

## Jesus in the Old Testament

### Christmas in the Chapel

History is a fun course of study, but the real fun is not simply from learning facts. It is from learning culture. Learning how people really lived, how they thought, and their frame of reference for life and the world can be transforming. I find this kind of study most edifying, especially when done in conjunction with Bible times. “Bible times” stretches almost two thousand years, if we simply look from Abraham to Christ. The biblical era spans not only millennia, but also a great breadth of religious thought. During those thousands of years, there were significant cultural changes, intellectual advances, and shifts in religious ideas of reality and the role of gods in the world and beyond. The Mesopotamian ideas of the divine represent a paradigm distinct from that of Egypt. Even within Egypt, the difference between a practical monotheism during the Hyksos reign compared to pre and post-Hyksos is profound.

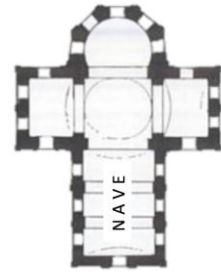
What amazes and edifies me in this regard is the way God communicated in each culture and era. Two examples might illustrate my point, starting with a contemporary look. In the west, we live in an age of science and logic. We look for God and seek to understand him in light of current knowledge. We have discovered many of the *spectacular ways* God works. God is not mysterious thunder; he authored laws of atmospheric science that produce thunder. We see in the wonderment of how the cosmos operates, the amazing hand of divinity that set things so perfectly into order. Better seeing some of his ways is a marvelous extra to our faith that other less informed cultures and civilizations missed. A second example can be found in the Biblical era of Christ’s incarnation. At the time, there were Magi from the east that believed that celestial signs foretold significant events. God used that belief. They followed a stellar sighting to Jerusalem and then on towards the baby Jesus in Bethlehem. We could cite many more examples, but the point behind them is hopefully already made. God speaks to people where they are, revealing his will and his message as he deems fit.

When we look at ancient Biblical passages, we need to always look at them in historical context to see how God was using not only the language and their surroundings to speak into their lives, but also their knowledge of reality and the world as he spoke into their lives in ways they could understand. When we examine the Old Testament in this way, we have marvelous insight into God teaching about the incarnation and ministry of Christ.

This affected us when, several years ago, we had the chance to design the painting of the ceiling in a replica 6<sup>th</sup> Century chapel. The chapel’s footprint is cruciform,

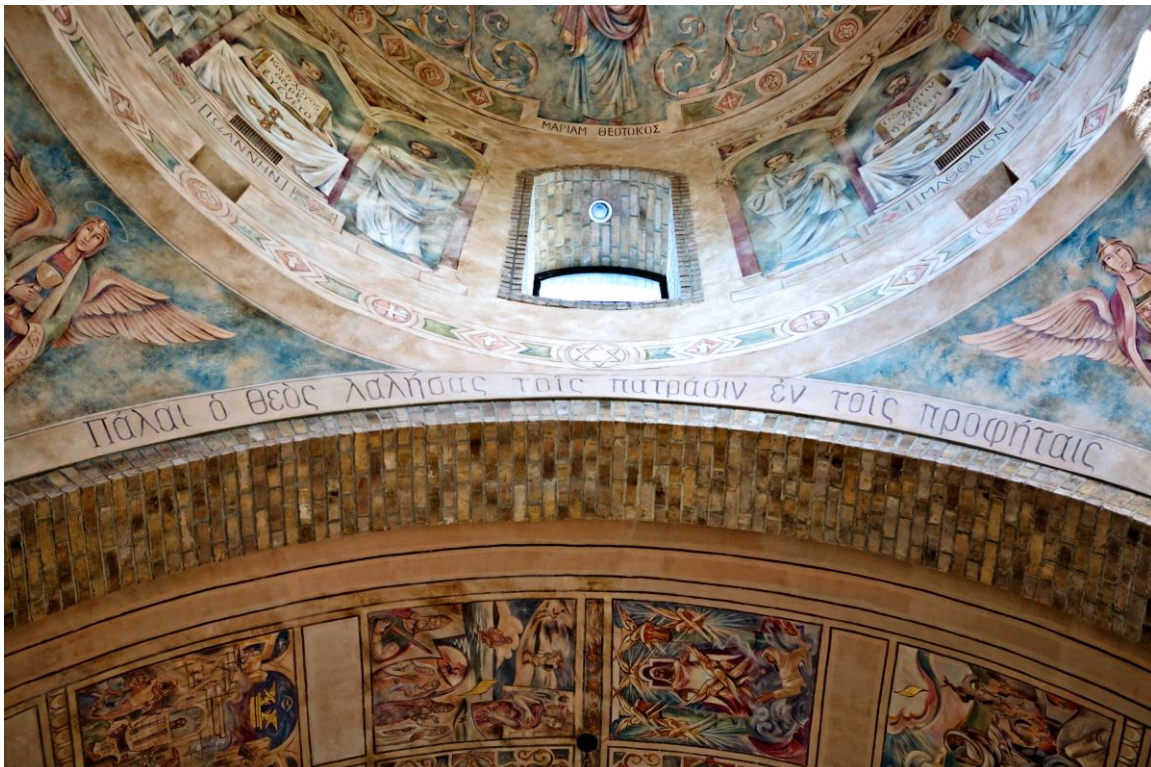
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shaped as a cross lying on the ground. The center of the cross is an elevated dome that houses a scene of Jesus sitting on the throne as the Almighty (*Pantocrator*), surrounded by heavenly witnesses. In each of the two wings (the arms of the cross) are painted the gospel stories. If one stands under the center dome and looks toward the nave at the entrance of the chapel, then immediately overhead is an archway with Greek painted on it. This archway gives the significance of all the paintings from the entrance at the beginning of the nave all the way up to the center of the cross. The Greek reads:



Πάλαι ο θεός λαλήσας τοις πατράσιν εν τοις προφήταις

This Greek is from Hebrews 1:1 and means, “Long ago God spoke to the fathers by the prophets.” Hebrews captures the way God revealed Christ pre-incarnation through the stories and events recorded in the Old Testament. We selected thirty of those stories and events to paint in the chapel in this Old Testament section as the gateway into the incarnation and stories of the gospel. The head of the cross in the chapel contains scenes of the coming end of days. In this lesson, we tie those Old Testament scenes into the Christmas message as we consider the many ways God spoke in ancient times to the world about the coming Messiah. Prophets, proven by their valid testimony, put together the Old Testament. As Hebrews affirms, these are stories where we hear God speaking of Christ “by the prophets.”



## THE FIRST ADAM



“Adam” is a man’s name, and yet it is more. It is the Hebrew word for “man.” In the very first chapter of the Old Testament, we read that God made “man” (Gen. 1:27). Man was made as male and female, but was made distinct from the other creatures. Man was made in God’s image. This is something most profound about man, something that sets man apart from the other animals and creatures. The Hebrew for “image” is *tzelem* (צלם). It means a likeness to God, but not in substance, more in shadow. Man reflects some things about God, but is not God, not even a mini-God. This does not mean that God has arms and legs; for the body of man was made from dirt. It does mean, however, that man’s resemblance to God enables a relationship distinct from that available to other creatures. There is something special and unique about humanity.

Man’s resemblance to God is found in man’s abilities that are shadowy reflections of aspects of God. Like the creator, man can create. Like the communicating God, man can communicate. God is not a computer, but is personal and capable of intimacy. So is man. God is moral, with right and wrong as composites of his character. Man was made to live and inhabit those same moral traits. God is just, and humanity has an innate sense of what is fair. It is built into man. God lived in relationships; man was made to live in relationships also. These traits and characteristics, and doubtlessly more, combine to make “the mannishness of man,” those things that made man “Adam.” This is the start of the story of man and his relationship to God. From this “very good” beginning (Gen. 1:31) came life to all men. Adam was the first born of creation.



## ADAM NAMES THE ANIMALS

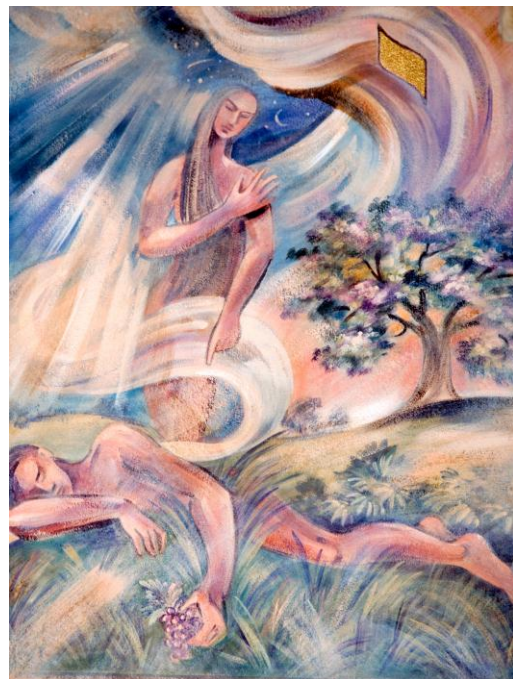


God gave Adam Eden, a paradise where he could live. Food was plentiful and there was work to be done, but that was not enough for fulfillment. God declared, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen. 2:18). As Calvin said, “man was formed to be a social animal.” Adam was built for relationships. God then gave man an object lesson: he brought before man all the animals. Man got to know the animals and gave each its name, but not a single animal was adequate for a fulfilling relationship. Those animals were not made in God’s image, and the difference was too profound. They could not provide understanding. They could not relate. For a true relationship man, needed someone like him, someone in the image of God.

## GOD CREATES WOMAN

Where was the answer? Where could man find a fulfilling relationship? God saw to this need of man, just as he had the needs of food and purpose. God caused a deep sleep to come over the man and God took a rib and fashioned it into a woman. After Adam awoke, God brought Eve to Adam.

Interestingly, woman was not fashioned out of the dirt the way Adam was. She was fashioned (literally “built”) from Adam’s side. In this sense, Adam is the source of human nature and humanity for all, including for Eve. The hand of God is already at work in setting up a correlation between Christ and Adam. But more of that later!



## THE FALL



We do not know how long Adam and Eve lived in Paradise, but we do find in their story a key limitation between man and God. God sets the rules, and man is to follow them. In other words, God is God (“autonomous”); man is not. God gave Adam and Eve the gift of every tree for food— every tree but one. It is in reference to this limit to man’s freedoms that we find another at work in the garden. The tempter in the form of a serpent comes to woman when she is apart from her husband. He appeals to her pride and induces her to eat the forbidden fruit. She set herself up as God, deciding for herself what she would and would not do. She gave the fruit to her husband and he followed suit.

## PARADISE LOST

From the sin flowed shame and consequences, just as naturally as touching fire produces burns. For the man, work would become a chore, the ground no longer a compliant partner, but a source of thorns and thistles. For woman, there would be greater physical pains of childbirth as well as issues of marriage. But one of the most prophetic curses also contains the blessing of Bethlehem and the promise to the church. God judges the tempter and declares that from the offspring of woman would come one who would bruise the tempter’s head, even as the tempter manages to bruise the offspring’s heel.





## NOAH AND THE FLOOD



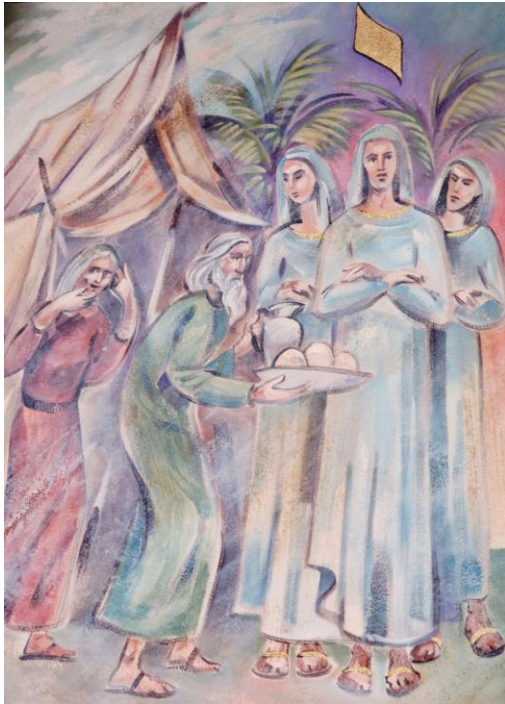
Over time, peoples' actions grew in wickedness, proceeding from hearts that were evil. The sin of man was like a cancer that needed to be excised. God was set to destroy humanity, yet such destruction would have rendered void the prophetic promise of God recorded just four chapters earlier. Complete destruction would deny an offspring of Eve bruising the head of the tempter. Among humanity, however, walked a righteous man with a righteous family – Noah. Noah would not suffer destruction but would receive mercy from God. In Noah and his offspring, rested the promise of God (“Noah” is Hebrew for “rest”). The same flood waters that destroyed the world, saved Noah and his family, lifting them above the wickedness and its consequences.

## MELCHIZEDEK

Eventually from the descendants of Noah came Abram (changed later to “Abraham”). God called Abram into Canaan and promised that through Abram's seed would come the promised blessing for all people (Gen. 12:1-3). During his eventful life, Abram had an opportunity to be received by Melchizedek, whose name means the “king of righteousness.” While the text adds he was the king of Peace (“Salem,” an ancient name for Jerusalem means peace) and a priest to God Most High, all names and titles echoed in Christ nearly 2,000 years later. Also foreshadowing Christ, Melchizedek brought wine and bread to serve a supper, receiving then a tenth tithe from Abram.



## ABRAHAM, SARAH, AND THE PROMISE OF THREE VISITORS



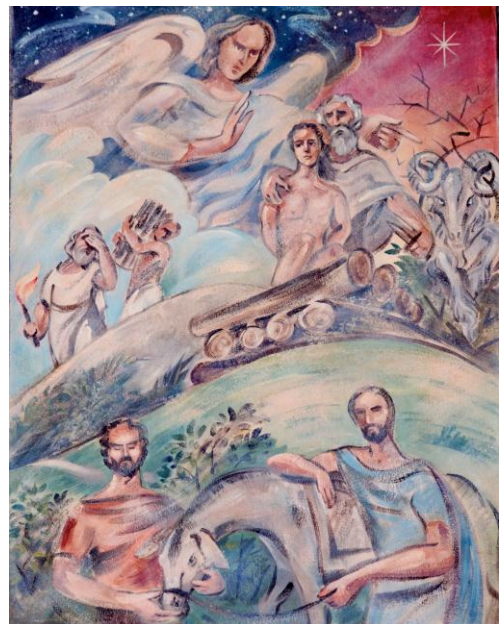
Early and often in his life, Abram heard God's promise of innumerable offspring, yet Abram and his wife could never bear a child together. They tried to manufacture an answer to God's promises through a surrogate mother, but that was not God's promise.

When Abram was 99 years old and his wife Sarah was 90, God appeared through the form of three men at his tent near some oak trees. God reconfirmed his promise that Sarah would bear a son to Abraham within a year. Sarah was eavesdropping, and she laughed out loud. Sarah knew she could not produce such a child at her age, but God superseded biology. Abram learned the lesson that God's promises are kept, even when the passage of time makes it seem

impossible.

## THE FAITH OF ABRAHAM

God was good to his word, and the baby of promise was born – Isaac (meaning “laughs”) (Gen 21). When Isaac was still a boy, God instructed Abraham to offer him up as a sacrifice. With words Jesus would later echo, God said, “take your son, your only son” (Gen. 22:2; Jn. 3:16). Isaac noticed that Abraham had all things needed but the actual sacrifice and asked his father, “Where is the lamb?” Prophetically, and truthfully, Abraham replied, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering.” God did in fact stay Abraham's hand from harming Isaac and provided a ram in the thicket, a temporary sacrifice until God's only Son would be offered instead.





## JACOB'S LADDER



Isaac grew up, married, and had twin boys – Esau and Jacob. God promised his earlier prophetic assurance would come through the younger twin, Jacob (Gen. 25:23; 26:3-4). Jacob was an unlikely candidate; he was deceitful, conniving, and a liar. Even his name sounds like the Hebrew word for “cheater.” But God’s choice, like God’s wisdom, is rarely the obvious choice of man. God chose Jacob, and then set about to turn Jacob into the man he needed to be.

Jacob tried to earn God’s promise by tricking his brother and lying to his father, but his efforts only gave his brother murderous thoughts and disappointed his father. Jacob left home a coward, seeking to escape consequences from his sins. Jacob did not go alone, but under the guiding hand of a God intent on sculpting his own promise in his own way. One night sleeping under the stars, Jacob dreamed of a ladder reaching from earth into heaven with angels going up and down. Isaac saw the ladder as a door to heaven, and pledged his obedience to God. God reiterated that Jacob was the one through whom his prophecy would find fulfillment, but that time had to wait. There was more work to do on Jacob. Jacob made it to his uncle where he sought work, refuge, and a wife. Jacob received what he had earlier dished out. He was cheated, deceived, and lied to. Finally, almost the man he needed to be, Jacob set out to return to his homeland, still fearing what his brother might do. On the way, he slept by the river Jabbok where he spent the night wrestling an angel. The angel was physically victorious, dislocating Jacob’s hip, but Jacob won out in another way. Through tears and pleading (Hos. 12:4-5), Jacob was finally relieved of his name and life as a cheater. God changed his name from Jacob (“cheater”) to Israel (“God’s fighter”) and Jacob limped home, a new man.



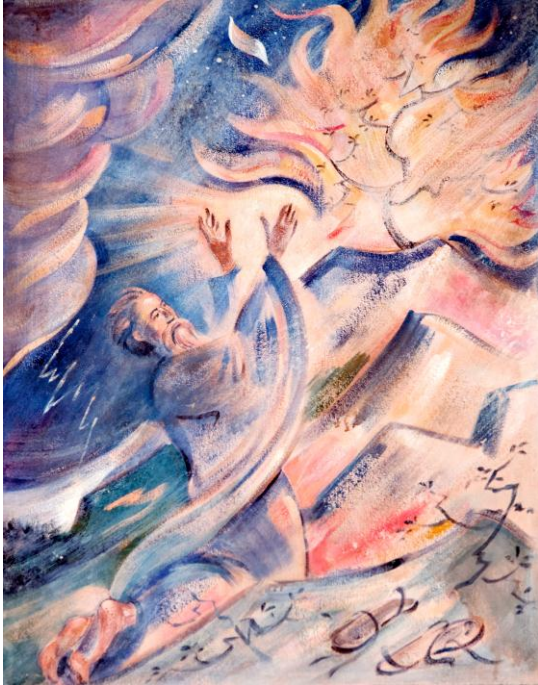
## MOSES, AN UNLIKELY HERO



Jacob's children included twelve sons that became the twelve tribes of Israel. The entire family moved to Egypt to survive a famine. What started as a place of protection became a place of persecution. For several hundred years, Israelite population exploded in Egypt. During these centuries, a promise of God was lying dormant, that God would bring the Israelites back into Canaan, giving them the land promised to Abram. At some point, a line of Pharaohs came into power that were threatened by the populous Israelites. The Israelites were pushed into abusive slavery and one Pharaoh tried controlling their numbers by forced drowning of newborn males. One protective mother hid her newborn son in a basket floating on the Nile. Fulfillment of God's promise was stirring when God rescued that baby by sending his floating basket into the care of Pharaoh's daughter. She pulled the basket and baby from the Nile and claimed the baby as her own. She named him Moses.

Moses was reared in Pharaoh's house, but unknowingly, Pharaoh's daughter chose his actual mother as his wet nurse. Moses grew into a man in Pharaoh's court with the learning and exposure of a king's son, yet with a sensitive heart toward his family and heritage living in bondage. One day, Moses witnessed an Egyptian overseer abusing an Israelite slave. Moses lost control and killed the Egyptian, a crime witnessed by other Hebrews. The Hebrews betrayed Moses and his actions put him under Pharaoh's death sentence. Moses fled into the wilderness, eventually marrying a shepherd's daughter. Israel continued to groan under Pharaoh's slavery, and through the renegade Moses, God was watching, and his promise was about to find fulfillment.

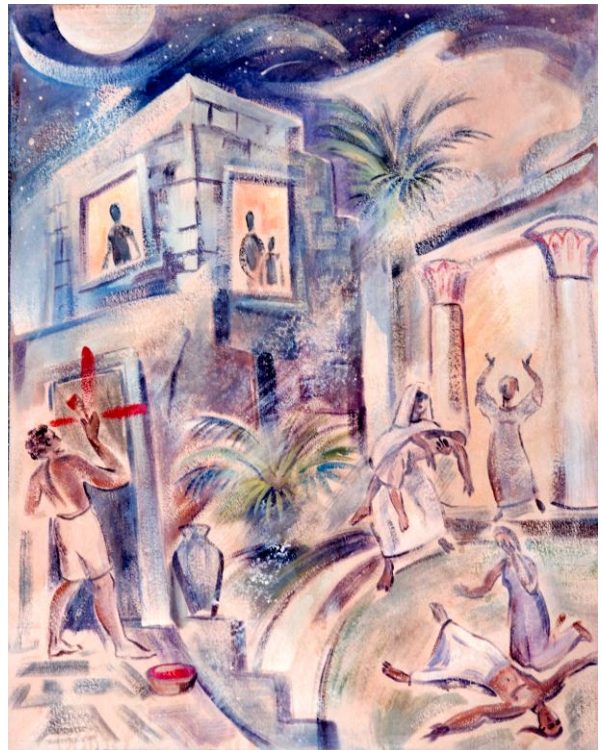
## MOSES AND THE BURNING BUSH



While working for his father-in-law, Moses was tending flocks in the wilderness. He saw a bush on fire and heard in the midst of the fire the voice of God. God instructed Moses to remove his sandals, for the ground was holy. God then identified himself as the God of promise, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. God had seen the Israelites' affliction and had come to deliver them. Moses was God's tool, even though it was the last thing in the world Moses wanted or thought himself capable of doing. Knowing the Israelites were living in the midst of countless Egyptians gods, Moses asked the Lord for his name. God told Moses he would be known forever as YHWH (יהוה).

## THE PASSOVER

Moses returned to Egypt and asked for release of the Israelites. Pharaoh refused. God sent plague after plague, but Pharaoh would not relent. As a final act of deliverance, God brought an angel of death to kill the firstborn of each household in Egypt. God ordered that each household or group sacrifice a spotless male lamb taking the blood and spreading it on the doorposts and lintels, forming a cross over each house. These homes with the blood of the lamb would be passed over from death and the people released from bondage and brought into the land of promise. It was a night of terror and deliverance. Pharaoh let the people go.





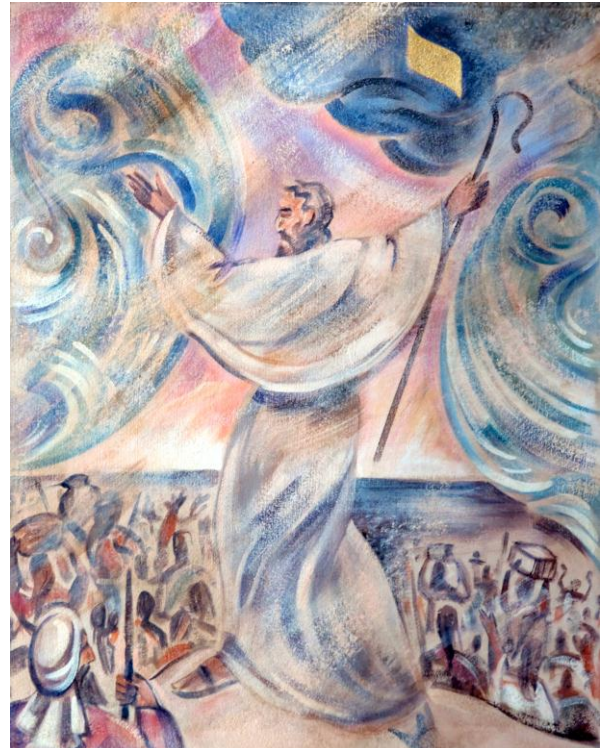
## THE EXODUS



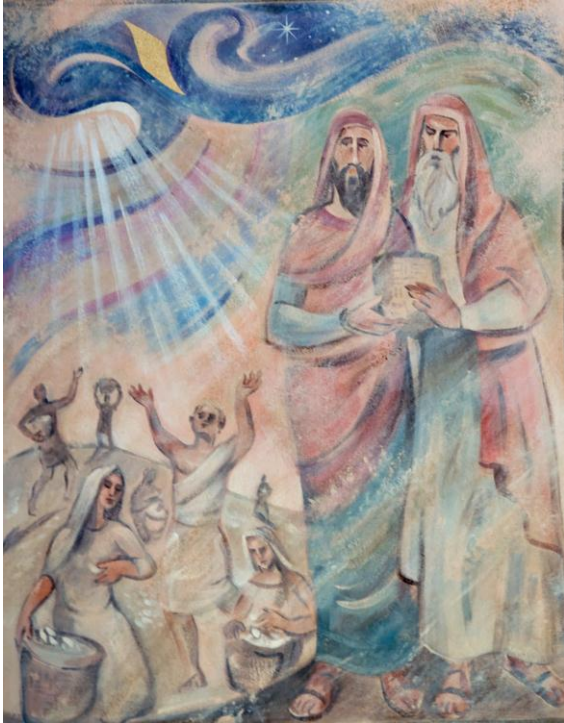
For over 400 years, the Israelites were in Egypt, but after the Passover, the Egyptians were desperate for them to leave. The Egyptians sent them with jewels and gifts, and the rejoicing Israelites left behind a mourning Egypt, following YHWH to a land of promise. God was visually leading the people with a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. This visual presence provided not only clear guidance to the people, but also a reassuring presence of the God of kept promises. As the people left, they took the bones of Joseph, Jacob's son who had rescued his family in Egypt, as God now rescued them away from Egypt. They were a walking testimony to the saving acts of YHWH.

## THE PARTING OF THE REED SEA

Soon, the mourning of Pharaoh turned to anger. His heart hardened toward God, his will, and his people. Pharaoh took his charioteers and set out for revenge. The route chosen by YHWH positioned the people in an apparent trap ripe for Pharaoh and his army. The Reed Sea fenced them in, and Pharaoh blocked their only exit. The people were desperate and scared to death. They cried out to YHWH and to Moses in the face of no conceivable solution. Moses responded: "Fear not! Stand firm and see the salvation of YHWH. YHWH will fight for you, and you only have to be silent" (Ex. 14:13-14). The sea then miraculously parted, and the Israelites passed through the waters. They were saved and delivered.



## MANNA FROM HEAVEN



After passing through the Reed Sea, the people wondered in the wilderness for a period of time. In what became very typical behavior, the people grew frustrated with Moses and his leadership. They saw the wilderness time as unfair and their hunger produced constant grumbling and complaining. Moses explained their accusations really targeted YHWH just as much as him. Indeed, YHWH did hear the grumbling of the people and sent them bread from heaven called manna. The bread was not usable beyond the day it was gathered (except for the double portion gathered to prevent work on the Sabbath). This food was a daily sustenance from God that kept the people alive for forty years in the wilderness.

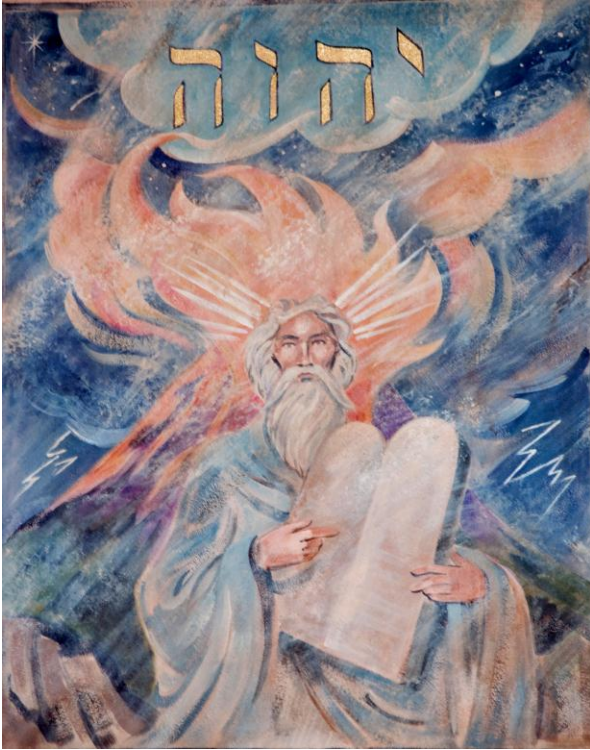
## LIVING WATER

As the people continued through their wilderness experience, they began to run out of water. They demanded Moses do something about it. Moses was unable to, and their demands grew to grumbling and complaining. The grumbling then grew into accusations against YHWH and Moses for failed leadership and planning. Moses turned to God, and God instructed him to use his rod and strike a rock. As Moses did so, living water flowed from the rock, and the people's thirst was sated. Moses named the place after the people, calling it a place of testing and strife. Rather than trusting God to see to their needs, they were challenging God, quarreling over his care and love.





## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS



God led the people to Mt. Sinai where God had spoken to Moses from the burning bush. There, amidst an awesome display of lightening and thunder, God impressed upon the people the event's holiness and significance. Calling Moses up on the mountain, YHWH wrote Ten Commandments upon stone for the Israelites to follow. These laws were easy to understand, but hard for the rebellious people to follow. They were to have no other gods than YHWH. They were never to reduce him to an image or idol, nor were they to take lightly who he was or what he had done (his "name"). They were to honor the Sabbath, honor their parents, avoid murder, adultery, theft, lying, and coveting.

## THE TABERNACLE

While Moses was on Sinai, YHWH instructed him to build a tabernacle, a kind of portable worship center, "exactly" as God designed (Ex. 25:9). The design included an ark or chest to contain the Law God had given Moses. Above the law as a lid, the chest had a seat framed of angels' wings. This seat was called the "mercy seat" and it was here, above the law on a seat of mercy that God would meet the priests that represented the people. The ark was placed in an interior section of the tabernacle called the most holy place. It was separated from the holy place by a curtain, and accessible only to the high priest and only with a blood sacrifice.



## THE PROMISED LAND



God led the people to the Promised Land and Moses sent out twelve spies to gather information about the land, its people, and its produce. After forty days, the spies came back panicked. Ten of the twelve were convinced that the Israelites had no chance to conquer the land. They persuaded the people that giants in the land defended the cities and the Israelites would be devastated in any military encounter. Joshua, Moses, and Aaron asserted that God would be fighting the battles, not the Israelites, and there was no need to worry. The people were scared, and threatened to stone the leaders if they insisted on invasion.

It was as if the people had forgotten everything they had been through. They failed to understand that they would never enter the Promised Land by their own might or merit, any more than they would ever escape the bondage of slavery by their own work. This was God's plan and God's promise. It was to be God's hand that brought deliverance and victory. The people's obstinacy and faithlessness trumped trusting obedience, and as a result, the people were punished. The punishment was wondering in the wilderness for forty years, one year for each day of the faithless spying.

Forty years later, all those who had let fear trump faith were dead, and the time came for entry into the land. Moses' leadership was over, and his own sin prevented him from entering into the land. With loving care, however, God set Moses upon Mount Nebo where he saw the land clearly. The people followed Joshua across the Jordan River and set to conquering the land, starting with Jericho. The promises and prophecies of God moved closer to completion.



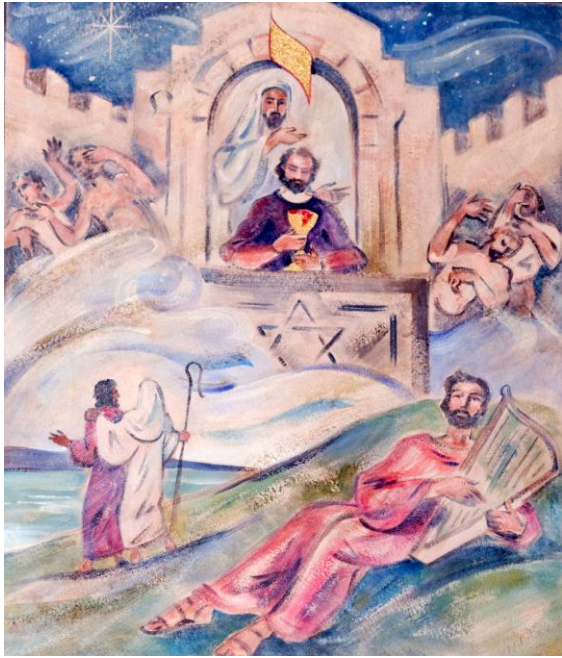
## RUTH



After the Israelites invaded the Promised Land, they lived as tribes, with no real central government beyond the priests who served before YHWH. In the small mountain village of Bethlehem lived Elimelech and his wife, Naomi. The couple had two sons. A stretch of famine hit Bethlehem and the family went East into the land of Moab to ride out the famine. While there, the two sons both married Moabite women. Soon, Elimelech died, as did both sons, leaving the Israelite Naomi and her two Moabite daughters. Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem, but urged both daughters-in-law to stay and keep their culture and people. One stayed but the other, named Ruth, insisted on going with Naomi. With a stirring speech that showed her faith in YHWH, Ruth insisted, “Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the YHWH do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you” (Ruth 1:16-17).

Naomi and Ruth returned at the time of the barley harvest. Ruth worked hard to support her mother-in-law, and she soon caught the eye of a well-to-do landowner named Boaz. Boaz was related to Naomi’s deceased husband Elimelech. Impressed with Ruth’s hard work, loyalty, sense of right and wrong, and humility, Boaz worked through the legalities and married her. From this union came a son, the father of Jesse and grandfather of King David. This relationship forged an important love story and link in the chain of God’s coming promise.

## THE SHEPHERD'S PSALM



David left the shepherds' fields of Bethlehem and became the model king of Israel. His kingship was one that God used to further define his divine promise. The coming one would be a king descended from the line of David. David was also famous as Israel's songwriter. Psalm 23 exhibits the imagery of David's shepherd days as well as the prophetic promises of David's future: "YHWH is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul. He leads me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will

fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the YHWH forever."

## THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

Among David's sons was Solomon, a man of great wisdom. Solomon reigned as king and received God's prophetic promise as the lineage of the coming Savior. The promise was now well over a thousand years old, but was not empty. It was waiting for the right moment. Solomon's greatest feat was building Israel's first permanent temple. Modeled after the tabernacle, this structure was never meant to house YHWH. Solomon knew he did not dwell on earth. God's promise to Solomon was to honor the temple as long as the people honored God. Rebellion by the people would render the temple to





rubble.

## ELIJAH, ELISHA, AND THE PROPHETS



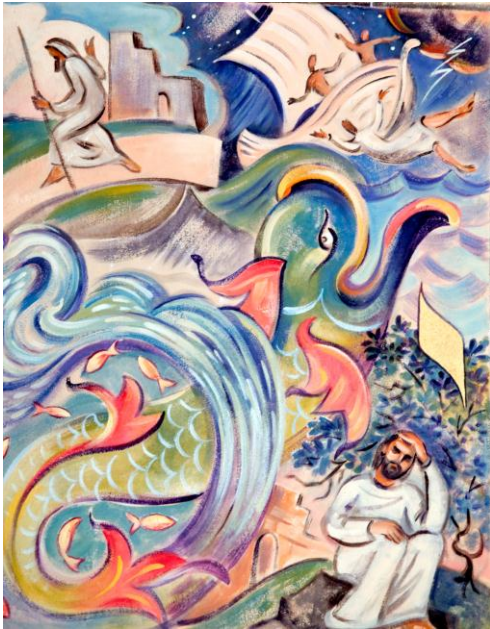
After Solomon's death, Israel split into a Northern and Southern kingdom. While kings ruled in each, prophets dispensed the word of YHWH. One of the greatest prophets was Elijah. A pious man aptly named ("Elijah" means "YHWH is my God"), Elijah stood up for what was right, calling kings to account for paganism in lieu of faithful worship. He worked hard to ferret out the minister of idols, with awesome displays of the power of YHWH. He ministered to the people and brought a grieving mother's dead son back to life. At the end of his life, he did not die, but was taken up in a flaming chariot. He left behind his cloak, passing his mantle of prophetic ministry to Elisha.

## NAAMAN, THE FOREIGN LEPER

During this time, Syria was frequently at war with Israel. The Syrian commander, Naaman became a leper, a disease untreatable at the time. An Israelite slave girl told Naaman that, Elisha, the prophet, could heal him. Indirectly Naaman made his way to Elisha who told him to dip seven times in the Jordan River for healing. At first, Naaman was incensed, thinking this a mockery. After counsel, he decided to try it and on the seventh dip, his flesh was washed as clean as a newborn's. Amazed, Naaman returned to Elisha offering rewards. Elisha refused any recompense. God's cleanness was never for sale.



## THE DEATH OF JONAH



God told Jonah to go preach repentance in Nineveh, the capital of the world superpower Assyria. Jonah did not want to go and fled the other way. Jonah escaped on a ship that quickly encountered the perfect storm. Rather than perish, the seamen threw Jonah overboard. The storm calmed, but Jonah's life did not. A large fish devoured him. The Hebrew words used for the three days and nights Jonah spent in the fish are "death words." They are words that picture Jonah as dead. After three days, Jonah was returned to life when the fish regurgitated him on the shore. Jonah then went on the mission God designed.

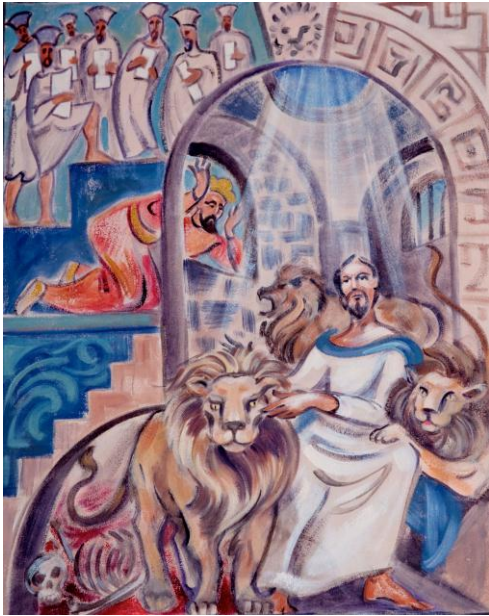
## ISAIAH AND THE THRONE OF GOD

One year, a prophet named Isaiah saw YHWH sitting high and lifted up on a throne. Angels flew about the throne in praise of the Lord calling out, "Holy, holy, holy is YHWH of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory!" It shook the foundations of the thresholds. Knowing his own sinfulness, Isaiah lamented, "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, YHWH of hosts" (Is. 6:5). This heavenly scene held not only YHWH on a throne with angels, but also an altar. On the altar of YHWH was a sacrifice that, when applied to Isaiah, "took away [his] guilt and "atoned for [his] sins"!





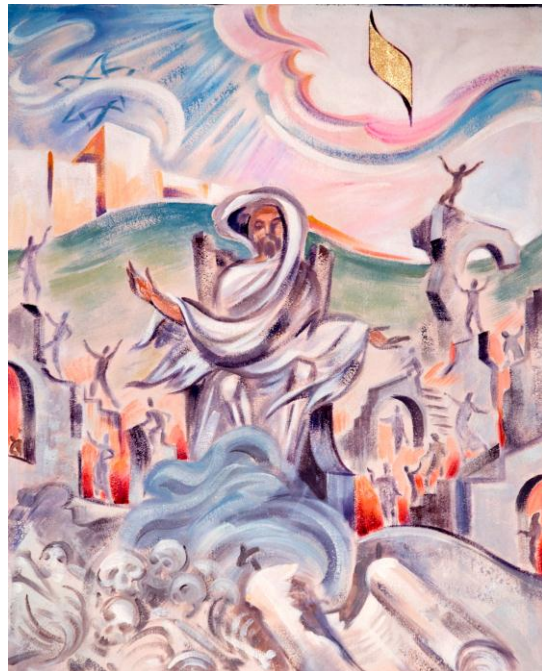
## DANIEL, THE LIONS' DEN AND THE SON OF MAN



Among the later prophets was a Jew named Daniel who served the Persian king Darius. Daniel is famous for many reasons, including his night spent in the lions' den. Daniel had refused to stop his worship of YHWH, and the night spent in the den was his penalty. The lions did not devour Daniel; God sent angels and shut their mouths. Daniel lived to prophesy in detail about the promised one of God. He would be "like a son of man;" would be "given dominion and glory and a kingdom;" would be served by "all peoples, nations, and languages;" and would have an "everlasting dominion" and "kingdom that shall not be destroyed" (Dan. (7:13-14).

## ELIJAH AND THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

At a time when Israel was no more as a nation, and when the people were living in Babylon in captivity, a prophet named Ezekiel had a vision from YHWH. He saw a valley full of bones that were "very dry." YHWH told Ezekiel to prophesy over the dry bones "the word of the Lord:" "Thus says the Lord YHWH to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live" (Ezek. 37:5). YHWH then promised that he would revive Israel, that he would put his Spirit within them and they would live. This was the word of YHWH and it was reliable.



## THE SUFFERING SERVANT



Isaiah gave one of the clearest defining prophecies of God's coming promised one:

“For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities.



Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors” (Is. 53).

## CONCLUSION

Adam was God’s creation, made for a fellowship with God in ways not possible by other creatures. There was a dignity to Adam, traits of godliness that set him apart. God gave him purpose, setting up care and custody of the earth and its creatures. Man was not fit for this assignment alone, and nothing short of another creature in God’s image could be the necessary compliment. So God made Eve, and a new course for life on earth began.

If the story ended there, then all would be well and good. Mankind would continue to exercise dominion and take care of the world, and we would find God walking and talking with man. Man would have communion with God and fulfillment in life. But such was not the case. Adam succumbed to sin, and chose a course of conduct that resulted in alienation from God. Sin entered into the world of man. Paul explained the result:

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned (Rom. 5:12).

The story of Adam sets the stage not only for the need humanity has for fellowship with God, but for the destruction of that fellowship. Man’s struggle to retain value and worth in the face of the marred image of God is the story of humanity. The God who exists out of time was never barred from interacting with man, because God lived in the reality of the crucifixion even before it occurred. Paul explained that in Jesus we see,

the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth (Eph. 1:9-10).

The incarnated Jesus Christ, sacrificed for the sins of the world is,

The plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things...according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus (Eph. 3:9-11)

God was able to promise his solution to the problem of man’s sin and watch the promise unfold in the history of mankind. We see the promise unfold in stories like Noah’s where God saved his remnant through waters, foreshadowing the

salvation from the sinfulness of the world seen in baptism that comes through the mighty work of Christ:

...they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God (2 Pet. 3:20-22).

As history continued to unfold, we reach the age of the patriarchs. God calling Abram from Ur to Canaan marks the beginning of this age. God promised Abram to work through his offspring to bring blessings and salvation to all nations. We read of Abram bowing to Melchizedek, a priest of God who existed before Moses and the institution of the Aaronic priesthood. Melchizedek blessed Abram as his superior and wore titles foreshadowing the ultimate Messiah priest: Melchizedek, the “king of righteousness” and Jesus, the king of righteousness; Melchizedek, the king of Salem/peace and Jesus, crowned king of Jerusalem and the prince of peace; Melchizedek, of no apparent beginning or end to his priesthood (or lineage) and Jesus, the pre-existent king who reigns forever, with God as his Father; Melchizedek, who receives the tithes of Abram and through him, of all his descendants and Jesus, who receives the tithes of his followers; Melchizedek, who brings supper of bread and wine and Jesus, who institutes the Lord’s Supper with the same elements (Heb. 7). This consistency of Melchizedek as a prototype of Jesus is not a New Testament idea. It was a prophetic announcement found first in a Messianic Psalm:

The Lord says to my Lord: “Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.” ... The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, “You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” (Ps. 110:1, 4).

Time seemed to deny God’s promise of the chosen one coming from Abram and Sarah, so they tried to take matters into their own hands. Sarah gave Abram her handmaiden Hagar who then conceived a child named Ishmael. But the promise of God would take the hand of God, not the maneuverings of man. God made the promise and God made the choice. The Savior would come through Sarah, through Isaac, and through Jacob:

...this is what the promise said: “About this time next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not



yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” (Rom. 9:9-12).

Isaac was a son of promise. The human effort that produced Ishmael produced a child of slavery, not one of promise.

For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise (Gal. 4:22-23).

Abraham did finally have a child with Sarah, and from his faith was willing to offer that child in sacrifice if God so wished it. He knew God was good to his word and could raise Isaac from the dead if need be:

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back (Heb. 11:17-19).

At the last moment, God spared Isaac, for surely Isaac's sacrifice could not have solved any real problem of humanity's sin. Abraham accurately prophesied that God would provide the lamb for slaughter. As further foreshadowed, that lamb would be the only Son of God, not the only son of Abraham. That Son would then see resurrection and become the salvation of the world!

In the story of Jacob, Jesus would become the ladder that reached from earth to heaven. Jesus became the doorway for fellowship between humanity and YHWH God. Jesus explained to Nathaniel when calling him to his apostleship,

“Truly, truly, I say to you, you will see heaven opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man” (Jn. 1:51).

This was the ladder at Calvary. Calvary can change the world's greatest cheater and deceiver into God's holy vessel.

Perhaps some of the most incredible affirmations about God's plans for his coming Messiah are found in the story of Moses and the Israelites' release from the bondage of Egyptian slavery. Many aspects of the story unfold as prophetic events, speaking not only of the redemption of mankind in Jesus, but also of the theology behind the redemption.

The Israelites, even as heirs of Abraham, were in bondage and slavery in Egypt, similar to humanity's bondage to sin. Jesus drew the parallel as noted in John 8:33-34,

They answered him, "We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, 'You will become free'?" Jesus answered them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

Christ was the true Passover lamb slain so that the angel of death would pass over those who bear his blood, the blood of a male unblemished lamb. Rather than face death, those with the blood of the lamb are released from bondage and set free to live in the land of promise. Along the way, they find sustenance from Jesus, the bread of life and the living water. They pass through the waters not of the Reed Sea, but of baptism. They follow not Moses, but Jesus, "a prophet like Moses" (Acts 7:37). Jesus was both lawgiver and law interpreter. Paul explained that Jesus was the mercy seat where God meet his people. God does not meet his people on the law, for it is under the mercy seat. The Greek word for mercy seat is *hilasterion* (ἱλαστήριον). Paul writes of it as a "propitiation" or "place of forgiveness," and adds that only through Jesus as the mercy seat for all time, did God commune with mankind, even before the crucifixion:

...all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins (Rom. 3:23-25).

When Jesus died, the curtain that set apart the Holy of Holies from access by others was torn from the heavens toward the earth (Mk. 15:38). There was a new way prepared for us to the Lord, illustrated by the temple, but brought to fruition by Jesus Christ:

...we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (Heb. 10:19-20).

The tabernacle and its attachments were prophetic copies of the realities that would come in Christ:

Now even the first covenant had regulations for worship and an earthly place of holiness. For a tent was prepared, the first section, in which were the lampstand and the table and the bread of the Presence. It is called the



Holy Place. Behind the second curtain was a second section called the Most Holy Place [Holy of Holies]... But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption... Thus it was necessary for the copies of the heavenly things to be purified with these rites, but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf (Heb. 9).

This prophetic worship continued as the people entered into the Promised Land. Either in the tabernacle or later through temple worship, these rituals and forms were kept until the fulfillment of Christ made them useless shadows.

John made the point that in Jesus, we see the tabernacling or dwelling of God among his people:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt [literally “tabernacle” or “pitched its tent”] among us.

Once the Israelites made it into Canaan, the promise of God continued to take shape. In Bethlehem, we had the marvelous story of redemption coming after the deaths in the story of Ruth. This story becomes part of the fabric of King David and ultimately Jesus himself. We have glimpses into more of the prophetic calling of Jesus in the life of David, another Old Testament person whose life and calling echo much of Jesus’. David was the shepherd of Israel, as Jesus would become for the world:

I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me (Jn. 10:11,14).

We have repeated stories that foreshadow the work of Christ. Elijah called forth God’s judgment and justice, seeking repentance from the people and leaders. He was a precursor to John the Baptist who did much the same, preparing the way for Jesus’ ministry. Malachi prophesied it:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the YHWH comes (Mal. 4:5).

Jesus explained this was the role of John the Baptist:

From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence, and the violent take it by force. For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John, and if you are willing to accept it, he is Elijah who is to come (Mt. 11:12-14).

We see smaller stories that also echo the ministry of Jesus and the life of the church. Naaman is a leper, cleansed only after his baptism in the waters of the Jordan, the waters that would later baptize Jesus and so many others. Jonah sees death for three days and nights in the belly of a fish, a sign that would speak of Jesus' death in the belly of the earth:

For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Mt. 12:40).

Perhaps one of the most graphic illustrations of the role Jesus has even in the lives of the pious is found in the monumental throne scene of Isaiah 6. Isaiah is acutely aware of his own sinfulness when confronted with the glory of God. The only purification comes from the touch of the sacrifice on God's heavenly throne. This is the sacrifice that God has prophesied clearly at the time of Isaac and Abram, but even earlier with the serpent in the garden. This is the sacrifice that bruises the tempter's head, even as it sets free the outcast and purifies the prophet.

The Son of Man gets the everlasting kingdom of Daniel; he raises the dry bones of Ezekiel; and he becomes the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. He is despised and rejected by men. He bore our griefs, sorrows, and sins. He was pierced for our transgressions and crushed for our sins. From his wounds we are healed. God laid upon him our iniquities, the iniquities of sheep who have gone astray. In the midst of his suffering and oppression, he stayed silent, bearing it by choice. He was put to death interceding for sinners, yet he was not abandoned to die. He came forth from the grave making the sinner righteous and bringing victory over death.

In these stories we see God, as Hebrews 1:1 noted, speaking to the fathers by the prophets. In words and stories, God promised a Messiah would come forth at the right time in ministry, service, and victory. Then came a day when an angel of the Lord came to shepherds in a field saying,

Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David [Bethlehem] a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Lk. 2:10-11).

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!