

From the Axial Age to American Exceptionalism

From Solomon to the Enlightenment

I. The Divine Mandates

The Universal Covenants or Institutions

The covenant foundations of Biblical History are anchored in what has been referred to as the Divine Institutions, or Genesis Mandates, listed as follows:

1. Work Gen. 1:28; 2:15
2. Marriage..... Gen. 1.28, 2:18
3. Family..... Gen. 1: 28

The Fall ----- The Flood

4. Government..... Gen. 9:6
5. Nationalism..... Gen. 11:7-8
6. Israel/Church..... Gen. 12:1-3

The first three provide the elements of the Adamic Covenant. Following the Noahic Flood, the fourth institution was the inauguration of universal human government. The fifth served as a preservative, or *social modification* of this governance under the Noahic Covenant, which divided humanity into separate linguistic groups resulting in the development of nations. Finally, in contrast to the corruption which was occurring at Babel, God selects Abram (Abraham) to be the foundation for both the eventual nation of Israel and its international commonwealth known as the Church.

Universal Corruption

Although regarded by some sort of parabolic myth, the first twelve chapters of Genesis set the stage for the triumph, turmoil, and treachery associated with humanity since the beginning. Listed below are a few of the corruptions which transpired in association with what God intended for good for the sake of the overall human community

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| 1. Work..... | 1. Sloth, Debt, Slavery |
| 2. Marriage | 2. Divorce, Adultery, Sodomy |
| 3. Family..... | 3. Murder, Abortion, Genocide |
| 4. Government..... | 4. Anarchy, Tyranny, Statism |
| 5. Nationalism..... | 5. Globalism, Communism |
| 6. Israel/Church..... | 6. Anti-Semitism, Anti-Christianity |

By Genesis 12, God has selected a man, Abraham, to establish two examples for the other nations and provide redemption for the entire family of man. The first example occurs through the protracted rise and unfortunate fall of national Israel. The final example occurs with the revelation of His Divine Son as the seed of Abraham to bless all the families of the earth. We must now examine and compare the distinction between what was intended on the plain of Shinar with Abraham and the promise land of Caanan.

II. Israel vs Babylon

Abraham vs Nimrod

While the ancient post diluvian people were still one (being of one language), they found a land in the plain of Shinar, desired to make a name for themselves, and under the leadership of Nimrod, sought to become their own blessing through building a city and a tower which would reach into the heavens. They were not seeking any blessing through calling upon the name of the Lord; rather they would craft their own idolatrous civilization through their own human strength. The reader has no doubt heard that God elected to halt their program through confusing their language and dividing the people into separate groups so they would spread throughout the earth which God had originally intended.

Following this historical episode, God elects a man named Abram (eventually Abraham) and says a) He will show him a land, (b) God will make his name great, and (c) he will become a blessing to all the families of the earth. The first installment of this promise is realized centuries later, through Moses and others, in the establishment of Israel as a nation in the land of Caanan.

Israel under Judges

The initial intention of God in the establishment of a social order for Israel may be seen in the following table. The Judge served as prime minister who bore the civic responsibilities in executing God's will. The people in their families *actually owned* the nation.

<u>Israel</u>	<u>Gentiles</u>
1. Divine Law (system of law) Ex 20+ Deut 5+	1. Systems of Men
2. Agrarian Emphasis Num 26; 33:54 Josh 13-22	2. Urban Emphasis
3. Private Property Josh 13-22 I Kings 21	3. Collective Property
4. Emphasis on Family Num 26 Josh 13-21	4. Emphasis on State
5. Family Inheritance Num 16-36 Josh 13-24	5. State (Public) Domain
6. Civilian Execution/Militia Lev 20,24	6. Professional Military
7. Fixed Tax (Tithe) Lev 27; Num 18; Deut 12,14	7. Arbitrary Taxation

It is easy to see that the Family, as in the Garden of Eden, was the preeminent institution through which service and wealth was to be realized. Unlike what was transpiring in other city states in the ancient world, Israel was to be a *unique example* of how God was working to provide for fallen humanity despite the hardships resulting from the Fall.

For whatever reason, eventually the people of Israel grew weary of this divine plan, and their respective responsibilities, and requested Samuel to “*make us a king like all the other nations*”. This

was a grave sin on Israel's part and it has had its impact on the rest of human history.

Israel under Kings

In briefest summary, suffice it to say that Israel suffered as much, if not more, than it ever was being blessed through the antics, misadventures, or spiritual rebellion of its kings. The appointment of Saul proved to be a disappointment, David eventually exposed his own moral failures, and despite the international achievement of Israel's imperial status under Solomon, Israel continually suffered under the weight of its idolatrous affections (like all the other nations).

Nevertheless, the true King of the Universe has always been able to accommodate the failure of fallen humanity to serve His purpose. Ultimately, His promise of a Davidic dynasty would serve His greater purposes, through Solomon (the first son of David to rule as king) and the last son of David who would one day become the King of Israel and ruler of the entire world.

III. The Legacy of Solomon and Daniel

The Solomonic Empire and the Axial Age

Although I do not generally hear it expressed in many pulpits, Israel essentially achieved *international, imperial status* under king Solomon. I Kings 4 and 2 Chr 9 states that *all the kings of the earth came to hear the wisdom of Solomon*. Much tribute flowed into the kingdom of Solomon from foreign civilizations. There should be little doubt that this situation resulted in a tremendous influence of global proportions.

It is clear enough in the Bible that following the death of Solomon, and the fragmentation and decline of Israel, that Gentile empires would eventually dominate the nation of Israel and much of world history beginning with the Babylonian Captivity. Generally speaking, most Christians often think of this as the Time of the Gentiles. However, recently I was introduced to a more secular orientation for this overall ancient transition known as "**The Axial Age**" (~800-200BC), an expression coined by existentialist philosopher Karl Jaspers. It was a period when personal consciousness and the individual "self" became emphasized. After a brief look into of the historical characterization of this age, I have yet to find anyone who has concluded that this so-called Axial Age *was actually triggered by Solomon's global influence*. On the contrary, a number of scholars seem pleased to simply view this as an amazing *transformation, or mutation*, associated with some kind of evolutionary shift in the development of human consciousness, as *logos* replaced *mythos*.

I have seen this Axial Age as being represented to have been between 900 or 800BC to around 300 or 200BC. Aside from the rise of the Gentile empires recorded in Daniel, many ancient religious philosophies/traditions developed toward the center of this period. Although exact dates are rather uncertain, here is a suggestive list of religious philosophies and their associated dates:

Zoroastrianism*	600 BC
Jainism	600-530 BC
Confucianism	550-500 BC
Buddhism	550-500 BC
Shinto	500 BC
Taoism	500-300 BC

* Some scholars suggest Zoroaster lived much earlier, but his religious ideas perhaps only gained preeminence during the time of the Medo-Persian empire.

What is of particular interest is that around 600-500BC something happened which perhaps was the *real axis* associated with the overall Axial Age. What historic event was prominent at this time in history? Was it not the final conquest and dispersion of the Jewish nation known as the Babylonian Captivity (usually dated around 585 BC)? I personally believe that the development of these religious traditions or philosophies expressed a *spiritual groping* throughout the Gentile world *in reaction* to the loss of international glory that once flowed from the preeminence of the Solomonic empire and the wisdom of God's Word prior to this period in history.

Daniel and the Time of the Gentiles

The continued rebelliousness and idolatrous affections of both Israel and Judah resulted in what has been referred to as the Babylonian Captivity. Short of any absolute annihilation of any society (think Sodom and Gomorrah), the final judgement of God upon a nation is to disperse its citizens, who are either destined to die or to be absorbed within a foreign power under a different culture. Such was the case of Daniel and his friends who were apparently raised as young teens within the system of Babylonian knowledge and culture. Fortunately, they had already learned and retained enough divine wisdom to resist the syncretism encouraged by their Babylonian captors.

Daniel and his friends ultimately become significant leaders and opinion shapers within the Babylonian and Medo-Persian empires. They provided the light from the Torah and Solomonic wisdom which served as a witness and a preservative influence for these Gentile civilizations.

VI. The Revelation of Jesus the Messiah

I have great confidence that that the reader has most likely heard about the person of Jesus Christ in human history. Despite what *you* may think, permit me to focus on what transpired around two thousand years ago when the final son of David had come to establish His rule in Israel at that time. Although many of the people recognized Him as Messiah, they missed the spiritual significance of His coming. Roman bondage may have seemed as humiliating as slavery in Egypt, but Jesus came to resolve a more fundamental problem. The people were looking for a Messianic strong man who would deliver them from Roman oppression. They failed to see the more fundamental importance of a Savior who sought to deliver them from *sin and death*. Although tragic, Egypt and Rome in their respective eras were just temporary problems at their worst. Death is an eternal problem.

Christ or Caesar

Unfortunately, as was mentioned earlier, Israel again made a tragic declaration. As the people under Samuel had wanted a king like all the other nations, they openly denied their Messiah and declared to Pilot, "We have no king but Caesar". After centuries of being subjected to the rule of Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece and Rome, the core tendency toward some form of political idolatry was apparently still embedded within the hearts and minds of many Israelites.

As the history of ancient Israel comes to a close by 70 AD after rejecting their Messiah (who indeed had come in the name of the Lord), let us now examine how the Gentiles have received the Savior of the World and the wisdom of the Bible. Have the Gentiles done any better, or do we manifest the same idolatrous tendencies as was seen in the nation of Israel?

V. The Decline of Rome and the Dark Ages

Cultural Fragmentation and the Corporatization of the Church

The loss of Israel was a unique cultural decline spiritually, but the birth of the Church and the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit was a new beginning for mankind in world history. Although Rome was still the preeminent world power it would become divided into East and West factions. How was this new force of Christianity to be understood *politically* in a world that was becoming more unstable? Although Israel essentially came to an abrupt end with the destruction of the Jewish temple, Rome sputtered along for a few centuries longer until the Church of Christ was absorbed into Roman culture as the new state religion. After an extensive period of Roman persecution, emperor Constantine essentially adopted the Christian Church which became the central organizing *political* framework for Roman society. Although this could be seen as a great blessing due to the end of centuries long persecution, a more complex cultural problem of the Church/State relationship was born. This somewhat confusing shift in distinction for determining the respective roles of these two divine institutions is still with us today.

With the freedom from persecution enjoyed by the Church under Constantine, there was a significant degree of growth and improvement. Although many may not agree, the Council of Nicaea and the establishment of a New Testament cannon were advancements in theological unity for Christians. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit and the mission of the Church was to save and redeem *individual people*. The cultural fallout from such activity should, no doubt, result in a positive impact upon society. However, the redeeming work of the Spirit cannot be *institutionalized* merely to satisfy some politically humanistic social order, any more than the Law of Moses was able to spiritually regenerate fallen humanity. European Christendom, which attempted to unify Church and State, somewhat analogous to an Islamic Caliphate, ultimately depreciated the unique spiritual effectiveness of both. Church and State are *divine institutions* established by God *for their respective roles* in serving *His* will. Since the death and resurrection of Christ, these institutions were to mutually coexist in any empire or national concern in order to serve *God's purposes* within human history among those who personally turned to Him. Of course, when *humility before God* is diminished within a culture (for whatever reasons) then both Church and State, as well as the people, will understandably suffer.

The Darkness of the Dark Ages

Some humanist scholars may attribute the so-called Dark Ages to a weakness or deficiency of Christian faith and its mythical worldview. Others such as the late Francis Schaeffer have worked to show that the so-called Dark Ages of Europe were not as intellectually bereft as we are often led to believe. Although European culture had lost much from the fall of the Roman empire, other forces were already at work prior to the dawn of medieval Europe (i.e. moral debauchery of Roman society, intrusion of foreign barbarians, decline of economic and educational resources from the classical world) which were adversely impacting the cultural integrity of the former empire. It is more likely that the Church, despite many severe inconsistencies, was actually a force that dimly preserved learning and culture, within monasteries or other remote Christian communities, which would survive to eventually flower and contribute to a *second axial age* centered in the West. Much had been lost culturally speaking, but a technological innovation would soon catapult the Word of God throughout Europe.

VI. Transmission of Classical Wisdom and the Gutenberg Bible

The Role of Human Technology

Anyone today who would attempt to deny that industrial or technological advancement has any significant impact on culture or society would immediately be seen as either a liar or a fool. In fact, many people are reeling from the rapidity of our current technological innovations, and may wonder if these should necessarily be considered to be an improvement for our human condition.

Despite various opinions as to how one might feel about it, everything from the printing press to the internet has made tremendous cultural impacts worldwide. In simply focusing on the printing press during, this single advancement was the technological engine which enabled the light of learning to shine once again in the so-called darkness of medieval Europe. Additionally, the light of the gospel from the Word of God directly would be made available all across the continent.

Setting the Stage for a New Axial Age

Similar to the seminal power of Solomonic wisdom, which perhaps helped initiate the first axial age, the proliferation of the Bible, as we know it, would provide a more direct form of divine wisdom which would again change culture and society. The spiritual power of God's truth in the hands of so-called common people led to the uncommon, and unexpected, transformation of Europe which would move well beyond its border. For better or worse (depending on your preferred perspective), European powers would dominate subsequent centuries of human culture across the globe. The light of God's Word was again moving throughout the world.

VII. The Renaissance, Reformation, Enlightenment and Modernity

The Secular and The Sacred (Renaissance and Reformation)

The glory of humanist man is forever flaunted due the Italian Renaissance. Indeed, Man, who was made after the image of God, began to expose and develop his privileged position within God's creation. Slowly but surely, as in earlier centuries, social and economic advancements, accompanied by architectural and technological innovations, began to stir and the so-called darkness of the Dark Ages was dispelled as Europe was becoming "*born again*" as Renaissance implies.

Although a bit later, the Reformation in Germany, following the reprinting of Guttenberg's Bible accelerated the stirrings of the Renaissance and placed the Word of God in the hands of many more people. The further translation and transmission of the Bible in the common languages of national cultures served to unify Europe and ultimately impacted the rest of the world. Any scientific revolution would now have a firm foundation in the fact that a *rational* God had created a *rational* universe to be overseen by a *rational* creature made after the image of God.

The Enlightenment

Following the developments from the Renaissance and Reformation, an age referred to as the Enlightenment arose which inherited the success of the previous periods. It is often viewed as an age representing the autonomous success of humanist man, who no longer had a need for any metaphysical crutch from either mysticism or religion. These were replaced by logic and a philosophies guided by human reason. The scientific revolution, perhaps the crowning achievement

of the enlightenment, accelerated human knowledge from the 17th to 20th century. Additionally, the subsequent industrial revolution during the 19th century also presented much of mankind with enhanced material blessings.

Nevertheless, in the advancement of human knowledge measured in terms of our *material* progress, was something being lost *spiritually*? This question is still being asked today and the side effects of our so-called progress remains a central concern.

American Exceptionalism

Since 2020, Americans have become confused about the heritage of our nation. Should we look to 1607 or imagine that the 1619 project is really central to the meaning of America. Some might suggest that our revolution of 1776 was the beginning of our turning point of our exceptionalism, while others would point to 1789 with our constitution as the firmer foundation. Some, like myself, would suspect that the Great Awakening of 1730s was even more foundational in our cultural transition than these last two events mentioned. Some might look to a secular view of the scientific revolution as the primary ground which would provide the rational basis for our cultural advancement. However, I would suggest that the earlier spiritual and philosophic foundations in Europe and America, resulted in the broader cultural commitment to the reality that a rational God had created a rational universe. Rational humanity has learned how to exploit this rational order to obtain various blessings for ourselves and our posterity. The scientific revolution *flowed* from this worldview; it didn't *produce* it. Sadly, however, this advancement was often associated with those who would use such wisdom (pregnant with the knowledge of good and evil) to exploit, dominate and oppress their fellow man in their idolatrous ambition to play god.

Despite the multitude of opinions in this matter, I would suggest that any so-called American Exceptionalism (or scientific revolution in the West) was necessarily anchored in the wisdom of God being exposed within a *second* axial age following the so-called European Dark Ages. Whether we consider the transformation of a single individual or a nation, it is always *the spiritual light of Heaven invading our intellectual darkness* that paves the way for true enlightenment and cultural progress. However, we will never eliminate or solve the problem of sin and death though cultural advancement or scientific progress. The answer to this metaphysical problem must alone be found in our Creator, who was pleased to become our Savior.

It is the unique privilege of man (as modelled after the image of God) to learn about and utilize the principles of God's creation in order to serve our Creator as well as ourselves. I am reminded of the riveting words of the late President John F. Kennedy: "Some men look upon the world and wonder why....I look upon the world and wonder 'why not' ". One should recognize the simultaneous glory and danger in suggesting such a statement. I must respectfully respond to the profundity of this proposition and say that perhaps we should have a *firm grasp of the divinity* behind the "why" before we venture toward any potential disaster which might arise from any unrestrained 'why not'.

We hear the cry of fellow citizens to *make America great again*. I am asking what was it that ever made America great in first place? I suggest that America *will never be great again*, until we rediscover the *greatness of God* and His wisdom. We do indeed need absolute truth to advance any form of productive civilization. However, to have *absolute truth*, we must have an *absolute source*.

VIII. The Future Hope of Christ

The New World Order

With the influence from Babel (Babylon 1.0) to Rome, under Nimrod to Caesar; we have passed through several cycles of Gentile imperialism in contrast to what was intended from the Garden of Eden to the establishment of Israel. Am I now hearing music (?).where have all the *imperial* flowers gone (?).have they not gone to graveyards *every one*! Yet, sadly in this instance, I also hear: “If at first you don’t succeed...then try, try again!”. Will the endless cycle of vain attempts to craft socialist empires ever be broken?

I think it was Albert Einstein who suggested that insanity was doing the same thing over and over again while expecting different results. So, what is the distinction between *godly perseverance* and insanity? Perhaps it lies in the understanding of the “whys” and the “why nots”, which I previously referred to with respect to JFK. I, therefore, think it ultimately rests in the distinction between the will of God versus the idolatry of man.

We clearly live in a *global* age, where the World Bank, the World Court, the World Health Organization, and the World Economic Forum have emerged and have become associated with the United Nations in order to fulfill their ideological dream of *a more perfect union*.a *global* union...a new, and final, world order. Will people really be able to *own nothing and be happy* ? Maybe you will, perhaps, be as happy *as an ant*. Remember that when you’re eating other insects.

The TRUE World Order

The promise of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ *alone* provides the future hope for any dimly imagined utopia of heaven on earth. Only God has the power to recreate man and restore what has been lost for millennia. Our best efforts, apart from God, eventually fail time and time again. Although it seems that there is a new young generation which is again looking toward some socialist hope in the future, it will also be doomed to failure if it is not anchored in the Person and Work of God.

During the Regan years I recall being challenged by some with the charge that the “Christian Right” was just interested in establishing a *theocracy* in America. That may, in fact, have been the orientation of *some* people (much like a number of those who currently represent so-called *Christian Nationalism, falsely so-called*). Although a theocracy *will* be the ultimate form of human government, it will only come about when *God chooses* to return and implement *His program*. Until then, astute Christians are called to honor their respective national distinctives (which God originally established) and shun any efforts which would advance some idolatrous global unification apart from the plans and purposes of our Creator.