

The LORD of the Covenant

- ⁶ And he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God.
- ⁷ Then the LORD said, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings,
- ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the place of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites.
- ⁹ And now, behold, the cry of the people of Israel has come to me, and I have also seen the oppression with which the Egyptians oppress them.
- ¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt."
- ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?"
- ¹² He said, "But I will be with you, and this shall be the sign for you, that I have sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain."
- ¹³ Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?"
- ¹⁴ God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'"
- ¹⁵ God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.
- ¹⁶ Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, "I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt,
- ¹⁷ and I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites, a land flowing with milk and honey.'"

Exodus 3:6-17

Covenant of Peace/Redemption

In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. But why? **Was it because he was bored and had nothing better to do?** Then he created man. **Did he do it because he was lonely, and needed companionship?** Such explanations, which are common even among Christians, do not understand the person and purposes of Almighty God.

Holy Scripture informs us that before the world was created, there was a book in heaven called the “**book of life**” (**Rev 3:5; 13:8; 17:8; 20:12, 15; 21:7; cf. Dan 7:10, Ex 32:32-33**). Then it says about this book that there are “**dwellers on earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world**” (**Rev 17:8**). Of course, this means that some have their names written in this book (**Rev 13:8** ESV) from the foundation of the world, and Paul speaks of this in **Ephesians 1:4** saying God “**chose us in Christ before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.**” And so there is a blessed hope that you must come to grips with as a Christian. **Titus 1:2** says “**Rest on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time.**” This is the human application of what took place before God created the universe.

However, you must not put yourself at the center of the purpose of creation. It is God alone who is at the center of creation, and the reason he created was to glorify himself. **Creation was not from lack or emptiness in God, but fullness overflowing.** The glory of God the Father expresses itself objectively and physically in the Word made flesh and phenomenologically and experientially in the glory-manifestations of the Holy Spirit, especially in biblical temples.

Listen to how the Scripture talks about this. In predictive form you read in the Psalms, “**The LORD says to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet’**” (**Ps 110:1**). We know from the NT that this is speaking about Jesus (**Luke 20:43; Acts 2:35; Heb 1:13; 10:13**). In the same Psalm it is again predicted, “**The LORD has sworn and will not change his mind: ‘You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek’**” (**Ps 110:4**).

Listen again to what it says there. “**The LORD says to David’s Lord...**” “**The LORD has sworn...**” There is swearing and speaking between two people going on here. That is critical to remember as I go on in this sermon. Listen to a couple of

other ways that Jesus speaks about this. “And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day” (John 6:39). The Father sent Jesus, which implies communication between them before he came. The Father gives Jesus a people, which follows in line with names being written in a book of life before creation. Jesus prays to his Father, “I [Jesus] have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do” (John 17:4). Notice that Jesus glorifies the Father, but notice that he does this through a work that he was given. This too implies communication, speaking, swearing that is going on before Jesus came to us in the flesh.

Let me go back to the OT for a moment. Zechariah 6:13 predicts, “Even he shall build the temple of the LORD; and he shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon his throne; and he shall be a priest upon his throne: and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.” Temple building, bearing the glory of God, ruling upon the throne, becoming a high priest... this was all part of the work that was planned out “between them both,” Father and Son, before the foundation of the world. This plan was developed in something Zechariah refers to as a “counsel,” a counsel of peace. One thinks of something like the representatives of “Big Ten” allied nations sitting around a large heavy table trying to hammer out the *Treaty of Versailles* in an attempt to bring lasting peace and justice to the world after WW I.

In other places, this “counsel” is referred to as a covenant. In fact, the language “counsel of peace” seems to be taken from the *covenant of peace* that God makes in Numbers with the priest Phinehas (Num 25:12; cf. Mal 2:5; Josh 9:15; Isa 54:10; Ezek 34:25, 37:26). Perhaps this is why, immediately after quoting the Melchizedek passage, Hebrews says, “Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant” (Heb 7:21). Luke 22:29-30 is the story of the Last Supper. It reads, “Just as My Father has granted Me a kingdom, I grant you, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” The verb “to grant” is the Greek *diathithēmi* from which the noun *diathēkē* or “covenant” is derived. The context suggests that we might better render the verse “As my Father covenanted unto me a kingdom...”¹ You can appreciate this more when you understand that the Lord’s Supper is the new *covenant* meal,

¹ Meredith Kline, *God, Heaven, and Har Magedon: A Covenantal Tale of Cosmos and Telos* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), p. 72.

“This is the new covenant in my blood.” So, as the Father covenanted with the Son, so the Son covenants with the Church to enforce the terms of that covenant which was made in eternity past.

This is why Peter says that Jesus was “foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you” (1 Pet 1:20 NKJ). It is why we might read Revelation 13:8 as saying, “The Lamb was slain from the creation of the world” (NIV).² It all comes together in 2 Tim 1:9, “God has saved us, and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity” (NAS); or in 1 Cor 2:7, “We speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom, which God predestined before the ages to our glory” (NAS).

What you need to see, then, is how creation was no accident or outgrowth of a bored or lonely God. Rather, everything was meticulously planned: salvation, Christ’s coming, Christ’s work, our election, the conflict between Jesus and Satan with Christ’s ultimate victory... everything was planned before the foundation of the world. And it is sure to come to pass because of God’s oath, his swearing covenantal agreement, wherein the Father bequeaths to the Son privileges, people, position, power, and province, the Son agrees to be the historical sponsor of the Father’s covenant as a Mediator, to pay the debt of sin in his blood in order to ratify the Father’s covenant, and then sends the Holy Spirit who agrees to indwell his people, to become their seal and guarantee that all of the future promises will be

² The NIV reads the Greek linearly: The temporal clause “before the foundation of the world” immediately follows the description of the slain Lamb and therefore modifies it. Some (Caird, *Revelation*, 168; Mounce, *Revelation*, 256) believe it is unlikely that the temporal clause would modify a phrase (“everyone’s name who had not been written”) with 12 words between it. However, Revelation 17:8 does refer to those whose names had not been written in the book before the foundation of the world. It is certain that both are theologically true, because if the fall was ordained, then redemption would also have been ordained for people to have their names written in that book. In the Pseudepigrapha, the *Assumption of Moses* 1:14 reads, “Accordingly He designed and devised me, and He prepared me before the foundation of the world, that I should be the mediator of His covenant.”

given to them who believe in Christ Jesus.³ If God makes a covenant, it is sure to come to pass!

Biblical history (that is, everything that takes place after creation which is written in the Bible) needs to be understood through the lenses of covenant. Covenant brings a unity and purpose to the Scripture and to history itself that is rooted in the plan and person of God. It is God's plan that gives history purpose, and it is his person that makes it all work. Since God is **omnipotent**, he can bring his plan to bear exactly as he desires. Since he is **all-good**, his counsel is good and ultimately works itself out completely for good and the glory of God, even while evil plays a role in the drama. This gives us solace and explanation for evil's role in the world. Since God is **faithful**, his promises come to pass exactly as he swears. Since God is **true**, his covenant is not a lie or a hoax and you are not delusional for believing it!

Covenant of Works/Creation/Life

Now, this eternal covenant **first began working itself out in the Garden of Eden**. It is really quite important to see what I am going to talk about here, though for an all too brief amount of time, because I am convinced more and more each day, that a host of biblical errors begin right here in Chapter 2 of Genesis, with the denial or a misunderstanding of the pre-lapsarian (i.e. pre-fall) covenant that God gave to Adam in the Garden.

Scripture is explicit about this covenant. In **Hosea 6:7**, upon the most natural reading of the text, which is confirmed by every major modern translation of the verse in English, we read, **“But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me.”**⁴ The only time we know that Adam transgressed anything was when he ate the forbidden fruit. **Isaiah 24:5** says that the **“earth lies**

³ Richard Muller defines the covenant this way, “In Reformed federalism, [it is] the pretemporal, intratrinitarian agreement of the Father and the Son concerning the covenant of grace and its ratification in and through the work of the Son incarnate. The Son covenants with the Father, in the unity of the Godhead, to be the temporal sponsor of the Father's *testamentum* [“covenant” or “legal bequest”] in and through the work of the Mediator. In that work, the Son fulfills his *sponsio*... i.e., his guarantee of payment of the debt of sin in ratification of the Father's *testamentum*” (Richard A. Muller, *Dictionary of Latin and Greek Theological Terms* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Book House, 1985), p. 217). It is a great definition, except that it leaves out the work of the Spirit in relation to this covenant.

⁴ Even if it read “like men” “they” [men] transgressed the covenant, what covenant would men other than the Israelites be under if not an Adamic covenant?

defied under its inhabitants; for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes, broken the everlasting covenant.” The only covenant that this could possibly refer to is the same one broken by Adam, which men still today stand under as a means of salvation or judgment, depending upon their level of obedience. As **Romans 2:6-11** says, “God ‘will give to each person according to what he has done.’ To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life. But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger. There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. For God does not show favoritism.” If you read the context, there is no one who does good, not one, neither Jew nor Gentile, neither you nor me. Therefore, even though this covenant continues to be enforced and makes people accountable to a holy God for their sin, its terms even being written on their heart (**Rom 2:16**), **it is not possible to be saved by obeying the terms of this covenant personally**, because, as James says, if you break even one commandment, you have broken them all (**James 2:10**).

It is passages like these, besides the Genesis account itself, which caused **Augustine** to write in *The City of God*, “**The first covenant, which was made with the first man, is just this: In the day you eat thereof, you shall surely die**” (*City of God*, 16.27).⁵ **What did God tell Adam in the Garden?** “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you must not eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (**Gen 2:16**). In a word, this was Adam’s *Law*. If he were to obey, he would merit eternal life for himself. If not, death would be the result.

You need to see the Tree as a reflection of the Law of God, even the moral law delivered to Moses, because this helps you understand the covenantal relationship there in the Garden. The Tree was “**pleasant to the sight, good for food and to be desired to make one wise**” (**Gen 3:6**). Now consider the Law of God, the tablets of the *covenant*, which was kept inside the Ark of the *Covenant*. **Psalm 19:7-8** says that the Law of God gives “**light to the eyes,**” “**revives the soul**” [**like food?**]; cf. **Lam**

⁵ Augustine immediately quotes Sirach (in the Apocrypha), not as authoritative, but as evidence that his view is very old, “All flesh waxeth old as a garment: for the covenant from the beginning is, Thou shalt die the death. (Sir 14:17).

1:11, 19; Ps 23:3; Prov 24:13; Isa 65:3], and “makes wise the simple.” In fact, David Clines has argued persuasively that everything said about the Law in Psalm 19 intentionally echoes the Tree of Eden.⁶ Besides simply being fascinating, the point is that the Tree and the Law of Moses serve the same covenantal purpose. The tree is a demonstration that there is a covenant between Adam and God.

How does this covenant relate to the covenant made before creation? In this way: Adam was set up as the Son of God (Luke 3:38), the representative that would usher mankind into eternal life. His purpose was to expand (i.e. “build”) the Eden-Temple and to be established as God’s high priest, thus forever ruling upon the throne next to his heavenly Father. These are the ideas mentioned already in Zechariah.

But of course, he failed. But someone has to obey the terms of the covenant and uphold the justice of God. And so it was in his likeness, as the Second Adam, that Jesus came, lived out perfectly the conditions of this Adamic covenant, and through his good works, merited eternal life for himself, his people, and the creation. But this was no accident or plan B. This was the design all along. These are some of the reasons why this Adamic covenant is referred to as the **covenant of works**, or the **covenant of life**, or the **covenant of creation** in our Reformed tradition. And that is how the covenant with Adam flows out of the covenant between the Trinity, this covenant of redemption, in eternity past.

Covenant of Grace

Adam and Eve

But since the covenant of works would no longer be a means whereby you or I could obey its terms and merit eternal life, God got busy working out his covenant of redemption immediately after the fall, right there in the Garden. God clothed Adam and Eve with the bloody skin of a sacrificial animal and swore a promise to them: **I will put enmity between the serpent and the woman, between his offspring and hers** (obviously speaking in a spiritual sense). **Her seed will crush the serpent’s head, but all that Satan will be able to do is strike his heel** (Gen 3:15). It is not without good reason that the entire Christian church has seen this as the

⁶ D. J. A. Clines, “The Tree of Knowledge and the Law of Yahweh (Psalm 19),” *Vetus Testamentum* 24 (1974), 8-14.

protoevangelium: First-Gospel. But the Reformed community saw it especially related to this idea of covenant. Indeed, this is the first instance of what we call the “covenant of grace” in history. **Why is it gracious?** Because Adam and Eve do nothing but trust God’s promises, while God does everything himself to ensure that they will be brought to redemption and that evil will be stamped out once-and-for-all.

There is a **relationship that exists between the eternal covenant and the covenant of grace**. In the eternal covenant, God swore within his persons to do all things to redeem the elect. That is why we call it the covenant of redemption. In the covenant of grace, including the various individual gracious covenants made throughout the Scripture, God is working out our redemption. But there is also a vital **relationship between the covenant of grace and the covenant of life**, the covenant of works. And you must not miss it. The covenant of grace is gracious because Jesus does the works contracted in the covenant with Adam. Grace can only be dispensed if justice is first served and if the terms of the previous covenant are met. God cannot just divvy out grace while justice is plowed under by humanity. He is gracious and he is just together. You must never, ever forget that. All of God’s plans go together in perfect harmony, with amazing precision, beauty, and purpose.

But we need to look more at God’s gracious covenant if we are ever to come to our text today. This promise to Eve would not occur suddenly, as she thought when she bore her first child and named him Cain: *I-Have-Brought-Forth-The-Man*. In fact, she would be sorely disappointed that her firstborn, most beloved Son turned out to be a hating, murdering, God-despising rebel. Satan, it seems, would bring forth a child first.

But God would choose another of Eve’s children, and through **Seth** would come the great faithful God-honoring patriarchs of elder days: Men like **Enoch, Methuselah**, and Noah. The point of the genealogies, covenantally speaking, is to show you that God has preserved a remnant in the midst of an increasingly wicked world, a world that grew so wicked that every thought of its heart was only evil all the time (**Gen 6:5**). And God did it all because of his covenantal oath in eternity past.

Noah

And so Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. God had preserved Noah and given him a heart to obey him, primarily because he had sworn to do so to Eve. But of course, if God had wiped all of humanity off the face of the earth, then the earlier promise to Jesus could not come true, and so God preserved Noah for Jesus' sake! I wonder if you have ever thought about it like that before? This is just one more of the relationships between the various covenants. God preserves his people in order to bring forth and magnify his Son to the world. I You simply can't understand God's covenant work *in history* apart from his covenant work *prior to history*. This historical work is the outflow of the pre-temporal counsel of peace.

But it gets more explicit with Noah than simply understanding how election was working at that time. It says that God established his “covenant” with Noah and his family (**Gen 6:18**). Again, the covenant of grace shows itself, now for the first time by actually calling it a covenant. It was a covenant of grace. God gave Noah instructions to build an ark, and really, all Noah did was believe that God was telling the truth. The obedient construction of the Ark was the outflow of his God-given faith. For Hebrew says, “By faith Noah, being warned by God concerning events as yet unseen, in reverent fear constructed an ark for the saving of his household. By this he condemned the world and became an heir of the righteousness that comes by faith” (**Heb 11:7**).

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob

I am finally ready to come to our passage in Exodus 3 today. But maybe I should read **Ex 2:24** first. “God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob.” In other words, when God decides to finally act in Israel's history, it is because of something covenantal which has occurred in their past already. **And this is going to teach you a great deal about God before we are finished.**

Let me pick it up in **Exodus 3:6**, “And he said, ‘I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’” Then in **vs. 15** God says to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the god of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.’” Again he says in the next verse, “Go and gather the elders of Israel together and say to them, ‘The LORD, the god of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of

Jacob, has appeared to me” (3:16). Are you seeing a pattern here? If there is this much repetition in a passage, you had better take the time to understand it, because it is important. Obviously, in order to understand it, you have to understand to think systematically about covenants, which is why I have taken the extra time this morning to give you a background.

When we come to Abraham, we find that the idea of covenant begins to take center stage in the biblical narrative. We see the idea presented in Genesis 12, again in 15, and again in 17. Now, covenants always involve parties. You can't have a covenant with just one person. Since there are three Persons in the Godhead, we may speak about a *covenant* in eternity past. The Scripture says that God swore a single covenant to Abraham, then swore the *same* covenant to Isaac, then again the same covenant to Jacob. This is why Exodus says that God remembered his covenant (singular) with the three men. And as you will see in a moment, this covenant was nothing but earlier covenantal promises being passed down. There is only one covenant of grace.

Covenants also involve promises. In the case of a *gracious* covenant, God swears to do something for someone unilaterally. Think of Noah where God swore: “I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth” (Gen 9:11). What did Noah have to do here? Nothing. God would see to it that he would meet the terms of the covenant himself.

The same is true of Abraham. God says to Abraham, “I will make you into a great nation... I will make your name great, all peoples on earth will be blessed through you... to your offspring I will give this land” (Gen 12:2, 3, 7). God swears to Abraham a *people* (who would become Israel), a *place* (Canaan), *prosperity* (great name), and a *planet* full of people that will be blessed through him. God simply says to Abraham that he is going to do this for him. Period. When you read the story of these three men, it becomes apparent pretty quickly that God isn't doing it because they are morally superior to other people on the earth. It simply had to do with God's own freedom to do it.

The interesting thing is, when you go back and read Genesis 9-10, the choice of these men followed in line with another list of names, beginning with Noah's son

Shem, through whom God swore the same promises. Blessed be the LORD, the God of **Shem**... Japheth will dwell in the tent of Shem (**Gen 9:26-27**). Abraham wasn't some random dude picked out by a Lotto scratch card. He was descended straight from Shem. Everything is unified and worked out according to plan. An interesting thing about this passage, is how God calls himself the *LORD* of Shem. As we saw last week, this is the same name God uses to identify himself to Moses in the bush. It is the name "I AM WHO I AM."

Excursus on the Jehovah

Have you ever wondered where the word Jehovah comes from? Exodus 3 is the best place to explain it to you. The Divine Name uses the consonants: YHVH (יהוה). Another word for God in the OT is Adonay (אֲדֹנָי). The Jews misinterpreted the third commandment ("do not take the LORD's name in vain" became "do not *say* the LORD's name") and so refused to speak the name YHVH. They replaced it with Adonay when they spoke. This became the basis for Jehovah. Original Hebrew has no written vowels. But some ingenious Jews discovered a way of "pointing" the Hebrew text, that is—inserting symbols (a: ;, e: ,or e,i: i,o: o,u: u, shevah:], and others) above and under the words that served to break the word up and provide vowels without ever touching the consonants already written down. So אֲדֹנָי becomes אֲדֹנָיִ. Since they used the word Adonay for LORD, they simply substituted the vowels of Adonay and put them under YHVH and the result is YaHoVah (יהוהִ) or simply יהוה⁷, which (if you have watched Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade) becomes JaHoVah in German since they have no "y." So, Jehovah became popular during the Protestant Reformation in Germany.

Covenant Name

Interestingly, the church has understood Yahweh (i.e. Jehovah) to be God's *covenantal* name. They get this from **Ex 3:15** where God says, "**The LORD—the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.** *This is my name forever, the name by which I am to be*

⁷ יהוה became יהוה as compound sheva became a simple sheva under the non-guttural yod (י) and the o (ו) drops out. As Page Kelley explains, "If there had been no need to avoid pronouncing יהוה, it would most likely have been pointed as יהוה and thus read as Yāhvēh. (Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew*, p. 32).

remembered from generation to generation.” The name is not so much identified with these *men* as it is with God’s *covenant* that he *swore* to these men. It is God’s faithfulness to the men, his promises to the men that is in mind.

So notice again in Exodus 3, “I have surely seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters. I know their sufferings” (vs. 7). But it is not like God was sleeping and got caught off guard by a series of unfortunate events and suddenly woke up to a surprise. Rather, God swore to Abraham that this very thing would happen. It is important to see this from Genesis 15, “The the LORD said to him, ‘Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a county not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years” (Gen 15:13). Then it says, “On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, wherein he swore again to give his people the land of Canaan” (vs. 18-20).

But God also swore something else that day, four hundred years before Moses had this conversation with God. “I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions... In the fourth generation your descendants will come back here, for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure” (vs. 15-16). This is why the LORD tells Moses, “I have come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey” (vs. 8), and repeats himself almost word for word in *verse 17*. God even names the same people groups that were given to Abraham.⁸ *Do you see, again, how everything is centering upon God’s covenant?*

This idea of a “land flowing with milk and honey” is also important, covenantally speaking. For, it gave the Prophets and later Jews such a feelingly of nostalgia for a Lost Paradise, that they often spoke of Israel and the Garden of Eden in the same sentence.⁹ In fact, it was more than nostalgia, it was many things about the geography of both places. In the Scripture, Lot is a good example of this. When

⁸ God gives Abraham a list of 10 names. He gives Moses a list of six (or seven, LXX) names. Of these, only the Hivites are not explicitly mentioned to Abraham.

⁹ See Lawrence E. Stager, “Jerusalem as Eden,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 26, no. 3 (May/June 2000): 36-47, 66.

Abraham and Lot looked down upon the land of the Jordan with its beautiful river, Lot exclaimed, “It is well watered like the Garden of God” (Gen 13:10). The point is, the very land itself is reminiscent of Adam’s home so long ago. And God had covenanted with Abraham to give very kind of land as he had covenanted with Adam so long ago (and it is interesting that for their sins, Adam and Israel are both kicked out of the land). But with Moses, this time has now arrived for God to do the miraculous.

What God had sworn to do for Abraham is now coming to fruition. He has let the wickedness in Canaan—the land of the giants—go on long enough. The time of testing his own people in the furnace of Egypt is sufficient. God’s word is still at stake. So he adds to Moses, “I promise” that I will do this (vs. 17). I am going to be remembered. My name will be remembered. I am true to my name, to my word, to my honor, to my Son. I have a plan—I have always had a plan—and nothing is going to stop me from bringing it to pass.

Stop for a moment and think about what a great comfort it is to trust in a mighty God that cares so much about his word that he will keep it at all costs. Think about trusting in a God that is so powerful that he can bring about his promises exactly *as he wants to, exactly when he wants to*. Think about *not* worshipping a God like that! This is really at the heart of my message to you this morning. It is at the heart of good, sound biblical systematic thinking about God’s word. It is at the heart of my heart that you should hear and believe this day. It is at the heart of God’s grace.

What is grace all about anyway? We use the word a lot. Grace is covenant promises coming to pass in the life of every single person whom God has ordained for eternal life. Not one will be lost of all that the Father has given to Jesus. Not one of the blessings will fail. Not one of the promises will be left unfulfilled.

You stand at the climax of this outworking in history. The Father’s meticulous planning and miraculous works have reached their inauguration. The Son has now come to you, in a greater way that he showed himself to Moses, for he has come *in the flesh* and has carried out all of the work that the Father has given him to do. He has obeyed the covenant of works, and ushered in the covenant of grace with his blood so that all of the covenanted promises in eternity past would be carried out

exactly as sworn. And he has sent his Holy Spirit, who himself covenanted to come to his people to guarantee their final redemption. And God has been mightily glorified, above all imagination, in the work that he is doing today through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gentiles have been saved. The nations have drawn near to the holy mountain. And the King is known far and wide.

This Jesus has reopened the way to the tree of Life, to the Garden of God, with its flowing river. And those who wash themselves with the blood of Christ are sprinkled clean once-for-all. And those who wash themselves with the word of God are sanctified and spotless. And those who are baptized into the waters of life have eternal life and will never thirst again. And soon, very soon, God is going to exalt this Jesus to the whole universe at his return, so that God may be all in all.

In our text, the LORD Jesus tells Moses, “When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain” (Ex 3:12). Two weeks ago I told you all about how the mountain is the temple of God. It began in Eden and you reach the top by coming to spiritual Mount Zion, which is the church of the living God.

What is this church? In my reading of the Apostolic Father’s, I came across this little sentence in the oldest Christian sermon we have outside of the NT. **2 Clement 14:1** reads, “So then, brothers and sisters, if we do the will of God our Father we will belong to the *first church, the spiritual one, which was created before the sun and moon.*” **Ignatius**, writing to the Ephesians around 110 AD wrote, “To the church at Ephesus... predestined before the ages for lasting and unchangeable glory forever, united and elect through genuine suffering by the will of the Father and of Jesus Christ our Lord” (Eph 1:1). I find it interesting that many people will quote the Puritans and the Confession of Faith all day long on these topics, yet this was the earliest understanding of the visible church! These words fit right in with how I began this sermon, with God’s covenant plan of redemption wherein he elected a people to be his very own before the foundation of the world.

Therefore, if you wish to be obedient to God on his mountain, worship him and serve him. The word “serve” used in **Exodus 3:12** is the word “*abad.*” It is translated “worship” in the NAS and “serve” in the ESV. But this is the word that God used in

his covenant with Adam where he was to “cultivate” and “keep” the garden. But it is better to translate this as “serve” and “guard,” as in serving the sanctuary, which was the primary duty of God’s priests ([Num 4:23](#), [24](#), [30](#), [35](#), [39](#), [43](#), [47](#)). You do this today by loving God and your brothers and your neighbor as yourself. That means doing the commandments of God both outwardly and inwardly, which you are now able to do out of thankfulness, not meriting God’s favor, but receiving it by faith alone because God has given you a precious covenant and kept his word through the covenant of grace. Let us take the bread and drink the wine together, and so feast upon Jesus in his new covenant meal, thereby ratifying the words and sealing them in our hearts.