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SETTING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS
FOR ANCHOR CHURCH IN TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

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SETTING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS
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To Jenae,
My wife and my greatest earthly blessing.

To our boys,
May you love Jesus with your whole hearts.

To my parents,
I am eternally grateful to you for leading me to Jesus.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

IBC	Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching
NAC	New American Commentary
OTL	Old Testament Library
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
WBC	Word Bible Commentary

PREFACE

I wrote this project with the hope that those who read it will find themselves caught up in the story of God, eager to know the one who has redeemed a rebellious people at great cost to himself and adopted them as his own. The more I learn, the more I am overwhelmed by this story of grace and love. For this reason, I am thankful to all those who helped me see the narrative that flows from Genesis to Revelation. You have opened my eyes to see more of God's glory. Primary in this is my father-in-law, Dave Wyrzten. He nurtured in me a desire to understand and explain God's plan for redemption throughout the Bible. He has spent countless hours with me, showing me a picture of Jesus through God's Word and through faithful living.

In addition, I owe a debt of gratitude to the faculty and staff of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary who have not only provided intellectually stimulating instruction, but who have modeled what it looks like to allow our study to drive us further into relationship with Jesus. This program has made a dramatic impact on my life. I was not just taught; I was discipled. Furthermore, I would like to thank my supervisor, Miguel Echevarría, who has provided me with guidance and feedback, helping me to see connections throughout the Scriptures and to focus my arguments.

I will be eternally grateful for a family that loved me and introduced me to Jesus. I have never lacked a model of what it looks like to follow Jesus, and I have never wondered what it would be like to be loved unconditionally. Mom and Dad, you have given me a tangible experience of what it looks like to be loved by our Heavenly Father.

My wife, Jenaë, has been an incredible support throughout this process. I would not have finished this were it not for her, and not just because of her editing. Everyone who knows me knows I would be lost without her. She is flesh of my flesh and

bone of my bone. She is my greatest earthly blessing. I do not know how to even begin to say how thankful I am for her.

Our boys, H. A., Zeke, Eli, and Silas, bring so much joy to my life. Thank you for your love. Thank you for your cheers. Thank you for your support. I pray that you will all love Jesus. You are being invited into the story of God, and I hope nothing more for your lives than you accept the invitation. I pray that you will get to experience the incredible adventure of a life lived on mission for your creator.

You never do a project like this in isolation. I am so thankful to all my family, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances who have been bombarded with my thoughts on Genesis and in the process helped me solidify my thinking on the subject.

Harvey A. Edwards IV

Tuscaloosa, Alabama

May 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Assumptions are powerful. They lay the groundwork for communication. Consider the pop culture example of *Friends*. The show ended in 2004, but in 2015, a fan offered an alternate ending that fundamentally changed how one would perceive the show. Instead of focusing on the interaction of six long-time friends, the alternate ending reframed the entire series as the product of a lonely, homeless woman's overactive imagination and her desire to belong to a group of friends she observed through a café window.¹ A small change in the beginning assumptions completely reframed the meaning of the show. This alternate ending was so engaging that it went viral on social media a decade after the series finale.

False assumptions lead to confusion about the message of the story. For example, the missionary Don Richardson wrote his book *Peace Child* documenting his experience with the Sawi tribe. He learned their language and soon after taught them the story of Judas betraying Jesus. The Sawi's reaction to this story was not what Richardson had in mind. They saw Judas as a hero. His betrayal demonstrated a mastery of treachery and trickery—things the Sawi tribe viewed as admirable and virtuous. They began to cheer for Judas. Jesus was considered a fool not one to be admired and followed. This is a far cry from the Christian understanding of this story in which Judas not only fails to recognize Jesus as the Son of God, but also betrays the one who has come to save him. Assumptions color our interpretation of stories.²

¹Rishi Iyengar, "The Creepy Alternative Ending for *Friends* That's Gone Viral," *Time Magazine*, August 26, 2015, accessed September 28, 2015, <http://time.com/4012752/friends-alternate-ending-phoebe-fan/>.

²Don Richardson, *Peace Child*, 4th ed. (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2005).

Anchor Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is like many American churches. Though its members have great love for the Lord, are committed, and have a desire to serve, some of its members may understand the gospel message based on faulty assumptions about Genesis.

Genesis lays the foundation for understanding who God is and what he is doing. To understand the story of Scripture, we must understand the assumptions that the biblical authors are making, and in order to uncover these assumptions, we have to see what they are based on. We have to trace the thinking back to its source material. Genesis is this source.

A Definition of Biblical Theology

To understand what Scripture is trying to teach, we must understand the foundational assumptions of it. All of Scripture is building and interpreting a story about who God is, what he is doing in creation, and how he is interacting with man. Numerous authors wrote this story over many years. We must understand how the pieces fit into the whole, seeing how each part interprets and builds upon what came before. Biblical theology is an attempt to comprehend this narrative.

Because of the challenge inherent in understanding a story composed of multiple sources, many have put forth competing definitions for biblical theology.³ Although understanding the narrative is a task with many challenges, it is by no means impossible.⁴ Rather, the approach chosen must be clearly stated. James Hamilton Jr. provides what is used in this project as the working definition for biblical theology,

³For an example of the diversity of opinions on biblical theology, see Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

⁴For a discussion of how these challenges can be overcome, see James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

which is “the interpretive perspective of the biblical authors.”⁵ This interpretive perspective is “the framework of assumptions and presuppositions, associations and identifications, truths and symbols that are taken for granted as an author or speaker describes the world and the events that take place in it.”⁶ When approaching the Scriptures this way, we have a more accurate understanding of the meaning of the text because we have a more accurate idea of the author’s intent.⁷

Genesis as the Foundation of Gospel Understanding

Genesis lays the foundation for understanding what God is doing in history and why his intervention is necessary. It sets a trajectory for the rest of Scripture. The theology of Genesis is the starting point for the rest of the biblical authors, teaching us what our assumptions should be as we read the Bible. Genesis introduces us to the setting, the main characters, the driving tension, and the basic rules under which the world operates. Later authors will build upon and expand these ideas until they are brought to their fulfillment in Jesus. Kenneth Mathews declares the foundational nature of Genesis:

Can we possibly understand Law and Gospel without their Genesis? Do we have Matthew and Luke’s historical Gospel without the Genesis genealogies? Does not Paul’s Galatians and Romans rely on Adam and Abraham? And can we still see the future Eden in John’s Apocalypse without the imagery of Genesis’s idyllic past? It is not too much to say that as there is no community without its first parents, there is no Christian world and worldview without its “Genesis.”⁸

The importance of Genesis can hardly be stated more strongly. Genesis is the soil in which the biblical worldview takes root and grows.

⁵James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology? A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 115, Kindle.

⁶Ibid., 116–17.

⁷Finding a unified interpretive perspective of the biblical authors is possible because the Scriptures were written under the inspiration and guidance of the divine author, the Holy Spirit.

⁸Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 22–23.

Gordon Wenham agrees with this assessment. He walks through the New Testament giving examples of how Genesis informs the theology of the biblical authors. John imitates Genesis 1:1; Acts 2 reverses the confusion of languages (Gen 11:7); Luke uses the genealogies to link Jesus to Adam and prove he is the Son of God (Luke 3:23–38); Paul tells of the accomplishment of the second Adam (Rom 5:12–21), and a New Jerusalem comes as a Garden of Eden (Rev 21:1–22:5). Wenham writes, “For the New Testament writers the opening chapters of Genesis are foundational to their theology.”⁹

Genesis informs our reading of the Old Testament.¹⁰ When read correctly, the Old Testament highlights man’s depravity and hopelessness. The reaction of the Israelites is predictable. Their failure in spite of God’s intervention sadly rings with our own experience of failure despite good intentions. Things look bleak, but God is setting the backdrop for the tiniest glimpse of hope in Genesis 3:15 to come bursting forth, shining with the long-suffering love of God. It sets our faith on the firm foundation of God’s grace rather than on our feeble efforts to earn righteousness. It bolsters our hope when we see a God who was always, from the very beginning, working to bring about the redemption of his creation. And if we are going to glean this, we must allow Genesis to establish our assumptions for approaching the rest of Scripture.

Genesis sets the stage for the unfolding of not only Jewish history, but that of all humanity. Without it, our reading of the rest of Scripture is shallow, like coming into a multi-part television drama in the middle. A person may eventually begin to understand what is happening, but they will not have the appreciation of plot and characters had they watched the show from the beginning. N. T. Wright demonstrates this idea when he writes,

⁹Gordon J. Wenham, *The Pentateuch*, Exploring the Old Testament, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2003), 33.

¹⁰Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?* 169–70.

Matthew's first chapter has long been a puzzle to modern Western readers. The genealogy (1:1–17) appears to be about as unexciting an opening as it could be. But to those with eyes to see (itself a Matthean theme, as in 13:16), it tells the story that must be grasped if the plot of the whole gospel is to be understood. We begin with Genesis, literally and metaphorically: Matthew's opening words, *Biblos Geneseos*, mean literally 'the book of Genesis', or, as in Genesis itself (2:4; 5:1), 'the book of the generation . . .' Matthew starts off by deliberately hooking his own plot into the larger plot, the story of the people of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.¹¹

Matthew is not just about a man named Jesus. It is about a man named Jesus who fulfills the redemption God promised at the fall and has been working throughout time to bring it about. The bigger story is missed without its connection to Genesis. Wright argues that Luke also presupposes the Old Testament narrative beginning with Adam to highlight the promises of salvation through David's lineage, emphasizing the culmination of the story of God and his covenant people: "Only if we read it in this light can we understand the significance of the narrative."¹² When we miss the theological and narrative weight of Genesis, it hinders the impact of the gospel.

Genesis lays the groundwork for the promises that are fulfilled in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. But we are still awaiting the fulfillment of the salvation that comes through Jesus. Thomas Schreiner says the New Testament salvation narrative "picks up the story of salvation from the OT, where God promised to bless the whole world through Abraham and his descendants."¹³ This is a narrative that has implications for us today, for we are still awaiting the fullness of the kingdom of God. Schreiner says, "The kingdom can be explained in terms of the already–not yet. The kingdom was inaugurated in Jesus' ministry but not yet consummated. It had arrived, but the full salvation and judgment promised had not yet come to pass."¹⁴ Matthew 13 teaches that

¹¹N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol. 1 (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1992), 385.

¹²*Ibid.*, 382.

¹³Thomas R. Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 41.

¹⁴Schreiner, *New Testament Theology*, 79.

only those who hold fast to faith in Jesus will receive salvation. Hebrews 10:39 echoes this teaching, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” We must grasp the significance of this faith if we are to be a people that hold fast to it. And there is no greater way to grasp the significance of it than to see how we are living in the salvation narrative begun at the beginning of time—in Genesis.

Familiarity with Literature

The scholarly works focusing on the book of Genesis have differing points of view, ranging from the authorship of Genesis to how it should be read and interpreted. Derek Kidner states, “There can scarcely be another part of Scripture over which so many battles, theological, scientific, historical, and literary, have been fought, or so many strong opinions cherished.”¹⁵ These strong opinions have led to many fine works. However, the number of opinions and the wealth of information available have often made it difficult to track the proposed problem and the answer of the gospel promise of the seed of the woman in Genesis. The following list will serve as a foundation of consultation for this project.

Commentaries

Kenneth Mathews’s volume, *Genesis*, in the NAC series is conservative and evangelical. He sees the unity of Genesis and recognizes within it an unfolding revelation of Scripture. This work contributes to the concept that God’s redemptive plan begins in Genesis.¹⁶

¹⁵Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 9.

¹⁶Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*. NAC, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005).

Victor Hamilton's work, *The Book of Genesis*, in the NICOT series offers a conservative and thorough treatment of Genesis. He offers helpful insight on difficult passages of the text. He recognizes the beginnings of grace to Adam and Eve and the hope for restoration through Abraham.

Gordon J. Wenham's work, *Genesis*, in the WBC is widely praised for its detail in exegesis.¹⁷ He offers a conservative view of Genesis with a stress on the unity of the text. His presentation of differing viewpoints in translation is particularly helpful.

Walter Brueggemann's IBC work, *Genesis*, allows the narrative of Genesis to shine, making his commentary helpful despite his more liberal views on authorship.¹⁸ This understanding of the narrative is a necessary part of understanding the beginnings of the gospel in Genesis. He argues that the narratives of Genesis are to inform theology.

Gerhard Von Rad's *Genesis* in the OTL is a commentary in the tradition of higher criticism.¹⁹ Although Von Rad's views on authorship and the historicity of the narratives are liberal, he sees the seed of salvation history in Genesis. He states, "Whatever happened to the patriarchs was part of the divine plan for history, which was directed beyond the life of these men toward a still distant goal."²⁰

The Jewish scholar Umberto Cassuto's two volume set, *Commentary on Genesis*, offers an alternative to the documentary hypothesis as seen in Von Rad's work

¹⁷Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987).

¹⁸Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982).

¹⁹Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972). Higher criticism is "the critical study of the literary methods and sources used by the authors of (esp.) the Books of the OT and NT, in distinction from Textual ('Lower') Criticism, which is concerned solely with the recovery of the text of the Books as it left their authors' hands" (Frank Leslie Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005], 773).

²⁰Von Rad, *Genesis*, 40.

and briefly in Brueggemann's work.²¹ He defends the traditional view of Mosaic authorship comprehensively. As a Jewish scholar, he does not make gospel connections in Genesis.

Derek Kidner's *Genesis* in the TOTC is a brief commentary useful in its recognition of the foundations of the New Testament in Genesis. He states, "Genesis, in fact, is in various ways almost nearer the New Testament than the Old, and some of its topics are barely heard again till their implications can fully emerge in the gospel."²² The brevity of his commentary is often a strength in formulating an overall view of the text.

Allen P. Ross's *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* explores how the text of Genesis leads to life application.²³ It is intended to be expositional in nature. The difference in approach is helpful despite the lack of focus on the narrative of Genesis as a whole.

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson's *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* explains the ways the New Testament authors reference the Old Testament.²⁴ This is a wealth of information organized in a manner that is easy to access. It provides a scholarly examination of Old Testament quotations and allusions in their context and in the context in which they appear, providing valuable insight into the Scriptures.

²¹Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 2 vols., trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1972).

²²Kidner, *Genesis*, 14.

²³Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988).

²⁴Gregory K. Beale and D. A. Carson, eds., *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007).

Theologies

Many helpful theological writings deal with Genesis. One that stands out is Peter J. Gentry and Stephen Wellum's *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenants*. It is an attempt to allow biblical theology to inform and lead to systematic theology. It addresses covenants as the major plot structure throughout Scripture.

Tom Schreiner's *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* offers a thorough exploration of the overall narrative of Scripture. He argues that the kingdom of God is the theme that summarizes the message of the Bible. He demonstrates how the expectations found in the Old Testament find their fulfillment in Jesus.

T. Desmond Alexander's *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* lays out numerous motifs in the narrative of Scripture, many of which appear in Genesis and lay the foundation for understanding God's ultimate purpose in creation.²⁵ He demonstrates how the narrative of Scripture is able to be traced back to its roots in Genesis. His work on the theme of the temple of God is beneficial.

Stephen G. Dempster's *Dominion and Dynasty* is a theology of the Hebrew Bible that takes a literary approach to Old Testament theology.²⁶ He argues that there is a clear literary unity in Scripture. He demonstrates again how Genesis plays a major role in setting the expectation for God's salvific work.

Hamilton's *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* traces the thread of salvation throughout Scripture from the assumptions set forth in the

²⁵T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009).

²⁶Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

Pentateuch.²⁷ Special attention is paid to God's saving work through judgment, something seen throughout Genesis. This work also provides a helpful discussion about biblical theology.

N. T. Wright's *New Testament People of God*, although mainly referencing the church's understanding of the New Testament, shows the Old Testament worldview the New Testament assumes.²⁸ This helps trace the implications of the Old Testament in New Testament theology. Wright offers a beneficial discussion of the first-century Jewish worldview and expectations.

Genesis and Anchor Church

Anchor Church in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, is a church plant consisting of members with differing church experiences. Many used to be members in churches that valued the Old Testament but taught it as a source of morality stories, thus missing the significance of these stories in the overall narrative of Scripture and its culmination in Jesus. Others have been in churches that have largely ignored the Old Testament in a pragmatic but misguided attempt to focus on Jesus. The members from these backgrounds may have developed fundamental misunderstandings of the Old Testament and Genesis in particular that lead to a failure to appreciate the depth of human sinfulness, the need for God's intervention, and the value of Jesus' sacrifice.

Genesis sets an expectation of God's intervention to save sinful man. The gospel narrative begins here. Righteousness has always been by faith in God's promised redemption fulfilled in Jesus. Failure to understand this leads to a false division between the Old and New Testaments. It is easy to miss Jesus as the source of righteousness in the Old Testament without seeing that Abraham was considered righteous for his belief in the

²⁷James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010).

²⁸Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*.

promise of God (Gen 15:6). It is easy to miss the signs pointing towards a future hope in Jesus and then be confused about salvation. It is easy to have questions about how an Old Testament believer is saved if the seeds of promise throughout Scripture have not been illuminated. All of this leads to a misunderstanding of the scope of man's sinful nature and an undervaluing of Jesus' sacrifice.

Anchor Church needs to understand that God's redemptive plan starts in Genesis. This book sets the stage for man's complete dependence on God for salvation, and His plan was always the same. Throughout the Old Testament, man is waiting for the promised seed of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent, but every man who seems to fulfill that promise shows himself to be broken. Everyone fails. Everyone dies. Everyone feels the weight of the curse. The message rings out again and again—man is without hope unless God intervenes.

When this message is missed, the Old Testament is a mystery. It is seen as a conglomeration of morality stories and out-of-context promises. This leads to beliefs that the church building is the new temple; the preacher is the new priest; and attendance and giving are the new acts of sacrifice.²⁹ Anchor Church is a new plant being built on a foundation of discipleship, but it is in the midst of a culture that prides itself in going to the church building on Sundays to check off the list of being a good Christian. Many people in our body have grown up in this ritual. Some of them have had to actively exercise their minds to begin to pull out of this inflexible methodology that hinders gospel freedom in the church.

When correctly understood, however, the Old Testament tells us none of these works can make us whole. God has to intervene. The gospel has never changed; faith has always been the key. Paul House argues that Genesis 1–11

²⁹All ideas have been observed and expressed by individuals in my time as a minister in the city in which Anchor Church exists. Observations would include such things as insistence on a formal invitation time, correlation between service attendance and holiness, and references to the church building as "God's House."

prepares us to understand the world we live in. It forces us to consider our temptation, our pride, and our fall. It leaves us to wonder how God will work in this kind of world to bring hope and salvation to His creation and its population. It shows us the issues we must deal with to understand our universe and to cope with life in that universe. The remainder of the Bible will provide solutions to this introduction to the problems of the nature of creation, humanity, sin, pride, temptation, judgment, hope, and salvation.³⁰

As Anchor Church sets its foundation for being a gospel-centered church, Genesis—the book that sets the trajectory for the gospel in God’s story—is a great place to begin. Anchor Church needs this understanding of the gospel and Genesis. They need to see that Genesis gives us hope and hints at a future redeemer and restoration. This type of reading will build a secure foundation for understanding the gospel—one devoid of uncertainties about how the Old Testament informs the New Testament. It will allow the good news of salvation, sprouting from the beginnings of the canon, to burst forward in full bloom, capturing the hearts of our congregation and community with the incredible love of God. Otherwise, a lack of understanding of the continuity of Scripture will lead to a shallow appreciation of the gospel and an unwillingness to share it with others.

Key Texts

Genesis 1:1–3:24

This section of Genesis sets forth God as the creator and sustainer of the universe. It reveals humanity’s position and God’s intention for his creation. This sets the stage, the characters, and the plan for the narrative of Scripture. It gives the tension of Scripture, man’s disobedience and separation from God, and the proposed solution for the problem introduced. God is good and loving towards his creation, but his creation is unwilling to be subject to the creator. There is a problem with the heart of humanity that the serpent exploits. Genesis 3:15 also hints at redemption. Special attention will be paid

³⁰Paul R. House and Eric Mitchell, *Old Testament Survey* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2007), 795–99, Kindle.

to the seed of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent as this is a foreshadowing of Jesus.

Genesis 4:1–11:9

In this section, the trajectory of sinful man is set. It becomes clear that apart from the intervention of God, man is headed towards violence and immorality as highlighted in Lamech's song and ultimately destruction (4:23–25). It also becomes clear that God is preserving for himself a righteous seed through faith as demonstrated by Seth's descendants. Even within this righteous line, however, death is the norm. They are still waiting on the destruction of the serpent and the seed of the woman who will bring this about.

Genesis 11:27–12:9

In this text, the promise of the seed is further clarified. It will come through the righteous seed as defined by those who believe the promises of God, but it will also be apparent that God preserves a righteous seed, both in preserving a people for himself physically and spiritually and in further explanation of his promise to make Abram the conduit of God's blessing to the nations. The New Testament will identify Jesus as the one who brings God's blessing to the nations.

Genesis 14:17–15:21

In this text, the pattern of the Messiah is given in Melchizedek, the Priest-King to whom Abram owes honor. Genesis 15:6 also gives the explicit source of righteousness—it is credited because of faith. In addition, this passage shows the one-sided nature of God's covenant promise to Abram. Salvation is a work of God received by faith in the promises of God that find their ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

Genesis 22:1–19

In this text, Abraham's faith is demonstrated, but God provides what is necessary. Obedience is recognized as an inseparable result from faith, but faith is shown to be the vehicle of righteousness.

Genesis 37:1–50:26

In this text, God's provision for the righteous seed is demonstrated. Joseph is a type of deliverer who provides a type of salvation for God's people. The line of Judah, through which the righteous seed is traced, is preserved. Belief in the promises of God to Abraham is demonstrated, showing the preservation of a righteous seed. God is intervening on behalf of his people even as he prepares his people to understand the importance of the truly righteous seed that will one day crush the head of the serpent and provide a resolution to the problem of man's sin and separation from God.

Conclusion

Anchor Church must understand the magnitude of the story in which we are caught up. Christianity is not just a helpful way to be a better person. It is not a stepping-stone to a better marriage or a better home life. It is not a path to a more stable nation. It is deeper than all of these things. Jesus has not saved us to live for ourselves. Jesus has saved us from sin and death, from separation from our creator. He has saved us from wasted lives to live as He intended—as bearers of his image. If we are to understand our purpose, our predicament, and God's solution, we must understand the gospel. And to understand the fullness of the gospel message, we must understand the seed from which it grows—Genesis. This kind of understanding prohibits the parceling off of the spiritual life to Wednesdays and Sundays and compels us to consider our lives as part of the ongoing narrative of Scripture. If we see ourselves in that light, our assumptions about this world and our place in it will be fundamentally changed.

CHAPTER 2

GENESIS 1:1–3:24

Introduction

The Bible starts as any good story should: at the very beginning. And what unfolds is the greatest story ever told. It is at once more compelling, more tragic, and more beautiful than any other, for it gives rise to all of our stories. It is the source of our inspiration, our emotions, our hopes and fears, even our very existence. It connects us to our world, our history, and our future. This story begins with Genesis.

Genesis sets our foundational assumptions for how Scripture is to be read.¹ It informs us of the characters and the setting. It gives us the rules by which we are to judge the story. It tells us what is acceptable and what is not. It shows us how things should be and how they are. It speaks of the tension that exists, of what we should expect and what

¹ In his book *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels*, Hays argues that the hermeneutical key to the Gospel authors' engagement with Scripture is figural reading, which he defines as "the discernment of unexpected patterns of correspondence between earlier and later events or persons within a continuous temporal stream" (Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Gospels* [Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016], 7694–95, Kindle). For Hayes, this means that an understanding of the Old Testament must be retrospective. He states, "A figural christological reading of the Old Testament is possible only retrospectively in light of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection" (locs. 7698–99) and that "in light of the unfolding story of Jesus, it is both right and illuminating to read backwards and to discover in the Law and the Prophets an unexpected foreshadowing of the later story" (locs. 7700–7702). While a full understanding of God's plan to rescue a people for himself through his son is only available now that Jesus has come, it is an overstatement to say that Old Testament authors only unexpectedly foreshadowed the later story. There are instances that show the Old Testament authors were aware of the expectations of a Messiah even if they did not understand exactly what he will look like. For instance, look at David's expectation in Ps 110 of a descendant greater than himself who will be a king and priest forever. Matt 22:41–46 shows that the Jews expected the Christ to be a son of David, but when Jesus asked them how David could call his son Lord they cannot answer. Jesus is implying that David knew exactly what he was saying even if the Jews did not. One from his line would be greater than him. Or consider the straightforward example of Gen 5:28–29. Lamech names his son Noah in hopes that he will bring relief from the curse of painful toil in work. He believes the promise of Gen 3:15. He knows it is foreshadowing a deliverer even if he does not know exactly what that will look like. Full understanding only comes with Jesus, but the Old Testament authors set the assumptions of what to look for. And when one considers the inspiration of Scripture, it is clear that these prefigurings are intentional and meant to unfold God's plan for redemption exactly as he intended.

we can hope for. The beginning of a narrative orients you to the world of the story and teaches you to think about and evaluate the characters, events, and outcomes the way the author does. Scripture is a story by God about himself and his creation. As part of his creation, we find our small stories are being intertwined into the overall plot of the Bible. To know our place in this world, we must allow God to teach us through his Word, and Genesis introduces us to us how we fit into and think about his world.

Genesis is what we might call our origin story, and as we read it, we respond like our fictional heroes do to their own origins—we see something deeper about ourselves and allow it to inform us or we reject it wholeheartedly, running from a truth we can never escape. If we are to understand ourselves, our world, and our place in it, we must allow Genesis to set our assumptions about our universe.

Setting the Stage

Genesis begins so simply but profoundly: “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).² This verse establishes the truth that defines our reality. God is creator, and we are created. Paul House says, “From the very first verse of the canon God’s uniqueness and sovereignty emerge.”³ To miss this and its implication is to handicap our understanding of the world and will cause us to struggle with the narrative as it unfolds in Scripture. God created the heavens and the earth, and they are his to do with as he pleases. We are at the mercy of our creator. This seems like a tenuous situation for the created, yet what unfolds is a picture of a good and loving God. He takes what was chaotic (Gen 1:2) and brings order. And at each step of creation, what he has done is declared “good” (see Gen 1).

²Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references are from the English Standard Version.

³Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 59.

The creation story should be read a certain way. To argue over the timetable and method of creation is to miss the point. Rather, creation proclaims something about God, ourselves, and our place. It sets the stage for the biblical narrative. It introduces the setting, the characters, the rules by which the world works, and eventually the great tension of our existence —the battle for our hearts.

As God’s creative work nears completion, he creates something unique for a specific purpose. Genesis 1:26 says,

Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.” So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth” (Gen 1:26–28).

The Characters

God creates humanity in his own image to rule over his creation. He gives them a commission and provides all that they need to accomplish it. Man is to rule as God’s vice regent, working and keeping the garden and eventually filling the earth in accordance with his plan for creation.⁴ Stephen Dempster says, “[This creation narrative] is indispensable for understanding the Bible, sketching out an understanding of what it means to be human, namely to bring the world under the dominion of the image of God.”⁵ Again, it is important to recognize the difference between God and man. God has

⁴ In chapter 6 of *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants*, Gentry and Wellum argue that the narrative of Gen 1–3 makes it clear that a covenant has been formed at creation clarifying humanity’s position as servant kings and sons of God. Gentry and Wellum state, “As servant king and son of God mankind will mediate God’s rule to the creation in the context of a covenant relationship with God on the one hand and the earth on the other. Hence the concept of the kingdom of God is found on the first page of Scripture” (Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015], 201, Kindle). This helps us see God’s design for humanity and the rest of his creation and informs our eschatological expectations.

⁵Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 58.

created man and breathed life into him (Gen 2:7). He is the pinnacle of creation, but he is not the center of the story. Instead, God is accomplishing his plan for creation, of which man plays a part. John Walton observes,

The functional cosmos in Genesis is not set up with only people in mind. The cosmos is also intended to carry out a function related to God. On the seventh day we finally discover that God has been working to achieve a rest. This seventh day is not a theological appendix to the creation account, just to bring closure now that the main event of creating people has been reported. Rather, it intimates the purpose of creation and of the cosmos. God does not set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple in which he will find rest in the order and equilibrium that he has established.⁶

God places man in the garden of Eden with the implied goal of expanding the boundaries of it to fill the earth.⁷ Again the story focuses on the goodness of God. He is working out his purposes, but he does so in a way that cares for his creation. He meets the longings of the human heart. He provides security through his provision in the garden. He provides love and belonging through both his personal relationship with Adam and as will be made clear in Genesis 2, the woman. He provides purpose by including humanity in the divine purpose. Alexander states, “Through time, the whole earth would become a holy garden-city. While Genesis 2 merely introduces the start of this process, the long-term outcome is the establishment of an arboreal temple-city where God and humanity coexist in perfect harmony.”⁸ God partners with his humanity, his special creation, for the purpose of filling the earth with his goodness and creating a place for humanity to dwell with him in perfect harmony.⁹

⁶T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds. “Pentateuch,” in *Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010), 161.

⁷T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009), 25.

⁸*Ibid.*, 25–26.

⁹The use of edenic imagery is a sign of eschatological salvation in the writings of the prophets. See Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996), 201.

The Story

Over and over again, we see the goodness of God. But there is a particular gift that will help us understand how God relates to his people in a tangible way. God sees that it is not good for Adam to be alone, and he makes a woman as a helper for Adam. When Adam wakes to find that God has created her, he rejoices. She is his perfect match and their joining is an intimate union—two people becoming one flesh where both are totally exposed and yet free from shame. This marriage is not only meant to set our expectations for what marriage is to be but also provides the narrative framework for understanding the depth of God’s relationship with his people. This picture will be used throughout Scripture but most notably in Ephesians 5:22–32 as a picture of how Jesus loved the church and in Revelation 21:2 as a picture of the consummation of the new kingdom in which God and man dwell together once again.

God’s Goodness

Throughout the creation story, God’s goodness shines through. There can be no doubt to his nature and character. He orders chaos. All that he creates is good. He forms Adam and Eve. He dwells in harmony with them. He places them in the garden and gives them purpose and provision. There is no reason to doubt his goodness. All that he commands them to do benefits them—even their work. This may sound strange to a culture that longs for retirement, but work is not a condition of the fall. Kenneth Mathews states,

In the garden God gives the man a purposeful existence that includes overseeing his environment. Work is a God-given assignment and not a cursed condition. It was sin that spoiled the pristine relationship between the man and his environment, making work a toilsome chore that became a requirement for mere existence (3:17–19, 23).¹⁰

At this point, Adam and Eve’s call to work is a good gift of clear purpose. In all of this, there is only one stated prohibition—to not eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of

¹⁰Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 209.

good and evil (Gen 2:16–17). Yet even this is for their protection. If they eat of it, they will die.

Man's Nature

Just as God's character and nature are revealed, so is the nature of man. In Genesis 3, a serpent enters the garden and begins to sow seeds of distrust in Eve. He implies that God is not good, that he is keeping the humans from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil even though that fruit would make them like God. As the woman and the man consider this claim, we see that Adam and Eve doubt the goodness of God. They doubt his character and rebel against their very nature as God's image bearers. They take the fruit and eat it in an attempt to make themselves something they will never be. They believe that they know what is best, and God does not. Eating the fruit is an attempt by created beings to wrongfully assume the role of their creator, and it reveals a fundamental flaw in man—their inability to love and trust God. This is at the very heart of their rebellion.

The Conflict

Immediately there is a difference in the relationships between both Adam and Eve and God and humanity. First, in shame, Adam and Eve seek to hide their nakedness (3:7). A man and a woman who are made for one another, who are so close they are said to be one flesh, can no longer be completely exposed to their spouse. Their shame at their physical nakedness here is symbolic of a more general fear of being known fully. When Adam and Eve hear God walking in the garden, they hide from the one who created them, who knows everything about them, and who has always provided. Trust is gone. Self-interest and self-preservation are the new normal for humanity. When Adam is questioned by God, he puts the blame on the woman and then almost unbelievably hints that the blame may even lie with God (3:12). The woman follows suit, claiming she was deceived by the serpent (3:13). Adam and Eve accept no blame. There is no apology.

There is no thought of how this might harm God. They react with only self-centered thoughts and actions.

This moment is simultaneously the beginning of the main conflict in the narrative of Scripture and the explanation of the tension we all feel between good and evil. It explains the distance between what is and what should be. This action reveals the flaw in the hearts of humanity and results in a broken creation. From this point on, we will see all of humanity in bondage to sin (Rom 5:12).¹¹ It is the reason for shame and discord. It is the reason for pain and frustration and futility. Adam and Eve cut themselves off from God, their source of life, and open the door to the consequence of sin, namely, death. Just as God promised, eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil has brought death. Rather than partnering with God in caring for his creation, they have become agents of destruction. They have brought death, not only for themselves, but for the entire world.

Even in this moment of sorrow, when evil is loosed on the world to disastrous effect, God reveals his goodness. Death is the promised result of Adam and Eve's sin, but in his graciousness, God delays the fullness of their punishment. Adam and Eve do not die right away, but neither do they escape justice. Their sin leads to the curse of Genesis 3:14–19.

The curse lays out the result of their sin. Where there was once a one flesh union between husband and wife, a nakedness free from shame, there is now strife (3:16). The union will still graciously result in childbearing, but it will be painful (3:16). Where the garden once abundantly provided its fruit, the ground will now be cursed. Man will toil at his work to bring forth food until the day he himself returns to the dust of the ground by which he was made (3:18–19). The full ramifications of their sin will become

¹¹Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 67.

evident as the narrative unfolds, but even now, their disobedience is costly. And Genesis 3:22–24 explains that this is not a momentary lapse in judgment for Adam and Eve. Their hearts have been contaminated by sin, and for their own good, they must be removed from the garden to be kept from the tree of life. To eat of its fruit and live forever in their current state of rebellion would be a catastrophe.

Our Story in the Beginning

Why Did God Create the World?

At this moment in the narrative, if we are reading carefully, we have learned God's intention for creating our world. God is creator and therefore exists outside of his creation. He is wholly other than us. We will always be his creation, and as such we will always be under his authority. To think otherwise is to read past the power and authority demonstrated by his speaking the world into existence, much less our humble beginnings as dust (Gen 2:7). We have also seen the goodness of God evidenced in creation, in establishing humanity in his image (1:27), in entrusting creation to humanity's care (1:28), in the provision of life and food (2:16), in the gift of the woman and the establishment of the intimate connection of marriage (2:22), in the mystery of two individuals joined so closely that they can be described as being of one flesh (2:24–25), and even in the delay of the punishment deserved by Adam and Eve's sin and the resulting fall (2:17).

We have also learned about God's plan and purpose for creation. He creates, but on the seventh day, he rests (2:3). We have seen that he intends to relate personally to humanity. He walks with Adam and Eve in the garden (3:8). We have seen that the garden is where God dwells with man and that man is to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Humanity is to expand the garden to fill the earth.

Who Are We?

We have learned much about ourselves. We are the pinnacle of God's creation, made in the image of God (1:26–28). We each bear dignity bestowed upon us by our creator. We have learned that it is not good for us to be alone (2:18). We were made for community, both with God and with one another. We have learned that although marriage may involve different roles for the man and woman, it is a covenant between two divine-image bearers who share equal value and dignity. We have learned that we are meant for intimate relationship with our spouse—that we are intended to know and be known fully (2:24–25). We see that God intended to be in relationship with us. We see that we are meant to rule over creation. But we are also reminded that though we may be the pinnacle of creation, we are still only created beings. We bear the divine image and have received the breath of life, but we were formed from dust. To pretend otherwise is to invite destruction. And unfortunately, we have learned this the hard way. To act as though we know better than God is to forget our place. It is an act of rebellion against the one who forms and sustains us.

The Antagonist

We have learned that there is a serpent working against the purposes of God (3:1–5). We know that he is purposefully deceptive. He undermines trust in God. He plays upon a penchant in the heart to claim the status of God and to wield his authority. We see that even the truths he speaks are mixed with deception. As he said, in eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve become like God in the sense that their eyes are opened to the knowledge of good and evil. But in this truth he hides his deception when he says that eating the fruit will have no consequence. He is shown to be the liar, and God is shown to be the truth. Just as God said, Adam and Eve pay for their sin with their lives.

The Problem

Finally, we learn something about the condition of our hearts and of our world. As we read the creation account, we see the world we long for. If we will allow ourselves to be caught up in the reading, we will find our hearts pining for creation. It is a place of beauty and abundance, of belonging and intimacy, of clarity of purpose. It is free of guilt, shame, hate, broken relationships, sin, sorrow, sickness, pain, and death. It is what we are hoping for, striving for, and yet it remains so elusive that we secretly fear that it is lost and we will never find our way back, or maybe that it was never real at all. C. S. Lewis catches something of this feeling in *The Weight of Glory*:

In speaking of this desire for our own far-off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency. I am trying to rip open the inconsolable secret in each one of you—the secret which hurts so much that you take your revenge on it by calling it names like Nostalgia and Romanticism and Adolescence; the secret also which pierces with such sweetness that when, in very intimate conversation, the mention of it becomes imminent, we grow awkward and affect to laugh at ourselves; the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it, and we betray ourselves like lovers at the mention of a name. Our commonest expedient is to call it beauty and behave as if that had settled the matter. Wordsworth's expedient was to identify it with certain moments in his own past. But all this is a cheat. If Wordsworth had gone back to those moments in the past, he would not have found the thing itself, but only the reminder of it; what he remembered would turn out to be itself a remembering. The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have never yet visited.¹²

The Preacher in Ecclesiastes 3:9–11 seems to be wrestling with questions similar to those that arise in a reading of Genesis 1–3: “What gain has the worker from his toil? I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's

¹²C. S. Lewis, “The Weight of Glory,” in *Theology* (London: S.P.C.K., 1941), accessed September 30, 2016, <http://www.verber.com/mark/xian/weight-of-glory.pdf>.

heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (Eccl 3:9–11). He recognizes the grandeur of God’s creation and even of a place for man in it, and yet he acknowledges a frustration with the dissonance in this and the actual experience of life.

When reading Genesis 1–3, we feel the same tension. Our hearts long for the world described, but the beauty of our world is a shadow of creation. Where there was once perfection, there is now brokenness. We read about and watch reports of murders, exploitation, abuse, theft, and injustice. At times we are victims; at times we are all observers; and disturbingly, as much as we would like to deny it, at times we are the perpetrators. We feel the battle in our hearts. We long for justice and righteousness even as we clamor for just a bit bigger piece of the pie for ourselves. Bruce Waltke says, “The [creation] story poses the crucial problem of human existence: unaided human beings cannot create paradise. Flawed and limited, they cannot oversee and ensure justice and wholeness; they cannot even tame the monster within themselves.”¹³ We know the truth of this too well.

The tension is uncomfortable, but it makes sense of our situation. As much as we want a world that matches that of creation before the fall, honest assessment of our own hearts will show us that the corruption that has gripped our world has gripped our hearts as well. In fact, we will find that our hearts are part of that corruption. We may not be murdering and stealing, but do we treat our spouses with a love that allows him or her to completely expose his or her heart to us? Are we patient with our children? Have we ever taken advantage of a situation? Ever lied? Cut out of work early? Littered? Have we ever passed someone in need and neglected to help them? The list could go on and on, and eventually each one of us will find a way we have contributed to the state of our

¹³Bruce K. Waltke and Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 249.

world even as we wish it were different. Genesis tells us why this is: we have a heart problem. We do not trust God to be God. We rebel against our nature as creatures. We long for the authority because we long for control. The problem is that we are too short-sighted to be in control. And the clamoring for our benefit comes at a price for everyone, ourselves included.

Genesis, and in some ways the rest of the Old Testament, will hammer this truth home. No one can live righteously. No one can save themselves from their sin. No one can act on their own authority without bringing about destruction. That is the real tragedy of the fall. Adam and Eve cut themselves off from God and his life-giving presence, and in the process, their hearts are broken. We have been reliving this story over and over again since then. Each one of us has a heart that at some level believes God cannot be trusted to do what is best. And as a result, we live in a world of shame and guilt, of sin and death.

A Glimmer of Hope

This part of the story is tragic. The fall changes the entire course of God's creation toward destruction. Yet in this dark moment, there is a tiny glimmer of hope. Adam and Eve choose to disobey God and rightly deserve the punishment of death. God will not allow sin to go unpunished, but he desires to be merciful. Because of his love for his creation, God delays the ultimate judgment of death and hints at a way his justice and mercy can coexist. In the midst of meting out the curse, God makes a promise. In Genesis 3:15, he says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15).

Instead of immediate death, Adam and Eve are promised offspring. They are promised that a seed of the woman will bruise the head of the serpent. Life outside of the garden will be hard. There will be toil and pain. There will be strife, particularly between

the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent. Adam and Eve will eventually die, but they will have offspring and eventually their seed will overcome the seed of the serpent. The one working against creation will one day be defeated. It is not clear exactly what Adam and Eve understood of this promise, but they see hope within the interaction. We see this in the naming of Eve. Up until this point, she has always been “the woman.” After the curse, when Adam is told he will return to the dust from which he was taken (3:19), he names the woman “Eve.” Kidner explains, “This name, ‘life’, with its play on the word *living*, is very striking; its connection with Eve’s role as *mother* further suggests that Adam heard the promise of [3:15] in faith.”¹⁴ In the midst of the curse, as Adam is told of his eventual return to the dust, he sees the promise of life and the triumph over the serpent and responds at some level with belief in God’s promise.

The identity of the serpent and his offspring must be made clear to appreciate this passage. Alexander states, “The serpent represents those forces within creation that oppose the purposes of God.”¹⁵ Eventually, the serpent will be unmasked as Satan (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9, 20:2).¹⁶ The seed of the serpent will be those who reject his promises (John 8:44) while the seed of the woman represents the righteous line.¹⁷ There will be forces working against God and his creation purposes, and there will be those who seek to follow him. The seed of the serpent will attempt to extinguish the seed of the woman (Gen 4:8; Exod 1:22; Matt 2:13). Eventually, this enmity will come to a climax. A seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent. Alexander states, “This line of ‘seed’ . . . is

¹⁴Kidner, *Genesis*, 72.

¹⁵T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003), 18.

¹⁶Kidner, *Genesis*, 71.

¹⁷Alexander, *The Servant King*, 18.

the beginning of a royal dynasty through whom God will bring this judgment upon the ‘seed of the serpent.’”¹⁸

Not everyone sees this connection.¹⁹ However, to miss this is to miss the thrust of the narrative. Leupold says,

Such interpreters see in the word before us [Gen 3:15] nothing more than that “in the war between men and serpents the former will crush the head of the foe, while the latter can only wound the heel.” Such a trite platitude would not have been worthy of recording. It stands about on the level of the astute observation that a man will slap at the mosquito that bites him.²⁰

As Alexander notes, the Hebrew word *zera*‘, which is translated as “descendants,’ ‘offspring,’ ‘seed,’ ‘children,’ ‘family,’ ‘grain,’ ‘semen,’ ‘line,’ and ‘people,’ is . . . a keyword occurring 59 times in Genesis.”²¹ The concept of “seed” and the genealogical structure of Genesis are used to highlight a distinct family.²² Through this family, God will bring about his blessings (Gen 12:3), ultimately leading to Jesus’ triumph over the serpent, sin, and death (Rom 16:20; Gal 4:3–5).

God, in his loving-kindness towards his creation, mercifully delays judgment and gives Adam and Eve the promises that he will one day put an end to the forces that oppose his purposes and that he will restore his creation and his communion with man. At this point in the story, tragedy has struck, and God has given a glimmer of hope. But before this hope can be fully unpacked, the consequences of humanity’s rebellion must be explored.

¹⁸Alexander, *The Servant King*, 18.

¹⁹For example, Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, The Anchor Bible, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964).

²⁰H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 164.

²¹T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 2002), 103.

²²*Ibid.*, 105.

Conclusion

It is no surprise that things are not as they should be. Even those who escape major tragedy experience our brokenness and that of creation in a thousand little ways every day, from dissatisfaction with a glimpse in the mirror to the never-ending monotony of the work week. No matter how hard we try, we are unable to remedy our situation. No amount of success or money or popularity satisfies us. We recognize that there must be more. Genesis resonates with us, for in it we see the world we long for. We see safety and belonging and purpose. But as we read, we discover that, like Adam and Eve, all of us have rejected our role as God's image bearers and have tried to go our own way. God's intended purpose for us is to expand the goodness of his creation, to live in harmony with him, and yet try as we might to create a good world, we find we add nothing of lasting value. Instead, even our best efforts often bring about destruction. Our technological advancements begin with such promise but are regularly coopted for evil purposes. Industrialization brought with it the promise of increased standard of living for all but often resulted in exploitation and an ever-widening gap between the haves and the have-nots. Nuclear power brought the promise of clean energy but also the power to destroy whole cities. The list could go on, but the point is clear. Our brokenness has permeated our world. And it has permeated our world because it has permeated our hearts.

This is in strong contrast to the character of God. His goodness shines forth in the early parts of Genesis. Even as he responds to his creation's rebellion, he reacts with goodness and mercy. But how can a people so thoroughly broken ever be restored to a harmonious relationship with this good God? That is the question you and I are to ponder. We are supposed to feel the tension, to see the difference between God and ourselves, to see the intent of creation and what we have made of it. We are supposed to lose hope in ourselves. We have made a mess we cannot fix. Genesis and the Old Testament will hammer this point home if it has not hit us yet.

We are supposed to lose hope in ourselves, but we are not supposed to lose hope. Rather, we are to trust the goodness of God. Like Adam, we are to grab the thread of promise in Genesis 3:15 and cling to it. We are to long for God's intervention, for his mercy and goodness, for salvation from ourselves and our sin.

Like Adam, we may not yet completely understand God's promise in Genesis 3:15, but we should know enough to see that we can never be the solution. And we have been given enough knowledge of the person and character of God to believe that he really is who he says he is, that he really is good, and that he really can be trusted. We know enough to know we must push forward in the story. We know enough to ask him to intervene. And because we live where we do in the story of our world—the story of God and his creation—we know that Jesus is God's answer to the question of how we can be restored.

CHAPTER 3

GENESIS 4:1–11:9

Introduction

Genesis begins beautifully. The Creator fashions a world that is full of goodness. He creates humanity in his image and bestows upon them the gift of his presence and the bounty of his new world. But the story takes a tragic turn when the man and woman are drawn into temptation. Believing they know better than God what is best despite his abundant provision, humanity rebels against him and becomes the creature longing to usurp the place of the Creator. As a result, God promises judgment. There will be death, but in his grace, God not only delays this punishment but gives hope that one day things will be set right. Genesis 3:15 foretells of a seed of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent. It is a promised deliverance. But there will be an ongoing struggle. God says to the serpent that he “will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring” (Gen 3:15).

Genesis 3:15 is a glimmer of hope in the midst of judgment. Adam, Eve, and their offspring who believe the promises of God see a foretold deliverance in the curse of the serpent, but there is also a hint of the struggle that will take place. The offspring of the woman and offspring of the serpent will struggle against one another. There will be enmity between the two groups. The seed of the woman will eventually prevail but not without injury. The serpent’s head will be bruised. He will be vanquished, but the heel of the woman’s seed will be struck. Genesis 3:15 not only sets the stage for redemption; it lays the groundwork for understanding what is happening in our world. It not only gives us a clue as to how a broken and sinful people can be restored to a harmonious relationship with a righteous and holy God; it also gives us the framework for

understanding the struggle between the righteous and the wicked and how the righteous will triumph in the end.

A Sad New Reality

Genesis 3 closes with a sad new reality. Sin and death have entered into God's good creation. There is strife between the man and the woman, toil in work, pain in child-bearing, enmity between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, and worst of all, broken fellowship with God. Humanity is driven from the garden of Eden where they dwelt with God and is denied the tree of life. Mercifully, the promise of a serpent slayer rings out. But although the promise of deliverance is sure, the effects of sin and death are disastrous. They are not a minor speed bump on the path to restoration but an obstacle that can only be removed by divine intervention.

Hope and Disappointment

Genesis 4:1–2 show God's graciousness in providing new life even in the midst of the judgment of death.¹ Adam names his wife Eve "because she was the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) denoting a belief in God's promise in Genesis 3:15. Eve believes God is fulfilling this promise when she bears two children, Cain and Abel. She names her firstborn son, Cain, saying, "I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1),

¹H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis, Leupold on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 190.

which shows her belief in God's promises.² In addition, God graces them with another child, Abel. All of this new life takes place amidst the new reality of the curse as a testament to God's grace. There is so much hope here, but we soon see that sin and death will not be easily vanquished. They have thoroughly infected the human heart.

When Cain and Abel bring offerings to the Lord, the Lord has regard for Abel's offering but not Cain's (Gen 4:4–5). Cain's response is important in this passage. He becomes angry. God is gracious with Cain and gives him hope that he will be accepted if he does well. God warns Cain what will happen if he is not careful: "And if you do not do well, sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is contrary to you, but you must rule over it" (Gen 4:7). God describes sin as something that is lying in wait to overcome Cain. It is seeking to destroy Cain.

God's warning to Cain teaches about the power of sin to enslave us. This is a theme picked up throughout Scripture. In Deuteronomy 30:1, God expects Israel to disobey even though they have been promised blessing for obedience and cursing for disobedience. Then in 30:6, God says he is going to provide the solution to his people's problem. He will circumcise their hearts so that they will love God. Jeremiah 31:31–34 picks up this same idea. As a result of Israel's repeated failure to keep the Mosaic

²Cassuto and Sailhamer, following Cassuto's lead, interpret the wording of the naming of Cain to suggest that Eve believes she has become like God in giving life. They argue that it is not until the naming of Seth (Gen 4:25) that Eve recognizes God as the sole giver of life. However, Adam's naming of Eve as "the mother of all living" (Gen 3:20) shows he trusts the promise of Genesis 3:15–16 that God will give an offspring through the woman. Adam, and apparently Eve as well, expect that God will provide life through Eve, as the wording can be interpreted to mean she produced a son "with the help of the Lord" (Gen 4:1) (Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1, trans. Israel Abrahams [Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1972], 201; John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*, in vol. 2 of *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Tremper Longman III and David E. Garland [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008], 3635, Kindle). Furthermore, Mathews says, "The narrator reinforces this indirectly in referring to Adam's wife by the seldom-used 'Eve,' not found again in the subsequent Old Testament, which echoed Adam's earlier confidence in God's provision for a future family (3:20; cf. 4:25)" (Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, NAC, vol. 1A [Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1996], 264). Regardless of whether Eve has trusted God at this point or not, her husband has, and she will. Her naming of Seth reveals that she sees God as the provider of life (Gen 4:25). In addition, Seth's descendants begin to call upon the name of the Lord (Gen 4:26) and evidence a longing for the fulfillment of Gen 3:15 (Gen 5:29).

Covenant, Jeremiah tells of a new covenant that God will make with his people. He will put his law within them, and all his people will know him. Ecclesiastes 7:20 tells us there is not a righteous man on earth. Psalm 14:2–3 says, “The Lord looks down from heaven on the children of man, to see if there are any who understand, who seek after God. They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.” Psalm 53 says nearly the same thing. The New Testament continues this view of humanity and sin’s power over them. Romans 1 and 2 recount humanity’s deep-seated rebellion. In Romans 3, Paul concludes his argument for man’s failure to achieve righteousness for himself by quoting Psalms 14 and 53. In Romans 5, he talks about the reign of sin and death as a result of Adam’s transgression. Romans 6 says, we have been set free from the power of sin and death.

Peter seems to make use of the imagery from Genesis 4:7 when he writes, “Be sober-minded; be watchful. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour” (1 Pet 5:8). It is clear that humanity is unable to undo the effect of Adam’s sin. Their hearts have been broken, and they are powerless to fix them. Cain’s sin is just an introduction to this new reality.³

Despite God’s warning, Cain is overcome by his anger. He rises up and kills his brother. Mathews expresses the tragedy of Cain’s decision: “The virus of sin has infected the parent’s children; Adam and Eve do not have to await their own death to experience the devastating effects of their rebellion in the garden. They witness the

³Brueggemann would argue against this idea of a heart that is broken and enslaved by sin. He says that God has created a crisis in Cain’s life that Cain should resolve by doing well, suggesting that a “post-Genesis 3 man can do well.” He argues that Cain is not fallen, “He is not the victim of original sin. He can choose and act for good . . . Cain in this story is free and capable of faithful living” (Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC [Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982], 57). The evidence discussed above refutes this position. Although Cain is willfully making his choice, the Old Testament forces us come to grips with the reality that every person, including the biblical heroes, has the same heart problem: they are sinful (Ps 14:2–3). And a sinful heart produces fruit that is sinful (Matt 12:33; Luke 6:43–45). This is why people must be given new hearts (Ezek 36:26) and have the law written on their hearts (Jer 31:33).

murder of their youngest and the exile of their firstborn.”⁴ Cain repeats the sin of his parents, ignores God’s warning, and believes that his way of obtaining what he wants is better than God’s. He thinks his brother is the problem, not his own heart. His actions demonstrate otherwise. Sin has captured his heart, and sin results in death.

When the Lord offers Cain a chance to confess, Cain increases his sin with deception. There is no remorse in Cain’s heart. His only sorrow is for himself and the judgment he has earned (Gen 4:13–14). Again, God is gracious. Cain is not immediately struck dead. He is protected. He goes away from the presence of the Lord and establishes himself in the land of Nod, east of Eden. The meaning of the name “Nod” is significant. It means “wandering.” Cain leaves the presence of the Lord and goes to the land of “wandering.” Gage says, “How subtle, yet how sure is the lot of the wicked to live a life of contradiction! Like those who ‘live’ in the land of the shadow of death (cf. Isa 9:2), Cain will ‘dwell’ in the land of wandering.”⁵ This imagery of wandering signifying exile began with Adam and Eve being forced to leave Eden. Similarly, Cain is removed from God, wandering because of his rebellion despite his warning. Cain has repeated the sin of his father and misses God’s rest. Israel will repeat these decisions. They are cursed to wander when they doubt God’s goodness (Num 14) and his ability to deliver them. Hebrews 3:12–18 uses the imagery of the wilderness generation to warn against separation from God and his rest. The author exhorts his readers to hold fast to their faith, to not be like the wilderness generation who did not enter into God’s rest because of their disobedience. Rather, through their obedience in the faith, they are called to enter again into his presence.

⁴Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 273.

⁵Warren Austin Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology*, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: St. Andrew’s House, 2010), 91.

The story of Cain shows the effects of sin on humanity. Of Cain's sin, Kidner says,

Sin is shown with its own growth-cycle as in James 1:15, and in 7b it is personified in almost Pauline fashion (*cf.* Rom. 7:8ff.). Many details emphasize the depth of Cain's crime, and therefore the Fall: the context is worship, the victim a brother; and while Eve had been talked into her sin, Cain will not have even God talk him out of it; nor will he confess to it, nor yet accept his punishment.⁶

The human heart has not briefly stumbled and recovered, like a man who has briefly caught his foot on a raised ledge but has quickly recovered. It has well and truly fallen. Sin has taken root and grown. Genesis tells of paradise lost, of a relationship broken beyond our ability to repair, of hearts that are bent on self-aggrandizement leading to self-destruction. Brueggemann reminds us what is at stake in the story of Cain and Abel. He says, "The world knows that the murder of a brother is a scandalous, unacceptable act. It does not require the Bible to announce that unchallenged norm . . . What interests the story-teller (and therefore us) is the destiny of the murderer, a destiny haunted by a skewed relation with God."⁷

Genesis wants us to see the destiny of this murderer because we are meant to see what happens to those who set themselves at odds with God and who do not believe his promises. They become the seed of the serpent. We follow Adam's lineage through Cain long enough to see the fruit of unbelief and disobedience. This finds its climax in Lamech. We are only given a few facts about Lamech, but they are enough to show the trajectory of a lineage of disobedience. Lamech has two wives, blatantly disregarding God's design for a man and woman to be joined as one flesh in marriage (Gen 2:24). He sings to them a song about killing a man, glorying in violence and bragging that his seventy-sevenfold vengeance, seemingly mocking the grace of God in his sevenfold

⁶Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 74.

⁷Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 55.

vengeance on any who would harm Cain (Gen 4:15). Lamech glories in violence and sexual immorality. Mathews says it succinctly, “Lamech is the epitome of Cain’s corrupt family. As the seventh name in the genealogy, the number for completeness, Lamech’s notorious career attests to the peculiarly wicked life of the Cainites.”⁸ Humanity’s destiny apart from a relationship with God is tragic.

The Righteous Seed

The story of Cain introduces the extent of the fall, a reality Genesis and the rest of Scripture will force us to watch and digest if we are to receive its message of hope in Jesus. It also introduces the ongoing battle between the righteous believing seed of the woman and the unrighteous unbelieving seed of the serpent. A story that started with such hope—God providing offspring according to his promise in Genesis 3:15 instead of the immediate death Adam and Eve deserved—has quickly turned to disappointment. The son of hope has instead shown the new trajectory of creation and murdered his brother. Whatever hope existed is temporarily gone.

But God shows his faithfulness to his promises. There will be a righteous seed for God provides Adam and Eve with another son. Eve recognizes God’s provision in Genesis 4:25, “And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, ‘God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him.’” God is in control and is working out his promises. Of the story of Cain and Abel, Sidney Greidanus says,

Although the narrative appears to be about murder and violence, the concluding verses call attention to God’s faithfulness in continuing the line of the seed of the woman *In the battle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, God provides for the continued existence of the seed of the woman.* The likely goal

⁸Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 282.

of the narrator is: *To assure Israel that God is faithful in maintaining in human history his covenant people.*⁹

God is providing a remnant, a righteous line who believes in his promises. Genesis 4:26 says, “To Seth also a son was born, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call upon the name of the Lord.” Cain fails and murders his brother, but God will keep his promises. He provides Seth, one whose line begins to call on the name of the Lord. This line is contrasted with the line of Cain. It is a line of righteousness as demonstrated by belief in the promises of God.

Just as Cain’s line is traced to the seventh generation from Adam on a trajectory of disbelief and sin, the seventh generation of Seth’s line, Enoch, exemplifies a trajectory of belief and righteousness. As Mathews states, “Structurally the two genealogies provide a striking contrast by highlighting Lamech and Enoch, and they elaborate on the careers of these two commanding figures.”¹⁰ Seth’s genealogy begins with a brief reminder that Adam is created “in the likeness of God” (Gen 5:1). Then Adam fathers a son “in his own likeness” (Gen 5:3). This is a reminder of man’s commission to multiply and fill the earth (Gen 1:28). In a way, Adam is fulfilling this commission. There is new life in the image of God filling the earth. But even this positive event carries a reminder of the fall. At each step along the genealogical path, the father dies. It is an ever present reminder that something is wrong. Sin and death have permeated the world and stained the blessing of life, yet all is not lost. The pattern of death for the father temporarily ends with Enoch.

Enoch reminds us that we are anticipating a deliverance from the effects of sin. In the midst of all of this death and in contrast to Cain’s descendant, Lamech, Enoch walks with God (Gen 5:22, 24) and then “was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:24). Where

⁹Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 89.

¹⁰Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 282.

Lamech was immoral and violent, mocking God with claims of vengeance, Enoch communes with God. This phrase “walked with God” denotes an intimacy with the Creator. As Wenham states, “The double repetition of the phrase ‘walked with God’ indicates Enoch was outstanding in this pious family.”¹¹ This becomes even clearer when we see that Enoch “was not, for God took him” (Gen 5:23). Enoch does not experience death. His relationship with God is such that he is spared this experience (Heb 11:5).

Continuing down the line of Seth reveals other examples of belief, righteousness and God’s preservation of a people for himself. Again in contrast to Cain’s Lamech, the Lamech in the line of Seth shows his belief in the promise of God given in Genesis 3:15. Genesis 5:28–29 says, “When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, ‘Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of our hands.’” Cain’s Lamech mocks God. Seth’s Lamech believes God and expects him to keep his promise. He hopes that Noah is the one who will bring relief from the curse of toil (Gen 3:17). Kidner tentatively says, “The allusion to 3:17 may be a sign that he treasured the promise of 3:15.”¹² But where else would Lamech find the expectation of a deliverer from the effects of sin? Mathews says more definitively, “Lamech looks ahead to a future victory (as 3:15) and prays that Noah will be instrumental in achieving it.”¹³ Brueggemann states, “This anticipation of the work of Noah, placed in the mouth of Lamech, is a gospel announcement.”¹⁴ Lamech’s reason for naming his son Noah is a belief that there will be a seed of the woman who will defeat the serpent.

¹¹Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, WBC, vol. 1 (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 127.

¹²Kidner, *Genesis*, 81.

¹³Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 317.

¹⁴Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 70.

Lamech recognizes that Noah is a seed of the woman, and the promise has not yet been kept. He hopes that his son will be this child. His expectation of a deliverer is a clue to help us see the pattern we are to expect for the seed of the woman. This promise will be clarified as the narrative of Scripture moves forward, but Moses, the author of Genesis, wants to make sure we are aware of an expectation of deliverance that is yet to be fulfilled. Noah will be instrumental in humanity's deliverance from God's judgment on sin.

God's Judgment and Salvation

The line of Seth is a reminder of God's plan for redemption. Despite humanity's rebellion and the reality of the curse, some people begin to call on the name of the Lord (4:26). Seth's line produces men who are counted righteous. They have a definite expectation for the restoration of creation. This comes as a relief following the story of Cain, but this sense of relief is short-lived. Sin has thoroughly infected mankind.

Genesis 6:1 begins with humanity multiplying according to the divine decree to fill the earth, but this is a mockery of God's intention. Life is expanding, but sin and death are as well. House states, "Despite the seeming monotony and sameness of procreation, life and death, under the surface of the text lies a sad fact: sin continues to increase as well, and sin never dies. This fact is evident in Genesis 6:1–4, where the world seems completely out of control."¹⁵ Although there are differing interpretations of the particulars of 6:1–4, "All scholars agree that the passage demonstrates pervasive human sinfulness, the consequences of which emerge in Genesis 6:5 and the following text."¹⁶ Regardless of how one interprets the particulars of 6:1–4, God does not approve. Genesis 6:5 says, "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and

¹⁵Paul House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 67.

¹⁶*Ibid.*

that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.” Sin is not a little problem. It has affected humanity so deeply that every intention of every thought was evil. The multiplication of man has only multiplied wickedness, and God is grieved (Gen 6:6) to the point of judgment.

It is easy to fixate on the wickedness of man and the coming judgment and miss an important insight on the nature of God. He is hurt by his creation: “And the Lord regretted that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, ‘I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, man and animals and creeping things and birds of the heavens, for I am sorry that I have made them’” (Gen 6:6–7). Man’s wickedness is meant to be seen and understood. The problem of sin is meant to be on display but so is the nature of God. Scripture is clear that God is not surprised by the unfolding of history. It demonstrates that he is sovereign, that it has unfolded exactly as he knew it would (Gen 50:20). We are meant to see that although God is not surprised, he still feels sorrow. Waltke says, “The narrator represents God as fully involved in his relationship with human beings and with his creation.”¹⁷ God is intimately involved with his creation. House explains,

The Lord knows the inclinations of human hearts, a sure sign that God knows everything. Sadly, every inclination is always toward evil. Every plan made tends toward wickedness. Having seen (6:5), God now feels grief and pain over what people are doing. God’s power and all-inclusive seeing lead to proper emotion, not to callousness or cynicism or brutality. Based on the seeing and feeling, the Lord determines to change the policy of allowing the human race to live in this condition. God’s regret means action must be taken now that a great cosmic mistake has been made. Therefore the Lord determines to punish the wicked but to spare Noah, a man who acts differently than others and who thereby avoids their punishment (6:8).¹⁸

God knows all, and yet he is invested in a relationship with us. God’s ways are mysterious and often beyond our ability to comprehend. The coming judgment can seem

¹⁷Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 285.

¹⁸House, *Old Testament Theology*, 68.

harsh from a man-centered perspective. But we are to find comfort in God’s promise in Genesis 3:15 that he has a plan in his establishing a righteous seed, in his omniscient assessment of the state of humanity, and in his mercy shown to Noah, particularly with the inclusion of his family in salvation from the flood.

In contrast to the world around him, Noah was a righteous man (Gen 6:9). We are told he “walked with God” (Gen 6:9) like his forefather, Enoch, who escaped death. We are meant to trust the narrator’s assessment of Noah’s righteousness here, demonstrated by Noah’s life. Genesis 15:6 will inform us of the explicit source of his righteousness—his faith, but we are clued in to this pattern here. God commands, and Noah acts (6:22, 7:5). Noah’s righteousness is demonstrated by his actions that are inexplicable outside of his belief in God’s promised judgment and salvation.

Just as God said, he brings the flood, his judgment on creation. In Genesis 1:1, the earth is covered in waters, and now waters have once again covered the earth (Gen 7:19). Where God once caused the earth to swarm with life, he now blots out every living thing (Gen 7:23). Creation is undone, and God will restart with the lone righteous man and his family. The language and pattern of the flood narrative punctuate the feeling of a new creation. When the waters dry, God commands Noah to bring out the living things that they may again swarm on the earth (Gen 8:17). He gives Noah the decree to “be fruitful and multiply on the earth” (Gen 8:17). God has saved a people for himself to begin anew his creation. As Gage puts it,

The new world has a new Adam; as the first Adam had been father to the antediluvians, Noah will be father to the postdiluvians. Adam had been given the command to fruitfulness that he might multiply upon the earth (Gen 1:28). Now Noah is given this same command, and of his sons the whole earth will be overspread (Gen 9:19).¹⁹

¹⁹Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, 106.

God has provided the righteous seed of the woman, expected by those who believe the promise of Genesis 3:15 to bring about relief from the curse (Gen 5:29) and again gives them the commission of filling the earth.

In the flood narrative, the seriousness of sin is evident. The lengths to which God must go to excise it from his creation result in what is almost a complete undoing of creation. But God desires to preserve humanity. Von Rad says, “We see, therefore (already in primeval history!), that each time, in and after judgment, God’s preserving, forgiving will to save is revealed.”²⁰ The cost is high, but we are left with the hope that maybe Noah, the lone righteous man, can turn the page on evil. God’s judgment is sobering, but there is tentative hope that humanity has hit rock bottom. There seems to be no place to go but up.

Still Broken

The post-flood world begins well. Noah receives the new commission to fill the earth. He responds with worship and builds an altar to sacrifice some of every clean animal (Gen 8:20). This act is pleasing to the Lord, and he decides in his heart to never again curse the ground because of man (Gen 8:21). God blesses Noah and his sons (Gen 9:21). He gives them every moving thing and green plant for their food (Gen 9:3). He establishes a covenant with them and their offspring and all of creation. He promises that he will never again destroy the earth with a flood and gives them the rainbow as a visual reminder of the covenant and the grace he has shown them and will show them in the future (Gen 9:9–17).

But we are clued in to a continuing problem. God determines he will no longer curse the ground because of man “for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth” (Gen 8:21). And this is not the only clue. God gives warnings and commandments

²⁰Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1972), 153.

regarding blood, the sign of life (Gen 9:4–6). Life is not to be disregarded. There will be a reckoning for the spilling of the lifeblood of man “for God made man in his own image” (Gen 9:6). These clues point towards a devastating reality that will shortly be revealed. Man’s heart is still sinful, and like cancer, sin that exists is sin that will grow. Even when creation is restarted with one righteous man and his family, humanity cannot shake itself free of sin.

Noah has been a man who up to this point has been characterized by righteousness and obedience. But Genesis 9:21 records Noah’s disobedience, “He drank of the wine and became drunk and lay uncovered in his tent.” Although some commentators do not see a clear tie to Noah’s drunkenness and disobedience, Noah’s actions set humanity back on a trajectory of self-destruction.²¹ This, when combined with Scripture’s teachings on the dangers of overindulgence in strong drink, implies disobedience. Gage argues from Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 24:38 about the eating and drinking that occurred before the flood that Noah is aware of the effects of wine and that his sin is deliberate.²² This seems to fit best with the narrative of Genesis, particularly when Noah is only recorded as having sinned this once, and yet he dies (Gen 9:29). Regardless, Ham’s reaction to his father’s nudity leaves no room to pretend sin has been conquered. It has a definite foothold in the founding family of recreation. Ham fails to cover his father’s nudity and tells his brothers, Shem and Japheth. They do what Ham should have and cover their father, refusing to look on his nakedness (Gen 9:22–23). When Noah awakens and realizes what has happened, he curses Canaan, the son of Ham, and blesses Shem and Japheth (Gen 9:25). Hughes says, “Sin was alive and well in the new world . . . Indeed, if God wanted to eradicate evil, he would have had to eradicate the

²¹For examples of alternate interpretations, see Wenham’s comments on Gen 9:21 in *Genesis: 1–15*, 198–99.

²²Gage, *The Gospel of Genesis*, 109.

entire human race. But this God would not do—because he had promised that the offspring of Eve would one day crush the head of Satan (cf. 3:15).”²³

Lamech expected Noah to be the one who would bring relief from the curse, and in a way he did for the world is briefly cleansed of unrighteousness. But this deliverance is not complete. The effects of sin will last beyond Noah. He has not defeated sin in his own heart. In fact, he has fathered a son, Ham, whose actions are recorded to help us understand the continued line of the woman and the line of the serpent. The first mention of Ham tells us of his son, Canaan. Moses gives us a clue to the trajectory of Ham’s line. As we read on, Canaan will be in a constant struggle with the people of God. This information, so near to the lineages of Cain and Seth and to the cursing of Canaan and the blessings on Shem, are meant to again highlight the ongoing conflict between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. Noah is a seed of the woman who has been used by God to bring about a deliverance of a righteous remnant, but this deliverance is not complete. Sin is still growing. Noah is only a type of deliverer.

As if to demonstrate the totality of humanity’s sinfulness even after the flood, Moses records the story of the tower of Babel. In this story, the new world is much like the old. Just as before (Gen 6:5), the intentions of men’s hearts are still evil (Gen 8:21). Noah, as a new Adam, is tasked with multiplying and filling the earth (Gen 9:1, 19), and Genesis 10 demonstrates how this man and his three sons are fulfilling this commission.²⁴ But as noted, things are not as they should be. Noah is the father of nations, but his offspring join together in rebellion. In Genesis 11, we see that this family is multiplying, but they are only spreading across the earth and filling it because God has dispersed them by his judgment. Genesis 11:4 records Noah’s offspring conspiring together: “Then they

²³R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 150.

²⁴Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 427.

said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’”

These people are multiplying, but they are not filling the earth. They fear being dispersed across the earth, as if God’s command is bad for them. So they repeat the sins of their ancestors, believing that they know better than God what is best. Their pride leads them to attempt to breach the heavens by the work of their hands. Their arrogance leads them to attempt to make a name for themselves apart from God. Moses is telling us something of the heart of man—that it is suspicious of and even set against its creator. Hughes says, “This story of Babel also mirrors humanity’s attempt in Eden to grasp power apart from God. The tower builders’ attempt to exceed proscribed human limits is much like Eve’s desire for the tree (cf. 3:5, 6).”²⁵ Humanity is repeating its rebellion against God. As Mathews states, “Genesis 1–11 then has come full circle from ‘Eden’ to ‘Babel,’ both remembered for the expulsion of their residents.”²⁶ The account of Babel illustrates the heart condition of humanity, even after cleansing the world through the flood.

God again judges his people, dispersing them so that they fill the earth as he intended but also as a protection to them. Genesis 11:6 records the Lord saying, “Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them” (Gen 11:6). God worries about the extent of their self-destruction. Just as God sought to protect Adam and Eve from partaking of the tree of life in their sinful condition, he confuses the languages of people and disperses them as a protection to them.²⁷ Otherwise, they would be left unchecked in their sinful pursuits—something Romans 1 says leads to increasing sin and destruction.

²⁵Hughes, *Genesis*, 169.

²⁶Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 467.

²⁷*Ibid.*, 484.

The world is clearly still broken following the flood. There is ongoing enmity between the woman and the serpent. Man continues to make disastrous decisions. But again the story carries hints of God's plan to rescue creation and preserve a people for himself amidst the wreckage. Sailhamer expresses it this way, "Out of the ruins of two great cities, the city of Cain and the city of Babylon, God preserves the promised 'seed.' The line of promise continues with Shem (11:10) and finds its destination in Abraham and a new promise about his 'seed.'"²⁸ Mathews explains how the story of the Tower of Babel sets the stage for another deliverer, one who will receive another promise from God that clarifies and advances the promise of Genesis 3:15:

The story of the tower also looks ahead by anticipating the role that Abram (12:1–3) will play in restoring the blessing to the dispersed nations The tower account then is sandwiched between the two genealogies of Shem, the first completing the table (10:21–31) and leading to the Babylon account (11:1–9): Shem → Joktan → Babel. The second continues the lineal descent as Shem → Peleg → Abram (11:10–26), followed by the Abraham narrative. This arrangement highlights the end of each line of descent from Shem. Structurally, the nonelect tribes of Joktan's line end up with the sordid story of the Babel builders, while conversely the privileged genealogy of the Peleg branch aims for the Abram clan and the subsequent narrative.²⁹

As the story moves forward in Genesis, people will either believe the promises of God and show themselves to be seed of the woman, or they will reject God and show themselves to be the seed of the serpent. Moses does the same thing in the genealogy of Noah that he does in the genealogies of Cain and Seth. Those who reject God set themselves on a trajectory of wickedness; those who believe him are made righteous. And through the righteous line, we are to expect a serpent slayer—one who will bring about restoration and rest from the curse.

²⁸Sailhamer, *Genesis*, 5218–20.

²⁹Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 428.

Conclusion

Genesis 1–3 sets the stage for understanding Genesis and our world. Genesis 4–11 tells us something of the stakes. Creation will not be set right immediately, sin has too great of a hold. Humanity’s heart has been broken. Cain kills his brother. His immoral descendant, Lamech, revels in his vengeance as he sings to his two wives. God examines the hearts of man only a few generations away from Adam, and he sees that the intentions of the hearts of man are continuously evil. Sin is cancerous and will not be undone easily. It requires the destruction of nearly all of creation to bring about some relief from it. God starts over with a righteous man and his family, and yet it is still not eradicated.

But the existence of a righteous man is a reason to hope. Evil has not yet triumphed, and God continues to show grace. As Hamilton says, “Neither the sin of individuals (Cain, Lamech, and Ham) nor groups (sons of God and daughters of men, the whole earth, and the builders of the tower) eclipses completely the mercy and sovereignty of God.”³⁰ He will accomplish his purposes. He has promised that the evil one will be slain. Genesis is careful to show how God preserves a righteous line in order that this promise may be fulfilled. He provides Seth after Cain murders Abel. He provides Noah, a lone righteous man in a world where every intention of every thought is evil continuously. He brings him by his grace through the judgment of the flood in order to establish a new creation with a reprieve from the effects of sin. In this way, Noah is a deliverer. He brings a sort of rest to creation, but he is not the serpent slayer. He is only a type of the expected deliverer. But as a type, he teaches us something of what we are to expect.

Noah is a seed of the woman, of a righteous (but not sinless) line. He delivers humanity from God’s judgment and as a new Adam, he fills the earth with his offspring.

³⁰Victor P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1982), 58.

God makes a new beginning with Noah, something the world desperately needs.³¹ Yet we are left with a clear understanding that the work is not done. We need another new beginning—a better one where sin is fully eradicated. We need God to intervene. We need him to judge sin, but we also need to be spared his judgment for we are part of the problem. Noah proves this. He is the one righteous man, the best of all of humanity, and yet his sin pollutes the new world. Noah is a picture of what we need but one that pales in comparison to the reality. He teaches us what to look for. He helps us see the pattern that will lead us to see other types of deliverers, all so that we can recognize the one we are truly desperate for. This is why the story is told and the seed is traced. It shows us our desperate need and then points to our Savior.

³¹Geidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 109.

CHAPTER 4

GENESIS 11:10–12:9

Introduction

Genesis 1–11 is a roller coaster. It starts with the Creator bringing the heavens and earth into existence. He brings beauty, form, and life. And then he entrusts it to humanity, his special creation that bears his image. Despite the privileges they were created to live within, man believes that he can discern right from wrong for himself, striking a divide between himself and God. All seems lost. Sin, pain, and death enter the world through man. But instead of destroying the defiant image bearers, God begins the work of restoring them to their rightful calling.

We see a flicker of hope in the midst of a world turned up-side-down. Man pines after what will destroy him. His trajectory is marked by immorality and violence, but the story calls us back to the promise that God makes in Genesis 3:15. God has not forgotten. He is preserving a remnant through men who choose to believe in him. Seth's line is identified with men who are marked by sin but who seek after God despite the fact that the world is spiraling into chaos around them. Lamech, in Gen 5:29, speaks over his son the promise that maybe he would be the one to lift the curse of sin and death. But even though Noah's life is a picture of faithfulness, he too shows that he is unable to lift the curse.

The Spiral Down of Humanity

In Genesis 11 the people who God commanded to scatter and fill the earth instead decide to settle down and build a city. In and of itself, this story seems innocent, even good. Man has become innovative. They have learned to make bricks. They have begun to learn how to explore the world. But Genesis 11:4 reveals their dangerous

motive: “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heaven, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.”

These “let us” phrases echo back to Genesis 1; it bears the underbelly of man’s inward, self-seeking heart. Humanity is right back to where they were before the flood. Even a restart of creation through a righteous man and his family cannot fix the problem of sin. There is a heart condition within mankind that we are unable to overcome. The world seems destined to flounder in sin.

Because of their wickedness and disobedience at Babel, God scatters the nations. It seems that rather than moving towards the promised restoration of creation as implied by the promised serpent slayer (Gen 3:15) and Lamech’s naming of Noah (Gen 5:29), creation is continuing towards chaos. How will God set this right? He has had to confound and confuse humanity to limit their wickedness and rebellion. Things do not seem good, but God intervenes, faithful to his promise despite man’s rebellion. He will bring about a seed of the woman according to his provision and timing. Just as he graciously provides Seth to Adam and Eve (Gen 4:25), he will again provide a child. This time it will be to a man from the line of Shem whom God chooses to bless.

Up to this point, Genesis has sped through time, mentioning short, defining instances to help us determine the narrative lay of the land. There has been much tragedy followed by a few moments of hope stemming from the promise of Genesis 3:15. However, following the story of Babel, the flame of hope seems to be flickering and in danger of going out. The scene for the story has been set. The rules of creation are clear. We know how the world should be, but we also know that something has gone horribly wrong. It seems that evil is going to prevail at every turn, and even in Genesis, the beginning, we are made to see the depths of our brokenness, our desperation, and our helplessness. But God continues to keep his promise in ways only he can imagine and orchestrate.

The Seed is Specified

Following the account of Babel, Genesis records the genealogy of Shem up to Abraham. Again, these genealogical records are incredibly important. They are the guideline of the narrative, connecting the different stories, indicating the trajectory, assuring us of a destination even when we are unsure of the path. Just as we saw the trajectory of evil in the line of Cain and the contrasting line of Seth, we grow in hope through the continuation of the preservation of the seed of the woman through Shem's line in spite of humanity's overt sin at Babel. As Mathews' states,

The appointment of the patriarch as the father of a new nation was God's gracious response to the troubled nations that had scattered from the Tower of Babel (10:1–11:9). The arrangement of the Shemite genealogy (11:10–26) following the Tower of Babel episode (11:1–9) completed the pattern of blessing-sin-grace that characterizes the Genesis stories to this point.¹

God is at work to accomplish his purposes despite humanity's rebellion, and he does so by preserving the seed. He continues to bring new life when humanity deserves death.

As we transition to Genesis 12 and begin the story of the line of Abram (referred to as Abraham from here forward as this is the name God gives him), the pace of the story drastically slows. His story fills more chapters than the events leading up to his birth. Now that an understanding of humanity's state following the fall has been established, we will see God's salvific plan continue to unfold and take shape. Just as the beginning of Genesis moves from the general story of creation to focus in on the creation of man, now the story moves from a bird's eye view of all mankind into the making of a man and his family. And in this we see a God who is over all of creation but also one who cares for individuals on an intensely personal level. He takes special interest in Abraham, for through him, the promises of God will move forward.

¹Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 85.

The Family Tree

God's initial commission to man is to "be fruitful and multiply" (Gen 1:28), a commission he reiterates at the recreation in the flood narrative (Gen 9:1). As the lineage of Shem comes to a close and leaves us following the life of Abraham, a tension arises. God has called man to be fruitful. His promise for dealing with the serpent will come through a seed of the woman. Each child brings with it the hope for redemption and evidence of God's blessing. And yet, Genesis 11:30 says, "Now Sarai was barren; she had no child" (Gen 11:30). This short sentence introduces a tension into the narrative. The tracing of the seed of the woman has come to what appears to be a dead end. How can blessing come to one who is unable to conceive? God seems to have painted himself into a corner in choosing to work through Abraham and Sarai (referred to as Sarah from here on as this is the name God gives her). But Sarah's barrenness introduces how God will move his salvific plan forward. It provides the opportunity for faith, the surprising basis for a righteous standing before him (Gen 15:6, Rom 4:3, Gal 3:6, Jas 2:23).

The Sovereign Choice of God

Genesis does not give us any reason for why God chooses Abraham other than that God decides to do so according to his sovereign will. He provides a seed for Adam and Eve (Gen 4:25); he preserves Noah through his intervention (Gen 6:13–22); and now, he chooses Abraham to be the source of his blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3). As Kidner says, "The history of redemption, like that of creation, begins with God speaking: this, in a nutshell, differentiates Abram's story from his father's."² God chooses Abraham; he "differentiates" him solely because he decides to do so.

As stated before, the narrative slows to a relative crawl with Abraham. This has less to do with Abraham than it does with God. He chooses Abraham to be the one

²Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 113.

through whom the plan of redemption will move forward. God speaks. He makes a promise based on his will, not humanity's performance as we are often tempted to believe. The concept that Abraham does not earn God's favor through his own merit or actions is a difficult lesson for us to learn but one that Scripture is intent on teaching us. We desire to be in control, to be the masters of our fate. This is the crux of the fall (Gen 3). Humanity attempts to wrestle control of our lives from God. But the result of our control is always disaster. Remember Noah. The world is so wicked that God decides to cleanse it with a flood. But he, by his sovereign choice, informs Noah and has him build an ark by which Noah, his family, and examples of the creatures of earth can be saved. God is obviously the actor in this story. Apart from his intervention on Noah's behalf, no one would have survived the flood (Gen 6—7). But why was Noah chosen? He was chosen because he "found favor in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen 6:8). We want to latch on to this idea, that we can earn righteousness, that we can earn salvation. However, this righteous man is unable to continue in righteousness. Once the world is cleansed, Noah is the one who sets it again on a trajectory of destruction (Gen 9:20–21). In the first eleven chapters of Genesis, the point is thoroughly made. We are helpless, and God must intervene.

The Call of Abraham

The call of Abraham is this intervention. Terah fathered three sons, Abraham, Nahor, and Haran, but God chooses Abraham to be the one through whom he works.

Genesis 12:1–3 says,

Now the Lord said to Abraham, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:1–3).

God initiates a covenant with Abraham and obviously has big plans for him. Our first reaction is to assume that Abraham has earned this honor, that he is a man of great import

or at least great character. Why else would God choose him? The only thing that sets Abraham apart is that he is in the line of Shem, but this is hardly distinguishable. By this time, Shem's line would have multiplied to the point where there would be many men who could have received the covenant. As we investigate the text, we are not given insight as to why Abraham is chosen over his brothers. On the contrary, from a human standpoint, there is a lot of evidence for choosing someone other than Abraham. It seems at first as if God has gambled and lost. First, Sarah is barren and has no children (Gen 11:30). As Brueggemann states,

The family of Abraham has derived naturally from historic antecedents, as indicated in the genealogies of Gen. 10–11. But that natural derivation now results in nothing. It ends in barrenness (11:30). The reference is cryptic and seems only to be descriptive. There is no reflection on the cause. There is no suggestion of punishment or curse. It is simply reported that this family (and with it the whole family of Gen. 1–11) has played out its future and has nowhere else to go. Barrenness is the way of human history. It is an effective metaphor for hopelessness. There is no foreseeable future. There is no human power to invent a future.³

This is not the best candidate for growing a family, much less a nation. Second, Abraham, as far as we can tell, is not a man of great import before God chooses him. There is no special mention of obedience like that of Noah. We are told only of his family line and nothing of what sets him apart from his brothers. His father worships other gods (Josh 24:2, 14).⁴ And third, even after God gives him this covenant, he does not seem to be a man of particularly high character. Later on in the story, not once but twice, he offers his wife to another man because he fears the man will kill him to marry her (Gen 12:11–13; Gen 20:2). This is the man God chooses to preserve the seed and father a great nation.

And this is the point. There is a lesson here. God is doing things in a way that shows he is the source of hope and blessing. This is not a new insight, but his choice of

³Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 116.

⁴Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 199. For a brief attempt at an explanation of the correspondence between Gen 31:53 and Josh 24:2, see Allen P. Ross, *Creation & Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 258.

Abraham reinforces it. Righteous Noah was unable to set things right. Then at this critical juncture in the redemptive narrative, God chooses a man we are told almost nothing about. This places emphasis on the chooser, not the chosen. God is the hero: he is the one upon which our hopes rest.

This is further emphasized in Abraham and Sarah's inability to conceive. God is not unaware of Sarah's barrenness. He intends to show his ability to provide a seed, to provide life out of barrenness. He makes sure we understand this when he rejects Abraham and Sarah's solution to their lack of progeny (Gen 16) and instead brings seed from barrenness, life from death, something from nothing (Gen 21:1–2). This is not new. This is what he has done in Genesis 1. We have a reminder in the choice of Abraham and his barren wife that God is God. He is able to cause what he wills to be. And he has chosen Abraham to be the conduit of his blessing to the nations.

This is not the only reason for God's choice of the barren couple. Brueggemann grasps the intention of including the barrenness of Sarah in the narrative. He says, "The marvel of biblical faith is that barrenness is the arena of God's life-giving action . . . A proper hearing of the Abraham-Sarah texts depends upon the vitality of the metaphor of barrenness."⁵ Barrenness is the setting for Abraham's choice of faith, and it is the setting by which all will know that God is the instigator of salvation.

God has made his choice in Abraham, and with that choice we are enlightened with respect to who God is. He is at the center of history. He is the one who must step in to bring salvation. He is the source of life. He is the source of blessing. And he is wholly sovereign.

And yet despite his rightful insistence that he be recognized as God, he is merciful and compassionate. He is working towards the salvation of his creation and the redemption of a people for himself. He longs to see us enjoy our place at the apex of

⁵Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 116.

creation but not through pride and rebellion. The intent of man at Babel was to make a name for himself (Gen 11:4). God punishes this folly. He will not allow a people to make a name for themselves outside of his authority. And yet in his blessing of Abraham, God promises to make Abraham's name great (Gen 12:2).

But what exactly is the call of Abraham? Genesis 12:1–3 says,

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

God commands faithful obedience and in turn makes several promises. The first set of these promises revolve around God's blessing of Abraham and his family. The second set revolves around Abraham as a mediator of the blessing of God, with the end goal of blessing all the families of the earth.⁶

It is important to understand what is being asked of Abraham here. Remember, we are told nothing of Abraham before this point that would have us single him out as deserving of God's calling. The promise does not come as a reward due Abraham for his stellar record of obedience, but rather by God's divine choice to bless Abraham. Without a firm hold on that point, we will be tempted to believe God owes Abraham the reward of blessing. However, Abraham's faithfulness is the result of God's intervention in his life. Abraham responds to the calling of God with faithful obedience. The promise comes first. Abraham then lives in light of the promise.

This is not to say that Abraham's obedience is unimportant. God's call is a difficult one. God tells Abraham to leave his land, his people, and his family to go to an unnamed land. His obedience requires faith, and this faith is what he is commended for. We see this specifically in Genesis 15 when God reaffirms his promise to provide Abraham with offspring: Abraham "believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as

⁶Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 108.

righteousness” (Gen 15:6). Paul builds his whole argument for a righteousness based on faith that was unavailable through works on the life of Abraham.

The writer of Hebrews also commends Abraham for his faith exemplified by his obedience in Hebrews 11:8, “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to a place that he was to receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham obeys, but as we will explore later on, his obedience does not make him righteous. It falls short. Rather, his obedience is the mark of his faith, and his faith is the condition of blessing. Ross states, “The evidence of Abram’s faith was his obedience to the Word of the Lord, which is stressed here. If he had not believed he would not have obeyed, and the promises of God would not have been fulfilled.”⁷ There is a required response from Abraham, but the promise is freely given, based on God’s mercy. Its fulfillment is accomplished by the work of God in a way that is completely outside of Abraham’s ability. Brueggemann clearly shows God as the initiator and source of hope:

There is no promise without the promise-maker. There is no real Genesis, no new beginning for barren people, apart from the reality of the God. It is the promise which requires a rejection of all posturing, a recognition that the world revolves around and is powered by this other one who will be trusted and praised.⁸

Abraham must respond in faith, but the causative agent is clearly God. As Abraham responds in faith, God begins to clarify the way his promises will unfold. In Genesis 12:7, as Abraham crosses in to Canaan, God says, “To your offspring I will give this land.” But Abraham has a long road of faith ahead. Genesis will spell out the beginning implications of the promises revealed in Genesis 12:1–3, but it will be generations before the messianic implications are fully revealed in Jesus.

⁷Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 263

⁸Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 119.

The Promises to Abraham

The first set of promises revolves around the blessing to Abraham and his family, and the first of these is that Abraham will receive a land that will be the replacement for that which he left (Gen 12:1, 7). The land will not belong to his family in full for 400 years (Gen 15:13). But as House states, “Emphasizing the land here indicates that the earth, or land, may finally be inhabited by people willing to obey Genesis 1:26–31.”⁹ Genesis 13:10 seems to present the Promised Land in this light as it describes the Jordan Valley as “well watered everywhere like the garden of the Lord.” Greidanus says, “Canaan was to become another Paradise—a beachhead on earth for the kingdom of God.”¹⁰ Whether or not this is the case, the Old Testament definitely understands this promise as kept on some level despite Israel’s failure to fully possess the land as a result of their disobedience. But there is an expectation for a future, full completion in the prophets (ex. Ezek 36:35). Hebrews tells us that even the possession of the land in the Old Testament was not the fulfillment of this promise (Heb 11:9–16). Rather, it is pointing towards the fulfillment of salvation when Jesus brings a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21).¹¹

Second, God promises to make Abraham into a great nation. We have already discussed Sarah’s barrenness and how it provides the context of Abraham’s faith and the necessity of God’s intervention, but it also tells us about the salvific plan of God. God begins with a single individual, but he intends to bless the nations. Not only can he produce life from a barren couple, he is able to bring spiritual life to those who are

⁹Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 72.

¹⁰Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 145.

¹¹Martin says, “Abraham looked beyond his present fleeting scene to the unseen blessing, for the land pointed beyond itself to a more excellent consummation. According to the author, then, the patriarchs knew that the land of promise was not the ultimate fulfillment, since they were dwelling as strangers and exiles (11:13)” (Oren R. Martin, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God’s Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 34 [London: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015], 144).

spiritually dead.¹² This is an inference that Moses intends (Deut 30:6) and the prophets unpack (Jer 31:33, Ezek 36–37).

Third, God will make the name of Abraham great. As mentioned earlier, God thwarts the plans of men to make a name for themselves at Babel (Gen 11). But God promises to make the name of Abraham great. In so doing, God lifts up Abraham as a model of faithfulness and demonstrates his power as the source of Abraham’s blessing.¹³ People will know of God in part by the way he has interacted with Abraham and his descendants. For instance, when God reveals himself to Moses, he instructs Moses to tell the people, “The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.” But this is not the only reason. Mathews points out that the promise to make Abraham’s name great coincides with 2 Samuel 7:9. He says, “David’s greatness was cast in the language and shadow of his ancestor Abraham, for whom there was no comparable measure, not until One greater than their “father Abraham” came to his people (John 8:53; cp. 4:12).”¹⁴ This is how Matthew interprets the Scriptures, which is the reason he begins his gospel with the genealogy of Jesus. He says, “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham” (Matt 1:1). Clearly, Matthew believes that Jesus is the one who fulfills the promises to Abraham and David. He is the true seed, the one whose name is great, the name above all names.

The intent of God’s blessing of Abraham is that he will be a blessing (Gen 12:2). The second set of promises expounds on this idea. First, God will bless those who bless Abraham and curse those who dishonor him. This is a promise that has some

¹²House, *Old Testament Theology*, 72.

¹³Ibid., 72–73.

¹⁴Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 114–15.

application in the present (see Gen 20:14–18, for example) but is meant to point forward to the promise of the blessing to the nations and its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

The focal point of the promises of God to Abraham is this: “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:3). This is the reason the story of Genesis slows to a crawl here. It is a revelation of an integral part of God’s plan for salvation. He will bless Abraham, and through him he will bless the world.¹⁵ Although not explicitly messianic, this text forms an expectation for deliverance even for those who do not believe this promise finds its fulfillment in Christ. Cassuto exemplifies this when he says, “We have here the first allusion to the concept of universalism inherent in Israel’s faith, which would subsequently be developed in the teaching of the prophets.”¹⁶ Although Cassuto would reject Jesus, as we begin to take the teachings of the prophets that he mentions and read them alongside the narrative of Genesis and the rest of Scripture, the identity of Jesus as the seed who brings God’s blessing to the nations begins to take shape. In Genesis, we have (1) the promise that there would be a seed that crushes the head of the serpent (Gen 3:15); (2) the tracing of the seed throughout Genesis, Lamech’s hope that Noah was this deliverer (Gen 5:29); and (3) the repetition of the promise to bless the nations through Abraham’s family in Genesis (18:18, 22:18, 26:4, 28:14). This idea is picked up in Psalm 72:17, which says, “May people be blessed in him, all nations call him blessed!” and Isaiah 49:6, “I will make you as a light for the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth.”¹⁷ In discussing Zechariah 8, Klien points to

¹⁵Chapters 7 and 8 in *Kingdom through Covenant* are helpful in seeing how the Abrahamic Covenant is God’s intervention for dealing with humanity’s rebellion and establishing his rule over all of creation through his relationship with Abraham and his family. Particularly helpful is the idea that Abraham and his family are a new Adam that will display the kind of relationships that God intended for all of humanity (Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum, *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015], 247, Kindle).

¹⁶Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 2, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University, 1972), 315.

¹⁷Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis*, 145.

this promise to Abraham as the source of the expectation for salvation, both for Israel and the nations:

Ultimately, the theological notion of the nations coming to Jerusalem to worship the Lord refers back to the Abrahamic covenant when God promised the patriarch that “all peoples on earth will be blessed through you” (Gen 12:3). A host of other Old Testament passages teach the same message (see Isa 2:1–5; 28:23–25; 45:14; 49:2–3; 60:1–3; 66:18; Mic 4:2–5) . . . The Abrahamic covenant assured Israel that she will become the channel of blessing between the Lord and the nations of the world.¹⁸

When taken together, it is apparent that the narrative of the Old Testament Scripture intends for us to view the call of Abraham as the continuation of God’s salvific plan for Israel and the nations.

Jesus is the one who brings the blessing. The New Testament spells this out specifically. In the genealogies of the gospels, Matthew connects Jesus to Abraham (Matt 1:1–17), and Luke connects him to God through Abraham (Luke 3:23–38). In Galatians, Paul teaches that righteousness is given by God to those who have faith in his promises and not by works of the law. As proof, he produces the story of Abraham. In Galatians 3:6, he recounts the Genesis 15:6 assertion of Abraham’s righteousness by faith. Then, he says, “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith” (Gal 3:8–9). Paul sees the promise of blessing to the nations as an early gospel presentation. He explains in Galatians 3:13–16, “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.” Paul identifies Jesus as the one who brings true blessing, the outpouring of the Spirit, to the nations. He receives the blessing

¹⁸George L. Klein, *Zechariah*, NAC, vol. 21B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2008), 247.

of Abraham as the true “offspring,” or seed, of Abraham and mediates it to the nations (Gal 3:16).

Peter sees Jesus in the same light. In his address at Pentecost, he says, “You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.’ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:25–26). He understands Jesus to be the one who brings the blessing to the nations and calls for a recognition of Jesus as the crucified and resurrected king by which people can be saved.

Conclusion

Central to understanding the story of Genesis is seeing the tender shoot of the gospel in the call of Abraham that has grown from the seed of promise in Genesis 3:15. Humanity has been spiraling out of control, and despite a few moments of hope (Gen 3:20; 4:1; 5:24, 29), the story continues in much the same vein. Even righteous Noah cannot live righteously, and he cannot father a perfect family for the post-flood world. But God has not abandoned his people. According to Paul in Galatians 3:8–9, Genesis 12:3 is explicitly preaching the gospel. God graciously promises to bless Abraham, and Abraham receives the blessing by faith.

Just as Abraham is blessed for his faith, so are those who believe in Jesus Christ, the one who brings God’s promised blessing to the nations. This is the application of the call of Abraham. We are to respond in faith to what God has done for us. He has made a way for us to be set free from sin and death by the blood of Jesus that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

CHAPTER 5

GENESIS 14:17–15:21

Introduction

In his divine sovereignty, God called Abraham to leave his country, his people, and his father's house and embark on a journey to an unknown place. He is called to leave everything behind but is promised that he will be blessed and that through him all the families of the earth will be blessed (Gen 12:1–3). Moses makes it clear that this is a pivotal point in Genesis. He has been working through history at a furious pace, generations often passing in sentences. When he comes to Abraham, things slow to a relative crawl. God steps into the life of an individual and intervenes in an incredibly personal way, but his intervention has global implications. The seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent will come through the line of Abraham, and he will be a blessing to the nations. He will set a world gone awry right. He will rescue a people who have rebelled against him, a people of whom even the best will not and cannot follow God wholeheartedly. Even this early in the story of redemption, God gives us clues to the depth of his mercy and compassion for he is willing to grant a righteousness apart from works.

A Pattern for the Redeemer and the Crediting of Righteousness

After our introduction to Abraham and a recounting of his initial faithfulness to the calling of God, he shows that like his predecessors, he is imperfect. In Genesis 12:10–20, this man who receives God's calling and ventures out to a new land based on the promises of God offers his spouse to another man for fear of losing his life. Were it not for God's intervention, Abraham would have lost the promise. He would have no

offspring to grow into a nation. But God protects him and actually uses the experience to enrich him.

As his wealth grows, Abraham begins to see that strife between his herdsman and his nephew Lot's herdsmen is inevitable if they are occupying the same land. Abraham allows Lot to have first choice of the land in which they will settle. Lot chooses to settle in the Jordan Valley because of the richness of the land. Moses here informs his readers that the Jordan Valley is "like the garden of the Lord" (13:10) because this is before God destroys Sodom and Gomorrah. Moses also comments here that "the men of Sodom were wicked, great sinners against the Lord" (13:13). These comments foreshadow the eventual outcome of Sodom and gives insight into Abraham's coming dealings with the king of Sodom. After Lot chooses the Jordan Valley, God reaffirms his promise of land and offspring to Abraham in Genesis 13:14–17.

In chapter 14, Lot is caught up in a war between the kings of the surrounding area and is captured when Sodom and Gomorrah fall (Gen 14:12). When Abraham hears of Lot's capture, he gathers his 318 trained men and rescues Lot. Abraham has grown great indeed to war with kings. But he meets someone greater than himself, and he knows it. Moses wants us to know it as well.

A Pattern for the Redeemer

Upon his return from battle, two kings meet Abraham in the Valley of Shaveh: the king of Sodom and the king of Salem, Melchizedek (Gen 14:17). We have been informed earlier that the king of Sodom rules over a wicked people. Melchizedek is his antithesis. The author of Hebrews describes him in this way: "He is first, by translation of his name, king of righteousness, and then he is also king of Salem, that is, king of peace" (Heb 7:2). In addition, Moses explains that Melchizedek is a priest of God Most High

(Gen 14:18).¹ Of Melchizedek's name and kingdom, Mathews states, "By this parallel language between his name and his city there is an association of 'righteousness' and 'peace' (Salem). These two characteristics are found together in the Old Testament (Ps 85:10; Isa 9:7; 32:17; 48:18; 60:17)."² The linking of these two terms is significant to Moses and the later biblical authors. For Moses, they are descriptors that set Melchizedek in sharp relief from the wicked king of Sodom and give us what little information we have about this king who Abraham treats as his superior. Later biblical authors use these same terms of "righteousness" and "peace" together when discussing the future that God has in store for his people. In Psalm 85, the psalmist is asking God to forgive and save Israel, fully confident that when he does "righteousness and peace kiss each other" (Ps 85:10). In Isaiah 9:6–7, the prophet looks forward to a time when God will provide a son of David who sits on the throne. He says,

For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government shall be upon his shoulder,
and his name shall be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.
Of the increase of his government and of peace
there will be no end,
on the throne of David and over his kingdom,
to establish it and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

¹There are varying opinions on whether Melchizedek worshipped the God of Israel. See Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982); and Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001); and particularly Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005).

²Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 148.

This son of David is the Prince of Peace. There is no end to the increase of peace, and his kingdom is marked by righteousness forevermore.³ As Smith says, “Such strong statements imply that Isaiah is talking about the final eschatological ruler.”⁴ Righteousness and peace are descriptors of the Messiah’s kingdom. Isaiah 60:17 says that the future of Israel is one where God “will make your overseers peace and your taskmasters righteousness.” In this same way, Mathews notes, the kingdom of Salem, thought by most to be Jerusalem, is also linked to the term *righteousness*. In discussing the covenant made with David and in expectation of its ultimate fulfillment because of God’s faithfulness, Jeremiah 33:16 says, “In those days Judah will be saved, and Jerusalem will dwell securely. And this is the name by which it will be called: ‘The Lord is our righteousness.’” In Psalm 118:19, the psalmist says, “Open to me the gates of righteousness, that I may enter through them and give thanks to the Lord.”⁵ These later biblical authors connect these terms with God’s promised king’s rule over a restored creation, just as the author of Hebrews does when he describes Jesus as being a high priest in the order of Melchizedek (Heb 5:10).

Moses wants us to see the contrast between these two kings and what they represent. Melchizedek is the king of righteousness and peace, a priest of God Most High. The king of Sodom is king over a group of wicked people, so wicked that Moses reminds his readers that the land is no longer fertile because God destroys it in judgment

³In *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage*, Holladay argues that Isa 9:6 refers to God rather than a human king (W. Holladay, *Isaiah: Scroll of a Prophetic Heritage* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 107). However, the expectation in Dan 7:13–14 of “one like a son of man” being given everlasting dominion by the Ancient of Days argues against this; Hamilton argues that the one like a son of man in Dan 7 is distinguished from Yahweh, and that this is expected because of God’s faithfulness to his promises, including the promise of a human descendant for David in 2 Sam 7. James M. Hamilton Jr., *With the Clouds of Heaven*, *New Studies in Biblical Theology*, vol. 32 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014), 147.

⁴Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 1–39*, NAC, vol. 15A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2007), 242.

⁵Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 148.

of these people. Abraham's interactions with these two kings vary greatly and are instructive to us. Melchizedek brings out bread and wine and then blesses Abraham. Dempster notes, "The fact that the blessing is given by someone who originates from what will become the holiest site in the Bible is significant. (Jeru)Salem emerges as a geographical source of blessing for Abram; later it will surface as a source of universal blessing!"⁶ Abraham accepts the blessing and responds by giving Melchizedek a tenth of everything (Gen 14:18–20).

When the king of Sodom interacts with Abraham, things go very differently. The king of Sodom instructs Abram to take the goods he has won from his victory for himself. There is irony here. The king of Sodom would have nothing except that Abraham rescues him and his land, defeating the kings who conquered the king of Sodom and his alliance. And yet he attempts to tell Abraham what to do with the spoils, acting as if the goods that Abraham has won are his to give away. Waltke notes, "His unnatural lack of gratitude and preoccupation with the spoils of war provides an index of Sodom's wickedness."⁷ Abraham will not have anything to do with it. He responds, "I have lifted my hand to the Lord, God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth, that I would not take a thread or a sandal strap or anything that is yours, lest you should say, 'I have made Abram rich.' I will take nothing but what the young men have eaten, and the share of the men who went with me" (Gen 14:22–24). Abraham accepts the blessing and offer of Melchizedek but not from the king of Sodom. What are we to make of this? Kidner is helpful here. He suggests,

There is a profound contrast between the two kings who come to meet him, Melchizedek, king and priest, his name and title expressive of the realm of right and good (see Heb. 7:2), offers him, in token, a simple sufficiency from God, pronounces an unspecified blessing (dwelling on the Giver, not the gift), and accepts

⁶Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 79.

⁷Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 232.

costly tribute. All this is meaningful only to faith. The king of Sodom, on the other hand, makes a handsome and businesslike offer; its sole disadvantage is perceptible, again, only to faith. To these rival benefactors Abram signifies his Yes and his No, refusing to compromise his call . . . Such a climax shows what was truly at stake in this chapter of international events. The struggle of kings, the far-ranging armies and the spoil of a city are the small-change of the story; the crux is the faith or failure of one man.⁸

Although it might have been difficult, it is not terribly hard to understand why Abraham does not accept the offer of the king of Sodom. He states it plainly. Abraham has made an oath to God and will not accept anything of value from the king of Sodom so that no one can claim that his wealth and success are a result of the king of Sodom's actions. Abraham recognizes that God is the possessor of heaven and earth. He knows what God has promised to him, and we are given evidence that Abraham believes that God will do what he said he would do: namely bless Abraham, providing him with offspring and a land. He has no need of provision from an earthly king, particularly when that earthly king's situation points to the reality of the provision of God. Apart from God's work on Abraham's behalf and its beneficial consequences for the king of Sodom, the king would have nothing.

The king of Sodom makes an offer to enrich Abraham. But this is an offer which, if accepted, would show Abraham's doubt in God's goodness, as if the path to blessing was safer if it was not dependent on God. In contrast to this offer for tangible wealth, Melchizedek offers bread, wine, and blessing to Abraham. Abraham receives these and then gives him a tenth of everything. In doing so, he shows Melchizedek honor, recognizing him as superior to himself. The author of Hebrews builds an argument for the superiority of Jesus based on Abraham's response to Melchizedek:

See how great this man was to whom Abraham the patriarch gave a tenth of the spoils! And those descendants of Levi who receive the priestly office have a commandment in the law to take tithes from the people, that is, from their brothers, though these also are descended from Abraham. But this man who does not have his descent from them received tithes from Abraham and blessed him who had the

⁸Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 120–21.

promises. It is beyond dispute that the inferior is blessed by the superior. In the one case tithes are received by mortal men, but in the other case, by one of whom it is testified that he lives. One might even say that Levi himself, who receives tithes, paid tithes through Abraham, for he was still in the loins of his ancestor when Melchizedek met him (Heb 7:4–10).

The author of Hebrews makes it clear that Abraham recognizes the superiority of Melchizedek. He pays him a tithe and accepts the blessing. Accepting the blessing puts any argument that Abraham is superior to Melchizedek to rest.

Although necessary to set up the opportunity for Abraham to demonstrate his faith, the superiority of Melchizedek to Abraham is surprising. After all, Abraham is the one through whom God has chosen to bless the nations. But it is also apparent from Genesis that what humanity needs is an intervention from God—that even the best humans fall short of his standard. Moses uses Melchizedek to remind his readers that salvation comes from God and not from a mere man, no matter his level of faithfulness. When Melchizedek blesses Abraham, he reminds him that God is the possessor of heaven and earth, that he is the one who has delivered Abraham’s enemies into his hand (Gen 14:19–20). Melchizedek seems to point us to God with his words, but also through his role in the story. We are given no lineage, no background, no clue as to how there is a king priest of God when all of the world seems to be rejecting him, and no further information on him, yet Melchizedek is obviously a major part of the story. For this reason, many see Melchizedek as a theophany. Whether he is or not, Moses purposefully leaves Melchizedek as a character upon which we can base an argument for the existence of something older and greater than the coming Mosaic Covenant. Waltke says, “Here is a king-priest of the Most High God who is able to mediate God’s blessing to Abraham, God’s mediator of blessing to the nations (12:3).”⁹

David picks up on this idea in Psalm 110. He knows the biblical story. He knows the promise of a righteous seed in Genesis 3:15. He knows the promise of a

⁹Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 227.

blessing to the nations in Genesis 12:1–3, and he has received the promise of his throne being established forever (2 Sam 7). Psalm 110:1 shows David’s belief that one from his line and yet greater than him is coming to rule at the right hand of God. In Psalm 110:4, David connects this coming king as one who is king, but also one who is a priest after the order of Melchizedek. The implication is that he is a priest king from a line greater than the priesthood of Aaron. David sees in Melchizedek a joining of these two offices in a way that supersedes the structure under which he rules. This is a reference to an expected Messiah.

Matthew 22:41–46 demonstrates the Jewish belief in a Messiah after this order. Jesus asks whose son the Christ will be. They answer that he will be the son of David. But Jesus takes this further. He uses Psalm 110 to show that the Messiah will be greater than David. He then asks how David can call a son, “Lord.” The Pharisees have no answer for this and do not dare try to entrap him with their questions anymore. Jesus is making a claim that he is greater than David, and by extension, that he is the one who is the priest forever in the order of Melchizedek.¹⁰ This is the same line of reasoning the author of Hebrews uses to argue that what Jesus has brought about is superior to the old covenant just as the priestly order that he belongs to is greater than the Levitical priesthood (Heb 7:1–28).

Moses’ inclusion and use of the story of Melchizedek as the one who mediates blessings to Abraham, the mediator of God’s blessing to the world, becomes part of the pattern by which later biblical authors recognize and clarify expectations for the Messiah. Melchizedek is a pattern of the Messiah who will be a priest by the power of an indestructible life, by an oath of God—a perfect priest to offer a one-time sacrifice for sin.

¹⁰T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible’s Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003), 139–40.

The Crediting of Righteousness

Abraham's interactions with Melchizedek and the king of Sodom demonstrate his belief in the promises of God. Abraham is willing to leave his family's well-being in the hands of God. He is a man of faith, but that faith is wavering at times. We saw earlier that Abraham hides behind his wife when he fears his life is in danger (Gen 12:10–20). Again in Genesis 15 Abraham's faith is imperfect. He remembers God's promise to make him a great nation (Gen 12:1), that he has been promised offspring (Gen 12:7), and yet he has no heir. God, in his grace, recognizes Abraham's demonstration of faith (Gen 14:17–24) and his need for a reaffirmation of his promises. Genesis 15:1 says, "After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.'" Abraham has acted in light of this truth, particularly in rejecting the offer of the king of Sodom, but his response to God uncovers his failing faith. He says, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus? . . . Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir" (Gen 15:2–3). God does not leave him to drown in his doubt. God responds with an incredible promise of blessing. He says, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be'" (Gen 15:5). God gives Abraham a startling picture—offspring so numerous that Abraham is unable to count them. God graciously provides just what Abraham needs as his faith flags—reaffirmation of his promise to provide what only he can, a child to a barren couple. But not just a child, he promises descendants more numerous than Abraham can count. God's reaffirmation of his promise results in belief, and this belief results in God crediting Abraham with righteousness.

This crediting of righteousness is a monumental moment in Scripture. It begins to answer the question of how humanity, whose best examples contribute to the brokenness of world, could ever be restored to a right relationship with God. Abraham is one of these examples. He has moments of incredible faith in life. He follows God and

leaves his homeland and family behind (Gen 12:1). Later, in Genesis 22, he obediently follows God's command and offers Isaac, the son he has waited for his whole life, to God as a sacrifice, believing that God will keep his promise even if it means Isaac being raised from the dead. For these decisions, he is raised up in the New Testament as an example of faith (Heb 11:9–22). But he is far from perfect. Abraham, too, walks in the steps of Adam and Eve. He exhibits doubt when he hides behind his wife for fear of Pharaoh (Gen 12:10–20). He attempts to seize the answer to the promised descendant by taking Hagar into his tent (Gen 16), resulting in broken family relationships. He repeats his mistake in hiding behind his wife, offering her to Abimelech in fear that Abimelech will kill him to make her his wife (Gen 20:3). Abraham demonstrates faith, but he also demonstrates our need for God's intervention. Abraham is part of God's plan of salvation for the world, but he too is in need of restoration. He has fallen short of God's design for humanity. Yet God declares him righteous in spite of his shortcomings. As Vickers notes, "Abraham's faith is counted to him as something it inherently is not, righteousness."¹¹ God declares him righteous on the basis of his belief. Von Rad helpfully defines Abraham's belief as "an act of trust, a consent to God's plan in history."¹²

This is the basis of humanity's hope. We have fallen short of his standard. We have wrecked his creation, including ourselves, and yet God is willing to credit righteousness based on belief in his goodness and his promise to save. Ultimately, this salvation will come through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but the righteousness that Jesus earns through his perfect life is credited to those who believe in the promises of God that have found their fulfillment in Jesus as well. It is clear Moses wants us to see that righteousness comes from God. He has not glossed over Abraham's

¹¹Brian Vickers, *Justification by Grace through Faith: Finding Freedom from Legalism, Lawlessness, Pride, and Despair*, Explorations in Biblical Theology (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013), 60.

¹²Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 185.

mistakes. He does not attempt to show Abraham as earning righteousness. Rather, he purposefully shows how Abraham is flawed. He tells us that God is the one crediting this righteousness. Moses shows Abraham as struggling to believe. Dempster notes how incredulity from both Abraham and Sarah dominates the story of Abraham.¹³ Moses shows that even after Abraham's belief is credited as righteousness, he still asks God for a sign to confirm his promise (Gen 15:8). Moses communicates something that later biblical authors hear and echo—humanity cannot make themselves right with God, yet God makes a way for those who will trust him. Righteousness is a gift of God to be received. He does not owe anyone anything. But he offers salvation to all who will trust in his promises.

In Psalm 51, David declares his hope is only in the mercy of the Lord. Nothing that he does can force God to accept him. He asks God to cleanse him, to have mercy on him, to not cast him out of his presence. He recognizes that he is at the mercy of God, and God desires recognition of our need for him. He says, “For you will not delight in sacrifice, or I would give it; you will not be pleased with a burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise” (Ps 51:16–17). Forgiveness cannot be bought. It is given at the pleasure of God to those who seek him.

Paul builds his theology on this principle. He begins his letter to the Romans by stating that the gospel he is preaching was promised through the prophets and then he connects Jesus to David, implying he is the messianic king (Rom 1:3). He then gives his thesis, quoting Habakkuk 2:4, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith’” (Rom 1:16–17). After establishing the fallenness of man, he claims,

¹³Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 81.

But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it—the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins. 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 (Rom 3:21–26).

His defense of a righteousness that is credited to believers because of the work of Jesus comes through “the Law and the Prophets.” He argues from Genesis 15:6 that justification is by faith (Rom 4). God credits righteousness to those who believe. The proof for Paul is that God credited Abraham as righteous because of his belief and before the sign of circumcision is given. In addition, Paul finds evidence in Psalm 32:1–2 that David knew righteousness to be a gift from God. For Paul, those who believe that righteousness comes from anything other than the blessing of God through the work of Jesus are deceived.

Genesis 15:6 is also central to James’ argument for a faith that is demonstrated by works. Abraham’s action in offering Isaac as a sacrifice to God fulfills Genesis 15:6 (Jas 2:13). This test shows the reality of the faith of Abraham. In this, James is arguing for the necessity of works as an outpouring of true faith.

Hebrews 11:2 says of faith, “For by it the people of old received their commendation.” Although Genesis 15:6 is not specifically mentioned, Abraham’s faith is described, and it is what he is commended for. The author of Hebrews says of these who have faith, “Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city” (Heb 11:16).

When God credits Abraham with righteousness because of his belief, we see the process by which fallen people can be restored even if we do not understand the justice in the transaction. But as Paul says in Romans 3:25, God’s righteousness in passing over former sins is displayed in Jesus, showing that he is just even as he justifies

those who have faith in Jesus (or for those in the Old Testament, in the promises of God that find their fulfillment in Jesus).

The inclusion of Abraham’s weaknesses and failures make it clear that even the mediator through which God is going to bless the nations is dependent on God. Not only this, it teaches us the real source of salvation. People do not earn righteousness. Abraham had moments of belief and moments of doubt, but Abraham is a man of faith. Moses, Paul, and the author of Hebrews all say so. But it is a faith like ours—one that ebbs and flows. When we see this, we realize something Tim Keller states so powerfully: “It is not the strength of your faith but the object of your faith that actually saves you.”¹⁴ If Abraham’s righteousness was dependent upon himself, he would be lost. If the bar was lowered and his righteousness was dependent on his ability to muster up a perfect faith, he would be lost. His only hope is God. This idea is central in Scripture. God desires his people to believe in him. He knows their failures; he knows their hearts; and he knows that they must be made new. This is why he makes his promises to Abraham. It is why even as Moses sets forth God’s law, he tells the Israelites that both blessings and curses will befall them because they will not obey it (Deut 30:1). Yet Moses also says, “And the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live” (Deut 30:6). Jeremiah echoes this sentiment when he prophesies that God will write his law on his people’s hearts (Jer 31:31–34). Hosea records God saying, “And I will have mercy on No Mercy, and I will say to Not My People, ‘You are my people’; and he shall say, ‘You are my God’” (Hos 2:23). It is why Paul talks about believers being new creations (2 Cor 5:17). God is intervening to make a righteous people for himself. Faith is the requirement God has for people, but the work of righteousness is his, completed in

¹⁴Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Penguin Publishing Group, 2008), 234, Kindle.

the righteous life of the fulfillment of God’s promises in Genesis—Jesus. This truth is powerfully demonstrated in what God does in his gracious response to Abraham’s desire for some sort of proof of God’s intent to provide him with offspring (Gen 15:8).

God enters into a covenant-making ceremony with Abraham (Gen 15:9–21). These ceremonies were a way for two parties to assure one another of their intent to keep an oath. Animals were cut in two and laid out. The parties would then pass between the halves of the animals, effectively saying, “May this happen to me if I do not keep my oath.” After preparing the cut animals, Abraham falls into a deep sleep and has a vision of the Lord, represented by a smoking fire pot and flaming torch, passing between the animals alone, promising that the land would belong to Abraham’s offspring. As Gentry and Wellum say, “The fact that only God passes between the pieces is quite remarkable and shows that the promise depends upon him and him alone.”¹⁵ This has incredible implications. Gentry and Wellum continue,

But there’s more. When God made covenant with his people, he did something no human being would have even considered doing. In the usual blood covenant, each party was responsible for keeping only his side of the promise. When God made covenant with Abraham, however, he promised to keep both sides of the agreement. “If this covenant is broken, Abraham, for whatever reason— for My unfaithfulness or yours— I will pay the price,” said God. “If you or your descendants, for whom you are making this covenant, fail to keep it, I will pay the price in blood.” And at that moment, Almighty God pronounced the death sentence on his Son Jesus.¹⁶

Salvation is an act of God bestowed upon his people according to his divine sovereignty. His people bear a trait that marks them as his. They are a people who believe his promises and are credited with a righteousness that comes through the work of Jesus. It is a faith that can only come from an encounter with God. Brueggemann says of Abraham’s faith, “He did not move from protest (vv.2–3) to confession (v.6) by knowledge or persuasion but by the power of God who reveals and causes his revelation

¹⁵Peter J. Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum. *God’s Kingdom through God’s Covenants: A Concise Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 2186–87, Kindle.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 2212–18.

to be accepted.”¹⁷ His faith occurs by the power of God, but it is not merely an identifier, devoid of action by its possessor. It is a necessary response to who God is and what he is doing (Gen 12:1–4, 15:6). Abraham demonstrates his faith, and God commends him for it even as the totality of Abraham’s righteousness and salvation depends on God.

Genesis 15 and the Beginning of the Exodus Motif

We should be astonished that our God would enter into a covenant in this manner. It demonstrates his loving kindness despite humanity’s waywardness. God provides an incredible demonstration of his commitment to Abraham and by extension creation, but we also see that God requires that we trust him. This is evident when God reveals the timetable for fulfilling the land promised to Abraham.

When God passes through the animals in the covenant with Abraham, he says,

Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you shall be buried in a good old age. And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete (Gen 15:13–16).

Abraham is assured of God’s promise to provide descendants and land, but it is a promise that will require a life of belief from Abraham, as the majority of it will come to fruition long after Abraham is gone. Not only this, but the land will be possessed only after his descendants become servants and experience affliction for 400 years.

From a temporary mindset, this promise provides very little comfort. He will have descendants, but generations will suffer before something good happens for them. And yet with Abraham’s understanding of who God is, this becomes a support for his wavering faith, particularly when God gives him and Sarah a son of their own flesh. God shows Abraham that he has the power to bring life out of nothing. He demonstrates this

¹⁷Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 145.

when he is willing to sacrifice Isaac according to God's instruction (Gen 22). The author of Hebrews tells us what was going on in Abraham's head, that he "considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead" (Heb 11:19). Abraham believes that God can do for him what he cannot do for himself, even bring life out of nothing or give life to the dead. Abraham develops a faith that sustains him even if the blessings are not in the here and now. He develops a faith that God will fulfill his promises in a meaningful way even if death comes before the fulfillment.¹⁸

This promise and the kind of belief it engenders in Abraham necessitates a belief that God is good and can deliver on his promises amidst any obstacle. God shows Abraham that he is working in a way that is bigger than one man's temporary life. The implication is that God is delivering his people to something better than this world as it stands. In the middle of discussing the faith of Abraham and his descendants, Hebrews 11:13–16 says,

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

They recognize that this world is not their home. When the promises of Genesis 15:7–21 come true in the exodus from Egypt, it is proof that God works as he has said he would, and the surety of God's character and promises becomes the basis on which people expect a new and better exodus.¹⁹ This new exodus will result in the restoration of God's creation hinted at in Genesis 3:15, longed for by Lamech in Genesis 5:29, and promised to come through the family of Abraham in Genesis 12:1–3.

¹⁸See discussion on Gen 22.

¹⁹Peter J. Gentry, *How to Read and Understand the Biblical Prophets* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 84, Kindle.

Conclusion

The narrative of Abraham found Genesis 14:17–15:21 is about faith. Abraham encounters God in Genesis 12 and is changed. He leaves his home and his family and strikes out to find the land that God will show him, anticipating the descendants God promises him. Abraham believes God, and for this God credits him with righteousness. But we also find that Abraham is like the rest of humanity, dependent on God's intervention. His righteousness must come from outside of himself. Abraham's interaction with Melchizedek hints at his need. Abraham, the mediator of God's blessings to the nations, has one who mediates God's blessing to him.

A lake can be filled with water by a river without it knowing the source of river. In the same way, Genesis 15:6 shows us that God credits righteousness to the faithful even before Jesus is the source of that righteousness. Not only do we see that righteousness is a gift of God credited as a result of belief, but we see that faith must endure, often for generations. Faith in God is sure, for he has promised to keep his covenant, ultimately sending Jesus to die in our place so that we might be participants in the coming new creation.

CHAPTER 6

GENESIS 22:1–19

Introduction

The story of Abraham has been filled with peaks and valleys, much like the book of Genesis to this point. God creates the heavens and the earth and sets humanity, made in his image, to rule over it. All of this is good, and yet despite his provision, Adam and Eve doubt his goodness and rebel against him. The world quickly falls into chaos, and humanity shows that it is unable to govern itself. Left to our own devices, we are selfish, spiraling down toward our own demise. The structure of Genesis insinuates that Abraham is a man of great importance. From a broad retelling of history in Genesis 1–11, the text hones in on one man and the promise of God. The furious pace of the narrative slows to a crawl as if to say this is a critical point in history. God chooses Abraham to be the mediator of his blessing to the nations (Gen 12:1–3). Abraham risks everything and leaves his country and his family and sets out to follow God to an unspecified land. He has demonstrated faith in the promises of God, but his faith will be completed by his works on Mount Moriah (Jas 2:21–22).

The Fruit of Faith

The story of Abraham has introduced the mechanism by which mankind can be restored to a right relationship with God. God credits righteousness to those who have faith in his promises. Understanding God’s plan for the redemption of mankind requires two things. First, we must see that above all, God is sovereign. He is working all things according to his purposes, and the salvation of humanity is no exception. This is clear throughout Genesis. God makes it clear to Adam and Eve that he is the source of provision. He promises a seed that will crush the head of the serpent, and he preserves it.

He reveals his plan to cleanse creation to Noah, providing a way for him to be saved from the flood. He chooses Abraham as the one he will bless and as the mediator of his blessing to the nations. He promises to fulfill this covenant. God is completely in control, bringing about his purposes. Second, we must see that his sovereignty in salvation is somehow not at odds with humanity's responsibility. We must respond in faith. Abraham receives God's promise by acting in faith. Abraham believes God, and his faith in the promise of God is credited to him as righteousness (Gen 15:6). God is the instigator; he is the source of righteousness; he has the power to credit it; he is choosing through whom he is going to work; and yet faith is the required human response.

Abraham is credited with righteousness because of his faith in the promises of God. Genesis 15:6 radically affects our understanding of the relationship between God and man. Humanity has rebelled, but God sees fit to graciously provide righteousness apart from what we deserve. It is a righteousness bestowed as a result of faith and not as a result of works. But what we see in the story of Abraham is that while God instigates salvation (God chooses Abraham and makes a promise to bless him and work through him), credits righteousness (God does not owe Abraham righteousness, rather he decides to bestow it upon Abraham), and keeps his people in the faith (God is constantly encouraging Abraham as his faith flags and sometimes fails), humanity's response of faith is necessary for salvation. Our faith is a choice that must be made and experienced. True faith acts in accordance with the promises of God, and through this faith, God is shaping us into the people he desires us to be. Genesis 15 lays the groundwork for how the Old Testament will unfold and how God will determine the righteous from the unrighteous. The righteous will live according to their faith in the promises of God. Genesis 22 demonstrates this kind of faith.

God has promised to make Abraham into a great nation and to bless the nations through him. He has identified Isaac as the son of promise, the one through whom his descendants will come. God has gone to great lengths to show this. He will not allow

Abraham to take matters into his own hands. Abraham's son by Hagar, Ishmael, is rejected. Instead, God miraculously provides the barren wife, Sarah, with Isaac and designates him the child of promise. God designates Isaac as Abraham's only son in the commandment of Genesis 22:2, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you." But more than just God's designation of Isaac as Abraham's only son, God's provision of Isaac, through whom his promises are meant to be fulfilled, provides an occasion for God to test Abraham.

Abraham is to take his treasured child and offer him as a sacrifice. This is a seemingly bizarre request but one often overlooked because it has a happy ending: Isaac is not sacrificed. But to mentally skip to the ending is to miss the emotions that must have flooded Abraham's heart. He has waited for years for God's provision. On numerous occasions, he has almost given up hope (Gen 15:2; 16:2; 17:17–18). What joy must have flowed over Abraham and Sarah when Isaac was born. The gift of God, a child totally unobtainable by their own efforts, longed after for years, is now a reality. We can imagine, Hughes says, that "Abraham loved him with aching parental love, the kind that hurts."¹ When we remember the years that these parents have waited to meet their promised son and the joy with which he must have been received, the call to sacrifice him can only be read with shock. And it is meant to be shocking. It is meant to move us. It is meant to make us question what we know. It is meant shake us from our assumptions about the nature of our relationship with God.

¹R. Kent Hughes, *Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 301.

The Test

The command to sacrifice Isaac seems completely out of character for God at first glance. Von Rad says, “For Abraham, God’s command is completely incomprehensible: the child, given by God after long delay, the only link that can lead to the promised greatness of Abraham’s seed (ch. 15.4f.) is to be given back to God in sacrifice . . . [Abraham] must give up his whole future.”² In fact, it is almost as if the author of Genesis feels he must prepare us for this command so that we do not reject God out of shock. He says, “God tested Abraham” (Gen 22:1). We are warned at the beginning that this is a test, and while this does not immediately allay our fears, it does engender curiosity. And when God stays Abraham’s hand, we remember that this was a test. Isaac’s life appeared to be required, but it never was. Isaac was never in danger, but to take Abraham on such an emotional roller coaster still seems cruel.

The idea that God would test his people seems strange to us. It may raise questions about his motives. It may make us think he is like a spouse so uncertain of his partner’s faithfulness that he sets up occasions designed to confirm his fear. It may cause us to feel like we are back in school being graded on our performances, fearful that we will not measure up. It may even cause us to doubt the sovereignty and omniscience of God. But rightly understood, we can avoid these errors of thinking and come to an understanding of God’s testing.

That God tests his people is evident from numerous passages of Scripture. Exodus 20:20 states, “Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.’” Deuteronomy 13:3 says, “For the Lord your God is testing you, to know whether you love the Lord your

²Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 239.

God with all your heart and with all your soul.”³ Proverbs 17:3 says, “The crucible is for silver, and the furnace is for gold, and the Lord tests hearts.” In these passages, testing reveals faith in God and his promises. Brueggemann says, “The testing times for Israel and for all of us who are heirs of Abraham are those times when it is seductively attractive to find an easier, less demanding alternative to God. The testings which come in history (and which are from God) drive us to find out whether we mean what we say about our faith being grounded solely in the gospel.”⁴ In other words, in the testing we know the reality of our faith.

First Peter says to rejoice in what God is doing in believers even though for a little while we “have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6–7). The testing reveals the beauty of our faith. Hebrews 11:39 says, “But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who have faith and preserve their souls.” In the testing, we find assurance of salvation, for there our faith is observable. Finally, James 1:2–4 says, “Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Our faith shapes us in trials.

No one naturally desires to be put to the test. No one desires to undergo trials, persecutions, or tribulations for the experience. But for the believer, these things can be a blessing. God tests us to reveal the reality and beauty of our faith. He allows suffering to teach and shape us. He is a loving Father, doing what is best for us, choosing for us

³God’s testing does not mean he does not already know the heart. See Ps 139, 1 Kgs 8:39, Eph 1:3–6, 1 John 3:15.

⁴Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, IBC (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 190.

things we would never choose for ourselves to make us into a people we would never be able to be apart from his intervention. This is true in both the moment of salvation and the process of being remade in the image of Christ.

For these reasons, his testing is a blessing to the believer. But it can also reveal a lack of faith. In the parable of the sower in Matthew 13, some of the seed the sower spreads lands on rocky ground. This represents one who receives the news of the kingdom with great joy but falls away when tribulation or persecution arrives because he has no root. In other words, he has no faith, and the testing reveals this. This is not the place anyone wants to find themselves, and yet, it is preferable to know the state of our hearts rather than to be deceived. It is better to be exposed as a fraud while there is time to respond than to hear on the day of judgment, “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness” (Matt 7:23). Thus, for the believer and unbeliever alike, God’s testing is a blessing, though for the unbeliever who fails to repent, the blessing will be short-lived.

With this defense of God’s testing of Abraham established at least to the degree that we do not reject the text before considering what it is teaching, we are able to proceed more deeply into the narrative. In Genesis 12, Abraham is called to follow God with the promise that Abraham will be a great nation and more specifically, “in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:3). This promise is made to a man with a barren wife. The unspoken question at this point is how will God provide? How can he deliver on his promise to make a great nation from this barren couple? But Abraham strikes out, following the Lord to an unknown destination. Soon, Abraham begins to wonder if God can deliver on his promise to provide an heir, and more specifically how. Sensing his doubts, God reaffirms his promise to Abraham with the specification that his heir will be his very own son and confirms this with a covenant (Gen 15:1–21). In this episode, Abraham is commended for his faith and counted righteous.

But the wait continues, and Abraham's faith flags. When Sarah suggests they take matters into their own hands, Abraham consents and takes Hagar as his wife. This predictably ends in trouble. Sarah complains to Abraham, who in turn empowers her to deal with Hagar as she will. Sarah runs the pregnant Hagar off, and Abraham is not recorded as intervening in any way. Although misguided in taking Hagar as his wife, Abraham has acted in light of the promise. But he fails to intervene for Hagar and his son when things become difficult. Only by God's actions in the desert, Hagar returns and Abraham meets his son Ishmael (Gen 16). At this point, it appears that God's promise will be met in Ishmael. For thirteen years, this is the assumption. But following the covenant of circumcision, we discover God will provide in an unexpected way. The 90-year-old Sarah will bear a child to her 100-year-old husband. And when Isaac is born, it appears that Abraham, and by extension we, have learned something about God—he is able to provide despite the circumstances. He is faithful to keep his promises in his own way in his own timing. He is the provider and will be recognized as such.

Armed with this knowledge of God, garnered over years of walking with God, Abraham enters the test: "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Gen 22:2). At its heart, this is a test of Abraham's faith. Will he trust God even when God's commands do not seem to make sense? Greidanus notices a parallel development between Genesis 12:1–9 and Genesis 22:1–19 that expects a development in Abraham's faith. He says,

In Genesis 12, the Lord commanded Abram to "go" [*lek-leka*], offer up his past (country, kindred, father's house), and receive the promises of the Lord's rich blessings. In this narrative the Lord commands Abraham to "go" [*lek-leka*], but now to offer up his future, "your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love." The stakes are raised. Now Abraham has to rely on the Lord even when the Lord seems to go back on his covenant promises.⁵

⁵Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 195.

Abraham has seen God bring life out of barrenness. He has seen God provide, but he has also seen that God's provision is on his terms. So what is the extent of Abraham's faith? This call to sacrifice his son, and with it all he has hoped for, could easily crush Abraham. To never receive what you desire is one thing but to have it seemingly in hand and lose it is another. A sound defeat in a sporting match is painful, but to lose on a last-second play is demoralizing. To have someone decline an invitation to dinner stings, but to have a marriage proposal declined can be crushing. If we put ourselves in the place of Abraham, this is how we may be tempted to feel. To have waited so long for a son only to see God seem to go back on his covenant promise would be devastating.

Brueggemann follows John Calvin and Martin Luther in saying that this narrative unfolds a contradiction in God. He says, "The *promise* of God is that through Isaac your descendants will be named (21:12; cf. Rom. 9:7). The *command* of God is that Isaac must be killed. It follows that there will be no descendants, no future. We are back to barrenness. The entire pilgrimage from 11:30 has been for naught."⁶ Although the story reveals that God is not in contradiction with himself, this seeming contradiction does highlight the intent of God's test. Brueggemann goes on to say, "The narrative concerns Abraham's anguished acknowledgment that God is God . . . The God who *delivers* is the one who *prohibits* any alternative to God, any alternative trust. He insists on being trusted only and totally."⁷ This is the crux of the text here. Is God who he says he is? Is he faithful? Will he deliver on his promises? Will he provide? Can he be trusted? Abraham must be asking these questions. Abraham's faith in God, as evidenced by obedience to God's commands, is what is being tested. The test reveals to us the true nature of faith, the true value of our God, and the true nature of the love that our God has for us.

⁶Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 188.

⁷*Ibid.*, 189.

The True Nature of Faith

Hebrews 11:1 says, “Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” The use of the words “assurance” and “conviction” evoke a sense of certainty in the believer’s thought. Faith is much more than mental assent to a hypothetical situation. Faith is a willingness to act in accordance with a set of beliefs. The book of James makes this abundantly clear in his discussion on faith, works, and salvation. James 2:14 says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?” The obvious answer is no. As Richardson says, ““Faith by itself” (Jas 2:17) demonstrates its deadness in that it shows no vitality. Vital faith is that which God considers righteous.”⁸ Faith is demonstrated by action, and the lack of action shows the absence of a saving faith. James goes on,

Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone (Jas 2:20–24).

In what appears to be in contradiction with Scripture’s teaching on salvation through faith, James writes that Abraham is justified by his works when he offers Isaac on the altar. But he is not arguing works outside of faith.⁹ Rather, in the testing of Abraham, the faith is revealed and completed by works. Something happens in the testing that cannot happen otherwise. Abraham’s faith exists before the test, but it cannot become what it is meant to be without the test. This is much like a marriage. You can love your spouse when you marry them, but that love is revealed in living life together. And in living life together, it becomes something more than it was before.

⁸Kurt A. Richardson, *James*, NAC, vol. 36 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 142.

⁹Some scholars who believe that the writings of James and Paul contradict one another debate this. For a summary of and rebuttal of these arguments, see Thomas Schreiner, *New Testament Theology: Magnifying God in Christ* (Grand Rapids: Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 599f, Kindle.

James says that “the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing” (Jas 1:3–4). Acting in faith is how God grows and shapes the believer. In Genesis 15:6, Abraham’s faith is credited to him as righteousness. Abraham’s actions in Genesis 22 fulfill this Scripture. Through the exercise of his faith, Abraham is being conformed to the righteousness that is credited to him on account of his faith. Rather than contradicting other sections of Scripture, James points to the true nature of faith with Abraham as his prime example. Faith and works are inseparably connected.

Hebrews 11 makes much the same argument. The author states that by faith the people in the Old Testament receive their commendation (Heb 11:2). He then recounts how the people of old acted in accordance with their faith. Their faith was demonstrated by their actions, and for it they were commended. Here, the testing of Abraham is again used in demonstrating how true faith results in actions consistent with the faith. The author recounts how Abraham offers up his only son, through whom the promises were to come. How could he do this? Because of his faith in God. He “considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead” (Heb 11:19). His faith was not mere mental assent. It acted in accordance with his belief in God. It was willing to place all of his hopes in the hands of God. It would take irreversible action based on the character of God as a promise-keeper. This is the true nature of faith revealed in the testing of Abraham. This faith believes the promises of God, trusts his character, and acts accordingly.

The Giver is of More Value Than the Gift

Not only does God’s test of Abraham’s faith reveal the nature of faith, it demonstrates the difference between valuing the gifts God gives and valuing God. Waltke notes that the danger in the narrative of Genesis 22 is not to Isaac, but to Abraham’s relationship to God: “Here the saint is torn between his faith in the divine promises and the command to nullify them, between his affection for God’s gift and for

God.”¹⁰ Abraham is asked to choose between the gift and the giver, and he is asked to do so in a way that does not make sense to him. Why would God seemingly go back on his promise?

The emotional response we have when reading this story reveals something about us. We do not want our futures resting in the hands of another. This is not altogether surprising as we can all name ways that even those we trust the most have let us down. But it tells us something about our relationship with God as well. We do not like uncertainty. Our fear of uncertainty is rooted in a lack of trust in God, in a belief that he is not as good or as loving as he tells us that he is. We fear that he is like everyone else in this world, that he will do what is best for himself, even if it comes at our expense.

In Sinclair Ferguson’s book, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance – Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters*, he writes,

The lie by which the Serpent deceived Eve was enshrined in the double suggestion that (1) this Father was in fact restrictive, self-absorbed, and selfish since he would not let them eat from any of the trees, and (2) his promise of death if they were disobedient was simply false. Thus the lie was an assault on both God’s generosity and his integrity. Neither his character nor his words were to be trusted. This, in fact, is the lie that sinners have believed ever since—the lie of the not-to-be-trusted-because-he-does-not-love-me-false-Father.¹¹

This is what Abraham is tempted to believe—God cannot be trusted. How can a God who loves me ask me to give up what I have longed for? How can he promise me a son and descendants, seem to deliver, and then pull the rug out from under me? The question the narrative asks is will Abraham be able to trust in God as provider, even when trusting him goes beyond human reason and life experience?

That is the question we must ask of ourselves. When trials come, how will we interpret them? Will we doubt God? Will we be like Adam and Eve and attempt to snatch

¹⁰Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 304.

¹¹Sinclair B. Ferguson, *The Whole Christ: Legalism, Antinomianism, and Gospel Assurance—Why the Marrow Controversy Still Matters* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2016), 13, Kindle.

our fate from the hands of God? Will we wring our hands in indecision, paralyzed by the fear of making a mistake? Will we attribute difficulties in our lives to an uncaring, or even spiteful God? Or will we trust in the character of God as he has revealed himself in history?

This is what Abraham chooses. He trusts the faithfulness and provision of God revealed not only in God's dealings with his ancestors (Noah, for example) but also in his own life. God has blessed him in many ways. He has kept him safe. He has grown Abraham's tribe. He has miraculously provided life from barrenness and given him a son. With God's faithfulness in mind, he walks in obedience, just as he does to God's initial call.

Abraham's obedience is not momentary. He prepares for the journey. He saddles the donkey and cuts the wood for the sacrifice. Then he travels until, on the third day, he sees from afar where they are headed. At that point, he leaves the young men to care for the donkeys, and he and Isaac go off to worship God. Here we have a hint of Abraham's faith as he says, "I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you" (Gen 22:5). Isaac is aware that they have no sacrifice. He asks his father where the lamb for the burnt offering is. Abraham's response again indicates something of his faith, or at least his hope: "God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son" (Gen 22:8). He trusts and hopes in God as the provider, even when he does not understand God's call. Then he builds the altar, binds his son, and takes the knife to slaughter Isaac. Think of the sustained faith it takes to comply with God's command. Abraham does not steel himself for a single moment of action. Rather there are constant steps of faith along the way, each one a hurdle to his obedience, each one carrying him closer to the moment he dreads. And yet Abraham is faithful. He has turned himself completely over to God. He has recognized something about himself that few ever do—he is hopeless apart from God. So he casts his whole self—his hopes, his failures, his reputation, all of it—into the care of God. In sacrificing Isaac, Abraham is sacrificing the

promise. He gives up the gift of God, trusting wholly in the giver, believing that he is good, that he is to be trusted no matter the situation.

As Abraham releases control over his fate, God stays Abraham's hand. The test is over. God never required Isaac's life. Instead, Abraham looks up and finds that God has provided in a most unusual way. A ram is caught by his horns in the thicket behind him. The Lord has provided, just as Abraham told Isaac that he would. Genesis 22:13 tells us, "And Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering instead of his son." God provides what is needed, in this case a ram for a burnt offering. But just as Abraham learned as he waited on God to provide an heir, it is in his own time and in his own way.

Abraham's faith demonstrates that his love for God is greater than his love for the gifts of God. He trusts in the character of God, believing that God is good, that he is gracious and merciful. His faith exhibited in a willingness to sacrifice his only son at the command of God stands in stark contrast to the fall of Adam and Eve. Despite the evidence of God's provision, they doubt God's goodness. They believe he is holding the best back from them. Abraham believes that God is taking away what he has wanted most, and yet he trusts God. He believes that he is good, that he keeps his promises, and that his ways are best.

Of Abraham's belief, Hebrews 11:19 says, "He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back." Stigers rightly attributes Abraham's belief that God could raise Isaac from the dead to the promise inherent in Genesis 3:15. He says, "The fact that the resurrection is involved in the protevangelion stood before Abraham as the witness to the dilemma before him as he saw it. If salvation was to come to men in the spiritual realm in that manner, then what would present the application of the use of resurrection power in this

equally impossible situation confronting Abraham?”¹² Abraham believes God will be faithful, even if it requires a resurrection from the dead. It is interesting that the author of Hebrews tells us that figuratively Abraham does receive Isaac back from the dead, and in Genesis, this figurative resurrection happens on the third day of the journey.

This calls to mind that Jesus’ resurrection occurs on the third day. Though the skeptic may dismiss this as happenstance, it is apparent in Scripture that the third day is important. As many commentators point out, the third day is clearly identified with a time of preparation, but here it seems that it may also help contribute to the understanding of the resurrection.¹³ In Luke 24:46–47, Jesus says, “Thus it is written, that the Christ should suffer and on the third day rise from the dead, and that repentance for the forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.” According to Jesus, his resurrection on the third day is prophesied in the Scriptures. The most direct reference to the resurrection on the third day is found in Hosea 6:2. Hosea writes that after God’s judgment, Israel will be revived on the third day. Jesus as the true Israel is the typological fulfillment of this pattern.¹⁴ Jesus himself points to the story of Jonah as another third-day resurrection example. In Matthew 12:40, he says, “For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.” Jonah is a type of Israel who is to be a light to the nations. Through God’s judgment on Jonah, Gentiles are saved and respond to God. Jonah is a type of Christ, and just as Jonah was figuratively resurrected

¹²Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976), 188–89. See also his discussion on the protevangelion (78–79).

¹³For example, Ross states, “The emphasis on three days signifies a period of preparation for the most important event (see Gen. 31:22; 34:25; 40:20; 42:18).” Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 398.

¹⁴For a defense of this position, see Duane A. Garrett, *Hosea, Joel*, NAC, vol. 19A (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1997), 158.

on the third day, again so is Jesus.¹⁵ Isaac's figurative resurrection appears to help set this pattern. That this third day motif arises again in Genes 42:18 is further evidence of this intended pattern. Joseph puts his brothers in custody for three days. During this time, they recognize their sin against Joseph. On the third day, they are offered a chance to live and provide for their family if they will bring their youngest brother.

The True Nature of God's Love

Although this test must have been agonizingly difficult for Abraham, he has learned to walk in faith even when it seems to be in conflict with his desires. As Allen Ross says, "Abraham's obedience demonstrated that he recognized that God was the Lord of the promise."¹⁶ He is set free to trust. In the words of James, his faith is completed by his works (Jas 2:22). God's test forces Abraham to choose, to know where his heart lies. God strips away his doubts and fears and frees him to trust in a way that is impossible outside of experience. God gives Abraham the gift of clarity of heart. And in so doing, he enables Abraham to truly enjoy his son as a gift given by his heavenly father.

However clearly Abraham understands God's love for him, we have knowledge of God's love that is unavailable to him. Abraham is asked to sacrifice his son, his only son, the son he loves. If we imagine all of the emotions Abraham must have experienced as he prepares for three days to slay his son, we may at times struggle to understand how a good and loving God could test Abraham in this way, even if he does provide a ram to be sacrificed at the end. But Abraham loves God. He trusts him. He recognizes him as the source of his life, his provision, and his hopes for a future. And so he offers up his son, trusting that God will be faithful to keep his promises even if it

¹⁵James M. Hamilton Jr., "Use of the OT in the NT," unpublished class notes for 80233 (The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Spring Semester, 2016).

¹⁶Ross, *Creation and Blessing*, 401.

means the resurrection of Isaac. Abraham has incredible faith when he offers up his son, but it is faith in a God who has always been faithful.

As we continue forward in Scripture with this story in mind, we see the testing that Abraham endures and any suffering it entails pales in comparison to what God subjects himself and his son Jesus to on our behalf. He does not shield himself from our suffering. Instead he enters into it in a way that we can only understand theoretically. God offers his own son Jesus not because he has to, nor because he is obligated to, but because he loves us in spite of our rebellion against him. Paul says, “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:6–8). Abraham trusts a faithful God and is willing to sacrifice his son. God provides a ram to take the place of Isaac. God sacrifices his son for a faithless people. He provides in his son Jesus the spotless, sacrificial lamb to redeem a people for himself.

Conclusion

Abraham’s faith is demonstrated in his willingness to offer even his son at the command of God. In response, God reaffirms his promise. Genesis 22:15–18 says,

And the angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time from heaven and said, “By myself I have sworn,” declares the LORD, “because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice.”

Abraham’s faith is a necessary condition of the promise, but the promise from God is secure. God has made a covenant with Abraham. Still Abraham’s faith and obedience were a necessity. Following Abraham’s testing, God assures Abraham of his intentions in the strongest means possible. He swears by himself that he will bless Abraham and through him and his offspring, the nations. God recounts and expands upon his promises to Abraham.

Just as in the promise in Genesis 3:15, the offspring can be interpreted to refer both to numerous descendants and a singular individual. As Mathews says, “The semantic flexibility of ‘offspring’ permits the promise to refer to both an individual (David) and a group (Israel).”¹⁷ This flexibility is used throughout Scripture not only in the term *offspring*, but also in the picture of individuals acting out the role of Israel. It is precisely this flexibility that Alexander refers to when he says that while the first half of the divine oath in Genesis 22:15–18 refers to the plural use of “offspring,” the second half of the divine oath refers to the singular use and thus anticipates a future king who will mediate God’s blessing to the nations.¹⁸

What we see clarified in the story of Abraham is that God initiates salvation for his people through his promises and accomplishes it by his power. And yet faith in who God is and what he is doing is a necessity. Abraham does not earn the opportunity to be right with God, but he does respond with faith to who God is and what he has promised. So God uses him in accomplishing his purposes—to redeem a people for himself. And as we read this story, we see that God is good, loving, and faithful even when there are, according to our finite viewpoint, unexpected turns as he works out his plan.

¹⁷Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC, vol. 1B (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005), 299.

¹⁸T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009), 164–65.

CHAPTER 7
GENESIS 50:15–26

Introduction

Up to this point in the narrative we have learned many things about God, about his purposes for his creation, about ourselves and our need for salvation, and about how God will bring about redemption for his creation and for those who trust in his promises. None of this is meant to be academic. Each portion is meant to help us understand not only the nature of our reality, but more importantly the nature of our God. As we see him demonstrate his justice on sin, we are both thankful that evil will not stand and fearful for what this means for us. But the story shows that “Justice is not God’s final word . . . and it does not appear to be his ultimate purpose.”¹ Each portion of the narrative has uncovered a deeper understanding about God and his plans to redeem his world, and we are astounded that he would demonstrate his love by promising to redeem his creation in spite of humanity’s rebellion. From the story of Adam, we see a trajectory of men who, though flawed, cling to and even fight for the promise of God through the blessing of their fathers, especially from Genesis 12, the beginning of Abraham’s story, on. These stories expose the brokenness of men and at the same time, bring out the irony of who God chooses to bring about the promised seed of the woman. There is a need for righteousness, but it is a righteousness that even the patriarchs of God’s chosen people are unable to attain. God is preserving a people for himself. He is at work bringing about his covenant promises, and yet even those who cling to his promises often threaten the fulfillment of them.

¹James M. Hamilton Jr., *God's Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 1751–52, Kindle.

The narrative of Genesis has traced God's protection and provision for his people from the first glimpse of his promise to redeem his creation through a seed of the woman (Gen 3:15). This seed begins with God's provision of Seth, continues through God's protection of Noah, and is clarified and expanded upon through Abraham. Abraham's testing displays the kind of faith we are to have in God's promises—a faith that acts in accordance to his command even when we cannot understand his purposes. Following this testing, the narrative continues to follow God's chosen people through Abraham's line—specifically, Isaac, Jacob, and then his twelve sons.

Abraham gives his wife to other men out of fear, and he attempts to force God's hand in keeping his promise by sleeping with Hagar. Yet he shows his faith in God by being willing to sacrifice the fruition of God's promise through Isaac, Sarah's son. In this instance, Abraham believes that God is trustworthy where Adam and Eve doubted. In a situation where he could have believed that God is holding out on him, Abraham does what Adam and Eve did not. He believes that God is good and that he is worth even the sacrifice of his most treasured love. Abraham acts in faith, according to the promises of God, and trusts in God's nature as a good and loving father. Furthermore, Abraham's faith in God's promises continues as he makes it a point for him and Sarah to be buried in the land God has promised him.

Much of Isaac's story recapitulates that of Abraham's. Isaac, too, is married to a woman who is barren (Gen 25:21), and again, God provides life out of barrenness much like he did with Sarah. Isaac repeats the doubt of his father when he gives his wife to another man to protect himself (Gen 25:11). But God is faithful. The seed of the woman is preserved through God's chosen line, but it is by God's choice and provision.

The story of Jacob and Esau further shows that God's plan is not always what is expected. Esau, the firstborn and the more “manly” of the two brothers, is who anyone would expect to carry the line of the seed of the woman. But God demonstrates his

sovereignty in choosing Jacob over Esau in the womb (Gen 25:23).² The shock at the unexpected nature of God's choice is heightened when Jacob is shown to be a deceiver. Yet God is faithful to renew his promises to Abraham's descendants even when they are unfaithful (Gen 26:3–5, 24; 28:13–15). In fact, he does so even when Jacob is attempting to set conditions on God for how he will receive the promise. Compare Jacob's faith with Abraham. Abraham offers the fruit of the promise to God. Jacob attempts to bargain, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God" (Gen 28:20–21). And yet God chooses to work through him. God is faithful to deliver on his promises, but those who are his can expect discipline.

Jacob's bargaining and deceptions do not go uncorrected. His life of deception is marked with repercussions, and he experiences turmoil in his house as a result his scheming.³ As would any man, Jacob, while wrestling with God literally and figuratively, comes away changed. He is marked, so that he might not forget the power of the sovereign Lord over him, and his name is changed to Israel (Gen 32:25–28). God chooses Jacob, or Israel, to father the backbone of his chosen people: the twelve brothers, the twelve tribes of Israel. God specifically elects Jacob to demonstrate his sovereignty and our dependence on him. This is what Paul says in Romans 9:6–13,

But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring, but "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring. For this is what the promise said: "About this time

²Mathews helpfully notes, "The surprising appointment of the younger over the older witnessed, in the eyes of the apostle Paul, to the grace of God (Rom 9:6–13; v. 12 quotes 25:23)" (Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, NAC, vol. 1B [Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2005], 380). God's choice is meant to teach us about his grace.

³God brought Jacob in contact with one who would deceive him. Ross says, "In spite of the promise—which Jacob perhaps assumed naively would come his way unopposed—God brought the patriarch-to-be to Laban for discipline that would bring his deception before his eyes." Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1988), 503.

next year I will return, and Sarah shall have a son.” And not only so, but also when Rebekah had conceived children by one man, our forefather Isaac, though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God’s purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.”

Paul tells us that in the stories of the patriarchs, God is demonstrating his sovereign choice. He chooses his people, preserves them, and uses them in his purpose of election because he desires to do so. God does not call those he will redeem according to their works but rather in spite of them. Through a squabbling family, quick to deceive, filled with all kinds of immorality, and waffling in their faith, God will bring about the restoration of his world and his people. Genesis shows us our desperate position, how easily the seed could be snuffed out, and how long-suffering God’s patience must be to continue to love us. As we read, we wonder how God could ever redeem such a mess, and yet we have been promised that he will. Then in the story of Jacob’s family, the curtain is pulled back, and we are shown a demonstration of God’s sovereignty. We see that even those at odds with his purposes are unknowingly propelling them forward. The story of Jacob’s family brings further clarity to what Genesis has been showing us all along, that God is working out a plan to accomplish his purposes. Genesis will not answer the question of how creation can be restored, but it teaches us what to look for. The Genesis narrative exposes the cyclical pattern of redemption. God, through unexpected circumstances, preserves the seed of the woman through unexpected men, each one an imperfect vessel until God sends his own son in the likeness of human flesh to crush the head of the serpent.

God’s Sovereign Will

Genesis begins with a strong sense of God’s power to accomplish his purposes. He creates the heavens and the earth from nothing. He speaks things into existence, ordering the chaos, bending all to his purposes. We are given the impression that God is wholly in control and has ordered his creation to display his glory.

This is what makes Genesis 3 so surprising. The serpent enters the garden, tempting Adam and Eve to rebel against God. We are given no explanation for the serpent's existence or for his motivations. And when Adam and Eve disobey God and eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and the good world that God has created is corrupted, we wonder why God does not prevent this. It is clearly displeasing to him as he administers a curse to all involved. We are left to wonder if God's creation is good, if he is displeased at the actions of Adam and Eve, and if he is truly as powerful as the creation story presents him to be, then why does he allow this rebellion? Why did he not stop it? We are left with the problem of evil. This is not a question that Genesis answers directly, but as is so often true of Scripture, it tells a micro story that teaches us something about the macro story. We do not understand why God allows evil, but we are reminded that what God is doing is beyond our comprehension. The story of Joseph teaches us that while the righteous may suffer and the unrighteous seem to prosper, God is in control, using even what is meant for evil to accomplish his good purposes. As a response, we are called to believe that the God who orchestrates even the choices of those who oppose him to accomplish his purposes is accomplishing what is good. This is true even if we do not recognize it straight away.

Joseph as a Type of Messiah

From the time of the fall, there is a consistent expectation for a seed of the woman who will defeat the serpent and set creation to rights (Gen 3:15).⁴ This expectation is seen in Adam's naming of Eve (Gen 3:20), in Eve's statement about receiving the Lord's help at the time of the naming of Cain (Gen 4:1), and in Eve's

⁴ This expectation is developed typologically. A good discussion on typology can be found in Marten's *Bound for the Promised Land*. He says that typology (1) "Pays careful attention to textual and historical/theological correspondences that develop across the canon"; (2) "Is prospective and prophetic"; (3) "Stresses escalation as the OT story line moves forward to its NT fulfilment"; (4) And that "typological connections find their terminus in the person and inaugurated-yet-not-consummated work of Christ" (Oren R. Marten, *Bound for the Promised Land: The Land Promise in God's Redemptive Plan*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 24 [London: Apollos; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015], 25–27).

statement about God's provision during the naming of Seth (Gen 4:25). Though these statements may not seem expectant, we see them in a new light when we read Lamech's statement at the naming of his son, Noah: "Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from the painful toil of our hands" (Gen 5:29). A seed of the woman will bring us relief from the curse.

Following the flood narrative, the seed is traced to Abraham and his family. He receives a covenant from the Lord, clarifying the expectations for deliverance and God's blessing. Abraham will be the mediator of God's blessings, and through him, all the families of the earth shall be blessed (Gen 12:3). Abraham and Sarah's barrenness is a threat to the fulfillment of God's promises, but in his provision of Isaac and rejection of Ishmael, God demonstrates not only his ability to provide, but also his intent to deliver his people in a way that only he can take credit for. Care is taken throughout the story of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob to delineate the line of blessing and to show how the fulfillment of the promises of God is wholly dependent on God's intervention and his choice of conduit for the blessing. God's provision of seed from a barren woman for both Abraham and Isaac, as well as God's surprising choice of the younger brother as the bearer of the promises, prepares us to look for God's sovereign hand at work. We are eased into both a trust in his ability to keep his promises and an expectation for a deliverer.

When Joseph is introduced as Jacob's son from a barren wife (Gen 30:22–24), the provision of God, we are primed to see him as the expected deliverer, or at least one in the pattern established in Genesis. This expectation is heightened by Joseph's dreams. In the first, sheaves representing his brothers bow down to a sheaf representing him, indicating to him and his family that he will reign over them (Gen 37:7–8). In the second, the sun, the moon, and eleven stars bow down to him, implying again that he will reign over his family (Gen 37:9–10). From a human standpoint, a 17-year-old dreaming about ruling over his family and sharing this with jealous brothers seem to indicate something

about Joseph's personality. Yet Genesis 37:11 hints that this is more than a prideful fantasy. Jacob does not just dismiss this as the hubris of youth but keeps the saying in mind. Jacob has received his own promises of elevation (Gen 25:23; 27:29; 28:12–15).⁵ That Jacob notes this dream implies that we as readers are to do the same.

Beyond Joseph's birth from a barren woman and his dreams of his family bowing down to him, the catalytic moment in the story of Joseph is introduced with a response from Joseph that prepares us for a significant moment in Scripture. When Israel calls Joseph to search for his brothers who are pasturing the flock, Joseph responds, "Here I am" (Gen 37:13). This is significant throughout Genesis as it indicates a preparation for an important occurrence. In Genesis 22:1, Abraham responds to God's call with, "Here I am" as he is about to be tested. Later, as Abraham raises the knife to sacrifice his son, the angel of the Lord calls out to him, and he responds, "Here I am" (Gen 22:11). In preparation for passing his blessing, Isaac calls to Esau, and then to Jacob who he believes is Esau, and they respond again with, "Here I am" (Gen 27:1,18). When Jacob is preparing to flee from Laban, the angel of God appears to him in a dream and calls him to return to the "land of his kindred," and he replies, "Here I am" (Gen 31:11–13). Later, as Jacob prepares to go down to Egypt, God speaks to him in the night. Jacob replies, "Here I am" (Gen 46:2) and is then comforted that God will keep his promises.

This phrase carries the same function in many other instances throughout Scripture. Moses uses it when God calls to him from out of the burning bush in preparation to use him to deliver Israel from oppression in Egypt—a clear picture of a typological reference to God's Messiah and his promised deliverance (Exod 3:4). In 1 Samuel 3, Samuel responds to God's call and receives news of the fate of Eli and his family. In Isaiah 6:8, Isaiah responds to God's calling to go to Israel and proclaim God's message of judgment to a people who refuse to hear with, "Here I am." Finally, in the

⁵Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26*, 693.

New Testament, the Lord calls Ananias, who responds with, “Here I am,” and sends him to proclaim Jesus to Paul, saying, “Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). At all of these times, the response “Here I am” is paired with significant happenings in the life of the individual and in the plan of God.

With these uses of “Here I am” in mind in both Genesis and later Scriptures, Joseph’s response to Jacob’s call leaves us with a sense of expectation. Something of note is being introduced. In addition, there is a change in the way Jacob is addressed as the story of Joseph progresses. Though Genesis 37 begins by referring to Jacob as “Jacob,” when Jacob’s sons’ plan to murder Joseph and sell him into slavery, Jacob is referred to as “Israel” (37:12). It appears as though Moses, the author, wants us to understand that the actions of Jacob’s family are in some way representative of the way the nation of Israel interacts with God’s anointed. Moses is laying out a pattern for the seed that sets up expectations for understanding and recognizing the Messiah in later Scriptures.

Genesis makes it clear that the nation of Israel is the conduit of the blessings of God. Through Israel, the seed of the woman is both provided and preserved until it is fulfilled in Jesus. This seed will be victorious, but as Emadi says, “His victory will come with a cost—a ‘bruised heel’ atop the ‘bruised head’ of the serpent.”⁶ This suffering of the seed is seen throughout Genesis. Noah endures the flood (Gen 6). Abraham must leave his land and kin (Gen 12:1). God tells him that his offspring will be servants afflicted for 400 years, but afterwards they will be delivered into the land God has promised (Gen 15:13–16). Finally, God asks Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac, but this son, the fulfillment of God’s blessing, is delivered when God provides a ram to sacrifice

⁶Samuel Cyrus Emadi, “Covenant, Typology, and the Story of Joseph: A Literary-Canonical Examination of Genesis 37–50” (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2016), 119.

(Gen 22). Isaac suffers through this same experience but as the sacrifice rather than the one agonizing over sacrificing his son. Jacob is on the run from Esau (Gen 27:42–45) and then is swindled by his father-in-law Laban (Gen 29–31). Much of his trouble is self-induced, and yet there are definite elements of rejection and suffering caused by his family despite God’s identification of him as the seed of promise (Gen 25:23). Through this suffering comes Jacob’s deliverance as God uses his time with Laban to enrich him before he brings him back to the land. In all the stories in Genesis, the seed experiences suffering before being delivered. The Joseph story continues this idea and expands upon it.

Emadi says of the Joseph story, “Continuing the twin drum beat of seed and suffering, Joseph rises to the highest seat in the land *through* the experience of suffering.”⁷ Emadi argues that the Joseph story clarifies that the suffering the seed will experience comes at the hands of his own brothers. He continues, “Joseph is the beloved son who suffers in exile before blessing the nations and being exalted. He is part of a pattern developed, at least in nascent form, in Genesis. The rest of the OT continues this trajectory as other characters (David, Daniel, Esther) repeat the pattern . . . He is thus, first and foremost, a type of Israel.”⁸ As a type of Israel, he is representative of Israel in the same way that David is representative of the nation, and similarly, Jesus. Moses uses the story of Joseph to set an expectation that the seed of the woman will suffer and will do so at the hands of his kin. This same picture is painted in Psalm 2:1–2, although it is expanded to include not only Israel, but the nations. The psalmist writes,

Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
and the rulers take counsel together,
against the Lord and against his Anointed.

⁷Emadi, “Covenant, Typology, and the Story of Joseph,” 120.

⁸Ibid., 122.

The believers in Acts 4 interpret this passage typologically as what would happen to the Messiah. This is fulfilled in Jesus. They say, “For truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27–28). Israel and the nations reject David, the Lord’s Anointed. He is playing out a picture of the Messiah, rejected by the nations and by Israel, fulfilled in the crucifixion of Jesus.

In Acts 7, after referencing the story of Joseph’s brothers betraying him and God’s use of this to deliver his people, Stephen, in Acts 7, makes this same point. He states,

You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Which of the prophets did your fathers not persecute? And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it” (Acts 7:51–53).

Stephen’s survey of the history of Israel illustrates that God’s people have consistently rejected those who proclaim the coming of the Messiah, whether they do so by their words, or like Joseph, through the typological patterns set up by their lives.⁹

Moses shows the story of the family of Israel to help us understand the story of the nation of Israel that grows from this family. He wants us to see that the family of Israel is rejecting God’s chosen deliverer. Joseph is an offspring of Abraham. He is Israel’s representative chosen by God as revealed in his dreams to rule over Israel. He is sent by his father in search of his brothers, but his brothers hate him. They reject God’s chosen one. They consider murdering him, then decide on selling him into slavery and convincing their father that he has been killed. Joseph is carried out of the Promised Land and into Egypt—a move that, for the storyteller (Moses), would represent a move out of

⁹John B. Polhill, *Acts*, NAC, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 1992), 206.

the land of the living and into the land of death. But despite Israel's rejection, God raises his deliverer to rescue his chosen people. This blessing on Israel results in a blessing for the nations.

Jesus fulfills this type. He is from the line of Abraham. He is Israel's representative chosen by God as revealed in the Scriptures to rule his people. But he is rejected by Israel. They do not only consider murdering him, they follow through. Jesus is killed, entering death, but like Joseph who rises from the pit to royal status, Jesus rises from the grave demonstrating the reality of his kingship. Joseph rescues not only Israel, but also the nations from famine. Jesus rescues Israel and the nations not from famine but from sin and death, redeeming all who will trust in him. Greidanus explains the similarities in the life of Jesus and that of Joseph. He states,

Through his suffering and eventual ascension to rulership Joseph saved God's people Israel. Jesus, similarly, through his suffering, death, resurrection, and ascension would save God's people. Note the parallels between Joseph and Jesus: as Joseph's brother "conspired to kill him" (37:18), so, according to Matthew, Jesus' brothers, the chief priests and the elders, "conspired to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him" (Matt 26:4); as Joseph's brothers sold him for twenty pieces of silver, so Jesus' disciple Judas sold Jesus for thirty pieces of silver (Matt 26:25); as Joseph's brothers handed him over to the Gentiles, so Jesus' brothers "handed him over to Pilate the governor" (Matt 27:2); as Joseph suffered in silence, so Jesus suffered in silence (Matt 26:63); and as God used evil deeds of Joseph's brothers to save his people, so God used the evil deeds of Jesus' "brothers" to save his people.¹⁰

These similarities show the interrelatedness of these stories. The story of Joseph is meant to help lay the foundation for understanding and recognizing the Messiah. Emadi summarizes this idea,

Genesis itself supplies textual warrant that Joseph is a type of the Messiah. If Joseph fulfills the Abrahamic hopes, he creates an expectation that other Joseph figures will do the same—though more completely—in the future. As a royal seed of Abraham, endowed with God's very presence (Gen 39:2, 23), Joseph mediates blessing to the nations, preserves the offspring of Abraham, triggers the "multiplication and fruitfulness" of Israel's seed, and is a harbinger of Israel's Exodus from Egypt and inheritance of Canaan. Moses, through Jacob's prophecy, projects this Josephite pattern of covenantal fulfillment into the future by patterning Israel's "last days"

¹⁰Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis: Foundations for Expository Sermons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 356.

messianic king after the life of Joseph (Gen 49:8). All of these elements contribute to our understanding of Joseph according [to] his covenantal context which in turn gives warrant for a typological reading of the Joseph story.¹¹

Joseph is a type of Messiah. He is chosen by God to rule; he trusts in the promises of God despite his sufferings; and when delivered from his sufferings, he forgives and makes a way for those who have wronged him to be delivered as well. Yet Genesis makes it clear that Joseph is only a type as it closes with the death of Joseph. The curse has not been undone; the ultimate deliverer is yet to come. But as Emadi says, Joseph creates an expectation that other Joseph-like figures will arise. And as God so often does, he chooses a branch in the tree of Israel that proves his plans and purposes are his own. He chooses an unexpected man at the end of Genesis to carry forth the righteous seed.

The Line of the Seed

Another story is developing in the midst of this expectant picture of the Messiah seen in the story of Joseph. In Genesis 38, in the middle of Joseph's sufferings, one of his brothers, Judah, emerges as a character of interest. In contrast to Joseph, Judah is an unlikely choice to continue the line of the seed. Where Joseph is presented as above reproach, Judah is presented as self-interested. He is not only complicit in the betrayal of Joseph; he refuses to provide his sons' widow, Tamar, with another husband in his son Shelah. Then Judah visits what he believes to be a prostitute, only it is his daughter-in-law, Tamar, who has tricked him because he has kept Shelah from her. When she becomes pregnant, he seeks to have her burned for sexual immorality. The irony, of course, is that the sexual immorality he accuses her of is evidence of his own sin (Gen 38:24–26).

¹¹Emadi, "Covenant, Typology, and the Story of Joseph," 123.

This story is seen by some scholars as a superfluous interruption in the story of Joseph. Westermann states, “Ch. 38 is a self-contained individual narrative.”¹² Brueggemann says, “This peculiar chapter stands alone, without connection to the context. It is isolated in every way and is most enigmatic . . . It is not evident that it provides any significant theological resource.”¹³ This view misses the import of what is happening here. Alexander states, “The inclusion of this story can best be accounted for by noting its interest in the theme of ‘seed.’”¹⁴ As will be displayed by Jacob’s blessing of Judah (Gen 49:8–12) and its unfolding in the Scriptures demonstrated by its partial fulfillment in the Davidic dynasty and its setting of eschatological expectations, this story is about the preservation of the line of the seed through the line of Judah. In hindsight, the line of the seed is in jeopardy in chapter 38. Two of Judah’s sons die without bearing children. Out of fear, Judah keeps his last son, Shelah, from his rightful bride. As Alexander notes, “Judah’s reluctance to take the action necessary to maintain the family line is at the heart of the story.”¹⁵ But as is demonstrated through the story of Joseph, God is sovereignly at work in the midst of this family turmoil that is unknowingly endangering, at least from a human point of view, the line of promise. The wrestling of unborn twins calls to mind the wrestling of Jacob and Esau, preparing us look back on this event with understanding when we read of Jacob’s blessing of Judah. And so we see that, in opposition to those who miss the significance of this interruption of the story of Joseph, God is at work preserving his purposes even when we are unaware of the threat. Mathews states,

¹²Claus Westermann, *Genesis 37–50: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1986), 49.

¹³Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, IBC* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 307–308.

¹⁴T. Desmond Alexander, *The Servant King: The Bible's Portrait of the Messiah* (Vancouver: Regent College, 2003), 31.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, 32.

Chapter 38 shows that the purposes of God for Jacob's family and, from a historical perspective, for the nation Israel, overcame human obstacles—the selfishness of evil sons (Er, Onan), the ignorance and sensuality of an old man (Judah), and the disgraceful actions of a desperate widow (Tamar)—to provide heirs for Judah, even a royal legacy by the child Perez.¹⁶

In discussing the divine election of Joseph evidenced by his dreams in Genesis 37, Kidner states, “God’s design is seen to be no more thwarted by the indiscretion of its allies . . . than by the malice of its opponents.”¹⁷ This is true of the story of Judah and Tamar as well. The seed will be preserved by the sovereign hand of God.

God’s choice of Judah to carry forth the line of the seed is surprising. But this is true of all of the men God has chosen. God is sovereignly working things out according to his plan, not ours. Alexander states,

The choice of Judah, however, is a further sign that the royal line is determined by God rather than by human preference. Genesis suggests that each patriarch would have selected someone else as principal heir: Abraham speaks out in favour of Ishmael (17:18); Isaac seeks to bless Esau (27:4); Jacob idolizes Joseph (37:3). On every occasion, however, the line of descent is traced through another son.¹⁸

That the line of the seed is to continue through Judah and not Joseph is unexpected, so much so that it is easy to miss the true point of the narrative of Genesis 37–50. God is not just preserving a group of people from starving; he is preserving the seed through which his promises will be fulfilled. He is preserving the line from which the Messiah will come. Joseph helps us understand what the Messiah will look like, but his major role in the plan of God is to preserve the line of Judah.

This does not mean, however, that there is nothing to be learned from God’s choice of Judah. As the narrative in Genesis 37–50 develops, conflict arises between Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is betrayed and sold into slavery, but God is with Joseph. He rises to a position of power and prominence, below only Pharaoh in title. But even

¹⁶Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50*, 703.

¹⁷Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 180.

¹⁸Alexander, *The Servant King*, 33.

Pharaoh is dependent on Joseph's wisdom. When Joseph's brothers come to Egypt in search of food, Joseph recognizes them and tests them to see what kind of men they have become. At this moment, many things hang in the balance. We are still unsure of Joseph's motivations. He has risen to great power, but his brothers meant evil for him. Will he exact revenge? And what of the brothers? They recognize the evil of what they have done to Joseph and equate it to their misfortune (Gen 42:21), but we have yet to see if they have changed. Are they sorry they are feeling the effects of their sin, or are they truly repentant? Will they act selfishly or selflessly? Joseph's test of his brothers is designed to determine this.

When the planted silver cup is found in Benjamin's bag (Gen 44:1-13), Benjamin's life is forfeit to Joseph. In the climactic moment of this family's tale of envy and forgiveness, Judah offers his life for Benjamin's (Gen 44:33). Judah no longer responds in jealousy to the favored son, but with loving sacrifice. In this moment in the narrative of Jacob's family, Judah models the Messiah and helps us to understand God's plans and purposes. Much later in the narrative of Scripture, in the climactic moment of the macro story of the Bible, Jesus offers his life for those of his brothers as the method of salvation for all of God's people.

As the story of Jacob's family is concluding and Jacob is blessing his sons, we are informed of the surprise twist that God has marked Judah as the one to carry on the seed. Jacob says,

Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father's sons shall bow down before you.
Judah is a lion's cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?
The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey's colt to the choice vine,

he has washed his garments in wine
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.
His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk. (Gen 49:8–11).

Dempster helpfully relates Abraham’s blessing of Judah to the story of Joseph. He says, “From this blessing the big picture of the Joseph story begins to emerge. As Joseph is singled out in his dream as the one before whom his family will bow down, so the nations will do the same to Judah.”¹⁹ Judah is the one through whom the Messiah comes. The scepter will not depart from his line. He will be obeyed by all the peoples as he rules forever over a kingdom marked by blessing and plenty. The world will now only bring forth its bounty by sweat and toil, but when the king comes, it will be a land of such abundance that the choice vine may be used as a hitching-post and clothes may be washed in wine. Kidner points to the effect of the promised one,

Up to [the ‘until clause of 10b] the theme is the fierce dominance of the tribe among its fellows (8b,9). Then with the advent of the promised one, who will rule the nations, the scene becomes an earthly paradise such as the prophets foretell in their Messianic poems. It is a miniature of the biblical scheme of history.²⁰

The promised seed of the woman is undoing the effects of the curse. This is what Genesis is preparing us for—the expectation of a messianic king who ushers in a new kingdom and sets creation to rights. Later Scripture will pick up on this motif and advance it. In Numbers, a star comes out of Jacob to exercise dominion (Num 24:17–19). In 2 Samuel 7:16, God promises that he will establish the house and kingdom of David forever. Psalm 2 looks forward to the Lord setting his Anointed on Zion, ruling over the nations. Isaiah 11 looks forward to the rule of a shoot of the stump of Jesse who will rule with righteousness and justice and institute a kingdom in which the wolf can dwell with the lamb and children can safely play near the hole of a cobra. The New Testament will pick up on these expectations and show that Jesus is the messianic king who fulfills the

¹⁹Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Biblical Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, New Studies in Biblical Theology, vol. 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 91.

²⁰Kidner, *Genesis*, 217–18.

Scriptures and that his coming initiates the kingdom of God. Examples of this would be the tracing of Jesus' genealogy to connect him to the promised seed (Matt 1:1–17; Luke 23:38) and his performing signs and miracles that demonstrate his identity, like turning water in to wine (John 2:1–11)—a miracle that would allow the kind of nonchalance described in Genesis 49:11.

Conclusion

The stories in Genesis are not morality tales, but rather the stories of how people, even at their best, fall woefully short of God's perfect standard. Their sin brings brokenness, suffering, death, and heartache. But God uses even imperfect people to accomplish his plans and purposes to bring about redemption. This redemption will need to be accomplished by one who can do what not even the patriarchs can accomplish—offer himself as a righteous sacrifice. Some in the line of the seed arise as examples and patterns of what the Messiah will be like, but they are imperfect examples. However, as the story develops around these imperfect examples, we are taught not only what to expect concerning the Messiah, but also something of what he will bring about.

From the very beginning, God sets an expectation that he is sending a rescuer. He will be the man that completes what no other man can fulfill. He will be the conquering king who will establish his throne forever as declared in Israel's blessing on Judah. He will be a new Abraham fathering a new people and bringing God's blessing to all nations. He will be a new Adam that is better than Noah, overcoming temptation and bringing relief from the toil. He will be the offspring of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent, so that one day, the earth will be cleansed—not with a flood or some other temporary cleansing—but with the ultimate conquering of sin and death through the sacrifice of the son who created it. The loving, generous, creative God will make all things new. This is the hope expected in Genesis and accomplished in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

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ABSTRACT

SETTING EXPECTATIONS FOR THE GOSPEL IN GENESIS FOR ANCHOR CHURCH IN TUSCALOOSA, ALABAMA

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This project defends the notion that Genesis sets the expectations for the gospel by introducing the main characters, the intended purpose of creation, the main problem that exists within creation, and expectations for how that problem will be addressed. The intent is to demonstrate that the promise of a seed of the woman who will crush the head of the serpent in Genesis 3:15 is understood and developed foundationally in Genesis as humanity's hope to be set right with God and that this is consistent with the rest of Scripture.

Chapter 1 shows how an understanding of Genesis is imperative to grasping the narrative of Scripture. This chapter validates the need for a biblical-theological understanding of Scripture. The foundation for the assumptions later biblical authors make are laid in Genesis.

Chapter 2 demonstrates how Genesis sets the foundational assumptions of our story and how it is to be read. It introduces the reader to the creator God, his special creation of humanity, the deceiving serpent, the tension introduced by sin, and the first glimmer of hope that things will one day be restored.

Chapter 3 reveals the depths to which humanity has fallen. It demonstrates that though people have hearts that are utterly sinful and broken, God continues provide a promised seed through which he will redeem his creation.

Chapter 4 clarifies the method through which God will bring salvation. It introduces the idea of a chosen seed through whom God will bless the nations.

Chapter 5 explores a pattern for the promised deliverer and begins to answer the question of how an unrighteous person can be counted as righteous. It demonstrates that salvation has always been through faith in the promises of God.

Chapter 6 shows the nature of faith in the promises of God. Through this faith people are shaped into who God desires them to be. It also introduces the depth of God's love for his people.

Chapter 7 explains that though Genesis does not fully answer the question of how sinful mankind can be restored to a right relationship with God, it does teach the reader what to look for as God unfolds his plan for redemption in history. God is working out his covenant promises and is faithful to bring them about by his power even when one is unable to see his hand at work.

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