

RESURRECTING THE HOUSE¹

by Mark D. Vander Hart

1. Introduction

THE FIRST THING I want to say is: I am a Kuyperian, the son of a Kuyperian. My father, a farmer and a factory worker, would talk about the world-and-life view that we Reformed people have. But I didn't understand what all of that meant. Yet, when walking through the pastures or looking at our cornfields, I was impressed with the fact that, somehow and in some way, this belongs to God and is to be used for his glory, that this world is Yahweh's, and everything must serve his glory. I am a Kuyperian, the son of a Kuyperian.

Secondly, I am firmly convinced that the Kingdom of God has come, at least in its initial stages, and there is more coming. The final story has not yet been written. I think of the beginning of Jesus' ministry, especially of what we read in Mark 1:14,15, "After John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, proclaiming (κηρύσσειν) the gospel of God, and saying, 'The time (καιρός) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.'" Here we find two indicatives, the time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand, and two imperatives, repent and believe in the gospel.

Just as an aside, the parsing exercises done in your seminary studies were not without purpose, nor were they simply for knowing good grammar. They were to equip you to read the text closely, and to see, for example, the indicatives—that which is fact—and the imperatives—that which is commanded. The indicative tells us what has been established, that is, what has happened and what God has promised will happen. Over against this is what God calls us to do in terms of imperatives. Those parsing exercises were not without some long term purpose, and I hope you still benefit from that kind of close attention to texts.

Thirdly, when I was in seminary, one of my professors pointed out that the danger in Lutheranism is a tendency towards pietism. But the danger among the Reformed is a leaning towards moralism. That's very true. I endorse the recognition of that kind of danger on the left and on the right for both of these Christian traditions. We Reformed are often tempted to be too chummy with the law, too

1. This article is an extension and adaptation of an address that was given to the Alumni Conference at Mid-America Reformed Seminary, April 10, 2014.

confident with it, and when that happens Pharisaism is not far away. Sadly, this has been the derailment of many Christian and Reformed churches.

In discussions today, we often hear about the distinction between the law and the gospel. Broadly speaking, the law is that which God demands of us in terms of his holiness, while the gospel is that which God freely provides for us through Jesus Christ alone. Therefore, the gospel (εὐαγγέλιον) is always good news. It is the proclamation that a new king has been born. It is the proclamation of a great victory by that king. The good news is the arrival of Jesus Christ in history. And when he finished his work on earth in terms of the cross and the resurrection, that's good news. We are to take the announcement of that to the nations. So, yes, I believe that the law and the gospel must be sharply distinguished, but never separated. Calvin reminds us that the law never comes to us as *nuda lex*, that is, as naked or bare law, for it always comes to us dressed in the garments of the covenant of grace.

I also affirm freely and without apology, the so-called three uses of the law. First, the law is a perfect measurement of God's righteous requirements in which we are able to see how far we have fallen short of his glory. In this way, the law drives us to Christ. Second, I believe that the law, as a righteous standard, addresses all of life. Therefore, it points out the principles that can be discerned or distilled through careful reflection for defining public and civic ordering. Thirdly, since the law defines how we should live a holy life before a holy God, it is the positive standard that the joyful, thankful Christian follows. It is not followed as a burden, but as the pattern of life that God intended.

I also understand, firmly and without apology, justification to be that act of God in which he takes our guilt, places it on Christ and freely credits to us, or reckons to us, his perfect righteousness. So in terms of our legal standing before God, we cannot be more righteous than we already are in Christ. If his righteousness is perfect, if it is reckoned as being ours, we cannot become more righteous than that. Therefore, it is the hinge upon which the whole gospel swings, namely, our legal standing before God as that is spelled out in justification.

But I also affirm that another benefit of the gospel is sanctification. For the righteousness, the legal standing we have in Christ, is not the whole story, it is not the only thing. The work of the Holy Spirit is to take the things of Christ and experientially apply them to us—so that, for example, when we read in 1 John 1:9 (“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins”) we find a new, legal standing: forgiven. But the verse continues, “And to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” This reveals a cleansing that is experienced by the person who comes to Christ and confesses his or her sins.

2. House as Biblical Motif

This address will focus on the so-called “metanarrative” of the Bible, specifically in terms of *resurrecting the house*. In John 2:19 Jesus said, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” His words were taken in their first hearing to mean the Herodian temple that stood in Jerusalem, a renovated structure that could be called the third temple, succeeding the second temple that had dated from the time of the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, from the time of the leaders Zerubbabel the governor and Joshua the high priest, at the end of the sixth century. Only later on would the disciples of Jesus realize that he was referring to his own body as a “temple.”

The earlier context in John is that of Jesus’ cleansing the Jerusalem temple, which was formally God’s house. “The Jews” (i.e., the leadership of the Jewish community)² asked a sign (σημεῖον) from him, implying that he was not merely a trouble-maker, but rather he was acting in some capacity as a prophet. The ultimate sign will be the physical resurrection of Jesus’ body from the dead, although Jesus masks that fact by using the words of temple destruction, followed by the resurrection of the same.

Furthermore, in John 2:17, the words of Psalm 69:9 come to mind in connection with this incident. Jesus would embody a perfect zeal and passion for this house, the temple, because of the messianic role he is fulfilling on behalf of the heavenly Father, whose house this temple was (cf. Luke 2:46). The question arises for the reader: does God have two houses, the one being the Jerusalem structure that has been 46 years in renovation, *and* the person (body) of Jesus Christ?

2.1. Some biblical terms

Several Greek terms can be used to indicate temple or shrine. In John 2:14, 15 the term ἱερόν is used, but Jesus uses the word ναός in verse 19 (cf. 2:20, 21). F.F. Bruce says that this latter term referred to “the sanctuary or the holy house proper (comprising the vestibule, the holy place and the holy of holies).” God dwelt in the ναός, not the ἱερόν as a whole.³ D. A. Carson, however, says that the distinction between ναός and ἱερόν in the Greek language of that time is not well-preserved.⁴ In any case, Jesus indicates that his very body now, in some not yet disclosed sense, was a place where the living God now dwelt among his people. Says Ridderbos, “The most striking feature in the whole pronouncement is of course that in speaking of

2. Cf. Herman Ridderbos, *The Gospel of John: a Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 117.

3. F.F. Bruce, *The Gospel of John: Introduction, Exposition, and Notes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 76.

4. D.A. Carson, *The Gospel according to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 181.

language of *Father* for God and *children* for believers. For example, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God (τέκνα θεοῦ); and so we are” (1 John 3:1). John continues in verse 2, νῦν τέκνα θεοῦ ἐσμεν. Not only does Paul use the eschatological νῦν, so does John. “Now we are the children of God, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is” (1 John 3:2).

Of the two terms πατριά and οἶκος, οἶκος is the more common word used. In the Græco-Roman world of Paul’s day, the οἶκος was the family as a household. Paul mentions such households in several of his epistles (Rom. 16:10-11; 1 Cor. 1:11, 16; 16:15; 2 Tim. 1:16; 4:19). Early church congregations met in the homes of such households (Rom. 16:5; 1 Cor. 16:9), proving once again that the church is God’s family, not a building as such.

The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* does much better when it comes to drawing attention to home and homecoming.⁷ It gives an entry to the words *home*, *house*, as well as an entry to *homecoming*, *stories of*. This is remarkable as well as greatly appreciated, for the imagery of home and returning home evoke powerful responses in so many people in many cultures, spanning many ages of human history.

2.2. At home: a biblical motif?

I have reflected on this for several years now, how such a theme or redemptive-historical motif can be traced throughout the whole of the Bible’s story, beginning in Genesis and moving right along until the full consummation in the new creation as sketched for us in Revelation. What images does *house* or *home* evoke? It is much more than an address. It is more than space. Walter Brueggemann, in his book *The Land*, talks about the distinction of space and place. Home is *place*, not merely *space*. It is a place, a location where relationships are forged, often through arguments and disagreements. Here is where meals are shared as well as discussions, gift-giving, laughter and tears. A home is where one can (usually) kick back and relax. You experience ease, being settled. There are rules for the household, where parents watch out for the growth, nurture and safety of children. One wants to avoid the picture that was true of Israel as a household as depicted in the book of Judges: “In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judg. 21:25). In that home there were no rules and the result was chaos. There are to be rules for the household where parents watch for their children to mature. Here is

7. *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. by Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 393-396.

where the reality of relationship that covenant is, should blossom. Sadly, the fact that this description does not often fit so many homes, should give us great pause.

It is often said that the foundation of civilization is the family because it provides the building blocks for society. That is why so many of the commandments in Scripture are family-oriented. “Honor your father and your mother” and “You shall not kill.” And, of course, you shall love your neighbor. Your closest neighbors are your parents, children, husband and wife. “You shall not commit adultery” is another commandment that has a home’s wellbeing in mind. Here God seeks to preserve the sanctity of the marriage bed because a solid marriage lies behind the basis of a well-ordered home. “You shall not steal.” That is to say, the family’s heritage in terms of property may not be taken by those to whom it does not belong. “You shall not covet what belongs to your neighbor.” Instead, you are to remain content with the heritage or estate the Lord has given to you and blessed you with. So many of the commandments are aimed at preserving the wellbeing of the family.

We might also speak of being *homesick*. Consider the student who goes off to college for the first time, or the young adult who moves to a new job in a distant city, or who enlists in the armed services for the first time. One experiences in those initial days and weeks the feelings of being *dis-placed*, *dis-eased*. If home is place and ease, then being away from home is *dis-placement*, being *dis-eased*, *dis-oriented*, being almost lost. The better memories, the smells, the sounds, the laughter, the togetherness of home and family come back to kick one in the pit of the stomach. You feel unsettled. The structured place of the family must be gradually inscribed upon the tablets of your heart as you grow older. In this way, the norms that you encountered growing up become norms that you know, affirm and can pass on to others. It’s called “growing up.” It’s called “becoming mature.”

2.3. Some biblical families: a sordid record

However, even families in the Bible clearly do not fit the ideal or the norm. In the very first generation of people born after the sinful rebellion of our first parents, there was fratricide. We should be thoroughly shocked by the cold-blooded murder that Cain commits against his righteous brother Abel. When God asks Cain where his brother is, the answer Cain gives to God is chilling: “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” Biologically, it takes generations for the lifespan of humankind to gradually shorten, but spiritually, when we sinned, we died. Dead is dead! When Adam sinned, he died. And he produced children who are spiritually dead. Not dying, but dead. Spiritual death was instant, even if physical death might be many years away.

This would not be at all the end of sinful disruptions in families, families that we call the church. In the church of Isaac, Esau desires to kill Jacob once father Isaac passes away. This is in the church. In the church of Jacob, Joseph is hated more and more by his half-brothers (cf. Gen. 37) until they reach the moment when they are prepared to kill him. But when the chance of making money occurs, they go for the money, getting rid of him in the process. For Joseph's brothers it was a win-win. He's gone—as they wanted—and they got cash.

Thus the *ideal* of family, the home, and the *reality* of family, the home, do not perfectly meet, even in the church of the old covenant. Yet the picture of family and the home is a powerful image that takes its place in Scripture to depict what God intends for his covenant people, the family of faith that he redeems and leads throughout Scripture. Salvation can be portrayed under a number of different pictures. For one, salvation is redemption: we are bought or purchased back by the precious blood of Jesus Christ, so that we are no longer our own. Second, salvation is atonement, expiation, and propitiation, in which our guilt is removed by the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross, and the wrath of God is turned away. Third, salvation is reconciliation, in which the Son of God so transforms our relationship with God the Father that we become friends of God. I've always been taken aback by Jesus' statement in John 15, where he says to his disciples, "You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you" (John 15:14-15). In other words, the relationship is upgraded by Jesus Christ. Now Paul, in humility, it seems to me, would refer to himself as a servant, a δούλος, a bondsman to Christ. Yet Christ says, "I don't call you that any more. I call you friends."

But I want to press salvation under another picture, namely, that of *homecoming*. To a human race that has wandered away from God, to a people that are lost, truly and profoundly lost, God says in his redeeming grace, "Let's go home!"

2.4. Eden, our first home

It is obvious that the Garden of Eden served as both a home for our first parents as well as their work-station. Think of this: Adam and Eve, in having children, would constitute not only the first family in history, they would also have been the first church, the first bank, the first school, the first business establishment, and all the other social institutions that we experience today. That first family constituted all of these. Now, in time and history, there occurs this process of differentiation, specification, and specialization in which those various spheres of society would develop and have their own

place of responsibility before God. In this connection, I am reminded of Abraham Kuyper's doctrine of "sphere sovereignty." I would prefer to express Kuyper's view with the language of "sphere *responsibility*." The various locations of authority in society are responsible to Christ the King for proper carrying out of their tasks in that area.

The dominion mandate of Genesis 1:26-28, coupled with the development-defense mandate of Genesis 2:15, is given to a man and woman who live in the most perfect home, the Garden of Eden. The man is placed there—at least that is the usual translation of the verb נָח in the hiphil. The Hebrew verb in Genesis 2:15 is often translated as put or placed.⁸ But that is rather colorless, bland, lacking spice. I prefer translating the verb there with the expression, "settled security." The verbal root נָח lies behind the noun מְנוּחָה , the 'rest' that was to be the inheritance of Israel in the Promised Land. But notice, gaining Canaan is not sabbath-rest, but it is that "settled security" that would allow Israel, God's family, bride, vine, etc., to carry out their callings as a holy people, a kingdom of priests. The terms מְנוּחָה and מְנוּחָה are used in the book of Ruth. In chapter one, Naomi urges her daughters-in-law to go back home, to the home of their mother, where they might experience מְנוּחָה (Ruth 1:9). This is not rest in the sense of retirement on the porch or relocation in some southern climate, but a place of settled security, i.e., marriage. It is just like the modern idiom we use in North America: "He was a single guy for so many years, but now he has settled down," meaning, he got married. It indicates the activities that belong to home and hearth (see Ruth 1:9; 3:1). And that's what God holds before his people. He would bring them to מְנוּחָה , taking his family, his vine, to the place that he promised on oath, where they would carry out their callings as God's holy people, a kingdom of priests.

2.5. A series of homes

Genesis 2:15ff. anticipates the several "homes" that God's people would have in redemptive-history:

Garden of Eden (1st home) →
 Promised land (OT home) →
 New creation (future home)

Let's explore the relationship and parallels between these several homes, reflecting how the LORD God moves his people to the house that he provides, but then he also spells out the rules of the house so that his bride, or (to switch the imagery) his children, might live with him and enjoy covenant fellowship.

8. A related passage is Genesis 2:8, where the verb is נָחַם , which means he put, placed, or set.

Think of the language of Genesis: הִקְנִיחָהּ or the verbal form of that. He settled the man in the garden. You also read that God tells the man to עֲבַד his world, that is, to serve, work, till it, develop it. He also used the verb שָׁמַר, which means to guard, keep, watch. That covers a wide range of areas. He is to watch out for snakes who suggest disobedience and any kind of enemy that might seek to come in. He is to be careful and observant of that which is under his charge. God commands this as the verbal root צוּה (in the piel) is used for the first time in the Bible here.

But you take all of those verbal clues and you come to the description of what is held before the people of God in the Promised Land. There in the Promised Land they are to carry out their עֲבוּדָה, their service, their work, their liturgy, their calling. You read the Torah, and God's people are told to שָׁמַר the Lord's commandments, that is, to keep, guard, watch, observe them. They are to observe the מִצְוֹת, the commandments of God. The verbal links are all there.

With respect to the Promised Land of Canaan, the home of the old covenant community of faith, Psalm 95:11 says that Israel will not enter God's מְנוּחָה. Now, we translate that as "rest." But again, it is that settled security that God held out before his people. That's why Deuteronomy 30:11-20 challenges Israel to choose life. And Psalm 95 warns us to listen and not to harden our hearts.

Israel was not yet in the full-blown eschatological kingdom of Sabbath rest. The LORD brought Israel into a place where life was to be lived *coram Deo*, always before the face of God. A full week of life consisted of service in the areas of the *culture* while activity in the holy shrine, God's house, was a service appropriate to the *cult*. The Mosaic covenant defined a full seven days of the week as labor or work done for the glory of God. Life was service (עֲבָדָה) to God; the covenant community is frequently called upon to *keep* (שָׁמַר) the Lord's commandments (מִצְוֹת) in all the spheres of life before God. In the description of living that we have in the Mosaic covenant, there is a repetition of roots that have their redemptive-historical first hearing already in the Garden of Eden setting: נוּחַ עֲבַד שָׁמַר צוּה.

The ultimate home for the elect children of God is the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth. All of what came before then anticipates the great rest we have in the book of Revelation. In this fully developed house, God's people enter a full Sabbath rest (cf. Heb. 3:7-4:11). The liturgy of Temple worship is conducted no longer by priests and Levitical work-teams and choirs, but rather full-throated praise and worship issues forth from the whole assembly in the very presence of the Lamb of God (see Rev. 4 and 5). The stipulations that once were encoded upon stones and scrolls, are now inscribed upon the tablets of human hearts, such that the knowledge of God and proper response and obedience are the very nature of those who occupy the sacred space of the new creation. In other words, God has fully brought his elect children home. God's

goodness and mercy conduct the wandering sheep of the covenant until they reach the safety of God's house, and there they may live forever (cf. Ps. 23:6). Death will be fully and forever banished to the lake of fire.

2.6. Abraham, father of believers

In Genesis 17, when God gives to Abraham, who is already in covenant with him, the commandment of circumcision, it is said in four places (17:12, 13, 23, 27) that not only must his sons be circumcised but the servants who are in his house, whom he had purchased from elsewhere, are to be circumcised as well. In other words, if there are people of other nations living among you, they too are in covenant with the Lord, so that the distinction between a physical race and a spiritual race is already erased by Genesis 17. The church was a household, a family that embraced from the very first days, people who were bought elsewhere. The servants also received circumcision as a mark of the covenant. Thus, the biologically natural sons and the foreign servants were religiously equal. In Genesis 17 there was neither Jew nor Gentile, there was neither slave nor free; they all belonged to the family of God.

2.7. Israel, a house

Furthermore, Israel is called a house many times (check your concordances). For instance, Exodus 16:31, "The house of Israel called its name manna." The people of Israel are constituted a house. And again, let the term bring up all the proper imagery that home/house should evoke among us.

Or, consider how Ezekiel later on in the exilic era repeatedly refers to the "house of Israel," or how God calls Israel a "rebellious house." Yet this rebellious house in the age to come will receive the Spirit, they will have spiritual surgery performed on them so that their heart of stone is removed and a heart of flesh is given, and God will write his law upon their hearts; and they will be sprinkled with clean water and they will be clean (Ezek. 36:24ff).

2.8. Tabernacle and Temple

2.8.1. In the wilderness

In the Sinai wilderness a portable home was constructed, and the Shekinah entered to take his place as a home with God's people. How dramatic is that! If you read the account of this in Exodus 40:34-35, the entrance of the Shekinah into his proper dwelling was so dramatic that Moses had to get out of the way, for here comes YHWH! In other words, it's Pentecost in the wilderness! It is the appearance

of an enormous tongue of fire, with the noise of cherubimic wings, as would be echoed later in Acts 2. It is pre-Acts 2 in the Sinai. This tent-home of YHWH was an oasis of beauty in the harsh environment of the desert wilderness. There's this little oasis of beauty and also of sweet smell, of color, even of light. Because the stench of the altar area would be counteracted and contradicted by the wonderful smells of incense, arising from the altar of incense before the veil of the Most Holy Place. In the person of the (high-)priest, who carried on his chest the names of God's people, the twelve tribes, God lived with his people and Israel lived with God and even entered his holy courts. They tented together. There was a home.

2.8.2. In the monarchy era

Later on, God authorized Solomon, the man of peace (in distinction from his father, David, who was a man of blood), to build him a temple. There are a number of clear indications in the Bible that the tabernacle/temple of the older covenant was intended to be a reproduction of a heavenly reality *and* a representation of the first paradise, the Garden of Eden. As Moses climbs the Sinai, there in the Shekinah, he sees the paradigm, the true sanctuary. Hence, we read in Exodus 25:8-9 the LORD instructing Moses, "Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly *like the pattern* I will show you" (cf. 25:40; 26:30; 27:8; 31:11; 39:32,42,43; Num. 8:4; 1 Chron. 28:11-19; Acts 7:44; Heb. 8:5). He comes down and the tabernacle (and the temple later on) is built according to that paradigm. But when you look at the ornamentation in that paradigm (as revealed in 1 Kings 6:18, 29, 30, 32, 35; 7:18-20, 36) you notice cherubim,⁹ lions, palm trees, open flowers, etc. The tabernacle/temple was not about artwork; you can't worship it, but it was not bare bones without any art. Even the priest was musically inclined, because he had bells on the hem of his robe, which alternated with the pomegranate fruit, another garden image. All of these were to evoke a memory of our very first home. It gave the worshiper a sense of a recreated garden, a resurrected Edenic home, a re-constructed paradise. Says Meredith Kline:

From the whole historical-literary parallelism that we have observed between the original creation and the exodus re-creation we would naturally expect to find the Creator-Lord so designed the Mosaic tabernacle that it reflected the nature of the original cosmic and microcosmic temples, and

9. See 1 Kings 6:23, where cherubim are 10 cubits (15') high sentries and the seat for the throne (cf. Exod. 25:17-22).

examination of the construction of the tabernacle reveals that such was in fact the case.¹⁰

Furthermore, the Promised Land was a further reflection of the lush beauty of the Edenic home. How is the Promised Land typically described? It flows with milk and honey. Now Romans 4:13 reminds us that Abraham was not the heir of just Palestine or Canaan, he was the heir of the whole world. So that Promised Land is a redemptive-historical anticipation of the people of God spreading out over the cosmos, fulfilling the mandate of Genesis 1:28, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it." So the land of Canaan is simply a moment in redemptive-history where the home for God's people would always be anticipating, spreading out, pushing the boundaries, extending the gates of the garden, if you will, so that it encompasses all the nations of the earth. That's why in Isaiah 56, long before Jesus arrives on the scene historically, the temple was described as a house of prayer for all nations. It was not a private little shrine for Jewish people, but it was always intended to be a house of prayer for all nations, a home to embrace all.

So we read, for example, in Hebrews 9:11, 23, 24:

When Christ came as high priest of the good things that are already here, He went through the greater and more perfect tabernacle that is not man-made, that is to say, not a part of this creation... It was necessary, then, for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these sacrifices, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; He entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence.

In other words, Jesus has gone to the place that Moses saw. Moses writes out the blueprint and takes the copy down, so that it can be manufactured on earth, but when Christ enters the real one, the true paradigm, all the earthly copies can pass away, and God's people are then positioned to be in the heavenly Zion (Heb. 12:18-29).

Briefly, if you consider the layout of the tabernacle/temple, you have these restrictions, courts, veils. The closer you get to the throne of God, the fewer people are allowed. Conversely, the farther you are away from it, the more people there are. So the nations are in the outer reaches, but one man, the high-priest (and he only with proper blood), and only once a year on Yôm Kippur, was permitted to enter the Most Holy Place. Notice how restricted the approach was to the throne of God: from very restricted (one man, once a year on Yôm Kippur), to less restricted (priests and Levites only), to even less

10. Meredith Kline, *Images of the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1980), 89.

restricted (ritually clean Israelite men and pious aliens, who brought their sacrifices to the altar). Access to the Ark of the Covenant with its Mercy Seat and cherubim, the earthly throne of the LORD (Exod. 25:22, Ps. 80:1; Isa. 6:1), was guarded, just as the Garden of Eden was guarded after Adam was expelled.

What the Old Testament calls the Mercy Seat, the book of Hebrews in the New Testament calls the throne (seat) of grace (mercy). Here is where Christ now ministers on our behalf, as the true King-Priest, the second and last Adam, the new Man, the Mediator, “our Man in heaven.” With the coming of the Messiah, the King-Priest after the order of Melchizedek, the new covenant saints are encouraged now to enter boldly where earlier members of the covenant community feared to tread. “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb. 4:16).

Solomon, in blessing the people and leading in prayer, casts himself in the role of a worship leader, a priestly role. His prayer of dedication for the temple in 1 Kings 8 reminds us that God has placed his name, his eyes and his ears, in the temple, so that when people would pray toward it, he would hear. In the Solomonic temple, heaven came down and glory filled the Most Holy Place. It became the home that God authorized, the home that God occupied, the point of contact for all of God’s people in the old covenant era.

But it didn’t neglect the nations, for Solomon includes a blessing with an admonition along Deuteronomic lines (1 Kings 8:56-61). All the nations are in view in this dedication (8:60), namely, “that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other.” Placing a house in the midst of God’s people has a universal goal, one that ties in with the original mandate given to our first parents, namely, filling the earth with people who truly image the LORD God. The Solomonic house of God thus has a universal and eschatological goal as part of its agenda. God restores a house for himself in the midst of the covenant community, but the rest of the human race is in view, in part, as an integral element of God’s design. In talking about the temple as the home of God, the missiology of God, the mission design and mission heart of God is clearly evident. Israel was not to “huddle and cuddle,” but always think that this is for the nations of the earth in order to incorporate them and engraft them into this home.

It is also significant that the dedication of the Temple concludes appropriately with feasting. The great son of David, Solomon, hosts a “messianic” banquet for God’s children. In 1 Kings 8:65-66 we read, “So Solomon held the feast at that time, and all Israel with him, a great assembly, from Lebo-hamath to the Brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, seven days. On the eighth day he sent the people away, and they blessed the king and went to their homes joyful and

glad of heart for all the goodness that the LORD had shown to David his servant and to Israel his people.”

2.8.3. In the post-exilic era

Two post-exilic prophets, Haggai and Zechariah, are well-known for their leadership when they insisted that the physical temple be rebuilt after several thousand Jews returned from the east. This occurred following the Medo-Persian ruler's decree permitting them to return to Palestine. Cyrus II even granted royal treasury funds to be used in the construction of the Jerusalem temple. However, Samaritan opposition, coupled with discouragement among the Jewish community, causes the reconstruction to cease. About a decade and a half later, Haggai and Zechariah press the matter of rebuilding on two levels. Haggai chides the community of faith for being more interested in their own paneled houses, rather than rebuilding the temple. Zechariah, most likely the younger of the prophetic pair, stresses the rebuilding of the community with a most impressive call to repentance, “Return to Me, says the LORD of hosts, and I will return to you” (Zech. 1:3). Returning and being in the land is not yet being settled in and at home with the LORD. Jews who are physically settled in Palestine must come home to the LORD himself. “Return to Me,” says the LORD of hosts.

What should not be neglected at this point is the why of rebuilding the physical temple with its Holy Place, its Most Holy Place, the altar, the furniture, and the several courts. Why does God himself insist on building the very thing that had in many ways become a stumbling block and a source of sinful temptation to the people of God before the exile? We recall how Isaiah in the eighth century had denounced this wicked trampling of the courts of God's house (Isa. 1:12). Even more pointed is Jeremiah's so-called “Temple sermon” in Jeremiah 7. There he stands at the gates of the Temple itself, and he says to his Judean audience, “Do not say, ‘the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD, the Temple of the LORD is this,’ and then commit all kinds of sins outside of its precincts.” If the temple, God's house, had come to be viewed as a source of magical protection, a snare to godliness and proper Torah piety, why would God want to see it rebuilt? Why does God raise up two post-exilic prophets to insist upon the Temple's reconstruction?

The answer is found in the sacramental significance of the temple, that is, its function as a visible sign and seal of a gospel reality. Any sacrament points beyond itself to something much more significant and important. Psalm 48:12 says, “Walk around Zion; count her towers. This is God.” Obviously, it is not that the towers are God, but they represent what God is: a protection for his people. The temple signifies the glory of God's dwelling with his people. So what is the gospel reality of the temple? “I will dwell with you. I will

be your God, and you will be my people.” The truth conveyed by the temple is that the transcendent God was with his people, that he was Immanuel, that he truly was immanent among them, without being limited or boxed in by the physical structure. The temple was a visible representation of God’s dwelling place, which the people could see and from which they could learn. The temple was to be rebuilt, not so that the people should come to trust in brick and mortar, but so that, in seeing the temple, they might always lift up their hearts on high where God is. For this temple, even the heavens, even the heavens of heavens, cannot contain him. “Lift up your eyes. Lift up your hearts.”

This truth of God’s home being in his people’s midst had to be maintained until the Son of God would become incarnate among us. Then, and only then, could the Word become flesh and dwell among us, and we would see it, something that Moses longed to experience in the wilderness. After the LORD had passed by him, we hear the expression, “The LORD, the LORD, full of grace and truth.” But when the Word becomes flesh in the Person of Jesus Christ (John 1:14), we behold his glory, the divine Shekinah, who is full of grace and truth. Therefore, although the temple could be a snare to anyone in the community of faith at any time, the house of God had to be rebuilt after the Exile to serve its redemptive-historical purpose as a sacramental entity until the true Lord of the manor would come into human history. God resurrects his house, a physical temple, after the Exile until a better house, a richer home, the final lodging, might appear in redemptive-history.

2.9. Jesus, the new ‘Temple’

As the opening prologue of the Gospel of John makes clear, Jesus enters history to fulfill and realize all that the temples, divine homes, and shrines of the older covenant era had intended to communicate. Jesus Christ came to bring us home. This becomes one of the most powerful and moving images of the Gospel of John. Consider the following from John’s Gospel and other New Testament passages:

1. In John 4 Jesus engages in a conversation with a Samaritan woman. So very striking is the fact that Jesus speaks as a rabbi with a woman, but also as a Jew with a Samaritan. At two points Jesus says that the Father’s house was a house of prayer for all nations, since Jesus as the house of God, as the home that God provides the human race, proceeds to tell her in person—and us as readers—that the temple in Jerusalem was properly situated on the correct mountain (the Jews got it right while the Samaritans had it wrong). But the Jerusalem temple was now finished in terms of its sacramental function in redemptive-history. A new hour is now coming—no, it is now here!

2. In John 14, Jesus again brings up home/house/family imagery when he says, "In my Father's house are many mansions/rooms." Any Jewish auditor to that statement, and any reader alert to redemptive-history, in coming across that statement would link Jesus' words to the temple. Even in Luke 2, where Mary says (after she finds Jesus who had been 'lost'), "Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress" (Luke 2:48). Now when she says "father," she means Joseph. However, Jesus responds, "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49). When he says "father," he's not referring to Joseph; he is referring to his Father in heaven. Christ's work is in the real Father's house. The Father's house was the temple. Jesus tells his disciples that he is departing this world to go to the Father's house and there he will prepare, make ready, a location for his brothers and sisters. The home/house/family theme continues to unfold further in the upper room at the Last Supper. The way to that house, the place where the Father dwells with his children, is through the Son. He is the way, the truth, and the life. He is the only living way back home to God. The disciples make this clear to the Sanhedrin that there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved, except the name of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 4:12). No one comes home, except through him.

3. In the Gospel of Luke there is the very poignant parable of the two sons (Luke 15:11-32), with the younger prodigal son being embraced warmly, greeted vigorously, and welcomed most graciously by a father whom that prodigal son had, in effect, wanted dead. The Anglican Alternative Service Book of 1980 contains this very striking prayer, "Father of all, we give You thanks and praise, that when we were still far off You met us in your Son and brought us home." How did the Son of God bring us home? By having his own body, a physical temple, destroyed in death upon the tree of the Cross by absorbing the righteous wrath of God for us, and then resurrecting that very same body, his own temple, on the morning of the first day of the week.

2.10. The Church as a house, a temple

On Pentecost we have the resurrection of the church-home. Moses therefore has to end his custodial duties, and the Son-Servant, Jesus, takes over, thus making the Jerusalem temple just a very beautiful building. It would remain only for about forty more years, that being the usual period of testing and trial. Would the nation of Israel learn that the true Son, the true Lord of the manor, had arrived and now through Christ they could come home? Or would they still focus upon brick and mortar, rituals of Moses that had now passed away? God himself in redemptive history removes it in AD 70 by means of the Roman army under Titus.

In Hebrews 3:1-6 we read:

Therefore, holy brothers, you who share in a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the apostle and high priest of our confession, who was faithful to him who appointed him, just as Moses also was faithful in all God's house. [Moses was faithful, in his redemptive era] For Jesus has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses—as much more glory as the builder of a house has more honor than the house itself. (For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God.) Now Moses was faithful in all God's house as a servant, to testify to the things that were to be spoken later, but Christ is faithful over God's house as a son. And we are his house if indeed we hold fast our confidence and our boasting in our hope.

And in Hebrews 10:1 it is written:

For since the law was but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

These passages confirm that the work of the Mediator is the recovery of his elect, the salvation of his people, his family, and the restoration of his creation-home as the place, the turf, where God's children might have “settled security,” their service or work stations. The place where they might carry out their callings before God, *coram Deo*, always remembering that eating and drinking are not secular affairs granted to us because of the Noachic covenant, but they must be done as it was in the beginning, is now and always will be in the new creation for the glory of God. Eating and drinking are not banal activities, common activities, secular activities, but all is to be done to the glory of God.

For this reason, the apostle Paul writes in Ephesians 1:22-23, “And he put all things under his feet and gave him as head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all.”

3. Summary

This survey of Scripture shows how one can characterize the story of redemptive-history as the recovery and resurrecting of God's house, with that imagery embracing first of all, the family of God, his elect children from all the nations and peoples of humanity. But always closely associated with the people of election is the location of that election, namely, creation. While it is true that human beings do not

“redeem” or “transform” God’s creation, we must acknowledge that God’s purpose is to do so. We may not reduce the continuity between the present and future order of things to the salvation of the elect by God’s grace. This is surely to truncate the full biblical witness to God’s resurrection of his creation-temple. God’s divine fire of purification will destroy all that is sinful and impure, and what will emerge will be a new earth as well as a new heavens. God will resurrect his house for the sake of his people, bringing it to all proper advancements. True, redemption does not return us to the situation of Adam before the fall. Not at all. I am not even sure anyone in the Reformed tradition would make that claim. But neither does the Biblical picture leave us with the impression that the only thing of continuity between what is now and what will be, is the human soul.

In short, in the gospel, we learn about what God has done to create a home for his people. Because of Jesus Christ’s finished and perfect work, God has and will fully restore his home, the new creation, for all his elect children. And on the basis of the gospel, we say to the nations of the world, “Come home! Let’s go home!”