

FOUNDATIONS
FOR CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW

THE LAW OF GOD (6): GOD'S WORKS



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A REVISION STUDY FROM
THE FELLOWSHIP OF AILBE

Foundations for Christian Worldview: The Law of God (6): God's Works
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Welcome to *Foundations for Christian Worldview:
The Law of God (6): God's Works*

We cannot know or appreciate our salvation as fully as God intends apart from a clear understanding of Him Who provides it. And one way we get to know God better, and grow to appreciate our great salvation, is by understanding His works.

The works of God are comprehensive. They take in everything, sustain everything, cause everything to exist and to abound, and keep the cosmos in good running order.

But more than that, the works of God are the means He employs to make Himself known, to reach the world with His grace, and to bless His people as a holy people unto Him. The more we know, understand, and review the works of God, the more our love for Him will increase, and our joy in knowing Him will overflow.

If you find *ReVision* helpful, would you send us a note and let us know? How do you use *ReVision*? By yourself? In a group? What benefits are you gaining from this particular study? What suggestions do you have for improving our work? Write me at tmmoore@ailbe.org and let me know how the Lord is using these studies in your life.

ReVision studies are designed as brief introductions to the subject under consideration. We hope they will enlarge your worldview, help you to become more firmly rooted in Scripture, equip you to minister to others, and stimulate you to want to learn more about the Word of God and the Biblical worldview.

We're happy to provide this study at no charge. If you find these studies helpful, we hope you'll consider sending a gift to The Fellowship of Ailbe, to help us in making these resources available to others.

May the Lord bless your study of His Word.

T. M. Moore
Principal

1 Creation

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Genesis 1.1

A thrown gauntlet

The opening words of the Bible are a gauntlet thrown at the feet of every human being, believer and nonbeliever alike.

What is this world? How did it come to be? What is its most basic nature? Are the creatures and stuff of the vast cosmos merely data and facts, waiting for someone to make sense of them? Or do they come invested with meaning, significance, and purpose from a source beyond them? Who determines what the cosmos is and what it is for, and on what basis is this determined?

The answers to these questions constitute a worldview cornerstone from which all the rest of what we believe and aspire to is constructed. For the secularist, the answers are not all that clear. A good bit of speculation and discussion continues over at least some of these questions. The tendency among secular thinkers, however, is to believe that the cosmos – matter, in one form or another – is eternal and without any inherent meaning or value. Even those – such as Lawrence Krauss – who want to argue that the cosmos came into being out of “nothing” admit that they don’t really mean “nothing”, but particles of matter so small and inconsequential that to humans they would *appear* as “nothing”. The stuff of the cosmos has always existed, that’s the consensus. Thus, by implication, the cosmos does not need God for its existence or for whatever significance may be assigned to it. Humans, since we are the most highly evolved beings in the food chain, give meaning to the stuff of the cosmos according to how we value it for our own purposes.

So insistent, so thorough, so relentless and unyielding, and so effective at capturing the bully pulpits of the land have been the advocates of this secular cosmogony, that even most believers have conceded their basic points; and in trying to establish their own view of the origins of things, many believers require God to dance according to the tunes of modern unbelieving science.

Yet the words of Scripture stand: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” The plain, unadorned, accessible-to-all meaning of this opening verse of Scripture is that everything in the cosmos had a beginning, everything came to be at some point, and the reason everything exists is explained by God Himself. God created everything. The work of creation is the first of the great works of God which the Law reveals to us as foundational for the Christian worldview.

God is Creator, and creation is His work, for His purposes, according to His will and design.

The manner of God's creating

Human beings, being inveterately curious, want to ask, like Zacharias, “How shall I know this?” (Lk. 1.18) The answer for the believer should be straightforward enough: God has told us. We should not need some angelic rebuke for us to embrace the straightforward Word of God. God has told us that the cosmos is *creation*, not *nature*. He has told us that it began at a particular time, and that He brought it all into existence according to His pleasure and for His purposes.

God created the cosmos *out* of nothing and *into* nothing. Nothing existed except God. God spoke, and the cosmos came into being, the mass of it all at once, the particulars over a period of six days. And all in response to God’s command: “Let there be...”

That Word of God, carried into effect by His Spirit (Gen. 1.2), reflected the eternal counsel and will of God. It was always in the mind of God to create the cosmos. For all eternity past God had been planning the

creation and preparing it, in His plan, for His good and holy purposes.

The secular scientific community has long since decided that what Moses reported in Genesis 1-3 is simply not true. It is not that modern science came to this conclusion as a result of considered reflection and deliberation. The modern scientific enterprise, willfully separating from its Christian foundations, began with this conclusion, and has been working to reinforce it ever since. For the secular mind, such things do not happen in the world, and thus some other explanation must be discovered to account for the existence of the cosmos. That explanation, unsurprisingly, left no room for God to act in the cosmos, or to have any influence over it. Therefore, either He does not or need not exist, and we need not pay Him any heed.

Many Christians, believing (unjustifiably) that science must have the last word on all things of which it speaks, have tried to force the glass slipper of creation onto the fat feet of secularism, and have compromised the straightforward teaching of Genesis 1 in an effort to make Scripture “respectable” in the eyes of skeptics and unbelievers.

The first commentator on Genesis 1 was God Himself. As He said to Moses, in instituting the Sabbath, “For *in* six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that *is* in them, and rested the seventh day” (Ex. 20.11). Do we really want to say to God, “Well, I know that’s not what You mean”?

Is God capable of such a thing? They only doubt it who do not know Him as He intends.

The purpose of God's creating

Genesis 1.31 gives us some sense of why God created the cosmos: “Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed *it was* very good.” God, as we have seen, is good; and He created the cosmos as a way of bringing His goodness to tangible expression, including creatures which both partake of that goodness and benefit from His goodness in countless wonderful ways.

God’s purpose for the cosmos is that it should be *good*, that is, that it should reflect Him, draw attention to Him, and thus lead everything in the cosmos *to* Him, that it might realize the fullness of His good intentions.

God created the world for good, and that everything in the world might find its purpose and fulfillment by serving His good and perfect will. The first great work of God – the work of creation – teaches us how to understand all the other works of God, as expressions of His power, undertaken for His glory, and as means to the realization of His goodness. Creation is the cornerstone of the Christian worldview, and when we compromise the plain Biblical account of creation, we end up with a worldview like Nebuchadnezzar’s vision of the statue, whose legs were a strange and unstable concoction of iron and clay, which cannot stand before the scrutiny, power, and progress of the Kingdom purposes of God (Dan. 2.40-45).

For reflection

1. Is God capable of creating the cosmos in six days? Why is this so hard for many Christians to accept?
2. In what sense is God’s work of creation a cornerstone for all of Christian worldview?
3. Science is a good tool, given by God to the world, for the purpose of knowing His goodness. Why is it so hard for secular science to acknowledge the cosmos as *creation* rather than as *nature*?

Next steps – Conversation: Search yourself. Do you believe the Biblical account of creation, or some admixture of Biblical teaching and “scientific” commentary? Why does this matter so much? Talk with a Christian friend about your answers.

2 Revelation

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." Genesis 1.28

The miracle of revelation

Among the works of God, it is easy to overlook His work of revelation. Without His work of revelation, human beings would have no knowledge of God at all, and would be similar to animals and plants, differing only in kind, and not in essence.

God reveals Himself in the world He has made. He reveals Himself to people, who are made in His image and likeness, that they might know Him, understand His will, think with His mind, value what He values, desire what He desires, obey what He commands, and thus know and enjoy Him, and all the goodness He has prepared for them.

That God reveals Himself to human beings must be regarded as a miracle, because this does not happen by merely mechanical or material means. God is infinite, holy, and entirely and purely Spirit; people are a mixture of spirit and matter. The sounds we hear – of winds and birds and other humans – and the things we see – of the world around us or the words on a page – can all be explained in naturalistic terms, at least, to an extent. But the revelation of God is a *supernatural* work which depends on God's desire, ability, and initiative in breaking into the material realm. By revelation, God imparts information and understanding about Himself and His will to the minds, hearts, and consciences of human beings. We cannot induce or provoke God to reveal Himself, like we can manipulate the material elements of the world to suit our purposes. Unless God reveals Himself to us, by His own free and perfect choice, we can have no knowledge of Him whatsoever.

And *that* He reveals Himself to men is a miracle not to be taken for granted, but to understand, submit to, and enjoy, and by which to be blessed and edified.

Types of revelation

As we see in the Law of Moses, God reveals Himself through two media. The first is the revelation that comes through creation, through the various creatures God has made throughout the cosmos. God made everything to reflect His goodness (Gen. 1.31). In the trees, beasts, stars, planets, oceans, mountains, and fields of the creation, God lets His goodness show forth. The variety, abundance, majesty, and creative power of the creation testify to the character of God. The study of creation can yield many insights into God and His ways.

In addition, God uses aspects of the creation to heighten awareness of His presence and power, and to induce His people to listen to His Word: as when He opened the sea for them to pass through, when He showed Himself in smoke and fire on the mountain, and when He opened the earth in judgment against certain rebellious Israelites.

Within this creational revelation, God also employs aspects of culture to communicate His nature and being. The tabernacle and its implements and decorations, the garments of the priests, the various types of sacrifices and offerings, and the Sabbaths and feast days – all aspects of Israel's cultural life – reminded the people of God concerning His will for them as a holy people and a nation of priests.

Thus in the works of God in creation, as well as in certain aspects of the works of culture, God continues to reveal Himself in the world. But this revelation of God is not sufficient to enable people to know all they must know about God, or what He requires of them. To that end, God provided an additional form of revelation, adding clarity, focus, and permanence to these more transient forms.

The second form of revelation is the revelation that comes through God's Word. God speaks to make Himself known and to reveal His will to people. Throughout the Law of God, He employs the sounds of human language – God adapting Himself to a medium common to His image-bearers – in order to communicate information about Himself and His covenant.

A variant form of this Word revelation comes in the oral transmission of stories and teachings from one generation to the next. Beginning with Adam and continuing to the time of Moses, God's people faithfully transmitted His Words to their children, who, in turn, taught them to their children as well. Those transmitted Words, to the extent that they faithfully represented the Word of God, were the Word of God.

Some written forms of revelation may have existed before Moses, and were perhaps in the possession of the people of Israel during his lifetime. The various *toledoth* ("history" or "generations") records in the book of Genesis are very similar to clay tablets found in sites of other ancient civilizations, recording names and events of significant people. God may have led His people to inscribe and preserve such records before Moses arrived to weave them and oral tradition – under the guidance of God's Spirit – into the book of Genesis and the first two chapters of Exodus.

Later in the books of Moses, God instructed him to write His Law – the five books, Genesis through Numbers – in a book, to be read, taught, taken to heart, copied, and obeyed by His people and their leaders, thus preserving His will in a more precise, comprehensive, clear, and permanent form for all generations.

Revelation receptor

God made human beings in His image, according to His likeness. The chief defining feature of this status is humankind's ability to receive divine revelation and to know God.

The account of the creation of Adam and Eve shows us this dynamic at work in pristine perfection. When God spoke to Adam and Eve, there was no need for Him to introduce Himself, explain Who He was and how they'd come to be, or to justify His ability to tell them what to do. Made in His image and likeness, Adam and Eve were constructed to receive divine revelation, recognize its provenance and authenticity, and respond to it gladly and obediently. The fall into sin did not obliterate the image of God in human beings; rather, it corrupted it, so that, apart from written revelation – and, later, the revelation of God's own Son – humankind's understanding of God remains corrupted, perverted, and incomplete.

The fact that religion has been a feature of every culture bears testimony to the longing of the human soul for connection with its Creator. God speaks to that longing continuously, both in creation and by His Word; but only certain of His image-bearers will ever hear and receive His revelation, those whom He has chosen to be His holy people.

For reflection

1. Why do we say that revelation is a kind of miracle?
2. What role does each of the various forms of revelation play in your own walk with the Lord?
3. Since God's revelation of Himself and His will begins in His Law, is it ever wise for us to neglect or ignore this portion of Scripture? Explain.

Next steps – Preparation: Do you need to improve your use of the various forms of divine revelation? What changes might you make to enhance your ability to hear God speaking to you? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

3 Providence

Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive." Genesis 50.19, 20

Provide-ence

We may think of the providence of God as His continuous attention to, care for, and ruling over all His works of creation. The basic idea of providence – or *provide-ence* – is captured in the Latin root, *providere*: to see beforehand so as to supply as needed. God sees all His creation and all its needs, and He exerts Himself in power to supply everything creation needs to fulfill His purposes. The Hebrew word, מָשַׁל, *mashal*, while not used of God in the Law of Moses, expresses His exercise of dominion, power, authority, and rule over the creation. As the sun and moon were provided to *rule* over the day and night, so they merely function as agents of God, obedient to His Word, in His continuous and comprehensive ordering, governing, and providing for the creation in whole and in part.

In the Law of God, the nature and beauty and mystery of His providence can be seen in the story of Joseph. When Joseph assured his brothers that “God meant it for good”, he was referring to everything that had transpired between them, from the time they sold him as a slave to Egypt to the time they stood before him, seeking bread. God provided for *Joseph*, despite their evil intentions; and now God was providing for *them*, through Joseph, despite their evil works.

Consider all that came under the power of God’s providence in the story of Joseph: his finding his brothers, the Midianite caravan; his being sold to an Egyptian of prominence; the gifting of Joseph with organizational skills, and the opportunities afforded him by Potiphar and then in the prison; Pharaoh’s dream; Joseph’s exaltation; the seven years of bounty and the seven years of famine; the kindly disposition of Pharaoh’s heart toward Joseph’s father and brothers (even though Egyptians despised Hebrews and shepherds); and all the myriad details of weather, crop cycles, political conditions, human decisions, and more that combined to unfold this story. God was providing them all, both *immediately* – as in sending a dream to Pharaoh – and *mediately* – in the circumstances of Joseph’s imprisonment and his service to Pharaoh’s butler and Pharaoh.

In His providence, God rules all of creation, down to the most minute details and in every moment of existence, to accomplish the salvation of His people and to bring His goodness to the world. The providence of God is yet another of the great works of God which begins to emerge in the Law of God as foundational to the Christian worldview.

In the place of God?

The doctrine of divine providence has been under assault by proponents of a secular worldview at least since the middle of the 18th century. The French *encyclopedists* who compiled the first great compendium of human knowledge, did so for the express purpose of writing God out of the picture. Denis Diderot, Jean la Rond D’Alembert, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and the others wrote, over a period of some twenty years, more than 74,000 articles covering every aspect of life and culture then known to the European mind, removing knowledge and life from the providential oversight of God, and placing them in the hands of human reason.

So successful has been the effort they launched, that now, in place of divine providence, the rationalism of human beings is considered to be that which sees and meets the needs of the world.

Joseph understood the folly of presuming to be God in the circumstances of life; the modern scientific and academic community knows no such humility. Rather, the hubris of the secular worldview consists precisely in its insisting that God has no place in the cosmic order, that He is either irrelevant or nonexistent, and that

everything that exists can be explained with the simple formula, *time + matter + chance + the rational mind*. We don't have to look far to see how successful the rationalistic effort to replace God has been. Look at the public school curriculum. Look at the entrenched hegemony of humanism in the colleges and universities. See how all matters of religion have been systematically hedged in, minimized, and vilified over the past generation. Note the marginalizing of religion and churches, which continues apace to this day.

Even among Christians the idea of God's providence is curtailed – the *idea*, but not the actual providence of God. We have ceded large segments of society, culture, and human relations to the dictates of rationalism; and we act as if God no longer is able to work miracles, or has no role in the seasons and harvests and political conditions of the world. We barely believe that He rules in our hearts, for we pay but lip-service to the relevance of His Law and the calling to seek His Kingdom and glory.

But the providence of God is no less true, no less comprehensive, and no less powerful today than it was in Joseph's day.

The end of God's providence

The proponents of a rationalist and secular worldview want no part of God, because they believe He has nothing good or positive to contribute to the wellbeing of the world. In truth, the unbelieving world prefers to be its own arbiter of what is good and true, than to submit to the holy and righteous and good Law of God.

In the Law of God, three purposes of divine providence are consistently in view. We see them all in the story of Joseph. In His providence, God thwarts the progress and effects of evil, which entered the world in the fall of Adam and Eve. Given the evil in men's hearts – as in the hearts of Joseph's brothers – we should be amazed that there is not *more* evil in the world than is present at any time. God works – mediately and immediately – to restrain the progress and effects of evil, and to overcome evil by His goodness.

The second purpose of divine providence is to continue His original plan for the creation, that it should know, enjoy, produce, flourish in, and refract His goodness in bountiful seasons, useful culture, justice and love, and the everyday wonders of creation and community.

And finally, God in His providence works for the salvation of His people, as Joseph explained to His brothers. For it is the people of God who, acknowledging His providence, give Him worship and thanks and praise, and thus realize His joy and power to serve Him in every area of their lives.

The providence of God over all creation is thus *critical* to the Christian worldview. Understanding this doctrine, and living in the light of it, we can be overcomers like Joseph in the midst of even the most adverse of conditions and circumstances.

For reflection

1. How would you define the doctrine of divine providence? Why is this such an important facet of the Christian worldview?
2. What do we mean by saying that God exercises His providence *immediately* as well as *mediately*? Give some examples of each.
3. How can being assured of the providence of God strengthen our faith and equip us to live in joy and power in every area of life?

Next steps – Transformation: Spend an extended time in prayer – 30-60 minutes. In this time, thank God for everything in

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your life. Praise Him for as many of His attributes as you can recall. And surrender every area of your life to His good and glorious purpose. Then begin to live more confidently in the providential care of the Lord.

4 Covenant

So God heard their groaning, and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. Exodus 2.24

Covenant

The covenant, as a work of God, is a prominent theme in the Law of Moses. The first mention of God's covenant is with Noah, when God showed him favor and promised to bring him into what is always referred to by God as "My covenant" (cf. Gen. 6.18). Later, God established His covenant with Abraham (Gen. 15.18; 17.7) and, subsequently, with Isaac and Jacob. And He "remembered" this covenant as the basis for Israel's deliverance and renewal in His covenant at Mt. Sinai.

But what *is* God's covenant?

God's covenant is an arrangement between God and the people He chooses for Himself, an *economy* in which He promises them life, blessing, and dominion on condition of their trusting in Him exclusively. Only one covenant – God's covenant – exists between God and His people, although that covenant takes various forms and is differently administered according to the changing circumstances of God's people.

God's covenant involves four components: God's calling, God's promises, God's covenant obligations, and God's seal. His calling is the occasion of His extending the covenant to people. His promises are what He resolves to do for them. His obligations describe the means whereby they may realize those promises. And his seal provides a stamp and marker which God provides as a reminder of His covenant.

Even though the word *covenant* is not mentioned in connection with Adam and Eve, we can see that, in effect, all the components are there. God created Adam and Eve and called them to take up His work of filling the earth and having dominion. He promised them life with Him, on condition of their obeying His Word. His seal of the covenant for Adam and Eve was the garden of Eden, where the goodness of God abounded on every hand.

God's covenant comes to its first definitive form with Abram (Abraham), whom God called, and to whom He spelled out precious and very great promises, which Abram could expect to realize by moving to the land of Canaan and serving God there. This covenant with Abraham was transferred to his son, Isaac, and to Isaac's son, Jacob, and his sons. It is this covenant with Abraham that God was attending to and preparing to renew ("remembered") when He called Moses from the burning bush. At Mt. Sinai, God renewed His covenant with His people, setting forth both its promises and conditions in terms of His Law. The Law was not given to *save* His chosen people, but to show them how to *live within the salvation* God had provided for them, so as to realize maximum blessing.

Precious and very great promises

In Genesis 12.1-3, God declared His promises to His people in definitive fashion. Two basic promises organize the six promises outlined here: God promised to *ble*ss His people, and to *make them a blessing* to the world. Let's look briefly at the six promises made to Abram which constitute the essence of God's covenant.

A great nation. God promised Abram that he would be the father of a multitude of people. This echoes the mandate to Adam and Eve and Noah to "fill the earth" with offspring. God would later reinforce this promise by likening Abraham's offspring to the sand of the sea, the dust of the earth, and the stars of the heaven.

Blessing. God promised to *ble*ss Abram and His seed. The Hebrew root of this word, בָּרַךְ, *barach*, also means "to kneel", and in its nominative form, "knee." Contained in the idea of God's blessing Abraham, therefore,

is that of his being on his knees before God, to see, know, worship, delight in, and serve God exclusively

A great name. Here the sense seems to be that Abraham and the nation descending from Him, blessed to know and serve the living God, would be a people of great influence, to shape and bring God's goodness to their world.

Be a blessing. God's covenant people are to be for God a conduit of blessing to the world, to all creation and its peoples, that the goodness of God might again appear throughout the earth.

Bless and curse. This promise anticipates that not all the nations and peoples of the world would respond favorably to the blessings extended to them through the people of God. Some will be incorporated into those blessings, and those who repudiate them will come under the curse of God.

All families of the earth. The promise of blessing is to extend through Abraham's seed to all the earth, both geographically and historically. God Himself will bring restored blessing and goodness to the world through the people He has chosen for Himself.

All of grace

Theologians sometimes treat the various covenants of the Old Testament, particularly those mentioned in the Law, as separate covenants, in which people, in effect, *earn* the favor of God by fulfilling certain obligations. This is to misread both the nature of God's covenant and the terms on which He has founded it.

God's covenant is *one* covenant – “My covenant” – but it unfolds in various stages, during which the manner of God's administering His covenant with His people changes to adjust to their circumstances. The covenant remains the same, but the manner of God's discharging it – the *economy* or *dispensation* of His covenant – is made to fit the needs of His people.

Thus, God's covenant is always a covenant of promise, a covenant of grace. We see this most clearly in Genesis 15, in the ceremony by which God sealed His covenant with Abram. What is described here was a covenant practice common among kings and rulers in those days. A covenant path of slain animals was constructed, the terms of the covenant were declared, then the covenanting partners walked the path, as if saying to the assembled hosts of each nation, “Let the same thing happen to whoever violates this covenant as you see having happened to these animals.” In the case of God's covenant with Abram, only the symbols representing God pass between the slain animals. God takes upon Himself *both* the obligation of fulfilling the covenant, and the *penalty* for failing to do so. Abram's duty is merely to receive the covenant and live within its gracious terms, and the precious and very great promises of the covenant would come to him accordingly.

God's covenant provides an economy and administration which sustains the Lord's relationship with His people throughout the Scriptures. And all the essential features and terms of that glorious and gracious covenant are established in the Law of Moses.

For reflection

1. Why is God's covenant so prominent in the books of Moses?
2. What is the role of faith in God's covenant? What comes to those who live by faith?
3. How is it apparent that God's covenant with His people is always all of grace?

Next steps – Transformation: Imagine that the promises of God's covenant were being fulfilled in your life and Personal Mission Field. What would you expect to see?

5 Judgment

“And the Egyptians shall know that I am the LORD, when I stretch out My hand on Egypt and bring out the children of Israel from among them.” Exodus 7.5

The idea of judgment

Judgment, as a work of God, is frequently misunderstood. Some see in God's judgment a kind of unfairness. They recognize that God does not judge comparatively, but absolutely; thus, they cannot excuse themselves from His judgment by pleading they aren't as bad as that other guy. Further, as a stance of self-justification, they consider that all judgment is bad; we should learn to tolerate and get along with everyone, and so should God. And since God is the *supreme* Judge of the world, such people probably consider that He is supremely unfair.

Others consider that judgment is an important part of God's works, but merely as that which is coming on the Last Day. They know God will judge the world, and that it will not be a happy occasion for everyone. Some will hear Him say to them, “Depart from Me,” and then it will be too late to try setting things right with the Judge of all flesh. To talk of God judging more than this, though, is presumptuous. To say of any act or event that takes place in time, that it is “the judgment of God,” is not within our remit. Best to leave all such determinations to God alone.

There is, of course, a Day of Judgment coming, but this particular aspect of the work of God's judgment does not appear in the five books of Moses. This comes later, especially beginning in the Writings of the Old Testament, and into the New. That God judges in the here and now of our lives *does* appear in the Law of God, and represents an important aspect both of His providence and His covenant.

In the Genesis-Deuteronomy, the judgment of God takes the form of His just decision-making against those who have “cursed” or are about to “curse” His people in some way. Thus, God's judgment is a part of the outworking of His grace for the people of His covenant. By His judgment, God acts to protect or vindicate or deliver His people, by acting to stop, hinder, overthrow, or otherwise thwart those who intend His people ill.

The judgment of God is an important work for us to understand, because, being a work of grace, God's judgment always works to further the purpose of His covenant in blessings to those who trust in His Word.

Degrees of judgment

God's judgment does not come to all people alike. His judgment against Cain, for example, was so great, that Cain feared He would not be able to bear up under it (Gen. 4.13). His judgment against Pharaoh took the form of “great plagues” – a foreshadowing of a greater time of plagues to come (Gen. 12.14-20). He completely destroyed the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, in no small part because of the threat they posed against His righteous servant, Lot (Gen. 14, 19).

Against Abimelech, God's judgment was lighter – temporarily closing the wombs of his household and an admonition and warning in a dream (Gen. 20.3-18). Abimelech learned the lesson well; later, when he discovered that Rebekah was not Isaac's sister, but his wife, he didn't wait for any warning from God. He acted immediately, to avert any judgment, such as he had experienced with Isaac's father. He knew he needed to act, lest any violation of Rebekah by anyone in his household would “bring guilt” on them before the Lord (Gen. 26.1-11).

With the prophet Balaam, God's judgment took the form of warning and thwarting his attempts to curse the people of Israel (Num. 22-24). But Balaam apparently didn't learn his lesson well. He seems to have played a

role in leading the people of Israel into harlotry and idolatry, and thus God judged him by taking his life (Num. 31.8, 16).

Against Nadab and Abihu, the judgment of God was sudden and deadly, because they sought, for the sake of gaining some special attention, to add to God's Word regarding the burning of incense (Lev. 10). And the judgment of God was equally sudden and lethal against the sons of Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and all others who sought to overthrow Moses and seize leadership in Israel (Num. 16). His judgment against Moses, for striking the rock, rather than speaking to it, was to deprive him of the blessing of entering the land of promise (Num. 20).

There can be no doubting that the Law of God teaches that God works judgment in time, against people, by various means and to varying degrees, according to His good pleasure, timing, and will. Judgment in time is an important work of God, and it continues to this day.

The end of judgment

But why? Why does God judge people and nations? Why not just allow things to play out in history, and then render final determinations on the Last Day? Three objectives are in view in every act of divine judgment. We can see all these objectives at work in the judgment God brought by the hand of Moses against Pharaoh.

Honor His covenant. First, God acts in judgment against men and nations to honor His covenant with His people. He has declared His Word, and He will stand by it. He promised that those who curse Israel, He will curse. Egypt and Pharaoh had cursed Israel by making them slaves, depriving them of their identity as a people unto the Lord, and seeking to destroy them as a race. God's promise to them, in the covenant He was *remembering* as He sent Moses to them, was that He would bring His curses against all such people, and He surely did.

Preserve His people. And this was so that He might keep His people alive. As we shall see in our final installment in this series, God in His grace and providence works in special ways to advantage His people and carry out His promises to them. He is the Shepherd of His people, and He acts in judgment against those who threaten them, so that they can continue in their mandate to fill the earth and exercise dominion for His goodness.

Obtain glory. Finally, God's judgment is so that He and His glory might be acknowledged. Pharaoh certainly came to know the LORD is God, and there is no other. This does not mean he worshiped or submitted to God, but that He knew that God *is*, and that He is able to carry out His Word *against* any who resist Him, and *for* all who trust in Him.

God's acting in judgment in time, in the lives of men and nations, is an important work of God in His Law. We should assume that, because this work is so prominent at this early stage of Scripture, it will remain prominent throughout, as well as beyond the pages of Scripture into the times in which we live.

Questions for reflection

1. Why is it important for us to understand that God judges people and nations in time?
2. God judges not only unbelieving people and nations, but His own people as well. How can you see that in the books of Moses? How should that serve to warn us in our day (cf. Heb. 12.3-11)?
3. How can we avoid becoming the objects of God's judgment?

Next steps – Preparation: Think and pray about the day ahead. Where do possibilities exist that you might come under the judgment of God? How can you prepare at the beginning of the day to avoid that judgment? Talk with a Christian friend about these questions.

6 Redemption

“Therefore say to the children of Israel: ‘I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. I will take you as My people, and I will be your God.’” Exodus 6.6, 7

The nature of redemption

As with other words in the vernacular of Christian faith and worldview, *redemption* can be used so often and with so little attention to its true meaning, that it can become easily misused and mistaken for other terms.

For example, in the minds of many Christians, *redemption* and *salvation* are virtually the same idea. One who is redeemed is also saved, and so *salvation* and *redemption* refer to the same condition.

Yet this is misleading. Equating *redemption* with *salvation* narrows the scope of *salvation* by compromising the true nature of *redemption*. *Redemption* is a *work* of God; *salvation* is a *gift* of God. It is because God has done the work of *redemption* that the gift of *salvation* comes to sinners who believe the Good News of Jesus.

To get at the true nature of *salvation*, therefore, we have to consider what God had in mind, and what He intended when He accomplished the work of *redemption*. His *redemption* is unto our *salvation*; and our *salvation* is, therefore, defined by His *redemption*, and not merely our experience or ideas.

The basic idea of the Biblical doctrine of redemption is to purchase at a cost, a price determined by the assessed value of the object to be redeemed. The Hebrew word, גָּאָל, (*ga'al*) means to redeem; act as a kinsman for (the natural love of brethren encourages redeeming another when needed); to redeem something by payment of the value assessed. Redemption involves securing something to oneself, usually in exchange for payment, to carry out a promise or pledge, “to buy back.”

Redemption as an act of God involves His purchasing a people for His own possession, a people who are of infinite value to Him, thus demanding an infinite price, a price higher than they – individually or altogether – could ever raise.

But why do God's people need to be redeemed? And how is this work of redemption accomplished, so that they might be saved, and God might possess them for Himself?

The need for redemption

It is important to remember that all situations of redemption in the books of Moses are *real* but *symbolic* primarily. They are real in that God really accomplished them; they are symbolic in that they are not the full work of God's redemption, but point to it, and encourage faith in it.

Redemption becomes necessary because God's people are not in the condition for which He originally intended them. They are fallen in sin, ensnared in lies and deceit, and doomed to die. Redemption comes as redress of this condition, albeit only partially during the period of Moses and the Law of God.

Thus, when God redeemed Adam and Eve by clothing them with the skin of sacrificed animals, He provided for them better garments than they were trusting in, garments acceptable to Him because they were His work, not theirs. But this act of covering with a sacrifice primarily points forward to a greater sacrifice, one of infinite worth, that would accomplish for Adam, Eve, and all God's chosen people the purchase from helplessness and hopelessness which they can in no way accomplish for themselves.

So also when God redeemed Isaac from being sacrificed on Mt. Moriah. He really redeemed the lad, by

supplying a ram in his place. But this is just the next marker in a forward-pointing story of a greater redemption to come.

The great event of Old Testament redemption is the deliverance of Israel from captivity in Egypt. When Israel became captive in Egypt, God came to redeem them. They could not free themselves from the oppression and misery which had become their condition in life. God came to do so, and He paid for the redemption of His people with the blood of Egypt's first-born animals and men. Only when Israel's captor – Pharaoh – saw the high cost of holding God's people captive, a price paid by every Egyptian household, only then did he let God's people go to meet with Him at Mt. Sinai. And, as if the death of every first-born were not quite sufficient, God also caused the payment of Egypt's armies, which were drowned in the Red Sea.

The message here is clear: The cost of God's redeeming His people from captivity is terrible, but it is not a cost they would have to pay.

All the various acts of redemption encoded in the Law of Moses – the sacrifices, offerings, purchasing previously sold lands or houses, and transfers of deeds, etc. – are of the same nature. An object is redeemed at cost, *really* and *symbolically*. It is not too much to say that daily life in ancient Israel was an ongoing experience of redemption, all of which had meaning and efficacy in their time, and all of which signaled to the people of God that a greater, more complete and transformative, work of redemption was yet to come.

The agent of redemption

Redemption being a work of God, it is necessarily a work of grace. God is not obliged to redeem anyone. He does so because He places infinite value on the lives of His people; He loves them in spite of themselves; He desires them as His own people, to know Him in a life of blessing and joy; and He alone is able to provide the infinite payment necessary for their full and final deliverance from sin to salvation, death to life, misery to joy, coffins in the earth to eternal bliss with Him.

Redemption is all of grace, and provides the gift of salvation which, while it is received by faith, is realized only by the ongoing work of God and His grace. God accomplishes redemption with a view to His previous intentions, that His people should be blessed in Him, should fill the earth and have dominion over it, and should be a blessing to all the nations of the world. Redemption is unto a *great* salvation (Heb. 2.3), and not merely unto ensuring transit to heaven for those who are saved.

God's work of redemption means that the work of His saved people should be *cosmic* in scope and focused on renewing the goodness of God in all the earth, before all peoples, to the praise of His glorious grace.

Questions for reflection

1. How does the story of Noah show the redemption of God?
2. Moses himself was twice-redeemed before God called him to deliver His people from Egypt. Explain.
3. How should we expect to know God's work of redemption as a daily experience?

Next steps – Transformation: God's redemption is for your salvation in every area of your life, unto His goodness and glory. How does this lead you to think about your daily schedule? How should it guide you in praying for your day? Share your thoughts with a Christian friend.

7 Keeping

“And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink, that you may know that I am the LORD your God. And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh. Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.” Deuteronomy 29.5-9

An administration within the administration

We have previously described the Lord's work of providence, what He does, every moment in every place, to sustain and administer His creation and maintain its creatures. God's providence bears witness to the love He has for His creation, and even for those people who oppose or deny Him. The goodness of the Lord is in all the earth, as we have seen in so many ways during our investigation into the worldview *vision* presented in the Law of God.

Within God's providential administration of all things, a special exertion of divine attention and energy is directed toward His people, those He calls to Himself within His covenant. This administration is designed to keep, preserve, increase, and prosper – to *bless* – those who have responded to His grace by faith and obedience. We may call this particular component of divine providence God's work of *keeping*. God *keeps* to Himself, and within the parameters of blessing marked out in His covenant, those He has chosen, redeemed, and saved. Keeping is a special component of divine providence. Like the Gulf Stream, it is a river of spiritual energy which flows with the riches of grace within the ocean of providence, and in ways that only the faithful people of God can know.

Whereas *providence* expresses the *grace* of God to all creation, *keeping* expresses His *special grace* to those who dwell within His covenant.

We can understand the uniqueness of this “administration within the administration” which is divine providence by looking at its focus and ends, as Moses outlines these in Deuteronomy 29.5-9.

Focus of God's keeping

Five foci outline the purpose and effects of God's keeping.

Presence. First and most important of these is the *presence of God* with His people (v. 5; cf. Ex. 33.12-14). God was with His people throughout their sojourn in the wilderness, as He had been with their forebears in every generation. He revealed His glory to them so that they saw Him in His greatness, majesty, power, beauty, and fearsomeness. As His people knew and practiced the presence of God, they entered the *rest* He provided for them – that condition of peace that leads to joy in knowing the Lord.

Guidance. Second, God *guided* His people each step of their way (v. 5). He guided Abram to the land of Canaan, Jacob to Ur and back to Canaan, and Israel through the desert to the banks of the Jordan River. The daily guidance of God is especially evident in the pillar of smoke and the pillar of fire by which God indicated His presence with His people. When these moved, Israel moved, and they went only so far as God directed them. Each day for forty years, they were learning how to follow the guidance of the Lord ever further into the promises of His covenant.

Provision. Third, God *provided* for His people's needs at all times (vv.5, 6). Daily they had food, water when it was nowhere to be seen, clothing, flocks and herds, and the wealth of the Egyptians to supply all their daily needs. All this came from the hand of God in a place where such supplies were not available to other people.

Protection. God protected His people throughout their sojourn in the wilderness, just as He protected their fathers before them (v. 7). At times He used skilled leaders, such as when Joshua defeated the Amalekites who were harassing the camp; at other times He protected them by direct intervention, such as at the Red Sea. God consistently made sure that the enemies of His people could not realize their plans against His chosen ones.

Promises. Finally, God daily led His people to a fuller realization of and greater trust in His precious and very great promises (v. 8). This is especially seen in the way Israel defeated and appropriated the lands of the kings east of the Jordan – the “firstfruits” of the larger conquest of Canaan which was to come. Each day, as God shepherded His people with food, water, protection, guidance, and the presence of His glory, He was granting them a greater measure of the promises of His covenant, and leading them to live toward more of those promises day by day.

God did not administer His grace in these ways to any nation other than Israel, on whom He set His *special* love, and for whom He administered His grace in these *special* ways, to keep them and bless them as His people.

Ends of God's keeping

Why did God do this? We may note three purposes for God's work of keeping His people. First, by this special administration of His grace, which stands out in stark relief to the grace He shows the rest of the world, God intended His people to *grow in the knowledge of Him and His glory* (v. 6). The greatest benefit of covenant membership is that people can know God, can relate to Him, come before Him in worship and prayer, delight in Him, increase in His virtues, and partake of His glory. God's keeping of His people is designed above all to help them gain more of this great boon, that they might realize in knowing Him all the greatest hopes, fondest desires, most earnest purpose and meaning, highest aspirations, and deepest rest.

Second, God keeps His people so that they remain within and enjoy more of the benefits of His covenant (v. 9). The special grace He showed by His daily *keeping* of Israel was designed to induce them to daily and increased *keeping* of His covenant. As they realized His presence with them and all the benefits of His keeping, the people were greatly encouraged in their calling to increase, multiply, and exercise dominion according to God's Law, and for His glory and the blessing of the world.

As they did, as God's people walked in faithful obedience to the directives of His covenant, they increased in His *blessing* (v. 9) and “prospered” in every aspect of life.

Keeping is the ongoing work of God by which He shepherds His people, within the framework of His covenant love, to help them realize all the goodness He intended for them from the beginning, and that He still seeks for them today.

Questions for reflection

1. What do we mean by saying that God's keeping of His people is an “administration within the administration”?
2. How do you experience the five foci of God's keeping?
3. How does God want you to respond to His keeping you to Himself?

Next steps – Transformation: Make a list of all the ways you experience God's keeping today. Use that list to pray with thanksgiving and praise at the end of the day. Share this exercise with a Christian friend.

Questions for reflection or discussion

1. Summarize in your own words each of the works of God examined in this study.
2. Why is it important that we understand, remember, and review the works of God frequently?
3. What do we learn about God from His works? What do we learn about ourselves?
4. How can prayer help us to recall and appreciate God's works?
5. What's the most important lesson you've gained from this study? How are you putting that lesson to work in your walk with and work for the Lord?

Prayer:

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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