

THE PSALMS

A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

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TERMS AND CONCEPTS¹

Here's a short description of the Old Testament:

Israel is God's Firstborn son, and the story of Israel is of the son learning to live with his Heavenly Father.

God originally created Man to live in two worlds: in this physical world as its ruler, and in God's world as God's son "created in his image." The second was absolutely essential for the first to succeed. But that project failed as recorded in Genesis 3; when man rebelled against God, his life here became death.

But starting with Genesis 12 the story begins with a new Family – not inclusive of the entire human race, but only the descendants (physical and spiritual) of Abraham. The rest of the Old Testament describes the intimate relationship between Father and son, the painful lessons that Israel had to learn to be a pleasing son, their failures and successes, the rewards and punishments.

So the religion of Israel wasn't like other religions that simply prayed to some nebulous "god" when they wanted things. Israel was being trained to live with and rule with the Almighty God.

In fact by David's day, the critical concepts had been worked out. The terms and definitions had already been given to Israel in the Mosaic Law, and the setting where all this was to happen was the Promised Land – in which they had lived for 400 years during Joshua and the Judges. They were supposed to be the pleasing Son that the Law describes. They weren't, however, and that was David's great task: to bring Israel back to her God where she belonged.

We have to keep this all in mind, therefore, when we read the Psalms. There was a theology already worked out for the people of God. When David prayed, he used certain words with historic meanings. His goal was to bring about the program that God had been using with the Israelites since the time of Abraham and the Patriarchs. None of this was new in his day; he was instead to be the chief executor to finally bring it about.

The message of the Bible

In summary, God has gone back to his original plan of having man in a Father/Son relationship. But the new Creation is going to be a much greater work than the original Creation was. In other words, there has to be a major transformation of the heart, mind and body of man to change him into the image of

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the Son that God loves. There are two things to accomplish: to bring the dead back to life, and to prepare them to live on a new spiritual level.

The goal has always been to make man in God's image – relating to God as a son relates to his Father. The original Creation was designed to achieve that. But now the goal has been raised infinitely higher: to make people like the eternal Son, with the same character, the same works and abilities, in fact the same relationship with the Father that the Son now has. We're no longer talking about a reflection in the physical realm of a spiritual reality hidden in the Trinity; now we're looking at man taking part in this Trinity relationship itself. This is the really astonishing aspect to the change that God has in mind for sinful humanity.

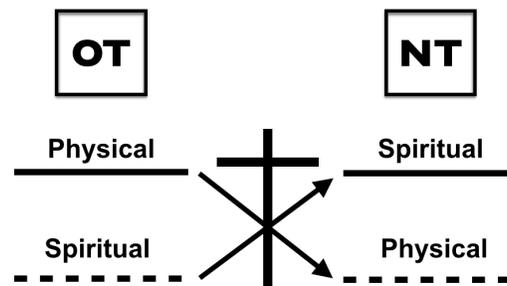
This is why God is in no way obligated to save all of mankind. God is at war with humanity because humanity is at war with God; the only thing he owes us is justice for our crimes against him. The eternal Son, on the other hand, is special, the “only-begotten” Son, the Beloved Son, who has privileges with his Father that no other has the right or even ability to share. Therefore the *only* basis that God has for doing anything good for any human being is not because they are human, but only if they are one with his Son. Right now, sinful human nature automatically incurs a sentence of death; but being found “in Christ” guarantees eternal life. We will find that Christ, the single Heir of the Father, is obligated to pass out Heaven's treasures to the other heirs in the Family, and *only* to them. The rest of humanity are not included.

The Bible quickly lays out the background and problem of mankind for us in the first eleven chapters of Genesis. Right away, however, in chapter twelve, we start reading about the new Family that God starts building to replace the original sons of God from Creation. And as any father will do who faithfully educates his son, God started working with the Chosen People, the nation of Israel, training them to become the sons he wants. The history of Israel spans across 2000 years from Abraham to the time of Jesus, as the Old Testament records it. What's going on in the Old Testament is the training of the Son – this is the preparation necessary to make new sons of God who will live with God forever in Heaven.

**The Old Testament describes the Son,
and his life with the Father.**

What God did with the Israelites reflects the relationship between Father and Son in the Trinity. Of course, the Israelites were still sinners, and along the way they presented God with all sorts of problems and sins and failures. They were hardly model sons! But the task, remember, was not only training them to be sons but also solving their problems. In other words, what the story often tells us is this: *this is what has to be done to sinful man in order to make him into a son of God.* God never gave up on the Israelites because the Father never gives up on his Son – that's a given.

The ultimate goal, as always, is to make sons who look like the eternal Son. This time the sons who have been trained are actually going to be brought into Heaven to live with the Father. This means that the preparation must dig deep into the state of the heart; the son's mind has to fix itself on his spiritual inheritance – the fullness of the Father. Whereas the setting was physical in the first Creation, the setting in the second Creation becomes nothing less than the fellowship of the Trinity. This goal was always assumed in the stories of the Old Testament, even though many of the Israelites may have lost sight of it along the way. The spiritual point was always right underneath the physical lesson.



For example, when the Lord instituted his Temple (as with the Tabernacle earlier in their history) among the Israelites as his House, this represented – it was the “shadow” of – the spiritual, eternal House in Heaven where God dwells among his people. The requirements for entering that Temple on earth were the same as those for entering the Heavenly Temple; the difference is that, instead of a physical perfection, we are after spiritual perfection.

There were seven phases in Israel's training program, and they are distributed across the Old Testament story. Point for point, the lessons that God gave Israel in the Old Testament described what it's like to live with the Father in Heaven. Many people think that Christians don't need the Old Testament, that it was the book for the Jews, and that the Church only needs the New Testament now. *This is not true.* Remember our need for the *one person* who truly understands the message of the Bible. So – what did Jesus say about the Old Testament? Jesus told us that he came to fulfill the Old Testament concepts in his life and ministry; the Apostles preached the Gospel of Christ as the fulfillment of the Old Testament hope. And if the Old Testament is actually the description of the Son and what life is like with his Father, then *that book alone* provides the information we need to make sense of the Son of God when he came in the New Testament. Without the Old Testament, we have no way of understanding the Christ.

People also think that the Old Testament was actually a progression of historical steps in which God unveiled the truths involved in saving his people from their sins – they call the storyline the “plan of redemption,” or “progressive revelation.” Their idea is that the salvation of God's people (which is God's

ultimate goal) is unfolded to us in pieces and shadows, and gradually the picture gets clearer as we progress further along in Israel's history. Finally in the New Testament, with the coming of Christ, we understand the real point of salvation in Christ and now we can come into a saving relationship with God.

This isn't strictly true either. Redemption – or salvation from our enemies – actually only covers part of the story, the 150 years spent between Moses' birth, the deliverance from Egypt, receiving the Law at Mt. Sinai, wandering in the desert, and Joshua's entrance into and conquest of the Promised Land. The rest of the story is much larger: God is preparing the son in all the ways that he needs to live and act according to his Father's will. The details are distributed from Genesis to Malachi, from the calling of Abraham to the return of the Exiles from Babylon. I call it "phases" of the son's training program.

The Seven Phases of the Son's Training

The Creator	The Father gives life to his son
The Covenant	The Father makes his son his heir
Deliverance & Law	The Father makes his son holy
The Temple	The Father gives full access to his son
The Kingdom	The Father enthrones his son beside him
Wisdom	The Father teaches his son
The Prophet	The Father reveals himself through his son

There's not really a progression here, as modern students like to use the term. The data is all there in the Old Testament. The training program is done by the end of the Old Testament; and what's left for the New Testament to do is much different from what we're usually led to believe by modern scholars. If any man or woman would perfectly conform to these seven training phases, he/she would indeed be a perfect child of God. The Old Testament leaves us not with the need for more data, or a clearer picture – but with the pertinent question: *is there anybody like this?* Has anybody gone through all seven phases perfectly to God's satisfaction? And that is where we are introduced to the **Messiah**, the perfect Son with whom the Father is well pleased.

We're going to spend some time going through each of these phases because, as we shall see in the New Testament, not only does this training program of the Son describe the Christ, but also what the Christ intends to use to transform

Christians into his image. The work of the Church is to train the children of God in the same way, using the same training program that God used with the Israelites in the Old Testament.

A new Creation

We already looked at the Creation account, and we learned about the Creation Categories, the special methods that God used to create the world. The lesson that we should bring away from that story is that *only a world that is designed in this way will be pleasing to him* – or, as Genesis tells us, “God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good.” (Genesis 1:31) Only these Categories, these methods, produce a world that has the kind of characteristics God is looking for.

The New Testament tells us that Christians are “new Creations.” “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new Creation.” (2 Corinthians 5:17) Paul doesn’t use this word “Creation” lightly. What he has in mind is the Creator God, described in Genesis, who always creates in his own unique way. God’s methods haven’t changed at all; the difference is that this time the Creation is going to encompass a spiritual world, with spiritual sons of God, who will live in eternity.

Our present bodies could never last in Heaven. Not only will the physical break down in the demands of eternity, we are also sinful and that nature is bound up tightly in our makeup. Remember too that the goal is life with the Father – inside the Trinity, one with Christ the Son. This requires a complete transformation of the weak, sinful flesh into union with the Body of Christ. As Jesus was brought back from the dead transformed into a new kind of man, so we also must be transformed. “It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body ... Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.” (1 Corinthians 15:44, 50)

Let’s go through the Categories, then, and see how God makes new sons for his eternal Family.

- **Miracle** – The making of a Christian is nothing less than a miracle. It’s God creating something out of nothing, bringing the dead to life, doing the impossible. There isn’t any force in this world that can restore man to a vital relationship with God – we can’t do it to ourselves, nor can any other person or organization on earth. We may try to reform ourselves, and we set rules for ourselves for self-improvement, but nothing can bring us back into God’s favor except the hand of God.

The work is too great for anybody but God to take on. We read about the miracle of life in several Old Testament stories, such as the bones

in Ezekiel's vision coming back together and the breath of life creating an army of living men. (Ezekiel 37:1-14) God did the impossible and gave Sarah a son in her old age. (Genesis 21:1-7). And in the New Testament, Jesus called Lazarus out of the grave – not by using medicine, or slow evolutionary steps, but immediately through his spoken Word. (John 11:38-44)

The miracle is even greater in light of the goal: God isn't restoring his children to their original glory in this physical world, but re-designing their bodies to live in the new spiritual world of God. Since we have no awareness of that world right now, and we can't even deal with such realities (as in Paul's amazing experience of leaving his body temporarily and seeing the fullness of glory, something that he couldn't even describe to us – 2 Corinthians 12:1-4) it's plain that God must do what we can't do, and give us a new birth into a world that is beyond our understanding.

- **Command** – The new birth solves a long-standing problem between man and God: the King of kings creates his children to be obedient to him, forever, in all things. Our present understanding of the will of God falls far short of the real requirements of God's Kingdom. We reduce the Law of God to a few easy-to-follow rules and then consider ourselves righteous; God, however, makes us capable of not only knowing the true depth of the Law, but also living perfectly by that Law. The Prophet Ezekiel said it best: "And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules." (Ezekiel 36:27)

In other words, we're going back to that original Creation harmony with zeal and power and understanding this time. Only God's will works, and man is only blessed when he's in complete harmony with the will of God. The task requires a miracle, of course, because the will of man has to be changed from the depths of his heart; he must love the Law of the King more than his life (see David's zeal for the Law in Psalm 119). And our obedience isn't a superficial display of works, but the very desire of our hearts, forming our deepest character. Jesus described this kind of character in the Sermon on the Mount when he said, "You have heard it said ... but I say to you ..." (Matthew 5) What he's saying is that there's a superficial way of keeping the Law, and then there's the heart of the son keeping it in a way that truly pleases the Father.

- **Word** – If man were nothing more than rocks and trees and animals, God wouldn't bother explaining anything to us about what he's doing. But Christians are the sons of God, and therefore the Father

reveals to them what he's doing with them. He reveals himself and his glory, he reveals their inheritance to them, he opens up their hearts and minds to grasp the deepest purposes of Heaven. The Logos is showing them their Father and the life that he has for them, so that they will work with him as his sons.

That Light from the Father falls upon the mind and soul of man and has the same life-giving effect that sunlight has on living things in this world. In his Word we hear our Father, we know and feel the will of our Father, we gravitate toward our Father and what he's opening up before us. We understand what he's doing, and we become passionate about it. What we're seeing in the new Creation, however, is not the physical world that the Logos reveals to all men, but a new spiritual world of eternal life, infinite power and glory. That spiritual light shone on the Old Testament saints "at many times and in many ways ... by the Prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son." (Hebrews 1:1-2) In Christ, "you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true)." (Ephesians 5:8-9) Beholding that Light, we are transformed into the image of the Son that we see there. (2 Corinthians 3:18)

- **Spirit** – The Spirit of God gives life. He makes the soul alive, and empowers the soul to live in God's world. The Spirit was there at the first Creation giving life to all living things, so that they could live in God's physical world. In the same way, the Spirit gives life to the dead souls of sinners to wake them up spiritually and live in God's spiritual world. "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John 3:5-6)

The prophecy in Ezekiel 36 shows us how crucial the operation of the Spirit is in order to make us obedient to God's will. Our conversion from sinner to son requires that kind of power, a power from God. But the Spirit has much more in store for us: the new world of God has an infinite fullness of the treasures of Heaven, the very fullness of the Father himself. In order to participate in, and fully enjoy, these kinds of treasures, the Spirit has to make us spiritual – with the senses to know God directly without anything between us.

- **In Christ** – The first Creation was made through Christ so that he would have full power and authority over everything in it, to carry out his purposes for it. The idea was that the sons of God would be able

to receive everything they needed from the eternal Son of God; all the sons worked together with the Son to glorify the Father.

The new Creation – the spiritual children of God – are also the work of Christ, but this time the goal is much higher, more intense, more glorious. They are literally going to be *in Christ*, made *one* with the Son, so that his life will be their life. What he experiences, they will experience, because they form his very Body. The life that he enjoys in the Trinity Family will be their life, because he intends to bring them Home to live with him and the Father and the Spirit in Heaven. Christians will rule with the Son, we will be fellow heirs with the Son, we will serve with the Son. “Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am.” (John 17:24)

- **Judgment** – Judgment is a fearful thing in God’s world, because God requires that his Creation measure up to his design standards. Everything *must* be acceptable to him; so there are all kinds of systems designed into this world to reveal the truth about man’s character and performance. Like fruit on a tree, our actions will display the true nature of our hearts.

But in the new Creation, judgment will be a delight, not a thing to dread. What a relief it will be for us when, created anew in Christ’s image, we will hear the Father say of us, “Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.” (Matthew 25:21) We will no longer fear what God might think of us; we will *know*, because he will say over us, “This is my son, with whom I am well-pleased.” We will display God’s glory in our lives, the evidence of the Father’s hand in his son’s actions and character.

- **Wisdom** – A father wants his son to listen to his teaching and counsel, and obey him, so that the son will grow up to be like his father. The father has an inheritance to pass on to his son, and he doesn’t want to pass that treasure on to a rebellious fool who will shame the family name. “Who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 2:19) Man certainly failed his Heavenly Father the first time around!

But it won’t be the same in the new Creation. The new sons of God are so designed that they delight in the Father’s teaching; they learn from him, submit to his discipline, accept his counsel and rebuke and correction, and grow up to be sons that the Father is proud of. And they will prove their wisdom as they take their places beside their Father in the Kingdom of God and make his spiritual world *their*

world. They will look and act like their Father because they are wise sons; they will do things God's way – it will be easy to see that they learned their lessons well from their Father. “[*May*] the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, ... give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him.” (Ephesians 1:17)

- **Blessing** – God in his goodness filled this first Creation with joys and pleasures, but he linked those pleasures to obedience to his will. As we do what he told us to do, in the way he told us to do it, *then* we will receive blessing from it. Unfortunately sinful man has tried to get pleasure out of this world apart from obedience to God, and the result has been immorality resulting in death, not joy. This coin has two sides to it.

With the new Creation, God returns to the same system and gives “joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory” (1 Peter 1:8) to his spiritual children. What God has planned for his new Family, there are no words to express – there is nothing in this world that compares to it. “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” (2 Corinthians 4:17) But we will be perfect there, since we will be “in Christ;” and there is nothing that the Father will hold back from his own Son – *because* his Son pleases him. The good things we have in this world are created things from the hands of a good God; in the new world, however, we will feel the hand of God directly – a joy that no other creature will ever have, a pleasure that only the Son experiences from the fullness of the heart of his Father. The joy of Heaven consists of being part of the Trinity Family.

- **Witness** – If there is one thing that sinful man is in great need of right now, it's the knowledge of God. Finding out the truth about God, and in what relation we now stand with him, would completely affect our lives in this world. That's why religions and philosophies have spent so much time on the subject. If we could just see God in his glory and fullness, then we would know what we need from him and how much we really depend on him – and we would know how to please him and know what not to do. Right now, the most information that many people have about him is through hearsay – the testimony of a few others who have seen the reality of God and his world. The average person has never seen God.

But not in the new Creation. We all will see him as he is: “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12) “But the anointing that you received from him

abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you.” (1 John 2:27) We are going to see God himself, in his full glory, without any created thing between us. What used to be an impossibility will be (as the ancient writers called it) our Beatific Vision of the Almighty God. But the children of God will see even more than the angels see, despite how close as the angels are to the throne of God. Sons will enter all the way into the Holy of Holies and see the Father *as only the Son sees him*. No one else will be able to see the Father like this. We will all see the very heart of the Father, we will experience his fullness through all of our recreated senses, and spend eternity testifying of him and singing his praises as eyewitnesses of the Father.

- **Glory** – Being made “in God’s image” gave man a nobility and glory above all the rest of Creation; he was God’s son in this world, and it was obvious – all treated him accordingly with respect. The world was under the hand of man the ruler, and man and woman related to each other as if they were dealing with God himself. Man carried God’s name and authority and resources upon his shoulders in all that he did and said. The fall into sin and death was an unspeakable tragedy in many ways, not least of which that it reduced mankind to wallowing in filth and degradation and humiliation. It’s the very opposite of glory and sharing the honor of God their Father. It should never have happened.

In answer to that downfall, the Creator intends to not only raise man out of the depths but into the highest heights. God will lift his children up to where Jesus is now: “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come.” (Ephesians 1:21) And the very essence of that glory will be the majestic truth of who we really are: sons of the most high God, brothers and sisters with Christ, members of God’s Family. The radiance of that reality will forever shine in what we say, what we do, what we are. “That you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world.” (Philippians 2:15)

When we look at the new Creation – or conversion of the soul, the making of a Christian – in the light of the Creation Categories, it becomes much clearer to see the reason for the complex work to be done. We have an amazing destiny before us, and this requires the work of the Creator to finish to perfection.

However, it’s important to see that the first Creation – in other words, man as he naturally is – can’t exist in this new Creation. He must be re-designed from the

inside out. There is nothing of the natural man that can, or is allowed to, exist in God's spiritual world. The body of sin must be destroyed, and the heart of man brought from death to life, before he can see and know God in his full glory.

This new Creation therefore will be a fitting environment for the New Man, because as man was designed in such a way as to fully understand and use this *physical* world, so the new sons will have an infinitely greater and glorious universe for their new *spiritual* capabilities. And by far the greatest part of that glory will be living with the Father in his House, part of the Family of God.

The Covenant with Abraham

After we read about Creation, the Fall of man, and the Flood that God sent upon the world to destroy the wicked (which demonstrates at least one way that God intends to deal with them!), right away the story switches from a universal scope to the personal story of Abraham. From here on, the rest of the Bible focuses on Abraham and his Family. The Jews (who were Abraham's physical descendants) and the Christians (who are his spiritual descendants) are what the Bible is all about.

Abraham was a man living in the Middle East about 2000 BC, somewhere in the region of northern Mesopotamia. He was already getting on in years (about 70 years old) and was probably planning to spend the rest of his life there, when the Lord changed his life completely. The Lord wanted Abraham to pick up everything – family and possessions – and move to “the land that I will show you.” (Genesis 12:1)

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. (Genesis 12:2-3)

The whole story of Abraham extends across fourteen chapters in Genesis. We can summarize it all in this way: the Lord made four promises to Abraham and to his descendants, and these promises would prove to be the solution for mankind's fundamental spiritual problems. Whoever became part of Abraham's family would be saved from sin and death; any who were outside the family had no hope.

There's a lot of material in these chapters, but I believe we can condense what is said there into these four promises:

- **The Son** – Abraham had no son, even in his later years; and he was afraid that his chief servant would inherit his property in the end. But the Lord promised him that he and his wife Sarah would have a

son – even though it would require a miracle – and *that* son would be the heir of all of Abraham’s estate.

- **The Land** – The Lord moved Abraham from Haran to Canaan. He then promised Abraham that he and his family would inherit all the land of Palestine, from the area later known as Dan in the north to Beersheba in the south, from the Mediterranean Sea to the area across the Jordan River. Of course at the time there were many Canaanite tribes living there who had no intention of moving out; but the Lord had plans to eradicate them in the future and move Abraham’s family in.
- **The Nation** – Not only did the Lord promise a son to Abraham, he also promised to make his descendants so numerous that they would become a great nation. This was no small undertaking! There was no reasonable chance that a man’s family could become a nation in this world of wars and diseases and economic reversals. But Abraham’s Family would become great, and other nations would come to *them* to be blessed by God.
- **The Blessing** – The Blessing was to be the opposite of man’s great curse, which is sin and death. Through Abraham’s Family the sinners of the world find reconciliation with God, forgiveness of their sin, and a hope for eternal life.

If we track these ideas through the rest of the Old Testament, we discover that God kept his side of the agreement and richly blessed Abraham’s Family with the Covenant Promises. All through the Old Testament we read about those Promises as they were worked out in all sorts of ways. For example, the Blessing, which was to overturn the curse of mankind, took the form of the Temple in Jerusalem, where sacrifices were made to forgive the Israelites of their sins and restore fellowship with God. No other nation had that great privilege – which again shows the special nature of the Family inheritance. For that matter, we also read instances of the *exclusive* nature of the Family promises: there were many times when someone was denied the Covenant blessings precisely because he couldn’t prove his descent from Abraham.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

THE PROMISES

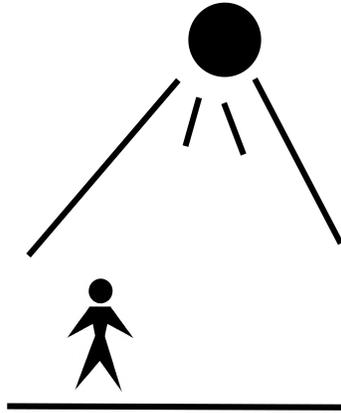
THE SON
THE LAND
THE NATION
THE BLESSING



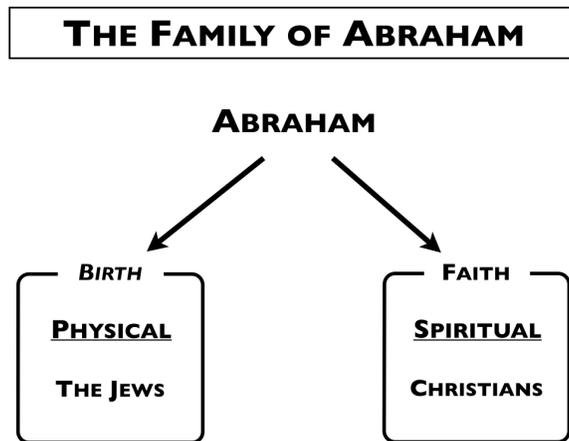
THE CHOSEN PEOPLE
LIVING WITH GOD

The key to inheriting the promises made to Abraham is *faith*. (Genesis 15:6; Romans 4:1-12; Galatians 3) Faith is not what most people think it is – which is simply believing in something (whatever it might be) with all their heart, as if the stronger their faith, the more certain that it will turn out the way they hope. In fact the kind of faith that Abraham received from God is a learned skill. There were five steps to Abraham's faith:

- **First**, Abraham learned that true faith means believing in what God said – in other words, in his Word. Faith always starts with the Word of God. It's what God promises to do for us that is the basis of our hope, not in what we want.
- **Second**, Abraham found that he actually wanted what God had promised him. For him to pick up everything and move hundreds of miles away to an unknown land, based on promises that looked as though they were impossible to achieve, tells us where his heart was. He *wanted* what God had planned for him, enough for him to leave everything in this world behind so that he could achieve *that* – a better inheritance than what he had before.
- **Third**, Abraham had to face the impossibility of the promises and not waver at all in his belief that God could do the impossible. Every single promise was impossible, in this world's eyes. For example, his wife was too old to have a son, and here was God promising to give him a son through her. Evidently, Abraham learned, God can do the impossible.
- **Fourth**, he learned that trying to do God's part of the agreement never works. After twenty years he still had no son, so he let his wife talk him into having a son by her handmaid Hagar. That was a bad mistake and God told him so. It started a new stream in history that would prove extremely problematic for many, but especially for Abraham's descendants.
- **Fifth**, even though the promises were impossible, and even though God took his time fulfilling them, Abraham learned that he must wait on the Lord no matter how long it took. Waiting on the Lord proved that he had finally learned the importance of the first four steps of faith.



We can define true faith in a short sentence: *faith is living in the light of God's world.* By faith we see, as the writers of Hebrews tells us, the reality of God's world: "Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1) Abraham saw and was looking forward to "the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God." (Hebrews 11:10) Moses, we are told, "saw him who is invisible." (Hebrews 11:27) And when the children of God can see the reality of God, that affects the way they live in this world: "there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you." (Psalm 73:25) They are making plans to leave this world and take hold of the Promises that God has made to his children, his heirs.



How can we tell whether we're part of Abraham's family and therefore his heir? If you're Jewish, it's a matter of DNA. For the rest of us, the primary family characteristic is Abraham's faith.

So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. (Galatians 3:9)

You can see from this why faith is such a critical spiritual skill to have. It's literally the legal proof in God's court that you belong to the family of Abraham and have a right to the inheritance. Jew or Gentile, it doesn't matter which you are

– without faith you get nothing from God’s spiritual treasures; but with faith the whole treasury of God is yours. That’s why Jesus was so careful with the Canaanite woman: he had no right to hand out the Covenant blessings to anybody outside the Family. But when she proved that she had the faith of Abraham, he had no right to withhold it from her!

“I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” But she came and knelt before him, saying, “Lord, help me.” And he answered, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.” She said, “Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” Then Jesus answered her, “O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.” (Matthew 15:24-28)

The Jews inherited the physical promises during the Old Testament; but now the Lord has done away with the physical system and the only promises that God has for Abraham’s Family, whether Jew or gentile, are the spiritual promises.

THE ABRAHAMIC COVENANT

THE PROMISES

TO ABRAHAM

TO THE CHURCH

THE SON - ISAAC

THE SON - JESUS

THE LAND - DEED

THE LAND - HEAVEN

THE NATION - SON’S WIFE

THE NATION - CHURCH

THE BLESSING - ISAAC’S LIFE

THE BLESSING - ETERNAL LIFE

The reason that the Covenant made with Abraham is so important for the rest of us is that *nobody gets anything from God unless they are descendants of Abraham*. The Promises were made to Abraham directly, and to any who are related to him by inheritance. It’s an unfortunate mistake that people make, even those who are in the Church, that they think God gives them his gifts on their own merit. Only the Family gets these Promises by way of their descent from Abraham. Everything we read about in the Old Testament is the fulfilling of the Covenant to Abraham’s heirs; the Father is taking care of his sons. The same holds true for the New Testament sons created in Christ.

And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:29)

Christ is the Designated Heir of Abraham who will distribute the Covenant Promises to the rest of the Family. He is, as Paul tells us, the Seed of whom the Lord spoke of in his promises to Abraham.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your Seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ. (Galatians 3:16; *NIV*)

Christ is the only Son who has access to the spiritual treasures that the Covenant is really about. Since he’s the Son within the Trinity, everything that the Father has belongs to him and to whomever he gives them.

Modern Christians like to think that the Gospel is a strictly New Testament concept, that the Old Testament saints didn’t know the Gospel as we know it now. But that’s not true: the terms of the Covenant made with Abraham actually outline the main promises of the Gospel of Christ. Every Old Testament saint who had his or her forefather’s faith knew that. “Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad.” (John 8:56) King David “foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ.” (Acts 2:31) Each Covenant promise – the designated Heir (the Son of God), the Land (Heaven), the Nation (Church), and the Blessing (resurrection from the dead) – is part of the Gospel that we Christians count precious in our faith; there is nothing else that constitutes our hope in Christ besides these promises. This was the Jewish hope all through the Old Testament times, and it became the foundation of the Christian Church in the New Testament.

Someday the Family of Abraham – all the spiritual descendants and heirs of the Covenant – will gather together in Heaven, in the Father’s House, and share in the eternal feast.

I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven, while the sons of the Kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. (Matthew 8:11)

In the new Family, what counts is faith, not DNA. It’s then that everyone will see how important it is to be Abraham’s spiritual heir.

Deliverance and Law

The most important event in Israel’s history was their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their conquest of the Promised Land. The Jews still celebrate it to this day, 3500 years after it happened.

How they ended up in Egypt was an interesting story. The family of Jacob, as we read in the last chapters of Genesis, found safety in Egypt under the rule of one of their own family members – Joseph. He had risen to be second-in-command under Egypt’s Pharaoh by God’s providential hand, and he arranged to have the rest of his family there with him in Egypt so that he could take care of them. For

the next four hundred years the descendants of Abraham grew (according to the Covenant Promise) into a great nation of millions. Unfortunately the succeeding Pharaohs forgot about the services of Joseph and started enslaving these Hebrew immigrants, forcing them to work on state projects under harsh conditions.

And that's where the story begins in Exodus. The Israelites were slaves in a foreign land, they seemingly had no purpose to their lives and no freedom, and they actually forgot about who their God was. Now this isn't just a random story about an enslaved and oppressed people; these were the heirs of the Covenant, the children of God, the chosen race who were destined to know and live with God. Something had to be done.

And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his Covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel – and God knew. (Exodus 2:24-25)

Like a Father who hears the cry of his own son in distress, the Lord's heart went out to the Israelites and he started moving Heaven and earth to rescue them. He chose Moses to lead them out of slavery, and the process that God used to deliver them ensured that they would never fall under that slavery again. With a series of ten Plagues the Lord broke Egypt's back and Pharaoh's resolve, led the nation out of Egypt across the Red Sea (miraculously separated for their crossing), and destroyed the Egyptian army behind them. Then he took them to Mt. Sinai and formally set up the Nation of Israel as a political and religious entity.

Now there are several aspects about this deliverance that are really important to see.

- **First**, God brought them out of danger. If Moses had gone to them in their slavery and simply told them that their God loved them, and things would get better someday, that would have been no help at all! They had to get *out* of slavery; it was destroying them.
- **Second**, God destroyed their enemies. The Egyptian army stayed on their heels all the way to the Red Sea, and God could not have them crossing over and bringing the Israelites back into slavery. So God destroyed the army by overwhelming them in the sea. The danger was over, for good – there would be no more going back into slavery.
- **Third**, God brought them to himself. This is the really critical part of the story. Instead of giving them their freedom and letting them go wherever they wanted, the Lord brought them to Mt. Sinai and formed them into his people, his nation, ruled by his Law. There was only one way to stay safe, and become prosperous – and that was to submit to God's rule over them.

- **Fourth**, God took them to a safe place. From Mt. Sinai the Lord took his people across the desert into the Promised Land, the second Covenant Promise. Here they had a rich inheritance all for themselves: “a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey.” (Exodus 3:8) This is the “new Creation” that God has in mind for his people, full of blessing, joy, prosperity, and God’s glory.

The word “deliverance” also means “salvation”; the two words refer to exactly the same process. But in our day, “being saved” has come to have such a superficial meaning that we’ve lost sight of what God means by the word. Salvation isn’t simply a convenient fire-insurance policy that will keep us from going to Hell. It isn’t just that we’re suddenly religious now and we start going to church. Salvation has to include all four of the elements of Israel’s deliverance or it doesn’t mean anything at all – to God or to us.

The key to understanding salvation is to see our true spiritual state. We are dead spiritually; we are in darkness, and we can’t see God or the danger that surrounds us. We have no workable answers, no hope, no future; we can’t help ourselves, nor is there anybody else who can help us. If something doesn’t happen and soon, we’re going to die “having no hope and without God.” (Ephesians 2:12) It’s then that the true son cries out to his Father, “My God, my God – why have you forsaken me?”

And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience — among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind. But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ — by grace you have been saved — and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the Heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. (Ephesians 2:1-7)

God does not leave his son in danger. He delivers his children from their three main enemies: the **world** (into which sinful man has corrupted God’s Creation, a carnival of temptations to feed his lusts which actually brings death instead); the **flesh** (his own body craves the temptations of the world); and the **devil** (the great Deceiver, the fomentor of lies and death who is intent on destroying God’s image in man). The point, however, is that we must be freed not only from the effects these enemies have had on our lives, but freed also from their presence – forever. So God leads us away from these enemies, out of their

influence, having broken their power over us, and leads us into his presence where we will be safe.

Of course our safety depends on the fact that we must be holy from now on. Holiness means centered on God completely. He becomes our source of all good things; we depend on his resources only; we follow his leading into his Promised Land. Being holy doesn't mean independence from God but a new form of servitude.

But thanks be to God, that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed, and, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. (Romans 6:17-18)

Paul puts this in terms of slavery, but he goes on to show us that this "slavery" results in life, not death. It's a joy to serve God; it brings life to our lives to be full of God's treasures. It's a glory and an honor to be part of God's people.

The giving of the Law of God at Mt. Sinai was also a crucial step in their deliverance. The Law is not the negative thing that so many Christians in our day think it to be. Jesus summarized the purpose of the Law in this way:

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

There's nothing negative about this. If we all lived in this way, what a better place the world would be! The rest of the Sinaitic Law simply spells out in detail what these two commandments look like in everyday life. The problem isn't with the Law. God has always insisted, and will always continue to insist, that his Nation live by this perfect Law. Jesus told us that his goal was not to set aside God's Law, but to fulfill it perfectly. "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them." (Matthew 5:17) But rather than depend on us to fulfill the Law on our own, Christ gives us his Spirit to do the job for us –

... in order that the righteous requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:4)

Jesus changes our natures so that we *will* live in a way that fulfills the demands of God's Law. Then we will be the perfect sons that the Father wants us to be.

Notice, however, that although the Lord brought all the Israelites out of Egypt, not all of them made it to the Promised Land. "For no one is a Jew who is merely

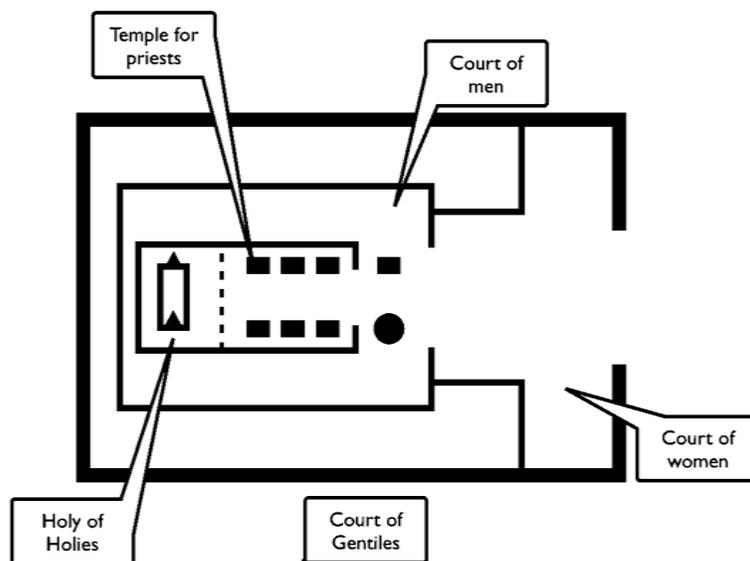
one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter.” (Romans 2:28-29) Even in the Old Testament the Lord was separating out the physical from the spiritual heirs of the Covenant. Deliverance has to reach down into the heart, and change the soul of man, before it has done its eternal work. God continually faulted the Israelites for not understanding the necessity of a change of heart, not just a change of outward actions. That’s why superficial Christians who claim the name of Christ may not be “saved” in spite of their claims. True conversion starts with the heart and works out to the actions of our lives.

Salvation, then, means nothing less than the Lord freeing his children from the enemies that are enslaving and destroying them, bringing them to his Throne, creating a new nation out of them, giving them his Law to live by, and putting them in a safe place where they will enjoy a life of Covenant prosperity and peace with God in their midst.

The Temple

The Israelites soon learned that being God’s special people meant living in a close relationship with him. Right away the Lord had Moses build a Tabernacle, which would be the special House of God where he would live in the midst of his people. The books of Moses, from Exodus to Deuteronomy, describe what the House of God looked like and what was included in it.

The point here is that this was God’s home, not only for himself but also for his entire Family. The Israelites were going to live with their God on a daily basis: he would provide for their needs, he would cleanse their hearts, he would protect them, he would gather them around his throne of grace for feasts and joyful worship. Later on, David and Solomon made blueprints and built a stone building known as the Temple, but the layout and the functions were the same as the Tabernacle described in the Law.



There were different areas in the Temple, called courts, in which certain groups had privilege of access. Anybody who wasn't Jewish had to stay outside the Temple area itself; they weren't allowed inside for any of its functions. The women had their own court in front of the Temple, the men could go further in to the place where the altar of sacrifice was, and the priests were allowed all the way inside the Temple building itself.

In fact the real life of the Temple depended on what the priests did there. They represented "the firstborn sons of Israel."

Thus you shall separate the Levites from among the people of Israel, and the Levites shall be mine ... Instead of all who open the womb, the firstborn of all the people of Israel, I have taken them for myself. (Numbers 8:14, 16)

The priests had two functions: *first*, they helped the Israelites with their sacrifices. People would bring both sin sacrifices and praise sacrifices to the Temple in order to worship God according to his Law. But the ordinary Israelite wasn't allowed inside the Temple building itself, nor was he/she permitted to actually present the blood of the sacrifice to God – they were not "sanctified" or set apart for this holy work. The priests were, however; they went through elaborate ceremonies to become holy for this kind of work. So when someone brought a sacrifice, the priest himself would present it to the Lord, and the result would be forgiveness of sin and acceptance from a holy God.

Second, the priests not only offered the sacrifices for the people, they actually went into the Temple where God was – they came into God's presence. The High Priest, once a year (on Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement), even went into the

Holy of Holies, the innermost room of the Temple, to appear before the throne of God to plead for the entire nation.

Outside the Temple there was feasting going on. The priests often ate the sacrificial meat that the Israelites brought. And on the three days of national feasting that the Law prescribed (the Passover, and the Feast of Tabernacles, and the Festival of Weeks), the entire nation ate the abundant food that was collected all year by the Levites as the Tithe.

In other words, it was a time of feasting and fellowship around the throne of God – it was the Family of God gathered around his abundant table as he provided for all of his children. Here was their Home, their Family, their source of abundance and security and purpose. And their God was in the middle of the whole thing making it all possible.

There was only one problem: the sins and limitations of men and women. The sacrifices, for example, were animal sacrifices, and as the New Testament tells us, “It is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” (Hebrews 10:4) The Law demands that someone die for sin, and God was being merciful in letting the Israelites give animals in their place; but the system didn’t really address the problem of sin and the harm it does.

Another problem was that right after a person offered a sacrifice for his sin, he went back home still a sinner – and most likely repeated the same sins. That sacrifice, though awesome and holy and fearful to see, didn’t change his heart in the least.

A third problem was that only the priests were allowed into the Temple into God’s presence, as representatives of the rest of the nation. Even the priests, however, never *saw* God himself. Access to God was extremely limited and far less than one would have hoped for, in light of the fact that they all belonged to him.

And there is the crux of the matter. To see God in his glory is the ultimate joy. David knew that: “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the House of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his Temple.” (Psalm 27:4) But how are sinners, who can’t be saved by the blood of animals, going to draw this close to God and sit down at the Family table to enjoy the Feast? How can sinners enjoy the true glory of God?

For this we need a new kind of priest who can do what the Levitical priesthood couldn’t do. And David saw that too: “The LORD says to my Lord ... “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.” (Psalm 110:1, 4) Melchizedek was the priest of the Covenant (Genesis 14), not of the Law as were the Levites. The priest “after the order of Melchizedek” (Hebrews 5:10) can do things that the Levites couldn’t do: he can take away our sin permanently, from

our hearts as well as our lives; and he can bring us into the presence of his Father in the Holy of Holies, to live with him there forever in true peace and righteousness. The writer of Hebrews explains all of this to us. (Hebrews 5-7)

What is critical to understand is that the Old Testament Temple was a shadow of the Temple in Heaven, the eternal House where God lives. That's why there were limitations to its ministry.

They serve a copy and shadow of the Heavenly things. For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying, "See that you make everything according to the pattern that was shown you on the mountain." (Hebrews 8:5)

In other words, God cast a light down from Heaven from his Home there so that Moses and the Israelites could see what it was like – and build the earthly Temple according to that Pattern. God was training his sons in how to live with him in his House.

Now let's turn this around: this Heavenly Temple is the eternal House of God where his spiritual Family are gathering together for the eternal Feast. "Many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 8:12)

The same rules apply there as do here. Only the sanctified are allowed into God's House: "Blessed are those who wash their robes, so that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." (Revelation 22:14) Only priests are allowed into God's presence. "To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a Kingdom, priests to his God and Father." (Revelation 1:5-6) Now, however, there is no difference between male and female, slave or free, Jew or Gentile (Galatians 3:28); they are *all* one with the New Man; all of God's children are priests and are allowed into the Holy of Holies.

And the greatest glory of all, the very fulfillment of David's prayer, will be true of all of God's children:

The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in [*the Heavenly city*], and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his Name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever. (Revelation 22:3-5)

The Kingdom

God set up the entire universe as his Kingdom; we were created to be his subjects; and he intended to rule over all with his Law. He showed us how

important the Kingdom of God is when he brought the Israelites out of Egypt to Mt. Sinai where, again, he formed them into his Nation to be ruled by his Law. The reason is simple: God alone is infinitely wise and powerful, his will alone is perfect, and everything works out right when all the subjects of his Kingdom do things *his way*.

But as we saw in Genesis 3, and also throughout all of the history of Israel, man refuses to be ruled, even by God. And it's particularly easy to ignore the King when we can't see him. God is Spirit, and therefore he has no form or substance in which he appears before men. So for all appearances, we are like children running around the house with no parent present – doing exactly what we want with no regard for the Rules. The result is, predictably, chaos.

What we need is a King who lives among us, who is like us, who will enforce the rules. This is exactly the situation in which Israel found herself during the time of the Judges. “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” (Judges 21:25) And they all realized that this state of affairs was causing no end of confusion and suffering; so they pleaded with the prophet Samuel to find them a king “like the other nations.” His first choice – Saul – proved to be a failure; he disobeyed God's commands in order to serve his own purposes. But then the Lord led Samuel to a man “after God's heart” – the shepherd boy David.

The reason David was so special was that he knew what God wanted done, and he wanted it just as passionately as God did. David had a zeal for God's glory. The whole idea was that the king of Israel would reign in God's Name, according to God's Law, to achieve God's agenda. David was the one man who knew exactly how to go about that. He created a 5-Point Plan as the Chief Executive of God's Kingdom. We read about David's Plan in 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.

- ***Set up the capital city*** – It was time for the tribes of Israel to be united, and the single most effective way of doing that was to set up Jerusalem as the capital. It was situated about midway in the country, which meant that everyone could get to it easily enough. David put his throne there, and built the Temple there – which means that all of the blessings of God would come out of Jerusalem from now on for the entire nation.
- ***Defeat the enemy*** – For centuries the Israelites had been harassed by their pagan neighbors, and although they won some of the battles (under the Judges), there seemed to be no end to their suffering and oppression under ruthless enemies. David took the matter in his own hands. He immediately waged war against their enemies on all sides and taught them a lesson they never forgot: leave us alone! As a

result, there were no more problems with their neighbors, and the people of God went about their business in peace serving their God.

- ***Bring the people back to God*** – Another problem caused by their neighbors was that the Israelites had learned to worship false gods, and they had forgotten the God who saved them. So David himself led them back to the Lord. He created worship songs and psalms, he assembled the people from all over the nation and led them in festival in Jerusalem, he offered sacrifices – in other words, he shared his passion for the Lord by his own example. As the king does, so the people do; Israel turned away from idolatry and became strong again in their God-centered worship.
- ***Set up a government*** – David couldn't run the entire Kingdom by himself, so he selected trusted individuals to help him execute the laws. He chose his own sons as well as men who had proved themselves in battle and were loyal to the king. These administrators were scattered across the nation to make sure the king's will was enforced. They had a great deal of power in their own right, because David trusted them to make wise judgments and handle all cases in his name, only taking those cases back to the king for which they had neither authority nor resources to address.
- ***Build the Temple*** – Along with establishing everything in Jerusalem for easy access for the entire nation, David also made the blueprints and gathered the materials together to build the Temple there as well. He passed on the plans and materials to his son Solomon, who built the first Temple on Mt. Zion, or Mt. Moriah – the very spot where Abraham had been instructed to offer his son Isaac 1000 years previous. Again, because the Temple was finally built in a specific location, David could enrich and expand on the Temple's structure and grounds so that Israel's spiritual life there would be the high point of their yearly feasts and daily worship.

David's 5-Point Plan was hugely successful; nobody had managed to pull the nation together before as David did, and all those who followed him were expected to continue maintaining that Plan if they wanted God's blessings. In fact, the historians of Israel judged the performance of succeeding kings by comparing them to their forefather David: "He did as his father David had done;" or "He did not do as his father David had done." This Plan is the only way that God's Kingdom would prosper among men; and it required the king to enforce it.

The kind of government that David set up is called a **hierarchy** – meaning rule from the top down. We who live in modern times usually think that the perfect government must be a democracy, but that's not true. The perfect government is one in which God rules, and everyone follows his will. God

commands from the top, the king enforces God’s Law, the administrators carry out the king’s executive orders, and the people obey the will of the king. When everyone does what they’re commanded to do, the result is a perfect Kingdom and everyone prospers.

GOD’S KINGDOM: HIERARCHY



When, therefore, the Bible calls Jesus the “Son of David,” it’s making a critical point: Jesus intends to follow that same 5-Point Plan in his Church that David used over Israel. This is the only way that God’s Kingdom can prosper.

- ***Set up the capital city*** – Jesus Christ returned to Heaven to set up his capital *there*. This is critically important, because where the capital is tells us what kinds of things to expect from the King: spiritual treasures, an oversight over the entire world, and power and authority “above every other power.” It’s from there that he pours out his Spirit and “gives gifts to men”; his Kingdom is not of this world.
- ***Defeat the enemy*** – David fought against physical enemies, but the enemies of God’s people are much more sinister and powerful: they are up against the world, the flesh and the devil. Jesus is destroying all of them: “I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) “Take up your cross and follow me.” (Mark 8:34-35) “That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil.” (Hebrews 2:14) With these enemies overcome, it’s now possible to live in God’s Kingdom in peace and righteousness and holiness.
- ***Bring the people back to God*** – Through Christ’s ministry, man and God are finally reconciled. In fact Jesus brings man into the Holy of Holies before the presence of the Father, where they will live with him forever. Through Christ, the Father becomes their “all in all,” their very life. (John 17:3) That’s why sermons and lessons and everything that happens in Church must be God-centered, not man-

centered. Our hope is to grow in the knowledge of our God; our hope is not in ourselves.

- ***Set up a government*** – The Church is not a democracy. It’s God’s hierarchy, where the Lord Jesus rules from the top, his administrators (elders and deacons and pastors and teachers) have oversight over the Church, and the members obey their leaders. The point is that the structure of the Church is designed in such a way that the will of the King is made known (the Word of God) by various means and gifts so that the whole Body grows up into the Son. (Ephesians 4:11-16)
- ***Build the Temple*** – Jesus consecrates all of the children of God as priests who will serve God and one another forever. He does this by giving everyone gifts through his Spirit and empowering them to minister the treasures of Heaven to others.

5-POINT PLAN OF DAVID

<u>CAPITAL</u>	HEAVENLY JERUSALEM
<u>ENEMIES</u>	WORLD, FLESH, DEVIL
<u>BACK TO GOD</u>	GOD-CENTERED MINISTRY
<u>GOVERNMENT</u>	CHURCH LEADERSHIP
<u>TEMPLE</u>	PRIESTS IN GOD’S HOUSE

“JESUS DOES AS HIS FATHER DAVID HAD DONE”

You can see how involved everyone is in this system. Christians, because they become sons and daughters in God’s Kingdom, are expected – and empowered – to take their places under the King and help him extend the authority and blessings and power of God’s Kingdom over all the new Creation. We are not only willing subjects, we are part of God’s Family: we are children “after God’s heart” with the same passion for the success of his Kingdom that the King has. Christians are destined to sit at God’s right hand, in Christ the Son, to participate in God’s rule over his Kingdom. (Revelation 3:21)

Wisdom

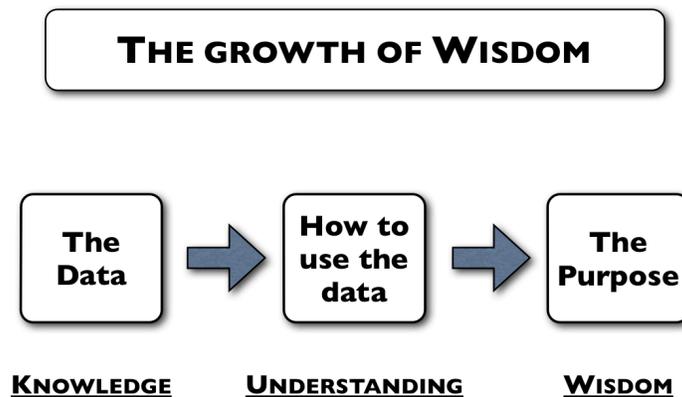
In a Father/Son relationship, it's the father who teaches the son. We all start out as helpless infants, and it's a long, slow process to "raise up a child in the way he should go." And as every parent knows, it really helps the process along when the child is a willing learner. "Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and forsake not your mother's teaching." (Proverbs 1:8)

A wise son hears his father's instruction,
but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke.
(Proverbs 13:1)

The process of training the son involves not only time but patience, resources, rebuke and correction, and over-all discipline. (2 Timothy 3:16) *Discipline* is not what most people think of – it's not just punishment. It involves training and drills, over and over again, until the student gets the lessons and skills deep into their minds and hearts. The military uses discipline to train a fighting force for battle; schools use discipline and testing to train students for positions in the world. And a father uses discipline to train his son and daughter not only for life in the larger world, but also to carry on and honor the family name.

God, therefore, as our Father intends to train and discipline us as well, so that we will live wisely and productively in his Creation. It's when we grow in wisdom *in this way* that we will most honor our Father and not only fit in with, but help extend, his Kingdom.

Wisdom comes to us in three stages.



- **First**, we have to learn the *data*, the information about God and ourselves and the world that we live in. It's important to know *who our God is*: that he is holy, that he has all power and wisdom, that he is the Creator and Judge and King. We have to learn about *ourselves*: that we are sinners, helpless without God's miracles of grace, and in the dark without his light. We have to learn about the *world*: that it's a minefield of temptations, that there is nothing here worth setting our

hearts on, that God has a much better world in mind for his children to inherit.

- **Second**, we have to learn how to *use* that data. It's one thing to know about God; it's quite another matter to come into this God's presence. If God is holy, for example, how should that affect the way we pray to him? Isaiah found that out when he saw God in his glory: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!" (Isaiah 6:5) In other words, prayer is all about God, not us. If we aren't getting answers to our prayers, it may be that we aren't being careful in how we approach this holy God! (Isaiah 1:15)
- **Third**, we finally achieve wisdom when we understand the *purpose* behind what we're learning. Wisdom usually comes with age and experience; the young think they know what's going on, but – "If anyone imagines that he knows something, he does not yet know as he ought to know." (1 Corinthians 8:2) Going back to our example of prayer, we show that we're gaining wisdom when we pray for God's will, and God's glory – no matter what that might mean for us. "He must increase, but I must decrease." (John 3:30)

A fundamental aspect of the training of the son involves the time spent in his training. We don't become perfect overnight. If you ever wondered why there are 2000 years of history in the Old Testament, this is the reason. To be sons of God is no small matter! Generation after generation had to learn the lessons (all seven phases) of what it's like to live with God. They failed God over and over, and yet the Father never gave up on them – how can the Father cast off his own son? God is going to get these children ready for life with him one way or another, no matter how long it takes. Individuals may be rejected by God, but the Remnant – the true nation of Israel – he will never reject. It's that Father's love which explains God's patience, forbearance, continuous training and starting over when necessary which otherwise would be unexplainable in human terms.

There are two ways for God's children to learn wisdom: the easy way, and the hard way. The easy way is to open his Word and learn from the Father.

All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The entire ministry of the Church is designed to instruct the children of God and enable them to mature in the faith – in the likeness of the Son of God himself. The Lord gives spiritual gifts to members of the Body, so that ...

We all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ, from whom the whole Body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the Body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:11-16)

The hard way to get wisdom is when we ignore instruction and counsel, and the Father has to deal with us severely to get our attention. It's like putting a bit in a horse's mouth and pulling on it (and causing pain) to make the horse turn in a certain direction.

I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you. (Psalm 32:8-9)

For as much as we have to learn, and as important as it is for our soul's well-being, we often have to learn the hard way for it to make an impression on us. This world's temptations are just too strong to resist, and our flesh – though willing – is so weak and unable to resist. So we will often see God's children going through the fire of discipline to crucify the flesh and wean them from this world. But it's not that God has given up on us; quite the contrary, he is the loving Father training us in the ways of righteousness and spiritual life.

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it. (Hebrews 12:11)

There is so much to learn because of what God has planned for his children. We have already seen that each of the phases of the training of God's sons involves a great deal to learn, and many skills, and the need for extensive practice in order to fit into his new spiritual world. The children of God will be taking their places beside the King of kings, the One with all wisdom and power and glory. Therefore, we have to know what his purposes are, and his ways, and his unique works, so that we can cooperate with him instead of work against him in our ignorance.

God's many names are also a rich inheritance of wisdom that we can learn and use with great effect. For example, Jesus told his disciples that "Until now you have asked nothing in my Name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full." Names – such as the Light, a Fortress, a Shield, the Ancient of Days, the

Creator, the Author of our Salvation, the Rock – reveal the rich resources of Heaven for our needs. Prayer should focus on these names for the purpose of mining their usefulness for our daily survival and responsibilities. That’s praying in wisdom.

There are five books in the Bible known as “wisdom books” – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. It’s true that these books have unique lessons that teach us how to live in a world created by a spiritual and holy God. But actually the entire Bible does the same thing, in different ways. For example, the principles in Proverbs were experienced first-hand by the Israelites in their entire history of living with God among them; and the worship songs of Psalms were written by David who set up his Kingdom in a certain way (recorded in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles); he was always praying about, and working toward, the success of his 5-Point Plan.

Not only did God teach his children and train them to be wise, he also gave *us* the record of his training program – the Bible – so that all of the Father’s children, both in Israel and in the Church, would learn and grow and “be pleasing to their Father.”

You shall therefore lay up these words of mine in your heart and in your soul, and you shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, talking of them when you are sitting in your house, and when you are walking by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates, that your days and the days of your children may be multiplied in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give them, as long as the heavens are above the earth. (Deuteronomy 11:18-21)

That’s why teaching the Bible in the Church is so critical a function in the life of the Church – it’s the only way the children will grow in wisdom and understanding and please their Father.

The Prophet

God does speak to man in this world, but only through his Prophets. Very rarely has anyone heard God speak directly. Almost always, the Lord would select a man as his spokesman and give him a specific message that he wanted delivered to some individual or nation.

The Prophet only came in times of trouble. When times were good, people relied on the ministry of the priests and the sacrifices at the Temple. But when the people’s hearts went astray after other gods, and their lives sank into immorality and injustice and greed, and they treated the ministry of the Temple as of little

worth, then God raised up a Prophet to take a message of warning and rebuke to them.

The Prophet was only a man like the rest of the Israelites, but God chose him and set him apart for a special mission. The mission was critical: his job was to take the words that God gave him and deliver them faithfully, word for word, to the intended audience. He was not allowed to change or interpret the message in any way. In fact the Prophets almost always began their message with the words, “This is what the LORD says ...”

There are two reasons for this great care and faithfulness in the prophetic message. *First*, the Israelites belonged to the Lord, not to the Prophet. It’s like delivering a message from a husband to his wife: it would be a bad idea for the messenger to stick himself in the middle of someone else’s situation and change the wording of the husband’s message to suit his own ends. The husband will be very angry with a meddler! She is his wife, not the messenger’s. In the same way, Israel (and the Church) belongs to God, not to any man. We are bound to obey the King of kings, and only the leaders when they faithfully deliver the King’s Word to us.

Second, the souls of God’s people are at stake. No man truly knows the state of another’s heart; no man knows the spiritual medicine, or remedies, or resources, or corrections that have to be taken to bring us back into the light and into life. Only God knows what we need to hear and what we need from him. So the Prophet dare not apply his own remedy to the spiritual ills of God’s people; it wouldn’t help them in the least and would only make matters worse.

That’s why Peter said we can depend completely on the Prophets’ writings.

And we have the prophetic word more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts, knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of Scripture comes from someone’s own interpretation. For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit. (2 Peter 1:19-21)

What was that message? *First*, it was a painful message to hear: God’s people have turned aside from him to worshiping idols, they have been treating each other unjustly, there has been murder and rape and robbery and deceit and greed within the Family of God. Remember that it’s difficult to take God and his Law seriously when we can’t see him, particularly if we don’t have the faith to see the spiritual God. Over and over the Israelites forgot their God and made an immoral spectacle of themselves, shaming the name of their God in front of the other nations.

But in order to convince people of their sin (their response will almost always be “not guilty!”), God had to give the Prophet inside information about the

people's hearts and lives. He wasn't like an ordinary preacher who could only hope that his message was hitting the mark in guilty consciences. The Prophet *knew* what they were inside; he could see into their lives, he knew what they had done – because God showed him. That's why people hated the Prophets – their lives became open books before God and man as the Prophet exposed the truth about them publicly. They were forced to deal with the Prophet one way or another.

Second, the Prophet's message was always to *go back to the Law of Moses!* There is where we find out what holiness and righteousness are, how to worship and glorify God, how to treat each other with love and justice. The Law is always the standard for God's nation. The point was that they were delivered from sin, and called to be holy – which is defined by the Law alone.

The Bible tells us that Moses was the greatest of the Old Testament Prophets.

And there has not arisen a Prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

Moses' ministry was different from that of the other Prophets in Israel, because it was through Moses that God delivered his people from Egypt, formed them into a nation, gave them his Law to live by, set up the sacrificial system at the Tabernacle, and took them to the Promised Land. It was a massive job that laid the very foundation of the history of Israel. What made this all possible was the unique relationship that God and Moses had between them which, again, no other Prophet could claim:

If there is a Prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. (Numbers 12:6-8)

All this is to say that Moses and what he did was the Rock upon which the nation of Israel must stand; whenever they strayed away from the Lord after that, the Lord would send another Prophet to them with this message: *go back to the Law of Moses.*

There is another Prophet in Scripture with the same stature as Moses, and Moses knew about him. "The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from among you, from your brothers—it is to him you shall listen." (Deuteronomy 18:15) That phrase "like me" means that this second Prophet would do *the same kinds of things* that Moses did: deliver his people, form them

into a new nation, give them his Law, set up a new Temple and sacrificial system to remove sins, and lead them into the Promised Land. And the Apostles tell us who this new Prophet is: Jesus Christ. (Acts 3:22; 7:37; Hebrews 3:2-6)

There's a *third* aspect about the Prophet's message that is terrible to see: it's the Father rebuking his own son. When we were young, we were naturally afraid of adults when they were angry; but there's nothing like the fear that comes over a child when his own father gets angry. This is the person who says he loves us, and yet here he is furious with us! From a father's point of view, he is filled with grief and disbelief that his own son would have done something so stupid and self-destructive and shameful to the father. After all the care that the father gives him, all the resources that the child would need, all the good instruction that leads to life, and then the son throws all that away and shames the family name by doing things that the pagans and reprobates are known for! Such behavior is totally unacceptable.

This is the heart-breaking message of anguish that fills the Prophets. Israel's Father is "yelling at them," so to speak, as only a Father would. It's highly emotional, it comes from the distress of the Father who just doesn't understand how his own son could disobey and dishonor him this way. This isn't simply a judicial scene in which the judge dispassionately finds out the facts of the case and imposes a sentence on the guilty party; this is a scene in the private home between Father and son as God deals with a hard-hearted and rebellious child. There's nothing like the wrath of an offended Father.

What this child is going to find out is that an offended Father has the right and the power to make his life miserable. The son did this crime, so the son is going to pay the penalty. The Prophets warned Israel over and over about the armies and plagues that the Lord would bring upon them if they didn't listen to his rebuke and correction; and since it's much easier to ignore God when you can't see him (in spite of the warnings of the Prophets), Israel usually had to learn the hard way. Her history is filled with the harsh discipline of the Father.

But even then, we're dealing with the Father here – not a disinterested judge. The Father will never destroy or do away with his son; that's unthinkable. The son may have to go through some harsh punishment, but the point of the lesson is to bring him back to the Father and restore their close relationship. The Father is amazingly forgiving if the son will only repent; he wants his son to succeed and to be an honor to him. And so the *fourth* aspect of the Prophets was that, even though it was going to be painful for a while, there would be a day when a few of the Israelites – the Remnant – would wake up and come back to their God in repentance, ready to do it right this time. And their Father will accept them back *as if nothing had happened between them*. There's the Family at work. There is no other relationship in which hope and love and forgiveness and faithfulness work so strongly together.

And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against Heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his servants, ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate. For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found.’ And they began to celebrate. (Luke 15:21-24)

There’s one more point about the Prophets that we should recognize. The entire Bible comes to us through the hands of the Prophets (and Apostles – the New Testament version of the Prophets) – and the reason for this goes back to the way God works within the Trinity. The Father is the source of all good things, but his intention is to give all that he has to his Son *only*; the Son is the sole Heir of the Father. This honors the Son, and makes him glorious and equal to his Father. The Father and Son stand together in all that they do – as is evident when *the rest of us have to deal with the Son* if we want anything from God. That’s why Jesus told us that “if you have seen me, you have seen the Father.”

All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. (Matthew 11:27)

The Son is the Prophet, because it’s through him that God speaks to the rest of us. In the same way, the Prophets in the Bible take on that same role and speak for God as sons of God (therefore with the authority of God), with the testimony that they received from the eternal Son. That’s why Revelation says that the “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.” (Revelation 19:10)

We saw, from the very beginning of the Bible, that God has been putting together a new Family of children to take the place of fallen mankind. And we Christians are also being made “into God’s image” – in fact, into the very image of the eternal Son of God. It is therefore perfectly natural to start training men and women for the role they will play as sons of God – one of which is to be the official messenger of the Father. That’s why God has decided to use people to carry his message and do his work in the Church (and in ancient Israel). They are partners in the Father’s work.

What this means is that even the ministry of weak and sinful men can (in the Spirit’s hands) become the very Word of God – and the rest of us are obligated to accept it as such.

I will give you the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in Heaven. (Matthew 16:19)

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers. (1 Thessalonians 2:13)

Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith ... Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. (Hebrews 13:7, 17)

That's why we dare not ignore the Word of the Prophets; we must listen and do exactly what they tell us. God sent them to us to speak in his place.

David's Faith

As you can see, simply plunging into Psalms without first finding out what David understood by its terms and concepts will get us nowhere. We will end up putting our own definitions to the words and making totally wrong conclusions about the passages. In fact, we're going to see a man-centered message, something about us – when it isn't that at all.

David was an Israelite, a descendant of Abraham and the Patriarchs, heir of the blessings of Jacob. He was also chosen by God to be King of Israel responsible to make sure the Covenant blessings were distributed to all of Abraham's descendants. And his purpose in the Psalms was not just a personal musing about his relationship with God, but to outline how all of God's people should worship him. He was working on a national level, as well as a spiritual and eternal level. He was, in fact, following the Christ and his eternal relationship with the Father.

All this is to say that if we want to understand the Psalms we had better do our homework. And we dare not turn the Psalms into a narcissistic exercise: our task is just what Jesus told us to do. "And when you pray ... seek first the Kingdom of God and his righteousness."

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The Psalms: A Theological Commentary



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