

## **Adam, Noah, and the Kingdom: The Covenants of Genesis and Consistent Eschatology**

by Ralph Allan Smith

Eschatology is not merely the doctrine of “last things,” as the etymology of the word might suggest. Rather, as Anthony Hoekema states, “Properly to understand biblical eschatology, we must see it as an integral aspect of all biblical revelation. Eschatology must not be thought of as something which is found in, say, such Bible books as Daniel and Revelation, but as dominating and permeating the entire message of the Bible.” With this assertion, we heartily agree.

It is disappointing, therefore, to note that Hoekema fails to fulfill the promise of this fundamental insight. Having annunciated the principle, he promptly transgressed it. For if biblical eschatology is an eschatology that dominates the entire message of the Bible, it must be eschatology grounded in the theology of creation. An eschatology that focuses on redemption, without being grounded in creation, utterly fails to be the kind of dominating truth that Hoekema has proclaimed Biblical eschatology to be. It also fails to be a truly redemptive eschatology, because the restoration of what was lost is an essential component of the Biblical notion of redemption. The doctrine of redemption must be built on the foundational truths of the theology of creation.

This means that Biblical eschatology finds its roots in the original creation order, rather than beginning, as Hoekema’s exposition suggests, with Genesis 3:15. Obviously, this is not to deny that biblical eschatology concerns the coming of the Messiah to defeat Satan and save His people. The point is that the Messiah comes as a *second Adam*. He comes, as Paul explained, to fulfill a work that Adam could not fulfill because of his sin. But the creation covenant and the original commission that God gave to man in Adam is omitted from Hoekema’s eschatology, undermining his ability and contradicting his claim to give a fully Biblical account.<sup>1</sup> The problem is not, in my opinion, incidental nor is it peculiar to Hoekema. Both amillennialism and premillennialism are characteristically eschatologies not rooted in the creation covenant.

### **The Edenic World and Biblical Eschatology**

To develop an eschatology that is wholly Biblical, we must begin with the creation story in Genesis. Two aspects of that story are particularly relevant for biblical eschatology. First, God established a pattern for man in the way that He created the world, a pattern of work and rest that pointed the way for man to live and gave man some idea what his work would consist in. Second, God gave man a commission that made explicit what was implicit in the six-day creation pattern.

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<sup>1</sup> Though Hoekema mentions Genesis 1:28 when he discusses the new earth, the importance of God’s covenant word to Adam is entirely missed.

### ***Creation As Paradigmatic Work***

Why did God create the world in six days when He could have just as easily created it all in an instant? The answer is found clearly in the Genesis record when we are told that God worked for six days and rested on the seventh, setting an example for man to follow. God's creation week is the model for man's work week.

We can be more specific. When God first created the world, He created it so that it would need to be improved in three particular areas. The original world was 1) dark, 2) without form, and 3) empty (Gen. 1:2). In God's six-day work week, He made light to drive away the darkness. He separated the day from the night, the land from the sea, the heavens from the earth, giving the world a clear form. He also began to fill the world with plants and animals. Doing this in six days and creating man last of all was the way that God showed Adam how to work.

It is important to note, however, that Adam was not present to see either the original condition of the world or God's work to change it. He could only know what God had done and how He had done it through the word of God. From the very beginning of creation, Adam could only know the truth about God and the world, as well as his own responsibility through a verbal revelation from God.

We must also note that not everything was made before Adam. For it was after creating Adam that God planted the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:7-8). Adam watched God design and make this Garden sanctuary. We assume that the Garden was planted according to a pattern of some sort because two special trees with names were in the center and it is implied that the Garden had a wall since it seems to have had an entrance at the East (Gen. 3:24). However the details may have been, Adam watched God build the Garden and learned from God what his own task in the larger world was to be. For to be God's image means to be like God. What, therefore, God does, man also does, though in a qualitatively different way since man cannot literally create. Man imitates the heavenly Father in the earthly sphere, the mimetic relationship being designed by God from the beginning as an aspect of what it means that man lives as God's image.

### ***The Commission to Adam***

All of this was implicit in the way that God created the world. But Adam was not left to speculate on who he was and what the meaning of his existence might be. God revealed to Adam the meaning of his life by giving him a mandate: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen. 1:28). The mandate includes two of the three tasks that God had performed during the six days of the creation. Adam was to fill the world with people, just as God had worked to fill the world with plants and animals. If we assume that God created animals in a manner similar to the way that He created man, the animal world, too, would need to increase, and Adam's dominion probably would have included aiding in the multiplication of domestic animals. However that may have been, he was clearly responsible for the propagation of the human race. Fill the earth!

His work also included work that would have been analogous to God's work of separating the various aspects of the created world to order and glorify it. Adam was to subdue the world as its ruler. To the modern mind, the notion of bringing the world into submission to man may be offensive, but the meaning of Adam's dominion is further explained as *servicing* and *guarding* the Garden (Gen 2:15; KJV has "dress" for serve and "keep" for guard; NASB has "cultivate" for

serve.). To have dominion means to serve, not to subjugate. In order to serve the world, Adam would have to have some idea about the order of the world. Naming the animals in the Garden was an aspect of service and the beginning of Adam's analysis of the created order. He would have to categorize the creation in order to care for it.

The third aspect of God's six-day creation, removing the darkness, is not explicitly mentioned with regard to man, but there is no question about the fact that Adam is accustomed to fire already from the time that he was in Eden. The offering of sacrifice at the time of the fall and as a rule of life thereafter expels myths about man discovering fire late in the history of human development. Adam knew and used fire from the beginning. The spread of human culture, therefore, meant the spread of light.

## **The Fulfillment of the Commission to Adam in the Old Testament**

From the time of the fall, the redemptive work of God in history has always been covenantal. Furthermore, each covenant that God granted to man involved the restoration to man of his original commission and grace from God so that man could accomplish that mission in history. But until the coming of the Messiah, redemption is not accomplished and every "new Adam" in the era of the old covenant imitates the first Adam, sinning against God and breaking the covenant. The center of Old Testament eschatology is the hope of the Messiah, the King and Savior who will first save man from Satan and sin, but also, as an essential aspect of that salvation, restore man to Edenic blessing and lead man to fulfill the Edenic commission.

The promise of salvation in Genesis 3:15 is part of God's curse upon the serpent and Satan. It is not too much to say that it implies the overturning of Satan's work in tempting man to rebel against God. In other words, implied in the curse upon the serpent is the promise that Satan's attempt to get man to join him in rebellion against God will ultimately fail. It is an implicit promise that the seed of the woman will fulfill the original covenant task that God gave to Adam, although now, after the fall, it must be fulfilled through spiritual warfare. When we read the text of Genesis, it is important that we see the profound and comprehensive implications of the original promise of salvation. If we read the Bible "normally," we should be reading in expectation and hope so that the various expressions used in later Scriptures that point back to this fundamental promise stand out.

### ***The Noahic Covenant***

As we read the chapters that immediately follow this promise, we might feel that our hope has been betrayed, for by the time of Noah, it appears that Satan has actually won the historical warfare God announced in Genesis 3:15. Enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent did not result in the defeat of the serpent, but in the defeat of the seed of the woman, for there was only one family on earth that feared God. The judgment of the flood was the result of man's gross apostasy.

The text of Genesis lays no little stress on the fact that the flood brought the world back to the place it was in Genesis 1:2. The darkness of the storm, the water covering the earth, and the destruction of the order that had been established by creation are a de-creation judgment necessary to the re-creation of the world. When the flood is over, there is a new world and a new humanity. God, therefore, gives to Noah the same covenant that He gave to Adam.

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So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them:  
Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.  
And the fear of you and the dread of you  
shall be on every beast of the earth,  
on every bird of the air,  
on all that move on the earth,  
and on all the fish of the sea.  
They are given into your hand.  
Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you.  
I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.  
But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.  
Surely for your lifeblood I will demand a reckoning;  
from the hand of every beast I will require it,  
and from the hand of man.  
From the hand of every man's brother  
I will require the life of man.  
Whoever sheds man's blood,  
By man his blood shall be shed;  
For in the image of God  
He made man.  
And as for you, be fruitful and multiply;  
Bring forth abundantly in the earth  
And multiply in it.

In addition, God promises Noah that He will never again destroy the earth by a flood. This does not mean, as has sometimes been suggested, that He may destroy the world by some other means — an interpretation which transforms God's gracious promise into a veiled threat! It is, rather, a guarantee that Noah and his descendents would be able to fulfill the commission that God gave them through the normal processes of God's covenantal providence. It is a promise that there will never again be the kind of historical gap that occurred at the flood. If there could be any doubt about this, we need only to compare the covenant promise in chapter 9:8-17 with God's oath to Himself in 8:21-22. Clearly, the covenant promise to Noah merely repeats the previous oath.

And the LORD smelled a soothing aroma.  
Then the LORD said in His heart,  
"I will never again curse the ground for man's sake,  
although the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth;  
nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done."<sup>2</sup>  
While the earth remains,  
Seedtime and harvest,  
Cold and heat,

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<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that God says He will not again smite the "adamah" (Hebrew for "ground") because of "adam" (man). The covenantal relationship between man and the earth is explicit in the Hebrew. The word is "ground" rather than "earth" in order to emphasize more clearly man's covenantal headship.

Winter and summer,  
And day and night  
Shall not cease.

The covenant oath is unambiguous: no catastrophic interruption until the very end of earth history. It is also apparent that the covenant calling that God originally gave to Adam and Eve is repeated. This means that the human race has a covenant work in history and that God has promised to preserve the world until Noah and his true descendents can fulfill that calling. There will be no discontinuity of Noahic proportions, no apocalyptic interruptions, until the Adamic/Noahic commission has been fulfilled. If this is not what the promise means, we must despair of the possibility of “literal interpretation”! *If this promise, foundational to the rest of the Biblical covenants, is to be taken seriously, it must function as a covenantal standard by which later promises are to be understood.*

In other words, the Noahic covenant is a redemptive covenant that cannot be understood apart from the original covenant in the Garden. *It is the redemptive covenant, in fact, that grounds all the rest of redemptive history.* For the theological significance of the flood includes the fact that God’s wrath against man’s sin was so great that God destroyed the earth and virtually re-created everything from scratch. Given the fact of man’s sin, we might expect that similar judgments in history would be necessary, as indeed both the premillennialist and amillennialist believe.<sup>3</sup> But the covenant oath that God gave to Noah affirms precisely the opposite — God will not be doing this again. From now on, morning and evening, summer and winter will continue until the end of history. God will do His redemptive work without repeatedly erasing the board and starting over. Every other renewal of the covenant grace of God is grounded in this Noahic promise. One of the basic errors of both premillennial and amillennial eschatology is the failure to do justice to the Noahic covenant, the foundation for redemptive history.

### ***The Abrahamic Covenant***

The dispersion of man from tower of Babel is catastrophic in certain respects but it does not begin to compare with the de-creation judgment of the flood. Rather, by dividing mankind into competing groups, God undermined the Satanic unity of apostasy that the tower attempted to impose, thereby obviating the necessity of another global cataclysm. Then, from the tribes that had been dispersed throughout the world, He chose a man for Himself. Like Noah before him, Abraham became the new head of a new covenant.

Although the fact is often overlooked, the promise that God gave to Abraham is unquestionably grounded in and an extension of the covenants with Adam and Noah. Abraham is to be blessed and be a blessing to others with the result — the climax of the promise — that through him all the world would be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). This includes promises for innumerable descendents (Gen. 15:5; 17:2-5; 22:17), land (Gen. 15:13 ff.; etc.), kings as descendents (Gen. 15:6), global blessing (Gen. 18:18; 22:18), and victory over enemies (Gen. 22:17). It would be more than odd if we should interpret these promises as if they were not rooted

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<sup>3</sup> The premillennialist insists that only the apocalyptic judgment of Christ’s second coming can possibly bring in the kingdom. The amillennial position is essentially similar in that it claims that only after the end of history can the kingdom promise be fulfilled. In other words, only the judgment of the Second coming can usher in the kingdom.

in the previous covenant promises of blessing, even though some of the language used is new. There are, in fact, both theological and literary connections that we must understand in order to appreciate the unity and organic growth of covenantal revelation in history.

The promise that the seed of Abraham would be as abundant as the dust or stars is theologically based in the command to be fruitful and multiply given to Adam in the Garden and repeated to Noah after the flood, as well as the promise that the seed of the woman would defeat the seed of the Serpent. For God did not merely promise Abraham that he would have many children, but that his children would be the channel of global blessing. In other words, Abraham is seen as one who will multiply physically and spiritually so that his seed fills the whole earth. In the context of the book of Genesis — and especially since there are related promises of defeating enemies which suggest a spiritual warfare — what else can this possibly mean if it does not point to the promise of blessing through the seed of the woman? If there could be any doubt about the theological connections in Genesis, the apostle Paul makes it clear that the seed of Abraham is the seed of the woman (Gal. 3:4 ff.).

In addition to the theological themes running through the covenants of Genesis, there are also clear verbal links between the covenants in the repeated use of the verbs “bear fruit” and “multiply.” First, the book of Genesis links the covenants of Adam and Noah by a repetition of the basic command to “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” (compare Gen. 1:28 with 9:1, 7). Then, God promises Abraham, in effect, that the command for man to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth will be fulfilled through him. For Abraham’s seed is to be like the sands or the stars for number (Gen. 13:16; 15:5). The explicit verbal link is established in the repeated use of the verbs “multiply” and “bear fruit” (Gen. 17:6; 26:22; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4).

It should already be plain that we would be profoundly misled if we were to see a mere tribal blessing in all these promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. For though the promise of the land of Canaan is linked with the promise of descendants and the promise of kings, these promises are not limited to Hebrews living in Canaan. Abraham and his descendants were chosen to be the means for all humanity to be blessed. In the same way, the promise of victory over enemies should not be seen in nationalistic terms — as if the Hebrews have *carte blanche* to beat up their neighbors — but as an application of the promise given to Adam and Eve that the seed of the woman would defeat the seed of the serpent. Victory over enemies is a means for spreading blessing to the world, not a means of mere nationalistic glory.

Through the theology of the covenants and the verbal links between crucial texts, the book of Genesis announces that Abraham and his descendants are chosen by God to be the instruments through which the commission given to Adam and Noah would be fulfilled. They would be the leaders of the human race in bringing about the kingdom of God, for through them the blessing of the covenant would be spread to all the families of the earth. If this much is undeniable, it should also be apparent that the promise to Abraham, being grounded in the Noahic covenant, should find its fulfillment in the outworking of the normal covenantal processes of history guaranteed by that covenant, rather than through a miraculous intervention of the proportions of the Noahic flood.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The emphasis here is on the idea of intervention of catastrophic proportions, like the flood. I do not deny that God does miracles throughout history. In fact, we should emphasize that miracles are in no way an “intervention” in the flow of covenant history. They are part of God’s normal covenantal leading and blessing. Sign miracles are special. They are covenantal signs that normally are associated with periods of covenantal transition. But again, they are part of God’s covenantal rule of the world. The flood, by contrast, was not “normal.” It was

Premillennialism misses the flow of covenantal history and the underlying relationship between the covenants largely because dispensationalism insists on covenantal eras that are utterly discrete, separate from one another and operating according to distinct and sometimes divergent principles. It is even more remarkable that amillennialism departs from a covenantal view of history, for in general amillennialists hold to covenant theology. However, with respect to the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises, amillennialism is similar to premillennialism, for it sees these promises being truly fulfilled only after the coming of Christ, the final deluge that brings in an even more catastrophic judgment than the one in the days of Noah. Amillennialists like Hoekema ignore the eschatology of the Garden of Eden and miss the meaning of the covenant with Noah. The rest of the covenants, beginning with Abraham, are not grounded in original creation or the re-creation of the world after the flood. The notion of covenantal salvation, therefore, lacks roots and true salvation and redemption wait for the post-historical world.

### ***The Mosaic Covenant***

In the generations that Israel was in Egypt, we see the initial fulfillment of the promise of abundant descendants. In the Mosaic covenant that is given to Israel in the desert, we also begin to see *how* Abraham's descendants were to bring blessing to the world. The covenant with Moses — emphatically *grounded in*, not contrasted with, the Abrahamic promise (cf. Ex. 32:13; 33:1; Lev. 26:42; Num. 32:11; Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5,27) — suggested more than one means for Israel to be a blessing. 1) The example of Israel would be used by God to bring other nations to the true knowledge of the Lord (Deut. 4:5-8). 2) The sacrificial system included the feast of tabernacles during which seventy bulls were sacrificed for the seventy nations of the world (cf. Gen. 10), indicating Israel's intercessory work for the world. 3) The sacrificial system was prophetic, pointing forward to the perfect sacrifice to come, which would take away the sins of the world.

As I suggested before, Israel's warfare with Canaan was not just conquest of land. If we understand it in any other way than as warfare against the seed of the serpent, we totally pervert the meaning of the conquest itself and God's leading of His people in history.<sup>5</sup> This also means that Canaanites who converted were accepted into the people of God. The most prominent examples are Caleb (Num. 32:12; Josh. 14:6; Caleb was a Kenizzite, one of the tribes of Canaan, Gen. 15:19), Rahab (Josh. 2), and the Gibeonites (Josh. 9).

The promises to Abraham would be fulfilled through the people of Israel as they worshipped God according to His law. Obedience to the covenant would bring about ever greater fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise that Israel would bless every nation in the world. Disobedience would result in the nation being disciplined so that she could be brought back to her calling. For Israel was chosen to accomplish an historical mission, one that was bound up

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global covenantal de-creation that will only find a true analogy in the judgment of the second coming of Christ at the end of world history. It is a promise that final judgment at the end will be victorious over the hosts of Satan that remain. But it is not "normal" covenantal historical leading.

<sup>5</sup> Liberals often exclaim, How could God command Joshua to exterminate the inhabitants of Canaan! The problem is not with God or Joshua but with the liberal presuppositions that guide their interpretation of the text. The issue is not nationalism, nor is God being pictured as favoring one tribe against another. God is enabling His people to defeat the seed of the serpent, just as He had promised to Adam and Abraham.

with the promise of the seed of the woman, a Messiah who would come through Abraham to be the particular seed that would defeat Satan and bless all mankind.

In closing, we must emphasize again that the law given to Israel is presented in Scripture as an extension of the covenant given to Abraham and not at all as a fundamentally different sort of covenant. The law was not given to annul the promise, nor is it contrary to the promise. It was in continuity with the Abrahamic covenant brought in as an aid for its fulfillment. It is not to be seen, therefore, as an interruption in covenant history, as if the Divine word to Noah was to be set aside for an age.

### ***The Davidic Covenant***

God's covenant with David brought greater focus to the promise. Through this particular man and his descendents, God would give the Messiah who would fulfill all the promises and lead the world to blessing. In David, Israel's national purpose and meaning is clarified and emphasized. She exists to bring one man, the seed of David, into the world.

The Davidic king would be the one to defeat all the Satanic enemies of God and establish the kingdom of blessing all over the world (Ps. 2, 89:21-29; 110). He would be the seed of the woman who would defeat the seed of the serpent and save the world. Not only a king, he is also a priest after the order of Melchizedek (Ps. 110). It is even hinted that He would offer Himself as the sacrifice for sin (Isa. 52:13-53:12).

Like the Mosaic covenant before it, the Davidic covenant is simply expanding and making more specific the promise that was originally given to Abraham — which means also that the mandate of the Noahic covenant would be fulfilled through the Davidic Son.<sup>6</sup>

### ***The New Covenant***

The new covenant is announced as the new covenant by Jeremiah (31:31). As we see this covenant being fulfilled in history, it seems clear that there is an initial gift of the covenant in the days of Ezra and in the restoration of Israel to the land, in preparation for the coming of the Messiah. The new covenant that Jeremiah spoke of has as its first reference the post captivity era, but it looks forward, as do all the covenants, to a greater new covenant.

The Messiah would be given as a covenant to the Gentiles, a savior for the world (Isa. 42:1-8). He has been especially chosen and prepared by God to bring salvation to the world and restore the earth (Isa. 49:1-8; 61:8-9). The Messianic promise of God's blessing on the people of Israel is specifically related to the promise to Noah (Isa. 54:1-10; Jer. 31:35-37). The promise to save Israel is linked also to the Davidic covenant — having as its foundation the unshakable certainty of the Noahic promise. The LORD declared to Jeremiah that the covenant with David is as sure as the covenant with Noah! (Jer. 33:19-26). The new covenant is God's reaffirmation of the sure mercies of David (Isa. 55:3). It includes the promise of the Holy Spirit to God's

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<sup>6</sup> The new covenantal age brought in by the Davidic covenant is overlooked in the dispensational interpretation of Old Testament history. The law is seen to extend from Moses to Christ. But in the Biblical history of the covenant, the Davidic era is a distinct era. Does that mean that the Mosaic law no longer applies in David's day? Not at all, for each new covenant builds upon the previous covenants. A new covenant is not a cancellation of the previous one, nor is a new "dispensation" a totally different covenant arrangement. The Noahic, Abrahamic, and Mosaic covenants are all renewed, revised, expanded, and continued in the Davidic covenant. The covenants are progressive, each one leading to the final covenant in Christ.



people (Isa. 59:21). Ezekiel, too, declared that the new covenant would be established to fulfill the promises of the original covenants (Eze. 16:60-63). Though He would discipline Israel for her sins, the Lord would eventually bring them back to His covenant (Eze. 20:36-38). The blessings of the new covenant would be brought in by the Davidic king (Eze. 34:20-34). The promise of abundant seed, rule over the nations, a Davidic king, and restoration to the land of promise are all seen to be part of the new covenant and dependent upon the blessing of the Spirit (Eze. 37).

Thus the climactic covenant promises of the Old Testament allude unmistakably to the covenants in the book of Genesis, including the foundational promise in Genesis 3:15 and the postdiluvian covenant with Noah. Covenantal continuity is taken for granted as a theological fact and emphasized as a truth that brings comfort and encouragement to the people of God facing trial.

### ***Conclusion***

The covenant promises of the Old Testament form an organic whole that finds its roots in the pre-fall Edenic covenant mission that God gave to His image. The connection is made through each of the covenants from Abraham to the end of Old Testament history being an outgrowth of the covenant that God gave to Noah, which was itself a repetition of the original Adamic covenant. God's promise to Noah that He would preserve the world and direct it without catastrophic intervention is fulfilled as He providentially corrects His people and works through them to bring the Messiah into the world. The Old Testament ends with a final reaffirmation of the covenant promise of the coming Messiah, one which points back to the Genesis promise of defeat for the seed of the serpent (Mal. 4).

## **Amillennial and Premillennial Interpretation of the Adamic Covenant**

Neither amillennialists nor premillennialists suggest that the Adamic mandate is simply forgotten. We may even say that in both systems the mandate is fulfilled. However, in neither system is the Adamic mission fulfilled in normal history. This seems to contradict the meaning of the original mandate and the renewal of that mandate to Noah and his descendants. If the mandate is to be fulfilled after the second coming of Christ by glorified men in heaven, as the amillennialists aver, or by a glorified Church in cooperation with the unglorified saints of the millennium, as the premillennialists claim, then the whole point of the promise to Noah seems to be undermined. If the mandate is not going to be fulfilled within the boundaries of normal history, why is the republication of the Adamic mandate to Noah accompanied by a promise that God would preserve the normal covenantal flow of history until the end?

Amillennialists especially have little to offer in the way of justifying their interpretation of the Adamic mandate. Hoekema begins his interpretation of eschatology with the Genesis 3:15 promise, as if that promise did not look back to the original mandate. On his view history can end at any time. There is no special historical mission for mankind that must be fulfilled before Christ returns.

The premillennialist view allows for a sort of historical fulfillment of the Adamic mandate, but not until the future kingdom after Christ has returned to destroy Satan and His enemies.

Among other problems, it is odd to mix people in resurrected bodies with those in Adamic bodies working together to fulfill the commission that God gave to Adam and his descendents. There more important incongruity has already been pointed out, the catastrophic manner of the introduction of the kingdom. Christ's second coming in judgment is precisely the sort of historical discontinuity about which God spoke to Noah, when He swore that no such interruption of normal covenantal history was to occur until the Adamic/Noahic mission had been accomplished by Noah and his descendents.

But the premillennialist, at least of the dispensational school, also appeals to the covenants. To him they are proof that God will not abandon Israel until the covenant promises are fulfilled. God said that He would break His covenant with Noah before He would allow the nation of Israel to depart from before Him (Jer. 31:35-37). The house of David and the Levitical priesthood are similarly involved with the promises to Israel (Jer. 33:19-26). The irony here is that in order for the dispensationalists vision of a future for Israel to be fulfilled, the Noahic covenant must be broken, for the dispensationalist views the second coming of Christ as including catastrophic judgments in the heavens as well as in the earth (Rev. 6:12-17, etc.). If the covenant promise through Jeremiah is that Israel will not disappear until the covenant with Noah be broken, then on the dispensationalists' literalist interpretation of the book of Revelation, the covenant with Noah is broken during the tribulation. Of course, apart from the problem that a literal interpretation of the signs in the heavens would undermine the Noahic covenant and thus, too, the promise to David and Israel, the larger difficulty for the premillennial interpretation is that the Second Coming of Christ is a greater intervention than the flood. It is certainly the kind of intervention that God promised would not occur. To build the new covenant fulfillment on what is nothing less than an abrogation of its foundation in the Noahic covenant seems obviously the wrong approach.

In the postmillennial view, the language of the book of Revelation is figurative. There is no abrogation of the Noahic covenant, which is kept until the second coming of Christ at the end of history when the historical promise has been fulfilled. The question that remains is how the New Testament interprets the first coming of Christ, His fulfillment of the covenants, and the second coming. Does the New Testament endorse the amillennial view that the Adamic mandate is postponed to post-historical eras? Does the New Testament support the premillennial view that only the coming of Christ can deal with Satan adequately so that the Adamic mandate can be fulfilled in the semi-post-historical kingdom era? Or, does the New Testament teach that God will work through the normal processes of covenantal history — including, of course, the miraculous but mysteriously unobtrusive work of the Holy Spirit — to bring about the salvation of the world through the preaching of the Gospel? If the postmillennial view is true what happened to the promise of God to Israel?

## **The New Testament Fulfillment of the Covenants**

Perhaps our first question should be, Where does the New Testament refer to the Adamic mandate? Where does the New Testament speak of the mission that God gave to Adam to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, to subdue it and rule it? If we are looking for a clear and direct quotation or a reference that says something like, “the church must fulfill the responsibility that God gave to Adam,” then the answer will be that there is no reference to the Adamic mandate in the New Testament. But to restrict ourselves to this kind of direct language would be

absurd. It is more common to find old truth dressed in the new clothes appropriate to the covenantal context.

Romans 5:12-21 sets forth a contrast between Adam and Christ that provides a theological foundation for viewing the relationship between the two covenants. Adam sinned and failed, bringing covenantal judgment on mankind. Christ succeeded where Adam failed, bringing grace and blessing to mankind. Paul does not explicitly refer to the Adamic mandate here, but he does speak of grace *reigning* where sin used to reign. *If the reign of grace is to be thought of as anywhere near as extensive as the reign of sin, then the implications of Paul's statement must be broad.*

The other passage in Paul that speaks of Adam and Christ is 1 Corinthians 15:20-58. Though the thrust of the passage is Paul's teaching about resurrection, it includes Paul's outline for the present order of history — we should add for emphasis that this the *only* passage in Paul's epistles to set forth an explicit outline of history. As in Adam all his race die, so also the new race in Christ will all be raised. For the resurrection of the new race, God has ordained a certain order, a two-stage resurrection. First, Christ rose from the dead as the firstfruits, which means that His resurrection is the guarantee of the future resurrection of His people. Then, at His second coming, the dead in Christ will rise with Him.

Premillennial interpreters would have us believe that between the reference to the second coming at the end of verse 23 and the expression “the end” in verse 24, there is a thousand year kingdom of blessing that Paul passed by without mentioning. We are told to believe that a period of time like no other in which the resurrected saints together with men in their fleshly Adamic bodies will cooperate together to accomplish the work that God gave to Adam has been passed over without so much as a single word. The silence here is deafening. But it is only the beginning of woes for the premillennial interpretation.

When we read the rest of the context, the premillennial interpretation becomes even more difficult to sustain. The end is the time that Christ puts an end to all rule and authority for, Paul explains, Christ must rule until he has defeated all of his enemies. The premillennial interpretation assumes that this reference to Jesus' reign is to the millennial reign after His second coming. *But Paul here quotes Psalm 110, the very same verse that Peter quoted to announce that Christ had ascended to the right hand of the Father and poured out the gift of the Spirit.*

Paul also referred to Psalm 110 in Ephesians 1:20-23 when he spoke of the present — not future — reign of Christ. One of the important themes of the book of Hebrews is that Christ fulfills the Melchizedekian priesthood as prophesied by Psalm 110 (Heb. 7, esp. vs. 17, 21). Moreover, special emphasis is placed upon the conclusion of Paul's whole argument about Melchizedek, “Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man” (Heb. 8:2). Melchizedek was both priest and king. The present session of Christ at the right hand of God fulfills the Davidic promise as well as the meaning of the whole Levitical priesthood. Jesus at the right hand of God, the promise of the Davidic covenant, is therefore the repeated theme of the book that announces the fulfillment of the old covenant through the Messiah (Heb. 1:3, 13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2). When, therefore, we read that, “Christ must reign until He has put all enemies under His feet,” we cannot see it as a reference to anything other than the present reign of Christ that the New Testament so often proclaims as the fulfillment of the promise of Psalm 110.

*Adam, Noah, and the Kingdom: The Covenants of Genesis and Consistent Eschatology*

The defeat of all of Jesus' enemies before His second coming means the defeat of His enemies through the normal course of covenantal history in fulfillment of the Noahic and Abrahamic promises. Paul does not say that Jesus must defeat all of His enemies *so that* He can reign — which is actually what premillennialism envisions — but that Jesus' reign must continue until they are defeated. There is a long historical process in view here. History is here seen as warfare between Christ and His enemies — a perspective that we have encountered previously, for Genesis 3:15 pictures history in precisely the same terms. The Abrahamic promise included references to defeating the enemies of God. The Mosaic and Davidic covenants, too, look forward to the conquest of righteousness. All of this points to the fact that the defeat of God's enemies is an aspect of the restoration of the world.

Does the New Testament endorse this sort of conquest mentality? Are we to think in terms of a historical battle between good and evil, with the Church of Jesus Christ as the bastion of righteousness?

Consider the following. First, Jesus promised that the gates of hell would not prevail against His Church (Mat. 16:18). Gates, of course, are not offensive weapons. The picture is one of the Church on the move against the empire of Satan with the Church being victorious. Without question, it is the church that is the aggressor for this is the language of conquest. In the context, Peter and the disciples have confessed their faith in Jesus as Messiah and the Messiah proclaims that upon that confession He will build His church and kingdom (cf. 16:19). In other words, if Peter is correct in asserting that Jesus is the Messiah, then Jesus must be the One to bring in the kingdom through defeating the enemies of God. Jesus promises precisely that, while also making it clear that the means for bringing in the kingdom is the work of the Church. Peter, as a representative leader of the church, is given the keys of the kingdom. We see later that the power to bind and loose is not Peter's personal prerogative but the authority given to the Church for Church discipline (Mat. 18:15-20). In this promise of Jesus, given at the crucial time of the disciples' confession that they believe He is the Messiah, we see a New Testament application of the promise of Genesis 3:15 — a promise which includes a view of how the warfare between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent is to be fulfilled in new covenant history.

Second, when Jesus gives to His disciples what is known as the Great Commission, His language reflects the Old Testament covenantal promises. To begin with, Jesus claims that, "All authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth." This is a claim that He is the Messiah and that the blessing of kingly reign that was promised to the Messiah through David has been given to Him. It is His now. Jesus is not speaking of His second coming. Indeed, since Jesus has already been given *all authority* in heaven and *on earth*, we must wonder what additional kingly authority might possibly be given to the Messiah if He did return according to the theology of the premillennialist? If we interpret this passage literally, will we not have to say there is nothing more that can be given to Jesus in the way of authority?

What, on the amillennial view, is morally required and covenantally promised with respect to the Messiah's exercise of all authority? Will He not, as Paul said, defeat all His enemies before the second coming? And if He does defeat all His enemies, fulfilling the promise of Genesis 3:15 and covenant oaths given to Noah, Abraham, and David, does that not mean that Jesus, through His church and by building His church, will bring in the kingdom of God through the normal covenantal processes of history?

If there could be any doubt about the implications of this declaration of total Messianic authority, it is removed by the fact that it is made the foundation for a commission to conquer the

world in Jesus name. All nations are to be converted to be His disciples. Every nation is to be baptized and to be taught to obey His kingly authority by observing all that He has commanded. This commission is nothing less and nothing other than a command for the Church to bring the nations into submission to the one and only King and Messiah. Baptism is the ceremonial pledge of loyalty to the Lord. It is the covenant oath of obedience to the Messiah. When all the nations are baptized, the Church will have prevailed against the gates of Hades and Jesus will have defeated all His historical enemies. Satan and his seed will have been the historical losers, and the new Adam will have brought in the kingdom that fulfills the commission God gave to the old Adam in the Garden.

But will this commission find historical fulfillment? Jesus Himself gave us assurance, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world!” The assurance that the Church will be able to fulfill its commission is couched in the language of the covenant — language that is even used in martial contexts in the Old Testament. For example, the famous promise to Joshua that he would indeed be able to defeat his enemies and conquer the land of Canaan is given in the very same covenantal language: “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you; I will not fail you or forsake you. . . . Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:5, 9).

Jesus assurance has the same meaning for the Church. He is the One who commanded, therefore we should be strong and courageous, certain of the victory. He will neither fail nor forsake us, therefore we should fight the good fight in the certain hope of victory.

Third, if we keep in mind these promises of Christ and their relationship to the Old Testament covenants and promises of salvation through the Messiah, we will be in a better position to understand Paul’s use of martial language also. Imagery connected to warfare is repeatedly referred to in Paul’s epistles (Rom. 13:12; 1 Cor. 9:7, 26; 2 Cor 6:7; 10:3-4; Eph. 6:11 ff.; 1 Tim. 1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:4; 4:7). Paul claims to be “pulling down strongholds” (2 Cor 10:4), language unmistakably reminiscent of Jesus’ promise that the gates of Hades would not be able to stand before the Church. Paul’s extended description of the Christian warrior depicts the Christian as a kingdom warrior whose weapons are the Word of God, faith, righteousness and prayer (Eph 6:11 ff.). If Jesus is going to defeat all of His enemies, if we are His army, spiritually equipped to fight the devil, if Jesus is with us like He was with Joshua, and if the war we are fighting aims to bring about the fulfillment of the covenant promises of God through the leading of the risen Messiah, how can the Church not be victorious in history?

Fourth, amillennial and premillennial interpreters miss the Biblical program for victory because they miss one of the clearest passages in Paul’s epistles: Romans 8:36-39. It is much to be regretted that not a few postmillennialists have missed this passage also! Paul’s frequent references to spiritual warfare, just like the original promises of Christ, put the Christian fight into the context of a battle for the hearts and mind of men. This is not a physical war, nor is it merely a battle over words. It is covenantal war.

How is the Church to be victorious in a covenantal war? The obvious answer is that the Church is to be victorious in the same way that her Head was victorious. The Church is to walk in the way of Christ. How did He defeat the devil? By a philosophical/theological debate? Perhaps in part (cf. Mat. 4:1-11). But the real answer is that Jesus defeated the devil through the cross (John 12:31; 16:11). And when Paul speaks of the victory of the Church, it is through the

cross that the Church is seen to be victorious. This means both the message of the cross and the experience of suffering, dying for the sake of the Truth, like our Savior did.

As it is written: “For Your sake we are killed all day long; We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.” Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Rom. 8:36-39)

Note that Paul says, “we are more than conquerors.” Is this the language of covenantal defeat? Not at all. The Christian warrior fights as Christ fought and gains the victory through faithfulness to his Lord. Paul is here following the teaching of Jesus, who taught His disciples in that last discourse that they were to imitate Him in dying to bear fruit.

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor.

Jesus’ disciples had to bear fruit in the same way that He did — through death. He is the supreme one who does not love His life, but sacrifices it. If the disciples are really going to follow Him, they must also sacrifice their lives in order to bear fruit that will remain. The way of the cross is the way of victory. It is the way that Jesus defeated Satan in fulfillment of the promise and it is the way that He called His disciples to follow Him.

This is not the glamorous road of success that some imagine. There is nothing splashy or showy about the way God works, though it is true that He does answer prayer and miracles are not only possible, they are a daily reality as God works in the hearts of men to bring them to the knowledge of Jesus. The age of *sign-miracles*, however, is over. The point is that the victory of the Gospel proceeds humbly and unobtrusively. The Gospel’s working is more subtle than either the world or many Christians can appreciate. By preaching the Gospel and living according to its truth, the Church bears fruit through death until she gradually overcomes all opposition and the world sees the manifestation of God’s glory in history. It is through the humble way of the cross that the nations are converted, baptized, and trained to follow Jesus, just as He commanded and promised.

The importance of the Noahic promise for the accomplishment of this plan is clear. There will be no more catastrophic judgments until Jesus has defeated His enemies and brought in the kingdom, as He promised. God will bring covenantal judgment on those who oppose Him, but to the unbelieving the covenantal connections between sin and judgment are less than perspicuous. What seems most obvious — for example the covenantal judgment upon sexual immorality through the diseases it brings — cannot be seen by the non-Christian who denies the

covenantal Lordship of Christ.<sup>7</sup> In the same way, the covenantal connections between social envy and covetousness with the resultant social poverty escape the notice of most non-Christian economic advisers.

The Noahic covenant assures us that we live in a world that is so structured that we may be certain that if we follow in the way of Christ, the way of covenantal obedience to God, including, when necessary, the sacrifice of our lives for the truth, we shall bear fruit (John 12:24; 15:1-16). We are more than conquerors through Him that loves us. If we are living according to His covenant word, we may be sure that death and suffering are not signs of His displeasure, but preludes to the kingdom. For suffering and death are the means that God uses to defeat the devil.

## **Conclusion**

In the light of this brief covenantal survey, we conclude that both amillennialism and premillennialism fail to offer an eschatology that truly permeates and dominates the message of the entire Bible. Their eschatologies are not an integral aspect of the whole of Biblical revelation, for they cannot take into account the progress of the covenants in Christ, the promises of Christ that His Church will conquer the world, or the meaning of the cross as the undefeatable means for the Church's conquest. Eschatology and the Christian life are not united in the amillennial and premillennial viewpoints. Christian growth through obedience and suffering are not seen as part of God's way of working in the world to bring about the victory of the message of the cross and resurrection. The resurrected Christ is not seen as King of kings and Lord of lords now, but as waiting for some future date when "all authority in heaven and on earth" will *then* be granted to Him.

Only the postmillennial vision of history conforms to an integrated Biblical view of the progress of the covenants and the victory of the Messiah. And it does this without transforming victory into garish triumphalism of the sort that boasts of conquest but flees from the humble obedience and suffering of the covenant. The postmillennial vision is the vision of a seed falling into the ground and dying — not in order to rot (amillennialism?), but in order to bear fruit, fruit that will remain and multiply through covenantal love and obedience (John 15:1-16). In postmillennialism, eschatology, individual sanctification, church growth and discipline, and the progress of the covenant are all united in the resurrected Christ and His kingdom.

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<sup>7</sup> It is hard to imagine why the non-Christian intellectual so often fails to see that there is a simple moral solution to many of our medical problems. Biblical monogamy would bring about the end of every STD within a relatively short period of time.