

POSSESSING THE LAND  
AS COMMAND AND PROMISE

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There is a humorous story told among native Americans that when Christopher Columbus and his men arrived in the new world, one Indian said to a fellow Indian, "There goes our real estate."<sup>1</sup> The joke reminds one of what Rahab the harlot relates to the two spies when they investigate the city of Jericho (Joshua 2). Rahab reveals that the Canaanites were terrified of the approaching Israelites. She confesses that she knows that YHWH will give the land to Israel (Josh. 2:9-13). The Canaanites' hold on the land was to be broken, while Israel would acquire possession of the real estate of Canaan.

In this essay I will seek to explore the relationship between two ideas that are mentioned in Psalm 37, ideas or statements dealing with possession of the land as a command and as a promise. Two verses especially call attention to wisdom exhortations regarding dwelling in the land:

Trust in the LORD and do good; dwell (*shkn*) in the land and enjoy safe pasture (v.3).<sup>2</sup>

Turn from evil and do good; then you will always live (*shkn*) securely (v.27).

In both verses the verb for "to dwell" or "to live" (*shkn*) is in the imperative. Nevertheless, some Bible versions translate these clauses in such a way that dwelling on the land is in some sense a result or outcome of trusting in YHWH and doing good (cf. RSV, NIV). What is important to notice, however, is that dwelling on the land is a challenge to the hearer, a goal to be achieved, or a task to be involved in as

part of the exhortation to trust and obey.

There are even more verses in Psalm 37 which hold out as a promise the fact that the land will be given as an inheritance.

For evil men will be cut off, but those who hope in the LORD will inherit the land (v.9, NIV).

But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy great peace (v.11).

Those the LORD blesses will inherit the land, but those he curses will be cut off (v.22).

The righteous will inherit the land and dwell in it forever (v.29).<sup>3</sup>

Wait for the LORD and He will exalt you to possess the land; when the wicked are cut off, you will see it (v. 34).

In the above verses the land of inheritance is granted to Israel. It is known that in the political relationships of the ancient Near East, a great king who was suzerain over other lesser kings might decide to give to a favorite vassal a parcel of land or territory. Nothing obligated the greater king to do this; it might be to reward the lesser king because of some particular meritorious service or because of some outstanding act of loyalty or faithfulness.

Old Testament scholarship has not failed to see some analogies in the biblical givens. For example, Abram of Ur of the Chaldees is called out of his native area to move toward another land (Gen. 12). He is brought into covenant relationship with YHWH who called him, and he is promised numerous descendants who will live in the land of Canaan (Gen. 15). Another type of royal grant is the promise of YHWH to establish David and his dynastic line upon the throne in Jerusalem (II Sam. 7). In both examples YHWH is not obligated in any way to bestow these gifts. Nevertheless, he grants them to the vassals he loves so that a key relationship might be continued for the carrying out of his redemptive plan.

Psalm 37, however, is a wisdom psalm which raises a number of questions concerning the nature of the inherited land. Is YHWH's gift to Israel unconditional or conditional? If he has given his most solemn promise to Abraham that his posterity will possess the land, how can Psalm 37 speak of the godly who are not in possession of the land? The discrepancy is felt even more pointedly in the light of the summary of the conquest given in Joshua 21:43,45,

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. . . .Not one of all the good promises which the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass (cf. Josh. 23:14).

Regarding the unconditionality or conditionality of the land as gift, H. Z. Szubin and B. Porten have pointed out that the ancient Near East did know of revocable and irrevocable gifts.<sup>4</sup> In their study they show that a *dashna* was a revocable gift or grant that could include movable and/or unmovable items, i.e., land and its chattel (slaves). A *dashna* was not a "grant to be held in perpetuity by the father and his estate but a gift subject to revocation by the sovereign benefactor."<sup>5</sup> Szubin and Porten conclude regarding a *dashna* that it was a royal grant of the land, specifically of its *usufructum*, not a bestowal of absolute ownership.<sup>6</sup> A *pardashna* was an irrevocable gift or grant. A *pardashna* was something which, once given, could not be recalled by the giver.

The two terms *dashna* and *pardashna* are non-interchangeable Persian loan words, with legal connotations. They are used in several Talmudic passages, and reveal something of the nature of Jewish exegesis in several passages of the Old Testament.<sup>7</sup> II Chronicles 31:9 records that Hezekiah caused portions of land to be given to the priests and Levites as *pardashna*. But several verses later in II Chronicles 32:1 the text tells us that Sennacherib "invaded Judah and encamped against the fortified cities, thinking to win them for himself." The Talmudic commentators sense an irony here in that, while Hezekiah treats the land as an irrevocable grant (*pardashna*), YHWH treats the land as a

grant that can be lost (*San. 94a*).<sup>8</sup> Israel's hold on the land of Canaan was not such that it was beyond challenge in her own history.

*Contrast with other worldviews*

All that we have said up to this point suggests that Israel can exist as God's people and as a holy nation quite apart from full and unquestioned possession of the promised land. This is not to say that an absolute separation of God's people and God's land is ultimately normative. From the perspective of creation as revealed in Genesis 1-2 God placed the perfect man and woman within his garden within his world. From the produce of the garden the first man and woman would be sustained in life. People and land belong together. Yet after falling into sin and being expelled from the garden, Adam and Eve can still survive by eating bread, but only after great effort, having encountered thorns and thistles, the evidences of a cursed and groaning earth. Psalm 37:25 confirms this by revealing that the psalmist has not observed in his lifetime that the righteous were ever forsaken, requiring the children to beg for bread. God's people still survive without full possession of the land.

This perspective from Psalm 37 is found in many places in the Scriptures. Israel is not autochthonous in Canaan; that is, she could never view herself as aboriginal, standing in some kind of relationship to Canaan that made her existence there a constitutive element from the beginning of time and thus creational. Indeed, Abram is called to leave Ur, later to leave Haran, in order to go to Canaan. He is transplanted from one land to enter and sojourn in another land.

Such a perspective stands in stark contrast to many pagan and non-Christian views of the world. We will briefly examine two of them: the ancient Egyptian and the native American.

Understanding ancient Egyptian religious beliefs has not proved to be easy, primarily because in the religious texts now extant, often contradictory ideas and statements can be found. For example, Frankfort points out that in the same

hymn, the sun god can be the self-creating, self-begetting god, but is also the son of his mother, the goddess Hathor.<sup>9</sup>

To the ancient Egyptians their country and civilization was the center of the world brought into being by the gods in the beginning. Mircea Eliade says that it was "obvious" to Egyptians that "'men' were the earliest inhabitants of Egypt, since Egypt was the first country formed, hence the center of the world."<sup>10</sup> Only Egyptians themselves were the rightful dwellers in their land, while all foreigners were somehow less than fully human. Foreigners were forbidden to enter into Egyptian sanctuaries, since they were built to represent the world in miniature. In the beginning the gods created Egypt, gave birth to the pharaoh, and the Egyptian people were the beneficiaries of this cosmogony.

In Egyptian religious beliefs we have an example of what develops when an apostate people hold down the truth of God in unrighteousness (cf. Rom. 1:18ff.). When a proper understanding of the Word-revelation is lacking, then the creational order must necessarily become the foundational point for the ordering of reality: animals are gods, pharaoh is divine, non-Egyptians are subhuman, the land and people are necessarily inseparable. Egypt was not just land they happened to occupy. "The bond between them and their land was as singular and strong as the bond of blood."<sup>11</sup>

Egyptian religion was immanentistic in that there is little evidence of a belief in a god whose being transcended the realm of natural phenomena. In polytheism typically the forces and powers experienced in creation are given the status of deities personally present. Egyptian religious feeling held to two basic truths: there were many gods and these gods were immanent in nature. "Only on this basis could the Egyptian combine a profound awareness of the complexity of the phenomenal world with that of a mystic bond uniting man and nature."<sup>12</sup> With the animation of nature there also comes the mythology which explains the actions of the gods in terms analogous to human activities.<sup>13</sup>

Important also within the Egyptian view of reality was the person of the pharaoh. Pharaoh was the son of the gods

who founded the world in the beginning. The beginning was that "golden age" of primeval history in which all the world was perfectly ordered according to *ma'at*, i.e., justice, truth, and wisdom. The pharaoh as a son of the gods was not merely a representation of the god Horus, the son of Osiris and Isis. Pharaoh *was* Horus, and he gave order and well-being to Egypt, her people and civilization. Thus a very ordered, conservative, "immobile" society resulted. There was no passionate desire among Egyptians toward rebellion or revolution. The existing order among the gods, the world, and mankind was right. Everything in Egypt sought to recreate the origins of society at the dawn of time. Keeping order within the cosmos was the supreme challenge in order to fend off the forces of chaos.<sup>14</sup> According to Eliade, the pharaoh embodies *ma'at*. His rule gives life to his subjects and stability to the cosmos. His victories over his enemies were a repeat of the sun god Re's triumphs over the serpent of chaos.<sup>15</sup> An Egyptian could not conceive of his people existing apart from the ordered life of Egyptian civilization. The gods ordained it so.

Another example of a non-Christian worldview involving the peoples' relationship to the land is that of the native American, especially that of the Plains Indians. Here again we note motifs that echo many elements already present in Egyptian mythology.

N. Scott Momaday relates that the earth is revered by a native American since it is his source.<sup>16</sup> In the mind of a native American "nature" is not something apart from himself. He conceives of it as an element in which he exists. He has existence within that element, much in the same way we think of having existence within the element of air."<sup>17</sup> An American Indian keeps in contact with the earth, with her spirits (since the earth is called "Grandmother" and "Mother"), and with the earth's ongoing genesis through rituals. Thus the American Indian, during his own growth toward maturity, parallels the growth of holy mother earth from childhood to maturity. The earth's "mind" grows, as it does in a human being. The Indian cannot conceive of himself apart from a vital contact with the living organism of

the land.<sup>18</sup>

In summary up to this point, the relationship toward the land that the godly have as revealed in Psalm 37 is quite different from what was briefly noted in at least two other worldviews. Psalm 37 presents the promised land as a gift not yet acquired. The righteous ones are called to dwell in it, and they are assured of finally inheriting it.

*Redemptive-historical contours*

To get a better grasp of the dynamics of Psalm 37 one must place the psalm and its statements regarding possessing the land within the larger framework of the history of redemption.

A careful study of the language of Genesis 1 shows that Moses describes the creation of all things in such a way that the polytheism of the pagan world receives a stunning refutation. The pagan deities are swept off the page, as it were, as it is revealed, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). The Scriptures reveal that the creation is ordered, it is a diversity, and it is good. The caretakers of this creation are neither gods nor animals, but they are image-bearers of the one true God, YHWH. Adam and Eve are in possession of the earth, and yet they stand under a covenantal challenge to till and keep the garden in which they live.<sup>19</sup>

It should be noted at this point that the command (along with blessings and promises) given by YHWH adds a dynamic that is unique to biblical revelation. This is what will allow history to begin and move forward, either unto blessing and life, or unto cursing and death. The interaction of the elements of creation under the spiritual direction of Adam and Eve gives us what we call "history."<sup>20</sup>

With mankind's fall into sin in Genesis 3, the earth is estranged from mankind. It does not assist him. It hinders his efforts to sustain life. The dominion mandate causes humanity to work in an effort to dwell in the earth. Yet after all efforts are accomplished, the earth still claims

mankind. He is dust, and in death every human being returns to the dust.

The Bible reveals that the creation is not the interplay of competing deities. But in order to understand the distance that exists between mankind and the rest of creation, one should recall a specific element within the covenantal renewal legislation of Deuteronomy. In three passages "heaven and earth" are called upon as witnesses to the covenant which YHWH has made with Israel through Moses at Mt. Sinai (Deut. 4:26; 30:19; 31:28).

The function of heaven and earth as covenant witnesses is understood against the backdrop of ancient Near Eastern diplomatic language. Among the nations of Moses' day many treaties would list a number of witnesses to the treaty just concluded, usually minor deities of earth--rivers, mountains, trees, etc.--and of the sky--sun, moon, etc. These so-called gods would stand, as it were, as third party observers to see to it that both sides in the treaty would obey the stipulations of the covenant.

But the Scriptures reveal that there are no gods except YHWH alone. So no "gods of nature" exist, and thus they cannot be summoned. Yet the creation--heaven and earth--is called upon to observe how Israel, the people of God created in covenant, will observe the stipulations of the *torah* in righteousness before the God who loves Israel and has redeemed her from slavery.<sup>21</sup>

What is striking is that in Psalm 37 Israel is promised an inheritance of what is but a parcel of all the LORD'S possessions. Canaan is a small tract of land (*'erets*) that Israel must possess and will inherit, but Canaan is only a part of the total creation ("heaven and earth") which exists as a kind of "third party" that observes compliance or non-compliance with the Mosaic covenant.

How one translates *'erets* in Psalm 37 is important, either as "land" or "earth." Contextually, that is, within the Old Testament history of redemption, "land" is the preferred translation, as the English translations show. Yet it would be difficult to suppress an exegetical overtone present in the

word *'erets*, namely, the *world*. God created the world in the beginning, all the families of the land shall receive a blessing through Abraham (cf. Gen. 12:3, where *'adamah* is used), and all the world continues to be YHWH's (cf. Exod. 19:5,6; Ps. 22:27-31; Ps. 24:1; etc.).

We therefore note that a religious "distance" exists between humanity and the land/earth. Mankind is created from the dust of the ground but is not its evolutionary product. Only the man and woman are created in the image of God. Mankind works in creation on the land, but he does not worship it. Not the animals but YHWH alone is God. We have noted already how this contrasts with pagan world-views.

Creation is thus mankind's home and workshop, but it is that only under specified conditions. It is home by way of righteousness within the promises of God's covenant and by walking faithfully within the covenant. So God's people come to possess the land. Since they are God's people, the righteous receive the exhortation to dwell in the land (Ps. 37:3,27). Since they are God's people, the righteous receive the promise that they will receive the land as an inheritance (Ps. 37:9,11,18,22,29,34). In this way the religious "distance" between God's covenant people and the land will be bridged. What now exists as a covenant witness (and groans at present, Rom. 8:22-23) is to be occupied and will be occupied by God's righteous people.

#### *Obstacles to possession by the righteous*

We have noted that by expressing both wisdom exhortations and repeated promises, Psalm 37 presupposes that the righteous are not in (full) possession of the land, and that is so following the conquest of the land under Joshua. The righteous dwell out(side) of it, there is a "distance" between them and their full possession. Nevertheless, they continue to exist. They are exhorted not to fret (37:1,8). In fact, that they have a little is better than possessing an abundance in unrighteousness (37:16). A number of reasons could be cited for this dis-ease experienced by the righteous.

One obstacle to possession of the land could be the exile due to apostasy. This occurred in the history of redemption to both Israel in the north and Judah in the south. But this reason is obviously not in the universe of discourse in Psalm 37.

The psalm itself specifies several things which pose threats to the righteous dwelling in the land: plots by evil-doers (v.12), drawn swords and bent bows (v.14), lost riches (vv.16ff.), famine (v.19), the wicked borrowing without repaying (v.21), falling (some type of crisis? v.24), and the wicked lying in wait to kill the righteous (v.32).

Here the "distance" between the promised land and the dwelling therein by the righteous is due to blatant violations of God's laws given in the Torah. When Israel was enabled to conquer Canaan, she was coming into YHWH's land as strangers and sojourners with him (Lev. 25:23). Israel did not yet own the land of Canaan. The distribution of the land to the twelve tribes did not change that fact; YHWH remained ultimate owner with Israel as steward and vassal.

The so-called "social legislation" of the covenant provided that the land which each family received could never be sold outside of that family. Debts of the poor were suspended or cancelled, and land received by creditors was returned in the sabbatical year (Exod. 21: 1-6; Deut. 15:12-18) and in the jubilee year (Lev. 25:2-17,23-25,39-43).<sup>22</sup> The Torah thus provided a "safety net" for the ever-present poor. Some semblance of economic and social balance could be maintained. The poor and meek would never be in jeopardy of permanently losing their apportioned land if the jubilee were faithfully observed, for the jubilee's aim was "the restoration of the position as it was of old: free persons living on free land."<sup>23</sup>

Psalm 37 makes it clear that the sabbatical and especially jubilee commandments were not being observed by members of the Israelite covenant community. To neglect the way of *torah* is unrighteousness, injustice, wrongdoing. Furthermore, it is evident that the king was not enforcing the covenant law. "When a king reigned in justice, he was to

proclaim the jubilee in due time, delivering the needy (cf. Ps. 72:4,12-14). Justice, in Israelite law, is primarily the protection of the weak."<sup>24</sup>

Archaeological evidence from the 10th century B.C. in Canaan seems to suggest that there was a high degree of social equality within Israelite society, but by the 8th century houses show a much greater discrepancy between the rich and the poor.<sup>25</sup> The 8th century prophets among both Israel and Judah strongly condemned the evidence of greed, coveting, fraud, and creditors who showed no pity to debtors.

The result is poverty, oppression, and anxiety among those disadvantaged. The disadvantaged are those who are the righteous--righteous not, however, because they are disadvantaged as such. Psalm 37 is a wisdom psalm that presupposes an ordered world, a controlled universe, a cosmos under YHWH's sovereignty. The disruptions caused by the unrighteousness of the wicked and the oppressive will be answered and made right by YHWH. The command and promise regarding possession of the land is thus held out to those who are now experiencing "distance" from land that YHWH had granted them.

Historical forces do not ultimately decide the outcome of the present human situation.<sup>26</sup> The provisions of the Torah were intended to right wrongs, if need be through the "gods," the judges and kings of Israel, the office-bearers who were appointed to administer justice. But in the case of the wicked, the way of *torah* was neglected. A *day* must come (37:13), an acceptable time for release of the captives, good news for the righteous poor, blessedness for the meek (Isa. 61: 1f.; Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:18-19; 7:22; cf. Matt. 5:5).

Righteousness for the oppressed is manifested by a determination to maintain *torah* and to avoid redressing injustice by taking matters into one's own hands. Vengeance belongs to YHWH; he will repay the wicked for depriving the righteous of the land he gave to his people Israel. That is why they are righteous: not because they are disadvantaged, but because they do not rectify an injustice by acting outside of

God's law. That would constitute an extension of wickedness. The mandate is to "trust YHWH, and do good; dwell in the land, and enjoy *shalom*" (37:3).

The righteousness of the meek is spelled out in the parallel statements which hold forth the promise of receiving the land. The meek are "those who wait for YHWH" (v.9), they are "blameless" (v.18; cf. v.37), they are "blessed of YHWH" (v.22), and they are "righteous" (v.29). Other verses in Psalm 37 specify that these righteous poor and needy "walk uprightly" (v.14; cf. v.23). Thus it is only in the way of faithfulness to *torah* and humility before YHWH that the promise of possession of the land is received.

At the same time the command to dwell in the land addresses itself to these same righteous people. The Scriptures maintain consistently that the LORD'S sovereign control of history and of its ultimate outcome does not excuse the people of God from positivizing YHWH'S *torah*. By "tenting" (*shkn*) in land that is unjustly seized from them, the righteous meek establish a presence *in the land*. Thus they can "occupy" the land, manifest a spiritual presence of godliness and covenantal faithfulness even in territory now somewhat beyond their firm possession. Obedience to *torah* serves to bridge somewhat that "distance" between the meek and the land that rightfully belongs to them.

### *Some trajectories of Psalm 37*

In the concluding section of this essay we can mention some areas of Christian interest that open up in regard to the relationship of possessing the land as command and promise.

We would be remiss in our reflection if Matthew 5:5 were not brought in: "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Jesus picks up the words of Psalm 37:11 and puts the promised inheritance in another context. Interest in the small parcel of Canaan gives way to a broader promised happiness to those who continue to humble themselves under the way of the LORD: they shall receive the earth (N.B. the translation shift to "the earth").

Coupled with this beatitude is Jesus' commission to his disciples in Matthew 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8. He has received all authority in heaven and earth. Therefore, there should be a witnessing throughout this earth that proclaims the authority of Jesus, proclaims the message of the gospel, and disciplines all peoples unto an obedience of the *torah*. Christian passivity is excluded in the time of the new covenant.<sup>27</sup>

There is now, therefore, a flowering in this new covenant period of that which was in seed or budding form in the older covenant epoch. The commands and promises regarding possessing the land in Psalm 37 give way to a fuller command and better promises in the new covenant that was inaugurated by the work of Jesus Christ.

But the fuller and better situation in the New Testament does not warrant a triumphalism that ushers in the fullness of Jesus' eschatological kingdom. Jesus repeats Psalm 37:11, "the meek shall inherit the earth." The meek are those who maintain covenant and practice the love of the law, even when facing great unrighteousness. The people of God have an unconditional promise: the land is theirs. The promise is approached historically by the single route of meekness before the LORD. Revolutionary action in the name of the LORD (e.g., liberation theology) is also excluded, since revolution by its very nature is unhistorical.

Triumphalism is also avoided because the inherited land of Psalm 37:11 and the promised earth of Matthew 5:5 are not found in this present creational situation. While the authority of Jesus Christ is throughout this universe, yet the meek know that they remain strangers and pilgrims here, always looking in faith toward another place, a better country--a heavenly one--a place of their own (Heb. 11:13-16). The land always remains YHWH's; the meek while here are aliens who live by faith and are comforted by promises.

It is evident that a number of avenues in New Testament studies, in ethics, in eschatology and dogmatic theology open up and suggest themselves with every proper consideration of biblical theology. This is to be expected when both the dogmatician and the student of the history of revelation

begin with a confession that God's Word cannot be broken and that revealed truth is of one piece.

What Geerhardus Vos said regarding Scripture is true: "The Bible is not a dogmatic handbook, but a historical book full of dramatic interest."<sup>28</sup> Dogmatic (doctrinal) theology can help guard the biblical theologian from historicizing and atomizing revelation. At the same time the study of the history of revelation serves to keep the dogmas of revelation placed within the historical dynamics of the covenant of grace.

It is precisely such reflection on possessing the land as a command and as a promise which keeps the righteous and meek people of God active in faith and living in hope.

#### ENDNOTES

1. John J. Timmerman, "Wounded Warriors," *The Reformed Journal* 35/5 (May 1985) 7.
2. The RSV reads, "Trust in the LORD and do good; so you will dwell in the land, and enjoy security." The Berkeley Version (v.3cd) reads, "Inhabit the land and practice faithfulness." The NASB (v.3d) reads, "cultivate faithfulness."
3. Cf. v.18, "The days of the blameless are known to the LORD, and their inheritance will endure forever." The word "inheritance" (*nachalah*) serves to explain what the land of Psalm 37 means in its primary sense: it is Canaan seen as the territory given to Israel and apportioned to its various tribes to be held as a perpetual trust. A major study (out of the critical tradition) of "the land" in the Bible is Walter Brueggemann's *The Land* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977). Although the book contains many useful insights, Brueggemann overstates the case when he suggests that "land might be a way of organizing biblical theology" (p. 3).
4. H. Z. Szubin and Bezalel Porten, "Royal Grants in Egypt: Interpretation of Driver 2," *Journal of Near*

*Eastern Studies* 46 (Jan. 1987) 39-48.

5. Szubin and Porten, "Royal Grants in Egypt," 43.
6. Szubin and Porten, "Royal Grants in Egypt," 47.
7. Szubin and Porten, "Royal Grants in Egypt," 44-45.
8. Szubin and Porten also take note of the Persian king Ahasuerus' gifts and offers to Esther (Esther 2:18,20; 5:6; 7:2).
9. H. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion: An Introduction* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1961 [1948]) 17-18.
10. Mircea Eliade, *A History of Religious Ideas*, Vol. I, trans. by Willard R. Trask (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 90.
11. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 30.
12. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 25. This gives rise to the Egyptian view that animals as such were deities. Since they do not change, their natural stability represented what was divine, orderly, supra-human. For this reason gods and goddesses could be portrayed as humans, animals, or combinations of both.
13. Frankfort, *Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 28. The fact that the Egyptian gods were very much immanent in nature "enabled a correlation of human and natural life which was an inexhaustible source of strength. The life of man, as an individual and even more as a member of society, was integrated with the life of nature" (29).
14. Eliade, *History*, 86. "All existing things, from natural phenomena to religious and cultural realities. . . owe their validity and their justification to the fact that they were created during the initial period. Clearly, the First Time constitutes the Golden Age of absolute perfection. . ." (p. 87).
15. Eliade, *History*, 92. Frankfort says that "Pharaoh was no mere despot holding an unwilling people in slavery. He ruled in the strictest sense by divine right. . ." The

French king Louis XIV's attitude was typified by the expression *l'etat c'est moi*. This summed up the Egyptian view of the Pharaoh's place in reality, both religiously and politically. The Pharaoh's subjects wholly concurred in this (*Ancient Egyptian Religion*, 31).

16. N. Scott Momaday, "Native American Attitudes to the Environment," in *Seeing with a Native Eye: Essays on Native American Religion*, edited by Walter Holden Capps (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 79.
17. Momaday, "Native American Attitudes," 84.
18. Elaine A. Jahner, "Lakota Genesis: the Oral Tradition," in *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*, edited by Raymond J. DeMallie and Douglas R. Parks (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987), 56.
19. In using the phrase "covenantal challenge" I am aware of the fact that there is no formal covenant promulgated in Genesis 1-2. Hence I use the term rather broadly in the sense of a life relationship between YHWH and mankind (here Adam and Eve), a relationship sustained by promises and administered through sanctions.
20. This reality has caused some to describe the biblical faith as time-oriented (the "ship" image; moving forward) as opposed to much apostate thinking as (sacred) space-oriented (the "cathedral" image; time is cyclical). While the contrast can be exaggerated, it is true that development of creation (for better or worse) has been a largely (though not exclusively) Christian phenomenon. Pagan cultures whose mythologies prize the return to the perfection of the primordial time are largely intolerant of change. The unchanging order must be maintained.
21. Other elements are also designated in Scripture as covenant witnesses: stones of memorial and of altars (Gen. 31:48-52; Deut. 27:2ff.; Josh. 8:30-35; 22:34; 24:27); the book of the law (Deut. 31:26; Josh. 24:26); the people themselves (Deut. 31:19-22; 32:1ff.; Josh. 24:22). Cf. Exod. 19:3-6.

22. See the two articles by Christopher J. H. Wright, "What Happened Every Seven Years in Israel?" Part I, *The Evangelical Quarterly* 56/3 (July 1984) 129-38; and Part II, *The Evangelical Quarterly* 56/4 (October 1984) 193-201. Wright explores the nature of the sabbatical, its beneficiaries, and its relationship to the jubilee year. Wright takes issue with some conclusions of I. Mendelsohn (see "Slavery in the OT," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962] 383-91).
23. A. van Selms, "Jubilee, Year of," *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Supplement Volume (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1976) 497.
24. Van Selms, "Jubilee," 498.
25. Roy Brasfield Herron, "The Land, the Law, and the Poor," *Word & World* 6/1 (Winter, 1986) 77.
26. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms: A Theological Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 43.
27. Biblical revelation thus does not permit the withdrawal of Christians from any legitimate area of life. Obedience to the full range of biblical revelation and to the principles articulated in the commands of the covenant, cannot be postponed to some future millennium. Jesus Christ is king of all the earth now, and obeying his commands now is a way that his glory and dominion are manifested in this world.
28. Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975 [1948]) 17.