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The Faithful Vassal: **The Suzerain-Vassal Covenant Relationship as a Biblical-Theological Theme Connecting the Old and New Testament Narratives**

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Tyler Matthew Brown

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The Faithful Vassal: The Suzerain-Vassal Covenant Relationship as a Biblical-Theological Theme Connecting the Old and New Testament Narratives

Tyler Matthew Brown

READ AND APPROVED BY:

Chairperson: _____
Richard A. Fuhr, Ph.D.

Supervising Reader: _____
Myron C. Kauk, Ph.D.

Second Reader: _____
Todd S. Buck, Ph.D.

Dedication and Acknowledgements

First and foremost, this work is dedicated to my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the one true vassal king and only begotten Son of the Father.

Second, to my Dad, Derek Brown, whose childhood bedtime Bible stories first began my lifelong love of Scripture.

Third, to my Mom, Laurie Brown, for always reminding me that religion without relationship is meaningless.

Fourth, to my grandparents, Steve and Joyce Rogers, who always found the time to drive me to youth group, and who always encouraged my call to ministry, even before I heard it myself.

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Contents

Abstract

Much has been written within the scholarly literature regarding the nature of the Mosaic Law as being one which reflects a suzerain-vassal covenant between Yahweh and the nation of Israel in the Old Testament, and particularly in the book of Deuteronomy. Likewise, it has been well established by scholars that this covenant relationship serves as a key biblical-theological theme within the narrative of the former prophets, the so-called "Deuteronomistic history." At the same time, however, there have been relatively few attempts to examine the ways in which this critical theme features throughout the remainder of the biblical narratives, from the relationship between God and Adam in the Garden of Eden, to the relationship between Jesus and the Father in the Gospels. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to trace this key biblical-theological theme across the entire biblical narrative, from Genesis to Revelation. In doing so, it will be demonstrated that the suzerain-vassal covenant relationship serves as a central thematic thread which not only runs through, but also connects, the Old and New Testament narratives. This theme, moreover, is one which builds towards, and ultimately culminates in, the death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth in the Gospels. Finally, it will be demonstrated that Jesus is presented by the New Testament authors as both the ontological Son of God, and as the one truly faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, whose covenant faithfulness redeems His people from the curse of the Law, thereby bringing about covenant blessings and restoration, blessings which ultimately culminate in the eschaton.

Abbreviations

AD	*Anno Domini*
ANE	Ancient Near East
BC	Before Christ
Dtr	Deuteronomist
DtrH	Deuteronomistic History
NT	New Testament
OT	Old Testament

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION: The Gospel of Jesus as the Climax of the Old Testament Narrative

The Gospel of Jesus and the Story of Israel

On the third day following His arrest and crucifixion at the hands of the Jewish and Roman authorities, the risen Jesus appeared to two of His followers on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35, English Standard Version). The evangelist Luke recounts how the disciples, who have been discussing recent events among themselves, are approached by the Lord, whom they are prevented from recognizing, and who asks them what it is that they have been discussing (Luke 24:15-17). Shocked at the "stranger's" apparent unfamiliarity with what has just occurred, quite publicly, in Jerusalem, the two disciples explain that they have been discussing the fate of Jesus of Nazareth, whom they regard as a prophet "mighty in word and deed before God and all the people" (Luke 24:18-19). Moreover, they reveal that they had hoped that this Jesus would be "the one to redeem Israel," and so they lament the fact that it has now been three days since He was handed over and crucified, His death bringing an apparent end to their hopes for restoration (Luke 24:19-21). Adding to their fear and confusion, however, is the bewildering report that Jesus's tomb has been found to be empty, and that several of His female followers had seen a vision of angels who declared that Jesus had risen again to life (Luke 24:22-24). The disciples, then, find themselves at a loss regarding what to make of these things, and indeed, whether or not to believe the report of the women that Jesus is, in fact, alive.

In response to this, however, Jesus rebukes His disciples as being "foolish" and "slow of heart" to believe what had been prophesied about Him in the Scriptures, saying "was it not *necessary* that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into His glory? And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning

Himself" (Luke 24:25-27, emphasis added). Likewise, when He later appeared in the midst of the eleven, Jesus reminds His disciples of "the words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled," and, having "opened their minds to understand the Scriptures," he declared that "*it is written* that the Christ should suffer, and on the third day rise from the dead and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem (Luke 24:44-46, emphasis added)." Jesus, then, clearly presents His work as being necessary "in accordance with the Scriptures," and as the fulfilment of the promises given to Israel through the prophets. In other words, the story of Jesus, as recorded in the New Testament Gospels, is the climax, or culmination, of the story of Israel presented in the Old Testament.

Indeed, as the early church went about proclaiming the lordship of the risen Jesus in the book of Acts, it is evident that the apostles constantly frame the story of Jesus within the context of the history of Israel.[1] The apostle Peter, for instance, in his speeches during Pentecost and at Solomon's Portico, clearly presents Jesus as the fulfillment of the Lord's promises to Israel through the prophets, and points to His resurrection and exaltation as the eschatological turning point in the story of Israel, indicating the arrival of "the last days" (Acts 2:14-36, 3:12-26). In the same way, Luke records that it was the custom of the apostle Paul, when engaging in his evangelistic mission, to visit the synagogues to proclaim Jesus as Messiah to the Jews, reasoning with them "from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead," and that he encouraged them to examine "the Scriptures daily to

[1] Cf. Scot McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel: The Original Good News Revisited* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2016), 129-136.

see if these things were so (Acts 17:2-3, 11).” In the case of both Paul and Peter, then, it is clear that their proclamation of Jesus as Lord and Christ was firmly rooted in the story of Israel as told in the Old Testament Scriptures.

Likewise, this has been the orthodox position of the church throughout history, in theory if not always in practice. The Nicene Creed, for instance, states that Jesus was crucified and resurrected, “in accordance with the Scriptures,” a declaration that reflects the apostle Paul’s assertion in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4.[23] Likewise, in the second century AD, when Marcion of Sinope attempted to exclude the Old Testament Scripture from the developing Christian canon, and even began to assert that the Old Testament God of Israel was a different entity altogether from the New Testament Father of Jesus, the young church responded by declaring such teaching heretical.[4] Any such attempt to disassociate Christianity from the story of the Old Testament was soundly rejected by the early church, who excommunicated Marcion in 144AD, leading him to set up a rival church that would ultimately exist into the fifth century.[5]

In spite of this, over time the church’s teaching on the Gospels became increasingly disconnected from the context of the Old Testament narrative. McKnight, for instance, asserts that the reformers’ focus on the gospel message in terms of presenting the means of salvation began a subtle shift away from the story of Jesus as the resolution to the story of Israel, and

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[2] Translation from Mark J. Edwards, *We Believe in the Crucified and Risen Lord*, vol. 3, Ancient Christian Doctrine (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 145.

[3] McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 68-69. McKnight further notes that the writings of the church father Tertullian also present the gospel story, referred to as the “rule of faith,” which he states was handed down from the apostles, in this manner, in that the work of Jesus is said to have taken place “according to the Scriptures,” 66-67.

[4] Everett Ferguson, *Church History: The Rise and Growth of the Church in Its Cultural, Intellectual, and Political Context* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2013), 137-139.

[5] Ibid.

towards a more abstract system of soteriology focused on personal salvation.[6] N.T. Wright, likewise, charges the reformers with failing to give sufficient attention to the Gospels as intentionally crafted narratives, rather than as a mere collection of semi-related incidents in the life of Jesus.[7] The result, Wright asserts, is a reading of the Gospels in which Jesus's death and resurrection are largely disconnected from the events of His life and ministry, let alone the story of Israel, and one in which the focus is turned away from the gospel *story* and towards more abstract theological concepts, such as incarnation and atonement.[8] Perhaps Wright's most provocative charge is that "orthodoxy, as represented by much popular preaching and writing, has no clear idea of the purpose of Jesus' ministry. For many conservative theologians, it would have been sufficient if Jesus had been born of a virgin (at any time in human history, and perhaps from any race), lived a sinless life, died a sacrificial death, and risen again three days later."[9] In other words, according to Wright, much of evangelical Christianity since the reformation has thoroughly disconnected the story of the Gospels from the story of Israel. While Wright's assertion here is something of an overstatement, if not a touch hyperbolic, it is also not completely without warrant, as can be seen in the examples of modern gospel preaching collected in McKnight's own work.[10]

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[6] McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 72-73. It should be noted at this point that McKnight does not blame this shift on the reformers themselves per se. Rather, he sees certain theological emphasis of the reformers, as presented in the Augsburg and Geneva Confessions, as planting the seed for what would become a far less "balanced" approach to preaching the gospel message by later popular preachers. According to McKnight, this results in teaching the message of salvation in a way that is "abstract, propositional, logical, rational, and philosophical and, most importantly, de-storified and unbiblical…we are tempted to turn the story of what God is doing in this world through Israel and Jesus into a story about *me and my personal salvation*," 62.

[7] N[icholas] T[homas] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1996), 14-15.

[8] Ibid., 14-15.

[9] Ibid., 14.

[10] McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 32-33, 38-39, 42.

Lest one think that this issue only affects "popular level" preaching, it is important to recognize that the tendency to rip Jesus, and the Gospel accounts, free from their Jewish roots has been, if anything, even more prevalent among the academy over the past several centuries of scholarship, a problem particularly apparent in much of the so-called "quests for the historical Jesus."[11] Beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, scholars engaged in such "quests" have claimed to undertake an objective historical investigation into the person of Jesus of Nazareth, in order to construct an accurate picture of who He really was, what He really did, and what He really said.[12] With the majority of these critical scholars, however, there has been an underlying assumption that historical research will reveal a drastic difference between the "Jesus of history" and the "Christ of faith," the latter of whom is believed to be a theological invention of the early church.[13] Reimaus (1694-1768), for instance, whom Wright identifies as the first major scholar in the "old quest for the historical Jesus," set out with the explicit intention of undermining the historical reliability of the biblical accounts of the life of Jesus, so as to undermine the Christian faith as a whole.[14] Likewise, both David Friedrich Strauss's *The Life of Jesus Christ Critically Examined* (1835) and Adolf von Harnack's *What is Christianity?*(1957) approached the New Testament from a rationalist perspective in which the possibility of the supernatural was explicitly ruled out *a priori,* a perspective which led them not only put forth a thoroughly non-miraculous Jesus, but which also led them to view the New Testament Gospels

[11] For an overview of the major trends and figures in these "quests," see Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Ch.1-3. The "quests" themselves should not be seen as rigidly defined periods, but are better used to define and frame trends in historical Jesus scholarship.

[12] Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 605.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 16-18. See also Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 606.

as nothing more than literary fictions reflecting the faith of the early Christian community, rather than as accurate historical accounts of the life of Jesus.[15] While a number of different methodological approaches to the historical study of Jesus have been attempted over the course of the three "quests," there has been a shared view among the majority of critical scholars that one must get behind the "theological fiction" of the Gospels themselves, which portray only the "Christ of faith," in order to find the "Jesus of history."[16] The more modern "Jesus seminar" for instance, founded in 1985, is composed of scholars who examine the various sayings of Jesus found in not only the canonical Gospels, but also those found in a number of extracanonical sources as well, such as the *Gospel of Thomas,* in order to vote on their perceived authenticity, thereby determining which parts of the Gospels reflect what Jesus "actually" taught, and which parts were "invented" by the Gospel writers themselves.[17]

Given this common approach to historical Jesus studies, as well as the underlying presuppositions which give rise to it, it is hardly surprising that so many critical scholars have felt no need to situate the Jesus of the Gospels within a cohesive scriptural narrative, since the narrative itself is viewed as little more than religious propaganda with some bits of history perhaps sprinkled in. As a result, the first and second quests have, generally speaking, presented portraits of the life of Jesus that are largely detached from His first century Jewish context, and in many cases detached from any real first century history altogether.[18] The influential scholar

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[15] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 16-18.

[16] Ibid., 25 The "quests" themselves are not rigidly defined periods, but are better used to define and frame trends in historical Jesus scholarship,

[17] Ibid., 29-35.

[18] David B. Capes, "New Testament Christology," in *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight, and Nijay K. Gupta (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 164.

Rudolph Bultmann and his followers, for instance, set out to "demythologize" the New Testament accounts of the life of Jesus, which Bultmann viewed as mere "faith statements about the 'risen Christ' read back into his lifetime, expressing therefore the current faith of the church rather than historical memory."[19] The result, unsurprisingly, is not only a Jesus unrelated to the story of Israel, but a "faith" that is detached from history itself. Moreover, particularly among members of the first quest, there has been a striking tendency for liberal scholars to create "portraits" of the historical Jesus that are ultimately little more than reflections of the scholars themselves.[20]

There are, of course, exceptions to this, such as Eduard Schweitzer, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Ernst Käsemann, all of whom attempted to paint a portrait of Jesus that was more firmly situated in a truly historical first century Jewish context, and a Jewish apocalyptic context in particular.[21] Nonetheless, it is questionable whether any of these scholars actually succeeded in properly framing the story of Jesus within anything other than a seriously distorted view of first century Judaism. As Wright observes, a perception of Second Temple Judaism as a strictly "legalistic" religion, as well as a misunderstanding of Jewish apocalyptic thought, motivated many historical Jesus scholars to present an overly sharp contrast between the teachings of Jesus and Judaism, and to suppress or ignore any part of the New Testament that made Jesus appear "too Jewish."[22]

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[19] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 22.

[20] Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 606-607.

[21] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 20, 23-24.

[22] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 6.

It is only really with the so-called "third quest," then, that there occurs a significant shift within the academy towards understanding Jesus, and early Christianity, within the context of Second Temple Judaism.[23] As Wright describes the situation:

> the Old Quest was determined that Jesus should look as little like a first century Jew as possible…the renewed 'New Quest,' following this line, has often played down the specifically Jewish features of Jesus stressing instead those which he may have shared with other Mediterranean cultures…the present 'Third Quest,' by and large, will have none of this. Jesus must be understood as a comprehensible…first century Jew, whatever the theological or hermeneutical implications.[24]

Central to this shift were scholars such as Martin Hengel and E.P. Sanders,[25] as well as the discovery and translation of the Dead Sea Scrolls in the mid-twentieth century, which lead to a reevaluation of the scholarly conception of Second Temple Judaism.[26] Sanders, in particular, is notable for coining the term "covenantal nominalism" to describe the Judaism of this period.[27] In Sanders' estimation, Second Temple Judaism was not a legalistic, "works based" religion, devoid of concepts such as grace, but one centered around the twin ideas of election and covenant.[28] The "works of the law" then, were not a means of *earning* salvation, but a means of *maintaining* the already present covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh.[29] While

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[23] Capes, "New Testament Christology," 164.

[24] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 86.

[25] Wright identifies at least twenty scholars, including Hengel and Sanders, who he sees as "particularly significant" within the Third Quest. Ibid., 84.

[26] Capes, "New Testament Christology," 164.

[27] Michael J. Gorman "Pauline Theology," in *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight, and Nijay K. Gupta (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 200. See also N[icholas] T[homas] Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters: Some Contemporary Debates*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2015), 71.

[28] Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, 71.

[29] Ibid.

aspects of Sanders' work are open to significant critique, his influence on modern scholarly conceptions of Second Temple Judaism is hard to overstate.

Running somewhat parallel to these more recent developments in historical Jesus studies is the rise of narrative approaches to Scripture, an approach which relied upon the work of the earlier structuralists, who had attempted to "uncover a universal pattern of storytelling and meaning-making…to distill folktales into storied grammar, so that the underlying narrative logic could be exposed."[30] While such a narrative approach was built upon and applied to biblical studies by a number of scholars, it was Richard Hays who first truly applied this concept to understanding the relationship between the Old and New Testament narratives.[31] In his work *The Faith of Jesus Christ,* Hays uses this approach to demonstrate "the degree to which Paul uses submerged OT stories in his argumentative logic…to show that Paul's surface argument depends on a more primal logic that has been informed by certain OT narratives."[32]

In the work of N.T. Wright, one can see the merging of these two scholarly horizons, historical and narrative, as he applies both to the study of the Gospels in his *Christian Origins and the Question of God* series.[33] Within this series, Wright puts forth his "competing stories about the story" paradigm, in which he argues that the various strands of Judaism in the first century, the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes etc., each read the story of Old Testament, in a somewhat different manner.[34] The result of such divergent readings is that each group, while

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[30] Matthew W. Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," in *The State of New Testament Studies: A Survey of Recent Research*, ed. Scot McKnight, and Nijay K. Gupta (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 87.

[31] Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," 87.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid., 90-91.

sharing certain core beliefs, such as monotheism and the election of Israel, engaged in practices that were in line with their own particular understanding of the Old Testament story.[35] In doing so, each of these groups hoped to graft themselves into the ongoing story in such a way that, at its conclusion, they would be vindicated as the true and faithful covenant people of Yahweh.[36] What is found in the teaching of Jesus, then, is the authoritative reading of the Old Testament story, the story of Israel, in contrast to the distortions of the religious leaders.[37] His actions, meanwhile, constitute the God intended climax of this story, a story centered around Jesus Himself as the promised Messiah, and lived out by the New Covenant community that He formed.[38]

While some of the details of Wright's arguments may be open to debate, his narrative approach and competing stories paradigm provides a solid framework in which to understand the relationship between the New Testament story of Jesus and the story of Israel in the Old Testament. The question that must be answered, then, is what exactly is the "story" of Israel, and in what way do the New Testament writers present the work of Jesus as the climax of this story, so that His entire life, from birth to death to resurrection to exaltation, can be seen as being "in accordance with the Scriptures?"

The Relationship Between History and "Story"

Before moving forward, it is necessary to define what exactly is meant by "story/narrative" within the context of this dissertation, and, perhaps more importantly, what is

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[35] Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," 90-91.

[36] Ibid., 90-91. See also, N[icholas] T[homas] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1992), 222.

[37] Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," 87.

[38] Ibid.

not meant. First, the use of the term "story" to describe the biblical accounts found in both the Old and New Testaments should certainly not be taken to imply that such accounts are fictional or nonhistorical. Indeed, it is a fundamental presupposition of this work that the biblical accounts, from Adam to Christ, describe events that actually occurred in human history.[39] At the same time, however, the term "story" should not be taken to mean simply "what happened," in a purely objective sense. There is, after all, no such thing as the purely "objective" writing of history.[40] All history writing is, by its very nature, selective, with certain events included or excluded, interpreted in relation to one another and presented in such a way so as to support the author's particular purpose in writing said history.[41] The Gospel of John, for instance, while also providing his readers with an account of the ministry of Jesus, includes a number of different events, and often in a different order, than the Synoptic Gospels, all written in support of the author's purpose, namely, that the reader "may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). The apostle John, then, has not written his Gospel merely to provide an objective and detached description of a series historical events, but rather, he has selected, arranged, and presented these events in such a way so as to support a particular theological and evangelistic purpose.[42]

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[39] It is the position of this dissertation that the doctrine of biblical inspiration and inerrancy is best understood in accordance with the definition found in the Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy. See "The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy," *Evangelical Review of Theology* 4, no. 1 (1980): 3-11.

[40] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 82.

[41] Ibid.

[42] For a more extensive discussion on the purpose of the fourth Gospel, see Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 21.

For many modern secular scholars, who stress the supposed need for an extreme objectivity in the field of history writing, such an evangelistic and apologetic purpose serves to undermine the historical reliability of the biblical texts.[43] This should not be seen as being the case, however, since *all* history writing is selective, interpretive, and done for a particular purpose from within the author's particular worldview. There is simply no such thing as the truly "objective" writing of history, and this is just as true for "secular" historians as it is for the biblical writers.[44] Moreover, a rejection of the biblical narratives as historical on the grounds that the biblical authors betray a theological purpose in writing is flawed, as it depends on an *a priori* rejection of the possibility of divine intervention in history, or, at the very least, a belief that any author who holds and writes from within a worldview which allows for such divine intervention cannot be trusted to provide "facts." This view, however, is itself an unproven presupposition, and one which is only valid if, in fact, such a belief in divine intervention and the supernatural is false. If, on the other hand, God really has intervened in history in and through the person of Jesus, as the biblical writers declare that He has, i.e. Acts 17:24-31, then it is the historian who rejects this reality who holds an inadequate and flawed view of history and history writing, as they have merely traded one worldview and set of presuppositions, that of biblical writers, with another, that of modern naturalism, without actually bothering to demonstrate the validity of their own worldview. Provided that one does not rule out *a priori* the possibility of divine intervention in human history, however, there is no reason to assume in advance that a writer with a theological purpose cannot also at the same time be writing "history." Therefore, while

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[43] Osvaldo Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles: Interpretation, History, and Theology* (Downers Grove, Il: InterVarsity, 2016), 113.

[44] Ibid., 118. See also Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 83.

the historical accounts in the Bible are certainly "theological history," and written from within the biblical writers worldview, or "interpretive framework," this does not make them any less "historical" than the type of history writing which allows for only "natural" occurrences, and which feigns an impossible "objectivity" in regard to the events recorded.[45]

Furthermore, history writing, as Padilla observes, is in fact impossible without the use of just such an interpretive framework as that of the biblical writers, since:

> the events that make up the *bruta facta* of the past do not contain in themselves the type of narrative order and explanations of causality that is essential in a work of history. That is, historical events do not come with tags explaining how they relate to other historical events. No, it is the task of the historian to string these together, thereby creating a plot (this action is called *emplotment*); and this plot is, as it were, in the historian's head, not in the facts themselves.[46]

In other words, history writing, if it is to make sense, must be done in such a way as to place events in their proper context, in proper relationship with one another, and it is this relationship that forms the "story."[47] For instance, the bare historical statement that "Jesus of Nazareth was crucified" conveys relatively little information if taken on its own, outside of the context of the New Testament narrative. It is only within that narrative framework that one can understand why this particular event, this particular death, was not only more significant that any of the other's thousands of young Jewish men crucified at the hands of the Roman empire, but was itself the climax of human history up to this point.[48] And it is only within this narrative framework that one can see and understand that "Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3).

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[45] Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles,* 118. See also Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 95-96.

[46] Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles,* 119.

[47] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 112-113.

[48] Cf. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 83.

Within the context of this dissertation, then, the term "story" is used to refer not simply to "what happened," but to the framework or overarching metanarrative by which a collection of individual events can be understood in relationship to one another. As Wright states, "human life…can be seen as grounded in and constituted by the implicit or explicit stories which humans tell themselves and one another."[49] In other words, stories are how humans make sense of life; they are the worldview formed by one's understanding of the relationship between individual events, as well as the framework by which said events can be interpreted. All history writing, therefore, is ultimately a form of storytelling, but one in which the "story" is comprised of true events. The "biblical story," then, refers to the way in which the different human authors of Scripture understand and present the relationship between the various historical events recorded in both the Old and New Testaments as a cohesive narrative, one which gives meaning to all of human existence.[50]

The Problem and Proposed Solution

While it is the position of this work that there is a single biblical narrative which crosses both the Old and New Testaments, this overarching narrative can itself be broken down into a series of smaller stories, such as that of Israel in the Old Testament and the gospel of Jesus in the New. Moreover, the New Testament writers themselves understood the later story, that of Jesus of Nazareth, as the climax, or culmination, of the former, the story of Israel. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to examine the way in which the New Testament writers read and understood the story of Israel up to this point, in order to better understand the way in which their presentation of the gospel of Jesus serves as the continuation and climax of this overarching

[49] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God,* 83.

[50] What Padilla calls "emplotment." See Padilla, *Acts of the Apostles,* 119.

biblical narrative. While this task has been undertaken before, and while others have certainly made excellent contributions in this area, the following chapters will show that there is significantly more that can be said on the subject.

Wright, for instance, sees the story of Israel at the start of the New Testament period as one in which the nation remains under the curse of exile despite a physical return to the land.[51] The gospel of Jesus then, is seen as the story of God's Messiah as the one whose task it is "not only to announce, but also to enact and embody, the three major kingdom-themes, the return from exile, the defeat of evil and the return of YHWH to Zion."[52] Brandon Crowe, meanwhile, while engaging with Wright's work, takes an altogether different approach, stepping outside the "story of Israel" and into the "story of humanity," to argue that "Jesus is portrayed in the Gospels as the last Adam whose obedience is necessary for God's people to secure the blessings of salvation."[53] Scot McKnight represents yet a third approach, stressing the formation of a New Covenant community of Jews and Gentiles, with Jesus enthroned as King, as both the heart of the gospel message and the fitting conclusion to both the stories of Israel *and* humanity.[54]

Each of the above approaches have much to commend them, and the position of this dissertation should not be taken as being in fundamental conflict with any of these scholars, except as discussed in regard to particular details in subsequent chapters. Nonetheless, the remainder of this project will demonstrate that a more well-rounded understanding of the relationship between the story of Jesus and the story of Israel can be reached by reading the New

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[51] Bates, "The Old Testament in the New Testament," 90.

[52] Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 481.

[53] Brandon D. Crowe, *The Last Adam: A Theology of the Obedient Life of Jesus in the Gospels* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 2-3.

[54] McKnight, *The King Jesus Gospel*, 168-169.

Testament narrative through the lens of several key Old Testament themes, including election, vocation, and covenant.[55] Furthermore, a particular focus of this project will be the relationship between Jesus's perfect obedience to the Father and His role as the rightful Davidic king and royal priest, a topic which has received insufficient attention in previous works on the subject.

While Crowe makes a similar observation regarding the need for greater focus on the role of Jesus' perfect obedience in the Gospels, he ultimately examines this obedience primarily in relation to the story of Adam, placing the emphasis on Jesus' sinless perfection in a more abstract sense, and one largely disconnected from the story of Israel or the Mosaic Covenant.[56] As Daniel Block argues, however, the idea of Jesus's "righteousness" must be understood in a Jewish biblical context, as acting in accord with the standard of the Mosaic Covenant.[57] Moreover, the Mosaic Covenant itself is best understood as a suzerain-vassal treaty, one through which Israel's vocation as a nation of priests is to be carried out as a vassal state in relationship with the divine suzerain, Yahweh.[58] It is this suzerain-vassal covenant that not only provides the conditions by which Israel and her kings are to maintain their relationship with the Lord, but which also provides the means by which this vocation may be carried out, by instructing Israel in how they are to represent Yahweh, and act as mediators of His divine blessings, to the nations. It is the Mosaic Covenant, then, with its attending blessings and curses, and this vocational calling,

[55] For an overview of these themes within a narrative approach to the Old Testament, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; Inter Varsity, 2003).

[56] Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 1-6.

[57] Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 463.

[58] See, for instance, the discussion in Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 27.

that underpins the story of Israel in the Old Testament. Within this framework, then, it can be seen that the story of Israel as told in the Old Testament is one of both covenantal and vocational failure, of an unfaithful vassal state ruled over by a long line of unfaithful vassal kings, God's unfaithful covenantal "sons."[59] This story will be the focus of chapters three and four, setting the stage for a discussion of the New Testament story of Jesus in the subsequent chapters. Chapter five, then, will shift the focus to the New Testament presentation of Jesus, and will provide the crux of the dissertation's argument, that the New Testament writers present Jesus as the ontological Son of God, who, in becoming incarnate as a descendant of David, submits Himself fully to the covenant obligations of Israel's kings, and who, by perfectly fulfilling the demands of the Law in His perfect life and self-sacrificial death, is exalted as the rightful covenantal "son of God." The final chapters, then, will demonstrate that Jesus' resurrection, His exaltation to the right hand of the Father, and the defeat of His enemies are all presented by the New Testament writers as the bestowing of the covenant blessings from the divine suzerain to the faithful vassal king, and mediated through Him to the New Covenant community, whom He Himself restores and empowers through the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. In this way, then, the "story of Israel" in the Old Testament can be seen as the unsuccessful search for a faithful vassal to fulfill the demands of the Mosaic Covenant. It is a story, moreover, which is brought to its climax by the "story of Jesus," as presented in the Gospels, in which the incarnate Son of God takes on the role of Israel's representative vassal king and faithfully fulfills these demands on behalf of the nation, so that the Father and Son together accomplish the vocation of Israel, reconciling the world to God, so that all nations might be blessed through the seed of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3).

[59] For a discussion of both Israel and Adam as covenantal "sons of God," see Crowe, *The Last Adam,* 62-63.

Thesis Statement

In line with the covenantal and vocational theology of the Old Testament, the New Testament writers present Jesus, the rightful David king, as the representative figure who, in taking upon Himself the role of faithful vassal to His Father, the divine suzerain, fulfills Israel's obligations under the Mosaic Covenant on their behalf, thereby securing for Himself and His people the covenantal blessings promised in the Torah, an end to exile, and reconciliation for the nations.

CHAPTER 2: "A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS": ELECTION, VOCATION, AND THE STORY OF ISRAEL

Adam and the Story of Israel

In order to understand the story of Israel, it is imperative to first recognize that the formation of Israel as a nation did not occur within a historical vacuum, but rather, as the culmination of a broader historical narrative tracing back to the beginning of God's creation of the world, and to the creation of the first man, Adam.[60] Redemptive history does not begin, in other words, with the giving of the Torah at Sinai, nor even with the Exodus event, but rather, with a series of promises and decrees made by God, i.e. Gen 3:15, 22:17-18. The formation of Israel as a nation by the Lord, then, was for a particular purpose, with the nation serving as both the initial fulfillment His promise to Abraham, as well as the means through which God would bring the fullness of said promise to fruition in the future.

Moreover, the calling and formation of Israel, as well as it's unique vocation and relationship to the Lord, should be understood as a direct response to the failure of Adam in the Garden of Eden. Indeed, as Postell demonstrates, there are numerous linguistic and thematic parallels between Adam and Israel, to the point where the story of Adam can be seen as typological of Israel's entire national history leading up to the exile.[61] Both Adam and Israel, for instance, are brought into existence by God, and are called into a covenantal relationship with Him.[62] Both are "placed/rested" within Eden/The Promised Land, and both are given a vocation

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[60] While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss interpretive issues pertaining to the age or method of creation, i.e. old earth theistic evolution, old earth direct creation, young earth direct creation etc., it is the position of this work, as noted in chapter 1, that Adam and Eve were literal historical figures, and the events of Genesis 2-3 recount actual events which occurred within the realm of real human history.

[61] Seth D. Postell, *Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah And Tanakh* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 32.

[62] Ibid., 32.

as the Lord's image/representative to creation/the nations.[63] Both Adam and Israel transgress the stipulations of the Lord's covenant by their failure to drive out the serpent/inhabitants of Canaan, and both are themselves drawn into sin as a result.[64] Finally, both Adam and the nation of Israel are sent into exile outside of the garden/Promised Land as a result of their covenantal failure, yet in both cases exile comes with the hope of restoration through the promise of a future act of God.[65]

The story of Israel, then, reflects the story of Adam in ways which suggest that the nation of Israel should be understood as a corporate "second Adam," ones whose election and vocation is initially presented as the divine "solution" to the covenantal failure of the first. Indeed, this view was common among many of the Jewish Rabbis throughout history, who saw "the giving of the Torah and the observance of its commandments as the ultimate remedy of Adam's sin and the restoration of God's creation purposes." [66] This optimism regarding the nation's ability to actually keep the Law, however, is substantially greater than either history or a careful reading of the Pentateuch itself allows for, i.e. Deuteronomy 30. Nonetheless, the relationship between Adam and Israel is such that to understand the vocational calling of the latter requires one to first examine the vocation, and the vocational failure, of the former.

Adam as Vassal Priest-King

In Genesis 1:27, the Scriptures declare that God created Adam "in His image," a term which has caused no shortage of debate among theologians. As Mathews writes, the "traditional"

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[63] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 32.

[64] Ibid.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Ibid., 7.

understanding of the concept of the *imago Dei* is that it is primarily ontological, that is, that it refers to some aspect of man's *nature* that is unique in relation to other creatures, such as the ability to reason or to enter into relationship with each other and with God.[67] However, more recent study of the concept of representative "images," in Ancient Near Eastern culture, such as those of kings or gods, has led to the rise in popularity of the "functional" understanding of the *imago Dei,* in which Adam being created in the "image" of God refers, not to an aspect of his human nature, but to his role as God's representative on earth.[68] Block, for instance, points to a number of parallels in other ANE texts in which either an individual or idol/statue was seen as the "image" of a deity or king, serving to represent them to the people.[69] This "imaging," as Block emphasizes, went beyond mere physical resemblance, as it was believed that the gods looking down upon the image of a king might be moved to bestow favor on the one the image represented, and the images of gods were even thought to be indwelt by the spirit of said gods, who could then act through their "representative."[70] This does not mean, as Block argues, that there is no ontological aspect to the concept of an "image," as an "image bearer" will by necessity share certain characteristics with the original in order to represent it properly.[71] However, this similarity in form and nature is better linked to the idea of "likeness" than "image," the latter of which is linked in ANE thought primarily to *function,* and specifically, to

[67] K[enneth] A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*. Vol. 1A. *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 165-166.

[68] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* 166.

[69] Block, *Covenant,* 49.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

the idea of functioning as a *representative* of the one being imaged.[72] As Block writes, "human moral conscious, spirituality, rationality, intellectual freedom, and relation ability are necessary to be able to function as God's image…however, it is as his *selem* (image) that God deputized Adam to govern the world on his behalf."[73] Likewise, Heiser links this idea of "imaging" or "image bearing" to the creation mandate found in Genesis 1:28, in which the Lord commands Adam and his wife Eve to "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."[74] The *imago Dei*, then, according to Heiser, is not a quality or ability of humans, but a role or status.[75] To be an image bearer is the purpose for which God created Adam, it is his vocational calling, and this vocation has both a representative and an administrative aspect.[76]

Central to Adam's image-bearing vocation, then, is a royal or kingly function, specifically, that of exercising of dominion over the natural world. As Postell, Bar, and Soref write, "the terminology used to describe rule and dominion in the creation mandate is used elsewhere to describe the rule of kings," as can be seen in a description of the reign of Solomon in 1 Kings 4:24, as well as in a number of the royal (and potentially messianic) psalms.[77] At the

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[72] Block, *Covenant,* 49.

[73] Ibid.

[74] Michael S. Heiser, *The Unseen Realm: Recovering the Supernatural Worldview of the Bible*, First Edition. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2015), 43.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Block, *Covenant,* 50.

[77] Seth D. Postell, Eitan Bar, and Erez Soref, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus: How the Torah Fulfills Its Goals in Yeshua* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham, 2017), 49-50. See also the discussion in Kevin S. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2019), 36.

same time, however, Adam's vocation should be understood as "priestly" as well. Numerous Old Testament scholars, including Postell, Heiser, and Chen have highlighted the numerous linguistic parallels between the descriptions of the Garden of Eden in Genesis 2-3, and of the description of the tabernacle in Exodus, such as the presence of precious jewels and metals, an entrance "in the east," the presence of the cherubim, and the design of the tabernacle menorah in the form of a tree, likely related to the tree of life in Eden.[78] Likewise, the Lord's presence in the tabernacle is described using the same verb "to walk" in Leviticus 26:12 and Deuteronomy 23:14 as that used to describe the Lord's presence in Eden in Genesis 3:8.[79] In regard to Adam himself, meanwhile, Postell notes that "the terms 'cultivate' and 'keep,' used to describe Adam's occupation in the garden, are terms most frequently used elsewhere in the Pentateuch to describe the Levites' occupation in the tabernacle."[80] Adam then, is cast in Genesis as a God's human representative on earth, one who is to fulfill his divinely given vocation by acting in the role of a priest-king who reigns and serves in the Edenic sanctuary.[81]

Adam's royal-priesthood, however, is not on the basis of his own authority, but rather, his vocation is one which is to be carried out in full submission to the Lord, and within the confines of a divinely instituted covenantal relationship. It must be noted here that the term "covenant" is never explicitly used in Genesis 1-3 to describe the relationship between Adam and the Lord, and

[78] Postell, Bar, and Soref., *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus,* 52-53, Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 175, Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch,* 37-38.

[79] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 112.

[80] Ibid. Postell also notes that these terms are used in Deuteronomy 13:5 to "describe obedience to the precepts of Sinai."

[81] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 37-38.

many Old Testament scholars reject an "Adamic covenant" on this basis.[82] There are, however, a number of good reasons to understand the relationship between Adam and the Lord in Eden as being of a "covenantal" nature, and even proto-Sinaitic, as Postell does.[83] First, some later biblical passages seem to assume a covenant between the Lord and Adam in Eden. The most explicit example of this *may* be found in Hosea 6:7, in which the Lord declares that Israel has transgressed His covenant "like Adam." This verse, however, has proven notoriously difficult for translators, as it may be rendered in a number of different ways which do not necessarily refer to the first man, such as taking "Adam" as referring to the location of a town in Israel, as collective, as in, "they, to a man, have transgressed my covenant," or even as referring to the ground, as in, "they have walked on/trampled my covenant like dirt."[84] While these difficulties mean that Hosea 6:7 cannot be taken as definitive proof of an Adamic covenant on its own, the remains fact that the "traditional" understanding of this verse, held by a number of ancient Jewish and Christian exegetes, is that "Adam" here is to be taken in the personal sense, as referring to the first man. [85] As such, it is worth considering this verse alongside other evidence.

Similarly, it is significant that the first time the word "covenant" does appear in in Scripture, found in Genesis 6:8, the Lord does not use the more usual terminology for "establishing" a covenant, but rather, He uses a phrase which more usually means to "confirm" a covenant, and this, along with the reference to *My* covenant, rather than *a* covenant, may suggest

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[82] Paul R. Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath: Covenant in God's Unfolding Purpose*, Edited by D. A. Carson. Vol. 23. *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; InterVarsity, 2007), 54.

[83] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 108-109.

[84] Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath,* 55. See also Block, *Covenant,* 46. See also Duane A. Garett, *Hosea, Joel*, vol. 19A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1997), 162.

[85] Crowe, *The Last Adam,* 59.

the *reestablishment* and modification of preexisting covenant with Noah and humanity, rather than the institution of a new covenant altogether.[86] As with Hosea 6:7, however, Genesis 6:8 cannot be seen as definitive, since the distinction between the terminology used to refer to establishing vs. confirming a covenant is not always strictly observed in Scripture, with Ezekiel, for instance, using the two terms interchangeably.[87]

What are more significant than either of these verses for establishing an Adamic covenant, however, are the numerous thematic and linguistic parallels between Genesis 1-3 and various aspects of both the Sinaitic Covenant and the history of Israel, a number of which have already been discussed above. As Postell observes, "the phraseology used to describe Adam's life and duties in the garden portrays an individual who is fulfilling the conditions of the Sinai Covenant."[88] Adam's vocation as a priest-king, and his continued presence in the garden, is contingent upon his obedience both in fulfilling the Lord's mandates, as well as to the prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, just as Israel's life in the Promised Land and their role as a kingdom of priests is contingent on their obedience to the Mosaic Covenant.[89] In both cases, then, obedience leads to life and the fulfillment of vocation, whereas disobedience will lead to exile and death.[90] Additionally, even the specific prohibition against *eating* from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil likely foreshadows the numerous dietary restrictions found in the Mosaic Law, a position strengthened by the fact that the

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[86] Block, *Covenant,* 45.

[87] Ibid., 46.

[88] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 116.

[89] Ibid., 117-118.

[90] Ibid., 118.

prohibitions against eating, or even touching, certain animals found in Leviticus 11:8 and Deuteronomy 14:8 utilize the same language used by Eve to describe the Lord's prohibition against eating from the tree during her discussion with the serpent.[91] Both the positive and negative commands given to Adam and Eve, then, as well as the blessings and curses for disobedience, are reflective of the future covenant between God and Israel, which provides a strong basis for understanding the relationship between God and Adam as being a type of proto-Sinaitic covenant, even if the particular term "covenant" is not found in the opening chapters of Genesis.[92] Block, likewise, while more cautious regarding whether to identify the relationship between God and Adam as a "covenant" *per se*, describes the nature of the relationship as being one of a divine suzerain (Yahweh), and vassal king (Adam), with the promise of life and death connected to the two trees corresponding to both the blessings and curses found in standard ANE suzerain-vassal treaties, as well as to the blessings and curses found in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 under God's covenant with Israel.[93]

Therefore, even if one rejects an explicit "Adamic covenant," the suzerain-vassal relationship between Adam and Yahweh, a relationship contingent on Adam's continued obedience to the divine commandment not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, in which life and death are held out as the consequences for obedience and disobedience respectively, should be seen as typologically anticipating the relationship between Yahweh and Israel established at Sinai. Likewise, the nature of Adam's vocation as an image bearer and royal priest not only anticipates Israel's own calling and vocation, but the latter can be seen as the Lord's initial

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[91] Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 117-118.

[92] Ibid., 115, 119.

[93] Block, *Covenant*, 45-46.

response to the former in the post-fall world. Finally, as Postell demonstrates, the story of Adam's fall and exile typologically anticipates Israel's own fall and exile, as the failure to drive out the enemy of Yahweh leads the vassal into sin, resulting in the divine curse of death and exile.[94] To a preexilic Israelite audience, then, from the time of Sinai onward, the relationship between Adam and Yahweh would most likely have been understood as reflective of Israel's own relationship to the Lord, while the story of Adam's fall would be understood as a call to faithful obedience and vocational fulfillment, as well as one which served as a warning regarding the consequences of covenantal disobedience.[95]

Therefore, although the specific term is not found in the opening chapters of Genesis, the nature of the relationship between Adam and the Lord should be understood as being a "covenant" in all but name, one which foreshadows the covenant later made between the Lord and Israel. Adam, then, is not only a priest-king, he is a *vassal* priest-king, one whose vocation can only be carried out through his fidelity to the divine suzerain and his adherence to the requirements of a proto-Sinaitic "covenant."

Adam as Unfaithful Vassal and the Promise of a Seed

As a priest-king, however, Adam fails to uphold the stipulations of the covenantal relationship with his creator, proving himself to be an unfaithful vassal to the divine suzerain. First, he fails to "subdue" the enemy of God, the serpent who has come into the garden and challenged the authority of the Lord.[96] Further, rather than expel the serpent from the garden,

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[94] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 32.

[95] Ibid., 134-142. Postell argues that the purpose of the Adam narrative is to prophetically anticipate Israel's own fall and exile, thereby pointing to the need for something greater than the Law to save Israel and humanity. However, it does not seem necessary to take the texts purpose as being either/or, since the Adam narrative can serve to both exhort Israel to exhibit covenant faithfulness in contrast to Adam, as well as to anticipate their own covenant failure and exile.

[96] Ibid., 99-104.

thereby having already failed in his role as priest-king, Adam allows both himself and his wife to fall into sin, by actively breaking the Lord's command not to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.[97] Moreover, Adam and Eve eat from the tree with the express desire to become "like God/like gods," an act of treason which can only be described as an attempted usurpation of the Lord's divine authority.[98] As Chen writes "by obeying the serpent instead of subduing it, Adam effectively subverted the authority that the Lord intended for him to have over all creatures of the earth."[99] As a result of this act of rebellion, the vassal king is expelled from his "kingdom" and experiences the curses of covenant violation (Gen. 3:16-19). Adam's exile from the garden, however, is not without a glimmer of hope, one which is found within the Lord's pronouncement of judgement upon the serpent. In Genesis 3:15, sometimes referred to as the "protoevangelium," God declares to the serpent that He "will put enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your offspring/seed and her offspring/seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall bruise his heel."[100]

The woman's "seed," then, will succeed in the vocation in which Adam failed, He will conquer the serpent, the enemy of God, "crushing" his head, though He Himself will be "bruised/struck" as a result.[101] As Chen argues, this total defeat of the "unclean" serpent presents the "seed" as one who will fulfill both a kingly and priestly role, subduing the enemy and thereby

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[97] Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 99-104.

[98] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 38.

[99] Ibid., 56.

[100] Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, *Tyndale Old Testament* Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1967), 75.

[101] While the same Hebrew word is used to describe the blow given to other by the seed and the serpent (alt. translated strike, bruise, or crush) the striking of the serpent's head indicates a fatal blow (hence crush) vs the striking of the seed's heel, a nonfatal strike, hence "bruise." See Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* 245.

removing uncleanness from creation.[102] In this way, the "seed" fulfills the vocation with which Adam was entrusted, making the "seed" a faithful vassal priest-king, in contrast to Adam the unfaithful vassal.

It is the search for this promised "seed" which will occupy a significant focus of the narrative moving forward. It must be noted at this point that many scholars throughout history have rejected an individual, let alone messianic, identification for the "seed" of Genesis 3:15, instead taking the noun as collective, referring to all of Eve's descendants, humanity as a whole.[103] While it is certainly true that the term "seed" here can be used to refer to either an individual or a group, there is good reason to understand the author of Genesis as having a particular individual in mind. First, as Chen argues, the use of a singular independent personal pronoun "He will crush," strongly indicates that a particular individual is in view here.[104] Second, as Mathews observes, the subsequent narratives of Genesis strongly indicate an ongoing search for an individual "seed" who will provide rest from the effects of the curse brought on by Adam's covenant failing.[105] Following Adam and Eve's expulsion from the garden, the next several chapters of Genesis show an intense focus on the concept of offspring/seed, from the initial narratives of Cain's murder of Abel and the subsequent birth of Seth, to the extensive genealogies contrasting the righteous line of Seth with the wicked line of Cain.[106] Here one might be tempted to see the entire righteous line of Seth as the corporate "seed" of the woman,

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[102] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 58. See also Postell, et al., *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus,* 67.

[103] Kidner, *Genesis,* 75.

[104] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 42.

[105] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* 246.

[106] Ibid.

and the entire wicked line of Cain as the wicked "seed" of the serpent, however, the hope of Noah's father in Genesis 5:29, that his son will be the one to bring them "rest" from the "curse" indicates a hope for a particular individual to fulfill the role of the "seed."[107] This is not to say that there is *only* an individual focus to Genesis 3:15, as the ongoing enmity and struggle between God's people and the "seed" of the serpent is a common theme throughout Scripture, from Cain's murder of Abel to the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders in the New Testament, with both Cain and the religious leaders being identified explicitly as being of/children of the devil (Jn 8:39-47, 1 Jn 3:7-112).[108] Indeed, there is a continuing tension throughout the Pentateuch between the concept of the "seed" as a collective group, as the people of God/Israel, and of the "seed" as a particular eschatological figure. However, as the Old Testament narrative unfolds, the extensive proliferation of human sin even among God's people can be seen to correspond with a narrowing in focus, in which the search for the "seed" narrows from humanity in general, to Israel as a nation, to a particular future King rising from the line of David, a topic that will receive extensive focus in chapters 3 and 4.

In spite of his father's hopes, Noah does not provide ultimate "rest" from the curse brought on by Adam's failure, proving that he is not the "seed" who will defeat the serpent.[109] Having destroyed all of humanity save for Noah's family on account of human wickedness, God promises to never again destroy the earth by means of a flood in Genesis 8:21-21, yet these verses make clear that the problem of sin has not been dealt with. This is clearly and quickly demonstrated in the events of Genesis 11:1-9, in which the people sin by attempting to "make a

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[107] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* 299. See also Postell, et al., *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus,* 67.

[108] Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26,* 247-248.

[109] For a discussion of Noah as both a "new Adam" and the potential "seed," see Postell, et al., *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus,* 67-69.

name for themselves" by building a tower to the heavens, an act of hubris as well as disobedience to God's command to spread throughout the earth.[110] In response, the Lord confuses their language, scattering the nations across the face of the earth (Gen. 11:7-8).

It is from these nations, then, that the Lord calls Abram, whom He renames Abraham, and it is the Lord's promise to Abraham, that through His "seed" all the nations of the world will be blessed, which initiates a new phase in redemptive history, and which narrows the search for the "seed" of Genesis 3:15 to this particular family.[111] As Dempster writes, "against the dark background of the table of nations and the fiasco at Babel, the blessing of Abraham is clearly an answer to the fundamental problem of the human condition. Just as Lamech's hope for a removal of the curse was answered through his son Noah, so Terah's son Abram will be the agent of blessing for the world."[112]

As with Genesis 3:15, the promises made to Abraham regarding his "seed" can be taken as having either a singular or plural referent, and in some instances the latter is required by context, such as the promise that Abraham's "seed" will be a numerous as the stars of heaven or the sand on the shore (Gen. 22:17, 26:4). Other aspects of the Lord's promise to Abraham's "seed," however, are more ambiguous, potentially referring to either an individual or to a group, and in some cases seem better suited as referring to an individual, such as the promise that Abraham's "seed" will "possess the gates of *his* enemies (Gen. 22:17)."[113] At this point in the

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[110] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm,* 112. See also Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, 473-474.

[111] Block, *Covenant,* 73.

[112] See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 77. The hope of Noah's father is at best partially fulfilled through his son, indicating that the full promise of the seed is yet to be fulfilled.

[113] For an in depth discussion on the linguistic and thematic consideration in determining which instances of "seed" in the Lord's promises to Abraham refer to an individual, and which refer to his offspring in general, see Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 71-78.

biblical narrative, then, the tension between the "seed" as an individual and as a group is maintained. What is clear, however, is that the promises made to Abraham regarding his "seed" are directly connected to the reversal of the curse brought on by Adam's sin, in that the promise of land to Abraham's "seed" contrasts with the exile of Adam and Eve from the garden, while the cursing of the "seed's" enemies is linked to the ongoing conflict with the seed of the serpent and the ultimate defeat of the serpent itself.[114]

"A Kingdom of Priests:" Israel as a Vassal State

While subsequent chapters will focus on the identity of the "seed" as an individual, the more immediate narrative of the Pentateuch focus primarily on the *corporate* aspect of God's promise to Abraham, as God brings His people out of slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land, forming them into a nation with a divinely given vocation, to serve as a "kingdom of priest" to the nations (Exod. 19:6). Just as Adam was created to act as a vassal priest-king, with Yahweh as the divine suzerain, and was to serve as both the Lord's representative and administrator of His creation, so Israel was created as a vassal *state*, with the task of representing Yahweh and mediating His divine blessings to the nations of the world.[115] As Heiser writes, "Israel's status as Yahweh's own portion was not an end in itself, but the means by which Israel would draw all nations back to Yahweh (Deut. 4:6–8; 28:9–10). This is the idea behind Israel being a 'kingdom of priests' (Exod. 19:6) and 'a light to the nations.'"[116] Israel, then, can be seen a "new corporate Adam," ones whose formation and vocational calling is in direct response to the vocational failure of the original, individual Adam.

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[114] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 70.

[115] Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 169.

[116] Ibid.

Central to this vocation, however, is the role of the covenant made between Yahweh and Israel through Moses. Much as Adam's role as a vassal priest-king in the garden was contingent on his faithful adherence to the commands of his divine suzerain, so Israel's role as a vassal state is contingent on their faithfulness the Lord's commands under the Mosaic Covenant.[117] By keeping the Lord's commands, Israel may experience life and divine blessing in the land promised to Abraham's seed, while continued rebellion will result in death and exile (Gen. 17:8, Deut. 28). Unlike with Adam, however, here the covenantal basis of the Lord's relationship with His vassal state is quite explicit. Not only is the necessity of obedience to the Lord's covenant established as the foundation for the ongoing relationship between Yahweh and Israel and the accomplishment of Israel's vocation in Exodus 19, but the Law itself is presented within the Pentateuch in the form of an Ancient Near Eastern, and specifically Hittite, suzerain-vassal treaty, as can particularly be seen in the book of Deuteronomy.[118]

As Merrill writes, the past several decades of scholarship have established a "near consensus" on the essential elements that comprise Hittite suzerain-vassal treaties c.1400-1200 BC, elements which include a "preamble, historical prologue, general stipulations, specific stipulations, blessings and curses, and witnesses.[119] He further argues that all such elements are present, and appear in precisely the same order, in the book of Deuteronomy, strongly suggesting

[117] Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty,* 101.

[118] Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy,* 29-30. Some scholars, especially those who favor a late date of composition for the Pentateuch, have argued that the structure of Deuteronomy is modeled after Neo-Assyrian covenantal documents rather than Hittite. However, as Merrill argues, the structural and thematic parallels between Deuteronomy and Hittite suzerain vassal treaties are far closer than that of the alleged similarities between Deuteronomy and Neo-Assyrian covenants, strongly suggesting a far earlier date of composition than such critical scholars are willing to admit. Merrill, *Deuteronomy,* 37. Furthermore, of the various ANE suzerain-vassal treaties discovered by archeologists, only Hittite treaties parallel Deuteronomy in containing a section describing blessings for obedience in addition to the standard curses for disobedience. See Block, *Covenant,* 193, 233-234.

[119] Ibid., 30.

that the original author intended to present, and the original readers would have understood, the relationship between Yahweh and Israel as one of a divine suzerain and a vassal state respectively.[120]

Such suzerain-vassal relationships were common in the Ancient Near East, in which a more powerful ruler, the suzerain, established a covenantal relationship with a lesser powerful nation and its ruler, the vassal.[121] While this relationship could at times be initiated through the suzerain's conquest of the vassal state, a closer parallel to the relationship between Yahweh and Israel occurred when a less powerful nation placed themselves under the protection of a more powerful one, so as to receive deliverance and protection from their enemies.[122] In the preamble and historical prologue of a standard suzerain-vassal treaty, the nature of this relationship, as well as the historical events leading to the present situation, would be recounted, with a particular emphasis on the greatness and sovereignty of the suzerain.[123] In the case of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel, this aspect the covenant is further heightened by the fact that Israel's suzerain is also their God, whose mighty acts of deliverance in the Exodus event sets the foundation for the suzerain-vassal relationship.[124]

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[120] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 30. See also Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), Dt 1:46.

[121] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Dt 1:46. See also Jeffrey H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, *The JPS Torah Commentary* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), xiv.

[122] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 30. See also Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, xiv.

[123] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Dt 1:46. See also Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 30.

[124] Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary*, Dt 1:46. See also Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, xiv.

Following this introduction, subsequent sections of such treaties contained a series of general and specific stipulations which served to spelled out the roles and responsibilities of both the suzerain and the vassal, with divine blessings and curses from the gods invoked as a means of ensuring the compliance of both parties.[125] The covenant between the Lord and Israel is, of course, unique in regard to the fact that Yahweh is Himself party to the terms of the covenant, as well as being the one who will administer the blessings and/or curses in response to Israel's faithfulness, or lack thereof.[126] Furthermore, just as Yahweh swore upon Himself to bless Abraham "since he had no one greater by whom to swear," there is no one else to whom the Lord can be held accountable for His self-imposed obligations to His vassal state (Heb. 6:13-14).[127]

Nonetheless, Israel is to recognize that the Lord's covenantal faithfulness is assured on the basis of His very nature, which has been demonstrated through His actions as recounted in the covenant's historical prologue.[128] As Merrill writes, "a good and gracious God need do no more than pledge himself to the well-being of his chosen ones as they submit to his dominion over them."[129] Should Israel fulfill the role and obligations of a faithful vassal, by exhibiting total and exclusive allegiance and faithfulness to their divine suzerain, then they can be assured that they will experience the blessings prescribed under the terms of the covenant in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28. The blessings themselves include material promises of fertility, agricultural success, and the defeat of Israel's enemies (Lev. 26:3-10, Deut. 28:1-8). In addition, the Lord

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[125] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 30-31. See also Tigay, *Deuteronomy*, xiv.

[126] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 31-32.

[127] Ibid.

[128] Ibid., 339-340.

[129] Ibid., 340.

promises that faithful adherence to the covenant on the part of the vassal will result in the continuing presence of the divine suzerain, stating "if you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them… I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people (Lev. 26:3, 11-12)." As both Sailhamer and Sklar observe, the nature of these blessings are "reminiscent of the blessings enjoyed garden of Eden."[130] Likewise, Sklar writes that "the previous (material) blessings would make the land of Israel like the garden of Eden," while the promise of verses eleven and twelve "now return to the Lord's goal in Eden: *walking among* his people as their God."[131] Furthermore, it is apparent that the covenantal blessings listed in both Leviticus and Deuteronomy contrast with the curses pronounced upon Adam and Eve by the Lord during their exile from the garden. There, the ground is cursed on account of the man, so that "in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust and to dust you shall return (Gen. 3:18-19)." Here, however, the result of covenant faithfulness is that the Lord promises to "give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full (Lev. 26:4-5)." Likewise, in Genesis the woman is condemned to pain in childbearing, while in Deuteronomy,

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[130] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: a Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 364, 471. See also Jay Sklar, *Leviticus: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 3, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2013), 316.

[131] Sklar, *Leviticus*, 316. Rooker likewise notes the similarity between the covenantal blessings listed in Leviticus and the eschatological portrait of the "age to come" as presented in Ezekiel, further demonstrating a connection between said blessings and the reversal of the curse. Mark F. Rooker, *Leviticus*, vol. 3A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2000), 315.

there is blessing upon the "fruit of your womb (Gen. 3:16, Deut. 28:4,11)." Finally, the Lord in Genesis decrees ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, whereas in Leviticus and Deuteronomy, Israel is promised security from her enemies, they are promised that "the Lord will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways," and that the Lord "will remove *harmful beasts* from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land (Deut. 28:7, Lev. 26:6 emphasis added)." The blessings promised to Israel under the stipulations of the covenant, then, can be understood as the fulfillment of Lamech's hope as expressed in Genesis 6:29, "relief from our work and from the toil of our hands." Relief, in other words, from the effects of the curse brought on by Adam's failure in his role as vassal priest-king. Israel, then, is not only to corporately embody the vocation given to Adam, but, by doing so, is given the opportunity to receive "rest" from her enemies, and from the effects of the curse, in the Promised Land (Deut. 12:10).[132] Just as with Adam, however, this blessing is predicated on Israel's faithful fulfillment of the role of vassal to the divine suzerain, whereas disloyalty will result in covenant curses that parallel and amplify the curses placed on Adam, brining death and exile on a national scale (Lev. 26:14-29, Deut. 28:15-68).

In addition to serving as the *condition* for Israel's fulfillment of their divinely given vocation as a priestly vassal state, the Law also serves as the *means* by which this mission is to be accomplished. Israel's election as Yahweh's "treasured possession" is not merely for its own benefit, but for the benefit of all people, so that the promise to Abraham might be fulfilled, that through his seed all the nations of the world might be blessed (Gen. 22:18, Exod. 19:5-6). Stuart,

[132] For a discussion of the covenantal promise of "rest" for the people of Israel, see David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua*, vol. 5, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1998), 64.

for instance, identifies several ways in which this mission was to be accomplished by Israel. [133] First, Israel was to act as *example* to other nations, demonstrating the wisdom and holiness of Yahweh. In Deuteronomy 4:6, for instance, Israel is instructed to "keep them (the covenant stipulations) and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." Second, and relatedly, Israel was to proclaim the truth of Yahweh, not only in word, but through their deeds as well.[134] In other words, just as Adam, his wife, and their future progeny were to act as the "image bearers" of Yahweh in the world, Israel was to act as an image bearer for Yahweh to the nations, with this being a central aspect of their vocation as a priestly vassal state. As Dempster writes, "if Israel becomes a holy nation, it will 'image' God to the nations…it will be a kingdom marked by priesthood, service of God on behalf of people and *vice versa.*"[135]

Of course, the nature of Israel's mission was to differ markedly from Adam's in some respects.[136] Notably, while Adam was called to be an image bearing vassal king, that is, to subdue, rule over and care for the earth, his vocation was given in a pre-fallen world, whereas Israel's mission involved representing Yahweh in the midst of a world already experiencing the effects of the fall. The key difference here, however, is the *circumstances* in which Adam and

[133]See Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 423.

[134] Ibid.

[135] Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 101.

[136] Stuart further notes a number of ways in which Israel was to not only represent Yahweh to the nations, but was to act in an intercessory role between Yahweh and fallen humanity, an aspect of the nation's "priesthood." While Adam did not have such an intercessory role in the pre-fall world, his responsibility in caring for the Edenic garden "temple," as well as his responsibility to subdue and expel the serpent, are reflective of his own role as a royal priest. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 423.

Israel were to carry out their respective vocations, rather than the *nature* of the vocation itself, which remains one of serving as Yahweh's image bearer in the world.

The vocational calling of Israel as presented in the Pentateuch, then, is to uphold the stipulations of the Law, so that by doing so they might come to faithfully image their divine suzerain to the nations, thereby serving as the faithful vassal that the first man, Adam, failed to be, receiving rest from the curse in the form of covenantal blessings, and mediating these blessings to the world.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Given the above considerations, it may initially appear that the Pentateuch presents Israel as the ultimate answer to Adam's sin, the promised corporate "seed" who will succeed where the first man failed. Indeed, this, has been the view of many Jewish exegetes throughout history, such as Morris, who writes "while Adam was given but one commandment but failed to observe it, Israel has been given the 613 commandments of the Torah and keeps them. While Adam consigned his descendants to the 'flaming sword' and was denied from the Tree of Life, the Torah will 'save' Adam's descendants and enable them to partake in the eternal life of the final redemption."[137] If this view is accurate, then it must be concluded that the purpose of the Pentateuch is to encourage the reader to keep the Law of Moses, so as to receive the covenant blessings and redemption from the effects of the curse. Such an understanding of the message of the Pentateuch, however, is severely undermined not only by Israel's repeated disobedience within the narrative of the Pentateuch itself, but also by the explicit statements of passages such

[137] Paul Morris, "Exiled from Eden: Jewish Interpretations of Genesis," In *Walk in the Garden,* edited by Paul Morris and Deborah Sawyer, 117-166, (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic, 1992), 125.

as Deuteronomy 31, which prophecy that Israel will *not* fulfill its covenant obligations in the future, but will instead prove itself to be just as unfaithful a vassal as Adam.[138]

The story of Israel as an unfaithful vassal state, one ultimately ruled over by a succession of unfaithful vassal kings, will be the focus of the following chapter. First, this chapter will examine both the narrative presentation of Israel's unfaithfulness in the Pentateuch, as well as the prophecies of future unfaithfulness found in Deuteronomy 30. This will lead to an examination of how Israel's history, when viewed through the lens of Deuteronomistic theology, points to the need for an individual eschatological figure, "the seed," to fulfill the vocation of both Israel *and* Adam, informing the messianic vision of the Old Testament. Finally, it will be demonstrated that this individual is primarily presented as a *faithful vassal king* who will fully submit to and uphold the covenantal standard of the divine suzerain, thereby receiving and mediating the promised covenantal blessings on behalf of the nation, as well as providing the final solution for Adam's sin, the ultimate defeat of the serpent, and the removal of the curse.

[138] Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative,* 471. See also Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, chapter 9.

CHAPTER 3: FAITHLESS VASSALS: The History of Israel through the Lens of Deuteronomistic Theology

Israel as an Unfaithful Vassal State in the Pentateuch

It has been a common misunderstanding among biblical scholars, and among Jewish exegetes in particular, that the purpose of the Pentateuch is to provide God's chosen people, and ultimately the world, with a means to salvation through the nation of Israel's faithful adherence to the Law of Moses.[139] As a result, many modern readers tend to view the Pentateuch primarily as a book of laws, and for many interpreters, "the central message of the Pentateuch is the giving and keeping of the Sinai/Deuteronomic law."[140] This view, which is the view especially of Rabbinic Judaism, sees Israel as the divinely appointed solution to the sin of the first man, a corporate "second Adam" whose obedience to the Law will overcome the failure of the first, a faithful vassal state to finally accomplish the mission of the failed vassal king as the rightful administrator of God's creation.[141]

Such an approach to the message of the Pentateuch, however, requires the exegete to understand the biblical text as having an optimistic view regarding Israel's ability to keep the stipulations of the covenant through adherence to the demands of the Law. In other words, if one sees the purpose of the Pentateuch as primarily being to instruct its readers regarding the Law's requirements, and to encourage their obedience to said requirements, then it would logically follow that the author of the Pentateuch assumed that such obedience was actually possible on the part of the audience. Moreover, if Israel can, in fact, actually keep the Law under its own

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[139] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 270-271. See Morris, "Exiled from Eden," 125.

[140] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 270. See also Postell, Bar, and Soref, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus*, 17.

[141] Postell, Bar, and Soref, *Reading Moses, Seeing Jesus*, 17. Morris, "Exiled from Eden," 125.

power, then there is a chance, however remote, that Abraham's children might actually fulfill their divinely given vocation as a kingdom of priests, receive the covenant blessings, and act as mediators between Yahweh and the nations.

When Moses stands before the congregation of Israel as they prepare to enter the Promised Land, just prior to his death, he declares that "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse," and appeals to them to "chose life" (Deut. 30:19). If the purpose of the Pentateuch is to present Israel and the Law as the solution to Adam's sin, then this statement by Moses must be seen as presenting the people with the real possibility of obtaining blessing and life through the Law. Not only is this the view of Rabbinic Judaism, but even many Christian commentators seem to take v.19 in this way as well, as though Israel, under its own power, might actually make the right choice in choosing life and blessings in the land.[142] However, despite this being a common understanding of the Pentateuch's purpose, a careful reading of the book's narrative reveals a substantially more pessimistic outlook regarding Israel's ability to keep the stipulations of the covenant than is commonly assumed by those who insist that the purpose of the text is the teaching of the Law.[143]

Sailhamer and Chen, for instance, point to the way in which the giving of the Law within the Pentateuch is framed by a larger narrative context, namely, a narrative of ongoing covenantal

[142] See for instance, the discussions in Eugene H. Merrill, "Deuteronomy," in *Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy*, vol. 2, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1996), 641, J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1974), 313.

[143] The apostle Paul, of course, rejects any such possibility of obtaining life through the Law, writing, "for if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law," and "if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose" (Gal. 2:21, 3:21).

failure on the part of Israel.[144] It is significant that, even as Moses is on Sinai, receiving the terms of the covenant from the Lord, the people, despite having *just* experienced the Lord's presence, and having *just* sworn to follow Yahweh and to obey "all that the Lord has spoken," are already actively engaging in idolatry down below (Exod. 24:7, Exod. 32). The effect of this, then, is that it demonstrates Israel's complete inability to keep the demands of the Law, since "the narrative shows that the covenant was being broken even if while Moses was still on the mountain."[145] Furthermore, as Sailhamer writes, this event "casts a dark shadow over Israel's relationship with God, much the same way as the account of the Fall in Genesis 3 marked a major turning point in God's dealing with humankind."[146] In other words, the golden calf incident is Israel's Adam and Eve moment, their first covenantal failure as a newly formed vassal state.

Having violated the very heart of their covenant with Yahweh, it is difficult to overstate the severity of Israel's sin, and it is only at Moses' intercession that the Lord refrains from completely destroying the young nation (Exod. 32:7-14). In spite of this act of mercy however, the people's "repentance" following their idolatry proves to be fleeting at best, with the Pentateuch presenting the first generation of Israelites' as a people who are chronically unfaithful and rebellious.[147] Even after the Lord spares their lives at Sinai, the people continue to engage in acts of idolatry, i.e. Leviticus 17:7 and Numbers 25:1-3, and display an ongoing stubborn refusal to trust and follow the Lord, culminating in the entire generation being barred from entering the

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[144] Cf. Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 271-272. See also John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 374-398.

[145] Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 310.

[146] Ibid.

[147] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 274.

Promised Land.[148] It is for this reason that the Lord describes the people as being "stiff necked" i.e. "stubborn and oppositional," a term used repeatedly throughout the Pentateuch to describe Israel's spiritual condition and their lack of conformity to the requirements of the covenant (Exod. 32:9, 33:3, Deut. 10:16).[149] This "stiff-neckedness" is in direct opposition to the inner attitude of humility, reverence and submission to the Lord's commands that Israel is meant to display, an attitude metaphorically described in the Pentateuch as a "circumcision of the heart" (Deut. 10:16).[150] Israel's problem then, is primarily one of the heart, reflecting the same sinful nature that is common to mankind from Adam onward.[151]

Furthermore, this is not a problem unique to the first generation of Israelites, as their children are likewise described as "spiritually dull" and stiff-necked in Deuteronomy.[152] As Barker notes, the sins of the first generation, particularly the golden calf incident and the response to the spies' report, are seen in Deuteronomy as paradigmatic of Israel for future generations.[153] He writes that "Deuteronomy supposes that Israel has a propensity to sin, based on its past record. Its history is not of occasion blemishes amidst and otherwise good record. Israel's sin is persistent and deep seated."[154] Despite their constant verbal pledges of loyalty to Yahweh alone, the narrative of the Pentateuch is one which presents Israel as a people

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[148] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 274.

[149] Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 670.

[150] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 203. See also, Paul A. Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy: Faithless Israel, Faithful Yahweh in Deuteronomy* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 2004), 105.

[151] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 274-275.

[152] Ibid., 274.

[153] Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy*, 88.

[154] Ibid., 88.

consistently incapable of displaying covenant loyalty to their divine suzerain; a faithless vassal state.[155]

Not only does the Pentateuch present Israel, past and present, as a sinful and stubborn people incapable of living out the demands of the covenant they swore to uphold, but it explicitly predicts the failure of future generations to do so as well. In Deuteronomy 30:1, Moses explicitly tells the congregation that they will not only fail to uphold the stipulations of the covenant, but that they will experience the full force of the covenantal curses in the form of exile. Likewise, in Deuteronomy 31:16, the Lord informs Moses that, after his death "this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them." Both the narrative and explicit statements of the Pentateuch, then, make clear that Israel has not upheld the demands of the covenant, will not uphold the demands of the covenant, and are, in fact, fundamentally incapable of upholding the demands of the covenant under their own power. In other words, despite the tendency of some exegetes to read the Pentateuch as though its primary purpose is to teach the stipulations of the Law to God's people so that they may live by them, the Pentateuch itself is decidedly pessimistic regarding the peoples' ability to do so. Further, this is not a pessimism directed only at the first generations of Israelites, but rather, is grounded in an understanding of the people as "stiff necked," inherently sinful, and incapable of adopting the necessary "circumcision of the heart" that would allow them to turn and obey the commands of their divine suzerain.[156]

[155] For a discussion on the contrast between Israel public declarations of loyalty to Yahweh and their failure to faithfully live out the demands of the covenant, see Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy,* 204-205.

[156] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 203. Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy,* 105.

Israel's inability to obey the commands of the covenant should not be seen as negating their culpability in regard to their constant disobedience. While there is certainly a tension between the Pentateuch's commands to obey the stipulations of the covenant, and its consistent and ongoing pessimism regarding Israel's ability to actually do so, human responsibility is never downplayed or denied.[157] Israel has sworn to uphold the covenant by acting as a faithful vassal state, loyal to Yahweh alone, and they will be held to that pledge. Nonetheless, their failure, and that of their descendants, is presented as a forgone conclusion throughout the Pentateuch. The Law can only bring death and exile to Israel, not life, because the people are inherently incapable of keeping its demands.

At the same time, however, the Law's inability to impart life should not be seen as a shortcoming of the Law itself.[158] The Law itself declares that it gives life to those who keep its commands (Lev. 18:5, Ezek. 20:11). The problem, however, is that, as George writes, "while the law says, 'Do this and you shall live'…fallen human beings are utterly incapable of the 'doing' contained in such a commandment and thus have fallen under the law's curse."[159] The problem facing Israel, then, is not in the terms of the covenant, but in the faithlessness of the chosen vassal.

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[157] Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy*, 208-209.

[158] As the apostle Paul writes, the Law, which is from God, "is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good (Rom. 7:12) Therefore, it is not the Law itself which leads to death, but rather human sin, which "seizing an *opportunity through the commandment*," produces death in those who, though under the Law, were unable to keep its commands (Rom. 7:11, emphasis added). See for instance the conversation in Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 165. See also Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity, 1988), 283. Both Mounce and Morris note that Law, being given by God, by necessity reflects His nature as holy and life giving, though ultimately insufficient for salvation due to human sinfulness.

[159] Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 260.

Given the above considerations, it can hardly be said that the purpose of the Pentateuch is to encourage fidelity to the covenant so much as it is to present Israel as an unfaithful vassal, both now and into the future. As Chen writes, "the Pentateuch is as much about the *breaking* of the Sinai/Deuteronomic law as it is about the law itself."[160] Israel, then, cannot be the solution to Adam's sin, nor can they be the promised "seed" who will crush the head of the serpent. Rather, Israel's repeated failure in keeping the Law, as well as the prediction of future faithlessness, points to the need for something, or someone, greater; a *faithful* vassal to fulfill the vocation of both the nation and humanity in a way that Adam and Israel never could.

The Story of Israel and the Deuteronomistic History

Within the narrative of the Pentateuch Israel's future faithlessness in regard to the commands of the covenant is repeatedly and consistently predicted, i.e. Deuteronomy 31:16. It is within the so-called "Deuteronomistic history," however, that this story of covenantal infidelity is fully played out in Israel's national history. The term "Deuteronomistic history," or DtrH, was first coined by Martin Noth in 1943, as new means of describing the compositional history and relationship between the books of the former prophets, i.e. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings, and that of the Pentateuch.[161] Contrary to other prevailing theories of the time, Noth hypothesized that Joshua-Kings formed a single literary unit, with Deuteronomy serving as an introduction to this work, and that it was composed during the exilic period, c. 562 BC, by an anonymous author, known as the Deuteronomist, or Dtr.[162] Furthermore, Noth argued that that this author's purpose in writing was primarily etiological, that is, that he was attempting to

[160] Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 273.

[161] Steven L. McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books: Strategies for Reading* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: William. B. Eerdmans, 2010), 14-15.

[162] Ibid., 14.

explain the cause of the Babylonian exile, by compiling and editing a collection of various older sources into a sprawling historical epic, one which presented the exile as the inevitable result of Israel's ongoing sin and faithlessness in regard to the covenant expressed in Deuteronomy.[163]

For Noth, however, as well as for those critical scholars who follow him, the content of the DtrH is not "history" in the sense of "what actually happened."[164] This is not to say that all, or even most, critical scholars reject *any* historical core to the narratives of the DtrH, however, the prevailing opinion among critical scholars is that the Dtr, as well as other biblical writers, did not engage in the writing of "history" in a modern sense.[165] Rather, such writers are seen as having largely collected, adapted, and edited various traditional materials, some historical, some mythological, and having then combined these sources into a narrative to suit their various purposes in writing, which was primarily theological and etiological, rather than "historical."[166] According to such scholars, then, the purpose of the DtrH is not to provide an accurate account of the events of Israel's history, but rather, to tell a "story," one which is part "historical fact" and part "fiction," so as to advance the author's particular theological agenda.[167]

As discussed in chapter one, however, such an approach to history is inherently flawed, as it assumes that a writer whose purpose is primarily theological cannot also be trusted to provide factual historical information regarding "what *actually* happened." These two purposes, informational and theological, need not be seen as being mutually exclusive, since *all* history writing, whether secular or "theological," is by necessity "selective, interpretive, and done for a

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[163] McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books,* 15.

[164] Ibid., 18, 6-12.

[165] Ibid., 11-12.

[166] Ibid.

[167] Ibid.

particular purpose from within the author's particular worldview."[168] Additionally, the assumption that the attribution of events to divine causation in the DtrH precludes the text from being "historical" is flawed as well, since it is based on an *a priori* rejection of the supernatural, which is itself hardly and objective starting point for critical scholars. Certainly the text of the DtrH is "theological history," in that it was written with a particular theological purpose in mind, however, it is the position of this dissertation that it is also "history" in the sense of "what actually happened" as well.[169]

This, then, is a primary point of departure from the use of the term DtrH within this dissertation and what is meant by critical scholars. While the remainder of this dissertation will use the term "Deuteronomistic history/DtrH" for its familiarity, what is meant by this term is the history of Israel as presented by the author(s) and editor(s) of the former prophets, who are understood as having presented a record and theological evaluation of Israel's history through the lens of the covenantal theology found primarily in Deuteronomy, as well as throughout the Pentateuch, i.e. Exodus 19 and Leviticus 26.[170] This history is understood as having been presented in a narrative format, but also as having recorded events as they actually occurred in history.

Israel as an Unfaithful Vassal State in Joshua-Judges

Despite the people's repeated pledges to faithfully serve Yahweh alone as their divine Suzerain, i.e. Exodus 24:7, Joshua 24:24, the predictions of unfaithfulness found in

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[168] Again, see the discussion on story and history in chapter 1 of this dissertation, pgs. 10-14.

[169] For an in depth discussion on the Old Testament biblical writer approach to history in contrast to their ANE neighbors, see John N. Oswalt, The Bible Among the Myths: Unique Revelation or Just Ancient Literature? (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009).

[170] See, for instance the discussion on the covenantal theology of the Dtr writer(s) in Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 35.

Deuteronomy 30:1 and 31:16 do not take long to come to pass. Even the conquest generation, having received the words of the covenant from Moses, and having renewed their vows of fealty to the Lord in Joshua 8:30-35, displays a faithfulness that is, at best, uneven. It has long been observed by scholars that a tension exists within the book of Joshua between a supposed presentation of the Israelites as being wholly successful in their conquest of the land vs. passages which seem to indicate a failure to fully drive out the land's inhabitants.[171] For critical scholars such as McKenzie, this tension is an indication of multiple, contradictory, redactional layers that have been fused together by the Dtr in the books final form.[172] However, as Howard argues, such an approach to the text tends to make too much of statements regarding the extent of Israel's victory, which are better understood as indicating that Israel now had effective control of the land, rather than indicating that they had driven out the Canaanites to the last man.[173] Additionally, such redactional theories are often forced to assume a rather sloppy, or even confused, approach to writing on the part of the biblical authors, who must be seen as having been incapable of harmonizing, or even recognizing within their own narratives, the types of supposed contradictions apparently clearly evident to critical scholars. It is better, then, to understand such "tensions" as an intentional rhetorical strategy on the part of the author, one which is designed to emphasis the historical tension, even as early as the conquest, between Israel's faithfulness, which results in divine aid and victory over their enemies, and faithlessness, which results in their failure to fully drive out the Canaanites from the land.[174]

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[171] McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books,* 42-43.

[172] Ibid.

[173] Cf. David M. Howard Jr., *Joshua,* vol. 5, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1998), 259-260.

[174] Howard Jr., *Joshua*, 260.

Israel's faithfulness to the stipulations of the covenant, or lack thereof, is therefore a central theme within the book of Joshua. Indeed, Joshua records specific instances in which the Israelites are portrayed as faithfully carrying out the commands of the Lord, "down to the smallest detail," obedience which results in divine blessing in the form of victory over Israel's enemies.[175] At the same time, however, instances of disobedience are likewise recorded, which inevitably result in Israel's defeat, and ultimate inability to fully drive out the inhabitants of the land.[176] Particularly illustrative of this paradigm is the contrast between Israel's victory at Jericho, in which the Lord, in response to the people's faithfulness in carrying out His commands, supernaturally intervenes to provide victory over the their enemies, and the Israelites subsequent defeat at Ai (Josh. 6-7).

The latter is the result of the sin of Achan, who takes for himself items from Jericho which the Lord had commanded to be placed under the "ban," items devoted to destruction (Josh. 7:1). Achan's sin is explicitly presented here in the text as a covenant violation, with the Lord informing Joshua "Israel has sinned; *they have transgressed my covenant that I commanded them*; they have taken some of the devoted things; they have stolen and lied and put them among their own belongings (Josh. 7:11 emphasis added)." The people's defeat at Ai, by a smaller military force no less, is therefore clearly presented as an outpouring of the covenant curse depicted in Deuteronomy 28:25, which reads, "the Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them."[177] It is

[175] Howard Jr., *Joshua*, 59.

[176] Ibid.

[177] It also seems likely that the peoples' failure to consult with the Lord prior to attacking Ai, which may have resulted in Joshua being made aware of the covenant violation in the midst of the congregation, is likewise seen by the author as contributing to Israel's defeat. However, it must be noted that this is not explicitly stated in the text. See the discussions in Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, The New International Commentary on the Old

only once the people purge this sin from the congregation that they again receive the divine blessing of victory over their enemies as promised in Deuteronomy 28:7 (Josh. 8:1-29).

Central to the book of Joshua, then, as with the remainder of the DtrH, is the Deuteronomistic theology of the necessity of the people's covenantal fidelity to the divine Suzerain, Yahweh, with the blessings and curses promised through Moses playing out in the earliest days of Israel's history.[178] The Lord is shown throughout Joshua to be a faithful suzerain in upholding His promises to His vassal state, while at the same time being just in addressing covenant violations. As the book draws to a close, then, the people, having experienced divinely enabled victory throughout the conquest, once again reaffirm their commitment to the stipulations of the covenant, declaring that they will not "forsake the Lord to serve other gods," but that they will "serve the Lord, for he is our God (Josh. 24:16,18)." Joshua however, like Moses before him, prophesies that Israel will indeed forsake the Lord to serve other gods, and that they are, in fact, incapable of serving the Lord faithfully (Josh. 24:19). While some scholars, based on Joshua's prior exhortations that the people keep the commands of the covenant, have referred to this statement as "shocking," or "paradoxical," this verse is well in line with the theology of the Pentateuch, which likewise presents of Israel as being fundamentally incapable of fulfilling their vocation as a faithful vassal state, a reality rooted in their nature as sinful humans in contrast to a holy and perfect God.[179]

Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1981), 122, and Richard S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996), 160–161.

[178] Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, 33. Woudstra not notes the importance of covenant faithfulness vs disobedience that is prevalent in Joshua, but also the contrast between the overall positive assessment of Israel's faithfulness during the conquest in contrast to later periods.

[179] Howard Jr., *Joshua*, 437. A number of scholars, such as Coleson and Hubbard, view Joshua's declarations as a type of rhetorical strategy, designed to press upon the Israelites the difficulty of exhibiting exclusive allegiance to Yahweh while still encouraging them to do so. However, this seems unlikely given the uniformly pessimistic view of Israel's ability to keep the law. See Joseph Coleson, "Joshua," in *Joshua, Judges,*

In spite of this, and in spite of Joshua's warning that they witness against themselves, the people reaffirm yet again their commitment to Yahweh and to His covenant (Josh. 24:21-25). This commitment, however, last only as long as the lifetime of Joshua and the elders of the conquest generation (Josh. 24:31). Indeed, even this commitment is only ever partial, with the book of Joshua as a whole presenting a tension between Israel as a faithful and unfaithful people.[180] As a result, the book of Judges opens with the Lord condemning Israel for their failure to follow His command to fully drive out the Canaanites, and to not make any covenant with the people, but rather, to "tear down their alters" to their gods (Judg. 2:1-2). This covenant failure on the part of Israel is contrasted in with the Lord's own covenant faithfulness, who not only rescued the people from Egypt, but also drove out their enemies before them and brought them into the land that He had promised to their ancestors.[181] Because Israel's faithfulness in keeping the demands of the covenant has only been partial, the Lord declares that their victory over the inhabitants of Canaan will only be partial as well, with a remnant remaining in the land to act as a "snare" for the people (Judg. 2:3).

The results of this failure play out throughout the book of Judges, as the people descend into a seemingly endless cycle of sin and oppression following the death of Joshua and the first generation of elders. If Joshua presents a tension between Israel as vassal who is at times faithful and other times unfaithful to their divine suzerain, Judges presents a dramatic shift in balance towards repeated unfaithfulness. Time and time again the author of Judges records that "the

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Ruth, Cornerstone Biblical Commentary ed. Philip W. Comfort, (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), 171. Also Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Joshua*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 557.

[180] As Coleson emphasizes, Joshua's instruction to "put away forever the idols" indicates that, even at this early stage, and in spite of all they had experienced, the people loyalty was at best divided. Coleson, "Joshua," 171.

[181] Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, vol. 6, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 113.

people did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and served the Baals. And they abandoned the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them (Judg. 2:11-12)." Here again one can see the repetition of Israel's "original sin" at Sinai, the worship of idols. Once again, Israel has violated the very heart of the covenant, by worshiping false gods they have "abandoned the Lord," they have failed to demonstrate covenant loyalty to their divine suzerain (Exod. 20:3, Judg. 2:11). Given that the Canaanite god Baal was a god of fertility and agriculture, the temptation for the Israelites, who were new to agriculture, to seek to secure the blessings of a bountiful harvest through the cultic practices of the Canaanites makes sense in a perverse sort of way.[182] The irony, of course, is that Yahweh had already promised to bless the people's harvest if they adhered to the stipulations of the covenant (Deut. 28:3-5). Instead of trusting in the Lord and receiving the divine blessing, however, the people to turn to false gods, and so incur the covenant curse of oppression at the hands of their enemies instead (Deut. 28:25, Judg. 3:8).

Thus begins a centuries long pattern of repeated apostacy that will continue throughout the book of Judges. The book of Judges is structured around a cycle in which the Israelites repeatedly 1) transgress the stipulations of the covenant by worshiping false gods, thereby provoking the Lord to anger 2) undergo the covenant curses in the form of oppression by their enemies, 3) cry out to the Lord for deliverance, 4) receive salvation from the Lord in the form of a deliver/judge, who defeats Israel's enemies and restores the covenant relationship between Yahweh and His people.[183] Each time however, the peace provided by the judges proves to be

[182] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 87-88.

[183] See the conversations on this cycle in Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 8. Also Block, *Judges,* 145-146.

short lived, as "the people of Israel *again* did what was evil in the sight of the Lord (Judg. 4:1 emphasis added)." As Block writes, the author of Judges presents seven instances of rebellion, oppression, and deliverance, a narrative arrangement in which the "sevenfold scheme contributes to the impression of totality in the nation's degeneration and suggests that the author viewed the disasters of this period as literal fulfillments of the covenant curses in Leviticus 26," and by extension, those of Deuteronomy 28 as well.[184]

Moreover, the pattern of repeating apostasy and covenantal transgression in the book of Judges is not only a repeating cycle, but an escalating downward spiral into sin and depravity. As Webb states, each subsequent cycle of Israel's unfaithfulness to their divine suzerain demonstrates a deepening deterioration of Israel's spiritual health as a nation, a spiritual deterioration which is reflected in the judges themselves.[185] This can be seen in particular in the contrast between the first judge, Othniel, who is presented as a morally upright military leader and faithful servant of the Lord, and that of the last judges, Jephthah, whose foolish vow leads him to sacrifice his own daughter, and Samson, who himself constantly transgresses the Lord's covenant as well as his Nazarite vows.[186] Thus, regarding the spiritual state of Israel in the book of Judges, Bartholomew and Goheen write "the cycle of disobedience continues throughout the book, but the level of sin worsens until the circular pattern of disobedience-oppression-repentance-deliverance becomes a downward spiral into chaos. The successive judges become

[184] Block, *Judges*, 145.

[185] Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading*, Vol. 46, Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1987), 30, 175-177.

[186] See the discussion in Andrew T. Abernethy and Greg Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 29. See also Block, *Judges*, 150-151.

more and more flawed; the Israelites embrace debauchery, rape, and murder. At last the nation is divided by civil war."[187]

By the end of the narrative cycle of Judges, then, the sin and depravity of Israel has reached a point at which the primary threat to Israel's continued existence is no longer the Canaanites, but Israel themselves, as the nation descends into a civil war which nearly results in the destruction of an entire tribe (Judg. 20-21). Israel, at this point, then, has utterly failed in their calling as a vassal state. Rather than acting as a "royal priesthood" and "holy nation," faithfully imaging their divine suzerain to the nations, they have instead come to resemble the wicked Canaanites whom they had been commanded to drive from the land, a process Block refers to as the "Canaanization of Israel."[188] At the root of this crisis is the people's abandonment of the covenant, and the rejection of their divine suzerain, leading to a period in which "everyone did what was right in his own eyes (Judg. 21:25)."

It is clear, then, at this point in the story of Israel, that the predictions of Deuteronomy 31:6 and Joshua 24:19 have come to pass. Israel has proven that they are incapable of serving as a faithful vassal state under their own power, and that something greater is required of they are to fulfill their vocation as a royal priesthood to the nations.[189] Moreover, the author of Judges provides an indication of just what this "something" is, by connecting the depravity of Israel in the time of the judges, i.e. "everyone did what was right in his own eyes," to the fact that, "in those days there was no king in Israel (Judg. 21:25)." Given the fourfold repetition of this reference to a lack of kingship in Israel in connection with Israel's sin in those days, Block notes

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[187] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 89.

[188] Block, *Judges,* 57–58.

[189] Ibid., 58.

that many scholars have argued that the book of Judges serves primarily as an apologetic for the institutionalized monarchy, and that, in this view, "the chaos reflected in the narratives demonstrates the need for a centralized royal constitution."[190] However, Block himself rejects such a view as inconsistent with the books supposed anti-monarchical stance, such as expressed in Gideon's assertion that only the Lord is to rule over Israel, as well as the negative assessment of those who "assume the role of kingship" in judges, such as Abimelech and, ironically, Gideon himself (Judg. 8:23).[191] Instead Block suggests that the reference to the lack of a king in Israel is primarily a reference to the people's rejection of Yahweh as their true king, rather than implying the need for a human ruler.[192]

While it is certainly true that Judges presents the people as having broken faith with their divine suzerain, it goes too far to say that Judges, or the DtrH as a whole, is thoroughly anti-monarchical.[193] Not only does Deuteronomy provide instructions for the institution of kingship,

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[190] Block, *Judges,* 57. See, for instance Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges and Ruth: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 7, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1968), 203. Cundall writes that "the book closes with the reflection of the editor that the absence of the strong hand of a king was largely responsible for the disorders of the land in this earlier age. The editor thereby shows his own background to be one of stability and security, conditions which obtained in the major part of David's reign and in the earlier part of Solomon's reign, when, most likely, this portion of Israel's history was completed." See also McKenzie, *Introduction to the Historical Books,* 69. Also Carolyn Pressler, *Joshua, Judges, and Ruth,* ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett, *Westminster Bible Companion* (Louisville, KY; London: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 233.

[191] Block, *Judges,* 59. Gideon, while denying the *title* of king, acts in a manner which suggests he views himself as a king in all but name.

[192] Ibid., 59. Boiling likewise argues that the reference to a lack of king in Israel refers primarily to the peoples repudiation of Yahweh as king, rather than to the need for an institutional human monarchy. See Robert G. Boling, *Judges: Introduction, Translation, and Commentary*, vol. 6A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University, 2008), 258. See also Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 90.

[193] Block himself recognizes this in his more recent work on biblical covenants, in which he discusses the "royal expectation" of numerous passages in the Pentateuch, which indicate that a divinely sanctioned kingship was always part of God's plan for Israel. See Daniel I. Block, *Covenant: The Framework of God's Grand Plan of Redemption* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2021), 303-306. See also Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 264-265 for a discussion on the positive portrayal of the divinely sanctioned Israelite monarchy. Merrill writes "Israelite monarchy, far from being inimical to the Lord's purpose and unforeseen by his people, was at the core of his redemptive and historical purposes."

but the Pentateuch predicts the future arrival of a king who will serve an integral role in the Lord's plan to raise Israel and defeat her enemies (Deut. 17, Num. 24). Additionally the primarily positive portrayal of David in the subsequent books of the DtrH indicate that writer(s) of the DtrH had at least a somewhat positive view on the human institution of kingship.[194] This is not to say, however, that either Judges or the rest of the DtrH presents an unqualified endorsement of the institutional monarchy. Rather, as Abernethy and Goswell emphasize, the type of king envisioned by the author of Judges as the solution to Israel's failure is the type of ruler described in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, which states that this king, who is to be chosen by the Lord, "shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law…and it shall be with him, and he shall read in it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God by keeping all the words of this law and these statutes, and doing them…and that he may not turn aside from the commandment, either to the right hand or to the left."[195] Further, this king is not to acquire for himself excessive horses, wives, or gold, nor is he to elevate himself above his fellow Israelite (Deut. 17:16-20). In other words, Israel's king was not to be like other ANE kings, but was to recognize that he himself was subject to the same covenant stipulations as the nation as a whole. As Abernethy and Goswell writes, "the type of king Judges anticipates as a solution to Israel's mess is one who orients the community around obeying and worshiping YHWH, Israel's

[194] See the discussion on the presentation of David as the paradigmatic Israelite king in Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 56-60.

[195] Ibid., 33. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001), 165. Hamilton likewise argues that the author of Judges presents a human king as the solution to Israel's apostacy, however, he notes that the king envisioned by the author is to be a particular type of ruler, specifically, they are to function primarily as a "guardian of the covenant," rather than simply a warrior or political leader. Similarly, Stone notes that "Kings in Israel were not called to exercise power, create opulent palaces, temples, and capital cities, but to stand as guardians of Yahweh's covenant, upholding the spirit and letter of his moral law." See Lawson G. Stone, "Judges," in *Joshua, Judges, Ruth,* ed. Philip W. Comfort, Vol. 3, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), 485.

King."[196] This king then, was not to exercise royal authority on their own behalf, but rather, they were to be a faithful vassal king through whom the divine suzerain, Yahweh, would exercise authority over His vassal state.

The Kings of Israel and Judah as Unfaithful Vassals in Samuel-Kings

The reality of Israel's kings, however, can hardly be said to match up to this picture of ideal kingship presented in Deuteronomy 17. While it is true that both the Pentateuch and DtrH endorse the establishment of a monarchy in Israel, the people's initial request for a king in the book of Samuel is tainted by their sinful motivation, "to be like the other nations," and to replace Yahweh as the sole recipient of their loyalty.[197] The people's request, then, is not in line with the positive vision of a faithful vassal king prescribed in the Pentateuch, but is instead a twisted desire which ultimately stems from the people's rejection of Yahweh as their divine suzerain.[198] While the Lord grants the people's request, it is hardly surprising, then, that the reign of nation's first monarch, Saul, was an almost unmitigated disaster. As Bergen emphasizes, Saul was, from a secular perspective, i.e. the perspective of Israel's ANE neighbors, an ideal candidate for kingship, popular, regal, and skilled in military matters.[199] Yet, despite some early military success, i.e. 1 Samuel 11, Saul quickly proves himself to be unfit to sit upon the throne of Israel, as his actions are those of an unfaithful vassal to his divine suzerain, repeatedly failing to follow

[196] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 34. See also Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 15, New Studies in Biblical Theology (England; Downers Grove, IL: Apollos; Inter Varsity Press, 2003), 119.

[197] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 55.

[198] See for instance Robert D. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, vol. 7, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 113. As Bergen writes "The more fundamental reason for Israel desiring a king, however, was spiritual: the Israelites had rejected God as their king."

[199] Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 146.

the Lord's commands, and thereby usurping the divine authority that belongs to Yahweh alone, i.e. 1 Samuel 13-15. In doing so Saul has positioned his own kingship in direct opposition to that of Yahweh, resulting in the Lord's rejection of Saul as His appointed vassal, and of His selection of David son of Jesse as His chosen king instead (1 Sam. 13:13-14, 15:26, 16:1-13).

Unlike Saul, David is described as being "a man after God's own heart," and "fully devoted to the Lord his God (1 Sam. 13:14, 1 Kings 15:3)." In other words, David is portrayed, in contrast to Saul, primarily as a faithful vassal king to his divine suzerain, one who rules as a loyal *administrator* of God's earthly kingdom, rather than as an usurper of divine authority. Indeed, David is regularly held up within the DtrH as the paradigmatic "righteous king," as well as the standard against which later kings will be judged.[200] This is not to say, of course, that David was a perfect king, let alone without sin. Indeed, the narrative of Samuel presents David as a deeply flawed individual in multiple instances, particularly in regard to his adultery with Bathsheba, as well as his machinations in having her husband Uriah murdered (2 Sam. 11). Likewise, 2 Samuel 24, records David's sin in initiating a census of the people, over the objection of his military commanders.[201]

In both instances, David's sin, his violation of the Lord's covenant, results in curses upon both himself as well as the nation. As Bergen writes in regard to the Bathsheba affair, "although David repented of the sins he had committed, irreparable damage had been done; the dynastic covenant promises graciously given to David remained, but the Torah blessings resulting from

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[200] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 98.

[201] While it is not altogether clear why David's initiation of the census was a sin, given that the Torah allows for such a census to be taken, it seems likely that the problem was David's motivation in taking the census, i.e. to glorify himself. While it is also possible that the issue was the *manner* in which the census was undertaken, Joab's objection seems to be to the very act of the census itself, as he implores David to reconsider his actions. See the discussion in Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel,* 475-476.

obedience vanished. In their place David began to experience the stern curses of the Torah, including loss of family (cf. Deut. 28:18) and even exile (cf. Deut. 28:64–67)."[202] Likewise, David's initiation of the census result in a three day plague upon the land, one which results in thousands of deaths among the people (2 Sam. 24).

Although the initial impetus for the Lord to incite David to take his census was the sin of the people themselves, it is clear in both of the above cases that the covenant faithfulness, or lack thereof, of Israel's vassal kings is to have a profound impact on the fate of the nation as a whole with disobedience resulting in covenant curses upon the land in the form of famine, civil war, and defeat at the hands of Israel's enemies (i.e. 2 Sam. 12: 10-12, 21:1, 1 Sam. 28:18-19, 31:1-13).[203]

Just as the sins of Israel's first kings bring covenant curses upon the land, it is the vassal king's sincere and fullhearted repentance that may result in the merciful restoration of the covenant relationship and the resumption of blessings by the divine suzerain. Here David shows himself to be an altogether different type of vassal from Saul, as following both the Bathsheba affair and the taking of the census, David recognizes his sinfulness, repents, and throws himself at the mercy of his divine suzerain, recommitting himself to upholding the stipulations of the Lord's covenant (Ps. 51, 2 Sam 12:13, 22:10-14). The portrait of David as the ideal Israelite king in the Old Testament comes not from sinlessness, but rather, from his complete and heartfelt devotion to worshipping Yahweh alone, as well his sincere commitment to keeping the Lord's covenant as a faithful vassal king.

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[202] Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 361, 379. Bergen links not only the death of David's child with Bathsheba to his sin, but also the subsequent rebellion by David's son Absalom, which forces David to flee Jerusalem and plunges the nation into bloodshed and civil war.

[203] Or to allow Satan to incite, i.e. 1 Chronicles 21:1. For a discussion on the contrast between 2 Samuel 24:1 and 1 Chronicles 21:1, see Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 474-475.

Moreover, it is this fullhearted devotion to the Lord as a faithful vassal which leads to David's desire build a "house," i.e. a temple, for his divine suzerain (2 Sam. 7:1-3).[204] Somewhat surprisingly, however, the Lord rejects this plan, instead declaring that He Himself will instead build a "house," i.e. a dynasty, for his vassal David (2 Sam. 7:11).[205] The Lord thereby initiates a new covenant between Himself and His chosen vassal king, just as He had with His vassal state. Not only does the Lord promise David that he will make his name "great" and provide rest from his enemies, but He also assures David that He will provide him with a royal heir, one who would oversee the construction of the temple that David himself had desired to build (2 Sam. 7:12-13). Moreover, the Lord promises that He will establish the throne and kingdom of David "forever," and that His steadfast love will never depart from David's house as it had from Saul's (1 Sam. 7:16-17). Instead, the Lord declares that the relationship between Himself and His chosen vassal kings will be like that of a father to their son (1 Sam. 7:14). As Block observes, this adoptive father-son language is found in other ANE suzerain-vassal treaties, while also reflecting ANE conceptions of human kings as the "sons" of the national deity.[206] While the Hebrew Bible certainly rejects any claim to actual divinity by Israel's human kings, it is clear from passages such as Psalm 2 that Scripture presents David and his descendants as having been "adopted" by Yahweh, thereby enjoying a particularly intimate relationship with the Lord, one which goes far beyond that of human suzerains and their vassals.[207]

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[204] Block, *Covenant,* 310-317.

[205] Ibid., 314.

[206] Ibid., 315.

[207] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 62. See also Heiser, *The Unseen Realm,* 246–247.

As with the national covenant that the Lord made with Israel, the Davidic Covenant is in one sense unconditional, in that the Lord promises that He will establish David's throne "forever," and that He will never withdraw His love from David's house, even if future Davidic kings fail to fulfill their covenant obligations as faithful vassals by obeying the commands of the Mosaic Covenant.[208] As the same time, however, there is another sense in which the Davidic Covenant *is* conditional, in that, as Block writes, "these commitments continue objectively irrespective of the responses of the vassal. However, access to the benefactions of the covenant was always dependent on upon the vassal's fidelity to YHWH."[209] Just as with Israel itself, faithful vassal kings would bring blessings upon both themselves and the nation, while faithless vassals would bring calamity and covenant curses.

Perhaps nowhere is this contrast more clearly illustrated than with David's own son, Solomon. Initially, Solomon is portrayed in many ways as an even "greater David," one who not only builds a temple for the Lord, but who is blessed with wisdom, influence, territory, and wealth that all eclipsed that of his father.[210] Additionally, Solomon himself can initially be seen as leading the way for Israel in their vocation as a "priestly and holy nation," as his wisdom becomes known throughout the world, so that even foreign rulers who visit his court declare the glory of Yahweh (1 Kgs 10:6-9). As a result, the peace, prosperity, and international influence that characterize the early days of Solomon's reign can be seen as the clear manifestation of the Lord's covenant blessings on Israel found in Deuteronomy 28, to the extent that Solomon

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[208] Block, *Covenant,* 316.

[209] Ibid., 316. See also Abernethy and Greg Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 72. Abernethy and Goswell write "what is striking here is how the Davidic Covenant comes to be viewed through the conditional lens of the Sinai covenant. The longevity of the Davidic dynasty depends on whether Solomon and subsequent kings obey the law of Moses."

[210] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 73.

himself declares that "the LORD…has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant (1 Kings 8:56)."

In spite of all these blessings, however, and in spite of his father David's warning that he must "keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn," Solomon will ultimately prove himself to be an unfaithful vassal king (1 Kings 2:3). Not only does he violate the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 17, which state that Israel's kings are not to acquire for themselves great riches or many wives, but he actually begins to *worship* the foreign gods of the women he married, even going so far as to build "high places" where offerings can be made to them (1 Kings 11).[211] Solomon, then, has fully violated the terms of the Mosaic Covenant. Through his divided loyalty to Yahweh and the worship other gods, he has actively rebelled against his divine suzerain. Unlike David, "his heart was not fully true to the Lord his God (1 Kings 11:4)." As a result, the covenant blessings that characterized the start of his reign quickly give way to covenantal curses, as the Lord declares that, after Solomon's death, Israel will be broken in two, with ten of the twelve tribes being torn away from Solomon's son and given to another (1 Kings 11:9-13). While the Lord's promise that He will never withdraw His love from David's house as He did from Saul's means that David's descendants will continue to rule over two of the tribes of Israel, as recounted in 1 Kings 11:13, it is clear at this point in the narrative just how seriously the Lord takes covenant violations on the part of His chosen vassal kings; nothing short of complete and undivided loyalty to their divine suzerain is acceptable.

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[211] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, 73.

As with Israel itself, then, the greatest threat to Israel's kings is the sin of idolatry, as the worship of foreign gods breaks the suzerain-vassal covenant at its most fundamental level. Therefore, it is unsurprising that idolatry vs faithfulness to Yahweh becomes the primary means by which the Dtr evaluates the "evil" or "righteousness" of Israel and Judah's subsequent kings post-Solomon.[212] In the case of the northern ten tribes of Israel, it is notable that not one of the nineteen kings is given a positive evaluation by the Dtr, that is, not a single one is said to have done what was "right" in the sight of the Lord, but rather, every single evaluation of the northern kings declares that "he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord," particularly in regards to the worship of idols.[213] This deep-seated sin is one which began with the northern kingdoms very first king, Jeroboam. Despite the fact that the Lord had promised to build a dynasty for Jeroboam like He had for David, should Jeroboam prove himself a faithful vassal over Israel, the new king almost immediately decides to reenact Israel's "original sin," building two golden calves for the people to worship, and declaring that these idols are "your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt (1 Kings 11:37-38, 12:27-28)." Not only does Jeroboam betray his divine suzerain, then, but he actively leads and encourages the people in doing so as well. This act of idolatry and rebellion sets the course for the northern kingdoms future, as each of the subsequent kings continues to "walk in the way of Jeroboam," and to do "what was evil in the sight of the Lord (i.e. 1 Kgs 15:26, 34 16:25, 16:30)."[214] The history of the northern kingdom, then, is that of an unfaithful vassal state, one ruled over by a long succession of unfaithful vassal kings. Despite the warning of the both the prophets and the Law, Israel and her kings have time

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[212] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 74. See also, House, *1, 2 Kings,* 74.

[213] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament,* 74.

[214] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 106.

and time again broken their covenant with their divine suzerain, with the result being that "curse after Deuteronomic curse is experienced by the nation," ultimately resulting in destruction and exile at the hands of the Assyrians in 722 BC.[215]

The southern kingdom of Judah, meanwhile, fares somewhat better, though their fate will ultimately be the same as that of their northern neighbors, faithlessness leading to judgement and exile; this time at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC.[216] Despite continuing to be ruled over by the house of David, eleven of the nineteen southern kings engage in the same type of evil and idolatry as their northern counterparts, with only eight kings being said to have done what was "right in the eyes of the Lord" by exhibiting exclusive allegiance to Yahweh alone, and even this positive assessment tends to be somewhat qualified by the Dtr.[217] For instance, six of the eight "good" kings, while *themselves* displaying exclusive covenant loyalty to their divine suzerain and rejecting the worship of idols, are condemned by the author for having failed to remove the "high places" from Judah, thereby allowing the people to continue to engage in covenant violations through idolatry and improper worship.[218] In failing to institute religious reform and restoration among the covenant community, these kings thereby failed in regard to their vocational obligations as vassals of Yahweh.

Two kings, however, Hezekiah and Josiah, are praised by the Dtr as having undertaken the types of religious reforms that even the previous "good" kings had failed to implement. Hezekiah, for instance, not only removes idols from the land and tears down the high places, but

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[215] Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 119. Paul R. House, *1, 2 Kings*, vol. 8, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 317–318.

[216] House, *1, 2 Kings*, 356.

[217] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, 77.

[218] House, *1, 2 Kings*, 356. See also William H. Barnes, *1-2 Kings*, vol. 4b, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, ed. Philip W. Comfort (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2012), 16.

he even destroys the bronze serpent crafted by Moses, which the people had evidently begun to worship as an idol (2 Kings 18:4). Because of this, the author of Kings declares that Hezekiah "trusted in the Lord, the God of Israel…he held fast to the Lord. He did not depart from following him, but kept the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses. And the Lord was with him; wherever he went out, he prospered" (2 Kings 18:5-7). Hezekiah, like David, was, in other words, primarily a faithful vassal, and as a result, he and Judah received the covenant blessings promised in both the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants. This can be most plainly seen in the 2 Kings 18:13-19:37, which recounts how the king of Assyria sent their army to conquer Judah and Jerusalem, surrounding the city and threatening Hezekiah and the people with destruction. Unlike the northern kingdom of Israel, however, Judah is not be destroyed by the Assyrians, as the Lord responds to Hezekiah's prayer for deliverance by sending His angel to strike down 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night (2 Kings 19:15-19, 35). Once again, Yahweh has shown Himself to be a faithful divine suzerain to His chosen vassals, even rescuing them from the hands of their enemies.

Unfortunately, the end of Hezekiah's reign is marred somewhat by his foolish decision to put on a display of wealth for a group of Babylonian envoys, a group who had come to inquire about a miraculous astronomical sign that had been performed by the Lord (2 Kings 20:12-19, 2 Chr 32:31).[219] While the author of kings remains rather ambiguous regarding the exact nature of Hezekiah's error in this matter, the author of Chronicles explicitly states that pride had taken root in Hezekiah's heart during this time (2 Chron. 32:25). It is likely, then, that Hezekiah's sin was in putting on a boastful display of his own wealth and power for a group of foreign dignitaries,

[219] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture*, 107.

rather than glorifying the Lord as a faithful vassal would.[220] While Hezekiah will later repent of his pridefulness, his actions here prompt the Lord to declare an oracle of future judgement through the prophet Isaiah, declaring that Jerusalem will one day fall at the hands of Babylon, with all the wealth that Hezekiah is so proud of being carried off by Judah's enemies (2 Kings 20:17-18).

Even more so than Hezekiah, Abernethy and Goswell emphasize that the author of Kings holds up Josiah as the ideal of faithful kingship, the epitome of what a faithful vassal should be.[221] Not only is Josiah presented as wholly faithful to the Lord and His covenant, but he is also recorded as having engaged in sweeping religious reforms on a scale never before seen in Israel, destroying both idols and the high places, casting out the sorcerer and necromancers, restoring the temple, and reinstating the Passover, "so that he might establish the words of the law" in Judah (2 Kings 22:1-23:24). Indeed, the author of Kings writes of Josiah that "before him there was no king like him, who turned to the Lord with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him (2 Kings 23:25)."

It may seem somewhat surprising, then, given the wholly positive assessment of Josiah found in Kings, that the subsequent verses declare that the Lord's judgement upon Judah has not been averted by Josiah's faithfulness, nor by his sweeping reforms among the people (2 Kings 23:26-27). [222] Judah will still go into exile at the hands of Babylon for their apostacy, and

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[220] See, for instance, the discussion in Martin J. Selman, *2 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 535–536.

[221] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, 78.

[222] The author of Chronicles provides a somewhat alternative perspective to the author of Kings at a number of points. See, for instance Martin J. Selman, *1 Chronicles: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 10, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994), 62. Particularly important is the author of Chronicles' assessment regarding the various kings of Judah. While the author of Kings provides

Josiah's intervention has only delayed the inevitable judgement a while longer (2 Kings 22:16-20). For Bartholomew and Goheen, this is evidence that Josiah's faithfulness and reforms are simply "too little, too late," and not fully embraced by the people of Judah.[223] In one sense, this is certainly true, in that Judah's unfaithfulness and exile have long been prophesied, and there is nothing that Josiah can do to avert this (2 Kings 22:16-20, 20:16-18, Isa. 6:9-13, Deut. 31:16-18). In a practical sense, however, it is Josiah's untimely death which ultimately serves to seal the nation's fate, in that, as Selman writes, "Josiah's passing removed the last obstacle to the coming catastrophe."[224] In spite of the king's best efforts and sincere faithfulness to Yahweh, his reforms fail to outlive him, and the nation slides back in apostacy.[225] The remainder of Kings records a rapid succession of wicked kings, faithless vassals whose covenant violations culminate in the long predicted destruction of Jerusalem and the peoples' exile to Babylon in 587 BC.[226]

Two important considerations warrant discussion here. First, while the author of Kings provides no theological commentary on the reason for Josiah's untimely death, the author of Chronicles states that he died as a direct result of his failure to "listen to the words of Neco *from*

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assessments of each that are primarily positive or negative, i.e. "righteous" or "wicked," the author of Chronicles tends to provide a significantly more nuanced assessment. Not only does the author of Chronicles include a number of accounts not found in Kings regarding the repentance of "wicked" kings, but they also include a greater emphasis on the failings of the "good" kings, as well. As Selman notes "The examples of Israel's infidelity and rejection of God are repeated so often that it seems nothing can deflect God's punishment. Each generation is implicated, even those of the so-called good kings." This is particularly important in the case of Josiah, whose failure to avert the exile is not only linked to an act of sin leading to his death, but whose death and failure demonstrates the fundamental insufficiency of human kingship as an ultimate solution for God's people.

[223] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 107-108.

[224] Selman, *2 Chronicles,* 564.

[225] Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty,* 153.

[226] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 108.

the mouth of God (2 Chron. 35:22, emphasis added)."[227] Had Josiah heeded the Lord's warning through Neco, or at the very least sought the Lord's will prior to going into battle, he would not have met his untimely fate, a fate which served as the final catalyst for the Lord's judgement upon the southern kingdom.[228]

This leads to the second, related consideration. Josiah's inability to save Judah was rooted in the fact that, in spite of all his faithfulness and love for the Lord, he was still subject to the same curse of sin and death as his subjects, and indeed, his death was a direct result of his sin. Ultimately, this has been the problem for all of the kings of Israel and Judah, beginning with Saul and even with David, the "man after Gods own heart" (1 Sam. 13:14). Even a king who truly loves the Lord "with all his heart," as David and Josiah did, can never amount to more than a partially and imperfectly faithful vassal, as sin renders human beings incapable of ever fully and perfectly keeping the commands of the Lord's covenant, a fact demonstrated time and time again by both Israel and her kings.

As such, if the Lord is to fulfill His promises, to Abraham, to Israel, and to David, then something, or someone, greater than even Josiah will be required; a faithful vassal who will not only exhibit exclusive allegiance to Yahweh alone as divine suzerain, but who will also *perfectly* keep the demands of the Lord's covenant. This naturally raises a question in the mind of the biblical reader, of what sort of person could ever be *greater* than Josiah, and what sort of vassal king could ever be *more* faithful to their divine suzerain? After all, if the hope for Israel, and the

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[227] See Mark J. Boda, *1-2 Chronicles*, vol. 5, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2010), 420. Boda not only notes the explicit statements of the Chronicler regarding Josiah's failure to heed a legitimate prophetic warning from the Lord, but also notes the parallels between Josiah's death and that of the wicked king Ahab as evidence of a loss of the Lord's favor by Josiah on account of his sin.

[228] J. A. Thompson, *1, 2 Chronicles*, vol. 9, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 385.

world, rests in the hands of a future human vassal king, one who will exhibit *perfect* covenant faithfulness to Yahweh, then the nation's sordid history offers little in the way of hope.

Nonetheless, the Lord has promised to bless all nations through the seed of Abraham, He has promised His people a return from exile and future restoration in the Promised Land, and He has promised David that He will establish his throne and his house forever (Gen. 12:3, Deut. 30:3-5, 2 Sam. 7:16). Moreover, because these promises are not based in the ability of faithless vassals to keep the commands of the covenant, but rather, in the mercy and faithfulness of the divine suzerain, there is still hope for Israel and the world, though what shape this hope will take remains to be seen at this point in the biblical narrative. One thing is clear, however. Just as the Lord will ultimately accomplish His purpose for the world through Israel, His vassal state, in spite of their inability to actually keep the demands of His covenant, He will likewise ultimately accomplish His purpose for Israel through the line of David, again in spite of the failure of past Davidic kings to fulfill their role as faithful vassals. This reality, rooted in the Lord's faithfulness to keeping His promises to His chosen people, provides the framework for the messianic expectation of the latter prophets, whose vision of redemption for Israel and the world, through the raising of a future Davidic king, a perfectly faithful vassal, will be the subject of the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 4: FAITHLESS SHEPHERDS AND A RIGHTEOUS BRANCH: HOPE FOR A FAITHFULL VASSAL IN THE LATTER PROPHETS

The destruction of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians in 587 BC, an event which follows the earlier destruction of the Northern Kingdom at the hands of Assyria in 722 BC, marks a dramatic turning point in the story of God's chosen people.[229] Here at last the total failure of the people and their kings to uphold the stipulations of the Lord's covenant results in the full force of the covenantal curses being poured out upon the nation, curses which, in accordance with the predictions of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, take the form of death and exile from the land.[230] To the casual observer, such a cataclysmic event might at first glance appear to herald the end of God's plan for the world through Israel. After all, both the people and their kings have utterly broken faith with their divine suzerain, there is no Davidic vassal king on the throne, and the population has gone into exile, a type of "reverse exodus" that brings a (temporary) end to Israel and Judah as national entities.[231]

However, such an outcome should hardly be seen as surprising, since, the nation's failure is one which was prophetically predicted through Moses from the very beginning, as recorded in Deuteronomy 30:1 and 31:16-18, and which was prophetically confirmed time and time again to the prophets of Yahweh throughout the nation's history, i.e. 2 Kings 20:17-18, 23:26-27, Isaiah 6:9-13. In other words, Israel's failure to fulfill their role as a priestly vassal-state was never in doubt, and the nation's history has always moved towards the present moment of covenant failure and exile.

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[229] See Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 108. Also Block, *Covenant,* 275.

[230] Block, *Covenant,* 275.

[231] i.e. Hosea 11:5, which, as Garret notes, describes Israel's exile at the hands of Assyria as an event in which "the exodus will be undone and Israel will return to its former condition of slavery but that this time the captivity will not be in Egypt but in Assyria." See Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 225, 229.

In spite of such failure, however, and in spite of the magnitude of the crisis facing the nation of Israel, hope remains for the future. As Block writes, "contrary to common opinion, the devastation of the land and the exile of the population did not signal the end of God's covenant with his people."[232] Rather, just as Israel's covenantal failure and exile is consistently prophesied from the very beginning of the nation's existence, so too is the hope of future rescue and restoration for God's people post-exile, a "second exodus," in which Yahweh will act to bring His people back into covenant relations with Himself (Deut. 30:1-10).[233] It is this promise of future restoration which will provide the framework for the hope found in the message of the latter prophets, a hope which will ultimately center around a future Davidic king, one who will act as the faithful vassal that Adam, Israel, and all her previous kings failed to be.

Indeed, it will be argued that Deuteronomy 28-30 provides the broad framework for the message of the latter prophets as a whole, so that the prophetic writers "fill in the details" of what was already present within the Pentateuch.[234] As Robertson writes, Jewish rabbinic tradition maintains that "Moses had already spoken all the words of the prophets and all that was prophesied afterwards comes from the prophecy of Moses," and that "neither have [the prophets] diminished anything nor have they added anything to what is written in the Torah."[235] While such statements are rather hyperbolic, both the role and the message of the prophets were indeed

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[232] Block, *Covenant*, 275.

[233]Hosea, having presented the exile as a type of reverse-exodus, with Assyria cast in the role of Egypt, then presents promise of future restoration and the peoples return as a "second Exodus" event in verses 10-11. Garrett, *Hosea*, 299. Likewise, Patterson and Andrew highlight the way in which references to the Exodus serves as a common motif in scripture to refer to God's mighty works on behalf of Israel, particularly in regard to the promise of future restoration post-exile. See Richard D. Patterson and Andrew E. Hill, *Minor Prophets, Hosea–Malachi*, vol. 10, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2008), 69.

[234] See, for instance, the discussion in O. Palmer. Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 78-79.

[235] Ibid., 78.

firmly rooted in the Mosaic Covenant, so much so that, as John Calvin would argue, "the prophets utter nothing but what is connected with the law," in that they expound upon the laws commands for later generations of Israelites, proclaim covenant curses on the nation for their disobedience, and provide hope for those facing the reality of exile.[236]

It is in this role, as expounders, enforcers, and mediators of the Lord's covenant with Israel, that the prophets provide a divinely inspired commentary on the history of Israel, one which not only provides an explanation for the events of the Exile(s), but which also points forward to the divine solution to Israel's failure.[237] This solution, which is again linked to the promise of post-exilic restoration in Deuteronomy 30, is further expanded upon throughout the latter prophets, where it is firmly tied to the restoration of the Davidic monarchy and the rule of a future Davidic king. Moreover, this future Davidic king is presented within the latter prophets as a perfectly faithful vassal, one who surpasses all previous kings in terms of covenant righteousness, and it is through this figure that God will ultimately fulfil His purpose for not only Israel, but for the whole world.

The purpose of the present chapter, then, is to examine the way in which the latter prophets, while maintaining their distinct voices, present a coherent message of hope for the future of God's people post-Exile, one which is grounded in the Lord's continuing faithfulness to His covenant promises, and which is centered around the promise of a faithful vassal to lead the Lord's people in fulfilling their role as priestly vassal state. This examination will begin with a brief discussion of the role of the prophets in the life and religion of ancient Israel, in particular,

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[236] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 79.

[237] See Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 159. Dempster, following the Jewish organization of the OT books, writes "from a literary point of view the largely poetic content between the ending of Kings and the beginning of Daniel serves as commentary and reflection on the storyline. The commentary begins with Jeremiah, who predicted the Exile, and ends with Lamentations, which resumes the theme of exile and the judgement of 587BC before the narrative storyline is taken up again.

their role as mediators of the Mosaic Covenant. This in turn will lead to an examination of the message of the prophets, with a particular focus on the prophets' condemnation of the nation in general, and her leaders in particular, for their ongoing violations of the Lord's covenant. This discussion will demonstrate that both the nation and her kings are presented throughout the latter prophets as faithless vassals, whose disloyalty to their divine suzerain serves as the root cause of the nation's exile. At the same time, however, it will be demonstrated that the message of the latter prophets is primarily one of hope for God's people, a hope rooted in the promise of restoration not only for the nation, but for the house of David as well, through the enthronement of future Davidic king. Finally, the identity and description of this future king will be examined, demonstrating that this eschatological figure is portrayed primarily, and in contrast to Israel's past leaders, as a truly faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, one whose perfect covenant righteousness serves as the fulfillment of Israel's royal-priestly vocation.

Covenant Mediators: The Role of the Prophets in Ancient Israel and Judah

For many modern readers, the role of the biblical prophets is seen as primarily involving the prediction of future events.[238] While such predictions, known as "foretelling," are certainly prevalent throughout the latter prophets, and include predictions of both the near, distant, and eschatological future, i.e. Isaiah 7:16, 39:6, and 65:17 respectively, such predictions are not the sole, or even primary, function of the prophetic office.[239] Rather, the role of the prophets in ancient Israel primary revolved not around "foretelling," but around "forthtelling," that is, prophetic preaching on events current to the prophets immediate audience and historical

[238] Jack R. Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets: An Introduction* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2010), 32. See also, Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 12.

[239] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 12. Also Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 32. See also Heiser, *The Unseen Realm*, 232.

context.[240] As Reddit writes, "much of their [the prophets] recorded proclamations, indeed by far the majority, dealt with explanations of past and present events and exhortations for the people to live righteously, priests to teach properly, and rulers and judges to administer justice fairly."[241] Likewise, Robertson emphasizes that Moses, the Old Testament prophet par excellence, rarely engaged in foretelling.[242] Rather, the primary role of Moses, as a prophet of the Lord, was the communication of divine revelation regarding God's Law to the people of Israel.[243] Likewise, the primary role of the latter prophets was the communication of God's will, received by divine revelation, to the Lord's people. While this often involved the prediction of future events, such instances of foretelling are far outnumbered in the prophetic writings by instances of forthtelling.[244] However, such forthtelling should not be seen as "less inspired" than the act of foretelling the future, as both involve the reception and communication of divine revelation.[245] The role of the prophets then, rooted in the covenant relationship between Yahweh and Israel, was to act as the messengers of the divine suzerain to His vassals, revealing His will and addressing violations of the Mosaic Covenant on the part of the people.[246] The message of the prophets, as recorded in Scripture, thereby provides the reader with a divinely inspired

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[240] Paul L. Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), xiii. See also William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, Third Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 462.

[241] Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, xiii.

[242] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 12. There are of course, significant exceptions to this, such as the prediction of national covenantal failure, exile and subsequent restoration that is central to Moses speeches in Deuteronomy, and which is foundational to the message of the latter prophets.

[243] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 12.

[244] Klein, Blomberg and Hubbard, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 462.

[245] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 12.

[246] Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets*, 32.

commentary on the events of Israel's history, one which, profoundly shaped the New Testament writers understanding of the story of Israel, as well as their own place in it.

The phenomenon of prophetism was not wholly unique to ancient Israel and Judah, as a number of Ancient Near Eastern cultures possessed individuals with similar functions, "prophets" who claimed to receive messages and speak on behalf of the gods.[247] Often, these individuals would deliver a message of warning, instruction or blessing to the king regarding national and cultic affairs, similar to the role of biblical prophets such as Samuel and Nathan (1 Sam. 15, 2 Sam. 11-12).[248] Likewise, a number of Ancient Near Eastern cultures are known to have composed and compiled written collections of their prophets' proclamations, such as those found in the Mari tablets in Mesopotamia, which address the king regarding various political and military matters.[249]

Despite these and other similarities, however, Israelite prophecy differed from that of its ANE neighbors in several key respects. First, while a number of ANE cultures kept written records of prophetic activity, and while some of the recorded oracles resemble the writings of the biblical prophets to a degree, no other ANE culture produced prophetic collections with anywhere the scope or literary sophistication of those produced in ancient Israel and found in the

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[247] See, for instance the discussion in Matthews, Chavalas, and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, Prophetic Literature* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000). See also John W. Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 368-373.

[248] Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 2. See also Matthews, Chavalas and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, Prophetic Literature.*

[249] Matthews, Chavalas and Walton, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament, Prophetic Literature.* See also Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 371. Hilber notes that "there are approximately 150 extant texts containing prophetic speech or describing prophetism from Ur, Uruk, Kish, Mari, Babylon, Eshnunna, Biblos, Hatti, Ugarit, Emar, Assyria, Amman, Hamath, Deir Alla, and Egypt. Not only is there wide geographical representation but also the dates for these texts range from the late third millennium to the third century BCE."

biblical canon.[250] Second, and more significantly, while the prophets of Israel's neighbors believed in and claimed to speak for many gods, the biblical prophets are clear that Yahweh alone is God, and it is from Him alone that they receive their commission and message.[251] This loyalty to Yahweh alone as God and divine suzerain is particularly apparent in the condemnation of the people for worshiping other gods that is found throughout the message of the prophets, a key aspect of Israelite prophecy not found among Israel's polytheistic neighbors (i.e. Jer. 2:11).[252]

Third, while the prophets of Israel and Judah engaged in certain practices that are similar to that of their ANE neighbors, such as receiving visions, engaging in symbolic actions, and proclaiming oracles of judgement, there are a number of prophetic practices common to the ANE which are explicitly forbidden for prophets of Yahweh. In particular, practices designed to forecast the future or to inquire of the dead, other gods, or even Yahweh Himself, practices known as "technical divination," were commonly practiced by other ANE cultures, but were prohibited by the terms of the Mosaic Law (Deut. 18:10-12).[253] Unlike Israel's neighbors, God's people were not to seek divine knowledge on their own terms, rather, Yahweh Himself would select and commission prophets for His service.[254]

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[250] Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 374.

[251] Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 3.

[252] Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 372.

[253] Ibid., 368.

[254] One possible exception to this general prohibition on divination is the use of the Urim and Thummim as a form of casting lots to seek the will of Yahweh. See John W. Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 370. However, as Stuart writes, this practice only had "validity in certain limited contexts and only as God chose to guide the hand of the high priest in response to faithful prayer from an obedient people." See Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 613. Moreover, Yahweh might Himself choose not to answer through the Urim and Thummim if these requirements were not met, such as His refusal to answer Saul in 2 Samuel 28:6. Therefore, the Urim and Thummim were not an unfaithful

Fourth, and of particular significance for the present chapter, is a number of key differences between the messages and key themes of Israel's prophets and those of their pagan neighbors. Specifically, while there is some concern with issues of societal justice in the prophetic literature of other ANE cultures, the central and sustained focus on justice and morality in the biblical prophets sets the biblical writers apart from their pagan counterparts.[255] Similarly, while pagan ANE prophets would at times issue oracles of condemnation towards ANE kings, these were always for cultic, rather than moral, infractions.[256] The prophets of Yahweh, by contrast, regularly held both the people and kings of Judah and Israel accountable for their sin and violations of the Lord's covenant, even when doing so placed their lives in danger, i.e. 1 Kings 19:1-3 and Jeremiah 26.[257]

Covenant Violations and Faithless Vassals in the Latter Prophets

Israel and Judah as Faithless Vassal States in the Latter Prophets

A particularly central aspect of the prophetic vocation in ancient Israel and Judah was the condemnation of covenant violations on the part of the nation. Indeed, the insistence that Yahweh demands moral behavior from His subjects is a central theme throughout the latter prophets, as is the demand for societal justice.[258] This focus on morality and societal justice,

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means of attempting to force the Lord to divulge divine knowledge, but rather, a means by which the Lord might chose to reveal His will to a faithful people.

[255] Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 372.

[256] Ibid.

[257] Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 4. Also Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 372.

[258] Redditt, *Introduction to the Prophets*, 4.

particularly the need for God's people to care for the outcasts of society, such as widows and orphans, is a unique aspect not only of biblical prophecy, but of the biblical conception of God Himself.[259] While the prophets of Israel's pagan neighbors would at times condemn and declare judgement against the king or nation for causing offense to a god or gods, these infractions were exclusively in regard to cultic matters, such as failure to offer the proper sacrifices.[260] Indeed, the very concept of morality and ethics being a concern, let alone a command, of the gods was a foreign concept to Israel's polytheistic neighbors, where even the desires and demands of various gods were seen as varied and conflicting.[261] Moreover, a common feature of pagan ANE religions was an inability for humanity to relate to, or even understand the will of the gods.[262] This is reflected, for instance, in ANE writings such as the "prayer to every god," in which the speaker, facing some form of hardship, and having perceived it as divine judgement, offers a prayer to an unknown god or goddess, seeking forgiveness for some unknown, and perhaps ultimately unknowable, offense.[263] The contrast between the common conception of deity in the ANE and the close personal relationship between Yahweh and His people, then, is both stark and fundamental to the message of the prophets.

Only among the people of Israel does one find a consistent moral code and ethical expectations based in the personal and holy nature of God Himself (Lev. 19:2).[264] As Block

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[259] Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths,* 88-89.

[260] Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 372.

[261] Oswalt, *The Bible among the Myths,* 89.

[262] Block, *Covenant,* 201.

[263] Block, *Covenant,* 201-202.

[264] As Rooker writes, "every statement about the moral nature of God in the Bible carries the implied demand that the believer exhibit this same quality in daily living. It is thus not possible to divorce ethics and theology, since human morality is justified by the nature of God." Rooker, *Leviticus,* 252.

writes "through his (Yahweh's) revelation of the covenant stipulations at Sinai, he gave his people a clear view of the boundaries of acceptable ethical and cultic behavior so that the Israelites were without excuse."[265] Unlike their ANE neighbors, then, the Israelites could not claim ignorance regarding the will of Yahweh, since His expectations for His people were clearly spelled out and based in His own moral nature as revealed in the Mosaic Law. Therefore, the condemnations of the prophets toward the people of Israel and Judah are neither random nor surprising, since they are based in the nation's founding covenantal document, which the people and their leaders have failed to uphold time and time again (Jer. 11:10).

It is to the Mosaic Law, then, the latter prophets consistently refer when judging the actions of the nation and its leaders, both in regard to the people's general violation of the covenant, as well as to specific violations of various covenantal stipulations.[266] In regard to the latter, the people are condemned throughout the latter prophets as idolatrous, i.e. Jeremiah 2:11 and 2:20, as taking the Lord's name in vain, i.e. Isaiah 29:13, as having profaned the sabbath, i.e. Ezekiel 20:13-24, as being disobedient to parents, i.e. Ezekiel 22:7, as shedding innocent blood, i.e. Isaiah 59:7, as adulterous, i.e. Hosea 4:2, as stealing from the poor and needy, i.e. Habakkuk 2:6, as liars, i.e. Isaiah 59:3, and as covetous, i.e. Jeremiah 6:13. Even within just this brief sampling of the prophetic corpus, then, one can see that the people of Israel and Judah are condemned as having broken every single commandment found in the Decalogue.[267] While the peoples covenant violations certainly go far beyond these specific examples, their breaking of these particular commandments is significant in that the Decalogue serves as a foundation for the

[265] Block, *Covenant,* 202-203.

[266] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets,* 93.

[267]For an alternate list and discussion of prophetic passages referring to the peoples transgression of the Decalogue, see Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 99-110.

remainder of the Mosaic Law.[268] In their violation of these commands, then, the people have broken the very heart of their covenant with the Lord.

Behind the people's transgressions of the specific stipulations of the Mosaic Law, moreover, is an underlying general lack of fidelity to the covenant relationship between the nation and Yahweh, one leading to an ongoing posture of rebellion towards their divine suzerain. Time and time again throughout the latter prophets, the people are condemned for their lack of faithfulness to the Lord. Through prophet Jeremiah, for instance, The Lord employs the metaphor of an adulterous wife to describe the spiritual posture of both Israel and Judah, saying "Have you seen what she did, that faithless one, Israel, how she went up on every high hill and under every green tree, and there played the whore…for all the adulteries of that faithless one, Israel, I had sent her away with a decree of divorce. Yet her treacherous sister Judah did not fear, but she too went and played the whore. Because she took her whoredom lightly, she polluted the land, committing adultery with stone and tree" (Jer. 3:6, 8-9). This metaphor of the people as an unfaithful wife, common in the prophetic corpus, serves to underline both the severity and nature of the peoples' transgression. Just as an adulterous wife has broken a sacred covenant with her husband, so the peoples' "whoring," which may be understood both as a reference to their ongoing idolatry as well as to more literal rampant sexual immorality, has broken the sacred covenant between the nation and Yahweh.[269] Additionally, Jeremiah stresses that this broken covenantal relationship is not one which is easily mended, comparing the situation to one in

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[268] Stuart, for instance, compares the Decalogue to a national charter or constitution. See Stuart, *Exodus*, 157.

[269] F. B. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, vol. 16, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1993), 70–71. See also Hetty Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 21, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* ed. David G. Firth (Nottingham, England: InterVarsity, 2013), 85–86. Also R[oland] K[enneth] Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 21, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 67.

which a wife, having been divorced from her husband, goes and marries another (Jer. 3:1). In such cases, the Mosaic Law forbid her first husband from marrying her once more, even if her second should die or divorce her as well, thereby making reconciliation effectively impossible (Deut. 24:1-4).[270] Given the severity of the situation, then, Huey highlights the unexpectedness of the Lord's subsequent call for the people to return to Him.[271] Ultimately, he concludes that this tension, between the description of the people as profoundly unfaithful, and therefore unable to return to Yahweh, and the subsequent calls for repentance and reconciliation, serves to anticipate the New Covenant theology found in later chapters, in which "repentance was to be enabled by an extraordinary work of divine grace. The Lord was willing to forgive in spite of Judah's faithlessness."[272]

Such reconciliation, however, would require an act of divine intervention in order to change the spiritual disposition of the people. This is because, as the prophets make clear, at the root of the peoples ongoing faithlessness is a problem of the heart. Jeremiah, for instance, declares that, while the people may have the outward sign of the covenant, physical circumcision, they, like the wilderness generation, have not "circumcised their hearts," i.e. they have not adopted an inward posture of reverence and loyalty towards the Lord (Jer. 4:4, Deut. 10:16).[273] Because of this inward disposition, Jeremiah writes, the people are unable to even hear

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[270] Lalleman, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 85. Also Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 67.

[271] Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 71. See also J. A. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 140-141.

[272] Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations,* 71.

[273] Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 72-73. Also Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 79-80. See also Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 203.

his warnings since their ears are "closed" literally translated "uncircumcised," and "the word of the Lord is to them an object of scorn; they take no pleasure in it" (Jer. 6:4).[274]

Likewise, even when the people go through the motions of covenant obedience, the posture of their hearts is so far from true covenant faithfulness that Yahweh is disgusted by their actions. Speaking through the prophet Amos, the Lord declares to Israel that "I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them and the peace offerings of your fattened animals, I will not look upon them. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harps I will not listen" (Amos 5:21-23). While the people put on an outward show of honoring their divine suzerain through extravagant religious displays, the preceding and subsequent verses make clear that they have failed to truly internalize the Law in their hearts, as they continue to oppress the poor and to despise true justice and righteousness (Amos 5:11-12). As Freedman and Anderson write "it is their total life-style—the combination of ruthlessness with religiosity, their values, attitudes, and actions in court and cult—that makes the religion they profess and practice in their rites abhorrent and abominable to God… it is the smugness and self-satisfaction of those who presume to violate the covenant and at the same time act as though nothing were amiss."[275] Page, likewise, emphasizes that the peoples' "worship" is rejected because it lacks "authenticity manifested in a lifestyle of obedience."[276] Unlike the pagan gods of the ANE, then, Yahweh is clear when speaking through His prophets

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[274] Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 98.

[275] Francis I. Andersen and David Noel Freedman, *Amos: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University, 2008), 470-471.

[276] Billy K. Smith, "Amos," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, Vol 19B, *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenon (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 112.

that He expects full obedience to all aspects of the covenant, and not merely to the cultic aspects of the Law. Indeed, the Lord declares through the prophet Hosea that "I desire steadfast loyalty, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6).[277]

While this does not mean that cultic matters where unimportant, either to the prophets or to Yahweh Himself, such concerns were ultimately secondary to a faithfulness which manifests as love for God and others.[278] Likewise, preaching to the southern kingdom of Judah, the prophet Isaiah condemns the people for their meaningless fasting, which is marred by their ongoing faithlessness in their daily lives, and commands them to engage in true "fasting" by caring for the poor and the oppressed.[279]

In no way was this lack of covenant faithfulness on the part of the people limited to any particular generation of Israelites. Rather, the repeated condemnations of the people by both the southern, i.e. Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, and northern, i.e. Amos, Hosea, prophets, across several centuries of the nations' history, demonstrates that the problem was one which was ongoing and pervasive throughout the entire Old Testament narrative. Just as the first generation of Israelites in the wilderness were commanded to "Circumcise…the foreskin of your heart, and be no longer stubborn," the same exhortation is given to the people of Judah through the prophet Jeremiah on the eve of exile more than eight centuries later (Deut. 10:16, Jer. 4:4).

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[277] The Septuagint translation has "mercy" rather than "steadfast loyalty." See Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, vol. 19A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1997), 161.

[278] Garrett, *Hosea*, 161. See also Page, *Amos*, 112. Also Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 112. Jesus would likewise go on to condemn the religious leaders of His own day on these same grounds, saying "you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others" (Matt. 23:23).

[279] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 112. See also Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. 15B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 578–579.

Perhaps no sin, however, is more pervasive and ongoing among the people of Israel than idolatry. Idolatry can, in many ways, be seen as Israel's "original sin," rooted in the golden calf incident at Sinai, during which the Exodus generation violated the very heart of the covenant while still in the process of receiving the Law, and repeated in the actions of Jeroboam, who, as the northern kingdoms first ruler, immediately led the people in violating the first and second commandments of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:3-4, 32:1-8 1 Kings 12:27-28). Similarly, Beale argues that idolatry is not only the original sin of Israel, but of humanity, in that Adam's failure in the garden represents a shift in allegiance "from God to himself and probably also to Satan."[280] It is hardly surprising, then, that idolatry is consistently found at the root of Israel and Judah's failings, or that condemnation of idolatry is such a persistent theme throughout the latter prophets. As Robertson observes, twelve of the fifteen prophetic books make reference to idol worship among the people, with the practice being addressed and condemned approximately two hundred times throughout the prophetic writings.[281] This picture of pervasive idolatry, moreover, has been confirmed by archeological study of both Judah and Israel, which has revealed rampant heterodox religious practice among the people of both kingdoms, whether synchronistic, the "worship" of Yahweh alongside other gods such as Asherah, or outright idolatry, such as seen in the use of household idols.[282] While some scholars have used this physical evidence to suggest

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[280] G[regory] K. Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2018), 133.

[281] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 112

[282] See Amihai Mazar, "Archaeology of the Iron Age II," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 66–67. Also Matthew J. Lynch, "Monotheism in Ancient Israel," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 343–344, 347. Also Brent A. Strawn, "Canaanite/Israelite Iconography," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 172-180.

that Israel experienced a gradual evolution from an early polytheism to a monotheistic worship of Yahweh alone, these conclusions ignore the biblical testimony, particularly that of the prophets, which constantly lament and condemn the widespread apostacy of God's people.[283] Jeremiah, for instance, writes that the people worship idols "on every high hill and under every green tree," and metaphorically compares the peoples propensity for idolatry to the actions of a wild animal in heat (Jer. 2:20, 24).[284]

The role of idolatry in the shattering of the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and His people, then, can hardly be overstated. As a vassal-state, Israel's most fundamental responsibility is to exhibit exclusive covenant loyalty to Yahweh alone as divine suzerain, and to reflect His wisdom to the nations through the internalizing and living out of the Mosaic Law (Exod. 19:5-6).[285] By directing their loyalty towards the false gods of their pagan neighbors, then, the people of Israel and Judah have engaged in nothing short of an act of treason against their divine suzerain.

Moreover, Israel's very ability to reflect the nature of the Lord and serve as His representatives to the nations, that is, to fulfill their vocation as a nation of priests, is directly linked to their faithful worship of Yahweh alone, since, as Beale puts it "what people revere,

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[283] For instance, see Lynch, "Monotheism in Ancient Israel," 340. Ironically, other scholars accuse the prophets of presenting an exaggerated portrait of Israel's wickedness and apostacy. Lunbom, for instance states that prophetic speech "is always lopsided and must not be judged as a balanced presentation on this subject or that," and concurs with Heschel that "that prophets were given to much exaggeration and could be enormously unfair in their judgments." See Lundbom, *The Hebrew Prophets,* 33. Neither of these extremes should be accepted, however, since the archaeological evidence of idolatry among the peoples of Israel and Judah is completely in line with the picture presented by the biblical writers.

[284] Gary E. Yates, "Jeremiah's Message of Judgment and Hope for God's Unfaithful 'Wife,'" *Bibliotheca* Sacra 167, no. 666 (April 2010), 148.

[285] As discussed in regard to Israel's vocation as a priestly vassal-state in chapter 2. See Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus*, vol. 2, The New American Commentary (Nashville: B & H, 2006), 423. See also Heiser, *The Unseen Realm,* 169. Also Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty,* 101.

they resemble, either for ruin or restoration."[286] Faithful worship of Yahweh necessarily involves being conformed to His image, so that said image is reflected through the worshiper, whereas idolatry spiritually distorts that image in humans, so that they instead come to resemble the object of their worship.[287] Israel's idolatry not only damaged their relationship with the divine suzerain, but it also undermined their ability to fulfill the very mission for which they had been created. he latter prophets, like the Deuteronomist, can be seen to present Israel and Judah as a consistently faithless vassal.

The Leaders of Israel and Judah as Faithless Vassals in the Latter Prophets

Central to the nations' descent into apostacy, moreover, is the utter failure of both Israel and Judah's leaders themselves to model and lead the people in covenant faithfulness to Yahweh. Indeed, all of the nineteen kings of the northern kingdom receive a negative assessment from the Deuteronomist, as do eleven of the nineteen southern kings.[288] Moreover, even among those southern kings who receive a somewhat positive assessment from the Deuteronomist, most are condemned for their failure to tear down the "high places."[289] Cultic responsibility, that is, leading the people in proper worship and demonstrating exclusive allegiance to Yahweh alone, is

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[286] Beale, *We Become What We Worship*, 63, 87.

[287] Ibid. Beale, for instance, highlights the ways in which the OT writers describe apostate Israel's spiritual condition in terms reminiscent of the very idols they worship, i.e. "blind", "deaf", and "stiff."

[288] Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, 74.

[289] Ibid.

therefore central to the role of God's chosen vassal-kings, with covenant failure on the part of Israel and Judah's kings deeply impacting the spiritual health of the nation.[290]

While the latter prophets do not contain as sustained a focus on the failings of the nations' leaders as does the Deuteronomistic history, it is clear that the subject of the nations' leadership, and its effects on the people, is a topic of great concern for the messengers of Yahweh, who regularly condemn the kings of both Israel and Judah for failing to fulfill their role as faithful vassals to the divine suzerain. Moreover, this willingness to regularly confront the institutional monarchy is a particular notable feature of the biblical prophets, one which sets them apart from their ANE counterparts.[291] As Hilber observes, nowhere else in the ANE does one find prophets delivering messages of divine judgment to the king at the risk of their own lives, yet this is a regular feature of biblical prophecy.[292] Unlike their pagan counterparts, then, who saw their role as being largely in service to the nations' king, the biblical prophets clearly understand themselves as servants of the divine suzerain, rather than of the human vassals of Israel and Judah.

Given the above considerations, then, it is hardly surprising that references to the institutional monarchy in the latter prophets are largely negative. In the book of Jeremiah, for instance, the Lord condemns the leaders of Judah by comparing them to faithless shepherds, who

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[290] Terence E. Fretheim, *First and Second Kings, Westminster Bible Companion,* ed. Patrick D. Miller and David L. Bartlett (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 5–6. As Fretheim puts it "as kings go so goes the nation," an aphorism that well describes the effects of Israel and Judah's kings upon the spiritual disposition of the nation.

[291] Hilber, "Prophecy, Divination, and Magic in the Ancient near East," 372.

[292] Ibid. Hilber writes "while Mesopotamian prophets on occasion admonished the king, the issue was always for cultic infractions. Only one text reports a serious threat by the deity toward the king, and this from a prophet whose location effectively placed him out of the king's reach. But the Bible reports Israelite prophets confronting royal and cultic authority 'face to face.'"

"destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture" (Jer. 23:1). While the image of a shepherd was commonly employed as a metaphor for kingship in the ANE, here the stark contrast between the proper function of a shepherd and the actions of Judah's leaders serves to highlight the nature of their failure.[293] Rather than guiding and caring for the people, as a shepherd guides and cares for their flock, and rather than teaching them to love and obey the commands of Yahweh, Judah's leaders had instead led the people to their destruction.[294] As Jeremiah writes elsewhere "the shepherds are stupid and do not inquire of the Lord; *therefore* they have not prospered, and all their flock is scattered" (Jer. 10:21, emphasis added).In other words, while the people certainly bear responsibility for their sin as well, it is the nation's leadership who led the charge into apostacy, and, as Harrison writes, "bad leadership is the ultimate attributive cause of exile" in the prophets.[295]

Like Jeremiah, the prophet Ezekiel utilizes the metaphor of faithless shepherds to describe the failure of Judah's kings in leading God's people (Ezek. 34:2-6). Here the kings are accused of having fed themselves rather than the flock, and of failing to have cared for the poor and downtrodden (Ezek. 34:3-4). Instead of ruling righteously, as servants of the divine suzerain, the kings of Judah are accused in verse four of ruling over the people with "force," and "harshness," terms regularly used to denote the oppressive rule of God's people by foreign powers.[296] The result of the shepherd's failure, then, repeated three times in verses five and six,

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[293] Huey, *Jeremiah*, 210. See also Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology* (Kregel Academic, 2008), 51, 54.

[294] Huey, *Jeremiah*, 210. Also Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah*, 333-334.

[295] R. K. Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 21, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1973), 122. See also, Huey, *Jeremiah*, 129.

[296] Moshe Greenberg, *Ezekiel 21–37: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 22A, *Anchor Yale Bible* (New Haven; London: Yale University, 2008), 697–698.

is that the flock has been "scattered over the face of the earth," a term regularly used by Ezekiel to reference the exile (Ezek. 34:5-6).[297] As in Jeremiah, then, the nation's decent into apostacy and subsequent exile is attributed largely to the moral and spiritual failings of the nation's leadership. As Cooper writes, it was "the apostasy of the leadership that proved to be Israel's ruin…they (the kings of Israel and Judah) led the nation to spiritual and political ruin."[298]

Perhaps the harshest prophetic description of the nation's leadership, however, is found in Micah chapter three. In verse one, the rhetorical question posed to Judah's leaders, "is it not for you to know justice?" carries an implied answer of "yes."[299] It is the role of the of the leaders of the nation, and the king in particular, to establish justice in the land, yet Judah's leaders have done precisely the opposite, as they "hate the good and love the evil" (Mic. 3:2-3).[300] Moreover, the Lord condemns the leaders of Israel as bloodthirsty tyrants who, rather than guiding and caring for the "flock" of the nation, instead "tear the skin from off my people and their flesh from off their bones," and who "eat the flesh of my people, and flay their skin from off them, and break their bones in pieces and chop them up like meat in a pot, like flesh in a cauldron" (Mic. 3:3). This vivid and gruesome language paints a graphic picture of Judah's leaders, one which presents them not only as faithless vassals who have failed to uphold the Deuteronomic command to establish justice, but, moreover, as what Waltke refers to as "shepherds turned

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[297] John B. Taylor, *Ezekiel: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 22, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1969), 214–215.

[298] Lamar Eugene Cooper, *Ezekiel*, vol. 17, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 300.

[299] Kenneth L. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, vol. 20, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1999), 74.

[300] Barker, *Micah*, 75. See also Bruce K. Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 26, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 178.

cannibals," who themselves actively exploit, oppress, and even shed the blood of those who are under their care (Deut. 16:18-20, Mic. 3:3, 9-10).[301]

In spite of their wickedness, however, the civil leaders of Judah arrogantly assert that "no disaster shall come upon us," as they mistakenly believe that the presence of the Lord's temple ensures the continuing presence and protection of the Lord Himself (Mic. 3:11).[302] The prophet, however, is quick to dissuade his listeners of such misguided delusions, declaring in verse twelve that, "because of you…Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins." Once more, then, the fate of the nation is clearly linked to a failure in leadership, as every level of Judah's government, civil and religious, has been thoroughly corrupted, comprised of wicked shepherds who abuse and lead their flock astray.[303]

Certainly, far more examples of the prophetic condemnation of Israel and Judah's leaders could be discussed.[304] The above passages, however, serve as paradigmatic examples of a consistent message within the latter prophets, namely, that the rulers of Israel and Judah, like the nation itself, have acted as faithless vassals to the divine suzerain. Moreover, not only have these rebellious vassals violated the terms of the covenant with Yahweh, but, as faithless and unrighteous shepherds, they have led the nation astray as well. As a result, the kings of Israel and Judah, rather than serving as a solution to the evil that was rampant among God's people in the

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[301] Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah,* 178. See also Barker, *Micah,* 75-76. Barker writes "Instead of shepherding them (the people), the civil leaders are pictured as exploiting and oppressing them like animals that are being butchered, cooked, and prepared for eating." See also Daniel C. Timmer, "Micah," in *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2021), 151.

[302] Barker, *Micah,* 81. See also Timmer, "Micah," 159.

[303] Barker, *Micah,* 74. See also Waltke, *Obadiah, Jonah and Micah,* 177-178. Waltke writes that "ultimately the responsibility for justice resided in the king," whose role it was to appoint and oversee the judges of the people. The corruption of the nation then, can be seen to emanate downward from the king, spreading throughout the government and into society at large.

[304] i.e. Jeremiah 21:11, 22:11, Amos 6:5, Hosea 5:1, 5:10, 7:3, Zephaniah 1:8, 3:3.

days when "there was no king in Israel," instead ultimately serve as a catalyst for further wickedness and depravity within the covenant community (Judg. 21:25).

Judgement and Restoration in the Latter Prophets

Divine Judgement and Exile as Covenant Curses in the Latter Prophets

It is this rampant wickedness and depravity, then, as exhibited by the nations' ongoing covenant violations, which will ultimately result in the full force of the Deuteronomistic curses being poured out upon both the northern and southern kingdoms. Time and time again throughout the latter prophets, the Lord warns His wayward vassals of the consequences of continued rebellion, yet time and time again the people refuse to repent.[305] Ultimately, this ongoing rebellion will result in both Israel and Judah being sent into exile as the pinnacle and culmination of the Deuteronomistic curse (Deut. 28:64-68). Prior to this point, however, both nations will experience the gradual escalation of the covenant curses, both as judgement for their present sin as well warning against further apostacy.

The prophet Joel, for instance, points to a recent and unusually severe plague of locusts, one which had destroyed the harvest and depleted the food supply, as evidence of Yahweh's judgement upon the people (Joel 1:4).[306] This particular judgement can be seen to reflect the curses of Deuteronomy 28, which promises that "you shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it" and that "the cricket shall possess all your

[305] i.e. Hosea 11:2, Jeremiah 6:17, Amos 4:6-11

[306] While there is no consensus among scholars regarding the date of composition for the book of Joel, with estimates ranging from the time of the early monarchy to the late intertestamental periods, the presentation of the plague of locusts as a covenant curse resulting from disobedience remains valid regardless of whether Joel is pre- or post-exilic. See Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 286. See also David A. Hubbard, *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 25, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 23.

trees and the fruit of your ground."[307] Moreover, Joel stresses that this plague is only the beginning of the Lord's judgement, should the people refuse to repent of their wickedness, with Joel chapter two drawing upon the imagery of the locust plague to describe a future invasion of the land by foreign enemies, an escalation of covenant curses on the "day of the Lord."[308]

Likewise, the prophet Amos, writing to the northern kingdom of Israel in the mid eight century BC, points to the myriad ways in which the Lord has judged Israel in accordance with the Deuteronomistic covenant, and yet the people still refuse to repent (Amos 4:6-11).[309] Specifically, the Lord has "withheld the rain," "struck you with blight and mildew," sent locusts to devour "your fig trees and your olive trees," "killed your young men with the sword," and even "sent among you a pestilence after the manner of Egypt (Amos 4:7-11)." Again, one can see here a clear reference to the covenant curses found in Deuteronomy 28, which specifically promise 1) the withholding of rain, 2) the destruction of the peoples' crops by pestilence and plagues of insects, 3) the defeat of Israel by her enemies, and 4) an outbreak of "all the diseases of Egypt" (Deut. 28:22-24, 25, 38-39, 60).[310] As Hubbard writes, then, "in this litany of judgment, Amos has been mindful of the covenant curses that hung over the heads of the people to warn them against disloyalty to the great King."[311] The people, in other words, have been

[307] The Hebrew words translated here and elsewhere as "locust" have proven notoriously difficult for translators, given the ambiguity and wide range of words used in the Hebrew bible to describe not only locusts, but a wide array of other insects as well, i.e. grasshopper, palmerworm, caterpillar, etc. See Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 315, 321.

[308] See Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 56. See also Tchavdar S. Hadjiev, "Joel," in *Joel and Amos: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP Academic, 2020), 34.

[309] Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 92. See also M. Daniel Carroll R., *The Book of Amos*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan William B. Eerdmans, 2020), 236. Also Gary V. Smith, *Hosea, Amos, Micah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2001), 237.

[310] See Smith, "Amos," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 90.

[311] Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 169.

faithless vassals to the divine suzerain, and it is this rebellion which the prophet declares is the cause of the ongoing judgement against the nation. Moreover, as in Joel chapter one, it is the peoples' failure to repent in the face of such judgements which results in the further escalation of the covenant curses (Amos 4:12).[312]

Reflecting on this long pattern of historical disobedience, the prophet Jeremiah likewise declares to the people of Judah that they have thoroughly broken the Lord's covenant, and done so in spite of the Lord's persistent warnings, both through the prophets and in the form of covenant curses (Jer. 11:6-8).[313] Indeed, the Lord declares through the prophet that He has "brought upon them (the people of Israel and Judah) all the words of this covenant, which I commanded them to do, but they did not" (Jer. 11:8).[314] Here the central charge against the people is idolatry, instead of honoring Yahweh alone as God, the people of Israel and Judah have "gone after other gods to serve them," an action which represents a fundamental shattering of the suzerain-vassal relationship (Jer. 11:10). Because of this, and because the people have failed to respond to repeated calls for repentance, the Lord declares that He is now "bringing disaster upon them that they cannot escape" (Jer. 11:11). Once again, one can see in this passage an

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[312] Smith emphasizes that the list of seven past judgements given by the prophet indicates a sense of completion, indicating a declaration that "God had done all he could do to gain Israel's repentance." Because they have failed to heed these warnings, however, verse twelve shifts to a declaration of imminent judgement in the form of a direct encounter with Yahweh. While "Amos alludes here to that terrifying experience when Israel first encountered their God… the theophany of judgment Amos was announcing would be not to discipline Israel (Deut. 4:36) but to destroy them because of their stubborn refusal to return to the Lord…the circumstance here…is one of covenant breaking rather than covenant making." See Smith, *Amos,* 90, 92.

[313] Martens observes that the word translated "persistently" in the ESV is idiomatic, lit. "to rise early and testify," and conveys the idea of persistence, repeated activity, or even eagerness. See Larry L. Walker and Elmer A. Martens, "Jeremiah," in *Isaiah, Jeremiah, & Lamentations*, vol. 8, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2005), 366. See also Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations,* 134.

[314] As both Huey and Harrison state, the "words of the covenant" here refers specifically to the covenant curses "which described the penalties attached to a violation of the stipulations." See Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations,* 99. See also Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations,* 134.

escalation of the covenant curses, from those intended to warn and correct, to those intended primarily to judge the nation for their refusal to turn from their apostacy.[315]

Given the above considerations, then, neither the exile of Israel in 722BC, nor the subsequent the exile of Judah in 587BC, should be seen as an unexpected turn of events for God's people. Rather, such exile is the culmination of centuries of rebellion on the part of both nations and their leaders, and is completely in line with the Deuteronomistic theology of the latter prophets as a whole. This is not to say, however, that these events were not an incredibly traumatic turning point in the history of both nations. For the southern kingdom of Judah in particular, Walton argues that the destruction of the Solomonic temple would be viewed with the same abject horror that a nuclear strike on a major city would evoke in the mind of a 21st century individual, as it signified the utter abandonment of the city by God.[316]

Additionally, the prophets themselves present the exile as a type of reverse-exodus, with Hosea in particular making use of this motif to describe the coming judgement on the northern kingdom of Israel.[317] In chapter eleven, for instance, Hosea writes that the result of Israel's ongoing rebellion is that they shall "surely return to Egypt."[318] Here Egypt is used

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[315] As with the previous sections of this chapter, the above examples are not intended to serve as an exhaustive survey of covenant curses in the latter prophets, of which many more examples could be cited. Rather the purpose of the above examples is intended to demonstrate that a) the judgements found in the latter prophets are rooted in the covenant curses of Deuteronomy 28 (and Leviticus 26), and b) that there is an escalation in covenant curses in response to the peoples' ongoing apostacy, one which ultimately culminates in the curse of exile for both Israel and Judah.

[316] See John H. Walton, "The Temple in Context," in *Behind the Scenes of the Old Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Jonathan S. Greer, John W. Hilber, and John H. Walton (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2018), 349–350. Ezekiel, of course, prophetically announces the Lord's abandonment of the temple and the city in Ezekiel chapter 10.

[317] Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 225, 229.

[318] Some translations, such as the ESV, render this verse as "they (Israel) *shall not* return to the land of Egypt, *but* Assyria shall be their kings," while others, such as the NIV render it as a rhetorical question, "will they not return to Egypt *and* will not Assyria rule over them?" Given Hosea's tendency to use Egypt symbolically of Assyria elsewhere, however, i.e. Hosea 8:13 and 9:3, it seems best to understand 11:5 in this way as well. As Hubbard says, "*Egypt* and *Assyria* are fixed pairs to Hosea; the mention of one almost inevitably calls for the other

metaphorically of Assyria, as made evidence by the second half of verse five, which reads, "Assyria shall be there king, because they have refused to return to me."[319]

As Garrett writes "the meaning is that the Exodus will be undone and Israel will return to its former condition of slavery but that this time the captivity will not be in Egypt but in Assyria."[320] In other words, because the people have failed to uphold the stipulations of the covenant, the very foundations of the nation, which were established through the Exodus event, are coming undone, and because they have failed to display loyalty to the divine suzerain, they will now fall once more under the power of foreign human rulers. This return to Egypt motif, moreover, is one which is rooted in the proclamations of Deuteronomy 28:64 and 68, which state that the result of covenantal disloyalty on the part of Israel is that "the Lord will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known… the Lord will bring you back in ships to Egypt."[321]

The exile of both the Israel and Judah, then, at the hands of Assyria and Babylon respectively, should be understood as nothing less than the complete upheaval of the social order, as well as the near destruction of national identity for both kingdoms. Furthermore, the destruction of the temple represents a complete withdraw of divine favor and protection, and

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as part of the poetic parallelism." See David A. Hubbard, *Hosea: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 24, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1989), 201.

[319] See Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 225, 229. See also Hubbard, *Hosea*, 201.

[320] Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, 225.

[321] While the use of Egypt in these verses seems largely symbolic, indicating a complete reversal of the Exodus as the ultimate manifestation of the covenant curses, it is likely that some Israelites did, in fact, flee to Egypt in an attempt to escape the coming destruction of both Israel and Judah cf. Jeremiah 42. See Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 372. Also Hubbard, *Hosea*, 201.

would have been perceived by the people as nothing short of a complete abandonment of the nation by Yahweh.[322] Likewise, the dispersion of the people in the exile represents a complete undoing of the Exodus event in which Israel and Judah's national identity was rooted. It is therefore difficult to overstate the significance of the exile in the story of Israel, as these events signify the complete failure of the nation to carry out its vocational calling as a "kingdom of priest (Exod. 19:6)." Just like Adam before them, Israel and her kings have proven themselves to be rebellious vassals to the divine suzerain, and just as Adam was expelled from the garden for his failure, so too does Israel face expulsion from the Promised Land.[323]

Future National Restoration as Covenant Blessings in the Latter Prophets

As with Adam, however, hope remains for God's people even in the midst of exile. Indeed, in spite of the severity of Israel's failure and the resulting covenant curses described above, it would be a mistake to understand the message of the prophets as being primarily one of condemnation and judgement. Rather, the primary message of the prophets is ultimately one of hope for the future of God's people. Such hope, however, is in no way based in any sort of naïve optimism on the part of the prophets regarding the people of Israel's ability to finally fulfill their role as a nation of priests, nor to remain faithful to the demands of the covenant. Rather, the prophets consistently present both the people and their leaders as faithless vassals, whose "uncircumcised hearts" render them incapable of exhibiting covenant loyalty to the divine

[322] See for instance, the discussion on temple abandonment in Niehaus, *Ancient Near Eastern Themes in Biblical Theology,* 116.

[323] For a discussion on the relationship between the story of Adam and the story of Israel, see chapter 1. Also see Postell, *Adam as Israel,* 134-142.

suzerain.[324] The hope of the prophetic message then, is not rooted in the faithless vassals who have broken the covenant, but rather, in the promises of the faithful divine suzerain. As a result of this, the message of the prophets regularly moves between proclamations of judgement and promises of future restoration, often within the same prophetic oracle.[325] As Robertson writes, "the heart of the prophetic message is to be found in the threat of judgement *together with* the promise of subsequent restoration.[326]

An example of this can be seen in Hosea 11, which predicts the exile of the northern kingdom of Israel at the hands of Assyria in a type of reverse exodus. Immediately following this oracle of judgement in v. 5-7, however, verse 8 shifts to an image of Yahweh's intense anguish over His wayward "son."[327] In spite of Israel's persistent apostacy and rebellion, Yahweh's love for His people, presented as that of the love of parent towards their child, means that He will not fully execute His judgement upon the nation by destroying it completely (Hosea 11:9).[328] Rather, in verses ten and eleven, the Lord promises that, following a period of judgement, He will once again act to restore His people, so that "they shall come trembling like birds from Egypt, and like doves from the land of Assyria, and I will return them to their homes." This promise of

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[324] As above, see the discussions in Harrison, *Jeremiah and Lamentations*, 72-73. Also Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 79-80. Also Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 203.

[325] Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 145-146.

[326] Ibid., 146.

[327] There is of course a degree of accommodation in the metaphors used to describe the Lord's emotional state in these verses. Nonetheless, as Garrett writes "we should not be overhasty to correct the image that the text gives us. While accepting the fact that God transcends our metaphors and that theological doctrines about the impassability and foreknowledge of God should never be jettisoned, texts such as this should be allowed to speak to us in the power of their raw emotion." Garrett, *Hosea*, 227. See also J. Andrew Dearman, *The Book of Hosea* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 221.

[328] These passages do not indicate that Israel will escape severe punishment, but rather, by contrasting Israel's judgement to the prior complete destruction of Sodom, the text indicates that the Lord's love for His "son" will prevent Him from completely annihilating the people for their sin. See Garrett, *Hosea*, 227-228. Also Dearman, *The Book of Hosea*, 220-221.

restoration, then, presented in terms of a "new Exodus," provides hope for God's people beyond the curse of exile.[329] This hope, however, is not based in any merit on the part of the nation or their leaders, but rather, it is rooted in the faithfulness and mercy of Yahweh towards His people.[330]

Likewise, the prophet Jeremiah, speaking to the southern kingdom of Judah two centuries later, provides a word of hope for God's people, assuring them that, although they are about to experience the covenant curse of exile at the hands of the Babylonians for their sin, the Lord will not abandon His people entirely (Jer. 21:3-10, 29:10-11, 30:1-11).[331] Rather, the Lord assures His people that, following seventy years of captivity in Babylon, He will restore the people and bring them back into the Promised Land, giving them "a future and a hope" beyond the exile (Jer. 29:10-11). This promise is likewise repeated in Jeremiah chapter thirty, in which the Lord assures His people that the purpose of the coming judgement is to discipline the nation for their sin, rather than to destroy them completely (Jer. 30:1-11).

Furthermore, the Lord declares that not only will Judah be rescued from her enemies and restored to the Promised Land, but that ultimately, the northern kingdom of Israel will experience renewal as well (Jer. 30:4-7).[332] However, while the people of Judah are explicitly told that their restoration to the land will occur after seventy years of exile in Babylon, no such timetable is

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[329] Garrett, *Hosea*, 225, 229.

[330] Here both the judgement and mercy of Yahweh towards His people are rooted in His holy nature, which ensures that His judgement is just while also displaying patient love and forgiveness. See Hubbard, *Hosea*, 205.

[331] Huey, *Jeremiah*, 21.

[332] As Huey writes "Again Israel and Judah are linked. As they both would experience God's judgment, also they both would experience his blessing and together would be reunited and in their own land." Huey, *Jeremiah*, 268.

given in regard to the northern kingdom.[333] Nonetheless, it is evident from these passages that Yahweh's plans for His people ultimately include a full restoration of both Judah *and* Israel, so that the return of the Babylonian exiles is only the very beginning of the "new Exodus" event.[334]

Far from being a new development within the prophetic corpus, this promise of post-exilic restoration for God's people is, in fact, rooted in the promises of Deuteronomy 30 at the very beginning of Israel's existence as a nation. Israel's utter failure as a vassal state was repeatedly predicted through Moses and the subsequent prophets, starting with Yahweh's message to the wilderness generation in Deuteronomy 30:1 and 31:16-18. Rather than serving as a fatalistic message of hopelessness and doom for God's people, however, these passages in fact serve to highlight God's grace and mercy towards His faithless vassals. Having declared to the people of Israel that they and their descendants will ultimately fail in their calling to fulfill the stipulations of the Lord's covenant, thereby bring upon themselves the curse of exile outside the land, Moses shifts focus in verses two through five to a prophetic portrait of post-exilic restoration (Deut. 30:2-5). Here Moses declares to the young nation that, "when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse…and you call them to mind among all the nations where the Lord your God has driven you, and return to the Lord your God… then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have mercy on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you (Deut. 30:1-3)." Moreover, not only does Moses assure the people that the Lord will ultimately restore the nation from their future state of exile, but that said restoration will ultimately result in the outpouring of covenant blessings of a

[333] The idea of a future total restoration for all of Israel, connected to the coming of the Messiah and the restoration of the Davidic kingship, will be a central topic in chapter 5.

[334] As will be argued in chapter 5, the concept of Israel as being in a state of ongoing spiritual exile, despite the partial return of the people from Babylon, is an important concept for the New Testament writers, who regularly present the coming of the Messiah in "new exodus" language. Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 387–388.

unprecedented level, so that the Lord "will make you more prosperous and numerous than your fathers" (Deut. 30:5, 9).

The nation's future, then, as the prophet Jeremiah will later declare, is one of "hope" rather than "evil" and ultimate disaster (Jer. 29:11). Indeed, just as the prophet Jeremiah rooted his predictions of judgement in the Deuteronomic curses, he likewise firmly anchors his predictions of national restoration in the promises of Deuteronomy 30.[335] This restoration will see the return of the exiles from Babylon, i.e. Deuteronomy 30:4-5 and Jeremiah 30:3, 31:8, the removal of the covenant curse and resumption of covenant blessings, i.e. Deuteronomy 30:9 and Jeremiah 31:4-5, 12-14, 17, and the subsequent placing of covenant curses on the nation's enemies, i.e. Deuteronomy 30:7 and Jeremiah 30:11, 18.[336] Just as the nation's failure and exile is never in doubt, then, neither is their ultimate restoration, though the latter will only occur through a an act of divine mercy by Yahweh on behalf of His people.

This is due to the fact that the root cause of Israel and Judah's faithlessness throughout their history is a profound and pervasive spiritual sickness, that despite having been given the Lord's covenant, their hearts remain hardened and "uncircumcised." At the same time, however, Moses declares to the people that their full restoration will occur only when the people "return to the Lord your God…and obey his voice…with all your heart and soul (Deut. 30:2)." Such obedience, however, has been proven time and time again to be beyond the ability of Israel in their natural state of hard heartedness. Therefore, in both Deuteronomy and Jeremiah, the

[335] Cf. J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy,* 311. As Thompson writes, "The fact of Yahweh's *delight* in prospering Israel is reminiscent of Jeremiah 32:41. The broad picture of the blessing and healing of the people in a coming day has a strong parallel in the whole of Jeremiah 32." See also Huey, *Jeremiah,* 295-296.

[336] These listed parallels, while certainly not exhaustive, are representative of the prophetic allusions to Deuteronomy 30 throughout the latter prophets as both Jeremiah and the other prophets regularly allude to the promises of Deuteronomy 30 in their predictions of restoration for the nation.

catalyst for future restoration is a change in spiritual disposition among the people, one which will be brought on by Yahweh Himself.[337] Central to the promises of Deuteronomy 30 is that "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live" (Deut. 30:6). Life for Israel can only be found in their relationship with Yahweh, a relationship predicated on the people's faithful obedience to the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant and fulfillment of their calling as a vassal state. Yet in spite of the people and their leaders' failure in both regard, Yahweh is not willing to give up on His chosen people, and so here promises that, following the full outpouring of covenant curses, He Himself will take the initiative in not only restoring the broken suzerain-vassal relationship, but will even effect a change in the hearts of the people, so that they might finally fulfill their calling as faithful vassal's.[338] Yet again the prophet Jeremiah draws upon this idea in his description of the "New Covenant," a time in which the Lord, "will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33).[339] It is this internalizing of the Lord's covenant,

[337] Cf. Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 217. See also Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 310-311.

[338] As Thompson writes, "God himself will carry out the inward renewal of Israel (*circumcise your heart*), so that Israel will love Yahweh with all their heart. By his own gracious activity he will reconstitute Israel. Repentance in itself will not suffice. Perhaps, indeed, the origin of repentance itself lies in the divine activity." Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, 310-311. Likewise, Merrill writes, "The miraculous, totally regenerating nature of the circumcision of the heart would be manifest by Israel's ability to love the Lord "with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 30:6). This is an obvious reference to the demand of the Shema (Deut. 6:4–5), adherence to which was at the very core of covenant commitment. This impossible standard was always understood as the ideal of covenant behavior, one to be sought but never fully achieved (c.f. Matt 22:40; Mark 12:33). Here, however, Moses did not command or even exhort his audience to obedience. He promised it as a natural by-product of the renewal of the heart. People can love God with all their heart only after the heart itself has been radically changed to a Godward direction. When that happens, not only is obedience possible but so is life. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 389.

[339] As Huey emphasizes, the concept of a "New Covenant" is a common motif throughout the latter prophets promises of restoration for Israel, though the exact term appears only here in the first testament. Nonetheless, the hope of the "New Covenant," superior to the Mosaic Covenant through its internalization in the hearts of the people, is central to the hope of both the old and new testaments. See Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 282–283. See also Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets*, 217.

then, which will finally allow God's people to break the seemingly endless cycle of apostacy in which they have been trapped ever since Sinai, as the Lord Himself will empower their obedience.[340] Moreover, as Block argues, the "new" aspect of the New Covenant is not its essence, which is essentially similar to the covenantal relationship experienced under the Mosaic Covenant.[341] Rather, the essential distinction between the "new" and Mosaic Covenants, is that, while the latter was undermined by the peoples sin, and only experienced by a fraction of God's people, the New Covenant will effect change which brings about the fullness of the covenant blessings to all of Israel.[342] It at this future point, then, that Israel will be fully restored in their covenant relationship with the Lord, able to finally enjoy life and blessing within the land, and finally able to fulfill their calling as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6).[343]

The "Branch" of David as Faithful Vassal in the Latter Prophets

The Future Davidic King as Key to Restoration and Covenant Blessings

Perhaps the most shocking aspect of this future restoration, however, is the promise that the restoration of the nation will be accompanied by, and indeed, tightly connected to, a restoration of the Davidic monarchy. Unlike the promises of national restoration that are rooted

[340] Block, *Covenant,* 283.

[341] Ibid., 285.

[342] Ibid., 285-286. Block writes "Jeremiah anticipated no deliverance from the law as if, like Pharaoh, the law held people in bondage. Nor did he anticipate any adjustment in God's standards of righteousness. Rather, the institution of the "new" would signal the day when all Israel would finally enjoy the freedom and wellbeing envisioned in the original Israelite covenant, a freedom that would celebrate both the knowledge and the application of the Torah because it would be internalized in their hearts and demonstrated in life.

[343] The prophet Ezekiel likewise anticipates this future restoration as a time when Yahweh will rescue the people from their sins and reestablish both Israel and Judah as a single nation in the land, where they will "walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statues" (Ek 37:15-28). Cf. Cooper, *Ezekiel*, 327–328. Also Block, *Covenant*, 294. Both Cooper and Block argue that Ezekiel's "covenant of peace" should be identified with Jeremiah's "New Covenant."

in the promises of Deuteronomy 30, the promise of restoration of the Davidic monarchy is a new development within the latter prophets, yet it is one which is central to their message of hope for God's people. As with the national hope, however, this royal hope is in no way rooted in the faithfulness, or lack thereof, of the nation's previous kings. Rather, as Jeremiah writes, the restoration of the Davidic monarchy is rooted in the faithfulness of Yahweh to His covenant promises, so that "David shall never lack a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel" (Jer. 33:14, 17).[344]

Indeed, as early as the prophet Amos in the 8th century BC, and prior to the fall of the northern kingdom, the Lord declared that He would "raise up" and "repair" the fallen "booth of David" (Amos 9:11).[345] As Smith argues, this oracle, written several centuries prior to the fall of the Davidic monarchy and the southern kingdom, likely refers to the deteriorated state of Davidic rule during the time of the divided monarchy.[346] The promise, then, is that the Lord will act to restore the Davidic throne to its former glory, so that David's descendent will one more rule over a united Israel.[347] This rule, moreover, will result in Israel itself being restored, so that they might "rebuild the ruined cities and inhabit them… plant vineyards and drink their wine… make gardens and eat their fruit," and so that they will "possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name" (Amos 9:12-14). Additionally, the Lord promises that at

[344] Some scholars have questioned the authenticity of Jeremiah 33:14-26, due to these verses exclusion from the Septuagint. Nonetheless, the themes developed within these verses are consistent with the larger prophetic and biblical testimony regarding the Lord's commitment to the Davidic Covenant, i.e. 2 Samuel 7:12-16, Psalm 89:3-4, etc. See Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 301–303.

[345] Smith, *Amos,* 23–24.

[346] Ibid., 165. Also Block, *Covenant,* 332. Additionally, both Smith and Block note that these verses anticipate the future collapse of the Davidic dynasty during the fall of the southern kingdom.

[347] Smith, *Amos,* 165. See also Hubbard, *Joel and Amos*, 255.

this time He will "will plant them on their land, and they shall never again be uprooted" (Amos 9:15). Here then, one can again see these promises of national restoration as being drawn from the descriptions of renewed covenant blessings found in Deuteronomy 30, yet here they are also tightly tied to the Lord's restoration of the Davidic throne. Of particular note within these verses is the promise that this restoration will include the possession of "the remnant of Edom and all the nations who are called by my name (Amos 9:12)." Here the Septuagint differs from the Masoretic text, in that the latter describes the "possession" of Edom and the nations by a restored Israel, while the former indicates that the nations will themselves seek out the restored Israel in order to know the Lord.[348] These two translations need not be seen as being in conflict with one another, however, since the MT's "possess" does not necessarily indicate military conquest and subjugation.[349] Rather, as Smith argues, both translations indicate a future time in which Gentiles will experience a "spiritual incorporation into the restored kingdom of David."[350] In other words, these verses point to a time in which Israel, under the leadership of a future Davidic king, will finally fulfill their vocation as a "kingdom of priests" to the nations (Ex 19:6).

This linking together of national rescue and restoration with the promise of a future Davidic king, moreover, is consistent with the message found throughout the latter prophets. The prophet Micah, for instance, describes the birth of a future ruler in Bethlehem, the ancestral home of David, and links the coming of this individual with restoration for God's people (Mic. 5:1-15). While verse one describes the destruction of the nation at the hands of foreign enemies, the coming ruler from Bethlehem will "stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord,"

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[348] Smith, *Amos,* 168.

[349] Hubbard, *Joel and Amos,* 255-256. See also Smith, *Amos,* 168.

[350] Smith, *Amos,* 168. See also Carroll R., *The Book of Amos,* 429.

and "shall deliver us from the Assyrian" (Mic. 5:1,4,6).[351] This, in turn, will result in an age in which the people will finally "dwell secure," as a result of the king's rule, since "he shall be great to the ends of the earth…he shall be their peace (5:4-5)." The coming of this future Davidic king, then, is not only the sign that restoration is at hand, but the king himself is the primary agent through whom Yahweh will provide rescue and restoration for His people, since Yahweh Himself will empower the king to shepherd the people.[352] Not only will the people dwell securely under their king, but the Lord also declares that in those days He will cut off the peoples "sorceries," and "carved images," so that "you shall bow down no more to the work of your hands" (Mic. 5:12-13). Here then, one can again see a clear parallel not only to the promises of Deuteronomy 30, but likewise, to Jeremiah's later prophecy regarding the "New Covenant," and the giving of a new heart to God's people.

Indeed, Jeremiah himself closely links the future restoration of Israel with the coming of a future king in the line of David, writing "behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will raise up for David a righteous Branch, and he shall reign as king… in his days Judah will be saved, and Israel will dwell securely (Jer. 23:5-6).[353] The prophet Ezekiel, likewise, links the advent of the Lord's "covenant of peace" with the coming of this future Davidic king (Ezek.

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[351] While the passage refers primarily to Assyria as the threat facing the nation, it is likely that Assyria is used here, as elsewhere, as symbolic of Israel's enemies in general, including the later destruction of the southern kingdom at the hands of Babylon. Because the people have acted faithlessly, God will give them up to their enemies until the coming of the ruler from Bethlehem, at which point rescue and restoration will begin. As Barker notes, the phrase "he will stand" may refer to either the ruler installation as king, to the ongoing endurance of his reign, or both. Cf. Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 95–96, 98-99, 102-103. See also Waltke, *Micah*, 201.

[352] See Barker, *Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah*, 100. See also Waltke, *Micah*, 201-202. Waltke emphasizes the stark contrast between the future Davidic ruler's faithful shepherding of the people and the failure of past kings of the nation to do so.

[353] As Huey observes, the term used here for "righteous" may refer not only to the ruler's character, but was also used in the ANE as a technical term to denote the legitimate heir to the throne. This king, then, in contrast to the faithless rulers of the nation whom the Lord has rejected, is the one whom Yahweh Himself has chosen to shepherd His people. Huey, *Jeremiah, Lamentations*, 211–212.

37:22-24). This "covenant of peace" in Ezekiel should be identified with the "New Covenant" in Jeremiah, as the institution of this covenant results in both national restoration and the Lord's purification of the people, so that "they shall not defile themselves anymore with their idols and their detestable things, or with any of their transgressions," but will instead "walk in my rules and be careful to obey my statutes" (Ezek. 37:23-24).[354] This physical and spiritual restoration, moreover, is explicitly linked to the reign of "my servant David," who is installed by Yahweh to shepherd both Israel and Judah as "their prince forever" (Ezek. 37:24-25). As Block writes, "remarkably, verses 24b-25a associate the presence of this Davidic king with the people's obedience to YHWH's 'stipulations and ordinances…' having been cleansed by YHWH (v. 23), in keeping with Deuteronomy 17:18-20, the king will serve as a model of covenant righteousness and inspire the people's fidelity."[355] The coming of the future Davidic king, in other words, will not only signify the time of the New Covenant, but the king himself, in contrast to the faithless vassals who have previously occupied the throne, will faithfully lead a restored covenant community in fulfilling the stipulations of the Lord's covenant.

The prophet Isaiah, likewise, paints a picture of an eschatological future in which "the wolf shall dwell with the lamb," and "the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea" (Isa. 11:6, 9).[356] This idyllic portrait, moreover, is made possible by the righteous rule of a Davidic king, identified here as the "root of Jesse" (Isa. 11:4, 10).[357] This

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[354] Block, *Covenant,* 294.

[355] Block, *Covenant,* 356. See also the discussion in Cooper, *Ezekiel,* 327.

[356] As with the promises of restoration, the eschatological portrait in Isaiah indicates a unprecedented outpouring of the covenant blessings, such as to return Israel to the state of Eden. See Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39, The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2007), 268–269. Also J. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1999), 118–119.

[357] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39,* 268-269.

ruler, who is empowered by the Spirit of the Lord, will not only rescue Israel by destroying the "wicked" with the "breath of his lips," but he will lead and judge God's people with "righteousness," and will "stand as a signal for the people" (Isa. 11:2-4, 12). In contrast to the current rebellious kings occupying the throne of David, then, this future ruler is presented as faithfully executing his role as Yahweh's appointed vassal, one whose "delight is in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:4). Moreover, Isaiah 11:10 expands upon the prophet's earlier message in 2:2-3, which predict an eschatological gathering of the nations to Jerusalem to learn the ways of the Lord, here linking this gathering to the work of the Davidic king. [358] Not only does this king rule righteously over Israel, then, but his reign is one which is characterized by the fulfillment of Israel's priestly vocation, as the nations of the world are drawn to him to learn the ways of the Lord (Isa. 11:10, 2:3).

The Future Davidic King Presented as Perfectly Faithful Vassal

As can be seen from the above sampling of passages, then, both the promise of national restoration, and the fulfillment of Israel's vocational calling as a vassal state, are consistently linked in the latter prophets to the coming of a future king descended from the line of David. Moreover, this Davidic king is presented, in stark contrast to many of the kings of the prophets' own day, as a totally faithful vassal to the divine suzerain. Rather than ruling the people with "force" and "harshness," this king will rule and judge with "righteousness" and "justice," thereby establishing both in the land (Ezek. 34:3-5, Isa. 32:1, Jer. 23:5). Rather than loving evil and hating good, the king's "delight will be in the fear of the Lord" (Mic. 3:2-3, Isa. 11:3:3). And rather than "cannibalizing" the flock, the king with faithfully shepherd them, providing

[358] Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, 275.

deliverance from their enemies and leading them in the ways of the Lord (Mic. 3:3, 5:4, Jer. 3:14-15, Ezek. 34:23, Mic. 5:4). Central to the message of the latter prophets, then, is that restoration and redemption for Israel and Judah will come through the reign of this righteous Davidic "branch," whose rule, in contrast to the string of faithless vassals who have occupied the throne throughout the nation's history, will be characterized by utter devotion to Yahweh as divine suzerain, in accordance with the commands of Deuteronomy 17:14-20.[359] This will be made possible, moreover, due to the fact that it is Yahweh Himself who will raise up this Davidic ruler, and whose Spirit will empower him for the task (Isa. 9:6-7, Jer. 23:5-6, Isa. 11:2).[360]

In discussing the messianic hope of the latter prophets, one final observation must be made regarding the "suffering servant" figure in the book of Isaiah, as well as this individual's relationship to the future Davidic king. Some scholars, such as Abernethy and Goswell, are hesitant to directly identify these figures with one another in the mind of the prophet, writing "due to similarities between these lead agents and due to Jesus's fulfillment of all of these, some evangelical scholars tend to conflate the three lead agents as if the book of Isaiah had only one lead agent, the Messiah, in mind…it seems better to retain distinctions between the roles of these agents."[361] Nonetheless, there is good reason to understand the prophet as having viewed the

[359] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 266–267.

[360] As Abernethy and Goswell observe, the emphasis within these verses is on the work of Yahweh as the one who establishes the coming king and works through him to establish justice, i.e. Isaiah 9, which concludes is description of the king's glorious rule with the phrase "the zeal of the Lord of hosts will accomplish this." The author's write "the Davidic ruler is God's agent…if there ever would be a ruler from Jesses line to reign, it would only be through the work of God and his empowering wisdom." See Andrew T. Abernethy and Greg Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament: Expectations of a Coming King* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 91-93.

[361] Ibid., 86. The third "lead agent" here is the "eschatological messenger" of Isaiah 56-66. See also Andrew T. Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom: A Thematic—Theological Approach*, vol. 40, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson (Downers Grove, IL; London: Apollos; InterVarsity, 2016), 156–157.

Davidic ruler and suffering servant as one and the same.[362] First, the role of the servant, to establish justice, to restore Israel, and to serve as a "light for the nations," closely parallels the role of the Davidic ruler earlier in the book (Isa. 42:1-4, 49:5-6, 9:2,6-7 11:4, 10). Second, both the servant and the Davidic ruler are said to be empowered for their mission by the Spirit of the Lord (Isa. 11:2, 42:1). Third, the "botanical imagery" of Isaiah 53, which describes the servant as being like "a young plant, and like a *root* out of dry ground," parallels the earlier identification of the coming ruler as the "root" or "branch" of David/Jesse.[363] Taken together, then, these parallels present the servant figure as being identified with the coming Davidic ruler, the perfectly faithful vassal who, in contrast to the faithless vassals of the past, will restore and lead God's people back into covenant relationship with Him, so that they might finally receive the full covenant blessings within the land.[364]

Likewise, the suffering servant figure stands in sharp contrast to the Lord's other chosen servant, the nation itself (Isa. 41:8). Rather than acting as a faithful vassal state, displaying the glory and wisdom of Yahweh to the nations, Israel has time and time again turned their backs on the Lord's covenant. As a result the Lord laments that His servant Israel is both "blind" and "deaf" (Isa. 42:18-19). As Abernethy writes "Instead of being in a position to bring light to the nations, Israel finds itself in the very same circumstances. God's servant is blind just like the

[362] Of course, many scholars doubt the unity of the book of Isaiah as a whole, and as such see the prophecies regarding the "servant" figure as being from a different, later author than those of those of the prophecies regarding the Davidic ruler. For a defense of a unified composition of Isaiah see Robertson, *The Christ of the Prophets,* 187-196.

[363] Cf. Gary Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, vol. 15B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2009), 444–445. Smith likewise emphasizes that this root will grow up from the "dry" ground of the previously fallen monarchy. Also Block, *Covenant,* 340.

[364] For a discussion of these and additional parallels between the servant and the Davidic ruler, see Block, *Covenant,* 340.

nations. In fact, though they should set free those in 'prison' (*byt kl'*; 42:7), they are in 'prison' (*byt kl'*; 42:22), as they remain unresponsive to God even after experiencing his judgment, presumably through exile (42:25)."[365] Likewise, Smith points out the absurdity of the present situation, in that the Lord's "messenger," the one who is called to teach the nations the way of the Lord, and to lead them in following His ways, is themselves too spiritually "deaf" to hear the Lord's instruction, and too spiritually "blind" to even see where they themselves are going.[366] At their core then, these verse summarize the central problem presented within the latter prophets, that God's chosen people have failed in their calling as kingdom of priests, and have instead chosen to be faithless vassals to their divine suzerain, leading to their own destruction in the exile.

It is in response to this national failure, then, that the individual suffering figure is sent by the Lord to take up Israel's task as a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6).This individual, in his role as the rightful Davidic king, will act contrary to all who came before him, in that he will fully embody the covenant ideals of a faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, and will act to "faithfully bring forth justice" (Isa. 42:3). Furthermore, unlike blind Israel, stumbling around in darkness, he himself will "open the eyes of the blind" a mission which will involve both the restoration of Israel itself, as well the proclamation of Yahweh's rule and glory to the wider Gentile world, Israel's own original task, "so that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa. 42:7, 49:6).[367] The suffering servant than, takes upon himself the role of both Israel's kings, restoring

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[365] Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom,*142.

[366] Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 184–185. See also Motyer, *Isaiah*, 299. Motyer writes "when they (the gentile nations) look, it is to see a *servant* as *blind* as they are…can the blind lead the blind?"

[367] Despite some interpreters claims to the contrary, Abernethy is certainly correct that, while earlier passages, i.e. Isaiah 41:8 and 42:18-19, identify Israel as the Lord's "servant," this verse effectively rules out any identification of the individual *suffering servant* with the nation itself, since the servant is clearly presented as acting to restore Israel back into relationship with Yahweh. See Abernethy, *The Book of Isaiah and God's Kingdom,*147.

and leading the covenant community in faithful worship of Yahweh, as well as the vocation of Israel itself, in providing a light to the nations of the world, and drawing them back into relationship with the Lord.

While much of what is said of servant figure in Isaiah is in line with the prophetic portrait of the Davidic ruler elsewhere, Isaiah 52:13-53:12 expands upon the servants mission in a significant way. Namely, this passage presents the servant/Davidic king's mission as one which involves intense suffering, and even death, on the part of the servant (53:3, 5, 7-8).[368] Not only this, but these verses indicate that the servants ultimate exaltation will come about as a result of this suffering and death, which are themselves a part of God's will (53:10). At the same time, however, the prophet makes clear that the servant's suffering is not a result of his own sin, but rather, "he was pierced for *our* transgressions…and the Lord has laid upon *him* the iniquity of *us all*" (Isa. 53:5-6 emphasis added).[369] Indeed the servant himself is presented as blameless, yet he experiences the full force of the covenantal curses in the form of death on behalf of the nation (Isa. 53:4-6, 9).[370] It is through this act of self-sacrifice, however, that the servant shall "make many to be accounted righteous," because "his soul makes an offering for guilt" (Isa. 53:9,11). The servant, then, is not just a king whole rules in righteousness, but a priestly figure whose self-sacrifice provides atonement and reconciliation for God's faithless vassals. As Block writes, "whereas the Messiah was by definition to be a royal Davidic figure who would one day rule

[368] While some scholars have argued against a literal death for the servant figure, Smith rightly notes that the phrase "cut off from the land of the living" leaves little room for such figurative interpretations, and indeed, the Septuagint translations understands this phrase literally, adding "he was led to death." Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 454.

[369] There is a clear distinction here between the servant and the prophet's readers, rendering any identification of the servant as Israel untenable. See Smith, *Isaiah 40-66*, 450-451. See also John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grandin Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 585. The servant takes upon himself the iniquity of the prophet and the people, it is for their sin that he suffers.

[370] Cf. Smith, *Isaiah* 40-66, 450-451. Oswalt, *Isaiah*, 558. Block, *Covenant*, 342.

Israel and the world with righteousness and grace, this amazing passage portrays him also as the true guilt/sin offering, the Lamb whose own sacrifice would actually effect forgiveness."[371] In other words, the suffering servant is presented as a perfectly faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, yet one who willing takes upon himself the curses of suffering and death brought on by the faithlessness of Israel and her past kings. In this way, then, the servant far surpasses even the "righteous" kings of Israel and Judah, David, Hezekiah, and even Josiah, as he gives his own life in place of others as an offering to Yahweh. The result of this, in verses ten through twelve, is that the Lord exalts His servant, so that "he shall prolong his days" (Isa. 53:12). As Smith observes, the prophet does not reveal how this is possible, but it is clear that, despite having given his own life for the sins of others, the servant is not only alive in these verses, but exalted, so that "he shall divide the spoil with the strong, and indeed, this exaltation is a direct result and vindication of his faithfulness to Yahweh, "because he poured out his soul to death" (Isa. 53:10-12).[372]

Conclusion and Looking Forward

The latter prophets can be seen as presenting a divinely inspired commentary on the story of Israel's past, present, and future.[373] Despite having been written over the course of several centuries and in a wide array of circumstances, the latter prophets provide a remarkably coherent message for God's people, one rooted in Lord's faithfulness to the Mosaic and Davidic Covenants. The message of hope presented in the latter prophets is that, despite the people and their leaders' ongoing rebellion against the divine suzerain, the Lord has not given up on His

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[371] Block, *Covenant*, 342.

[372] Smith, *Isaiah*, 460.

[373] Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 159.

wayward vassals, nor on His plan for the world through them. Rather, the Lord promises through His prophets that, following a period of judgement, He Himself will act to not only rescue His people, but will supernaturally empower them to finally fulfill their calling as a kingdom of priests. This will be accomplished, moreover, through the raising up and empowering of a future king, a son of David who, in contrast to kings of the past, will act as a perfectly faithful vassal to the divine suzerain. Not only this, but this king will, through his suffering and death, take upon himself the full force the covenant curses, effecting reconciliation between the Lord and His chosen people, so that the king himself will lead a restored and Spirit empowered covenant community in finally fulfilling their vocation as a "kingdom of priests" to the nations. The story of Israel at the time of the exile, then, is one which awaits its climax in the coming of this future king, and one which, despite the return of the exiles to Judah in 539 BC, still awaited this climax, the coming of the faithful vassal king, at the time of the Gospel writers.[374] This, then, will be the topic of chapters five and six, as the New Testament writers, reading the story of Israel through the lens of the latter prophets, understand and present the gospel of Jesus as the long awaited culmination of Israel's story, presenting Jesus of Nazareth not only as the rightful king of Israel, but as the perfectly faithful vassal king, whose life, death and resurrection fulfill the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant, overcoming the curse of the law and enabling the reception of life and blessings for the covenant community.

[374] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 114.

CHAPTER 5: THE RETURN OF THE KING: JESUS AS FAIITHFUL VASSAL IN THE GOSPELS

The opening of the New Testament narrative finds the people of Israel in the midst of what Bartholomew and Goheen aptly term "a kingdom story waiting for an ending."[375] During their time in exile, hope for God's people is rooted in the divine promise of a "new Exodus event," one which will result in not only national restoration and return to the land, but in an unprecedented outpouring of covenant blessings, in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30. This "new Exodus," moreover, will be tied to, and indeed centered around, the restoration of the Davidic monarchy, and the raising up of a "son of David" to sit upon the throne of Israel, one whose covenant faithfulness to the divine suzerain will perfectly embody the ideals of loyal vassal kingship, succeeding where past Davidic kings, Israel, and Adam have all failed. Only then will God's people be free to experience the fullness of covenant blessings, and to fulfill their vocation as a "kingdom of priests" to the nations (Exod. 19:6).

In light of this hope, when Babylon falls to the Persian empire in 539 BC, and the people of Judah given leave by Cyrus to return to their homeland, it might reasonably be assumed that the prophetic promises of restoration and exaltation for Israel are set to come to pass imminently.[376] It quickly becomes clear, however, that this prophetic portrait of postexilic blessing does not match the reality of life experienced by the returning exiles or their descendants over the course of the next five centuries.[377] First, in spite of Cyrus' decree granting the exiles leave to return to their homeland, only a small portion of the Judeans actually make the

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[375] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 119.

[376] Ibid., 114.

[377] Ibid.

return journey.[378] Likewise, the ten northern tribes of Israel remain scattered throughout the world following the northern kingdoms destruction at the hands of the Assyrian empire, and as a result, the vast majority of God's people still live outside of the Promised Land in the first century AD.[379] Second, while the returning exiles do ultimately rebuild the Lord's temple in Jerusalem, this new temple is at best a pale imitation of the one that was built by Solomon, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC.[380] Third, during the nearly six centuries between the start of the Babylonian exile and the opening of the New Testament, no Davidic descendant has arisen to once again sit upon the throne of Israel. Instead, God's people have suffered under the rule of a succession of foreign powers, beginning with Babylon and ending with Rome in the time of Jesus.[381]

Of particular significance during this period were the actions of Antiochus IV, ruler of the Seleucid empire, whose brutal attempts to suppress the Jewish faith included outlawing readings of the Torah, forbidding Jewish practices such as circumcision and the observance of the sabbath, and even the desecration of the temple with a pagan altar, upon which a pig was sacrificed to the Greek god Zeus.[382] These events would in turn result in a revolt among the

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[378]Nicholas Perrin, "Exile," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 25.

[379] Perrin, "Exile," 25. See also Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 120.

[380] The biblical writers themselves emphasize the peoples' disappointment with the new temples lack of glory in comparison to Solomon's temple in the book of Haggai. Cf Taylor and Clendenen, *Haggai, Malachi*, 151. See also Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 123.

[381] For a brief overview of this period, see Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 123-128. For a more in depth discussion on the historical events of the intertestamental period, see chapters 3-5 in Joel B. Green, and Lee Martin McDonald, eds. *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013)

[382] Larry R. Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 39-40. See also Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 126-127. Also Thomas R. Hatina, "Palestine," in *The World of the New Testament: Cultural, Social, and Historical Contexts*, ed. Joel B. Green and Lee Martin McDonald (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 476.

Jewish people, led by the priest Mattathias and his sons, the Hasmoneans.[383] Through the use of guerrilla warfare tactics, Mattathias and his followers, who came to be known as the "Maccabees," ultimately succeeded in driving the Seleucid forces from their land in 142 BC, leading to a brief period of Jewish independence, during which time the Hasmonean dynasty ruled over the nation as priest-kings.[384] Unfortunately, the faithfulness to God's Law displayed by Mattathias and his family quickly gave way to corruption and wickedness in subsequent Hasmonean rulers, as they began to embrace various aspects of pagan culture, and to abandon the ideals of kingship prescribed in the Torah.[385] Brutal power struggles among rival members of the Hasmonean family resulted in ever escalating violence and bloodshed that would ultimately prompt direct Roman intervention in the nation's political affairs, with Pompey the Great once again conquering Jerusalem in 63 BC, thereby bringing a tragic end to this brief period of Jewish independence.[386]

While the Hasmonean dynasty continued to exist for several decades afterwards, they had little real power under Roman rule, and even this was brought to an end in 40 BC, when, following a revolt by Mattathias Antigonus, the last Hasmonean ruler, Rome conferred kingship upon Herod the Great, providing him with military assistance in defeating Antigonus and placing Judea under his rule as a client king of Rome.[387] Like the kings of Israel and Judah in the Old

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[383] Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," 40. Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 126-127.

[384] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 126-127. Hatina, "Palestine," 476. For a detailed overview of the Hasmonean period, see Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," 39-48.

[385] Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 126-127. Hatina, "Palestine," 476.

[386] Hatina, "Palestine," 476. Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," 47. Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 128.

[387] Helyer, "The Hasmoneans and the Hasmonean Era," 47.

Testament, then, the Hasmonean rulers ultimately showed themselves to be yet another series of faithless vassals to the divine suzerain. As a result, the closing of the intertestamental period God's people found themselves once again as little more than conquered vassals under the control of foreign powers, still waiting for an act of divine intervention to rescue and restore the nation.

Because of this, despite physically residing within the Promised Land, it became common for Torah observant Jews during the late second temple period to view the nation as still existing in a state of exile, one which would only end with full national restoration, the coming of a Davidic king, and the full outpouring of covenant blessings.[388] The partial return of the exiles from Babylon, then, signified not the total fulfillment of the Yahweh's promises to Israel in Deuteronomy 30, but rather, was merely the first step in the next phase of the Lord's plan to redeem His people.[389]

This belief, in turn, influenced a great deal of the messianic expectation during the time of Jesus' public ministry. Of course, this is not to say that all Jews of the second temple period held to this view of ongoing exile, nor that all had the same set of messianic expectations. Indeed, a wide variety of different beliefs and messianic expectations existed not only between the major Jewish sects of the day, but amongst the common people as well.[390] Nonetheless, as Wright asserts, the numerous known messianic movements of Jesus time point to "a reasonably widespread Jewish hope, cherished no doubt among some classes more than others, that there

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[388] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 241, 243, 268-270.

[389] Ibid.

[390] For an in depth overview of the various messianic expectations in second temple Judaism, as well as debate regarding the nature and extent of OT messianic expectation, see Stanley E. Porter ed. *The Messiah in the Old and New Testaments, McMaster New Testament Studies* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2007).

would come a king through whom Israel's God would liberate his people."[391] Moreover, this messianic expectation was closely tied to the second temple hope of a "new Exodus" event, in that the messianic king was regularly envisioned as the primary agent through whom Yahweh would enact national restoration and the outpouring of covenant blessings in fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30 and the message of the latter prophets.[392]

The Coming of Jesus as the Climax of the Old Testament Biblical Narrative

Central to the message of the four Gospel writers is the presentation of Jesus of Nazareth as the long awaited Messiah and rightful king of Israel, with Matthew, in particular, going to great lengths to present Jesus as the fulfillment of Jewish messianic expectation and Old Testament prophecy.[393] Indeed, Matthew begins his Gospel with a genealogical overview of Jesus' family history, one designed to provide a historical framework in which to understand the subsequent account of Jesus' life and ministry, by placing it within the ongoing story of Israel (Matt. 1:1-17). Certainly, much has been written regarding the scholarly debate surrounding various aspects of Matthew's genealogy. One aspect which holds a broad scholarly consensus, however, is the role of King David as the central figure around whom the genealogy is organized.[394] Not only does David feature as both the final figure of the first section and the first

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[391] Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 308.

[392] Ibid., 319.

[393] Cf. Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 28-31. Also Grant R. Osborne, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 31, 39. R. T. France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 41-56. Blomberg in particular notes the extensive use of fulfillment quotations in Matthew, many of which are not present in the other gospels. Moreover, Matthew is concerned not only with the fulfillment of direct messianic prophecies, i.e. Matthew 2:5's quotation of Micah 5:2, but also with more general typological fulfillment, such as the child Jesus' flight to, and return from Egypt. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 30.

[394] Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 53. Also Osborne, *Matthew*, 68. Also John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster, 2005), 72.

figure of the second, but the overall organization of names into three groups of fourteen, accomplished through the exclusion of several names, likely reflects a form of gematria, a numerical code in which numerical values stand in place of words.[395] In this case, Matthew uses a threefold pattern of "fourteen" as this is the numerical value of "David" in Hebrew.[396] In this way, then, Matthew places a major emphasis on Jesus' royal Davidic roots, showing Him to possess a legal claim to the throne of Israel.

Additionally, as France writes, Matthew's threefold division "highlights two essential turning-points in the history of Israel, and of the Davidic line: the accession of David to kingship, and the loss of that kingship at the Babylonian exile."[397] This in turn presents the arrival of Jesus not only as the restoration of Davidic kingship, but as the start of the "new Exodus" and the true return of God's people from exile.[398] This can likewise be seen in Matthew's heavy focus on typological fulfillment in the birth narratives of Jesus. In particular, Matthew sees in Jesus' childhood flight to, and return from, Egypt, the fulfillment of Hosea 11:1, which reads, in part, "out of Egypt I called my son."[399]

Of course, in its original context, it is not immediately evident that Hosea 11:1 is meant to convey any sort of messianic prophecy, let alone that it refers to any specific event in the life

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[395] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 53. Also Osborne *Matthew*, 60.

[396] Ibid.

[397] France, *Matthew*, 80.

[398] France, *Matthew*, 80. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 53.

[399] Matthew, more so than any of the other Gospel writes, emphasize Jesus' fulfillment of both Old Testament prophecy and typological patters, in order to support the author's assertion that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the promised son of David and long awaited Messiah. Indeed, Matthew's gospel contains no less than sixty quotations from the Old Testament, including the ten "fulfillment quotations," as well as numerous additional Old Testament allusions. Cf. Osborne, *Matthew*, 38-40.

of Jesus of Nazareth.[400] Rather, within Hosea's oracle, the phrase "out of Egypt I called my son," refers back to the earliest days of Israel's history, during which time God first rescued His people from bondage in the Exodus event and formed them into a nation.[401] Because of this, it is common for many commentators to assert that Matthew, in applying this verse to events in the life of Jesus, has severely distorted the original meaning of Hosea 11:1, and thereby misappropriates the text to suit his apologetic purposes.[402] Likewise, even somewhat more conservative commentors have, at times, suggested that Matthew's quotation of Hosea 11:1 reflects a flawed or inappropriate hermeneutical approach, albeit one which, under divine inspiration, ultimately serves to draw out the *sensus plenior* of Hosea's text.[403] Such assertions, however, are ultimately unwarranted. When one considers the message of Hosea chapter eleven

[400] Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 67.

[401] This can be seen by the parallel between "out of Egypt I called my son," and the preceding "when Israel was a *child* I loved him," which clearly point back to the earliest days of Israel's history. Likewise, the "son" terminology here is likely an intentional reference to Exodus 4:22, in which Israel is referred to as the Lord's firstborn "son". Cf. Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 102. Also Hubbard, *Hosea,* 219-220.

[402] For an overview and sampling of these objections see G[regory] K. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: Inerrancy and Genre," in *The Inerrant Word: Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*, ed. John MacArthur (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 210–211. See also the discussion in Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Respecting the Old Testament Context: Matthew's Use of Hosea and Jeremiah," in *The Uses of the Old Testament in the New* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2001), 47–48. Also Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope,* 102. As Rydelnik argues, assertions that Matthew is "proof texting" by distorting Hosea's meaning are problematic, since this would undermine Matthews apologetic purposes in seeking to convince Jewish readers that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah. After all, such blatant distortion of the OT text would hardly constitute a convincing argument to nonbelieving Jews well versed in the OT Scriptures.

[403] Again, for an overview of such approaches, see Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15: Inerrancy and Genre," 211. As Beale writes "Others have attributed to Matthew a Qumran-like special revelatory insight into the 'full meaning' (*sensus plenior*) of Hosea 11:1, a revelatory stance no longer available to subsequent church interpreters. Still others have understood Matthew to be employing a faulty hermeneutic used elsewhere in Judaism, which Christian interpreters should not emulate, but that nevertheless the interpretative conclusion is purportedly inspired by God." The problem with such approaches is twofold. First, appealing to *sensus plenior* ultimately unmoors the meaning of the New Testament quotation from the meaning of the Old Testament passage as intended by the human author(s). Likewise, appealing to *sensus plenior* means that attempting to understand, let alone emulate, the hermeneutical practices of the New Testament writers ultimately becomes futile for modern readers, since it requires divine inspiration to draw out meaning in the Old Testament text otherwise inaccessible via a grammatical-historical approach.

as a whole, one can see that Matthew is not, in fact, distorting the meaning of Hosea's oracle to suit his own purposes, by applying it as a prophetic "proof text" to an unrelated event from Jesus' childhood.[404] Rather, Matthew builds upon a typological foundation already present in the original text, in order to demonstrate that, with the arrival of the Messiah, the long awaited restoration of God's people is finally at hand.

Hosea chapter eleven begins as a condemnation of the nation of Israel for their ongoing pattern of faithlessness to the divine suzerain, and as a proclamation of judgement upon the nation for their failure to uphold the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant.[405] Moreover, this judgement, in the form of exile at the hands of Assyria, is presented in Hosea's oracle as a form of "reverse-exodus," and as the culmination of the Deuteronomistic curses (Hosea 11:5-6). At the same time, however, Hosea's oracle, consistent with the message of the latter prophets as a whole, provides hope for the nation by pointing forward to a time of postexilic restoration, a "new Exodus" event in which God will act to bring the people back into the Promised Land (Hosea 11:11). In doing so, Hosea himself draws a clear typological connection between the original Exodus even, referenced in 11:1, and the eschatological "new Exodus," prophesied in 11:11, so that the passage as a whole moves from Exodus-to exile-to new Exodus.[406] Moreover, the hope of the "new Exodus" is consistently linked in the latter prophets to the coming of the Messiah. Indeed, Hosea himself clearly links the restoration of Israel "in the latter days" to the restoration of the Davidic kingship following the judgment of the exile (Hosea 2:14-3:5).

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[404] As Kaiser observes, the NT writers, when quoting a single verse from a longer passage, often expect their readers to recognize the larger context of the passage from which the verse is drawn, in this case, the message of Hosea chapter eleven as a whole must be considered. See Kaiser Jr., "Matthew's Use of Hosea," 51-52.

[405] See the discussion in chapter 4, 29-30.

[406] Cf. Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15," 221.

Therefore, Hosea chapter eleven is not only a prophetic word regarding the new Exodus restoration, but is ultimately messianic as well.

Of course, one may still question whether Hosea himself had any idea that the Messiah would personally travel to, and return from, Egypt at the start of the new Exodus event. In regard to this, Rydelnik, Beale, and Sailhammer all observe the linguistic parallels between Hosea 11 and Numbers 23-24 to argue convincingly that Hosea had these passages in mind when writing this oracle.[407] In this case, the message of Numbers 23-24 becomes critical in seeking to properly exegete Hosea's own message. While Numbers 23:22 describes the nation of Israel, using the plural pronoun "them," coming out of Egypt during the Exodus, the parallel oracle in chapter 24 shifts to a prophetic portrait of a future king, and to the use of the singular pronoun to describe how "God brings *him* out of Egypt" (Num. 24:8 emphasis added).[408] This not only indicates that the Messiah Himself will one day be called out of Egypt by God, but also establishes an initial typological connection between Israel as a nation and the Messiah as an individual, one which is recognized by both Hosea and Matthew.[409] At this point then, one might question why Matthew does not simply quote Numbers 24 directly, rather than taking the more circuitous route through Hosea 11. Here Rydelnik suggests that Matthew chooses to quote Hosea specifically because he wants to "emphasize the Messiah's relationship to His Father as Son."[410] While this is likely true, it likewise seems probable that Matthew is also seeking to demonstrate to his readers that Jesus'

[407] Beale, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15," 222. Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, 103-105. John H. Sailhamer, "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15" *Westminster Theological Journal* 63 (2001): 94-95.

[408] Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope,* 103-105. Sailhamer, "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15," 94-95.

[409] Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope,* 104. Sailhamer, "Hosea 11:1 and Matthew 2:15," 95.

[410] Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope,* 104.

personal exodus not only fulfills the prophecy of Numbers 24:8, but that this in turn is the beginning of the new Exodus event prophesied in Hosea 11:11.

Matthew, in other words, naturally sees in Jesus childhood return from Egypt, not only a reenactment of Israel's historical Exodus in the person of Israel's Messiah, but the initiation of the second, greater Exodus event. Asa result, Matthew recognizes the typological connection between the two events, with Jesus' arrival heralding the beginning of the promised restoration for God's people.[411] As Crowe writes, "Matthew portrays Jesus in the role of covenantally obedient Israel who comes out of Egypt in accordance with God's design…as the true Israel Jesus identifies with the failures of Israel reflected in Hosea, and overcomes them in keeping with the divine call. Jesus' flight to and return from Egypt is thus the eschatological realization of Hosea's hope-an enacted reversal of the recalcitrance of Israel."[412] This sort of typological fulfillment is central to Matthew's presentation of Jesus, as the Gospel writer sees in the Messiah not only a reenactment or recapitulation of Israel's history, but ultimately the overcoming of that history of failure through Jesus' total obedience to the will of the Father.[413]

Luke, likewise, crafts his narrative in such a way so as to clearly frame Jesus' birth within the ongoing story of Israel. Zechariah's prophecy at the birth of John the Baptist, in particular, emphasizes the Messiah's imminent arrival as the fulfillment of both Old Testament prophecy

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[411] Cf. Craig Blomberg, "Matthew" in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, eds. G. K. Beale and Carson, D. A. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 8. Blomberg defines typology as a "recognition of a correspondence between New and Old Testament events, based on a conviction of the unchanging character of the principles of God's working." See also Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: W.B. Eerdmans; InterVarsity, 1992), 43–44. Also Osborne, *Matthew*, 98-99. See also Seong-Kwang Kim, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15," 구약논단 25, no. 3 (September 30, 2019):109.

[412] Brandon D. Crowe, "Fulfillment in Matthew as Eschatological Reversal," *The Westminster Theological Journal* 75, no. 1 (Spr 2013): 114.

[413] Kim, "The Use of Hosea 11:1 in Matthew 2:15," 111-112.

and the promises made to Abraham (Luke 1:67-75).[414] Here Zechariah, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, declares that, through the imminent birth of Jesus, the Lord has "raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of His servant David" (Luke 1:69). The "horn" terminology used here was commonly utilized to denote strength and power, and royal authority in particular.[415] It is used specifically, moreover, in reference to the Davidic dynasty in the Psalter, i.e. Psalms 89:17–24, 132:17, and 148:14.[416] This, combined with the reference to the house of David, demonstrates that Zechariah sees in the birth of Jesus the promised restoration of the Davidic line, and with it, the promised salvation for the people of Israel.

Likewise, both the angel Gabriel's message to Mary announcing her impending conception, as well as Mary's own Magnificat, present the coming birth of Jesus as both the continuation of the Old Testament narrative, as well as the fulfillment of the Lord's covenant promises to His people. In the latter, Mary declares that the birth of her child is in accordance with the Lord's "remembrance of his mercy, as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his offspring forever" (Luke 1:54-55). The birth of Jesus, then, is presented here as the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to His people, promises stretching all the way back to the covenant made by Yahweh to Abraham, and to his "seed/offspring."[417] Likewise, Mary looks upon her

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[414] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge; Nottingham, England, William B. Eerdmans, Apollos, 2015), 62. Edwards writes that salvation in Luke "stands in continuity with God's historic work in Israel, as revealed in the establishment of the Davidic monarchy (v. 69), the holy prophets through whom God spoke (v. 70), and the holy covenant sworn to Abraham. See also Robert H. Stein, *Luke*, vol. 24, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 100-103.

[415] Cf. David E. Garland, *Luke*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament: (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 107. Also Leon Morris, *Luke: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 3, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 96–97. Also Stein, *Luke*, 99.

[416] Garland, *Luke*, 107. Also Morris, *Luke*, 96-97.

[417] See the discussion in chapter 2 pgs. 12-14 on the Lord's promises to Abraham and the search for the promised "seed". See also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 56. Edwards writes "This covenant promise and age-old hope of Israel comes to fruition in Mary, who fulfills the promise "to Abraham and his descendants."

pregnancy as the culmination of the Lord's many great acts throughout Israel's history, referring in verse fifty one to the Lord's performance of "mighty deeds with his arm" a phrase which alludes to the original Exodus event i.e. Exodus 3:19, and thereby points forward to the promised new Exodus to be accomplished through the coming Messiah.[418]

In the angel Gabriel's visit, meanwhile, the angel declares that the child to be born to Mary will sit upon "the throne of his father David…over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end" (Luke 1:32-33). In this way, then, Gabriel announces that the birth of Jesus, the coming of the Messiah, corresponds to the restoration of the Davidic throne, and the fulfillment of central covenantal promises, i.e. 2 Samuel 7:16 and Amos 9:11.[419] This, in turn, will lead to the greater restoration of God's people, in which they will be saved "from their sins," i.e. their covenant violations, through the work of the Messiah in the new and greater Exodus (Matt. 1:21).[420] Likewise, Gabriel's asserts in Luke 1:33 that Jesus will reign "over the house of Jacob forever." This reference to the "house of Jacob" a phrase which is used throughout the OT to refer to the nation of Israel, points to the promise of a restored covenant community finally rescued from the ongoing curse of exile.[421] Luke, then, as well as Matthew, clearly presents Jesus' coming as a turning in the story of God's people, fulfilling both the

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[418] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 55. As Edwards observes, "the 'arm' of God, a Semitism, is used throughout the Exodus narratives to refer to God's redemption of captive Israel from Egypt."

[419] In both Gabriel's announcement to Mary and the angel's message to Joseph, Jesus' Davidic lineage is stressed, presenting Him as a rightful heir to His ancestor's throne, and the fulfillment of God's promise to David of an everlasting dynasty. Cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* 28-29. Also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 47. Also Garland, *Luke*, 80.

[420] Craig S. Keener, *Matthew*, vol. 1, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997), Matt 1:18–25. As Keener writes, in referring to salvation from sin, "Matthew speaks of more than personal repentance; he evokes the Old Testament hope of the salvation of God's people, including the justice and peace of God's kingdom."

[421] Stein, Luke, 84. Also Garland, *Luke*, 80.

promise of restoration for the house of David, as well as the start of the new Exodus, a return from exile for God's people.

Like Matthew, Luke provides his reader with a genealogical history of Jesus' family line, one which places Jesus' birth within the ongoing story of God's people.[422] Unlike Matthew however, whose genealogical history extends only back to Abraham and the patriarchs, Luke's genealogy extends all the way back to "Adam, son of God" (Luke 3:38). Certainly, this reflects Luke's more "universal" focus, in writing to a Gentile audience, vs Matthew's more Jewish Gospel, which seeks to frame Jesus' coming within the story of Israel tracing back to Abraham.[423] Beyond this, however, Luke's more universal perspective highlights the way in the story of Israel is directly linked to the fall of Adam and the larger story of humanity.

Israel, as presented in the Pentateuch, was called to act as an answer to Adam's covenantal failings, a second, "corporate Adam," whose election and vocational calling as a royal priesthood reflect that of the first man, the first failed vassal. It is the historical and ongoing failure of Israel to fulfill their vocational calling, however, which latter gives rise to the need for an institutional monarchy, vassal kings to rule and guide the vassal state of Israel in service to the divine suzerain. The failure of these vassal kings, in turn, however, only results in the deepening failure of the nation, and ultimately brings the people under the full weight of the covenant curses. The messianic hope of the Old Testament, as expounded by the latter prophets, therefore, centers around the hope for the future coming of a faithful vassal king, one whose perfect fidelity

[422] There are, of course, significant differences between the genealogies found in Luke and Matthew, particularly in the names spanning from David to Joseph. While a number of solutions to these difference have been suggested, none seem conclusive. Cf. the discussion in Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 123-124. Regardless of the position one takes, however, the purpose of these genealogies remains the same, to, as Nolland puts it, locate Jesus "firmly within, but at the climax of, the history of God's dealings with his people." Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 70.

[423] Cf. Garland, *Luke*, 172. Also Stein, *Luke*, 142.

to the divine suzerain will overcome the covenant and vocational failure of past vassals. Given the above considerations, then, one can see how, by highlighting Jesus' genealogical link to David/the Davidic kings, to the Patriarchs/Israel, and to Adam, both Luke and Matthew present Jesus as this long awaited faithful vassal king. This in turn will set the stage for the Gospel writers to present Jesus' total obedience to the Father throughout the Gospel narratives in terms of covenantal faithfulness. Moreover, each the past faithless vassals are identified throughout Scripture as covenantal "sons" of God, i.e. Psalm 2:7, Exodus 4:22, Hosea 11:1, and Luke 3:38. Jesus, then, can be seen as the ontological Son of God who is also the faithful covenantal "son" of God, so that Jesus is presented by the Gospel writers as the faithful vassal king who is contrasted with the faithless vassals of the past.

The Son of God as Covenantal "son" of God in the Baptism Narratives

Although all four Gospels link the beginning of Jesus' public ministry to that of John the Baptist, an actual account of the baptism of Jesus appears only in the three Synoptic Gospels (Matt. 3:13-16, Mark 1:9-11, Luke 3:21-22). These accounts are significant for a number of reasons. First, Jesus' baptism identifies Him with the covenant community of which He Himself is the head. As Crowe writes, "by participating in John's baptism Jesus identifies with God's people as their representative," despite having no need to undergo a baptism of repentance for His own sake.[424] Likewise, Keener writes that Jesus' baptism "represents Jesus' ultimate identification with Israel at the climactic stage in its history."[425] Jesus' baptism, then, represents

[424] Crowe, The Last Adam, 68-69.

[425] Keener, *Matthew*, Matt 3:15.

His anointing as Israel's representative Messiah and vassal king, both in water by John, and, more significantly, by the Holy Spirit, who empowers Him prior to His public ministry.[426]

Second, the voice of the Father from Heaven identifies Jesus in covenantal terms as His "beloved Son (Matt. 3:17, Mark 1:11, Luke 3:22)." Certainly, one should not downplay the ontological nature of Jesus' Sonship in these verses, particularly given the Trinitarian theology of the baptism accounts, in which the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all clearly present.[427] Nonetheless, the reference here in His baptism to Jesus as God's Son certainly carries strong messianic and covenantal overtones as well. As Edwards observes, the identification of Jesus as God's Son echoes the enthronement of Israel's king in Psalm 2:7, once again linking Jesus to the Davidic dynasty.[428] Moreover, it links Jesus to both Israel, in that He is "the perfect fulfillment of the original concept of sonship that was linked to Israel's call," and to Adam, God's other covenantal "sons" and vassals.[429]

In this way, then, as with the birth accounts, the Gospel writers present Jesus here as a vassal king to the divine suzerain, continuing, and ultimately concluding, the line of past vassals. At the same time, however, Jesus is contrasted to these failed vassals by the Father's declaration that He is the "beloved Son, *with whom I am well pleased* (Matt. 3:17, emphasis added)." This declaration of pleasure by the Father not only likely alludes to Isaiah's servant figure, "my

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[426] Block, *Covenant*, 553. Block emphasizes how Jesus' anointing in baptism parallels that of Israel's kings, presenting Him as the new David and "son" of God in a covenantal sense, and receiving empowerment for the role to which He is called. Also Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 72-74.

[427] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 82. Also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 119-120. Also Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 68.

[428] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 118. See also France, *Matthew*, 100–101.

[429] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 118.

chosen one, *in whom my soul delights*," but also serves to contrast Jesus, as God's faithful Son and vassal, to the failed vassals of Israel's past (Isa. 42:1, emphasis added).[430]

Jesus as Faithfull Vassal in the Gospels

Given the above considerations, then, it can be seen that the Gospels present Jesus as not only the heir to the Davidic throne, but as a vassal king to the divine suzerain. The implication of this reality then, is that, in becoming incarnate as a son of David, the Son of God has placed Himself under the covenant obligations of Israel's vassal kings. As Block writes, Jesus "fully accepted the mission and requirements that YHWH had laid out for his vassals in the stipulations of the Israelite covenant."[431] Much of the narratives of the Gospels from this point forward, then, can be seen as portraying Jesus as the ultimate faithful vassal king, by contrasting His total obedience to the will of the Father with the disobedience and covenantal failures of Adam, Israel, and the Davidic kings. While this faithfulness will define Jesus' entire ministry, the most paradigmatic example can be seen in the wilderness temptation narratives. While all three of the Synoptic Gospels make reference to Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, Matthew and Luke provide a far more in depth account of these events, though in slightly different order.[432]

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[430] Cf. Darrell L. Bock, *Luke*, *The IVP New Testament Commentary Series* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), *Luke*, Luke 3:21–22. Also Osborne, *Matthew*, 125. Also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 118. Also Keener, *Matthew*, Matt 3:16-17. As Keener writes "the voice reveals Jesus as the Son obedient to the point of death, who willingly divests himself of his proper honor by identifying with us in baptism and death."

[431] Block, *Covenant*, 463.

[432] Either Matthew or Luke inverts the second and third temptations, likely in keeping with the author's own thematic and theological purposes. This was a fairly common literary practice in ancient Greco-Roman bibliographies, in which strict chronological sequence was of lesser concern than literary purpose. See the discussion in Mike Licona, *Why Are There Differences in the Gospels?: What We Can Learn From Ancient Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2017) 127, 196-197.

Jesus as Faithful Vassal in the Wilderness Temptation Narratives

Having undergone baptism, the Gospel writers recount that Jesus was then led into the wilderness by the Holy Spirit, where He fasted for forty days and underwent temptation by Satan (Matt. 4:1-2, Mark 1:12-13, Luke 4:1-2). Immediately one sees here a parallel between Jesus' forty days in the wilderness and Israel's forty years of wandering after the Exodus.[433] Like Israel, Yahweh's covenantal "son," the Son of God will undergo a series of temptations in the wilderness, testing His faithfulness to the divine suzerain. Unlike Israel, however, it is Jesus' responses to these temptations which will demonstrate His total submission to the divine suzerain as a faithful vassal.

In each of the three temptations, one can see a direct parallel to Israel's covenantal failures in the wilderness.[434] First, when faced with hunger in the Exodus event, the people of Israel complained to Moses and grumbled against Yahweh, even going so far as to claim that He had only brought them into the wilderness to die (Exod. 16:2-3). This, despite, having witnessed the Lord's power and provision in Egypt, demonstrated a fundamental lack of trust in their divine suzerain. Jesus, however, despite having fasted for forty days and experiencing great hunger, rebuffs the devils temptation to turn stone into bread, instead quoting from Deuteronomy 8:3 by saying "man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God"

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[433] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 40. Also Osborne, *Matthew*, 128-129. Also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 124-125. Also Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 74-76.

[434] Within the context of the overarching biblical themes under consideration in this dissertation, it is the parallels between Jesus' temptations in the wilderness, and those of past vassals, Adam and Israel, that are of primary concern. Nonetheless, it should not be overlooked that the three temptations which the Lord faces, and overcomes, likewise represent the various forms of temptation common to all of humanity, God's imagers. As Blomberg writes, the wilderness temptations "seem to parallel John's epitome of human temptation: "the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life" (1 John 2:16, RSV). Jesus' temptations therefore illustrate the precious truth that he was indeed tempted in every way common to human experience (Heb. 2:17–18; 4:15)." Blomberg, *Matthew*, 87.

(Matt. 4:4).[435] Here, then, rather than misusing His divine authority, or even grumbling as the Israelites did, Jesus demonstrates total trust in, and reliance on, His Father for His provision, a principle that He Himself would later preach to His followers, i.e. Matthew 6:25-33.[436]

Following this, the devil presents Jesus with a second temptation (third in Luke's account), by taking Him to the highest point of the temple and pressing Him to demonstrate His messianic identity by throwing Himself to the ground (Matt. 4:5-6, Luke 4:9-11). If Jesus is, in fact, the Son of God, the devil argues, then the Lord will surely '"command his angels concerning you,' and 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.'" Here Satan himself quotes from Scripture in an attempt to goad Jesus into putting His Father's promises to the test.[437] Jesus, however, once again cites the book of Deuteronomy, specifically chapter six, verse sixteen, in refuting the devil's temptation, stating "again it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test,'" (Matt. 4:7 Luke 4:12). Here again there is a clear reference to Israel's failure in the wilderness. Indeed, the verse from Deuteronomy which Jesus cites here are followed by the words "as you tested him at Massah," referencing yet another instance in which the Israelites grumbled regarding their thirst, demanding that the Lord *prove His presence among them* by providing water (Deut. 6:16, Exod. 17:1-7). As Osborne writes, these events at Massah, the name of which means "testing," "became symbols of putting God to the test and thereby bringing judgment down on the

[435] Deuteronomy 8:3 likewise presents the Israelites hunger prior to the giving of manna by the Lord as a "test," one which they failed. Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 84. Also Osborne, *Matthew*, 133.

[436] Cf. Stein, *Luke*, 146.

[437] Satan quotes here from Psalm 91:11-12. While there is little reason to see this Psalm as an explicit messianic prophecy, the devils implication is that, if God promises to protect His people, then surely He must intervene to protect His own Son. Cf. Stein, *Luke*, 148.

nation."[438] Jesus, however, has no need to "prove" His messianic identity or Sonship, which have already been confirmed in His baptism (Matt. 3:17). Unlike Israel in the wilderness, Jesus knows that His Father is always with Him, and He refuses to put God to the test.

As it relates to Jesus role as a vassal to the divine suzerain, however, it is the third temptation (second in Luke's account) which is of the greatest significance. Having failed twice to entice Jesus to sin, the devil now presents Him with a final test. Taking Him to a high mountain, the devil shows Jesus "all the kingdoms of the world," offering to give them to Jesus if He should bow down and worship the devil (Matt. 4:8-9, Luke 4:5-7). While some scholars, such as Bock, argue that the devil's claims here regarding his authority are either deceitful or delusional, they accord with other biblical statements, such as those of Jesus in John 12:31, in which He refers to Satan as the "ruler of the world."[439]

Further, it is notable that Jesus does not refute the devil's premise, that authority over the kingdoms of the world had indeed been given to Satan, nor that the devil could actually bestow such authority upon whomever he chose. In other words, what the devil appears to be legitimately offering is an alternative to the path of faithful suffering and death to which Jesus has been called, which Stein refers to as "a crossless path of messiahship."[440] The choice facing Jesus, then, is one of faithful suffering and death, or of faithless compromise and easy temporal power through idolatry.

Such idolatry was not only Israel's "original sin," the very thing which led them down the path to exile and death under the curse of the Law, but was likewise found at the heart of both

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[438] Osborne, *Matthew*, 134.

[439] Bock, *Luke*, Luke 4:1–13. Also see Gerald L. Borchert, *John 12–21*, vol. 25B, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2002), 58–59.

[440] Stein, *Luke*, 147.

Adam and the Davidic kings' covenantal failures. It is, moreover, an utter and complete breaking of the suzerain-vassal relationship, and the ultimate expression of covenant faithlessness. Should Jesus bow down and worship the devil then, He could conceivably receive political power without the need for suffering and death on the cross, but it would also mean the certain and complete failure of His mission as a vassal king. The attempted deception, then, is not in regard to the issue of the devil's ability to grant political power and authority, but in regard to its cost. As Blomberg rightly notes, "the devil's price is damning. He requires nothing short of selling one's soul in worshiping him, which leads inexorably to eternal judgment."[441] This was ultimately the choice which has faced every past vassal throughout the history of humanity, from Adam onward, and which every past vassal had failed. Jesus, however, rebukes the devil yet again, declaring that, "it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve (Matt. 4:10, Luke 4:8).'" In doing so, Jesus clearly demonstrates that, in contrast to the failed covenantal "sons" who came before Him, the Son of God is also the one and only true faithful vassal to the divine suzerain. As a result, the devil is forced to end his temptation of Jesus and to depart from Him (Matt. 4:11, Luke 4:13). In this way, then, Jesus is again contrasted to God's first covenantal "son," Adam, whose failure to drive out the serpent from the garden represents the original vocational failure by the Lord's vassal kings, a failure which Jesus Himself has now arrived to overcome.[442]

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[441] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 85.

[442] As discussed in chapter 2, pg. 1-2, 9, Adam's failure to drive out the serpent was not only a covenant failure as a vassal priest-king, but likewise anticipates the failure of Israel and her kings to fully drive out the Canaanites and their gods. See also Postell, *Adam as Israel*, 32.

Jesus as Faithful Vassal During His Public Ministry

Jesus' faithfulness in the temptation narratives sets the stage for the remainder of His public ministry, during which He is consistently shown to be nothing short of completely faithful to His Father in all things. Indeed, Jesus Himself affirms that He did not come to do His own will, "but the will of him who sent me (John 6:38)." Likewise, He neither acts nor speaks of His own accord, but does "only what he sees the Father doing," and speaks only what the Father has commanded Him to speak (John 5:19, 12:49-50).[443] Jesus' entire public ministry, then, can be characterized by His total obedience to the Father. Having already rejected the devils offer of earthly political power, Jesus refuses to follow in the footsteps of the past kings of Israel and Judah, whose faithlessness to the divine suzerain led the people's charge into apostacy, and ultimately into exile.[444]

First, Jesus refuses throughout His ministry to seek political power by earthly means. At one point, after having fed five thousand people with only five loaves of bread and two fish, the crowd, impressed by Jesus' miraculous works and teaching, seek to establish Him as king (John 6:15). Jesus however, sensing their intentions, withdraws from the people into the mountains (John 6:15). There was a fundamental difference, then, between the type of king the people expected, a military and political leader to free them from the Roman occupation, and the type of king Jesus had come to be.[445] As Jesus would later tell Pilate, His kingdom was "not of this

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[443] D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: InterVarsity; W.B. Eerdmans, 1991), 250–251. As Carson writes, Jesus is "always submissive to the Father. Not only does the Son always do what pleases the Father (8:29), but he *can do only what he sees his Father doing.*"

[444] See chapter 4, pgs. 19-22.

[445] Colin G. Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 4, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 164.

world," and therefore could not be established through human force of arms (John 18:36). This, likewise, is the basis for Jesus' refusal to allow His disciples to physically defend Him during arrest (Matt. 26: 51-54). In rebuking Peter for his actions in attacking the high priest's servant, Jesus assures him that He could at any time "appeal to my Father, and he would at once he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels" (Matt. 26:53).[446] Yet Jesus does not exercise His divine prerogative as the Son of God, as doing so would thereby prevent the Scriptures from being fulfilled.[447] It is clear, then, that Jesus' kingship is not to be implemented through human strength, but only through submission to the Father.

Second, Jesus is clearly contrasted to the past kings of Israel and Judah through His concern and care for the people, as the kings of the Old Testament were regularly condemned by the prophets for their failure to rule righteously as vassals of the divine suzerain.[448] Rather than acting as faithful shepherds for the Lord's flock, the kings of the past are described in cannibalistic terms, as having devoured those under their care.[449] Jesus, by contrast, is clearly presented in the Gospels as one whose concern is for His people, i.e. Matthew 9:36, and for the poor and downtrodden in particular. As a number of commentators have observed, this is particularly apparent in Luke's Gospel, where concern for the marginalized members of society,

[446] As Blomberg writes "At five to six thousand soldiers per legion, twelve legions could literally amount to seventy-two thousand angels. The number underlines the magnitude of the power available to Jesus which he declines to utilize." Blomberg, *Matthew,* 399.

[447] Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew,* 399. Also France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*, 381, Also Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew,* 1114. As Nolland emphasizes, it is not simply one particular prophecy in view here, but the whole of Jesus' death and resurrection which must be allowed to occur in accordance with the divine purpose of the Father.

[449] See Chapter 4, pg. 21.

such as the poor, women, Samaritans, etc. is heavily emphasized, though this concern is certainly present in the other Gospels as well.[450]

Indeed, Jesus' own understanding of His messianic identity and mission is clearly tied to His care for His flock. First, when asked by John's disciples if He is, in fact, the "one who is to come," i.e. the Messiah, He responds by telling them to report to John what they "have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them (Luke 7:18-22, Matt. 11:1-5)."[451] Not only does this list clearly allude to the messianic prophecies of Isaiah, but it likewise demonstrates Jesus' own understanding of His messianic ministry as one of healing for the people under His care.[452] As Blomberg writes "Jesus' 'messiahship' little resembled the political and military program of liberation many Jews anticipated…he is inverting the world's standards of greatness, so it should surprise no one that his concept of messiahship did not involve political or military aspirations."[453]

Second, Jesus clearly defines His mission as one of service, rather than power. Following a request by John and James' mother for a special place of honor for her sons in Jesus' kingdom, He provides His disciples with a lesson in the importance of servant leadership in God's kingdom, of which He Himself is the primary example (Matt. 20:20-28, Mark 10:35-45). Jesus' followers, He informs them, are not to behave like Gentile rulers, who, at best, lord their

[450] Cf. Stein, *Luke*, 49-50. See also I. Howard Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 35–36.

[451] Cf. Blomberg, *Matthew*, 184–185. Also Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 220–221.

[452] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Luke*, 220–221. Also Garland, *Luke*, 311-312.

[453] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 185.

authority over others, and, at worst, act as petty tyrants.[454] This, moreover, was likewise the habit of past kings of Israel and Judah. The disciples, however, are to follow Jesus' own example of submission, since "even the Son of Man came *not to be served but to serve,* and to give his life as a ransom for many (Matt. 20:28, Mark 10:45 emphasis added)."[455] Here again, one can see that Jesus understood His role as king as one of service for the benefit of those under His care. As Nolland writes "Jesus exhibits his exalted status precisely in taking up a serving role…the Son of Man exhibits his preeminence precisely by giving service rather than by receiving service. In view will be the whole range of the beneficent nature of Jesus' ministry, from his teaching and preaching to his healings and feedings."[456]

Given the above considerations, then, it is hardly surprising that Jesus identifies Himself, in contrast to past vassal kings, as the "good shepherd" (John 10:11-18).[457] Unlike these past kings, who are identified as themselves actually feeding upon the flock, Jesus, as God's faithful Son in both an ontological and covenantal sense, will willingly lay down His own life for those

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[454] Cf James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Leicester, England: Eerdmans; Apollos, 2002), 324–325. Also James A. Brooks, *Mark*, vol. 23, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1991), 170. Also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 307–308.

[455] Particularly illustrative of Jesus self-understanding of His kingly role as being one of service is His surprising willingness to wash His disciples' feet, as recorded in John 13:4-5, a job so despised that it was typically reserved for slaves, children, or women. Indeed, some Jewish commentators of the day argued that the task was so demeaning that it should not even be given to Jewish slaves, but only to Gentiles. For a ruler to wash the feet of their subjects, would be nearly unthinkable. Indeed, as Borchert writes, "I know of no other example in the literature of the ancient world before the coming of Jesus where such a foot washing by a leader occurs." Jesus, then, complete inverts the normal understanding of kingship, taking on a posture of humility and service in contrast to past kings of Israel and Judah, let alone Gentile rulers. See Borchert, *John 12–21*, 79–80. See also Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 462–463.

[456] Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 823–824.

[457] As Borchet writes, "The word *kalos* ('good') here is used to describe the role of Jesus in the context of self-giving (laying down his life, 10:11, 15, 17–18) and implies much more than the general meaning ascribed to the word by the philosophers, such as 'beautiful,' 'good,' 'useful.'" See Gerald L. Borchert, *John 1–11*, vol. 25A, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1996), 333.

under His care (John 10:11).[458] Indeed, Jesus identifies this as the very reason for which the Father has sent Him, to lay down of His own life for the sake of their flock (John 10:18). It is Jesus' willingness to obey His Father, the divine suzerain, in this charge which makes Him a faithful vassal king, and it is this faithfulness that the basis of the Father's love (John 10:17). As Carson rightly asserts, this is not to say "that the Father withholds his love until Jesus agrees to give up his life on the cross and rise again. Rather, the love of the Father for the Son is eternally linked with the unqualified obedience of the Son to the Father, his utter dependence upon him, culminating in this greatest act of obedience now just before him: willingness to bear the shame and ignominy of Golgotha, the isolation and rejection of death, the sin and curse reserved for the Lamb of God."[459] It is for this reason, then, that Jesus, the faithful vassal king, is given authority by the Father to not only lay down His life for the sake of others, but ultimately, to take it back up again (John 10:17).

Jesus as Faithful Vassal in the Crucifixion

If the temptation narratives are a paradigmatic example of covenant faithfulness which launches Jesus' public ministry, it is His mission's conclusion, a self-sacrificial death on behalf of His people and in total submission to the will of the Father, which are the ultimate act of covenant faithfulness on the part of the faithful vassal king. In His crucifixion, Jesus demonstrates total submission to the will of the Father, while simultaneously taking upon Himself the full force of covenant curses that have been poured out upon the nation. In doing so,

[458] As Kruse emphasizes, Jesus' identification as the good shepherd recalls God's promises through the prophets to gather and care for His flock, in contrast to the people's faithless leaders. See Kruse, *John: An Introduction and Commentary*, 234.

[459] Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, 388.

Jesus fulfills the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, paving the way for the outpouring of divine blessings through His resurrection and exaltation.

Jesus' death, though entered into willingly by the Son, is fundamentally an act of total submission to the will of the Father. This can be seen most clearly in Jesus prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, in which He implores the Father to, if possible, remove the cup of suffering which He is about to receive (Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42). Here, then, one can see a clear contrast between Jesus' human will, which naturally wishes to avoid the horrific pain and suffering of crucifixion, and the Father's divine will. As Blomberg writes, "verse 39 epitomizes Jesus' full humanity and demonstrates the complete extent to which he could be tempted.[460] Likewise, Edwards writes that, "the plea of Jesus suggests that he is genuinely tempted to forsake the role of the suffering servant."[461] Nonetheless, Jesus concludes His prayer by declaring to His Father that "not my will, but yours be done (Matt. 26:39, Mark 14:36, Luke 22:42)." Here, then, the incarnate Son of God does what no other covenantal "son" of God has ever done, He submits Himself fully to the will of the divine suzerain as a faithful vassal, and does so even to the point of a torturous and horrific death.[462] Jesus Himself will soon assert that He has the divine prerogative, as the Son of God, to appeal to His Father for aid, and that the Father would, in turn, place twelve legions of angels at His disposal (Matt. 26:53). In spite of this, Jesus refuses to undermine the Father's will in this way, instead choosing to suffer and die for the sake of His flock.

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[460] Blomberg, *Matthew*, 394.

[461] James R. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2002), 434.

[462] For a discussion on the brutality of crucifixion as a form of capital punishment, see Donald E. Green "The Folly of the Cross." *The Master's Seminary Journal* 15, no. 1 (Spr 2004).

It is this act of self-sacrifice and submission to the Father's will, moreover, which provides the ultimate fulfillment of the demands of the Mosaic Covenant. Having been approached during His public ministry regarding the "greatest" commandment of Law, Jesus Himself is recorded by the Gospel writers as having declared that there were two (Matt. 22:34-40, Mark 12:28-31). The first, to "love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind," and the second, to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37-39, Mark 12:29-31). Upon these two commandments, Jesus teaches, "depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:40).[463] Here, the Greek word translated "to love," *agapan,* refers to a total, selfless, and self-sacrificing love, and is used throughout the New Testament to describe God's love for His people.[464] It is precisely this sort of love, both towards the Father and towards His flock, which Jesus exhibits, and indeed, epitomizes, in His death upon the cross. Certainly, Jesus' entire life and ministry are characterized by His submission to the Father and upholding of the letter of the Law, yet it is in His death that Jesus most clearly exhibits the total fulfillment of the spirit of the Law, as expressed in these two commandments.

At the same time, Jesus not only fulfills the Law requirements through total submission and *agape* towards the Father, but He also takes upon Himself the full force of the covenant curses that were previously poured out upon the covenant community as a result of their faithlessness and transgressions. First, death itself was the ultimate covenant curse, even beyond the curse of exile (Deut. 30:15-16). The covenant made between Yahweh and Israel in Deuteronomy offers "life and good…if you obey the commandments of the Lord your God…by

[463] It was common in second temple Judaism for the religious leaders to categorize the relative importance of the 613 Mosaic laws. Jesus here selects the two laws upon which all others depend, complete *agape* towards God, which in turn results in *agape* towards His children as well. This love, then is the basis upon which the whole of the law depends. Cf. Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark,* 370–371.

[464] Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark,* 372-373.

loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments," while promising "death and evil" to those who transgress the stipulations of the covenant (Deut. 30:15-16).[465] Likewise, it is the original faithless vassal, Adam, who first brings the curse of death upon humanity through his transgression in the garden (Gen. 2:17, Rom. 5:12). And yet, it a dramatic reversal, it is the ultimate faithful vassal, whose entire life has been characterized by perfect obedience to the demands of the covenant, who willingly experiences the curse death as the ultimate act of faithfulness, and who does so on behalf of the covenant community.[466]

Not only this, but it is significant that Jesus' death occurs on a cross, since, as the apostle Paul will later observe, this places Jesus under the curse of the Law, in that "cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree (Gal. 3:14)." As George writes, although Jesus was born under the Law in His incarnation, His sinless life meant that "he did not merit the curse of the law for any wrongdoing he had committed."[467] Death on a "tree," however, demonstrates that Jesus was indeed placed under the curse of the Law on behalf of the covenant community of which He is the head, thereby taking upon Himself the full force of the covenant curses in the ultimate act of faithfulness to the divine suzerain. Moreover, it is this act of self-sacrificial *agape,* the ultimate expression of covenant faithfulness which overcomes the curse of the Law, and which allows for the outpouring of covenant blessings in the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus.

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[465] Cf. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 392. Merrill writes that "the linkage between this passage and the Shema and its context, already noted earlier (v. 14), is confirmed by the appeal to "love the Lord your God," a command that lies at the very center of the covenant relationship." Jesus, then, as the only one to faithfully uphold the Law in this way, rightfully deserves "life and good," yet willing undergoes "death and evil."

[466] Moreover, in dying in place of His subjects, the covenant community, Jesus once again completely inverts the standard conception of kingship in the ancient world, where it was the subject's role to suffer, or even die, for the sake of the king. Block, for instance, describes an ANE ritual in which "in response to an omen that threatened the life of the king, diviners would choose a man from the population to serve as a substitute king and take the curse of the omens upon himself" a ritual would reach its climax in the execution of the substitute in place of the ruler. Block, *Covenant,* 341-342.

[467] Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1994), 238.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Throughout the Gospel narratives, then, Jesus of Nazareth is presented as a perfectly faithful vassal to the divine suzerain. He is born a son of Adam, Abraham, and David, concluding the line of vassals around whom the Old Testament narrative centered, and He is anointed by the Holy Spirit as Israel's representative king and covenantal "son" of God in His baptism. As a vassal king, He fully upholds both the letter and spirit of the Mosaic Covenant through total submission to the will of the Father, the divine suzerain, in all things, in stark contrast to the failed and faithless vassals of the past. Having done so, He then willing gives up His life on behalf of the people in the ultimate act of covenant faithfulness, an act which places Him under the full force of the covenant curses in the form of death on a tree.

As discussed in chapter 1, "the 'story of Israel' in the Old Testament can be seen as the unsuccessful search for a faithful vassal to fulfill the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, a story brought to its climax by the 'story of Jesus,' as presented in the Gospels."[468] Here, then, one at last comes to the narrative climax of Scripture, as the ontological Son of God, incarnate as a son of David, not only places Himself under the obligations of Israel's vassal kings, but perfectly fulfills these obligations through His sinless life and self-sacrificial death. In this way then, it is the Father and Son whom, together as divine suzerain and human vassal, fulfill the demands of the Law, thereby overturing the covenantal curses poured out on Israel, and paving the way for the renewed outpouring of covenantal blessings.

Of course, should the story end at this point, with Israel's representative vassal king hanging on the cross, then it would be story of tragedy, rather than hope. It is only through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that the story reaches its proper conclusion. This, then, will

[468] Chapter 1, 17.

be the focus of the next chapter, showing how Jesus, having demonstrated total covenant faithfulness to the Father, receives in Himself the outpouring of the promised covenant blessings, the undoing of death, exaltation to the right hand of the Father, the defeat of His enemies, and ultimately the renewal of creation. It is these blessings which He Himself then bestows upon the covenant community as king, thereby bringing the overarching story of Scripture to its ultimate conclusion in the new creation.

CHAPTER 6: ALL AUTHORITY IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH: THE RESURRECTION AND EXALTATION OF THE SON OF GOD AS THE CULMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

It has been a central premise of the preceding chapters that the Old and New Testament stories are to be read and understood as a single continuous narrative, one which centers around a series of vassals in covenant relationship with the divine suzerain, Yahweh, and which reaches its climax in the coming of Jesus of Nazareth. It is Jesus, the ontological Son of God, who, in becoming incarnate as the son of David, thereby taking upon Himself the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, and then perfectly fulfilling these demands in His sinless life and self-sacrificial death, proves Himself to be the truly and perfectly faithful vassal that Adam, Israel, and the Davidic kings were called, and ultimately failed, to be. Moreover, it is Jesus, who, in His role as God's covenantal son and representative head of the covenant community, takes upon Himself the ultimate covenant curse of death on behalf of the people.

However, this act of perfect covenant faithfulness, the ultimate act of *agape* on the part of the Son towards both the Father and the covenant community, presents the reader of Scripture with a striking paradox. Namely, that the Mosaic Covenant promises life and abundance to those who keep the commands of the Law i.e. Leviticus 18:5 and Deuteronomy 30:19, yet Jesus, despite perfectly fulfilling the demands of the covenant as a faithful vassal king, rather than receiving these blessings, instead suffers the *curse* of the Law, in the form of death on a tree (Deut. 21:23). It is hardly surprising, then, that the very idea of a crucified Messiah, was as the apostle Paul writes, "a stumbling block to the Jews" (1 Cor. 1:23).[469] Not only was a suffering

[469] Morris asserts that "stumbling block" is in some ways too soft of a translation for the Greek *skandalon,* for which Lenski offers the alternative "death trap." The point then, is that the idea of a "crucified Messiah" is an unthinkable scandal for a first century Jew. See Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary,* vol. 7, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 51.

Messiah a stark contrast to the second temple Jewish expectation of an exalted and conquering king, but the death of an individual by crucifixion would be seen as a clear sign that such a person was in fact under God's curse.[470] Indeed, Ciampa and Rosner observe that this very objection is raised in Justin Martyrs' writing in the second century AD by the figure Trypho, who argues, "your so-called Christ is without honor and glory, so that he has even fallen into the uttermost curse that is in the Law of God, for he was crucified."[471] To a second temple Jew, then, the very idea of a crucified Messiah is an oxymoron, a complete contradiction of terms.

This is a paradox, then, which can ultimately only be solved by the resurrection. Indeed, Paul himself writes that "if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins" (1 Cor. 15:17). Without the resurrection, the biblical story would be one of tragedy, rather than hope, a story of exile with no new Exodus, curse without blessing. It is only through the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus that the biblical story reaches its ultimate conclusion, since it is through the resurrection that God's people have been "born again to a living hope" (1 Pet. 1:3). Jesus' resurrection and exaltation, then, is at the very heart of the gospel message, and is the hope around which the remainder of the New Testament writings center. This, then, will be the topic of the present chapter.

First, it will be shown that Jesus' resurrection is presented by the New Testament writers as a *vindication* of His perfect faithfulness to the Father, the divine suzerain, and as the ultimate proof of His messianic identity. Likewise, it will be shown that Jesus' Lordship and ultimate authority over all of creation is bestowed upon Him by the Father not only as a result of His

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[470] Cf. Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2010), 100. Also Morris, *1 Corinthians*, 51.

[471] Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 100.

ontological Sonship, but as His rightful inheritance as the faithful vassal king and covenantal son, who fulfills the vocational calling first given to Adam in the garden. Third, it will be shown that the New Testament writers understand Jesus' resurrection as the climatic turning point in the story of God's covenant people, so that the exaltation of Jesus ushers in a new chapter of redemptive history, one in which the covenant blessings are once again poured out upon the covenant community by the Lord Himself. This in turn results in the restoration of the covenant community through the pouring out of God's Spirit, a return from exile, and Gentile inclusion in the people of God. Ultimately it will also mean the defeat and judgement of God's enemies and the total restoration of creation in a new Eden, bringing to fulfillment all of God's covenantal promises in and through Jesus as Lord and Messiah, and drawing the biblical story to its ultimate conclusion at Christ's return.

The Resurrection of Jesus as Vindication and Covenant Blessing

The death of Jesus as presented in the Gospels, and death by crucifixion specifically, would be seen by most second temple Jews as conclusive proof against His claims of messiahship. Not only this, but such a death would seem to indicate, and indeed Paul affirms as much, that the one crucified had been placed under God's curse (Gal. 3:14). How, then, could such a person be the promised Messiah, let alone a perfectly faithful vassal king, since death, the ultimate curse of the Law, was upon those who violated the stipulations of the Lord's covenant (Gal. 3:10, Deut. 27:26)? This perspective, of course, which was held by those Jews who rejected Jesus as God's Messiah, is the direct fulfillment of the prophecy found in Isaiah 53:4, which reads "we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted." It is also a perspective which arises from a failure to recognize in Jesus' death the fulfillment of the subsequent verse, which makes clear that the Messiah's death is not on account of His own sin, but rather "he was pierced

for *our* transgressions; he was crushed for *our* iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed" (Isa. 53:5 emphasis added).[472]

Jesus, then, in His death, certainly takes upon Himself the curse of the Law that had previously been poured out upon Israel for her violations of the Mosaic Covenant, yet He Himself was wholly without sin for which to die (i.e. Heb 4:15, 1 Pet 3:18). This, then, creates the previously noted paradox, since as Paul writes "the sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" (1 Cor. 15:56). Jesus, then, as the perfectly faithful vassal, whose life and death completely fulfill the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, could not be held by the curse of death, since God has promised life and blessing to the one who keeps His Law (Lev. 18:5, Deut. 30:19). This paradox, again, is ultimately solved by Christ's resurrection, in which the Father "raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, *because it was not possible for him to be held by it*" (Acts 2:24, emphasis added). As Crowe writes "the resurrection, then, is a vindication of Jesus's obedience and is therefore tantamount to a legal proclamation of Jesus's being in the right. Put even more starkly, the resurrection was the just verdict of God for Jesus perfectly meeting the demands of 'do this and live.' In Jesus's resurrection we see that perfect obedience does indeed lead to everlasting life."[473]

In other words, just as exile and death are the ultimate covenant curses, restoration and life are the ultimate covenant blessings. Jesus, then, on account of His perfect faithfulness as vassal to the divine suzerain, not only experiences, but ultimately overcomes the power of the curse, in order to receive the blessings of eternal life as resurrected Lord. Wright puts this particularly well, in writing that, in Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection "He *is* Israel, going down

[472] See chapter 4 of dissertation, pages 43-44 for a discussion of this prophecy in the book of Isaiah.

[473] Crowe, *The Last Adam*, 195.

to death under the curse of the law, and going through the curse to New Covenant life beyond."[474] Jesus' resurrection then, is both the vindication of His identity as the long awaited faithful vassal king, as well as the manifestation of covenant blessing bestowed upon Him by the divine suzerain on account of said faithfulness.

The Exaltation of Jesus and the Climax of the Biblical Story in Acts

With the resurrection of Jesus, and His vindication as God's Messiah, comes a turning point in the biblical narrative. This fact is not lost on the disciples, who inquire as to whether the Lord will "at this time restore the kingdom to Israel" (Acts 1:6). This is certainly a reasonable expectation on their part, since the coming of the Messiah, the Davidic king, was firmly linked in second temple Jewish thought to the hope of national restoration and rescue from their enemies, and indeed, the two were closely linked in the Old Testament prophetic writings.[475] Jesus, however, responds by telling them that it is not their place to know "times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority" (Acts 1:7). Rather, they are to wait for the promise of the Holy Spirit, who will empower them to serve as the Lord's witness "in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth" (Acts 1:4, 8). As Peterson argues, this response from Jesus should be taken to mean that restoration of the covenant community is a totally future event, but rather, that the total fulfillment of biblical prophecy regarding national restoration for

[474] N[icholas] T[homas] Wright, *The Climax of the Covenant: Christ and the Law in Pauline Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1994), 152.

[475] David G. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 109. As Peterson writes "Restoration hopes were deeply rooted in classical prophecies of Israel's future and closely tied to the sacred space of Jerusalem/Zion. The apostles were expecting Jesus, as God's anointed king, to usher in the restoration to which many Jews looked forward, and of which Jesus himself had spoken. Since the Spirit was connected with the end events in Jewish expectation (e.g., Jl. 2:28–32), they took it for granted that sovereignty was soon to be restored to Israel, so that God's ultimate purpose for the world might be fulfilled." See also John B. Polhill, *Acts*, vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 84.

Israel will only be consummated at the Lord's return.[476] Indeed, the promised restoration of the covenant community begins at Pentecost with the coming of the Holy Spirit, who empowers the New Covenant community in fulfilling the vocational calling of Israel as a "royal priesthood" who serve as the Lord's witness throughout all the earth (1 Pet. 2:9).[477]

This commissioning parallels that of the ending of Matthew's Gospel, in which Jesus commands the disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:19). This command, often referred to as the "Great Commission," is itself based in Jesus' messianic authority as risen Lord, having now received from the Father, "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18).[478] This granting of all authority to the Son, then, is what inaugurates the new age of redemptive history. Prior to the resurrection, authority over the nations of the world was claimed by the devil, a claim which Jesus Himself does not dispute (Matt. 4:8-9, Luke 4:5-7).[479] Indeed, it is the offer to grant such authority to Jesus in exchange for idolatrous worship that serves as the basis of the devil's final temptation in Matthew's account (Matt. 4:8-9). Here, however, it is clear that whatever authority had previously been granted to the devil has stripped away and given over to the Son.[480] This, then, is what Jesus meant when He declared that His crucifixion

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[476] Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 109-110.

[477] As Schreiner observes, Peter makes a clear allusion, using the same terminology found in Exodus 19, to the vocational calling of Israel in the Old Testament to describe the role of the church, the restored covenant community, in the New Testament. Just as Israel was to fulfill its role as a vassal state by representing Yahweh to the nations, so too the church is to serve as Christs' representative to the world. See Thomas R. Schreiner, *1, 2 Peter, Jude*, vol. 37, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H,, 2003), 114–115. See also Wayne A. Grudem, *1 Peter: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 17, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 117.

[478] As France writes "Jesus' universal Lordship now demands a universal mission. The restriction of the disciples' mission to Israel alone in 10:5–6 can now be lifted, for the kingdom of the Son of man as described in Daniel 7:14 requires *disciples of all nations.*" France, *Matthew*, 419.

[479] See the discussion in chapter 5, pgs. 17-19.

[480] Cf. France, *Matthew*, 419. France writes "In 4:8–9 Satan offered him '*all* the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; now, by the way of suffering obedience, he has received far more than Satan could offer, all authority *in heaven and on earth.*"

and subsequent exaltation is the moment when "the ruler of this world" will "be cast out" (John 12:31).[481] In stark contrast to the faithless vassals of the past, then, whose idolatry and attempts to usurp the authority of the divine suzerain led to exile and death, Jesus' complete submission and faithfulness to the Father serves as the basis for both His resurrection and exaltation. Moreover, it is on the basis of His authority as resurrected Lord that Jesus inaugurates the New Covenant, by sending the Holy Spirit to restore and empower the New Covenant community.

The Holy Spirit and the Restoration of the Covenant Community at Pentecost

With Jesus' ascension to the Father's right hand, then, the long awaited time of restoration for God's people has arrived. There is, of course, an "already but not yet" aspect to this restoration, in that Jesus presently reigns as Lord in Heaven, and in that the Holy Spirit has already been poured out upon the covenant community to restore and empower, yet the full restoration of creation, the final defeat of the Messiah's enemies, and the resurrection of the dead are still future events which await the Lord's return. This is made clear, for instance, by the author of the book of Hebrews, who, when writing of the nature of the Lord's present authority, declares that "in putting all things in submission to him (Jesus), he (the Father) left nothing outside his control," and yet, "at present we do not yet see all things subjected to him" (Heb. 2:8).[482] From this, then, it is evident that the author of Hebrews understands Jesus as already

[481] As Borchert writes, "While judgment ultimately is to be viewed as eschatological, John sees the cross (12:33) as the proleptic dividing point in the history of the world. Thus he can confidently announce that now (*nyn*) is the evil ruler dethroned (12:31) and that whoever refuses to believe in Jesus is already (*ēdē*) condemned (3:18) …in the "lifting up" of Jesus the decisive event in the history of faith can be identified." See Borchert, *John 12–21*, 59.

[482] See Donald Guthrie, *Hebrews: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 15, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1983), 90. As Gunthrie writes, the author of Hebrews recognizes in Jesus the ultimate fulfillment of Psalm 8, in which God subjects all things to the "son of man" and although "this subjection is regarded as still future…the writer has no doubt regarding its ultimate fulfilment." See also David L. Allen, *Hebrews*, vol. 35, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 2010), 208–209.

possessing, at present, full authority over all of creation, since He is seated at the right hand of the Father and "crowned with glory and honor" on account of having experienced "the suffering of death," and yet also recognizing that the full manifestation of said authority will only be realized at the eschaton, when He returns to judge the living and the dead (Heb. 2:9).[483] Indeed, it is exactly this "already but not yet" understanding of the present age that characterizes much of the New Testament writers' eschatology. While clearly awaiting the future return of Jesus in glory, i.e. Acts 1:11, it is equally apparent that the New Testament writers present the events of Pentecost as the beginning of the "last days" and the fulfillment of God's covenant promises to His people, i.e. Acts 2:17.[484]

As such, the account of Pentecost and coming of the Holy Spirit in Acts contains a number of instances of "return from exile/new Exodus" imagery. Within the Gospel accounts, the coming of Jesus is presented by the biblical authors as the start of the "new Exodus" movement, which finally brings an end the covenant curse of exile. Indeed, numerous scholars have asserted that Jesus' calling of the twelve disciples as the core of His followers should be taken as representative of the twelve tribes of Israel, with the disciples themselves comprising the core of the restored covenant community now returning from their state of spiritual exile.[485] It is therefore unsurprising that, at Pentecost, it is the twelve disciples, including Matthias as the

[483] As Gunthrie states "glory and honour bestowed on Jesus is the direct result of suffering. The combination between the two ideas, which is alien to natural thought, is nevertheless central in the New Testament." Guthrie, *Hebrews,* 91.

[484] As Marshal writes, "the promise of the parousia forms the background of hope against which the disciples are to act as the witnesses to Jesus." I. Howard Marshall, *Acts: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 5, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1980), 66.

[485] Brooks, for instance writes that, "The number twelve recalls the twelve tribes of Israel and therefore symbolizes the new or restored people of God, which later came to be known as the church. The Twelve were the nucleus of this new creation." Brooks, *Mark*, 71. See also Osborne, *Matthew*, 371. Also Garland, *Luke*, 273.

replacement for Judas, upon whom the Holy Spirit first comes to initiate the restoration of God's people (Acts 1:26-2:4).

Moreover, with the arrival of the Holy Spirit, Luke records that the disciples then "began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance," to the amazement of those who were present, a group called together by the sound of the Spirit's arrival (Acts 2:4-8). This event, in which Jews and proselytes are gathered together in Jerusalem from "every nation under heaven" i.e. from the furthest parts of the diaspora, and who each hear the gospel proclaimed by the Twelve in their own language, should therefore be seen as a further reversal of the curse of exile, and as the restoration of the covenant community, continuing the new Exodus motif begun in Jesus' arrival and ministry.[486] Furthermore, that this event initiates the church age demonstrates that God is first restoring the Jewish community, prior to sending His followers out into the world as His witness to the Gentile nations, and that it is this restoration and empowering which will ultimately allow the covenant community to finally fulfill their vocational calling as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6).[487] Where Israel has continually failed since Sinai, serving as Yahweh's witness to the nations, the restored covenant community will now finally succeed, not by their own power, but rather, by the power of Lord's Spirit working in and through them.[488]

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[486] Cf. Brandon D. Crowe, *The Hope of Israel: The Resurrection of Christ in the Acts of the Apostles* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 23.

[487] As Pohil observes, the three thousand converts to Christ at Pentecost, the feast of firstfruits, are themselves the "firstfruits of the harvest of the Spirit," who will spread the gospel of Jesus throughout the world. Likewise, the gathering together of Jews from "every nation" anticipates the "worldwide scope of the Christian witness" that has now begin. John B. Polhill, *Acts,* vol. 26, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 106. See also Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 136.

[488] As is clearly evidenced by the numerous instances in Acts in which the disciples' witness is said to be the direct result of being "filled with the Holy Spirit," who guides and empowers them, i.e. Peter in Acts 4:8-12, Stephen in Acts 6:5, 8-7:1-60, and Paul in Acts 13:4-12.

Peter's sermon to the crowds at Pentecost likewise supports this understanding of events. In response to the crowd's confusion, as well as accusations of "drunkenness" by certain bystanders, Peter stands up among the disciples to declare to those listening that these events are, in fact, the fulfillment of what the Lord had spoken through the prophet Joel (Acts 2:16-21, Joel 2:28-32). Here Peter reminds his listeners how God has promised that "in the last days it shall be…that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh," resulting in prophecy among the people as well as signs and wonders in the heavens and on earth and that, at that time, "it shall come to pass that all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:17-21).[489] With the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost, then, Peter declares that "the last days," the time of Israel's restoration, have indeed begun, and that therefore salvation is available to all those who call upon the name of the Lord.

The Exaltation of Jesus as the Restoration of the Davidic Throne

Having identified the present time of restoration and salvation as the "last days," evidenced by the arrival of the Holy Spirit, Peter than goes on to declare to the crowds that this new era of salvation history has come about as a result of the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth, who, despite having been shown by God to be the promised Messiah in life through His miracles, was ultimately rejected by the people, who had Him "crucified and killed by the hands of godless men" (Acts 2:23). This death, however, Peter declares, was itself in fact the result of "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God," a plan to which Jesus fully submitted

[489] While Peter mostly follows the LXX translation of these verses with some variations to adapt the passage to his present context, he explicitly identifies their present fulfillment as indicating the arrival of "the last days," rather than the Hebrew or LXX text's more general "afterwards," reflecting the disciples conviction that "the messianic age had already dawned in the resurrection of Christ, that we are indeed already living in the final days of God's saving history." See Polhill, *Acts,* 109. See also Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles,* 141. Also Marshall, *Acts,*78.

Himself as a faithful vassal (Acts 2:23).[490] As a result, God "raised him up, loosing the birth pangs of death, *for it was not possible for him to be held by it* (Acts 2:24 emphasis added).[491] Moreover, Peter declare that this is what was spoken of by King David in the Psalms, when he wrote that God would not let "your Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2:27, Ps 16:10).[492]

As Peter argues, David himself did in fact die and see corruption, and indeed, the location of his grave was known to those who were present (Acts 2:29).[493] As such, Peter declares that David, "knowing that God had sworn an oath to him that he would set one of his descendants on the throne" prophetically "foresaw and spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:30-31).[494] Jesus, then, is not only the promised "son of David," who sits upon the restored throne of His ancestor, but He Himself is also greater than David, having been raised from the dead on account of His faithful

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[490] There is of course a certain tension here between divine sovereignty and human responsibility, neither of which should be diminished. As Peterson writes "Jesus came into the world to fulfill certain God-given roles, and those associated with him had their own roles to play in the drama of redemption. Despite this emphasis on God's sovereignty, there is no diminution of human responsibility here. See Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 146. Likewise Pohil writes "Peter carefully balanced all the participants in the drama of Jesus' death—the guilt of Jew and Gentile alike, the triumphal sovereignty of God. See Polhill, *Acts*, 112.

[491] As Peterson writes "It was *impossible* for the Son of David to be prevented by death from exercising his eternal, kingly rule… Jesus was resurrected because he already was the Messiah, not that he 'became' Messiah through resurrection." Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 147. In other words as the perfectly faithful vassal king, Jesus eternal rule is secure in the promises of the Father, and even death cannot stop it. See also Marshall, *Acts*, 81.

[492] Even within the original Psalm the title "Holy One," has clear messianic overtone in its application to David, and, by extension, his descendants. While David himself will ultimately experience resurrection at the final judgment i.e. Revelation 20, only Jesus has fulfilled the Psalmists expectation by overcoming the power of the grave. See Polhill, *Acts*, 113-114. Likewise Crowe writes "In earlier generations David professed that he would be delivered in accord with his righteousness (cf. Ps. 18:20–24 [18:21–25 MT/17:21–25 LXX]). The logic of Acts is that David, who in one sense was delivered from death in accord with his righteousness, anticipated a greater Son of David who would be more fully delivered from death because of his greater righteousness." Crowe, *The Hope of Israel*, 29.

[493] See Polhill, *Acts*, 114. While the exact site of David's tomb is no longer known, is does seem to have been known to Jews of Jesus' day, as attested by several references in the works of Josephus.

[494] As Peterson asserts, only through bodily resurrection could a son of David rule over an eternal kingdom, thereby fulfilling the Lord's promises to David. See Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 149.

submission to the Father, and having inherited an everlasting throne.[495] The apostle Paul, likewise, make this point during his speech at Antioch, in which he proclaims that Jesus, having been raised from the dead and given "the holy and sure blessings of David," is "no more to return to corruption," and thus His rule is eternal (Acts 13:34).[496]

The result of the resurrection, then, is that God has made Jesus eternally "both Lord and Christ" so that He has been "exalted at the right hand of God" (Acts 2:33, 36).[497] Not only this, but is Jesus, who, "having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit," had now poured out the Spirit upon the covenant community, in order to restore and empower it for its mission (Acts 2:33). As Crowe writes "it is the *risen Christ* who pours out the Spirit," thereby fulling the words of John the Baptist that the Messiah will baptize His followers with the Holy Spirit and fire.[498] Therefore, the salvation prophesied through Joel, which Peter now proclaims to those in attendance, is to be found only in calling upon the name of Jesus, whom the Father has declared the rightful Lord of all creation.

Gentile Inclusion in the Restored Covenant Community

With the Lord having sent the Holy Spirit to restore the covenant community, then, a new age of redemptive history has officially begun under the New Covenant. Central to this new

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[495] Jesus Himself makes this point to the religious leaders in the Gospel accounts, when He asserts that David himself prophetically addressed the Messiah as "Lord," declaring that He would sit at the place of power at the right hand of God. Cf. Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew*, 565–566.

[496] Here the "holy and sure blessings of David" seems to refer specifically to both rescue from the grave and eternal rule at the fathers right hand. See Polhill, *Acts*, 304.

[497] The "right hand" of God in Scripture designates the place of power and authority. Thus, the risen and exalted Christ now shares fully in the Fathers rule. Cf. Polhill, *Acts*, 150-151.

[498] Crowe, *The Hope of Israel*, 29. See also Polhill, *Acts*, 151. Polhill writes "What the crowd at Pentecost could *see and hear* were signs of Jesus' exaltation to the situation of absolute glory, power, and authority in the universe. As the dispenser of the Spirit, he was now acting with '*the Father*', sharing fully in his heavenly rule."

epoch is the worldwide mission and witness of the church, who fulfills Israel's original covenant vocation as a "kingdom of priests" (Exod. 19:6 1 Pet. 2:9). As a result, a major narrative focus of the remainder of the book of Acts post-Pentecost is the spreading of the gospel to the Gentile world through the churches missionary activity.[499] This shift in missional focus beyond the border of Judea and Samaria marks the fulfillment of God's original covenantal promise to Abraham that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen. 12:3).[500] Likewise, the church's mission to the Gentiles serves to fulfill the Lord's promise through that prophets that in the last days people from all nations shall seek out the Lord to learn His ways, and that they will find Him i.e. Amos 9:12-14, Isaiah 11:10, 2:3, Zechariah 2:11.[501] This new reality, moreover, is confirmed by the pouring out of the Holy Spirit upon Gentile converts in the same manner as the Jews, making "not distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith" (Acts 10:47, 11:15-17, 15:8-9).[502]

Likewise, James, the brother of Jesus, recognizes the inclusion of Gentiles within the covenant community as part of Lord's eschatological promises spoken of through the prophet Amos (Acts 15:16-17). Quoting from Amos 9:11-12, James reminds the Jerusalem council of the Lord's covenant promise that He will return and "rebuild the tent of David that has fallen," and that He will "restore it," so that "the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord…all the gentiles who are called by my name," (Acts 15:16-17). As has already been discussed, the New

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[499] Cf. Polhill, *Acts*, 57–63, 69. Also Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 96.

[500] For a discussion of this passage see chapter 2 pgs. 12-14.

[501] See the discussion in chapter 4 pgs. 36, 39.

[502] As is argued by Peter following the conversion of Cornelius in Acts 10-11. The church upon hearing Peters report that God had sent the Holy Spirit to the Gentile converts, recognized that "God has also granted to the Gentiles the repentance that leads to life," marking the official start of the churches worldwide mission (Acts 10:18). Cf. Polhill, *Acts*, 249. Also Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 325.

Testament writers understand Jesus' exaltation to the Father's right hand as the moment of restoration for the house of David, in which the Son was granted the eternal throne of His ancestor, as well as universal authority over creation. In light of this new reality, the disciples recognize that the time has come in which "the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord," so that Gentiles may now be included in the covenant community by faith in the Messiah.[503]

It is significant that James quotes here from the Greek Septuagint translation, which states that the nations shall "seek the Lord," as opposed to the somewhat more militaristic Hebrew text, which states that Israel shall "possess the remnant of Edom and all the nations called by my name" (Acts 15:17, Amo 9:12).[504] As discussed in chapter four, however, these translations need not be seen as mutually exclusive, since the Hebrew text's "'possess' does not necessarily indicate military conquest and subjugation. Rather, as Smith argues, both translations indicate a future time in which Gentiles will experience a "spiritual incorporation into the restored kingdom of David.'"[505] This is not to say, of course, that there is no sense in the Hebrew text of the future conquest of the Lord's enemies. The Messiah, after all is said in Genesis 22:17 to "possess the gate of his enemies," and Jesus assured the church that "the gates of hades shall not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).[506] Likewise, the future destruction of the Messiah's enemies is regularly affirmed by the New Testament authors, i.e. Acts 2:35, 2 Peter 3:7. Here, however, the

[503] Cf. Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 431.

[504] Cf. Marshall, *Acts*, 267. Also Peterson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, 432.

[505] See chapter 4, 36. See also Smith, "Amos," in *Amos, Obadiah, Jonah*, 168. Also Carroll R., *The Book of Amos*, 429.

[506] The singular "him" in Genesis 22:17 indicates that an individual figure is in view. See chapter 2, 15. Also Chen, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*, 71-78.

emphasis is on the present inclusion within the covenant community of those Gentiles who seek out the Lord, rather than the future destruction of those who oppose Him.

From the above, then, it is clear that the New Testament writers see Jesus resurrection and exaltation to the Father's right hand as the definitive turning point in cosmic history. It is the moment of restoration for both the house of David as well as the covenant community of Israel, and the fulfillment of God's covenant promises through the prophets. Moreover, it is the beginning of the churches worldwide mission as a kingdom of priests, sent out to fulfill the original vocational calling of Israel at Sinai, so that all nations may be drawn to the Lord, so that "all who call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21).

Jesus as Faithful and Exalted Vassal King in the Pauline Epistles

Jesus as Faithful Vassal in Philippians 2:5-11

Perhaps the most paradigmatic statement of the early churches understanding of Jesus' death, resurrection, and exaltation can be found in Philippians 2:5-11, a passage which had been called "one of the most Christologically significant passages in the NT."[507] Many scholars see these verses not as an original Pauline composition, but rather, as an example of an early church creed which Paul had included here as part of his immediate theological argument regarding the proper attitude of his Christian readers.[508] Of course, as Hansen states, there is always the chance that Paul composed the hymn himself, either at an earlier date or in a "spontaneous burst of

[507] Peter C. Orr, *Exalted Above the Heavens: The Risen and Ascended Christ*, ed. D. A. Carson, vol. 47, *New Studies in Biblical Theology* (Downers Grove, IL; London: IVP Academic; Apollos, 2018), 14.

[508] For an extensive overview regarding the various theories of authorship, see G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, England: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 127–133. Also Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, vol. 32, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1991), 99.

inspiration" during the composition of the letter itself.[509] Regardless of the hymns origin, however, it is clear that these verses reflect deep theological reflection on the work of Christ in Scripture as understood by Paul and his coworkers.

The opening line of the hymn begins by immediately identifying Jesus as the preexistent one who existed "in the form of God" (Phil. 2:5). Here the Greek word translated "form," *morphē,* likely refers here to both the glory and nature of God possessed by Christ.[510] This phrase, as Melick observes, parallels the phrase "equality with God," in the second half of the verse, connecting to the two, i.e. to exist "in the form of God," is to be equal with God.[511] Likewise, this understanding is consistent with Christological statements found elsewhere in Paul and the New Testament, such as Colossians 1:15 and Hebrews 1:3 which refer to Jesus respectively as the "image of the invisible God" and as the "radiance of the glory of God and exact imprint of his nature." Jesus' divine nature as the ontological Son of God is therefore on full display in these verses.

Despite being by nature God, however, the second half of verse six states that the Son "did not count equality with God something to be grasped." Here the Greek *harpagmos* "to be grasped" can be taken to mean either that the Son did not seek to usurp authority possessed only by the Father, or that the Son, though rightfully possessing such authority, did cling to His rights as the Son of God, choosing instead the path of the Servant in the incarnation.[512] Given the

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[509] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 127.

[510] Cf. Melick, *Philippians,* 104. Also Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 134-139.

[511] Melick, *Philippians,* 104.

[512] Cf. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 143–146. See also Ralph P. Martin, *Philippians: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 11, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 107–108.

previous consideration regarding the equivalency between existing "in the form of God" and "equality with God," the second option seems more likely, that the Son, though sharing divine authority with the Father in His preincarnate state, choose to submit Himself to the will of the Father during the incarnation.[513] Rather than exercise His divine rights as the Son of God, He "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men (Phil. 2:7)."

Here one sees a sharp contrast between Jesus, the faithful vassal, and the faithless vassals of the Old Testament, and particularly with Adam, the original faithless vassal.[514] While Adam, a covenantal "son" of God, attempted to become "like God" in the garden, an attempted usurpation of divine suzerains authority, Jesus, by contrast, is the ontological Son of God who, despite possessing divine authority by virtue of His very nature, instead humbles Himself, becoming a faithful covenantal son of the Father and fully submitting Himself to the will of the divine suzerain.[515]

Indeed, verse seven affirms that the Son's faithfulness to the Father is such that He actually "emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men." It should be understood here that the phrase "likeness of men" should in no way be taken to indicate that Jesus merely *appeared* to be human, and any such an interpretation is clearly ruled out by the remainder of the verse, which asserts that the Son "emptied himself" in the incarnation, that is, He truly took on the form of a servant, not merely the appearance of one.[516]

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[513] Cf. Melick, *Philippians,* 102-103.

[514] Cf. Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 144-145. Also Martin, *Philippians,* 107-108.

[515] Martin, *Philippians,* 107-108. Martin writes "The eternal Son of God, however, faced with a parallel temptation (to that of Adam), renounced what was his by right, and could actually have become his possession by the seizure of it, *viz.* equality with God, and chose instead the way of obedient suffering as the pathway to his lordship."

[516] Cf. Martin, *Philippians,* 109. Also Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 153. Hansen writes "The hymn tells the story of one existing in the form of God who entered into human experience as a human being; it is not a

As Melick rightly asserts, "likeness "does not suggest any degree of unreality in Christ's humanity; the word is almost a synonym for 'form' (*morphē*) and 'image' (*eikōn*)."[517] That is, the Son who had previously existed "in the form of God" i.e. was truly God, has now, through the incarnation, been born in the "form" of man, i.e. is truly a man. This is likewise clearly asserted by Paul in his letter to the Galatians, in which he writes that Jesus was "born of a woman" that is, truly human, and "born under the law" (Gal. 4:4).[518] This, as George writes, is critical to the New Testament writers Christology, since only one who is truly human and born under the Law, i.e. a son of Adam and Abraham, can serve as the covenantal representative who fulfills the Law's requirements, thereby rescuing those who are themselves under the Law (Gal. 4:5).[519] At the same time, however, Hansen is certainly correct that Jesus full humanity should not be seen as diminishing the reality of His divine nature, He remains the ontological Son of God, even in the incarnation.[520]

Not only did the Son of God take on the "form" of fallen humanity, but the form He took on was one of a servant, rather than one of prestige and power (Phil. 2:7).[521] This of course is reflected in Jesus own declaration that "the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:28). Moreover, not only did the Son of God

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farce or comedy of one who was faking identification with humanity." Also Melnick, who writes "The contrasts between 'Lord' (v. 11) and 'servant,' (v. 7) and 'very nature of God' (v. 6) and 'human likeness' (v. 7) express the emptying." Melick, *Philippians,* 104.

[517] Melick, *Philippians,* 104.

[518] See the discussion in George, *Galatians,* 303–304.

[519] Ibid., 303-304.

[520] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians,* 153.

[521] Martin notes the possibility that the "servant" language here is an intentional reference to Isaiah's suffering servant figure, who likewise submits to God's will unto death, and is exalted as a result. Martin, *Philippians* 109.

submit Himself to the will of the Father in life through the incarnation, but, having done so, verse eight goes on to declare that He "humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Phil. 2:8)." This, death is significant not only in that it is the Son's ultimate act of covenantal obedience to the Father, but also in that it places Jesus under the curse of the Law (Gal. 3:13).

From here verse nine shifts the focus of the hymn from Jesus' submission to His exaltation, declaring that "therefore, God has highly exalted him, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name." As Hansen writes, the word "*therefore*, as an inferential conjunction, indicates that Christ's action of self-humbling is the reason for God's actions of exalting him and giving him the name above every name."[522] In other words, Jesus' exaltation is predicated upon His perfect faithfulness and obedience to the will of the Father. Likewise, Martin writes that, "The resurrection and glorification of the Lord are the Father's response to the filial obedience which led him to the cross. This pattern of exaltation following humiliation is thoroughly biblical, and especially evident in the teaching of Jesus."[523] It is Jesus' covenantal obedience, then, as the faithful vassal king, for which He is resurrected and exalted to the right hand of the divine suzerain and given "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). Again, Martin beautifully sums this up in writing:

> He who stooped so low is now lifted up to the glorious rank of equality with God, i.e. the enjoyment of that dignity which was ever his by right but which he never clutched at as his personal possession. The elevation is, then, not in regard to his nature or inherent place within the Godhead. It is rather an ascription to him of what could only be his after the submission and sacrifice of his earthly life, and specifically relates to his lordship as king of the universe.[524]

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[522] Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 159.

[523] Martin, *Philippians* 112.

[524] Ibid., 113.

Therefore, because God has exalted Jesus to this position of authority, the result is that "every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). These verses, then, paint an eschatological portrait of the time when every being in heaven and on earth, both men and angels, will kneel before the Son of God and confess that He is the rightful Lord of creation.[525] Moreover, this worship of the exalted vassal king will not only be to His glory, but will in turn be to the glory of the divine suzerain, as the one who has exalted Him and bestowed upon Him the "name above every other name (Phil. 2:11)."[526]

Jesus as Exalted Vassal King in 1 Corinthians 15:20-28

Of course, this portrait of universal submission to God's Messiah looks forward to the end of the age, when Jesus returns in glory. This again is part of the "already but not yet" eschatology of Paul and the other New Testament authors, as displayed in Paul's letter to the church in Corinth. Writing of the resurrection of Christ, Paul assures his readers that Jesus has in fact been raised from the dead, as "the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep" (1 Cor. 15:20).[527] From here Paul makes an explicit contrast between Adam, as the first man and faithless vassal, and Christ, the faithful vassal and risen Lord (1 Cor. 15:22). Just as death came

[525] Melick, *Philippians,* 107–108. Also Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians,* 165.

[526] As Melick writes "There is perfect unity in the Godhead. The actions of Jesus in his exaltation bring glory to the Father. Thus the Father honors the Son, and the Son honors the Father. In this dynamic, both display selflessness, and both receive honor." Melick, *Philippians,* 108.

[527] "*Firstfruits* is a metaphor 'derived from the OT where it denotes the first portion of the crop (or flock) which is offered in Thanksgiving to God. As such, the term signifies the pledge of the remainder, and concomitantly, the assurance of a full harvest … the first installment of that part which includes, as by synecdoche, the whole.' By way of this metaphor Paul underlines the link between our fate and the fate of Christ; Christ's resurrection is not an isolated event but guarantees something even more stupendous." Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* 761.

through the first man, the original covenantal head of humanity, so Paul says that forgiveness and life comes through Jesus, humanity's new covenantal head (1 Cor. 15:22).[528] This of course parallels Paul's contrast between Jesus and Adam in Romans 5:18, in which he identifies Adam's trespass, the breaking of the Lord's covenant in Eden, with the introduction of sin and death into humanity, while the "one act of righteousness" by the faithful vassal, i.e. His self-sacrifice on the cross, provides restoration and life to the covenant community.[529] "For as in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22).

This resurrection, however, is not to occur all at once. Rather, Christ as the risen Lord was the first to experience it, as the firstfruits of the new creation (1 Cor. 15:23). It is only at His second coming, then, that those who are "in Christ" will likewise experience this resurrection, at which point the end will come (1 Cor. 15:23).[530] This, then, is the time at which Christ will finally destroy "every rule and every authority and power" (1 Cor. 15:24).[531] Indeed, Paul

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[528] See Morris, *1 Corinthians,* 205–206. Also Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* 762-763.

[529] Cf Robert H. Mounce, *Romans*, vol. 27, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1995), 145. Also F. F. Bruce, *Romans: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 6, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1985), 135. Bruce writes "One man's 'act of righteousness' (*dikaiōma*) is the crowning act of Christ's life-long obedience (verse 19), when he yielded up his life; the second man's act, which brought salvation, is contrasted with the first man's 'trespass', which brought perdition." For a discussion of Adam's sin as a covenant violation, see chapter 2, 5-10.

[530] Taylor writes that "The resurrection of all the dead, both righteous and wicked, is affirmed in the Old and New Testaments (see Dan 12:2; John 5:29; Rev 20). Some will be raised to everlasting life; others will be raised to everlasting condemnation. Here, however, Paul's concern lies only with the resurrection of believers, not unbelievers. The time of the resurrection of believers is the "coming" of Christ, a word that means presence and that was used in some contexts in the ancient world in a technical sense to denote the coming of a political figure of high office, such as the visit of an emperor to a province. In the New Testament the term takes on the technical meaning of the second coming of Christ in certain contexts." Mark Taylor, *1 Corinthians*, vol. 28, *The New American Commentary*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen (Nashville: B&H, 2014), 387.

[531] Morris is likely correct in his assertion that "Paul speaks of Christ as destroying *all dominion, authority and power*. These three words are probably not meant to define with precision different kinds of authority. Rather they together emphasize that in that day there will be no governing power of any kind that will not be completely subservient to Christ." Morris, *1 Corinthians,* 207.

declares, Christ must continue to reign at the Father's right hand "until he has put all his enemies under his feet" at which point even death itself will be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:25-26).[532] Even at this point however, the Son will continue to be subjected to the Father's authority. There is no sense here that the Son's authority will in anyway be superior to that of the Father, indeed, Paul flatly rejects any such possibility in verses twenty seven and twenty eight.[533] Rather, the faithful vassal will in the end willingly hand over the kingdom to the divine suzerain, so that "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).[534] This handing over the kingdom to the Father, however, does not mean that Jesus Himself is to be stripped of His present authority.[535] Rather, Christ's eternal rule as the Father's vice regent over creation is itself the fulfillment of the original Edenic ideal for humanity, which was lost by Adam at the fall.[536]

Given the above considerations then, it is clear that Paul understands Jesus' exaltation and present authority as being directly linked to His earthly obedience in the incarnation, and specifically His obedience unto death on the cross. Likewise, Paul clearly contrasts Jesus' faithfulness with the faithless transgression of Adam, the original faithless vassal. Moreover, whereas Adam's faithlessness led to sin and the curse of death for the covenant community, Jesus' faithfulness results in life and blessings for those who are in Him. Finally, Paul looks forward to Jesus' return as the time in which these blessings will be fully consummated through

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[532] That is, stripped of its power by the reality of the resurrection of those in Christ. Cf Morris, *1 Corinthians,* 208. Also Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* 773-774.

[533] Which would, as Taylor writes, "contradict the functional subordination within the Godhead." Taylor, *1 Corinthians,* 389.

[534] Ibid., 390. In other words, bringing an end to all rebellion so that God's rightful rule over all of creation is fully restored..

[535] Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* 766.

[536] Taylor, *1 Corinthians,* 389. Also Ciampa and Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians,* 766.

the resurrection of those who belong to Christ, and the ultimate destruction of those who oppose Him.

Conclusion and Looking Forward

Following Jesus' resurrection and ascension, it is clear that the New Testament writers present the events of Pentecost as the start of a new age of redemptive history, one in which Jesus, exalted to the right hand of the Father, sends out the Spirit to restore and empower the covenant community in fulfilling their royal priestly vocation. This in turn leads to the forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ Jesus, not only to the Jews, but also to the Gentiles. There is, however, a distinct sense of "already but not yet" in the New Testament writers understanding of the present age, in which Jesus "already" possesses "all authority in heaven and on earth," and yet the full consummation of the Lord's covenant promises ultimately awaits the Lords return. Only then will the curse of sin be fully lifted and all of creation be finally restored under the eternal rule of the faithful vassal and the divine suzerain. This, then will be the focus of the subsequent chapter, as the hope of the Lord's return in the New Testament, and the book of Revelation in particular, points forward to ultimate conclusion to the narrative of Scripture.

CHAPTER 7: COMING ON THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN: THE PAROUSIA OF JESUS AS THE CONCLUSION OF THE BIBLICAL NARRATIVE

The eschatological outlook of the New Testament writers can be best described as containing a distinct sense of "already but not yet," in that Jesus has "already" been raised from the dead and exalted to the right hand of the Father, yet all things have "not yet" been fully subjected to His authority. In light of this reality, there is a distinct sense throughout the New Testament that the biblical narrative remains ongoing, and indeed remains ongoing to the present day, as Christ works through His church to fulfill the great commission throughout the world. It is the future return of Christ in glory, then, to which New Testament writers point as the ultimate conclusion of the story begun in Genesis chapter one, the time at which the enemies of God will be destroyed, the dead in Christ will be raised to life, and all of creation will be restored and fully freed from bondage i.e. 1 Corinthians 15:25, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17, Romans 8:21. Moreover, it is this eschatological outlook which provides the New Testament writers with hope in the face of ongoing persecution.

Nowhere is this more apparent than in the book of Revelation, in which John of Patmos is given a vision of "things that must soon take place" (Rev. 1:1).[537] While the precise meaning of much of the symbolism found within the book of Revelation is open to considerable debate among scholars, it is clear that a central theme of this oftentimes enigmatic book is the promise

[537] There is significant debate regarding the precise identity of the author of Revelation, namely, whether he is to be identified with "John the Apostle," a different "John the Elder," or even an otherwise unidentified John altogether. While it seems best, given the consistent witness of the early church fathers and lack of serious alternative suggestions, to identify John of Patmos as the disciple of Jesus and author of both the Gospel of John and three Johannine epistles, such identification is unnecessary for the material discussed in this chapter, and indeed, has limited bearing on the message of Revelation itself. Therefore, the author will be identified herein simply as "John" or "John of Patmos." For a discussion of the authorship of Revelation and the various views, cf. G[regory] K. Beale, *The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, Cumbria: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster, 1999), 34–37. Also Paige Patterson, *Revelation*, vol. 39, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B&H, 2012), 18–21.

of future recuse and restoration for God's people, a promise which in turn calls for faithful obedience in the midst of trials and tribulation.[538] Moreover, Revelation stresses the present reality of Christs' reign and universal authority even in the midst of ongoing persecution, a reign which will be fully consummated at His return.[539] It is these two central themes, then, which will be the central focus of this chapter, as the subsequent sections examine the overarching message of Revelation as the conclusion of the biblical story. First, John's vision of the heavenly throne room will be examined, demonstrating how Revelation, like the other New Testament writings, presents Jesus, the son of David, as the faithful vassal king whose obedience to the Father results in His exaltation and universal authority. Second, it will be shown how the various judgements of Revelation are presented both as covenant curses poured out upon the enemies of God, those who have persecuted the covenant community, and as the "final Exodus" for God's people. Finally, it will be shown how Jesus' future return in glory is presented as the ultimate return from exile, with the restoration of creation to its Edenic state as the full manifestation of covenant blessings under the lordship of the last Adam, thereby bringing the biblical narrative to its fitting conclusion.

Throughout the history of the church, there have been four primary interpretive approaches applied to the book of Revelation, namely, the Preterist, Futurist, Historicist, and Idealist approaches, each of which significantly impact the way in which one understands the

[538] Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 171-172. Beale writes "The main rhetorical goal of the literary argument of John's Apocalypse is to exhort God's people to remain faithful to the call to follow the Lamb's paradoxical example and not to compromise, all with the goal of inheriting final salvation…The major theological theme of the book is the glory due to God because he has accomplished full salvation and final judgment.

[539] As Patterson observes, the reality of Christ's present and eternal reign as exalted Lord is central to the message of Revelation, and is tightly connected to the books eschatology, in that it is the risen Jesus who returns to judge the world. See Patterson, *Revelation*, 31.

meaning of the various symbols contained within John's vision.[540] The Preterist approach, for instance, which relies on an early, pre-AD 70, date of composition, understands the prophecies of Revelation as referring to events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem to the Romans in the first century AD.[541] For Preterists, then, much, if not all, of the prophecies of Revelation have already been fulfilled shortly after the time of the book's composition.[542] A second approach, meanwhile, is that of historicist view, which understands Revelation as providing a prophetic portrait spanning the entire church age, from the time of John's vision to the return of Christ, and which sees the symbols of Revelation as representing various events in church history, such as the fall of Rome and protestant reformation.[543] A third view is that of the idealist, which does not seek to map the book's symbols onto any specific historical events, but rather, sees the message of Revelation as being primarily about the timeless struggle between the forces of good and evil, with evil being ultimately defeated by the power of God at Christ's return.[544] Finally, there is the futurist view, which sees most of the symbols of Revelation as depicting still future events which will take place just prior to the second coming of Christ.[545] This last view takes a far more literal

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[540] Cf. C. Marvin Pate, *Interpreting Revelation and Other Apocalyptic Literature: An Exegetical Handbook*, Handbooks for New Testament Exegesis, ed. John D. Harvey, (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Academic, 2016), 141. Also Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 44.

[541] Pate, *Interpreting Revelation*, 142. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 45.

[542] Ibid. An alternative Preterist view, it should be regognized, sees Revelation as dealing with the fall of Rome in the fifth century.

[543] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 46. Also Leon Morris, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 20, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1987), 19–20. As both Beale and Morris write, the Historicist view has largely fallen away in modern times. A major problem with this view is that it focuses heavily on events in Western church history to the general exclusion of the church outside of western Europe.

[544] Pate, *Interpreting Revelation*, 143-144. Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 48. Morris, *Revelation*, 21.

[545] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 46. Also Morris, *Revelation*, 20. Also Pate, *Interpreting Revelation*, 144-147.

approach than the others in regard to much of what is presented in John's vision, particularly in regard to the various seal, trumpet, and bowl judgements.[546]

Regarding the above approaches, two points should be made. First, these approaches are not all mutually exclusive. For instance, the idealist view, of Revelation as a portrayal of the ongoing struggle between good and evil in which the Lord ultimately triumphs, does not fundamentally conflict with the other three views, except in so far as it adherents deny the validity of the alternative approaches. Certainly the theological themes of Revelation, particularly as regards the sovereign rule of the risen Christ over human history, are indeed themselves timeless, and can therefore be seen as applying to the persecuted church throughout history without denying a literal future, or in some cases historical, fulfillment of the prophetic visions found within the book.[547] Therefore, much of the subsequent discussion does not rely on any one particular interpretive approach. Although it is the perspective of this dissertation that an understanding of the judgements of Revelation as final Exodus and covenant curses fits best within the Futurist view, this understanding does not necessarily depend on this approach, and can fit with varying levels of comfort within any of the four major views.

Any view which does not hold to a future, literal, and physical return of Christ should be rejected, however. As Patterson rightly asserts, the physical return of Christ is a central tenant of orthodox Christianity, one which is extensively attested to throughout the New Testament.[548]

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[546] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 46-47.

[547] A number of scholars, such as Beale and Morris, contend that taking a Futurist interpretation of Revelation "robs the book of all significance for the early Christians and, indeed, for all subsequent generations right up to the last." This is hardly the case, however. Since one can affirm, with the Idealist, that the theological messages of Revelation are indeed timeless, then the message of Revelation is highly relevant to the church in all generations, particularly those facing persecution, even if the fulfillment of specific prophecies has special relevance to the final generation of belivers. Cf. Morris, *Revelation,* 20. Also Beale *The Book of Revelation,* 47.

[548] Patterson, *Revelation*, 35.

Regardless of which interpretive approach one takes, then, the final chapters of Revelation, which depict Christ's return and the renewal of creation, must be understood as future events. To argue for a nonliteral or spiritual fulfillment of passages depicting Christ's return, such as to say that Jesus has already "returned" in judgment in AD 70, is to distort the text's message beyond what can be reasonably sustained.[549]

Jesus as Exalted Vassal King in John's Vision of the Heavenly Throne Room

Following the individual letters to seven churches that opens the book of Revelation, John goes on in chapters four and five to describe a vision of the heavenly throne room, in which he sees God the Father seated upon His throne, surrounded by the hosts of heaven. In His hand, John writes that he sees "a scroll written within and on the back, sealed with seven seals" (Rev. 5:1). Central to this vision is the search for one who is worthy to open this scroll by breaking the seven seals, and to look inside it. John writes "and I saw a mighty angel proclaiming with a loud voice, 'Who is worthy to open the scroll and break its seals?' *And no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll or to look into it*" (Rev. 5:2-3 emphasis added). The heavenly search, then, is extensive, encompassing all of creation, and yet none are found among the living or dead, among men or angels, who is worthy to take the scroll from the Father, and to break its seals.[550] As a result, John begins to weep, lamenting the apparent futility of the search, and it seems, the lack of one worthy to carry out God's will by opening the scroll (Rev. 5:4).

Yet all is not lost, as John finds himself comforted by one of the heavenly elders, who instructs him to cease his weeping, declaring, "behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

[549] Such as in *some* Preterist interpretations, cf. Pate's outline in Pate, *Interpreting Revelation*, 143. See also Craig Blomberg, *Matthew*, vol. 22, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H, 1992), 362–363.

[550] Cf. Patterson, *Revelation*, 163.

David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals" (Rev. 5:5). It is here that John writes that he "saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne" (Rev. 5:6-7). Two points here warrant discussion. First, the Lamb is clearly identified by His connection to both the Davidic dynasty and the tribe of Judah, marking Him as the promised Messiah and rightful King of Israel.[551] Second, this Lamb is "standing, as though it had been slain," yet, seemingly paradoxically, also stands victorious, having "conquered" (Rev. 5:6). Indeed, it is clear from the heavenly ensemble's declaration of praise that the Lamb's death was, in fact, the very means by which ultimate victory was achieved, since it was *by His blood* that the Lamb has "ransomed a people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation" (Rev. 5:9).[552] In other words, as Beale writes, "Christ's death, the end-time sacrifice of the messianic Lamb, becomes interpreted as a sacrifice that *not only redeems but also conquers* (emphasis added)."[553]

The result of this redemptive conquest is that those whom the Lamb has redeemed are made "a kingdom and priests to our God, and they shall reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10). Again, one sees here a clear reference to the original vocational calling of Israel at Sinai (Exod. 19:6).[554] What Israel and her kings failed to accomplish under their own power has now at last been achieved by the last son of David, so that the Lamb's victory here is the climax, or turning

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[551] Cf. Patterson, *Revelation*, 165-166. Also Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 349. Also Morris, *Revelation,* 97.

[552] As Morris writes "when John speaks of the Lamb *as if it had been slain* there can be no doubt but that he is thinking in terms of sacrifice. But he does not think of the Lamb as 'slain'. The Lamb is 'as though slain', for he is very much alive." See Also Morris, *Revelation,* 98.

[553] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 351.

[554] Ibid., 361-362.

point, of the biblical narrative, in which the covenant community, redeemed and restored by the blood of the Messiah, is at last free to carry out its vocational calling as a kingdom of priests, one guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, then, it is the Lamb, the promised Messiah from the tribe of Judah and heir to the Davidic throne, who is identified here as the only one in all of creation who is worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the Father, to break the seals, and to look inside it. Not only this, but it is the Lamb alone who is worthy to "receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" on account of His redemptive work, so that He might be glorified alongside "Him who sits on the throne" (Rev. 5:12-13). Here then, just as in the creedal statement found in Philippians 2:6-10, the Son's exaltation is tightly linked to His faithfulness to the Father unto death, faithfulness which results in His sharing in the Father's rule, so that to them should be the "blessing and honor and glory, and might forever and ever" (Rev. 5:13). In other words, it is the Father, the divine suzerain, who exalts the Son, the faithful vassal, and it is the Son who in turn glorifies the Father through His eternal reign at the Father's right hand, so that all of creation will ultimately give glory to God (Rev. 5:13).

The precise nature of the scroll in John's vision has been the subject of much scholarly debate, with various suggestions ranging from a copy of the Old Testament, to the Lamb's book of life, to a covenantal promise of inheritance.[555] It seems best, however, to identify the scroll, as Beale does, as being the "covenantal promise of inheritance," first given to, and forfeited by, Adam, the original faithless vassal.[556] Beale writes "God promised to Adam that he would reign over the earth. Although Adam forfeited this promise, Christ, the last Adam, was to inherit it. A

[555] Cf. Pate, *Interpreting Revelation,* 154. Also Beale *The Book of Revelation,* 340-341.

[556] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 341.

human person had to open the book because the promise was made to humanity. But no person was found worthy to open it because all are sinners and stand under the judgment contained in the book (5:3). Nevertheless, Christ was found worthy because he suffered the final judgment as an innocent sacrificial victim on behalf of his people, whom he represented and consequently redeemed."[557]

Likewise, as Pate observes, the breaking of the seals results in the outpouring of divine judgements upon the world, judgements which correspond well to the covenant curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy.[558] This further indicates that the scroll should be seen not only as a covenantal promise in a general sense, but as the Mosaic Covenant in particular. Since Jesus is the only one in history to perfectly fulfill the demands of the Law in every way, He alone is worthy to receive the covenant blessings, which includes the outpouring of covenant curses upon His enemies i.e. Deuteronomy 30:7. Ultimately, the result of these curses being poured out upon the enemies of God, those who have persecuted His people, is rescue and blessing for the covenant community, culminating in the total annihilation of evil and the renewal of creation.[559] In this way, the Son is shown to exercise His full authority over creation on behalf of the Father. Here, then, Jesus is again presented as the vassal king whose total faithfulness to the divine suzerain perfectly fulfills the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, and it is this faithfulness which allows Him to break the seals and open the scroll, thereby receiving the promised inheritance

[557] Beale, *The Book of Revelation*, 341.

[558] Pate, *Interpreting Revelation*, 154.

[559] Ibid.

from the Father. This in turn results in the destruction of His enemies, and the rescue and vindication of His people.[560]

The Judgements of Revelation as both Covenant Curses and New Exodus

With the opening of the scroll by the Lamb comes the outpouring of the Lord's judgement upon the world in a series of escalating plagues, beginning first with the seven "seal" judgements, and continuing with the seven "trumpet" and "bowl" judgements (Rev. 6, 8-9, 16:1-12, 17-21). Within the various interpretive frameworks discussed above, these plagues can be understood as either a sequential series of judgements, i.e. seals, then trumpets, then bowls, or as various symbolic expressions of the same event(s).[561] What is clearly apparent however, is the connection between these divine judgments, particularly those of the trumpets and bowls, and the plagues poured out upon Egypt in the book of Exodus.[562] Tabb, for instance, emphasizes that the parallels between the judgements of Revelation and the plagues of the Exodus include water turning to blood, hail, boils, locusts, frogs, and darkness.[563] Moreover, just as the plagues of the first Exodus broke the power of Pharaoh and Egypt, freeing God's people through divine judgement on their captors, so too do the judgements of Revelation serve as divine judgement upon those who have persecuted the covenant community i.e. Revelation 6:10-1.[564] The judgements of Revelation on the enemies of God and His people are therefore clearly meant to

[560] Beale similarly interprets the scroll in covenantal terms, as a "covenant promise of inheritance" specifically to the earth, lost by Adam but now reclaimed by Christ through His faithfulness to the Father. See Beale *The Book of Revelation,* 340-342.

[561] Cf. Brian J. Tabb, *All Things New: Revelation as Canonical Capstone*, vol. 48, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, ed. D. A. Carson, (London; Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic; Apollos, 2019),153. Also Patterson, *Revelation*, 176–177.

[562] Cf. Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 465-467. Also Tabb, *All Things New*,153-158.

[563] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 466-467.

[564] Tabb, *All Things New*,158.

allude to the first Exodus event, so that, as Tabb writes, "the Apocalypse discloses the last and greatest exodus…this ultimate exodus spells decisive defeat for the most formidable foes of God's people," namely, the devil and the two "beasts."[565]

Not only do these judgments allude back to the original Exodus event, but they also reflect the covenantal curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy, now removed from the covenant community, and poured out instead on the enemies of God and His Messiah. While the former point is widely regognized among commentators, the latter is significantly less so.[566] Nonetheless, within the book of Deuteronomy the two are closely linked, so that the covenant curses stipulated in the Mosaic Covenant are presented as "'exodus reversal' (cf. v. 27); that is, the calamities in Canaan would be like the plagues Yahweh visited on Egypt."[567] In other words, the curses for disobedience laid out in the Mosaic Covenant reflect the very same type of judgements by which the Lord destroyed the Egyptians, so that, should the Israelites fail to uphold the stipulation of the suzerain-vassal covenant, they themselves would be subjected to the very plagues which had previously been poured out on their oppressors. The story of Israel, it has been seen, is one in which the ongoing apostacy of both the nation and her kings does indeed result in the manifestation of such curses, culminating in the ultimate curse of exile outside of the Promised Land at the hands of Assyria and Babylon. At the same time, however, hope for God's people is found in the promise of restoration from exile and the resumption of covenant blessings in a new and greater Exodus ties to the coming of the messiah, the faithful vassal king. While

[565] Tabb, *All Things New,*161-162.

[566] Pate, in particular emphasizes the significance of covenant blessings and curses in much of both biblical and noncanonical apocalyptic literature, in which escalating covenant curses precedes the coming of the Messiah, an event which in turn results in the removal of the covenant curses from Israel, judgement upon God's enemies, and New Covenant blessings for God's people. See Pate *Interpreting Revelation,* 79-82.

[567] Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 369.

this new Exodus, as seen in chapters five and six, began with the coming of Jesus and with His death, resurrection, and exaltation, it will be fully consummated at His return. This, in turn, results in the total removal of the curse and total outpouring of covenant blessings on all of creation. At the same time, however, Moses identifies the restoration of Israel as also being the time in which God will avenge the former persecution of His people by transferring the full force of covenant curses onto the nations that have afflicted them (Deut. 30:7). The fulfillment of this promise, then, can be seen in the judgements of Revelation, in which the plagues of Egypt are poured out by the authority of the Messiah upon those who persecute the covenant community. In particular, the target of these curses is identified in Revelation chapters eighteen and nineteen as "Babylon," the nation responsible for the Exile of Judah and the ultimate symbol of Israel's enemies.[568]

Given the above considerations, then, namely, the link between the judgements of Revelation with the plagues of Egypt and the covenant curses, it seems best to understand these judgements as literal future events which preceded the return of Christ, rather than as symbolic of spiritual judgements upon the nations occurring throughout history. It seems, at best, exegetically inconstant to maintain that the plagues of Exodus and the Old Testament covenant curses on Israel were historical realities, while also viewing the judgments of Revelation in a nonliteral manner, as in the idealist approach. Furthermore, the worldwide scope of the judgements of Revelation makes it difficult to correlate them with any known historical events as

[568] Babylon is often identified by commentators with Rome, the persecutor of the church at the time of John's writing. While this is likely true as far as it goes, "Babylon is not simply a cipher for Rome but is a rich biblical-theological symbol for the world's idolatrous, seductive political economy—the archetypal godless city, which Rome embodied in the first century." In other words, Babylon here is symbolic of all those who have persecuted the covenant community throughout history, the kingdom of the world under the leadership of Satan. See Tabb, *All Things New*,164.

in the preterist or historical approaches.[569] Therefore, it is best to see these judgements as the literal, and still future, fulfillment of Deuteronomy 30:7, which is itself the penultimate act of the final Exodus, one which immediately proceeds Christ's return.

The Second Coming as the Culmination of the Eschatological Exodus

Just as the first Exodus culminated in the rescue of God's people from the power of Egypt, so the final Exodus results in the rescue of the covenant community from the power of Satan and his servants, who are definitively defeated and judged at the return of Christ.[570] In Revelation chapters nineteen and twenty, John describes a vision of the Lord's return in glory, riding upon a white horse and leading the armies of heaven. At this time, John writes, the armies of the "beast and the kings of the earth…gathered to make war against him who was sitting on the horse and against his army" (Rev. 19:19). The beast, however, is captured, along with the false prophet, and cast into the lake of fire, his army destroyed by the Lord's power (Rev 19:20). Likewise, John writes that he saw Satan bound and cast into the pit for a thousand years, "so that he might not deceive the nations any longer" (Rev. 20:3). While the devil must ultimately be released for "a little while" at the conclusion of the thousand years, his final rebellion is likewise promptly crushed, as his armies are consumed by fire from heaven, and Satan himself is finally cast into the lake of fire alongside the beast and false prophet (Rev. 20:3, 7-10).

The brevity with which John describes the defeat of God's enemies at the Parousia is striking, and only in the loosest of terms can these events be described as a "battle" between the

[569] As Patterson writes in regard to the breaking of the sixth seal, for instance, "the exponential proportions and global engulfing that seems to be pictured in the opening of the sixth seal are the factors that induce the entire population of the earth to conclude that this can only be an act of God." Patterson, *Revelation,* 188.

[570] Tabb, *All Things New*,161.

exalted Christ and the forces of the beast and the devil.[571] Rather, what is described by John is better identified as the definitive judgement and summary execution of Satan and his servants by the Righteous Judge, who has at last returned to claim His full and rightful rule over the nations. As Beale aptly writes, "The nations are deceived into thinking that they are gathering to exterminate the saints, but they are gathered together ultimately by God only in order to meet their own judgment at the hands of Jesus."[572] This, in turn, results in the ultimate vindication and rescue of the Lord's people, particularly those who suffered persecution and martyrdom for their faith, whom John writes will "be priest of God and of Christ, and they will reign with him for a thousand years" (Rev. 20:6).

Likewise, Jesus Himself describes His return in the Olivet discourse in terms which evoke a sense of new Exodus and rescue for God's people. Having been question by the disciples regarding the signs that are to proceed His return and the "end of the age" Jesus points to a series of judgments and disasters which shall come upon the earth, as well as to the intense persecution that will fall upon the covenant community (Matt. 24:3-14). All these things, He says, are the "beginning of birth pains" which will culminate in a time of "great tribulation, such as has not been from the beginning of the world until now… and never will be" again (Matt. 24:8, 21).[573] Immediately after this time of tribulation however, Jesus declares that "all the tribes of the earth…will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory"

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[571] As Morris observes, no mention is made of the armies of heaven actually engaging in combat, rather, it is the Lord Himself who strikes down His enemies by His very word. Morris, *Revelation,* 220.

[572] Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 835.

[573] As Blomberg argues, it is difficult to see how this description of such an intense period of tribulation can be applied to the events of AD 70 as Preterists do. Blomberg, *Matthew,* 359. It seems better, then, to take this tribulation as referring to either the events immediately preceding Christ's return, or as a description of the whole time between the first and second coming, with the tribulation escalating until the Parousia.

(Matt. 24:30).[574] At this time, "he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and *they will gather his elect from the four winds from one end of heaven to the other*" (Matt. 24:31 emphasis added). Here then, one sees a parallel to the promise of Deuteronomy 30:4, which reads "if your outcasts are in the *utmost parts of heaven, from there the Lord your God will gather you* (emphasis added)."[575] The gathering of God's people at the Parousia, then, is presented here as the ultimate end to the curse of exile, as the remnant of the covenant community is brought out of the nations and into the Promised Land under the eternal rule of the son of David. That this coincides with the final defeat and judgement of God's enemies through the pouring out of covenant curses on "Babylon" demonstrates that the return of Christ in glory is to be understood as the ultimate eschatological Exodus for God's people, and as the final fulfillment of the promised restoration of Deuteronomy 30.

The New Creation as the Eschatological Eden

With Christ's return and the defeat of God's enemies comes the ultimate restoration of creation. In the concluding chapters of Revelation, John paints a picture of the New Jerusalem, which he sees "coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2). The imagery of this holy city is thoroughly Edenic, from the flowing river of life to the presence of precious jewels and streets of gold, and most notably, the presence of the tree of life, the leaves of which are "for the healing of the nations" (Rev. 21:18-21, 22:1-3).[576] Even more significantly, however, John writes that he

[574] Unlike His first coming, then, the Lord's return is one of glory and power, in which He exercises His full authority as King and righteous judge. As Osborne notes, the term "coming on the clouds of heaven" is a clear reference not only to the Son of Man in Daniel 7:13, but also to passages such as Isaiah 19:1, in which the Lord is portrayed as riding upon the clouds and coming in judgement against Egypt. It is a term, in other words, which emphasizes Jesus' divinity and divine authority as Lord. Cf. Osborne, *Matthew*, 894. Also Blomberg, *Matthew*, 359

[575] Cf. Osborne, *Matthew,* 895. Also Blomberg, *Matthew,* 362.

[576] Cf. Tabb, *All Things New,* 188-190. Also Patterson, *Revelation*, 376. Also Beale, *The Book of Revelation,* 1107.

"saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb" (Rev. 21:22). For the first time since the fall of Adam, mankind once again has unrestricted access to not only the tree of life, but to the very presence of their Creator.[577] As John writes "behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away" (Rev. 21:3-4). What the first Adam, the original faithless vassal, lost through his sin, the faithful vassal king, Jesus, has now restored, and with the eternal presence of God and the Lamb comes the total removal of the curse of both sin and death.[578]

As a result, the people of the covenant community are at last free to serve and worship the Lord forever, and to reign upon the earth as a royal priesthood in fulfillment of the original creation mandate (Rev. 22:5).[579] Moreover, this eschatological reality is presented not merely as a *return* to the original Edenic state, but as a new and greater Eden, one in which the Son of God Himself fulfills the Adamic commission of priest king and faithful vice regent to the Father, leading humanity in their worship of the divine suzerain, so that, as Paul writes, "God may be all in all" (1 Cor. 15:28).[580] As Tabb writes, "the redemptive drama of Revelation 5 serves as the bridge linking Adam's failure and the saints' future. Jesus the Lion of Judah is found 'worthy' and has 'conquered' because, as the slain Lamb, he ransomed people for God and made them 'a

[577] As Patterson writess "the temple is no longer necessary because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb constitute the temple. To be in their presence is to be at the center of the worship of the universe." Patterson, *Revelation*, 373.

[578] Cf. Patterson, *Revelation*, 376–377.

[579] Tabb, *All Things New*, 189, 198-199.

[580] Ibid., 187-189.

kingdom' (5:5, 9–10). Jesus thus fulfils Adam's commission to image God rightly by ruling over the world…in Danielic terms Jesus is 'given dominion and glory and a kingdom' and then grants those who conquer a share in his unending messianic kingdom."[581] This, then, is what brings the story of Scripture to its ultimate conclusion, when the Son of God, incarnate as a son of Adam, fulfills the covenantal obligations of humanity on their behalf, so that God's original purpose for creation may be carried out under the faithful and eternal rule of His beloved Son, the faithful vassal king with whom He is well pleased (Matt. 3:17).

Conclusion

The eschatological outlook of the New Testament writers, then, is one which awaits the return of Christ as the proper conclusion of the biblical narrative, the final Exodus in which God's enemies will be defeated, His people rescued, and all of creation restored to a new and greater Eden. Until that time, however, the church continues to live within this ongoing story, carrying out the great commission by the authority of the risen Lord, who has been exalted to the right hand of the Father, and who empowers the Church by the Holy Spirit. Having now examined the biblical narrative from Genesis through Revelation through the lens of the suzerain-vassal covenant relationship, the concluding chapter of this dissertation will discuss the implications of this reading for a proper understanding of the biblical story as a cohesive narrative, one which centers around the redeeming work of Jesus, the faithful vassal king whose total obedience to the divine suzerain secures salvation and blessings for the covenant community.

[581] Tabb, *All Things New*, 200.

CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION AND PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS

It has been the central argument of this dissertation that Jesus of Nazareth, the ontological Son of God who becomes incarnate as the son of man, is presented in Scripture as the one and only faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, the rightful king of Israel whose sinless life and self-sacrificial death perfectly fulfill the demands of the Mosaic Covenant, thereby overcoming the curse of the Law and securing life and blessing for His people through His exaltation to the Father's right hand. Moreover, this understanding of the relationship between the Father and Son provides the reader of Scripture with a key thematic lens through which to understand the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, so that the two can be clearly seen as a singled unified narrative, one which finds its climax in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Certainly, this is not to suggest that this is the only, nor even necessarily the primary, thematic lens through which the Bible should be read. Nonetheless, as has been seen throughout the preceding chapters, the relationship between the Father and Son as divine suzerain and faithful vassal king is one which intersects with other significant biblical themes, such as covenant, vocation, and the kingdom of God, and which highlights key aspects of the biblical narrative.

Previous chapters, therefore, have sought to trace this theme through the majority of the biblical writings, from Genesis to Revelation, in order to demonstrate how the story of the Old Testament, a story of faithless vassals and broken covenants, points forward to, and is ultimately concluded by, the gospel of Jesus, who not only rescues humanity from the curse of sin and death through His own death and resurrection, but who actively fulfills the original vocational calling for which the first man, Adam, was originally created, so that the Father's purpose for creation will finally be brought to fruition under the righteous rule of the Son. Of course, ultimately, any study of God's word, if it is to be of service to the Lord and His kingdom, must

seek, like its very subject, to be "profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16). In other words, biblical study should be done with the intent of aiding and encouraging the reader in faithfully walking with the Lord, as the Spirit conforms them more fully into the image of Christ. Therefore, unlike with previous chapters, which maintained a primarily academic focus in their analysis of Scripture, the present chapter seeks to be largely pastoral in nature. The purpose of the present, chapter, then, is not only to briefly summarize the conclusions of previous chapters, but also to discuss the implications of these conclusions, both for reading the Bible as a cohesive narrative, and for the life of God's people today.

Summary of Previous Chapters

With the creation of Adam as the first man in Genesis 1-2, the reader of Scripture is told that God created man in His own "image," bestowing upon humanity a particular vocational calling, namely, to act as His representatives on earth, with authority over His good creation. As discussed at length in chapter two of this study, this vocational calling included both a royal and priestly role, as the Lord placed Adam in the garden to guard and keep it. This royal-priestly authority, however, was to be exercised in submission to the Lord's ultimate authority as the creator and king of all creation. In this way, Adam serves as the prototypical "vassal king" to the "divine suzerain," whose vocation calling and covenantal relationship to the Lord anticipates the later vocational callings of Israel, the Davidic kings, and, ultimately, Jesus Himself.

In failing to drive out the serpent, then, Adam not only engages in an act of personal sin and rebellion, but of vocational failure and covenantal unfaithfulness. By seeking to become "like God/like gods," Adam and his wife attempt to usurp the Lord's rightful authority, engaging in an act of idolatry and open rebellion against the divine suzerain. Adam, therefore, becomes the

first faithless vassal of the biblical narrative, resulting in both he and his wife being exiled from the garden and coming under the curse of death. Hope, however, can be found in the Lord's promise of a coming "seed," a decedent of Eve who will serve as the faithful vassal that Adam failed to be, crushing the head of the serpent, and providing rest from the curse.

Much of the Old Testament narrative from this point forward, then, can be seen as the attempt to identify this faithful vassal whom the Lord has promised. As discussed in chapters two and three, there is an initial ambiguity regarding whether this promised "seed" of Eve, and later Abraham, is to be understood as an individual or as a group, with the events of Sinai seeming at first glance to indicate that Israel itself is the promised corporate "seed". Indeed, this is how many Jewish rabbis have read the Old Testament, by viewing Israel, the Lord's chosen "kingdom of priest/vassal state" as the divinely appointed answer to Adam's transgression, whose vocational calling is fulfilled through their keeping of the Mosaic Law, ultimately leading to salvation for the nations.[582] Such a reading of the Old Testament, however, is untenable. As discussed in chapter three, the narratives of both the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic history quickly reveal Israel, like Adam, to be a unfaithful vassal, unable to uphold the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant do to their sinfulness and hard hearts, and regularly engaging in act of idolatry and rebellion against the divine suzerain.

Likewise, the kings of Israel, and later Israel and Judah, rather than guiding the people in love and faithful submission to Yahweh's sovereign rule, instead abuse their position, and even the people themselves, ultimately leading the nation ever deeper into an escalating cycle of idolatry and depravity. Even the most righteous of the Davidic kings, such as Josiah, are ultimately unable to turn the tide of the nation's idolatry and rebellion, demonstrating that no

[582] Morris, "Exiled from Eden," 125.

person who is themselves under the power of sin and death can ever hope to free the people from the curse of the Law. As a result, the covenant curses of Leviticus and Deuteronomy are poured out upon both the northern and southern kingdoms in full force, ultimately coming to a climax in the exile of both nations outside of the Promised Land, and under the rule of pagan powers. Ironically, by rejecting the rule of the divine suzerain, the nation and her kings become vassals subjected to human kings instead, having failed in their vocational calling as a royal priesthood to the nations.

In the midst of this darkness and turmoil, however, the biblical prophets provide the reader of Scripture with a divinely inspired commentary on the story of God's people, as well as providing the nation with a message of hope in the midst of exile. This hope, as discussed in chapter four, is not based in any way in any actual ability by the people to finally turn from their sin and serve as faithful vassals to the divine suzerain, since their hard heartedness renders such faithfulness humanly impossible. Rather, this hope is rooted firmly and solely in the faithfulness of the divine suzerain, Yahweh, who promises to not only return the people to the Promised Land in an act of divine restoration, but to write His law on their hearts under a new and better covenant, so that they might finally serve Him faithfully as a kingdom of priest. The restoration, moreover, is to occur in concert with, and indeed be accomplished through, the coming of an anointed descendent of David, a righteous king whom God will raise up and place upon the throne of His ancestor. It is this anointed king whom the prophets declare will reign over not only Israel, but the whole world, and whom will do so, in stark contrast to the nation's past rulers, as a truly and fully faithful vassal to the divine suzerain, leading the restored nation in service to Yahweh and in fulfillment of their divinely give vocation.

It is this reading of the Old Testament narrative, then, which the New Testament writers understand as having reached its climax in the life, death, resurrection, and exaltation of Jesus of Nazareth. As discussed in chapter five, Jesus, the ontological Son of God, having become incarnate as a man, and being born as a descendent of David, Abraham, and Adam, takes upon Himself all of the covenant obligations of a vassal king to the divine suzerain, and then perfectly fulfills them through His sinless life and self-sacrificing death on the cross. Not only this, but, in experiencing death on behalf of sinful humanity, the Lord takes upon Himself the full force of the covenant curses, making way for restoration and blessing for the covenant community. Moreover, having done so, He ultimately overcomes death itself, being raised up and exalted to the right hand of the Father, who bestows upon Him "the name that is above every other name" (Phil. 2:9).

The remainder of the New Testament writings, then, as discussed in chapters six and seven, expound upon this new reality, in which Jesus, having received from the Father "all authority in heaven and on earth," sends the Holy Spirit to restore and empower the covenant community, so that it might finally fulfill its vocational calling as a kingdom of priests, by faithfully representing Jesus to the world in accordance with the Lord's command to "go therefore and make disciples of all nations" (Matt. 28:18-19). The present reality of the church post Pentecost, then, is one of "already, but not yet" in which the covenant community awaits the Lord's return in glory, while simultaneously recognizing His present rule and authority over the course of human history.

In this way then, the story of the New Testament can be seen as one in which the Father, as divine suzerain, and the Son, as faithful vassal king, together fulfill both sides the Mosaic Covenant, resulting in salvation and restoration for God's people through the power of the Holy

Spirit. Ultimately, this restoration will reach its consummation at the Lord's return, at which point "every knee should bow…and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11).

Practical and Pastoral Implications

By tracing this central theological theme through both the Old and New Testaments, one can clearly see that the whole of Scripture contains a single, cohesive, historical narrative, one which builds towards, and ultimately reaches its climax in, the redeeming work of Jesus of Nazareth, who is both the Son of God and rightful king of creation. This, understanding, moreover, has a number of implications for how one reads, understands, and presents the gospel message. As stated in chapter one, there is a tendency, even among evangelical Christians, to treat the Old Testament as though it is superfluous to the New Testament gospel message. This, in turn, often results in an understanding of the gospel which is highly individualistic, focused solely on personal forgiveness and salvation. Certainly, this is a critical and central aspect of the gospel, as evidenced by the account of Pentecost in the book of Acts. Having just heard the apostle Peter expound upon the reality and meaning of the Lord's resurrection, the peoples first question is "what shall we do?" to which Peter replies "repent and be baptized…for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:37-38). Clearly, then, personal forgiveness and salvation are at the heart of the gospel message. Nonetheless, an understanding of the gospel which focuses *solely* on this aspect will inevitably fail to capture the full scope of the biblical picture, as it ignores the cosmic aspect of Christs redemptive work, in which the Son of God, incarnate as the son of man/last Adam, fulfills the original vocational calling of humanity, thereby reclaiming the inheritance that was forfeited by the original Adam's sin, and ultimately reconciling all of creation to the Father, i.e. Colossians 1:19-20.

From this then, one can see that the story of the Old Testament is anything but superfluous to the biblical narrative, indeed, it is essential to it. Not only this, but the historical reality of the Old Testament narratives is likewise critical, since the Gospels can hardly be seen as the climax of a previously fictitious story.. Likewise, if Jesus is to be understood as a faithful vassal king, whose sinless life, death, and resurrection overcomes the covenantal failures of past vassals, then it of great significance that these past vassals actually existed as historical individuals. Therefore, the historicity of individuals such as David, Abraham, and Adam is to be affirmed as essential to the overall biblical message, and any approach which claims to present a faithful reading of Scripture, while simultaneously rejecting the historical reality of the narrative contained within, should be rejected

Additionally, because the story of the Old Testament is critical to a proper understanding of the biblical narrative as a whole, pastors and other teachers in the local church should take care in how they present the Old Testament narrative accounts. Oftentimes, such stories are presented primarily as individual morality tales, disconnected from the larger biblical context. This is certainly not to say that moral lessons should not be drawn from such accounts, however, this should not be presented as the sole purpose of the Old Testament narratives. Rather than presenting these as isolated and unconnected stories with various moral lessons to be learned, it should be stressed how these accounts fit into the larger story of the Bible, and how they build towards the coming of Jesus.

Likewise, when engaging with those outside of the church, such an approach can serve a powerful apologetic function, by demonstrating how the entire narrative arc of the Old Testament moves towards the coming of Jesus and the New Testament Gospel accounts. This, in turn, has the potential to be far more effective than attempting to demonstrate Jesus' messianic

identity through a series of prophetic "proof texts" read outside of their narrative context. In particular, Jewish readers often have a far different understanding of the Old Testament narrative and its implications than those proposed in this dissertation. By approaching the issue of messianic identity through the suzerain-vassal covenant paradigm, however, one can demonstrate effectively how the story of Israel in the Old Testament flows naturally into the events of the New Testament, as well as demonstrating that the messianic expectation of the Hebrew Bible fits well with the Gospel writers' testimony regarding the person and work of Jesus of Nazareth. This, again, has the potential to be more effective than the use of various prophetic "proof-texts," the proper interpretation of which is often fiercely contested between Christian and Jewish readers.

For Christian readers, meanwhile, understanding the Bible as having an overarching narrative means recognizing that the church today continues to live and operate within the ongoing story of God's people.[583] As discussed in chapter six, there is a distinct sense of "already but not yet" to the present age, in which God's people are called to carry out the Great Commission by the guidance and power of the Holy Spirit, taking up Israel's vocational calling to act as a "royal priesthood," and representing Jesus to the world i.e. 1 Peter 2:9. It is imperative that the church today recognize that the vocational failures of past vassals throughout the biblical narrative are consistently rooted in idolatry, as well as a hard-hearted refusal to submit to the total authority of the Lord, acts of rebellion which remain all too common among modern believers. If the church is to be effective in its calling, then, it must seek to heed to words of the apostle Paul, who in Philippians chapter two, exhorts his readers to emulate the humility and

[583] Cf. Bartholomew and Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture,* 214-218.

submission of Christ, the one and only truly faithful vassal. In this way, the church will serve as a faithful witness until the Lord's return.

Finally, it is this promised return of Jesus the righteous king which provides the covenant community with hope during the present age. In knowing the end of the story, in which the Lord returns in glory to consummate His rightful rule over, and restoration of, creation, belivers can have confidence in the midst of trials and tribulations. This hope for the "not yet," moreover, is rooted in the "already" reality of Christ's reign at the Fathers right hand, and in the present working of the Holy Spirit in and through the covenant community. Believers can be assured of ultimate victory over sin and the devil, then, because it is a victory that has already been won, not by man, whom has himself a faithless and rebellious vassal to the divine suzerain, but by the Lord Himself, who sent His only Son, the one and only faithful vassal, who is both fully God and fully man, to fulfill the vocational calling of humanity on its behalf, taking upon Himself the covenant curse of death due to humanity, and thereby making a way for life and blessing to be poured out on those who put their trust in Him. Therefore, as John writes "to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever…Amen!" (Rev. 5:13-14).

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