

# THE KING IN HIS BEAUTY

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A Biblical Theology of  
the Old and New Testaments

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13 14 15 16 17 18 19      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Diane,  
my beloved wife and coheir in the kingdom



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## PREFACE

It has been a great joy to write this book, though I am keenly aware of its limitations. I can scarcely express my debt to other scholars who confirmed, sharpened, and corrected my thinking. I am also aware that I have barely scratched the surface in terms of secondary sources. I tried to read enough to get a sense of what biblical scholarship was saying about the theology of the various books examined. But I was not concerned about being comprehensive; I mainly cite sources that proved to be of help in understanding the theology of the Bible. My hope is that this book will be understandable for college students, laypersons, seminary students, and pastors. It is not intended to be a technical work for scholars. Obviously, in a work of this scope virtually all readers will disagree with me somewhere on something, but I hope I will stimulate all to reflect on the majesty and beauty of the biblical message.

A word should be said about how I wrote this book. I wrote the first draft inductively without consulting other sources, based on my own work in the biblical text. Subsequently I read widely, incorporating many insights from others. Except for one or two short sections, I wrote the NT portion without consulting my previous writing on Pauline and NT theology. Obviously, there are many points of contact with what I wrote before, since my views have not changed substantially about NT theology.

I am grateful especially to Southern Baptist Theological Seminary for granting me a sabbatical and to President R. Albert Mohler Jr. and Vice President and Dean Russell Moore for supporting my scholarship. Thanks are also due to Jim Kinney from Baker Academic for his encouragement and support for this project and to Brian Bolger for his fine editing work that improved the final product. I am particularly thankful for Joshua Greever, my PhD student and Garrett Fellow, who ran to the library again and again to check out books

and to copy articles for me, and for his help in the dreary task of compiling my bibliography from my footnotes. Joshua also read the book carefully, making a number of suggestions for improvement. Joshua has been an immense help, and his willingness and eagerness to assist me have been a great encouragement.

I am dedicating this book to my beloved wife, Diane, who has recently survived a near fatal bicycle accident. She has been like Tabitha in her love and service to me and to many others, and like Tabitha she has been, as it were, raised from the dead (Acts 9:36–41). I can't express adequately what a gift Diane has been to me.

## PROLOGUE

By now it is common consensus that no one theme adequately captures the message of the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup> It is not my intention to dispute that hypothesis here, for almost any center chosen tends to domesticate one theme or another.<sup>2</sup> I maintain that there are a number of different ways to put together the story line and theology of the Scriptures that are legitimate. We should not insist, therefore, that one theme captures the whole. Indeed, the word “center” is ambiguous. Are we talking about the central theme of the story or the ultimate reason for the story?<sup>3</sup> Here my focus is on one of the major themes in the narrative. I have argued elsewhere that the ultimate reason and purpose for the story is the glory of God, and hence in this book I will not focus on the reason for the story.<sup>4</sup> Here the intent is to focus on the story line as it unfolds. The theme pursued must be flexible enough to comprehend several different interlocking themes in Scripture so that it summarizes the fundamental message of the Bible. I intend to argue in this book that the “kingdom of God,” if that term is defined with sufficient flexibility, fits well as a central theme of the

1. Writing a biblical theology of the whole Bible is a daunting task. It is not the purpose of this book to give a final word, for that is impossible. I am convinced that a biblical theology of the whole Bible can be written from a number of different and complementary perspectives. I have been preceded and helped by a number of scholars who have written a biblical theology of the whole Bible. See Childs, *Biblical Theology*; Fuller, *Unity of the Bible*; Scobie, *Ways of Our God*; VanGemeren, *Progress of Redemption*; Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*; Beale, *Biblical Theology*; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*.

2. In this work I quote a number of different writers from various perspectives. I usually quote these sources when they say something insightful, but it does not follow, of course, that the author quoted necessarily agrees with me in terms of the larger picture that I am presenting. Indeed, any given author may differ from me dramatically.

3. Vern Poythress (“Kinds of Biblical Theology”) rightly argues that a variety of perspectives can be adopted in doing biblical theology.

4. See Schreiner, *Paul*; idem, *New Testament Theology*.

entire Bible.<sup>5</sup> Let me hasten to say that such a thesis does not rely upon a word study approach, for it is quite obvious that the kingdom of God cannot be a central theme if we count up how many times the words “king,” “kingdom,” or “rule” and “reign” appear, for in many books of the Bible they do not appear at all.<sup>6</sup> Instead, the contention here is that the phrase “kingdom of God” thematically captures, from a biblical theology standpoint, the message of Scripture. Now I would immediately add that God brings in the kingdom for the glory and praise of his name. Scripture unfolds *the story* of the kingdom, and God’s glory is *the reason* for the story.<sup>7</sup> In this book I focus on one of the central themes of the story.

Perhaps it will help if I sketch in what I mean by “the kingdom of God.” First of all, it designates the rule of God. In one sense, God is always the King of kings and the Lord of lords, reigning over everything that happens. But in another sense, God’s rule has been flouted since the fall of humankind, and the Scriptures tell the story of the kingdom regained. The objection to seeing the kingdom as central is that it does not seem to fit with the Writings of the Hebrew Bible—for example, the book of Proverbs. I will argue in due course that Proverbs (and the other books from the Writings in the OT) fits with such a notion, even though the term “kingdom” is virtually absent in Proverbs. I will demonstrate that the Wisdom literature features the supremacy of God in everyday life, showing that he rules over the particulars of our existence. We will see that Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes teach that the fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom. To fear the Lord is to live under his lordship. The focus on God as King is evident in the regular refrain found in Scripture, particularly the OT, where God is identified as the Lord. As Lord, he is the sovereign one, the creator of all, the one who deserves praise and obedience. In other words, saying that the theme of Scripture is God’s kingship is verified and confirmed by the constant refrain that God is the Lord.<sup>8</sup>

Focusing on God as King in the abstract apart from human beings does not do justice to the breadth found in the Scriptures.<sup>9</sup> For the central message of Scripture also includes human beings—the crown of creation—who are created in God’s image.<sup>10</sup> Since God is King and Lord, it is his purpose and

5. I agree with G. K. Beale (*Biblical Theology*, 168–84) that there is a coherent story line in the Scriptures.

6. On this matter, see Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 59–60.

7. I tried to unpack this foundational reason in two earlier books: Schreiner, *Paul*; idem, *New Testament Theology*. See also Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*.

8. For the centrality of lordship in the Scriptures, see Frame, *Doctrine of God*.

9. See Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 59–83.

10. Others have rightly argued that one of the major themes in Scripture relates to God’s people. See Scobie, *Ways of Our God*, 469–651; Martens, “People of God.”

design that he be glorified in all things and by all people. Some have complained that such a God is narcissistic, but that objection misses the point. For God as King glorifies himself by giving himself to his human beings in love. God is honored as King when human beings receive and depend upon his love and experience his salvation. God's glory and God's love must not be placed into two separate compartments. Rather, God is glorified as Lord in his love for human beings.<sup>11</sup> The sovereignty of God and his kingship take place in history, in the story recounted in the Scriptures, revealed supremely in the ministry and person of Jesus Christ.

A close relationship exists between God's kingdom and his covenant.<sup>12</sup> Indeed, the divine covenants are the means by which God's rule is established.<sup>13</sup> God's lordship becomes a reality as he dwells with his people, as they experience his gracious presence.<sup>14</sup> This fits with Desmond Alexander's remark that "the theme of God's presence on the earth is especially significant for understanding the biblical meta-story."<sup>15</sup> God's love for human beings is manifested in his covenants with human beings, for in the covenant God promises that he will accomplish salvation for his people and be their God.

The lordship of God, however, cannot be confined to God's love, for the Scriptures call attention to another dimension of the story. God expresses his kingship also in punishing his enemies, in judging those who resist the overtures of his love.<sup>16</sup> Some of God's subjects rebel against his kingly rule and his sovereign love. Their recalcitrance and rebellion will not ultimately succeed. The story line of the Scriptures indicates that evil will be destroyed and pacified. The subjects who refuse to bow the knee will be judged, and God's rule over all and glory will be manifested in judgment as well.

We must beware of another abstraction in understanding God's lordship. God's kingdom certainly consists of his rule over angels and human beings, but the emphasis on rule must not blind us to the truth that there is also a realm. History does not take place in an ethereal sphere. God created the entire

11. See the careful articulation of both divine sovereignty and God's relatedness to the world in Childs, *Biblical Theology*, 356–58.

12. A covenant signifies a relationship in which there are obligations made under oath. For the definition of the term, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 132–33.

13. Meredith Kline says that "covenants function as administrative instruments of God's kingly rule" (*Kingdom Prologue*, 3). So also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 42. For a survey of covenant in the Scriptures along with his own proposal, see Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*.

14. Rightly Martens, "People of God," 230. See also Terrien, *Elusive Presence*.

15. Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 14–15.

16. See Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 37–65. He defends the notion that God's glory is expressed "in salvation through judgment."

universe, and the lordship of God and his relationship with human beings take place on earth. Place matters in this story. God is King over the world and over the universe, but history raises questions about his lordship over this world. The incursion of evil represents a rebel kingdom that threatens God's sovereignty and seeks to undo his love. This world, with all its beauty, is vitiated by sin. The drama of God as King and human beings as his subjects is worked out in history and in a certain place. The story of Scripture is not only the relationship between God and human beings; it also relates to the universe. What is the destiny of the world that God has made? The Scriptures promise that there will be a new heaven and a new earth—a new creation where the glory of God will illumine the cosmos. So, the kingdom of God has a threefold dimension, focusing on God as King, on human beings as the subjects of the King, and the universe as the place where his kingship is worked out.

A final comment should be made about the approach of this book. It is not my purpose to interact with critical reconstructions of Israel's history or literature. The same could be said regarding the NT history. Careful interaction with such reconstructions is a significant part of the scholarly endeavor, but no book can accomplish everything.<sup>17</sup> It is also a historical fact that particular books were recognized and accepted as canonical, though I maintain also that the church was providentially led by God to recognize which writings belonged to authoritative Scripture.<sup>18</sup> Hence, my goal in this book is to unpack the canonical writings in their final form.<sup>19</sup> We are still faced with an important decision with regard to the OT. Should the canon be explored in terms of its Hebrew order or the Christian order?<sup>20</sup> Some regard this issue to

17. I concur with most conservative evangelicals in believing that the accounts in the Scriptures are historical, whether we are speaking of Genesis or the Gospels. My view will surface in this book, but it is not my intention to defend it. The goal of this book is to set forth the theology of the Bible in its final, canonical form.

18. See Kruger, *Canon Revisited*, for an important work on this topic.

19. The canonical approach is well known through the groundbreaking work of Brevard Childs. For a similar approach, see Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*. For a very different reading, see Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*. Brueggemann adopts a postmodern approach in which a Christian reading is not privileged. Clearly, the present book moves in a very different direction. Even though Brueggemann trumpets postmodernism, there are a number of positivistic, dogmatic, and modernist statements in his book, though his work also contains many helpful insights. I am not denying that the postmodern turn rightly uncovered many problems in the modernist agenda. I would suggest that the way forward is to presuppose the truth of the Christian worldview and the authority and the complete truthfulness of the Scriptures. For a full exposition of this view, see Frame, *Knowledge of God*; idem, *Word of God*. My work is similar to Brueggemann's in that I am not seeking here to investigate the historical truth of the OT, though I do believe that the OT is historically reliable.

20. The trend is to examine the OT in its Hebrew order. For a robust defense, see Seitz, *Fellowship of the Prophets*. See also Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 59–63; Gentry and

be of major importance, but its significance is exaggerated.<sup>21</sup> In my judgment, the central themes of OT theology are not affected dramatically whether one follows the Hebrew order or the order used in English translations. I am assuming here that the ordinary reader of English who is not even aware of the Hebrew order is at no disadvantage in trying to understand the theology of the OT. Therefore, in this book I follow the English order.

I should also note that my approach to various books differs. Some books are examined chronologically, others thematically, and in the Psalms the canonical ordering of the books is explored. I am not suggesting in any particular case that the approach adopted here is the *right* approach. I would simply maintain that it is one fruitful way to examine the message of the Scriptures.

---

Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 95n308. The fact that the Writings are not in the same order in every list indicates that the order is not as crucial as some claim.

21. Childs says, “In my opinion, there are far too many unverified assumptions with such an argument to rest much weight on it. A far more fruitful avenue of investigation would be to explore the effect of a canonical ordering on the reading of the book and the differing theologies involved in the canonical arrangements of the Hebrew and Greek Bibles” (*Old Testament as Scripture*, 564).

# ABBREVIATIONS

## General

|          |                    |
|----------|--------------------|
| chap(s). | chapter(s)         |
| cf.      | compare            |
| e.g.     | for example        |
| esp.     | especially         |
| ibid.    | in the same source |
| idem     | by the same author |
| i.e.     | that is            |
| par(s).  | parallel(s)        |
| p(p.)    | page(s)            |
| rev.     | revised            |
| v(v).    | verse(s)           |

## Divisions of the Canon

|    |               |
|----|---------------|
| NT | New Testament |
| OT | Old Testament |

## Ancient Versions

|     |                |
|-----|----------------|
| LXX | Septuagint     |
| MT  | Masoretic Text |

## Modern Versions

|      |                                 |
|------|---------------------------------|
| HCSB | Holman Christian Standard Bible |
|------|---------------------------------|

|      |                              |
|------|------------------------------|
| KJV  | King James Version           |
| NIV  | New International Version    |
| NRSV | New Revised Standard Version |

## Hebrew Bible / Old Testament

|            |                |
|------------|----------------|
| Gen.       | Genesis        |
| Exod.      | Exodus         |
| Lev.       | Leviticus      |
| Num.       | Numbers        |
| Deut.      | Deuteronomy    |
| Josh.      | Joshua         |
| Judg.      | Judges         |
| Ruth       | Ruth           |
| 1–2 Sam.   | 1–2 Samuel     |
| 1–2 Kings  | 1–2 Kings      |
| 1–2 Chron. | 1–2 Chronicles |
| Ezra       | Ezra           |
| Neh.       | Nehemiah       |
| Esther     | Esther         |
| Job        | Job            |
| Ps./Pss.   | Psalms         |
| Prov.      | Proverbs       |
| Eccles.    | Ecclesiastes   |
| Song       | Song of Songs  |
| Isa.       | Isaiah         |
| Jer.       | Jeremiah       |
| Lam.       | Lamentations   |

## Abbreviations

|       |           |
|-------|-----------|
| Ezek. | Ezekiel   |
| Dan.  | Daniel    |
| Hosea | Hosea     |
| Joel  | Joel      |
| Amos  | Amos      |
| Obad. | Obadiah   |
| Jon.  | Jonah     |
| Mic.  | Micah     |
| Nah.  | Nahum     |
| Hab.  | Habakkuk  |
| Zeph. | Zephaniah |
| Hag.  | Haggai    |
| Zech. | Zechariah |
| Mal.  | Malachi   |

## New Testament

|            |                   |
|------------|-------------------|
| Matt.      | Matthew           |
| Mark       | Mark              |
| Luke       | Luke              |
| John       | John              |
| Acts       | Acts              |
| Rom.       | Romans            |
| 1–2 Cor.   | 1–2 Corinthians   |
| Gal.       | Galatians         |
| Eph.       | Ephesians         |
| Phil.      | Philippians       |
| Col.       | Colossians        |
| 1–2 Thess. | 1–2 Thessalonians |
| 1–2 Tim.   | 1–2 Timothy       |
| Titus      | Titus             |
| Philem.    | Philemon          |
| Heb.       | Hebrews           |
| James      | James             |
| 1–2 Pet.   | 1–2 Peter         |
| 1–3 John   | 1–3 John          |
| Jude       | Jude              |
| Rev.       | Revelation        |

## Apocrypha and Septuagint

|           |                   |
|-----------|-------------------|
| 1–4 Macc. | 1–4 Maccabees     |
| Sir.      | Sirach            |
| Wis.      | Wisdom of Solomon |

## Old Testament Pseudepigrapha

*Pss. Sol.*    *Psalms of Solomon*

## Mishnah and Talmud

|               |               |
|---------------|---------------|
| <i>m.</i>     | Mishnah       |
| ' <i>Abot</i> | ' <i>Abot</i> |
| <i>Sukkah</i> | <i>Sukkah</i> |

## Secondary Sources

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| AB            | Anchor Bible  |
| AUMSR         | Andrews University Mono-<br>graphs: Studies in Religion               |
| BibJudS       | Biblical and Judaic Studies   |
| BibOr         | Biblica et orientalia   |
| BibSem        | Biblical Seminar  |
| BST           | The Bible Speaks Today  |
| <i>BTB</i>    | <i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>                                     |
| BTNT          | Biblical Theology of the<br>New Testament                             |
| BZAW          | Beihefte zur Zeitschrift<br>für die alttestamentliche<br>Wissenschaft |
| <i>CBQ</i>    | <i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>                                    |
| CC            | Continental Commentaries  |
| CEP           | Contemporary Evangelical<br>Perspectives                              |
| ConBNT        | Coniectanea biblica: New<br>Testament Series                          |
| <i>ExpTim</i> | <i>Expository Times</i>   |
| FBBS          | Facet Books: Biblical Series  |
| FFNT          | Foundation and Facets:<br>New Testament                               |
| GDNES         | Gorgias Dissertations:<br>Near East Series                            |
| <i>GTJ</i>    | <i>Grace Theological Journal</i>                                      |
| HBSt          | Herders biblische Studien   |
| <i>HS</i>     | <i>Hebrew Studies</i>   |
| HSM           | Harvard Semitic<br>Monographs   |

|             |   |               |  |
|-------------|---|---------------|--|
| IBC         | Interpretation: A Bible<br>Commentary for Teaching<br>and Preaching   | NTT           | New Testament Theology                                       |
| <i>Int</i>  | <i>Interpretation</i>   | NVBS          | New Voices in Biblical<br>Studies                            |
| ITC         | International Theological<br>Commentary                               | OBT           | Overtures to Biblical<br>Theology                            |
| <i>JBL</i>  | <i>Journal of Biblical<br/>Literature</i>                             | OTL           | Old Testament Library  |
| <i>JETS</i> | <i>Journal of the Evangelical<br/>Theological Society</i>             | PBM           | Paternoster Biblical<br>Monographs                           |
| JPSTC       | JPS Torah Commentary  | RB            | <i>Revue biblique</i>  |
| JPTSup      | Journal of Pentecostal<br>Theology: Supplement<br>Series              | SBJT          | <i>Southern Baptist Journal of<br/>Theology</i>              |
| <i>JRH</i>  | <i>Journal of Religious<br/>History</i>                               | SBLAB         | Society of Biblical Litera-<br>ture Academia Biblica         |
| JSNTSup     | Journal for the Study of the<br>New Testament: Supple-<br>ment Series | SBLDS         | Society of Biblical Litera-<br>ture Dissertation Series      |
| <i>JSOT</i> | <i>Journal for the Study of the<br/>Old Testament</i>                 | SBLSymS       | Society of Biblical Litera-<br>ture Symposium Series         |
| JSOTSup     | Journal for the Study of the<br>Old Testament: Supplement<br>Series   | SBT           | Studies in Biblical Theology                                 |
| <i>LS</i>   | <i>Louvain Studies</i>  | <i>SJT</i>    | <i>Scottish Journal of<br/>Theology</i>                      |
| NAC         | New American<br>Commentary  | SNTSMS        | Society for New Testament<br>Studies Monograph Series        |
| NICNT       | New International Com-<br>mentary on the New<br>Testament             | SNTW          | Studies of the New Testa-<br>ment and Its World              |
| NICOT       | New International Com-<br>mentary on the Old<br>Testament             | <i>TJ</i>     | <i>Trinity Journal</i>                                       |
| NIVAC       | NIV Application<br>Commentary   | TOTC          | Tyndale Old Testament<br>Commentaries                        |
| <i>NovT</i> | <i>Novum Testamentum</i>  | <i>TynBul</i> | <i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>                                      |
| NovTSup     | Novum Testamentum<br>Supplements                                      | VT            | <i>Vetus Testamentum</i>                                     |
| NSBT        | New Studies in Biblical<br>Theology                                   | VTSup         | Supplements to Vetus<br>Testamentum                          |
| <i>NTS</i>  | <i>New Testament Studies</i>  | WBC           | Word Biblical Commentary                                     |
|             |   | WTJ           | <i>Westminster Theological<br/>Journal</i>                   |
|             |   | WUNT          | Wissenschaftliche Unter-<br>suchungen zum Neuen<br>Testament |
|             |   | ZECNT         | Zondervan Exegeti-<br>cal Commentary: New<br>Testament       |



Part 1

---

CREATION TO THE EDGE  
OF CANAAN

---



# 1

## GENESIS

### Creation

The story commences where the book of Genesis begins, with the creation of the heavens and the earth (1:1).<sup>1</sup> There is no reflection on what God was doing before creation, nor does the writer recount the creation of angels. Speculative issues have no interest for the writer of Genesis.<sup>2</sup> The first creation account (1:1–2:3) heralds the majesty and power of God, for by his word he creates and orders the world in six days. Umberto Cassuto sums up the message of God’s creation of the world:

Not many gods but One God; not theogony, for a god has no family tree; nor wars nor strife nor the clash of wills, but only One Will, which rules over everything, without the slightest let or hindrance; not a deity associated with nature and identified with it wholly or in part, but a God who stands absolutely above nature, and outside of it, and nature and all its constituent elements, even the sun and all other entities, be they never so exalted, are only His creatures, made according to His will.<sup>3</sup>

The simplicity and the depth of God’s creative power are evident because all things come into existence by his word.<sup>4</sup> As Ps. 33:6 says, “By the word of the

1. In defense of this reading of Gen. 1:1, see Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 20; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 11–15. See also von Rad, *Genesis*, 48–49. Von Rad says, “It is amazing to see how sharply little Israel demarcated herself from an apparently overpowering environment of cosmological and theogonic myths” (p. 49).

2. God clearly created the world thoughtfully and with wisdom (Prov. 8:22–31). See Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 43–49.

3. Cassuto, *From Adam to Noah*, 8.

4. Von Rad says, “Gen. 1 presents the results of concentrated theological and cosmological reflection in a language which is concise and always utterly direct in expression” (*Israel’s Historical Traditions*, 141). See also his comments on p. 142.

LORD the heavens were made, and by the breath of his mouth all their host.”<sup>5</sup> God’s creation of the entire universe communicates his sovereignty and lordship, for the creator of all is also the Lord of all. The account of creation in Genesis also differs from the creation accounts in surrounding ancient Near Eastern cultures, since the one God is the creator of all things.<sup>6</sup> In creating the world Yahweh shows his sovereignty over all other powers and gods (Pss. 74:12–14; 89:5–13).<sup>7</sup> The implication of creation, as Paul House affirms, is that “God has no rivals. God has jurisdiction over all created persons and things.”<sup>8</sup> As Jeremiah says, “The gods who did not make the heavens and the earth shall perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (Jer. 10:11). Psalm 96:5 echoes the same theme: “For all the gods of the peoples are worthless idols, but the LORD made the heavens.”

The creator of all is also the King of all, and his lordship is extended over a place—a realm. As Gerhard von Rad says, “If the world was called into being by the free will of God, then it is his very own possession, and he is its Lord.”<sup>9</sup> He is the King of the created cosmos. Therefore, the creation of the universe demonstrates that God is the Lord of the whole world, and that his lordship will not be limited to Israel.<sup>10</sup> Since God is the creator, it follows that “the creation exists for the praise and glory of its creator God.”<sup>11</sup> “The earth is full of God’s glory [Ps. 24:1] because what fills the earth constitutes his glory.”<sup>12</sup> In other words, we see the glory of God when we delight in, reflect upon, and enjoy the world he has created.<sup>13</sup> God’s creative power supports the notion that “Genesis describes God’s work in regal terms, even without using the word ‘king.’”<sup>14</sup> God’s wisdom, power, and goodness in creating the world demonstrate his sovereignty over all things (see Ps. 145).

In reading the creation account, how should we interpret the “let us” in Gen. 1:26? Some have argued that it is a *pluralis majestatis* (“plural of majesty”), or that it includes angels or the heavenly assembly.<sup>15</sup> It is doubtful that

5. On the power of God’s word, see Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 49–52.

6. House, *Old Testament Theology*, 60. For a full discussion of this matter, see Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 197–203. See also Collins, *Genesis 1–4*. Contrary to Brueggemann (*Theology of the Old Testament*, 158–59), God’s creation is *ex nihilo*.

7. See Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 64–75.

8. House, *Old Testament Theology*.

9. Von Rad, *Israel’s Historical Traditions*, 143.

10. See Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 155.

11. C. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 114.

12. *Ibid.*, 115.

13. “But the creation not only declares the glory of God (Ps. 19:1); creation’s fullness is also an essential part of that glory” (*ibid.*, 116).

14. *Ibid.*, 121.

15. For the options, see Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 212–15. In support of the idea that the heavenly assembly is in view, see Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant.”

the author thought specifically of the Trinity in using this expression, or that the earliest Israelite readers read the text in such a way, for the Trinity is only clearly revealed in the NT. Recent developments in hermeneutics, however, have rightly corrected an overemphasis on authorial intent.<sup>16</sup> Interpreters of sacred Scripture must also consider the canonical shape of the Scriptures as a whole, which is to say that we must also take into account the divine author of Scripture.<sup>17</sup> Nor does appeal to a divine author open the door to arbitrariness or subjectivity, for the meaning of the divine author is communicated through the words and canon of Scripture. It is not the product of human creativity but is textually located and circumscribed.

A canonical approach supports a trinitarian reading, which is suggested by the actual words of the text and confirmed by the entire canon.<sup>18</sup> The Spirit's role in creation is signified by his "hovering over the face of the waters" (Gen. 1:2).<sup>19</sup> Psalm 33:6, cited above, probably alludes to the work of the Spirit, for the word "breath" is the word used for "Spirit" (*rûah*), and hence here the writer attributes the creation of the world to the Spirit.<sup>20</sup> In light of the NT revelation on the divinity of the Spirit, it is warranted to see the Spirit as creator. The Son's role as creator is even clearer from a canonical perspective. John's Gospel commences, "In the beginning" (John 1:1), an unmistakable allusion to Gen. 1:1. Another allusion to Genesis immediately surfaces, for John 1:3 speaks of the role of the "Word" in the beginning, claiming that "all things were made" by the one who is the "Word." Hence, the "Word" that spoke creation into existence (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, 11, 14, 20, 24, 26) is identified as the Son of God—Jesus the Christ (John 1:14). Hence, from a canonical perspective, the "let us" in Gen. 1:26 should be understood as a reference to the Trinity.<sup>21</sup>

The other feature of the creation in Gen. 1:1–2:3 that must be considered is the creation of man and woman in the image of God (1:26–27). Clearly, this is the climax of creation, and the previous days anticipate the creation of human beings on the sixth day.<sup>22</sup> What is particularly striking is that "man" (*'ādām*) is created as male and female in the image of God (1:27). Theologians

16. See, e.g., Hays, *Echoes of Scripture*.

17. See Poythress, *God-Centered Biblical Interpretation*.

18. Hermeneutically, I am suggesting that the meaning of the text must also be investigated canonically. In other words, neither Moses nor the original readers could grasp fully the meaning of what is said here.

19. Against von Rad, *Genesis*, 49; Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 82.

20. Again, I am defending this reading in light of the whole canon of Scripture.

21. See House, *Old Testament Theology*, 61–62.

22. But C. Wright (*Old Testament Ethics*, 126–27) rightly cautions that this is misunderstood if human beings think of themselves, rather than God, as the center of creation, noting also that there is a sense in which the Sabbath rest is the climax of God's creative work.

have long reflected on the meaning and significance of the creation of human beings in God's image. If we pay attention to the text, the focus is on human beings as the vice-regents of creation. We read the mandate for human beings in 1:28: "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." Human beings are made in God's image in that they are to rule the world for God. The regal nature of the image is confirmed by the use of images in the ancient Near East where "a ruler's image was set up in distant parts of his kingdom to indicate that his authority reached there."<sup>23</sup>

Certainly, other elements of the divine image are implied by the mandate to rule.<sup>24</sup> But the biblical text calls attention to human beings as those having the responsibility and privilege of subduing the world for God. As Stephen Dempster says, "The male and female as king and queen of creation are to exercise rule over their dominion, the extent of which is the entire earth."<sup>25</sup> Peter Gentry rightly argues in a detailed study that the image of God is not functional here; rather, it is ontological, for human beings are in the image of God because they are servant kings and sons of God, and as a result of being made in God's image they rule the world for God.<sup>26</sup> The importance of human beings being created in God's image can scarcely be exaggerated. Indeed, the central three themes of this book appear right here. God is the sovereign creator who extends his kingship over the world. But he extends his rule through human beings, for as God's image-bearers they must govern the world for God's glory and honor. As von Rad remarks, "God set man in the world as the sign of his own sovereign authority, in order that man should uphold and enforce his—God's—claims as lord."<sup>27</sup> And their rule is not abstract, for God's reign is to be implemented in the world of space and time, over the good creation that God has made. Dempster rightly ties together the themes of Gen. 1: "Another way of describing this emphasis on human dominion and dynasty would be the simple expression 'the kingdom of God.'"<sup>28</sup> Indeed, there are indications that human beings functioned as priest-kings.<sup>29</sup> Adam

23. Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 78. See also Mathews, "Genesis," 142; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 34.

24. See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 613–16.

25. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 59. C. Wright says, "Human dominion over the rest of creation is to be an exercise of kingship that reflects God's own kingship" (*Old Testament Ethics*, 121). So also Levenson, *Persistence of Evil*, 112–17.

26. Gentry, "Kingdom through Covenant," 22–33.

27. Von Rad, *Israel's Historical Traditions*, 146; cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 59–60.

28. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 62.

29. See Beale, *Church's Mission*, 66–70.

is commanded to “work and keep” the land (2:15). These two verbs are often used of priests and their work in the tabernacle/temple (Num. 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chron. 23:32; Ezek. 44:14). Adam was to begin by ruling the garden for God and presumably to extend God’s reign over the whole earth.<sup>30</sup>

The seventh day of creation (Gen. 2:1–3) stands apart because on it God does not create but instead rests, since he has completed his creative work.<sup>31</sup> God’s rest plays a significant role thematically in the story line of the Bible. God’s rest indicates that “he was now reigning over the creation for the good of his people.”<sup>32</sup> According to Joshua, Israel enjoys rest from its enemies when it possesses the land promised to it (Josh. 23:1). Israel’s Sabbath observance also replicates the rest of the Lord on the seventh day (Deut. 5:12–15). The theme of rest points to the refreshment and joy found in God’s presence, for the seventh day never ends.<sup>33</sup> The Sabbath rest of God, according to Hebrews, finds its fulfillment in the new creation, where believers will enjoy a heavenly and eternal rest during the eschaton (Heb. 4:1–11). Meredith Kline observes that the final rest will take place after the Lord’s victory over his satanic enemies (Rev. 19–20).<sup>34</sup> Then human beings will enjoy fellowship with God and see the King in his beauty.

The second creation account (Gen. 2:4–25) supplements the first by zeroing in on the creation of the man and the woman and their unique responsibility. God’s special covenant love for human beings is emphasized by the use of the term “Yahweh,” whereas the first creation account, in recounting the creation of the cosmos, regularly used the word “God” (*’ēlōhīm*). The Lord’s care for human beings is relayed by the terms used for his creation of both the man and the woman. The Lord “formed” the man from the dust and “breathed” life into him (2:7). Furthermore, he fashioned the woman from the rib of the man (2:21–22). According to Gen. 1, man and woman, as those who image God, are to display his image as they rule the world for God.

In Gen. 2 this rule begins in the garden that the Lord planted. The garden is, as Dempster says, “the throne-room . . . of the kingdom.”<sup>35</sup> The man and the woman are to “work it and keep it” (2:15). The garden, as others have observed, anticipates the tabernacle (Exod. 25–31), and hence it “was the place where human beings could enjoy the fellowship and presence of God.”<sup>36</sup>

30. *Ibid.*, 82–83.

31. The Lord rests because he has finished (Goldingay, *Israel’s Gospel*, 127).

32. Hafemann, “Covenant Relationship,” 40. See also Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 23.

33. Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*, 40.

34. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 23.

35. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 62.

36. Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 98. Cf. Ezek. 28:13.

“Paradise was a sanctuary, a temple-garden.”<sup>37</sup> Desmond Alexander notes a number of parallels between the tabernacle/temple and the garden:<sup>38</sup> (1) the Lord walks in both (Gen. 3:8; Lev. 26:12); (2) both Eden and the tabernacle are guarded by cherubim, and they are accessed from the east; (3) the lampstand may symbolize the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22; Exod. 25:31–35);<sup>39</sup> (4) the verbs used in Gen. 2:15 are also used of the work of the Levites in the sanctuary (Num. 3:7–8; 18:5–6); (5) a river comes from Eden and also flows from Ezekiel’s temple (Gen. 2:10; Ezek. 47:1–12); (6) stones found in Eden are also in the tabernacle (Gen. 2:11–12; Exod. 25:7, 11, 17, 31); (7) both are on a mountain, which is sacred land in the ancient Near East. The temple imagery indicates that “God intends that the world become his dwelling place.”<sup>40</sup>

The man and the woman, however, do not exercise their rule autonomously. They are ever subject to the will of God.<sup>41</sup> The Lord showers his goodness upon them by placing them in an idyllic garden with verdant trees from which they are nourished. At the same time, the man and the woman would reveal their submission to God’s lordship by refusing to eat from “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen. 2:17). Indeed, partaking of that tree will bring death. The “tree of life” (Gen. 2:9; 3:22, 24) anticipates the final joy of human beings who know the Lord (Rev. 22:2, 14, 19). The call to obedience forecasts the Mosaic covenant, where God’s people are summoned to keep his commandments, thereby showing their devotion to him.<sup>42</sup> God’s covenant is integrally related to his rule over his people, for God’s covenant with his people always involves a relationship.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, one of the refrains of

37. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 31. He goes on to say, “The garden of Eden was a microcosmic, earthly version of the cosmic temple, and the site of a visible, local projection of the heavenly temple” (p. 32).

38. Alexander, *Paradise to the Promised Land*, 21–23; idem, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 21–23. See also Beale, *Church’s Mission*, 66–80; Dumbrell, *Faith of Israel*, 19–20; Waltke, *Genesis*, 57–75; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 211–16; Levenson, *Sinai and Zion*, 129. Levenson says that “the Temple was conceived as a microcosm, a miniature world,” and “the world . . . as a macro-temple” is “the palace of God in which all are obedient to his commands” (*Persistence of Evil*, 86).

39. Jenson, *Graded Holiness*, 112.

40. Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 26.

41. “On the one hand, the sovereign King delegates to humanity the authority to rule under him. On the other hand, God’s issuing of a commandment assumes man has the moral capacity to choose freely whether to obey or disobey God” (Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 259).

42. Scholars have long debated whether God’s relationship with Adam and Eve was covenantal. It seems to me that the arguments defending a covenantal idea are stronger. See Gentry, “Kingdom through Covenant,” 19–22; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 177–221; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 15–26. For the contrary view, see Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 52–58, 69–76.

43. It is commonly recognized that the relationship in the covenant is familial. See Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 59–67.

Scripture is covenantal, where God pledges, “I will be your God and you will be my people,” showing that God’s covenant and rule are personal.<sup>44</sup>

## The Fall and the Flood

The fall of Adam and Eve into sin signifies their rejection of God’s lordship over their lives (Gen. 3).<sup>45</sup> The author of Genesis betrays no interest in where the serpent came from, nor does he inform the reader about how the serpent became evil.<sup>46</sup> Still, there is no idea that the serpent is equal in power to God, nor that something that God created (see Gen. 1) was actually evil.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the serpent is most unusual because he talks with Eve, and talking is not normal for animals!<sup>48</sup> The serpent is strikingly different from the other animals, for it is quite clear from 2:19–20 that Adam’s naming of the animals symbolized his dominion over them. Kline notes that such naming represents wisdom,<sup>49</sup> so that already in the creation account we have a link between wisdom themes and lordship. The other animals are not “crafty” (3:1) and are unable to converse with Adam and Eve. Presumably, Adam and Eve were to evict the serpent from the garden by obeying the Lord.<sup>50</sup> They were “to keep or guard the garden so that it would remain holy.”<sup>51</sup> Instead, they capitulated to the serpent’s blandishments and transgressed the Lord’s command by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.<sup>52</sup>

By failing to obey God’s command, they manifested their stubborn independence and their desire to be godlike (3:5). As von Rad remarks, “The unthinkable and terrible is described as simply and unsensationally as possible.”<sup>53</sup>

44. See Martens, “People of God,” 225.

45. Eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil means that Adam and Eve were arrogating to themselves a godlike status. So von Rad, *Israel’s Historical Traditions*, 155; Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 257–58; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 37–38.

46. See Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 261.

47. Rightly House, *Old Testament Theology*, 64.

48. Dempster (*Dominion and Dynasty*, 67) rightly criticizes the idea that people in those days believed in talking snakes. So also Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 103.

49. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 48. He comments, “Man’s culture was to provide a human replica of the divine kingship manifested in the Glory-Archetype” (p. 49).

50. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 54–55, 77; Beale, *Church’s Mission*, 87; Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*, 75. Kline (*Kingdom Prologue*, 75) observes that the judgment of the serpent in the garden anticipated the responsibility of human beings to judge angels (1 Cor. 6:2–3) in the future.

51. Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 26.

52. Beale (*Biblical Theology*, 35) says that distinguishing good from evil is the judicial function of kings (2 Sam. 14:17; 19:35; 1 Kings 3:9; Isa. 7:15–16). See Clark, “Yahwist’s Use of ‘Good and Evil.’”

53. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 90.

The precious fellowship that they enjoyed with God was shattered. As Kline says, Eve “idolized herself as well as Satan, for she arrogated to herself the divine prerogative of final judgment in discerning between good and evil and in defining the meaning of reality in general. Her new theology was evidenced in her assumption of a critical stance over against the word of God.”<sup>54</sup> Nor did their rejection of God’s lordship only touch upon their relationship with God. The created world, with all its beauty, was also, as the apostle Paul later noted, “subjected to futility” (Rom. 8:20). The ground that was fertile and yielded fruitful trees now sprouted “thorns and thistles” (Gen. 3:18). The exercise of dominion over the world was now marred by sin so that frustration, pain, and boredom were part and parcel of work. Similarly, the joy of bearing children was now tarnished by the pain that accompanies childbirth (3:16). Adam and Eve were evicted from the garden and now lived east of Eden (3:22–24).

Human beings were to rule the world for God, but now both they and the world were blighted by sin. Nevertheless, a ray of hope shines through the narrative. The Lord promises a future victory over the serpent through the offspring of the woman (3:15).<sup>55</sup> The victory will not be easy, however, for it will come through intense conflict with the offspring of the serpent. In the story line of the Bible Jesus the Christ is the offspring predicted here (see Gal. 3:16), who will triumph over Satan through his death and resurrection. The Lord bestowed his grace upon Adam and Eve by clothing them with the skins of animals (Gen. 3:21). The clothing may indicate the “royal authority” of Adam and Eve.<sup>56</sup> Such clothing anticipates the slaughter of animals for sacrifices, and it is warranted canonically to see the climactic fulfillment in Christ’s sacrifice for his people. Adam apparently grasped the significance of the promise in 3:15, for he expressed hope for the future through the children of Eve, who “is the mother of all living” (3:20).<sup>57</sup> The story line of the Scriptures details how the curses pronounced here will be reversed through the blessings promised to Abraham.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, as Kenneth Mathews points out, the verbal and noun form of “blessing” appears eighty-eight times in

54. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 78.

55. Against von Rad (*Genesis*, 93), there is a messianic dimension to the prophecy here. Rightly Hamilton, “Skull Crushing Seed”; Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 106.

56. So Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 228.

57. Rendtorff observes that the “biblical primordial history shows its readers . . . the greatness and beauty of creation and its derailment and endangering by humans. But it also reassures them that God wants to retain and maintain his creation despite human sinfulness” (*Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 20).

58. Rightly Mathews, “Genesis,” 143; Hamilton, “Seed of the Woman”; against Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative*, 301.

Genesis, showing that is a major theme.<sup>59</sup> A new Eden, a new creation, will come through Jesus Christ.<sup>60</sup>

Adam and Eve did not comprehend the horrific evil that they had unleashed into the world. It is possible that Eve believed that Cain was the promised child who would triumph over the serpent and his children (4:1). Cain did not turn out to be the promised deliverer. On the contrary, it became clear that he sided with the serpent. The battle between the children of the serpent and the children of the woman had begun. Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to God, while Cain's was rejected (4:2–7). We learn from Hebrews that the fundamental reason why Abel's sacrifice was pleasing to God was that it was offered in faith (Heb. 11:4), which suggests that Abel sought the Lord for the forgiveness of his sins. Cain is not criticized for failing to bring animal sacrifices, for he brought to the Lord the fruits of his labor. Perhaps there is a suggestion in Genesis that Cain kept for himself the best produce (Gen. 4:3–4). In any case, Hebrews informs us that Cain did not bring his offering in faith. Hence, his offering was not motivated by trust in God. We see from the beginning that mechanical obedience is not pleasing to the Lord, that he demands obedience that flows from a heart of faith (see Rom. 1:5; 16:26). Cain demonstrated that he belonged to the children of the serpent (1 John 3:12; cf. John 8:44; Rev. 12:15–17) by slaying Abel, the offspring of the woman.<sup>61</sup> It is thereby apparent that victory over the serpent will not come easily, that the victory of the woman's offspring will be gained only through intense conflict. The kingdom of God will reign over all, but its triumph will be realized at great cost. At the same time, the Lord reveals his patience and grace in response to Cain's sin, for he does not destroy him but instead shows him mercy.

Culture, craftsmanship, and improved ranching were introduced through Cain's line (Gen. 4:20–22), and yet at the same time the moral character of Cain's descendants declined, and this is evident particularly in the case of Lamech (4:19, 23–24). Human culture, artistry, and technological skill are gifts of God, but they may be used to advance evil rather than good.<sup>62</sup> The riches and beauty of human culture may be dazzling so that the evil perpetrated is hidden from perception. The offspring of the woman continue through Seth (4:25–26), but the trajectory dips rapidly downward. The daughters of men begin to intermarry with the sons of God, and the latter

59. Mathews, "Genesis," 141.

60. This suggests that the land promise, including the promise given to Abraham, will embrace the entire creation (see Williamson, "Promise and Fulfillment," 27).

61. See Alexander, *Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 107–8.

62. See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 113.

most probably are demons (6:1–4), though the identity of the sons of God remains controversial.<sup>63</sup>

The influence of the serpent was now becoming rampant on the earth so that the earth was filled with corruption (6:5, 11). As David Clines notes, “There is an ever-growing ‘avalanche’ of sin, a ‘continually widening chasm between man and God.’ There is a movement from disobedience to murder, to reckless killing, to titanic lust, to total corruption and violence, to the full disruption of humanity.”<sup>64</sup> Clines goes on to say, “God responds to the extension of human sin with increasingly severe punishment: from expulsion from the garden to expulsion from the tillable earth, to the limitation of human life, to the near annihilation of mankind, to the ‘dissolution of mankind’s unity.’” But Clines also rightly sees that God’s grace is featured. “God not only punishes Adam and Eve, but also withholds the threatened penalty of death; he not only drives out Cain, but also puts his mark of protection upon him; not only sends the Flood, but saves the human race alive in preserving Noah and his family.”<sup>65</sup> Von Rad memorably makes the same point about the flood: “It shows God as the one who judges sin, and it stands at the beginning of the Bible as the eternally valid word about God’s deadly anger over sin. Thus it protects every succeeding word of grace from any kind of innocuousness (*Verharmlosung*); it undergirds the understanding of God’s will for salvation as a pure miracle.”<sup>66</sup>

The offspring of the woman after the flood is restricted to Noah and his family. The promise that God’s kingdom would triumph seemed distant and improbable. The account of the flood generation underscores the depth and horror of human sin. Human beings are not stained with a light imperfection (8:21; cf. 6:5); the evil that besets the human race is at the core of humanity and is not easily erased. The story of the flood generation reveals that human beings, left to themselves, turn toward violence and evil. Any student of twentieth-century history acquainted with the atrocities inflicted by Hitler, Stalin, Mao, and Pol Pot should not find it difficult to understand the evil that bedevils the human race.

The judgment and destruction of all of humankind through the flood also demonstrates that the children of the serpent will not ultimately win. God’s kingdom is realized not only through salvation but also through judgment.<sup>67</sup>

63. For a discussion of this matter, see Mathews, *Genesis 1:1–11:26*, 323–32.

64. Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch*, 70. Clines in the afterword clarifies that he would have written the book somewhat differently and more tentatively in 1996 than he first conceived of it in 1976.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 129.

67. This is the theme of the important work by Hamilton, *God’s Glory in Salvation*.

The head of the serpent will be crushed, and God is glorified in the vanquishing of his foes. In addition, the story of Noah illustrates the truth that God saves and rescues those who trust and obey him, even if they are a small remnant (see 1 Pet. 3:20; 2 Pet. 2:5). The wonder and the grace of salvation stand out when set against the backdrop of God's wrath unleashed upon the world. The land is both cleansed and judged by the flood.<sup>68</sup> God's wrath, as Abraham Heschel points out, "is not a blind, explosive force, operating without reference to the behavior of man, but rather voluntary and purposeful, motivated by concern for right and wrong."<sup>69</sup> Heschel rightly observes that indifference to evil is itself a great evil.<sup>70</sup>

The offspring of the woman, Noah and his family, triumphed over the offspring of the serpent. God made a covenant with Noah and all humankind (Gen. 9:8–17),<sup>71</sup> pledging that the world would not be destroyed by water again.<sup>72</sup> The preservation of the world means that the saving promises for the world will be realized before the end comes. God's creation of human beings will not end up being a failed experiment where the world ends up being destroyed. The "bow" that God sets in the sky is the sign of the covenant, standing here for a weapon of war that God will not unleash on human beings.<sup>73</sup> Nevertheless, the root problem with human beings has not been solved, but God will show mercy as Peter Gentry and Stephen Wellum rightly see, "The condition of humanity after the cataclysmic judgement remains the same after the flood as it was before; so the judgement has not altered or changed the condition of the human heart. The implication is that God would be completely justified in wiping out every generation of humanity by means of a great judgement. There is only one reason why he does not: because of his own grace and mercy towards us. The earth is maintained and preserved in spite of the human situation. Thus the covenant made with Noah creates a firm stage of history where God can work out his plan for rescuing his fallen world."<sup>74</sup>

68. Alexander (*Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 28–29) underestimates the judgment, but he does see the role for cleansing.

69. Heschel, *The Prophets*, 282. Heschel goes on to say that God's anger "is a secondary emotion, never the ruling passion, disclosing only a part of God's way with man" (pp. 282–83).

70. *Ibid.*, 284. Heschel remarks, "The Lord is long-suffering, compassionate, loving, and faithful, but He is also demanding, insistent, terrible, and dangerous" (p. 285).

71. Gentry and Wellum comment, "The statements in verses 8–17 are highly repetitive and monotonous to western ears. This repetition is like a cathedral bell pealing and ringing out again and again, reverberating into the future, that God is committing himself to all his living creatures while the earth lasts. There can be no mistaking of the parties specified in the covenant" (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 168).

72. Incidentally, covenants can be either egalitarian or hierarchical, so we must be careful of saying that the term is used univocally. So Goldingay, *Israel's Faith*, 183–84.

73. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 170.

74. *Ibid.*, 169.

The author of Genesis consciously draws parallels between the new start with Noah and the initial creation of Adam and Eve, indicating that a fresh era has commenced, that we have something like a new creation after the flood.<sup>75</sup> We find the following parallels:<sup>76</sup> (1) creation out of water and chaos (1:2; 7:11–12, 17–24); (2) birds, animals, and creeping things are brought in to swarm upon the earth (1:20–21, 24–25; 8:17–19); (3) God establishes days and seasons (1:14–18; 8:22); (4) animals are commanded to be fruitful and multiply (1:22; 8:17); (5) repetition of the mandate to be fruitful and multiply (1:28; 9:1, 7); (6) dominion over the world is reestablished (1:28; 9:2); (7) God provides food for humans (1:29–30; 9:3); (8) human beings are still in the image of God (1:26–27; 9:6). All of these features signal that the plan to rescue the human race from sin and the serpent has not ended. Of course, the parallels between the days of Adam and of Noah do not stand at every point, for Noah’s world was still stained by sin, whereas the original creation was free from the curse.

## Babel and Abraham

The salvation of Noah and the new start with his family are not a return to paradise. Sin is still pervasive (6:5; 8:21). Noah, like Adam in the garden, also sinned in a garden by getting drunk from the fruit of the vine (9:21). And just as Adam and Eve were ashamed of their nakedness after their sin (3:7), so Noah was shamed by his nakedness (9:21–23). Ham’s dishonoring of his father (9:22–25) demonstrates that the children of the serpent were not extinguished by the flood but rather were alive and well upon planet earth.<sup>77</sup> But God in his mercy promises not to wipe out the human race by a flood, marking this promise by the covenant sign of the rainbow (9:8–17).<sup>78</sup> God puts aside his bow of war for the preservation of the human race.<sup>79</sup> Human government was also instituted to deter evil (9:6) so that the human society does not descend into anarchy.<sup>80</sup> This is not to say, however, that the fundamental problem with human

75. Dumbrell (*Covenant and Creation*, 15–26) argues that the Noahic covenant represents the reaffirmation of an existing covenant made with Adam and is not the inauguration of a new covenant. See also Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant*, 95. For a confirmation of Dumbrell’s view that responds to criticisms and puts it on a firmer foundation, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 155–61.

76. See G. Smith, “Genesis 1–11,” 310–11. See also Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 161–65.

77. See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 161–62.

78. See Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 64–65, 67–69.

79. So von Rad, *Genesis*, 134; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 29–30. Hahn (*Kinship by Covenant*, 50–59) rightly emphasizes that covenant is closely linked with oaths.

80. See Kline, *Kingdom Prologue*, 160.

beings had been solved. Indeed, the power of evil increased exponentially, so that by the time of Babel human arrogance had crested again (11:1–9). The building of what probably was a ziggurat represented the apex of anthropocentrism instead of theocentrism. They built “to make a name for ourselves” (11:4) instead of living to make a name for God.<sup>81</sup> Perhaps human beings also sinned by congregating in one place instead of dispersing throughout the earth. The Lord reigns over all, and he judged human beings by introducing linguistic diversity and dispersing them throughout the world.<sup>82</sup>

The new start that commenced with Noah was looking more and more like the old world. The entirety of the human race was the offspring of the serpent. The tentacles of evil had all of humankind in its grasp, so that none were able to resist its allure. “Babel expressed a naïve and total confidence in what human achievement could effect. . . . It was the beginning of the utopian humanistic dream to which mankind has always aspired.”<sup>83</sup> Nevertheless, the final chapter had not been written, and the promise that God’s kingdom would triumph through the offspring of the woman was not withdrawn.<sup>84</sup> Von Rad observes that in the early accounts in Genesis each word of judgment was followed by a promise of grace, but such a gracious word is not expressed after Babel, raising the question of whether “God’s relationship to the nations is now finally broken; is God’s gracious forbearance now exhausted; has God rejected the nations in wrath forever?”<sup>85</sup> The calling of Abraham answers those questions. Mark Strom says, “Abraham would receive the very things for which the people at Babel had grasped: he would have a great name; he would father a great nation; and he would become a source of blessing throughout all the earth. In other words, the Lord would maintain his purposes for creation and humanity through Abraham and those who followed him.”<sup>86</sup>

God had promised, after all, that he would “put enmity” between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent (3:15). When all seemed lost, the Lord called Abraham to the land of promise. “No matter how drastic

81. On the significance of God’s name, see Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 106–8.

82. Quoting Procksch, von Rad says about Yahweh coming down to see what was happening at Babel, “Yahweh must draw near, not because he is nearsighted, but because he dwells at such tremendous height and their work is tiny. God’s movement must therefore be understood as remarkable satire on man’s doing” (*Genesis*, 149).

83. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 63.

84. See Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch*, 84–86. Clines (p. 74) also argues that the Table of Nations (Gen. 10) is placed before the incident at Babel (11:1–9) to preclude the idea that judgment is the final word.

85. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 153.

86. Strom, *Symphony of Scripture*, 26. For a full discussion of Yahweh’s relationship to the nations, see Goldingay, *Israel’s Faith*, 732–833.

human sin becomes, destroying what God has made good and bringing the world to the brink of uncreation, God's grace never fails to deliver humankind from the consequences of their sin."<sup>87</sup> Abraham's obedience, however, cannot be ascribed to his own virtue or wisdom. Abraham himself was from a family of idolaters (Josh. 24:2) and hence was classed among the "ungodly" (see Rom. 4:5).<sup>88</sup> The Lord "took" Abraham from Ur and led him to Canaan (Josh. 24:3).<sup>89</sup> Abraham was one man against the world, but he was a man of the world who had been summoned out of the world by the grace of God. Abraham's leaving Ur for the land of promise also functions as an anticipation of the exodus of Israel from Egypt, where Israel by the mercy of God left Egypt and settled in Canaan.

The focus upon God's grace does not cancel out the reality of Abraham's obedience.<sup>90</sup> Instead, it functions as the foundation upon which his obedience rested. Abraham obeyed the divine summons by leaving his country, relatives, and family without knowing the place of his destination (12:1). Alexander rightly says, "First, the fulfillment of the divine promises is conditional upon Abraham's obedience."<sup>91</sup> Abraham here functions as a new Adam, obeying the Lord in contrast to Adam. And yet, according to Hebrews, such obedience flowed from Abraham's faith: "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" (Heb. 11:8). So Alexander is mistaken when he says that Abraham merited the promises.<sup>92</sup> The discontinuity between Adam and Abraham must also be emphasized, for Adam before his transgression did not stand in need of forgiveness of sins. Even though Abraham obeyed the Lord in contrast to Adam, he still needed God's forgiveness, for he was not entirely free from sin. He lied twice about Sarah (Gen. 12:11–20; 20:1–18) and resorted to Hagar for children instead of trusting God's promise (16:1–16). Significantly, the writer of Genesis does not identify Abraham's obedience as his righteousness, even though Abraham's obedience is mentioned first (12:4). When the narrator reflects

87. Clines, *Theme of the Pentateuch*, 83.

88. Rightly Hafemann, "Covenant Relationship," 43.

89. In Josh. 24:3 "take" (*lāqah*) signals election (Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel*, 196). The election of Abraham is clear in the biblical story (see also Gen. 18:19; Neh. 9:7; Isa. 41:8; 51:2). See Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 21; Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 57–58.

90. Waltke ("Phenomenon of Conditionality") rightly says that the covenant is both irrevocable and conditional. God certainly will fulfill his covenant, but it will not be fulfilled by a disobedient generation.

91. Alexander, *Paradise to the Promised Land*, 50.

92. *Ibid.*, 55. Von Rad rightly observes that Abraham's obedience was rooted in faith (*Genesis*, 161).

upon why Abraham was right with God, he attributes it to his faith, not his obedience (15:6).<sup>93</sup> Paul follows the lead of Genesis in insisting that Abraham was right with God by faith instead of by virtue of his works (Rom. 4:1–25; Gal. 3:1–9). The centrality of God’s grace is again featured as the answer to human corruption.<sup>94</sup>

The promises made to Abraham were the means by which God would undo the devastation wrought by Adam and would bring in his kingdom. The Lord promised Abraham land, children, and blessing (Gen. 12:1–3).<sup>95</sup> The blessing and dominion given to Adam are now given to Abraham.<sup>96</sup> The promise that God would make “a great nation” from Abraham signifies the promise of the kingdom.<sup>97</sup> The command given to Adam to be fruitful and multiply (1:28) is now a promise given to Abraham and his offspring (17:2, 5, 6; 22:17; 26:4, 24; 28:3; 35:11; 47:27; 48:4).<sup>98</sup> Contrary to many English translations, Abraham is *commanded* to be a blessing in 12:2 so that, like Adam, he was enjoined to bring blessing to the world.<sup>99</sup>

The land was Canaan, the offspring Isaac, and the blessing was universal so that it encompassed all the peoples of the world (12:3). The serpent, then, would be defeated by the children of Abraham, and so it is now clear in the story that the children of the woman (3:15) would come from the family of Abraham. The promise that the Lord would make Abraham’s name great has kingly associations (12:2; cf. 11:4; 2 Sam. 7:9), pointing to the promise that kings would come from Abraham (17:6, 16; cf. 35:11).<sup>100</sup> Blessing for the world would come from a royal figure. The land of Canaan, in a sense, represented a new Eden where the Lord would rule over his people.<sup>101</sup> The land was Canaan, but there were intimations that it comprehended the whole world. Abraham’s “offspring” would “possess the gate of [their] enemies” (22:17). Just as the blessing through Abraham would be universal, so the land would include the

93. Contrary to Goldingay (*Israel’s Gospel*, 266), who thinks Abraham is counted as righteous in Gen. 15:6.

94. This is not the first time Abraham believed, but it was a confirmation and reaffirmation of faith that he already possessed (see Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 56).

95. Clines (*Theme of the Pentateuch*) argues that the promise to the patriarchs is the theme of the Pentateuch.

96. N. T. Wright, *Climax of the Covenant*, 21–26; Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 48.

97. Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 243–45.

98. *Ibid.*, 226–28.

99. See *ibid.*, 230–34. As Gentry and Wellum point out, the two commands are supported by three promises, showing that the commands will be fulfilled through divine grace and enabling. Goldingay (*Israel’s Gospel*, 201–2) interprets the imperative in Gen. 12:2 as a promise, but Williamson (*Sealed with an Oath*, 79) and Terrien (*Elusive Presence*, 74–75) see it as a command.

100. So Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 236.

101. On the theme of the land, see C. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 76–99.

entire world (Rom. 4:13; Heb. 11:13–16; Rev. 21:1–22:5).<sup>102</sup> It would begin with Canaan, which would be the Lord’s outpost in a world gone dramatically wrong.

Though the Lord began with one man, the blessing promised was intended for all peoples everywhere. The promise that the world would be renewed through the children of one man emblazons the truth that salvation is of the Lord and is due entirely to his grace. Human beings naturally side with the serpent, but the Lord will triumph over evil and reclaim the world for his glory and for the good of human beings. The centrality of grace is underlined through the covenant enacted with Abraham, showing that the kingdom would be realized through covenant.<sup>103</sup> The promises of land, seed, and universal blessing were covenant promises.

Was the covenant with Abraham conditional or unconditional? In one sense it was conditional, for it depended upon Abraham’s obedience. The logic of Gen. 26:4–5 is clear: “I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and will give to your offspring all these lands. And in your offspring all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.” The text specifically says here that the blessings were granted to Abraham “because” he obeyed the Lord’s directives.<sup>104</sup> In a more profound sense, however, the covenant was unconditional.<sup>105</sup> The decisive text here is Gen. 15. The Lord promised Abraham that his children would be as uncountable as the stars. In the latter part of Gen. 15 we find a covenant ceremony where the Lord pledged to Abraham that he would possess the land of Canaan. Abraham brought animals and cut them in half. Sleep and darkness descended upon Abraham. Typically, the covenant partners walked through the divided animals together, symbolizing the truth that they would be cut off if they violated the provisions of the covenant. “To walk between the carcasses is to submit oneself to the fate of the slaughtered animals as a penalty for covenant breaking.”<sup>106</sup>

Jeremiah 34, reflecting on the same covenantal custom, pronounced a judgment on those who transgressed the stipulations of the covenant: “I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts” (Jer. 34:18). But in the Abrahamic covenant the Lord alone “passed between these pieces” as “a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch” (Gen. 15:17). The Lord alone passing

102. So Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment,” 18–20; Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 708–9, 711.

103. See Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*.

104. Contrary to Kline (*Kingdom Prologue*, 198–99), Abraham’s obedience should not be seen here as a treasury of merits for others.

105. Gentry and Wellum (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 608–11) rightly argue that it is incorrect to say that some covenants are conditional while others are unconditional.

106. Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 319.

between the pieces symbolizes that the fulfillment of the covenant depends upon him alone.<sup>107</sup> The parallel in Jer. 34:18 indicates that “God is invoking the curse on himself, if he fails to fulfill the promise.”<sup>108</sup> Ultimately, the covenant will be fulfilled. God himself pledges that it will be so. The unconditionality of the covenant does not remove the need for human obedience. Any person who fails to obey will not enjoy the covenant blessings, and hence the demand for obedience remains in all its starkness. Nevertheless, the grace of God, not the obedience of human beings, remains central, for God will see to it that the covenantal demands are fulfilled by his grace.

It is significant, then, that the covenant of circumcision in Gen. 17, with its requirement of circumcision, is subsequent to the covenant ratified in Gen. 15 (cf. Rom. 4:9–12).<sup>109</sup> The priority of faith and divine grace is thereby underscored. This is not to say that the covenant in Gen. 17 is bereft of grace. After Abraham and Sarah wrongly tried to fulfill the promise through Hagar (chap. 16), chapter 17 begins with the Lord saying, “I am God Almighty” (17:1), signifying that the covenant would be fulfilled through the power of God.<sup>110</sup> The covenant sign of circumcision, where Abram’s name was changed to “Abraham” (“father of many nations”),<sup>111</sup> functions as a concrete reminder to Abraham that his children were the result of the grace of God, not Abraham’s own sexual virility. Furthermore, the rite signified that all of Israel was consecrated to God.<sup>112</sup>

We have seen that God’s kingdom will be realized through the offspring of the woman (3:15), and Gen. 12 clarifies that the offspring will be from Abraham’s family. Genesis 12–50 focuses on the promise of offspring. The promise of receiving the land was not fulfilled in Abraham’s day. Indeed, Stephen emphasizes that Abraham did not own even a foot of the land (Acts 7:5), which fits well with the narrative in Genesis. The only land that Abraham received was a place to bury Sarah (Gen. 23).<sup>113</sup> Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob

107. So also Williamson, *Sealed with an Oath*, 86. For a fuller discussion of the covenant here, see Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 251–56.

108. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 332.

109. But against Williamson (*Sealed with an Oath*, 89–90), it should not be interpreted as a separate and distinct covenant from that pledged in Gen. 15. Rightly Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 263–70, 275–80.

110. My thanks to Joshua Greever for this insight.

111. For the sake of simplicity I use “Abraham” even before his name was changed.

112. So Gentry and Wellum, *Kingdom through Covenant*, 272–75 (citing the work of John Meade).

113. The patriarchs were resident aliens in Canaan and did not see the fulfillment of the land promise. A burial place for the dead does not signify a fulfillment of the land promises but rather functions as an indication that the promise will be fulfilled in the future (see Williamson, “Promise and Fulfillment,” 29–30).

were nomads in the land, living as shepherds with their flocks. Hebrews 11:9 captures the story of Genesis in saying that the patriarchs lived as foreigners in tents in the land that God promised them. In addition, the promise of universal blessing, though it was reiterated to Abraham several times (Gen. 18:18; 22:18; 26:4), was not fulfilled during Abraham's life.

The drama of the story, then, focuses on the promise of offspring, but the promise that Abraham will have children becomes a reality only through conflict (3:15). Indeed, the promise of children was threatened when Sarah was included in the harems of Pharaoh (12:10–20) and Abimelech (20:1–18). Abraham could not have children if his wife no longer belonged to him!<sup>114</sup> The narrative does not focus upon Abraham's cowardice and fear in lying about his wife, though certainly he failed to do what God commanded in these instances.<sup>115</sup> Instead, it emphasizes God's dramatic intervention for Abraham's sake, showing that nothing will prevent the Lord from fulfilling his promise.<sup>116</sup> God brought a plague upon Pharaoh's house until Pharaoh realized that he had Abraham's wife and returned her to Abraham (12:17–20). Similarly, God threatened in a dream to kill Abimelech because he had taken Sarah (20:3), and as a result Abimelech returned her to Abraham. Nothing can thwart God's fulfillment of his promises—neither Abraham's failures of faith nor the opposition of unbelieving kings.

Another threat to the promise was the impotence and barrenness of Abraham and Sarah. Abraham worried that his servant Eliezer would be the heir, but God astonished him with the promise that his children would be as many as the stars (15:1–5). Sarah and Abraham, however, devised another plan to fulfill the promise, and Hagar (Sarah's servant) was given to Abraham so that she could bear a child for him and Sarah (chap. 16). The plan worked, and Ishmael was born. But Ishmael was a child derived from the flesh (human ingenuity and ability) rather than the Spirit (see Gal. 4:23, 28–29). God's promise, however, was that the son of the promise would be born to Abraham *and Sarah* (Gen. 17:15–22), thereby underscoring that only God could fulfill the promise, that nothing is “too hard for the LORD” (18:14). The kingdom is the Lord's, and it will be introduced into the world only through his work.

114. Rightly Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 25.

115. As Gentry and Wellum point out, Abraham builds altars in honor of God only in Canaan: “There is no altar during his sojourns in Egypt or in Gerar; only half-truths, lies, and troubles” (*Kingdom through Covenant*, 235).

116. “One must always discern the chief thing in God's actions. Here the narrative is one-sidedly concentrated on that, and we have difficulty in following it because the moral problem of Abraham's guilt worries us” (von Rad, *Genesis*, 169).

Paul reflects on this narrative, concluding that Isaac rather than Ishmael was the child of the promise (Rom. 9:6–9). This coheres with the story in Genesis, for the covenantal promise that Abraham would have children was limited to Isaac (Gen. 17:19, 21). Isaac is characterized as “the only son” of Abraham (22:2, 12, 16). Hence, the line of promise was restricted to Isaac and his children. A strange twist in the story emerges in Gen. 22, for God commanded Abraham to sacrifice his son Isaac.<sup>117</sup> The command is astonishing, for it is only through Isaac that the offspring of the woman who would slay the serpent would come. Why would God instruct Abraham to put to death the one through whom the promises would be realized? Several explanations are offered in the account. First, the Lord tested Abraham, thereby confirming the blessing promised to him,<sup>118</sup> for he was willing to obey the most radical directive imaginable (22:16–18). The Lord underscores repeatedly that the child enjoyed by Abraham and Sarah was nothing short of a miracle. Second, Abraham’s obedience must not be sundered from his faith. Abraham was convinced, even though God commanded that he sacrifice Isaac, that Isaac would return with him from the sacrifice. Abraham said to the young men as he and Isaac left them to offer the sacrifice, “I and the boy will go over there and worship and come again to you” (22:5). In a narrative such as this, carefully constructed and dramatically effective, the inclusion of such words cannot be waved off as insignificant. Abraham truly believed that Isaac would return with him. The test is the call “to obey when God seems to contradict himself.”<sup>119</sup>

The author of Hebrews read the narrative similarly, concluding that Abraham believed that the Lord would raise Isaac from the dead if he was sacrificed (Heb. 11:17–19). Such an interpretation is confirmed by another theme that is woven into the story. When Isaac questioned where the sacrifice would come from, Abraham told him, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son” (Gen. 22:8). The words of Abraham were prophetic, for when Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, he was instructed to desist and a ram was offered in his place, which confirmed Abraham’s belief that “the LORD will provide” (22:14). The sacrifice of the ram in place of Isaac anticipates the final fulfillment of the promise of the offspring, where the true offspring of Abraham, Jesus Christ, fulfills what Isaac only forecasts typologically (Gal. 3:16). The atonement provided by the Lord becomes a reality in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, who is the beloved Son of God (Rom. 8:32).

117. As Hahn (*Kinship by Covenant*, 134) points out, in Gen. 15; 17; 22 the sacrifices demanded from Abraham escalate—animals, circumcision, Isaac—though the blessings promised escalate as well.

118. The oath formula indicates a covenant is in view (*ibid.*, 109–11).

119. Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 29.

## The Promise for New Generations

The Genesis narrative continues to focus on the promise of children, though the entirety of the covenant made with Abraham is confirmed to Isaac: offspring, land, and universal blessing (26:3–4). The offspring of the woman (Isaac) was now one man against the world, and the question is whether godly children would survive in a world where the offspring of the serpent desired to annihilate them. The first challenge for Isaac was to find a wife who worshiped the Lord, for if Isaac married a woman who turned his heart and the heart of his children away from the Lord, the promise of future salvation through Abraham's children would be nullified. Hence, Gen. 24 recounts the narrative of how Abraham's servant found a wife (Rebekah) from Abraham's relatives instead of from the Canaanites. Thereby the purity of the line of promise was preserved. Nevertheless, the integrity of the family was compromised when Isaac, like Abraham, lied about whether Rebekah was his wife so that she was taken into Abimelech's harem (26:7). The Lord showed favor to Isaac just as he did to Abraham, for when Abimelech realized that Rebekah was married to Isaac, God threatened anyone who would violate their union with death (26:8–11). The promise was also endangered because Rebekah, like Sarah, was barren. But the Lord, in response to Isaac's prayer, granted Rebekah children (25:21). The promised offspring survived only by the intervention of God, underlining the truth that the Lord graciously fulfills what he has pledged.

Nor was the fulfillment of the promise dependent merely on Isaac and Rebekah producing children. For the children of Isaac and Rebekah were not necessarily the offspring of the woman merely because they were their physical children. Esau and Jacob were the twin children of Isaac and Rebekah, and one would expect that the promise would be transmitted through the older son (Esau). The Lord prophesied, however, that the older son would serve the younger (25:23). Paul, in commenting on the choice of Jacob, highlights God's election (Rom. 9:11–13). The choice of Jacob could not be ascribed to Jacob's virtue or moral heroism; rather, it finds its roots in the grace and election of God. Jacob's deception and manipulation verify his moral impoverishment, confirming Paul's reading. Since all people are children of the serpent by nature, the promise of victory over the serpent will become a reality only by virtue of God's mercy. Esau's casual disregard for his birthright demonstrated that he was not a son of the promise (Gen. 25:29–34), for it is almost inconceivable that he would give it up for the sake of one lunch (Heb. 12:16). The mystery of God's sovereignty in choosing Jacob is relayed in the story of the blessing, for Rebekah and Jacob shamefully conspired together so that Jacob, rather than Esau, would receive the blessing from Isaac (27:1–40).

Despite (not because of!) their machinations, the Lord granted the blessing to Jacob rather than Esau.

Immediately, God's promise was in peril, for Esau was enraged and vowed to kill Jacob (27:41). But as the people of God flee from Satan into the wilderness (Rev. 12:14), so Jacob fled from Esau and traveled to his relatives in Haran (Gen. 27:42–46). Jacob's life was preserved, and unlike Esau, he did not intermarry with Hittite women who worshiped false gods (27:46). Esau's murderous intentions became the means by which Jacob would marry women who were devoted to the Lord, so that the parents of the children to come were devoted to Yahweh. As Jacob traveled to Haran to escape from Esau, the Lord met him at Bethel and confirmed to him the promise of Abraham: land, offspring, and universal blessing (28:13–15).<sup>120</sup> As Rolf Rendtorff says, "When Jacob has experienced the most devastating bankruptcy, when all seems lost and blessing seems to have turned to a curse, God adds his blessing to him."<sup>121</sup> There is no need to linger over the details of Jacob's marriages to Leah and to Rachel. The promise was no longer limited to just one son; all twelve of Jacob's sons were recipients of the promise. Hence, the promise of many offspring began to be fulfilled as Jacob's children multiplied.

Threats to the preservation of Jacob's children continued. Jacob left Laban without notice because the tension and the strife between them were constant. When Laban discovered that Jacob had left and overtook Jacob, he intended to inflict harm upon Jacob and his family (chap. 31). God warned Laban, however, to refrain from injuring Jacob, implying that if Laban did so, he would be severely punished (31:24, 29). Jacob's fears were not ended, however, for immediately after he left Laban, reports arrived that Esau was riding to meet him with four hundred men (32:6–7). Naturally, Jacob was afraid, for the last thing he had heard from Esau was that his brother wanted to kill him, and hence he prayed earnestly to the Lord for deliverance (32:11). Jacob's wrestling with God and prevailing is a significant moment in his life, for his name is changed to "Israel" (32:24–30). As Dempster says, this means that he "will be God's conquering warrior in the earth."<sup>122</sup> Such a name change verifies that victory over the serpent will come through the one who is named "Israel." And Jacob's prayer for protection was answered, for Esau did not come for war but to renew their friendship (chap. 33).

Another threat to the promise loomed on the horizon. Shechem the son of Hamor from the Shechemites was smitten with Dinah and raped her, prevailing

120. Alexander (*Eden to the New Jerusalem*, 31–32) points out that Mount Moriah and Bethel are anticipations of the temple where Yahweh dwells.

121. Rendtorff, *Canonical Hebrew Bible*, 30.

122. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 87.

upon his father to work out an arrangement by which he could marry her (34:1–4). Why is this rather strange story included? If the Israelites intermarried with the Shechemites, the children of Jacob would lose their purity because of uniting with people who worshiped other gods. Hence, the children of the serpent would triumph over and overwhelm the children of the woman. Ironically, the means by which Israel was protected from intermarriage involved subterfuge and murder, for Jacob’s sons persuaded all the Shechemite males to submit to circumcision before they would agree to intermarry (chap. 34). After the surgery Simeon and Levi dishonorably murdered the Shechemites while they were sore (34:25–26), and the remaining brothers gleefully looted their possessions (34:27–29). Simeon and Levi were punished for their cruelty, and as a result they were scattered among the twelve tribes and were not given a specific portion of land as an inheritance (49:5–7). Even though the narrator did not comment immediately in Gen. 34 on the actions of Simeon and Levi, it is clear that he saw these deeds as evil. Nonetheless, the Lord’s purposes were realized through their malfeasance, for the Israelites were prevented from intermarrying with the Shechemites.

Another danger surfaced, however, because of the evil perpetrated by Simeon and Levi. Now the family of Jacob (and the realization of the promise of the kingdom) faced the danger of attack from the Canaanites and Perizzites, who would retaliate for Israel’s slaughter (34:30). The only explanation for Israel’s preservation was divine intervention, for “a terror from God fell upon the cities that were around them, so that they did not pursue the sons of Jacob” (35:5). The Lord then appeared to Jacob and confirmed the promise of Abraham to him again, pledging offspring, land, and blessings for all peoples (35:9–13). The stories of the preservation of Jacob and his children drive home one of the main themes of the narrative: the preservation of Jacob’s offspring is not due to human ingenuity or even human virtue. Only God’s covenant promise can explain why this small family escaped disaster after disaster and was preserved intact.

## Judah and Joseph

The story of Joseph dominates Gen. 37–50, though the account of Judah bearing children through Tamar is inset into the narrative (chap. 38). Why is this rather sordid story about Judah and Tamar included in the narrative? If we consider the entire narrative of Genesis, we find a significant clue in 49:8–10:<sup>123</sup>

123. See Mathews, “Genesis,” 144.

“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.” The writer clarifies here that from Judah will come the ruler who will defeat the Lord’s enemies. The promise that the offspring of the woman will triumph over the serpent will be obtained through the family of Judah. The blessing promised to Abraham through all nations will be realized finally through Judah’s family.<sup>124</sup>

How does the story of Gen. 38 relate to this promise of future rule? Brevard Childs says, “Judah demonstrated an unfaithfulness which threatened to destroy the promise of a posterity, which was only restored by the faithfulness of a Canaanite wife.”<sup>125</sup> Hence, the birth of Perez and Zerah is significant because the promises made to Abraham will finally be fulfilled through Judah’s descendants. John Sailhamer also makes a crucial observation. Jacob’s words in Gen. 49 relate to the “days to come” (49:1), forecasting a coming ruler from Judah.<sup>126</sup> The same phrase (translated as “in the latter days”) occurs in Num. 24:14, where Balaam predicts Israel’s triumph over Moab. Indeed, the parallels do not stop there. The language about a lion is picked up from Gen. 49: “He crouched, he lay down like a lion and like a lioness; who will rouse him up?” (Num. 24:9).<sup>127</sup> A coming ruler who will triumph over Moab is also foretold: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel; it shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth” (Num. 24:17).<sup>128</sup> The kingdom of God will become a reality through a ruler from the tribe of Judah.

We turn to the Joseph narrative, which encompasses Gen. 37–50. The purpose here is to see the overarching purpose of the account. It is apparent throughout Genesis that the offspring of Abraham were not necessarily characterized by virtue. The moral weaknesses of Jacob and his sons are quite evident. The treachery of Joseph’s brothers reached its apex when they sold him into Egypt and lied to their father about his death. In the midst of Joseph’s sufferings, the theme that the Lord was with him is underscored, whether he was in Potiphar’s house or in the prison (39:2–3, 23). Since God gave him the ability to

124. Sailhamer (*Pentateuch as Narrative*, 140) notes the emphasis on “blessing” in Gen. 49:28.

125. Childs, *Old Testament as Scripture*, 157.

126. Sailhamer, *Old Testament Theology*, 211.

127. See Beale, *Biblical Theology*, 99.

128. See Sailhamer, *Old Testament Theology*, 211–12. Sailhamer (p. 247) sees at the end of the Pentateuch (Deut. 33) prominence for Judah as well.

interpret dreams, he became the second in command in Egypt, conserving and distributing food during the seven years of abundance and the seven years of famine. Joseph's story is full of human interest, but what is its role in terms of the purpose of Genesis? Joseph himself declared the purpose in the dramatic scene where he disclosed his identity to his brothers: "And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. For the famine has been in the land these two years, and there are yet five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. And God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth, and to keep alive for you many survivors. So it was not you who sent me here, but God. He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house and ruler over all the land of Egypt" (45:5–8). Joseph did not minimize the evil his brothers inflicted upon him (50:20), but he saw the larger purposes of God in the events that transpired. The Lord sovereignly regulated circumstances so that Joseph would be a ruler in Egypt, and thus Jacob's family was sustained in Egypt during the famine so that a remnant would continue to exist (45:11).

The offspring of the woman would not be annihilated by the children of the serpent. In fact, the children of the serpent (the Egyptians) play a vital role in Israel's survival. Ultimately, the Lord even rules over Satan and mysteriously uses him to accomplish his will (cf. Job 1–2). At the same time, the promise of offspring was being fulfilled, for now there were seventy persons in Jacob's family (Gen. 46:6–27). The children were not yet as numerous as the stars, but they were on their way to the realization of what God had promised. Nor did the Israelites intermarry with the Egyptians, so as to pollute the holy seed. They had an occupation as shepherds that the Egyptians detested, and so they were able to live separately in Goshen (46:33–47:6).

Israel's population was growing, and they were safe in Egypt, but they were in the wrong place. They were destined for the land of Canaan. It was there that the kingdom would be established, but the land was not to be theirs yet. God's justice must be preserved, and evicting the Canaanites from their land was not yet fitting.<sup>129</sup> The Canaanites would not be removed from the land for four generations, since their "iniquity" was "not yet complete" (15:16). Canaan eventually would belong to Israel. Hence, Jacob insisted that Joseph bury him in Canaan rather than Egypt (47:29–31; 50:5–13). Like Abraham, the only portion of Canaan that Jacob possessed was a tomb, but the Lord's promise was not revoked (48:3–4).

129. It is interesting to note that the narrator believes that the slaughter of the Shechemites was evil, but the same conclusion is not drawn regarding the Canaanites in the land. In the latter case, their evil was great enough to warrant their complete annihilation. In that respect, they were like the generation of the flood, which deserved utter destruction.

Genesis concludes with Joseph's death in Egypt, before which he reminded Israel of the promise that they would inherit the land promised to the patriarchs, and instructed them to bring him to Canaan in the future (50:24–26). So Genesis ends with Israel in the wrong place. The kingdom is the Lord's, but Egypt was not where they were supposed to be. The offspring of Abraham were scarcely as many as the stars. They did not live in the land of Canaan, and worldwide blessing was not even close. Still, the family of the patriarchs survived and was even beginning to thrive. The Lord had preserved them even though they were small and weak, even while they were sojourners in the land promised to them (Ps. 105:11–15). He had showered his grace on Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob by making a covenant with them and showing them grace again and again. The preservation of the offspring clearly was the Lord's work, for Abraham's family survived despite barrenness, sin, stupidity, squabbles, and famine. Genesis teaches that the kingdom will come, for ultimately it depends upon the Lord. It will be realized through his promise rather than human virtue.