

Of the Exhibitions of the Covenant of Grace in the Patriarchal State.

by John Gill

The sermon explores the exhibitions of the Covenant of Grace throughout the patriarchal period, highlighting key figures and their roles in God's redemptive plan.

Scripture: Genesis 3:15, Genesis 6:8, Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15:6, Genesis 17:4, Genesis 22:14-18, Genesis 28:13-15, Job 19:25-27, Romans 4:3, Hebrews 11:4

Topics: "Faith in God", "Covenant of Grace"

Description

John Gill expounds on the exhibitions of the covenant of grace during the patriarchal state, illustrating how it was revealed from Adam to Abraham. He emphasizes the significance of key figures such as Adam, Abel, Noah, and Abraham, each representing aspects of God's grace and the promise of salvation through faith. Gill highlights the prophetic nature of these figures, showing how they foreshadow Christ and the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant. The sermon underscores the continuity of God's grace throughout history, culminating in the gospel. Through these patriarchs, the foundations of faith and the promise of redemption are established for all believers.

Transcript

A Body of Doctrinal Divinity

Book 4--Chapter 2

OF THE EXHIBITIONS OF THE COVENANT OF GRACE IN THE PATRIARCHAL STATE

Through the administration of the covenant of grace may be considered in a three fold state; as in the patriarchal state, before the giving of the law; and then under the Mosaic dispensation; and last of all under the gospel dispensation: yet more agreeable to the apostle's distinction of the first and second, the old and the new covenant, observed in the preceding chapter, I shall choose to consider it in the distinct periods under these two; and I shall begin with the administration of it under the first testament, as reaching from the fall of Adam to the coming of Christ, and consider it as held forth in the several periods in that long interval of time. 1.

The first period shall be from Adam to Noah. And those in this period to whom the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it were manifested and applied, were, 1a. Our first parents themselves, Adam and Eve,

and that both by words and actions. By words, and these spoken not directly to them, nor by way of promise to them; but to the serpent, and threatening-wise to him; and yet were the first dawn of grace to fallen man (Gen. 3:15), from whence it might be at once concluded by Adam and Eve, that they should not immediately die, but that a seed should be of the woman who would be the ruin of Satan, and the Saviour of them; which must spring light, life, and joy, in their trembling hearts: and though these words are short and obscure, yet contain some of the principal articles of faith and doctrines of the gospel; as the incarnation of the Son of God, signified by the "seed of the woman," who should be made of a woman, born of a virgin, unbegotten by man, and without father as man; the sufferings and death of Christ for the sins of men, signified by the serpent's "bruising his heel," bringing him to the dust of death in his inferior nature, sometimes expressed by his being bruised for the sins of his people; and may hint at the manner of his death, and crucifixion, since his feet could not well be pierced with nails without bruising his heel; also the victory he should obtain over Satan signified by "bruising his head," destroying his power and policy, his schemes and works, his authority, dominion, and empire; yea, him, himself, with his principalities and powers; and may express the bruising him under the feet of his people, the deliverance of them from him; the taking the captives out of the hand of the mighty, and the saving them with an everlasting salvation.

Which is the sum and substance of the gospel, and matter of joy to lost sinners. The grace of the covenant, and the blessings of it, were manifested and applied to our first parents, by certain actions and things done; as by the Lord God making "coats of skin," and "clothing them with them," which were emblems of the robe of righteousness, and garments of salvation, Christ has wrought out; that righteousness which God imputes without works; and is unto all, and upon all them that believe, as their clothing and covering: and those coats being made of the skins of slain beasts, very probably slain for sacrifice, which man was soon taught the use of; may have respect to the sacrifice of Christ, the woman's seed, which should be offered up, as was agreed on in the covenant of grace, and by which atonement would be made for sin, and upon which justification from it proceeds; all which are momentous articles of faith.

The "cherubim" and "flaming sword," placed at the East end of the garden of Eden, to keep the way of the tree of life, were not for terror, but for comfort; and were an hieroglyphic, showing that God in succeeding ages would raise up a set of prophets, under the Old Testament, and apostles and ministers of the gospel, under the New Testament, who should hold forth the word of light and life; that word which is quick and powerful, sharper than any twoedged sword; that has both light and heat in it; and who should show to men the way of salvation, and observe unto them the true tree of life, and the way to it; even Christ, the way, the truth, and the life;(see Gen. 3:21,24). 1b.

Abel, the Son of Adam, is the next person to whom an exhibition of the covenant and of the grace of it, was made; he was an instance of electing grace, according to which the blessings of the covenant are dispensed: a hint was given in the serpent's curse, that there would be two seeds in the world, the seed of the serpent, and the seed of the woman; this distinction took place in the first two men that were born into the world. Cain was of the wicked one, the seed of the serpent; Abel was one of the spiritual seed of Christ, a chosen vessel of salvation; and, in virtue of electing grace, was a partaker of the blessings of grace in the covenant; particularly of justifying grace: he is called righteous Abel, not by his own righteousness, but by the righteousness of faith, by the righteousness of Christ received by faith; for he had the grace of faith, which is a covenant grace, bestowed on him; by which he looked to Christ for righteousness and eternal life; "By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain; by

which he obtained witness that he was righteous" (Heb. 11:4).

His sacrifice was a more excellent one; not only as to its kind, being a lamb, and so typical of the Lamb of God; but as to the manner in which it was offered, by faith, in the view of a better sacrifice than that; even the sacrifice of Christ, by which transgression is finished, sin made an end of, reconciliation for it made, and an everlasting righteousness brought in; all which Abel, by faith, looked unto, and God had respect to him, and to his offering; which he testified in some visible way; perhaps by sending down fire upon it; which drew the envy of his brother upon him, who could not rest until he had slain him: in this Abel was a type of Christ, as well as in his being a keeper of sheep; who, through the envy of the Jews, who were in some sense his brethren, was delivered to the Roman governor, to be put to death; so that they are justly said to be the betrayers and murderers of him; and a like punishment of their sin came on them as on Cain; as he was drove from the presence of God, was an exile from his native place, and wandered about in another land; so they were carried captive by the Romans, and dispersed throughout the nations of the world, among whom they wander about to this day.

Abel was a type of Christ also in his intercession; for as he "being dead, yet speaketh;" so Christ, though he was dead, yet is alive, and ever lives to make intercession, to speak on the behalf of his people, and be an Advocate for them; and his blood has a speaking voice in it, and speaks better things than that of Abel; it calls for peace and pardon. 1c. Seth, the other seed appointed in the room of Abel, whom Cain slew, is not to be overlooked; since the appointment of him was of grace, and to fill up the place of righteous Abel, and be the father of a race of men that should serve the Lord; and was put, set, and laid as the foundation, as it were, of the patriarchal church state, as his name signifies; and was a type of Christ, the foundation God has laid in Zion: and in the days of his son Enos, as an effect of divine grace, and the displays of it, "Men began to call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen. 4:25,26), not but that they called upon the Lord personally, and in their families, before; but now being more numerous, families joined together, and set up public worship; where they met, and socially served the Lord, and called upon him in the name of the Lord, in the name of Christ, who, as Mediator, might be more clearly manifested; or they called themselves by the name of the Lord, of the Lord's people, and the sons of God, in distinction from the sons of men, the men of the world, irreligious persons, profane and idolatrous; which distinction took place before the flood, and perhaps as early as the times of Enos; (see Gen. 6:2). 1d.

Enoch is the only person in this period besides, who is taken notice of for the grace of God bestowed on him; though, no doubt, there were thousands who also were made partakers of it. He was "trained" up in a religious way, as his name signifies; he was eminent for his faith, and was high in the favor of God: he had a testimony that he pleased God, which could not be without faith, by which he drew nigh, had much nearness to, fellowship and familiarity with him; he "walked with God," enjoyed much communion with him, and had large communications of grace, light, and knowledge from him; was even favored with a spirit of prophecy, and foretold a future judgment, and the coming of Christ to it; and as he was made acquainted with the second coming of Christ, so, no doubt, with his first coming to save lost sinful men: and as Abel was a type of Christ in his low estate, in his sufferings and death, Enoch was a type of him in his ascension to heaven; for he "was not" on earth any longer than the time of his life mentioned; "for God took him," translated him from earth to heaven took him to himself; so Christ, when he had finishes his work on earth, was taken to heaven, a cloud received him out of the sight of his apostles, and he ascended to his God and their God, to his Father and their Father. 2.

Secondly, The next period of time in which an exhibition of the covenant of grace was made, is that from Noah to Abraham. And Noah is the principal person taken notice of in it. His father, at his birth, thought

there was something remarkable in him, and designed to be done by him, and thus expressed himself; "This same shall comfort us concerning our work" &c. (Gen. 5:29), and therefore called his name Noah, which signifies comfort, and is derived from Mxn, to "comfort," the last letter being cut off.

And in this Lamech has respect, not so much to things temporal, and to that benefit that should be received through Noah's invention of instruments for the more easy cultivating of the earth, and by bringing agriculture to a greater perfection, as he did; whereby the curse of the earth was, in a great measure, removed, which made it very difficult, through great toil and labour, to get a livelihood; but not so much to these as to things spiritual, respect is had by Lamech; and if he did not think him to be the promised Seed, the Messiah, the Consolation of Israel; yet he might conclude, that he would be an eminent type of Christ, from whom all comfort flows, the Saviour of men from their sins, their evil works, and from the curses of the law, on account of them; and who has eased them from the toil and labour of their hands, to get a righteousness of their own for their justification, having wrought out one for them.

However, in this person, Noah, there was a rich display of the grace of the covenant. 2a. In his person, both in his private and public capacity. He found grace in the eyes of the Lord; that is, favour and good will, which is the source of all the blessings of grace, of electing, redeeming, justifying, pardoning, adopting, and sanctifying grace; of all the graces of the Spirit, as faith, hope, love, &c. all which Noah was a partaker of, and this in the midst of a world of ungodly men; which showed it to be free and distinguishing: he was a just, or righteous man; not by his own works, by which no man can be justified, but by the righteousness of faith, of which he was an heir (Heb 11:7), even the righteousness which is by the faith of Christ: and he was "perfect in his generations;" not in himself, but in the righteousness of Christ, by which he was justified, and was a truly sincere and upright man, and walked with God, as Enoch did, and was favored with much communion with him: and in his public capacity he was a "preacher of righteousness;" of righteousness to be done between man and man; of the righteousness of God in bringing a flood upon the world to destroy it; and also of the righteousness of Christ; for no doubt he was a preacher of that of which he was an heir, and so had knowledge of and faith in it: the persons to whom he preached, or Christ in him by his Spirit, were the spirits that are now in prison; but then in the days of Noah, while he was preparing the ark, were on earth; to whose ministry they were disobedient, and so it was without success; (see 2 Pet. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:19,20). 2b.

There was a display of the grace of God in the ark which Noah was directed to make for the saving of his family (Heb. 11:7), which may be considered either as an emblem of the church of God, which is to be formed in all things according to the pattern given by God himself, as that was; and which weathers the storms and tempests, and beatings of the waters of affliction and persecution, as that did in a literal sense; and in which are carnal professors, hypocrites, and heretics, as well as God's chosen people, and truly gracious souls; as there were all sorts of creatures in the ark: or else the ark may be considered as a type of Christ, the cover and shelter from the storm and tempest of divine wrath and vindictive justice, and in whom spiritual rest is to be had for weary souls; just as the dove let out of the ark found no rest until it returned to it again; and as in the ark few souls were saved, only Noah and his family, and none but those that were in the ark; so there are but few that seek and find the way of salvation, and eternal life by Christ; and there is salvation in no other, but in him; nor are there any saved, but who are saved in and by him. 2c.

This sacrifice of Noah, after he came out of the ark, was typical of the sacrifice of Christ, both with respect to the matter of it, clean creatures; expressive of the purity of Christ's sacrifice, who is the Lamb of God without spot or blemish; and who offered himself without spot to God; and who, having no sin himself, was

fit to be a sacrifice for the sins of others: and also with respect to the acceptance of it; "God smelled a sweet savour;" that is, he was well-pleased with, and graciously accepted of Noah's sacrifice; and the same phrase is used of the acceptance of Christ's sacrifice (Eph. 5:2; Gen. 8:20,21). 2d.

The covenant made with Noah, though it was not the special covenant of grace, being made with him and all his posterity, and even with all creatures; yet as it was a covenant of preservation, it was a covenant of kindness and goodness in a temporal way; and it bore a resemblance to the covenant of grace; inasmuch as there were no conditions in it, no sign or token to be observed on man's part; only what God himself gave as a token of his good will, the rainbow in the cloud; and seeing that it is a covenant durable, lasting, and inviolable; (see Isa. 54:9,10).

The rainbow, the token of it, showed it to be a covenant of peace, which is one of the titles of the covenant of grace in the text referred to. So Christ, the Mediator of it, is said to have a rain-bow upon his head; and a rainbow is said to be round about the throne, signifying, that access to the throne of grace is only through the peacemaker Jesus Christ (Rev. 10:1; 4:3). To which may be added, that if this covenant of preservation had not taken place; but mankind had been now destroyed; the covenant of grace would have been made void, and of no effect; since the promised Seed, the great blessing of that covenant, was not yet come, and if so, never could, in the way promised. 2e.

Noah's blessing of Shem is not to be omitted; "Blessed be the Lord God of Shem!" in which is a display of covenant grace; for to be the Lord God of any person, is the sum and substance of the covenant of grace, which always runs in this style, "I will be their God," Moreover, Noah foretold spiritual blessings of grace which should be enjoyed by his posterity in future time; "God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem" (Gen. 9:26,27). The tents of Shem signify the church of God in its tabernacle state; and which continued among the Jews who were of the race of Shem, until the coming of Christ; and then God sent the gospel into the Gentile world, among the posterity of Japhet, and enlarged, or "persuaded" them, as some choose to render the word, to come and join with the believing Jews in the same gospel church state; whereby they became of the same body, and partakers of the same promises and blessings of the covenant; by which the above prophecy was in part fulfilled, and will be more completely in the latter day; (see Isa. 60:1-8). 3.

Thirdly, The next period of time in which an exhibition was made of the covenant and of the grace of it, is that from Abraham to Moses. And, 3a. Abraham himself stands foremost in it; he was an eminent instance of the grace of God, of the electing and calling grace of God. He was born in an idolatrous family, and lived in an idolatrous land; and he was called from his own country, and his father's house, to forsake it, and go elsewhere and serve the Lord; and to be separate from them, and the rest of the world; as the people of God are, when effectually called: he was an eminent instance of justifying grace; he was justified, but not by works, and so had not whereof to glory before God; but he was justified by faith in the righteousness of Christ; "He believed in the Lord, and he counted it to him for righteousness" (Gen. 15:6).

Not the act of faith, but the object of it, what he believed in, the Lord and his righteousness; for what was imputed to him, is imputed to all that believe in Christ, Jews or Gentiles, in all ages; now whatsoever may be said for Abraham's faith, being imputed to himself for righteousness; it can never be thought, surely, that it is imputed to others also for the same. Besides, it is the "righteousness of faith," the righteousness of Christ received by faith, which Abraham, when uncircumcised, had; and which is imputed to them also that believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised (Rom. 4:2,3,11,13,22-24).

To which may be added, that the gospel was preached to Abraham; the good news of his spiritual seed, those that walk in the steps of his faith, whether Jews or Gentiles, being blessed with all spiritual blessings in the Messiah, who should spring from him (Gal. 3:8). But what more especially deserve attention, are the various appearances of God unto Abraham, and the manifestations of the covenant of grace then made unto him. The first appearance was at the time of his call from his idolatrous country and kindred, when the covenant of grace was broke up to him, and he was assured of the blessings of it (Gen. 12:1-3), as it is to the chosen ones in effectual calling; and that it was this covenant that was then made known to Abraham, is clear from Galatians 3:17 where it is said to be "confirmed before of God in Christ;" which certainly designs the covenant of grace; for what else could be said to be thus "confirmed?" and which indeed was made with him, and confirmed in him in eternity, and was now made manifest to Abraham; and from the time of the manifestation of it to him at his call from Chaldea, to the giving of the law on mount Sinai, were four hundred and thirty years there mentioned.

The next appearance of God to him I shall take notice of, (for I propose not to consider everyone) is that which is recorded in Genesis 15:1 where in a vision God said unto him, "I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;" his shield, to protect him from all enemies, temporal and spiritual; his reward, portion, and inheritance in this life and that to come; and which is an exceeding great one, and is the sum and substance of the covenant of grace. Another appearance of God to Abraham was, when he was ninety nine years of age; when, besides the covenant of circumcision, God gave to him, and his natural seed of the male gender, and a promise of the land of Canaan to his posterity, as he had done before, he made himself known to him as the almighty God, or God all sufficient; whose power and grace were sufficient to support him in his walk before him, and bring him to a state of perfection (Gen. 17:1), and particularly in Genesis 17:4 he said to him, "As for me, behold my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations;" which the apostle explains of his being the father of all that believe, whether circumcised or uncircumcised; even of all that walk in the steps of his faith, and believe unto righteousness, as he did; these are blessed, with faithful Abraham, with all the blessings of the covenant of grace, as he was (Rom. 4:9-17; Gal. 3:9,29).

Once more, the Lord appeared to him in the plains of Mamre. Three appeared to him in an human form, two of them were angels, and one was Jehovah, the Son of God; who not only foretold the birth of a son to Abraham, but made known to him the design to destroy Sodom; and gave an high encomium of his piety and justice; and allowed him to expostulate with him about the destruction of Sodom; admitted him to stand before him, and he communed with him. All which showed him to be a friend of God, and interested in the covenant of his grace (Gen. 18:3,10,17,22,33).

At the time of the offering up of his son Isaac, by the command of the Lord, he appeared to him, and restrained him from the actual performance of it; upon which he called the name of the place Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will see, or will appear in the mount of difficulties, as he had to him; and when he made a further manifestation of the covenant of grace in that important article; "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 22:14-18), meaning the promised Seed, the Messiah, that should spring from him, as he did, and is called the Son of Abraham (Matthew 1:1), in whom all the elect are blessed with all spiritual blessings, the blessings of the everlasting covenant.

Not to omit the interview Abraham had with Melchizedek, who met him upon his return from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him in the name of the most high God; this man was an eminent type of Christ; his name and title agree with his, king of righteousness, and king of peace; the righteous and peaceable king; a priest continually, and of whose order Christ was; and whose eternity is shadowed forth in his

genealogy being unknown, in which he was made like unto the Son of God, the eternal Son of the eternal Father: it may be our Lord has respect to this interview, when he says, "Abraham saw my day, and was glad;" saw him in the promise, and saw him in this type (John 8:56; Heb. 7:1-3; Gen. 14:18,19). 3b.

Isaac, the son of Abraham, is the next instance of covenant grace in this period of time; in his line from Abraham it was promised the Messiah should come, and did: the same covenant of grace that was exhibited to Abraham, was manifested to Isaac in the same words (Gen. 26:3,4). And he was himself an eminent type of Christ, the promised Seed, and the great blessing of the covenant, both in his sacrifice and in his resurrection. Isaac was Abraham's own son, his only son, his beloved son, whom he took to offer on mount Moriah; Isaac went with him without reluctance, carrying the wood on which he was to be laid, and was laid; by which it appeared that Abraham withheld him not.

So Christ, who has been offered a sacrifice by the will of God, is his own Son, his begotten Son, his only begotten Son, and his beloved Son, when it was his pleasure to make his soul an offering for sin, he willingly went, as a lamb to the slaughter, bearing on his shoulders the cross on which he was crucified; and was not spared by his divine Father, but delivered up for us all. And though Isaac died not, yet he was reckoned by Abraham as dead; who accounted that God was able to raise him from the dead; from "whence also he received him in a figure" (Heb. 11:19), a ram caught in a thicket being shown him, and which he offered in his room; and so Isaac was delivered, and went home alive to his father's house; and this was on the third day from the time Abraham reckoned him as a dead man.

So Christ was "put to death in the flesh," signified by the ram in the thicket; and "quickened in the Spirit," typified by Isaac saved alive; who, after his resurrection, went to his God and our God, to his Father and our Father; and his resurrection was on the third day, according to this scripture type of him. 3c. Jacob, the son of Isaac, is another instance in whom there was a display of covenant grace, in the period of time between Abraham and Moses. He was an eminent and illustrious instance of electing grace, according to which the blessings of the covenant are dispensed.

He and Esau were brothers, twins, and if any, Esau had the precedence; yet before their birth it was notified to Rebekah, that "the elder should serve the younger" (Gen. 25:23) which the apostle makes use of to illustrate and exemplify the grace of God in election (Rom. 9:11-13). The same covenant of grace that was manifested to Abraham and Isaac, was repeated and made known to Jacob (Gen. 28:13-15). Christ also was represented to him by a ladder, whose top reached to heaven, and on which he saw the angels of God ascending and descending (Gen. 28:12).

The same is said of Christ (John 1:51), who in his divine nature reached to heaven, and was in heaven when in his human nature he was here on earth; and to whom angels ministered, and who is the only Mediator between God and man, and the way of access to God, and communion with him. Christ in an human form appeared to Jacob, and wrestled with him, with whom Jacob had so much power as to prevail, and obtain the blessing from him, and got the name of Israel (Gen. 32:24-28). The Messiah was prophesied of by him, under the name of Shiloh, the prosperous and the peaceable; in whose hands the pleasure of the Lord prospered, and who made peace for men by the blood of his cross; and that he should spring from his son Judah, and out of his tribe, as he did; and that he should come while civil government, in some form or another, was in Judah; and that when he came, there should be a great gathering of the Gentiles to him; all which have been exactly fulfilled: and for Christ, as the author of salvation, provided and promised in the covenant of grace, did the patriarch Jacob wait (Gen. 49:10,18). 3d.

Within this period of time, about the time the children of Israel were in Egypt, and before the times of Moses, lived Job, and his three friends: who, though they were not of Israel, but of the race of Esau, yet the covenant of grace, and the blessings of it, were made known to them, as a pledge and earnest of what would be done in later times. Job was an eminent instance of the grace of God; his character, as given by God himself, is, that he was "a perfect and upright man;" perfect, as justified by the righteousness of Christ; upright and sincere, as sanctified by the Spirit; and who, in his walk and conversation, appeared to be "one that feared God and eschewed evil" (Job 1:8), and as he was a man of great knowledge of natural and civil things, so of things divine, spiritual, and evangelical; of the impurity of nature; of the insufficiency of man's righteousness to justify him before God; and of the doctrine of redemption and salvation by Christ.

How many articles of faith, and doctrines of grace, are contained in those words of his; "I know that my Redeemer liveth?" &c. from whence it appears, that he knew Christ as the Redeemer, and as his Redeemer, provided and promised in the covenant of grace; that he then existed; that he would be incarnate, and dwell among men on earth; and come a second time to judge the world; and that there would be a resurrection of the same body, and a beatific vision of God in a future state; (see Job 9:2,20,30,31; 14:4; 19:25-27).

Job's three friends, though they mistook his case, and misapplied things to him, yet were men that knew, much of divine things; of the corruption of nature; of the vanity of self-righteousness; this, indeed, was their quarrel with Job, imagining, though wrongly, that he was righteous in his own eyes: and how gloriously does Elihu speak of the great Redeemer as the "Messenger" of the covenant, the uncreated Angel, Christ; as "an Interpreter" of his Father's mind and will; One among a thousand, the Chiefest of ten thousand, whose office it is "to show unto men his uprightness," his own righteousness, to declare and preach it (Ps. 40:9).

And as a Ransom found in council and covenant; a proper Person to give his life a ransom for men: (Job 4:17,18; 15:14-16; 25:4-6; 33:23,24). Thus the covenant of grace was exhibited, held forth, displayed, and manifested in the grace and blessings of it in the times of the patriarchs.

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