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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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And take thou unto thee Aaron thy brother, and his sons with him, from among the children of Israel, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office, even Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar, Aaron's sons. And thou shalt make holy garments for Aaron thy brother for glory and for beauty. And thou shalt speak unto all that are wise hearted, whom I have filled with the spirit of wisdom, that they may make Aaron's garments to consecrate him, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And these are the garments which they shall make; a breastplate, and an ephod, and a robe, and a broidered coat, a mitre, and a girdle: and they shall make holy garments for Aaron thy brother, and his sons, that he may minister unto me in the priest's office. And they shall take gold, and blue, and purple, and scarlet, and fine linen...And of the blue, and purple, and scarlet, they made cloths of service, to do service in the holy place, and made the holy garments for Aaron; as the LORD commanded Moses.

—Exodus 28:1–5; 39:1

Holy Garments

How glorious and striking the high priest would appear in his service of God in the tabernacle! God told Moses to separate Aaron as high priest and Aaron's sons as priests. Just as the tabernacle was full of spiritual significance in its pointing to Christ, so also the high priest was full of significance as a powerful picture of Jesus Christ in his saving work. God specified the garments that the high priest must wear, which garments pointed to various spiritual characteristics of Jesus, our only high priest.

There were seven garments. The first was a white tunic that hung to Aaron's feet. Over that went a blue robe that hung to his knees. On top of that was the multicolored ephod, which hung to his waist. Attached to that was a square breastplate adorned with precious stones. The fifth garment was a beautiful multicolored belt to hold all the garments in place. On Aaron's head was a white turban, or mitre. The seventh and final garment was a golden plate, or crown, attached to his turban.

These garments were "holy garments" (Ex. 28:4). They consecrated the high priest (v. 3) in the sense that they set him apart for the service of Jehovah. The garments were made of the

same fine linen as the tabernacle and were dyed with the same blue, scarlet, and purple colors. To any onlooker, it was obvious that the tabernacle and the high priest went together. They were both part of the same service of Jehovah. So important were the garments that the high priest must wear them every day of the year. The only day he did not was the great day of atonement, when he wore only the white garments.

The garments were "for glory and for beauty" (Ex. 28:2); that is, the purpose of the garments was to make the high priest resplendent in glory and beauty. "Glory" refers to royal majesty, honor, and dignity. It is the same word used to describe Jesus at his ascension: "the King of glory" (Ps. 24:7). "Beauty" refers to the ornamentation and adornment of one who is splendid in his person and work. It is the same word used to describe the splendor and glory of Jehovah's name: "so didst thou lead thy people, to make thyself a glorious name" (Isa. 63:14). Everything about the garments spoke of glory and beauty. Their colors were resplendent; their texture was fine and even luxurious; even their sound was pleasant and fair, for there were golden bells on the blue robe. Yes, even their

smell was sweet, for they absorbed the sweet smoke of the incense. “All thy garments smell of myrrh” (Ps. 45:8).

The high priest must have holy garments for glory and beauty as a type of Christ, who is

bedecked with all the perfections of Jehovah as our holy, glorious, and splendid high priest. “And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot” (Rev. 1:13).

—AL

FROM THE EDITOR

Here at *Reformed Pavilion* headquarters, the first snow of the year is in the forecast. Man makes his best guess at when the snow shall fly and how much, but the Lord alone sends forth his word. When the Lord says that it shall be winter, then winter it shall be.

He sendeth forth his commandment upon earth: his word runneth very swiftly. He giveth snow like wool: he scattereth the hoarfrost like ashes. He casteth forth his ice like morsels: who can stand before his cold? (Ps. 147:15–17)

In this week’s issue of the magazine, Dewey Engelsma continues his extended book review on the life of James Arminius. This week’s installment deals with pivotal matters in Arminius’ life, including his views on predestination and on Romans 7. The reader will undoubtedly be on the edge of his seat as he watches Arminius slide further away from the Reformed faith. It is only by a wonder of God’s grace that the church is ever preserved, as is evident especially when we see such popular and powerful preachers as Arminius sowing their lies. Truly God is good to his Israel.

There is also a matter to comment on in Herman Hoeksema’s *Banner* article this week. Hoeksema relates God’s dealings with Israel at Mount Sinai. Hoeksema’s main point is that the history proves that God will have mercy on whom he will have mercy. Israel sinned, but God graciously and sovereignly saved his elect in Israel, according to his covenant promise. To that we say a hearty amen.

The difficulty in Hoeksema’s article is that he presents a view of God’s establishing his

covenant with Israel that seems at odds with Hoeksema’s later development of the doctrine of the covenant. In his *Banner* article Hoeksema has the covenant being concluded—that is, being established or ratified—by Israel’s consent to God’s covenant. Hoeksema says about the conclusion of the covenant at Sinai,

Evidently, this is, in general, the conclusion of the covenant between the Lord and Israel as a nation. Jehovah comes to his people through Moses. He reminds them of the mighty deliverance from Egypt Jehovah accomplished for them. He recalls to them his grace and loving-kindness in bringing them thither to the holy mountain. He bore them as on eagles’ wings. He assures them that they shall be his peculiar possession, a people for him from all the nations of the earth. They shall be a nation of priest-kings for Jehovah. But as such the people must reveal themselves. They must walk in the way of his covenant. And while Jehovah is their God, their friend and their party, they must be Jehovah’s party and obey him. And when Moses brings the words of this covenant to the people, they all consent, assume this covenant relation, and promise that they will do according to all the words of the Lord their God. In principle the covenant is, therefore, established. The Lord made known his covenant to them, and they assumed the relationship.

Hoeksema was mistaken to take Israel’s confession as the conclusion of God’s covenant.

The fact is that the concluding of God's covenant with Israel happens entirely apart from Israel's confession that they will obey him. God concludes his covenant with his people unilaterally. God concluded his covenant with his people eternally in the decree of election. God concluded his covenant with his people at the cross of Jesus Christ. God concluded his covenant with his people by speaking the word of his covenant promise. At no point did the conclusion of God's covenant await man's consent.

But what, then, shall we make of Israel's words in Exodus 19, the text that Hoeksema is dealing with? For the people do speak of their doing and their obeying. The short answer is that this was not the ratifying or concluding of the covenant, but it was the people's mistaken notion about the role that they would play in that covenant. The people spoke of *their* doing, but God spoke of *his* doing. A few meditations on Exodus that deal with the text in question are included today, reprinted from past issues of *Reformed Pavilion*.

Hoeksema's mature doctrine of the covenant was that man has no part in concluding or ratifying God's covenant with man. For example, in his catechism book, *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine*, Hoeksema has this:

6. How does God establish His covenant?

God establishes His covenant by His own work of grace, whereby He takes His people into His own covenant fellowship. Ephesians 2:8¹

Hoeksema's doctrine of the covenant was that God has mercy on his elect people even when they sin against him. To that we say a hearty amen. And we also thank God that he led his people further into the truth of the covenant in scripture, so that the error that shows up here in 1921 could be corrected later.

Truly God is good to Israel, though we are the least deserving of it. Behold the grace and covenant mercy of our God!

—AL



¹ Herman Hoeksema, *Essentials of Reformed Doctrine: A Guide in Catechetical Instruction*, rev. Herman Hanko (Grandville, MI: Protestant Reformed Churches in America, 2006), 38.

Correction and Addition

In the previous issue's cast of characters, I mistakenly identified Adrianus Junius as a Dutch physician, humanist scholar, and tutor of Arminius.¹ That was incorrect. There was a *Hadrianus* Junius (1511–75), a Dutch physician and humanist scholar, but *Adrianus* Junius was a different man entirely. He was a contemporary and friend of Arminius, traveling with him to Italy in 1586, but he was not his tutor. There was also *Franciscus* Junius, professor at the University of Leiden, who was not Arminius' teacher but his colleague. (Phew—I'm glad I could clear that up for the reader.)

If I could redo the cast of characters, not only would I delete the mistaken description of Adrianus Junius, but I would also add one more name: Petrus Ramus. Ramus was a French philosopher, logician, and humanist best known for his blistering critique of Aristotelian philosophy. How critical was he? According to Carl Bangs in his biography of Arminius, "There is a popular tale to the effect that his [Ramus'] master's thesis in 1536 consisted of one proposition: *Quaecumque ab Aristotele dicta essent, commentitia esse*—'All that Aristotle has said is false.'"²

Ramus' critique of Aristotle did not go over well. So incensed was one Aristotelian, Pierre Galland, that, according to Bangs, there is evidence Galland murdered Ramus during the slaughter known as the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre.

Ramus enters our story because Arminius was enamored with Ramist logic and taught it during his time in Geneva. This drew the ire of Beza and others, ultimately causing Arminius to leave Geneva for Basel. Curious what Ramist logic looked like in practice? Here is a taste, taken from Arminius' discussion of repentance:

In speaking of repentance [he] lists the following causes: the primary efficient, the inly moving, the outwardly moving, the proximate yet less principal, the external, the internal and inly moving, the instrumental, and still other minor causes. But these causes themselves are set over against the form, which in turn is dichotomized. And the cause and form together are set over against the fruit and parts. The parts are two. Then repentance itself is contrasted with impenitence, of which there are of course two kinds. And so on.³

Two thoughts: First, nobody knows what any of that means. Second, Ramus was simply a man ahead of his time. His philosophizing, which allowed a man to cloud simple gospel truth with dense logic and leave the child of God in a fog, would not get him killed today; it would likely earn him a professorship in certain Reformed seminaries.

So, to summarize, if I could amend the list from last week's *Reformed Pavilion*, I would correct the entry on Adrianus Junius and add this entry:

Ramus, Petrus (Peter) (1515–72) – French philosopher and logician known for his sharp critique of Aristotelian philosophy. The difference between the two could be (perhaps overly) simplified this way: Aristotle emphasized abstract theory and technical precision, while Ramus promoted a more practical and streamlined logic aimed at what he thought would be clarity and persuasion.

—DE

¹ Dewey Engelsma, "The Life of James Arminius (1)," *Reformed Pavilion* 3, no. 30 (November 1, 2025): 5.

² Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan [Francis Asbury Press], 1985), 56.

³ Bangs, *Arminius*, 60.

The Life of James Arminius (2)

When we last left James Arminius, he had just begun his preaching career in Amsterdam and had set himself to expound the epistle to the Romans.¹ The biographer Kaspar Brandt describes his discourses as “masculine and erudite” and says that “everything he uttered breathed the theologian—not raw and commonplace, but superior, acute, cultivated, and replete with solid acquisitions both in human and in sacred literature.” This, Brandt says, made him a favorite of both “high and low,” so that in a short time he “attracted towards himself the ears and the hearts of all classes alike.”² Even if this hagiographic description is only half true, it still provides insight into the intellect and capability of Arminius and the favor he quickly gained with the people of Amsterdam.

Here we meet a new figure in the story: Dirck Volckertszoon Coornhert, or Theodore Coornheert, a humanist critic of Calvinism and citizen of Amsterdam, who had served as secretary to William of Orange. Though not formally trained as a theologian, his writings on religious matters would profoundly shape the next generation.³ According to Brandt, Coornhert had “valiantly stood against Rome” yet believed that the Reformed churches still labored under serious errors, “both of confession and of walk.” The doctrine he found most intolerable was that of “an absolute decree of divine election and reprobation, as had been maintained at large by the very celebrated divines of the Geneva school” (34).

Brandt does not use the term, but his tone makes clear that he viewed the ensuing campaign against Coornhert as little better than a witch hunt. In response to Coornhert’s teaching, the

ecclesiastical court of Amsterdam tasked Arminius with refuting his views, teachings that the Reformed church of that day had branded as heresy. Two ministers from Delft had already debated Coornhert on his teachings but, according to Brandt, tried to soften the Genevan position, writing a book in which they taught that God’s decree of election and reprobation was made after the creation and fall of man, rather than before. Yet, in Brandt’s judgment, this distinction offered little improvement, since it still made God’s decree the ultimate cause of sin and perdition. As he puts it, “the necessity of sinning, no less than of perishing, being fixed by the more than iron absolutism of that decree, they thereby actually made the ever-blessed God the author of all sin” (35).

To summarize, Brandt explains that the Genevan divines embraced the supralapsarian view of God’s counsel (although he does not use that word), in which God’s decree to elect some and reprobate others is placed logically before the decree to create and permit the fall. By contrast, in Brandt’s mind, the two ministers from Delft sought to soften the severity of this teaching by adopting the infralapsarian position (again, a word that Brandt does not use; rather, he uses the word “posterior”), holding that God’s decree of election and reprobation comes after his decree to create mankind and allow the fall.

The two ministers from Delft then drew up a document explaining their view and submitted it for review to Rev. Martin Lydius, a professor at the University of Friesland, officially known as the University of Franeker. Brandt writes that these ministers recognized “a variety of difficulties under which the more rigid opinion of the Genevans seemed to labor” (36); and although

¹ Dewey Engelsma, “The Life of James Arminius (1),” *Reformed Pavilion* 3, no. 30 (November 1, 2025): 4–9.

² Kaspar Brandt, *The Life of James Arminius, D. D., Professor of Theology in the University of Leyden, Holland*, trans. John Guthrie (Charleston, SC: Legare Street Press, 2023; originally published London: Ward, 1854), 31. Page numbers for subsequent quotations from this book are given in text.

³ According to one historian, by the end of his life Coornhert “was focusing on the individual’s spiritual striving and efforts to gain salvation, dispensing with organized religion” (Jonathan I. Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995], 97–99).

Lydius was not unwilling to respond himself, he instead turned to Arminius, urging him to undertake the defense of Beza and the refutation of Coornheert.

Arminius accepted the task and began to study the matter thoroughly. But after careful examination, he was not convinced by either the supralapsarian view of the Genevan divines or the infralapsarian position of the two Delft pastors. Because this moment proved so pivotal, Brandt—Arminius’ friendly biographer—deserves to be quoted at length:

But when he [Arminius] entered on this field [of study of both the Genevan position and the position of the pastors from Delft] and, with the view of defending his own opinion, had accurately balanced the arguments on both sides, and brought them to the test of the ancient truth, he found in either view of an absolute decree of predestination such inextricable difficulties, that what to choose and what to refuse came to be a matter of perplexing doubt. Indeed, the longer he revolved the point, and weighed the reasons which had been urged against the view of Calvin and Beza, the more difficult did he find it to meet them with a solid reply; and thus he felt himself bearing rapidly over to that very opinion which, at first sight, he had undertaken to impugn. (37)

Here I must interject to note that this story is disputed. What is not disputed is that the Reformed church sought to respond to Coornhert’s criticism of predestination and that two pastors from Delft took part in that effort. What is disputed is Brandt’s claim that Arminius was commissioned to refute Coornhert and then went over to his side. Supporting the view that Arminius changed is a letter from Arminius to Grynaeus, his former professor at Basel. In it Arminius reports the ongoing controversy and writes, “Our opponents, who are numerous

here, deny it [original sin] altogether.”⁴ As biographer Carl Bangs observes, Arminius could not have been referring to the Calvinists as his opponents. Were these “opponents” those who denied original sin and, with it, unconditional election?

Bangs points to the testimony of Peter Bertius, a close friend of Arminius, who wrote that Arminius was asked not to defend Calvinism against Coornhert but to defend *Beza* against the two Delft ministers, who had, in the minds of some, softened the Genevan doctrine of predestination in their response to Coornhert. Bangs criticizes those who “carelessly conflate” these stories, “sometimes to assert that Arminius was trying to refute Coornhert and went over to Coornhert’s humanism.”⁵

Bangs gives several pieces of evidence that would support his view that Arminius was not in agreement with Beza’s doctrine of predestination and perhaps never agreed with it. We will not enter into that because whatever the truth of the matter is, it is safe to say that Arminius either began to disagree with predestination or became further hardened in his opposition to the doctrine at that time in response to the writing of Coornhert.

Brandt points out that when Arminius realized that he disagreed with both parties in the predestinarian debate, he then devoted all his free time to a study of the doctrine. According to Brandt, Arminius, although “rigidly on his guard against openly impugning the generally received tenets concerning Divine Predestination,” nevertheless allowed himself “occasionally and modestly” to express his disagreement with the “prevailing opinions of others.” Further, he made it a goal to remove from the minds of his hearers those teachings that he considered to be “in the highest degree hostile to Christian piety” (39).

It was in that spirit, as he proceeded in his exposition of Romans, that he came to chapter 7,

⁴ Carl Bangs, *Arminius: A Study in the Dutch Reformation*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan [Francis Asbury Press], 1985), 139.

⁵ Bangs, *Arminius*, 139.

verse 14: “For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.” Here Arminius had the opportunity to demonstrate how firmly he meant it when he said he would not take the opinions of his instructors for law. Calvin (and Beza) had taught that the speaker in Romans 7 was a regenerate believer—“an example of a regenerate man, in whom the remnants of the flesh are wholly contrary to the law of the Lord, while the spirit would gladly obey it.”⁶

Arminius took the opposite position. To apply these words to a believer, he argued, would “invalidate the effect of regeneration” and “the cultivation of Christian piety” (39). The person described in Romans 7 was, in his judgment, not a believer but one upon whom the law had done its convicting work—one aided by the Spirit, sorry for his sin, convicted of the law’s inability to save, and therefore “in quest of a deliverer.” Such a person, said Arminius, was not regenerated but stood “in the stage next to regeneration” (40).

Opposition arose. Some accused Arminius of teaching Pelagianism, while others branded his views as outright heresy, since his interpretation of the passage resembled that of Faustus Socinus. For most, however, the cry was that he had departed from the Belgic Confession (1561) and the Heidelberg Catechism (1563).

The matter quickly came before the governing body of the Reformed churches: the classical court, or *classis*. Arminius was summoned to appear that he might either explain his views or be convinced of his error. According to Brandt, Arminius cheerfully agreed to the conference but only on the condition that it be held either in the presence of the city magistrates or, if in private, solely among the ministers, but in any case, without the elders of the church present.

It was agreed that the meeting would take place only in the presence of his ministerial colleagues. Arminius therefore met with Petrus Plancius, his senior in Amsterdam and the pastor who had first raised the objections. Plancius charged that Arminius was “teaching Pelagianism, was overly dependent on the early fathers, deviated from the Belgic Confession and Heidelberg Catechism, and held incorrect views on predestination and on the perfection of man in this life.”⁷ Arminius firmly denied the charge of Pelagianism and rejected many of the statements attributed to him. What he had taught, he insisted, was nothing new; it had been maintained by many divines before him, and it was not contrary to either the Belgic Confession or the Heidelberg Catechism. Yet he added that he was

in no respect bound to every private interpretation of the Reformed, but was plainly free and entitled to expound the heavenly oracles, and particular passages of the sacred volume, according to the dictates of his conscience; and that in so doing, he would ever be on his guard against advancing aught which went to tear up the foundation of the Christian faith. (42)

According to Brandt, Plancius went on the attack against the church fathers and began to “detract greatly from the authority, and to weaken the credit, of the ancient fathers of the church.” Arminius took this poorly of Plancius and declared that Plancius had no right to speak so “disparagingly of men whose names were held sacred” (42).⁸

Arminius declined to debate predestination, asserting that his teaching on Romans 7 had nothing to do with that doctrine.

⁶ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 259.

⁷ Bangs, *Arminius*, 144.

⁸ The Canons would address this oft-repeated defense employed by Arminius in its conclusion. “Wherefore, this synod of Dordt, in the name of the Lord, conjures as many as piously call upon the name of our Savior Jesus Christ to judge of the faith of the Reformed churches, not from the calumnies which on every side are heaped upon it; nor from the private expressions of a few among ancient and modern teachers, often dishonestly quoted or corrupted and wrested to a meaning quite foreign to their intention; but from the public confessions of the churches themselves, and from the declaration of the orthodox doctrine, confirmed by the unanimous consent of all and each of the members of the whole synod” (Conclusion to the Canons of Dordt) (emphasis added).

His explanation did little to quiet the controversy. To assist, his friend John Uitenbogaert, pastor of the church in The Hague, was invited to Amsterdam. He, in turn, called upon John Taffin, minister of the Walloon Church, “a man most desirous—if ever man was—of Christian piety and peace” (44). Together they appeared before the classis and offered their help, which, Brandt says, was gratefully accepted. Yet this conference, too, produced no positive results.

At this point Uitenbogaert and Taffin prepared a document in the hope of restoring harmony. In it several mutual declarations were proposed. Arminius affirmed that he had never taught anything contrary to the Confession or the Catechism, nor given anyone just cause to suspect that he had done so. Nevertheless, he was willing to sign a statement pledging that he would teach only those things set forth in the creeds and publicly taught in the Reformed churches. He further promised that he would give no occasion for suspicion that he held views differing from those of the Confession and Catechism; and if ever doubts or differences should arise in his mind, he would discuss them privately with his colleagues, remaining silent in public until a general synod could be called to decide the matter.

On the other hand, those who had opposed Arminius were asked to pledge that they too would, in both public and private conversations, avoid giving the impression that the ministers were not at peace with one another. This provision, however, would not prevent them from defending the truth or refuting the arguments of errorists as occasion required.

While all of this was going on, the rulers of Amsterdam decided to issue a call to John Uitenbogaert, pastor in The Hague and a friend of Arminius, to serve as a pastor in Amsterdam. They did this to balance out the theological opinions in Amsterdam.

When the call that the senators were desirous to make came before the classis, men objected. Plancius was the first to speak. He said that this call to Uitenbogaert would not tend to the edification of the church, and he provided several reasons. First, he said that he had heard reports suggesting that Uitenbogaert was not firm in his convictions regarding certain doctrines, including original sin. Second, he had heard that Uitenbogaert had called into question (“mooted”) several things in the Heidelberg Catechism. Third, Plancius claimed that Uitenbogaert had once said that a certain Arian book was “unanswerable” and that Uitenbogaert wished Coornhert’s book could be “satisfactorily refuted,” implying that perhaps it was not able to be refuted. Finally, Uitenbogaert was rumored to hold the same position as Arminius on Romans 7.

Uitenbogaert caught wind of this and was not willing to let the occasion to vindicate his own character pass him by. He met privately with Plancius, who was, according to Brandt, “the fabricator of those wicked suspicions which some had conceived against him”; and, according to Brandt, Uitenbogaert “reduced him [Plancius] to such straits that he pleaded guilty of imprudence, and pledged his faith that he would inform the Church Court of all that had passed between him and Uitenbogaert” (50–51). According to Brandt, he did so later that month before the whole classis.⁹

The civil authorities took a dim view of this theological controversy. On February 11, 1592, at 3:00 p.m., the four sitting magistrates¹⁰—joined by the three magistrates who had finished their terms only a week earlier—summoned Uitenbogaert, Taffin, and all the city’s ministers for what can only be described as a stern reprimand. They had heard that there was dissension among the ministers. That must stop, they warned, “checked in the bud,” lest it spread and cause trouble in the church and the republic (52).

⁹ Bangs, although still friendly with Arminius, puts it less hysterically and probably more accurately. “[Uitenbogaert] protested to Plancius about the fallacy of his charges, exacting from Plancius an agreement to rectify the matter before the brethren. This Plancius did on January 23 in a meeting of the classis (or possibly the consistory, it being a Thursday)” (Bangs, *Arminius*, 143).

¹⁰ Brandt refers to them as senators; Bangs refers to them as burgomasters.

They instructed the ministers that they were free to discuss these matters privately, but under no circumstances were they to give the public reason to believe that serious discord existed among them. Furthermore, any disputes were not to be carried from the ecclesiastical courts into the pulpits, lest those disputes become public controversies. If peace were not maintained, the senators cautioned, they would be “obliged to have recourse to other remedies, that no harm might accrue to the Church and the Republic” (53).

¹¹ Bangs, *Arminius*, 145.

At this point it is worth pausing to consider the relationship between church and state at that time. Who were these senators who presumed to govern the affairs of the church? Were they friends or foes of Arminius? The answer is captured memorably by Carl Bangs: “To put it pointedly, Arminius was surrounded by friends. When the case was taken to the Town Hall, Br’er Rabbit was in the briar patch.”¹¹

We turn our attention to that next.

(To be continued)

—DE

THE ALCOVE

The following meditations are reprinted from *Reformed Pavilion* volume 2, issues 20 (August 24, 2024), 21 (August 31, 2024), and 22 (September 7, 2024).

In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself.

—Exodus 19:1–4

On Eagles’ Wings

In the third month after they had left Egypt, the children of Israel came to the mount of God.

It is not too strong to say that Mount Sinai, also known as Mount Horeb, was the mountain of God (Ex. 3:1; 18:5). Mount Sinai was the mount of God because Jehovah dwelt on Mount Sinai as his home and his abode. No, Jehovah does not need a home. He is the infinite God. He is omnipresent. The heavens cannot contain him. Even the heaven of heavens cannot contain him (I Kings 8:27). Nevertheless, though Jehovah does not need a home, he was pleased to dwell

on Mount Sinai, just as he would soon be pleased to dwell in the tabernacle and then in the temple (v. 29) and just as he is always pleased to dwell in heaven (v. 30). When Moses had kept the flock of his father-in-law, he had come to this home of God, to this mountain of God, and he had beheld God there! Jehovah had appeared to him from the burning bush. Jehovah had required Moses to take off his shoes before coming into his home, for the place where God dwells and where Moses had stood was holy ground (Ex. 3:5). Now, ten plagues and three months in the wilderness later, God still dwelt on Mount Sinai.

When Moses and the children of Israel arrived at the mount, Moses went up unto God (19:3).

What did this mean for Israel? It meant that God had brought Israel to his home! It meant that God had brought Israel to himself! This is how God himself explains it: “Ye have seen... how I...brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). Of all the nations on the face of the earth, God had brought this one alone to himself.

How could this be? God’s home is holy ground, for God himself is holy. He is a consuming fire (Heb. 12:29). In his consuming holiness he would soon cause the mountain to burn, smoke, and tremble. How could Israel, incurable complainers that they were, stand on God’s holy ground? How could they be brought unto God and not be consumed?

God explains this too. He tells the children of Israel through Moses, “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). I bare you on eagles’ wings! What an image! Jehovah, as a tremendously large and majestic

eagle with its powerful wings outstretched, bore his son Israel upon his back, soared out of Egypt, whisked him through the waste howling wilderness, and sped him to his mountain. He bore his children on eagles’ wings and brought them unto himself.

By this image God teaches his church the divine power of salvation. Eagles’ wings are powerful. They propel the eagle aloft. They launch him down again at his prey. So also it took divine power to bring Israel unto God: not only power to keep their clothes and shoes from rotting (Deut. 29:5) but also power to make a sinful people right with God so that they could be with him. The power of Jehovah’s eagles’ wings.

Now behold the power of God, Jehovah’s eagles’ wings, upon which he bears us unto himself: “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (I Pet. 3:18).

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: and ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.

—Exodus 19:5–6

Keep My Covenant

God’s covenant must be kept. At Sinai God told his church, “Keep my covenant” (Ex. 19:5).

To keep God’s covenant means to obey God’s law. God himself said so: “obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant” (Ex. 19:5). To keep God’s covenant means to obey God’s law diligently. God himself said so when he called us to *keep* his covenant. The word *keep* refers to a soldier’s duty to watch the city, guarding it against the enemy. The soldier attends to his duty with zeal, lest he and the city be lost. So also the Israelite in the wilderness must keep God’s law conscientiously, zealously, attentively, eagerly, willingly,

ardently, fervently, avidly, passionately, earnestly. God’s law must not be his afterthought but his first thought. God’s law must not be tedious or unsavory to him but his chief delight. He must attend to God’s law, meditate upon God’s law, measure his thoughts by God’s law, and conform his deeds to God’s law.

The child of God must obey God’s law because of God’s covenant. What is God’s covenant? This: “I bare you on eagles’ wings, and brought you unto myself” (Ex. 19:4). This: “Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (v. 5). This: “Ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (v. 6). What is the

theme of each of these? This: “unto me.” Unto me! The almighty and infinite Jehovah says to the insignificant dust of the earth, “You are unto me!” This expresses the essence and heart of God’s covenant, which is his gracious fellowship with his people through Jesus Christ. In gratitude for being brought “unto me” in the covenant, the child of God keeps God’s covenant by obeying God’s law.

But what of the way God told the children of Israel to keep his covenant? “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people” (Ex. 19:5). If ye will keep my covenant...then ye shall be unto me. The grammar of God’s covenant promise is conditional: if...then. The theology of God’s covenant promise, however, is pure, unconditional grace.

What is the theology of God’s covenant promise? First, God establishes his covenant with his people according to his eternal decree of election and not at all according to the worth or the deeds of his people. “The LORD thy God hath

chosen thee to be a special people unto himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth”(Deut. 7:6). No condition; only the pure grace of election!

Second, God establishes his covenant with his elect people in Jesus Christ, who atoned for the sins of his people and obeyed God’s law on behalf of his people. “Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works” (Titus 2:14). No condition; only the pure grace of Jesus Christ!

Third, proceeding from God’s decree and on the basis of Christ’s atonement, God calls his people out of darkness into his marvelous light as a holy nation and a peculiar people (I Pet. 2:9). The result is that God’s people are zealous of good works of obedience (Titus 2:14). Their obedience is their gratitude and the mark of their election and redemption. No condition; only the pure grace of God’s calling!

God’s covenant must be kept. Not unto God’s fellowship but because of it!

And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD. And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.

—Exodus 19:7–9

Jehovah’s Covenant Constitution

The solemn setting was the camp of Israel in the wilderness before Mount Sinai. The occasion was Moses’ return from the mount after receiving Jehovah’s word to his people. Moses called for the elders of Israel and laid before their faces all the words which Jehovah had commanded him. Those words were these: “keep my covenant” and “obey my voice indeed” (Ex. 19:5).

Upon hearing Jehovah’s commandment, the children of Israel answered, “All that the LORD

hath spoken we will do” (Ex. 19:8). The children of Israel were united in their purpose to obey God: “all the people answered together.” The children of Israel were committed to obeying every law: “all that the LORD hath spoken.” The children of Israel were sincere regarding their duty: “we will do.” Israel’s response was a kind of formal constitution. It was an official declaration of the people through their elders. Their response even has the ring of a constitution to it. Their “We will do” was their “We the people.”

But there was a problem with Israel's response. It failed to reckon with their guilt and their depravity. The children of Israel said nothing of their need for Jehovah's pardon of such infamous sinners as themselves. They said nothing of their need for Jehovah's grace and Spirit to give them obedience. They spoke only of themselves: "We will do." In so speaking they set Jehovah on one side and themselves on the other. Their constitution made Jehovah one party who would command and themselves another party who would obey. "All that the LORD hath spoken we will do."

Jehovah revealed the sin of Israel's response when Moses returned Israel's words to him. In the thick cloud of lightning and thunder and consuming fire, Jehovah would reveal his holiness and every man's unworthiness to live in his presence. In his speech to Moses, Jehovah would reveal that Moses, type of Jesus Christ, was worthy to stand before him. "Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever" (Ex. 19:9). By this Jehovah would teach the people that they could live before him only

through faith in Jesus Christ. This is an entirely different principle than works: "we will do." It is the principle of faith: "that the people may... believe thee for ever."

There is a covenant constitution. But the covenant constitution is not redeemed man's willing obedience. Rather, the covenant constitution is Jehovah's gracious promise. The essence of God's promise is Jesus Christ, who is received by faith and not by working. Whereas the people spoke of "we," Jehovah spoke of "I." Whereas the people spoke of "do," Jehovah spoke of "believe." Whereas the people spoke of their work, Jehovah spoke of his words. The covenant is unconditional and unilateral, both of which mean that Jehovah alone establishes, maintains, and perfects his covenant. In Jehovah's covenant constitution there are not two parties but one, and he makes his people his party in Christ. There is not God's doing and man's doing for the covenant but only God's. Jehovah's covenant constitution is grace.

And our obedience? Not a covenant constitution but a covenant confession of gratitude for Jehovah's covenant of grace.

HERMAN HOEKSEMA'S *BANNER* ARTICLES

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Our Doctrine by Rev. H. Hoeksema

Article CXXXV: The New King and His Kingdom: The Children of the Promise (continued)

"I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."—Rom. 9:15; Ex. 33:19

We must recall that Paul in this ninth chapter of his epistle to the Romans is showing that the Word of God does not at all come to naught if all the children according to the flesh do not prove to be children of God. Not the children of the flesh are children of God, but the children of the promise are counted for a seed. And even

in the sphere of the covenant as it reveals itself in history Jehovah carries out his sovereign purpose of election and reprobation.

To show the truth of this statement the apostle pointed to different historical illustrations. First he pointed to the example of Isaac and Ishmael. Both were of the seed of Abraham according to the flesh. Yet, in Isaac the seed of Abraham was counted, not in Ishmael. In the second place he adduced the still more forceful

illustration of Jacob and Esau. Both were of the seed of Abraham. Yet, Esau was hated and Jacob loved. And now the apostle points to a last historical incident and a word of Jehovah in connection with it when he writes in verse 15: "For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." A quotation from Ex. 33:19 which carries us back to the time when Israel was at Sinai and had broken the covenant with Jehovah in the calf worship.

In order to understand the significance of this word of Jehovah it is necessary that we review the history connected with it and of which it is, in part, an explanation.

Principally, at the time these words were spoken the covenant had been established between Jehovah and Israel as a nation.

With a mighty hand the Lord had delivered his people from the house of bondage. He had shown his wonders in Egypt, and Israel had been witness to the fact that these wonders wrought destruction upon the Egyptians and at the same time deliverance to God's people. Especially the last one of these had been significant. The destroyer had passed through Egypt emptying the vials of God's wrath over his enemies by killing all the firstborn of the land. In that night Israel had eaten the passover. The families of Israel had been protected against the wrath of Jehovah passing through the land by the blood of the Paschal lamb that was struck on their door posts, thus covering them. And in that same night they had been delivered. They had passed through the Red Sea, and by the water of the sea they had been baptized into Moses and separated from the house of bondage forever.

Now they were at Sinai, where the covenant was to be formally concluded. Already it had been established principally, for in Ex. 19:1-8 we read: "In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. For they were departed from Rephidim, and were come to the desert of Sinai, and had

pitched in the wilderness: and there Israel camped before the mount. And Moses went up unto God, and the Lord called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say unto the house of Jacob and tell the children of Israel: Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings and brought you unto myself. Now, therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine. And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, All that the Lord hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the Lord."

Evidently, this is, in general, the conclusion of the covenant between the Lord and Israel as a nation. Jehovah comes to his people through Moses. He reminds them of the mighty deliverance from Egypt Jehovah accomplished for them. He recalls to them his grace and lovingkindness in bringing them thither to the holy mountain. He bore them as on eagles' wings. He assures them that they shall be his peculiar possession, a people for him from all the nations of the earth. They shall be a nation of priest-kings for Jehovah. But as such the people must reveal themselves. They must walk in the way of his covenant. And while Jehovah is their God, their friend and their party, they must be Jehovah's party and obey him. And when Moses brings the words of this covenant to the people, they all consent, assume this covenant relation, and promise that they will do according to all the words of the Lord their God. In principle the covenant is, therefore, established. The Lord made known his covenant to them, and they assumed the relationship.

But only a few days later Israel breaks this covenant and commits what becomes the root sin of the nation. The history of paradise repeats

itself. Even as the sin of Adam is the root sin, dragging the human race into the condemnation involved in the breaking of the covenant, while the grace of God becomes the wedge saving the race, though not all individuals of the race, so the sin of Sinai proves to be the basic sin of the nation of Israel, while God's grace saves the remnant and in that remnant his people. They break the covenant at Horeb. "And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down out of the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron and said unto him: Up, make us gods which shall go before us, for as this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him" (Ex. 32:1). Correctly, indeed, Keil interprets: "They were unwilling to continue longer without a God to go before them, but the faith upon which their desire was founded was a very perverted one, not only as clinging to what was apparent to the eye, but as corrupted by the impatience and unbelief of a natural heart, which has not been pervaded by the power of the living God and imagines itself forsaken by him whenever his help is not visibly and outwardly at hand. The delay of Moses' return was a test for Israel, in which it was to prove its faith and confidence in Jehovah and his servant Moses, but in which it gave way to the temptation of flesh and blood."

Unbelief and subsequent disobedience and breaking of God's covenant then, these were the sins of the people at Sinai, and these were the sins of Israel throughout their history. At Sinai they rejected Jehovah and rejecting Moses spoke

contemptuously of him. They made their own gods and, bowing down before them, honored them as the gods that brought them up out of the land of Egypt. They gave the glory of their covenant God to another. This is also the sentence of Jehovah upon them. "And the Lord said unto Moses: Go, get thee down, for thy people, which thou broughtest down out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them: they have made them a molten calf and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed thereunto, and said, These be thy gods, O Israel, which have brought thee up out of the land of Egypt."

The history of Sinai is significant.

It is a foreshadowing of the general line of development in the history of Israel. A first proof of the fact that all is not Israel which is called Israel, that also among the nation there are many children of the flesh that are not children of God.

Yet, the word of God is not brought to naught even by the apostasy of Israel as a nation. God will remember his covenant and save his people.

But to understand this the word which Jehovah spake to Moses must be remembered as also applicable to Israel: "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

The freedom of God's sovereign election makes separation between Isaac and Ishmael, between Jacob and Esau, between Israel and Israel.

—Grand Rapids, Mich.





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