

A PATTERN OF RESTORATION



Restoring the Reconciled World Part 3

T. M. Moore

A ReVision Resource from The Fellowship of Ailbe

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Waxed Tablet Publications

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Welcome to *A Pattern of Restoration*

God has never been content to allow His people and His world to languish in sin.

Sin is not the way it's supposed to be. To get back more in the direction of God's original intent, God raised up in every generation of the people of Israel men to restore a portion of His original goodness to the people. Together, their work constitutes a pattern of restoration that can help us in understanding our own calling to the ministry of restoring the reconciled world.

In this part of our study, we will trace highlights of that pattern from the earliest days of Scripture to the work of our Lord Jesus Christ. And we will see, at every stage, an emerging pattern of restoration that comes down to us in our day.

We hope you find these studies helpful. Take one lesson at a time, reading the Scriptures and narrative aloud, and pausing to reflect on and discuss the questions provided. Don't be in a hurry. Be willing to take more than one session on a lesson if it will allow you to delve more deeply into the subject matter.

If you're in a group, make sure you prepare for each study by reading through the lesson in advance and answering the questions in writing. Take turns leading your group. Let every member share in the privilege and responsibility of facilitating discussions. Group leaders should not feel like they have to "have all the answers." Their task is simply to lead the group through the readings and questions, and to help everyone participate.

These 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 Noah

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." Genesis 9.1

God's unchanging plan

I can imagine that some believers become uncomfortable considering the Gospel in terms of restoration. We're so used to thinking of salvation as the forgiveness of sins and eternal life – that is, going to heaven when we die – that making any serious investment of effort in the stuff of this world can seem like a distraction from spiritual and eternal matters. Isn't that the mistake Christians made back in the days of the "social gospel", when the modernist/fundamentalist dispute rent the fabric of the Church?

But we need to remember that the call to follow Jesus is a call to His Kingdom and glory (1 Thess. 2.12). The Kingdom of Jesus – His rule and reign at the Father's right hand – extends to the entire cosmos, which He upholds by His Word of power (Heb. 1.3), which He has reconciled to the Father together with the "all things" it contains (2 Cor. 5.18, 20), and in which He is making those all things new (Rev. 21.5). The work of reconciling all things to the Father has been passed on to us, and we continue the work Jesus began as we seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God (Matt. 6.33).

Moreover, our calling to the glory of God applies to everything in our lives (1 Cor. 10.31). Whatever we do has the potential to show the goodness of God and to reveal His wisdom, beauty, and truth. But only if we consciously live in all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities as unto the Lord and in the service of Jesus Christ (Col. 3.23, 24). This means taking captive every thought and thing and action for obedience to the Lord (2 Cor. 10.3-5), within our own spheres of influence (2 Cor. 10.13-18). This is the work of restoration.

In this part of our study of *Restoring the Reconciled World*, we'll see that a recurring pattern of restoration pervades the Scripture, incorporating all the various aspects of restoration we have discussed thus far – the soul, relationships and society, culture, and creation itself. By this pattern, God means to imprint on our souls a way of being in the world that will prepare and sustain us for the work of restoration.

And that pattern begins with Noah and his work of restoration following the flood.

Noah and the work of restoration

Noah's life following the flood was one of restoring life and hope to the world. Imagine the desolation and devastation that everywhere prevailed after the waters of the flood receded. It might have been easy for those eight people, as they disembarked the ark and watched the animals disperse, to simply resign themselves to an unpromising existence of hopelessness and despair.

But this was not God's intention for them.

The first order of business was to re-establish connection with God – to get their souls back into proper orientation. To that end, Noah built an altar and sacrificed some of the clean animals God had commanded him to take on board by sevens (Gen. 8.20-22). God received Noah's offering and held out the promise of blessing and long life to Noah and his family.

Their souls thus rightly oriented, God next reiterated the charge He had given Adam and Eve – to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Gen. 9.1). God's intention here is clear, and it echoes the mandate and vision He set before Adam and Eve. The creation is to be populated, ordered, and cultivated so that it and the people who inhabit it can know the blessings of God.

A law concerning murder was added to restore right relationships between people, who had for generations

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been living in violence with one another before the flood (vv. 6, 7). The society of human beings is to be founded on mutual respect and care, rather than on violence.

God also charged Noah with the work of cultivating the earth (v. 7). This would entail a variety of cultural activities to allow the creation to fulfill its productive potential. Homes, vineyards, tools, and the work that goes with these were all invested in restoring the fruitfulness of the earth and its people.

God pronounced His covenant with Noah, as He had promised before the flood; and it's clear this covenant was not just for Noah's salvation. All creation, all Noah's work and family and future, and especially Noah and his family's relationship with God were bound up in this covenant. All the work of restoration was to be undertaken, maintained, and advanced so that the earth and its people could realize the goodness of the Lord once again.

That this did not actually occur does not negate God's plan; rather, it reminds us of the need for divine intervention to break the cycle of sin and rebellion that prevents God's covenant from realizing its full blessing and potential. God made the rainbow a sign of His faithfulness, pointing back to the promise made to Noah, and forward to His coming eternal Kingdom (cf. Rev. 4.2, 3).

Lessons from Noah

As this first stage of the pattern of restoration unfolds before us, let's make just a few quick observations.

First, the work of restoration is all-encompassing, overlapping, and ongoing. Keeping their souls, relationships, culture, and the creation fruitful and blessed would be the daily work of Noah and his family, and not always with the most impressive results. Restoration is not a once-and-done proposition. It's what we're called to by the Lord, Who intends His goodness and glory to cover the earth as the waters cover the sea (Hab. 2.14).

Second, the work of restoration unfolds according to God's Law and promises. Put another way, God promises to bless our work as long as we abide within the framework of worship and life He has appointed for us. Depart from that, as the descendants of Noah soon enough would, and you end up on the short end of God's big stick. God tells us what He intends to do and how we must do His work. Our duty is to hear His Word, aim for His promises, and obey His Law.

Finally, restoration is a work *at hand*, and not far off in the future. It's not for after we graduate college, or get a new job, or the kids grow up and leave home, or we have a little more free time. It's for now, always, in every situation, at every opportunity, investing all our time and talents in the work of bringing the goodness of God to light in the land of the living.

With Noah, God establishes the pattern and template for the work of restoration. As we shall see, He repeats this pattern again and again throughout Scripture, to prepare us for the work of reconciliation we have received.

For Reflection

1. Summarize the various aspects of Noah's work of restoration.
2. What would have happened if Noah had refused to take up that work?
3. What are the main lessons for you from Noah's work of restoration?

Next Steps – Transformation: Begin putting to work the lessons you have learned from Noah's work in your own daily walk with and work for the Lord. Where will you start?

2 Joseph

*Moreover He called for a famine in the land;
He destroyed all the provision of bread.
He sent a man before them—
Joseph—who was sold as a slave.* Psalm 105.16, 17

Prevenient grace

One aspect of the grace of God which is frequently overlooked or taken for granted is its *prevenience*. Grace, that is, goes before us. This is what Jesus had in mind when He said He was going away to prepare a place for us, so that He might come again and take us unto Himself (Jn. 14.1-3). By the grace of God, Jesus is at work even now, making ready a great banquet for His Bride, and preparing a new heavens and new earth for her – our – eternal dwelling.

Closer to home, the grace of God *goes before* even in the work of salvation. Consider first the question of who will be saved. Whosoever may come and believe in Jesus (Jn. 3.16). But who will do that? Those whom God has chosen from before the foundation of the world, whose names and everything about them were written in the Lamb's Book of Life before the world began (cf. Eph. 1.4; Rom. 9.6-16; Ps. 139.13-16; Rev. 21.27). Grace was at work for our salvation even before we were born. Grace works at the moment of salvation as well. As Paul explains, when it pleases God to save, He sends His Spirit into our hearts, engendering faith and empowering us to confess God as our Father and Jesus as Lord (Gal. 4.6; Rom. 10.6-13). Paul's own life is an example of the power of prevenient grace to overcome even the hardest of hearts and make a disciple of a destroyer (cf. Acts 9.1-20; 1 Tim. 1.12-16).

The grace of God is always running ahead of us, always clearing paths, opening doors, and readying resources so that our work of restoring all things can go forward according to His plan and for His glory. Joseph provides an excellent example of how prevenient grace works to bring restoration to God's people and the world. Let's take a closer look.

Prevenient grace in Joseph's life

Already in his youth, Joseph was being readied by God for his great work of restoration. He was the object of his father's special love (Gen. 37.3), because he was born to Jacob in his old age. He was showered with affection and gifts, and while these must certainly have pleased Joseph, and given him a measure of assurance and confidence, they caused his brothers to hate him (Gen. 37.4).

While he was still a youth, God spoke to Joseph in a dream, which he did not understand at the time, and which, by sharing it, enraged his brothers even more (Gen. 37.5-28). They sold Joseph into slavery, then lied to Jacob, saying his beloved son had been devoured by a wild beast (v. 33). Joseph, meanwhile, was sold again in Egypt. But, as the psalmist seems to indicate, the dream stayed with him, and gave him a sense of God's Presence and purpose for his life (Ps. 105.18, 19; cf. Gen. 39.8, 9). He did not know what God was planning, but he resolved to be ready for it, whenever it came. He worked hard, learned all he could, helped where he was able, and kept himself pure from sin and deceit.

And for his troubles, he ended up in prison. Grace works that way sometimes. But Joseph held on to the Lord, Who continued showing him mercy (Gen. 39.21) and using him as a source of blessing to the lowest of the low in Egyptian society.

We know the rest of the story. Joseph interprets dreams in prison, and this becomes the means of his release. He interprets dreams for Pharaoh, and this becomes the occasion of his exaltation to the highest office in the land. By trusting in the Lord and seeking to discern His will, Joseph led the people of Egypt to make extraordinary preparations for seven years of famine, which Joseph was given to understand were shortly to

begin.

Joseph's diligence and genius as a servant, communicator, organizer, and leader saved the entire nation of Egypt. God used him to maintain and restore wellbeing through a time of terrible disaster. The work he did in preparing for the famine was by the prevenient grace of God, and not merely – or even primarily – for the people of Egypt. As Joseph testified, God meant this whole situation – from his being sold into slavery to his saving the nation of Egypt – as a means for keeping alive a people unto Himself (cf. Gen. 50.15-21).

By faith, Joseph knew he was a chosen child of Abraham, and thus an heir of the promises of God. By faith, he waited on the Lord to make clear the deep meaning of His revelation. By faith, he worked diligently, and with a view to the coming days, when God's Word would be realized. Then a people would be saved, if only temporally, together with their culture and society. But more important, the people of God would be restored to Him, and to one another; and they would enter together the next stage of God's great plan of redemption, in which they would, from a family of seventy, become a nation of millions as vehicles of God's grace and salvation.

Prevenient grace in your life?

God is at work within you even now, willing and doing according to His good pleasure (Phil. 2.12). That power is greater than you could ever ask or think (Eph. 3.20). Some of what He is doing is for your good today, as, by His grace, He assures you of His love, clothes you increasingly in the many-colored coat of Christ, communicates His good and perfect will, and empowers you for obedience. He is sending you out into your own Personal Mission Field, like Joseph, to do good works of restoration, and to look forward to greater works even than these.

The grace of God is going ahead of you, preparing opportunities, equipping you with experiences and gifts and skills, and disposing your soul – heart, mind, and conscience – for whatever work of restoration He may set before you in the days to come. Our attitude must be like that of Joseph: Doing whatever is at hand today, and doing it as unto the Lord, and for His goodness and glory (Col. 3.23, 24; 1 Cor. 10.31); peering into and poring over the revelation of God in His Word, seeking to discover what He may intend for us in the day or years ahead (Ps. 90.12, 16, 17); making the most of every opportunity to make all things new (Eph. 5.15-17); doing good works that glorify God (Matt. 5.13-16); and pressing ever more earnestly and deeply into His Kingdom of righteousness, peace, and joy in the Spirit (Matt. 6.33; 11.12; Lk. 16.16; Rom. 14.17, 18).

Knowing that the grace of God is running ahead of us, making ways for us, and fitting us with every good work in our particular calling to restoration, let us be always preparing, always laboring, always looking to the Lord in faith, always open to wherever the Lord might lead through whatever open door pleases Him, and confident in Him – and in His prevenient grace – to go forward with joy and boldness into whatever work of restoration lies ahead. And if we'll do so, we will be always rejoicing in the present and prevenient grace of our all-restoring God.

For reflection

1. What are some ways you have seen the prevenient grace of God at work in your life?
2. How should knowing that God's grace is always running ahead of us help us to prepare for each day?
3. What are the main lessons from the story of Joseph that you take away for your own work of restoration?

Next Steps – Transformation: Take the lessons you mentioned in question 3, and begin working to incorporate those into your work of restoring the reconciled world of your Personal Mission Field.

3 Joshua

*For He remembered His holy promise,
And Abraham His servant.
He brought out His people with joy,*

*His chosen ones with gladness.
He gave them the lands of the Gentiles,
And they inherited the labor of the nations,
That they might observe His statutes
And keep His laws.
Praise the LORD! Psalm 105.42-45*

The promised land

The Scriptures remind us that the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it (Ps. 24.1). In a way analogous to this, God promised Abram that all the land of Canaan would belong to him and the people of God's covenant after him (Gen. 12.7; 13.14-17; 17.8). "The land is yours, and everything in it," God said in effect. And thus Abram (Abraham) set out to bear children, build herds, cultivate fields, and hire native dwellers to create a dwelling place from which the blessings of God's covenant could flow to the entire earth.

Throughout the rest of the Old Testament, the land of Canaan is seen as a sign of God's blessing and an outpost for reaching the whole earth. As in the land of promise, so beyond, the wisdom of God would confront and impress the nations (Deut. 4.5, 6); the glory of God would cover the earth (Hab. 2.14); and nations and peoples, seeing the effects of God's people living by His Law, would stream up to Mt. Zion to learn more about God and how they might share in the blessings of His covenant (Is. 2.1-4; Mic. 2.1-8). The people of Israel would enlarge their tents and territories beyond the land of Canaan, reaching into all nations and peoples, to incorporate them into the grace and blessing of God (Is. 54.1-10).

But in Joseph's day, the people suffered a major dislocation. It would take them 400 years and more to begin to recover from this; but after that time, God assured them, they would once again possess the land promised to Abraham – the land that had come to be occupied by the various tribes and peoples of Canaan (Gen. 15.13-21). The promised land would be restored to the people of Abraham, and with it, blessing and bounty in every facet and aspect of their lives (Deut. 28.1-14).

God sent Moses to begin the work of restoring His people to their land; but it was Joshua who would ultimately lead and deliver the people of God into the promises of God's covenant in Canaan.

Conquest and settlement

Joshua's conquest and settlement of Canaan foreshadow in many ways the work of our Lord Jesus Christ in reconciling the world to God. Like Jesus, Joshua's work began in the wilderness of what would become Judea. There he began the work of binding and expelling the demon-worshipping pagan peoples of Canaan. In a series of strategic campaigns, Joshua pursued the pagan usurpers and drove them from the land of promise, in the process, appropriating their fields, farms, and homes to be restored to God's people and worked and inhabited according to God's Law, and destroying every vestige of pagan worship and ways.

Like Jesus and the Holy Spirit, Joshua prepared the people for the work of restoration by renewing the covenant with the Lord (Josh. 6), and writing the Law of God for all His people to see and read (Josh. 8.30-32). From there he led the people as one into the work of restoring the promised land to the people of Abraham. Once the pagan peoples had been largely subdued, Joshua parceled the land out among the tribes,

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allocating cities and farms to all the people, and charging them to keep covenant with God and live according to the words of His Law (Josh. 24.14-28).

Joshua's work of conquest had the effect of leading the people of God into the promises He had long ago given, but only in an incomplete manner. For Joshua's work was but a *template* of restoration, a type and sign of restoration to come, and not the final work. He and his work bring forward the reconciling and restoring pattern we observed in Noah and Joseph; and they point forward to the day when a greater Joshua – our Lord Jesus Christ – would destroy the enemies of God and send His people into every nation, to restore the reconciled world to God.

The way of restoration

As another overlay of the restoration template that we have observed thus far in Scripture, Joshua adds some important information for us in thinking about our work of restoration.

First, restoration is a work for all the redeemed of the Lord, all who have entered into covenant with Him by blood. It requires all the people playing their part, working together, focusing on the vision and promises of God, and pressing the struggle for restoration to the limits of the earth. All the redeemed of the Lord have been given the ministry of reconciliation; we must all be equipped and engaged, beginning right where we are each day, in bringing the rule of King Jesus in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit, to realization in all things.

Second, the work of restoration does not occur in a vacuum, or on a clean slate. There are obstacles to overcome, battles to fight, and strategies to be employed over extended periods of time. Our views may be challenged, our attempts at conversation rebuffed, our efforts to bring more beauty, goodness, or truth into our world laughed to scorn or resisted. But the earth is the Lord's, and everything in it – including that space of influence assigned to you (2 Cor. 10.13-18). He will enable us to succeed, but we must continue the struggle daily.

Third, the work of restoration seeks to bring the blessings of God's Law and all His Word into every facet and aspect of life. We look to God's Word to show us the way things are supposed to be, and to guide us into all truth, beauty, and goodness for all our relationships, roles, and responsibilities. As God's Law loomed high over the people of Joshua's day, so it lives in our hearts by the work of the Spirit, Who guides us into all truth.

Finally, the work of restoration can only proceed when God's people are faithful to Him, not harboring sin in their midst, and remembering all His many works on their behalf, as they rest in His Word to guide them each step of the way. Unless we are always restoring our soul before the Lord, we will have little desire, incentive, or power to restore anything else.

Joshua's work of restoring the promised land to the people of Abraham offers many insights for how God intends the followers of Jesus Christ to spread throughout and restore the reconciled world to Him.

For reflection

1. How can you see that Joshua's work of restoration was in some ways like that of Noah and Joseph?
2. What might a local church learn about the work of restoration from Joshua and the people of Israel?
3. What do you primarily learn about your work of restoration from Joshua and the people of Israel?

Next steps – Transformation: What can you add to your own work of restoration?

4 David

*Your God has commanded your strength;
Strengthen, O God, what You have done for us.
Because of Your temple at Jerusalem,
Kings will bring presents to You.* Psalm 68.28, 29

A reign of restoration

In many ways, the reign of King David was a perpetual restoration project, beginning with the monarch's own soul.

For all his greatness, David gave in to fleshly desires. His sins with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, early in his reign, and his pride in taking the census, near the end of his rule, show us that sin continues to be an issue, even with the most saintly of the people of God. As David reminds us in his great psalms of confession (such as Psalms 38 and 51), we who have been given the work of reconciliation must always be on guard against the inroads of corruption in our innermost being. We need daily restoration to the Lord, daily confession of sin, repentance, and devoting ourselves to God, that we might be living sacrifices and offerings to His Name (Rom. 12.1, 2).

David undertook three great periods of restoration during his forty years of ruling the people of God. First, he had to restore the fragmented nation following the death of Saul; that work took seven years. In the process, he had to reclaim lost territory from pagan nations and strengthen his own ranks against the natural tendency of movements to fragment and fizzle (2 Sam. 1-10). The culmination of this great work of restoration was bringing the ark of God's covenant to its proper resting place. At the end of this work, God Himself renewed His covenant with David, expanding that covenant to include more detail about His eternal Kingdom (2 Sam. 7).

Second, David had to restore his reign following the rebellion by Absalom, his son (2 Sam. 15-18). Absalom worked craftily for a long time to win the hearts of the people. When he finally proclaimed himself king, it was all David and his followers could do to get out of town with their lives. Upon Absalom's demise, David had to slowly and patiently rebuild the wounded nation and restore the people to God and His promises (2 Sam. 19-23).

It's at the end of his life, however, that we see David's greatest undertaking to advance the glory of God and the wellbeing of Israel in the sight of the nations – a work of restoration that he would prepare for in his day, and which would only come to realization after he had died. David had been a warrior all his life, winning back territory from pagans and extending Israel's influence into foreign lands. By the time he was ready to hand the kingdom over to Solomon, the nation had achieved a measure of peace, in which it could begin to prosper as never before (cf. 1 Kgs. 10).

In Psalm 68, David focused on his greatest work of restoration – restoring the greatness and glory of God to Israel through the construction of a glorious temple unto the Lord.

Continuity with the past

In Psalm 68, David's intention is to rally the people of Israel to take up a work of restoration which, as David saw it, was comparable to that which Joshua had accomplished. He deliberately tied his effort at building the temple (v. 29) with Joshua's conquest of Canaan (vv. 1-14), thus calling for nationwide participation in this restoration project. The tabernacle was old and flimsy (2 Sam. 7.1, 2; 1 Chron. 17.1), and David did not regard it a proper dwelling place for the God of Israel. He would build a temple to restore the greatness of God and the glory of His people, and he would enlist all Israel in the work.

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David knew that the temple would require many kinds of resources and materials – just as when the tabernacle had been constructed in the wilderness (we read about this in 1 Chron. 22-29). He knew the people of Israel, scattered throughout the land of promise, had those resources, and he called on them to bring their offerings to the Lord (Ps. 68.18). The people did so in abundance, and more than enough resources were gathered for when the building of the temple would begin under Solomon. To ensure that this work of restoration would go on after his demise, David organized the people into religious and civil institutions, each group charged with important work of overseeing and maintaining the restored greatness of the nation.

Throughout the process, David led the people to keep their eyes on the Lord, as we see Him doing in Psalm 68. This psalm was perhaps written and distributed throughout communities all over Israel to enlist the people in the restoration project for which David was preparing. Read in synagogues and households, this psalm would have reminded the people of Joshua's work of restoration, and of the many good gifts God had given to them. It would have pointed the people to the temple project and called on them to take their place in this great work of restoration by offering the gifts God had given them. It held out a vision of the nations coming to worship God and of God Himself – “the God of salvation” (v. 20) – being exalted and glorified even above the great work of the temple which was yet to be built (v. 35).

The building of the temple was a most worthy restoration project, and God honored David and Solomon and the people of Israel in this great effort.

Always restoring

Jesus taught us to pray that His Kingdom would come on earth as it is in heaven (Matt. 6.10). He commanded us to seek that Kingdom as the defining priority of our lives (Matt. 6.33). Paul reminds us that this Kingdom is striking in its character and impact, a Kingdom of holy spiritual power resulting in righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 4.20; Rom. 14.17, 18). He has ascended on high and given us His Kingdom and all the gifts and abilities we need to seek and advance it (Dan. 7.13-18; Eph. 4.8).

We who have been born-again into that Kingdom are its citizens and ambassadors. *We* are the temple of the Lord, which He by His Spirit is building and enlarging and beautifying for His own glory (Eph. 2.19-22). Each of us has something to offer in this great project, by which God is restoring the reconciled world to His goodness and glory.

Psalm 68 comes to us as a call to take up the work of Jesus in building His Church (Matt. 16.18), advancing His Kingdom, and bringing the knowledge of God's glory to the attention of the entire world (Hab. 2.14). That work begins each day in our souls, and carries over into our Personal Mission Fields, where we go with the Lord Jesus, conquering and to conquering, that His Kingdom and glory might come on earth as it is in heaven. Let us follow the example of Noah, Joseph, Joshua, and David and devote ourselves to the work of restoration to which God sends us each day. We may not see that restored glory in our lifetimes, but we must be always preparing for it and always pursuing it in everything we do. This is the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us.

For reflection

1. What do we learn from David about the need always to be restoring our soul before the Lord?
2. In what way was David's campaign to build the temple like Joshua's campaign to conquer the land of Canaan?
3. What has God given you – in the way of gifts, abilities, and opportunities – for the work of building His Church and advancing His Kingdom?

Next steps – Transformation: Seek the restoration of your soul daily, and throughout the day; and take up all the work you do as unto the Lord and for His glory.

5 Daniel

*"I was watching in the night visions,
And behold, One like the Son of Man,
Coming with the clouds of heaven!
He came to the Ancient of Days,
And they brought Him near before Him.
Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom,
That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him.
His dominion is an everlasting dominion,
Which shall not pass away,
And His kingdom the one
Which shall not be destroyed."* Daniel 7.13, 14

Captivity

Daniel appears to have been among the first group of those carried away into captivity by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon. As a youth, he and three friends were selected for service in the Babylonian court, where they would perform a variety of functions for the king.

Daniel would have been familiar with the prophecy of Jeremiah (cf. Dan. 9.1, 2). He would have remembered the prophet's counsel to those who had been taken into captivity. Jeremiah expected the people of Israel to be the people of God, even in a foreign land, and as captives to a foreign king. He exhorted the people to increase, prosper in all their ways, establish culture and communities, and seek the peace and wellbeing of the people among whom they lived as captives (Jer. 29.1-7). Captivity was no excuse for not being the people of God – a people of God's Law, wisdom, beauty, goodness, faithfulness, and truth.

Jeremiah expected the people to restore their sense of and experience as a people holy unto the Lord.

Daniel thus applied himself diligently to the task he had undertaken, so that he and his friends excelled beyond all others in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom (Dan. 1.17). As a result, the four young men advanced in primacy, service, and opportunity, and bore faithful witness to God all the days of their service.

The story of their diligence in preparing and carrying out their duties, and in being bold and faithful in their witness to the Lord follows the template of restoration we have seen, for example, in Joseph and David. We remember and honor them as examples of how the people of God in every generation should comport themselves before the Lord and men.

But for our purposes, it is the understanding of the coming Kingdom of God, entrusted to Daniel, that projects the work of restoration far into the future, even to our own day.

A coming Kingdom

We learn about this Kingdom as Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar's dream (Dan. 2.44, 45). Four great empires would spread out successively from the time of Nebuchadnezzar to what we recognize as the Roman Empire (vv. 36-43). We know these historically to have been the kingdoms of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, the Roman Empire being the last seen in Nebuchadnezzar's dream.

In the time of the Roman Empire, Daniel explained, God Himself would set up on earth an eternal Kingdom, which would be given to a peculiar people, never to be taken away from them. That Kingdom would be of such a nature and such power that it would "break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever" (v. 44). This Kingdom would not be made by human hands or effort; it would be the work of God, and would destroy, supplant, and replace all other human kingdoms, and last forever.

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This is not the first Old Testament witness to the idea of God setting up a great and eternal Kingdom on earth. God had promised Abraham that kings would descend from him, through whom all the earth would be blessed (Gen. 17.1-6). Jacob had prophesied that a great King called Shiloh would descend from Judah, and would gain the obedience of all peoples (Gen. 49.8-11). And God had specifically promised David that this King would descend from his loins, to establish an eternal and glorious realm (cf. Ps. 132). In using Kingdom language, God intended His people to think in familiar terms of what He was promising to do. They would have thought of what David prayed for in Psalm 72, and what Israel actually realized under Solomon in 1 Kings 10. They would have thought in terms of restoration.

And through Nebuchadnezzar, God was reviving that vision to His people, even as they suffered captivity in Babylon.

A Kingdom for God's saints

In Daniel 7.13-27, Daniel received an even more compelling vision of the coming Kingdom of God. God would bestow His promised Kingdom on “one like the Son of Man” (v. 13) – the reward, clearly, for some great work He had accomplished. The Son of Man, in turn, would bestow the Kingdom on His saints – His chosen, redeemed, saved, and commissioned people (v. 18). Immediately the kings and nations of the earth would try to destroy the people of God, but to no avail. After long years of struggle and conflict, “the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdoms under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people, the saints of the Most High. His Kingdom *is* an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him” (vv. 27, 28).

When Jesus came declaring that the Kingdom of God was at hand (Matt. 4.17), Daniel’s visions would have sprung to the minds of those who knew and believed the ancient prophecies. Through Daniel, God outlined a course for all of human history, described in terms of an eternal Kingdom, and thus encompassing and affecting all that we think about as comprising human society and culture. Whereas all the kingdoms of men would fail and falter, each in its own time and place, the Kingdom of the Most High God, in the hands of His holy people, would be established and would prosper, increase, advance, and prevail forever.

This breathtaking scenario has come down to us in our day. As we take up the ministry of reconciliation, which God has given to us, we engage that glorious work of promise which Daniel foresaw, Jesus brought near, and the first Christians received, pursued, and achieved with such glorious success, turning their world upside-down for Jesus.

We have great and precious, mighty and proven promises undergirding our calling to restore the reconciled world. Let us not hesitate to follow where King Jesus leads, as He rides out daily, conquering and to conquer.

For Reflection

1. What is the Kingdom of God? Why does the idea of a kingdom provide a good way of thinking about the work of restoration?
2. How did the first Christians receive and advance the Kingdom of God? What kinds of things did they restore?
3. How should you expect this eternal Kingdom to come in your Personal Mission Field?

Next Steps – Preparation: Pray daily about all the people and activities that are before you, and ask the Lord to help you restore them for His eternal Kingdom.

6 Ezra and Nehemiah

Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! Go up to the mountains and bring wood and build the temple, that I may take pleasure in it and be glorified," says the LORD. "You looked for much, but indeed it came to little; and when you brought it home, I blew it away. Why?" says the LORD of hosts. "Because of My house that is in ruins, while every one of you runs to his own house. Therefore the heavens above you withhold the dew, and the earth withholds its fruit. For I called for a drought on the land and the mountains, on the grain and the new wine and the oil, on whatever the ground brings forth, on men and livestock, and on all the labor of your hands." Haggai 1.7-11

Not the way it was supposed to be

For all the seventy years Daniel and the people of Israel were held captive in the land of Babylon, Jerusalem and the temple of the Lord lay in ruins. Only a handful of the poorest people remained, to eke out a living on the land in a prolonged struggle to survive. The once-glorious City of God became overgrown by weeds and overrun by wild beasts. Israel had been cast out of her garden; and the garden had gone to seed.

This is not the way it was supposed to be.

God intended Jerusalem to be a shining city on a hill, the joy and beauty of the earth, the epicenter for His Law of love to reach the nations, that the nations might see His wisdom, seek His Presence, and become one with His people (Ps. 48.1-3; Mic. 4.1-5; Deut. 4.5-8).

When the seventy-year disciplining of His people came to its end, God raised up His servant, Cyrus, king of the Persians, to send the people back to the land of promise, to resume their covenant relationship with God (Is. 45.1-4; Ezra 1.1-5). Israel's purpose was to return to the land, rebuild the temple, restore the city of Jerusalem, and wait for the promised Kingdom of God. To ensure this work of restoration would come to fruition, God raised up two men – Ezra and Nehemiah – to lead the people in these difficult undertakings.

God's plans for His people had not come to an end. He intended them to have a future and a hope (Jer. 29.11), and the rebuilding and restoration of Jerusalem and the temple were interim objectives in God's longer-term restoration project.

Leading for restoration

All the elements of the work of restoration are in view here: the rejection of pagan peoples and their ways; the renewing of covenant with God; the involvement of all the people according to their abilities and resources; and the realization of concrete objectives – the temple and the wall of Jerusalem – that would bear witness to the surrounding world of God's goodness and favor.

The project began where Noah, Joshua, and David began, by restoring the people to their covenant relationship with God. First, the altar of God was constructed, and sacrifices were offered to His praise. Next – after a lengthy period of being distracted – the people set to work rebuilding the temple, under the leadership of Ezra and the prophets Haggai and Zechariah and the governor Zerubbabel. The finished project was not nearly as glorious as the first temple constructed by Solomon. But even the rather drab temple that was constructed served to create a longing in the hearts of God's people for greater beauty and glory yet to come.

Rebuilding the wall of Jerusalem was the next project, and the leadership of this effort fell to Nehemiah. He took stock of the situation, rallied the people for the effort, assigned builders and posted guards, rebuffed the pagans who sought to distract him, and finished the project with a celebration of praise and worship that renewed the people and brought the joy of the Lord back to His land.

A Pattern of Restoration

The temple and city wall restored, the priests and Levites reassigned, and the sacrifices renewed, all that remained was for Israel to appoint a king who would lead in the full restoration of the nation, and the realization of their worldwide mission (Is. 54.1ff).

But it would be many years before that next phase of God's restoration project would begin.

Restoration for God's glory

Let's not miss the purpose of all this work of restoration. Why did God send His people back to Jerusalem, to rebuild the temple and renew the spiritual practices of the people? Why was it so important that the wall and city should be restored? For the pleasure of God, and for His glory; for the renewed promulgation of His Law, and the reviving of His people; and that a witness to the Lord might reach to all the surrounding nations (Hag. 1.7-11; Neh. 8.1-12; 10.1-39; 6.15, 16).

It pleases God to restore the wellbeing of His dwelling place, His city, His people, and His land. That is, the pleasure of God is renewed where such work of restoration takes place, and it extends to all who participate in that great work. God is glorified as grateful people sing His praises, renew covenant with Him, and glory in His bounty and goodness. And this great work of restoration bears witness to the unbelieving world that God's Word is sure, His promises are faithful, His love is unfailing, His power is real, and His people are the citizens and ambassadors of His Kingdom.

The work of Ezra and Nehemiah represents perhaps the culmination of the Old Testament pattern of restoration, the most graphic and dramatic illustration of God's determination that His sin-blighted world shall not remain so, but that His people, following His Word, will work to bring restored goodness and glory to all that God puts under their power.

But the work of Ezra and Nehemiah is not the high-water mark of restoration, either for the Old Testament or the work that glorifies God and brings His pleasure and goodness to the world. That great work would be on hold until the King should come to proclaim, bring near, receive, and give His Kingdom to the saints of the Most High God; and they, receiving from their Father the ministry of reconciliation, would begin that great work of restoring the world God loves to the way He intends it, the way it's supposed to be.

For Reflection

1. How does the work of Ezra and Nehemiah illustrate the pattern of restoration we have been observing throughout the Old Testament?
2. How did the work they completed leave faithful Israelites longing for more?
3. What can you learn from the example of Ezra and Nehemiah about the ministry of reconciling all things?

Next Steps – Transformation: What's one area of your life where you can take up some work of restoration – for God's pleasure, goodness, and glory – today?

7 Jesus

Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him. I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." John 9.3-5

The way it's supposed to be

God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. He came not to condemn the world, but to save it. He came to proclaim and bring near the Kingdom of God, and to launch that Kingdom in the Person of the Holy Spirit, upon His ascension to the right hand of the Father. And He came to reconcile the world, and everything in it, to God the Father, that the goodness God intended for the world when He created it might once again be seen and abound, and the earth might be filled with knowledge of the glory of the Lord.

Throughout the course of His earthly ministry, Jesus showed us the way things are supposed to be. Both by His teaching and works, Jesus pointed toward the restoration of all things – the salvation of men and the renewal of culture and creation. In working to restore people to wholeness – and through them the groaning and travailing world – Jesus “lit” the way for His followers to do all things to the glory of God. He explained that God will be glorified in the good works we do – works that restore the reconciled world to a greater measure of God’s original intent – and that we must devote ourselves to this work “while it is day”.

Jesus shows us that following Him means working at the ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us. Jesus was given the ministry of reconciliation to defeat and bind the devil, take away the sins of the world, inaugurate the Kingdom, and begin calling His elect to salvation and building His Church. The ministry of reconciliation that has been given to us builds on the work of Jesus as we make disciples, build the Church, seek and advance the rule of King Jesus on earth as it is in heaven, and bring the liberating power of God’s Law to bear on all aspects of life in the world.

By observing Jesus through the lens of restoration, we can see more clearly what God intends for us. We have been given the ministry of reconciliation in the form of restoring the reconciled world by working as agents of grace and truth through whom Jesus is making all things new.

Jesus and the work of restoration

I can only briefly summarize Jesus’ approach to the work of restoration by a quick overview of this very familiar story of His healing the man born blind. Let’s notice seven different facets of the work of restoration as we see it here.

Observe and analyze: What appeared to the disciples to be a hopeless situation, the consequence of sin, was really an opportunity for God to work through His people. We must not dwell on causes or blame in such situations, but should rather determine to carry out our work of restoring the reconciled world, however the situation may require.

Envision the work of God: What would be the outcome of a work God might do in this situation? Get this clear in your mind, then commit your vision to the Lord, and begin considering what work is required of you.

Take the initiative: Don’t wait to be asked. Move ahead, one step at a time, without fanfare or doubt. Touch someone with the grace of God, or introduce some new measure or component that might bring restoration.

Explain the next steps: People have to take responsibility if restoration is to be realized; and we must show them what to do. Make sure their next steps are within the scope of their power.

A Pattern of Restoration

Follow-up as needed: Be available to assist with follow-through. Not everyone will welcome change right away. Change may be slow in coming, so we'll need to be willing to cultivate change so that restoration can proceed.

Focus within: Look for the opportunity provided by restoration to open a fissure for light to shine into the souls of those who are benefitting from the change. Seek them out and take a new initiative for the Gospel.

Call to repentance and faith: Use the opportunity of restoration to address the larger issue of salvation and eternal life. Preach the Gospel and call people to repentance and faith.

Greater works than these

Incredibly, Jesus promised His followers that they would do greater works of reconciliation and restoration than even He was able to do during His limited stay on earth (Jn. 14.12). We must embrace the calling to work while it is day to restore the reconciled world to God.

The work we've been given to do is greater than the job at which we work. We are continuously being called to the Kingdom and glory of God, to walk in the light as He is in the light (1 Thess. 2.12; Eph. 5.8-11). Our work of restoration brings light into the darkness – truth against error, healing and restoration, goodness, righteousness, peace, love, and kindness, against the narcissism, degradation, and abuse of our unbelieving age.

This is work, but it is the work of the Spirit in us, Whom we engage as we move toward the work of the light of Christ and His Kingdom. All work requires thought, exertion, skill, perseverance, assessment, and an overall plan. As long as we are awake, we are either working or resting from work or preparing for work, these latter two overlapping at times. We can only do the work of the Lord according to His Word, by His Spirit, and unto His glory. And we must at all times remember that we have been redeemed for good works and should be ready and zealous for them at all times.

The work of restoring the reconciled world is thus always before us. Every day brings opportunities for following in the footsteps of Jesus and bringing His rule and power to bear on all aspects of life in our world. God has given us the time of our lives for the ministry of reconciliation, so that all our work will go toward restoring the reconciled world, bringing the light of Jesus into the darkness of our fallen age, and returning as much as possible of our God-loved world to the way it's supposed to be.

For reflection

1. How many different ways can you see Jesus modeled the work of restoration in His ministry?
2. What do we mean by saying, "The work we've been given to do is greater than the job at which we work"?
3. You have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2.16). What can you do to think more with the mind of Christ about the work of restoration?

Next Steps – Preparation: Pray for the day ahead through the lens of restoration. How will Jesus use you today to restore the reconciled world?

A Pattern of Restoration

For Reflection or Discussion

1. Summarize the pattern of restoration that we see revealed throughout the pages of Scripture.
2. How can we see that Jesus made the work of restoration the focus of His ministry?
3. Since the work you've been given to do is greater than the job at which you work, what does your work of restoration entail?
4. What can you do to nurture more of a restoration mindset for the time of your life?
5. What's the most important lesson you've learned from this third installment in our series, *Restoring the Reconciled World*?

The Fellowship of Ailbe

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