

Restoring the Image of God: A Corporate-Filial Approach to the “Royal Priesthood” in Exodus 19:6

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Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (Exod 19:5–6 ESV)

In the Bible “royal priesthood” or “a kingdom of priests” only appears two times—once in Exodus 19:6 (Heb. *mamleket kohanîm*; Gk. *basileion hierateuma*), once in 1 Peter 2:9 (Gk. *basileion hierateuma*).¹ From such a scant number of occurrences one might assume the subject of royal priesthood is unimportant to storyline of the Bible.² Such a conclusion, however, would be premature and misguided, because as this article will demonstrate, the

cohesion of priesthood and kingship, with the conjoining concept of sonship, provides a composite picture of humanity—e.g., Adam, Israel, Jesus, Church—that runs from Genesis to Revelation.

More than being just an idiosyncratic appellation for Israel and the Church, royal priesthood is a *title of status* given to God's chosen people, an *institution* that permeates Israel's history, a *messianic description* which identifies the heart of Jesus' person and work, and a *blessed vocation* conferred on the new covenant people of God. In other words, far from being a title restricted to two passages of Scripture, the twin concepts of priest and king stand at the center of the biblical story, as well as numerous theological doctrines—e.g., Christology, ecclesiology, anthropology, and missiology, to name a few.³

Yet, before we can make any doctrinal conclusions or missiological applications about what it means to be a royal priest, we must consider the exegetical details of Exodus 19:6.⁴ As with any passage of Scripture, we must understand Moses' words in their textual, covenantal, and canonical contexts.⁵ Yet, to avoid turning this exegetical investigation into a full-fledged monograph, this article will focus on the royal priesthood within the Pentateuch. More specifically, it will observe how Genesis 1-Exodus 18 inform the "royal priesthood" conferred on Israel in Exodus 19:6. In the second part of the article, I will continue the investigation of the Pentateuch from Exodus 19 to the end of Deuteronomy.

In this present study, I will make two arguments. First, the appointment of Israel as a "royal priesthood" must be understood in the light of God's endowment of royal priesthood on Adam in Genesis 1-2. Only by relating Eden to Sinai, and tracing the intermediary "sons of Adam" with their variegated priestly and royal duties, can we fully grasp what Moses is saying in Exodus 19:6. Second, the story of the Israel's royal priesthood does not end at Sinai. Rather, this is only the beginning. Accordingly, we need to read the rest of the Pentateuch to discover how Israel as a kingdom *of* priests became in its history a kingdom *with* priests—i.e., a kingdom with a Levitical priesthood.

Indeed, if Exodus 19:6 builds on the concept of the *imago Dei* in Genesis 1, it also lays the foundation of a system of priests to be established in Israel. But what is the nature of that priestly institution? And how does it relate to any system of priesthood before Sinai? The answer to those questions, and hence the meaning of *mamleket kohanim*, can only be fleshed out as we discover how the "filial priesthood" of the patriarchs (i.e., a priesthood

where firstborn sons followed their fathers to build altars, offer sacrifices, and intercede for the family) is replaced by “the establishment of a professional priestly class,” as Jacob Milgrom puts it describing the redemption of the firstborn by the Levites (Num 3).⁶ What follows is the first of a two-part study on the development of Israel’s royal priesthood from Eden to Sinai with the second part to appear in a forthcoming issue of *SBJT*.

WHY THIS APPROACH?

There are three reasons why we need to approach Exodus 19:6 and the royal priesthood in this way. First, excellent lexical studies on the meaning of “royal priesthood” (*mamleket kohanim*) already exist. The most thorough is the 2004 monograph by John A. Davies, who interprets Exodus 19:6 in the context of Exodus, the ancient Near East (ANE), and the remainder of the Bible.⁷ Starting with a thorough lexical study of Exodus 19:6, Davies considers the way royal and priestly themes coalesce in passages like Hosea 4:4-9; Micah 4:8; Psalm 114:2; Isaiah 61:6; and Zechariah 3:1-10. Similarly, Jo Bailey Wells, in her book *God’s Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology*, also looks in depth at Exodus 19:6.⁸ Among the literature on Exodus 19, I will interact significantly with their works.

What is less prominent in the study of Exodus 19:6 and Israel’s royal priesthood is the way in which royal priesthood finds its genesis in Eden, not Sinai. While laboring over the meaning of *mamleket kohanim* (primarily, Davies) and *goy qadosh* (primarily, Wells) and showing how Exodus 19:6 should be understood in its ANE context, they do not substantially ground royal priesthood in the original *imago Dei*. Peter Gentry is one of the few who makes this vital connection between Israel and Adam.⁹ Likewise, William Dumbrell makes the connection between Exodus 19:4-6 and Genesis 12:1-3. But because Genesis 12:1-3 restores what was lost in Eden, we need to go back to the beginning.¹⁰

Therefore, instead of retracing the works of Davies, Wells, and others, this article will bring earlier canonical data to bear on the words of Exodus 19:6. Because what is often lacking in most treatments of the royal priesthood is an appreciation for God’s antecedent covenants with Adam, Noah, and Abraham, we need to see how the priestly status of those sons of Adam inform the covenant at Sinai. In other words, we need to see how the patriarchal

understanding of sonship informs the priesthood granted to Israel.¹¹ Thus, our first step in answering the question—What does royal priesthood mean?—is to read Exodus 19:6 in the context of Genesis 1-Exodus 18. From those chapters we will see how sonship, priesthood, and kingship are three overlapping aspects of the *imago Dei*, and how Exodus 19:6 conjoins those three aspects together in Israel, as a corporate Adam.

Second, because Exodus 19:6 is set in the larger context of Exodus and the five books of Moses, we must consider how the entire Pentateuch informs the idea of a royal priesthood. For instance, how does a kingdom of priests relate to the high priesthood of Aaron (Exod 28-29), the redemption of the firstborn (Num 3), and the duties of the Levites (Num 3, 18)? Again, Davies' work on Exodus 19 is significant as it gives us a lexical and canonical approach to Israel's royal priesthood.¹² But his work and many others do little to explain how the royal priesthood conferred on Israel at Sinai develops (or even changes) over the course of the rest of the Pentateuch. Could it be that some of the debate surrounding Exodus 19 stems from the fact that little attention has been paid to the complicated story of the priesthood as told by Moses himself?¹³

For all Davies contributes to Exodus 19:6, he does not provide an exegetical (read: diachronic and literary) reading of Exodus 25-40 and the remaining books of Leviticus-Deuteronomy. Rather, he draws up a synchronic list of characteristics and duties of the priesthood, but one that does not follow the narrative of the Pentateuch.¹⁴ The trouble with this, as Wells points out, is that the Pentateuch tells a "complicated story" about the priesthood.¹⁵ While historical-critical approaches have gone too far, inventing a story of priestly rivalry (priests vs. Levites) behind the text of Scripture, there is something to be said for the accretion of mediating layers and priestly duties found in the Pentateuch. Accordingly, with an unswerving commitment to the unity, divine inspiration, and inerrancy of Scripture and rejection of multiple sources, it seems necessary to observe how the royal priesthood conferred at Sinai develops through a series of events in Israel's history. John Sailhamer's *The Meaning of the Pentateuch* identifies some of the ways in which the priesthood may have developed in the Pentateuch,¹⁶ but unfortunately he resorts to a "behind the text" approach to priesthood and the law covenant, which Jim Hamilton rightly critiques.¹⁷ Sailhamer's approach is not the one pursued here.

A better approach to the Pentateuch is provided by Michael Morales. In his *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, he shows how the five books of Moses form a literary unit that should be read together and in order.¹⁸ By consequence, a synchronic summation of priestly characteristics cannot discern the development (and degradation) of the priesthood in the Pentateuch. Consequently, someone like Scott Hahn, who suggests that Israel lost their priestly status after the Golden Calf episode, reads the text more carefully than most, even if some of his conclusions are suspect.¹⁹ Nonetheless, I will argue that a diachronic reading of the Pentateuch, what Morales describes as the Pentateuch’s “journey” to God’s abode, is necessary for understanding how the mediating institution of the priesthood worked in the life of Israel.²⁰ Because of the sheer volume of material in the Pentateuch, it will not be possible to address every issue, but hopefully I can provide some general contours of the priesthood in Israel’s kingdom that will help us understand how a “royal priesthood” worked in Israel. Again, this approach will be pursued in two parts—the first looking backwards from Exodus 19:6, the second looking forward to the end of Moses five books.

Third and finally, from a unified reading of the priesthood from Adam to Israel, we will see how the royal priesthood developed and prepared the way for a New Adam, one who came as a better priest and a greater king. In other words, because the priesthood established at Sinai was given as a copy of the heavenly temple (see Exod 25:8, 40), it was always intended to be a shadow of a later, greater reality (Heb 8:5). Likewise, because Scripture (e.g., John 5:39; Rom 4:23; 1 Cor 10:11; Gal 4:4; Heb 1:1–2) teaches us to read the OT as preparing the way for a better royal priest (e.g., 1 Sam 2:35; Ps 110; Zech 3), we must understand how the concept of royal priesthood is meant to prepare the way for Christ and his new covenant people. In this final section, then, I will show how a canonical understanding of royal priesthood leads us to see its eschatological purpose and typological contours, which ultimately lead us to Christ and the kingdom of priests he is now gathering.

To summarize, here are the three directional aims of these two articles. First, in Part 1, I will demonstrate how Israel as a kingdom of priests reflects the original image of Adam, now marred by sin but restored (if only partially) in the royal priesthood in Israel. This section will show the need to understand priesthood in relationship to sonship, and why any study of priesthood that begins after Eden will suffer because it does not attend to the original pattern

of son-priest-king that is inherent to humanity's *imago Dei*. The goal of this article (Part 1) will be to explicate this triple office of the image of God (son, priest, and king) and how it informs our understanding of Exodus 19:6.

Second, in Part 2, I will outline from Exodus-Deuteronomy how the priestly institution of mediation developed in the legislation of the Mosaic covenant. This section will attempt to explain how Israel functioned as a kingdom with multiple "layers" of priestly mediation. This article will attempt to provide a reading of the Pentateuch which pays careful attention to the diachronic development of the priesthood from Sinai (Exodus 19-Numbers 10) to the Wilderness (the rest of Numbers) to the Land (the book of Deuteronomy).

Third and last, in both parts, I will make a number of connections from the royal priesthood of Adam and Israel to that of Jesus the Messiah and the anointed members of his new covenant community. In this canonical reading of Exodus 19:6, I will show the typological features of this old covenant system that are now fulfilled and exceeded by the high priesthood of Christ and the kingdom of priests he leads. Though this article will not use the language of typology much, it understands the royal priesthood of Israel as a significant ectype standing between the *archetype* Adam, the *antitype* Jesus, and the *supratype* of the Church.²¹

In the end, these studies on Exodus 19:6 will at times be more suggestive than definitive. Among conservative Protestant scholarship, there is much work to be done on a biblical theology of priesthood. As D. A. Carson recently noted, Andrew Malone's recent work is the only whole Bible treatment of the priesthood that he knows.²² Likewise, Malone notes the way localized biblical studies on the priesthood have proliferated, but laments how few consider the whole Bible.²³ I concur, and it is my aim in these two articles to relate Exodus 19:6, a bedrock text for understanding a biblical theology of the priesthood, in the larger scope of the Pentateuch and then the whole Bible. In so doing, I pray it will help us better understand the biblical storyline of the priesthood and our own calling to be a kingdom of priests (1 Peter 2:9).

A MARRED IMAGE: ROYAL PRIESTHOOD FROM ADAM TO ISRAEL

While studies on the priesthood often begin at Sinai, where the priesthood is first introduced in covenant form, it is better to begin our study of the royal

priesthood in the beginning.²⁴ As G. K. Beale has argued in his landmark work on the temple and again in this issue of *SBJT*, Adam is presented by Moses as a priest.²⁵ And specifically, he is a royal priest, one who as God’s son (Luke 3:38) is commissioned to “subdue and rule” (royal language), as well as to “serve and guard” (priestly language). Amazingly, little of Adam’s identity as priest, king, and son has entered into the discussion about Exodus 19. Yet, it seems almost impossible to understand Israel as God’s son (i.e., *segullá*) and his royal priesthood without paying attention to the way Adam’s triple identity as son-priest-king was passed down to his sons—marred by sin as they were.

Therefore, in what follows I will offer three steps showing how Adam and his sons relate to Israel and their identity as son, priest, and king. First, Adam’s priesthood will be shown in cohesion with his kingship and sonship. Only when we see how these three concepts contribute to the image of God, or conversely how the *imago Dei* is best understood as a matrix of sonship, priesthood, and kingship, can we rightly see where later “Adams” exhibit or empty the original image.²⁶ Second, with this priesthood-kingship-sonship matrix in place, I will examine how the patriarchs functioned as “royal priests.” And third, I will show how Exodus 19:6 itself is reiterating the claim that Israel, as God’s son, is a kingdom of priests.

THE IMAGE OF GOD: SON, PRIEST, KING

In Genesis 1:26–27, Adam is called the image and likeness of God. This language carries with it a whole host of cultural and theological reflection. Studies by D. J. A. Clines,²⁷ Randall Garr,²⁸ and Richard Middleton²⁹—to name only a few—help us assess the fullness of the meaning of God’s image and likeness. Still, most important for our study on Exodus 19:6 is a full understanding of how Adam’s *imago Dei* conjoins sonship, priesthood, and kingship. On that connection, Stephen Dempster observes from Genesis 5:1 a “link between sonship and the image of God.”³⁰ Similarly, Peter Gentry writes, “The term ‘image of god’ in the culture and language of the ancient Near East in the fifteenth century B.C. would have communicated two main ideas: (1) rulership and (2) sonship. The king is the image of god because he has a relationship to the deity as the son of god and a relationship to the world as ruler for the god.”³¹

Further, Dempster states that Adam, who is God's son, is also a priest and a king. Speaking of the anthropological climax of creation, he states, "It is as if humanity is functioning as a type of priest-king, mediating God to the world and the world to God."³² Likewise, G. K. Beale who has argued extensively for Adam as priest, notes Adam must be considered a kingly priest. Noting the way "rest" is associated with the Garden (see Gen 2:8, 14), he posits,

Thus, the implication [of rest being the prerequisite for the formation of a royal temple] may be that God places Adam into a royal temple to begin to reign as his priestly vice-regent. In fact, Adam should always best be referred to as a 'priest-king,' since it is only after the 'fall' that priesthood is separated from kingship.³³

When all these observations are put together, the resulting "image" of Adam is that of a priest-king-son.³⁴ Adding support to this threefold image is the way latter revelation speaks of Adam. For instance, Psalm 8 describes Adam in royal terms,

Yet you have made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor. You have given him dominion over the works of your hands; you have put all things under his feet, all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field, the birds of the heavens, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas. (vv. 5-8)

Likewise, when Ezekiel 28:12-15 portrays the king of Tyre in his glory, he pictures Adam dressed in the resplendent garments of a priest.

"Son of man, sing a lament for the king of Tyre, and say to him, "This is what the sovereign Lord says: "'You were the sealer of perfection, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. ¹³You were in Eden, the garden of God. Every precious stone was your covering, the ruby, topaz, and emerald, the chrysolite, onyx, and jasper, the sapphire, turquoise, and beryl; your settings and mounts were made of gold. On the day you were created they were prepared. ¹⁴I placed you there with an anointed guardian cherub; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked about amidst fiery stones. ¹⁵You were blameless in your behavior from the day you were created, until sin was discovered in you. (NET)³⁵

Last, when Luke writes out Jesus’ genealogy, he goes all the way back to Adam, who he calls “the son of God” (Luke 3:38).³⁶ Altogether, from the cultural background of the ANE we learn that *tselem* and *demût* often conjoined sonship-priesthood-kingship. Similarly, from later Scripture we see how Adam is variously presented as God’s son, God’s priest, and God’s human king. Finally, when we come to the NT, we discover that when Jesus receives the title “Son” in his resurrection, it comes with royal and priestly authority (see Heb 5:5–10).³⁷ As Morales puts it, “as the last Adam and true Israel, *the* Son of God dawned, as prophet, priest, and king, now conforming humanity to himself as the image and likeness of God.”³⁸ From this testimony of Scripture, we have strong support for seeing Adam as son-priest-king.³⁹

Yet, such a lofty view of humans may be missed because it only flashed across the screen in Eden. As Beale notes concerning Adam, the Fall caused the division of priesthood from kingship.⁴⁰ Likewise, we only get a brief glimpse of Christ’s glory while on earth (see Matt 17:1–8) and a very distant view of any royal priesthood in Revelation (1:6; 5:10; 20:6). Conversely, what we find after the Fall and in all of Scripture is the disintegration of Adam’s original glory. In the sons of Adam, various figures give us truncated combinations of imperfect sons, priests, and kings, but none match the original beauty (Ezek 28:12–15) or glory (Ps 2:5–8) of the first man. And perhaps this explains why so many have not put all three concepts together.

While Dempster speaks of Adam as son and king, and again as priest and king, he does not bring all three together. Yet, it is vital to see that the image of God is a son-priest-king. Moreover, when we see the original unity of these offices, we discover that they do not coalesce in the same “person” again until Israel is named God’s son (Exod 4:22; cf. *segullâ* in 19:5). Indeed, in this sense Israel is a “corporate Adam,” as much as they are a royal priesthood.⁴¹ In canonical context, Exodus 19:6 is the first instance of a “total,” albeit a short-lived, recovery of God’s original image. Nevertheless, before making that claim—that Exodus 19 is recapitulation of God’s image—we must consider what we find during the generations from Adam to Moses.

Patriarchal Priests: From Seth to Moses

Filial Priests in the Line of Abraham

The genealogies of Genesis (chs. 5, 10, and 49) give us a clear family lineage from Adam to Israel.⁴² So great is Israel's family record-keeping, Moses and Aaron can trace their lineage to Levi (Exod 6:14–30) and Aaron's wife can trace hers to Judah (6:23)—a stunning “easter egg” that suggests every son of Aaron is a royal priest.⁴³ From this history, we can understand how every generation is a “son of Adam.”⁴⁴ Yet, these generations do more than carry forth the family lineage. They also bring forth the image of God (Gen 5:1), which means they also carry forward the fractured remnants of Adam's sonship, priesthood, and kingship. Accordingly, just as Genesis 9:6 indicates that the image of God continues after the Fall, we will also see how the various elements of Adam's image (his sonship, priesthood, and kingship) are continued in the book of Genesis.

This continuation of the *imago Dei* is an important observation because it links the first son of God (Adam) with the second son of God (Israel). As observed above, Israel is the restoration of Adam's image. To appreciate that fact, however, means we need to see how Seth, Noah, and Abraham (Isaac and Jacob), along with Melchizedek and Jethro reflect various combinations of priest, king, and son on the way to a restoration of God's image at Sinai.

Below, I will argue that no son of Adam gives a full picture of Adam. That said, there are multiple figures who typify the image of God partially. Thus, in what follows, I will quickly trace the themes of son, priest, and king through Genesis and Exodus in order to show the canonical background to God's words in Exodus 19:6.

Seth. In Genesis 5 Adam's likeness to God is repeated (v. 1), but now it is set in the context of his fatherhood. While Adam was made in the image and likeness of God, his son Seth would be made in his own image (v. 3). From this genealogy Seth's sonship is explicit, but nothing is said about priesthood or kingship.

Nonetheless, Genesis 4, which tells the story of Adam's two seeds (Cain and Abel), is suggestive that Adam's sons were called on to offering sacrifices at “the original sanctuary door, the gate of Eden guarded by cherubim.”⁴⁵ In that chapter, Abel proves his faith by offering an acceptable sacrifice to the Lord (Heb 11:4). Likewise, Seth who took Abel's place is said to “call upon

the Lord” (Gen 4:26), language reflective of dependent prayer.⁴⁶ Even more suggestive is the “cultic theology in primeval history.”⁴⁷ As Morales notes,

The general picture that emerges through primeval history, therefore, is that of a cosmos constructed as a tabernacle, with a defiled (priestly) humanity driven ever eastward as punishment for sin. Moreover, because humanity’s sin had defiled the tabernacle itself (i.e., the cosmos), the earth needed to be purified.⁴⁸

This purification, Morales argues, would be found in the flood.⁴⁹ But until then, the sons of Adam functioned as priests making sacrifice to atone for sin. This can be seen in the blood sacrifice offered by Abel,⁵⁰ the failure of Cain to bring a “sin-offering” to the Lord,⁵¹ and in the way Seth and his line of called upon the Lord.

Nevertheless, if Seth and his sons have priestly responsibilities, there is no mention of their kingship. In Genesis 4:17 Cain built a city for his son Enoch where his offspring would establish features of civilization that presuppose or prefigure some type of a kingdom. Later, after the flood Nimrod, a descendent of Ham, is presented as a king (10:6–14), but the sons of Seth and Shem are always presented as faithful sojourners (cf. Heb 11:10, 13–16), never kings.

Noah. At the other end of Seth’s genealogy, we encounter a man named Noah. The story of Noah is well-known, but what is less obvious is his priestly vocation. Yet, from a careful reading of Genesis 6-9 we can see how Moses presents Noah as a priest.⁵²

Consider: After surviving the flood, Noah built the first altar mentioned in the Bible.⁵³ The language used by Moses to describe the altar-building employs at least three Levitical terms (“clean” [v. 20, 2x], “burnt offerings,” [v. 20], “pleasing aroma” [v. 21]).⁵⁴ Yet, it is not just linguistic similarities that make Noah a priest. A number of older commentators “hold that the sacrifice” offered in Gen 8:21 “was essentially propitiatory.”⁵⁵ Observing that “Noah’s sacrifice is effective for all mankind,” Wenham states, “we can view Noah’s offering of sacrifice as a prototype of the work of later priests who made atonement for Israel.”⁵⁶

In addition to the Levitical language and offering of sacrifice that propitiates God, there is also the covenantal context of Genesis 6-9.⁵⁷ This too adds support for seeing Noah as a priest. As the mediator of this “new” covenant, Noah has the responsibility of enforcing covenantal stipulations (e.g., be

fruitful and multiply and do not shed blood). Accordingly, he would have to teach his children and their offspring the rules of the covenant, just like Adam.

Unfortunately, Noah like Adam, fails in his priestly mission when he gets drunk and is found naked. Yet, this only adds confirmation to his priestly status. After his “fall” (9:25-27), Noah pronounced blessings and curses upon his three sons, an act of covenant mediation that the priests of Israel would come to perform (Num 6:24–26; Deut 10:8; 1 Chr 23:13).⁵⁸ Thus, the priestly contours of Adam can be seen in Noah. As he announces the gospel (cf. 2 Pet 2:5), takes clean animals onto the ark, offers sacrifices (8:20), and mediates God’s covenant (9:1ff.), he demonstrates his priestly calling.

At the same time, Noah’s reflection of Adam lacks some of his royal characteristics. Significantly, Noah is never seen to possess any specific plot of ground. He plants a vineyard (v. 20), but the location of this garden is unknown. In the context of Genesis 9, this vineyard serves as a foil for his drunkenness and his son’s curse. Thus, like Abraham after him, Noah does not have a place to subdue and rule.

In fact, while the commands “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth” repeat in Genesis 9:1, the command to “subdue and rule” does not. Rather, as Mathews notes, “This admits that the new circumstances of the sin-burdened world have altered this aspect of the Adamic blessing, which now will be difficult to accomplish the hostile environs of the world.”⁵⁹ Echoing observations made by Geerhardus Vos, Mathews point is helpful because it attends to the dissimilarities between Adam and Noah.⁶⁰ While many scholars have rightly perceived the similarities between these covenant heads, we must also see how Noah’s dominion, if we can call it that, is fraught with frustration. Moreover, from the testimony of the NT, until the second Adam, the world lay under the dominion of another king—namely Satan (John 12:31; 14:30; Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2).

From these observations, Noah is presented as a son of Adam and a priest, but his status of king less certain, or at least significantly reduced from that of Adam. Though some have seen in Noah a royal motif, this identification is not as strong as his filial priesthood.⁶¹ Thus, I believe that Noah, like Seth before him and Abraham after him, reflects Adam’s original glory in some ways but not in others. And thus the narrative of Genesis takes another step forward towards Abraham and his sons (Isaac and Jacob) who will also demonstrate great priestly characteristics, but who will also lack a full

possession of any kingship.

Abraham and His "Seed." After the fall of Babel, Genesis shifts attention to the man Abram, later renamed Abraham.⁶² Elected by God to be the recipient of his blessing, and commissioned to be a means of blessing to the all the families of the earth (Gen 12:1–3), Abraham becomes a central figure for the rest of redemptive history.⁶³ But was he a priest? God calls Abraham a "prophet" (20:7) and the Hittites refer to him as "lord" and "a prince of God among us" (23:6), but nowhere does Scripture explicitly identify him as a priest.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, a number of scholars make a strong case for his priestly function.⁶⁵ For instance, Scott Hahn writes, "Canonical evidence points to the existence of a pre-Levitical form of priestly activity before the Mosaic period."⁶⁶ In fact, from a close reading of Gen 11:27–25:11, we can observe Abraham's priestly functions in at least five ways.

First, Abraham's call to receive a blessing from God and to in turn become a blessing to his family is by its very nature priestly.⁶⁷ Much like Israel's call unto holiness (Exod 19:5–6) and the separation of Levites from all things unclean (Lev 21), Abraham's unique calling prepared him for priestly service. Moreover, the imperative given by God to Abraham to bless others is very similar to that of Aaronic blessing in Numbers 6:24–26. Indeed, the whole idea of pronouncing a blessing on someone is a priestly prerogative.⁶⁸ In this way, God's covenant with Abraham puts him in a priestly role where he stands between God and his family as the "mediator of blessing."⁶⁹

Second, Abraham's priestly duties are evident as he builds altars.⁷⁰ In Genesis 12-13 Abraham builds three altars (12:7-9; 13:18), places of worship which harken back to Eden and Adam's role as priest.⁷¹ On this point, Gentry and Wellum comment, "Canaan is depicted in Edenic language as a mountain sanctuary," and Abraham is depicted as "fulfilling an Adamic role, [as] he offers sacrifice as a priest and worships God in this mountain sanctuary."⁷² While Moses takes little time to develop the theme of these altars, they anticipate the altar on which Isaac will be laid (22:9) and the altars that will be associated with sacrifice and worship in the later stages of Israel (Exod 17:15; 20:24–26; 24:4–6; 27:1–8; 38:1–7).

Third, Abraham's priestly ministry is visible when he intercedes for Lot. As he pleads for God to spare the righteous (18:24), he is maintaining the balance that all priests must. He is holding fast to God's holiness, while pleading mercy from God's coming judgment. As a result, the righteous are

saved from judgment by the prayers of their covenant mediator (19:29).⁷³ This strongly typifies the intercessory work of Israel's priests, and ultimately Jesus Christ.

Fourth, between the two episodes with Lot, the reader of Genesis observes two distinct but related covenantal ceremonies in Genesis 15 and 17. Related to Abraham's priestly ministry, it is worth noting two things about Abraham's covenant mediation. First, in Genesis 15 Abraham is observed preparing the sacrifices and guarding the holy place of God—the place where God's presence would soon pass. In these twin functions—especially in his driving away the carrion-eating birds of prey⁷⁴—he is acting out the duties that would later be given to the Levitical priests.⁷⁵

Next, as an obedient priest who carries out the duty of circumcision, he is marking out the people who would receive his blessing, and by extension establishing a boundary between God's people and the nations.⁷⁶ In fact, Gentry goes as far as to say, "Circumcision symbolised complete devotion to the service of God as a priesthood. The covenant sign underlines Abraham's Adamic role as a priest in his calling to bring blessing to the nations."⁷⁷ In short, all who were circumcised in the covenant God made with Abraham would be blessed,⁷⁸ but those who broke the covenant (as many in Israel would do) or those who rejected the covenant through non-circumcision (as Ishmael's children would do) would be cursed (cf. Exod 4:24-26). In circumcision then, Abraham leads his family to be in covenant with God, a task that Levites would later perform in order to keep covenant with God (Lev 12:3).⁷⁹

Fifth, and most importantly, Abraham's priestly duties are evidenced in his (near) sacrifice of Isaac.⁸⁰ In short order, we can mark out four reasons why we should read in Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac a priestly shadow. First, the location of the sacrifice is clearly associated with priestly sacrifices (vv. 2, 14). The Chronicler indicates that Solomon's temple was built on Mount Moriah (2 Chr 3:1), the same place where David purchased the threshing floor from Araunah (2 Sam 24:18-25). The sacral location of Abraham's/David's/Solomon's altar not only prefigures the location of Christ's own sacrifice, but if "Salem" in Gen 14:18 is really Jerusalem, as Psalm 76:2 suggests, then Abraham would be returning to the dwelling place of Melchizedek in order to carry out a priestly duty of the greatest magnitude.⁸¹

Next, the language of Genesis 22 suggests a priestly theme.⁸² For instance,

Abraham indicates his journey to the mountain of the Lord would result in “worship.”⁸³ Likewise, six times Moses uses the word *olah* (vv. 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 13) to speak of Isaac’s sacrifice. In Genesis, this term is only used of Noah’s offering (8:20), before it is uniformly used in Exodus–Deuteronomy to describe various kinds of “burnt offerings.”⁸⁴ Moreover, Yahweh’s “test” of Abraham’s “fear” of God adumbrates Sinai,⁸⁵ which in turn became the pattern for the tabernacle service. Thus, the language of Genesis 22 connotes priestly activity.

Finally, the sacrificial nature of Abraham’s obedience is unmistakably that of a priest. This is evident in Abraham’s obedience to the word of the Lord.⁸⁶ He does not sacrifice his son as a father, but in obedience to God, he raises the knife as a God-appointed priest.⁸⁷ That Abraham functions as a priest is evident from a comparative reading of Deuteronomy 33:9 which could easily be applied to Abraham: “[H]e disowned his brothers and ignored his children. For [he] observed your word and kept your covenant.”⁸⁸ The Levites were awarded the status of priest because of their allegiance to God *against* their kinsman, and such is the case with Abraham.

Altogether, these five elements of Abraham’s life demonstrate his priestly actions. And they will continue to repeat in the lives of his offspring, Isaac and Jacob. Space does not permit a full study of these patriarchal priests, but it is enough to identify an important but often overlooked factor—namely, the fact that firstborn sons in Israel functioned as priests by right of primogeniture, i.e., the right of firstborn sons to receive the father’s inheritance and represent the family.

While the word “primogeniture” is not found in Scripture, the concept is abundantly obvious. It “can be seen in the distinction drawn between the firstborn and other sons (Gn 10:15; 25:13; 36:15), the double portion to be given to the firstborn (Dt 21:17), as well as the paternal blessing given to them (Gn 21:1–14; 27:1–28; 48:18).”⁸⁹ Significantly, Genesis shows how priesthood like that of Abraham was passed down from father to son. As Scott Hahn observes, “During the patriarchal age the firstborn son was accorded certain privileges and prerogatives which later would belong to the Levites.”⁹⁰ Citing a bevy of scholars, Hahn continues, “The cultic-familial nexus of primogeniture, priesthood, and paternal succession is generally recognized in many older Jewish and Christian interpretive traditions, where it is understood to be a natural institution.”⁹¹ Some of the sources he cites

include the Targums on Genesis 49:3:

Reuben, you are my first-born, my might and the beginning of my strength. For you it would have been fitting to take three parts—the birthright, the priesthood, and royalty. (Gen 49:3, *T. Onq.*)

Reuben, you are my first-born ... you would have been worthy of the birthright, the dignity of the priesthood and the kingship. But because you sinned, my son, the birthright was given to Joseph, the kingship to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi. (Gen 49:3, *T. Ps.-Jon.*)

Stepping outside the biblical canon, these Jewish interpretations of Jacob's judgment on Reuben for sleeping with his concubine (49:4; cf. Gen 35:22), teach us how the blessing was (or was not) passed down to the firstborn. "Although Reuben disqualified himself, these texts bear witness that, among his siblings, the firstborn son stands as the senior member for the next generation. He is in the natural position for paternal succession," a position which includes the responsibility to intercede for the family as priest.⁹²

More could be said about the patriarchs, priesthood, and primogeniture,⁹³ but for now we need to see how this familial priesthood serves as the background to all the priestly regulations in Exodus-Deuteronomy. In other words, God's statement in Exodus 19:6 must be read in the light of this earlier, patriarchal priesthood. Indeed, only as we consider how God had already marked out his covenant people as a priestly people do we have the appropriate context for Exodus 19:6.

At the same time, it is important to see how the original image, complete with son-priest-king connotations, was carried forward in patriarchs. While never formalizing another son-priest-king like Adam, we have seen how sons should be seen as priests (i.e., "filial priests"). Likewise, there are hints that these sons will also carry in their DNA royal blood. For instance, Abraham raised an army (318 "trained men," 14:14), goes to war to defeat kings (14:17), and is called a "prince of God" (23:6), all of which hint at Abraham's potential to be a king. Likewise, Abraham and Sarah are told kings will come from their lines (Gen 17:6, 16); Jacob too is a recipient of a royal promise. In Genesis 35:11, Yahweh says to him: "A nation and a company of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come from your own body." Next, Joseph is portrayed with the greatest of royal images.⁹⁴ Finally, Judah

is promised that a royal scepter will not depart his household (49:9–12).

For all these hints of royalty in the patriarchs, however, Abraham and his sons never possessed anything more than a burial cave in Canaan (see Gen 23:1–20). He is not the ruler of the land, but a “sojourner and foreigner” (23:6), one awaiting a city whose author and builder is God (Heb 11:10). Likewise, Joseph was a ruler in a foreign land. Thus, until Israel is redeemed from Egypt and brought into their own land, there can be no king from the line of Abraham. Thus, the kingly contours found in Abraham and Joseph and the royal promises made to Abraham, Jacob, and Judah are always proleptic and never present. They image Adam in part and God’s restoration of his image in part, but in the patriarchs, we do not find a full vision of son-priest-king. Nevertheless, and this is the important point, “the dual capacity of king and priest is implicitly present” in the firstborn sons of Abraham.⁹⁵

Priest-Kings Outside the Family

At the same time, in Genesis and Exodus we do find two priest-kings who are not sons of Abraham. The first is Melchizedek, the priest-king of Salem; the second is Jethro/Reuel, the father-in-law of Moses. If the image of Adam is partially carried forward by the priestly sons in Abraham’s family; these priest-kings from outside the family of Abraham also advance our understanding of royal priesthood. We see this most explicitly in Melchizedek and then echoed in Jethro, who is found in the immediate context of Exodus 19:6.

Melchizedek. Melchizedek is a priest-king who worships the God Most High. Genesis 14 introduces him after Abraham returns from defeating the armies of Chedorlaomer and three other kings (v. 17). On this return, Abraham encounters two kings, who “represent two different kinds of kingship.”⁹⁶ Abraham, discerning this difference, rejects Sodom’s king and honors Salem’s king, even giving Melchizedek a tithe.

As Hebrews 7 explains, every feature of Genesis 14 is valuable for understanding who Melchizedek is and what he contributes to the biblical storyline. For our purposes, it is striking that Melchizedek, unlike the other kings of Canaan, is a king of righteousness (Melchizedek) and a king of peace (king of Salem). Likewise, he is a priest of the Most High God, and may even contribute to Abraham’s understanding of who this God is.⁹⁷ Still, even more significant is the fact that in a book filled with genealogies and structured by ten *toledôt*’s, Melchizedek has no family connection. Remarkably, taking

this observation from silence Hebrews 7:3 states, “He is without father or mother or genealogy” (cf. 7:6). In other words, Melchizedek is a priest and king, but not a “son,” nor especially a son in Abraham’s family.

Yet, despite standing outside Abraham’s family, the patriarch recognizes the greatness of this priest-king. Therefore, Abraham honors him by receiving Melchizedek’s bread and wine (v. 18) and returning a tithe to Melchizedek from all Abraham’s spoils of war (v. 20).⁹⁸ In this exchange, we get a glimpse in Melchizedek of what Adam might have been, what Israel was meant to become, and what Jesus Christ would ultimately be—a glorious royal priest. However, because Melchizedek stands outside the line of Abraham, he cannot be the one; he can only foreshadow the One who will come to be a high priest based on his indestructible life, not the lineage of Levi. This is the point Hebrews makes—that there is a greater royal priest than what the Law supplies. Ostensibly, this promise lies dormant in Israel’s history as the Law is put in place, but as the Law unravels and the priesthood of Levi disintegrates (cf. Mal 2:1–9), it will become apparent that Israel’s priestly hope lies in a priest-king like Melchizedek (cf. Psalm 110).

For now though, it is enough to recognize that Melchizedek plays an important role in Exodus 19:6 because he is the only explicit priest-king between Adam and Israel. Whereas Noah, Abraham, and Abraham’s sons demonstrate filial priesthood (and flashes of kingship) in Genesis, Melchizedek explicitly foreshadows the priestly kingdom that Israel is supposed to have. Whereas other nations rule with Babel-like ambition, Melchizedek shows us another way of priestly service and royal rule. Thus, just as he teaches Abraham the way of true righteousness, so Aaron and the priests of Levi are chosen to model for Israel the way of the Lord.⁹⁹

Jethro/Reuel. The other priest-(king?), Jethro, is less explicit as a precursor to Israel’s calling in Exodus 19:6. Yet, because he is more closely associated with Israel at the time that God calls them to be a kingdom of priests, his priestly ministry in Midian is worth considering. In fact, there are at least five ways Jethro’s (royal) priesthood is worth noting.

First, like Melchizedek, whose name means “king of righteousness,” Reuel (Jethro’s other name) may mean “friend of God.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, while Reuel’s priestly allegiance is not as explicit as Melchizedek, his name is suggestive that he serves the true God. Likewise, Reuel lives in a place where Moses, tending Reuel’s flock could come to “Horeb, the mountain of God” (Exod

3:1). Thus, Reuel’s name and place open the possibility that Reuel is a priest like Melchizedek, one who knew the true God.

Second, a comparison of Genesis 14-15 and Exodus 17-24 shows many textual similarities. For instance, both covenants (Abraham’s and Israel’s) are preceded by the same order of events—war with the nations (Gen 14:1–12 || Exod 17:8–10); divine victory (Gen 14:14–17 || Exod 17:11–13); and the emergence of priest-king from the nations who will bless God’s people (Gen 14:18–20 || Exod 18:1–12).¹⁰¹ Only after these parallel events occur are the covenants ratified (Gen 15 || Exod 19–24). Moreover, stressing the intentional literary shaping of these two covenants, Sailhamer observes fifteen points of connection between Melchizedek and Jethro.¹⁰²

Third, when we first encounter Jethro in Exodus 2:16, we learn he is “the priest of Midian.” While we do not know the content of Midian’s religion, Davies observations are worth considering,

Rather than being ‘a priest of Midian’ (Exod 2.16 NIV), the construction (construct state followed by proper noun) requires that he be *the* priest of Midian, and he appears to enjoy something like a general authority, civil and religious, in his community that the Israelite patriarchs, as portrayed in Genesis, did in theirs.¹⁰³

If Davies is correct, then Jethro should be seen as more than just a priest, but a priest who rules, or a priest-king. Certainly, the similarities between Melchizedek and Jethro add to this belief, as does Jethro’s counsel to Moses to organize a system of elders in Israel (Exod 18). Maybe this is too pragmatic an observation, but such counsel demonstrates the wisdom of ruler.

Fourth, Jethro is mentioned again in Exodus 3:1, where we discover Moses is working for him and tending his “father-in-law’s” flock. This identifies a close relationship between Moses and Jethro. With that relationship in mind, Exodus 2:21 says “Moses was content to dwell with the man [Jethro].” If Hebrews 11 bears any witness to this relationship, we can deduce that if Moses turned against Egypt because he sought to identify with the God of Israel, his stay in Midian for 40 years indicates a place hospitable for his faith. Could Jethro’s priestly ministry play a part in that? It’s plausible, especially because of what happens when Moses return to Horeb (Exod 18).

Fifth, when Moses comes to Sinai with the redeemed people of Israel, Jethro joins him in worshiping Yahweh. This is, in my estimation, decides

who Jethro worships and how we should assess his priesthood. As Exodus 18 recounts, after hearing all God did in Egypt, “Jethro rejoiced for all the good that the Lord had done to Israel” (v. 9). Then he turned and blessed Yahweh,

Jethro said, “Blessed be the Lord, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh and has delivered the people from under the hand of the Egyptians. ¹¹ Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods, because in this affair they dealt arrogantly with the people.” ¹² And Jethro, Moses’ father-in-law, brought a burnt offering and sacrifices to God; and Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God. (vv. 10–12)

Of significance is this priest’s worship of Israel’s God and the covenant-like meal that Jethro ate with Moses, Aaron, and all the elders in the presence of God. Foreshadowing another meal eaten in God’s presence (cf. Exod 24:9–11) with these same priestly leaders, we get a glimpse of Jethro’s royal priesthood in the presence of God. Again, this harkens back to Adam and Melchizedek, and it glimpses what is to come in Israel. Still, because Jethro is not a son of Abraham by way of Isaac, the image is not yet fully restored.

Envisioning the Image: A Summary of What We Have Seen So Far

From this survey of Genesis and Exodus, we find at many times and in many ways sonship, priesthood, and kingship interweaving the generations between Adam and Israel. Yet, after the Fall, no one individual (or people) captures all of these facets of image-bearing the way Adam did. Therefore, what Exodus 19:6 says is something new for the people of God. That Israel would be called God’s firstborn son (Exod 4:22) and a royal priesthood (19:6) indicates Yahweh’s intention for Israel to recapitulate the image of God.

This conclusion becomes all the stronger when we realize that in the context of Exodus 19:6, the language of *segullâ* relates to sonship.¹⁰⁴ As we will see below, the grammar of Exodus 19:1–8 leads us to see “kingdom of priests” and “holy nation” qualifying and/or describing God’s “treasured possession” (*segullâ*). Thus, like Adam, Israel receives in Exodus 19:5-6 a threefold calling—they are (1) God’s son, who will become a (2) kingdom of priests and a (3) holy nation, *if* they keep covenant with God.

A KINGDOM OF PRIESTS CONSECRATED UNTO GOD: EXODUS 19:6 IN ITS COVENANTAL CONTEXT

The context of Exodus 19:6 is that of the introduction to the Sinai Covenant.¹⁰⁵ As John Davies and Brevard Childs observe, Exodus 19:1-8 functions like an index of what follows in 19:9-24:18.¹⁰⁶ While displaying a prominent chiasmic structure, where the covenantal promises of 19:4-6a are placed in the center, we can subdivide the eight verses according to the three parts of Exodus 19-24.¹⁰⁷

19:1-2	Mountain (19:9-23)
19:3-6	Covenant (20:1-23:33)
19:7-8	People’s Response (24:1-18)

In addition to this structure, we also find that the introduction of Exodus 19:1-8 is balanced by a concluding section in Exodus 24:1-11. Observing the way “descend” (*yrd*) is used seven times in chapter 19, and “ascend” (*ylh*) is used a corresponding seven times chapter 24, Davies writes, “This is an extraordinary *inclusio* which would serve to bind the two chapters as an anticipation and realization.”¹⁰⁸ Likewise, there is lexical support for believing that the covenant is “proposed” in 19:3b-8 and “consummated” in 24:3-8.¹⁰⁹ Only in these two sections (of Exod 19-24) does the word *brt* occur, and significantly, it is in Exodus 24:3-8 where the people undergo a “priestly ordination,” as Moses sprinkles blood on them (v. 8). The only other place where such an event happens is Leviticus 8-9, where Aaron and his sons are set apart as priests.¹¹⁰ Again, citing Davies, “As we have been expecting some form of priestly inauguration of the whole congregation of Israel [in the wake of Exodus 19:6], it is difficult to escape the fact that the double application of blood to the altar (representing Yhwh) and to the people constitutes such a rite.”¹¹¹ The point I want to make with these literary features is singular: Exodus 19-24 presents the nation as kingdom of priests (i.e., a corporate priesthood), *with no original sense* that one tribe would represent them as priests.

Who is Israel? A Restored Corporate Adam, Not a Jewish Missionary Society

While it is often assumed that Israel is to be a nation with a priesthood, or that the corporate priesthood is meant to be a missional society to the

nations. From what we have learned already and now summarize, it seems better to assert Israel's royal priesthood is corporate and consecrated (i.e., set apart for the Lord), and not yet Levitical or missional. On this point, Timothy Ashley goes so far as to say that a straightforward reading of the Pentateuch, "Levi was originally a secular 'tribe.'"¹¹² Likewise, to see Israel's priestly calling as one and the same with the Church's Great Commission is to read Exodus 19:6 anachronistically. Therefore, it is better to see Israel as a nation that "functions as *another Adam* through whom the promised offspring of Eve and Abraham will come to restore God's kingdom that was corrupted by the sinful rebellion of the first Adam."¹¹³ Included in this restoration is the corporate re-imagining of God's likeness, which includes sonship, priesthood, and kingship.

Therefore, just as Adam and Eve, along with their offspring, were designated God's image and likeness, so now in a newly ratified covenant, the offspring of Abraham would together image God's likeness to the world as one "corporate Adam."¹¹⁴ In fact, Exodus 24:3 identifies "all the people with one voice" as entering into covenant with Yahweh through the mediation of Moses—a point that stresses the corporate nature of this covenant and Israel's status as a kingdom of priests.

Moreover, at no time in this "priestly ordination" is there a designation or separation of Levites as a priestly tribe. Rather, it is all the people, from all the tribes. Accordingly, if Sinai serves as a paradigm for the way in which Israel would approach the Lord in worship, then what we see in Exodus 24, which stands in textual connection with Exodus 19:4-6, is a covenant mediated by Moses, who represents the entirety of Israel. And from this ordination ceremony, he is anointing the entire nation as a royal priesthood.

This corporate priesthood is, in fact, the very conclusion Davies arrives at in his study. Considering the various possibilities of *mamleket kohanim* (e.g., passive, active-elite, active-corporate),¹¹⁵ he concludes that Israel is called to be a "royal house of priests or a priesthood with royal characteristics."¹¹⁶ From a synchronic look at this Exodus 19:6, Davies conclusion seems best. He rightly appreciates the way in which Israel's calling in Exodus 19 is unto the Lord, and not to the nations.

Yet the thrust of the passage in Exodus 19 is about the promise of a divine grant, a great privilege which is being bestowed on Yhwh's treasured people, provided

that they continue faithful to him. That grant is preeminently one of relationship with him. The other nations are not in view as objects of Israel’s attention. The expression “all the earth is mine” (v. 5) will not serve this role of marking the nations as the beneficiaries of Israel’s service. It is simply the backdrop for the divine election of Israel. The nearest reference to the nations in relation to Israel as an active agent in the wider context is at Exod. 17.14-16, which concerns the obliteration of the memory of the Amalekites! The Sinai pericope simply contains no direct reference to Israel’s responsibilities towards the nations.¹¹⁷

Whereas others make Israel a priesthood *to the nations*, he rightly observes that the direction of service is *unto the Lord*.¹¹⁸ As Aaron and his sons will be set apart in Exodus 28-29, Israel as a whole community is first consecrated as priestly people to the Lord. Wells make the same point, saying “In contrast with those individuals who are described as priests, the use of the term here describes the totality of God’s people.”¹¹⁹ Unlike Davies, however, Wells (like C. J. H. Wright, Kaiser, and Voss) argues for the missional function of Israel to the nations. Yet, such a reading imports too much from the missional thrust of the new covenant and overlooks the more evident way God is setting apart his people from the nations in Exodus 19.

One of the most helpful ways to observe this is in the way *segullâ* is used throughout the rest of the Pentateuch. First, in the two of the three other places where *segullâ* is used by Moses (Deut 7:6; 14:2), God’s treasured possession is consistently set apart from the nations as “chosen” (*bhr*). For instance, in Deuteronomy 7:6 *segullâ* explains why God chose Israel and set his love on them. The rationale is similar to Exodus 19:5. Though Yahweh possesses all nations, he chose Israel because of his particular love for them (cf. Amos 3:2). In context, Deuteronomy says nothing about Israel being set apart *for the nations*. Rather, Israel is set apart *from the nations*.¹²⁰

The use is similar in Deuteronomy 14:2, where Yahweh’s special possession are “sons of the Lord,” chosen and holy (vv. 1-2). In this context (vv. 2, 21) Israel is called “a people holy to the Lord your God.” Strikingly, two of three appellations give to Israel at Sinai (“treasured possession” and “holy nation”) are reapplied to Israel as they prepare to enter the land.¹²¹ “Royal priesthood,” however, is conspicuously absent. Thus, Deuteronomy 14:2 confirms the argument of this article, that Israel’s corporate priesthood has been altered, while God’s purpose of Israel’s holiness remains.

At the same time, because Israel's holy calling puts stress on their separation, it also seems unlikely Israel has been given a priestly mission as in 1 Peter 2:1-10. Such unqualified comparisons between Exodus and Peter only flatten out distinctions between the old covenant and the new. Therefore, without denying God's global purposes for redemption (cf. Gen 3:15; 12:1-3), it is important to let the story of Scripture unfold at its own pace. As Timmer makes clear, "Prior to Christ's coming, proactive transmission of testimony about the God of Israel's person and work was not a clearly corporate task."¹²² While many lobby for Israel as priesthood to the nations, one first must prove that they retained their national status as kingdom of priests—something more assumed than argued—and that their original calling was a corporate missional priesthood.

Deuteronomy 26:18, the last place Moses uses *segullâ*, also points against Israel's mission as a priesthood to the nations. Like before (7:6; 26:18), Moses uses the word to separate Israel from the nations saying "that you are a people for his treasured possession, as he has promised you ... and that he will set you in praise and in fame and in honor high above all nations that he has made, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as he promised" (vv. 18-19). Coming at the end of his exposition of the Decalogue, Moses reminds Israel of his promises to them.¹²³ Here again, he swears allegiance to making them a holy people "above the nations." At this point, Israel is being set aside for God, not commissioned as a priestly people unto the nations. Such global purposes will come, but only in the Prophets when they look forward to the eschatological advance of new covenant priesthood.¹²⁴

Second, as the grammar of Exodus 19:5-6 indicates, "treasured possession" and "royal priesthood" and "holy nation" are mutually interpretive. Because the intention of this article is not the grammar of Exodus 19:5-6, I will not specify the debated relationship of these three terms, but this much is certain, from the narrow context of Exodus 19:1-8 and the wider context of Genesis and Exodus—Israel is called to be God's firstborn son and royal priesthood. This conclusion can be drawn from reading Exodus 4:22 and 19:6 together. However, by cross-referencing *segullâ* with its uses in Scripture, we also learn that *segullâ* refers to a treasured son.

For instance, in Malachi, a book with many priestly themes, the prophet speaks of a day coming when the Lord will again claim the people who will serve him. He says in Malachi 3:17 "They shall be mine, says the Lord of

hosts, in the day when I make up my treasured possession [*segullâ*], and I will spare them as a man spares his son [*ben*] who serves him.” From this reading, and the way sonship and priesthood are developed in Genesis and Exodus, we find strong support for seeing sonship and priesthood in Exodus 19:6. Thus, one important point, often missed in Exodus 19, is that God is saying to Israel: “You are my chosen son who will be to me a royal priesthood and a holy nation if you keep my covenant.” As Gentry concludes, “When Yahweh calls Israel to be his personal treasure, he is speaking of the kind of devoted service given by a son,” a kind of sonship, he continues, which goes back to the first royal priest in the Garden.¹²⁵

From these considerations, therefore, Exodus 19:6 is not first and foremost a calling for Israel to go to the nations. Rather, from the nations, God is adopting Israel as his treasured possession. He is making a covenant with them for the purpose of restoring what Adam lost. And while this will have massive implications for the nations, as they will see “the image of God” in Israel (cf. Deut 4:5-8), it will take the rest of the Bible to reach final destination in God’s plan of redemption—a great commission to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:18-20). Therefore, it is premature to make Israel’s priesthood an immediate missionary command to the nations. Rather, the calling was unto priestly service in the presence of God, which was designed to restore to Israel something of humanity’s original blessing in Eden.¹²⁶

The Conditional Nature of Exodus 19:5-6

That said, such a calling was not without conditions. As Gentry and Wellum have observed, every covenant must be read on its own terms.¹²⁷ And in the case of Sinai, we discover that the offer of priesthood was offered conditionally to the nation of Israel. Again, the text reads,

Now therefore, *if* you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

Importantly, Israel’s status as treasured possession and corporate priesthood depends on their obedience to the Lord. If they will “obey my voice and keep my covenant,” then like Abraham (who obeyed God with Isaac) will

receive the right to be his treasured possession (son) and royal priesthood (cf. Gen 22:18b; 26:5). However, if they do not keep covenant, then their relationship with the Lord is in jeopardy.¹²⁸ To say it differently, if the people called to be God's son prove themselves worth of the title, they will keep the status of royal priesthood. However, if they fail to live as God's children, then their national priesthood will be lost (cf. Deut 14:2).

Sadly, the weakness of the Israel's obedience is proven throughout the rest of the OT. Ultimately, God is forced to drive them out from the land because they seek live as the surrounding nations, rather than God's holy nation. Yet, what is often missed in this reading of Israel's history is the way in which Israel's sonship and royal priesthood is also threatened, indeed altered, *while Israel remains at Sinai*. In other words, it doesn't take the exile to prove the failure of Israel to keep the conditions of Exodus 19:4-6, although it reinforces the point.¹²⁹ Rather, this fracturing of God's image and hence Israel's loss of corporate priesthood will begin in the book of Exodus itself.

This is what Davies and others have not fully appreciated—namely, the way in which the priesthood develops in the Pentateuch. Thus as we close this study, there are three observations we must make as we seek to define Israel's royal priesthood—one that looks back and one that looks ahead. First, when we read Exodus 19:6 in light of the filial priesthood which precedes it (Gen 1-Exod 18), we discover how the image of God is being restored at Sinai. Instead of being an immediate commission to take God's light to the nations at Sinai (like Isa 49:1-7), Exodus 19:6 is a restoration of what was lost at Eden. Before we can consider Israel's mission unto the nations, this restoration needs to be further established and appreciated. Israel's corporate calling was to image God's likeness, not (yet) bring his Word to the nations.

Second, as we keep reading the rest of the Pentateuch and especially the section of time where Israel remains at Sinai (Exod 19:9-Num 10:10) we learn how the "Levitical priesthood"—which is only so called in the book of Deuteronomy—develops through a series of accretions after Israel sins with the Golden Calf. In fact, as Part 2 will show, it is response to multiple sins in Israel's Wilderness wanderings that a system of priestly mediation is created.

Third, only as we hold together what comes before Exodus 19:6 and what comes after it, we can rightly grasp the tension of God's covenant with Israel. As his treasured possession and beloved firstborn son, God will make them a royal priesthood *if* they will keep covenant with him. In this gracious

promise, Yahweh is offering to restore humanity’s divine image to Israel. Sadly, however, this offering will not come to full fruition, and, as the rest of the Pentateuch reports, before Israel leaves Sinai that covenant will already be shattered like the stone tablets on which it was written.

THE IMPORT OF HAVING FILIAL PRIESTS AT SINAI

As noted in the introduction, this article only completes half of the diachronic reading of the Pentateuch necessary to understand the fullness of “royal priesthood” in Exodus 19:6. This means some of the assertions made above will only hold up as we consider the rest of Moses five books. That is what Part 2 will seek to accomplish in my forthcoming article in *SBJT*. But for now, at this point of intermission, let me offer five theological conclusions we can draw from our survey of Genesis 1-Exodus 18.

First, as with any passage of Scripture, we must read Exodus 19:6 in light of its redemptive-historical context and antecedent theology.¹³⁰ While priesthood as an institution originates in some respect at Sinai, it is clear from a diachronic reading of Genesis, that priesthood fills the generations leading up to Sinai. Therefore, when Yahweh pronounces Israel a kingdom of priests, we must consider the priestly background of Adam, Abraham, Melchizedek, and Jethro, not just the ANE side-ground. At Sinai, God is not introducing priesthood to Israel for the first time. Rather, as with everything at Sinai he is restoring what was lost in Eden.

Second, when we read Exodus 19:6 in the context of previous patriarchal priests, we discover that before the priesthood was legislated by Moses, it was a covenantal mediation associated with the sons of Abraham. In other words, priests were sons and firstborn sons were priests. We saw evidence for this in this from Genesis and Exodus, and this background gives rise to an interpretation of Exodus 19:6 which understands the language of *segullâ*, *mamleket kohanim*, and *goy qadoš* as repeating the original office of image-bearer. In symbiotic relationship, then, Exodus 19 confirms what we have seen partially in Noah, Abraham, and Melchizedek. Now in Exodus 19, it also aims to restore God’s image to the nation of Israel as a whole.

Third, if this reading of image-bearing is correct and the language of sonship, priesthood, and kingship explicate what it means to be God’s chosen vessel to bear witness to his glory among the nations, then it leads us to

interpret Exodus 19:6 less as an evangelistic commission and more as a restoration of covenant blessing to God's people. Certainly, God has set apart his people Israel from the nations and will see individuals from other nations come into covenant with them (e.g., Rahab, Ruth, etc.), but from a canonical reading it seems unlikely that Exodus 19:6 gives Israel a mission to the nations. This confuses the nature of the Old Covenant and the New; it imports, anachronistically, the calling of Jesus's disciples to the nation of Israel; it fails to see the significant eschatological difference between Christ's royal priesthood and that of ancient Israel; and it misses the calling of Israel to be God's restored image displaying to the world the wisdom and glory of God.

Fourth, the chronological development of the priesthood from firstborn sons to Israel as God's firstborn son, which in time will result in a priestly tribe—the tribe of Levi—may also reflect a certain priestly logic that is repeated in the NT. Today, scholars debate whether Jesus is a priest in his earthly life.¹³¹ In the Gospels particularly, there is a measure of ambiguity about his priesthood. While many have observed Jesus doing priestly things, he is never called a priest—and hence the debate continues. I would suggest that if we see a movement from sonship to priesthood in Genesis and Exodus, then perhaps this gives us a typological pattern for understanding how priesthood is established in the New Covenant.

In Hebrews, the book which most clearly identifies Jesus as royal priest (i.e., a high priest like Melchizedek), we find the first two chapters establishing the sonship of Christ. Rather than beginning with the Law, which in its fullness identifies the priesthood with Levi, Hebrews begins with the greater Sonship of Christ. And once that is established by his resurrection (Heb 5:5-10), it then explains *how* Jesus can be a priest like Melchizedek (Heb 7). On its own, we understand that there existed before the Law a greater priesthood, but in our study of Genesis and Exodus, we come to see more clearly the original logic of sonship and priesthood, and how the former relates to and antedates the latter—at least in Israel's redemptive history. Therefore, by paying closer attention to development of the royal priesthood in coordination with sonship, it helps us understand what the author of Hebrews is saying. And it may also help us understand the Gospels better—for while the Gospels do not explicitly call Jesus a priest; they do repeatedly identify him as a son. And if a son, then might they implicitly be identifying him as a priest? It is worth further exploration.

Fifth and finally, by understanding Exodus 19:6 as a restoration of God’s image, we also come to better understand 1 Peter 2:9. Meaning, if Exodus 19 aims to restore (and expand) the image of God to Israel as a nation, then when those words are applied to Christ’s people, the same logic is at work. In the new covenant, God establishes in Christ’s death and resurrection a people redeemed to reflect his glory. And unlike the people of Israel, whose sonship, priesthood, and kingship were in question because of the weakness of their flesh; the new covenant, with its gift of the Holy Spirit, secures God’s people as the image of God. Hence, the new covenant royal priesthood is both similar to and greater than short-lived royal priesthood of Israel. Indeed, because the priesthood of the believer is derivative of Christ’s new covenant work, its strength and security depends on the power of his indestructible life and not the weakness of Israel. This, as Hebrews 7 highlights, may be the most valuable lesson for us in this study and the reason why rightly understanding the foundations of the royal priesthood from Genesis 1 to Exodus 18 is so important.

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- 1 Exodus 23:22 (LXX) also includes the phrase “royal priesthood” (*basileion hierateuma*). This occurrence is clearly “a Septuagintal expansion based on Exod 19:5–6” (John A. Davies, *A Royal Priesthood: Literary and Intertextual Perspectives on an Image of Israel in Exodus 19:6* [New York: T&T Clark, 2004], 64n8).
 - 2 In this article, I will use the terms “royal priesthood” and “kingdom of priests” in complementary fashion. Conceptually, the former stresses the unity of priestly order; the latter stresses the plurality of the priesthood. While Davies’s extensive lexical study of *mamleket kohanim* renders it a “royal priesthood” (63–102), he does admit some flexibility in the language (101–02). Moreover, his work does not trace the development of the priesthood which I seek to do in this article and in a forthcoming article. Therefore, anticipating my argument, I believe we should understand royal priesthood as biblical-theological mold which develops over time and that exercises various functions in redemptive history. Hence, there may be times when stress should be laid on the unity of the priesthood as a people before God and other times when the stress should fall on the plurality of the priests with their institution of mediation in Israel. Still, there is also evidence in Scripture for individuals who are or function as a priest and king. All of these factors should be considered as we explicate Exodus 19:4–6.
 - 3 See, e.g., Stephen J. Wellum, *Christ Alone: The Uniqueness of Jesus as Savior: What the Reformers Taught and Why It Still Matters* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 127–55; Alex T. M. Cheung, “The Priest as the Redeemed Man: A Biblical-Theological Study of the Priesthood,” *JETS* 29 (1986): 265–75; Uche Anizor and Hank Voss, *Representing Christ: A Vision for the Priesthood of All Believers* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2016).
 - 4 Exodus 19:4–6 is repeatedly used as a pillar text for evangelism and mission in the OT. Cf. Walter Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 22–24, C. J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2006], 252–64; Andrew S. Malone, *God’s Mediators: A Biblical Theology of Priesthood* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2017), 134–37.
 - 5 On the three horizons of biblical interpretation, see Richard Lints, *The Fabric of Theology: A Prolegomenon to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 293–309, and before him Edmund P. Clowney, *Preaching and Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961; repr. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2002), 16.

- More recently, Stephen J. Wellum has outlined the importance of these three horizons in the introduction to Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 92–102.
- 6 Jacob Milgrom, *Numbers* (JPS Torah Commentary; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 2003), 432.
 - 7 Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*. Davies provides a thorough list of commentaries, monographs, essays, and theological works on the Sinai periscope, the priesthood in general, and Exodus 19:4–6 in particular (3–14).
 - 8 Jo Bailey Wells, *God's Holy People: A Theme in Biblical Theology* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), see esp. 98–129.
 - 9 See Peter J. Gentry's work with Stephen J. Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 322. Cf. Peter J. Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant: Humanity as the Divine Image," *SBJT* 12 (2008): 16–42. Likewise, J. Richard Middleton (*The Liberating Image: The Imago Dei in Genesis 1* [Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005], 90) makes a connection from Adam to Israel: "The human vocation as imago Dei in God's world thus corresponds in important respects to Israel's vocation as a 'royal priesthood' among the nations (Exod. 19:6)." Still, many have not made this important connection, and consequently their exposition of Exodus 19:4–6 suffers as a result.
 - 10 William J. Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 89–90.
 - 11 Two recent examples of interpreting Exodus 19:4–6 sans sonship are the otherwise fruitful studies of Andrew S. Malone (*God's Mediators*) and W. Ross Blackburn (*The God Who Makes Himself Know: The Missionary Heart of the Book of Exodus* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012]). To be specific, Malone, at the behest of Matthew Emadi, mentions the connection of sonship to priesthood (132), but it does not play a role in his conception of Israel's priesthood. Likewise, Blackburn (89–95) makes no connection between Israel's priesthood and sonship, even though we find in Exodus clear evidence that Yahweh calls his people by both names ("firstborn son," 4:22) and ("royal priesthood," 19:6). One counter-example to this filial priesthood is the important work of Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God's Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. 132–175.
 - 12 By canonical, I mean everything after Exodus 19.
 - 13 The primary debate I have in mind relates to whether Israel, as a "kingdom of priests," is a functional mission God's elect nation or an ontological status. Davies (*A Royal Priesthood*, 70–76) provides the best entry point into this debate, as he presents three approaches to the title *mamleket kohanim* (e.g., passive, active-elite, and active-corporate). Andrew Malone picks up this debate (*God's Mediators*, 126–37), and cautiously concludes that "We can retain confidence that God has missiological intentions for Israel even as he pronounces their privileged status" (136). As I will argue below, this missiological intention seems premature with respect to God's designs in the biblical covenants. Better is the careful work of Daniel Timmer (*A Gracious and Compassionate God: Mission, Salvation, and Spirituality in the Book of Jonah* [NSBT 26; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2011], 23–39), who differentiates the missiological roles of the nation and individuals under the old covenant as being centripetal and centrifugal, respectively.
 - 14 See Davies' chapter 6, entitled, "Modeling the Royal Priesthood: The Cultic Model of Exodus 24.12 to 40.38" (*A Royal Priesthood*, 138–69). Instead of following the literary structure and logic of Exodus 25–40, Davies amasses a list of priestly traits found in Exodus 25–40. Certainly, his observations are helpful, but they miss the Spirit-given order of these chapters, which center on Israel's covenant-breaking idolatry, Aaron's creation of the Golden Calf, and Moses' "priestly" intercession.
 - 15 Wells, *God's Holy People*, 98–101.
 - 16 John H. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 379–99.
 - 17 Jim Hamilton, "John Sailhamer's 'The Meaning of the Pentateuch' A Review Essay," *SBJT* 14.2 (2010): 70–71.
 - 18 L. Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord? A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015), 23–38.
 - 19 Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 142–47.
 - 20 Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 37.
 - 21 For a discussion about the unfolding of such biblical types, see my "From Beelines to Plotlines: Typology That Follows the Covenantal Topography of Scripture," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21.1 (2017): 35–56.
 - 22 "There is, as far as I know, no previous book-length canonical study of priesthood" (Malone, *God's Mediators*, ix).
 - 23 *Ibid.*, xi.
 - 24 Remarkably, many studies on the royal priesthood fail to begin in the beginning. As Hank Voss notes, N. T. Wright's biblical theology of the royal priesthood in *After You Believe: Why Christian Character Matters* (New

- York: Harper One, 2010): “is the first in recent history to begin a biblical theology of the royal priesthood with Adam (citing Beale)” (16). Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers and the Missio Dei: A Canonical, Catholic, and Contextual Perspective* (Princeton Theological Monograph Series; Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2016), 16. Voss and Uche Anizor also correct this trend in their chapter-length biblical theology of the priesthood in *Representing Christ*, 26–56.
- ²⁵ G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God* (NSBT 17; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 81–121. Beale is not alone in this assessment of Adam’s royal priesthood. See also, Meredith Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 83–90; idem, *Images of the Spirit*: (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1980; reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1996), 35–56; Middleton, *The Liberating Image*, 81–90; J. V. Fesko, *Last Things First: Unlocking Genesis 1-3 with the Christ of Eschatology* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2007), 57–75; T. D. Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 20–31; Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 51–53.
- ²⁶ On Noah and Abraham as “second Adams,” see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 163–65, 235. Cf. C. John Collins, “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” in *Adam, The Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives* (ed. Hans Madueme and Michael Reeves; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2014), 7.
- ²⁷ D. J. A. Clines, “The Image of God in Man.” *Tyndale Bulletin* 19 (1968): 53–103.
- ²⁸ W. Randall Garr, *In His Own Likeness: Humanity, Divinity and Monotheism, Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 15*, (ed. B. Halpern et al.; Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2003).
- ²⁹ Middleton, *The Liberating Image*.
- ³⁰ Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58–59.
- ³¹ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 192. Two other recent dissertations at Southern Seminary have also made this connection of sonship-priesthood-kingship. The first is that of Juan Sanchez, “The People of God: Toward an Evangelical Ecclesiology” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), esp. 25–53; the other is Matthew Habib Emadi “The Royal Priest: Psalm 110 in Biblical and Theological Reflection” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015), 32–49.
- ³² Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 62.
- ³³ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 70.
- ³⁴ Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, 232–36, also makes this connection.
- ³⁵ The NET (The NET Bible [Richardson, TX: Biblical Studies Press, 2005] provides a better reading of verse, as it comments on Ezekiel 28:14:
- In the Hebrew text the ruler of Tyre is equated with a cherub, and the verb “I placed you” is taken with what follows (“on the holy mountain of God”). However, this reading is problematic. The pronoun “you” at the beginning of verse 14 is feminine singular in the Hebrew text; elsewhere in this passage the ruler of Tyre is addressed with masculine singular forms. It is possible that the pronoun is a rare (see Deut 5:24; Num 11:15) or defectively written (see 1 Sam 24:19; Neh 9:6; Job 1:10; Ps 6:3; Eccl 7:22) masculine form, but it is more likely that the form should be repointed as the preposition “with” (see the LXX). In this case the ruler of Tyre is compared to the first man, not to a cherub. If this emendation is accepted, then the verb “I placed you” belongs with what precedes and concludes the first sentence in the verse. It is noteworthy that the verbs in the second and third lines of the verse also appear at the end of the sentence in the Hebrew text. The presence of a conjunction at the beginning of “I placed you” is problematic for the proposal, but it may reflect a later misunderstanding of the syntax of the verse.
- Others who have seen Ezekiel as an evidence for a priestly Adam include William J. Dumbrell, “Genesis 2:1-17: A Foreshadowing of the New Creation,” in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect & Prospect* (ed. Scott J. Hafemann; Downers Grove: IVP, 2002), 61; Beale, *The Temple and Church’s Mission*, 75; Emadi, “The Royal Priest,” 44–45. With different theological concerns, Collins “Adam and Eve in the Old Testament,” 24–25 also sees Ezekiel 28 as dependent on Adam’s historical fall in Genesis 3, and Daniel I. Block, *Ezekiel 25–48*, (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 99–112, 117, also connects Ezekiel 28 to the original Adam in Eden.
- ³⁶ For a biblical-theological explanation of how Luke came to call Adam God’s son, see Graeme Goldsworthy, *The Son of God and the New Creation* (Short Studies in Biblical Theology; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), esp. 61–66.
- ³⁷ See my article, “Resurrection and Priesthood: Christological Soundings in the Book of Hebrews,” *SBJT* 18.4 (2014): 89–114.
- ³⁸ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 236.

- ³⁹ As the quotation from Morales suggests, we could also include the office of prophet in this portrait of God's image. The inclusion of the prophet, however goes beyond the purview of this article and the language of Exodus 19:4–6. For a study on how prophet, priest, and king relate and develop in the OT, see Gerard Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990; reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1997), esp. 32–38.
- ⁴⁰ “Adam should always best be referred to as a ‘priest-king,’ since it is only after the ‘fall’ that priesthood is separated from kingship, though Israel’s eschatological expectation is of a messianic priest-king (e.g., see Zech. 6:12–13).” Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 70.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 120–21.
- ⁴² The *toledôt* structure of Genesis and the nature of God’s covenant with Abraham also argues for a familial-oriented history in Genesis.
- ⁴³ Andrew Malone, *God’s Mediators*, 63. Exodus 6:23 reads, “Aaron took as his wife Elisheba, the daughter of Amminadab.” Amminadab is a descendant of Judah by Perez as multiple genealogies attest (Ruth 4:19, 20; 1 Chr. 2:10; Matt. 1:4; Luke 3:33).
- ⁴⁴ Gentry and Wellum even refer to Noah and Abraham as “second Adams.” Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom Through Covenant*, 223–30.
- ⁴⁵ Michael Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 57. Morales goes on to argue plausibly that Genesis 4:7 should be translated as “a sin offering lies at the door/entrance [*petah*]” (rather than ‘sin crouches at the door,’ as in the door of Cain’s heart or tent)” (*ibid.*).
- ⁴⁶ See Graeme Goldsworthy, *Prayer and the Knowledge of God: What the Whole Bible Teaches* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 72, 110–11.
- ⁴⁷ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 64–67.
- ⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 66–67.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁰ William Symington, *On the Atonement and Intercession of Jesus Christ* (Pittsburgh: United Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1864), 66–92, esp. 80–83.
- ⁵¹ Morales, *Who Shall Ascend?*, 56–57.
- ⁵² What follows is abbreviated from my dissertation: “A Biblical-Theological Investigation of Christ’s Priesthood and Covenant with Respect to the Extent of the Atonement” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2015).
- ⁵³ Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 15–16. Ross notes, “The word altar (*mizbēkah*) is related to the verb ‘to slaughter for sacrifice.’” And thus, “an altar was the ‘place of the slaughtering the sacrifice.’” (*Recalling the Hope of Glory*, 138).
- ⁵⁴ Speaking more broadly of the covenant with Noah, Scott Hahn observes what other critical scholars have attributed to the P redactor, “From a critical perspective, Gen 6–9 is replete with terms characteristic of Priestly covenant theology (e.g., ‘everlasting’ [*ôlām*—9:16]; ‘sign’ [*ôt*—9:12, 13, 17]; ‘remember’ [*zākar*—9:15, 16])” (Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 96). Cf. David Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant: Transformations of Genre in the Growth of Biblical Literature* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 292–93.
- ⁵⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, “The Theology of Old Testament Sacrifice,” in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. Roger T. Beckwith and Martin J. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995; reprint: Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2004), 80.
- ⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.
- ⁵⁷ O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of the Covenants* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1980), 109–25; William J. Dumbrell, *Creation and Covenant: A Theology of the Old Testament Covenants* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1984), 11–46; Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 93–100; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingship through Covenant*, 147–76.
- ⁵⁸ Richard D. Nelson, *Raising Up a Faithful Priest: Community and Priesthood in Biblical Theology* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 44–46.
- ⁵⁹ Ken Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*, (NAC, vol. 1A; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 400. Cf. T. D. Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 118–19.
- ⁶⁰ “Originally, there was a supremacy of man (Gen. 1:26, 28), but, as instituted by creation, this was of a nature of a voluntary submission. This may be seen from the eschatological pictures given of it by the prophets, on the principles of a return of paradise at the end (Isa 11:6–8). In the state of sin the result is obtained by fear and dread instilled into the animals.” Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1948; reprint Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 53.
- ⁶¹ “The larger context of the Genesis narrative suggests at least three aspects of Noah’s privileged [covenantal]

- grant. These may be classified as priestly (8:20), kingly (9:1–3), and prophetic (9:25–27)” (Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 389). Likewise, Meredith Kline outlines the civic duties of Noah’s dominion in Genesis 9:1–7 (*Kingdom Prologue*, 252–53).
- ⁶² For simplicity, Abraham will be the singular appellation used for this man.
- ⁶³ T. D. Alexander, “Abraham Re-Assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith,” in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, (ed. R. S. Hess et al.; Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 7–28.
- ⁶⁴ Hahn cautions, “To avoid the danger of anachronism, it should be stated that the patriarchs are called neither ‘priests’ nor ‘kings’ although such terms are applied to others” (*Kinship by Covenant*, 408). Still, as Hahn continues, “This does not annul the cultic nature of [the patriarchs] actions” (409).
- ⁶⁵ John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 373; Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation in the Old Testament*, 221.
- ⁶⁶ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 136.
- ⁶⁷ Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation*, 133.
- ⁶⁸ “The priest functioned as an intermediary between God and people. This [function] is most clearly seen in his role as one who declares or imparts divine blessing and as one who intercedes with God on behalf of the people. The priestly blessing found in Num 6:23–27 (cf. Deut 10:8) is also reflected in the text of two amulets found in Jerusalem. To invoke the divine blessing on Israel to place the name of God on them (Num 6:27), that is, Israel is to have a privilege analogous to that of the high priest, who physically displays the divine name on his person” (Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 163).
- ⁶⁹ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 68.
- ⁷⁰ “The name given to the place of worship between the Fall and Exodus is the altar” (Longman III, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 15). See also, Jeffrey J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai: Covenant and Theophany in the Bible and Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 142–80.
- ⁷¹ Longman asserts that the construction of altars by trees (Gen 12:6–7; 13:18; cf. 21:33) evokes images of Eden (*Immanuel in Our Place*, 21). This echo adds weight to Abraham’s role as a priest like Adam.
- ⁷² Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 235. Likewise, T. D. Alexander notes of Abraham: “his special relationship with God suggests he enjoys a status equivalent to that of a priest, although he is never designated as one.” T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2008), 83.
- ⁷³ Gen 19:29 reads, “So it was that, when God destroyed the cities of the valley, God remembered Abraham and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow when he overthrew the cities in which Lot had lived.” This summary statement explains that Lot is preserved for Abraham’s sake; Abraham is “remembered” and Lot is spared. Harkening back to the promise of Gen 12:3, Lot’s “blessing” is mediated through the man Abraham and his prayers. (Sailhamer, *Genesis*, EBC, 2:158–59; John Calvin, *Commentaries on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis, vol. 1, in Calvin’s Commentaries* [trans. John King; Edinburgh: 1843; reprint: Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005], 516–17).
- ⁷⁴ Ken Mathews comments, “The appearance of Abram as defender of the animal portions may refer to his obedient piety that confirmed his loyalty and ensured Israel’s future (e.g., 22:16–18) or his intercessory function as prophet (e.g., 18:16–33; 20:7, 17)” (Genesis 11:27–50:26, 172). While Mathews posits a prophetic function to Abraham’s ‘defending’ the animal pieces, it is just as likely, if not more fitting, for him to function as a priest because the animals “are the standard types of sacrificial animal” and frequently represent priests in Israel (Gordon J. Wenham, “The Symbolism of the Animal Rite in Genesis 15: A Response to G. F. Hasel, *JSOT* 19 (1981): 61–78,” *JSOT* 22 (1982): 135. Cf. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 53–57.
- ⁷⁵ That his priestly duties have more significance than just driving off birds, see Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26, 172–73*), who remarks, “In the context of the prophecy (vv. 13–16), the animal portions represent Abram’s descendants, and the birds of prey are the nation (Egypt) that enslaves them.” Such symbolism anticipates the way the Passover sacrifice separated Israel from Egypt (Exod 12:21–27), and helps support a particular view of the atonement (see also, Williamson, “Because He Loved Your Forefathers,” forthcoming).
- ⁷⁶ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, NIBC (New York: CUP, 2009), 169–70.
- ⁷⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 275.
- ⁷⁸ As Dumbrell observes, Abraham “becomes the mediator of blessing for mankind” (*Creation and Covenant*, 68).
- ⁷⁹ For more on the priestly nature of circumcision, see John Meade, “Circumcision of Flesh to Circumcision of Heart,” in *Progressive Covenantalism: Charting a Course between Dispensational and Covenant Theologies* (ed. Stephen J. Wellum; Brent E. Parker; Nashville: B&H Academic, 2016), 130–31.

- ⁸⁰ Many have bound themselves in an exegetical thicket, because they like Origen have sought to find a “hidden treasure” in every detail of the account (*Genesis 12–50*, ACCS, vol. 2, ed. Mark Sheridan [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002], 101). While this passage is pregnant with types and shadows related to Christ and the gospel (Gal 3:8), the method taken here will follow that propounded in chapter three—seeking scriptural evidence at the textual, epochal, and canonical levels. For a history of interpretation on Gen 22, with an extensive bibliography, see E. D. Noort and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, eds., *The Sacrifice of Isaac: The Aqedah (Genesis 22) and Its Interpretations* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2002).
- ⁸¹ “Salem’ is an ancient poetic name for Jerusalem.” Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51–100* (WBC; Dallas: Word, 1990), 261; cf. Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 102–03.
- ⁸² R. W. L. Moberly, “Christ as the Key to Scripture: Genesis 22 Reconsidered,” in *He Swore an Oath*, 154–61.
- ⁸³ On the cultic significance of “worship” (*hwh*), see Terence E. Fretheim, “*Hwh*” in *NIDOTTE*, 2:42–44.
- ⁸⁴ Highlighting the continuity (and discontinuity) between the patriarchal and Levitical sacrifices, Averbeck comments, “The same external worship system to which the Israelite people were already accustomed before Sinai was tailored to fit into the tabernacle system, where, however the key features of the rituals could be performed only by the Aaronic priests, not the offerers themselves” (“*Olah*,” in *NIDOTTE*, 3:408).
- ⁸⁵ Moberly comments that “the two primary words for interpreting the story are ‘test’ in 22:1, ... and ‘fear’ in 22:12.” He continues by noting a “conceptual linkage” between these terms (Deut 5:29; Job 1:1; 28:28), and that the “specific juxtaposition of ‘test’ and ‘fear’ comes in only one other passage, Exodus 20:20, in which Moses explains to Israel the purpose of God giving to Israel the Ten Commandments, the heart of Torah” (“Christ as the Key to Scripture,” 155).
- ⁸⁶ Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2001), 39–41.
- ⁸⁷ Affirming the divine nature of this strange command, Wenham following Delitzsch suggests, “In the first half of the story where God is acting in a strange, remote, and inexplicable way, he is called *elohim* [vv. 1, 3, 8], but when he is revealed as savior and renews the covenant promises, his personal name, ‘the LORD,’ is appropriate and reintroduced [v. 11]” (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 103).
- ⁸⁸ Merrill suggests that the Levitical loyalty foreshadows the call Jesus has on his later disciples (*Deuteronomy*, 439). Indeed, Jesus’ imperative to let the “dead bury their dead” (Matt 8:22) may carry an allusion to the priestly command to separate themselves from the dead (see Lev 21:1–2, 11).
- ⁸⁹ W. A. Elwell and B. J. Beitzel, “Primogeniture,” in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 2:1764. In the same article, primogeniture is defined as “the exclusive right of inheritance which belonged to the firstborn male” (*ibid.*).
- ⁹⁰ Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 136.
- ⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 137.
- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 138.
- ⁹³ *Ibid.*, 136–42. Gerard Van Groningen offers a helpful discussion on the firstborn in Israel (*Messianic Revelation*, 218–21). Cf. Voss, *The Priesthood of All Believers*, 9.
- ⁹⁴ James M. Hamilton, “Was Joseph a Type of the Messiah? Tracing the Typological Identification Between Joseph, David, and Jesus,” *SBJT* 12.4 (2008): 52–77. For a full description of Joseph’s royal imagery, see Sam Emadi, “Covenant, Typology, and the Story of Joseph: A Literary-Canonical Examination of Genesis 37–50” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), esp. 57–81.
- ⁹⁵ “The idea of a son representing God to the people brings out the royal concept—the firstborn was a son of the royal family of God. As such, he was called to serve as leader for the family and as evidence of God’s claim on and presence among his people. In addition, the firstborn evidenced the strength of the father, represented the people before God, and served in a mediatorial role in that capacity. In the firstborn the dual capacity of king and priest is implicitly present.” Van Groningen, *Messianic Revelation*, 221. Emphasis mine.
- ⁹⁶ Gentry, 237. “The king of Sodom represents the notion that one acquires goods and rules by might ... Melchizedek, king of Salem, represents a different kind of kingship. He acknowledges a supreme God who is Creator/Possessor of everything. Therefore all rule must acknowledge the sovereignty of the Most High God and must consider that everything one owns is a gift from him.”
- ⁹⁷ Observe the way in Genesis 14, Melchizedek is identified with God Most High (v. 18), pronounces a double blessing on Abraham from the God Most High (vv. 19, 20), and then Abraham responds (for the first time) Yahweh as “God Most High” (v. 22). Cf. Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 369–74.
- ⁹⁸ Matthew Emadi makes the astute observation, “Just as Adam failed in the garden by disobeying God’s law, Noah fails in his garden-sanctuary by becoming intoxicated with wine. For Melchizedek, however, wine is a means of blessing for victorious Abraham. It is also significant that the only other occurrence of “bread” prior to Genesis 14 is found in Genesis 3:19, where God’s curse on Adam means that man will have to eat

- bread by the sweat of his brow.” This quotation comes from Emadi’s forthcoming NSBT volume on Psalm 110, which is based upon his 2015 dissertation.
- ⁹⁹ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 240.
- ¹⁰⁰ J. Crichton, “Jethro,” in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. Geoffrey Bromiley; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), 3:1055.
- ¹⁰¹ Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 369. I credit Matthew Emadi for introducing Sailhamer’s observations to me. Much of what follows depends on the observations Emadi makes in his forthcoming NSBT volume *The Royal Priest*.
- ¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 370–71
- ¹⁰³ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 152–53.
- ¹⁰⁴ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 317.
- ¹⁰⁵ On the structure of Exodus, see Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 32–60; cf. Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 35–45.
- ¹⁰⁶ Davies, 36. Brevard Childs can say of Exodus 19:3–8, “The passage now serves as a topical introduction to the chapter, ... The passage actually anticipates by way of summary the action of the next chapters, and presupposes the ratification of the covenant which only comes in 24.3ff.” Childs, *The Book of Exodus* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2004), 360.
- ¹⁰⁷ Davies structures Exodus 19:1–8 in this way (*A Royal Priesthood*, 35):
- A People of Israel camp at the mountain (third person plural verbs) (vv. 1–2)
 - B Moses’ ascent and Yhwh’s summons (third person singular verbs) (v. 3a)
 - C Divine instruction regarding delivery of message to Israel (second person singular verbs) (v. 3b)
 - D Divine declaration concerning Israel (second person plural verbs) (vv. 4–6a)
 - C’ Divine instruction regarding delivery of message to Israel (second person singular verbs) (v. 6b)
 - B’ Moses’ descent and summons to the elders (third person singular verbs) (v. 7)
 - A’ People of Israel respond (third person plural verbs) (v. 8a)
- ¹⁰⁸ Davies, 116.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*
- ¹¹⁰ See “The Blood Rites as a Priestly Initiation: Exodus 24:3–8,” in Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 119–24.
- ¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 121–22.
- ¹¹² “From the point of view of the text as it stands, Levi was originally a secular ‘tribe’ that was later set apart for sacred service” (Timothy Ashley, *The Book of Numbers*, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993], 86–92).
- ¹¹³ Stephen J. Wellum, *God the Son Incarnate: The Doctrine of Christ* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 139.
- ¹¹⁴ Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission*, 120–21.
- ¹¹⁵ Davies, *A Royal Priesthood*, 70–76.
- ¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 76. Later, he adds, “It is difficult to see how the notion of rule by a priest-king, or a priestly elite suits the context ... the emphasis is on the mode of Israel’s belonging to Yhwh, not on its mode of government” (81). Again, this is right in the immediate context of Exodus 19–24, but other factors must be considered as we move beyond this initial covenant formulation.
- ¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 97.
- ¹¹⁸ Cf. Peter Leithart, “Attendants of Yahweh’s House: Priesthood in the Old Testament,” *JSTO* 85 (1999): 7–12. Following Aelred Cody (*A History of Old Testament Priesthood* [Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute Press, 1969], 29), orients the priests as God’s “personal attendants” (12).
- ¹¹⁹ Wells, *God’s Holy People*, 52.
- ¹²⁰ Digging a bit deeper into the context. In Deuteronomy 7 there is a division between those who love God and those who hate him (vv. 9–10). This separation goes back to the beginning of time, where humanity is divided between the lines of Seth and Cain, and it does not imply any sort of missionary activity (yet!). Rather, the refrain through Deuteronomy 7 is one of Israel’s unique blessing: “You shall be blessed above all peoples” (v. 14); “you shall consume all the peoples that the LORD your God will give over to you” (v. 16); and “the LORD your God will send hornets among them, until those who are left and hide themselves from you are destroyed” (v. 20). From these context clues, it is best to see Israel’s corporate priesthood as one that restores the original image of Adam, without (yet!) having the mission of reaching the nations.
- ¹²¹ “The word for people has also changed from “nation” (*goy*) to “people” (*am*). This too may suggest the national loss of corporate priesthood, as the former word is typically more associated with an organized nation-state. Cf. Blackburn, *The God Who Makes Himself Known*, 92–93.
- ¹²² Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God*, 38.
- ¹²³ J. Scott Redd, “Deuteronomy,” in *A Biblical-Theological Introduction to the Old Testament: The Gospel Promised* (ed. Miles V. Van Pelt; Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 150.

- ¹²⁴ To read Exodus and Isaiah synchronically or to import the theology of 1 Peter back into Exodus without due attention to the eschatological develop of the covenants only confuses and conflates our understanding of royal priesthood. Far better is the eschatological-sensitivity of Andrew Malone, *God's Mediators*, 126–46 and Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 168–72.
- ¹²⁵ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 318.
- ¹²⁶ For a nuanced discussion of the complicated relationship between Israel and the nations, see Timmer, *A Gracious and Compassionate God*, 21–39.
- ¹²⁷ Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 129–35.
- ¹²⁸ See further Gentry's discussion of Israel's breach of covenant like that of Adam. Citing Hosea 6:7, he writes, "Israel's covenant violation was in her role as king-priest" (*ibid.*, 321–22).
- ¹²⁹ See Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission*, 120–21.
- ¹³⁰ On the importance of considering antecedent theology, see Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 14–18.
- ¹³¹ See the opening discussion in Nicholas G. Piotrowski and David S. Schrock, "'You Can Make Me Clean': The Matthean Jesus as Priest and the Biblical-Theological Results," *Criswell Theological Review* 14.1 (Fall 2016): 3–14.