

Introduction to Biblical Theology

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1. What is Meant by Biblical Theology

“Theology” is language (logos) about God (theos). We can distinguish two broad kinds of theology: Biblical Theology and Ecclesiastical Theology. Biblical Theology concerns the way God presents himself and his actions in the Bible itself, while Ecclesiastical Theology concerns how the Church has applied the content of the Bible since the close of the canon of Scripture.

Let us begin with what we are calling Ecclesiastical Theology. Ecclesiastical Theology is performed when the Church studies how the content of the Bible is applied in new ways and to new matters. We can roughly distinguish four branches of Ecclesiastical Theology, in no particular order.

First there is Historical Theology. Here we are concerned with the development of doctrine through the ages of the Church. The study of creeds and confessions is a sub-set of Historical Theology, which can be called Creedal or Confessional Theology. When doing Historical Theology, it is important to pay attention to how language is used by a given writer or preacher, or a given age of writers or preachers. For instance, the Westminster Catechisms consist very largely of definitions of terms. This is a literary style, one arising from the “terminist” branch of the “nominalistic” philosophy current at that time. An earlier Reformed catechism, the Heidelberg Catechism, is written in different style.

Second there is Systematic Theology. We have to be careful with this discipline, because the Bible does not “contain” a system, and there is no one “system” of the true religion. If we say that the Bible contains a system, then we reduce the Bible to that system, and exclude from consideration things in the Bible that do not seem to fit our system. Our minds are not infinite or mature enough to grasp how all of the Biblical revelation fits together with all of human history and inquiry. The only “system” in the Bible is the Bible itself, all of it, exactly as it is written. God is three and one. Instead of one “system,” we should be open to various “perspectives,” to more than one “system,” by which we can rightly organize that data of theology.

No systematic theologian tries to summarize and systematize the whole Bible. We do not find chapters on “hair” or “clothing” in Systematic Theology -- though these are important areas of concern in the Bible itself.

What Systematic Theology actually does is summarize and reflect upon great issues that have arisen in the history of the Church. We can divide these into Dogmatic Theology, dealing with things that must be believed, and Polemical Theology, dealing with areas of difference between groups of Christians. Of course, Systematic Theology also deals with creeds and confessions, and so Creedal or Confessional Theology is a kind of mixture of Historical and Systematic Theology.

The areas of concern to Systematic Theology have arisen progressively in the history of the Church. The early church was largely concerned with saying who God is and who Jesus Christ is, against heresies, thus giving birth to Theology Proper and Christology. The Western medieval Church was largely concerned with how God has redeemed humanity from sin and death, and thus began more intense reflection on the nature of man (Anthropology) and of salvation (Soteriology). The Protestant Reformation was concerned with how that salvation is given to sinners, and thereby raised into fuller consciousness

the study of the Holy Spirit (Pneumatology) and of the Church (Ecclesiology and Sacramentology). Questions about the last things and of the nature of the afterlife (Eschatology) have been debated all along, but are coming into greater prominence today.

In all of these areas, Systematic Theology translates the language and content of the Bible into a new language designed to deal with errors arising from pagan thinking. At the outset, for instance, it was necessary for the Church to define God as the creator of the universe, and not fall into the pagan notion that God is merely the highest part of some "scale of being" within the universe. One way or another, all early Church heresies are infected with this pagan notion. The Bible does not address this question directly, but provides the data and concepts that the Church translated into new language to address these questions. In contrast, Biblical Theology is concerned with how the Bible uses its own internal language to address the questions that are internal to it.

A third area of what we are calling Ecclesiastical Theology can be called Philosophical Theology, from philo (love) of sophia (wisdom). Philosophical Theology happens when men reflect, speak, and write about matters that are more broad than the concerns of Systematic Theology, that are not matters of dogma or of polemical definition, but of wisdom and reflection. We can think of Political Theology as one aspect of this, but also theological reflection on the family and marriage, on the arts, on science, and so forth.

Finally, for our purposes, a fourth form of Ecclesiastical Theology is Liturgical Theology. Liturgical Theology seeks to answer the question of how the vast amount of liturgical data in the Bible is to be applied in the liturgical life of the Church in the New Gospel Age. Liturgics, which is the actual performance of worship and liturgy, is a branch of Liturgical Theology.

Of course, all of these branches of Ecclesiastical Theology overlap and are intertwined. We cannot study one area without being partly informed about all the others.

Having looked at how the Church applies the Bible in these new ways, we are now in a better position to understand what Biblical Theology is. Biblical Theology is concerned with matters internal to the Bible itself: what the Bible says and how it says it, in its own terms. In Biblical Theology we subordinate our special Church language and categories to the inspired language and categories of the Bible itself.

Biblical Theology is often defined as the historical unfolding of God's revelation, or of God's revelation and of the history of his covenantal redemption and transformation of humanity and the world. In practice, Biblical Theology is usually broader than this, and also includes the study of literary structure and of Biblical themes. We shall include these in our understanding also. For our purposes, Biblical Theology includes the following large areas of concern: Covenant Theology, Literary Theology, Typology, and Ritual Theology. Again, in no particular order:

First, covenant theology. Covenant theology can be defined as the study of the form or structure of God's relationship with humanity. In addition, it deals with God's intra-trinitarian personal relations as they are revealed through his relations with us. Since Covenant Theology is concerned with history, it also seeks to describe how God's covenantal relationships with humanity change in time, as God transfigures one covenant into a new one throughout the course of Biblical history. As we become familiar with covenant theology, we gain perspectives that will help us understand our history and the times in which we live. Covenant Theology is roughly equivalent to Historical Theology, with the investigation of particular covenants as roughly equivalent to the study of historical creeds and confessions.

Second, Literary Theology. We are concerned here with the shape of the text of the Bible. Since the second Person of God is the Word of God, human beings are also words of

God, made in his image. Human language in its shape is related to the shape of human life. The Bible provides literary shapes that show us how we are to think and how we are to exist and move as God's images. Thus, the shape of the Biblical text is an important area of theological concern. We can see the study of Literary Theology as roughly equivalent to Systematic Theology, in that the literary architecture of a given passage, book, group of books, or of the whole Bible provides us with a kind of "system" for the literature under consideration.

Of course, investigation of literary structure or shape involves us in detailed grammar and in textual questions, and is interwoven with such matters. But Literary Theology is concerned with larger areas of the text. Investigating the shape of the text, especially its parallel structures, provides us with much insight not only into how God has chosen to reveal himself, but also into deep structures and pervasive themes in the Bible.

Third, typology. Covenant Theology focuses on the actual events of Biblical history, on what God and man actually did. We must affirm that this history actually happened, and that it moved progressively toward the goal of the new creation in Jesus Christ and his Church. But God's way of presenting the meaning of that history involves an abundant use of symbols and symbolic structures, symbols and structures that are transformed and renewed covenant by covenant over the course of Biblical history.

Hence, we must become familiar with the basic symbolic furniture of the world as God created it, and with how he has used and transformed that furniture covenant by covenant. We want to know, for instance, about the heavenly sea of Genesis 1:7, how that sea baptized the world in the Flood, how it found symbolic expression first in the Tabernacle laver, then in the Water Chariots and Bronze Sea of Solomon's Temple, and then in the Temple river of Ezekiel 47. We want to understand how that heavenly sea relates to the various baptisms of the Old Creation and to the Christian baptism of the New, and to the rivers that flow from God's throne in Revelation 22.

We must also become familiar with how these pieces of symbolic furniture are positioned in space, investigating symbolic geography (north, south, east, west, up, down) and symbolic architecture (Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple, Ezekiel's Temple, the New Jerusalem, etc.). Such configurations in space are world models, and they change covenant after covenant as God transforms the world.

Additionally, we must become familiar with the symbolism of human beings and of human life: ear, hand, foot, clothing, hair, clean and unclean flesh, various kinds of animals and plants, priest and king and prophet, etc.

We shall use "typology" as the term for all of this investigation. Typology presents the Biblical philosophy of history, and symbolism presents the Biblical philosophy of the world and of human life. Thus, Typology corresponds roughly to Philosophical Theology.

Finally, Ritual Theology. Rituals are acts that symbolically encode history and prophecy. Rituals are means by which we affirm what God has done for us in the past, and show our trust in what he has promised to do for us in the future. As we move through rituals, we are being taught and reminded to walk in a new way. This is not merely intellectual, for when we move through true ritual we are getting into step with God, and we are to keep moving this way as we go out into our larger life in the world. As images of God, we are also images of the Spirit, who is the Motion of God. Rituals help us get into step with the Spirit.

Biblical architecture, such as the Tabernacle, is a microcosm of the world, a small symbolic model of the cosmos. Similarly, Biblical ritual is a microchron of history, a small symbolic sequence of events that duplicates history. Understanding the Biblical nature of ritual, and its form, must inform how the Church does her Liturgical Theology.

With this introduction in mind, we now turn to particular topics of Biblical Theology.

2. What is the Covenant?

There are many and varied descriptions of what the Bible means by the word “covenant” (Hebrew: *berith*). We are tempted to write that there are as many definitions of “covenant” as there are covenant theologians. Because this is a short introductory book we shall not take up who said what, and argue for one view of another. Rather, we shall allow systematic and philosophical reflection on the Biblical data to help us rise to a full and broad understanding of covenant.

Clearly, a covenant is some kind of personal relationship that involves a bond and a structure. Such a bond is real -- breaking it is painful, and this pain is the pain of death.¹ Thus, we shall call it a bond of life or a living bond. At its most basic, then, a covenant is a personal and structural bond between two or more persons. We can see this in the marriage covenant, which involves two people, life-bonded together, in a structured relationship with the husband as head who gives himself sacrificially to the wife who subjects herself to him.

This is how God himself exists, and so the ultimate root of covenant is in the life of the Trinity. The Trinity exists as three related persons, with the Father as the Source of personality in some sense. These persons live in a living bond with one another, with the Spirit who moves between Father and Son as the Source of life-bonding in some sense. They also exist in a structure, with the Father as Father to the Son, and the Spirit as sent by the Father to the Son, and by the Son back to the Father. The Son is the Source of this structure in some sense, as he is the Word “in whom all things are linked together” (Colossians 1:16-17).

God is one in his being or essence, but he is also one because the three persons are in covenant together. They form one ultimate society.

When God created the universe, that covenant was extended to the universe. It could not be otherwise. The universe could not be some neutral thing outside of its relationship with God. The very act of creating was simultaneously the act of extending God’s internal covenant to that creation.

This is seen in the fact that the Spirit, the bond of the eternal covenant, is found in the creation from the very beginning. Genesis 1:2 says that the Spirit was already moving in the creation. He was not sent into the creation after it was made, but was in the creation from the beginning. The act of creating the universe is simultaneously the act of sending the Spirit, the life and bond of the covenant, into that creation. We can distinguish these two actions, but we cannot separate them.

God intended to have a personal relationship with the universe. He worked to grow the earth to the point where it was ready to receive the Spirit into itself in a special way. The Spirit entered into the dust of creation and formed mankind. Mankind, thus, is the self-consciousness of the creation. Mankind is the face of the creation in its personal relationship with God. We can say that the eternal covenant is “mediated” to the rest of creation through mankind.

¹ Since God’s life is Triune, human beings made in his image experience death when they are isolated from other people and from God. See the book of Job. We too often think of “life” only as individual life, but there is no life apart from community. This means human life, for God said, “It is not good for the man to be alone,” even though God was with him (Genesis 2:18). Old people who live alone, widows and widowers, need cats and dogs to keep them company. Life does not exist in isolation, but only in bondedness with others. That is why those who are “alive” in hell are also “eternally dead,” for they are cut off from God and from all other persons.

We must not say that God created mankind with some kind of neutral “nature” and then entered into covenant with humanity later on. Because the Spirit is there from the beginning, and because the Spirit is essential to human existence, the covenant was there from the beginning. And we must not say that mankind was created with the possibility of having more than one covenant with God, because there is only one ultimate covenant, only one Creator God, only one Spirit. God does not switch out various covenants with mankind. Rather, God transforms the one covenant with mankind through various phases, as mankind matures.

There are some other errors about the covenant that we must seek to avoid. The first is the notion that the covenant only came into being as a way to redeem fallen humanity. To be sure, the one covenant takes on a specific application and quality in God’s work of redemption. Now blood must be shed to bring about to restore man’s proper covenantal relationship with God. Jesus must die. But as we shall see shortly, each person of God delights to humble himself for the glory of the other two, and it is only an extension of that principle of God’s covenantal inner life when the Son humbles himself to redeem and glorify his future bride. The essence of the covenant remains a personal-structural bond of life.

In his death while on the cross, Jesus experienced isolation from his life-bond with the Father and the Spirit: “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” It is we who deserved to be cut off from this life-bond. Jesus took our place for three hours, which was enough. We are put back into the covenant life-bond (in a new way) by the death of Jesus, but the covenant itself does not come into being on the basis of his death. Rather, the covenant exists eternally and before Jesus’ death, and his death restores us to it.

The second error is to try and divide the covenants of the Bible into conditional and unconditional covenants. Since there is only one covenant in various phases, there cannot be two kinds of covenants. In fact, all the covenants of the Bible are “unconditional” in the sense that God sovereignly brings them to pass, and also “conditional” in that they must be received by faith and maintained by faith-full works.

The third error, very common in Calvinistic theology in the latter half of the 20th century, is to start with the notion that in his covenant with mankind, God is king and we are slaves. This is usually called the “suzerainty treaty” view of the covenant. While it is true that at Mount Sinai Yahweh came as king and the people were his slaves or vassals, this is not the most basic idea in the covenant. Before Sinai Yahweh had said, “Israel is my son, my firstborn” (Exodus 4:22). In Galatians 4:1-3, Paul says that a child does not differ from a slave. Both are ruled by masters, by law. In God, and thus in the ultimate covenant, the relationship is Father to Son, not Master to Slave. God is weaving humanity more and more fully into that relationship, so that we are positioned in union with the Son as both his younger brothers and as his bride. Because under the Law we were young children, it is as if we were slaves -- but only “as if.” The master-slave relationship is not the ultimate or most important covenantal category. The Father-Son relationship through the Spirit is ultimate, and is the foundation for all the covenants God remakes with humanity.

With this fact in mind, that the young son is like a slave, we can understand better the fact that there is a master-slave aspect to the Law. We can begin by noting that in Genesis 1, God the Father spoke his Word (the Son) to the creation, and sent the Spirit into it. The Son-Word is not yet in the world. He stands above it, and gives his Law-Word to it. Thus, before the coming of the Son into the world, there is a stress on God’s giving commands from outside of us, and our obeying those commands in faith, enabled by the Spirit who is with us in the world. Before the incarnation, the Son came as an Angel, from heaven, from outside, to give us the Law. Even when he came into the Tabernacle and

Temple in the shekinah glory, he was still separated from us by the veils. He was not fully with us as he is now.

After the Son comes into the world, and sends the Spirit from himself to make him ever-present to us, things change. The Law still tells us what God wants us to do, but not primarily as something outside of us, over us. We are now “in Christ,” and we do what the Law says because our hearts completely agree with it. We are no longer child-slaves “under” the Law, but partners with Jesus “in Christ” affirming the Law.

Of course, because we are sinners we must sometimes hear and obey God’s commands whether we agree with them and like them or not. And it is also true that believers before Pentecost also had the Law on their hearts (Dt. 30:14) and were to rejoice in it and agree with it (Ps. 119). But what was true of believers by way of anticipation in the Old Creation has now become true of believers in its fullness in the New Creation.

In summary, before the coming of the Son into the world, the Spirit was sent by the Father to bring us to the Son. The Son and his Word stood over us, commanding us as children or slaves, until we became adults. This is the primary emphasis in the covenant in its Old Creation administration, though it is also true that the Word was already in our hearts even then. In the New Creation, the Spirit has been sent by the Son to bring us, with him, to the Father. We are now adults, a grown daughter, married as bride to the Son. Now the Son and his Word are “in” us, no longer commanding us as children or slaves, but encouraging us as junior partners in the marriage, as adult younger brothers. This is the primary emphasis in the covenant in the New Creation administration, though because the Son is God, there will always be an element of sheer authority in his relationship with us.

A fourth error is to make too much of the language of being cut off from the covenant, or of being strangers to the covenant, which we find in the Scriptures. Ultimately it is not possible for people to be cut off completely from God. Indeed, Revelation 14:10 says that the lake of hell-fire burns right in front of the throne of God, in the presence of the Lamb. Men are always either rightly or wrongly related to God, and thus are either rightly or wrongly “in” covenant with God. For those in hell, the personal-structural life-bond with God is still in place. They experience God’s personal anger and wrath. They are crushed at the bottom of the structural hierarchy. And they experience the absence of the life-bond, for if they did not experience the pain of isolation, they would not suffer. Thus, when the Bible speaks of those cut off from the covenant, or those alienated from it, it does not mean that they are in some neutral position. It means that they experience the covenant in a negative way.

A final error, which has plagued some Calvinistic theology for generations, is to think that there were two covenants: a covenant of works and a covenant of grace. It is the phrase “covenant of works” that is the problem. Theologians vary in how far into error they go as they try to use this bad term, but one way or another the idea seems to be that Adam was supposed to earn eternal life through good works. Since he failed, Jesus came and did it for us. This error is compounded when some theologians say that we “receive” the “covenant of grace” by faith, as if Adam was supposed to earn his merits apart from faith!

This notion is in error. It is based on Roman Catholic ideas of merit that the Reformation did not fully overcome. There is no “merit theology” in the Bible. God does not expect us to merit anything, but to remain faithful and become mature. The issue is “merit versus maturity.”

Adam was created a child -- that’s why he was naked -- and he was supposed to grow up in the Garden (kindergarten) by remaining faith-full towards God and by

keeping his hands off of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He was not supposed to “earn” anything. When he was mature, he would enter into a new phase of the One Covenant, the adult phase as we have described it. He would leave the Garden and go out into the wider world. Since he rebelled, he remained essentially a child, though since he claimed to be an adult, God sent him into the wider world. Humanity as a whole remained a child until Jesus became the first real adult. Now, in him, we are all adults.

To be sure, God does indeed deal with us by offering rewards for faithful obedience. But this way of dealing is secondary to God’s desire for us to grow up and become mature. There is nothing about meriting rewards in Genesis 2 or in any of the passages later in the Bible that reflect on Adam and his fall. When we were children, God offered us rewards along the way, but he only gave us the adult form of the covenant when we were mature. Now that we are adults, God still offers us rewards along the way, but becoming fully mature as elders will come only when we are ready, not as a result of specific actions that earn rewards.

The rewards offered to Adam in the Garden were this: He would get to remain in the Garden and enjoy its easy free food. This is the same reward-promise given to Israel in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28: They would get to stay in the Promised Land and be blessed in it. The reward is not that someday they would earn the right to move out of the Promised Land and take over the world. Graduation to adult status is not a matter of reward, but of maturity.

The threat implied to Adam was that if he was unfaithful and disobeyed, he would not become mature. He would be driven into the world, where he would suffer under its afflictions, instead of graduating into the world as an adult and ruling it. The same threat is given to Israel. If they insisted on being like the nations, if they tried to “move into the wider world,” before they were mature, God would indeed send them there, but they would suffer and not rule.

Thus, it is not a matter of earning merits. It is a matter of remaining faithful and becoming mature. If we remain faithful, and wait upon the Lord, we will become more mature and be given greater areas of dominion to oversee. If we are faithless, our dominion will be decreased.

We shall have more to say about this when we get to Genesis 2 and the fall of Adam.

3. Covenant Maturation

Let us now turn to the application of this One Eternal Covenant into history. We have been looking at Covenant Theology. Covenant Theology has to do with the persons of God and their relationships, with God’s relationships with humanity, and with our maturation toward being junior partners in the Divine community. Thus, the large focus in Covenant Theology is on persons, and we can link this with the Father-aspect of reality. Literary Theology studies how the Word is organized, and thus engages the Son-aspect of reality. When we move to Typology and Ritual, we are moving into the area of artistic imagery and of time sequences, the Spirit-aspect of reality.

These are the three large zones of Biblical Theology. Obviously, since God is One and “all of God does all that God does,” these three aspects of Biblical Theology cannot be separated fully from one another. What we begin to do in this essay is consider how the Spirit applies the one Covenant in history. We shall see that He does so by carrying humanity through ever-widening and ever-deepening spirals of maturation. These spirals or cycles correspond to one another, and thus are typologically related to one another.

Thus, in this essay and those that follow, we are beginning to put Covenant and Typological Theology together.

We begin with the fact that God is eternally mature, while the creation was made formless, empty, and dark, and destined to become mature. The creation develops toward full maturity. This is also true of human beings, because human beings are made of the dust of creation.

Now, there is nothing in the creation that is not some kind of reflection of something in God. It cannot be otherwise. God cannot create something that is outside of His own infinite imagination and "experience." Hence, this process of maturation is a copy of something in God.

We have to be very careful how we think about this. God does not exist in matter, space, and time as we know it, for He exists outside of created matter, space, and time. All the same, created matter, space, and time are copies of three aspects of God. God the Father, the Source of identity and particularly, is the ultimate root of specific things in the universe, of matter. God the Son, the Source of structure, is the ultimate root of space and of how specific things are placed in relation to one another in the universe. God the Spirit is the Source of bonding and also of motion, as He moves between Father and Son eternally. The Spirit, then, is the ultimate root of created time.

Continuing to be careful, we ask how it is possible to think about God's maturing or growing. God is eternally mature, but also eternally becoming mature. We cannot imagine how this can be, but we must confess it is true, or else we have no Divine foundation for maturation in created time.

We can think about this in two ways. The first is that each person of God delights to humble himself for the glory of the other two. The Father hides himself and reveals himself only in the Son, and tells us to hear the Son. The Son, however, tells us to pray to the Father. Then the Son leaves the world, and tells us that the Spirit will come at Pentecost to guide us into all truth, so that we should be excited about the Spirit. But the Spirit is ungraspable, like water, air, oil, and fire. We cannot approach Him directly. In His humility, the Spirit causes us to cry "Abba, Father," and He continually causes us to look to the Son.

In eternity, each person delights to give himself to the other two. The Father gives his property of personality to the Son and Spirit. The Son gives his property of language to the Father and Spirit. The Spirit gives his property of life and action to the Father and Son. And as each person gives himself to the other two, he receives back double, for he receives back from each of the other two. In this way, each person of God moves "from glory to glory." God is all glorious, yet mysteriously God is also always becoming more glorious. This eternal movement in God is from initial glory, through delightful humility, to exaltation and greater glory. And yet, in some profound way, God does not change, because all of these movements in God are eternal.

This is how God lives eternally within himself, and so it is how the covenant works. When God extends the covenant by creating the universe, that universe is destined to move through the same maturing process: from initial glory, through humility, to greater glory.²

We see this right away in Genesis 1, where the glory of each day is followed by an evening, and then a more glorious new day. Each new day is a transformed version of the preceding day. Each new day is a new covenant established in historical time, signaled by

² Notice how after his humiliation, Job received double what he had possessed in the beginning. Consider also the parable of the talents in Matthew 25.

the phrases “it was established,” and “God saw that it was good.” But these new covenants are not completely new and different. Rather, they build upon and transform the preceding covenantal arrangement. There is one covenant, which is being transformed through times of humility and then of new glory toward its goal of complete maturity.

The second way we can think about God’s eternal maturation is to consider that the second person of God is a Son. In the creation, a son grows up to be mature, like his father. If we want to, we can consider that the Father is eternally mature, while the Son is eternally becoming mature and has eternally become mature. The Father sends the Spirit to the Son to enable Him to become mature like the Father, and the Son is thus also eternally mature.

The Spirit is the agent or cause of maturation, and the Son is the recipient of the Spirit’s work. The Son eternally becomes mature. The Spirit eternally causes the Son to mature.

Now this activity is duplicated in the creation, as the Father sends the Spirit to his daughter (the creation) to enable her to grow in maturity so that she can be a fit bride for his Son. The Son is eternally mature because he has become eternally mature. The daughter is growing toward maturity. It is the Spirit who brings about that maturity.

We can now begin to talk about the covenant as it applies to human life. The covenant matures in three phases: childhood, adulthood, and full maturity. The Bible associates these three phases with priesthood, kingship, and eldership or prophethood. A priest is like a child in that he lives strictly under the Law and is to do exactly and only what God commands. The king is more mature: Having grown up under the law, he now applies the covenant in new and difficult ways by wisdom. In Biblical history, the Sinaitic and Kingdom periods correspond to these two phases, and in a larger way, the Old Creation before Jesus and the New Creation after Pentecost correspond with them.

There is a final phase. Jesus said that the Spirit would lead us into all truth, so that in the New Creation we are still maturing toward our final goal. That final goal will be reached in heaven and in the resurrection, when we shall be fully mature. A kind of foretaste of that final maturity is seen in the last part of our earthly lives, when we are elders, and in the last part of Israel’s history, the age of prophecy. A prophet is a member of God’s divine council who tears down an old world and speaks a new world into existence by his words alone. Look at all the prophetic books, from Isaiah to Malachi, and you will see this. (We shall take it up more fully later on.)

Thus, the one covenant matures in three phases. First there is a covenant of childhood, in the Old Creation, from Adam to Jesus (Galatians 4:1-7). In Jesus humanity becomes an adult, but notice that Jesus leaves when he is only about 33 years old. He sends the Spirit to bring us to full maturity. This full maturity is also “in Christ,” because Jesus becomes fully mature in heaven, where he is pictured glorified with white hair (Revelation 1:14). In the New Creation, we are maturing toward that goal. There will be some kind of Final Creation, and thus a final form of the covenant for us, in the world to come.

4. The Three Basic Phases of the Covenant

We have introduced the three phases of the covenant, from childhood to adulthood to full maturity. Let us look more fully at each of these three phases.

The Bible speaks of the Church as Daughter in this Old Creation phase: Daughter Zion, Daughter Jerusalem, and for converted nations, Daughter Tyre, etc. This is a time of

childhood, of immaturity. We think of immaturity as something bad, but it is not. It is a gift of God appropriate for our first phase of life. We have said that the Son has eternally “become” mature, but this also means that the Son is also eternally moving from being immature. There is nothing wrong with such immaturity. It is what being a son means: to look up to one’s father. The Son is eternally immature, being a Son to his Father. He is eternally becoming mature through the Spirit. And he has eternally become mature, so that he is fully like his Father.

Thus, in the Old Creation we are like the Son in his Divine immaturity. We are under the Father, who has sent the Son to us as his Angel (messenger) to teach us the rules we are to obey during our childhood: the Law. The Father has sent his Spirit to cause us to grow up into adulthood. He wants us to become fully mature, just as his Son is eternally mature.

In this first phase, the Father is over us. The Son is with us, but only in a preliminary way, as Angel, as Teacher, as Lawgiver. The Spirit is with us to do two things: He is causing history to mature so that (1) the Son can be brought to us because (2) we are ready to be brought to the Son.

The Father is preeminent in this first phase, because the Son has not fully come to us and given his gift, and the Spirit has not yet completed his work of making us mature.

In this first phase, the Father sends the Spirit to bring the Son to us and to bring us to the Son. We are still at a distance from the Son, and the Spirit moves back and forth between us. This moving back and forth is what a priest does. Under the Law, the priest brings the Word from the Son to us, and conveys us to the Son. This is pictured in the sacrificial system. We bring an animal that represents us, but we are not allowed to come near to the altar. We kill the animal, killing our old selves, and then the priest brings us to the Son, to Yahweh enthroned in the Tabernacle “above” the altar. The priest conveys the flesh (us) to the altar, and turns it (us) into smoke, so that it (we) rises up to Yahweh’s throne to be with him.

We can see that priestly activity is most important in this first phase of our maturation. We are not yet adult kings, let alone fully mature elder-prophets. We are immature children, and the Spirit is doing a priestly work of bringing us along in maturity, bringing us to the Son.

Let us now turn to the second phase. The Bible speaks of the Church as Bride in this New Creation phase. This is a time of adulthood, of adult maturity but not full maturity. Once again, this adult maturity is a reflection of the eternal Son, who is eternally immature, eternally maturing as an adult, and eternally fully mature like the Father. Thus, in the New Creation we are like the Son in his Divine adulthood.

We are still under the Father, not yet beside him as fully mature creatures. But we are beside the Son as his bride. We are to rule with him in this world. Thus we are kings, co-rulers, as the collective Bride-Queen. In this phase of history, the Spirit has been sent to us primarily as the Spirit of the Son. The Spirit comes not to convey us to the Son, but to be the bond of our marriage to the Son. He comes not to make us Bride-Queen and kings, but to enable us to act as true kings, true Bride-Queen.

The Son is preeminent in this second phase, because the Son has now fully come to us and given his gift, but the Spirit has not yet completed his work of making us fully mature as elders.

In this second phase we are no longer at a distance from the Son. Rather, we are “in Christ.” The Spirit comes not as a priest to bring us to the Son, but as a Counselor (Paraclete) to help us live in and with the Son. The Spirit comes “from the side” (parakletos) of the Son to enable us to live “side by side” with the Son.

We can see that kingly activity is most important in this second phase of our maturation. We are no longer priests, traveling to the Son, but neither are we yet fully mature elder-prophets. We are adults.

We are still traveling, though. We are still maturing. In this second phase, the Spirit is bringing us to the Father. He has brought the Son to the Father -- for Jesus was glorified in the Spirit and ascended to the Father by the Spirit -- and now brings us to the Father with the Son. Thus the Spirit continues to do his priestly work, but he does so by applying the Son's kingly work to us.

We can now turn to the third phase. This will be the time of full maturity. It is anticipated by old age -- eldership -- in this life, and will be complete in the world to come. Once again, this full maturity is a reflection of the eternal Son, who is eternally fully mature like the Father. Thus, in the Final Creation we shall be like the Son in his Divine full maturity.

We shall no longer be under the Father -- except in the more general sense that as creatures we shall always be "under" God. As the fully mature Son sits with his Father on his throne, so shall we (Revelation 3:21; John 17:21-22). We shall be co-elders with the Father and the Son.

In this final phase, the Spirit will be with us not only as the Spirit of the Father and as the Spirit of the Son, but then fully as the Spirit of Glory. He will fully give us his own Divine property of glory. He will no longer be conveying us either to the Son or to the Father, except as he is the bond of this everlasting fellowship.

Thus, in a way the Spirit will be preeminent in this third and final phase, because the Spirit will have completed his work of making us fully mature as elders.

If we understand what a prophet is, we can see that prophetic activity is most important in this last phase of our existence. In order for us to do that, we need to look more closely at what the Bible says about priest, king, and prophet. To this we turn in our next chapter.

As we bring our discussion of human maturation to a close, we need to make two other points. First, Western theology usually uses the word "glorification" to refer only to the final phase of human life, after the resurrection. The Bible, however, speaks of growing from glory to glory. Glorification is a work of the Spirit that begins in immaturity and ends in full maturity. We are fully glorified at the end, but we are in a process of glorification throughout our lives. The history of the covenants is a history of progressive glorification.

Second, the Church Fathers spoke of this process as deification, as theosis, and Eastern theology has continued to use this language and reflect on it, though it has become distorted. The Fathers used this language because the Bible speaks of rulers and elders as gods (Exodus 21:6; 22:8, 9, 28; Psalm 82:1, 6; John 10:34). They used this language because man was created in the image and likeness of God, but with the capability of becoming more like God (Genesis 3:22). Deification in Christ does not mean that we cease to be creatures in an "ontological" sense, but that we become mature and fully like God in an "economic" sense.

5. Priest, King, and Prophet

We can begin with the phrase "prophet, priest, and king." This is the order normally heard from preachers and theologians. But it is not really the Biblical order. The age of priests ran from Moses to Saul, the age of Kings from Saul to the end of the Kingdom, and the age of prophets from Elijah to Jesus. If we believe in any kind of development and

maturation of the kingdom of God in history, we shall have to admit that king is more than priest, and prophet more than king. Since, however, the prophetic function is associated with predicting the future, it has often been abstracted from its historical context and placed at the beginning. At the same time, as we shall see below, the prophet does come at the beginning as well as at the end, to close one period and begin a new one, so that usual ordering of these terms is not so much erroneous as incomplete.

The Larger Catechism produced by the Westminster Assembly in England in the 1640s, and used by Presbyterian churches and some others, follows the order “prophet, priest, king.” Let us look at what it says about them.

Q. How does Christ execute the office of a prophet? Christ executes the office of a prophet, in his revealing to the church, in all ages, by his Spirit and word, in diverse ways of administration, the whole will of God, in all things concerning their edification and salvation.

Now, as a matter of fact, these things are not unique to prophecy at all. According to Malachi 2:7,

The lips of a priest should preserve knowledge;
And they should seek the teaching from his mouth;
For he is the messenger of Yahweh of armies.

This statement seems pretty definitive: What a priest is includes, by definition, bringing messages from God. As we shall see, that is not all that a priest does, but what is clear is that the catechism definition of “prophet” does not go far enough. Moreover, the wisdom literature associated with King Solomon is also revelation of the Word of God. Jesus reveals the Word of God, thus, as priest, king, and prophet. Thus, the catechism fails to tell us what is distinctive about Jesus’ work as a prophet. As we shall see, what is distinctive about the prophet is that he is a member of God’s privy council, and it is as such that he brings the decisions of the council to the people.

Q. 44: How does Christ execute the office of a priest? Christ executes the office of a priest, in his once offering himself a sacrifice without spot to God, to be a reconciliation for the sins of his people; and in making continual intercession for them.

There are two problems here. First of all, the answer seems to equate being a priest with being a sacrifice. There is much truth in this, but it is not enough. In Leviticus, there are three parties in every offering: the worshiper (“son of Israel”), the priest (“son of Aaron”), and the animal (“son of the herd”). Thus, priest and sacrifice are different, and Jesus’ work as a priest is not precisely the same as His offering Himself as a sacrifice. According to Hebrews 9:11-14, Jesus work as great high priest includes His self-offering for our sins, but being a priest is more than that, as we shall see.

It is correct to say that part of the calling of the priest is to die for others, to be a sacrifice. Israel as a nation of priests was under the laws of uncleanness (symbolic death), and thus was living under death so that the nations might live; and this calling is pointed in the Aaronic priesthood and ultimately focused in Jesus Christ, the great high priest. But it is also true that the king is called to die. Jesus died for us as priest and as king, so that

we might become priests and kings. As the book of Hebrews makes clear, He dies as Melchizedekal priest-king, not as Aaronic priest only.

Second, intercession is not the peculiar duty of priests either, though it is one of his duties. In fact, Genesis 20:7, which is the first time in the Bible that the word *prophet* is used, defines a prophet as the intercessor: Abraham “is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live.” Certainly it is true that the men who are priests do offer prayers of intercession, but it seems that this function is more that of the prophet than of the priest. The prophet is not merely a servant, but a member of the Divine Council, and so bringing petitions before the Council is much more a prophetic than a priestly task. The catechism answer seems to transfer one of the special properties of the prophet to the priest. Indeed, in 1 Kings 8 we see King Solomon offer a long intercessory prayer on behalf of the nation, as the nation’s representative. Thus, intercession is not the unique quality of priesthood.

The priest is a servant, specially a palace servant. This is how he differs from king and prophet. We shall take this up more fully below.

The catechism’s discussion of kingship is also problematic:

Q. 45: How does Christ execute the office of a king? Christ executes the office of a king, in calling out of the world a people to himself, and giving them officers, laws, and censures, by which he visibly governs them; in bestowing saving grace upon his elect, rewarding their obedience, and correcting them for their sins, preserving and supporting them under all their temptations and sufferings, restraining and overcoming all their enemies, and powerfully ordering all things for his own glory, and their good; and also in taking vengeance on the rest, who know not God, and obey not the gospel.

Since ruling or governing is a distinctive quality of kingship, the catechism’s answer seems adequate. But there is an important aspect of kingship that is completely missing from this long list, and that is that the king must die. Jesus was acclaimed king when He arrived in Jerusalem. He was put on trial as a king. He was crowned king, with thorns, and given a royal robe. Then He was executed with a sign over His head that said, “Jesus of Nazareth, the king of the Jews.” Jesus did not die only as priest, but also as king, for as the greater Melchizedek He was and is both priest and king.

The fact that the king is called upon to give up his glory and “die” for others is overlooked in this set of answers, because of the notion that sacrificial death is associated only with priesthood. This is a significant error, which we must see if we are to begin to understand the Biblical teachings regarding life and history.

While we think usually of priest and king as two aspects of our lives or as working side-by-side in God’s kingdom as officers of church and state, it is also true that priest comes before king in the Bible. At Mt. Sinai, Aaron was made High Priest, but we do not get a king (a “High Judge”) until we get to Saul. Thereafter, we have priest and king together over the Kingdom: ox and lion, Jachin and Boaz.

What is a priest? Peter Leithart has shown that a priest is a palace servant. Notice how Hebrews 3:1-5 associates the Mosaic priesthood with being a servant of God’s palace:

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house itself. For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. Now Moses was faithful in

all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things that were to be spoken later. . . .

Leithart shows that to define “priest” as president of sacrificial worship, or as mediator, or as sanctuary guard, does not do full justice to the usage of the Hebrew word *kohen* (priest) in the Bible. Only the notion of housekeeping, of serving a king in his palace, is both broad enough and specific enough to account for the duties and characteristics of a priest. And, since the tabernacle and Temple, as palaces of Yahweh, were symbols of the people-house of God’s worshipers, the priest is a servant of God within that religious community. In fact, the Biblical office of priest is virtually identical to that of pastor or minister in the New Covenant church: He teaches God’s Word, supervises religious meals, and organizes/disciplines the people for worship.

Servant is the key word here. The priest as such has very simple jobs: He inspects the animal brought for sacrifice; he helps the layman offer it; he inspects for leprosy; he does certain rituals in the palace of God; etc. All of these are simple tasks and involve nothing but sheer obedience. The priest judges between right and wrong, between lawful and unlawful, between clean and unclean, between holy and common. Is the sheep blemished or not? This a simple matter to determine. At the time the priesthood was set up, at Sinai, the Law was given, and again, when we think of law, we think of obedience, of right and wrong. It is simple: You either obey or you don’t.

Jesus is not only priest but king. He is Melchizedekal priest-king. Thus, He is not merely a servant in the house, but the Son-king over the house. He does not rule the house as priest, but as king. And He does not die as a priestly servant but as a house-ruling king.

A king has a different and far more mature task. When we get to the Kingdom era, we get wisdom literature. Wisdom concerns not simple questions of right and wrong, but questions of what is wise and what is unwise in any given situation, new situations not specifically covered by the Law. More than this, the king must usually decide not between right and wrong, but between two evils. He must choose the lesser of two evils. Think of a commander in the field. He may have to send one platoon of men to its death in order to draw fire from the enemy, so that another platoon can circle around and destroy the enemy. That is not an easy decision to make. It is kingly, not priestly. An example of such kingly wisdom is seen when Solomon must decide between the claims of the two harlots in 1 Kings 3.

The king is not going to have such wisdom unless he learns the Law first. Wisdom builds on law, and king builds on priest. There must be a “priestly phase” of our lives, during which we *learn* wisdom through obedience and struggle, before we enter a “kingly phase” and *have* wisdom to give to others. As should be obvious, this is very similar to the relationship between childhood and maturity. As children, we obey. As adults, we have to make hard decisions. Bread is for priests and for children, while wine is for kings and adults. Leviticus 10 forbids the priests to drink while they carry out their tasks, and priests never sit during their tasks, but kings are repeatedly shown drinking wine while they rest enthroned.

If a priest is an obedient servant, and a king is a wise ruler, then a prophet is something beyond this. In the Bible, a prophet is one of God’s chief counselors, whom God consults before He acts (Amos 3:7; 7:1-6; Genesis 20:7; 18:16-33). The prophet is the mature image of God, now woven into God’s fellowship as a junior partner in His Council.

Becoming prophets is a third phase of our lives, our eldership, when we have not only acquired wisdom, but have tested our wisdom through years of being “kings” and now have acquired the ability to pass on both law and wisdom to others, those coming

after us. This is because we are mature enough to know how to pray, how to advise God; and thus, we are mature enough to advise others also.

Moreover, when we look at the prophetic literature, we see that a prophet is someone who by his words alone tears down an old world and creates a new one. His words cause people to think in a new way. He does not merely repeat what has been said before, or apply the old ways into new situations. He provides a new vision, a vision encompassing death and resurrection. Once a true prophet has spoken, no one can continue to think in the old comfortable way any longer. His words cause turmoil, but they also provide a vision of something better, and the righteous begin to think and act in new ways as a result.

Thus, the distinctive quality of a priest is obedient service. The distinctive quality of a king is wise rule. And the distinctive quality of a prophet is mediation and transformation, carrying prayer-petitions to the Council and reporting back the decisions of the Council.

Each is associated with passing judgment. The priest passes judgment according to the rules of the law: supervising the killing of animals and distinguishing clean and unclean. The king passes judgment according to wisdom, in the wider sphere of national life. But judgment is preeminently associated with the prophet, who brings judgment upon the whole culture, thereby ending one period of history and initiating the next.

The prophet as judge and advisor explains why the prophet is not only the culmination of one phase of life and history, but the initiator of the next. Moses comes as great prophet to tear down old Egypt and to set up the history of Israel, when then runs through priestly, kingly, and prophetic phases. Jesus comes as the climax of the prophetic phase, tearing down the old Adamic world and instituting the next (and final) cycle of history. The first prophet was God Himself, who set up first three phases: Adam (priestly), Cain (kingly), Sons of God (prophetic). The culmination of the third phase was Noah, who prophesied before the Flood, and then initiated the next phase of history: Abraham (priestly), Jacob (kingly), Joseph (prophetic). Moses was the culmination of the third phase, prophesying against Egypt and initiating the next phase of history.

Because the prophet is both a member of the Divine Council and also a world-maker, we can see that the prophet is the most mature, the most Father-like, of the three phases of human life.

We can see the same kind of pattern if we distinguish the youthful prophet from the aged prophet. We see this in the book of Daniel. In Daniel 2, Daniel is able to advise the king, and to prophesy the future, because God explicitly reveals the future to him during a night of prayer. Daniel is a very young man at this time. In Daniel 5, however, the aged Daniel is able to prophesy out of his own lifetime of experiences, without any special explanatory revelation from God. Indeed, the following sequence can easily be observed in Daniel 2-5:

Daniel 2 - Daniel as youthful prophet

Daniel 3 - Daniel's friends as true priests, who reject false worship

Daniel 4 - Nebuchadnezzar as king

Daniel 5 - Daniel as aged prophet, revealing the end of the old Babylonian age and the beginning of the new Persian age.

The flow from childhood (being under an older prophetic initiator), to priestly service, to kingly rule, to prophetic "divinity" as a member of God's council, is not only the course of human history as a whole, but also is found in smaller time sequences within history. We could look at each of the Biblical covenantal periods and see in them a general

movement from a time of priestly service to a time of kingly action and then to a time of prophetic judgment and reordering.

The same is true in our lives. Not only do we grow from childhood to eldership over the course of our lives, but we pass through this sequence many times in shorter ways. Let us take an example.

1. Initial prophethood. The home computer is invented. This is a new thing, superseding the old: The older typewriter is now dead. You purchase such a computer. You have now entered into this new phase of your own life and activity. The producer of the computer provides you a law-book that tells you how to use this new machine. This is the prophecy uttered by the prophet at the beginning of this new phase of your life. Compare it to the books of Moses.

2. Priesthood. You must obey the book. You must learn how to use the computer. Probably others will help instruct you, and you will be asking them for advice. During this period of time, you are under such tutors and governors, as a "servant" learning how to use the computer.

3. Kingship. Gradually you become able to use the computer yourself. You begin to learn more, by trial and error rather than by consulting authorities. Of course, if you actually disobey the law found in the book, you will not be successful with your computer. Still, because you have internalized the law, you don't have to consult the book as often, nor do you have to ask advice as often. Also, you gradually become sensitive to what the computer can and cannot do. This is wisdom, the sensitivity to the situation that comes from experience.

4. Prophethood. After much time of using the computer, you become able to instruct others. You become one of the advisors, consulted by other people who have just bought their first computer. Moreover, you can also advise the "god" who made the computer. You can send the company email messages with advice on how to make the computer better. If they are wise, they will take your experience and advice into consideration.

Notice that you don't cease to be a priest when you become a king. The rule book is still there, and occasionally you have to go back and consult it. The rules still govern how you use the computer, and you'd better not depart from them. Similarly, you don't cease to be a priest and king when you become a prophet. You still use your own computer, even though you are also advising others how to use theirs, and advising the maker how to make things better in the future.

We can go through the same sequence looking at the activity of baking a cake. The first time you make a bundt cake, you need to open the book and follow the rules very carefully. After a while, you become more kingly in how you make the cake: You begin to experiment a little, trying a bit more of this and a bit less of that, adding a certain spice, etc. Through trial and error, you acquire wisdom about making a bundt cake. Then, when people praise your cake as especially good, you can write down the recipe for them and instruct them in how to make one. You can even write to the publisher of the cookbook with your new ideas.

From these two examples, which could be multiplied billions of times, we can see that the passage from priest to king to prophet is not something distinctively "religious," but is in fact the essence of human life and growth. We are moving through these phases all the time, not only in small ways, but also in the larger course of our entire lifespan.

This is part of what it means to be an image of God. The image of God passes through these three stages, and the three phases have much to do with the Trinity, as we have seen.

Because of sin, human beings apart from grace are bad priests, bad kings, and bad prophets. As bad priests, they are disobedient and rebellious. As bad priests, they don't follow the rule book. They buy a computer, plug it in, and then start messing with it. They may learn a few things, but they resent having to obey the book. Also, as bad priests, they are not willing to be learners for a time. They move right away into the trial-and-error phase that should come later, and often blab away their opinions to others, trying to be prophets to them when they have little useful to impart.

As bad kings, they rule poorly. Because they refused to serve, they don't know how to rule well. Our computer analogy does not help us much here, but the reader need only think of the multitudes of bad kings, owners, and managers that have afflicted human history.

As bad prophets they give bad advice and set in motion evil trends that move history in the wrong direction. We need only think of the many older people who are not elders, but only bitter and self-centered old people.

The meaning of Jesus' perfect human life is not only that He came to die for our sins, but also that He gives to us His perfect life. He gives it to us not so much as a model, for we do not in fact do the same things Jesus did, but as a type. A type is a deep-pattern impressed into us by the Holy Spirit. We are placed in union with Jesus, and the deep-pattern of His life is given to us. Ultimately, the pattern of Jesus life from childhood to full maturity, from priest to king to prophet, arises from the fact that as Son He is eternally immature, eternally adult, and eternally fully mature. By eating His body and drinking His blood, we are restored and renewed so that we can move properly through these three phases of life.

We can now improve the questions found in the Westminster Catechism.

Q. How does the Spirit work as a priest? The Spirit works as a priest by bringing the Son to us and by bring us to Jesus, in full and joyful submission and obedience to the Father.

Q. How does Jesus do the work of a priest? Jesus does the work of a priest by being fully submissive and obedient to His Father by means of the Spirit, by guarding His Father's house, and by bringing us through the Spirit to Himself.

Q. How does Jesus work as a king? Jesus works as a king by coming into the world to die for the redemption of His people, and by ruling them in all ways.

Q. How does the Spirit work with the Son in His kingship? The Spirit works with the Son in His kingship as paraclete to keep us close to the Son as co-rulers with Him, and by bringing us with the Son to the Father.

Q. How is the Spirit "the Spirit of prophecy"? The Spirit is the Spirit of prophecy in that He is the glorifier of God, of humanity, and of the world.

Q. How does the Father work as a prophet? The Father works as a prophet by creating and re-creating humanity and the world and by sending His Spirit and His Son into humanity and thereby into the world to glorify them.

Q. How does Jesus work as a prophet? Jesus works as a prophet by joining with His Father in the work of creation and re-creation, and by sending His Spirit into humanity and thereby into the world to complete their glorification.

6. Covenant Phases in the Bible

Thus far we have spoken of only three phases in the history of the one covenant. We must now divide the third phase into two parts. We can begin by looking at human life. Human beings do not die and become fully mature in glory while they are in their prime as adults. Rather, at some point human beings begin to lose their strength; they begin to die in preparation for their final death and transformation into glory. Sometimes this death begins with some kind of mid-life crisis. With women it is associated with menopause. When men it is associated with the loss of power and the realization that they will not accomplish everything they had hoped to accomplish when they were young.

This is when human beings start to become elders. Their kingly wisdom matures into prophecy, the ability to speak life-changing words. Their hair turns white, and white hair is glory (Revelation 1:14). Thus, at the very time human beings begin to lose their kingly power and ability to act, they increase in their God-like glory and power to speak.

We can see this in Israel's history. When we look at the Kingdom period, we see that it started in kingly glory. Then it split, and then each kingdom became weaker and weaker as well as more and more sinful. It is as the kingly power of Israel diminishes that the prophets emerge in the Remnant period. There is still a kingly aspect, but the more mature prophetic phase of the covenant is becoming more and more important. The kingdom of God is maturing into eldership. Then comes the death of Israel, in the exile. After this, the Jews are no longer kings. They no longer have a nation of their own. They can no longer act. They are spread out into the nations as prophets. The Restoration age is an age exclusively of prophecy.

This small history of Israel is a type, a small pattern, of the history of humanity. We have moved from the priestly Old Creation to the kingly New Creation, but our kingship consists of words. It is a prophetic kind of kingship, and as history moves along the Church will become more and more mature as a prophetic host. Finally, after the day of judgment, the Church will be fully mature. There will not just be a new Israel, but a wholly transformed creation.

This is the pattern not only of human life and of Biblical history, but also the pattern of the history of the New Creation. We are only 2000 years into the New Creation, but already we can see the pattern in the history of the Western Church. The Church began with a priestly emphasis: worship and doctrine were paramount in the early church. With Constantine, we begin to enter a kingly phase. In the late Roman empire and early middle ages, not only were their Christian kings, but the Church also had power in society; the Church ruled in a kingly way. In the later middle ages and in the Renaissance, both the Christian kings and the Church began to weaken and become corrupt. Prophetic movements arose, like the teaching friars and the Hussites, culminating in the Protestant Reformation. With the Reformation, the unified Church in the West died and was resurrected. For a brief time, the Reformation and the Counter-reformation continued to exercise some degree of kingly power and there were Christian rulers. But since that time, the Church in the West has been exclusively prophetic. Power was lost, but proclamation remained. As the prophetic time in Israel degenerated into Pharisaism and Sadduceeism, so has the Church today. A new cycle is beginning, one that embraces far more of humanity than the earlier Western cycle did.

Let us draw together what we have learned. There is one covenant in three large phases. These phases of maturation in history reflect in time the eternal maturation of the Son by the work of the Spirit. These three phases can be characterized as:

1. Priestly, childhood
2. Kingly, adulthood
- 3a. Historical prophetic, eldership
- 3b. Full prophetic, resurrection in glory

These 3-4 phases of the one covenant cover all of human history, and they also cover the full course of the normal human life (that is, for people who do not die prematurely). These 3-4 phases also cover smaller periods of history at various levels, as God's Spirit causes humanity to mature through expanding cycles.

We can now begin to become a bit more familiar with some of these smaller cycles, as they are presented to us in the Bible. Let us begin with the last four covenants of the Old Creation. The first is the Sinaitic Covenant, which set up the priesthood and gave the Law, and which extended to the time of Saul and David. The second is the Kingdom Covenant, which extended to the destruction of the kingdom of Judah under Nebuchadnezzar. The third is the Remnant Covenant, which was inaugurated by Elijah and Elisha. This was a prophetic time toward the end of the kingdom time, before the death and resurrection of Israel. The Remnant prophets proclaimed the coming end of the old world, and provided visions of the world to come after the judgment on Judah and Israel. Then came the fourth, the Restoration Covenant, which is described in Ezekiel 40-48 symbolically, and which was fully inaugurated through the prophet Zechariah in Zechariah 1-6. This is the fourth phase, after the death and resurrection of the people.

We can also see these four phases in earlier history, though not associated so closely with particular covenantal eras. Adam was created to be a priest in the Garden. He was exiled into the Land, though he and his true sons remained essentially priests, offering worship to God. Cain went out and built a city, and thereby became the first king, though a false one. Toward the end of this period, the prophet Enoch began to prophesy judgment in the larger World as the sons of Seth began to marry the daughters of Cain. (Jude 14-15). Then after the death and resurrection of the world, Noah came as a prophet to set up the new world (Genesis 9:25-27).

We have looked at two progressions, and in each of them we have seen this sequence of important locations:

1. Garden-sanctuary	Pre-fall Adam	Sinaitic
2. Land	Post-fall Adam; Cain	Kingdom
3. Old World	Sethites	Remnant
4. New World	Noah	Restoration

The age of the patriarchs also moves through these four phases. Abraham is essentially a priest, building altars and leading those around him in the worship of God. With Abraham we are in the sanctuary. Isaac failed in his task, so Jacob became the king, the man of action, who ruled flocks and sons, and who suffered for them. With Jacob we are in the land. Joseph, of course, is the prophet, and with Joseph we move into the wider old world. But it is Moses who, after the judgment and resurrection of the Hebrews, becomes the fully mature prophet and brings us into a new world after the destruction of the old.

We could look at the biographies of each of these men and see how he moved from priestly servant to kingly man of action to prophet in his old age. This is most obvious with Jacob, who served, ruled, and finally prophesied. In death, each man moved into a new world.

In a larger way, the whole Adamic period is priestly, down to Noah. God gives the right to exercise capital punishment to mankind through Noah, and thus we enter a larger kingly period. With the age of the Patriarchs, we come to a larger prophetic period, during which old worlds are condemned (starting with Babel, for Abraham is called in the context of the scattering of Babel) and a new world is awaited. This whole period is located in the priestly Garden-sanctuary in an important sense: There is no holy land, let alone a holy world. There are only holy sanctuaries. (Note Genesis 4:26; 8:20; 9:20ff.; and the tower [sanctuary] of Babel. Abraham and the patriarchs live in the land, but it was not yet theirs.)

With Moses, the new world arrives as a new creation, with Israel as a nation at its heart. Israel as a nation, and as a land for that nation, comes into being after the destruction of the old world of Egypt, and which starts a new cycle within the nation of Israel: priestly (Sinaitic), kingly (Kingdom), prophetic (Remnant), and full prophetic (Restoration). This whole cycle takes place with a holy land at its center, but there is as yet no holy world.

In the first cycle (Adam, Noah, Patriarchs), there was one third or prophetic era. In this new cycle in the land, there are two: the Remnant prophetic era in the latter part of the Kingdom era, and the Restoration prophetic era. We can see this division anticipated in the first cycle when, after the rebellion of Ham, Noah sets up the tents of Shem, so that the Shemites were like remnant prophets before the call of Abraham.

Now notice that just as the patriarchs were sent from Babel-Ur to live in the land during their prophetic era without possessing it, so now in the second cycle Israel is sent from fallen Jerusalem into the empire, into the world, though without yet possessing it. The patriarchs had sanctuaries within the land they did not yet possess, and in the Restoration era Israel has a land within the world that they did not yet possess. The patriarchs ministered in the land as Israel was sent to minister in the world of the empires. God's people finally possess the world as its true rulers with the coming of the New Creation.

The period from Adam to the end of the Restoration era covers the whole of Biblical history, with the New Creation beginning some 40 years before the end of the Old Creation in ad 70. This Old Creation history is marked by the seven covenantal periods we have been describing: Adamic, Noahic, Patriarchal, Sinaitic, Kingdom, Remnant, and Restoration. These are explicit covenantal periods, not mere "covenantal phases of maturation." They are marked out by events that start the new era.

In each case there is a transition through death into resurrection, a passage from darkness to greater light, an evening before a new day. This is how God's Spirit acted in Genesis 1, and it is the same way He acts in Bible history.

Adam, the created son of God, fell into sin and was restored, but sin increased until judgment came in the Flood. Then God established the more glorious Noahic Covenant.

Noah's son fell into sin, but there was restoration through the Shemites. All the same, sin increased until judgment came at Babel. Then God set up the more glorious Patriarchal Covenant, with greater promises.

Isaac, son of Abram, sinned and was restored. But sin increased until the people became idolaters in Egypt (Joshua 24:14) and full judgment came in the exodus and wilderness. Then God set up the more glorious Sinaitic Covenant.

The sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu sinned, but the priesthood was restored. Sin increased through the period of the judges until God tore up the Tabernacle and destroyed the house of Eli (1 Samuel 1-4). Then God set up the more glorious Kingdom Covenant.

David and then his sons sinned, but David and his house were restored. Sin increased during the Kingdom period until a great judgment came on northern Israel in the days of Ahab. At that time God established the Remnant Covenant through Elijah and Elisha, with greater promises.

Sin continued to increase in a double way. The kings of Judah became worse and worse, and also the prophets began to become false prophets. Judgment came fully at the exile. Then God set up the more glorious Restoration Covenant.

The Restoration Covenant, of witness to the nations, failed early on when Mordecai disobeyed the king God had put over him and counseled Esther to conceal her Jewishness. But God restored the Jews. Still sin continued to increase until full judgment came with Jesus and the Apostolic Church, culminating in ad 70. This was the last event in the establishment of the New Creation, the fullness of the New Covenant.

These seven Old Creation periods link with the seven days of creation. The Spirit always works the same way. We cannot understand how this is, however, until we have learned much about Biblical symbolism, the language God created to give expression to these parallels. We shall investigate these parallels later in our studies.

There is one more aspect of this history that we need to understand. History not only implements the one Covenant through phases of maturity, it also reveals the one Covenant stage by stage. And since the Covenant is God's inner life, the progressive revelation of the Covenant is the progressive revelation of God.

The chart on the following page provides a model for our understanding. The three triangles move from garden to land to world. They show that these three periods focus in a major way on each of the three persons of God. In the first phase, it is primarily the Father who is progressively revealed. In the second phase, it is the Son who is progressively revealed, particularly as King over Israel. In the third phase, it is the Spirit who is progressively revealed, together with the Son's rule over the world. Of course, all three persons are revealed one way or another in all of history, but there is also this progressive revelation of each one in turn.

The center of the diagram provides historical markers. Each new covenant has a prophetic initiator who sets up the new order. The student is likely to be less familiar with the Restoration Covenant, so a couple of remarks are in order. Zechariah the prophetic initiator sets up Jeshua as high priest in Zechariah 3. In Zechariah 6, the kingly crown is given to Jeshua for safekeeping until Messiah comes. The Restoration Covenant is both the great full-prophetic time for Israel, but also the priestly phase of the New Covenant. The Restoration is called "New Covenant" in Jeremiah 31:31. Jeremiah 31:27-40 has three parallel sections, each beginning "behold, days are coming," and it is clear that the period being prophesied is the restoration from exile. Hebrews 8 quotes this passage and applies it to the full New Covenant in which we live today. But its first fulfillment was after the exile.

Jeshua the priest has the same name as Jesus, and to establish the parallels, I have used Jesus' name in Hebrew in this center column: Jeshua the priest is followed by Jeshua-Jesus as King, and will be followed by Jeshua-Jesus as prophetic judge of the world at the last day.

The student who masters this chart will have a good handle on the course of Biblical and covenantal history.

7. A Text for Chanting

The Bible is written to be read aloud and to be heard. We are often told to hear the Word, and never told to read it. This makes sense because in the ancient world only scribes could read. There were no printing presses, so most people did not need to know how to read.

It is important for another reason, though. We can close our eyes and we can close a book. We can stop the flow of information that comes through our eyes. We have total control over it. It is not so with our ears. We cannot stop our ears very easily. We must submit to what we hear; we do not have total control over it. Thus, what we hear comes to us with some degree of authority. The only way we can stop hearing what someone is saying is to leave the room, or else try to shout him down. Otherwise, we must submit.

Hearing differs from seeing in other ways as well. Not only does hearing involve some degree of submission, whether we like what we hear or not, but it also creates community. We all are hearing the same thing. When we read a book to ourselves, we are isolated.

Third, hearing reveals persons to us. When we look at a person, we learn next to nothing important about him. He may be fat, but we don't know if this is because he is a glutton or because he has some physical ailment. But when we read a person's words, we begin to learn something about him as a person. This is even more true when we hear him speak aloud, for we hear his tone of voice.

Thus, when we hear the Word of God intoned aloud, we hear it with the most authority, we are partly formed together into community, and we encounter the Person of God most fully.

The Bible was written to be intoned aloud, in a kind of reading that is almost chanting. It is written in lines, lines that usually begin with "and" and have one verb. Our Bibles should be printed this way, and should be read this way.

Sadly, our Bibles are usually printed in verses. The verse numbers are helpful when we want to find a place in the Bible, but when Bibles are printed in verses, it tends to obscure the character of the text. Our present division of the Bible into chapters and verses was made in the Middle Ages and Reformation eras. A Dominican named Hugo of Santo Caro (or Hugh de St. Cher) who lived in the early 1200s provided our present division of the Bible into chapters; before that time there were many different systems. He took up the verse divisions from the Hebrew Masoretic text, verse divisions that originated around the 8th century. The verses of the New Testament books were devised by Robert Stephens (Stephanus) for a 1555 edition of the Latin Vulgate, and first appeared in a modern language in the 1560 Geneva Bible.

Even worse is the recent practice of printing the Bible in prose paragraphs. This system does even more damage to the character of the text. It results in people rushing as they read the text aloud. Almost none of the Bible -- arguably none of it at all -- is written in prose paragraphs. To be sure, some parts are more poetic than others, but all of it seems to be written in lines.

Many of the chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles are unhelpful. Whenever you read a chapter or consult a verse, always look at what precedes and follows what you are reading. Some reform is needed in this area, but since our concordances and commentaries are fixed to the older system, it is doubtful that any reform can be made.

A second problem with many modern translations is inaccuracy. The notion is that the text should be as clear as possible to those reading it for the first time. In fact, however, God's Word is designed to be heard over and over, and as we hear it over and over, it begins to make more sense to us. This is particularly obvious with the Psalms. Often when we read a psalm for the first time, it is very unclear what is going on. The text shifts from I to we to you to they to he, etc., and seems to jump from one subject to another. Only as we hear and chant the text repeatedly does it begin to make more sense to us.

Translations should try to be strict as possible, following the word order of the original as much as possible. Often the word order involves parallelisms of various sorts, which we shall look at in our next essay. This is part of the rhythm and sound of the text, its shape, and should be preserved in translation as much as possible.

Another aspect of inaccuracy happens when translators change odd words or phrases into something more familiar to the modern reader. When this happens, we are not brought into contact with the actual words of God. Once again, such strange language will become clearer as we hear the word over and over. It is always possible to provide an explanation for an odd word or phrase in the margin. The translation text itself should preserve the original Greek or Hebrew as much as possible.

Here I provide three examples. These should be read aloud, and more than once. You will see some odd words and phrases, but as you hear them more than once, they will begin to make more sense to you. Read aloud by lines, and feel how the text is designed to be intoned. First, from Leviticus 1:

1 And Yahweh called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting,
saying,

2 "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them,

`A man, when he brings near from you a Nearbringing to Yahweh,
From livestock from the herd and from the flock you shall bring near your
Nearbringing.

3 `If his Nearbringing is an Ascension from the herd,

A perfect male shall he bring him near,

To the forecourt of the Tent of Meeting he shall bring him near,
For his acceptance before Yahweh.

4 `And he shall lean his hand on the head of the Ascension,

And he will be accepted for him to cover him.

5 `And he shall slaughter the son of the herd before Yahweh.

And Aaron's sons the palace-servants shall bring near the blood,

And they shall dash the blood on the Communion Site round about That is at
the forecourt of the Tent of Meeting.

6 `And he shall then skin the Ascension.

And he shall section him into his sections.

7 `And the sons of Aaron the palace-servant shall stoke up fire on the
Communion Site,

And they shall arrange wood on the fire.

8 `And Aaron's sons the palace-servants shall arrange the sections: the head
and the suet, over the wood that is on the fire that is on the Communion Site.

9 `And his entrails and his shins he shall wash with the water.

And the palace-servant shall transform all of it into smoke at the place of the
Communion Site for an Ascension,

Bridal-food of a pleasing aroma to Yahweh.

Now from Daniel 5:

1 Belshazzar the king made a great bread for a thousand of his great men,
And in front of the thousand he was drinking the wine.
2 Belshazzar commanded,
While tasting of the wine,
To bring forth the vessels of gold and silver
That Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out from the temple
That was in Jerusalem;
That they might drink from them,
The king and his great men,
His wives and his concubines.
3 Then they brought forth the vessels of gold
That they had taken out from the temple,
The house of The God that was in Jerusalem;
And they drank from them,
The king and his great men,
His wives and his concubines.
4 They drank the wine,
And they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.
5 In that moment came out the fingers of a man's hand,
And were inscribing in front of the lampstand upon the plaster of the wall of
the king's palace,
And the king was watching the back of the hand that was inscribing.
6 Then the king's splendors were changed in him,
And his thoughts troubled him,
And the knots of his loins were untied,
And his knees were knocking one against another.
7 The king cried out to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the
soothsayers.
The king spoke and said to the wise men of Babylon,
"Any man that reads this inscription,
And shows me the interpretation thereof,
In the purple he will be clothed,
And have the chain of gold about his neck,
And will be the third ruler in the kingdom."
8 Then came in all the wise men of the king;
And they were not able to read the inscription
And its interpretation to make known to the king.
9 Then was the king Belshazzar greatly troubled,
And his splendors kept changing upon him,
And his great men were perplexed.

Finally, from Matthew 24:

4 And answering, Jesus said to them,
"Discern, lest anyone you mislead.
5 For many will come in My name,

Saying, I myself am the Messiah,
 And many they will mislead.
 6 And you will be hearing of wars and rumors of wars.
 Watch carefully so that you are not startled,
 For it is necessary for this to happen;
 But not yet is the end.
 7 For nation will rise up against nation,
 And kingdom against kingdom.
 And there will be famines and earthquakes in various places.
 8 And all these are a beginning of birthpangs.
 9 At that time they will deliver you up to tribulation,
 And will kill you,
 And you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.
 10 And at that time many will be scandalized,
 And they will betray one another,
 And hate one another.”

8. A Text With Shape and Flow

As we begin to hear the Bible in its lines, we begin to become aware of the shape and flow of paragraphs and larger passages, and even whole books. The flow of the text arises from the fact that it was breathed out by the Spirit of God, the lord of time and maturity, of rhythm and music. The text has rhythm and repetition. It builds toward climaxes.

This feature of the text is much more obvious, of course, when we hear it aloud. We can look again at some examples from our previous study. First, notice in this passage from Daniel 5 how the text repeats itself in a rhythmic fashion and but adds a striking and powerfully important new matter the second time; and then there is a climax at the end:

2 Belshazzar commanded,
 While tasting of the wine,
 To bring forth the vessels of gold and silver
 That Nebuchadnezzar his father had taken out from the temple,
That was in Jerusalem;
 That they might drink from them,
 The king and his great men,
 His wives and his concubines.
 3 Then they brought forth the vessels of gold
 That they had taken out from the temple,
The house of The God that was in Jerusalem;
 And they drank from them,
 The king and his great men,
 His wives and his concubines.
 4 They drank the wine,
And they praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze, iron, wood and stone.

Notice that there is an overlapping rhythm in this passage, two overlapping arcs. The first arc takes all of verses 2 and 3, and what stands out is the expansion of the phrase about Jerusalem to include “the house of The God.” A second arc begins, “and they drank

from them” in the middle of verse 3. This phrase is repeated at the beginning of verse 4, and followed by the last phrase of the whole larger arc (paragraph).

Now notice the shape of this brief section from Matthew 24:

4 And answering, Jesus said to them,

“Discern, lest anyone you mislead.

5 For many will come in My name,

Saying, I myself am the Messiah,’

And many they will mislead.

By preserving word order as closely as possible, we hear the word “mislead” at the end of these two phrases. It provides rhythm.

Shortly thereafter we have a double arc that ends with the idea of hatred both times:

9 At that time they will deliver you up to tribulation,

And will kill you,

And you will be hated by all nations on account of My name.

10 And at that time many will be scandalized,

And they will betray one another,

And hate one another.

Again we hear a rhythm in the text.

Now the Bible is not only a message to be heard, but also a written text to be studied, to be looked at. We might say that hearing the text is primarily for the Church while studying the text is primarily for the Levite or pastor, but we don’t want to make a large separation between these two. The musical flow and architectural shape of any passage are inseparably intertwined, and as we become more accustomed to hearing the text in its flow, we will also become more familiar with its shape.

It is primarily when we look at the text that we see its literary shape. If the musical flow of the text stems from the fact that it was breathed out by the Spirit, the architectural shape of the text stems from the fact that the finished product is a revelation of the Son, who provides the structure and form in the Godhead.

Looking back at Matthew 24:9-10, we can see a literary shape that we can analyze and study. It consists of two sets of three lines. Each set begins the same way and ends with the same idea. The literary architecture is parallel. The prophecy that the saints will be delivered up to tribulation is related to the prophecy that many will be scandalized. Killing the saints is related to betraying one another. Hatred of the saints is related to hating one another.

The two triple parallels are also progressive. First comes tribulation upon the saints, accompanied by murder and hatred. This causes many in the Church to fall away: They are scandalized and fearful. They begin to betray and then to hate one another.

This is an example of general parallelism. We see a more strict parallelism in the passage from Daniel 5 cited above, where whole phrases are repeated without change. The stricter parallelism in Daniel 5 is also progressive, as the addition of the phrase “house of The God” in the second part indicates.

Parallelism is the fundamental literary shape of the Bible. In parallelism, the second presentation intensifies, specifies, or completes in some essential respect what the first presentation has said. Notice how the second line of Isaiah 40:3 does this:

In the wilderness prepare the way of Yahweh.
In the desert make straight a highway for our God.

In the second phrase the wilderness has become worse: a desert. Preparation has intensified to making straight. The simple way has become a highway. Yahweh has become OUR God.

Parallelism occurs not only in phrases but also in larger units. For instance, Genesis 24:43-48 follows very closely 24:17-27. It can be shown that the books of Exodus, Ezekiel, and Revelation are generally parallel in structure. Obviously, each intensifies what was said and done in the previous.

Very often what we find is not simple parallelism but inverse parallelism, where the second statement reverses the order of the first. Here is Psalm 19:1 in a translation that preserves the word order:

The heavens are declaring the Mighty One's glory;
And His handiwork proclaims the firmament.

Now the problem here is that the subject of the second line is "the firmament": the firmament does the proclaiming; but it looks in English as if "handiwork" is the subject. If we want to keep the word order, and thus the shape of the text, we must translate the second line:

And His handiwork is proclaimed by the firmament.
Alternatively, we can convert the second line to simple parallelism:
And the firmament is proclaiming His handiwork.

We have seen that some long passages are parallel to one another. We also find long passages that are in inverse parallelism to one another. These are called chiasms or palistrophes, passages that have the shape A>B>C>B>A. Chiasm is the most common of all literary shapes in the Bible, and in our next chapter we turn our attention to it.

9. An Introduction to Chiasm

The word "chiasm" comes from the Greek letter *chi*, pronounced "kh," and written X. This X shape, when we look at it from bottom to top, represents a literary structure that presents certain ideas (the bottom of the X), moves to a central pivot point (the center), and then upwards to the representation of those same ideas in a transformed way (the top of the X). An extended chiasm is also called a palistrophe.

A chiasm is not merely a structure of ideas; in narrative passages it is also a flow of events in time.

In inverse parallelism, the second set of phrases adds something to the first set, and usually intensifies it in some fashion. A true chiasm, however, is not just a series of balancing ideas, that when compared bring out further associations. John Breck argues that for an inverse parallelism to be considered a chiasm, there must be a central idea or pivot that is the most important, so that the phrase or passage rises to a central point and then descends again.³

³ John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994), chap. 3.

There is one additional element in a full chiasm, and that is that as the sequence of ideas moves upward to the pivot, and on up to the top of the X, the second half carries with it all the ideas of the first half, and thus the entire sequence is cumulative. The second half intensifies the first half, and brings the entire chiasm to a second climax at the end. Thus, a full chiasm has two places of climax. For instance, the narrative of the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 is a full chiasm:

- A. One lip, one vocabulary (culture), v. 1**
- B. Shinar, v. 2a
- C. Dwell together, v. 2b
- D. Said to one another, v. 3a
- E. "Lend your strength," v. 3b
- F. Bricks and tar, v. 3c
- G. Build city and tower, v. 4a
- H. Name of their own, v. 4b
- I. Lest we be scattered, v. 4c**
- H' Yahweh as Name, v. 5a
- G' Examine city and tower, v. 5b
- F' One people and one lip, v. 6
- E' "Lend your strength," v. 7a
- D' Confuse one another, v. 7b
- C' Scattered, v. 8
- B' Babel, v. 9a
- A' Confused lip, many cultures, v. 9b**

Notice that the pivot of the narrative, where the people reject God's command to take dominion over the entire earth, is answered by the second climax at the end, where God forces them to do so.

Chiasm is far and away the most prominent literary shape in the text of the Bible. Most if not all the books of the Bible are chiastic in shape. The investigation of chiasm has only recently commanded the attention of Bible scholars, so older books almost never take it into consideration. David A. Dorsey has studied the structure of all the books of the Old Testament, summarizing all the literature through 1998. His book is called *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), and provides all the evidence necessary to convince anyone that the fundamental literary shape of all parts of the Bible is chiastic. While there is no equivalent summary of recent research into the New Testament books, the reader can consult the following for much information: John Breck, *The Shape of Biblical Language: Chiasmus in the Scriptures and Beyond* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1994); J. W. Welch, *Chiasmus in Antiquity. Structures Analyses Exegesis* (Hildesheim, Germany: Gerstenberg Verlag, 1981); and Welch, *Chiasmus in the New Testament: A Study of the Form and Function of Chiastic Structures* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Pub., [1942] 1992).

We can roughly divide Biblical chiasms into two groups: verbal and thematic. A verbal chiasm is marked by the repetition of key words. A thematic chiasm is marked by the return of key themes. Some scholars are doubtful about thematic chiasms, because they argue that identifying key themes is difficult and that many people do a poor job of it. We must say in reply that thematic chiasms are very much present in the Bible, and that the corrective to doing a poor job of identifying them is to do a good job.

Some scholars also object that some people are seeing chiasms everywhere nowadays. We reply that this is because chiasms are indeed everywhere in the Bible. If some people are identifying chiasms that do not exist, the corrective is to do a better job.

Finally, some object to the fact that often more than one chiasm can be found in a given passage. For instance, the Jacob narrative in Genesis 25:12 - 37:1 can be analyzed as a chiasm with the births of Jacob's sons at the center (29:31-30:22) and as another chiasm with Jacob's wrestling with God at Peniel at the center (Genesis 32). We can also find smaller chiasms within larger ones: chiasms for each section, or chiasms that extend over several sections. And we can find chiasms that start in one large chiasm and carry through into the middle of the following one. We can also find extended simple parallelisms running through parts of a larger chiasm. Dorsey provides many examples of each of these.

What can we say about this? Only that it is exactly what we should expect to find when we realize that the Spirit is the music of God. Polyphonic music has several melodies running at once. A good composer can not only weave several melodies together, but he can also taken one melody and stretch it out by making the notes longer and run other melodies above and/or below it. He can run one melody on top of itself, as when a round or canon begins the same melody over and over. A more sophisticated kind of canon is found in ricercars and fugues, where the basic melody enters on top of itself in other keys. Thus, the fact that there are overlapping melodic/architectural shapes in the text of the Bible cannot surprise us. It is what we should expect.

Identifying chiasms is a skill that comes with time and practice. The student can begin by noticing passages that begin and end with the same basic idea. Then he can start comparing the second and next-to-last idea in the passage, and see if they match each other one way or another. Reading the passage, he can see if these is a central pivot that marks the middle of the passage. In this way, he can begin to become familiar with this basic literary shape.

An example is Genesis 30:25ff. We notice that the story begins with Jacob's decision to leave Laban. This idea recurs at the beginning of chapter 31, when Jacob actually determines to leave. If we start comparing key ideas, we find the following shape:

- A. Jacob decides to leave, 30:25-26
- B. Laban has become wealthy, 30:27-28
- C. Laban's livestock has burst forth, 30:29-30
- D. The new arrangement is established, 30:31-33
- E. Laban abuses the arrangement, 30:34-36
- D' The new arrangement at work, 30:37-42
- C' Jacob's livestock bursts forth, 30:43
- B' Jacob has become wealthy, 31:1
- A' Jacob decides to leave, 31:2ff.

Not every passage in the Bible is chiastic, and as noted, identifying chiasms takes skill. But the student is well on the road to good literary exegesis if he starts with the assumption that the passage he is examining has a chiastic structure, or is part of a larger palistrophe. More often than not, he will find that his assumption is correct, and he can begin to compare key themes and begin to learn what particular things this particular part of God's Word is designed to say.

10. Chiasm and Life

Now that we have introduced the matter of chiastic structure and the reader is a bit familiar with it, there are two more things to be said about it. The second will be our subject in chapter 13.

The first is that the chiastic shape corresponds to the shape of human life. This should not surprise us, because we are made in the image of God, and God is manifest in Word and Spirit. If we are living epistles, our lives will look a bit like the literary shape of the books and book-sections (pericopes) of the Bible. If we are borne along by the Spirit, our lives will move in the same pattern the Spirit moves, which as we shall see in our next essay is also chiastic.

This matter is so obvious that we don't notice it. But consider: The very shape of our body can be considered chiastic from left to right, though not from bottom to top:

fingers
palm
arm
shoulder
rib cage
up to head, and/or
down to heart
rib cage
shoulder
arm
palm
fingers

Turning from "text shape" (Word) to "movement shape" (Spirit), consider the shape of an average day in your life.

begin in bed
take off night clothes
wash, brush teeth
put on day clothes
breakfast
leave home
work
have lunch
work
return home
supper
take off day clothes
brush teeth
put on night clothes
return to bed

Consider the normal whole life:

in the womb, awaiting birth
 infancy, bet-wetting, others need to dress you
 childhood
 stage of learning
 stage of working under others
 mid-life crisis; menopause
 stage of leading others at work
 stage of teaching as elder
 second childhood sets in
 senility, incontinence, others need to dress you
 in the tomb, awaiting new birth

Notice that the stage of learning (around 7 to 20) matches the true meaning of the stage of eldership (around 60 to 70), when we have much to pass on to others. In the middle of our lives, we are working, but also being frustrated at the seeming short-sightedness of those over us. At some point, men have a crisis, and for women the crisis is menopause. After such crises, we are better able to govern others we work with. This middle part of life varies greatly from person to person, but something like it is normal.

The crisis is a sense of death, an awareness that what we had hoped to do as younger persons will not fully come to pass. For men this is tied to their work, and their hopes of accomplishment. For women this is tied to the departure of their adult children, and to menopause. People's lives are significantly reoriented after such crises, and there can be more than one of them. We are humbled through such crises, and become much better able to lead others afterwards.

Or, consider going to the market. You gather up your money, leave your home, make the trip to market, enter the market, transact your business, leave the market, make the trip home – probably going in reverse past everything you passed on the way to the market, enter your home, and put what remains of your money away.

War is declared. The men are called from home. They are mobilized into the army. The men go off to battle. The war is fought. The men come back from battle. The army is demobilized. The men go home. War is over.

Not everything in human life is chiastic, of course, any more than every single passage of the Bible is chiastic. For instance, while you are at a supermarket, you select a basket after entering, and afterwards return the basket before leaving; but while you are shopping you select an item and put it in the basket, and then you select another and put it in the basket, and then another, and another. These actions are not chiastic but parallelistic. Moreover, after making all your selections, you get in line and pay for your selections. This event climaxes all the parallel actions of selecting items, but it may have no chiastic relation to your selection.

All the same, if you selected many things there will be a chiasm in the way you are charged for them. The last things you selected will be on top of your basket, and these will be counted first; while the first things you selected, which are on the bottom of your basket, will be counted last.

As can be seen, very much of human life is "there and back again," or chiastic. This is how God has designed human beings to live in the world. It is so obvious that we don't notice it. But it is everywhere.

This shape of human life arises ultimately from the give and take of the three Persons of God, as the Father sends the Spirit to the Son and the Son sends the Spirit back to the Father.

We can see that literary chiasm is not a mere curiosity, a mere poetic device to structure the text. It arises from the very life of God, and is played out in the structure of the lives of the images of God in many ways and at many levels. It is because human beings live and move so often chiastically, that poets often find themselves drawn to chiastic writing. God creates chiasms out of His inner life, and so do the images of God.

Biblical chiasms are perfect. That is, they are perfectly matched to the human chiasms they address and transform. As we become more and more sensitive to Biblical chiasms, we will become more and more sensitive to one aspect of the true nature of human life under God. We will be transformed from bad human chiasms into good human chiasms. In this way, becoming sensitive to chiasm can be of practical transformative value to human life, though in deep ways that probably cannot be explained or preached very well.

One further thought. We saw in our previous essay that chiasms often have a double climax, one in the middle and the greatest at the end. The food we bought at market is put away in the cupboard and refrigerator when we get back home. Moving forward to a final climax is what all literature does, whether it has a middle climax or not. (Shakespeare's five-act plays always move to a climax in the third and in the fifth acts.) This is just another way that human life matches literary production, in the Bible as well as in uninspired human literature. Becoming familiar with the shape and flow of Biblical texts will have a transforming effect on human life.

11. The Menorah Chiasm

If chiasm relates somehow to the nature of the Divine Word, as reflected in the shapes of language in the Written Word, it also relates somehow to the movement of the Divine Spirit. In the Bible, "dynamic" narratives as well as "static" topical matters are usually set forth chiastically. In this essay, we want to take a look at the seven-fold Spirit of God (Revelation 1:4; 3:1; 4:5; 5:6) and how the Spirit moves in a seven-fold way.

The seven-fold Spirit is associated with the seven lamps of the Temple lampstand (Revelation 4:5). In Exodus 25:31-40, this almond or "watcher" (in Hebrew) lampstand symbolizes the "seven eyes of the Lord" watching over Israel, for the lamps faced the twelve loaves on the Table of Face-Bread (Exodus 25:37; Revelation 5:6; Zechariah 3:9 & 4:10). The Lamp is chiastically designed, with three branches on each side moving toward a central shaft in the middle. The Lampstand is called in Hebrew the "Menorah," and for this reason some scholars call a seven-fold chiasm a "menorah pattern."

The fact that a given chiasm is seven-fold does not by itself mean that it has a Menorah or Seven-fold Spirit association. It may just happen to be a seven-fold chiasm. The specific kind of chiasm we have in mind here is one that reproduces in some way the seven days of creation.

In Genesis 1:1, God created the heavens and the earth. Immediately we are told that at the moment of creation, the moving Spirit came into the creation to move it through the stages of growth and development (1:2). The Spirit moves through seven days, in sequence, numbered from one to seven.

These seven days are arranged chiastically, starting with light, moving to the great lights of the fourth day, and coming to a second climax on the sabbath day of the Lord on the seventh. Thus, light and giving light governs the whole sequence, and this is thus a Lampstand or Menorah chiasm.

Genesis 1:2 identifies three "problems" with the world that the Spirit will work to bring forward to fullness. The world was formless, empty, and dark. Giving light to

darkness is the overarching concern of the Spirit. Everything else in the creation week is within this context of giving light.

The chiasm is as follows:

- A. Day 1: light (light)
- B. Day 2: firmament (forming)
- C. Day 3: sea and land; plants (filling)
- A' Day 4: light-bearers (light)
- C' Day 5: fish for sea and birds for *land* (vv. 20, 22) (filling)
- B' Day 6: man for firmament: overlord of earth under God (forming)
- A'' Day 7: day of the Lord (light)

Now, this fundamental Menorah chiasm is repeated many times in the Bible, and always with the theme of making a new creation. That is what the Spirit does: He makes a new creation out of an old one and brings it forward to fullness. We have to be aware of two matters, however. The first is that while Genesis 1 does actually describe the creation and formation of the world, each day contains events that are taken up later on in the Bible in a general and/or symbolic fashion. For instance, Exodus 25-40 runs through creation week repeatedly, presenting the Tabernacle as a new creation. But it does so very symbolically.

The second thing to be aware of is that these Menorah chiasms are cumulative. Genesis 2, which we shall lay out below, follows Genesis 1 as a Menorah chiasm, but adds things to it, unfolding Genesis 1 in new ways. This process of accumulating a wider and deeper view of the Menorah chiasm continues all through the Bible and reaches its climax in the book of Revelation, which is replete with Menorah chiasms. A very large book could be written tracing the transformations of the Menorah chiasm through the Bible. This essay is only a brief introduction.

Here are a few examples, which I hope will be clear enough after you meditate on them for a bit.

Genesis 2-3:

1. Garden formless, empty, given light-bearer (man), 2:4-7 "*And Yahweh God formed man*" (<Spirit hovered, made light> parallels <Spirit breathed into dust, made man>)
2. Garden-sanctuary, 2:8 "*And Yahweh God planted a garden*"
3. Trees grow out of land, 2:9; centrality of land, 2:10-14 "*And Yahweh God caused to grow*"
4. Man established as ruler, 2:15 "*And Yahweh God took the man and put him*"
5. Commands, regarding trees, 2:16-17 "*And Yahweh God commanded the man*"
6. Community, 2:18-24 "*And Yahweh God said*"
7. Sabbath sin and judgment, 2:25-3:23

From Genesis to Judges:

1. Genesis - creation and generation narratives (men as lights)
2. Exodus - transition out of Egypt and description of house (house as firmament between God and people)
3. Leviticus - law for the sanctuary (altars rise out of "sea")
4. Numbers - narratives and descriptions of host (Israel pictured as a heavenly host)
5. Deuteronomy - law for the land (laws for the swarming host of Israel, to organize them)
6. Joshua - transition into Canaan and description of land (people enter "firmament" land between God and world)
7. Judges - narratives of sabbath fall and judgment

Leviticus:

1. Chapters 1-7: The Sacrifices as the establishment of the world (Day 1).
2. Chapters 8-10: The Priesthood as the establishment of a pure mediating boundary between God and the people (Day 2).
3. Chapters 11-15: Rules of clean and unclean, separating "land and sea," involving cleansing by water (Day 3).
4. Chapter 16. The Day of Coverings (Atonement) to restore the righteous to their position as mediators between God and the world (Day 4).
5. Chapters 17-23: Laws of righteousness for the host of the righteous, and times of gathering for the host (Day 5: the creation of hosts and a command to those hosts).
6. Chapter 24:10-23: Sin and its punishment, focusing on man and his fall (Day 6).
7. Chapters 25-27: Sabbaths and Offerings (Day 7).

Leviticus 23:

1. Sabbath - seventh day
2. Passover - first central annual offering
3. First-sheaf - waves people before God
4. Pentecost - fiftieth (eighth) day
5. Trumpets - gathers the people before God
6. Atonement - second central annual offering
7. Tabernacles - climax of year in seventh month, eight days

What I notice in the Leviticus 23 sequence is, first, the association of Passover with the Day of Atonement ("B" sections), which are the twin foci of the ellipse of the sacrificial year. Second, I notice in connection with the "A" sections, we begin with the seventh day (Sabbath), move to the eighth day (Pentecost), and finally to an eight-day feast in the seventh month (Tabernacles). I suggest that the link between First-sheaf and Trumpets is the idea of the host of God waved and gathered before Him.

Creation Days in Zechariah 1-6:

Day 1: "I saw at night, and behold" (Zech. 1:8).

Yahweh and His host, among myrtles, by (not "in") the deep.

Spirit of God over the face of the deep.

Preparation for action.

Day 2: "And I lifted up my eyes, and looked, and behold" (Zech. 1:18).

Old altar torn down; new altar being erected.

Altar as firmament between God and world.

Day 3a: "And I lifted up my eyes, and looked, and behold" (Zech. 2:1).

Separation of God's people from the world system.

Separation of land from the sea.

God's glory in and around His people.

Day 3b: "Then he showed me" (Zech. 3:1).

Grain and fruit plants on the land.

Atonement restores priesthood: vine and fig tree (Tabernacles) ensue.

Day 4: "The angel returned, roused me as from sleep, and said, 'What do you see?' . . . I see, and behold" (Zech. 4:1-2).

Lampstand.

Sun, moon, and stars.

Day 5: "And I lifted up my eyes again, and looked, and behold" (Zech. 5:1).

"Leprosy" (anti-glory) uncleanness on the houses of secret sinners.

Swarms of birds and fish: glory clouds.

Parallel houses of Israelites gathered around God.

Parallel Feast of Tabernacles (vine & fig tree; 3:10).

Day 6: "Lift up now your eyes, and see" (Zech. 5:5).

Evil woman in ephah given temple in Shinar.

Humanity set in Garden of Eden.

Day 7: "And I lifted up my eyes again, and looked, and behold" (Zech. 6:1).

Horses & chariots ride forth and cause God's Spirit to rest in the North.

Sabbath rest.

The Book of Ezekiel:

1. God Takes the World in Hand, ch. 1-7.

2. Firmament-Rulers of Israel To Be Judged, ch. 8-13

3. Plant Imagery Describes the Coming Judgment, ch. 14-19.

4. Climax: City and Land To Be Destroyed, ch. 20-23.

5. Swarms of Nations Around Israel To Fall Simultaneously, ch. 24:1-33:20.

6. A New Adam and a New Eden, ch. 33:21-39:29.

7. A New Sabbath for God's People, ch. 40-48.

The Book of Isaiah:

The whole book of Isaiah is structured as a Menorah. Each of the seven sections is seven-fold, as are some smaller sections also. David Dorsey displays these in his book *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament*, to which we referred in our previous essay. Here is the overall structure of Isaiah:

1. Introductory messages of condemnation and future restoration, 1-12
Day 1: Anticipates the whole book with seven messages.
2. Humiliation of proud King of Babylon; condemnation of nations, 13-27
Day 2: Focus on the nations and on "covering" leaders.
3. Collection of woes; do not trust in earthly powers, 28-35
Day 3: Focus on the Land
4. Judgment ("death") and resurrection in midst of history, 36-39
Day 4: Elevation of Hezekiah; God over all
5. Yahweh supreme over idols; do not trust idols, 40-48
Day 5: Swarms of idols
6. Exaltation of humble Servant of Yahweh; blessing on remnant, 49-54
Day 6: The Coming Man
7. Concluding messages of condemnation and future restoration, 55-66
Day 7: Sabbath theme

The Book of Revelation:

1. The Man (ch. 1), Jesus presented as shining with light.
Lev. 23: Sabbath.
2. The Churches: True & False (ch. 2-3), Letters to the Seven Churches.
Lev. 23: Passover.
3. The Call to the Throne (ch. 4-5), Ascension of Christ.
Lev. 23: Waving of first sheaf.
4. The Book (ch. 6-7), Seven Seals.
Lev. 23: Pentecost (the day the Law was given).
5. The Call to Judgment (ch. 8-15), Seven Trumpets.
Lev. 23: Trumpets.
6. The False Church and the True (ch. 16-20), Seven Bowls.
Lev. 23: Day of Coverings, separating two goats.
7. The Bride (ch. 21-22), The Sabbath City.
Lev. 23: Feast of Tabernacles.

The description of the glorified Jesus in Revelation 1:14-16:

1. And His head and His hair were like white wool, like snow;
2. And His eyes were like a flame of fire;
3. And His feet like burnished bronze, when it has been caused to glow in a furnace;
4. And His voice like the sound of many waters;
5. And in His right hand He held seven stars;
6. And out of His mouth came a sharp two-edged sword;
7. And His face was like the sun shines in its strength.

The Letters to the Seven Churches in Revelation 2-3:

1. Ephesus - eat of Tree of Life
2. Smyrna - Jews, and tribulation coming soon
3. Pergamum - (white) manna, white stone, name, Jesus coming soon
4. Thyatira - Jezebel (Babylon); true and false meal & rule
5. Sardis - white garments, name, Jesus coming soon
6. Philadelphia - Jews, and tribulation coming soon
7. Laodicea - eat meal with Christ

These are but a few examples. I have discussed this at greater length in three papers available from Biblical Horizons. First, *An Introduction to the Seven-Fold Covenant Model*. Second, *The Tabernacle: A New Creation*, which focuses on the many Menorah chiasms in Exodus 25-40. Third, and most fully, *The Revelation of Jesus in Revelation 1:12b-16 and Its Relation to the Structure of the Book of Revelation*, which discusses all the many Menorah chiasms in Revelation, relating them to creation week, and bringing in many Menorah chiasms from the earlier Scriptures that are relevant to those in Revelation.

12. Narrative and Supernarrative

Narrative. Story. Narrative Theology. In recent years seeing the Bible as story, as narrative, has been one of the “big things” that “everyone” is “into.”

In many ways this is a welcome development. The Bible does indeed teach us through stories, through narratives, and very often preachers and teachers do not pay attention to the story. A good example is in Genesis 12, where we find that a famine drives Abram and his people (several hundreds; he had 318 fighting men, Gen. 14:14) down to Egypt. Abram asks his beautiful wife Sarai not to reveal that she is his wife, but to say (quite truthfully) that she is his sister. Abram believes that the Egyptians might kill him to get Sarai. He expects, however, the Egyptians to honor the custom of negotiating with a brother for a sister’s hand (Gen. 24:29, 53, 60; 34:13). The lawless Pharaoh seizes Sarai and only afterwards gives gifts to Abram. Then Yahweh sends plagues on Pharaoh. Pharaoh blames Abram, but Abram leaves Egypt a wealthy man with much spoil.

That’s the story, and it’s very clear. Abram did nothing wrong, and acted to protect himself and his people from what turned out indeed to be a lawless king. God protected Abram and punished the Pharaoh. The story teaches us to be careful around powerful and lawless people, and also teaches that God will watch over us when we try to do what is right. It is also an instance of the exodus pattern. And more can be said as well, but:

Very often, however, the whole *story* is ignored and instead people try to make Abram into a coward and a liar, agreeing with Pharaoh. What is communicated by the narrative (judgment on Pharaoh, blessing on Abram) is ignored.

So, taking story / narrative seriously is important, and we can be happy that more attention is being paid to it.

At the same time, there is more than one way in which “story theology” is being done, and so we should be careful about the matter. Here are some problems:

1. Many liberals do “story theology” by bringing all kinds of pagan and fertility-cult notions into the text of the Bible, treating the Biblical narratives as examples of ancient near eastern literature. The Bible is not ANE literature, but is priestly literature supervised by God. The Song of Songs is not “like Egyptian love poetry,” but is Temple literature, read aloud in the Temple courts, not in the boudoir. It is allegory, not sex. Its theme is “political eros,” the love of king and people (and behind that, God and people).

2. Many “post-modern” liberals do “story theology” by simply using the Biblical stories as raw material for whatever they want to say, since according to these theories, the text itself has nothing to say and is only a springboard for our fancies. A vast amount of utter rubbish has been produced by people employing these two approaches.

3. A third bad way of doing narrative theology, increasingly popular in evangelical and Reformed circles, is to assume that a lot of the narratives in the Bible are pure fiction, or are some kind of “historical fiction” that enhances and exaggerates whatever may really have happened. This approach says that Jesus “fulfilled” these stories – He’s the True Daniel, the True Jonah, the True Moses – but that the stories may not be historically true.

The Biblical stories, this view holds, are the Real and Good stories that point to Jesus (unlike, say, the story of Aladdin and the Lamp), but they may *just* be stories. These narratives “float above the surface” of real history.

This approach is a radical departure from the way the Spirit has led the Church to view the Biblical narrative during the last 2000 years. According to the Church, God is not a Story-teller but a Playwright whose characters live and move and actually do the things He has foreordained them to do. There is no need for God to “enhance” the story of what happened in history, because He planned it in the first place.

The Christian understanding of God is called into question by this approach. Why would God deliver a few thousand people from Egypt and then cause Moses (or whoever) to write it up as if more than two million had been delivered? If the real history that God foreordained was not “good enough” (only a few thousand people), then why didn’t God foreordain something that *was* “good enough” (over two million)? And why has God the Holy Spirit been tricking His people, ancient Jew and historic Christian, for the past 3000 years – because for 3000 years people have assumed that the Bible recorded history as it happened.

Turning to the right way to begin to look at Biblical narrative, the thing to bear in mind is something that has been rejected by academic Christians for 150 years, but which was always believed by the Church before that time. And that is this: Bible has a Supernarrative that lasts 4000 or so years and that is carefully fixed by rigorous chronological information. This Supernarrative is the history of the center of the world, the history of the priestly core of the human race. It is not a “mythically enhanced” history, but is the Truth of which myths are carbon copies. It is a boundaried-off, holy history centered on a boundaried-off holy people and written by boundaried-off “holy men moved by the Spirit of God” (2 Peter 1:21).

Taking Biblical chronology seriously (as all the great theologians have done) enables us to see the Grand Narrative in ways that those who break the Bible up into “stories” cannot do. The chronology reveals that Samson, Samuel, and Jephthah’s daughter were all about the same age and ministered at the same time, rebuilding Israel. They are, in a way, a new version of Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, respectively, who led and built up Israel in the beginning. (Miriam was a prophetess, and Jephthah’s daughter taught the women every year.) It is only the chronology that reveals this, however. The fact that Jephthah’s daughter arrived to serve at the Tabernacle two years before the Ark was taken into Philistia; the fact that Samson began his “attack” on the Philistines at the same time the Ark was plaguing them; the fact that Samuel led Israel in victory over Philistia immediately after Samson had killed all their kings and military commanders – these facts only appear if we take the chronology seriously. When we do we see that there are not only individual stories, with particular meanings as parts of particular books, but that they fit together as a Grand Story.

The Supernarrative is the story of God’s maturing His daughter into a bride for His Son. God comes into history and does things that change people, causing the human race to grow and mature. The Biblical narrative is about how He did that with the core people, into whose history we are now engrafted by the Spirit (Romans 11). What Jesus fulfills is that entire history; He is the perfection of the process.

God makes a new kind of person out of Abram, a man who can leave home and not yearn to return (compare Odysseus). God makes it possible for twin sons to learn to live in peace, so that twins don’t have to be killed when they are born (as is very common). God changes people, and those changes are inherited over time.

God made a deposit of revelation, a lot of it simply dictated, at the time of Moses. After several centuries during which the leaven of Genesis-Joshua did its work, God inspired another deposit of revelation centered in on the psalms and the wisdom books written by Solomon. After several more centuries of leavening, God introduced the prophetic writings, much of which were once again dictated by God. After one more period of leavening, Jesus came and the “New Testament” was written.

This is the Grand Narrative. But that Supernarrative is not being considered today because the chronological information in the Bible, and the Bible as a book extremely concerned with chronology, is not being reckoned with. Maybe Solomon did not write Ecclesiastes, we’re told; maybe it came much later. Well, if so, then we have a different narrative. If so, then Ecclesiastes was not doing its leavening work in tandem with the other wisdom books starting in the days of Solomon.

Narrative theology is important, but we must guard against the gnostic tendency to reduce the Biblical history to *mere* story.

Narrative theology is important, but we need the right narrative.

13. Music and Typology

Back in our first of these essays, we wrote this about typology:

Covenant Theology focuses on the actual events of Biblical history, on what God and man actually did. We must affirm that this history actually happened, and that it moved progressively toward the goal of the new creation in Jesus Christ and His Church. But God’s way of presenting the meaning of that history involves an abundant use of symbols and symbolic structures, symbols and structures that are transformed and renewed covenant by covenant over the course of Biblical history.

Hence, we must become familiar with the basic symbolic furniture of the world as God created it, and with how He has used and transformed that furniture covenant by covenant. We want to know, for instance, about the heavenly sea of Genesis 1:7, how that sea baptized the world in the Flood, how it found symbolic expression first in the Tabernacle laver, then in the Water Chariots and Bronze Sea of Solomon’s Temple, and then in the Temple river of Ezekiel 47. We want to understand how that heavenly sea relates to the various baptisms of the Old Creation and to the Christian baptism of the New, and to the rivers that flow from God’s throne in Revelation 22.

We must also become familiar with how these pieces of symbolic furniture are positioned in space, investigating symbolic geography (north, south, east, west, up, down) and symbolic architecture (Tabernacle, Solomon’s Temple, Ezekiel’s Temple, the New Jerusalem, etc.). Such configurations in space are world models, and they change covenant after covenant as God transforms the world.

Additionally, we must become familiar with the symbolism of human beings and of human life: ear, hand, foot, clothing, hair, clean and unclean flesh, various kinds of animals and plants, priest and king and prophet, etc.

We shall use “typology” as the term for all of this investigation. Typology presents the Biblical philosophy of history, and symbolism presents the Biblical philosophy of the world and of human life.

Now we must move further. Typology has much to do with patterns of events that repeat over and over in the Bible with variations. The reason for this is that history is moved along by the Spirit of God who is the Music of God. As the Son is the Word of God, so that Spirit (Breath) is the Music of God.

We think of music as a concentrated kind of sound that has “melody, harmony, and rhythm.” But the musicality of sound exists in all sound. The moment an Idea (Word) is made out loud by Breath (Spirit) it become musical. The Spirit *musics* the Word. So, when I speak, my voice goes up and down (melody), is loud or soft (dynamics), has a distinct tone different from other people (timbre, or tone color), is rapid or slow (tempo), has accents (rhythm), and in any given sentence or speech has a shape (form, line).

Music exists in repetition. We use the same words and phrases over and over. At a “higher” level, songs repeat the same melody stanza by stanza. As the words change, stanza by stanza, a singer may vary how he sings the melody. This is the beginning, so to speak, of what eventually becomes the richness of classical or art music.

In such “high” music a given melody can be heard in many forms, sometimes rather disguised. Bach takes church hymns, slows them down to even notes, harmonizes them differently each time he comes to them, sometimes takes the melody and hides it in the bass line of an organ prelude, etc. The same hymns may be set in different ways by other composers from Luther to Pachelbel to Ernst Pepping. It’s the same tune, but it shows up in differing places. Sometimes it’s played faster than normal (“diminution”), sometimes slow (“augmentation”), sometimes with the higher and lower tones reversed (“inversion”), and even sometimes backwards (“cancrizans”).

Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony’s “da-da-da-daaaah” rhythm occurs in all four movements of his symphony: dramatically in the first movement, softly right at the end of the melody in the second, as a dance in the third, and victoriously in the fourth. Then Mahler, writing his own Fifth Symphony, picks it up for his first movement as a funeral march tattoo.

What is important about all this, for our purposes, is that the Spirit has sung the Bible in the same way. The Spirit is not only the Mover of history; He is also the inspirer of the Holy Scriptures. Melodies repeat, variously in various contexts.

Isaac’s wife Rebekah is met at a well, one of the symbols of woman as life-giving fountain. But Isaac does not meet her; rather, Abraham’s servant does. Isaac is a passive figure, lying under Abraham’s knife and not much of a shaker and doer. Rebekah, however, is a women of action: She waters all the camels with great alacrity. “ReBeKaH” is a play on the word blessing, “BaRaKaH.”

Jacob’s wife Rachel is met at a well. Unlike Abraham’s servant, Jacob has no camels loaded with gifts. But Jacob, unlike Isaac, is a man of action. Like his mighty mother who hauled jar after jar of water for twelve camels, Jacob pulls off the big stone for Rachel so that she can get water. Rachel, meanwhile, is like Rebekah in that she is willing to practise deception in order to safeguard God’s covenant, as she steals her father’s household gods, mocking his false religion.

Moses’ wife Zipporah is met at a well. We move from passive Isaac to strong Jacob to heroic Moses, as Moses singlehandedly drives away the bad shepherds who kept Jethro’s daughters from the well.

In 1 Samuel 9 we find another variation on this musical sequence of events. Saul, searching for his father's donkeys but soon to be king (and royal husband) for Israel, meets young women going to draw water. They are not his bride, but they represent his bride in the narrative. Ah, and that's the point. By this time we know that a man meeting a woman at a well is about marriage. We have the symbolic imagery in mind. Now we read that Saul met "*young women going out to draw water.*" Why not "some people leaving the city"? The Spirit wants us, you see, to pick up the idea of a marriage, so He makes sure that we read about *young women and water.*

Of course, we wind up with Jesus in John 4, meeting the Samaritan woman at a well. And what do they talk about? Marriage, of course. At this late date in history, the *woman* (as archetype) has had five husbands and is now with a sixth man. It's time for the Seventh, and clearly Jesus is the husband for the *woman* (as archetype). Jesus is the Greater King Saul.

Yet... Didn't we hear this melody back in the beginning? There was a well-watered garden. The man lacked a wife, so God made a wife for him, and the were together in the well-watered garden.

And.... Doesn't the New Jerusalem, the Bride made ready and coming down from heaven, feature a river that flows down to twelve gates of pearl?

So.... What about the Laver of Cleansing in the Tabernacle Courtyard, where the Husband-King of Israel, Yahweh, met His bride? And that Great Bronze Sea and Water Chariots in the Temple, where Yahweh and His pillar representatives Jachin (priest) and Boaz (king) met with His bride-people? With this in mind, is there a marriage to gentiles in view when the River in Ezekiel's visionary temple goes to the area of Sodom (the Dead Sea) and makes the waters fresh, so that Big Fish (nations) are caught?

Yes. Surely these are other slightly different permutations on the melody we've been considering: a note or two different, making a new and complimentary melody.

But wait. There are other versions of this theme. In the wilderness we had no water, so Yahweh Himself gave water to His bride in Exodus 17. But when this particular variant of the theme recurs, in Numbers 20, there is a difference: Miriam the prophetess dies in v. 1, and then in v. 2 there is no water. Death of woman; death of water. It was Miriam who had led the women in the refrain of the Song at the Red Sea in Exodus 15. She sang, "Horse and rider He has thrown into the sea!" Woman-water. Water-woman. There is a melody, or at least a melodic motif here. We don't have to sort it out, at first anyway. We only need to hear it.

We have only listened to one theme. We shall hear a few more before leaving this topic. Bottom line: Music is essential to Biblical hermeneutics and typology. Those who would be good readers and teachers of the Bible would do well to become familiar with how great musicians construct their works, for it is virtually identical to how the Spirit has sung His own.