



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —

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*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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Thou shalt not delay to offer the first of thy ripe fruits, and of thy liquors: the firstborn of thy sons shalt thou give unto me. Likewise shalt thou do with thine oxen, and with thy sheep: seven days it shall be with his dam; on the eighth day thou shalt give it me. And ye shall be holy men unto me: neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.

—Exodus 22:29–31

### Holy Firsts

All the firsts in Israel were to be given to God. Israel had many, many firsts each year. The “first of thy ripe fruits” was the first harvest of each crop that came ripe each year—wheat, barley, lentils, olives, grapes, almonds, myrrh, pomegranates, figs, and more. The first of thy “liquors” were the first batches of the liquid products each year—wine, oil, and honey. The “firstborn of thy sons” of each family were to serve God in the tabernacle, although at Sinai God would take the entire tribe of Levi as a suitable replacement for the firstborn sons of all the tribes. The firstborn of “thine oxen, and...thy sheep” were to be left with their mothers for seven days and devoted to God on the eighth. So many firsts among the people! And all the firsts in Israel were to be given to God. “Thou shalt give it me.”

The firsts represented the whole. The first harvest of wheat in a season represented all the subsequent harvests of wheat that season. The first bottles of olive oil represented all the subsequent bottles of oil. The first son in each family represented all the sons and daughters of the family. When Israel brought their firsts to God, it was a testimony that all Israel was God’s nation, and all of Israel’s things were God’s gifts. The entire nation was given to God in the giving of the firsts.

And what did it mean that the entire nation belonged to God, as represented by its firsts? It meant that God had *consecrated* the nation of Israel to himself. God had singled out the nation

of Israel from all the nations of the earth and had set her apart as his people. There was nothing inherently special about Israel. She was small. She was weak. She was disagreeable, rebellious, wicked, and full of complaint. Nevertheless, God had chosen Israel as his nation. God had dedicated and devoted and hallowed the nation to himself as his own. The sign of God’s consecrating the whole nation as his own was that all Israel’s firsts must be given to God.

God’s consecration of Israel as his own is taught by the word *holy*. “And ye shall be holy men unto me.” The word *holy* has been so twisted that we think it means *good* or *obedient*. It is our reflex to find man and man’s work in the word *holy*. But holy men are not good men; holy men are consecrated men. Holy men are not obedient men; holy men are chosen men. Holy men are often the worst of men—Jacob in the Old Testament and Paul in the New Testament. But God does what those men could never do in bringing them to himself and making them his own.

How unfathomably deep is the mercy of God. God’s mercy was symbolized in the prohibition against eating what was torn of beasts. “Neither shall ye eat any flesh that is torn of beasts in the field; ye shall cast it to the dogs.” Because of our sin we deserve to be cast away from God—cast into the field to be torn of beasts and cast into hell to suffer everlasting agony. But in his mercy God consecrates us to himself instead. As a symbol that God would never cast his elect people into hell, the people of Israel were not to eat

anything torn of beasts in the field. Though of themselves they should be cast away from God, “ye shall be holy men unto me”!

It is the wonder of salvation. For behold God’s great First: Jesus Christ, who is “the firstborn among many brethren” (Rom. 8:29), “the

firstfruits of them that slept” (I Cor. 15:20), and “the firstborn of every creature” (Col. 1:15). God’s great firstborn is consecrated to God as “thy holy child Jesus” (Acts 4:27). And all of God’s people are consecrated to God in him. Holy firsts because of God’s Holy First!

—AL

## EDITORIAL

### God of God: Nicea’s Septendecicentennial (1)

**N**ext week marks one of the great milestones of the Christian church. On May 20, AD 325—exactly 1,700 years ago—a council convened in the city of Nicea under the auspices of the Roman emperor Constantine.<sup>1</sup> The fruit of the Council of Nicea would be the Nicene Creed, which is perhaps the greatest of all Christian confessions. All these centuries later, the Nicene Creed still shapes what God’s people know about Jesus—Jesus is truly God! Even though many Christians today have never heard of the creed; and even though those who have heard of it probably could not quote much of it, if anything at all; yet the creed has stamped itself upon the Christian confession of Christ—Jesus is truly God! Not that the Nicene Creed invented something new for God’s people to know about Jesus, as is the scandalous claim of the creed’s opponents. The scriptures fully and abundantly reveal who Jesus is, creed or no creed. But in the Nicene Creed the Spirit of Christ led the church of Christ to confess the truth of Christ according to the word of Christ—Jesus is truly God!

Seventeen hundred years—a septendecicentennial—is a long time. It is difficult for us to imagine the world so long ago. The names and cultures have changed—the ancient Greek city

of Nicea is now the modern Turkish city of Iznik. The people have been long forgotten—Colluthus the presbyter, Theon the presbyter, Tryphon the deacon. Even those names that have come down to us through the ages remain to many of us a vague recollection from a long-ago history lesson—Alexander the presbyter, Arius the heretic, and Athanasius *contra mundum*. Seventeen hundred years is a long enough time for the buildings where the Council of Nicea met to have fallen to ruins, to have been buried under the shifting sands of the centuries, to have been forgotten out of mind for many centuries more, and finally to have been excavated again by modern archaeologists. The world that then was is gone, and only its fragments remain. Today’s Turkish Muslim in Iznik, walking past an ancient stone ruin along the road to his mosque for his Friday prayers, has hardly a passing inkling that somewhere around here, generations and generations ago, the greatest Christian council of all time met and declared that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is “God of God; Light of Light, true God of true God; begotten, not made, being of one essence with the Father.”<sup>2</sup>

Many things have changed in the seventeen centuries from May 20, AD 325, to May 20, AD 2025. But the truth upon which God set his

<sup>1</sup> Some sources have the Council of Nicea beginning in June. One of the earliest historians to write about the council, the fifth-century Socrates of Constantinople, recorded that the council opened on May 20.

<sup>2</sup> The Nicene Creed.

church at Nicea remains unchanged and unchangeable: Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today, and forever—for Jesus is truly God. On this septendecicentennial of the great Council

of Nicea, let us wing our way through centuries long forgotten and revisit that most notable of all Christian assemblies.

To be continued...

—AL



# REFORMED

— P A V I L I O N —



# Two Free Public Lectures

## Speech One:

### THE SOVEREIGN GOD OF SALVATION

How can a sinner be saved? That question is not hypothetical but very personal and real. It is not a question about some person somewhere – how can he be saved? Rather, it is a question about you; it is a question about me. How can you be saved? How can I be saved? There are really only two possible answers to that question. Either God saves us, or we save ourselves. Either God is the Saviour, or Man is the Saviour. Either God is sovereign, or Man is sovereign. Either God is God, or Man is God. If I must save myself, even by the smallest contribution, then I am lost. But if God saves me, completely and fully, then I am saved, indeed.

Thanks be to God that God is God and that He sovereignly saves His people through Jesus Christ. On Saturday, 7 June, join us for a lecture on this most comforting truth of God's sovereignty in salvation.

**Theme: The Sovereign God of Salvation**  
**Speaker: Rev. Andrew Lanning**

**Date:** 7 June 2025 (Saturday)  
**Time:** 10 AM

## Speech Two:

### THE PSALMS OF JESUS

God gave His people a lovely song book called The Psalms. The book of Psalms opens with a resounding blessing: "Blessed is the man" (Psalm 1:1). The book of Psalms closes with a ringing doxology: "Praise ye the LORD" (Psalm 150:6). In between are all the things that belong to God's people in this life -- joys and sorrows, sin and righteousness, suffering and victory, death and life. No matter what God's people are going through, the Psalms help them give voice to it. What makes the book of Psalms especially lovely is that the Psalms are Jesus' songs. Jesus is the blessed man of the opening blessing and Jesus praises God in the closing doxology. All the things in between that belong to God's people in this life first belonged to Jesus -- joys and sorrows, sin and righteousness, suffering and victory, death and life.

What a lovely song book God has given us: the Psalms of the blessed man for the praise of God! On Saturday, 14 June, join us for a lecture on this most lovely book of Psalms.

**Theme: The Psalms of Jesus**  
**Speaker: Rev. Andrew Lanning**

**Date:** 14 June 2025 (Saturday)  
**Time:** 10 AM

**Venue:** 371 Beach Road, #02-42, City Gate, Singapore 199597

**Directions:** Nicoll Highway MRT (Yellow Circle Line), From MRT station, walk along link bridge to City Gate

**Programme:** Lecture followed by Q&A, fellowship and refreshments

**Organiser:** Remnant Reformed Church and Redeemed Reformed Fellowship

## Article CX: The New King and His Kingdom: Abraham, the Friend of God (continued)

**A**s friend of God Abraham, then Abram, is called.

It is with his calling that the narrative of Abraham's life begins in the Word of God. Of the sixty or seventy years before that calling, the Bible tells us practically nothing. It is with Abraham's calling, with his separation by God, that his life becomes of significance for the history of God's revelation and the development of his kingdom in the world.

Abraham by God's calling is separated, is set apart.

The question is: From whom and from what is Abraham separated? And what is the nature of his new environment in the midst of which God places him? Gen. 12:1 tells us: "Now Jehovah said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto the land that I will show thee." Abram, then, must separate himself from his kinsmen, from his own people, from the midst of those he knew and to whom he was related. He was called to leave an environment that was familiar and dear to him, in which he had grown up. And he was to face an unknown future, go to a land which Jehovah would show him.

So much is plain.

Yet the question still arises: What surroundings were they from whose midst Abram is called? Above all, what must we think of them from a religious point of view? Abram lived in Babylonia before he was called. He was called from Ur of the Chaldees, and for the second time from Haran. How must we picture the environment of Abram before his calling from the point

of view of grace? Did Abram grow up in heathen surroundings? Was the environment from which Abram was called not influenced by the light of revelation? Was Abram himself, perhaps, only such a Babylonian heathen before his seventieth year, and was his calling at the same time his conversion to Jehovah? Does the line of grace and of special revelation begin with Abram's calling, or does that calling, at least, constitute a new beginning? Is there an entirely new beginning in the calling of Abram?

It is of great significance to get a clear conception of some of these things. To answer the question: Whence is Abram called? is of importance in the first place for a right estimation of that calling itself. As we said before, if Abram is called from the midst of heathendom and idolatry to isolation, God rather calls him for his own safety. He is then called from the world into a life of separation from that world.

But there is more. The right conception of religious conditions in Babylonia at the time of Abram's calling is of importance, too, to determine the relation between some things that are being discovered in those countries today by means of excavation and parts of the Word of God, between revelation and the "light of nature."

Say that Babylonia was nothing but a heathen country, without the light of God's special revelation. Before Abram is called, Jehovah had not revealed himself. He was not known in Babylonia. All that is found in that country of the time of Abram must simply be attributed to natural light.

Now, comparatively recent discoveries have brought to light such things as the “Code of Hammurabi.” He was a celebrated warrior, through the discovery of his code became famous especially as a lawgiver, who ruled over Babylonia about 2000 B.C. and, therefore, approximately at the time of Abram. Now, in the beginning of our century a collection of laws was found in the site of the old royal city of Susa. The author of this collection was found to be King Hammurabi of Old Babylonia. The fact we want to bring to your attention, however, is that there are some striking parallels between passages of this Code of Hammurabi and passages of the laws of Moses, parallels that suggest a relation between the two.

For instance.

In Ex. 21:15 we read: “And he that smiteth his father or his mother shall be surely put to death.” In the Code of Hammurabi we find a similar expression: “If a son strike his father, his hand shall be cut off.”

In Ex. 21:18 we read: “And if men contend, and one smite the other with a stone or with his fist, and he die not, but keep his bed; if he rise again and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and he shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.” So the Code of Hammurabi has it: “If a man strike another man in a noisy dispute and wound him, that man shall swear ‘I did not strike him knowingly’; and he shall pay for the physician.”

In Ex. 21:24: “Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot.” So in the Code of Hammurabi: “If a man destroy the eye of a freeman, his eye shall be destroyed.” And again: “If he break the bone of a freeman his bone shall be broken.” Again: “If a man knock out the teeth of a man of the same rank, his teeth shall be knocked out.”

These and other similarities between the two codes naturally suggest some questions. How must it be explained, in the first place, that a heathen king, without the light of special revelation, promulgated laws that are also embodied

in the laws of Israel? Whence this light? The answer is given: In Hammurabi’s Code we have nothing but the light of nature, to speak in Scriptural terms, a remnant of creation. A natural, civil righteousness developed independently. Along this line the light of Hammurabi’s Code is generally presented as bright as possible till the need of special revelation is practically discarded. And further, as to the relation between Moses and Hammurabi, well, the former is dependent upon the latter; Moses’ law is a further development of the Code of Hammurabi. Or, according to others, the civilization of Babylonia was to an extent prevalent in Canaan at the time that Israel entered the country, and they naturally adopted some of its customs and laws.

It is quite difficult to see how along this line it is possible to escape the conclusion of the evolutionist. Man’s religious views gradually developed from the lower to the higher. His conceptions of God and justice were at first crude. A rather high development is already represented by the Code of Hammurabi. Still higher is the development in the laws of Moses. And the highest conception is reached at the time of the prophets of Israel, who preach the One Ethical God and social righteousness. The fact of original righteousness, the fact of the fall and sin, the need of grace and special revelation, all these are, then, simply discarded. Religion develops as normally from the lower to the higher as the human race itself develops. The religion of Israel at the time of Moses is a further development of the old Babylonian religion. And of this same, natural development the religion of Israel’s prophets represent the highest stage.

It is this line of argumentation that deprives us of the Word of God. It is at bottom pantheistic evolutionism. It obliterates the distinction between sin and grace, between special revelation and the light of nature, between Israel and the nations, between Christ and mere man, between the Church and the world, between the divine and the human, between the miracle and nature.



It is for that reason that we emphasized that we cannot explain all that is found in Old Babylon at the time of Abraham from natural light. It is simply a historic fact that in Babylonia we find the light of special revelation at the time when Hammurabi reigned and Abraham was called. There lived the descendants of Shem. There lived the patriarchs, many of whom, Shem himself included, were still living when Abraham was called. There it was that thousands of God's people must have been dwelling at the time when Abram was separated to go to the country of the Canaanite. From there Rebekah, the beautiful illustration of a covenant-mother, is called. There was the knowledge of the true God. The light of revelation shone there even at that time. In the calling of Abram we have no beginning of revelation, but simply a further development of that covenant that was revealed in paradise in most general form, that was continued through Abel, Seth, Enoch, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, and all the patriarchs up to Abram's time. Abram, before his calling, cannot be explained as a Babylonian heathen, whom perhaps God's special revelation causes to rise to a higher level of religion. He stands four-square on the basis of grace and revelation

even before he is called. He marks the end of the post-diluvian patriarchs in whom the light of revelation and the power of grace was continued.

And it is in the light of these historic facts that we prefer to explain Hammurabi's Code as a corruption of the light of revelation. The few parallel passages between the law of Moses and Hammurabi's Code must not blind us to the fact that in many ways the latter cannot be compared to the former at all. Hammurabi's Code is heathen and manifests its heathen character plainly. And it is not difficult to conceive that the Babylonian lawgiver borrowed of the light of revelation shining in his day, and in many ways corrupted it. In the introduction to his code Hammurabi expresses that he was predestined to be lawgiver by the gods, whose faithful servant he is. He even calls himself the god of the kings and the sun-god of Babylon. And what is especially a proof of corruption of the light of revelation is that he even expresses the hopes of a Savior, but regards this hope as realized in his own person. He is the savior that was to come.

Israel is in no way to be explained as a further development of heathendom. But what is found in heathendom, even at the time of Hammurabi, is a corruption of the light of revelation.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.

