



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 8

JUNE 1, 2024

*For in the time of trouble he shall hide me in his pavilion:  
in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me;  
he shall set me up upon a rock.*

—Psalm 27:5

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And they came to Elim, where were twelve wells of water, and threescore and ten palm trees: and they encamped there by the waters.

—Exodus 15:27

### Elim

**T**welve wells of water and seventy palm trees.

Where there are palms, there is grass. Twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees and much grass.

Where there is grass, there are flowers. Twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees and much grass and beautiful, blooming flowers.

Where there are flowers, there are insects and critters. Twelve wells of water and seventy palm trees and much grass and beautiful, blooming flowers and living creatures and teeming life.

A verdant garden! A lovely oasis! A restful haven in that weary sea of desert!

And...a mystery.

Yes, Elim is a mystery. It does not really belong in the wilderness. A wilderness is empty and barren. The Bible calls this particular desert “the waste howling wilderness” (Deut. 32:10). Wells and palms and flowers have no place in a waste howling wilderness. In fact, you cannot find Elim in that wilderness today. Men try to locate it. They find a few palms here or some scattered wells there, and they call it Elim. But those things are not Elim. Elim does not fit in the wilderness. Elim is a mystery.

Elim is a mystery because Elim is heavenly. Elim was a little patch of heaven that Jehovah planted in the wilderness for his people. As far as the historical circumstances go, Elim was earthly enough. There was earthly water in those earthly wells and earthly shade under those earthly palms, and the earthly grass felt wonderful under their earthly feet. But as far as the

spiritual meaning of Elim goes, it was heaven. When the children of Israel encamped there by the waters, it was as if they were in paradise for a while.

God plants those little patches of heaven in our wilderness too. We sometimes call them “foretastes.” Assembled in God’s house for worship, we have a foretaste of dwelling in the heavenly temple of God. Joining with God’s people from different lands, we have a foretaste of the great congregation of all nations, tribes, and tongues. Our confessions speak of it this way: “What comfort takest thou from the article of ‘life everlasting’? That since I now feel in my heart the beginning of eternal joy, after this life I shall inherit perfect salvation, which *eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, and that, to praise God therein forever*” (Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 58).

What makes these things foretastes of heaven? How can we have the beginning of eternal joy even now? Because our Lord Jesus Christ, who is seated at God’s right hand in heaven, unites us to himself by his Spirit and gives us all of our heavenly salvation through him. In our wilderness he causes us to encamp by the waters, which are himself (John 6:35) through his Spirit (7:38–39). In that little patch of heaven, which is Jesus Christ, we are refreshed.

Shall we sing to God in thanks for Elim? “He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul” (Ps. 23:2–3).

—AL

**Article LX. The New King and His Kingdom (continued)**

**T**he relation between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity as is indicated by their very Names, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, must still be discussed. But even now that relation may in general be designated as a covenant-relationship. The Triune God is a covenant-God. He lives a covenant-life within His own divine Being. Just because God is one in being but subsists in threeness of Persons, the covenant-relationship is rooted in His own divine life. On the one hand, it must be remembered, there are three Persons in God, three divine subsistences, three divine individuals, that are absolutely equal. The Son is not subordinate to the Father; neither is the Holy Spirit subordinate to the Father and the Son. All three Persons possess the same divine nature, all three Persons live the same divine life; all three Persons are in the same sense God. The Father is God, the Son is God and the Holy Ghost is God, and all possess in the same sense all the attributes of the divine nature. True, they have their distinct Personal attributes, for the Father only is eternally Father, the Son only is eternally Son and the Holy Spirit only is eternally Spirit. But as we shall see later, these so-called personal attributes have reference rather to the relation between the three Persons mutually. It does by no means imply that the Son is less God than the Father, or that the Holy Spirit occupies a place subordinate to both. To claim subordination for any of the divine Persons of the Holy Trinity would be equivalent to the denial of the Godhead of that Person. And, therefore, it must be strictly maintained, these three Persons in the Holy Trinity are most absolutely equal.

They are coordinate. They all live in the same divine sphere, they all stand on the same divine level. The Son and the Holy Spirit are as absolutely self-existent, independent, eternal, omniscient, omnipotent, sovereignly free, self-conscious and self-determining as is the Father. In a word, all these three persons subsist on the same plane of the divine nature.

On the other hand, though Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three distinct Persons, yet these three are absolutely one. For God is one in Being. There are not three divine natures; there are not three divine beings with similar natures. There is but one divine Being and there is but one divine nature. There are not three divine wills and three divine minds. The will of the Lord of hosts is one and indivisible. The mind of Jehovah Sabaoth is absolutely one. There is, therefore, the most perfect unity, the most intimate union between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. The mind of the Father is also the mind of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. As the Father knows, so knows the Son and so knows the Holy Ghost. As the Father wills, so wills the Son and so wills the Spirit. There is nothing in the Father but the Son knows it thru the Spirit. There is nothing in the Son hidden to the Father. There are no depths in God which the Spirit does not search. And, therefore, in the Holy Trinity we have the life of most intimate, yea, of absolute communion between three Persons of perfect equality. It is in this light that we call the relation between the three Persons of the divine Trinity a covenant-relationship. It is a relationship of Friends that dwell together in most intimate communion, of friends that

have no secrets for one another, of friends that enjoy one another's most intimate confidence to perfection. Exactly how this relation variates in the three Persons severally we shall see later. But even now it can readily be seen that the general relationship between these divine Three must be such a covenant-relation.

This truth is of most profound significance. Especially for a correct understanding of the covenant-relation between God and man, it is extremely significant that this deepest and at the same time most beautiful of all truths is clearly understood. God is a covenant God. That does not mean that He became a covenant-God after He had created man, for God became nothing that He had not eternally been. Or rather, God only IS. He is Jehovah. Such is His Name. He is the eternal I AM. All that is in the world is after all only a creaturely reflection of His infinite Being. Also the covenant-relation between Him and man is only a reflection of that same relation between the three Persons within the Trinity. And, therefore, it is not thus, that God became a covenant-God after man was created, for He was a covenant-God and lived within Himself a covenant-life in infinite perfection and harmony. Neither is it thus that the real covenant-relation exists between God and man and that the term "covenant" can be applied only in a figurative sense to God Triune. For rather the reverse is true. The most perfect, the most absolutely real covenant-relation exists between Father, Son and Holy Ghost in unity of Being. And the covenant of God with us, possible subjectively because man was created in the image of God, is only a creaturely reflection of that eternal covenant-relation between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

At the same time, you will understand that this truth naturally throws light also upon the covenant between God and man. In the first place it teaches us that the very essence of the covenant-relation is not expressed in the term "agreement." Thus the covenant is frequently defined. Dr. A. Kuyper constantly defines the covenant as a relation, an agreement between two parties against a third. Also he plainly points

out that the covenant between God and man rests in the relation between the three Persons in the Trinity. Yet, whenever he defines the covenant-relation he presents it as an agreement, a contract between two parties against a third. When two parties have a common enemy, a common foe to battle against, they unite and form an alliance that they together may prevail against their enemy. Thus God and man have a common enemy in the Devil. Satan is the enemy of God, and for that reason of man, created after God's image with dominion over all things. And, therefore, God enters into covenant-relation with man, not because the Infinite is in need of an ally, but for man's sake. The same is true of the covenant between God and the Head of the covenant of grace. It is an alliance between God and His people in Christ for the overthrow of the dominion of the devil.

Now as we have pointed out before, there is an element of truth in this definition. The truth of this view is this, that two parties in covenant-relationship naturally will be each other's allies against a common foe. Let us say that positively speaking the covenant relation is one of friendship. God is the friend of man and the latter is the friend of God. Naturally it follows as a result that the enemy of God is also the enemy of man, just because the latter is friend of God. As long as the devil is allowed to rage and to oppose the Almighty, man will, as friend of God, appear as God's party in the world. But this does not imply that the very essence of the covenant lies in this alliance against the devil. On the contrary, opposition against satan follows as a necessary consequence from the covenant with God. But a thing itself and one of its consequences are by no means identical, and the essential idea of the covenant must not be taught in this alliance against satan. If it actually was nothing but this alliance the covenant would be rather accidental and temporal. If the devil had not appeared on the scene as the opponent of God the covenant-relation would never have existed. And again, the moment the devil disappears from the stage of history and is cast into everlasting darkness, the reason for this covenant ceases to be and the

covenant itself has an end. And, therefore, we would emphasize very strongly that the covenant essentially is not this temporary alliance between God and man against satan, but is rather that eternal relation of friendship between God and man which is a creaturely reflection of the relation between the three Persons in the Holy Trinity.

This view also marks the definition as insufficient that would describe the covenant as the way along which God leads the elect sinner in Christ Jesus to eternal salvation. What this definition has in common with the preceding is that it presents the covenant as a means to an end. The former definition finds this end in the opposition against and defeat of the devil. It is a means to conquer satan. The latter finds the end in the salvation of God's people. In both cases it must necessarily be presented as a temporary agreement that will cease the moment the end is reached. Also in the last mentioned definition there is undoubtedly an element of truth. Salvation can be obtained only in covenant-way. That is, just because we are created covenant creatures, there is no life and no bliss except in the right covenant relation to the Almighty. Death, eternal darkness is exactly that the covenant creature is separated absolutely from his covenant-God, that his infinite Friend is his Enemy. And, therefore, truly, salvation is obtainable only in the covenant-way. But the definition is at fault if it presents the covenant as a way. If it is only a way to salvation, it follows that the realization of the covenant and salvation are two different things, just as the way differs from the destination. And again, if the covenant is a way to salvation it follows that the covenant must cease to exist the moment salvation is realized. And this is exactly what we deny. The highest realization of the covenant between God and man is his

salvation. Salvation is in itself the perfection of the covenant-relation thru Christ Jesus. Life, true, eternal life, life in the fullest sense is life in the perfected covenant-relationship. The covenant, therefore, is not temporal but eternal. It is not only a means to an end, it is an end in itself.

Once more, then, positively expressed, the covenant is that relation of friendship between God and man that is a creaturely reflection of the divine relation of friendship between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity itself.

By friendship we understand such a relation of mutual affection, intimate communion, free and open intercourse, confidence and harmony as exists between persons of greatest possible equality and mutual correspondence.

This relation exists in the highest, in the absolute sense of the word between the Persons of the Holy Trinity. They are absolutely equal and at the same time absolutely One. In that absolute sense man will, of course, never be friend of God. To assert this would be to fall into the abyss of Pantheism. Man is not God's absolute equal. Man never will be God. He will always remain creature.

But there is a reflection of God's own nature and life in man, for he is created after God's image. And in a creaturely sense man may be called the friend of God. In Adam this relation is violated, and the friend of God becomes His enemy. In Christ this relation is perfectly restored. Immanuel is the tangible realization of God's covenant and the Incarnation is its central fact. In and thru Him we also are again received into that covenant-communion in which only there is life.

"I in them and Thou in me, that they may be perfected in One." John 17:23.

—Holland, Mich.

