

CHAPTER TWO

GOD'S SELF-REVEALING PURPOSE: A STARTING POINT

The Molinist Position: Based upon the logical necessity that true love demands indeterministic human freedom, the desire to respect human indeterministic freedom, or both, God created humans in a manner in which they were permitted to choose sin.

Theological Truth #1 That Favors Calvinism: The Bible reveals that God permitted sin in order that he might display his attributes more fully, and especially to highlight his mercy and grace to a greater degree.

I have lived most of my adult years in Nebraska, where the overwhelming majority of people are excited and committed fans of their college football team—the Nebraska Cornhuskers. Very rarely does it happen that children growing up in such families conclude, “I believe I will be a Texas Longhorn fan.” No, their allegiance is shaped by where they start.

The same is true of what a Christian believes about God’s sovereignty and man’s responsibility. In saying this, I am not merely suggesting that a Christian often follows the beliefs of parents or their childhood church (though that can also be true). What I am saying is more to this point: Where a person starts with biblical passages or emphases—and especially if such a starting point(s) is allowed to stand alone without being tempered by other emphases—can be decisive in beliefs on this subject.

It is because this is true that I wrestled in my study of divine sovereignty and human freedom with where to start in my understanding and explanation, especially as I was bringing together all the data. What I have come to believe is that the most helpful starting point is to look at key biblical passages and emphases in the Bible that not only make significant contributions to the salvation historical narrative of Scripture, but also address what God’s purposes are in his creation and providence. These texts come about as close as any biblical texts to answering the

question, “Why did God create the world he did and why has he governed it in the manner he has?”

What we discover in these passages is not only that God has willed to bring about a world that communicates his attributes, but we also discover a way of talking about God in the Bible, including how he functions toward man and why the world is the way it is, that leads away from any views that limit God’s absolutely sovereign meticulous providence by the human will or that conclude God must have created mankind with indeterministic freedom.

Let me state this in another way. All the Molinists I have interacted with in person or through their writings have been people who want to hear what the Bible says and they want to craft not just a philosophically viable position, but also a biblically sound one. Yet, as they have done that, there seems to be a way of thinking that goes like this, “Well, of course man is free with indeterministic freedom. Part of the way we know this is that it would not be true human love of God if God forced mankind to trust in and love him. Now, if man is free in such a way, this leads to our need to look at how God can be sovereign and exercise providence in a manner that is consistent with this view of freedom.”¹ The result of this starting point is the crafting of an explanation for God and the world as it is that limits God’s absolutely sovereign and meticulous providence by human choices.

What I am proposing in this chapter is that if we can discover starting points that the Bible itself identifies as formative, we are standing on more solid ground to lay a foundation for crafting a biblical explanation for divine sovereignty and human freedom. Those starting points have to do both with what the Bible affirms God is like (and how this impacts the subject) and also what the Bible uncovers from key passages about what God’s purposes are in the world—

¹ An example of this approach came from Tim Stratton in an unpublished paper he wrote in his M.A. program and to which he requested my response.

and how these impact his interaction with man in the historical flow. The result will be our first key theological truth.

We begin by looking at what God is like.

God As Trinity

The starting point is God as a Trinity:² “God, in his very being, has always existed as more than one person. In fact...God eternally exists as three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and each person is fully God, and there is one God.”³ This reminds us, as I have written elsewhere:

For eternity the triune God has been a God who communicates among the Godhead in a way that can be understood. We see evidence of this in the Father communicating to the Son (John 5:19, 30, 34; 8:26), the Son to the Spirit (John 16:14-15), and the Father to the Spirit (1 Cor. 2:10-16 [cf. John 6:45]). What is more, we find that God’s communication is at the heart of what He does and that this word of God accomplishes what it declares, in other words, what God, by it, sets out to do (cf. Genesis 1:3; Isaiah 55:11).⁴

God, in his very nature, is one who communicates—displaying or revealing his glory. As a result of this, we should not be surprised that God brought the world and mankind into existence that he might communicate his glory. Again, I have written:

To understand God’s ultimate purpose in creation as putting His glory on display is to understand that the act of revealing Himself is at the heart of all that God is doing. Whether it is God delivering Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 14:4), His instructions for a tabernacle within Israel’s worship (Exodus 25:8), the display of Himself and His attributes to Moses (Exodus 33:18; 34:6-7), the incarnation of His Son (John 1:1, 14-18; Hebrews 1:1-2), the saving work of the Son (John 17:1-5; Ephesians 1:6, 12, 14), or the resultant changed lives of believers (Philippians 1:9-11; 2:14-15), God is revealing Himself to the world through His redemptive work. This is why Jesus could affirm, “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.” (John 17:3)⁵

² For the reality we should begin with the Trinity see Michael Reeves, *Delighting In The Trinity: An Introduction To The Christian Faith*, (Downers Grove: IVP, 2012 [Kindle version]).

³ This definition is from Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000, repr.), 226. Scriptural support for the Trinity is found in Gen. 1:26 (in seed form); Is. 44:6; Mt. 28:20; John 1:1, 14, 18; 5:18; 10:30; 14:7; Acts 5:3-4; Phil. 2:5-7; Heb. 1:1-13, et. al.

⁴ Tom Barnes, *Every Word Counts* (Darlington, England, EP Books, 2010), 32.

⁵ Ibid.

Joe Rigney takes this even a step further when he argues:

*Because God is always triune, we must always conceive of his glory in Trinitarian terms. God's glory is his Trinitarian fullness, or the abundance of perfections and knowledge and love and joy and life that he has within the Godhead. Or, to put it another way, the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit knowing, loving, and rejoicing in each other from all eternity simply is the glory of God.... So when you hear "the glory of God," think "Trinitarian fullness."*⁶

Now, to go further, what kind of triune God exists who is always and ever revealing his glory?⁷ He is simple, such that always and at every moment all of his attributes are true of him (Exodus 34:6-7; Is. 30:18; 33:22; Jer. 9:24; Rom. 3:26; 1 Tim. 1:17);⁸ unique (Dt. 6:4; 2 Sam. 7:22; Is. 43:10; 44:6; 45:5; Jer. 10:6; Hos. 13:4; 1 Tim. 1:17; Jude 25); eternal (Pss. 90:2; 93:2; Lam. 5:19; Hab. 1:12; 1 Tim. 6:16); immutable (Nu. 23:19; Mal. 3:6); sovereign (1 Sam. 2:6-8; Prov. 16:4; Is. 6:1-7; Jer. 10:6; Dan. 4:35; Ac. 4:24; Rev. 4:11);⁹ independent (Exodus 33:19; Job

⁶ Joe Rigney, *The Things Of Earth: Treasuring God By Enjoying His Gifts* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015, Kindle Edition), chapter 1.

⁷ The following list of attributes does not follow the usual division of communicable and incommunicable attributes, but generally follows the division set forth by Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985, Unabridged One Volume Edition), chapters 12-13, that is, of God's attributes of greatness and goodness. This is not an exhaustive list of God's attributes, but does provide enough for us to see the glorious, beautiful, varied, and praiseworthy character of God.

⁸ Joel Beeke, Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine For Life* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012), 61: "Negatively, simplicity denies that there is one thing and another in God. Positively, simplicity affirms that whatever is in God is God. Simplicity, then, is God's incommunicable attribute by which the divine nature is conceived by us not only as free from all composition and division, but also incapable of composition and divisibility." In other words, we can distinguish between God's attributes (i.e. different aspects of his nature), but we cannot divide them from each other or suggest that he is mostly love, but sometimes justice or now a God of wrath and at times a God of grace, etc. R.C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty Over All: Understanding The Sovereignty Of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 20-21, adds: "God, however, has no parts. He is a whole—a unity and simplicity.... To say that God is one [as in Dt. 6:4] or that he has no parts is to say that he cannot be divided. It reminds us that when we speak of God's attributes, we are making distinctions but not separating.... God is of a piece. He is a unity, a whole. When we speak of his sovereignty, we do not set aside his grace, or vice versa."

⁹ T. H. L. Parker ("Sovereignty Of God," in *A Dictionary Of Christian Theology* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969], 317, explains that God is sovereign means that "he occupies the unique position of lordship, which none can take from him.... He reigns as king, actively ruling...." God's sovereignty pertains to all events, persons, and creatures in the world (1 Sam. 1:5; Prov. 16:4; 21:1; Dan. 2:20-21; 4:25, 35; Eph. 1:11; James 4:13-17; 1 Pt. 1:6-9; 4:19). This sovereignty is exercised through the works of creation and providence.

41:11; Acts 17:24-25; Rom. 9:15);¹⁰ happy and fully satisfied (Prov. 8:30-31; 1 Tim. 1:11; 6:15); omnipotent (Is. 59:1; Jer.32:27; Mt. 19:26);¹¹ omniscient (Pss. 90:8; 147:5; Jer. 32:19);¹² omnipresent (Ps. 139:7-10); jealous (Ezek. 39:25; Zech. 8:2);¹³ wrathful against sin (Exodus 34:7; Ps. 11:5; Prov. 11:20; Rom. 18); holy (Lev. 19:2; Ps.99:9; Is. 6:3; 30:11, 12, 15);¹⁴ righteous (Is. 24:16; Jer. 9:24);¹⁵ just (Jer. 9:24; Rom. 3:26); true (Nu. 23:19; Tit. 1:2); faithful (Lam. 3:23); wise (Prov. 2:6; James 3:17); good (Ex. 33:19; Ps. 25:7-8; Mk. 10:18; Titus 3:4);¹⁶

¹⁰ This is sometimes termed aseity.

¹¹ Omnipotence speaks of God's ability to do all his holy will, i.e. all he desires, that does not contradict his nature (which would contradict the attribute of righteousness, which communicates God always acts in accordance with his nature). This means God can do that which is outside the bounds of what normally happens in the world according to natural laws (e.g. he can resurrect the dead, immediately turn water into wine, heal the sick, etc.), but he cannot sin and he cannot do the logically impossible (e.g. make a square circle or married bachelor).

¹² God knows all things past, present, future, actual, and possible.

¹³ This attribute communicates that God is very zealous to preserve his reputation and to carry out his promises to his people.

¹⁴ God's holiness consists in this, he is set apart. That is the basic meaning of "holy." However, what is he set apart unto? I believe the answer, implied in the parallelism found in Is. 6:3, is that he is set apart to himself, i.e. committed to his own glory. I am indebted for this insight to Jonathan Leeman, *The Church And The Surprising Offense Of God's Love* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 99f. That he is set apart to himself would include the fact there is no darkness (including sin) in him (Is. 59:2; 1 Jn. 1:5) and that he hates what opposes him (he hates sin). Stephen Charnock, *Discourses Upon The Existence And Attributes Of God* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1840), 470 (cited in Beeke, Jones, *A Puritan Theology*, 76), writes: "Far from being an infinite monster, God possesses a perfect and unpolluted freedom from all evil."

¹⁵ God's righteousness reminds us that God always does that which is right (in accordance with his own character, and so he always acts in accordance with his character—meaning he always acts to glorify himself, which results in his saving sinners and also judging sinners. See Pss. 89:16b; 93:2; 132:9, 16; Is. 24:7-13, 14-16a; 26:10; Jer. 33:16; Zech. 9:9; Rom. 1:17

Since our definitions of righteousness, holiness, and goodness are similar, it is necessary for us to see how they differ. Typically, holiness connotes more of the end to which God is set apart and so he is set apart from anything opposed; righteousness connotes that he positively does that which is in accordance with his character, and goodness speaks of the works of God that flow from his nature or righteousness—especially how they are beneficial to the ends he desires.

¹⁶ The word "good" connotes what is "proper; fit...well adapted to the end." (Webster's, 1828) As such, it can mean in different contexts: "Complete or sufficiently perfect in its kind;" "having moral qualities best adapted to its design and use, or the qualities which God's law requires...." (Webster's, 1828)

That God is good seems to mean that he always acts in such a way that what he does is proper, fit, well adapted to his character and the God-glorifying, holy ends he desires. The goodness of God is ultimately revealed to us in Jesus Christ (Titus 3:4)—i.e. God's goodness speaks of his always acting in accordance with his end of glorifying himself through the judgment of sin and the saving of sinners. Another way to say this is the way Grudem (*Systematic*, 197)

gracious (Ex. 33:19; 34:6; Jer. 9:24; Rom. 3:26);¹⁷ merciful (Ex. 33:19; 34:6-7; Jer. 9:24; Rom. 3:26);¹⁸ kind (Eph. 2:7); and loving (Ex. 34:6-7; Dt. 7:7-8; Ps. 136; Jer. 9:24; John 3:16; Rom. 3:26 [in light of 5:6, 8]; 1 John 4:8).¹⁹

The picture, then, the Bible gives of the God who is there, is of a triune God eternally and fully satisfied, content, and in perfect community. This has never changed and will not. As such, he did not need to create anything at all as if he lacked something. His creation, instead, was out an overflow of his Trinitarian fullness and joy as a God who is always and ever fully committed to his own glory and communicating that glory.²⁰ God's decision in that logical moment in eternity past to create was similar, then, to a husband who buys flowers for his wife on the way home (in the context of a very strong loving marriage) and gives them to her simply out of a fullness of joy in her and an overflow of love for her, even though it is not a birthday, anniversary, a time of conflict, or any other occasion that might put him in debt, a situation that suggests duty, or a period of marriage in which he lacks her full love and relationship.

puts it: "God is the final standard of good and all that God is and does is worthy of approval...worthy of his own approval" for it fits properly with his ends. It must always be remembered that God is the ultimate standard by which goodness, holiness, righteousness, justice, love, etc. are all defined and measured (Lev. 19:2).

¹⁷ God's grace speaks of his favor toward his creatures, a favor that is unmerited.

¹⁸ God's mercy speaks of his unmerited favor toward his creatures whereby he reaches out to them and helps them in their plight.

¹⁹ For the reality that God's love is a complex topic and that Scripture teaches that God has different degrees of love for different kinds of people, see Tom Barnes, *Atonement Matters* (EP Books, 2008), 181ff., as well as D. A. Carson, *The Difficult Doctrine Of The Love Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000). A simple definition of God's love is found in Grudem (Systematic, 198), namely that God "gives of himself to others." This definition understands "love as self-giving for the benefit of others." It ranges from his steadfast love with which he effectively loves those whom he has chosen (cf. Jer. 31:3) all the way to his general love for all whom he has created by which he showers common grace upon them (Mt. 5:45).

²⁰ R. C. Sproul, Jr., *Almighty*, 36-37, agrees.

Since we can imagine humans carrying out decisions and actions that flow, not from need or lack, but from an overflow of what is in them positively, how much more should we be able to imagine God creating and decreeing the world that is out of his fullness and not from any lack!

This point of God's full satisfaction and freedom is important for us to grasp, because what we are about to discover is that God decided to create and bring about the world that is so that all of his attributes—the fullness of his Trinitarian glory—could be put on display in a manner that this glory could be seen for the greatness inherent in it and fully enjoyed by sentient beings.²¹ On the one hand, this should not surprise us, since he has always been a communicating God committed to his glory. Yet, from this, we do not want to conclude something was lacking in God that led to his creation and works of providence. Nor do we want to conclude that God was compelled by anything outside himself to create. God has always and forever will be free. Yet, God's eternal purpose²² in creation and his works of providence flow from his nature, his character, i.e. who he is and what he is like. This leads us to the next point.

The fact that the world emerged from God's eternal purpose to display the fullness of his glory also should not be missed. If God were to bring forth a world that displays all his attributes, for example, those that humans do not as readily see as good and desirable (e.g. his wrath against sin, holiness, righteousness, justice), and also those that are more readily seen as desirable (goodness, graciousness, kindness, and love), then God would need to decree a world as it is—

²¹ By this I mean angels and humans.

²² With insight J. Gresham Machen, *The Christian View Of Man* (Carlisle, Pa.: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1999, repr.), 29-30, helpfully writes about God's decrees and singular purpose that in one sense we could say many, manifold, numerous beyond number are the purposes of God. Yet, there is also a sense in which “we can say that the purposes of God, infinite in number though they may seem to be, are all just one purpose, are all just portions or aspects of **one great plan.**” (emphasis added) He then adds (31): “That is what the [Westminster] Shorter Catechism[, answer 7,] means when it says that the decrees of God are ‘His eternal purpose.’ It is not by chance that the singular number of the word ‘purpose’ is there used. The many decrees all constitute just one purpose or plan. They...form a mighty unity as God Himself is one.”

one in which angels and men are able to make the decisions to sin, a world in which God can display his hatred against sin, but also his love for and mercy toward sinners. In other words, God's decision to create the world he did, one that flowed from his own nature and character, led him freely to create a world that includes sin (and we will discover in Chapters 4-6 how God can ordain this, but not be the morally responsible author of sin). That it would be that kind of world is dependent upon his logically antecedent choices. So, it is a contingent necessity. An example may help us see this accurately.

Suppose an athlete has previously decided to be involved in a sport, to try out for their country's Olympic team, and as a result, they have qualified and so have decided to go to Brazil to compete (as I am writing, the 2016 Summer games in Brazil are underway). As a result, then, it is a contingent necessity they or the team need to purchase a plane ticket to travel to Brazil. Such necessity can exist within truly free chains of decisions. And so it is with God's "need" to create the world as it is.

In this stance we want to say as much as Scripture does about this purpose God has in creating the world that is, but we do not want to say more than what Scripture does. What I will argue in the rest of the chapter is that though we cannot fully and exhaustively explain why God created as he did, we can say what Scripture says—namely, the absolutely free and sovereign God created the world he did to display more fully his glory. "Creation is God's self-expression, the free overflow of his triune personality and life. Creation itself is revelatory, and this revelation is not sporadic, occasional, or restricted to one corner of reality. Rather, God's revelation of himself in creation is pervasive and constant."²³

²³ Rigney, *Treasuring*, ch. 3.

Yet, we do not want to say somehow God was forced to create. “There is no compulsion of any kind resting upon God; He is absolutely sovereign; he can do exactly as He wills.... Yet, He will not act against his nature.”²⁴

It is also important for us to see that since God acts according to his nature (which includes the reality that he is always and forever a communicating God committed to his own glory), he also acts in accordance with his one purpose or plan (Rom. 11:34-36; Eph. 1:6, 11-12, 14).

Again, Machen is helpful:

*...the freedom of God's actions...does not mean that they are purposeless actions; it does not mean that they are undetermined by ends which God has in view. God...has ends in view when He acts. His will must not be thought of as though it were swinging blindly in a sort of vacuum, without relation to His infinite knowledge and wisdom. No, the choices of God's will are always – not sometimes, but always – determined by the ends which His infinite knowledge and His infinite wisdom place before Him.*²⁵

Precision is in order here. I am not saying that “the end justifies the means” with God, as if because God has good ends in view, then it somehow makes all that happens, even evil, righteous. Righteousness and evil are ultimately determined by God in accordance with his own character (Lev. 19:2; Is. 6:1-6; 1 Jn. 1:5). As we will see unfolded in this book, God governs all things, but he does not govern all things in the same manner. In regard to evil, God decreed to allow the morally responsible choices and actions of mankind and angels. That in no way makes

²⁴ Machen, *The Christian View*, 25.

Keathley, *Salvation*, 80-83, wrongly accuses soft determinists of robbing God of his freedom at this point, by saying that God decreed sin so that his glory could be more fully revealed. He wrongly argues that what is being set forth by determinists is that God had to create a world that included sin, as if he were coerced to do so.

²⁵ Machen, *Christian View*, 27-28. It is noteworthy that Machen speaks of God willing in accordance with his knowledge and wisdom. The soft determinist does not deny this. What he denies is that Scripture teaches this takes place in a manner that God is limited by human choices in accordance with this knowledge. Such is the difference between the Calvinist and Molinist.

the evil righteous. It does, however, remind us that God had good and holy ends in view for why he has permitted evil—ends that flow from his holy character.²⁶

Finally, it should be noted that nowhere does Scripture argue the world was actualized based upon God’s simple foreknowledge or middle knowledge that is dependent upon human choices; nor can we say that Scripture leads us in a direction to conclude the world was created in order to preserve indeterministic human freedom.²⁷ Scripture does not make either of those arguments, but instead leads us in another direction.²⁸

Let’s turn to the evidence the Bible does set forth to explain God’s purpose behind his works of creation and providence.

God’s Full And Manifold Self-Glorifying Revelation Of Himself In Creation And Providence

It seems to be instructive that at key times when God is revealing himself, he clarifies that both those attributes more associated with the saving of sinners and also those more associated with the judgment of sinners are emphasized. These passages strongly suggest to us that God’s ultimate purpose in his works of creation and providence—to display his glory—involves a full display of his manifold attributes.

²⁶ For this paragraph I am dependent upon John S. Feinberg, *The Many Faces of Evil: Theological Systems And The Problem of Evil* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2004, repr., Kindle Edition), chapter 2. William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility Of Divine Foreknowledge And Human Freedom* (Eugene, Or.: Wipf And Stock Publishers, 1999, repr.), 47, also argues that God permitted evil, in part, for the ultimate good: “...it seems plausible that God permits some evil in order to bring about a greater good.”

²⁷ Someone might quickly say, “Tom, no one argues that indeterministic human freedom is the ultimate purpose for God’s creation. Molinists can and do argue that God created ultimately for his own glory.” This is all true. My point is that indeterministic human freedom is not even a penultimate or antepenultimate purpose.

²⁸ John S. Feinberg, *No One Like Him: The Doctrine Of God* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), 531-36, rightly argues that the deciding factor for God in what he decreed was not prescience in regard to libertarian freedom. Rather, it was his glory, i.e. the display of his attributes, including judgment and wrath, as well as mercy and grace, among his creatures.

Exodus 4-14:

We especially see this truth in the plague and pre-plague narratives of Exodus 4-14.²⁹ We need to begin by understanding what happens in these chapters, how God’s sovereignty and human responsibility relate to one another, especially in regard to Pharaoh’s heart hardening, and then finally see why these events happened in the manner they did.

What we discover in these chapters is Moses returning to Egypt from Midian after his divine call to lead Israel out of Egypt (Ex. 4:18-31), a place where they had been for over 400 years (Gen. 15:13) and a place where they now served as slaves under harsh conditions (Ex. 1:8-2:25); the initial meetings with Moses and his brother, Aaron, before the Pharaoh to request that he let Israel leave Egypt—requests that Pharaoh denied (5:1-7:7); and then the outworking of ten plagues that God brought upon Egypt—designed not only to increase the tension and display the hardness of Pharaoh’s heart, but also to magnify God’s glory to even a greater degree in the eyes of the Egyptians and Israelites when God did bring his people out of the land of slavery (cf. Ex. 7:3-5, 17; 10:1; 11:19; 14:4; 18:11).

A big question emerges from these chapters that deal with a hard-hearted Egyptian Pharaoh that repeatedly refused to let Israel leave: Did he harden his own heart against God or did God harden Pharaoh’s heart? If it was some of both, how do the two actors relate to each other and to

²⁹ This is a formative passage in the biblical canon for understanding God. Rather than trying to establish a canon within the canon, my point is that this is one of many passages we will look at in this chapter that address key points in the Bible’s revelation of redemptive history—namely, what God is doing through history to save his people, how he is doing it, and what he is like as he does it. In other words, these are implied “highlighted” passages. Here is why. These chapters, found in Exodus, are not only part of the Torah or Pentateuch, books foundational to the rest of the Bible, but they also are found within the narrative of the exodus of Israel from Egypt. This exodus becomes not only a type of fuller and more ultimate salvation for God’s people under the Old Covenant (e.g. Mic. 7:15-19), it also becomes a type of the future more ultimate salvation God will bring to his people in the end times, a new exodus (e.g. Pss. 90-106 [Book 4 Of The Psalter]; Is. 40:3; 42:15-17; 48:21; 49:8ff.), that is ultimately fulfilled in the Christ (Lk. 9:31; Rev. 8ff.). These chapters, then, seem crucial in setting direction for what God is doing in history, how he does it, and what he is like.

these events? Our answers not only have much potentially to teach us about God's sovereignty and human freedom, but also God's purposes behind his decrees.³⁰

In reference to Pharaoh, his refusal to let Israel go, and in particular the greater suffering the first request for release (5:1) led to (cf. 5:6-14), the cause of the greater hardship is attributed both to the LORD (5:22) and to Pharaoh (5:23) in synthetically parallel clauses: "Then Moses turned to the LORD and said, 'O LORD, why have you done evil to this people? ...For since I came to Pharaoh to speak in your name, he has done evil to this people....'"³¹ If Moses' words in this text accurately portray how the events are unfolding, then causation is attributed both to God and to Pharaoh. The rest of the hardening narratives in Exodus 4-14 also demonstrate this dual causation, with God serving as the ultimate cause of the hardening to Pharaoh. This hardening takes place so that God might receive greater glory as his power, mercy, and justice are all highlighted even more in light of Pharaoh's obstinacy and rebellion. The following is a summary of these texts in Exodus.

The LORD tells Moses ahead of time he knows that the king of Egypt will not let Israel go unless compelled by a strong hand (3:18-20). I must admit that this text could fit with a Molinist understanding of Scripture—namely that what is being communicated here is in line with God's middle knowledge. However, I believe it is more likely, in light of other texts in these chapters (e.g. 4:21; 7:5; 9:15-16; 10:1-2; 14:4, 17, 18), that God takes a more decisive role in Pharaoh's heart and the outworking of the events than what Molinists would argue. Nevertheless, a Molinist understanding is possible at this point.

³⁰ Throughout this treatment of Exodus 4-14 I am dependent upon G. K. Beale, "An Exegetical And Theological Consideration Of The Hardening Of Pharaoh's Heart In Exodus 4-14 And Romans 9," *TrinJ*, 5, 2 (1984): 129-154.

³¹ What we have in 5:22-23 is a Hiphil, perfect, 2nd person, masculine singular of the verb translated "do evil" (v. 22) and a Hiphil, perfect, 3rd person, masculine, singular, of "do evil" (v. 23). The Hebrew Hiphil expresses causation.

The LORD commands Moses to perform before Pharaoh all the miracles (signs) he has put in his power, but that God would harden Pharaoh's heart³² with the penultimate purpose that he would not let Israel go (4:21).³³ We see the first fulfillment of 4:21 when Pharaoh shows he does not know the LORD and, by implication from the whole hardening narrative, does not fear him (5:2). It is as a result of this first request that things get worse for Israel before they get better (5:6-21). As stated above, it is clarified in 5:22-23 that both the LORD and Pharaoh are causes in the difficulties the Israelites are facing. It must be admitted at this point that the concurrence present in this text could be explained both by Molinists (in accordance with middle knowledge) and by Calvinists.

Prior to the plagues, the LORD once again foretells to Moses and Aaron that he will harden Pharaoh's heart, so the king will not decide to let them go—and this time it is for the penultimate purpose that the Egyptians will know he is *Yahweh*, the only true God (7:1-5).³⁴ In the last pre-plague narrative we read that Pharaoh's heart had previously become hard so he did not listen to

³² Beale, "An Exegetical:" 132-33, comments on the use of "heart." "In the OT 'heart' (*leb*) may denote intellectual activity (204 times), emotional activity (166 times), volitional activities (195 times), and personality or character. The heart is also seen to be spiritual in that many of its decisions concern one's religio-ethical relationship with God. Perhaps the heart may be seen as that faculty which combines into a psychical unity the volitional, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of a person. Among these the volitional, decision-making aspects should be viewed as primary but always influenced by the thoughts and emotions, all of which impinge on the spiritual. Consequently, the heart is often viewed as the inner, spiritual center of one's relationship to God." He goes on to show that in Egypt there was a similar meaning as in the Old Testament. In Egypt the heart was even more emphasized, even to the point that it was virtually viewed as "a second being of man." "The heart was also seen as a divine instrument through which a god directed a man and the organ by which man could receive and comprehend divine commandments."

³³ I say it is the penultimate purpose because the ultimate purpose throughout this section of Exodus is that the Egyptians, Israelites, and even others who hear what happened might ascribe glory to God—after another penultimate or secondary purpose takes place—namely growing in their knowledge of the true God, what he did, and how he did it (7:3-5, 17; 10:1; 11:19; 14:4; 18:11). The penultimate or secondary purpose of Pharaoh's obstinate heart served to heighten the difficulty of the situation, as well as God's power in bringing his people out of Egypt.

³⁴ In 7:3a we read of God's prediction: "But I will harden Pharaoh's heart...." Here we have the Hiphil, 1st person, common, singular, from the verb, *qashah*. God, then, has some causative relationship to the hardening of Pharaoh's heart. I propose that in light of those passages that speak of Pharaoh hardening his own heart (e.g. 8:15), the causation on the part of God is to be seen in light of God bringing about what he has decreed through secondary causes—the movements and volition of Pharaoh's heart and circumstances surrounding Pharaoh.

Moses and Aaron when they come before him with a release request and miracle—and this just as God had predicted—which all suggests Pharaoh’s own volitional actions were emerging from the LORD’s sovereign work (7:13).³⁵ As Beale explains about the last clause in 7:13, “as the LORD said” (or predicted): It is perhaps one of the most significant clauses in the whole pre-plague and plague narrative complex since an examination of the 200 times it is employed in the Pentateuch shows there is an “exact correspondence character” to this phrase, demonstrating that what is taking place exactly corresponds to an earlier prediction. Since this is the case, we must go back to the previous hardening predictions (cf. 4:21; 5:2), wherein they have already established Yahweh as the ultimate cause behind Pharaoh’s real volitional stubbornness.³⁶

At this point we are moving into such a decisive and causative relationship of God to Pharaoh’s heart hardening that we cannot conclude (as Molinism would demand) that Pharaoh’s heart hardening must originate in his own heart apart from any determinative causative relationship of God to the king’s will.

In the first plague narrative the LORD reveals to Moses the pre-existing condition of Pharaoh’s hardened heart (7:14)—i.e. emerging from God’s previous sovereign action—and so Pharaoh’s heart remained hardened, just as the LORD had predicted and emerging from the LORD’s sovereign action (7:15-22, esp. 22b);³⁷ in the second plague narrative we are told that Pharaoh hardens his own heart (8:1-15, esp. 15); in the third his heart remains hardened, as God

³⁵ For the translation, “And Pharaoh’s heart had previously become hard,” see Beale, “An Exegetical:” 139.

³⁶ Beale, “An Exegetical:” 140-41.

³⁷ In verse 22 we find the same kind of constructions as in 7:13, so it is a continual state of rebellion and this state continues such that Pharaoh refused to listen and this happened exactly as the LORD predicted—and so it continues to go back to what the LORD had said and done previously. As such, we are still dealing with the LORD as the ultimate cause behind Pharaoh’s heart hardness.

predicted and emerging from his sovereign action (8:16-19, esp. 19);³⁸ in the fourth we discover an additional hardening of Pharaoh's heart—attributed to the Egyptian king (8:20-32);³⁹ in the fifth his heart remains in its preexisting condition of hardness (9:1-7, esp. 7); in the sixth (9:13-35) we discover the explicit statement that the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart and so the king did not permit release, as God had predicted (9:8-12, esp. 12);⁴⁰ in the seventh we see that the LORD is clearly behind the plagues (14), he could have easily killed Pharaoh and the Egyptians, but hasn't since he had raised up Pharaoh and these circumstances for the penultimate purpose of demonstrating his power and reputation (15-16), and that Pharaoh and his servants harden their hearts against the LORD and lack true fear of him and so do not allow the release (17-34), and all of this ultimately goes back to God's sovereign plan and prediction (35);⁴¹ in the eighth (10:1-2) we discover God is the ultimate cause of Pharaoh's hardening for the penultimate purpose that Israel may know he is Yahweh, the only true God (1-2), and we see it repeated that the LORD is the ultimate cause of the hardening (10:20); and in the ninth it is made clear that the LORD is the ultimate cause of the hardness of Pharaoh's heart (10:21-29, esp. 29).

In the introduction to the death narrative (11:1-10) an apparent summary is given that attributes the ultimate causation of Pharaoh's hardened heart to the LORD (11:1-10, esp. 10) for the antepenultimate purpose that God's wonders might be multiplied in Egypt (11:9). In the

³⁸ See the treatment of 7:13 and 7:22 above for the clause, "as the LORD said" (or predicted) and the impact it has on the text.

³⁹ The phrase "this time also" most likely suggests a connection back into previous hardening statements. We see here that Pharaoh's hardening of his own heart shows his decisions and actions are truly his own, even though they are being ultimately brought about by God's decrees.

⁴⁰ In this text we are once again reminded that Pharaoh's decisions and actions, though truly his own, are ultimately happening because of the sovereign purpose of the LORD.

⁴¹ See the treatment of 7:13, 22 and 8:19 above for the clause, "as the LORD said" (or predicted) and the impact it has on the text.

second major phase of the hardening (14:1-31) the LORD predicts that he will harden the heart of Pharaoh (14:4) and he in fact does this very thing (14:8) for the antepenultimate purpose that the Egyptians would pursue the Israelites as they leave (14:8) and all of this for the ultimate purpose of the LORD's glory (14:4, 17, 18).⁴²

In summary, Greg Beale helpfully explains the overarching purpose of these chapters:

As the narratives develop there is a thematic progression with respect to the purpose of the hardening.... That the uniqueness of Yahweh's omnipotence would be demonstrated to the Egyptians (7:17; 8:6[10, 18[22]; 9:16; 10:1-2; 14:4, 17-18).... That Yahweh's acts would become a memorial in Israel and its later generations (10:1-2; 13:14-16); then 14:4, 17, 18 summarizes the whole purpose of the...program: it is for Yahweh's glory.... Having said this, the overarching theme of Exodus 4-14 may now be stated: Yahweh hardens Pharaoh's heart primarily to create an Israelite [redemptive history]...which culminate[s] in Yahweh's glory. Yahweh caused the kabad [heaviness] of Israel's bondage (Ps 105:25; Exodus 5:9) and the kabad [heaviness] of Pharaoh's heart, both of which culminate in his own [heaviness/glory] (Exodus 14:4,17, 18)."⁴³

If we have read these chapters correctly, not only must we conclude that God was not merely decreeing Pharaoh's actions based upon his middle knowledge of what Pharaoh would do in certain sets of circumstances—preserving the indeterministic freedom of the king—rather we must conclude that God ordained these events that he might magnify his own attributes—namely that he would be shown to be both a God who hates and judges sin, but at the same time loves and saves sinners. Given the fact that this theme is repeated throughout Scripture (as we are about to see), it causes us to lean in the direction that sees God's eternal purpose for his works of creation and providence arising out of his desire to put on display his manifold attributes, and this includes creating a world in which angels and humans sin, death is present, brokenness shrouds all of existence, and salvation is desperately needed.

⁴² Beale, "An Exegetical:" 148-49, explains that even when Pharaoh is the subject of the hardening, or when the subject is unmentioned, these statements describe a resulting condition traceable to a previous hardening action caused by God (cf. 7:13, 14, 22; 8:15[19]; 9:7, 35). Therefore these statements cannot refer to Pharaoh independently hardening his heart, as some commentators argue.

⁴³ Beale, "An Exegetical:" 149.

Exodus 33:12-34:9:

The next key passage that displays God's purpose in his works of creation and providence is Exodus 33:12-34:9.⁴⁴ In order to know for sure that the LORD would go up in the midst of and show favor to such a stiff-necked people (Exodus 33:12-17, in light of Exodus 32), Moses made the following request of the LORD: "Please show me your glory" (33:18).⁴⁵ The LORD immediately answered Moses with these words (33:19): "I will make all my goodness pass before you⁴⁶ and will proclaim before you my name 'the LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy."

Several things are of interest in God's initial answer. To begin, the goodness of God is associated here with his glory (also driven home by the translation "glory" here in the Septuagint). Additionally, the goodness of God is associated with God's independence in the bestowal of his grace and mercy as shown in the following two clauses ("And I will be gracious...mercy."). The figure of speech used here is known as *idem per idem*. John Piper writes about this idiom:

Other examples of the idiom are 4:13 ("I pray, Lord, send now by the hand you will send"); 16:23 ("Bake what you will bake, boil what you will boil"); 1 Sam. 23:13 ("They went about where they went about"); 2 Sam. 15:20 ("Shall I make you go with us while I go where I go"); 2 Kings 8:1

⁴⁴ As with the previous chapters out of Exodus we just examined, so with these, we have texts part of the exodus and formative for God's redemptive history. As we will discover in this text, in the midst of this key and formative narrative God reveals to Moses what he is like, his glory. We should sit up and take notice!

⁴⁵ *har'ani na' 'eth k'bodeka*: The Hiphil imperative (translated "show me") communicates that Moses is requesting that the LORD make his glory appear, that he cause it to be revealed to Moses. I am indebted to John Piper, "Prolegomena To Understanding Romans 9:14-15: An Interpretation of Exodus 33:19," JETS, 22, 3 (September 1979): 207-208, for the insight regarding how Moses' desire to have Yahweh go with him and the people and how his desire to see God's glory are connected. Piper (208) writes: "...the request to see God's glory should be understood in this context as a desire to have God confirm his astonishing willingness to show his favor to a stiffnecked, idolatrous people (33:16-17). The confirmation is to consist in a revelation of that glory which is the ground or source of such great mercy."

⁴⁶ *'aniy 'a'abiyir cal tubiy 'al panika*: Lit. "I myself will make to pass all my goodness before you." The LXX translates "my goodness" (Hebrew noun *tub*) as *te doxe mou* ("my glory").

(“Sojourn where you sojourn”). By leaving the action unspecified the force of this idiom is to preserve the freedom of the subject to perform the action in whatever way he pleases. By simply repeating the action without adding any stipulations the idem per idem formula makes clear that the way the action is executed is determined by the will of the subject within the limits of prevailing circumstances. Therefore when God says, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and I will be merciful to whom I will be merciful,” he is stressing that there are no stipulations outside his own counsel or will that determine the disposal of his mercy and grace. As Childs says, “The circular idem per idem formula of the name – I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious – is closely akin to the name in Ex. 3:14 – I am who I am – and testifies by its tautology to the freedom of God in making known his self-contained being.”⁴⁷

What is more, since God, in his revelation of his glory and name not only proclaims his mercy, grace, patience, love, and faithfulness, but also his wrath and judgment toward sin (Ex. 34:6-7), we must also conclude that the goodness of God does in fact speak more about the reality his actions always fit with his character and the ends that emerge from that character than that he is benevolent (in the sense that many today might define it). God’s goodness includes both those attributes more associated with salvation and those more associated with judgment. (See also my definition of “good” above in the discussion about God’s attributes)

We also do not want to miss that in God’s answer he says (33:19): “I...will proclaim before you my name, ‘the LORD.’”⁴⁸ In other words, God is proclaiming his reputation, the essence of what he is and is like, and doing this in his greatest name, *Yahweh*. The best understanding of what God is doing here appears to be that he is referring back, in part, to his self-disclosure to Moses in Exodus 3:14, when God called Moses to go back to Egypt and lead Israel out of bondage, and there said that his name is “I am who I am...I am.”

*What’s more, some Hebrew scholars believe that the name *Yahweh* is actually based on the causative form of the Hebrew verb *hayah*, ‘to be.’ These scholars argue that we should interpret the*

⁴⁷ Piper, “Prolegomena,” 209-10.

⁴⁸ *wəqara’tiy bəshem Yahweh ləphaneyka*: “Lit. “And I will proclaim my name, *Yahweh*, before you.”

name Yahweh as 'The One Who Causes All Things To Be That Are,' or 'The Causer Of All Things' for short. Thus, the name Yahweh stresses the absolute sovereignty of God over all of creation."⁴⁹

Joe Rigney adds: "Apart from creation, he is God, I am, the self-existent one. But in relation to creation, he is *Yahweh*, the causer of all things. Thus, 'I am' emphasizes God-as-God; *Yahweh* emphasizes God-as-author."⁵⁰

In other words, he is the self-existent, ever-present, immutable God who has always been, the ultimate cause of all, and thus can carry out the purposes he has and so can show himself faithful and powerful to his people. God is saying that this name, as such, also implies that, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." In other words, the self-existent, independent, ever-present, immutable God, is gracious and merciful upon those whom he chooses to be gracious and merciful and this sovereign freedom, in part, defines his goodness.

In context, it also appears that God's character, as he reveals it here, is intended to display that he both judges sin and sinners and saves sinners. For, as God reveals himself to Moses, here is what we read (Exodus 34:5-7):

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."

⁴⁹ Rigney, *The Things Of Earth*, ch. 2, commenting on Exodus 3:14 and its relation to *Yahweh*, cites Douglas K. Stuart, *Exodus* (Nashville, Tn: Broadman, 2006), 121.

⁵⁰ Rigney, *The Things Of Earth*, ch. 2.

We need to notice that again the LORD says he is revealing his name, the essence of who he is and what he is like. In 33:19 he emphasizes his independence in showing mercy and grace. Here, he appears to emphasize a wide array of attributes that, at least in part, show Moses and the reader of Exodus three key matters that are pertinent for our present discussion. First, when God reveals the essence of who he is, i.e. his glory, he reveals the broad range of his attributes. Though this text does not explicitly say all his attributes are in view, it at least makes the reader lean in that direction.

Second, when God reveals the essence of who he is, i.e. his glory, he reveals both that he is a God who saves sinners and a God who judges sinners. In a text that is located in a foundational book of all the Scriptures and where God is displaying his glory, the essence of who he is, we are told that he is a God who saves sinners and judges sinners. In other words, if we are to see who God is, we cannot see him in any full way apart from seeing the full range of his attributes and what we might want to term both sides of the divine spectrum—namely that he loves and saves sinners, but also hates sin along with judging sinners.

Third, when God reveals who he is and shows his glory, he deems it important to reveal his attribute of independence (i.e. aseity)—his sovereign freedom. In context it appears that the reason this is so important is because if God's plans must be contingent upon the human will, then there would be no way for God to go forward with Moses and Israel. They simply would not deserve it. Yet, God, who can work in mankind to bring about what pleases him and who can change man, has a way forward that he might be present with them and continue to work among them. What is more, God is a forgiving God and so can pardon their iniquity and sin (cf. 34:9) so that they can be reconciled to God.⁵¹

⁵¹ It also should not be missed that when God reveals himself, when he displays his glory, the reaction of Moses is the chief purpose God has given to man, i.e. he worships him. Exodus 34:8 reads: "And Moses quickly bowed his

Given what we have just discovered from Exodus 33-34, James Hamilton is accurate when he writes: “I would suggest that the glory of God is the weight of the majestic goodness of who God is, and the resulting name, or reputation, that he gains from his revelation of himself as Creator, Sustainer, Judge, and Redeemer, perfect in justice and mercy, loving-kindness and truth.”⁵² Hamilton is also correct when he argues that at the core of the metanarrative of Scripture is the theme “the glory of God in salvation through judgment.”—in other words God displays his manifold attributes.⁵³

Deuteronomy 7:6-8

This passage reinforces the purpose behind the Exodus 4-14 chapters above, as well as the focus on God’s sovereign grace, as we saw in Exodus 33:12-34:9. In it we discover that God created Israel as a collective people to be set apart unto him, unto his glory:

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. ⁷ It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the LORD set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, ⁸ but it is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

More specifically, he set them apart and saved them with his mighty hand and redeemed them from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh, based upon his sovereign grace. In other words, God determined to set his love upon them and chose them to their special purpose of showing forth the worth of the divine King of kings (what “treasured possession” appears to

head toward the earth and worshiped.” This fits with God’s ultimate purpose being that of his glory and the enjoyment of this glory by sentient beings.

⁵² James M. Hamilton, Jr. *God’s Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010, Kindle Ed.), ch. 1, pages 37-66.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

mean) not because of anything in them that commended them to him. Rather, he chose to love them and set them apart unto this purpose because he loved them.

Though this passage may not be decisive, it does make us move in the direction of seeing that the purpose for which God has decreed what he has is ultimately to glorify himself and he is moved internally for this purpose, not externally (i.e. in any way dependent upon the options human choices make available to him). If we had other passages that explained God's eternal purpose in accordance with his middle knowledge, we might search for a way to interpret this text in that direction. However, as I will continually argue in this book, we don't have those passages and there is nothing in this passage that would suggest that God has decreed what he has in light of his middle knowledge of what people would do in certain circumstances. In fact, its emphasis upon his internal motivation, as opposed to external, seems to oppose this possibility.

That God has created and ordered the world that is (here including his choice of Israel as his treasured possession) to put on display his manifold attributes is not explicit in this text. But implicitly that purpose on the part of God fits with this text. God decreed their bondage and their deliverance that they and others might see he is both a God who judges sin (Pharaoh's, Egypt's, Israel's as they were coming out of Egypt and rebelled against God) and who loves and saves sinners.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

The next text is Jeremiah 9:23-24. In a book in which the prophet is instructing Judah on the reason for the Babylonian exile (the unfaithfulness of Judah in the face of the LORD's faithfulness), it is revealed that those who are supposed to be God's people are adulterers (9:2), treacherous people (9:2), who continually do evil and don't truly know the LORD (9:3). What is

more, they talk a good game of faith, but don't walk their talk (9:8). At the bottom of all this is that they have followed after other gods (9:14; 10:1ff.) because their hearts are not changed—they are no different than the other nations (9:25-26). This is why God is bringing judgment upon them (9:12-22).

In the midst of this message, the prophet clarifies what does please the LORD. In other words, if the people want to turn back to him, what must they turn away from and how do they turn back to the true God? Consider what we read in Jeremiah 9:23-24:

Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, ²⁴ but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD."

To "boast" (*halal*) here appears to connote trust, for typically what a person is boasting about they are, at least to some degree, trusting in and saying this is what really matters. This is how this verb is used elsewhere in Jeremiah.⁵⁴ So, the LORD is telling Judah not to trust in their own insightful skill for life (wisdom), their own ability (might), or their own resources (wealth) when it comes to salvation, security, purpose, and what ultimately matters. Instead, they should trust in a genuine knowledge of the LORD, not just an awareness of him or a knowledge about him, but a true knowledge of him that includes an intimate awareness and experience of what he is like.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ In Jeremiah 4:2 it speaks of true faith in the LORD. In Jeremiah 49:4 it is found in a passage in which God is announcing judgment on Ammon and this nation is accused of the following: "you boast of your valleys...who trusted in her treasures...." In other words, to boast is parallel to "trust."

It is particularly in the Hithpael form (the causative-reflexive form) that this verb takes on this connotation. As such, it is expressing something like this: "Make one's own boast or praise." This same connotation of the Hithpael of this verb is found elsewhere: Pss. 34:2; 49:6; 63:11; 64:10; Is. 41:16; 45:25. It seems as if what the hithpael is emphasizing is not that the movement of faith is only or ultimately from our own self or heart (as if God cannot be an ultimate cause). Rather, it is emphasizing that it is from our heart. It truly is a faith that is ours.

⁵⁵ I understand the knowledge to be more than mental assent of data because earlier in this chapter Judah is charged with not truly knowing God (9:3), even though they know much about him—enough where they know he had covenanted with them and expressed his presence with them through the temple, but they do not truly know him or else they would not have a magical view of the temple—i.e. we can't be hurt because we have the temple—even if we are not truly following him! (7:1-29) This true knowledge leads to a changed life.

And, what is the LORD like? What will the person of true faith know? “That I am the LORD who exercises steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth.” Note the breadth of God’s self-revelation: He is a God who commits himself to loyal steadfast love through which he saves sinners, he is a God who always acts in accordance with his character when it comes to judgments passed down upon his creatures (this includes both standing against the wicked and standing up in behalf of the oppressed), and he is a God who always does right, which is defined by his character and results in saving sinners and judging those who reject and oppose him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24, like John 17:3,⁵⁶ reveals that at the essence of true life in the true God is a knowledge of him that includes an understanding of both those attributes that are more associated with salvation and those more associated with judgment. God reveals himself in a full-orbed manner. This was not only clarified in the foundational book of Exodus, but now in a very important text in Jeremiah where the prophet is unveiling to God’s erring nation why it is they are facing exile and what the path is back to him.

This pattern of God revealing the full breadth of his attributes does not end with the Old Covenant. It becomes even sharper in the New. The next passage that we will consider is Romans 3:26.

Romans 3:26

In a letter written to the church in Rome somewhere around A.D. 56-57, the apostle is explaining the need for the gospel (1:18-3:20), what this gospel is that he preaches (3:21-8:39), and the implications of this gospel (12:1ff. and interspersed throughout chapters 1-8 [see

The trajectory of the book of Jeremiah appears to be that this heart-and-behavior-shaping knowledge comes only through a gracious transformation by the hand of the LORD that must precede it (cf. Jer. 31:31-34; 32:40).

⁵⁶ “And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”

especially 6:1-23; 8:1-39]) so that he can unite a divided church (see 12:9-21; 14:1-15:7) and also bring them on board with his desired future mission (15:24-25).

The paragraph of 3:21-26 is pivotal in Paul's argument. As he moves from showing how the immoral Gentile, the moral man, and the Jew are all sinners rightly under the judgment of God and in need of God's grace (1:18-3:20) to his presentation of how one is made right with God, here is what he writes:

- There has been a salvation-historical shift so that God's righteousness is now revealed apart from the law (no longer under the covenant of the law) and this change was foretold by the Old Testament. Rom. 3:21 reads: "But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it...."
- This righteousness of God is imputed to a person through faith in Jesus Christ—and this is what happens for all who believe in him. After all, all have sinned, all are in need of salvation, and all are saved, that is, declared righteous by grace, as a gift, and this all through the redemption accomplished by Jesus Christ. Rom. 3:22-24 read: "...the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...."
- The reason redemption is in Jesus Christ is because God the Father put Jesus Christ forward as a sacrifice that removes his wrath from the sinner and reconciles the sinner to him. The results of the work of this sacrifice are applied by faith. Rom. 3:25a reads: "whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith."
- Part of the purpose of the Father putting forth Jesus Christ as this sacrifice was to display God's righteousness (i.e. that he always operates in accordance with his character when it comes to how he deals with man). The reason this was needed is because in a very real sense he passed over the sins of believers under the Old Covenant. Rom. 3:25b reads: "This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins."⁵⁷

⁵⁷ I take this to mean virtually the same as the line-of-thought in Hebrews 8-10, where we discover that the sacrifices in the Old Covenant taught people the need for sin's penalty to be paid and that the only way a person could be forgiven and reconciled to God was through penal substitutionary atonement. However, the bloody sacrificial death of bulls and goats could never remove sin. They were a type, a blueprint, of the coming true and ultimate sacrifice of Jesus Christ. In that sense God passed over the sins of Old Covenant believers (namely, the penalty was not yet paid). Yet, they were reconciled to God through genuine faith as they looked to him for forgiveness in faith-fueled obedience, exercised through their sacrifices—as they leaned forward toward the Messiah, the coming suffering servant who would die in their place (Is. 52:13-53:12). The implication of this seems to be that Jesus Christ has paid the sin penalty not only for all presently alive in his day who would believe in him or all those in the future who would believe in him, but also all who in the past had believed in God in the hope of a coming Savior.

- To make the point of 3:25b even clearer, Paul explains that God showing forth his righteousness more clearly in the sacrifice of Jesus involves showing that he is at one and the same time a God who judges sinners according to justice and a God who saves sinners by declaring them to be righteous in Christ. Rom. 3:26 reads: “It was to show his righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

The reason we have come to this paragraph is found in the verse 26 clause, “that he might be righteous and the one who declares righteous the one who has faith in Jesus.”⁵⁸ Paul has argued that the righteousness of God is revealed in the gospel (1:17), the very gospel that is the power of God for salvation (1:16) and growth (1:11-15; 16:25), and the very gospel that is needed because God rightly judges the sin of all people, regardless of their place in life (1:18-3:20). Based upon the far and near contexts, Paul is teaching that the way God saves is in keeping with and not opposed to his character.

So, in these last days when God has sent into the world the ultimate communication of himself, his Son (John 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-3), to reveal who God is (i.e. to glorify him [John 17:1-5] so that people can know him, it is once again clear that when God reveals himself he desires to give a picture of the full breadth of who he is—including those attributes that are more associated with his judgment and those with his salvation. Or, put more simply, that we can see he is “just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

Now, why have I belabored this point? Because it gives us some insight into why God created the world that he did, a world that includes sin and sinful people, as well as the salvation of sinners. An eternally communal and communicating God who also has eternally been the God

The point of Rom. 3:25b is that God does not save in a way that he denies his righteousness. If he had never sent a sufficient sacrifice for sins, then he would have denied his character that demands he not take sin lightly or not suggest sin doesn't matter.

⁵⁸Author's own translation of this clause: *eis to einai auton* (that he might be) *dikaion* (righteous) *kai dikaionta* (the one who declares righteous) *ton ek pisteōs* (the one who has faith in Jesus).

characterized by all his attributes is a God who has created this world in order to put on display who he is in all his attributes. God, therefore, created in such a way that he would allow what he hates (sin) to accomplish what he loves (putting on display his manifold attributes)—i.e. permitting evil for the greater good,⁵⁹ and this all accomplished in such a way that mankind can experience in the fullest way who God is. This is, by the way, how I would define the “maximally great God”—the God who has put on display in the fullest manner the full array of his attributes. If we define “maximally great” apart from this kind of biblical narrative and thread, we run the risk of constructing a system (even if it is logical) that is not consistent with the biblical picture of who God is.

The reality is that the Bible never constructs an explanation for God’s works of creation and providence based upon an alleged human libertarian freedom. It does address, however, the issue of why God has created and governed things the way he did by appealing to the line-of-reasoning I have just followed—namely to glorify himself through a full display of his attributes.

This line-of-reasoning is also found explicitly in Romans 9:22-23: “What if God, desiring to show his wrath and to make known his power, has endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,²³ in order to make known the riches of his glory for vessels of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory...?” This text is so central to explaining God’s purpose in his works of creation and providence, but at the same time so controversial, we will devote an entire chapter to it (Chapter Three).

The Reality Of Sin And God’s Sovereignty: The World As We Have It

Where this chapter’s discussion brings us is to realize that what we have is a world in which God has decreed all for the magnification of his manifold attributes, and so what we have is a

⁵⁹ This line of argumentation has been taken by many in the church, going back as at least as far as Augustine. Helm, *The Providence Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 200.

world in which God is absolutely sovereign, but at the same time we have sin, suffering, death, and brokenness. In other words, the reality of this fallen world is logically necessary—contingent upon God’s eternal purpose in his works of creation and providence. To put this in another way, God could not actualize a world that includes sin, suffering, death, and brokenness, and, at the same time, bring into being a world that does not include these. Paul Helm adds:

It is important...to stress that for [a proposed greater good] to provide a solid reason for the divine permission of evil, the existence of evil has to be a logically necessary condition for that desirable state of affairs which follows from it.... [Of course, it depends on what the greater good is as to whether or not evil would be a logical necessity.].... One must not confuse logical justification [for evil] with ethical justification [of evil.]”⁶⁰

What is also true is that in order for God to maximize the revelation of his manifold attributes not only resulted in the long history of mankind leading up to the coming of Jesus Christ; it also has resulted in a long history of mankind stretching from the first coming of Jesus Christ until such time as he returns—an in-between age that includes non-glorified humans living in a world that is full of sin, brokenness, and pain, all working its way out by means of secondary causes; as well as a world in which humans are making genuine and responsible choices as secondary agents under God.⁶¹ The net effect of this is as follows:

- Physical pain and suffering resulting from a broken world and bodies (Gen. 3:16-19; Rom. 8:18-23).
- Human sin and resultant suffering (Gen. 3:12, 16b; 4:8; Rom. 5:12).

⁶⁰ Paul Helm, *The Providence Of God* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1994), 201-203.

⁶¹ As I will argue below, history is designed to heighten this metanarrative of God revealing the glory of his manifold attributes and his Trinitarian fullness.

- People who are saved and transformed by Christ, but who can still sin, suffer, and cause suffering—and yet they await a time when they will no longer sin, suffer, or cause suffering (Rom. 6:1-8:39; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21:4, 7-8; 22:14-15).

So, we can say sin and suffering happen because the world is broken and man has made choices that have such consequences. Yet, we can also say that God has ordained this kind of world with good and holy ends that flow out of his good and holy character. Princeton theologian Archibald Alexander (1772-1851) agreed when he wrote: “God is good. His goodness is manifest in every work of his wisdom, for he hath so continued and arranged all things in the best manner, to promote the happiness of his creatures.”⁶²

What is more, we should not be surprised to discover that the ultimate outcome of evil, pain, and suffering for the one who turns to God through Jesus Christ is glory.

Paul argues that the sufferings of the Christian church in this life “are not worth comparing with the glory what will be revealed in us” (Rom. 8:18), and the light troubles of the present “work” “an eternal glory that far outweighs them all” (2 Cor. 4:17; see also 2 Tim. 2:12). There is here not only the contrast between suffering and glory, but also a connection between the two; suffering “works” glory.

But a deeper relationship still can be discerned. Not only does suffering produce or work for glory, but the character of the glory, according to Paul, is such that it cannot be properly understood except in terms that presuppose sin and suffering. Sin and suffering, and glory, are not contingently or accidentally related, but internally related; there is a relationship of meaning between the two states. The character of the glory can be understood only in terms of the suffering.”⁶³

In other words, in line with what we have discovered in this chapter, the lives of saints will redound to the glory of God throughout all eternity in a greater way in light of the pain and evil than if it had not been present.

⁶² Archibald Alexander, *A Manual Of Devotion For Soldiers And Sailors* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board Of Publication, 1847), 25-26, cited in Randy Alcorn, *Happiness* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 2015), 144.

⁶³ Paul Helm, *Providence*, 203.

We live, then, with tension and still some mystery, but not contradiction. As we will see unfolded in Chapters 4-6, God can ordain all that takes place (and not limited by options open to him based upon human choices)—and yet through an immeasurable combination of causative and permissive movements upon God’s part—he can bring about all that he has determined and yet in a manner humans’ actions flow from antecedent decisions and movements of their own, they are doing that which they desire and which arises from their own will, and it is clearly seen that God is morally responsible for all righteousness (including man’s salvation), whereas Satan, demons, and mankind are morally responsible for their sin and brokenness.⁶⁴

We have not only discovered that we must deal with the world as it is—shaped by God’s eternal purpose, revealed to us in the wisdom of God’s Scriptures, but we also see that the particulars of history have been shaped by him to serve his eternal purpose to a greater degree than if they had been shaped in some other fashion. Let’s turn our attention to that topic, to examine it more fully.

Salvation History And God’s Eternal Purpose

We have discovered that God is authoring a world story that magnifies his glory, that is, his manifold attributes, as well as his Trinitarian fullness. This story also helps to make sense of the world as it is. Consider some of the high points.

The Creation Of Mankind

⁶⁴ Some will object that each person is not morally responsible for the curse that the world and human bodies are under due to the sin of the first man, Adam. Yet, as is seen from Romans 1:19-20; 5:12-19; 10:12-19, God has not only revealed himself through Scripture and nature that man might see he is there, what he is like, and so he can turn to God for salvation from that curse, he has also set up the world in such a manner that either a person is under the headship (or representation) of Adam or of Jesus Christ—the latter of which is gracious and beyond what is merely just. What is more, the world is such that no one who has ever been born (apart from Jesus) has lived without sinning in accordance with their own will (not outwardly coerced) and so each person, of their own actions and apart from Adam, deserve death for sin (Rom. 3:23; 6:23).

Humans were created by God to be his vice-regents, kings and queens who were crowned not with gold, but with the glory of being made in God’s image, to reflect his greatness through their lives and works (Gen. 1:26-28; Ps. 8:5-6). Most likely it is also intended in Scripture that Eden was a temple, a dwelling place of God, in which he could be present with his people and they were the image “erected” in the temple of the King, as ancient kings typically did.⁶⁵ Eden was also a place in which God lavishly provided for man and woman with the intent that they would certainly enjoy all that he had given to them (Gen. 2:8-9, 10-14, 15, 18-25). If Adam, as the representative of the race, would walk in child-like dependence upon and fellowship with God that brings about obedience to God’s standards, then the life with which God has infused him could be fully enjoyed by him and his progeny (2:16-17).

Despite all that God had graciously given to Adam, he sinned and fell. As such, mankind was both separated from each other and from God (Gen. 3:1-19)—having forfeited true and full life—and so was in need of deliverance. God promised that very deliverance through one of Adam’s descendants (3:15). As such, the rest of history becomes the story of God’s amazing grace, redeeming and restoring mankind to his purpose, life, joy, and glory, but also bringing judgment upon those who refuse God’s undeserved deliverance and life.

⁶⁵ G. K. Beale, Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells Among Us: Expanding Eden To The Ends Of The Earth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2014), 18, write: “Eden is presented as a sanctuary and place where God dwells, as seen in Genesis 1-2 and the wider witness of the Old Testament. Even the seemingly casual mention of God ‘walking’ in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:8) is rich with connotation that suggests God’s presence in the temple. In Leviticus 26, the Lord promises that he will ‘walk’ among them and be their God (Lev. 26:12). In Deuteronomy 23, the Lord commands the Israelites to keep their camp holy because he ‘walks’ in the midst of their camp (Dt. 23:14). When David plans to go build a temple in 2 Samuel 7, the Lord reminds him that ‘I have been walking about in a tent [the tabernacle!]—for my dwelling’ (2 Sam. 7:6...). In a similar manner, the Lord is ‘walking’ in Eden (Gen. 3:8) because Eden itself was the temple dwelling of God.

“More explicitly, Ezekiel calls Eden a temple, referring to it as ‘the garden of God...the holy mountain of God’ containing ‘sanctuaries’ (Ezek. 28:13-14, 16, 18). ‘Mountain’ and ‘sanctuaries’ are both references elsewhere to the temple. Ezekiel also speaks of an Adam-like person in Eden wearing bejeweled clothing like a priest (Ezek. 28:13, alluding to Ex. 28:17-20) whose sin profanes the sanctuaries and causes him to be cast out (Ezek. 28:17-18). Therefore, the Garden of Eden is most explicitly called a temple with an Adam-like figure as its priest in Ezekiel 28:18.”

One of the emphases of the post-fall early chapters of Genesis (chapters 4-11) is that in spite of God's goodness, mankind continued to spiral downward—into more and more sin and away from God (cf. Gn. 6:5). God was truly a gracious and good God, one who pursued man, but man was deserving of judgment.

In the flood narratives we discover what sin deserves—destruction through God's full wrath (cf. Gen. 6:5-8;19). Yet, in the postdiluvian world God has decreed that he will not kill all life again and curse the ground again in this manner (Gen. 8:21).⁶⁶ Instead, he will permit the unredeemed, sin-cursed world to continue on in this age (Gen. 8:22). Part of the reason seems to be found in the fact that his wrath is appeased or relieved through atonement, through either judgment upon the sinners or a substitute, a truth to which the account of Noah (and even his name) points (Gen. 5:29; 8:21). In other words, God is glorified through both judgment and salvation. God wants this unredeemed world to continue, along with non-glorified saints and the unregenerate, so that his self-glorifying, redemptive purposes can be carried out. What Genesis 8:21 points to in seed-form, the rest of Scripture unpacks for us. This truth is particularly enhanced when we discover what appears to be the intentional connection that is drawn between creation, the flood account, and the Mt. Sinai narrative in Exodus 19-20. The connection centers around God's purpose to pursue covenantal relationship with mankind. If that is the case, then certainly Genesis 8:21 is meant to serve a larger purpose of showing what God is doing in his overall redemptive history.

⁶⁶ Genesis 8:21: "And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done.'"

What God did, then, was to focus in upon one man and his descendants—Abraham—a man whom God would make into a great nation and would bless by giving to them great blessings and advantages, not the least of which was the special revelation of his Law in his Word, so that they could not only know how God wanted them to live, how they could pursue forgiveness for their falling short of his will, but they also could serve as a light to the rest of the nations, so that all people could see what great benefit there is in following God and so they would be drawn to the true God (Ex. 25:8; Lev. 16:1-34; 17:11; Dt. 4:1-6; Is. 42:6; 49:6; Rom. 3:1-2).

God referred to this nation collectively as his “son” (Ex. 4:22-23; Jer. 31:20; Hos. 11:1), communicating the intimate and special relationship he had with them (cf. Dt. 7:6-8). There appears to be two other important purposes God had in zeroing in on Israel in a special way during the Old Covenant (or Old Testament) era. To begin, it displays that no matter how many advantages God gave to this nation, they continued to rebel against him and failed to follow him in the obedience that flows from child-like faith (e.g. Is. 54:1-10; 57:3-13; Jer. 31:32; Lam. 1-2; Ezek. 16; Hos. 1-3; Rom. 3:1-3; Rom. 10:18-21). So, in this part of God’s story we discover how much God’s people need a Savior, one to live, suffer, and die in their place that they might be forgiven and reconciled to God (Is. 52:13-53:12).

The Centrality Of God’s Son , Jesus Christ

This leads us to the other important purpose God had in zeroing in on Israel during those years. This relationship that God had with Israel, in which he taught them the importance of obedience, atonement through substitute, and the reality that if one wanted God’s blessing, she must be united by faith to God’s “son” (e.g. Ruth), all prepared the world for the coming of Jesus Christ (Lk. 24:27; John 5:39; Acts 3;24; 10:43), God’s ultimate Son (Mt. 2:13-15; 3:17), ultimate sacrifice (Mt. 20:28; Col. 2:16-17; Heb. 8-10; 1 Pt. 2:24), the second and ultimate Adam (Rom.

5:12, 14, 19; 1 Cor. 15:21-22) who would pass the tests set before him and always obey the Father (Mt. 4:1-11; Jn. 5:30; Heb. 4:15), the one who was the ultimate tabernacle and temple (Zech. 6:12; Jn. 1:14; 2:19), the ultimate servant who is the light to the nations (Mk. 10:45; Lk. 1:79; 22:27), and the ideal man, who finally fulfilled God's purpose for mankind—that of reflecting his glory (Jn. 17:1-5; Heb. 2:5-9).

God ordered history, then, in such a manner to magnify his glory, i.e. his manifold attributes in salvation and judgment as particularly focused in his Son, Jesus Christ (John 17:1-5; 2 Cor. 1:20; Eph. 1:10; 3:10), the ultimate communication from and about God (Jn. 1:1-18; Heb. 1:1-3). "...God designed creation to commit all things to Christ so that Christ might dispose of it to the purposes and designs of his work of redemption and procuring the salvation and glory of his church...."⁶⁷

This narrative of God's history leading up to the first coming of Jesus Christ does not give to us all of the reasons why so much history took place in the world prior to then—i.e. why it took so long before a Savior came. However, it does point toward a general answer. From what we can know, we grasp that the time was right for Jesus to enter into the world (Gal. 4:4) and at the very least must mean that what God wanted to accomplish by the previous long periods of history had been accomplished. It seems that there is enough revealed in Scripture, as we have just seen, to lead us to the conclusion that God was displaying through history a clearer picture of the plight, the sinfulness, and the inability on mankind's part to save himself, and he was displaying the absolute need for a Savior.

What is more, God was weaving through history pictures of redemption so that when the Savior came, man would understand that if he were to be forgiven of his sin and reconciled to

⁶⁷ Jonathan Edwards, *Miscellanies* 1039, cited in Donald Westblade, "The Sovereignty Of God In The Theology Of Jonathan Edwards," in Sam Storms, Justin Taylor, Ed's, *For the Fame Of His Name* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2010), 109.

God, if he were to be part of God's missional temple (so God is present with him and working through him) so that he could extend God's garden temple (Eden) to the ends of the earth, if he were to have God's true life while living under the blessings of God's saving reign, if he were to live as a human created in God's image and reflecting God's glory, if he were truly to function as God's sons and daughters, his vice-kings and vice queens, he must be united by faith to the Son and Savior!

The New Covenant

Though God had made a solemn bond and agreement (a covenant) with Israel when he brought them out of Egypt (Ex. 19:5-6), a commitment to them that he would be their God and they his people, those who would carry out his mission, they broke that covenant (Jer. 31:32). As a result, this merciful God who is committed to his own glory, promised he would make a new and different kind of covenant with his people, one in which he would bring about a greater internal transformation resulting in a desire to keep his law, and this would mean that all people who are part of his covenant would truly know the LORD (Jer. 31:31-34). Another way to put this is that God would put within them a reverence for him (Jer. 32:40) so they would not turn from him. All of this would take place through a greater work of God's more permanent indwelling Spirit (Ezek. 36:26-27), with the result that all kinds of people will prophesy, have dreams, and see visions (Joel 2:28-29).

As will be demonstrated in Chapters 7-9, this level of transformation involves God working in the hearts of saints decisively such that their faith, their desires for righteousness, and many decisions they make are decisively and actively moved by God. What this means is that many decisions made do not originate merely in their own hearts and, what is more, there are decisions

and actions that could not go in a different direction. This biblical teaching runs counter to the core idea Molinism is seeking to promote and preserve—namely indeterministic human freedom.

What this work of the New Covenant would also bring about is a greater work among God's people to live on mission with the result that through them God would continue doing this work of conversion and internal transformation among the nations so that the nations come to worship the true God (Is. 59:19-62;12).⁶⁸

God decreed these events would come about with the advent of A Spirit-empowered Redeemer (Is. 59:19-20), who is Jesus Christ (Is. 61:1-2; Lk. 4:18-19), and this so that it would bring about the greatest magnification of glory to the Trinity (John 1:1-18; 14;18, 26; 16:7-15; 17:1-5).

This is the period of history in which we now live (Acts 2:14-36; Heb. 8-10 [esp. 8:8-13]).

The Inter-Advent Era

So, where we are at now in history is that God's saving reign and blessings (his kingdom), along with this New Covenant, have already been started (Mk. 1:15), but they have not yet been fully completed (Mt. 6:10). During this time God has ordered history in such a way as to bring about the greatest magnification of his Trinitarian fullness and manifold attributes, as he carries out the victory he has already won over his satanic and demonic enemies (Col. 2:13-15)—a victory that has brought an end to the times of ignorance among the nations (Ac. 17:30) in which

⁶⁸ Isaiah 25:3b gives a powerful picture of the conversion and internal transformation of the nations, when it says: "A city of fear-inspiring nations will fear you" (author's own translation). The entire world of nations is seen here as such a tightly woven system that the text says it is like one big city. Yet, God will so work that nations will fear him and this fear is parallel to "glorify" (25a). The ultimate goal God has in this work is the magnification of his own glory—and for peoples of all nations to delight in this!

That this mission would be carried out through a transformed people reflecting the glory of God such that it draws others to God is seen in Isaiah 60:1-3: "Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you. ² For behold, darkness shall cover the earth, and thick darkness the peoples; but the LORD will arise upon you, and his glory will be seen upon you. ³ And nations shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising."

God allowed them for the most part to “walk in their own ways” (Acts 14:16-17) and has prohibited Satan from deceiving the nations as he previously had (Rev. 20:1-3). As God sends forth his Christ-redeemed-and Spirit-empowered Church to proclaim his excellencies (1 Pt. 2:9), the result is that ransomed people from every “tribe and language and people and nation” will worship him (Rev. 5:9).⁶⁹

Yet, why must this period between the First and Second Coming of Jesus, in which non-glorified saints (transformed, but not yet perfected) carry out the mission of God in a broken world, last so long?⁷⁰ Though we cannot fully answer that question, there are some partial answers we can give.

To begin, it may very well be that the longer the time, the more diverse the peoples and nations become and so the more diverse the redeemed peoples will be that are part of the eternal worship of God in the new heaven and new earth.⁷¹ Credibility is given to this in the reality that God has decreed a specific number of Christians to suffer persecution and martyrdom in this age (Rev. 6:11). Since this text is found in a section of Scripture envisioning the carrying out of the application of the Redeemer’s work in history, one that includes judging world dwellers who do

⁶⁹ We must also note that the goal of what God is doing is a new heaven and new earth, in which humans who will always do the will of God will reside in perfect and eternally growing joy—in the presence of the Savior—enjoying not just the restoration of Eden (or paradise), but a state that will be even greater and in which the delight in God’s manifold attributes, his Trinitarian fullness, will be that much greater since the glorified humans there will experience the glory of God in light of their having been lost and yet saved by him. See Ps. 16:11; Mt. 25:21, 23; Rom. 8:18, 30; Heb. 12:23; Rev. 21-22. See also Chapter Ten.

⁷⁰ Paul writes of “the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Tim. 6:14), that it (the appearing) will be displayed “at the proper time” (ESV, NASB). The literal rendering here is “in his own time” (NKJV, HCSB, NIV). The sense of the phrase, however, seems to be that God has decreed to display this appearing once all antecedent events are finished and “at the right time” (GNT [NLT: “at just the right time”]).

⁷¹ Think of the reality that redeemed former Isis members will worship with groups they persecuted and killed, and in this, God’s mercy, along with his power to transform and reconcile persons, will be on display. In Isaiah 25:1-4 we learn that praise of God is intensified (v. 1) based upon judgment of the wicked (v. 2) and salvation of the righteous (v. 4)—both of which lead to the nations submitting in fear before God (v. 3). In other words, the unveiling of God’s “wonderful things, plans formed of old, faithful and sure” (v. 1) lead to the intensification of praise for him. Implied in this may very well be that the length of this age and the varieties of peoples saved serves God’s ultimate purpose, namely the magnification of his grace and mercy as contrasted to man’s sinfulness and rebellion.

not come to God in faith (Rev. 6:12-17), but also bringing in all the saints through the witness of the Church (cf. Rev. 7:1-17; 11:1-14), this may also suggest that part of God's purpose is to magnify his glory to the fullest extent by allowing the growing opposition of the nations, the growth of varied peoples, and also the growth in numbers of those who are subdued to him by his grace.⁷²

The Father of modern missions, William Carey, offered a similar explanation. In 1797, four years after he came to India and after he had preached on Acts 14:16-17, a man came to him and said, "Indeed I think God ought to repent for not sending the gospel sooner to us." Here is how he answered:⁷³

To this I added, suppose a kingdom had been long overrun by the enemies of its true king, and he though possessed of sufficient power to conquer them, should yet [permit] them to prevail, and establish themselves as much as they could desire, would not the valor and wisdom of that king be far more conspicuous in exterminating them, than it would have been if he had opposed them at first, and prevented their entering the country? Thus by the diffusion of gospel light, the wisdom, power, and grace of God will be more conspicuous in overcoming such deep-rooted idolatries, and in destroying all that darkness and vice which have so universally prevailed in this country, than they would have been if all had not been [permitted] to walk in their own ways for so many ages past.

If we have been accurate in our exegesis and if Carey was on target with his answer when it comes to God's delay in bringing special revelation to the world, we might have some insight here into why God has decreed that the world continue on for so long as a broken, sin-infested place wherein non-glorified saints and the unregenerate live—namely, God is working in such a way that intensifies his glory. This would fit with the direction we have taken in this chapter.

⁷² This is why, also, that "the end" will not come until after "this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations" (Mt. 24:14).

⁷³ The previous accusation and the following response is found in Tom Wells, *A Vision For Missions* (Edinburgh: Banner Of Truth Trust, 1974), 13, cited in John Piper, *The Pleasures Of God: Meditations On God's Delight In Being God* (Portland: Multnomah Press, 1991), 59.

This also fits with what Paul asserts in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10, where we read that not only is Paul's faith intensified in trials, but God's power is displayed all that much more in comparison with weakness and brokenness. This is a theme often repeated in the New Testament—namely that in a broken world in which people are sinners, they are often brought to Christ and grown in Christ through pain and suffering (e.g. Acts 16;25-34; Rom. 5:1-5; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 1:6-9). As Helen Keller once insightfully said, “Although the world is full of suffering, it is full also of the overcoming of it.”⁷⁴

Another possible answer we can give to the question, “Why must this period of history with its pain and suffering last so long?” is proposed by the Puritan, Thomas Brooks: “That the excellency and power of God's grace may be more illustrated and manifested, by making his people able to grapple with this mighty adversary [Satan], and that notwithstanding all the plots, devices, and stratagems of Satan, yet [God] will make them victorious here, and crown them with glory hereafter.”⁷⁵

Finally, following the implication that arises out of the book of Job (and the challenge that Satan makes to God in the first two chapters—namely that if all Job's blessings are removed, he will cease to worship God, as if God were not worth worshipping [cf. Job 1:9-11; 2:5]), one other possible purpose behind the longevity of this age is to display over and over again the glorious worth of God through saints who persevere in their love for and worship of God in the face of great pain and loss.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Alcorn, *Happiness*, 363.

⁷⁵ Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices* (n.a. Kindle Edition), 183.

⁷⁶ Satan desires to destroy the Church and the world and so he goes forth doing great harm (like a lion [1 Pt. 5:8] and like a dragon [Rev. 12] and yet, all that Satan does (along with his demonic cohort) is under the sovereign control and plan of God (see Rev. 6:1-11, in light of Rev. 4-5)—and of course, this in such a way that God is not morally responsible for what Satan does. Nevertheless, the revelation of this truth is designed to bring comfort to saints who are suffering. Part of what this implies is that even Satan's initial rebellion and fall were decreed by God,

Though we cannot state all the purposes for which God has decreed such a long period in a broken world that is still suffering, we can say enough to see that at the very least it fits with his ultimate eternal purpose of magnifying the glory of his Trinitarian fullness and his manifold attributes.⁷⁷

What is more, we can see that the world as it is, is one of the possible good worlds God could have made and why his works of providence include the allowance of much sin, pain, and suffering—yet, in a manner in which he is not limited by or dependent upon the options open to him by the human will.

But we also see he is limited by his decree that this kind of world continue on for a certain prolonged amount of time. He cannot also have a world that is shorter or one that is currently without all pain and suffering, or one that has perfected sinless saints currently in it. I am not suggesting at all that God merely started the world going in this direction and then does not govern its details meticulously. He does! And, through immeasurable combinations of his causative and permissive governance he determines who will suffer and who won't, how much a person will suffer, and so on and so forth (as will be demonstrated in Chapters 4-5). So, he

along with his temptation of man and man's fall—and the subsequent suffering and brokenness of the world. G. K. Beale, David H. Campbell, *Revelation: A Shorter Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 127, add: "...believers can have confidence that, in spite of their present sufferings, God is in ultimate control, working out His purposes in all that is happening. Satan, of course, is intent on destroying the church (and the world), but God's plan includes Satan pursuing his wicked purposes, because...through them...God work[s] out His higher strategy of refining the saints and punishing the wicked."

⁷⁷ Other possible purposes behind God decreeing such a long history of suffering that includes this prolonged inter-advent age, includes: 1. It magnifies his patience in application of redemption to his people (2 Pt. 3:9). 2. It provides for more and more heroic and missional works to be done by his people that will follow them into eternity and redound to his glory (Rev. 14:13). 3. It magnifies the glory and praise saints will experience and be able to give to God for eternity in light of the pain and suffering he brought them through during their earthly life (Rom. 8:18; 2 Cor. 4:16-17). 4. It magnifies the horror of sin and rebellion and shows God's righteousness in salvation and judgment (Rom. 1:18-32). 5. It magnifies God's love for those in Christ (Rom. 8:28-39). 6. It magnifies God's faithfulness to his promises (e.g. Jer. 1:12; Rom. 9-11). 7. It magnifies the Son—enabling him more and more to be a model for saints as the humble, redeeming, loving Savior and intercessor (1 Cor. 11:1; Phil. 2:5-11). 8. It provides the full number of God's elect to be brought to him (2 Pt. 3:9).

certainly can and does make those kinds of decisions. What he cannot do, though, based upon his decrees (flowing out of his eternal purpose) is contradict himself and also have a world that is its opposite.⁷⁸

Conclusion

This chapter, then, has introduced a metanarrative, a story God is authoring in history, that has touched upon how this absolutely sovereign and free God works through his meticulous providence (and directed by his nature) for his maximum glory among men in a way that men are free in the biblical sense of the word (with compatibilistic freedom). Nothing in the biblical metanarrative leads us in a direction wherein we must posit that God has created and ordered the world in a manner that preserves indeterministic human freedom or that he had to create and order the world in the manner he did because of that kind of human freedom. Instead, the biblical narrative has expressed our first theological truth that favors Calvinism over Molinism: God permitted sin in order that he might display his attributes more fully, and especially to highlight his mercy and grace to a greater degree.

Before we move on to look at more of the seven theological truths, we must deal with a very important and controversial passage that supports the thesis of this chapter, Romans 9:22-23. We turn to that passage in Chapter Three.

⁷⁸ This also provides context for and understanding behind the reality that pain and suffering play such an important part in the sanctification (the growth in holiness) of saints (cf. Rom. 5:1-5; 8:18-39; James 1:2-3; 1 Pt. 1:6-9). Given the world as it is, the one God has decreed, it seems to be the case that most often people do not come to faith in Christ apart from some pain and suffering and they do not grow in holiness apart from some pain and suffering.