

PART THREE

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THE  
TRANSFORMATION  
OF THE WORLD

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Batter my heart, three person'd God; for you  
As yet but knocke, breathe, shine,  
and seeke to mend;  
That I may rise, and stand,  
o'erthrow mee,'and bend  
Your force, to break, blowe,  
burn and make me new.  
I, like an usurpt towne, to'another due,  
Labour to'admit you, but Oh, to no end,  
Reason your viceroy in mee,  
mee should defend,  
But is captiv'd, and proves weake or untrue.  
Yet dearly' I love you,'and  
would be loved faine  
But am betroth'd unto youremie:  
Divorce mee,' untie,  
or breake that knot againe,  
Take mee to you, imprison mee, for I  
Except you enthrall mee, never shall be free,  
Nor ever chast, except you ravish me.

—John Donne  
“Holy Sonnets” No. 14

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T E N

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## BREAKING BREAD: THE RITE OF TRANSFORMATION

In the preceding chapters we have investigated the fundamentally revelatory or symbolic view of the world presented by the Bible. We have inspected some of the fundamental items of "furniture" in God's world-house. Now we need to put all these pieces together into a worldview, and show how God has acted to bring His world from glory to glory through the transforming process of history. In the present chapter we shall look at the process of transformation. In Chapter 11 we shall look at man, who is God's primary agent for transforming the world. Then in Chapter 12 we shall begin our study of the design of the world, as God originally made it, and as He has acted to transform it.

The Bible opens with a Garden and closes with a City. This simple observation points to the meaning of history, of process, of change, of time. Something has happened during the years between Genesis 1 and Revelation 22, and that something is the work of glorification. The world, created good, has been transformed or transfigured. The potential has become actual. The raw material has been worked into art.

Man is God's agent for the glorification of the world. Man is positioned between heaven and earth. He started out at the apex of the pyramid, the holy mountain. There he was able to see into heaven, to perceive the heavenly pattern, and then bring it down into the world and transform the earth. "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." Just so, Moses was shown the pattern on the mountain, and then he built the Tabernacle on the plain (Exodus 25:40). Just so, Jesus ascended to a mountain to speak

the Sermon on the Mount, giving the pattern of the Kingdom to His disciples.

The labor of glorification takes nature and turns it into culture. Henry Van Til has written that culture "is the activity of man as image-bearer of his Creator in forming nature to his purposes."<sup>1</sup> The natural glories of the Edenic world are reworked by man into the cultural glories of the New Jerusalem.

Since this is man's task, to dress the Garden as well as to guard it (Genesis 2:15), we can expect God to give direction as to how to go about it. We find those directions in Genesis 1.

### **The Five-Fold Pattern of God's Work**

God could have made the world instantaneously, or He could have done it over the course of six billion years. He could have taken six seconds, or six millennia. The fact that He chose to take six days is significant, for His sole revealed purpose in doing so was to set a pattern for His image. This is stated in Exodus 20:10-11, where man is told to work six days and rest on the seventh, because that is what God did. The world was designed for man; and God's actions in building up the world are prototypes of human actions in continuing to build up and glorify the world, transforming the raw materials of Eden and Havilah into the perfected beauty of New Jerusalem, from glory to glory. Man's work of re-creation follows the pattern of God's original work of creation.

God's original creation of the heavens and the earth out of nothing obviously cannot be imitated by man. From that point on, however, God acted in ways that man can copy. He brought light to darkness, gave form to the shapeless, named the unnamed, apportioned the restructured world to various kingdoms, etc. Man copies these acts of illuminating, restructuring, naming, distributing, etc. For reasons that will become clear as we proceed, let us synthesize the material in Genesis 1:2-2:4 into a five-fold sequence of actions.<sup>2</sup>

*First*, God took hold of the creation. I believe we can see this expressed by the phrase "And God said." The Word of God is the member of the Divine Trinity who acts in the world to restructure it according to the plan of the Father and under the hovering guidance of the Spirit. We see this in Proverbs 8:30, John

1:3, 10, and Hebrews 1:2, 3. The Father plans; the Son executes. The Son comes to do the will of the Father. Thus, the Word of God is the “hand” of God; and accordingly, the glorified Son is seated at the right hand of the Father. Man images this aspect of the Divine work when he lays hold on any created thing, to begin to work with it.

*Second*, God restructured the creation. This is particularly in focus in the first three days of the creation, during which God *separated* light from darkness, waters above from waters below, and land from sea. The world, which was already glorious in that it reflected God’s glorious Person, was rendered even more glorious in the course of time by being broken down and restructured. Men continually and inescapably image this action of God. If I remove a book from my shelf, I have broken down the original form of my room and restructured it. If I dig up ore from the ground, and heat it so as to separate gold from dross, I am restructuring. This act of restructuring is what we generally think of as work in the strict or narrow sense.

Once things have been broken apart and restructured, they are different from what they were before. New names are needed. “Gold ore” is transformed into “pure gold” and “dross.” Thus, we see God giving new names to the products of His labors on the first three days of creation: day, night, heaven, earth, seas. Similarly, we give names to the new things we bring forth—whether we produce a child, a work of art, or a new street.

*Third*, God distributed His work. This is particularly in view in the last three days, during which God gave the firmament to the sun, moon, stars, and birds, the sea to fishes, and the land to animals and men. This act of distribution follows naturally upon work in the strict sense. After I have made something, I can do one of three things with it. I can keep it for myself (as God kept the sabbath time for Himself, and as He temporarily reserved the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil); I can give it away; or I can trade it for the work of someone else (barter or sale).

When you buy something, you almost always get directions to go with it. When you give something to someone, you usually provide some instructions along with the gift: “Let me show you how to work this thing.” Thus, as He distributed the world, God

gave commands to fish, birds, beasts, and men. These were to be the rulers of the world, and they were under His orders. Thus, God's Word is always simultaneously both promise and command, both the grant of His Kingdom and rules to obey concerning it (cf. Genesis 1:28-30).

Notice that the order is gift and then rules, promise and then law. God gives the Kingdom, and then gives us rules to live by. The order is never Law and then Gospel. God's Word comes to us first as a Tree of Life, giving us grace, and then afterwards as a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, giving us rules.

*Fourth*, God evaluated His work. This is noted in the text where it says, "God saw what He had made and it was good," and in 1:31: "God saw all that He had made and it was very good." Initial evaluation is preliminary to consumption or full enjoyment. Before eating there is tasting. Thus, when mother makes a soup and distributes a bowl to each member of the family, the first taste elicits an evaluation. "Well, how do you like it?" That question comes not at the end of the meal, but after the first taste or so.

*Fifth*, God enjoyed His work. God's sabbath rest on the seventh day was not apart from the creation, but in it. God's temple, where He rested enthroned, was always set up in the world—for instance, in the midst of the Israelite camp, or in the center of the land. Having tasted His work and found it good, God relaxed and enjoyed it. Similarly, if the soup is good, we enjoy a whole bowl of it, and maybe a second.

These five simple actions are very ordinary, and are inescapable. It is, or should be, encouraging and invigorating to realize that the imaging of God is not focally the performance of great, heroic acts, but the carrying out of very ordinary activities. For instance, for me to give you a glass of water means:

1. I take hold of a glass in the cabinet, and take hold of the faucet.
2. I restructure the cabinet by removing the glass. Just as God separated the waters from the waters by putting "firmament" between them, so I separate one glass from the rest, putting space between them. Also, I separate water from the pipe into the glass, dividing water from water. I

probably won't rename it, but my mind will recognize that "empty glass" has become "filled glass."

3. I distribute the glass of water to you, and I may say, "Drink up."
4. You evaluate the water. It might taste bad if the faucet had not been used for a week and I failed to run the water out of the pipe first, or it might taste fine.
5. Assuming your judgment is that the water is good, you enjoy it by drinking more of it.

Such simple, mundane actions constantly and unavoidably imitate God's actions in the building of the world. Every calling in life, indeed every action in life, thus has immeasurable dignity.

### **The Six-Fold Pattern of Man's Work**

Because all men, Christian and apostate, thus constantly imitate God in their work, it cannot be in the area of works that the final distinction between the righteous and the wicked is found. Rather, it is the attitude or faith that accompanies these works that makes the difference. In the truest Biblical sense of the word, this attitude is "piety," the religious sense that accompanies our actions. This requirement of right faith or piety is set out in Genesis 2 and 3, and is seen in that God required an additional step in the performance by man of this sequence of actions. That additional step is the *giving of thanks*, a conscious act of self-submission to God, affirming that He is the One who set up the conditions for human labor, and affirming that He does all things well. The act of thanksgiving is placed immediately after the first step of "taking hold," before the act of "restructuring." While all our actions are to be pervaded by a spirit of thanks, an act of thanks is at least sometimes to be performed at this point in the sequence.

What is thanksgiving? It is a rendering of praise and an affirmation of dependence upon someone else. A person does not thank himself—that would be absurd. Thus, God did not thank Himself when He made the world. When, however, I thank you for something, I am acknowledging that you have done something for me (acknowledging dependence) and expressing gratitude (not resentment).

Romans 1:21, speaking of all men and thus pointedly of Adam and Eve, says “for even though they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, or *give thanks*.” Man was created on the sixth day of creation week. He was made in the middle of the day, after the animals. Before that first day was over, God brought various animals to Adam for Adam to name. The next day was the sabbath, the time when Adam was to come before God and give thanks, glorifying God as God.

It is important to reflect on what it meant for Adam to name the animals. These were not new names resulting from a work of restructuring. Rather, Adam was coming to grips with things the way they already were. To put a name on something is a way of laying hold on it. We cannot deal with things we cannot name. Thus, it was not labor in the strict sense for Adam to name the animals. Adam was simply taking hold of the creation.<sup>3</sup>

Before beginning to work with the creation, Adam was to give thanks to God, affirming His sovereignty. Adam was not to give thanks to God empty-handed. Rather, it was with God’s creation in his hands that Adam was to render thanks to God. This involved the dedication of his *future* works to God. Thus, Adam’s future works would involve moving the creation from glory to glory, by restructuring and redistributing it. Adam’s six-fold rite for life, thus, was as follows:

1. Adam was to lay hold on the cosmos.
2. Before working with it, Adam was to give thanks to God for His gift of the cosmos.<sup>4</sup>
3. Adam would then break down and restructure that portion of the cosmos within his grasp. He would give new names to the results (e.g., Genesis 4:17).
4. Adam would then distribute his works to others. A tithe (10 percent) would be given to God, on the sabbath day of judgment, for God’s evaluation. The rest Adam would either keep for himself or distribute to others through giving or trading. Just as directions for use accompany things we buy today, so Adam would have given directions to those who received his gifts or bought his wares.

5. Adam's works would then be evaluated. Adam would evaluate his own works, and so would other people. That portion given to God would be evaluated by Him, the part for the whole.<sup>5</sup>
6. The works of the unfallen Adam would be enjoyed by all, particularly by God, for whom they would be a savor of sweet incense.

There are two aspects of this I should like to call attention to. The first is that this process takes place in time. Thus, what is "good" at an early stage of history may not still be "good" later. A drawing by a child may be evaluated "very good" by adults, but the same crudities from the hand of an adult would not be given the same evaluation. It is important to affirm the eschatological character of the good, because it helps to explain the fact that the products of human work do not endure.

It also explains why each stage of the Old Covenant was good and wonderful at the time, but yet needed to be superseded later on. The New Testament speaks disparagingly of the Old Covenant, using such phrases as "weak and worthless elementary principles" (Galatians 4:9), "milk for babes" (Hebrews 5:13), and the like; but only in comparison with the New Covenant. In 1400 B.C., the Mosaic Covenant was the most wonderful thing in the world (Deuteronomy 4:6-8). But what is good for a child is not necessarily still good for an adult, and it is perverse to cling to childish things (Galatians 4:1-11; 1 Corinthians 13:11).

The second aspect of this, which also pertains to the fact that human works do not in themselves endure, is that man's six-fold action is an act of glorification. Man is God's agent for the glorification of the world. The world was created glorious, but is to become more glorious progressively under the hand of man. "Glory" is a difficult concept to describe, but clearly it has to do with the revelation of God. We know that God is fully revealed, and thus fully glorified, in all that He has made. Yet, the work of man is to reveal God even more, and bring Him even more glory. This is a theological paradox, called sometimes the "problem of the full bucket." If God is fully glorious, how can the creation add to His glory? If God is fully revealed in creation (Romans 1:19-20), how can He become more fully revealed? This is a mystery, but it is also clearly the truth.

The progressive revelation and glorification of God in history does not take place by a process of unveiling what is hidden, but by transforming what is already revealed. This is the mystery of time, of growth, of history. It means something amazing, however: that even in the simplest of human actions, God's glory can be enhanced and His Person revealed more fully.

This second aspect also gives perspective to the transitory nature of human works. The great paintings of the Reformation era are darkening and cracking with age. Many have been destroyed in wars. Of Bach's five great Passions, only two are extant. All our works are like castles of sand. Thus, it is sometimes argued that human work in the creation has meaning only in that it trains men: Adam himself is progressively transformed and glorified through the six-fold action. While this touches an important truth, the problem is with the word "only." By itself, the notion that human labor exists only to train men reduces the value of work only to the subjective dimension. The objective foundation needed is the confession that human labor, if it is ultimately worthwhile, progressively reveals and glorifies God. Even if the artifact does not itself endure, like the crude sketches of a child, the revelation of God and glorification of the creation is cumulative.

### **Corruption and Restoration**

Unfortunately, this process of glorification was corrupted. The sin of Adam lay precisely at the second step of his rite. He refused to give thanks to God, because he could not do so. With the forbidden fruit in his hand, Adam could not give praise to God. Thus, Adam's original sin entailed (among other dimensions) the failure to glorify God as God (by restructuring the creation along His desired lines), and the failure to give thanks (by expressing dependence upon God and gratitude for what God had given him). Thus, the six-fold action designed for man's good was corrupted. In Cain we see this fleshed out.

1. Cain laid hold of the creation to restructure it into the city of man.
2. Cain did not give thanks, or express dependence and gratitude, to God or to anyone else.

3. Cain restructured part of the land of Nod into a wicked city, naming it Enoch (Genesis 4:17).
4. Cain distributed his work to his son, Enoch, and to his heirs. In so doing, he became their law-giver.
5. God came down to evaluate the works of men, and found them evil (Genesis 6:3,5; cf. 11:5).
6. God resolved the situation by bringing judgment on them and thereby "rested" (Genesis 6:7; cf. 11:8; Deuteronomy 28:63; Psalm 2:4).

Thus, instead of progressively glorifying the world, man's labors progressively degraded it. Instead of a process of glorification, we have a process of debasement (though restrained by "common grace," the crumbs that fall to the "dogs" from the Lord's Table; Matthew 15:26-27). Instead of a paradoxical increase in the revelation of God, we have an equally paradoxical obscuring of that revelation (yet God continues to be fully revealed!).

Unless arrested, this process of debasement would lead to the destruction of the world. God's promise after the Flood, however, was that never again would He permit the process to go that far. Rather, in man's youth God would intervene to set things right (Genesis 8:21). That restoration, of course, entailed the whole work of Jesus Christ, especially His death under God's wrath as a substitute for our sins, and His resurrection as the inauguration of the transfigured Kingdom of God.

In practical terms, Jesus set at the center of His Kingdom a rite designed to restructure our thinking, and reset our course along the true lines of our calling. He did this by establishing the ritual of the Lord's Supper, or Holy Communion, which ritual restores us to the holy six-fold action:<sup>6</sup>

1. Jesus took bread; and took the cup after He Himself had sipped from it.
2. Jesus gave thanks for the bread and the wine.
3. Jesus restructured the bread by breaking it. In terms of the Old Covenant sacrificial system, when the sacrifice was slain and divided into pieces, the blood was always separated from the flesh (Leviticus 1:5, 9). Thus, Jesus gave them the wine in an act separate from His giving the

bread, and it should be partaken of in a separate act. Jesus gave new names to the products of His actions, calling the bread His body, and the wine His blood.

4. Jesus distributed it to all present, giving them a command to do this as His memorial.
5. They all tasted of it. "O taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). All but one evaluated it as good. Judas evaluated it as bad (assuming for the sake of argument that Judas was still present when the Lord's Supper was instituted, a disputed point).
6. (After Judas left) the godly disciples remained with Jesus, enjoying His fellowship and teaching for a time (John 14-17).

The performance of this weekly rite in worship is the heart of liturgical piety, and this is seen in both major sections of the worship service. The six-fold performance in the Eucharist, the Holy Communion, is obvious; but it is also performed in the Synaxis, the service of the Word. In virtually every kind of church, regardless how non-liturgical it may seek to be, during the time of proclamation the Word is first read, then thanks is offered, and then the Word is preached. Thus, the rite as applied to proclamation is this:

1. The reader lays hold of the Word, reading a portion or portions of it without comment.
2. Thanks is offered for the Word, and a request that the Spirit bless the exposition of it.
3. The Word is broken down and restructured in the preaching of it. Preaching expounds the text using different words from what are found there—new names as it were; and in that preaching. . . .
4. The Word is distributed to the people listening, as God's command for living. The Word provides both promise and law, both a description of Kingdom privilege and an outline of Kingdom duties.
5. The people evaluate what they hear. By that I do not mean to imply that the people are obligated to pass some kind of professional judgment on the sermon, but that inevitably

they will evaluate what they hear. The people are commended if they evaluate carefully (Acts 17:10-11).

6. Assuming they find it good and profitable, the people will take the message and inspiration with them as they leave, and integrate it into their lives, finding enjoyment therein.

Not only is the performance of the rite in worship the heart of liturgical piety, but it also restores us to true practical piety. Jesus gives us the pattern we are to follow in all of life. Because of His work we can, in Him, lay hold on the fallen creation (no matter how perverse it has become), give thanks for it, and go to work on it, restoring and transforming it progressively to the glory of God.

By transforming (in a mystery) bread into His body, Jesus provides a paradigm for the entire nature of the Kingdom. The Church is also called Christ's body, which means that as men are brought into the Church, this is parallel to the transformation of bread into Christ's flesh. Men are broken, cut in half by the covenant Word (Hebrews 4:12), and restructured into the body of Christ.<sup>7</sup> Eve (the Bride) is cut off from her one-flesh relationship with Adam and restructured into one-body (by the Spirit) with the New Adam. The fallen first creation, whether bread or people, is transfigured by death and resurrection into union with Christ. Indeed, since all things are in Christ, not only men but also the entire cosmos is progressively transformed by being restructured (repositioned) into the "cosmic body" of Christ (Colossians 1:17-23).

Thus, the structure of liturgical piety and of practical piety is the same: the six-fold action. The redemptive key to both is thanksgiving in Christ. Liturgical piety serves practical piety by (a) setting the basic pattern in the Lord's Supper, and (b) transferring men into union with Christ and then sending them out to transform the world after that same image.

The distinction between the Christian and the rebel thus lies at the point of thanksgiving. It is not possible to take hold of the world with the intention of sinning and still give thanks to God for it. A man cannot load a gun intending to murder his boss, and then give thanks to God for it.

### The Centrality of Worship

Worship, then, trains us in the proper mode of dominion. Without God's rite to repattern us, we would go out and work with the world after the fashion of Cain, and take it and ourselves down a course of degradation. In worship, however, we are repatterned to a true approach to the world. For this reason, the historic liturgies of the church have stressed the giving of thanks. In this way, the church serves to transform the world.

The Eucharistic liturgy that grew up rapidly and organically around the basic six-fold rite of the Supper (and "eucharist" means "thanksgiving") stressed thanksgiving. This is still seen in any liturgical church today. The following, or something like it, is found in the worship of all the historic Churches that have preserved the old catholic liturgical forms. This example is drawn from within the Western tradition.

At the beginning of the communion service, after the *sursum corda* ("Lift up your hearts," an ascent into heaven for worship), the minister says, "Let us give thanks unto the Lord our God," to which the people reply, "It is fitting and right to do so."

Continuing, the minister prays, "It is truly fitting, right, and salutary that we should at *all* times and in *all* places give thanks unto You," affirming that thanksgiving must characterize all that we do and not just the central act of worship. "Therefore, with angels and archangels, and all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify Your glorious name," he says, whereupon follows the *sanctus*, the angelic "Holy, holy, holy."

The eucharistic prayer that follows includes thanksgiving as well, with such words as, "Remembering therefore His salutary precept, His life-giving suffering and death, His glorious resurrection, ascension, and enthronement, and the promise of His coming again, we give thanks to You, Almighty God, not as we ought but as we are able."

After the Lord's Supper, the minister exhorts the congregation, "O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good," to which the people reply, "And His mercy endures forever." There follows another prayer of thanksgiving: "We give thanks to You, Almighty God, that You have refreshed us with this life-giving gift. . . ." The service closes with the *benedicamus*, the minister

calling, "Bless we the Lord!" and the congregation shouting, "Thanks be to God."

In this way, worship keys the believer into the proper frame of mind for all of life. Since men continually and unceasingly are engaged in acts of restructuring, distributing, and evaluating, it would be impossible to try to sort out every action in life and engage in a particular act of thanksgiving at the appropriate spot in the sequence. We do not ordinarily stop to give thanks, for instance, when we get a glass from the cabinet, to return to the example used above. All the same, there are certain specific times in the day when, according to the consensus of Christian wisdom of all ages, it is appropriate to stop and give thanks. The most obvious of these is mealtime. After the food has been set on the table (so that we visually "take hold" of it), we offer thanks, and then get to work eating it (restructuring, appreciating, etc.). Similarly, first thing in the morning, as we lay hold on the day's chores and events, we give thanks. Public meetings used to begin with prayer, before getting down to work. In this way, the simple six-fold rite is applied constantly in daily life, and in this way the Kingdom comes.

The stress on thanksgiving in liturgical piety is thus the key to practical or vocational piety. In the early Church, all life was thus worship, either the special worship of the rite, or the general worship of thanksgiving in all of life (1 Thessalonians 5:18). This worship-centered piety was the characteristic of the earliest Church. It must become ours today.

### **Conclusion and a Qualifying Addendum**

While it would be interesting and valuable to trace out many more examples of how men are to transfigure God's world through the six-fold pattern, our main concern in the present book is with God's own actions. At each stage of Biblical history, God lays hold of an existing deteriorating situation, breaks His people down through a death-resurrection transition, and re-establishes them with a renewed covenant. Each time God does this, He brings in a new covenant, a new stage of history, a new *world model*. We shall trace this pattern in Chapters 12 through 18. By becoming familiar with how God acts, we shall become

much better able to understand what is going on in our world at the present time.

My analysis of the activity of work and of covenant-making into five or six steps originally grew out of the observations of Dom Gregory Dix on the four-fold action of the eucharist, as I mentioned above.<sup>8</sup> I am not, however, arguing that this is the only useful or Biblical way to break down the sequence.

In my initial study, I did not relate this sequence to covenant-making or covenant-renewal in worship, but simply to the relationship between worship and work (the six-fold action of worship restoring us to a properly thankful attitude in our work).<sup>9</sup> There is, however, a clear correlation between the five stages of God's work of creation and the aspects of God's covenant-making, which can also be grouped in a set of five.<sup>10</sup>

Students of the nature of the covenant and of covenant-making in the Bible have divided the sequence in various ways.<sup>11</sup> We can say that in its fullest manifestations, God's covenant with man, which we can illustrate from the Mosaic covenant, entails the following steps and aspects:

1. Announcement of God's transcendence; His laying hold on the situation (Exodus 2:24-25; 20:3).
2. Declaration of God's new Name, appropriate for the new covenant being installed (Exodus 3:13-15; 6:2-8; 20:2a).
3. Statement of how God brought His people from the old covenant and world into the new one (Exodus 20:2b; Deuteronomy 1:6-4:40).
4. Establishment of the new covenant order, especially the governmental hierarchies thereof (Exodus 18:13-27; Deuteronomy 1:9-18).
5. Appointment of new names for the new finished product (Genesis 1:4-5, 6-8, 9-10; at Moses' time the new name was "children of Israel").
6. Grant or distribution of an area of dominion to the covenant steward or vassal (Exodus 3:8; Deuteronomy 1:19-12:31).
7. Stipulations concerning the management of this grant (Exodus 20-23; Deuteronomy 5:1-26:19).
8. Statement of the terms by which God will evaluate man's performance: promised blessings and threatened curses (Exodus 23:25-33; Deuteronomy 27, 28).

9. Placement of witnesses to report to God on man's behavior (Exodus 23:20-23; Deuteronomy 4:26; 30:19).
10. Arrangements for the deposition of the covenant documents (Exodus 40:20; Deuteronomy 31:9-13).
11. Arrangements for succession of covenant vice-regents (Deuteronomy 31:7, 14, 23; Deuteronomy 34).
12. Artistic poems and hymns that encapsulate the covenant, and that are to be taught to succeeding generations (Deuteronomy 31:14-33:29).

We could probably come up with other aspects as well, depending on how much detail we wished to go into.

This covenant order can be helpfully and Biblically grouped in more than one way. It is possible and desirable to see the sequence as proceeding from God's sovereign *Control* (1-3), to manifestations of God's sovereign *Authority* (4-7), and culminating in revelations of God's sovereign *Presence* with His people (8-12).<sup>12</sup> It is also possible and desirable to see the sequence as having five aspects:<sup>13</sup>

1. God's transcendence (1, 2).
2. New order and hierarchy (3-5).
3. Stipulations (6, 7).
4. Sanctions (blessings and curses) (8, 9).
5. Succession arrangements (10-12).

In the present study, which is concerned with how God institutes His new Kingdom progressively in history, we shall basically be concerned with four steps or stages:

1. God's announcement of His intention, including His judgment of the old world.
2. The exodus of God's people to a new world.
3. The establishment of God's people in the new world.
4. The history (and decline) of the new world.

We shall reserve a full discussion of this sequence, however, for Chapter 13, because before we begin to look at history, we need to take a closer look at man and at the world.

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The Lord at first did Adam make  
Out of the dust and clay,  
And in his nostrils breathéd life,  
E'en as the scriptures say.  
And then in Eden's paradise  
He placéd him to dwell,  
That he within it should remain,  
To dress and keep it well.

“Christmas Eve,” traditional English carol<sup>1</sup>  
stanza 1

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## E L E V E N

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# MAN: THE AGENT OF TRANSFORMATION

Man is the crown and captain of creation. Celebrating man's exalted position, the psalmist sings,

When I consider Thy heavens, the work of Thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which Thou hast ordained; what is man, that Thou dost take thought of him? And the son of man, that Thou dost care for him? Thou hast made him a little lower than God, and dost crown him with glory and majesty! Thou dost make him to rule over the works of Thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet (Psalm 8:3-6).

The Bible affirms the greatness of man in his very creation, for God said,

Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the cattle, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth (Genesis 1:26).

A survey of Genesis 1 will show us the great things that God had already done, and that His image would also grow to do. God had given structure to a formless world, and filled an empty world. He had organized the oceans and the lands, and established ecologies. Such things as these would man, ruler of creation, also do.

God's intentions for man are set out in Genesis 2:15, "Then the Lord God took the man and put him into the Garden of Eden to cultivate (serve) it and to guard it." There are two tasks here, and we shall call them man's kingly (or basileic) and priestly

(or hieratic) tasks. It is significant that man's prophetic task is not mentioned here. Service is the essence of man's kingly task, and guarding is the essence of his priestly task, as we shall see. Man's understanding of these two duties was to be progressive. Though made "like God," man was to become more and more like God through a process of growth and maturation in His image.

### Man as King

First, God brought animals to the man to see what he would name them. Man would learn from the animals and acquire wisdom from them. Acquiring knowledge and wisdom is the first part of man's kingly function. It is his *scientific* task to understand the world before working with it.

Solomon is the great example of a king in the Bible, and we are told of his wisdom as he investigated the creation: "And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish" (1 Kings 4:33). An example of how Solomon "named" the animals, and learned from them, is in Proverbs 6:6: "Go to the ant, O sluggard, observe her ways and be wise." Another example is Proverbs 30:24-28:

Four things are small on the earth,  
 but they are exceedingly wise:  
 The ants are not a strong folk,  
 but they prepare their food in the summer;  
 The badgers are not a mighty folk,  
 yet they make their houses in the rocks;  
 The locusts have no king,  
 yet all of them go out in ranks;  
 The lizard you may grasp with the hands,  
 yet it is in kings' palaces.<sup>2</sup>

Once man has begun to understand the world, he can begin working with it. Building on his scientific task, thus, is his *aesthetic* task of beautifying the world, advancing it from glory to glory. Here again Solomon is the great example, as his beautiful temple and palace show.

As we have seen, working with the creation is always analogous to working with human beings, for the things in the crea-

tion are images of men. Moses and David, for instance, became leaders of men by first being shepherds of flocks; and Jesus learned leadership by working with recalcitrant wood as a carpenter. Adam was actually told to “serve” the Garden, and the word used is the same as that used for slavery in the Bible. Service to the creation would teach him how to serve his wife, his children, and other men.

True kingship is by service, and is never apart from service. Jesus said that

those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. But it is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve (Mark 10:42-45).

The lives of Joseph and Daniel and others show that it is through humble service that God’s people become rulers. The lives of Saul and David show that if a man forgets to be a servant after he becomes a lord, he will lose his kingdom.

After all, the purpose of rule is not domination but glorification. If my goal is to glorify and beautify my wife, I will not abuse her. If my goal is to transfigure and exalt my neighborhood, I will not destroy it. If my goal is to “Jerusalemize” and “heavenize” my land, I will not pollute it.

God had an ulterior purpose in having Adam name the animals. From his examination of them, Adam realized that none of these animals was a helper peculiarly suited to him. For that, he would need another human being.

Now that Adam realized that human society was necessary, God acted to provide it. In accordance with the creation pattern, God sovereignly *took hold* of Adam and put him to sleep.<sup>3</sup> Then God divided Adam by removing flesh and bone from his side, and *restructured* humanity into male and female. When Adam awoke, God *distributed* the woman to him. Adam gazed upon her and gave her a positive *evaluation*: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!” (Genesis 2:23). Finally, Adam expressed that this condition would continue, that the situation was at *rest*, “For this cause a man shall leave his father and his

mother and cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh" (v. 24).

At this point it will be well to note that the act of making a new creation is simultaneously an act of generating a new covenant. Marriage is a covenant, according to Malachi 2:14. Covenant-making in the Bible entails dividing and restructuring, and that is what we have seen here. In the remainder of this book we shall look more fully at God's acts of restructuring and initiating new covenants in history. The point here is that human society is organized by covenant, by acts of separation and restructuring.

Eve is now part of the Garden, and it will be Adam's task to guard her as he guards the Garden. This brings us to his priestly task.

### **Man as Priest**

Systematic theologians generally locate man's priestly work in the area of worship. As the Presbyterian Westminster Shorter Catechism puts it, "Christ executeth the office of a priest, in His once offering up of Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice, and reconcile us to God; and in making continual intercession for us" (Question 25). Without contradicting the insights of systematic theology, our purpose here must be to uncover the Biblical imagery surrounding the priesthood.

Just as man's kingly task proceeds from scientific examination to aesthetic transformation, so his priestly task has two stages. First of all, as a priest, man establishes or recognizes pre-existing boundaries, and then he acts to guard those boundaries. Adam was to recognize the boundaries of God's holy Garden, just as he recognized the names of God's animals. Then Adam was to protect those boundaries against invasion.

In human society, it is actually a priestly task to establish and enforce boundaries. In the Church, those boundaries are established by baptism and safeguarded by excommunication. In the state, which also has a priestly role, the boundaries are political and are safeguarded by military force. Property boundaries are established by covenanting acts among people in society, and are safeguarded by the state using police powers.

Preeminently, of course, the priest guards the house of God. The most elaborate picture of the measuring function is found in

Ezekiel 40 and following, where a man with a measuring rod measures off the new Temple of God. For the most part, however, the Bible shows the priests guarding God's holy boundaries. They determined who was clean and who was unclean, and thus who could approach God's Tabernacle (Leviticus 11-15). They challenged sinners who dared to transgress His threshold, as Azariah confronted King Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-23).<sup>4</sup> Primarily, though, the priest guarded God's throne by leading the people in worship. People who truly worship God will not disobey Him. Thus, the systematic theologians are right to say that the priest's primary task, in one sense, was to offer sacrifice to God by leading men to become living sacrifices.

Just as God brought animals to Adam to teach him about society and his kingly task, so also He brought an animal to Adam to teach him about holiness and his priestly task. The serpent or dragon was the most beautiful and wise of all the beasts of the field. He was doubtless one of the "great monsters" created on the fifth day. Indeed, the use of the word "create" in Genesis 1:21 points to an especially wondrous work.<sup>5</sup> With God's permission (cf. Job 1, 2), Satan used the dragon to challenge Adam and Eve.

The assault was directly against the woman. Since it was Adam's task to guard the Garden and all within it, he should have guarded her. Instead he stood by and let her fall. (Genesis 3:6 says that he was "with her" during the discussion.) He failed to guard the Garden, and admitted the enemy.

We noted above that the priest's primary means of guarding is through worship. What should Adam have done? He should have led Eve away from the serpent to the Tree of Life.<sup>6</sup> There he would have led her in rendering obeisance to the Lord of Life, admitting his own need for life from God. He would have taken the fruit and given it to her (as Jesus, the New Adam, feeds His Bride). In this way, Satan's designs would have been thwarted.

Instead, however, Satan was given access to the Garden. By receiving food from Satan, Adam and Eve acknowledged him as their priest. They were disqualified from guarding the Garden, and new cherubic guardians were set up in their stead (Genesis 3:24).

During the Old Covenant, God set aside men to fulfill the office of priest in a special way. These men led others to the door

of the Garden (Tabernacle, Temple, etc.), but not inside. The priests themselves could only go into the Holy Place, not into the Most Holy. Only the High Priest could enter there, and only once a year (Leviticus 16). These exclusions pointedly reminded the people that access to the Garden had been lost due to sin, and only the work of the Messiah would give them renewed access.<sup>7</sup> Until that time, the priestly boundaries would be guarded primarily by cherubim, and only in limited ways by human priests.

### Man as Prophet

One thing that emerges from all this is that God was acting to provoke human growth and maturation. Adam grew to understand his need of a wife, and then was married. Adam was to grow to see his need for a robe of authority, and then he would be given it.<sup>8</sup>

This is most clearly seen if we examine what the Bible means by man as prophet. Here again we have to sidestep the traditional definitions of systematic theology, which, while not wrong in themselves, do not go far enough in uncovering the Biblical-theological motifs involved. The Westminster Shorter Catechism, to return to the example used earlier, says that "Christ executeth the office of a prophet, in revealing to us, by His word and Spirit, the will of God for our salvation" (Question 24). This is true, but there is more to being a prophet.

The full meaning of prophet is council member, a member of God's Divine Council. Originally, that Council consisted of three persons, the Father, the Word, and the Spirit. Man, created in the image and likeness of God, was created to be a council member (though clearly below God in the hierarchy). Cast out of Eden, man was cut off from the Council. Under the Old Covenant, only a few men were ever permitted, and then only temporarily, to function as Council members.

Abraham Heschel has written,

The prophet claims to be far more than a messenger. He is a person who stands in the presence of God (Jeremiah 15:19), who stands "in the council of the Lord" (Jeremiah 23:18), who is a participant, as it were, in the council of God, not a bearer of dispatches whose function is limited to being sent on errands. He is a counselor as well as a messenger.<sup>9</sup>

Amos 3:7 is worthy of citation on this point: "Surely the Lord God does nothing unless He reveals His secret counsel to His servants the prophets."

Understanding that the prophet is someone God consults with shows us why Adam had no "prophetic task" in the Garden. He had not yet matured to the point of being made a Council member. He was a priestly guard and a kingly shepherd, but not yet a prophetic counselor. I believe that Adam would have become a prophet by eating of the Tree of Knowledge.<sup>10</sup>

Certain Old Testament saints stand as striking examples of Council member/prophet. One is Abraham. When God was about to destroy Sodom, He asked Himself, "Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?" (Genesis 18:17). God proceeded to tell Abraham His plans, and asked Abraham what he thought. The remainder of the story is familiar to everyone. Abraham gave his advice and counsel to God, though always in a deferential manner, respecting the hierarchy. It is in the light of this that we can understand Genesis 20:7, where God told Abimelech regarding Abraham: "Now therefore restore the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you, and you will live." As a Council member, Abraham the prophet could bring petitions before the Council.

The second great example is Moses, who is the exemplary prophet of the Old Covenant (Numbers 12:6-8), and the greatest before John the Forerunner. Moses not only received information from the Council and passed its decisions on to the people, as he ascended and descended Mount Sinai, he also actively argued before the Council when he felt it necessary, even "changing God's mind" on occasion (Exodus 32:7-14, 30-35; Numbers 14:13-19).

This is not the common idea of what a prophet was. There is no ranting and raving here. Nor is the prophet simply someone soberly possessed by God so as to become His mouthpiece. Rather, it is as a Council member that the prophet announces the Council's decisions to the people.

Vandervelde sums it up:

[The prophets] are not only privy to the divine council (1 Kings 22:19-23; Isaiah 6:1-5), they are participants in God's plans. When God announces judgment, the prophet is not afraid to

challenge God. Amos asks God to forgive Israel, because Jacob is so small (Amos 7:2). As Heschel aptly puts it, Amos does not say, "Thy will be done," but "Thy will be changed." And in the case of Amos the Lord concedes. He repents: " 'It shall not be,' said the Lord" (Amos 7:3). The pivotal role of the prophet as one who stands in the council of the Lord and who becomes a partner in the unfolding of God's covenant plans of judgment and salvation is crucial for understanding the way in which the New Testament people as a whole may be considered prophetic people.<sup>11</sup>

John the Forerunner was the greatest prophet of the Old Covenant, according to the testimony of Jesus, yet the least in the heavenly kingdom of the New Covenant would be greater than he (Matthew 11:7-14). As a Council member, John was privy to more information than any other prophet ever had been (John 1:33), yet matters were not completely clear even to him (Matthew 11:3). Living under the Old Covenant, before the veil was torn and heaven reopened, John's access to the Council was limited and partial.

It would not always be so, however. God had given Joel to prophesy that when the New Covenant arrived, everyone would be made full-time Council members:

And it will come about after this that I will pour out My Spirit on all flesh; and your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions, and even on the male and female slaves will I pour out my Spirit in those days (Joel 2:28-29).

Not just men but women also; not just adults of full strength but also youths and the aged; not just free but also slaves; not just Israel but all flesh — all would be privileged to sit with the Council. All would have a voice in the decision-making processes, though each according to his station.

Jesus prophesied the same:

No longer do I call you slaves; for the slave does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).

The King's Friend was his closest privy counselor (1 Kings 4:5; 2 Samuel 15:32–17:15; 1 Chronicles 27:33), which explains the full depth of the statement that Abraham was God's Friend (James 2:23; 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; Genesis 18:17). In the New Covenant, all are made King's Friends by baptism.

There is an historical progression, thus, in the Scripture. We see this in an interesting note in 1 Samuel 9:9, "Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he used to say, 'Come, let us go to the seer'; for today's prophet was formerly called a seer." A seer was not a Council member. He was one who knew God's will and proclaimed it, but without being consulted. At the time of the inauguration of kingship in Israel, there was simultaneously an elevation of the seer to prophet.

This historical progression in Israel shows the pattern of maturation for the individual as well. In the area of prophecy, men go from being hearers of God's Word, to seers who explain God's Word, and finally to prophets who are consulted by God. God hears the prayers of all, of course; but in the fullest sense, being a prophet is a privilege of maturity.

In the area of kingship, men start out as students, learning about the world. Then they become warriors, fighting for God by serving others. In Israel's history, this corresponds to the period of the Judges. Finally they become kings, giving direction to human life and society.

Finally, in the area of priesthood, men start out as followers, led to worship by the priests of the church. They can then become deacons (Levites), who assist in leading men before God. Finally, they can become elders, or priests in the fullest sense.

It is the destiny of all redeemed men to become prophets, priests, and kings in the fullest sense, though not all serve in official capacities in church or state.

### **Conclusion**

Man was designed by God to be His agent for the glorification of the world. As men matured in their tasks, however, they themselves would also grow from glory to glory, as prophets, priests, and kings. Though sin sought to wreck God's design, through Jesus Christ we have been put back on track. May God raise up a generation of mature Christians who can see the world as it truly is, and serve it according to His will.

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Let all the world in every corner sing,  
“My God and King!”

The heavens are not too high,  
His praise may thither fly;  
The earth is not too low,  
His praises there may grow.

Let all the world in every corner sing,  
“My God and King!”

Let all the world in every corner sing,  
“My God and King!”

The Church with psalms must shout;  
No door can keep them out;  
But, above all, the heart  
Must bear the longest part.

Let all the world in every corner sing,  
“My God and King!”

—George Herbert  
“Antiphon I”

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## T W E L V E

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# EDEN: THE WORLD OF TRANSFORMATION

What was the world like when God finished making it? What was the design of the “raw-material cosmos” over which man was to take dominion? In this chapter it will be our concern to get before us the original Biblical world model. In succeeding chapters we shall study the transformations through which God and man put the world.

Before we begin, let us take an overview of the nature of Biblical world modeling. The Bible provides us with a number of world models, some very simple, and some very elaborate and complex. Fairly simple world models are provided by the three decks of Noah’s Ark, the three zones of Mounts Sinai and Zion, and possibly the three zones of Ezekiel’s stepped altar. Much more complex world models are provided by the Tabernacle and Temple.

The Bible uses forty-eight verses to describe the world in Genesis 1:1—2:17. By way of contrast, the world symbolically described in Ezekiel 40—48 occupies 260 verses, while the world of Solomon’s Temple takes 346, and the world of the Mosaic Tabernacle runs to a conservative 1,140 verses.<sup>1</sup> We can also note that the description of New Jerusalem, also a world picture, takes twenty-four verses.

Why so many verses for the Tabernacle and the Temples? Because these images speak simultaneously of many things, and in much rich detail. The Tabernacle and Temple, being God’s palaces, were symbols of heaven; and since heaven is the model for the earth, they were also models for the earth. Beyond this, when we put them together with their precincts and surrounding areas, the whole constituted a heaven and earth model. As

heaven, as earth, and as both together, they were images of God's house. Since the human person is a temple and a tabernacle, they were also images of the individual human being (1 Corinthians 6:19; 2 Corinthians 5:1). The human community is also a temple and a tabernacle, so that they were images of the body politic as well as of the human individual (1 Corinthians 3:10-17). Because of this, they portrayed the True Man, Jesus Christ, as well as His Church (John 2:19).

We shall expand on all this as we proceed, but it is necessary for us to take note of it here as we begin. Some matters that are relatively obscure in Genesis 2 are made clearer by comparison with later world models (always bearing in mind that the later models are more glorified than the earlier ones). The four rivers that flowed out of Eden are simply a curiosity, for instance, until we associate them with the four corners of the earth, and the four corners of the altar, and the four corners of the cross. Thus, even in our initial study of the first world, we shall draw on later world models to help us understand the images presented compactly in Genesis 1 and 2.

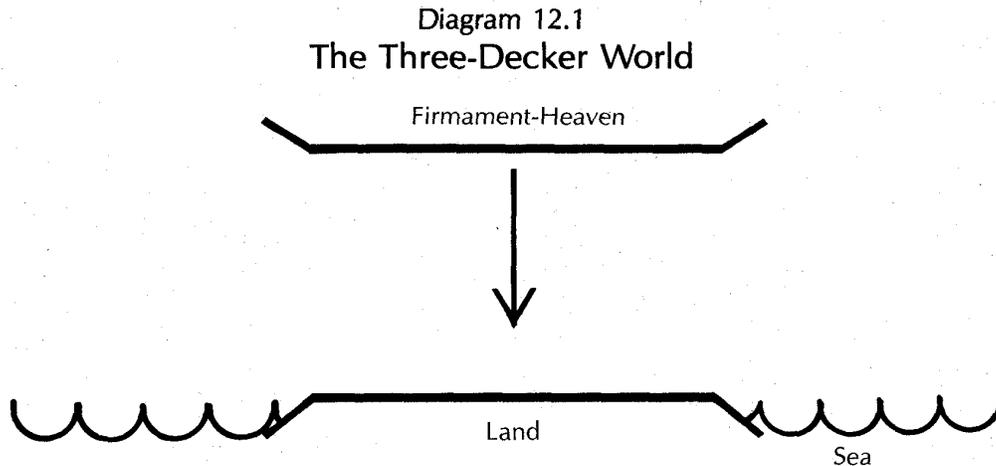
### **The Three-Decker Universe**

Bearing in mind that the Bible generally uses the language of appearance in describing the world, we can see the proper sense in which the Bible presents a triple-decker universe. The second commandment prohibits bowing before any image made in the likeness "of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth" (Exodus 20:4b). This three-part cosmos is fundamental to Biblical imagery and symbolism.

In Genesis 1:9, we read that the waters were gathered "into one place." This seems to be a reference to the oceans of the world, which in fact are continuous with one another, so that all the continents are in reality large islands in this one vast ocean. Except for a few isolated lakes, all the bodies of water on the earth are one large sea, and so the "one" gathering can also be called "seas" (plural).

The sea level establishes the limit of the land. Thus, the sea is always "below" the land, and since the sea goes down and down, it clearly stretches into an abyss. Moreover, the land is clearly in a visual sense "founded" on the seas, "established" on

the flood (Psalm 24:2). Suppose all the land of the earth were connected, so that the bodies of water were separated. In that case—a mirror image of the real world—we would say that the seas were borne up by the land. The reverse is the case, however: Each island of land, however large, is bounded by the sea. Thus, in *imagery* we have a three-decker universe: sea at the bottom, then land, and finally heaven. (See Diagram 12.1.) The three-decker world is referred to in Exodus 20:11, Psalm 146:6, Nehemiah 9:6, and Revelation 10:6. This visual three-decker world becomes a symbol for a three-decker moral world: hell, earth, heaven.



We have come to the wider symbolic structures established by the wording of Genesis 1. We saw that there are two heavens in Genesis 1: the highest heaven, created on Day One, and the earthly sky-heaven, the firmament, established on Day Two. The sky-heaven is an image, a symbol, a reminder of the highest heaven. By implication, the same thing is true of the sea, or abyss. The “deep,” the “abyss” of the sea points beyond itself to The Abyss, the place where the devil and the wicked will spend eternity. This Ultimate Abyss did not yet exist in Genesis 1, however, because neither angels nor men had yet sinned, and that is why it is not mentioned in Genesis 1. Once the Ultimate Abyss was established, however, the ocean-abyss became an im-

age, a symbol, a reminder of it, just as the sky-heaven is an image and reminder of the Ultimate Heaven.<sup>2</sup>

After the fall of man, the separation of land and sea becomes a common symbol for the separation of God's people and the ungodly nations of the world. The wicked are like the restless sea, while the righteous are given God's holy land to dwell in. As the chaotic sea tries constantly to eat the land, so the Gentiles try to invade God's land. In the Old Testament, the nations are frequently pictured in terms of the sea (cf. e.g., 2 Samuel 22:4-5; Psalm 65:7-8; Isaiah 5:30; 17:12-13; 57:20; Jeremiah 6:23; Daniel 7:2-3; cf. Luke 21:25; Revelation 13:1, 11). To protect His people, God at various times defeated the oceanic nations, and bounded them (Jeremiah 5:22; Psalm 74:13; Job 26:10-12).

It often is the "gathering of the sea into one place" that makes the "land" visible. When the wicked gather together against God and His people, He vindicates His people and defeats their enemies (Psalm 2). And notice the language of Revelation 20:8-9:

[Satan] will deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog [Prince] and Magog [People], to *gather* them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the *sea*. And they came up on the broad expanse of the *earth* and surrounded the camp of the saints. . . . (italics mine)

God said in the beginning that it was "good" for sea and land to be separated (Genesis 1:10), and at the end, He will remove the ungodly human "sea" from the land, and put them into the Ultimate Abyss (Revelation 20:15).

Christians should not be worried when accused of holding to a "three-decker world model." There is nothing pagan or primitive about such a worldview. As a matter of simple observable fact, the sea lies below the land, and the sky is above the land. This simple observation is relatively meaningless, of course, until we see that the sky is an image of heaven, and reminds us of our calling to grow into the fullness of God's likeness and bring this world toward glory. Similarly, the sea has to do with life and potential. The Bible consistently speaks of water as life-giving, and it is water that feeds the plants, animals, and men in the land, enabling them to grow toward their heavenly calling.<sup>3</sup> Thus water undergirds the land, stimulating it toward

perfection. Additionally, because of sin, the sea reminds us of the Abyss, the opposite of heaven, where impenitent sinners will reside forever.

### **The Four Corners of the Earth**

One of the most familiar symbols of Scripture is that of the four corners of the earth. Isaiah 11:12 says that God will “gather the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth,” and Ezekiel 7:2 says that “the end is coming on the four corners of the earth.” In Revelation 20:8 the wicked are gathered from the four corners of the earth.

To understand this imagery it is helpful to recall that the Bible pictures the world as a house:

Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell, if you have understanding, who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone? (Job 38:4-6)

The world is like a house, the firmament like its ceiling, and the mountains like the sky's pillars, so that the collapse of the mountains is associated with the rending of the firmament-ceiling (Isaiah 34:3-4; Revelation 6:13-14). As we have mentioned, the Tabernacle and Temple were world models, the world being conceived as a cosmic house.

A complementary image used in Scripture for the world is that of the altar. Altars must be made of earth (Exodus 20:24-25) and have four corners, and these figure the four corners of the earth (cp. Revelation 7:1 and 9:13). Thus, the fire on the bronze altar figured the judgment that must come upon the world; and the sacrifice spoke of the fact that the fire must come either upon a substitute, or upon humanity itself. In the same way, the incense burning on the altar of incense spoke of the universal duty and privilege of men to stand upon the world and pray to God. Thus, when the Bible speaks of the “four corners of the world,” it reminds us of the world as house and altar. The house imagery sees the world as a container for men, while the altar imagery sees the world as a platform for men. Both images are used throughout Scripture. In terms of the world as house, judgment means the collapse of the house, the shaking of its mountain-

pillars, the falling of its ceiling-stars, etc. In terms of the world as altar, judgment means fire falling upon the altar. Positively, the world is a house to be adorned and in which man worships, and also an altar on which man grows and upon which he offers himself and his faith-filled good works to God.

Not only is the Biblical, cosmic world four-cornered in a symbolic sense, so is the Biblical social world. Israelite society under the judges and kings had four *corners* or *cornerstones* at its top. These men were the supreme judge or king, and his three top advisors. This word occurs in Judges 20:2 and 1 Samuel 14:38, where it is translated "chiefs" (cf. also Isaiah 19:13; 28:16; Zephaniah 1:16; 3:6; Zechariah 10:4). Thus David had three mighty men, he being the chief corner (2 Samuel 23; 1 Chronicles 11). Similarly, Jesus had Peter, James, and John, who were the three corner pillars of the Apostolic Church (Galatians 2:9), remembering that Jesus was Himself the fourth and chief cornerstone of the new temple (Ephesians 2:20; 1 Peter 2:6).

This image of the four-cornered world takes its rise from the fact that four rivers flowed out of the Garden of Eden to water the whole world. They doubtless did not actually flow in four opposite directions; indeed, they all seem to have flowed south, as we shall see. Symbolically, however, they carried the Edenic pattern to the four corners of the earth. The task of Adam's descendants would be to follow the four rivers and carry with them the Kingdom pattern, extending it over the whole earth and bringing the world from primordial to eschatological glory.

The four rivers going to the four corners can and should be associated with the four faces of the cherubim (Ezekiel 1:10), the four sides of the camp of Israel (Numbers 2), and the four limbs of the cross.<sup>4</sup> It is a fundamental symbol of the world structure. (See Diagrams 12.2 and 12.3.)

### North and South

Ancient man knew that the world was a sphere, and the Bible affirms, in Job 26:7, that God hung "the earth on nothing."<sup>5</sup> It is a fundamental mistake to assume that ancient or medieval world diagrams with four corners, or riding on the backs of elephants or bulls, were taken by educated people as literal pictures of the world. They were always understood to be symbolic. For in-

Diagram 12.2  
The Four Rivers of the Garden of Eden

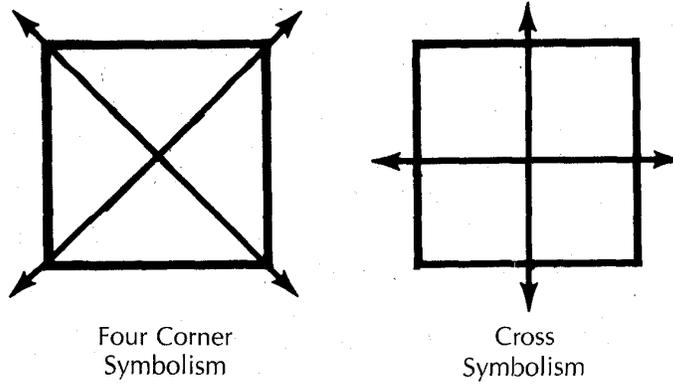
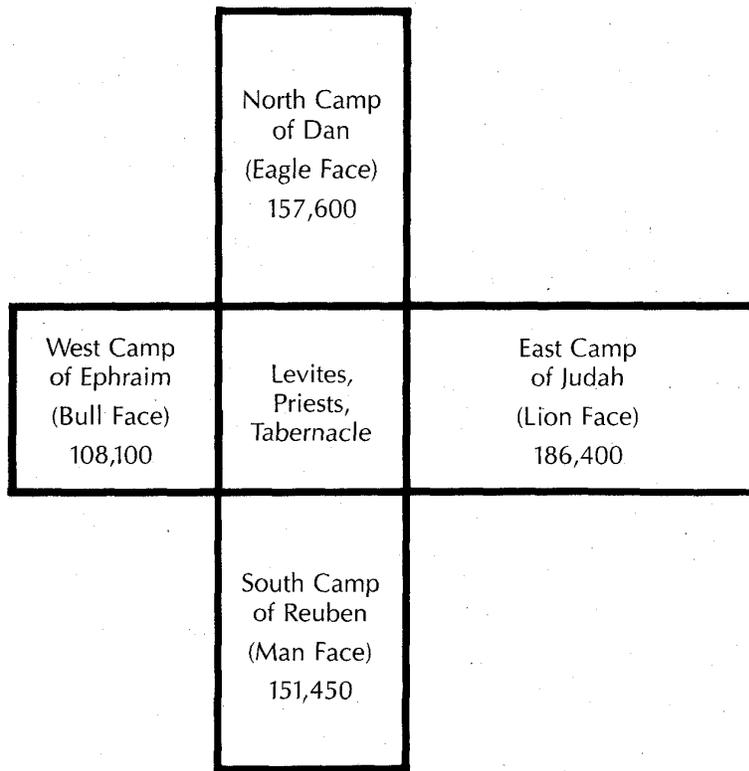


Diagram 12.3  
The Israelite Camp (Numbers 2)



stance, the Biblical world picture says that the earth is founded upon the seas (Psalm 24:2) because the sea is below the earth, as we have seen.

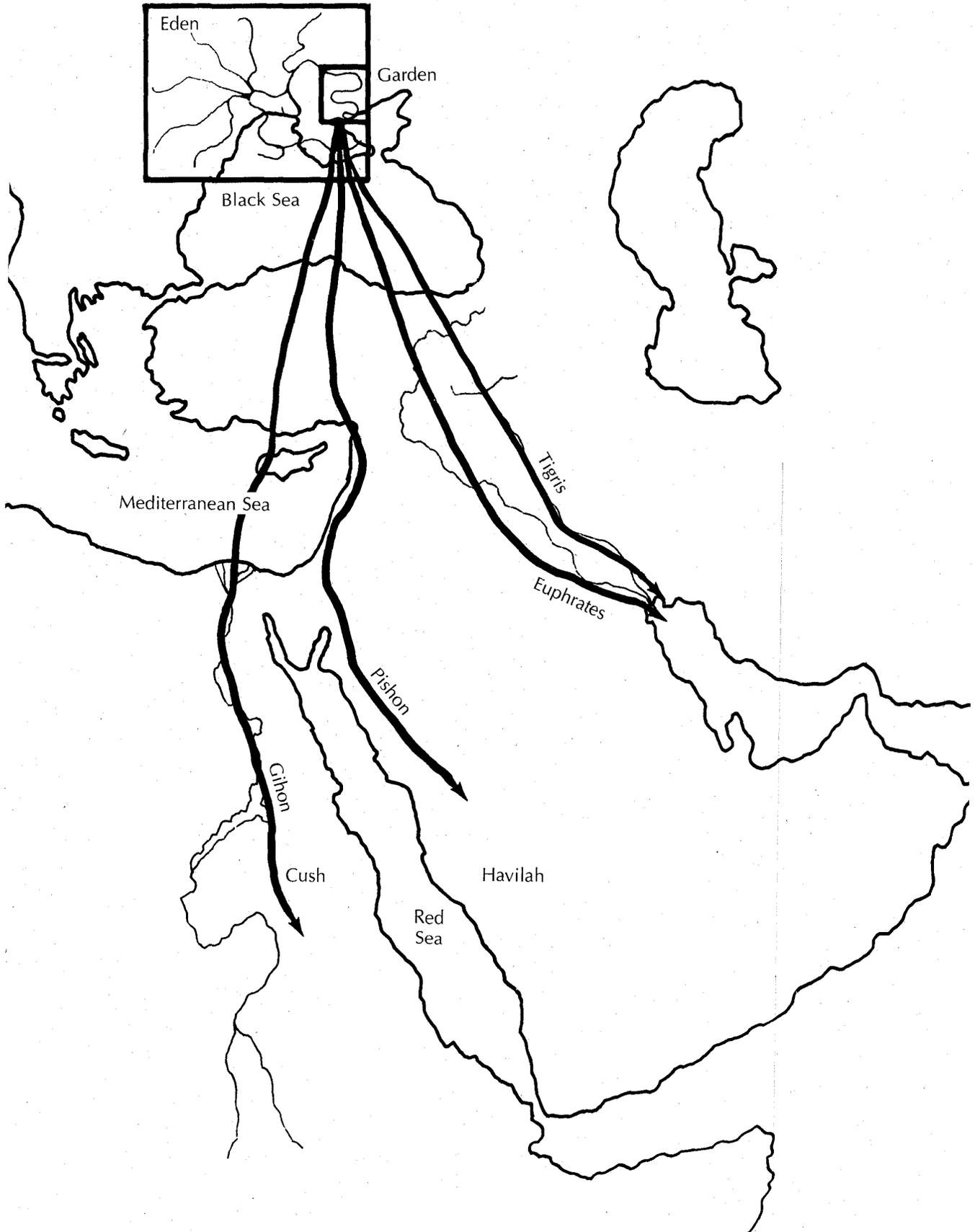
All the same, we are given information in Genesis 2 that helps us ascertain roughly the geographical location of the land and Garden of Eden. Eden was a real place, though it was washed away in the Flood. We are told that the four rivers flowed out of the Garden and that they flowed south. The first river, Pishon, went to the land of Havilah (Arabia); the second, Gihon, to Cush (Ethiopia) and the third and fourth were the Tigris and the Euphrates. These names were probably put in by Moses when he put Genesis in its final shape, but they still tell us the locations to which these rivers initially flowed. The only way one river can break up into four streams and go to these four places is if it rises either in the north or the south. It seems most likely that the Pishon flowed down what is now the Jordan river valley toward Arabia, and the Gihon flowed down what is now the Nile, though in the opposite direction, toward Ethiopia. (Remember, the Flood drastically changed the world.)<sup>6</sup>

This hypothesis is lent credibility by the references to God's Kingdom in the far north. Psalm 48:2 says that Mount Zion is in the far north, but in fact Zion was located in southern Israel. The language must be symbolic, but of what? The throne of God is stated to be in the "north" in Isaiah 14:13, and God is said to come from the "north" in Job 37:22 and Ezekiel 1:4ff.<sup>7</sup> It is easy to trace a line back from the locations of these rivers to a hypothetical point of origin to the north, and that point turns out to be in Armenia. After the Flood, the Ark rested in Armenia, and this is the point from which the new creation spread out (Genesis 8:4). Since rivers flow downhill, Eden was clearly located on a height. This is consistent with the high mountains of the Armenian region, though of course the Flood may have changed the topography. (See Diagram 12.4.)

What emerges from this discussion, in addition to a possible location for the original Eden, is another symbolic picture. To the north is God's throne. In the center is where men live, and to the south is the outlying world.

This symbolic structure is picked up particularly in Zechariah 6. The north, God's throne, was corrupted by Satan

Diagram 12.4  
Possible (Pre-Flood)  
Location of Eden

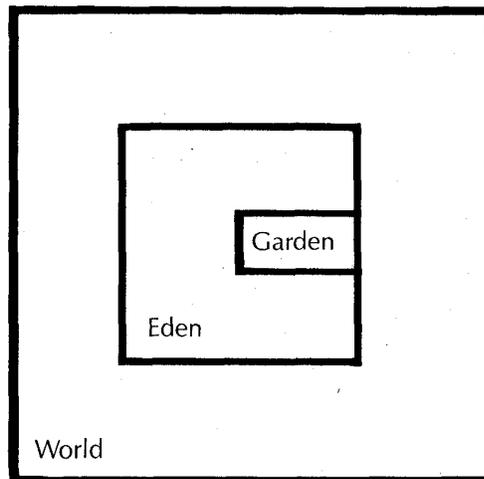


when Adam turned the Garden over to him. The armies of God in Zechariah 6 take judgment and then cleansing blessing to the north, reestablishing it first. Judgment also proceeds to the south, but without cleansing at this point in history.<sup>8</sup>

### The Three Environments

The Bible tells us that God planted a garden in Eden, on the east side of that land (Genesis 2:8). This establishes three environments on the earth: Garden, Eden, World. (See Diagram 12.5.) Men would proceed from the Garden and Home in the north downstream toward the lands of the south. They would be motivated to do so by the fact that there were good minerals in the southern lands, as we are told that in Havilah (Arabia) there were gold, bdellium, and onyx. Similarly, in another symbolic picture, men would follow the four rivers out to the four corners of the earth.

Diagram 12.5  
Three Human Environments



Let us consider the three environments. The land of Eden would be Adam's initial home. It would be the place where he slept, where his children were reared, and so forth. Home is where man returns when his work is done.

The outlying lands, Havilah, Cush, and so forth, would be the place of man's labors. They figure the place where Adam did his work, wrestling joyfully with the world to make it more and more glorious. His sons would move downstream and set up new homes in these lands. Perhaps Cain would dwell with his family in Havilah, and Abel in Cush. There would be trade between the members of humanity, as each land's peculiar treasures were swapped for those of other regions.

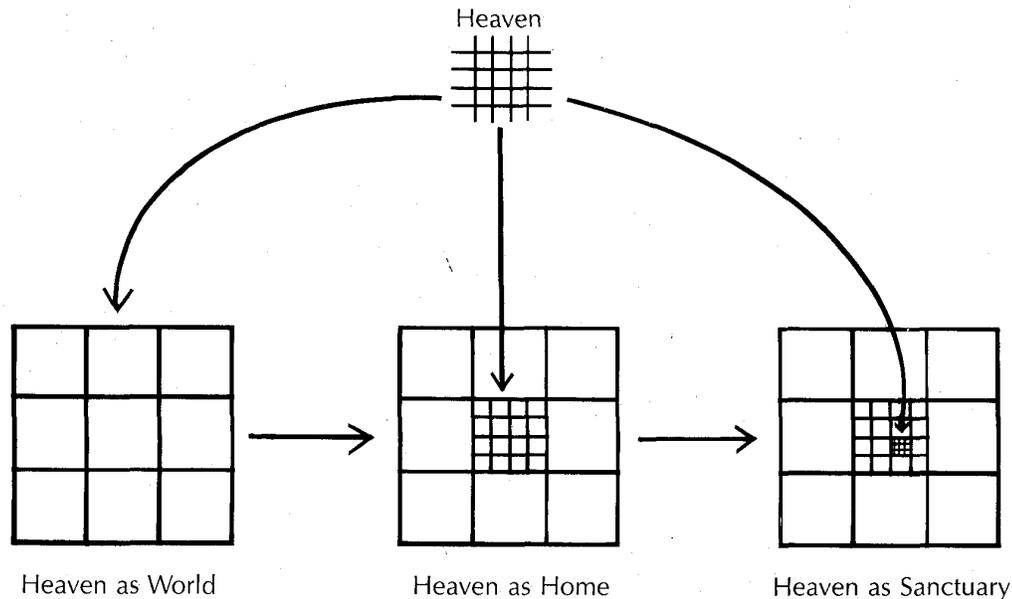
And then there was the Garden. This was the sanctuary, the place where Adam would meet with God at the times of His appointment. Adam was created on the sixth day, and the next day was God's sabbath. Adam was to meet with God, but by the time God arrived, Adam was already in sin and had to be cast out. Nonetheless, the pattern was established. Had Adam not sinned, his sons would have set up Garden-sanctuaries in Havilah, Cush, and the other lands.

These three environments correspond to the three-decker world of Genesis 1, but on a lateral plane. The Garden-sanctuary is the contact-point with heaven. The homeland is to be related to the earth, and thus God's people Israel were given *land*. The outlying lands, reached by *rivers*, are to be associated with the sea, and thus the Gentile nations are pictured as the sea.

Each of these environments was to be patterned after heaven. Heaven is not only the pattern for the sanctuary and worship, it is also the pattern for home and homeland, and also for work in the world. (See Diagram 12.6.) Ultimately, the New Jerusalem is city and sanctuary and world all in one. This shows the "eschatological coalescence of culture and cult."<sup>9</sup> As long as we live in history, however, we can apply the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3 to ourselves: For everything there is a proper time—a time to laugh and a time to weep, a time to worship in the sanctuary, a time to work in the world, and a time to relax at home. Thus, the three environments will continue to be distinct throughout history, and each is to be "heavenized" in a way peculiar to its nature.

Because of his sin, Adam was excluded from the Garden-sanctuary. It would not be until the Mosaic Covenant that men would be readmitted to the Garden, and then there were restrictions on who might enter. Sin did not stop with Adam; however,

Diagram 12.6  
The Sequence of Creation



and Cain for his sin was excluded from the Edenic homeland as well (Genesis 4:16). At the Flood, because of the maturation of humanity's sin, mankind was excluded from the whole world, and a new world was begun.

When God made the world, He made the sea first. Then He drew out the land, and finally He planted the Garden-sanctuary. Just so, after the Flood, we read first of the Table of Nations (Genesis 10). Then we find the call of Abraham and the promise of the land (Genesis 12). With the Mosaic Tabernacle we have the erection of a provisional Garden-sanctuary. Only when the land is finally secured under David do we find the full establishment of a permanent Garden-sanctuary under Solomon: the Temple. Israel sinned, however, and Nebuchadnezzar came to destroy the Temple and Jerusalem (2 Kings 25:1-21). When the people continued in their rebellion they were all deported from the land into exile (2 Kings 25:22-26). Then God rebuilt the world, first converting the pagan nations and restoring them under Daniel (Daniel 4, 6), then returning the people to the

land, and finally rebuilding the Garden-Temple under Haggai and Zechariah, Joshua and Zerubbabel (Haggai 1-2; Ezra 1-5).

Of course, regardless of where they lived symbolically, men always had access to God in heaven. Thus Noah worshipped God under the open sky, as did converted Gentiles of all ages. Abraham worshipped God in the land, as did all devout Jews. After Moses, the Israelites worshipped God in the courtyard of the sanctuary, the garden. Only the Aaronic priests, however, were permitted to worship God in the Tabernacle and Temple. All of this shows that the fullness of access to God was restricted until the coming of the Messiah.

In the New Covenant, men have immediate and full access to God in heaven. There are no longer any symbolic restrictions (Hebrews 7-10). Nonetheless, in the way of cultural movement, we find that when Christians first penetrate a pagan culture, they have to meet in homes and even catacombs. When the culture has been permeated by Christian influence, and becomes a Christian homeland, then the great and beautiful Garden-Churches (cathedrals) can be built. So it was with Rome. So it was with Europe. So it must be in our day.

Our cathedrals have been defiled, and our homes are under assault as officials of the secular humanist government seek to close down Christian schools and invade Christian homes. Thus, ours is not a day of cathedral-building, but a day of cultural permeation. Faithfulness must come first, and only then will glory come.

### **High Ground**

Rivers flow downhill, which means that the Garden out of which they flowed was on high ground. Not the highest, however, because the river arose in the homeland of Eden, which means that the Garden was lower than other parts of Eden. This is, perhaps, not what we should expect; but it is reiterated in Psalm 125:2, "as the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the Lord surrounds His people," which draws on the fact that the mountains surrounding Zion were actually taller than she. Indeed, Mount Moriah, where the Temple was built, was lower than Zion proper, where the city of Jerusalem was built. In fact, as the waters in the Garden of Eden flowed from the Land of Eden,

so the water used on Moriah flowed from springs on Zion.<sup>10</sup> Yet we are told that someday "the mountain of the Lord's house will be established as the chief of the mountains and will be raised above the hills" (Isaiah 2:2). What does this mean?

First, the true Mountain of God is in heaven, not on earth, and thus not approachable by man. It is always high, as the heavens are high above the earth.

Second, man's earthly sanctuary, while it starts high, is to grow and develop in glory during history. During the infancy of humanity, the sanctuary is protected with the swaddling clothes of the mountains roundabout (compare Galatians 4:1-7). Once maturity has been attained, then the holy mountain stands forth as the greatest of the mountains.

A third aspect of this prophecy is seen in that Jesus left Zion and Moriah behind, and transferred His Kingdom to the Mount of Olives, which was the highest mountain in the area.<sup>11</sup> Spiritually, though, the mountain of His Kingdom is a ladder to heaven, whose top breaks through the firmament to the Throne of God (Revelation 21:10; 22:1).

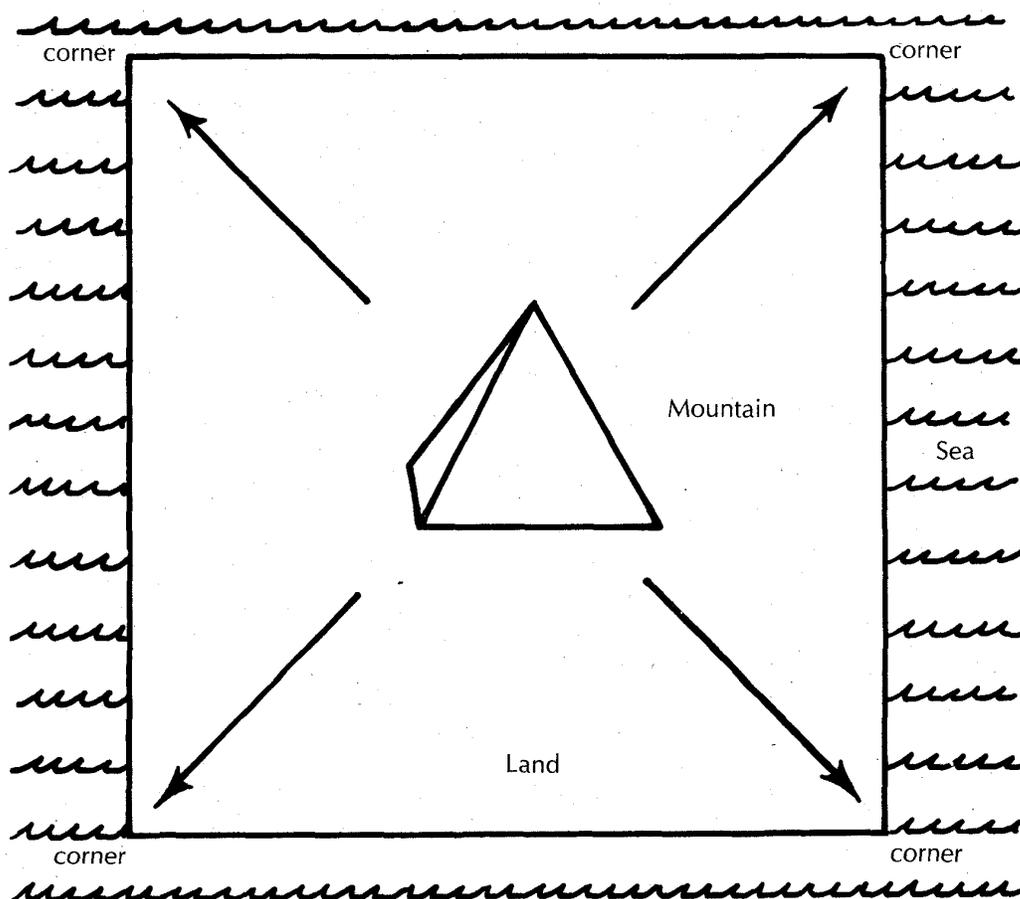
Mountain symbolism is found in all world religions. The Hindus had Mount Meru; the Japanese, Fujiyama; and the Greeks, Olympus.<sup>12</sup> It is also found throughout Scripture. Thus, Abraham offered Isaac on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22:2); Moses received the law on Mount Sinai (Exodus 19-24); Elijah defeated Baal on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and received his commission renewed on Mount Sinai (1 Kings 19); Jesus preached His definitive sermon on a mount (Matthew 5), was transfigured on a mount (2 Peter 1:16-18), and gave his final, great commission on a mountain (Matthew 28:18-20).

Beyond this, we find that Christians "are the light of the world; a city set on a hill cannot be hid," a reference to Jerusalem on Mount Zion, and also a symbol of the righteous person (Matthew 5:14). Believers are God's people-mountain, and someday "the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it" (Isaiah 2:2). God's holy mountain grows until it fills the whole world (Daniel 2:34-35). This can be so because the mountain symbolizes not only the individual human person but also the Church:

You have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels in festal array, and to the church of the Firstborn who are enrolled in heaven . . . (Hebrews 12:22-23a).<sup>13</sup>

The idea of a holy mountain is a place where men can meet God, because the top of a mountain is nearest to heaven. This is why Israel sacrificed on “high places.” The image, symbolically, is that of a pyramid, for a pyramid is but a stylized mountain. The four sides, or the four edges, of the pyramid correspond to the four rivers that flow out, taking God’s kingdom influences to all the earth. (See Diagram 12.7.) Man’s position at the top of the mountain enables him to see the heavenly pattern, and then brings it down to the earth below, as did Moses.

Diagram 12.7  
Eden in the World



Thus, mountains and pyramids are ladders to heaven. (See Diagram 7.1, p. 89.) At the Tower of Babel, sinful man tried to build such a pyramid-ladder from the ground up, but God forbade it. The ground had been defiled by Adam's sin, since Adam was made of earth and his sin corrupted the earth. Thus, if there were to be a new ladder to heaven it would have to proceed from above to below. Jacob saw such a ladder in prophetic vision (Genesis 28:12). In fulfillment, the New Jerusalem came from heaven to earth, not vice versa, on the Day of Pentecost.

The New Jerusalem is a gem-studded pyramid overlaid on a mountain (Revelation 21:2, 10ff.). Unlike the holy mountains of the Old Covenant, the New Jerusalem is definitely (symbolically) on the highest of all mountains, because the apex of the pyramid reaches into heaven itself and the throne of God (Revelation 22:1); and it is from here that the restored rivers flow to bring life to the world.

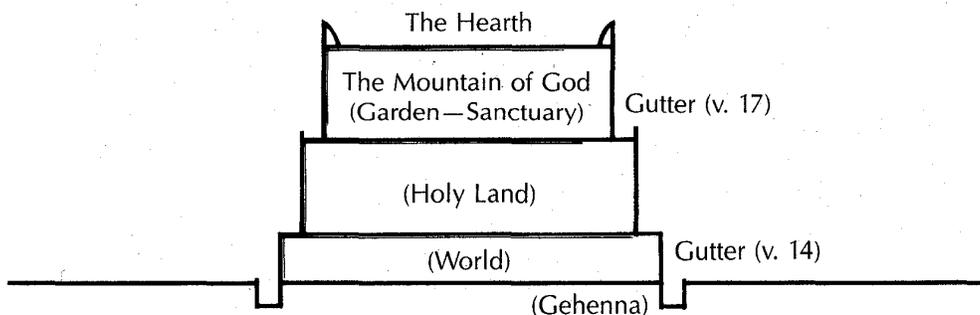
Whence came these gems and gold for Jerusalem? From the outlying lands. Neither Eden nor Israel, it seems, were rich in precious stones. The Jews got the raw materials for the Tabernacle and the gems for the High Priest's ephod from Egyptian spoil (Exodus 35) and from their travels in Havilah (Arabia). Solomon's Temple was adorned with gold and gems from other lands (2 Samuel 8:11; 1 Kings 7:51; 9:28; 10:11). The message is that God's house cannot be fully built until all nations are converted and cooperate in its spiritual development. As the rivers of spiritual blessing go out from Jerusalem (the Church), so the nations return their tithes for her adornment.

It remains to note that altars were also holy mountains, ladders to heaven. We have just mentioned the contrast between Jacob's ladder and the Tower of Babel. More broadly speaking, there is a contrast between the Tower of Babel and the altars of worship set up by Abraham. Abraham's altars were probably just pillars made up of stone and earth, but what they symbolized is set out for us in an important vision in Ezekiel 43.

Ezekiel describes an altar in the form of a stepped pyramid. The top section is called "the Mountain of God," and the platform on top for the fire is called the "hearth." A literal translation of Ezekiel 43:15 is: "And the Mountain of God: four cubits (high); and from the hearth four horns extend upwards."<sup>14</sup>

While the altar in the Tabernacle did not have this shape, the statement in Ezekiel clearly expresses the *theology* of the altar (see Diagram 12.8). When God appeared on Mount Sinai, the top was covered with fire and smoke (Exodus 19:18). We can hardly fail to see the visual association of this with the burning sacrifices on the bronze altar, and the incense on the golden altar. Moreover, altars for sacrifice were generally built on the tops of mountains before the Tabernacle was set up (cf. Genesis 22:9), and during the interregnum between the dissolution of the Tabernacle and the building of the Temple (cf. 1 Samuel 9:12). Thus, the association of altar with holy mountain is fairly pervasive.

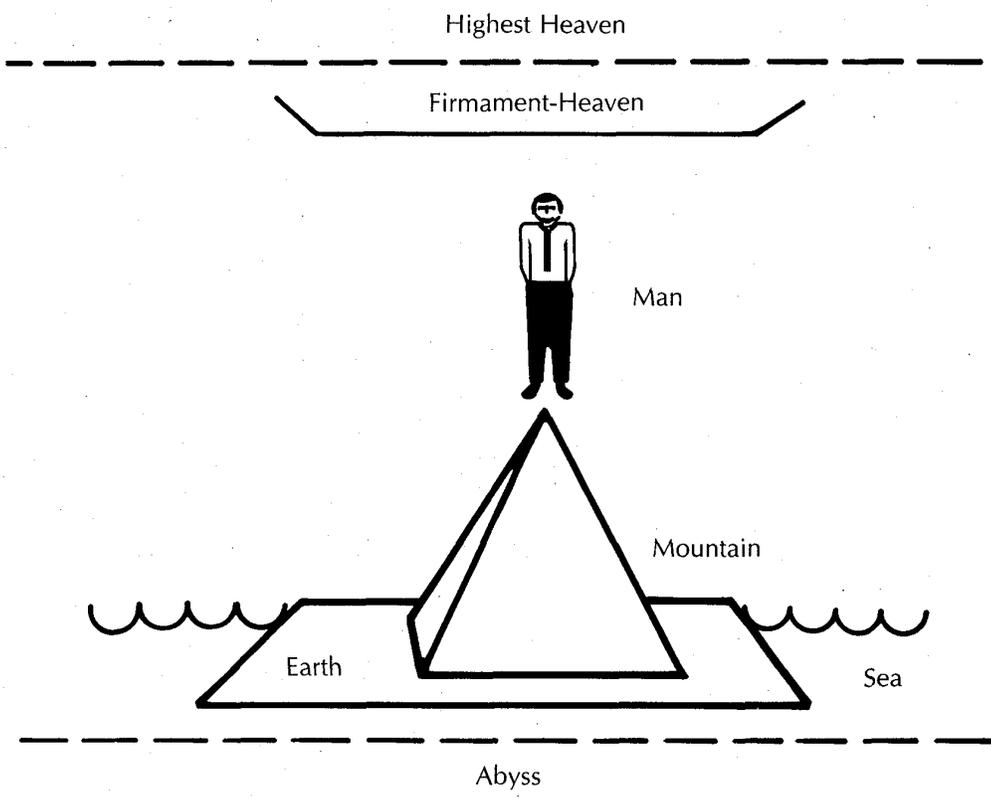
Diagram 12.8  
The Altar of Ezekiel 43:13-17



### Conclusion

First, with all this information before us we can construct a symbolic picture of the original world (see Diagram 12.9). Above the earth was the firmament-heaven, a picture of the highest heaven. Below the earth was the sea, a picture of the Abyss. Rising out of the center of the earth was the Holy Mountain, from which flowed four rivers to carry Spiritual influences to the four corners of the earth. Stationed at the top of the pyramid was man, God's agent for world transformation. From this vantage point, man could look up and see the heavenly blueprint, and then come down the mountain to work with the earth, making it like heaven.

Diagram 12.9  
The World in Cross Section

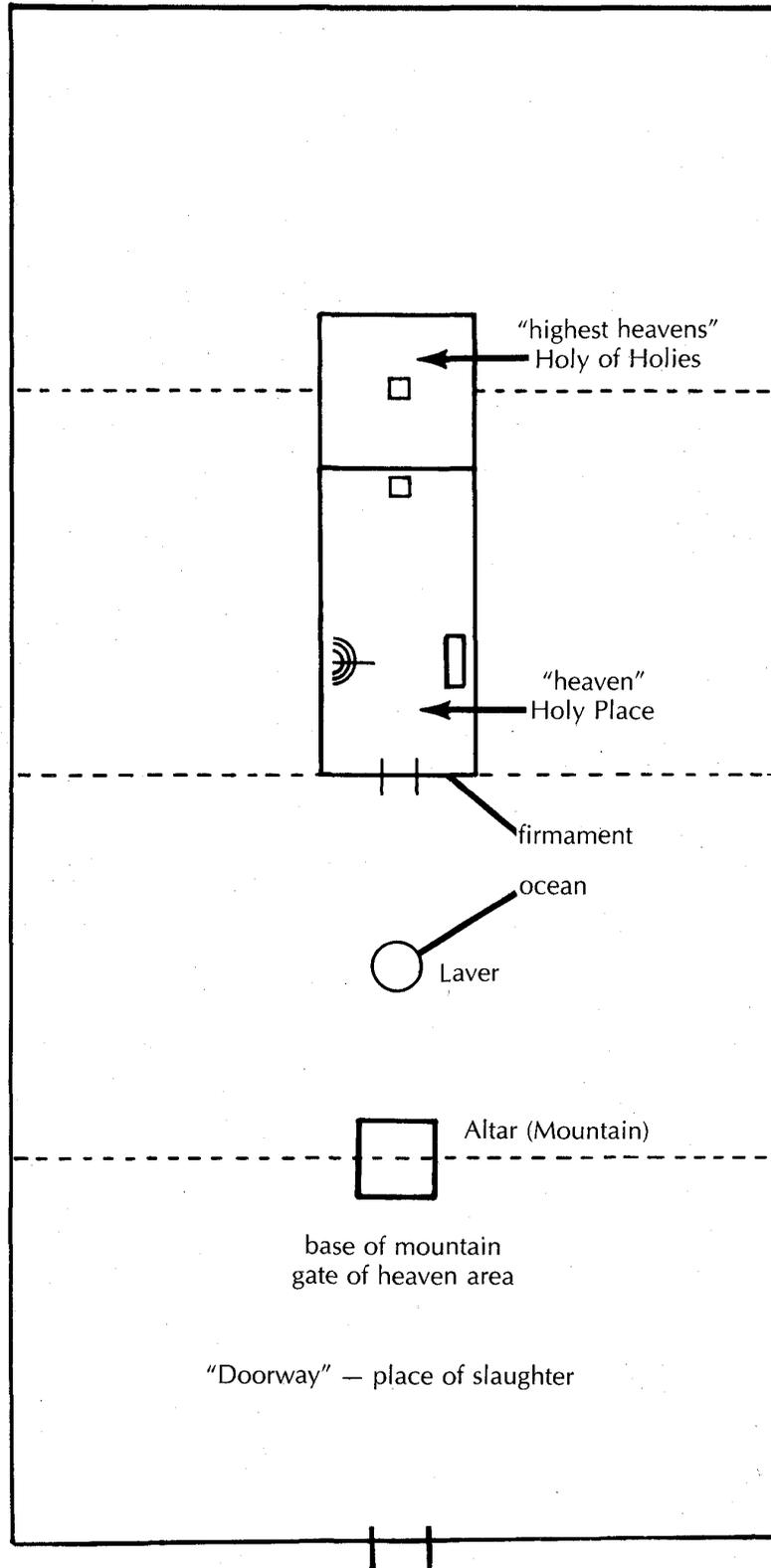


Second, we are now to the point of summarizing the concept of a ladder to heaven. Any ladder to heaven is of necessity a model of heaven and earth, with heaven at the top, and the earthly sanctuary, the gate of heaven, lower down or at the bottom. We can also say that any heaven and earth model is also a ladder to heaven. For instance, the Tabernacle of Moses: The Israelite citizen was admitted to the forecourt or gateway of the Tabernacle courtyard, where he offered sacrifice. He was not allowed to ascend the Holy Mountain of the Bronze Altar, and thus he was not to go farther back into the courtyard than the Altar. The Altar as Holy Mountain ascended up to the firmament. The Laver of Cleansing thus signified the heavenly sea of Genesis 1:7 (and *not*, N.B., the cosmic or Gentile sea of the waters below). The Holy Place had to do with the visible or firmament-heaven, God's outer court, while the Most Holy had to do with the Highest Heaven, the very Throne of God (see Diagram 12.10). The Bible speaks of both the highest heaven and the firmament-heaven as tents or tabernacles of God (Job 36:29; Psalm 18:11; 19:4; 104:2; Isaiah 40:22). We shall, of course, look at the Tabernacle in more detail in Chapter 15; for now we only wish to see it and the Temple as models of heaven and earth, and thus as ladders to heaven.

Ladders to heaven and models of heaven and earth speak of two related things. It is relatively easy for us to see that they speak of environments. Heaven is an environment, and so is the earth. The Tabernacle and Temple, with their courtyards, were environments—physical environments. A special tree, an altar, a monument pillar, a holy mountain—these are physical environments.

Each of these, however, pictures a social or human environment. We have seen that the heavenly host has to do very often with rulers or with saints. In terms of the political arrangement of a nation, the heavens are the rulers and the earth is the ruled (Isaiah 13:13; 34:4). In terms of the spiritual polity of the world, God's people are positioned in the heavens (Philippians 3:20; Ephesians 1:20; 2:6; Hebrews 12:22-23).<sup>15</sup> We have seen that trees speak of people, and that an environment of trees, such as the Temple and Tabernacle, speaks of a body politic. We have seen that the Temple and Tabernacle were symbols both of the righteous individual, and thus of Jesus Christ, the True Ladder

Diagram 12.10  
The Mosaic Tabernacle



to Heaven, and also of the Church as a body politic. The same thing is true of mountains, which symbolize nations and people (Isaiah 41:14-16; Jeremiah 51:25, 42; Zechariah 4:7; Matthew 21:21-22).<sup>16</sup> God's people are His Mountain, a Mountain that grows and fills the earth (Daniel 2:35).

This imagery is absolutely fundamental to Biblical revelation. We have to consider each passage in context to see what it is saying, of course; but we need to be alert to symbolism and imagery. The Bible uses these images to express its worldview, according to each stage of history. To an examination of these stages of history we must now turn our attention, beginning with the world of Noah.