineage of Cain. Noah was of the line of Seth, so all of Cain's descendants were destroyed in the Flood. This means that the worldly-mindedness that characterized Cain's progeny was not an acquitted trait through his example, but was rather the characteristic of fallen Man apart from the intervention of divine grace, as Augustin argued in *De Civitate Dei* (*cp.* p. 88). Keil & Delitzsch refer to Nimrod as 'the founder of the first imperial kingdom' and point out that the name derives from the Hebrew root that

means 'we will revolt.'[129] Nimrod not only carries on the inclination of Cain toward 'making a name for himself,' but goes well beyond toward what would today be called a 'one world government.' Thought the passage does not say so explicitly, the close association between the narrative of Nimrod and that of the Tower of Babel seems strongly to argue that this proto-emperor was the charismatic driving force behind the effort to unite the human race at that time and to exalt mankind (and especially Nimrod and his successors) above the reign of God.

Once again the biblical narrative is not only historical but also paradigmatic, as the attempt to unite the world of peoples and nations into one 'worldwide' empire under the sovereignty of one ruler has been a chronic feature of human history well into the 20th Century, at least diplomatically and militarily, and even to the present time if one considers economic and technological methods. The latter efforts are often justified as means of securing peace and prosperity across the globe, whereas the former have been condemned by modern western thinkers as nothing more than manifestations of personal or national hegemony and aggrandizement. However, by whatever means, the result or goal is essentially the same: to unite the world of men as an empire of Man, apart from any submission to God. This tendency has been widely recognized by historians as pervasive across the ages: "Historians like Spengler and Toynbee have perceived a trend in each of the various 'civilizations' which have appeared in world history, from many warring states, through a process of integration, to a universal state or empire followed by disintegration and the rise of a new civilization."[130]

Human history has often been studied under various rubrics or frameworks – economic, religious, military/political, etc. On the basis of the example of Nimrod and of the Tower of Babel, it should be possible to unite these different approaches to historiography under the overarching theme, "We will have a king." Even though such hegemony is largely condemned today through military means, the idea of 'one world

[129] Keil & Delitzsch, *Genesis*; 165.
[130] Wright, Quincy "Empires and World Governments Before 1918" *Current History*, Vol. 39, No. 228 (August, 1960); 66-67. Oswald Spengler (Germany) and Arnold Toynbee (British) were notable historians of the early and mid-20th Century.

government' has never lost its hold in the imagination of men, especially of powerful men. Wright comments: "Modern history has therefore been characterized by the rise and fall of empires, with self-determination of nation-states, with the grouping of neighboring states of similar culture into federations, and with the entry of all states into regional and general international organizations."[131]

Wright does not incorporate religious views into his article except to say that religion has usually played a part in the development both of kingdoms and of empires. This is illustrated in the biblical account of the Tower of Babel, which was undoubtedly a form of ziggurat, itself usually a religious monument. In spite of the lack of any thorough religious consideration, Wright does offer an interesting current (1960) assessment without further comment or elaboration.

> The evolution of means of communication and transport has increased the possible area of effective government. Development of such means since the middle of the twentieth century has probably, for the first time in human history, provided the *material* basis for *world* government in the literal sense. The *moral* basis for such government is still lacking.[132]

Religious considerations are, however, both necessary and important. The grand city- and temple-building effort at Babel was the work of the lineage of Ham, as also were the infamous cities of Sodom and Gomorrah.[133] This is the worldview of Cain continued after the Flood. But Noah, a righteous man who walked with God,[134] did not build a city when he got off the ark, he planted a vineyard. It is hard to escape the contrast being drawn in these formative chapters of Genesis – formative, that is, for the development of the human race on earth – between city-builders and city-dwellers, on the one hand, and those who 'called upon the name of the LORD,' on the other. What follows in the narrative of the post-diluvian period is a tale of several cities, and none of

[131] *Ibid.*; 67.
[132] *Ibid.*; 66.
[133] Genesis 10:19
[134] Genesis 6:9

them good. We next meet Ur of the Chadees, in Genesis 12 and, of course, the divine call of Abram.



Cities of Genesis 10[135]

Ur is today a famous archaeological site that has yielded a great deal of information from the third millennium BC. What these discoveries do not tell us, however, is the exact identity of the site in relation to the cities enumerated in Genesis 10 as having been founded by Nimrod. Many scholars believer Ur is, in fact, the Erech (also *Uruk*) of Genesis 10:10. Be that as it may, there is remarkable consensus that Ur belonged to the line of cities that ran up the western side of the Euphrates River, starting at the Persian Gulf. This means that Ur was not only located in the midst of the most ancient world kingdoms, but also at the heart of the Hamitic city-building program that characterizes the sons of Man, the fallen humanity. It is from this rebellious milieu that God calls Abram, himself most likely a pagan as was his father, Terah.[136] It is with the call of Abram that we arrive at a crucial moment in the trajectory both of the city (and later empire) building sons of Man and the sons of God. The latter, it appears, have all but died out in the world; with the exception of Job, widely considered to have been a near contemporary of Abraham, and Melchizedek, there is little evidence of men 'calling upon the name of the LORD' anymore.

[135] Bible Map: Erech, https://biblehub.com/atlas/atlaspages/erech.htm. Accessed 31August2026.
[136] *Cp.* Joshua 24:2

In the context of this chapter's study, what is significant about Abram is that he *did not build a city.* Indeed, he did not even possess land, except eventually a cave in which to bury his wife. Abram was coming from what was undoubtedly one of the premier cities of the Ancient Near East, fully cosmopolitan, no doubt, and fully wicked. But it was not the plan of God for Abram that he should mimic the sons of men by simply removing from one city and building another for himself. Abram was to leave his native land but, unlike Cain, he was to continue to wander without a land, without a city. He would become wealthy and powerful, as powerful as the territorial kings among whom he sojourned, but he was not to establish himself as a kingdom. That this is a significant lesson from the Genesis text is powerfully confirmed by the author of Hebrews, to whom Abraham became himself a paradigm of those who have no permanent home in this fallen world.

> *By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God… These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.*
>
> (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16)

Here are the two cities of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*: the city of Man to which Abram might have returned, and the City of God, to which he looked forward in faith all the days of his redeemed life. It should be remembered that Abram was not of the tribe of Ham, but of Shem, the son of Noah in whose lineage the covenant promise was to be continued. This did not mean, however, that the Semites were consistently faithful to the God of Noah and, indeed, what Joshua has to say about the family of Terah, Abram's father, seems to argue otherwise. Perhaps what we are seeing in this general apostasy after the Flood is an ancient living parable of what we read in the opening

verses of the Fourth Gospel: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."[137] We cannot locate salvation wholly within the lineage of Shem, nor can we altogether consign the descendants of Ham to perdition.

The Man Without A City, Abram/Abraham, nonetheless lived in a world of cities, though probably less grand and powerful than Ur. The War of the Kings in which Abraham participated not as an ally on either side, but as an independent sovereign mounting a successful rescue operation, involved the kings of the petty city-states of Canaan. None was more significant than the city of Sodom which, along with Gomorrah, have become representative of a human wickedness so base as to once again require divine intervention and annihilation. Once again, the narrative presents us with a stark contrast, this time between the nomadic and faithful attitude of Abraham, on the one hand, and the weak and vulnerable propensity of his nephew, Lot, on the other. We have seen how Abraham refused any material reward or benefit from the king of Sodom, though the patriarch gladly received a blessing from Melchizedek, the king of Salem. Abraham's contempt for Sodom is palpable; no doubt the city's reputation went before her. Abraham was still able to blush; his nephew, sadly, was losing that trait.

When faced with the need to separate due to their increasing flocks, herds, and servants, Abraham proposed that Lot make the first choice as to where to settle. Lot's first mistake, it seems, was to accept these terms rather than to defer to his elder. Be that as it may, he quickly manifested the character flaw apparent in Cain and later in Ham, though perhaps not to the same degree. Like Eve in the Garden, Lot made his decision based on physical appearance and not on either spiritual guidance or moral wisdom and caution.

> *And Lot lifted his eyes and saw all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere (before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah) like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt as you go toward Zoar. Then Lot chose for himself all the plain of Jordan, and Lot jour-*

[137] John 1:12-13

> *neyed east. And they separated from each other. Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain and pitched his tent even as far as Sodom. But the men of Sodom were exceedingly wicked and sinful against the* LORD. (Genesis 13:10-13)

Note the reference to the 'garden of the LORD,' Eden. No doubt the reader's mind is to return not only to Eden but to the manner in which Eve herself was similarly tempted astray by appearance: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate."[138] When next we find Lot, he has struck his tent and is now living *in* the city itself, and it is well known how that story ended. Lot was saved, 'but as one passing through the fire.'[139]

Age of Empire

Israel was placed, as a vineyard (*cp.* Isa. 11), in the midst of world empire. At the time of the Exodus and Conquest, the dream of Nimrod was becoming at least a serial reality, as empire followed empire throughout the Ancient Near East. Isreal's history intertwines with the imperial fortunes of Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia, though never as an equal and at times as a vassal. This history ultimately brings Nimrod back into the picture, as the divine judgment upon Israel – both Northern and Southern kingdoms – will utilize two of the imperial cities of which he was founder: Ninevah and Babylon. The former was the seat of the Assyrian Empire, the power that destroyed Samaria and cast the ten northern tribes into historical oblivion. The latter, of course, is where the majority of the Southern Kingdom, Judah, was carried during the Exile. From the biblical narrative of Israel, from patriarchs to Exile, there is nothing to encourage a positive assessment of the relationship between God's people, the City of God, and the world's kingdoms, the City of Man. It seems clear that Paul's assessment of the believer in the world applied to all the faithful of God throughout the ages.

[138] Genesis 3:6
[139] I Corinthians 3:15

> *Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you[f] are the temple of the living God.* (II Corinthians 6:14-16)

The antipathy between the kingdoms of Man and the kingdom of God is complete, but that does not place the former beyond the sovereign control of the latter. To the contrary, even the world empires that dominated and tormented Israel were no more than a part of the divine redemptive plan, and this is made manifest through prophecies and visions given during the Age of Empire. There are many passages in Scripture that remind us that no matter how powerful or how oppressive the kingdoms of Man become, nor how intensely the people of God suffer under their rule, God remains sovereign seated in the heavens unmoved by their wicked machinations. Two in particular come to mind, one in the Psalms and one from the 'philosopher' Paul on the Areopagus.

> *Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?*
> *The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,*
> *Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,*
> *"Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."*
> *He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.*
> *Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:*
> *"Yet I have [e]set My King on My holy hill of Zion."* (Psalm 2:1-6)

> *God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things. And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings.* (Acts 17:24-26)

These two passages sum up the biblical perspective on the two cities and the kingdoms they anchor. Psalm 2 not only describes the essential attitude of the kingdom of Man as set against – raging against – the kingdom of God, but also the futility of this vehement effort, as if Man in all his glory was any match for the Almighty Creator of heaven and earth. This is what Paul's diatribe establishes as well: despite the hubris,

their apparent autonomy and violent hegemony, all the world's empire are already circumscribed by the will and purpose of God before they ever come into existence. Indeed, though they will be held accountable for the inveterate wickedness and essential rebellion of their institutions, they are nonetheless instruments in the hands of God, performing against their will His eternal purposes.

Nowhere does this last feature of the dynamic between the kingdoms of Man and the kingdom of God appear more clearly than in two prophecies – one dream and one vision – recorded in the Book of Daniel. The apparitions are similar and have similar interpretations, though in content they are starkly different. One is merely a dream of an inanimate statue; the other a graphic vision of horrible portent. Both, however, have the same interpretation. They are recorded in Daniel 2 and Daniel 7. The first was a dream given by the LORD to Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon and instrument of Israel's Exile. The dream was interpreted by Daniel to represent four world empires, in the fourth of which an insignificant stone would crush the statute and itself become a mighty mountain filling the whole earth.

> *You, O king, were watching; and behold, a great image! This great image, whose splendor was excellent, stood before you; and its form was awesome. This image's head was of fine gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of clay. You watched while a stone was cut out without hands, which struck the image on its feet of iron and clay, and broke them in pieces. Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver, and the gold were crushed together, and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; the wind carried them away so that no trace of them was found. And the stone that struck the image became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.* (Daniel 2:31-35)

The second vision was experienced by Daniel directly and, as a child of Israel and a member of the community of God's people, he was given a much more graphic and terrifying encounter than Nebuchadnezzar experienced in his dream. The four beasts of Daniel 7 are, for one important distinction, *alive*. They live and devour and are devoured in their turn. Nebuchadnezzar's statue was made of the metals of mankind's splendor and strength, but without life. This is because his perspective of the matter is as one from within (he is the head of gold) and as a Gentile pagan, as yet unfamiliar

with the God of the Universe. Daniel, on the other hand, was of the people of God, Israel, who perennially suffer at the hands of these successive empires, from Exile in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar, to Destruction & Dispersion under the Caesars of Rome. The relationship of God's people to the kingdoms of Man has never been a static, lifeless one, but as the kingdoms of men successively replace each other, the people of God endure. Indeed, as the small stone shows in Daniel 2, and the Son of Man in Daniel 7, they not only endure, they *triumph*.

> *I was watching in the night visions,*
> *And behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven!*
> *He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him.*
> *Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,*
> *That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.*
> *His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away,*
> *And His kingdom the one which shall not be destroyed.* (Daniel 7:13-14)

The inanimate 'stone cut without hands' of Daniel 2 becomes the living, victorious Son of Man in Daniel 7, to whom 'was given dominion and glory and a kingdom.' This is the consummation of the kingdom of God unaffected by the successive kingdoms of Man, and triumphant over them in the end. One cannot read this passage in Daniel 7 without hearing at the same time Jesus' post-resurrection words in Matthew 28, and, for that matter, cannot read the Matthean passage apart from the echoes of Daniel 7. The gospel of the kingdom assigned to Jesus' disciples and their successors, is the message of Daniel 7:13-14 fulfilled.

> *And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go [a]therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." Amen.*
>
> (Matthew 28:18-20)

The Two Cities Today

Does the intervention of the Son of Man triumphant over the kingdoms of men change the current picture? Are the two cities now united? Or perhaps at least allied? Augustine certainly did not think so. The times of the kingdoms of men were not ended with the advent of Christ, the true King. As Adam did not physically die the day in which eat ate the forbidden fruit, so also the Roman Empire did not collapse the day that Jesus rose from the dead. However, the inexorable seed of death was sown into the human race, and corruption into God's good creation the very moment Adam rebelled. So also the seed of righteousness and of the inexorable coming of the Kingdom was sown the very moment Christ arose. By extension, then, there is as much cooperation and communion between the inaugurated Kingdom of God and the ongoing kingdoms of Man, as there is between Life and Death.

Unfortunately for both the Church and the World, Augustine's perspective is largely studied and widely ignored. In all ages of the Church attempts have been made to bring to fruition that long-held dream (nightmare, really) of uniting the Church and the State in one, global (or at least national) supreme institution: The kingdom of Man united with and theoretically under, the Kingdom of God. Perhaps the one piece of modern literature that corresponds most oppositely with Augustine's *De Civitate Dei* is the 17th Century work of Thomas Hobbes: *Leviathan.* The original subtitle has largely fallen from use in modern printings of this work, but it, as subtitles often are, highly instructive as to the political philosophy of the author and the goal of his treatise: "*The Matter, Forme and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil.*" Hobbes wrote the book during the English Civil War, a defining moment in the development of English governance as well as ecclesiastical authority in the land. It was a time not unlike the political turmoil and uncertainty following the Sack of Rome, and Hobbes' tome was no less an attempt to answer the times as was *De Civitate Dei.* Even the format of *Leviathan* is reminiscent of Augustine's work, as Hobbes throughout the book traces the development of human government through the lens of Scripture, though his interpretation of Scripture as well as his conclusions, differs widely from Augustine.

Leviathan seems an odd name for a book on political theory. Hobbes consciously draws a parallel between the type of human government he advocates and the biblical sea monster noted for its fearsomeness and uncontrollable power. Job speaks of Leviathan as a beast that only Almighty God can control, and that may indeed be what motivated Hobbes to use the allusion. Yet if Job 41 were on Hobbes' mind, it is hard to understand how he came to such an optimistic frame of mind with regard to the absolute monarchy that he advocates.

> *Can you draw out Leviathan[a] with a hook,*
> *Or snare his tongue with a line which you lower?*
> *Can you put a reed through his nose, or pierce his jaw with a hook?*
> *Will he make many supplications to you? Will he speak softly to you?*
> *Will he make a covenant with you? Will you take him as a servant forever?*
> *Will you play with him as with a bird, or will you leash him for your maidens?*
> *Will your companions [c]make a banquet of him? Will they apportion him among the merchants?*
> *Can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears?*
> *Lay your hand on him; Remember the battle – Never do it again!* (Job 41:1-8)

The biblical references to Leviathan are mostly from the Wisdom/Poetry section – Psalms and Job. But one reference in Isaiah helps to explain how Scripture itself used the sea beast as a metaphor for earthly powers. Hobbes' connection between Leviathan and earthly government is not wide of the mark, though his ardent support for powerful central government seems to be. Ultimately, per Isaiah, the governments of this world will fall by the hand of the LORD, though they be as strong and uncontrollable as the biblical monster.

> *For behold, the LORD comes out of His place*
> *To punish the inhabitants of the earth for their iniquity;*
> *The earth will also disclose her [l]blood, and will no more cover her slain.*
> *In that day the LORD with His severe sword, great and strong,*
> *Will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, Leviathan that twisted serpent;*
> *And He will slay the reptile that is in the sea.* (Isaiah 26:21-27:1)

Hobbes did not discount or negate the fallenness of Man, nor the kingdoms of darkness that have persecuted the people of God throughout time. His approach, how-

ever, owed far more to Enlightenment Reason than to Biblical Revelation, and he was a disciple of the Social Contract Theory of human government that would be so influential among the Founders of the American Republic. Yet Hobbes differed in that he believed that anarchy could only be avoided with the presence of a powerful sovereign who was over both the civil government and the ecclesiastical institutions, Head of State as well as Head of the Church. His perspective and conclusion are vividly portrayed in the frontispiece that he commissioned for his book: a portraiture of Leviathan ruling over both the State and the Church, holding a sward in one hand and a crosier in the other, signifying the sovereign's rule over both institutions.



The chain mail that the ruler is wearing is made up of men, both civil and ecclesiastical servants, all facing the head as if in worship, certainly in absolute deference. The pictures set opposite in two vertical columns represent civil power (on the left) and ecclesiastical power (on the right). This is Hobbes' Christian Commonwealth in graphic form, a far cry from the separate and distinct cities of Augustine's *De Civitate Dei*. Yet it is Hobbes' vision that has dominated Christian thought from before his time and to the present: the idea that human government can be not only be influenced by, but enlisted in support of, 'Christian principled.' But the course of history proves that Hobbes' spoke better than he knew: human government in a fallen world is indeed an uncontrollable monster from the depth of the sea, one day to be slain fully and finally by the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. Only then will the Kingdom of God be fully consummated, and 'the knowledge of the glory of the LORD will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.'[140]

Chapter Summary:

The arc of revelation encompasses the history of mankind as much as it does the history of redemption; salvation is at all times set against the background of fallenness. This is no less true of the two cities – the relative kingdoms of Man and of God – than of human sin. The Fall of Man brought sin and death into Creation, but it also set in motion a perverted development of 'kingdom' in which powerful men – Nimrods, so to speak - have attempted throughout the ages to unify all humanity under their rule, to 'make a name for ourselves.' Set against this is the redemptive plan of God and His City, not visible, not powerful by human standards, yet ultimately triumphant. Augustine saw this clearly in his day, and his *De Civitate Dei* set a standard of understanding the biblical teaching on the two cities, a standard that has been respected for over fifteen hundred years but rarely followed.

[140] Habakkuk 2:14

There is no fellowship between the City of Man and the City of God. The former is a corrupt attempt at replacing the latter; it flows from rebellion and ends in corruption. Meredith Kline provides an excellent summary of this chapter.

> With the Fall the coherence of the whole in its common central focus was fractured. Indeed, the focus entirely disappeared, and with the loss of the vertical cultic axis the identity of the city changed from the city of God to the merely horizontal city of man. A kind of fullness was still mandated, but the process was launched by an act of expulsion from the holy focus. It therefore had the character of a curse, the curse of dispersion. Though this cultural expansion retained through common grace an aspect of blessing in the form of fruitfulness and dominion in measure, the fullness it produced was not the unity of holy Megapolis but the diaspora of the profane nations of the Gentiles, a world divided.[141]

[141] Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*; 271. Megapolis, to Kline, represents the City that was meant to be, extending in concentric cultural and geographic extent from the holy center, Eden.

Chapter 7 – Paradise Regained?
Text: Exodus 19, Joshua 24, I Samuel 8

"Israel was in the land but not in the Lord."
(Thomas Schreiner)

From Nimrod's mighty imperial city Ur, God calls Abram to 'restart' Creation, so to speak. There are three such events in redemptive (and world) history: Creation itself, the creation re-covenant with Noah after the Flood, and the call of Abram. The situation of mankind is deteriorating; as we saw in the last chapter Abram differed from Noah in that the latter was a 'righteous man who walked with God,' the former a pagan. The kingdoms of Man had spread far and wide and there were precious few, at least according to the biblical record, who still 'called upon the name of the LORD.' God's intervention in Abram's life was an act of redemption; its purpose was restoration. This twofold aspect of the call of Abraham is contained in the initial words of the call itself, in Genesis 12.

> *Now the LORD had said to Abram:*
> *"Get out of your country, from your family and from your father's house,*
> *To a land that I will show you.*
> *I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great;*
> *And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you,*
> *And I will curse him who curses you;*
> *And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."* (Genesis 12:1-3)

We have already seen the character development of Abram in the role of a king, though by no means in the mold of the kings of the petty nations surrounding him. He was, however, a king without a kingdom, without a city. Coupled with the comment by the author of the Book of Hebrews, that Abraham was 'looking for a city whose Builder and Maker is God,'[142] many have pointed to Abraham as proof that the kingdom of God is spiritual, a *reign* and not a *realm.* The passage in Hebrews, for instance, is often interpreted to mean that the kingdom of God is entirely in heaven, where believers go when they die. This is, of course, to overlook the thread of redemptive revelation

[142] Hebrews 11:10

that develops the promise of the New Earth, 'in which righteousness dwells' and for which we are eagerly anticipating.[143]

But this view also overlooks the Abram/Abraham narrative itself, in which *land* is promised, a *realm* is made an essential part of the covenant. True, possession of this realm was delayed so much that Abraham himself did not live to see it, but nonetheless the promise of possession was never deleted from the covenant terms: "Now as for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried at a good old age. But in the fourth generation they shall return here, for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet complete." Perhaps the delay is due merely to the fact that the fulness of the Amorite iniquity had not yet reached its limit. More likely, the delay was intended to establish the principle of walking by faith – seeing as near that which is yet far off. This is certainly how Paul interprets the Abrahamic narrative in Romans 4.

Be that as it may (and as important a theological topic as it is, it is still beyond the scope of this particular study), the promise of the land did not die with Abraham. Indeed, in spite of the fact that his descendants found themselves, first as immigrants to Egypt, and later as slave to Pharaoh, the representative ruler of the worldly kingdom at that time, the promise of restoration to the Promised Land remained inviolate until its eventual fulfillment in the Exodus. With this event – an event so impactful as to become a theological, national, and certainly literary paradigm for Israel throughout her history – we have for the first time explicit kingdom language with regard to the people of God. Yet again, we must note that the language and form of this nascent kingdom remain wholly different and distinct from the kingdoms of Man. Israel was to be a 'kingdom of priest' to their God.

> *And Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; 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."* (Exodus 19:3-6)

[143] II Peter 3:13

Though we may reasonably consider the creation/formation of Israel at Mt. Sinai to be the 'beginning' of the kingdom – a kingdom of priests – it still remains the fact of biblical history that Israel *will not have a king* for over four hundred years more. Dating of events of the Ancient Near East is, by the nature of the case, indefinite, but it appears that Israel was in the Land without a king for roughly as long as Israel was in Egypt under bondage to Pharaoh. The biblical development leading up to the first king of Israel, Saul, runs linearly (literarily-speaking) from Moses to Joshua, through the period of the Judges, and finally to the last Judge, Samuel. The main passages that highlight each stage are: Exodus 19, Joshua 24, and I Samuel 8. In each segment of history, there is a notable feature that describes Israel in regard to a 'king.'

Period	**'King'**
Moses & Torah	Moses
Joshua & Conquest	Joshua
Judges	'No King in Israel'
Samuel	'We Will Have a King'

From a Biblical Theological perspective, these four periods in early Israelite history are paradigmatic for the whole concept of the Kingdom of God in the Old Testament. As such, and as they all predate the actual crowning of a king in Israel, the narrative record from Mt. Sinai to Ramah are uniquely instructive as to the nature of kingdom God intended for Israel and, as such, typologically significant for the messianic kingdom that was to come. The history covers a long period of time and often seems to get bogged down in the negative narrative of Israel during the time of the Judges. This is, of course, intentional as it shows the descent of an apostatizing people into a condition of *tohu v^{a}bohu* – of disorganized chaos – ahead of the advent of King David. As if to keep the reader on track, the short narrative of Ruth is located in this chronology, elucidating the lineage of David in the midst of a tumultuous time in Israel's history.[144]

[144] Moab, the birthplace of Ruth, was a perennial thorn in Israel's side during the period of the Judges.

A Kingdom of Priests

What exactly is 'a kingdom of priests'? In the Ancient Near East each of the terms involved would have referred to a distinct stratum of society; though the king was often referred to as the representative of the god(s), he rarely also stood in the place of the high priest/priesthood. A 'kingdom of priests' sounds very much like the amalgamation of Church and State in the most intimate union; is this what the Kingdom of God is like? It would seem not, as the civil/cultic framework of Israel was as clearly divided between Judah and Levi as in any other Ancient Near Eastern nation. Indeed, the establishment of the priesthood long antedates the rise of the monarchy in Israel, which is itself an important observation.

Yet the phrase must mean something and its uniqueness in its ancient context is worthy of note. The *melecha kohenim* (מַמְלֶכֶת כֹּהֲנִים) is a comprehensive description that may be translated 'kingdom of priests' or 'royal priesthood.' It signifies a kingdom in which all subjects are priests; the civil structure is, at it were, overlayed upon the cultic. Thus we have two characteristics that define ancient Israel: a people with a distinct tribe and family set apart for cultic responsibilities (Levi/Aaron) as well as a people who were themselves 'royal priests' regardless of tribe. The Priestly Code of Leviticus, as well as the general tenor of both Torah and the prophetic writings, make it crystal clear that access to the sanctuary *was not* open to all Israelites. This means that the 'generic' priesthood – the designation that applied to all Israelites – must have a different application than that applied to the Aaronic line. This different perspective flows from the basic function of a priest as a mediator.

The 'kingdom of priests' would indeed stand before Yahweh, but only the tribe of Levi, and specifically the family of Aaron, would mediate between Yahweh and His people. Between whom would the 'royal priesthood' then mediate? The answer to this question is very significant to our basal understanding of the nature of the Kingdom of God. Israel as a 'kingdom of priests' was to serve as the conduit between Israel's God, the Almighty Creator of all, and the nations that surrounded her. "The spiritual atti-

tude of Israel towards the nations was the result of its priestly character. As the priest is a mediator between God and man, so Israel was called to be the vehicle of the knowledge and salvation of God to the nations of the earth."[145] This is the focus of the commission given by Moses to the nation in Deuteronomy 4, reminding them of the day on which they 'stood before the LORD at Horeb.'[146]

Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according *to them* in the land which you go to possess. **6** Therefore be careful to observe *them;* for this *is* your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation *is* a wise and understanding people.'

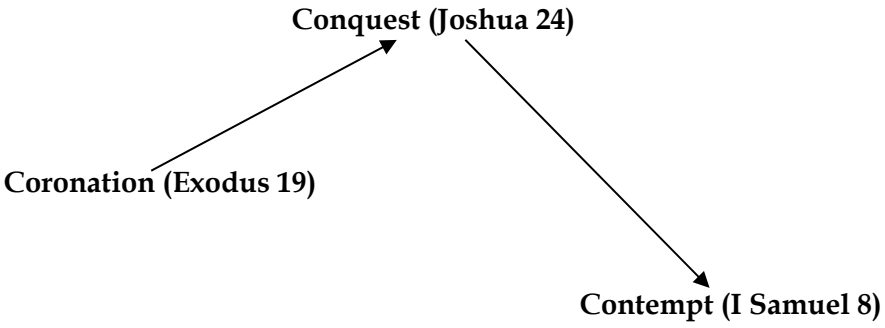
> *Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*
>
> (Deuteronomy 4:5-6)

Israel was not just to be a priesthood but a *royal* priesthood. A royal priesthood, yet without a king. This concept forms the first part of an implicit *inclusio* that defines the content of this chapter. At Sinai it is clear that the LORD God is King over Israel; they are His people and He rescued them from the enemy king (Pharaoh) by His own might. Indeed, Israel did not even take up arms against the Egyptians but rather stood aside and beheld the salvation of their God.[147] The second part of the brackets is in I Samuel 8 where Israel demands of the aged Judge, Samuel, that he give them a king 'like all the nations.'[148] The status of Israel as representative priests under one divine King reached its apex under Joshua, who at the end of his life charged the people with continued obedience in order to experience continued prosperity. The people's collective response was encouraging:

[145] Keil & Delitzsch; *The Second Book of Moses*; 98.
[146] Deuteronomy 4:10
[147] Exodus 14:13
[148] I Samuel 8:5

> *So the people answered and said: "Far be it from us that we should forsake the LORD to serve other gods; for the LORD our God is He who brought us and our fathers up out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, who did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way that we went and among all the people through whom we passed. And the LORD drove out from before us all the people, including the Amorites who dwelt in the land. We also will serve the LORD, for He is our God."* (Joshua 24:16-18)

The relationship of Israel as subjects of King Yahweh therefore sets up a sub-arc of kingdom theology within the pre-monarchical period of Israel's history. This arc rises and falls, as most in Scripture do, leaving the period at a very low ebb: Israel rejecting God as King over them.[149]



That Yahweh established Israel as His dominion, and Himself as Sovereign, at Mt. Sinai is really beyond dispute. The corollary between the Sinai Covenant and the form of the ancient Hittite suzerainty treaties has been well established in the late 20th Century, and the terminology and organization of the Law sets Yahweh at the Great King.[150] In terms of biblical 'kingdom' teaching, it is important to note that nowhere is Moses referred to as a king, nor is Joshua, nor are the regional leaders raised up afterward, the Judges. The kings that are mentioned during this period of Israelite history are invariably the kings of Israel's opponents; in other words, the kings of the kingdom of Man. Thus during what we might call Israel's infancy and adolescence, every indication was given that the people were to look to Yahweh as their king; He would be their Lawgiver, their Warrior-King, and their Judge. Moses was God's servant during the

[149] I Samuel 8:7
[150] *Cp.* Biblical Theology Part II – Exodus, Exile, & Eschatology; 138*f.*

establishment of Torah; Joshua during the battle years of Conquest; and sundry tribal leaders to judge Israel in the years following. But there never was a King Moses or a King Joshua, and none of the Judges wore the purple.

Yahweh as Warrior-King

There is a pattern of succession in Scripture that occurs at three different points along redemptive history. The first is from Moses to Joshua, the second from Elijah to Elisha, and the third from Jesus to the apostles. Two noteworthy characteristics attach to these couplets: first, the second person(s) are accorded the same authority as the first; second, this authority did not then transfer to a third generation. The three transfers occurred at three crucial moments in redemptive history: the transition from Moses to Joshua established both Torah and the Land, that between Elijah and Elisha founded the ministry and authority of the prophets, and that from Jesus to the apostle grounded the Gospel. Pertinent to this chapter, however, is the transition from Moses to Joshua, for which Yahweh grants His presence to Joshua no less than He had done for Moses.

> *After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, saying: "Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them – the children of Israel. Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given you, as I said to Moses. From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the River Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites, and to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun, shall be your territory. No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you.* (Joshua 1:1-5)[151]

'As I was with Moses, so I will be with you.' Not only does this mean that Joshua would have the same intimate and visible communion with Yahweh at the Tent of Meeting, but also that Yahweh would be the One performing that which He commanded. Joshua would indeed lead the troops of Israel in the Conquest, but there would be no doubt that 'the battle belongs to the LORD,' and so does the victory.[152] Yahweh will be with Israel in the Land as He was in the Wilderness; He will bring to pass the fulfill-

[151] *Cp.* Matthew 28:16-20
[152] Proverbs 21:31

ment of His covenant promise to Abraham, and His *reign* will now have a *realm*. The Conquest represents a foretaste of the Restoration of Eden, though it would be a terrible mistake to think that the Land was intended to fully restore what was lost. This is Paradise Regained, to a limited degree. Schreiner writes: "The land is not paradise, but it is an anticipation of paradise regained, an outpost of Yahweh's lordship over his people."[153] More than anywhere else in Scripture, the Book of Joshua establishes Yahweh as the Warrior-King who leads Israel victorious into battle. This is the 'King of glory' extoled in the 24th Psalm.

> *Lift up your heads, O you gates! And be lifted up, you everlasting doors!*
> *And the King of glory shall come in.*
> *Who is this King of glory? The LORD strong and mighty,*
> *The LORD mighty in battle.* (Psalm 24:7-8)

The Conquest of Canaan frankly disturbs modern sensibilities. It is too brutal, too much like genocide, too much like the extermination of indigenous peoples during the Age of European Colonialism. It cannot be denied that the Conquest was brutal and that Israel was commanded to eradicate the Canaanites from the land. Furthermore, Israel received a windfall in the Land, occupying a ready-made civilization: "I have given you a land for which you did not labor, and cities which you did not build, and you dwell in them; you eat of the vineyards and olive groves which you did not plant."[154] The Land was a gift from Yahweh to His people, a gift promised to their forefather Abraham many centuries before. But what do we say to those who claim the gift's price was too high, immoral even?

Our first response is to acknowledge that the world is fallen and corrupt and, consequently, violent. The true faith has coexisted with this present darkness for millennia, and the truly faithful have struggled with the ethical relationship between believers and violence. For most, and for most of history, conscience has given way to duty, and believers have served their king and country in battle. This acquiescence is im-

[153] Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty*; 107.
[154] Joshua 24:13

plicitly sanctioned in Scripture, both by example and by precept. John the Baptist, for instance, challenges the soldiers that came to him for baptism: "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."[155] It is evident that repentance did not require pacifism, though many have chosen that course as a result of their faith.

The second principle to keep in mind is that of the holiness of God and the certainty of judgment upon sin. We have already read from Genesis 15 that the Conquest of the Land was delayed until the fulness of the iniquity of the Amorites had been attained. No man can know the level of another nation's 'fulness of iniquity'; only God, who is absolutely disinterested in His holiness, can rightly determine that measure. But once reached, it becomes not only obligatory on the character of God to take judicial action, but also becomes an act of common grace to mankind in general, by removing excessive wickedness from the midst of an already corrupt humanity. The malignancy of Amorite sin had reached the point where extreme treatment was required.

The violence of that judicial act does not, therefore, flow from the nature of God but from the nature of fallen Creation and fallen humanity. God does not have to use men as instruments of such judgment – He meted out destruction upon Sodom & Gomorrah *im*mediately, without a human instrument, as He also did at the Flood. Korah and Dathan and Abiram were not executed by their fellow Israelites; rather the earth opened up and swallowed them alive.[156]

Yet Achan, who sinned at Jericho by taking some of the banned loot, was stoned to death by the people.[157] Israel would be used as instruments of Yahweh to punish the Amorites and later wicked pagans, the Chaldeans, would be used by Yahweh to punish Israel. As with all other effects of sin, the people of God are not immune to the violence of a fallen world and are sometimes called upon to act within that violent milieu, yet in a manner that is still obedient to the LORD and pleasing in His sight. The danger to the believer is that he become so inured to the violence as to be desensitized, or that he finds the violence so satisfying that he becomes himself a violent man, in thought if not

[155] Luke 3:14
[156] Numbers 16:31-33
[157] Joshua 7:10*ff*

in deed. Violence in all its forms is a fruit of the corruption of Creation due to human sin and will itself be eradicated in the New Earth.

Perhaps the most insidious thought associated with military conquest is that of 'Holy War.' As most of human religion is based on a symbiotic relationship between the worshipers and their god, the concept of a divinely directed military campaign of territorial expansion and genocide or subjugation is common to most world religions and throughout human history. The Catholic Church of the Middle Ages was not the only religious institution to advocate holy war, though other religions do not 'bear the cross' when they go to war for their gods. In light of Crusades and *jihad*, how do we interpret the Conquest? Was it a Holy War? A thorough investigation of this question is beyond the scope of this study, but the narrative of Joshua is clear: God commanded Israel to fight, and God fought for Israel. "Although the conquest is achieved by means of several battles, the narrative stresses throughout that the Israelites are entirely dependent upon the LORD for their successes."[158] Schreiner adds: "Israel's battles testify to the Lord's sovereignty. He is the divine warrior and king who ensures that they will triumph over their enemies."[159]

The Conquest has typological significance as well as historical-covenantal. Yes, it represents the beginning, at least, of the fulfillment of the divine promise made to Abraham concerning his descendants' possession of the land (full possession would await the military campaigns and triumphs of David – a significant biblical fact with regard to the 'kingdom'). The battles in which Israel was lead by Joshua are typological of the cosmic battle referred to by Paul in Ephesians 6, in which God's people continue to comprise the 'army,' and God Himself continues to give the victory.

> *Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the*

[158] Bartholomew, Craig G. and Michael W. Goheen *The Drama of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic; 2004); 79.
[159][159] Schreiner; 109.

> *whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.* (Ephesians 6:10-13)

The typology of the Conquest seems to be confirmed by the visitation of the Captain of the Army of the LORD in Joshua 5. This is undoubtedly a manifestation of the LORD Himself – a *theophany* – and likely in the Person of the Son – a *Christophany*. The interview with Joshua makes clear that the war that he was about to enter was not his own, and the troops of Israel of which he was the general, were also not his own. Joshua reported to a Supreme Commander of all God's Forces, the One who would not only lead Israel in triumph, but would one day fully and finally defeat the enemy of God and His people, the devil.

> *And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted his eyes and looked, and behold, a Man stood opposite him with His sword drawn in His hand. And Joshua went to Him and said to Him, "Are You for us or for our adversaries?" So He said, "No, but as Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come." And Joshua fell on his face to the earth and worshiped, and said to Him, "What does my Lord say to His servant?" Then the Commander of the LORD's army said to Joshua, "Take your sandal off your foot, for the place where you stand is holy." And Joshua did so.* (Joshua 5:13-15)

Nothing is recorded as to what passed between Joshua and the LORD at this time. It was sufficient for Joshua, and should be sufficient for all God's people in every age, to know that the LORD of Hosts is leading the battle and therefore victory is assured. In Christ we are 'more than conquerors' no less today than Joshua was on the western banks of the Jordan so long ago.

No King in Israel

God was with Joshua as He was with Moses. But Moses slipped up – failing to honor God in the matter of water from the rock.[160] Joshua, too, slipped up, as did the Israelites under him. First there was the matter of Achan and Joshua's failure to realize that Israel defeat at Ai was due to sin in the camp. Second, there was the deception of the Gibeonites, which only occurred because Joshua failed to consult the LORD, think-

[160] Numbers 20:8*f*

ing, no doubt, that the situation was obvious and that there was no need to trouble Yahweh with it. Neither Moses nor Joshua were the leader that God ultimately intended for His army, nor was Israel a perfect vessel for His glory and His grace. If there were any doubts about this assessment, Scripture presents us with the Book of Judges. Judges self-consciously fits into our biblical trajectory of the kingdom, though in a negative way. The theme of the book occurs frequently in the latter chapters of the book: "In those days *there was* no king in Israel; everyone did *what was* right in his own **eyes**."[161] Indeed, these two passages not only summarize the political (and religious) life of Israel during this period, but they also prepare the reader for the next stage of the developing story: "We will have a king!"

The Book of Judges answers a question that might be contemporized by paraphrasing Abraham Lincoln's famous rhetorical query from his Gettysburg Address: that a theocratic government by God, under God, and through God should not perish from the earth. Even Joshua was not sanguine about Israel's chances. In his closing dialogue with the people he challenges them with the seriousness of committing to full obedience to the LORD and is not very optimistic that they will be able to do it.

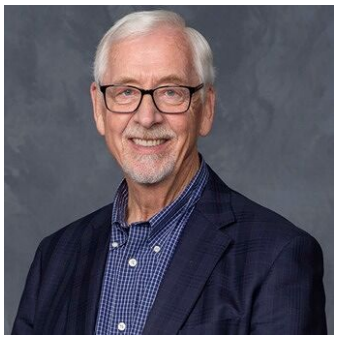
> *But Joshua said to the people, "You cannot serve the LORD, for He is a holy God. He is a jealous God; He will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake the LORD and serve foreign gods, then He will turn and do you harm and consume you, after He has done you good."*
> (Joshua 24:19-20)

The people insisted, and Joshua renewed the covenant with them at Shechem. He set up a large rock beside the tabernacle as a testimony against Israel on account of their vow to serve Yahweh only. We might wish that that rock could speak. Well, in a way, it did speak: in the Book of Judges. And it did not take long for the wheels to fall off the chariot of state in Israel. The book begins with a listing of the failure of the individual tribes to fully secure their inheritances, even though they had the ironclad promise of Yahweh to prosper their arms. Perhaps they were fearful or timid, or perhaps satisfied with what they had already attained and tired of warfare. Be that as it may, they

[161] Joshua 17:6, 21:25

disobeyed the LORD by failing (refusing?) to dispossess the inhabitants of the Land and to destroy all residue of their paganism. Their disobedience would thus become an instrument of divine judgment, and the remaining Canaanites would become a snare to Israel.

> *Then the Angel of the LORD came up from Gilgal to Bochim, and said: "I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"* (Judges 2;1-3)


Daniel Block (b. 1943)

Judges has been a difficult book to interpret, and commentators vary widely on its meaning and on the significance and nature of the judges themselves. Daniel Block is perhaps on one side of the spectrum in viewing the judges as essentially saviors, and their work as soteriological. He does, of course, run into some difficulty with Deborah, and needs to massage his view to describe her role in strictly judicial terms.[162] While it is clearly the case that the judges were raised up by Yahweh in order to deliver Israel – or at least a portion of Israel – from her enemies, most readers will recoil somewhat from calling them 'saviors.' This is, of course, based on their behavior which, in most cases, was far short of exemplary. Indeed, some of the judges were downright scandalous.

On one point at least there does seem to be near consensus: the judges were not kings. Schreiner writes: "These judges were spiritual and military leaders who delivered Israel in their distress, but they were not kings. They were not a permanent solution to Israel's problems."[163] Considering the fact that several of the judges, like Gideon, actually ensnared Israel with their own idolatry, one might say that the judges were at times *part* of Israel's problems. From the text it does appear that few, if any, of the

[162] *Cp.* Schreiner; 120.
[163] *Idem*.

judges were called to govern over all twelve tribes of Israel but were rather regional military leaders addressing regional defensive issues with Israel's neighbors. Thus Andrew Fausset seems to assign too much to these judges when he writes: "The Lord raised them up to save Israel, at intervals, as need required. They were the viceregents of Him who was at one and the same time the civil, as well as the spiritual King of Israel."[164] Fausset sees the judges as a continuation in the line of viceregents of Yahweh in Israel, ahead of the actual coronation of a king. But the book itself seems rather to highlight the *absence* of a king in Israel. It presents the judges as stop-gap measures who often highlight this lack of a central royal authority rather than provide lasting governance themselves.

As to the deliverance that the judges did manifest, credit was never given to them individually but always to Yahweh. It is evident that the primary purpose for each judge raised up was not to deliver Israel from its enemies, but to lead Israel back to obedience to Yahweh. Clearly some judges were better at this than others. The epitome of this righteous function of the judges must be the judgeship of Deborah alongside the Israelite general, Barak. The Song of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5 recounts the glorious victory, but begins with praise to Yahweh, a praise that is general to all judgeships in Israel.

> *When leaders lead in Israel, when the people willingly offer themselves,*
> *Bless the LORD!*
> *"Hear, O kings! Give ear, O princes! I, even I, will sing to the LORD;*
> *I will sing praise to the LORD God of Israel."* (Judges 5:2-3)

It is hard to miss the downward spiral of the Book of Judges, as both Israelite apostasy and wickedness, on the one hand, and the perfidy and general unfaithfulness of the judges, on the other, grow progressively worse. As we approach the final chapters of the book, the emphasis on the 'kinglessness' of Israel is highlighted. This may indicate authorship of the Book of Judges during the period of the Davidic dynasty, or it may simply be a self-conscious literary device intending to slot the Judges narrative

[164] Fausset, Andrew R. *Judges* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust; 1999); 2.

within the overall arc of the kingdom. Certainly the downward trajectory of Judges prepares the way for, first, Israel's demand for a king and then, second, Yahweh's provision of the king He always intended. Schriener notes: "The narrator of Judges dramatically depicts Israel's need for a righteous king in the concluding chapters of the book (chaps. 17-21). That Israel lacked a king is repeatedly noted in these chapters, and it appears at key junctures in the narrative and functions as a resounding conclusion to the book."[165] The two last narrative sections, recounting the idolatry and depravity to which Israel had sunk – the idolatry of Micah and the debauchery concerning the Levite's concubine - each begin with the notification: "In those days, there was no king in Israel."[166]

We Will Have a King

There is at least one place in the Christian Bible where the book order has been improved upon from the Hebrew Bible – that of the Book of Ruth. Included in the Writings (*kesuvim*) it most certainly belongs where we find it in the Christian Bible: between Judges and Samuel. This is not only because the events recorded in Ruth take place during the period of the Judges, but even more so because Ruth fits seamlessly into the trajectory of 'kingdom' and further prepares us for the denouement of first Saul, and then David, being raised up as king over all Israel. The *Sitz im Leben* of Ruth is in keeping with the chaos of Judges: famine, unlawful emigration, marriages to foreign women, and final destitution. Yahweh's mercy in the Book of Ruth comes not through a judge, however, but through a kinsman-redeemer, Boaz, who seems to be one of the very few faithful Jews left in the Land. There is much to learn regarding the grace of God in the Book of Ruth, but germane to our subject is the final paragraph, in which the lineage of David is outlined in its relationship to the converted Moabitess. This passage takes the Ruth narrative and neatly summarizes it and then sets it into its place within the 'kingdom' trajectory that we have been following.

[165] Schreiner; 125.
[166] Judges 18:1, 19:1

> *So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife; and when he went in to her, the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, "Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a close relative; and may his name be famous in Israel! And may he be to you a restorer of life and a [g]nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law, who loves you, who is better to you than seven sons, has borne him." Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her bosom, and became a nurse to him. Also the neighbor women gave him a name, saying, "There is a son born to Naomi." And they called his name Obed. He is the father of Jesse, the father of David.* (Ruth 4:13-17)

The closing verses of the Book of Ruth are a refreshing stopover on our journey tracing the unfolding of the kingdom through the Early Prophets. At least it is a story within the Judge milieu that has a happy ending. But for Israel as a whole, the downward spiral continues in spite of an unusually godly Judge, Samuel. By the end of Samuel's tenure, the people of Israel were of one mind regarding the solution of the chronic oppression by the surrounding nations, though they still were willfully oblivious as to the cause of the problem, their collective and growing apostasy. It is this divergence in knowledge – knowing the solution but ignoring the problem – that brings the whole narrative that began with Joshua, to a climax under the leadership of Samuel. By acclamation, Israel declares their desire to end the leadership structure of the Judge and shift permanently to the leadership structure of the surrounding, pagan nations; "We will have a king!"

> *Now it came to pass when Samuel was old that he made his sons judges over Israel. The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second, Abijah; they were judges in Beersheba. But his sons did not walk in his ways; they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* (I Samuel 8:1-5)

The conversation between Samuel and the elders of Israel deserves more analysis that we have scope to do here. Of particular note, however, is where it lies within the evident movement of the biblical text *toward* a king in Israel, and in light of that trajectory, Samuel's opposition to the move. Keep in mind that a king had been prophesied for

Israel both by the pagan seer, Balaam, and even earlier by the patriarch, Jacob.[167] It is probably that Samuel's unease had less to do with biblical prophecy and more to do with the spiritual condition of his charge, Israel. The demand for a king itself betrayed the hearts of the people: "Make us a king to judge us *like all the nations*." Yahweh, of course, confirms Samuel's concerns even though He instructs this last Judge to give the people what they are demanding.

> *But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day – with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods – so they are doing to you also. Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them."*
>
> (I Samuel 8:6-9)

Samuel did as he was told by the LORD, but to no one's surprise his warning to Israel failed to sway the people from their desire for a king. It seems that Yahweh intended to leave them to their own devices, and to their own selection, in order to confirm (not that He doubted) Israel's complete ignorance of His Word. On the basis of the patriarchal prophecy, Israel should have considered candidates only from the tribe of Judah. In reality, no consideration was given to the tribe from whence the new king would come. Saul, the son of Kish, from Benjamin, was chosen. Saul as king was, so to speak, the LORD giving His people the desire of their hearts.

> *There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*
>
> (I Samuel 9:1-2)

Saul was anointed king over Israel and, as we will see in the next chapter, he started well. But it was all wrong; he was Israel's king but not God's.

[167] Numbers 24:15-19; Genesis 49:10

Chapter 8 – The Journey of the Ark
Text: II Samuel 7

"Goliath is felled by a small stone to the head
and is immediately beheaded by David,
experiencing the same fate as his god, Dagon,
who collapsed in front of the ark of the covenant."
(Stephen Dempster)

Scripture is very sparse when it comes to physical descriptions. We have no knowledge of what Adam looked like, or Moses, or significantly, Jesus. Two physical descriptions, however, show up in the current scope of this chapter: that of Saul, the first king of Israel, and of David who succeeded him. We are told that Saul was a full head taller than any other man in Israel, and that David was 'ruddy, with bright eyes, and good looking.'[168] Later we are told that David was not able to function inside of Saul's armor, so we can safely assume that he was not as tall as the king. Given the paucity of physical descriptions in the Bible, and the relationship of these two men both to each other and to the overall kingdom narrative, it is reasonable to concluded that the comparative descriptions given concerning Saul and David are important in themselves, and not merely window dressing. As we will see, Saul's height turns out to be mor important to the storyline than David's good-looking ruddiness.

We can anticipate the punchline here by noting that the description of Saul, the son of Kish, as a very tall man answers directly to the type of outward appearance that people consider in making such a choice as a ruler. Height implies power, and Saul was indeed a powerful king and a mighty warrior. But so was David, though he apparently lacked the outward trappings of a 'peoples' choice' king. Even Samuel the Kingmaker seemed unimpressed initially with Jesse's youngest son. Samuel would have gladly settled on Jesse's eldest, Eliab, but at this point he was not 'judging' with wisdom, and the LORD set him straight.

[168] I Samuel 16:12

> *So it was, when they came, that he looked at Eliab and said, "Surely the LORD's anointed is before Him!" But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."* (I Samuel 16:6-7)

The story is familiar: the people approve the first candidate on the basis of his physical stature, but it is the second king who has a heart after God and who actually fulfills (at least typologically) the promise of the Kingdom. Looking at the narrative of I & II Samuel from both a literary and a biblical theological perspective, one discovers an important meta-narrative that underlies the human story of a Kingmaker and his kings. This is not to say that Samuel, Saul, and David are not important to the plot; they most certainly are. But perhaps even more important to the meaning of the narrative is the trajectory of fortune regarding the ark of the covenant, for this closely follows the fortunes – the defeats and apostasy, repentance and victory – of the leaders of Israel as well as the nation as a whole. Therefore, this chapter will not serves as so much of a commentary on the books of Samuel as it will a travel log following the journey of the ark, as its fortunes not only mirror but more so *define* the fortunes of the nation. The fates and fortunes of the key actors, then, will be introduced as they relate to the fate and fortune of the ark of the covenant.

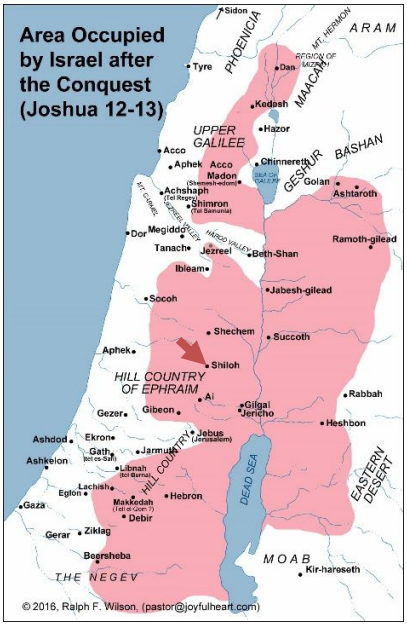
The Tabernacle at Shiloh

The ark of the covenant was the footstool of Yahweh's throne, situated within the Holy of Holies inside the tabernacle. It was the visible manifestation of the Presence of Israel's God and as such it was inherently holy. In the narrative of the Conquest we encounter the ark first at the miraculous crossing of the Jordan River, physical evidence of the Presence of Yahweh in the midst of the people and, consequently, assurance of Israel's victory.

> *So Joshua said to the children of Israel, "Come here, and hear the words of the LORD your God." And Joshua said, "By this you shall know that the living God is among you, and that He will without fail drive out from before you the Canaanites and the Hittites and the Hivites and the Perizzites and the Girgashites and the Amorites and the Jebusites: Behold, the ark of the cove-*

> *nant of the Lord of all the earth is crossing over before you into the Jordan. Now therefore, take for yourselves twelve men from the tribes of Israel, one man from every tribe. And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests who bear the ark of the* LORD*, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of the Jordan, that the waters of the Jordan shall be cut off, the waters that come down from upstream, and they shall stand as a heap."* (Joshua 3:9-13)

At the siege of Jericho, the ark progresses around the city along with the priests and the army of Israel, leading to the miraculous destruction of that pagan city. The connection made in the Book of Joshua between the presence of the ark of the LORD in the midst of the people and Israel's subsequent triumph in battle, is a phenomenon that will actually cause Israel to stumble many centuries later. At the nadir of Israel's fortune (corresponding with the height of her apostasy), the ark will be viewed not as the symbol of the divine Presence, but as a talisman, a 'good luck' charm, as it were. In the days of the High Priest Eli, "The Israelites have begun to treat it as if it were a magical charm, a way to bring God on their dies when they are threatened by enemies."[169] But what worked for Israel under Joshua would not work for Israel under Eli, and the difference tracks the downward spiral of Israel as the covenant people, a spiral that started in the period of the Judges and continued into the early years of Samuel.



The tabernacle came to settle in the time of the Conquest in the village of Shiloh, just north of Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and there the Aaronic priesthood will settle into the generational ministry of the LORD according to the precepts laid down by Yahweh through Moses, recorded in the Book of Leviticus. It was thus to Shiloh that Elkanah, a Levite living in the territory of Ephraim, traveled annually with his barren wife Hannah in order to 'worship and sacrifice before the LORD of Hosts.'[170] This is also where the narrative of I Samuel begins, with the plight and the prayer of Hannah, Elkanah's

[169] Bartholomew & Goheen; 88.
[170] I Samuel 1:1; *cp.* I Chronicles 6:23-28 where Elkanah's lineage is traced to Levi's son, Kohath.

wife.

At first glance the narrative of Hannah at the tabernacle before Eli the High Priest seems to be little more than introductory material to the book's namesake, Samuel. Seen, however, through the lens of the arc of revelation is becomes the age-old plea within faithful Israel for the fulfilment of the promise of a son. Indeed, the focus on a woman – Hannah – draws the reader's attention to the Seed of Woman, the promise that redemption was to come through a son, 'born of a woman.'[171] The trope is, of course, familiar: a barren wife who laments her predicament and is persecuted by a rival, is granted a child as a gracious (and highly redemptive) act of Yahweh. In this case the son is not messianic, though Samuel will be the one to reverse the downward spiral of Israel and will be used by God to anoint the king that God had always intended, David.

Hannah's barrenness mirrors the same in the nation as a whole. Schreiner writes: "Hannah's barrenness in chapter 1 reflects the state of Israel and anticipates the fulfillment of Yahweh's promise, for victory would come through a child born of a woman."[172] The travail of Hannah parallels the troubles of Israel which are themselves reflected in the status of the tabernacle ministry, and particularly in the corrupt and oppressive behavior of the High Priests two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Dempster writes: "The dark narrative at the end of Judges is continued, but now the moral and spiritual anarchy has contaminated the holy site and the priesthood."[173] These two worthless priests factor heavily into the narrative of the journey of the ark during this period as well as the trajectory of Samuel's life and ministry. Eli, the High Priest, is portrayed as an indeterminate character. His obesity certainly points to self-indulgence, but his greatest offense seems to be his failure to control and discipline his two sons. In the matter of Hannah's prayer, which he at first mistakes for drunkenness, his blessing to

[171] Galatians 4:4
[172] Schreiner; 137.
[173] Dempster; 135.

her lifts her spirit immediately.[174] Hannah's prayer is answered and she conceives a son.

The nativity of Samuel is typological as well as historic, and points forward to another who would come before a King: John. Like Hannah, John's mother Elizabeth was also barren, and furthermore aged. It is of particular note that Zacharias, Elizabeth's husband, was 'of the tribe of Abijah' – one of Samuel's sons – and that Elizabeth was herself 'a daughter of Aaron.'

> *There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah. His wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both well advanced in years.* (Luke 1:5-7)

One can immediately see the connection: Samuel as the forerunner of David; John as the forerunner of David's greater Son, Jesus. In this connection is also the implicit biblical claim of kingship to Jesus, as it was Samuel's duty to anoint David as God's choice of king over Israel. The connection between David and Messiah Jesus is firmly established in the Old Testament; what is not always recognized is the fact that it starts before either man's birth. This particular arc of the revelation of Scripture is in both cases sealed, as it were, with a song: the song of Hannah in the case of Samuel, and the song of Zacharias in that of John. Again, the similarities are significant and point to the underlying significance of each son's birth, being far greater than just the joy experienced by a barren wife thus rewarded by Yahweh. The emphasis on both is doxological and eschatological, and both have remarkable statements with regard to Israel's redemption by her God through her king. Hannah's song, in this regard, is all the more remarkable and truly prophetic, considering that in her day, 'there was no king in Israel.' As such, the literary position of the song reflects is role not only as the hymn of praise for Yahweh's deliverance, but also serves as an introductory outline to the two books of Samuel.

[174] I Samuel 1:12-18

My heart rejoices in the LORD; my horn is exalted in the LORD.
I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation.
No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You,
Nor is there any rock like our God.
Talk no more so very proudly; let no arrogance come from your mouth,
For the LORD is the God of knowledge; and by Him actions are weighed.
The bows of the mighty men are broken,
And those who stumbled are girded with strength.
Those who were full have hired themselves out for bread,
And the hungry have ceased to hunger. Even the barren has borne seven,
And she who has many children has become feeble.
The LORD kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and brings up.
The LORD makes poor and makes rich; He brings low and lifts up.
He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the beggar from the ash heap,
To set them among princes and make them inherit the throne of glory.
For the pillars of the earth are the LORD's, and He has set the world upon them.
He will guard the feet of His saints, but the wicked shall be silent in darkness.
For by strength no man shall prevail. The adversaries of the LORD shall be broken in pieces;
From heaven He will thunder against them. The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.
He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn of His anointed.

(I Samuel 2:1-10)

Hannah sees in the birth of Samuel not merely the end of her barrenness, but also the end of Israel's troubles. In this she is following in the footsteps of Eve at Seth's birth, and Lamech when his son Noah was born. Among the faithful throughout the ages there was the hope and expectation of that Child who would fulfill the promise of the Seed of Woman, who would finally deliver God's people from all their distress. Hannah sings prophetically. She speaks of Yahweh's king when yet there was no king in Israel; she speaks of Israel's deliverance from the oppression of her enemies and extends this deliverance to the whole world. Schreiner comments: "The story moves from Hannah's personal world to the cosmic scene, where Yahweh's reign over the entire earth is featured."[175] Dempster adds:

> The poem consists of three stanzas that progressively expand the theme of Yahweh's incomparability. The first stanza celebrates the incomparability for a stunning personal re-

[175] Schreiner; 137.

> versal (2:1-3); the second enlarges the vision to historical reversals in the life of the nation (2:4-8b); and the third expands the vision further to the ends of the earth (2:8c-10).[176]

Zacharias Prophecy, as it is called, is no less a song than Hannah's, and Hannah's Song is no less a prophecy than Zacharias.' Indeed, there may be some incipient chauvinism in the traditional labels given to these two passages, for they truly do not differ in either perspective, song and prophecy. The key to note in Zacharias' Song is the similar emphasis on the Coming King. Of course, Zacharias had a leg up on Hannah, for she predated David by perhaps two generations and was not given to know the name of the promised king of which she sings. Zacharias, living approximately a millennium after David, has no doubt the family of Israel from whence Messiah King would come.

> *Blessed is 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, who have been since the world began,*
> *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:*
> *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.*
> *And you, child, will be called the prophet of the Highest;*
> *For you will go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways,*
> *To give knowledge of salvation to His people by the remission of their sins,*
> *Through the tender mercy of our God,*
> *With which the Dayspring from on high has visited us;*
> *To give light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death,*
> *To guide our feet into the way of peace.* (Luke 1:68-79)

In Scripture the 'horn' signifies strength, whether good or evil. In Hannah's Song she exalts the LORD for lifting up her horn by enabling her the strength to conceive a son. That is how she starts her song, but she ends it as Zacharias begins his, with the 'horn of His anointed' (Hannah) or the 'horn of salvation' (Zacharias). From a biblical theological perspective, these two songs share an intertextuality that then links the

[176] Dempster; 136.

events recorded of the life of Samuel and his protegee, David, with the events recorded of the life of John and his greater successor, Jesus. The reciprocity factor of typological reading means that as we read about Samuel, Saul, and David we are proleptically reading about John, Herod (?), and Jesus.[177] And as we read the Gospel accounts of John's ministry, Herod's wickedness, and Jesus' advent we are reading the antitype to the narrative in I & II Samuel.

The Ark in Philistia

Hannah's optimism was well grounded, but the downward spiral of Israel's apostasy did not immediately reverse with Samuel's birth or Hannah's Song. Again we can trace the trajectory of Israel's fortune (and her self-estrangement from Yahweh) by following the journey of the ark. The tragic saga of the household and priesthood of Eli has yet to be played out fully and by the end of it, Israel's fortunes will have sunk to an inconceivable low. The situation is, as it has been for generations, warfare with Israel's neighbors; this time the Philistines. Perhaps remembering the military value of the ark in the midst of the army camp in the days of Joshua, the leaders of Israel have the brilliant idea to bring the ark of the covenant from the tabernacle and carry it at the head of the next battle. Eli's sons are in full agreement and participate in this blasphemous charade by carrying the ark themselves. The Israelites are soundly defeated, Hophni and Phinehas are killed, and the ark is captured and taken to Philistia. In this the Israelites were now no better than their pagan neighbors, for whom their idols were talismans providing them victory in battle, but not holy and almighty God who is to be feared. When the Philistines heard the rally cry from the Israelite camp, they, too, thought that their doom was sealed, since the God of Israel had come into her camp.

> *And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted so loudly that the earth shook. Now when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, "What does the sound of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" Then they under-*

[177] Herod the Great considered himself a messianic figure in Israel's life and his rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem was a false fulfilment of one of the key roles of the King. We will investigate this line of thought further in a later chapter.

> *stood that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp. So the Philistines were afraid, for they said, "God has come into the camp!" And they said, "Woe to us! For such a thing has never happened before. Woe to us! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all the plagues in the wilderness."*
>
> (I Samuel 4:5-8)

The outcome would not be as it was under Joshua at Jericho. Israel was put to the sword, the sons of Eli killed, and the ark of the covenant lost. This is more than military history; this is redemptive history. With Samuel still a young boy (though old enough to prophesy that these events would happen), Israel would enter the final and lowest stage of the era of the Judges, when the visible Presence would take up temporary residence outside the Land and in a pagan temple. As the continuing narrative will clearly show, this defeat had nothing to do with the relationship between Israel's God and the ark of the covenant, but everything to do with Israel's collective apostasy and the corruption of those who sole function was to minister before Yahweh as He dwelt above the ark in the innermost tabernacle. To make the ark a political symbol was nothing less than sacrilege; it would have been an injustice to His character for Yahweh to allow this charade to work. But the power of Israel's God was no less with the ark for all that, something the Philistines were about to learn.



Ralph W. Klein (1936-2021)

The narrative of the ark in the temple of Dagon has nothing to do with the nation of Israel in its condition at the time and everything to do with the continued sovereignty of Israel's God over both Israel and all the nations. The Philistines defeated the Israelites because God was not for Israel that day on account of her inveterate rebellion and unrepentant corruption. The Philistines *did not* defeat Yahweh even though they captured the ark. Outward appearances are deceptive, and the Philistines were no less self-deceived than the Israelites. Ralph Klein notes: "By placing the ark be-

side Dagon the Philistines seem to have been honoring Yahweh as if he had abandoned his own people to acknowledge the power and superiority of their god."[178]

It reminds one of the interview between the Captain of the Host of the LORD and Joshua recorded in Joshua 5. Joshua, not knowing to whom he was speaking, asked the Man if He was for the Israelites or for their enemies. The answer quickly made Joshua realize that he was not talking to any ordinary man: "No, but *as* Commander of the army of the LORD I have now come."[179] God is not *for* anyone so much as God is *for* Himself. Had they known this, the Philistines would have left the ark on the battlefield with the slain Israelites. Lest the Philistines mistakenly think that their gods were more powerful then the God of Israel, because they had won the battle and captured the ark, Yahweh soon proves His sovereignty over all. "But this defeat [*i.e.,* of Israel at Ebenezer] raised the radical question of the power and claims of Yahweh, the question of who was in control of history. In the climax of the story, this is answered by Yahweh's defeat of Dagon, where the apparent victor of Ebenezer is now the defeated one."[180]

The ark's journey in Philistia caused great turmoil and grief for the Philistines, making a circuit of Ashdod, Gad, and finally Ekron before being returned to Israel. The land was beset with sickness and death so long as the ark was there, but the most significant event occurred in the temple of Dagon in Ashdod. As we have seen in so many other passages in which one nation is seemingly pitted against God's people, here also the battle belongs to the LORD and the struggle is fundamentally a cosmic one. The demons behind the pagan worship of the Philistines cannot stand before the LORD, and so the statue of Dagon falls before the ark on two successive nights, the second resulting in the statue's loss of head and hands. This event is significant in its own right, but the meaning with regard to the biblical revelation of the kingdom is to affirm Yahweh's undiminished sovereignty even though His 'throne' has been captured and deported to

[178] Klein, Ralph W. *Word Biblical Commentary: I Samuel* (Waco: Word Books; 1983); 49.
[179] Joshua 5:14
[180] Campbell, Antony F. "Yahweh and the Ark: A Case Study in Narrative" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 98, No. 1 (Mar. 1979); 32.

a pagan land. The incident in Dagon's temple also foreshadows another, even more familiar story later in the ark narratives: the defeat of Goliath by David.

The Lost Years

The ark stayed seven months among the Philistines.[181] Finally the kings of the Philistines – five in all – despaired of keeping the ark (one wonders why it took them seven months to do so) and called for their own priests and diviners to instruct them what to do to bring relief to their land and people. Perhaps it was not so much that the did not know what to do – send the ark back to Israel – but rather how to do it. The reference in I Samuel 6 to a 'trespass offering' need not tie in with the Levitical offering of the same name; it is probably no more than a recognition by the Philistine lords that they had offended a god much more powerful than their own, and one ought not approach any god empty-handed. So it is agreed that the ark would be sent on a cart pulled by two milk cows that had never borne a yoke, along with a significant offering in gold. The Philistines did hedge their bets with regard to the calamities of the previous seven months, and set a sort of test with regard to the ark's journey from their land.

> *Then take the ark of the LORD and set it on the cart; and put the articles of gold which you are returning to Him as a trespass offering in a chest by its side. Then send it away, and let it go. And watch: if it goes up the road to its own territory, to Beth Shemesh, then He has done us this great evil. But if not, then we shall know that it is not His hand that struck us – it happened to us by chance.* (I Samuel 6:8-9)

This would seem like the toss of a coin: the cows statistically had roughly a 50:50 chance of taking either road (perhaps a higher chance of taking the downhill road, the path of least resistance). The narrative makes it clear that the matter need not have been questioned: the cows made a direct line to Beth Shemesh, heading 'straight for the road to Beth Shemesh, *and* went along the highway, lowing as they went, and did not turn aside to the right hand or the left.'[182] The Israelites of Beth Shemesh rejoiced to see the ark return, and offered the cows in sacrifice. But Israel had not learned its lesson, and

[181] I Samuel 6:1
[182] I Samuel 6:12

the people looked into the ark, a transgression for which over fifty thousand consequently died.[183] No doubt the people of Beth Shemesh saw in the ark's return the restoration of Israel's fortunes, but there would be no restoration without repentance, and this was still lacking in Israel.

The period between two kings, when there is one, is called an Interregnum. Perhaps the most famous is the Protectorship of Oliver Cromwell in the mid-17th Century, lying between the reigns of Charles I and his son, Charles II. The opposite pertains to the period now experienced in Israel: the ark had returned, but as yet there was still no king, and the ark will be all but forgotten by the people. During this time Israel would gain a king, but not the kingdom.

> *Then the men of Kirjath Jearim came and took the ark of the LORD, and brought it into the house of Abinadab on the hill, and consecrated Eleazar his son to keep the ark of the LORD. So it was that the ark remained in Kirjath Jearim a long time; it was there twenty years. And all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.* (I Samuel 7:1-2)

At this juncture the ark is lost to the narrative, to return much later. It has, however, not lost its significance. Samuel judges Israel all the days of his life, and during his tenure the LORD is with him and the Israelites subdue the Philistines. Israel under Samuel experienced what evangelicals would call a revival, but their return to Israel's God was only skin deep, and lasted, it would seem, only so long as Israel's armies were given victory over her enemies. This section of the narrative in I Samuel follows the first part of the ark's journeys. It is back in Israel, but Israel's heart is not yet back toward Yahweh, so the ark lies in obscurity in Kirjath Jearim, in exile while yet in the Land. Israel, too, is still in the Land, but largely no longer in the LORD.

Like the Nations Around Us

An ark in exile within the Land. That is the *Sitz im Leben* of the commencement of a kingdom in Israel. A people who lamented the ark's loss, rejoiced in its return, and utterly failed in both situations to realize what the underlying problem really was. Thus

[183] I Samuel 6:19

when the aged Samuel is approached by the elders of Israel, who demand that he give them a king, the narrative has prepared us for just what sort of king the people want, and just that sort of king the LORD will give them. The situation in Israel is transitional, though, with Samuel still judging successfully and victoriously, and with the prospect of the Davidic kingdom anticipated in the Book of Ruth. Samuel draws Israel to repentance at Mizpah, intercedes for the nation and leads her to victory over the Philistines (I Samuel 7:5-17). But there is no mention of the ark during the remainder of Samuel's tenure as Judge, and it remains in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim rather than back in Shiloh with the tabernacle.

When we come to the kingship of Saul, the son of Kish of the tribe of Benjamin, it is, as noted above, sort of a reverse interregnum. Israel had apparently forgotten its repentance at Mizpah, something that Israel was frequently to do throughout her history. The prospect of Samuel' sons taking his place was unacceptable to the elders of the nation, and the thought of another Judge was equally unacceptable. It is time for Israel to take matters into her own hands and to have a king over all the nation, just like the nations that surround her.

> *Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."* (I Samuel 8:4-5)

Sadly, Samuel succeeded as a Judge but failed as a father – another phenomenon that will occur with disturbing frequency in Israel's history (as well as human history in general; *cp.* Ecclesiastes). In the 2000 movie *Gladiator*, the emperor Marcus Aurelius (Richard Harris) confesses to his son Commodus (Joaquin Phoenix): "Your failure as a son is my failure as a father." Samuel could have spoken this line, and so, later, could David. There is a powerful lesson in parenting in this historical reality, but that is beyond the scope of our current study. The situation was what it was, and one can understand the elders' concern about Samuel's successor. It seemed to be time to make the shift to a kingdom and to leave behind the era of Judges. Yet the failure of Samuel as a

father, or the failure of Samuel's sons to live according to their father's precepts, was no excuse for the people to grasp after a king in much the same manner as Adam grasped after Knowledge. Once again, man anticipates the will of God, acts in willful impatience, and the result is disastrous.

Saul is chosen to be king (though not all of Israel agrees with the choice, a fact that lends great credence to the authenticity of the account). The narrative leaves little doubt that the primary qualification that Saul possessed was his unusual stature.

> *There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish the son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bechorath, the son of Aphiah, a Benjamite, a mighty man of power. And he had a choice and handsome son whose name was Saul. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.*
>
> (I Samuel 9:1-2)

The selection of Saul as king over Israel has the nature of a test about it. Had the Israelites been paying attention, the fact that the chosen candidate was from the tribe of Benjamin, and not the tribe of Judah, would have been enough to raise doubts. But even more significant is the fact that Saul was from Gibeah, the place where the Levite's concubine was so shamefully treated (*cp.* Judges 20). This is not to say that Saul's family had anything to do with that tragic event, but only to reflect that the first king of Israel was to come from the tribe and the town that rose up in arms to defend the perpetrators of this atrocity. And no one hit 'pause.' The events of Gibeah were not that long before the events of Saul's anointing; undoubtedly many still remembered, but apparently did not care. The tribe of Benjamin was almost wiped off the face of the Land; now a Benjamite from Gibeah was to be king over Israel. And no one thought that there was something terribly wrong with this picture. In the meantime, the ark remained in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim.

It is unnecessary to recount the failure of Saul's reign except perhaps to note that he attempted to kill the LORD's anointed, David. In many ways, Saul followed the same path that Israel had taken: he started well, but ended badly. He grasped at the prerogative of the priests and from impatience presumed to offer sacrifice to Yahweh before

battle. He disobeyed the direct command of the LORD by which the Amalekites were placed under the ban, preserving their livestock and their king. When Yahweh removed His Spirit from Saul and placed it upon David, the former spent the rest of his days seeking the life of the latter. In this Saul as king utterly failed to typify the true King and instead typified the king who sought to kill the LORD's Anointed, Jesus. Saul became a type of Herod.

The ark will remain in Kirjath Jearim through the reign of Saul and well into the reign of David. Only one other mention of it is found within the narrative of Saul's reign, in I Samuel 14, when Saul asks for 'the ark' to be brought to him ahead of a battle with the Philistines. However, there is significant manuscript support for the word being 'ephod' instead of 'ark,' which would make more sense since it was the ephod, and not the ark, that was often consulted for divine guidance through the priesthood. If it was indeed the ark of the covenant that was brought to Saul on this occasion, it was apparently returned to the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim afterward, as no further mention is made of it in the Saul narratives.

The amount of time the ark spent in Kirjath Jearim is a bit confusing from the text. I Samuel 7:2 says both that it was in the house of Abinadab for 'a long time' - literally, 'many days' – and that it was there for 'twenty years.' Given that both of these chronological markers are given in the same verse, it is probably that the second one – the reference to twenty years – is related not to the total duration of the ark's stay in Kirjath Jearim, but rather the time elapsed before Samuel called Israel to repentance in Mizpah, which is the next part of the narrative. Klein comments that the twenty years "refers to the period between the ark's return from Philistia until the battle reported in chap. 7."[184] This interpretation seems to be necessary due to the fact that the ark remained in the house of Abinadab through the entire reign of Saul (*i.e.*, forty years) and was only removed from there by David after he had secured the allegiance of the entire nation, at least another seven years, six months.

[184] Klein; 65.

A New Home – A New Era

Scholars have noted that the loss of the ark to the Philistines is an event tied integrally to the prophecy against the household and priesthood of Eli (*cp.* I Samuel 2:27-36). Yahweh was tearing the priesthood from the family of Eli as He would later tear the kingdom from Saul. This complex of events marks a significant milestone in redemptive history, the changing from the era of the Judges to that of the Davidic dynasty. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the ark never returned to Shiloh; its eventual home was also to be changed to Jerusalem and, soon after, to be re-housed in Solomon's Temple. "The defeats, the effective end of the Shiloh priesthood, and the departure of the glory from Israel spell out the end of an era."[185]

This new era is inaugurated by two events: the anointing of David and his eventual rise to the throne over all Israel, on the one hand, and the return of the ark, though to Jerusalem rather than to Shiloh. This return is nothing less than the return of the glory and Presence of Yahweh to the forefront of the people of Israel, and rightly corresponds to the elevation of the Judahite David as king.

> *Again David gathered all the choice men of Israel, thirty thousand. And David arose and went with all the people who were with him from Baale Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, whose name is called by the Name, the LORD of Hosts, who dwells between the cherubim. So they set the ark of God on a new cart, and brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill; and Uzzah and Ahio, the sons of Abinadab, drove the new cart. And they brought it out of the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill, accompanying the ark of God; and Ahio went before the ark. Then David and all the house of Israel played music before the LORD on all kinds of instruments of fir wood, on harps, on stringed instruments, on tambourines, on sistrums, and on cymbals.* (II Samuel 6:1-5)

This attempt to bring the ark up to Jerusalem, of course, did not go as David had hopes, and Uzzah will be struck dead by the LORD for touching the ark, an act, it would seem, of culpable irreverence. Yahweh's fierce anger burning against Uzzah may also have been a vivid reminder to David that the ark – the Presence of Yahweh in the midst of His people – is never to be viewed as a political tool Many modern scholars believe

[185] Campbell; 32.

the entire Ark Narrative is nothing more than that, a political myth derived to build support for the House of David. If so, one would think that the author would have left off the narrative of Perez-Uzzah. It seems far more reasonable to view this incident in the same light as that of the deaths of Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, again by the fierce anger of the LORD: "By those who come before Me I will be holy."[186] David turned the ark aside to the home of Obed-Edom, whose household prospered by the grace of Yahweh during the ark's stay.

Chapter Summary

The Samuel – Saul – David narrative I soften read merely in light of Israel demanding a king, and eventually getting the king of Yahweh's choice, David. But the close overlay of the Ark Narrative shows that the meaning of the history is not merely the change in political structures in Israel. It is rather the changing, and degenerating, relationship between Israel and Yahweh, caused by the progressive apostasy of the nation that extends even to the priesthood. The priesthood of Eli will be utterly rejected to the point that Shiloh itself will cease to be the cultic center of the nation. Everything is shifting, but in accordance with the plan and purpose of Yahweh. The era of the Judges is ending and that of the King arising. But not the king of the people's choice; it will be the king of Yahweh's choice from the tribe of Judah and the family of Jesse. Paralleling this transition in political structure, and indeed guiding it, is the journey of the ark from Shiloh to Jerusalem, by way of Philistia, Beth Shemesh, and Kirjath Jearim. "The conclusion of the narrative (2 Samuel 6) marks a new beginning in Jerusalem with the sign of Yahweh's favor. It also marks the legitimization of the new era that has been begun for Jerusalem; salvation history is resumed."[187]

[186] Leviticus 10:3
[187] Campbell; 33.

Chapter 9 – I Have Set My King…on Zion
Text: II Samuel 5 - 7; Psalm 2

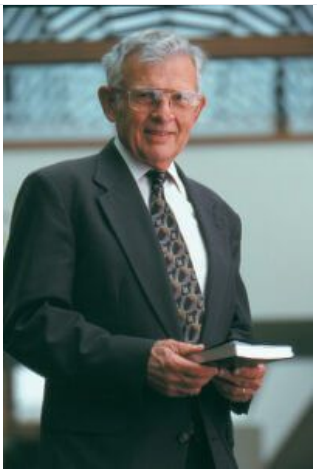
"Dynasty and Temple, the house of David and the house of God,
function within the order of history,
but are rooted in that other order of things."
(Jon Levenson)

The journey began at Mt. Sinai; the goal has always been Mt. Zion. Though we have encountered many individuals who played key roles in the unfolding of the kingdom drama, there has been no more important 'character' than the ark of the covenant, which is the Presence of Yahweh in the midst of Israel. The ark's journey, as well, began at Sinai and it, too, is heading ultimately for Zion. The fortunes of Israel may be directly overlaid on the fortunes of the ark, for the Presence of Yahweh could not long abide the apostasy of the people. Yet the faithfulness of Yahweh to His covenant was enduring, and the redemptive purposes of Israel herself would be attained as, at long last, with David we arrive at Zion – both the king and the Presence. The progress of this journey is summarized powerfully in the first half of Psalm 2, one of the most important 'Kingdom' psalms.

Why do the nations rage, and the people plot a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together,
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, saying,
"Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us."
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath, and distress them in His deep displeasure:
"Yet I have set My King on My holy hill of Zion." (Psalm 2:1-6)

This psalm proclaims the LORD's establishment of His kingdom both historically and typologically. The former represents the trajectory of revelation thus far – beginning with the creation and formation of the nation of Israel at Mt. Sinai (*cp.* Isa. 43:1) and progressing through the Conquest and the period of the Judges, arriving ultimately at the Monarchy. Overlaid on this history is the Ark Narrative, a phrase coined in the early 20th Century by the German Protestant scholar, Leonhard Rost. Rost was heavily

influenced by the Documentary Hypothesis of Julius Wellhausen, and the 'form-critical' school of Old Testament exegesis. Due to these influences, Rost concluded that the narrative concerning the journeys of the ark of the covenant comprised a different source material that was later redacted into the text of I Samuel. Although Rost's views have long since been abandoned in the main, the concept of a 'mini narrative' concerning the ark remains a common feature of modern Old Testament scholarship. Also retained, sadly, from Rost's work is the conclusion that II Samuel 6 – the narrative describing David's brining the ark up from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem – is a later redaction and not an integral part of the Ark Narrative. The error of modern scholarship is not only to truncate the Ark Narrative with the recovery of the ark from Philistia and its sojourn in the house of Abinadab in Kirjath Jearim, but to fail to see that the narrative actually begins long before, in the narrative of Sinai and the original construction and consecration of the ark.


John T. Willis (1933-2023)

This is due to a general failure, in the main, to accept the biblical narrative as both historical and theological. As a result of this, various mentions of the ark of the covenant are not seen as a composite whole, simply because the scholars fail to grasp the significance of the ark in the life of Israel (or, if they grasp the significance, they nonetheless deny the reality). Viewing the matter canonically, and not on the basis of form criticism or source criticism, we can see a much wider narrative woven through the broader storyline, in which the ark traces the Presence of Yahweh in the midst of the community – sometimes in favor, sometimes in displeasure. This Presence is, as we have seen, the presence of the Sovereign, the King of Israel who is none other than Yahweh Himself. "[T]he ark symbolizes the presence of Yahweh among his people as 'king,' since he 'sits enthroned' above the ark on the cher-

ubim."[188] The journey of the ark from Sinai to Zion is not a minor source material woven into the broader context; it is the central storyline itself, combining the dual concepts of Yahweh as Israel's God and Yahweh as Israel's King.

One of the reasons the Ark Narrative – taking it canonically from Sinai to Zion – is often overlooked is because the overall historical narrative is, on the surface, full of nations raging and kings of the earth plotting. Even the tone of Psalm 2 seems to emphasize the scope of human rebellion against God (and against His Anointed). This matches well with the narrative of the antediluvian city- and empire-builders, the coalition of Man at Babel, and the degeneration even of Israel under the Judges. This parallel narrative of nations raging culminates in Israel with the elders demanding 'a king like the nations around us.'[189] God makes it clear to Samuel that the underlying motive of His people is their desire to 'cast away the cords' of Yahweh from them. But throughout this time, God sits in heaven and laughs. It is not a very funny joke; the laughter is of derision at the foolishness of Man seeking to govern in his own name.

The machinations of unbelieving Man, even unbelieving Israel, are powerless to halt the divine purpose and plan. The path from Sinai to Zion may seem to have many detours; in reality it has none. At no point along the way is God either responding to the devices of Man or improvising as He figures out a way to make things turn out right. At this point in our study of the kingdom trajectory reaches a climax; God sets His king on Zion, and the Ark Narrative nears its conclusion.

David and Zion

With Saul's and Jonathan's death at Gilboa, and another defeat of the Israelites by the Philistines, the twelve tribes did not immediately rally around David. His own tribe of Judah, as expected, crowned him king at Hebron while the other tribes would try to make a go of it with Ishbosheth, Saul's son. This arrangement – and the accom-

[188] Willis, John T. "David and Zion in the Theology of the Deuteronomistic History: Theological Ideas in 2 Samuel 5-7" in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. Bernard F. Batto and Kathryn L. Roberts (Winona Lake, IL: Eisenbrauns; 2004); 139.
[189] I Samuel 8:19-20

panying civil war - lasted seven and a half years, until the northern tribes finally acknowledged that Yahweh had withdrawn His support from the house of Saul and transferred it to the house of David. Listen to the diplomatic words used by the elders of the eleven tribes as they yield submission to David's rule.

> *Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and spoke, saying, "Indeed we are your bone and your flesh. Also, in time past, when Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel out and brought them in; and the LORD said to you, 'You shall shepherd My people Israel, and be ruler over Israel.'" Therefore all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and King David made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD. And they anointed David king over Israel. David was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.* (II Samuel 5:1-5)

There is a bit of a spoiler in this passage in that it mentions that David ruled over all Israel *from Jerusalem* when, in fact, he had not taken that city for his own. Indeed, this tacit mention of Jerusalem betrays a deep underlying political and theological reality for Israel, a reality that brings to historical conclusion the journey of the ark from Sinai to Zion. The narrative will continue and will flesh out what is really just a synopsis here in these few verses, uniting David and his throne with Zion/Jerusalem as his city. In so doing, the priestly and the royal are united – not in the same person; David is not a priest-kind – but in Zion, Yahweh's holy mountain. Zion will not erase the meaning and memory of Sinai – by no means – but Zion will take primacy of place between the two mountains and will become both the political-religious capital of the nation and the eschatological mountain-city-kingdom of Messiah.

II Samuel 5 recounts both that David was finally proclaimed as king over all the nation and what he then did about it.

> *And the king and his men went to Jerusalem against the Jebusites, the inhabitants of the land, who spoke to David, saying, "You shall not come in here; but the blind and the lame will repel you," thinking, "David cannot come in here." Nevertheless David took the stronghold of Zion (that is, the City of David)…Then David dwelt in the stronghold, and called it the City of David. And David built all around from the Millo and inward. So David went on and became great, and the LORD God of hosts was with him.* (II Samuel 5:6-7, 9-10)

There are a number of unique aspects to this part of the narrative. The most obvious, of course, is that the LORD God of Hosts was with David. This is the divine name of military might, if we may so speak with regard to God. This is Yahweh of Israel who goes out before His people and leads them in victory, and this is what He commits to be on David's behalf. Verse 10 should probably read: "So David went on and became great *because* the LORD God of Hosts was with him." That is certainly the meaning – the reason that David became great was nothing less than that Yahweh was with him, as he will acknowledge many times, not least in the Psalms. We noted before that when Joshua came before the Captain of the Hosts of Yahweh, He was neither for Joshua nor for Joshua's enemies, but rather for Himself. Therefore, reading here that Yahweh of Hosts was *with David* signifies the truly unique position that David occupied as king over Israel, a position that is perhaps the first messianic type within the kingdom trajectory of revelation. God was with David, but God will be with Messiah Jesus in an even more powerful and perfect way. With the arrival of David (and the ark) in Zion, we begin to see that ultimate goal a bit more clearly.

A second feature of this short narrative is that the conquest of Jerusalem was a private, so to speak, battle. This was not a battle in which Israel would fight; it was a battle for David and his own mighty men. And when the battle was won, David did what no one had done before: he called the conquered city, the City of David. Now David was no Alexaner the Great, leaving a trail of Alexandrias in his wake across the Near East. There are no other cities of David because the name did not signify personal aggrandizement but rather a political and religious statement of unity in Israel. One might even say Israel was to become 'one nation under Yahweh' through David's throne on Zion's hill.

From a political perspective, Jerusalem is established in Israel as an independent, royal city not belonging to any tribe. The situation is analogous to Washington, D.C. The area in which the United States capital was established was donated from the states of Virginia and Maryland, but belonged to neither, nor to any other state. In the same

way, "Zion or Jerusalem is located geographically between Israel and Judah, but belongs to neither."[190] Diplomatically, David's capital being moved from Hebron, which is in Judah, to the just-conquered city of the Jebusites is a piece of political genius, solidifying the newly gained support of the other tribes by placing the center of court in a neutral territory. "David is dealing with a very delicate and complex political situation at this point. The ten tribes of North Israel and the tribe of Judah have been hostile to each other for a long time, and Jerusalem's has been in foreign hands. David seeks to unite these three entities by ruling each of them personally simultaneously."[191] By making Jerusalem his own personal fiefdom, David takes the high ground, politically and literally.

Perhaps David was aware of the theological implications; his psalms certainly indicate so, as he sings often of Zion as the holy mountain of Yahweh. Psalm 2 is unattributed and may have been used as a coronation song for David's successors, but it has long been viewed as messianic, tying together the righteous king with the holy mountain. Christopher Ash notes that the first two Psalms are to be viewed together as a prologue, so to speak, for the entire Psalter. Psalm 1 describes the righteous man; Psalm 2, the LORD's King who is, in fact, that righteous man *par excellence.* If David did pen Psalm 2 (and, for that matter, Psalm 1), he spoke better than he knew – or at least, better than he *was*. Though he knew himself to be the LORD anointed king over Israel, he also knew himself *not* to be the final and perfect fulfillment of the King in Psalm 2. Ash writes: "The only messiah who can rightly claim the authority of Psalm 2 is the law-delighting figure of Psalm 1. David abused his power (e.g., 2 Sam. 11) as did all his successors until Jesus the Messiah, who perfectly fulfilled Psalm 1 and therefore validly claims Psalm 2. His rule alone is flawless and wholly good."[192]



Christopher Ash (*b.* 1960)

[190] Willis; 138.
[191] *Idem.*
[192] Ash, Christopher *The Psalms: A Christ-Centered Commentary, Volume 2* (Wheaton: Crossway; 2024); 22.

Scripture interchanges 'Jerusalem' and 'Zion' frequently, and one cannot be dogmatic regarding the nuances of meaning between the two. In general, however, Jerusalem is the political capital of Israel, the seat of power for the Davidic dynasty, whereas Zion more fully represents the typological meaning of Jerusalem as the place where Israel's God has caused His Name to dwell. This will be confirmed, of course, by the construction of the Temple in Jerusalem by David's son and heir, Solomon. Theologically, therefore, Zion is of greater significance than Jerusalem, though the two are by no means hermetically sealed from each other in meaning. Psalm 2 again sets the tone, as it is 'on My holy hill of Zion' that Yahweh sets His king.

From Sinai to Zion

This journey began at Sinai when the ark was first constructed and consecrated. For the wilderness years the ark remained in the Holy of holies within the tabernacle, and was the focal point of both Yahweh's abiding with His people and the place where Moses spoke with Him. From this history comes the association between the ark and the Presence, and this will continue throughout the Ark Narrative, expanded as we have made it to commence at Sinai. But with the Conquest the ark takes on another aspect, another association. Unlike the crossing of the Red Sea, the crossing of the Jordan River – also on dry ground – was instigated by the priests carrying the ark into the edge of the water.[193] The ark was also present at the circumambulation at Jericho.[194] Thus the ark quickly became associated with Israel's military victories, and it is undoubtedly this association that convinced the Israelite army that the ark's presence would turn the tide in the battle against the Philistines at Ebenezer.[195] Israel's defeat that day, and the capture of the ark by the Philistines, did not negate the association of the ark with military victory, and as the narrative of I & II Samuel progress, the ark becomes increasingly associated with a particular Name of God: Yahweh Sabaoth – the LORD God of Hosts. Hosts, of course, signifies the armies of Yahweh, both in heaven and, in Israel, on earth.

[193] Joshua 3:8*f*
[194] Joshua 6
[195] I Samuel 4:3*f*

Willis notes: "the ark is strongly connected to the divine epithet 'Yahweh Sabaoth,' 'Yahweh of hosts,' that is, Yahweh of the armies of Israel."[196]

This is an important shift in designation for the ark, because in the midst of Israel's clamoring for a king 'like the nations around us,' Yahweh of Hosts, symbolized in the ark, is the divine king who leads Israel out and brings Israel in. "Thus, when Israel goes into battle against its enemies, its divine king Yahweh is leading them into battle, riding on his chariot, the ark."[197] This was no talisman, as Hophni and Phinehas, sons of Eli, found out to their demise. The advocacy of Yahweh in battle was indeed decisive, but it was also contingent on the obedience of Israel. The ark did not benefit Saul because he paid it no mind. But 'God was with David,' and we soon find out that the status of the ark is paramount to him.

Yet more needs to be said concerning the journey and transition from Sinai to Zion. This is because this thread of redemptive history is perhaps the most profound typological paradigm corresponding to the 'shift' from Law to Grace with the Advent of Messiah Jesus. Jesus as David's Greater Son is the One in whom Law is not superseded, but consummated, in Grace: "For the law was given through Moses, *but* grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."[198] The association between this transition and the journey from Sinai to Zion is made explicit by the author to the Hebrews. Though Sinai is not mentioned by name, the description leaves no reasonable doubt.

> *For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.* (Hebrews 12:18-24)

[196] Willis; 139.
[197] *Idem*.
[198] John 1:17

With David's conquest of Zion and, almost immediately, his expressed desire to bring the ark to Jerusalem rather than back to Shiloh, we make the final steps from Sinai to Zion, both historically and typologically. There is no dispute that Moses is associated with Sinai, but the more important association is David with Zion, which forms the redemptive-historical background for John's comment quoted above. Yet it is also important to realize that David no more abolished the Law than did Jesus. Again, Zion does not replace Sinai so much as fulfills it. Two passages of Scripture will confirm this in regard to the king, and especially in regard to David, the king. The first is from Moses, in Deuteronomy 17 where we read of the duty of a newly crowned king in Israel.

> *Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.*
>
> (Deuteronomy 17:18-20)

At no point was the king of Israel to become, like the kings of the nations, 'a law unto himself.' Rather the king of Israel was to be an exemplar to the people of one who knows and obeys Torah. In a manner wholly analogous to Adam in the Garden of Eden, the king in Jerusalem was to be a vice-regent, ruling God's people in the presence of Yahweh and wholly according to His Law. Harvard Divinity School's Hebrew scholar Jon Levenson compares and contrasts Mt. Sinai and Mt. Zion in his thought-provoking *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible*. Speaking of the advent of the Davidic Covenant, tied as it was to Zion, he writes: "There is no text in the Hebrew Bible that holds that the Davidic *replaces* the Sinaitic. But within the national covenant lies another, restricted to one family, the royal family of David."[199] Levenson also recognizes the inseparable



Jon Levenson (*b.* 1949)

[199] Levnson, Jon D. *Sinai & Zion: An Entry into the Jewish Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco; 1985); 99.

bond between David and Zion, though this 'new' development in no way abrogates the old, rather it advances upon it. This explains the uniqueness of Zion/Jerusalem in subsequent Israelite (*i.e.*, Old Testament) history: Jerusalem was singularly *David's* City, and it was also the place where Yahweh caused His Name to dwell. Levenson writes:

> We have found that in the mind of Israel, Jerusalem was inextricably associated with King David. It was he who conquered the city for Israel, who brought the ark of the Covenant - the most potent symbol of YHWH – into the city, who made Jerusalem the capital, and laid the groundwork for the Temple, which his son built on Mt. Zion…From the tenth century on, for the next four hundred years, until the destruction of the kingdom of Judah and the razing of Solomon's Temple by the Babylonians in 587 BC, the fortunes of Jerusalem and of the house of David were to rise and fall together.[200]

We do not have an explicit account of David writing out the Law in accordance with the Mosaic commandment, but we have ample proof of his adoration of and devotion to Torah. Many examples might be cited in this regard, not the least of which would be Psalm 1, the precursor psalm to the royal Psalm 2. Psalm 119, however, stands apart as a song of praise to God's Law. Again, we cannot ascribe authorship to David with any degree of assurance, but certainly the mediations written in Psalm 119, focusing as each line does upon the Law, represent the heart of the true King of Israel in accordance with Psalm 1 and Deuteronomy 17. Consider just one stanza, corresponding to the Hebrew letter, *mem*.

> *Oh, how I love Your law! It is my meditation all the day.*
> *You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies; for they are ever with me.*
> *I have more understanding than all my teachers, for Your testimonies are my meditation.*
> *I understand more than the ancients, because I keep Your precepts.*
> *I have restrained my feet from every evil way, that I may keep Your word.*
> *I have not departed from Your judgments, for You Yourself have taught me.*
> *How sweet are Your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth!*
> *Through Your precepts I get understanding; therefore I hate every false way.*
>
> (Psalm 119:97-104)

Thus, with David's conquest of Jerusalem/Zion – and his renaming it the 'City of David' – the narrative comes to a climax. It is, to be sure, an intermediate climax, for

[200] *Ibid*.; 97.

even the culmination of the ark's journey from Sinai to Zion is typological, as Psalm 2 makes very clear. Yet it is as if the journey reaches a very high plateau after having descended into what may truly be called a Slough of Despond. The 'City of David' is also the 'City of God' and the union of these two harkens back to Eden as well as it looks forward prophetically to the King of kings and the New Jerusalem. Time on this plateau will be sadly short – no longer than the duration of two reigns, David's and Solomons. Yet it is long enough to establish both the house of David and the house of God – both on Zion's heights – as the fundamental framework of redemptive history until the advent of Messiah. It all starts innocently enough, with David's desire to bring the ark to his city.

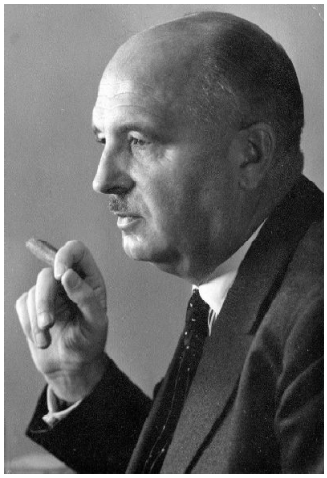
Home at Last

II Samuel 6 recounts the narrative of David's desire to bring the ark up from Kirjath Jearim to Jerusalem. It took two attempts, as Yahweh meant to prove once again that His Presence is never under the control of a man, even one who is the LORD's anointed. Dempster notes: "David is reminded of the identity of the real king in Israel, a God who cannot be domesticated or managed for political reasons."[201] But as significant as the narrative of Uzzah's demise is with regard to the holiness of Israel's God, a more important storyline with respect to the Kingdom actually goes unmentioned in the text: that is, why the ark should be brought to Jerusalem instead of 'back home' to Shiloh. As with the city of Jerusalem, the movement of the ark may be viewed in both a political and a theological light. In each, the relocating of the ark to Jerusalem/Zion is a momentous event in the life of Israel and in the narrative of the redemptive history of Scripture.

Politically speaking, David's desire to have the ark in Jerusalem, his new capital, may be viewed as a shrewd move with the goal of uniting the twelve tribes more solidly under his dominion and his dynasty. Jerusalem, as the City of David, is the independent capital of the united monarchy; claimed by no one tribe, it serves as the royal

[201] Dempster; 141.

city for the whole nation. 20th Century German scholar Martin Noth writes: "David wished to turn this city [Jerusalem] into the center of the tribal league. With a bold move he linked her with the ancient sacral tradition which unified the tribes, making that tradition subservient to his purposes."[202] This move certainly established the Davidic throne far more than had David remained in Hebron of Judah or, perhaps worse as far as his own people were concerned, removed his capital to Samaria in Ephraim. Successfully bringing the ark to the City of David would confirm that Yahweh was indeed with David, further strengthening his claim to be the divinely ordained king. Noth, as a liberal biblical scholar, simply assumes that David did what he did purely for political reasons, failing to see that Yahweh had already shown at the battle of Ebenezer, and will show in David's first attempt to bring the ark up to Jerusalem, that He is nobody's political pawn.


Martin Noth (1902-68)

The 'ancient sacral tradition' of which Noth speaks is, of course, the ark of the covenant. But was David seeking to assume the priestly function in addition to the royal one? One must be careful not to run too quickly to defend David's motives, while also being cautious not to accuse where Scripture does not accuse. The answer is more nuanced than a simple 'yes' or 'no.' On the one hand, David did at times act the part of a priest-king, as Thomas Schreiner notes: "Indeed, there are a number of indications that David was functioning as a priest-king: (1) he wears a linen ephod (II Sam. 6:14); (2) he sacrifices burnt and peace offerings (II Sam. 6:17-19); (3) he blesses the people as priests did (II Sam. 6:18)."[203] But Schreiner may be reading too much into the text at this point. It may very well have been the case that it was not David himself who sacrificed to Yahweh every six paces of the ark's progress, but that the sacrifices were made at his behest (and, undoubtedly, at his cost). David danced before the ark in a linen ephod, but the text does not indicate that this was the priestly ephod that was used for divina-

[202] Quoted by Karel Van Der Toorn, "David and the Ark" *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 113, No. 2 (Summer, 1994); 209.
[203] Schreiner; *The King in His* Beauty; 155-56.

tion. And David's blessing of the people, perhaps the nearest action to that of a priest, is also not uncommon for a king.

If David was a priest-king, it was in a very subtle manner that did not usurp the role of the Levitical/Aaronic priesthood. Even the first, unsuccessful attempt to bring the ark up from Kirjath Jearim was led by the sons of Abinadab, a priestly family. Yet there is in David's actions – and especially the *narrative* of David's actions in II Samuel 6 – a clear indication of a shift in divine intentions. The clearest indication of this is the overall shift of the ark's residence from Shiloh to Jerusalem/Zion. The association of the Temple with Jerusalem is so ingrained in our minds that we fail to see how truly incredible - as in 'unbelievable' – David's plan must have seemed to his contemporaries, especially among the priests. What possible association could be found between the symbol of the divine Presence, on the one hand, and a city that until very recently was in the hands of the Jebusites? We are not told explicitly that Yahweh desired His ark to be relocated to the newly conquered Jebusite city, though by the frequency with which (we are told) David consulted the LORD we might graciously conclude that he did so on this matter as well. However, the first attempt at bringing up the ark might easily have been interpreted by others, and perhaps even by David, as a divine sign that he should not proceed.

> *And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against Uzzah, and God struck him there for his [e]error; and he died there by the ark of God. And David became angry because of the LORD's outbreak against Uzzah; and he called the name of the place Perez Uzzah to this day.* (II Samuel 6:6-8)

The only indication within the transfer narrative that Yahweh approved of the relocation of His Presence to David's new city, is the diving blessing that settles on the household of Obed-Edom, in whose house the ark now resided. This was sufficient to convince David to try again, only far more carefully this time.

> *Now it was told King David, saying, "The LORD has blessed the house of Obed-Edom and all that belongs to him, because of the ark of God." So David went and brought up the ark of God from the*

> *house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness. And so it was, when those bearing the ark of the LORD had gone six paces, that he sacrificed oxen and fatted sheep. Then David danced before the LORD with all his might; and David was wearing a linen ephod. So David and all the house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet.*
>
> (II Samuel 6:12-15)

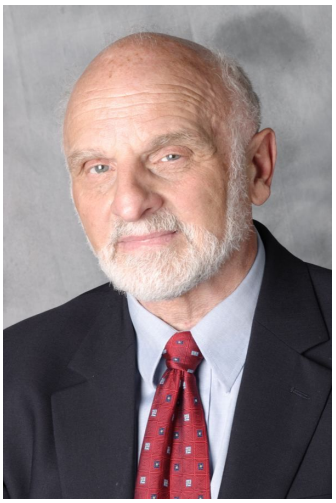
This successful attempt confirmed the relocation of the ark from Shiloh to Zion, the completion of the ark's journey from Sinai. There is one more loose end to tie up in the narrative of transition to David and Zion, that is, the household and dynasty of Saul. David's public display of joy at the bringing up of the ark of the covenant turns out to be quite offensive to his wife, Michal, Saul's daughter. Her motives were probably far less her concern for David's reputation than her contempt for both Yahweh and His ark, a contempt displayed throughout her father's reign. Her condemnation of David re-bounds upon herself, and the LORD closed her womb, for 'Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.'[204] The mention of Saul several times in this closing part of the ark narrative seems to indicate strongly that the consolidation of both David and the ark in one new place also forever closed the door on the dynasty of Saul. Yahweh had rejected Saul as king over Israel and He rejected the Elide priesthood as those who would stand before His ark. These two divine judgments are now established in Israel. God has set His king, and His ark, in Zion.

A House for the LORD and for David

It is hard to overstate the importance of II Samuel chapters 5 – 7 to the covenantal life of Israel or to the kingdom narrative as it unfolds in the Old Testament. The unification of the twelve tribes under the Davidic king and the unification of the royal seat with the House of the LORD mark the culmination of the Exodus. It will also be in the era of David that the extent of the Conquest will finally attain to the borders long ago promised to Abraham.[205] It is mere unbelieving cynicism that reads the narrative of Israel's journeying from Sinai to Zion, and particularly the Ark Narrative across that span

[204] II Samuel 6:23
[205] I Kings 4:21

of text and time, as merely political history. It is, as Walter Brueggemann notes, 'intensely theonomous.' Speaking particularly of the narrative recorded in II Samuel 5-7, Brueggemann notes: "It understands that ultimately the historical process is not shaped by political-economic factors, nor by inventive personalities, but by the purposes and governance of Yahweh, which may operate visibly or unnoticed. The literature is committed to this perception of reality and neither apologizes for it nor explains it. The modern reader is not free to regard this central motive as an intrusion or an embarrassment. Yahweh is a central character in the narrative, a quite expected presence in the drama, and a proper agent of historical events.[206]


Walter Brueggemann (1933-2025)

So far within the culminative narrative of II Samuel 5 – 7 we have encountered first David going up to Jerusalem, then the ark being brought up to Jerusalem. II Samuel 7 solidifies our understanding that these events were the plan and purpose of Israel's God, that David should reign in Zion as God's viceregent and that this situation should be made permanent. Such permanence is therefore manifested as a house for David and a house for Yahweh. But again, Yahweh will intervene to show that the narrative moves according to His will and not according to David's.

> *Now it came to pass when the king was dwelling in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies all around, that the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells inside tent curtains." Then Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you."* (II Samuel 7:1-3)

The way the narrative unfolds is interesting in that the LORD's prophet seems to be speaking off the cuff, as it were, on the basis of the general approbation of David by Yahweh: "Do all that is in your heart, for the LORD is with you." Nathan was premature, for that night the LORD spoke to him concerning David's intentions and, as so often is the case, flipped the narrative. David will not build Yahweh a house, but Yahweh

[206] Quoted by Willis, *op cit*; 126.

will build David house. There is, of course, a play on words going on here: David will not be the one to build the LORD a 'house' as in, a physical building to replace the tent in which Yahweh has dwelt since Sinai, but Yahweh will build David a 'house,' meaning an enduring dynasty of kings ruling in Jerusalem.

> *Now therefore, thus shall you say to My servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts: "I took you from the sheepfold, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people, over Israel. And I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have cut off all your enemies from before you, and have made you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. Moreover I will appoint a place for My people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in a place of their own and move no more; nor shall the sons of wickedness oppress them anymore, as previously, since the time that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel, and have caused you to rest from all your enemies. Also the LORD tells you that He will make you a house.*
>
> (II Samuel 7:8-11)

II Samuel 7 is widely known as the Davidic Covenant, for it is here that Yahweh makes a royal covenant with David and his descendants, that he shall not lack a man on the throne in Jerusalem. As with the Abrahamic and Mosaic (and indeed, the Noaic) covenants, this one is also monergistic: Yahweh initiates and Yahweh secures. Charles Scobie writes: "David's request to build a 'house' is turned down, but he is granted a 'house' in another sense. God reaffirms his choice of David as king…A royal dynasty is thereby established, descended from David and hence from the tribe of Judah, a development foreseen in Jacob's blessing of his son Judah: 'The scepter shall not depart from Judah.'"[207]

We must be careful to note again that, though we have journeyed with Israel and with the ark of the covenant from Mt. Sinai (Mosaic Covenant) to Zion (Davidic Covenant), we have not abolished the former to establish the latter. Torah will now go forth from Zion, but it will be the same Torah of Sinai. Yahweh's covenant with David and his line is a subset of Yahweh's covenant with His people Israel; the Davidic Covenant does not supersede or abrogate the Mosaic. All Israel, including the king, are subject to the true King, Yahweh, and are to obey His commandments. This is established even

[207] Scobie, Charles H. H. *The Ways of Our God: An Approach to Biblical Theology* ((Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; 2003); 305.

within Torah, in Deuteronomy 17, long before there ever was a king in Israel.[208] Willis quotes M. D. Guinan from the article 'Davidic Covenant' in the Anchor Bible Dictionary,

> The Mosaic covenant is the basic covenant that gives Israel its distinct identity. No text in the OT suggests that this covenant is ever replaced by the Davidic. The two covenants cannot be contrasted on the basis of covenant obligations; the king, too, is expected to be a faithful Yahwist and to obey the covenant commandments, especially in their concern for justice…Both covenants were accepted in Israel and appear in the canon of Scripture; responsible exegesis must do justice to this fact. It is better to view the two not as contradictory but as complementary.[209]

The continuity of the Davidic Covenant with the Mosaic is to be expected under the rubric of Biblical or Canonical Theology; the revelation of God's redemptive purposes have now progressed to the union of the Davidic throne with the holy mountain of Zion, and from here we can gain a stunning vista of the ultimate messianic fulfillment of it all. The historical reality is that David eventually *did* lack a son to sit on his throne; the Davidic line, while not ending, nonetheless was reduced to, prophetically-speaking, a 'stump.' But it was from that stump that a Branch would sprout, the Branch who would reign as priest upon His throne, the Messiah Jesus, David's greater son.

Chapter Summary

As important as the various characters are in the drama that unfolds from the end of the era of the Judges to the ascension of David to his throne over all Israel, none are as important to the narrative flow as the ark of the covenant, the very Presence of Israel's God and the symbol of the triumphant Warrior-King Yahweh. With the capture of Jerusalem – renamed the 'City of David' – and the ark's relocation to Zion we arrive at the preliminary fulfillment of the kingdom – God has set His king on Zion. From this vantage point we can now begin to see the ultimate fulfillment of the kingdom of God in the person of the Messiah Jesus.

---

[208] *Cp.* page 148 above.
[209] Willis; 127-28.