

COVENANT AND THE KINGDOM: GENESIS 1-3 AS FOUNDATION FOR BIBLICAL THEOLOGY

Eugene H. Merrill
Dallas Theological Seminary, Dallas TX 75204

The thesis of this paper is that the key to a proper biblical hermeneutic and theology is to be found in the covenant concept of both the OT and NT, especially in the form that concept takes in Genesis. The centrality of the covenant to biblical theology has, of course, been recognized for years by biblical theologians,¹ but only since the relatively recent recovery of comparative covenant materials from the ancient Near East have biblical covenant form and content been reevaluated and tied in closely to the meaning and even structure of the biblical message.² M. Kline, in a publication entitled *The Structure of Biblical Authority*,³ has argued, on the basis of his own previous studies of biblical and ancient Near Eastern treaty and covenant forms, that the entire Bible is formulated on the model of an extensive and expansive covenant. That is, the Bible does not merely contain covenant records, but is itself and in its entirety a covenant text.⁴

¹ See especially W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (2 vols; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) (first published in German in 1933). For others see G. Hasel, *Old Testament Theology: Basic Issues in the Current Debate* (3rd ed.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 138, n. 107; Henning Graf Reventlow, *Problems of Old Testament Theology in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 126-28. ,

² V. Korosec, *Hethitische Staatsverträge*. Leipzig, 1931; G. E. Mendenhall, "Covenant Forms in Israelite Tradition," *BA* 17 (1954) 49-76; D. J. McCarthy, *Treaty and Covenant* (An Bib 21; Rome, 1963); M. Kline, *The Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); K. Baltzer, *The Covenant Formulary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).

³ M. G. Kline, *The Structure of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972).

⁴ *Ibid.*, 75.

While this may be an overstatement, it does suggest the dominance of the covenant idea in certain segments of biblical scholarship.

I. *Biblical Concept of Covenant*

By "covenant" is meant "a written agreement or promise usually under seal between two or more parties especially for the performance of some action."⁵ The Hebrew word used to express "covenant" is **בְּרִית** a term that first occurs in Gen 6:18 and that appears about 285 times in the OT.⁶ It is translated by Greek $\delta\iota\omicron\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\iota\varsigma$ in the LXX and in the NT. Though the terms are not exactly synonymous, the Greek referring more to a "will" or "last testament," the concept of a legal contract at least is common to both.⁷

Until the advent of 19th century archaeological research, very little was known of covenants in the ancient East apart from the OT and even these (including the biblical) were little understood. The discovery, publication, and study of cuneiform tablets and other inscriptional material, especially from Boghazkoy, the old Hittite capital, have shed considerable light on international treaty and covenant arrangements from the Late Bronze and Early Iron Ages (ca. 1400-1200 B.C.). This is particularly instructive to biblical scholarship because according to the traditional dating the Mosaic covenants fall within this period or a little earlier.

The Hittite treaties reveal that such contracts existed in one of two forms:⁸ (1) The parity treaty between equals and (2) the sovereign-vassal (or suzerainty) treaty which was drawn up by a superior power and imposed upon an inferior. Both types generally contain at the minimum certain clauses including a preamble, an historical prologue, the list of stipulations, the witnesses, the curses and blessings, and provision for deposit and public reading of the covenant text. The major difference, of course, was that the superior party in the suzerainty treaty coerced the vassal into acceptance of the fidelity to the covenant terms while he himself had no such obligations except as he voluntarily subscribed to his own stipulations.

The significance of all this to biblical studies is the fact that biblical covenant form resembles almost exactly Hittite treaty form, specifically the sovereign-vassal type. The Covenant Code of Exodus 20-23 and the entire Book of Deuteronomy are the most outstanding

⁵ *Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary* (Springfield: G. & C. Merriam, 1976) 192.

⁶ BDB 136-37.

⁷ M. Weinfeld, "בְּרִית," *TDOT* 2 (1975) 256.

⁸ For the following, see especially Mendenhall, *BA* 17 (n. 2 above).

examples of this type. It is quite apparent that Moses undoubtedly utilized already existing treaty formulas in the construction of biblical treaty contracts between God and individuals or God and Israel. And the comparison does not end with the literary correspondences. An essential feature of certain ancient Near Eastern treaty-making was the slaughter of an animal, often an ass, as, perhaps, an example of the fate to be expected by the covenant party who violated his treaty obligations.⁹ There was also the sense of the binding together of the contracting parties through the mutuality of the animal sacrifice and the sprinkling of its blood upon the treaty participants or their representatives. The importance of slaughter and blood to biblical covenants is, of course, well known.

The reader of the OT who examines it from this covenant stance will see that covenant texts occupy a very significant portion of biblical composition. Deuteronomy, for example, is recognized as being almost entirely covenantal in its form and content,¹⁰ as are substantial parts of the rest of the OT. And, if Kline is correct, the entire Bible might be so analyzed. What is important now is to see that these individual covenants, far from being isolated and unrelated, are parts or successive elaborations of a basic covenant theme. All covenant references in the Bible are then but progressively revealed modifications and explanations of that motif. This, we feel, is the interpretive key to Scripture, a key which, applied consistently and skillfully, will unlock the mysteries of God's Word to one who sincerely wishes to understand and communicate God's redemptive message with authority and conviction.¹¹

II. *Covenant in Genesis 1-3*

Let us turn now to a systematic examination of the covenant theme in the early chapters of Genesis with the end in view of establishing our thesis that it is at the heart of divine revelation and that it can provide the organizing principle around which a consistent and comprehensive biblical theology may be developed. Because Genesis is the book of beginnings it is not surprising that covenant should first be found there, and, in fact, found in more specific

⁹ M. Held, "Philological Notes on the Marl Covenant Rituals," *BASOR* 200 (1970) 32-40.

¹⁰ For an excellent commentary structured along covenant lines see J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy* (TOTC; Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1974).

¹¹ This notion has been picked up and published recently by W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984).

instances than anywhere else in the Bible.¹² So fundamental is the covenant theme there it is not an exaggeration to say that Genesis provides the principal statement of God's purposes of which the remainder of the biblical witness is an enlargement and interpretation. The understanding of his creative and redemptive ways must issue from their initial statement in Genesis and not from a stance that considers Genesis to be only prolegomenon or retrojection.

The climax of God's creative work as revealed in Genesis 1-2 was the creation of man, an event reserved for the last part of the sixth day. In conjunction with the creative act appears the statement by God concerning its meaning and purpose. "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground" (Gen 1:26-28, NIV).

In its broadest sense, this mandate is a greatly abbreviated covenant expression in which the sovereign (God) outlines to his vassal (man) the meaning of the vassal's existence and the role that he is to play in the sovereign's eternal plans. Man was created, then, to serve as the agent of God in implementing God's sovereign will and sway over the universe.¹³ His subsequent fall into sin made him incapable of adequately fulfilling the covenant requirements, as we shall see, so he was forced to attempt to do so with great difficulty and struggle. The history of the human race is testimony to the miserable failure of man to accomplish the covenant mandate, a failure overcome only by the Second Adam, our Lord Jesus Christ, who perfectly demonstrated on earth the authority that was inherent in the Adamic covenant and who, moreover, by his perfect obedience to it has guaranteed the ultimate restoration of redeemed man to the original covenant privileges. Let us consider several ramifications of this covenant statement.

Mankind as God's Vice-Regent

That man is to serve as vice-regent of God is seen clearly in the fact that he is the "image" and "likeness" of God. The former of these terms, **צֶלֶם**, is the word ordinarily used in the OT to speak of an idol

¹² In all its forms **בְּרִית** occurs twenty-seven times in Genesis or about one-tenth of all the OT uses.

¹³ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (2 vols; New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 1. 146-47.

or other object carved or fashioned to resemble the deity that it presents.¹⁴ The Greek, both in the LXX and NT, usually translates it εἰκών, from which English "icon" is directly derived.¹⁵ The word translated "likeness" in our versions is דְּמוּת a term that is equally as common (25 occurrences), and that appears occasionally as a synonym for צֶלֶם (Gen 1:26; 5:3; Ezek 23:14-15).¹⁶ In our text the two words seem to be in a parallel relationship, indicating their synonymity. that this imago dei represents is, of course, a matter of divergent opinions, but at the least it is that quality in man that makes him different from and superior to all else in the created universe.¹⁷ It is our judgment that much more is involved, for the context of the passage is quite suggestive in this respect. For example, the first person plural pronoun is used by God consistently throughout the narrative. This cannot be explained by reference to the plurality of Elohim, for that plural of the divine name is nearly universally interpreted as the *pluralis maiestatis* or plural of majesty.¹⁸ Moreover, ordinarily the name Elohim occurs with singular personal or relative pronouns. The appearance of "us," then, rather than "me" is a clue that points to a plural of number, a plural that suggests the divine Godhead-Father, Son, and Spirit.¹⁹ The Spirit had already been introduced as that person of God who "moved" (better "hovered" or "brooded") over the face of the deep (Gen 1:2). It would appear appropriate that the Son should here be identified as that divine person of whom man is the image. The OT speaks elsewhere of Wisdom who is hypostatized and described as at least a co-Creator with God (cf. Prov 8:30). And, of course, the NT specifically identifies Jesus Christ as the Creator an 1:1-3; Col 1:16; Heb 1:2). There is clearly a straight line of development from OT מְחַיֵּה to Mishnaic מְמַרָא to NT Logos.²⁰

There is, furthermore, explicit evidence that both the Father and the Holy Spirit are invisible, spiritual entities and that only the Son is attributed with any bodily manifestation. This may be seen in the aT appearances of God as the Angel of the Lord or as the "Son of Man." Most fully and unequivocally, it is seen in the NT incarnate Christ.

¹⁴ C. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11. A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984)

¹⁵ BAGD 222.

¹⁶ H. D. Preuss, "דְּמוּת" *TDOT* 3 (1978) ~7 -00.

¹⁷ A. H. Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: Judson, 1970) 514.

¹⁸ GKC #124g.

¹⁹ E. H. Merrill, "Is the Doctrine of the Trinity Implied in the Genesis Creation Ccount?" *The Genesis Debate* (ed. R. Youngblood; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986) 9-22.

²⁰ J. B. Payne, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zonden.an. 1962)171-72.

We would suggest, therefore, that the image of God entails also a phenomenal aspect, a relationship between man and the Son of Man so close that the former could be said in the strictest sense of the term to be the image of the latter.²¹

If man of the covenant is to fulfill his covenantal mandate, we must attempt to discover how this fulfillment is described. Unfortunately, the evidence is sparse because man sinned before realizing the potentialities involved. We do learn, however, that he was to cultivate the ground (2:5, 15), that he had access to everything in Eden but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (2:17), and that he had the incredible ability to name all the animals (2:19), a feat that presupposes either the skill of writing and recording or the possession of a phenomenal memory! Tragically, however, sin marred the image in at least the area of man's covenant capacities, so that we can only guess at the powers that man could have exercised had he been obedient. Or need we only guess? Paul on several occasions refers to a Second Adam, Jesus Christ (Rom 5:14-17; 1 Cor 15:22, 45). This Second Adam presumably was more than one who came to undo the work of sin in human life; He came also to demonstrate the possibilities inherent in sinless man. In other words, Jesus Christ, often described as the Son of Man, was not only God but was man *par excellence*, the man whom God intended Adam to be. Should we not seek in the life of Jesus, the Perfect Man, some insights into the type of man created by God to carry out the Adamic covenant?

Jesus as Second Adam

A few examples from the Gospels must suffice. In the story of Jesus' calming of the stormy sea, the disciples are so amazed at what they see that they ask incredulously, "What kind of a man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey Him" (Matt 8:27; cf. Mark 4:36-41; Luke 8:27-75)? Or one is reminded of the need for the payment of taxes to Caesar. Jesus on one occasion told Peter to go to the sea, throw in a hook, and find a coin in the mouth of the first fish caught (Matt 17:24-17). When Jesus was about to enter Jerusalem in triumph at the beginning of Passion Week, He first of all amazed His disciples by riding on an unbroken donkey (Matt 21:7) and then proceeded to show His lordship over a fig tree by cursing it so that it withered immediately (Matt 21:18-22). These evidences of power over nature are usually attributed to His deity, but there is every reason to believe

²¹ For the view that human-form theophanies are limited to Christ see J. A: Borland, *Christ in the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1978) 65-72. Borland correctly; does not limit man as the image of God to the physical appearance of the Son (pp. 106-7) for, as he suggests, Christ did not exist permanently in human form in OT times.

("What kind of man²² is this?") that Jesus was exercising the God-given authority of Adam, an authority designed for the entire human race, forfeited by sinful Adam, and restored in and through Christ (cf. also Ps 8), That man will once again possess these powers may be seen in the beautiful eschatological pictures of the OT prophets in which, for example, "The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the young lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them" (Isa 11:6, NIV).

Mankind as Nature's Sovereign

Another feature to note in the covenant of Gen 1:26-28 is that of the command to rule over the fish, the birds, and large and small land animals (1:26) and to "subdue" the earth (1:28). The verb "to rule" is **רָדַד** usually used in connection with the absolute domination of one party by another (Lev 25:43, 46, 53; 26:17, 1 Kgs 5:4, 30; Isa 14:2; Ps 110:2).²³ "To subdue" is **כָּבַשׁ** which means "to tread down." The same word is used in Mic 7:19 to speak of God treading iniquities underfoot. In, another form it occurs in Jer 34:11 in the sense of bringing one into bondage or subservience.²⁴ Hence, these two verbs are practically synonymous. This prerogative of man was seen, of course, in his naming of the animals and his care of the garden. And we have already suggested that Jesus, the perfect Son of Man, demonstrated in his own life on earth His ability to dominate the various aspects of the natural world. Moreover, man, when fully redeemed, will resume his covenant responsibilities and privileges, by the grace of God, and forever will reign over the universe as God's agent in fulfillment of the reason for his very creation.

In stark contradiction to the idealized situation of the covenant stipulation of Genesis 1 is the reality of human existence vis-a-vis the covenant after the fall. Man now knows that he is naked, an understanding which not only derives from his possession of the knowledge of good and evil, but which makes him acutely aware that he cannot fulfill the covenant terms.²⁵ He was told to have dominion over all things, but he failed to govern even his wife and his own appetites. He has forfeited the right to reign and therefore does not have the ability to reign. His attempt to undo his nakedness and, hence, recover his dignity and lordship is frustrated by the Lord who shows him, by covering him with the skins of a slaughtered beast, that another

²² No explicit word for "man" is used in Matt 8:27 but the Greek *ποταπός* ("sort," "kind") is a common substitute for the term "person" (see BAGD 694-95).

²³ See W. White, "רָדַד", *TWOT* 2 (1980) 833.

²⁴ J. N. Oswalt, "כָּבַשׁ", *TWOT* 1 (1980) 430.

²⁵ T. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958) 209-10.

way--a super-human way--must be found. God must do the covering and the restoring or there is no hope at all.

The Fall and Covenant Modification

But to move more directly into the covenant terms as they are modified for fallen man in Gen 3:14-19, we observe that the original mandate ("to reign, to multiply, to subdue") is preserved but in an obviously qualified way. That is, man still has the rights and obligations of the original covenant, but will accomplish them only with pain and arduous labor. And, moreover, even this pain and labor could not bring about the desired ends for which man was created were God not to intervene in history in the seed of the woman and to fulfill in this seed His sovereign purposes. The second Adam was to do what God had required of the first, and impute to every Adam of every age the perfect obedience of the mandate which he achieved by his life, death, and resurrection.

In the first place, because an animal (the serpent) was the vehicle of man's temptation and fall, animals must, in general, be condemned for insubordination though the serpent is especially cursed (3:14). Man the sovereign had become the slave, a monstrous imbalance which must be righted.

A result of this imbalance was a hostility between man and animal, an antagonism suggested here but explicitly spelled out later on in the Noahic covenant (Gen 9:2). Animals would be docile only by training and discipline, not as a matter of course.²⁶ Only with the reestablishment of the paradise world could there be the compatible relationship between man and animals that God had originally intended.

Satan, incarnate in the serpent, is, of course, the real object of the rebuke of the Lord, for it was he who had attempted to subvert the covenant arrangement, possibly because he himself had originally served as vice-regent of God (cf. Isa 14; Ezek 28). The enmity between man and the serpent was only an illustration of the more profound and consequential enmity between man and Satan, and indeed, between the Seed of the woman and Satan. The underlying cause of the disruption of the covenant would be its chief victim when the covenant was renewed and perfected by the Seed of the woman, the Lord Jesus Christ.

In the second act of insubordination, that of the woman to the man and both to God, the result would entail the on-going covenant stipulations but with the added ingredients of pain, a powerful attrac-

²⁶ G. Vos, *Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1954) 64.

tion of wife to husband,²⁷ debilitating labor, and death. Man must carry out the mandate but the cost would be high-too high in fact for him actually to bring it to completion himself. The promise of the seed and the evidence of divine grace in the garments of skin pointed to a covenant completeness that would be a future reality.

In the meantime, the command to be fruitful and multiply would be complicated by the pain of the woman in childbirth. The injunction to man and woman to rule over all things would be tempered by the rule of the man over the woman, by the subordination of her desires to his. The earth which was to be subject to man and the ready source of his nourishment now would yield its riches only with toil. And the very soil which he tilled, and from which he originated, would eventually master him and cover him in death.

Fallen Man's Covenant Capacity

We are still left, however, with the intriguing question of the extent of unredeemed man's ability and right to pursue the covenant stipulations of Gen 1:26-18. At the outset we must be reminded that unregenerate man is generally not even aware of a covenant mandate, except possibly "intuitively," to say nothing of a command to pursue it. But it cannot be argued that he does pursue it even in his blindness. Man's environmental struggles all represent his endeavors to "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it." Ironically (or perhaps even predictably) he appears to be waging a losing battle as the present-day ecological concern so eloquently testifies. Man carries out the mandate, but as is true with every thing else that he does as fallen creature without divine orientation, he perverts it, misunderstands it, exploits it, and finally seems to be in danger of destroying it. But this is not to be, for the Adamic covenant was without condition—man was created to fulfill it and he will, both partially and imperfectly as fallen first Adam, and fully and perfectly in and through Second Adam. The ecological crisis is not, fatal, but only witnesses to the inadequacies of rebellious man. Christ has triumphed not only over death and sin but over the environment. He will undercut the ecological peril by bringing in the fruits of His redemptive work, even a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwells righteousness.

One thought that is staggering in the face of man's inability to the Adamic covenant perfectly is his sheer accomplishment

²⁷ This seems to be the best understanding of the phrase *אל אישך תשוקתך* ("unto your husband [will be] your desire"). So W. C. Kaiser: Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 204-5. As Kaiser points out, the wrong in this is that in turning in such a way to her husband the woman will turn from dependence on God.

scientifically and technologically in spite of his limitations. He has, by dint of creative and imaginative genius, risen to heights of achievement undreamed of by his predecessors of only a century ago. He has not only been able to dominate this planet with his superior intellectual powers, but has now planted his feet on the moon and his implements of discovery on the planets as well. All this, we feel, is part of the mandate, but only its superficial, external part. The factor that is missing is the ascription to God of the glory and praise due His name. Man fulfills the covenant, even to a remarkable degree, but at the same time he does not fulfill it at all for he does not operate as the conscious agent of God. Part of the meaning of the image of God is to act for God and represent God, but man will not have God to rule over him.

III. The Prospects of Covenant Fulfillment

The Christian man, on the other hand, is able to understand the covenant and even largely to fulfill it in points. And where he cannot fulfill it or overcome the liabilities built into it because of sin, he can at least await with patience and perseverance the redemptive day: when these liabilities will be removed in fact and when he will enter into the covenant relationship with the saints of all the ages, and with them pursue its goals and purposes eternally. Christ, who showed by example what it meant to keep the covenant and whose obedience retrieved it and made it a viable vehicle of divine intercourse with man, has pioneered the way that all men can follow. He is the first-fruits not only of them who sleep but of them who will in the day of His glory share with Him the joy of covenant-keeping, the joy of reigning forever and ever as the agents of the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father.

If God is immutable; if the covenant of Gen 1:26-28 is inviolable, unconditional, and eternal; if Christ as Second Adam has showed His earthly life and ministry what it meant to keep the covenant perfectly—all of which is true—then we should expect some biblical statement about the fulfillment of the Adamic covenant by redeemed man. But before such an investigation is undertaken some consideration of the biblical view of time must be made.

Biblical View of Time

Basically, there are two ways in which time can be understood—the linear and the cyclical.²⁸ The former sees time plotted on a non-

²⁸ For an excellent discussion of the matter see Mircea Eliade, *Cosmos and History* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) esp. 62-92.

ending straight line with only accidental or coincidental repetitions of events and these only of an insignificant nature. The latter, however, interprets time as occurring in series of repeatable, nearly identical events. It is measured in terms of aeons which, though lasting for thousands of years, have decisive -and dramatic beginnings and endings. Time in the linear sense, an understanding that originated in the 17th century,²⁹ views history as a continuously ongoing process with little or no theological significance. The religions and philosophies of the ancient world, particularly those of the Graeco-Mesopotamians, conceived of history as a cyclical phenomenon. Worlds and men are created to live, interact, and die, only to be recreated time and time again. Reincarnation is only one feature of such a world view.

Biblical notions of time are not properly either linear or cyclical, but a combination to be described, perhaps, as a "loop." Eternity is linear while the parenthesis that we call time, a sort of interruption of eternity, is cyclical in nature, though only unicyclical.³⁰ God, eternally existent, created all things to serve his own interests. His creation, however, through its disobedience, has temporarily intersected the continuum of eternity, but through Christ the promise of a resumption of the linear has been made. When history has run its course, the Kingdom of God will be established, the cycle now having swung full turn. In one sense, time will have been blotted out, and the linear aspect of the divine historical process will appear as never having been broken at all. Or, to put it another way, the establishment of a new heavens and a new earth will be nothing more or less than a reconstitution of the pristine heavens and earth known by sinless Adam. Because human history since the fall has been characterized by sin, and since sin will be eradicated completely from the universe: it follows that the cycle of human history between the fall of First Adam and the advent of Second Adam is to be as a bubble on a string--when the bubble is pricked, the string alone remains.

Redeemed Mankind and the Age to Come

In order to visualize what qualities will be characteristic of man in the Age to Come, we need only refer to the Paradise setting of the original covenant of Genesis once again. Man will be in the unimpaired image of God and will exercise lordship, under God, of all the universe. Specifically, however, it is instructive to search out the eschatological teaching of the prophets, for there they detail man-to-man, man-to-nature, and man-to-God relationships that are only suggested in Genesis. There will be no war (Isa 2:4; MIC 4:3; Joel 3:10),

²⁹ Ibid., 145-46.

³⁰ Ibid., 136-30.

but justice and righteousness will prevail (Isa 9:7). The "natural" animosities between animals and between men and animals (which, after all, are not natural) will end (Isa 11:6-9; 65:25; Ezek 34:25; Hos 2:18). There will be no death or sorrow (Isa 25:8) and even the desert lands will come alive and produce abundance (Isa 35:1-2; Joel 3:18). Man will then rule with God and for God over all things (Dan 7:27; Rom 5:17; 1 Cor 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2; Rev 2:26-27; 3:21; 20:4). In Paul's great exposition of the truth concerning human redemption in Romans 8, he goes on to speak of the redemption of the creation as a whole. He suggests that "the creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed" (8:19, NIV). This revealing is certainly to be understood as the full, final restitution of the elect to their position as partners with God in the covenant plan (cf. 1 Pet 1:7,13).

The Apostle continues by showing how that all creation was "subjected to frustration" or made to partake of the divine curse because of man's sin (cf. Isa 24:6; Jer 12:4). There is hope, however, for nature, a hope that will be realized following the completion of the redemption of man. The corruption of the earth (suggested by the thorns and thistles of Gen 3:18) will be undone and nature will be set free from its bondage (cf. Acts 3:21). In the meantime, Paul says, "the whole creation has been groaning as in pains of childbirth. . ." (Rom 8:22). This Image suggests that from the old will come something new. The cursed universe will give birth to a new one, a birth associated with the rebirth of the redeemed ones in their glorified state.³¹ Can it be that the violence and upheavals associated with the last days of this era, those signs of the end of the world, are at the same time the birth throes of nature which agonizes to deliver a new heaven and earth worthy of the King and his subjects who reign with him (cf. 2 Pet 3:10-13; Rev 21:1)?

We would not suggest, of course, that the new heavens and new earth will be identical to those described in Genesis. There are many factors which would necessitate differences. For example, Adam lived in a garden, a life of pastoral, agricultural pursuits. The citizens of the New Earth will live both in this kind of environment and also in a great city, New Jerusalem, come down from God out of heaven. We are led to speculate, however, as to whether or not such might have been the case in the original Paradise as well if sufficient time had elapsed for a population large enough to be conducive to urban life had emerged. For Adam and Eve to have lived by themselves in a city as extensive as that described in Revelation would be little short

³¹ C. Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955) 274-75.

of absurd (cf. Rev 21:16), And yet it is important to note that the Tree of Life, central to the Garden of Eden, is also a major feature of New Jerusalem (Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). The externals of the setting are different, but the underlying and essential content is the same.

Also, there is no sun or moon in the world to come, for the Lamb is the light thereof (Rev 21:23). Let us remember here also that there was sunless light on the earth before man was created (Gen 1:3), and that the function of the heavenly lightholders was not only to give light on the earth, but to serve as time indicators (Gen 1:14-18). They may have been prepared for this latter function in anticipation of the "interruption" of time mentioned previously, a kind of proleptic indicator that day and night, summer and winter, are testimonies to the continually alternating pattern of life in time, life as lived by fallen man. As we see later, part of the Noahic Covenant is the promise by the Lord that day and night shall not cease "as long as the earth endures" (Gen 8:22). Is it too much to propose that the sun would have become unnecessary and therefore nonexistent even in Eden had man successfully passed the probation of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil? The absence of a sea in the renewed earth might also be explained on this basis. Perhaps it had been reserved by the Lord as a means of judgment and not as a necessary part of the creation (cf. 2 Pet 3:5-7).³²

A third contact is that of God's dwelling among men. Rev 21:3 states explicitly that the tabernacle of God will be among men and "he will live with them. . . . But Genesis also describes man's fellowship with God in terms that suggest that he was among them in a unique way, a way not paralleled after man's exile from the Garden (Gen 3:8-10).

Finally, John the Apostle visualizes the fact that there will be no curse in Heavenly Jerusalem (Rev 22:3), a decided contrast to the curse of Genesis 3, but nonetheless a reminder that the resumption of the covenant relationship will hark back to the perfect, uncursed state of affairs that formed the backdrop of the original declaration of the

III. *Conclusion*

The proposition that covenant is a dominant theme of the Bible has, we trust, been at least partially demonstrated by this brief look at

³² For the sea as a symbol of chaos out of which came (comes) the created order see B. K. Waltke, *Creation and Chaos* (Portland: Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, 1974) 13-15.

early Genesis. It is much more than mere coincidence that Genesis and Revelation, the first and last books of Scripture, should share in common the idea of man in contractual relationship with God, the OT book rehearsing the covenant command to rule over all things, and the NT prophetically revealing that man shall indeed fulfill that covenant requirement perfectly and eternally.³³ Everything in between--from Genesis 4 through Revelation 20--speaks of sin and redemption the violation of the covenant by First Adam and its obedience and fulfillment by Second Adam. By the grace of God we may now exult with David who exclaimed:

What is man that you are mindful of him,
The son of man, that you care for him?
You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings
And crowned him with glory and honor?
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;
You put everything under his feet. . . .

(Ps 8:4-6, NIV)

³³ See now the stimulating and provocative connection of Revelation 21-22 to the OT by N. J. Dumbrell, *The End of the Beginning* (Homebush West, Australia: Lancer, Books, 1985).

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The Criswell College
4010 Gaston Ave.
Dallas, TX 75246
www.criswell.edu

Please report any errors to Ted Hildebrandt at: thildebrandt@gordon.edu