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GOD’S ORIGINAL, MISSIONAL PURPOSES FOR HUMANITY
CREATION, TRANSFORMATION, RESTORATION

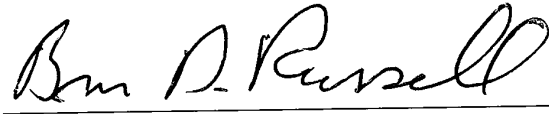
A Thesis presented to
The Faculty of Asbury Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree
Master of Arts—Biblical Studies

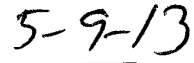
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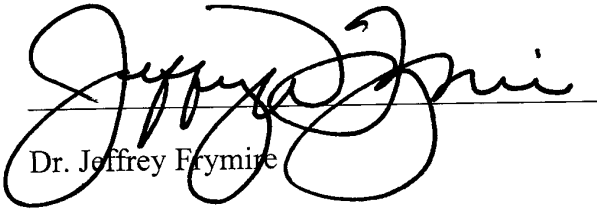
THESIS APPROVAL

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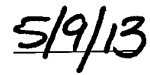
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Genesis has more to offer than just Sunday school lessons for children. It offers insight into the creation of the universe and all that is within it. Genesis' location within the canon is important for several reasons. The book of Genesis is a book about "beginnings, from the beginnings of the universe and various orderings of humankind to the beginnings of the people of Israel. It also witnesses to the beginnings of God's activity in the life of the world. But creation is more than chronology."¹ It is necessary to have Genesis stand at the beginning of the canon because "creation is such a fundamental theological category for the rest of the canon."² The book also shares with us the foundational history of the Israelites, which is linked all the way back to the beginning of creation. This study will begin to unpack some of the fascinating concepts contained in Genesis in regards to the creation of humanity.

The goal of this thesis is to demonstrate that Genesis 1-2 provides us with God's original, missional intentions for the creation of humanity. These intentions were then transformed in various ways by mankind in Genesis 3-11, which caused God to develop a new plan of restoration for all of creation beginning with the call of Abram/Abraham in Genesis 12.

In chapter two of this thesis we will discover what God's missional purposes were for creating humankind. God intended humanity to live out their missional purposes for their

¹ Fretheim, Terence E. "The Book of Genesis." Pages 319-676 in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreter's Bible; General and Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*. (ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 321.

² Freitheim, "The Book of Genesis," 321.

creation which were to (1) rule over the earth like a king, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. Each of these intentions will be explored in order to have a better understanding of what God really wanted humans to do here on earth and how he wanted them to behave and interact.

In chapter three, we shall discover that these missional goals were transformed dramatically. Beginning with the disobedience of Adam and Eve, God's creation began to morph into something it was never supposed to be. As we move through the chapter other examples of transformation will be discussed such as Cain's horrific murder of his brother, the destruction of the whole earth with the flood, and the dispersal of the people after their language had been confused and they no longer shared the same tongue. At the end of chapter 11, we are left wondering, what will happen to humanity now? How can God get them back in alignment with what He originally designed them for?

This question is answered in chapter four of this thesis. God will call a man (Abram), through whom He will establish a covenant and use him and his descendants to bless all the peoples of the earth. Eventually one of Abram's descendants, Jesus Christ the son of God, will save the people from their sins and allow them to have a right relationship with God once again. This part of the story is not fulfilled in Genesis however. On the other hand, we do see the beginning of a nation that will be God's chosen people through whom He will work to bring about redemption and restoration of what humanity was intentionally created for in the first place.

The hope is that by being enlightened to God's original, missional intentions, people today might look at their own lives and examine them in light of these intents. Are we fulfilling our mission? If not, what do we need to change in order to do so? These are a few of the questions that should ideally come to mind after reading this thesis.

Definitions

Before moving on, we should clarify a few definitions of words that can be used in varying ways in order to avoid confusion. Since Christopher Wright does a superb job of defining terms in relation to mission in his book *The Mission of God*, we will borrow his definitions for our purposes here. Mission goes beyond merely something we do. He states that our mission as Christians “(if it is biblically informed and validated) means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.”³ In this study we will discuss both God’s mission and intentions for humanity, which thus will highlight what our mission is supposed to be more specifically. In our context here, I will refer to *mission* as a term meaning a “long-term purpose or goal that is to be achieved through proximate objectives and planned actions.”⁴

Using the above definition for mission then allows us to use *missional* as “simply an adjective denoting something that is related to or characterized by mission, or has the qualities, attributes, or dynamics of mission.”⁵ Additionally, missiology is the study of mission. The term missiological will be used when a “theological or reflective aspect is intended.”⁶

³ Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2006), 22-23.

⁴ Wright, 23.

⁵ Wright, 23.

⁶ Wright, 23.

Methodological Considerations

This thesis is an attempt at a literary reading of Genesis, while at the same time using aspects of a historical approach such the Hebrew language and consideration of some aspects of an ancient Near Eastern worldview. It is not necessary for these two approaches to be mutually exclusive. However, a literary paradigm takes precedent in this work. We will focus on what the text itself says, allowing it to have its own voice. Features of this sort of literary paradigm include an ahistorical view of the text, the autonomy of the text, and meaning of the text is understood as aesthetics.⁷ There will be an emphasis on the final canonical form of the text, so approaches such as the Document Hypothesis are incompatible with this approach. Being aware of other hermeneutical approaches, it should be noted that this study does not claim historicity neither does it deny it; rather it simply is not the focus of this reading. Neither does this reading claim that Genesis (primarily 1-11) is essentially myth in the popular sense of the word.⁸ For our purposes here perhaps instead it could be thought of as a story that explains the origins of Israel's ancestors, but also links them back to the creation of the universe. This thesis also takes it as a given that the author of Genesis was divinely inspired by God along with the other authors of Scriptures (see 2 Tim 3:16).

Additionally, due to space constraints of this thesis, we will only explore what is in the text of Genesis and leave comparison with other Scriptures for a future endeavor. Also, while

⁷ Holladay, Carl R. "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible." Pages 125-149 in vol. 1 of *The New Interpreter's Bible*. (ed. Leander E. Keck et al.; Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 139.

⁸ For an alternative view of the stories of Genesis 1-11 as myth, though not necessarily uninspired see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation, Evangelicals and the Problem of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 49-56.

our study will primarily focus on Abraham in chapter four of our study, we could have demonstrated the beginnings of God's original intentions being restored through Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph as well. However, we simply do not have the space to do so in this study. Now that we have the preliminary considerations out of the way, let us begin with Genesis 1-2 and discover what exactly God had in mind when He created humanity.

CHAPTER TWO

GENESIS 1-2 GOD’S ORIGINAL, MISSIONAL INTENTIONS

FOR THE CREATION OF HUMANITY

Introduction

Genesis 1-2 presents the creation narrative of the Bible. The text goes beyond merely enlightening us with what the ancient believers of God believed about the creation of the universe and everything in it. The narrative also paints a picture of what God originally intended the creation of humanity to be like.

The Shorter catechism of the Westminster Confession asks the opening question, “What is the chief end of man?” Then the catechism states, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.” All of creation does this as well, yet humanity glorifies “our Creator in uniquely human ways, as befits our unique status as the one creature that has been made in the image of God.”⁹

From the first two chapters of Genesis we will explore the original intentions of God for mankind and what it means to be made in His image and according to His likeness. He intended humanity to live out their missional purposes for their creation which were to (1) rule over the earth like a king, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. In this chapter, we will unpack these fundamental

⁹ Wright, 404-405.

intents of being made in the image of God, in order to gain a greater understanding of whom and what God created us to be.

Made in the Image of God

Probably the most well-known fact among Christians about the creation of humans is that mankind was created in the image of God or *imago dei*. There are many good works out there already that discuss the meaning of “image of God” so we will only briefly summarize the main points here.

In the narrative God states, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (1:26, RSV). In 1:27, “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.” Here the Hebrew word, *’ādām*, refers to humankind generically and in 2:7, which we will look at next, the word refers to the first man.¹⁰ So man bears the image of God and his likeness and as we see in chapter two a spirit as well. Man was formed from the “dust of the ground” and then God “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (2:7). Now, man was alive. Adam the first man is linked to the ground since he was created from it (and as the narrative tells us in chapter three, he will return to it). These two words are linked lexically as well since we have *’ādām*, which represents the first man or humankind and then *’adāmâ*, which means ground.¹¹

A quick word about the use of the plural pronouns “us” and “our” from 1:26; these have caused people to come up with different theories as to who the plural is referring to, whether it be the three persons of the godhead, or angels with God, other deities, a divine council or simply

¹⁰ Fretheim, Terence E. *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 34.

¹¹ Walton, John H. “Creation.” *DOTP*, 160.

God.¹² “This form can be explained as either a plural of majesty or a potential plural, expressing the wealth of potentials in the divine being. This verb harmonizes with the plural ‘God’ (*’ēlōhîm*) used in verse 1 and following, which although plural in form, takes a singular verb.”¹³ Although the use of plurals in these instances “does not explicitly refer to the tri-unity of the Godhead,” it does permit the doctrine of the trinity to be developed “through the process of progressive revelation.”¹⁴

While some choose to ignore what the text itself says about the image of God, Russell rightly suggests that “the focus of Gen 1:26–31 is not on the ontological meaning of *imago dei*. Rather it describes the function or purpose of humanity bearing the divine image.”¹⁵ The Bible is not really focused on describing what exactly *imago dei* means, rather it is concerned “in converting us to a life in which God’s people can embody God’s original mission. A *missiological* focus is implicit” in the Lord’s creational design for mankind in the image of God.¹⁶

Now, let us investigate the original Hebrew of some of the words in these phrases. The word translated as “image” comes from the Hebrew word, *selem*. BDB gives its meaning as “image, likeness, resemblance of.”¹⁷ The word translated as “likeness” is *demut*, which means “likeness, similitude, of external appearance.”¹⁸ Though many see these terms as synonymous,

¹² See Walton, John H. *Ancient Near Eastern Thought and the Old Testament: Introducing the Conceptual World of the Hebrew Bible*. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 94-95, for an excerpt on the idea of a divine council.

¹³ Ross, Allen P. *Creation & Blessing, A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 112.

¹⁴ Ross, 112.

¹⁵ Russell, Brian. *Creation, Paradise Lost, and the Mission of God* (unpublished raw data accessed in 2013), 10.

¹⁶ Russell, 10.

¹⁷ Brown, Driver, and Briggs. *Hebrew and English Lexicon*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907), 853.

¹⁸ BDB, 198.

the word for “image” is the more concrete of the two terms and the term for “likeness” is used more generally in regards to “resemblance.”¹⁹ As you can see they are very similar in meaning. “Likeness” was used to “define and limit the meaning, by indicating that the sense intended for *selem* must lie within that part of its range which overlaps with the range of *demut*.”²⁰ Furthermore, “the Hebrew word, *selem*, is a representative in physical form, not a representation of the physical appearance. The image is a physical manifestation of divine (or royal) essence that bears the function of that which it represents; this gives the image-bearer the capacity to reflect the attributes and act on behalf of the one represented.”²¹

From these definitions we can conclude that to be made in the image of God and his likeness was to be formed in his resemblance; we resemble God and his likeness and manner. This special stamp of God upon humans “denotes a special relation between God and mankind which is unique among all the creatures.”²² We have attributes of God. Does this mean we are equal to God or that God is the same as us? Certainly not, but we do bear some of the same characteristics, likeness, and mannerisms of God. Many scholars now conclude that the idea of being an image of God is modeled after “the manner of a king who establishes statues of himself to assert his sovereign rule where the king himself cannot be present.”²³ Obviously, we can only carry this so far as sculptures are not able to move or speak and humans are called to speak and move about on earth representing God. Additionally, when He created mankind in His own

¹⁹ Bray, Gerald. “The Significance of God’s Image in Man” (*Tynbul* 42, 1991), 197.

²⁰ Barr, James. “The Image of God in the Book of Genesis—A Study of Terminology” (*BJRL* 51, 1968/69), 24.

²¹ Walton, “Creation,” 161.

²² Childs, Brevard. *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 34.

²³ Brueggemann, Walter. *Genesis*. Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 32.

image, God had certain purposes and desires in mind. The remainder of this chapter will discuss these original intentions.

Rule over the Earth as a King or Representative of God

Let us now look further at the phrase “image of God” or *imago dei* from the Latin Vulgate’s translation. After much comparison between Israelite literature and other ancient Near Eastern literature from both Egypt and Mesopotamia, “it has become clear that the phrase is related to royal language, in which a king or pharaoh is the ‘image of (a) god.’”²⁴ Therefore, humankind was supposed “to function as the divine image” by having dominion over the animals and ruling over them.²⁵ Man was instructed to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth” (1:26). The NAS version states “let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle...” (1:26). Notice both translations use the language of kingship, having “dominion over” or ruling over things are roles of a king. In 1:28, we see the same kind of language when they are instructed to subdue the earth and again to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air...”

Arnold suggests that the phrase “let them rule over...” in 1:26, which includes an imperfect waw consecutive of *rdh*, “should be interpreted as a purpose clause, expressing the motivation behind God’s creation of humans in his image: ‘in order that they may have dominion over...’”²⁶ This gets at one of the essential components of this chapter; which is that humankind was created in the image of God with the purpose of ruling over the earth and everything in it. However, we also know that not every human can literally be a king. Yet we can be God’s

²⁴ Arnold, Bill. *Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

²⁵ Arnold, 45.

²⁶ Arnold, 45.

representatives here on earth to His other creations. So the function of kingship is “democratized, and the royal links that may be present have been subverted and nonhierarchical perspectives prevail.”²⁷ Part of representing the Lord on earth was that “the human creature attests to the Godness of God by exercising freedom with and authority over all the other creatures entrusted to its care.”²⁸ Russell calls this “*representation authority*” and rightly suggests “humanity does not rule for its own sake or prerogatives.”²⁹ God gave humanity this authority and expected them to use it wisely, as they are His divine representatives.

Additionally, most of the Old Testament uses of *rdh*, the word for “rule over,” are in “the context of ruling over reluctant subjects.”³⁰ However, in this particular context of both creation and blessing, the term, *rdh*, “should be understood as indicating a supremacy that is harmonious and mutually beneficial” for both humankind and the other creatures of the earth.³¹

In addition to ruling over the living things on earth, we learn later in the narrative that the man actually names the creatures. God brought them before him and whatever name he gave to the animal that was thereafter its name (2:19-20). This task of naming in addition to being a kingly function is also the function of a creator, which leads us to the next original intention of God for humanity where the Lord calls humanity to be a creative accomplice with Him.

²⁷ Fretheim, *God and World*, 47.

²⁸ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 32.

²⁹ Russell, 11.

³⁰ McKeown, James. *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 27.

³¹ Lohfink, Norbert. *Great Themes from the Old Testament* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), 177-179.

Creative Participant with God

Humanity was called from the beginning of creation to be “participants in the continual renewal and maintenance of the created order.”³² The action of God allowing man to name the animals demonstrates that man was to be a participant in these creative acts with God. In ancient Near Eastern cultures, the act of giving something a name was to assign the object a function and thus bring it into existence. The names were sometimes “seen as a hypostatis, or the very essence of a thing.”³³ There are many examples of this, such as in the Babylonian creation narrative, *EnumaElish*, where the act of naming is equivalent to bringing into existence. Arnold suggests that “naming was often determinative of existence” in an ancient Near Eastern context.³⁴ This would have been the way it was understood in the ancient worldview.

God created and named his creation in Genesis 1-2. For instance, God created light and darkness in 1:5, and completed this creative act by assigning the names “day” and “night” to the light and darkness respectfully.³⁵ We see that God went on to continue assigning names to his creations such as the “sky” or “heaven” in v. 8, and the “earth” and the “seas” in v. 10 and so forth. Each time He created and named His creation, we discover in the narrative, its function as the creation was brought into existence by God. Clearly we can see how the ancients would have equated naming with existence and the act of creating. So when God instructed the man to name the animals, he was allowing him to work with God to fulfill a creative act.

While the narrative indicates that God fashioned the woman in 2:22, the man was the one who decided what she would be called, i.e. “woman.” God gave him this creative honor and

³² Gorman Jr., Frank H. “The Ideology of Ritual: Time and Status in the Priestly Theology.” *JSOT* Sup91. (1990), 230-232.

³³ Arnold, 40.

³⁴ Arnold, 40.

³⁵ Arnold, 40.

permitted him to be a contributor to this creative act when he rightly could have named the creature himself along with all the animals as well, since God was the one who formed them. Yet God desired for man to participate in such creative acts with him.

Another aspect where God called humanity to join with Him as a creative accomplice was through procreation. As we will discuss later in this chapter, God designed humanity so that they could form other human beings. However, it should be noted that humans alone cannot create life; it is an act of God for life to begin. He does choose to work through his creatures coming together, but humans cannot create life on their own.³⁶

Care for the Earth and its Creatures

Next, we will discuss another one of God's missional intents for humanity, which was to care for the earth or be stewards over it. After man was created, God placed him in the garden in Eden (2:8). Recall that earlier we discussed the lexical link between the words for "man" or "humanity" and "ground." Thus, in 2:7 we have the man which "received the breath of life and in origin coming from the ground itself, is eminently suited to take care of the garden and all that God has placed in it."³⁷ In 2:15, we see not only did God put man in the garden, but He does so in order that man can "till it and keep it" or the NAS states, "cultivate and keep it." This was to provide a solution to the problem of having no one to plant or cultivate the earth that was mentioned back in 2:5. When you examine the text, one can easily see that man was put in the garden with a purpose to care for it; he was to till the ground and plant the trees and other plants. His "presence was crucial for its life and health."³⁸ Contrary to the belief that man was put in the

³⁶ See later discussion on the issue of barrenness and how that is overcome with God's intervention and not by any human means.

³⁷ Hess, Richard S. "Adam." *DOTP*, 18.

³⁸ Fretheim, *God and World*, 47.

garden in order to provide a paradise full of luxury and ease for humans, the text actually demonstrates that man was placed there to be the garden's keeper. In essence, the human creature was "given a vocation and expected to share in God's work."³⁹ Rather than simply for self-gratification, man was placed in the garden to be the "image of God" or in other words his representative here on earth that would help plants be nurtured and to grow as God intended.

For further evidence of this, let us look at the original Hebrew in 2:15. The word translated as "till" or "cultivate" is a qal infinitive construct from the root word, '*abad*.'⁴⁰ Further synonyms include, "work, serve, labour."⁴¹ The word translated as "keep" is another qal infinitive construct and comes from the root *shamar*. BDB further defines it as to "keep, watch, preserve," or "have charge of."⁴² Thus we see that mankind was placed in the garden to work, serve, and till or cultivate the ground as well as to keep, preserve, and watch over the earth. Nowhere in the meanings of these words can we find that man was supposed to take advantage of the earth or exploit the garden for his own purposes. Humanity has a "stewardship responsibility" that includes "ordering and watching over the garden that God has created."⁴³ Russell sees in our pericope of Genesis 1-2 that "humanity's mission is to serve as stewards of God's Creation. This involves caring for and preserving what God has crafted."⁴⁴ Humanity was supposed to represent God here on this planet and nurture and protect the earth.

It should be noted that nature is not to be given divinity, but neither is nature or the earth to be desacralized. The earth is sacred in that God is its creator and "stands over the His creation

³⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

⁴⁰ Holladay, 261.

⁴¹ BDB, 712.

⁴² BDB, 1036.

⁴³ Hess, Richard S. "Adam." *DOTP*, 19.

⁴⁴ Russell, 6.

as Lord and King of Creation,” and thus the earth is sacred and important to God.⁴⁵ Therefore, humanity is to care for God’s creation as we were instructed, not only out of obedience, but out of love for the one who created the world. While we are not to worship the earth, neither are we to think that the planet was created for merely “human exploration and exploitation” or simply to “meet our human needs.”⁴⁶

There are other places in the Bible that attest to the idea that man was to work and cultivate the earth from the start of creation, though there is not space here to discuss all of these examples. One such place is suggested by Walter Harrelson states that Psalm 104 “celebrates the value of human work within creation, and also affirms the value of all that other creatures do, by God’s appointment.”⁴⁷ This Psalm speaks of other creation elements such as when God “established the earth upon its foundations, so that it will not totter forever and ever” (104:5, NAS). Shortly after the recounting and praise for the different creations, the Psalm states, “Thou dost cause the grass to grow for the cattle, and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth” (Psalm 104:14). This seems to imply that at the time this psalm was written, the author fully saw man working to cultivate the plants as a given responsibility in order to bring forth food. While we do not want to read too much into the text, it certainly presents some evidence for this suggestion.

Besides caring for the earth, man was to care for the other creatures as well, though this is perhaps somewhat implicit in the narrative of Genesis 1-2. As mentioned above, man was given the task of naming all of the living creatures in 2:19 and as we shall discuss below, man had a relationship to the animals. Additionally, by caring for the ground and nurturing the plants

⁴⁵ Russell, 3.

⁴⁶ Wright, 401.

⁴⁷ Wright, 400.

which would be used for food, he would care for the needs of not only humankind, but the animals too. The animals were given the plants as food back in 1:30; right after mankind was given the plants for food as well.

Created to be Relational

So far we have discovered how being made in the image of God and according to His likeness meant that God intended for humanity to rule over the earth like a king or as His divine representative; to be a creative participant with Him; and for us to be the caretakers of the earth by cultivating the ground. Now, we shall examine another aspect of God's primary purposes for the creation of humanity. He created us to be relational; with Him, with each other, and with the earth and its other creatures. From the very beginning part of God's missional purposes for humanity was for them to live in community with him and with each other.

With Him

God created humanity to be in relationship with him. We have already seen some of this in that we were supposed to be His divine image or representative here on earth. The narrative depicts an even more intimate relationship between mankind and their Creator. God was not far off and distant; He was close by and interacted with humans. "Moreover, God communes with humanity in Genesis 1-2. God speaks to humanity, provides guidance, equips, commissions, and blesses."⁴⁸

There were conversations between God and man. Humans are the ones that God chose to make "a peculiarly intense commitment (by speaking) and to whom marvelous freedom has been

⁴⁸ Russell, 12.

granted (in responding).”⁴⁹ We see in 1:28 that not only did God bless them; He spoke to them and said “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...” While both animals (v. 22) and man (v. 28) were commanded to “be fruitful and multiply,” in the imperative to the man the text has the phrase “God said to them.” McKeown asserts that this phrase has significance because humanity is elevated “to a superior and responsible relationship with God. God has a unique relationship with the creatures made in his image, and this is the ideal context for blessing.”⁵⁰ God continued to speak to them in the narrative in v. 29-30 regarding the gift of every plant for food. God converses with man again in 2:16-18 regarding which trees he may eat from as well as acknowledging that man being alone was not good.

Additionally, God desired to be in relationship with all humans. He did not discriminate between male or female. The Lord longed for an intimate relationship with both. Furthermore, while Adam and Eve are the only humans mentioned in Genesis 1-2, the continuation of the narrative reveals that God longed for a relationship with all of humanity. There was an international focus in 3-11, and even when the text zooms in on one particular man and his family with the call of Abram in Genesis 12, God does so with the missional intention of the restoration of all the peoples of the earth as we shall see in later chapters. Russell rightly states that “All of the stories in Genesis 1–11 are narratives about humanity as a whole.”⁵¹ He further asserts that the Scriptures of Genesis 1-11 reveal that “God is not merely the God of Israel. He is the God of the nations.”⁵²

⁴⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 31.

⁵⁰ McKeown, 27.

⁵¹ Russell, 8.

⁵² Russell, 9.

Though not found in our pericope of Genesis 1-2, we discover in chapter three of the narrative that God walked in the garden with man. This was likely not the first time He had done this. “For if Adam had previously seen no visible form of God but had known everything only by the secret and invisible impulse of the spirit, what reason would he have had for concealing himself in some obscure place for the sake of fleeing and hiding from the face of the Lord” in chapter three.⁵³ We can therefore make the assumption that God walked with the humans regularly.

We certainly can see that God desired a relationship with mankind as we follow the rest of the narrative in Genesis and indeed the rest of the Bible; but we also have clear indications in Genesis 1-2, as noted above, that God wanted and in fact created us to be in relationship with Him.

With Each Other

Humans not only had a relationship with God, they were also relational with one another. By design humanity was intended to live in community with one another. Humankind was created in God’s image (1:26), male and female (1:27). In other words, both male and female were created equally in the image of God; “they bear the same divine imprint.”⁵⁴ God states that all that He had made “was very good” (1:31). All was as it should be in God’s eyes, except for one thing. In the narrative of chapter two, we see that man was created first and God saw that it was not a good thing for man to be alone and not have a suitable companion. Man was incomplete without someone like him. Since one could not be found that corresponded to man,

⁵³ Thompson, John L. *Old Testament I, Genesis 1-11*. Reformation Commentary on Scripture. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 97.

⁵⁴ Mickelsen, Alvera. “An Egalitarian View: There is Neither Male nor Female in Christ,” in *Women in Ministry: Four Views* (eds. Bonnidell Clouse & Robert G. Clouse; Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1989), 182.

God put man to sleep and then formed woman from one of his ribs (2:21-3). Since woman is made from the bone and flesh of man, the man “shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh” (2:24). Furthermore, we learn that they were naked, yet there were unashamed (2:25).

Man and woman were to relate to each other without all the inhibitions that we have today. They were to be able to be completely open with one another and not hide their appearance from each other. There was no fear of humiliation. Neither was there any confusion about their sexuality. Sexual identity was simply a part of creation, when it states that God created them, male and female (1:27).

We also see that man and woman were joined together as one flesh. This would be the first indications of marriage between a man and a woman and being intimate with one another in that their bodies or flesh would be joined together as one; though the precise language of marriage is not used here, this is implied. They were to care for each other and place their relationship with one another above that of the relationship between parent and child.

Additionally, God gave to the “man and woman together identical responsibilities: a. be fruitful and multiply (neither can do this alone); b. fill the earth and subdue it (subdue surely implies responsibility and leadership); c. have dominion over every living thing (dominion, like subdue, implies authority).”⁵⁵ So not only were man and woman to be relational, they were equals. God did not speak to man alone when He wanted them to “be fruitful and multiply...and rule over...every living thing” (1:28). He spoke it to “them,” not man alone as indicated by the

⁵⁵ Mickelsen, “An Egalitarian View,” 182.

3rd person masculine plural suffix in the Hebrew. “There are no limits placed on the extent to which either man or woman can function in God’s mission.”⁵⁶

With Other Creatures and the Earth

Next, we also notice the relationship between humanity and God’s other creations and the earth. God intended for us to relate to one another. We see this clearly in that he created man from the dust of the earth, next man was to rule over the earth, and finally man will return as dust to the earth when he dies (though we learn this in 3:19).⁵⁷ This appears to be intentional on God’s part. He could have merely spoken mankind into existence as he did with the other creations, yet He changed the manner in which He chose to create, so as to actually form man out of the earth. We already noted the lexical link between the first man and the ground previously. Furthermore, we are clearly to be relational to the earth and its creatures since we have to be in order to “rule over it, and subdue it” as noted above (1:26). Likewise, the act of caring for the earth and cultivating the ground brought man into relationship with the earth.

Blessed by God/Be Fruitful and Multiply, Fill the Earth

Another component of God’s original intentions for humanity pertains to reproduction and spreading across the face of the earth. The first humans were blessed by God and He said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it...” (1:28). The Hebrew word *bārak* is translated as “blessed” in this verse. Ross concludes from his study of the word in Genesis that “the giving of a blessing bestowed prosperity with respect to fertility of land and

⁵⁶ Russell, 12.

⁵⁷ Arnold, 58.

fertility of life. The gift of divine blessing included the empowerment to achieve what was promised.”⁵⁸

God’s plan was not to create one man and one woman and that would be all; on the contrary, He fully expected them to procreate and fill the entire world. Similar to how God created us in His image, He wanted man to procreate someone in his own likeness. This goes back to being a creative contributor with God as well, since God would no longer do the creating alone in regards to more humans. Now mankind was to partake in this creative act.

Furthermore, as we mentioned above, God created humanity both male and female. There was an established sexual identity from the start of creation; it is “good and is ordained by God as part of creation.”⁵⁹

“God intended that the world be a settled place, and that means that procreation is crucial to what God intends for the creation.”⁶⁰ This act was important for the “sake of continuity in creation” and in order that this may be accomplished, God formed humans with the ability “to generate new life.”⁶¹ Reproduction was an essential element of being made in the image of God.

It should also be mentioned that initially we do not see any hint that there were any problems with conception or childbirth, though we see later in chapter three that there would be in the future, after man corrupts God’s original plan for humanity. Again, God created the first humans with the ability to make more of their kind (plants and animals could do this as well). This was to be a natural act that was part of being human and being made as God originally desired, in the image of God; it was part of their mission.

⁵⁸ Ross, 66.

⁵⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 33.

⁶⁰ Fretheim, *God and World*, 50.

⁶¹ Fretheim, *God and World*, 50.

The other aspect to God's command was to "fill the earth" (1:28). The first humans were not only to multiply; they were to spread out across the earth. God desired for the earth to be full. Again, the blessing helped make this possible.

One other note about blessing is that the blessing gets transformed into cursing in chapters 3-11 and then the prominence of blessing returns in 12-50. While we see glimmers of hope with the blessing of Noah, the majority of 3-11 contains examples of mankind's disobedience and the cursing that comes as a result. Beginning with Abram in chapter 12, God is again able to bless.

Man Given Boundaries or Limitations

Next, we turn to an element of God's original, missional purposes that you might not have considered before. Contrary to what many of us would want to believe, life in the garden was full of order with boundaries and limitations over against simply a life where mankind could do whatever they wanted because they were humans. As mentioned above, they were created to be the image of God here on earth and rule over it while at the same time taking care of God's creation. God did not expect man to neglect his task of caring for the earth; he was supposed to till the earth and keep it as we discussed earlier. So there were limits on what man could do or in this case not do, such as not caring for the earth.

Furthermore, there were limitations on humanity in that God placed boundaries on man beginning in the garden when he was commanded not to eat of the "Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die" (2:17). God fully expected mankind to be obedient to this command. They could have eaten from any other tree in the garden, including the Tree of Life, as much as they wanted (2:16). They simply were not to

eat of one particular tree. Brueggeman uses the terminology of “prohibition” in regards to this text.⁶² Though we are not told why it was prohibited to eat of this tree, what is important was that God had the authority to speak the prohibition and He had an “unqualified expectation of obedience” from the humans.⁶³ In fact, they could have looked at and probably even touched the fruit since God did not forbid them to do that, though Eve added that part when conversing with the serpent in chapter three of the narrative. God understood that man needed some boundaries or limitations, thus He established some boundaries from the very beginning. These commands and boundaries from God were the first laws, which would be developed further in time.⁶⁴

Live Forever

At last we have come to the final component of God’s original intentions for the creation of humanity. God desired for mankind to live forever with Him. Man was able to live forever by eating the fruit from a particular tree. The Tree of Life is first mentioned in 2:9. Its name is self explanatory. The Hebrew is formed by a construct chain. The word for “tree” is *’êts* and the word for “life” is *hay*.⁶⁵ Since the words form a genitive construct chain, we render it “tree of life.” Our bodies were not to have disease or decay because the Tree of Life and its fruit was readily accessible. The fruit from this tree was essentially the antidote to any sickness or decay Adam and Eve’s bodies might otherwise have experienced.

How do we discern this? First, death is not mentioned anywhere in Genesis 1-2 with one exception. In 2:17, God declares that if man eats from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that he would die. This could imply that one would not die otherwise. Remember that

⁶² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

⁶³ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46.

⁶⁴ Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 579.

⁶⁵ Holladay, 101, 279.

humans were to live in harmony with all the other creations. There was no fear of wild beasts that might kill them and they had plenty of food in the garden so there was no fear of starvation either. While one could argue that the text does not rule out the possibility of death in Genesis 1-2 simply because the narrative does not address the issue; it certainly gives no indication that it was expected.

We have further clarification in Genesis 3. From the narrative, we learn that part of the reason for being exiled from the garden of Eden was to prevent man from being able to “put forth his hand and take also of the Tree of Life, and eat, and live forever” (Gen 3:22). Now the implications should be obvious. Mankind was supposed to live forever with God as He originally desired. All they had to do was eat the fruit from the Tree of Life. However, we know that was no longer possible after Adam and Eve sinned. Nevertheless, eternal life was part of God’s original, missional intention for the creation of humanity.

Conclusion

We explored Genesis 1-2 and have discovered what God’s original, missional intentions for the creation of humanity were based off of what we find in the narrative. First, we saw that we were made in God’s own image. So we had to learn the meaning of being made in God’s image and this encompassed what God’s fundamental intents were for our formation. We observed that being made in the image of God had to do with kingship and the task and function of ruling over the earth. This was of course democratized since not every human can be king. Instead, we are now His divine representatives here on earth to the rest of His creation. He also intended for us to be a participant in certain creative acts with him and continue to shape the way the world would be in the future. Closely tied to the first two was the responsibility to care for the earth

and its creatures. Humans were to cultivate the ground and keep it (2:15). Part of humanity's mission was to serve God in this way, not only out of obedience, but out of love for the creator. This was a way to honor God by caring for what He loves.

We also observed that another one of his purposes for creating mankind was for them to be relational. God wanted to be in an intimate relationship with humans. This relationship is different from the relationship that He has with his other creations. Additionally, God wanted man to be relational with one another as well as with the other creatures of the world as we mentioned above. He designed us to live in community with one another rather than isolation. Furthermore, we discussed how man and woman were initially supposed to interact with each other and how they were unashamed of being intimate and naked with each other.

Then, we also saw how blessing was associated with creation initially. God blessed them and then commanded the humans to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth" (1:28). God's blessing helped them fulfill this command. In addition, God created the humans to be able to reproduce with one another. This was part of His primary purposes for making us as He did. He wanted us to procreate and then spread across the earth.

Next, we learned that from the moment of creation, man was intended to have boundaries and limitations placed on him. Man was never supposed to simply do whatever he wanted. On the contrary, humanity was created for a purpose as we noted above. Man was to be obedient to God's commands whether there were a few laws or many.

Finally, the idea that man was supposed to live forever was discussed. Humanity was originally able to eat of the Tree of Life and not be susceptible to disease or decay. Death was

not an evitable end for the first humans. Immortality was part of God's overall purpose for humanity's creation.

Now as we sum up, it should be clear to the reader that God intended mankind to be something special and different from all His other creations. Humans are related to all of God's creatures in some way, but not in the way many people believe. The earth and all that is in it was not created to satisfy man's needs alone. On the contrary, while humanity's needs were met from the other creations, mankind had to do its part for the rest of creation as well so that the earth might grow and thrive as God intended for all. These original, missional intentions discussed throughout this chapter, were God's initial goals and purposes for creating humankind. He created humanity with a specific mission in mind. Unfortunately, we know that things went awry beginning in chapter three of Genesis. We will examine this in our next chapter. However, as we search the rest of the Bible we discover that God had a plan of redemption to get humanity back to these original intentions of His, beginning with the call of Abram which will be explored in chapter four of this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

GENESIS 3-11 GOD'S ORIGINAL, MISSIONAL INTENTIONS TRANSFORMED

Introduction

While God's original, missional intentions for the creation of humanity, as mentioned in the previous chapter, were supposed to last forever for the benefit of all the creatures of the earth including humans, we learn that unfortunately these intentions began to unravel beginning in chapter three of Genesis. "The creation, which exists only because of and for the sake of the creator's purpose, has freedom to respond to the creator in various ways."⁶⁶ As we will soon learn from the narrative, humanity responds at times in a positive manner with "faithful obedience" and yet at other times in a negative manner by choosing their own will over God's.⁶⁷ "Genesis 3-11 focuses on the transformation of God's mission to take account for the profound tragedy of humanity's turn away from God."⁶⁸

Let us briefly highlight some of the main events of this pericope. "The Fall" as it has become known, occurs in chapter three where Adam and Eve disobey God with far reaching consequences.⁶⁹ While Genesis 1-2 have elucidated how and why "humans have an intimate relationship with the earth, the animals, with each other as sexual partners, and especially with God; Genesis 3:1-7 continues the etiological interests by narrating how all of these relationships

⁶⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 13.

⁶⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 13.

⁶⁸ Russell, 2.

⁶⁹ For an alternative to seeing the first transgression of Adam and Eve as "the fall" see Arnold, 62.

changed dramatically from their original intentions.”⁷⁰ Things do not get any better when their son, Cain, kills his brother Abel in 4:8. Cain commits a “premeditated murder” because of his anger over God preferring Abel and his offering over him and his offering.⁷¹ Actually the state of affairs on earth gets progressively worse that in time God has to essentially start over because the wickedness has become too great (6:5). God decides to flood the entire earth to cleanse it from all the evil. However, the narrative tells us that corruption still resides in the hearts of man (8:21), further confirmed by Noah’s own son dishonoring him (9:19-29) and the builders of the Tower of Babel disobeying God (11:1-9). This is obviously a short description of the events of Genesis 3-11, but it gives us an idea as to how far things have come since the Garden of Eden.

Recall from our previous chapter that God originally intended humanity to (1) rule over the earth like a king or as a representative, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. This was their mission. In this chapter we will discuss how each of these intentions was undone by humanity.

Image of God

Humans were still created in the image of God, but they no longer behaved as God intended beginning with the scene with the serpent. While called to be the image of God here on earth and to fulfill all of the purposes that the Lord had for them, the first man and woman chose to try to circumvent God’s desires for them and sought to follow their own wills. The humans suddenly longed to be like God and wanted their eyes to be opened instead of trusting God to

⁷⁰ Arnold, 62.

⁷¹ Overland, Paul B. “Cain.” *DOTP*, 109.

know what is in their best interest (3:5).⁷² It was no longer enough to merely be God's representative on earth. These transgression while not obliterating, do cause the image of God in humanity to be "blurred."⁷³

"As far as knowledge of good and evil is concerned, one must remember that the Hebrew *yad* ('to know') never signifies purely intellectual knowing, but in a much wider sense an 'experiencing,' a 'becoming acquainted with,' even an 'ability.'"⁷⁴ In an ancient context, "good and evil" was "understood more as what is 'beneficial' and 'salutatory' on the one hand and 'detrimental' or 'damaging' on the other."⁷⁵ So for Eve the serpent was proposing that the fruit offered more than simply increased knowledge; instead it was more the ability to decide for themselves what was beneficial and what would be harmful for them without the help of God. This "knowing" would allow them to no longer rely on God for their well being and protection. "What the serpent's insinuation means is the possibility of an extension of human existence beyond the limits set for it by God at creation, an increase of life not only in the sense of pure intellectual enrichment but also of familiarity with, and power over, mysteries that lie beyond man."⁷⁶ In eating of the fruit, they chose to ignore the mission that they were created for in the first place.

We will see this reoccur over and over again in some form or another as we move through Genesis. Humanity was unable to keep its focus on God and His missional purposes for it and thus, was easily swayed into disobedience. Let us further explore how each of God's

⁷² Russell, 18.

⁷³ Merrill, Eugene H. "Image of God." *DOTP*, 444.

⁷⁴ Von Rad, Gerhard. *Genesis* (Philadelphia: the Westminster Press, 1972), 89.

⁷⁵ Von Rad, 89.

⁷⁶ Von Rad, 89.

original, missional intentions was unraveled, beginning with the call to be His royal representative and rule over the earth.

Rule Over the Earth-Royal Representative

In Genesis 1:26, recall that man was instructed to “have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” Additionally, 1:28 states that humanity was to “have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air.” Some translations use “rule over,” which also gives the idea of a kingly function. In our previous chapter, we mentioned that God did not really intend for each person to be a king, rather that role was democratized. It should be noted that the command to “subdue should not be equated with unjust dominance or abuse.”⁷⁷ Part of every human’s mission was to be the Lord’s representative here on earth.

Now, if humans are supposed to be God’s representative or ambassadors, being made in the image of God, they should be ruling over and having dominion over the earth and all its creatures. However, at some point after creation, this intention of God’s was thwarted. Beginning in 3:1, we see that the serpent was so crafty that he eventually got Eve to believe that there would be nothing wrong with eating the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Eve no longer had dominion over this creature if it was able to deceive her. It states, “She took of its fruits and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate (3:6).” In reality, both were deceived and ate of the fruit; thus, forfeiting their dominion over the serpent.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Russell, 14.

⁷⁸ While the text does not explicitly indicate that Adam was present as the serpent was speaking, he also choose to eat of the fruit either way. Russell interprets the text as indicating clearly that Adam was there, but he remained silent. See Russell, 18.

It should be noted that while later progressive revelation has viewed the serpent as none other than Satan himself, there is no indication of that specifically within the Genesis text.⁷⁹ The text merely indicates that it was “more subtle than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made” (3:1). So while more subtle or crafty, it was still just another wild animal to the first humans. Eve and Adam were supposed to have dominion over these creatures. Humanity was to “rule over” these beasts, in harmony yes, but “rule over” them nonetheless.

As we follow the narrative we learn that God, of course, finds out after Eve and her husband eat of the fruit. He must take action and dole out the consequences for their disobedience. Part of the consequences or curses is that there will now be “enmity between you (the serpent) and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (3:15).⁸⁰ Up to this point there is no indication that there was ever any trouble between humanity and the creatures of the earth. We will look at other aspects of the curses as we discuss how God’s other intentions were undone.

In addition, as we shall discuss later on humans now will face death and will return to the dust of the ground. In reality this actually “suggests that the earth will subdue the man as much as vice versa.”⁸¹ Humanity’s call to subdue the earth and all that is within it has been drastically altered. No longer were they fulfilling their mission to rule over the earth as an ambassador for the Lord.

⁷⁹ Arnold, 69.

⁸⁰ Genesis 3:15 has been interpreted by some to “the first good news” and has been labeled by many as the protevangelium; this interprets the verse as refers to Christ as the woman’s seed who will have victory over the serpent, Satan. However, Arnold feels that is not the intention, yet is “an attractive appropriation of these words to find their fullest meaning (*sensus plenior*) in a future member of the human race destroying the serpent as part of God’s redemptive plan.” See Arnold, 69.

⁸¹ Turner, Laurence A. “The Book of Genesis.” *DOTP*, 353.

Creative Participant with God

God's second original, missional intention for the creation of humanity was for them to be a creative participant with Him in certain creative acts. We saw evidence of this when He allowed Adam to name the animals just as God named his other creations. The ability to procreate was further substantiation of this aim. As with the other purposes, this one was transformed in Genesis 3-11.

While God did not create any new creations for Adam to name after Genesis 2, we do see the naming of offspring. It was not just men that named the offspring, but women as well. For instance, Eve named both Cain and Seth (4:1, 25). This particular aspect of this purpose does not change much in the narrative.

However, an aspect that does change is in regards to procreation. For the first time there is something hindering a woman's ability to bear children. In 11:30, we learn that a woman named Sarai is barren (we will learn more about her in the next chapter). Up until this point there is no indication that there was anything that would prevent this natural cycle of life.⁸² "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth" was the command to both Adam and Noah (1:28, 9:1). Yet at some point, there are now hindrances to this ability to multiply. It may not be wide spread, but it is still there nonetheless.

From Caretakers to Laborers

Now let us remember that part of the original intents for humanity's creation was so that they could be caretakers of the earth. Humanity was God's solution to His problem of having no one to cultivate the earth. Part of mankind's mission was to "till it and keep it" (2:15). This was not

⁸² Arnold, 128.

a punishment; it was simply part of being made in the image of God. This was part of their job description.

However, in the Garden of Eden, when Adam would till and keep the earth, it would reward him for his work with more plants without hard strenuous labor. After Adam and Eve transgressed against God and ate of the forbidden fruit, they were cursed and exiled from the Garden of Eden. Note the transition from the blessing that was prevalent in Genesis 1-2 and now the cursing instead. Part of the curse for Adam was in relation to the ground, “in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground...” (3:17-19a). Obviously, if this had always been the state of affairs then it would not have been a curse for Adam. We can conclude that prior to being cursed, the ground did not make him labor with such toil to produce food. This punishment of “man’s strikes at the innermost nerve of his life: his work, his activity, and provision for sustenance.”⁸³ Consequently, all humans following Adam and Eve live under the same curses that were given; humanity will continue to have the relationship between itself and the creatures of the earth and the earth itself strained.

Further evidence of this missional purpose being nullified comes after Cain had killed his brother, which we will look at further in the next section so we touch on only make a few relevant comments here in regards to how this drama relates to humanity’s charge to be caretakers of the earth. In 4:2, we see that the work of mankind to “till and keep” the earth has

⁸³ Von Rad, 94.

been divided (2:15). We see this when we discover that Abel is a “keeper of sheep” and Cain is a “tiller of the ground” (4:2). Now there is a distinction among men in their vocation.⁸⁴

Another aspect of this story to note is that the Lord curses Cain from the ground; when he tries to till and cultivate the ground, “it shall no longer yield to him its strength” (4:12).⁸⁵ Instead, of being a caretaker and being able to nurture the earth and help cause it to spring forth with new life, there would be increased toil and labor.

Moving into Genesis 6, we discover that corruption upon the earth has gone to such a high level that God must act to cleanse the earth and start over. Humanity has forsaken their call to be caretakers of the earth and be in right relationship with God and His other creations. As a result of the wickedness of man, the Lord decides to remove not only man from the earth but every “beast and creeping things and birds of the air” (6:7). In 6:11-12, the narrator further clarifies that “the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. And God saw the earth, and behold, it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth.” A man named Noah was the sole human to find favor in God’s eyes (6:8). The Lord decides “to make an end of all flesh; for the earth is filled with violence through them; behold, I will destroy them with the earth” (6:13). All of the creatures of the earth would be destroyed, except for those that God instructs Noah to place on an ark, which he is to build in order to survive the flood. All of the plants and trees of the earth would also be destroyed; all as a direct result of the wickedness and corruption that mankind had produced. Humanity rebelled against

⁸⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 56.

⁸⁵ Though Adam’s punishment meant that he had to labor and toil to produce food from the ground, it could be done. The punishment of Cain was much more severe since the ground yield food for him. See McKeown, 42.

the missional purpose to be caretakers of the earth that they were originally created for in favor of living for themselves instead. This cost the earth and its creatures a high price—destruction.

Relationships Distorted

Next, let us examine the state of relationships beginning in chapter three of Genesis. First, however remember that God intended for mankind to live in harmonious relationship with Him, with each other, with the other creatures of the earth, and the earth itself. Unfortunately, these relationships become distorted into something that was not part of God’s original intent.

With the Earth

We already mentioned in the last section that after Adam was cursed, mankind would no longer be in harmony with the earth. He would have to labor and toil in order to bring forth the fruit of the ground. This was further evidenced when Cain was cursed of the ground. So the relationship between humanity and the earth was radically changed to the detriment of both.

With Each Other

Now taking a closer look at the text of 3:7-13, we immediately see that things are not so harmonious any more for Adam and Eve either. After partaking of the fruit, Adam and Eve both realized or became aware of their nakedness; they had lost their innocence and now were ashamed (3:7).⁸⁶ The word used in 3:7 for naked is ‘*êrummîm*. Up to this point in the narrative, recall that they were naked, yet they were unashamed of it (2:25). The Hebrew word used in 2:25 is an unexpected form for naked, ‘*ārûmmîm*. It was meant to be part of a word play concerning the serpent’s shrewdness. The word used for shrewd or crafty is ‘*ārûm*. So in 2:25

⁸⁶ McKeown, 35.

the couple had shameless innocence in their nakedness. Yet now in a way they became “shrewd themselves” or in other words “shamefully naked.”⁸⁷ From this point forward, humanity would no longer be able to be this open with one another. They would feel the need to cover and hide themselves. God even recognizes this and lovingly gives them garments of skin in order to cloth themselves after leaving the Garden of Eden (3:21).

Also, when God questions Adam about who told him about his nakedness and if he had eaten of the forbidden fruit, Adam immediately points his finger at Eve (3:11-12). He does not hesitate or even try to accept responsibility for his part in this debacle. Essentially, he throws Eve under the proverbial bus. In fact, in a way Adam even tries to shift the blame to God as well as Eve when he states “The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate” (3:12). In other words, Adam believes in a way it was God’s fault for giving this woman to him because she is the one who gave him the fruit. Adam could have refused to eat of the fruit in the very least, if he was not there when Eve ate of it first. If Adam was there or nearby when Eve spoke with the serpent, then he could have told Eve not to do it. The text is not clear on whether Adam was present as Eve ate the fruit or whether he came later. Either way, the narrative gives no indication that Adam was forced to eat it. Yet, it was easier to blame someone else, anyone else, including God for the disobedience. This is a clear break down in relationship between husband and wife.

Their relationship will have further complications as God decrees the various punishments to the three culprits.⁸⁸ According to 3:16, Eve (and all women after her) will henceforth have pain in bearing children and yet her “desire” will be for her spouse and he will

⁸⁷ Arnold, 66.

⁸⁸ While Adam and Eve had severe consequences for their transgression, only the serpent and ground were specifically cursed using that exact terminology. See McKeown, 36.

“rule over” her. This passage is where “male dominance appears” and comes as a direct result of the disobedience of both Adam and Eve.⁸⁹ “The oneness and equality between Adam and Eve” was destroyed seemingly beyond repair, for now the woman would desire “the old intimacy and harmony” with her husband, yet he would rule over her instead (3:16).⁹⁰ It was their sin that caused this change between them.

Besides the relationship of husband and wife being distorted, the relationship between all humans was affected as a result of sin. For example, after being exiled from the Garden of Eden we learn in chapter four that the couple had children. Two of their sons were Cain and Abel. The narrative goes from the horrible tragedy of being kicked out of the garden to shortly thereafter describing yet another devastating result of sin. Both of the sons gave offerings to the Lord, yet for some reason the Lord gave “no regard” to Cain’s offering, thus causing Cain to become angry (4:5). Even though God warned Cain about “mastering sin” lest it master him, Cain still killed his brother Abel (4:7-8). As a result of this atrocity, Cain was “cursed from the ground” and driven away from his family and from the face of God (4:11-14). The relationship Cain shared with his family was completely dismantled as well as his relationship with God severely damaged, which we will discuss further in a moment. This was surely not what God intended for his creation.

Since Cain was banished from his parent’s, he began a new family. In second half of chapter four of Genesis, we see the family of Cain contrasted with the family of Adam through Seth. Cain’s family “altered the institutions of God and disdained the value of life but at the

⁸⁹ Mickelsen, “An Egalitarian View,” 184.

⁹⁰ Mickelsen, “An Egalitarian View,” 184.

same time produced cities, music, and all types of implements for the good life.”⁹¹ One of Cain’s descendants, Lamech, takes for himself two wives (4:19). This was the first time in the Bible this occurs. Recall that God originally created one man and one woman to be joined as one flesh with each other. Furthermore, Lamech’s disdain for human life is demonstrated when he boasts of killing someone who wounded him and killing a boy simply for striking him (4:23). He takes it even further to exclaim that if Cain was avenged sevenfold, then he seventy-sevenfold (4:24). While Cain’s descendants transform God’s institution of marriage and blatantly disdain the value of life, they are also developing a society and culture, albeit one that is away from God. After giving birth to a son named Enoch, Cain builds a city and names it after his son (4:17). If we look back at Cain’s curse from God, “he was condemned to be a ceaseless wanderer in the earth.”⁹² Therefore, this act of building a city appears to be an act of defiance against God. Cain and his descendants go against God’s purposes for their lives and seek only to fulfill their own passions and desires. We see this through cultural advances which were created and intended to bring them “enjoyment and convenience” over against any sort of worshipful acts toward God.⁹³ One of Cain’s descendants was the “father of all those who play the lyre and pipe” and yet another was a “forger of all implements of bronze and iron” (6:21-22).

Similar to the announcement back in 4:1 of the birth of Cain, 4:25 announces God’s provision once again for Adam and Eve. Eve born another son, and called him Seth, exclaiming that, “God has appointed me another offspring in place of Abel; for Cain killed him” (4:25). Eve

⁹¹ Ross, 166.

⁹² Ross, 166.

⁹³ Ross, 167.

is demonstrating her faith in God with this name as it is both a reminder of the awful tragedy over the loss of her son Abel, yet at the same time it offers hope of a new beginning.⁹⁴

In fact, a new beginning does occur as Seth fathers Enosh and then, “men began to call upon the name of the Lord” (4:26). This is the first reference to the worship of God.⁹⁵ Some who traced their heritage back to Seth began to proclaim the Lord. This began with Eve’s faith in God for the provision and hope for another offspring.

So we discover that while there were people on the earth that were away from God and focused on their desires and their pursuit of more affluence, there were some through the line of Seth that were focused on spiritual things and began to proclaim the Lord while seeking to fulfill his missional purposes in the world. It should be noted that this passage does not necessarily mean that all of Cain’s descendants were wicked and that all of Seth’s descendants were righteous followers of God.

Let us move on now to another example of people giving up on their missional purpose, we come to the Tower of Babel incident. The people disregarded God’s command to fill the earth. They instead wanted to make a name for themselves by erecting a tower in the city they had built. They feared being scattered across the earth, but this is exactly what God wanted them to do (11:4). When God saw their rebellion, He went down and confused their language and scattered them across the earth (11:7-8). Previously all the people of the earth shared one language, but no more. Humanity would now find it even harder to relate to one another unless they spoke the same language.

⁹⁴ Ross, 169.

⁹⁵ It would have been important to identify God as the creator early on given the polytheistic context of the world at the time. See McKeown, 44.

With God

In regards to God's relationship with humanity, the sin that was committed by Adam and Eve sabotaged the relationship. As we follow the narrative and discover that Adam and Eve both ate of the fruit of Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil because it was "good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise" (3:6). In other words, they wanted to be like God, having His wisdom. As we discussed in an earlier section, the temptation was beyond merely simple knowledge of "good and evil;" it was an enticement to gain the knowledge and ability to choose what is beneficial and good or what is harmful or damaging for oneself.⁹⁶ Thus, they would be alleviating the need for God's guidance, provision and protection. "God and God's creation are bound in a relation that is assured but at the same time is delicate and precarious."⁹⁷ Unfortunately, both Eve and Adam give in to the temptation and disobey God. Immediately, their eyes were opened and the dynamics of all their relationships were changed (3:7). This transformation in how they relate to God is first evident in 3:8, when now the couple was afraid of the Lord and actually hid from Him. Fear was not a part of their relationship with God up until this point.

Once the sin is discovered, it would be easy to assume as one reads through the narrative that God would immediately cause Adam and Eve to die as a result of their sin. Yet they do not die (right then), they are cursed and forced to leave the garden. However, God does not completely give up on them. He even gives them the animal skins to cover their nakedness, rather than leave them exposed to the elements (3:21). It is "not that God and humans can no longer converse, but rather the difficulty that the human heart and mind can have in genuinely

⁹⁶ Von Rad, 89.

⁹⁷ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 27.

trusting God as a wise creator and living accordingly.”⁹⁸ God is still relational with them; it is just now there is not the intimacy and trust that was there previously.

As we mentioned in a previous paragraph, Adam’s son, Cain, and his actions further threatened God’s purposes for humanity; not only disrupting the family unit but his relationship with God was jeopardized as well. Yet again, we see that God is still not quite ready to give up on Cain. However, He must do something. Beyond the issue of the brother’s doomed relationship, is how God must relate to Cain and the cry of his brother’s blood.⁹⁹ Cain was cursed from the ground and exiled from his home and family (4:11-12). Although Cain was exiled, God chose to protect him by placing a sign on Cain that spoke of vengeance to be taken out on anyone who killed Cain (4:15). The Lord did not have to do this; he could have left him to fend for himself.

The narrative continues after Cain and enters the story of Noah and the flood; conditions between God and humankind are stretched to the point of no return. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually” (6:5). As a result, God “was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart” (6:6). This thoroughly sinful state of man and his heart, made God decide that He had to cleanse the earth and get rid of man’s wickedness by flooding the earth. The Lord was “sorry” that He had even created humanity, with the exception of Noah, whom actually “found favor in the eyes of the Lord” (6:7-8).

⁹⁸ R. W. L. Moberly. *Old Testament Theology, The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 86.

⁹⁹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 56.

The relationship between God and all of humanity, except for Noah and his family, was destroyed in the flood, as everyone perished on the earth that was not in the ark that God had commanded Noah to build. The people of the earth had fallen so far away from what God originally intended them to be here on the earth. No longer did they represent God and seek to fulfill His original mission for their creation. Therefore, God chose to begin anew after the flood with Noah.

Looking back at the naming of Noah in the genealogy of chapter five, we see that his father Lamech proclaims of Noah, “Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands” (5:29). The hope was to have relief from the curse.¹⁰⁰ Through Noah and his efforts, which were directed by God, the Lord would restore his creation after the flood. The judgment was complete and recreation began with Noah. He was blessed by God and again we hear the command, “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (9:1). The Lord also establishes a covenant with Noah and all his descendants, which would be everyone on the earth now, as well as with every living creature (9:9-10). He vows never to destroy the earth with a flood again (9:11). A rainbow will henceforth be the sign of this covenant. God’s recreation and restoration has begun.

Unfortunately, the flood was not successful in ridding the hearts of mankind from evil intent. This is evidenced by Noah’s own son, Ham, disrespecting his father and leaving his nakedness exposed. As a consequence for Ham’s actions, the narrative proclaims a curse on Canaan, the son of Ham.¹⁰¹ Canaan would be a servant to his brothers (9:25). So again we are back to the cursing, though this time it was by Noah.

¹⁰⁰ Ross, 176.

¹⁰¹ This is the first time in Genesis when a human utters a curse on someone else. See McKeown, 65.

The evil intent of humanity's heart is further demonstrated with the Tower of Babel story. The issue with this people group was not that they found a place to settle. It was that they were "interested in a strong alliance and in fame."¹⁰² The people were interested in making a name for themselves (11:4). They were concerned about being scattered all over the earth (11:4). However, this should not have been an issue since God actually intended for humanity to spread out and "fill" the earth (1:28). This is part of God's original, missional intentions. Instead, the builders sought to be self-reliant. In seeing their tower, God knew that now humanity will believe that there is nothing "impossible for them" (11:6). Essentially, this was an act of "rebellion against God."¹⁰³ In light of this, God decided to confuse their language and scatter them across the earth (11:7-9). The scattering was not a punishment; it was part of God's original intention for them to fill the whole earth. The confusion of the languages, however, was a punishment as now they cannot all communicate with one another as before. "In the final narrative of 11:1-9 the last state of pre-Israelite humanity is *lo'-shema*,' "they did not listen" (11:7).¹⁰⁴ This is how the narrative leaves humanity as the rest of chapter eleven deals with genealogy. What hope is there for God's creation? We will cover this topic in the next chapter.

Moberly accurately proposes that "in the primary relationships between the man and God, and between the man and the woman, elements of alienation and estrangement have come in and have, as it were, poisoned the well."¹⁰⁵ As we have just demonstrated, this theme of estrangement from God and from each other seems to keep reoccurring throughout Genesis 3-11. The only instances of a right relationship between God and a human that occur in 3-11 are that of Noah, Enoch and some of Seth's descendants. As we already learned, Noah was the only one to

¹⁰² Von Rad, 148.

¹⁰³ Von Rad, 149.

¹⁰⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 18.

¹⁰⁵ Moberly, R. W. L., *Old Testament Theology*, 84.

find favor in God's eyes just before the flood and he did as God instructed him; he was to build and ark and then to enter it. Noah was obedient in all that he was called to do.

Though he is only mentioned briefly with not much expounding, Enoch was also an example of someone who walked with God.¹⁰⁶ While the circumstances surrounding the event are not discussed in detail, we do learn that Enoch not only walked with God but that God took him (5:24). "Enoch offers a solution to the transgression and violence that has marred God's creation; that is, a life with God that somehow transcends life and death itself."¹⁰⁷ These examples are essentially the only three illustrations (and Enoch is very brief and implicit) of humans living out their God given mission.

With Other Creatures

Another facet of humanity's relationships that was affected by sin was that of God's other living creations and humanity. Beginning with the serpent, there is now enmity between the serpent and Eve and Eve's seed (3:15). Further evidence of this new dimension of mankind's relationship with other creatures comes in chapter nine, after the flood. God proclaims that "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every bird of the air, upon everything that creeps on the ground and all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you... (9:2-3)." Remember that in Genesis 1-2, the animals lived in harmonious relationship without fear of humans; they were God's representatives and caretakers of the earth. Now there is fear and terror. Additionally, the animals become food for the humans at this point; thus, brutalizing the "human-animal

¹⁰⁶ This Enoch is a descendant of Seth and is a clear distinction to the Enoch from Cain's lineage who was connected to the building a city. The two lines of descent are in contrast with one another. See McKeown, 46.

¹⁰⁷ Arnold, 88.

relations.”¹⁰⁸ Previously, humanity was only given the green plants to eat. This is a sharp change of direction in this relationship.

Blessings & Fruitfulness Hindered

Recall that another of God’s missional purposes for the creation of humanity was for them to “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth” (1:28). God blessed them in order to make this possible beyond normal capability. However, as we have already been discussing, things went severely wrong. After the first couple ate of the forbidden fruit, God had to pronounce curses instead of blessing (3:14-19). This was not what God wanted or desired to do, but He was left with no choice; He had to issue the consequences for their disobedience and their denial of their mission.

However, though Adam and Eve had sinned, God does not completely disregard them. Instead, He still maintains a relationship with them; though it is drastically altered from what it was before. The couple began to fulfill their purpose of filling the earth, when God blesses them with two sons, Cain and Abel. While we already previously discussed how the relationship of the two brothers ended, what is important here is that humanity has begun to populate the earth. Even after the death of Abel and Cain’s banishment, Eve bears another son, Seth.¹⁰⁹ Though only these three sons are named, the text states that Adam had “other sons and daughters” (5:4). It is also noteworthy that transformation from blessing to cursing seems to continue. Again as we mentioned already, Cain was cursed after he murdered his brother.

While we do see some instances of God blessing people still in this pericope, now there seems to be a prominence of cursing or judgment. The judgment of the flood for the wickedness of the people of the earth is yet another example of this.

¹⁰⁸ Turner, Laurence A. “The Book of Genesis.” *DOTP*, 354.

¹⁰⁹ As we noted above, Seth’s lineage is in clear contrast to Cain’s lineage and their actions.

An additional aspect of the transformation of this missional purpose to be fruitful and multiply is revealed when we learn that a woman named Sarai is barren or without child as we learned in a previous section (11:30). This is the first occurrence of barrenness in the Bible. This demonstrates that something could prevent a woman from bearing children, though we are not given the specifics at this time in the narrative. We do not know if it was an illness in her body or something else that prevents it, we simply learn that she is barren.

Boundaries or Limitations Crossed

Having set boundaries or limitations that were designated by God was established from the time of humanity's initial creation. In the garden, God gave them the command to not eat of the fruit of Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They were permitted to eat of any other plant or tree, just not that one. However, as we have already discovered the boundary set by God was questioned and then disregarded. As Brueggemann calls it, "the prohibition which seemed a given is now scrutinized as though it were not a given but an option."¹¹⁰ We have discussed previously the details of the account of Adam and Eve's disobedience so we will not recount them here. It is simply important to note that this was merely the first incidence of humanity disregarding boundaries set by God and acting in open defiance.

Again, we mentioned that Cain also went against God's set boundaries. Obviously it was known to Cain that murder was wrong or he would not have done it secretly. In fact, God warned him to be careful of the sin that was trying to master him.

¹¹⁰ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 47.

Additionally, humanity was obviously disregarding God's plan before the flood. Humankind had become so wicked that God was forced to destroy the whole earth. This is definitely an example of God's creation going beyond the boundaries that were set for it.

No Longer Live Forever

Recall that the final one of God's missional intents was for humanity to live forever. They were to be free of sickness and decay. This was possible through access to the Tree of Life in the garden. While death was mentioned back in 2:17 in regards to a result of eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, it was not considered a major issue or threat. It was not until chapter 3 when death became "a primary human agenda" as a result of the curses for their disobedience.¹¹¹ Now this facet of humanity's purpose was thwarted. Death has entered the picture in a glaring way. Henceforth there will be a "real deathliness that hovers over us and gnaws within us" that we as humans cannot escape.¹¹²

As we noted previously, the expectation would be that after Eve and Adam partake of the forbidden fruit that they would immediately die. However, this is not the case. It appears as some scholars argue that the couple die a spiritual death and are separated from God and later will die a physical death. There is no longer the closeness or the intimacy that was there previously between God and the humans. While the narrative at first leaves us wondering why they did not immediately die, we discover that God has something else in mind. The fact that death is now imminent is evident when the Lord proclaims to Adam that he will one day return to the ground, since from it he was taken; God states, "you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (3:19). This fact is further solidified when God announces that they are exiled from Eden to

¹¹¹ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 48.

¹¹² Brueggemann, Walter. *The Prophetic Imagination*. 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), 46.

prevent them from partaking of the Tree of Life and being able to live forever (3:22). The Hebrew word, *ḥāyay*, means to live and *‘ôlām*, means always, eternally. This clearly indicates that the exile was to keep the humans from eternal life.

Death is now a concern for humanity. Additionally, when we examine Genesis chapter five, we find a recurrence of death. The phrase “and he died” is repeated eight times in this chapter. “Death reigned from Adam’s time on through the generations.”¹¹³

Conclusion

In conclusion, the pericope of Genesis 3-11 attests to the transformation of God’s original, missional intentions for the creation of humanity. Recall that humanity was intended to be the image of God and (1) rule over the earth like a king, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. These were the missional purposes for which mankind was designed. While we see a few instances of this being lived out, the majority of the narrative seems to depict people who are transforming these intents for their own desires instead. Many times through Genesis 3-11 we see humanity become “stridently disobedient, proud, and alienated. That is clear of the first man and woman (3:1-7), of Cain (4:1-16), of the world in the flood narrative (6:5-13), and of the nations in the tower narrative (11:1-9).”¹¹⁴

However, even though the overwhelming amount of sin that occurs in 3-11 may seem hopeless, there are a few glimmers of hope as we follow the narrative. For instance, Noah is faithful and obedient to the Lord and it was said that he would bring the people “relief from their work and from the toil of their hands” (Gen. 5:29). After the flood, Noah offered up burnt

¹¹³ Ross, 171.

¹¹⁴ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 19.

offerings to the Lord, which were pleasing to the Lord; and God said that he would “never again curse the ground on because of man, for the imagination of man’s heart is evil from his youth, neither will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease” (Gen. 8:21-22). God guaranteed that regardless of the evilness of mankind, He would allow the natural order of the earth and life to continue.¹¹⁵ He went further and even made a covenant with Noah promising that He would not flood the earth ever again. Enoch was another man who worshipped the Lord. Scripture says that he walked with God and then simply that “he was not” because God had taken him (5:24). Additionally, some of Seth’s descendants “began to call on the name of the Lord” (4:26). These are a few positive elements in the midst of all the compounding negative results of humanity’s sinfulness that are continually brought to light in Gen. 3-11.

While there are glimmers of hope, the profound effect of the narrative of 3-11 is that humanity is sinful and desires to fulfill its own passions instead of living for God’s mission. Yet “the creator continues to address the creation, calling it to faithful response and glad obedience to His will. The creation has not been turned loose on its own. It has not been abandoned. Nor has it been given free rein for its own inclinations.”¹¹⁶

However, at the end of chapter 11 we are left without resolution to the problem of humanity’s rebellion against God’s original intentions for them. The Lord’s desire is for mankind to return to a willful obedience to Him, this is not in question. What is unknown is how will God bring them back in line with His original intentions for their creation? How will He

¹¹⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 19.

¹¹⁶ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 13.

call them back to their mission? This will begin to be answered beginning in chapter 12 with the call of Abram.

CHAPTER FOUR

GENESIS 12-50 GOD'S ORIGINAL, MISSIONAL INTENTIONS RESTORED

Introduction

Confusion... that is what we were left with at the end of chapter eleven. The people who built the tower had rebelled against God's missional intentions for them yet again. In Genesis 3-11 "we see the great creative mission of God being constantly thwarted and spoiled in ways that affect not just human well-being but the whole cosmos."¹¹⁷ What would God do now? This is the question we ask ourselves at the end of that narrative. "The Tower of Babel scene leaves readers with substantive gaps in their knowledge about the future, the most salient gap being the fate of the divine-human relationship. Have humans provoked Yahweh beyond hope of a sustainable relationship? Genesis 11:1-9 raises this question, but refrains from answering it."¹¹⁸ We are not left waiting for long for the answer.

Actually, we have the background information at the very end of chapter eleven in a genealogy; this section serves as an introduction for the material in the next chapter (11:26-32).¹¹⁹ Here we learn about a man named Abram and his wife Sarai, who was barren. Also, we observe Abram had brothers and that they had been on the move.¹²⁰ This is where the narrative picks up in chapter twelve. This is the man God will call to be set apart for Him and begin to work to bring about the return of humanity to His original mission for it. It is against this "backdrop" of barrenness that we see God make promises to Abraham in regards to his seed.¹²¹

¹¹⁷ Wright, 199.

¹¹⁸ Awabdy, Mark A. "Babel, Suspense, and the Introduction to the Terah-Abram Narrative." *JSOT*. Vol 35.1 (2010):3-29; 4.

¹¹⁹ Ross, 257.

¹²⁰ Ross, 258.

¹²¹ McKeown, 73.

Beginning with Abram, he and his descendants will be in covenant with God for the purpose of not merely being blessed themselves, but so that through them all the nations and families of the earth might be blessed (12:3). God intends to bring about restoration and realignment for humanity to its God given mission. The rest of Genesis narrows in on this man Abram and his family and provides the ancestral narratives for the nation of Israel. It traces Israel's lineage from Abram, Isaac, Jacob (later renamed Israel), and Jacob's twelve sons. The final chapters of Genesis focus on the story of one of Jacob's sons, Joseph. The nation of Israel discover from this narrative that their very existence "was by God's election" of Abram and his corresponding faithful response to God's call.¹²² The narrative focuses on God's dealings with this family and how he works to restore them to their mission. "Abram brings promises of land, descendants, and blessing together constituting a 'typological reversal of the primordial curses in Eden.'"¹²³ It should be noted that this family is not perfect and there are threats to God's plans along the way. The remaining books of the canon share how God continues to work with and through this family to bring humanity to restoration. His goal is redemption for all. Though beyond the scope of this study, God's plan includes and culminates in His Son, Jesus Christ, who is part of the lineage of Abram. It is only through "God's transforming grace" can humanity be brought back fully into alignment with God's original intents for it through believe in Jesus as God's son.¹²⁴

Let us remember that God's missional purposes for mankind were to (1) rule over the earth like a king or as a representative, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. We were created in God's image and as

¹²² Ross, 259.

¹²³ Arnold, 126.

¹²⁴ Russell, 15.

such are supposed to be His representatives here on earth and carry out our mission. However, as we learned from our last chapter, it was not that simple. Just allowing humanity to do as they please would not result in them fulfilling their mission. God had to come up with another answer. "The call of Abram may be understood as God's response to the dilemma created by the sin and evil that had become so pervasive among all the families of the earth."¹²⁵ In this chapter we will explore how God's original, missional intentions were beginning to be restored beginning with Abram and continuing on with his descendants. God desired for humanity to fulfill their mission and truly represent the image of God here on earth. The goal was to reclaim creation.

Since there is limited space in this study and Genesis 12-50 contains a vast amount of text, we will be selective rather than exhaustive with our examples in this section. We will mainly focus on examples and illustrations concerning Abraham and save further illustrations for a later, more in-depth work on the subject. It should also be noted that God changed Abram's and Sarai's names and henceforth this paper will refer to them using the names Abraham and Sarah respectively for the sake of simplicity.

The Call of Abraham

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; ² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; ³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." (Gen 12:1-3, NAS)

Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves." (Gen 12:1-3, RSV)

¹²⁵ Fretheim, *The New Interpreter's Bible*, 425.

Before we get into our discussion of how Abraham was used to bring humanity back to its original, missional intentions, let us first take a closer look at his call by God. The Hebrew imperative for “Go” is *lēk lēkā* and literally means “Go yourself” since it has a second person singular pronoun; thus, the imperative becomes “emphatic by the reflexive pronoun.”¹²⁶ Next, three phrases are headed by the preposition *min*, meaning from and emphasizes the separation that God requires of Abraham from his country, relatives or people, and his father’s house.¹²⁷ The only information about where he might be going, is simply that it is to “the land that I will show you” states the Lord (12:1). Abraham was to leave all that assured his safety and protection behind and rely of God instead. The strongest family bond of his father’s house was to be cut, but this “provided his own household’s socioeconomic viability” as well.¹²⁸ So God’s offer had to be extraordinary for him to consider this.

God promises to make Abraham into a great nation and bless him. Furthermore, He would make Abraham’s name great and that he would be a blessing. Recall that the Hebrew word for bless is *bārak* and in Genesis refers to benefits of either progeny or land typically. Once Abraham “went” then, God would do all the things that He promised to do. In order for Abraham to become a great nation that would mean that he would either have children to carry on his name or in the very least an heir that would carry it on. At this point in the narrative, God does not specify the “how,” only that He promises to do it. In the future, we will see that God is specific that Abraham will have a child of promise with his wife, Sarah.

¹²⁶ Matthews, K. A. *An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture; Genesis 11:27-50:26*. Vol. 1B in the New American Commentary. (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 109.

¹²⁷ While many scholars view Abraham’s call to leave his family positively since God is calling him to be set apart for Him; Henrietta Wiley views it negatively. She wrongly sees God’s promise of a new family as a “consolation family” and in the Abraham’s relationship with God only leaves him feeling deeply isolated and suffering loss. See Henrietta Wiley, “They Save Themselves Alone: Faith and Loss in the Stories of Abraham and Job.” *JOT* 34.2 (2009), 115-129.

¹²⁸ Matthews, 111.

Verse three provides some safeguards or assurance for Abraham if he is obedient. God declares, “I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse” (12:3a). Those who bless Abraham will receive a blessing from the Lord. However, the one who treats Abraham indifferently will be cursed. Notice the change from the plural “those” in the first part of the sentence to a singular “him” in the second part. Also the word translated as “curse” is actually two Hebrew words. The first “him who curses” is the rendering of the piel participle of *qālal*, which in “the piel stem carries a declarative sense, ‘to declare insignificant, to ridicule.’”¹²⁹ All of its “nominal occurrences in the Pentateuch” are juxtaposed with the idea of blessing. The second word is the more generally used Hebrew word for “curse.” Some scholars note the difference between the two words as “those who dare to treat Abram [Abraham] ‘lightly’ (*qālal*) will receive the greater weight of God’s ‘curse’ (‘*ārār*).”¹³⁰ Any person who shows contempt for Abraham or treats him and “his faith lightly will thus be removed from the place of blessing.”¹³¹

While 12:2d is non-specific beyond merely that Abraham “will be a blessing,” we have clarification in verse three. Of theological importance, is the phrase “And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:1-3, NAS). Notice that the RSV translation states, “bless themselves” as they render the niphāl form of the verb *nibrēkû* reflexively; which would imply that the families of the earth have to do something in order to make themselves blessed.¹³² The form permits both interpretations, and thus has led to disputes over the correct rendering. However, viewing it reflexively completely misses the theological implications that are present

¹²⁹ Matthews, 116.

¹³⁰ Matthews, 116.

¹³¹ Ross, 264.

¹³² See Moberly’s book, *Old Testament Theology, The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, pages 141-178 for a reflexive interpretation of the niphāl.

in this verse. If we view it as passive, “then 12:3 clearly articulates the final goal in a divine plan for universal salvation, and Abraham is the divinely chosen instrument in the implementation of that plan.”¹³³ Traditionally, the majority of scholars choose the passive translation as “shall/will be blessed.”¹³⁴ Assuming the passive translation, we see that Abraham was to “go” in order that “in you (him) all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (12:1, 3 NAS). This leads us back to God’s ultimate end goal, worldwide blessing and eventually redemption for the whole earth. “No one would find divine blessing apart from the blessings given through” Abraham and his descendants.¹³⁵ Abraham’s promise was universal in nature rather than being merely individual, with concern only for him and his descendants. This promise initiates “God’s agenda” for the redemption of humanity over against the successive acts of rebellion.¹³⁶ “Human history reaches a turning point with Abraham, as blessings instead of curses are emphatically promised.”¹³⁷ So the state of blessing has returned in contrast to the cursing from 3-11; yet we do see the potential threat of cursing remain for those that take Abraham lightly and thus are trying to thwart God’s plan for redemption of all the families of the earth.¹³⁸ The “motif of cursing” no longer has a “predominant role” and instead now the narrative focuses more on the “development of God’s resolution to bless.”¹³⁹

¹³³ Hamilton, Victor P. *The Book of Genesis Chapters 1-17*. NICOT (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1990), 374.

¹³⁴ Matthews, 116.

¹³⁵ Ross, 264.

¹³⁶ McKeown, 73.

¹³⁷ Alter, Robert. *Genesis—Translation and Commentary*. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc, 1996), 50.

¹³⁸ McKeown, 74.

¹³⁹ Ross, 253.

Rule Over the Earth as a Representative of God

Let us continue now by looking at specific ways God uses Abraham and his descendants to bring about His original, missional intentions once again. Representing God here on earth, humanity was to subdue the earth and rule over it. However, recall that now humanity was essentially to be ambassadors for God since we cannot all be kings. While there were kings on the earth in the time of Abraham, he was not one. Yet God was with him and enabled him to do what kings did for their people. For example, when various kings had rose up against each other, Abraham's nephew, Lot, was captured from Sodom. While other kings fled in defeat, Abraham, after getting news of his nephew's fate, gathered his trained men and took off after them. He defeated them and got Lot back, along with all the goods and possessions he had (14:16). Abraham acted as a representative of God here on earth by fighting for his family. God blessed him with a complete victory over foreign kings, and he "responded with loyalty and devotion to the God who promised" that he would become a great nation.¹⁴⁰

Afterward, the narrative states that Melchizedek, king of Salem and a priest of God Most High, came out to welcome Abraham back and bless him (14:18-19). Salem is believed to be the future location of Jerusalem.¹⁴¹ We also learn that Abraham gave him a tithe because he was a priest and represented God Most High.¹⁴² Abraham recognized him as a priest of God and a "spiritual brother."¹⁴³ Melchizedek is only mentioned here, in the Psalms and in the book of Hebrews. In the book of Hebrews chapters 5-7 he is mentioned a few times and connects Christ with him; we have "an interpretative recapitulation that further emphasizes both Melchizedek's

¹⁴⁰ Ross, 293.

¹⁴¹ Matthews, 148.

¹⁴² Some scholars believe that "God Most High" did not refer to the same God that Abraham believed to be the creator of heaven and earth. See Arnold's *Genesis* commentary for further explanation, p. 148-9.

¹⁴³ Ross, 294.

priesthood and the mystery that surrounds his person.”¹⁴⁴ For instance, Hebrews 5:6 speaks concerning Jesus when it states, “thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek.” It is interesting that we do not have more revelation in the book of Genesis concerning this order.

Also, the king of Sodom was there and told Abraham that he could have all the goods for himself, yet Abraham declared that he did not want any of it except a share for the men who went with him because he did not want anyone to say that they had made Abraham rich (14:23-24). His faith in God persuaded him “to refuse a share in the spoils of war,” which would have been very tempting for the average person.¹⁴⁵ Abraham recognized that “the blessings of God are infinitely expandable, and whatever Abram [Abraham] acquires will be by the hand of God...rather than at the expense of his neighbors in the Jordan Valley.”¹⁴⁶ He was acting as a representative of God and trusted God to prosper him as necessary and as God deems fit.

It was after these events that Abraham received the word of the Lord in a vision telling him not to fear, that God was his shield, and that his reward would be very great (15:1). Then, God promises to give him an heir from his own body, that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars and that he would possess the land which is before him (15:4-7). It was on that day that God made a covenant with Abraham.¹⁴⁷ Abraham or more specifically his descendants would possess the land. One aspect of the call for the “subjugation of the earth is transformed into the promise of land possession.”¹⁴⁸ This is partly how Abraham and his descendants of the covenant will fulfill God’s mission for them to subdue the earth. The promise of land possession is not fully fulfilled in Abraham’s life. However, we still have the promise and a small step in that

¹⁴⁴ Thomas, T.K. “Melchizedek, King and Priest; An Ecumenical Paradigm.” *Ecumenical Review* 52 no. 3 (July 1, 2000) 403-9; 405.

¹⁴⁵ Williamson, Paul R. “Abraham.” *DOTP*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Arnold, 149.

¹⁴⁷ See Genesis 15:9-21 for details of how God made the covenant and which animals were used.

¹⁴⁸ Turner, Laurence A. “The Book of Genesis.” *DOTP*, 354.

direction with possession of a well he has dug (21:30) and a tomb that he purchased (23:17-19).¹⁴⁹

Creative Participant with God

This particular intention for humanity of being a creative contributor with God is demonstrated by the fact that God still allows Abraham to name places. While he was not naming animals like in the Garden of Eden, naming places gives them significance. Such as after making an oath with Abimelech (see next section), Abraham calls the place “Beersheba, because there both of them swore an oath” (21:31). This section explains how Beersheba, which was mentioned earlier in the text, obtains its name.¹⁵⁰ Additionally, after this Abraham takes it a step further and plants a tamarisk tree at Beersheba and calls on the name of “the Everlasting God” (21:33). Planting is a creative action as well. Just as Adam would cultivate and plant new plants in the garden to take care of it and cause other to grow, here Abraham was planting a tree with the hope that it would grow for the Lord.

In addition, after God’s initial act of creating Adam and Eve, He fully expected humanity to procreate amongst themselves with His power being the ultimate initiation of life. We will not discuss this in detail here, but Abraham was supposed to create others with the help of God by having children that would be made in the image of God. However, he was not able to do this on his own due to Sarah’s barrenness and old age. It was so inconceivable that Sarah even laughed upon hearing the news of a forthcoming son from her womb. She was rebuked for her doubt in the promise.¹⁵¹ While perhaps unbelievable in the natural, it was God who enabled Abraham and

¹⁴⁹ Turner, Laurence A. “The Book of Genesis.” *DOTP*, 354.

¹⁵⁰ McKeown, 116.

¹⁵¹ Abraham laughed as well, though it was not received the same as Sarah’s and God does not pursue the issue with him (17:17). See Ross, 339.

Sarah to be able to fulfill this part of their mission to be a creative participant with God when He opened her womb in her old age.

Caretakers Once More

Next, let us discuss how God intended for humanity to be caretakers once more. While this theme of being caretakers of the earth is not hugely prevalent, we do see the instances where God blesses Abraham's flocks abundantly (13:2). His nephew Lot's flock grows tremendously as well, so much so that they have to separate because there is not enough pasture for all of them together (13:6).¹⁵²

Additionally, recall that in a previous section we discussed that Abraham's descendants would possess the land that God showed him (the land of Canaan). If they were to possess it, it would also be their job to take care of the land. They would be responsible for following God's commands unlike the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah whose wickedness caused God to rain down brimstone and fire upon them (19:24). They were not being responsible caretakers of the land. "This continues the theme that began with the curse on the ground as a result of Adam's sin: the welfare of the ground and its vegetation are adversely affected by the rebellion of human beings against God."¹⁵³ However, Abraham's descendants were expected to follow the will of the Lord and in doing so would keep the land safe unlike those in Sodom and Gomorrah.¹⁵⁴

Another example of Abraham caring for the land was when Abimelech asked him to "swear to me here by God that you will not deal falsely with me or with my offspring or with my

¹⁵² McKeown, 84.

¹⁵³ McKeown, 109.

¹⁵⁴ Though beyond the scope of our study, Isaac was the only one to remain in the land in the face of famine and as a result enjoyed "the fruits of great agricultural prosperity." See A. B. Luter and S. L. Klouda, "Isaac." *DOTP*, 446.

posterity, but as I have dealt loyally with you, you will deal with me and with the land where you have sojourned” (21:23). Abraham agreed to this and did as Abimelech asked. Abraham understood the importance of not only people, but of the land itself as well.

Relationships & Community Restored

The next original, missional intention of God for creating humanity was for us to be in community and be relational with Him, with each other, and with his other creations. In our last chapter we discovered how far things had come from the Garden of Eden. Humanity was so far away from God and His mission for them. God began with Abraham to redeem humanity and bring them back into right relationship with Him. This relationship will also now include worship, such as building altars to the Lord and calling upon His name.¹⁵⁵ God begins with a promise and it gets expanded upon as we go through the narrative of Genesis. While initially he only gets a word, after Abraham obeys and goes where God leads him, he gets an appearance of the Lord in 12:7. Here God reiterates the promise. Additionally, He makes an official covenant with Abraham in chapter fifteen. This covenant will continue and be the basis for the beginning of the nation of Israel’s claim to a special relationship with God. God also promised Abraham that He would have a son with his wife Sarah and that through this son his descendants would be as numerous as the “sand which is on the seashore” (22:17). An appearance by the Lord to Abraham, demonstrates the desired relationship that God wants to have with him. It occurs again in Genesis 17:1; 18:1; 26:2, 24; and 35:9. Abraham builds a new altar to the Lord after the Lord appeared to him; an act of worship and relationship (12:7).¹⁵⁶ Abraham’s response to

¹⁵⁵ Ross, 260.

¹⁵⁶ Arnold, 134.

“God’s confirming appearance was worship,” demonstrating a correct response to the Lord’s actions.¹⁵⁷

Obviously, we have already seen how God has a relationship with Abraham. He talks to him and has made promises and even a covenant with him. Promises made by God are not the same as ones made by humans who are prone to breaking them at times. A divine promise from God commits Him to do something and the recipient now has the hope and expectation that He will fulfill it. God does what He says He will do and the divine promises to Abraham will see repeated and continually reaffirm God’s commitment to Abraham and his descendants.¹⁵⁸ A further example of their closeness is evidenced by the dialogue concerning the fate of Sodom and Gomorrah. The wickedness of these two cities was great and God had every right to destroy them. Yet, Abraham is allowed to bargain for their fate and asks that they might be spared if there were at least fifty, twenty, and finally if only ten righteous people were found there (18:25-33). Unfortunately, these people could not be found, but the point was that God listened to Abraham. They had an intimate, close relationship with one another. It was this prior relationship and experiences with Abraham that caused God to decide to reveal his intentions concerning the two cities in the first place; thus presenting the opportunity for Abraham to be an intercessor for any righteous people in the cities.¹⁵⁹

In addition, we learn that Abraham was a prophet of God when God describes “him to King Abimelech of Gerar as a prophet, who can pray effectual prayers for Abimelech” (20:7).¹⁶⁰ Abraham receives the word of the Lord as the prophets in the rest of the Old Testament do. He

¹⁵⁷ Ross, 267.

¹⁵⁸ Alexander, T. Desmond. “Divine Promises.” *DOTP*, 661.

¹⁵⁹ Arnold, 181.

¹⁶⁰ Arnold, 153.

hears and obeys God and demonstrates his faithful obedience and right standing relationship with God.

Turning back to Abraham and Sarah now, after learning that they would have a son in their old age they did not believe that they could bear children together at such a time and thought perhaps Abraham should have relations with Sarah's handmaiden, Hagar. Ishmael is the son born of this relationship. However, God tells Abraham that the promise would be fulfilled through a son with Sarah, who will be named Isaac, rather than Ishmael. Isaac's birth not only demonstrated divine intervention to end Sarah's barrenness in her old age; it also evidenced to the fact that God honors the institution of marriage between one man and one woman, not a man, a woman, and a concubine. This was a common practice in the ancient near eastern context and some suggest that it was actually a duty of the wife to provide a female slave to her spouse if she was unable to bear children.¹⁶¹ However, this was not what God intended and it was "clearly displeasing" to the Lord.¹⁶² In reality, Abraham's having a child with Sarah's maidservant, Hagar, produced more trouble than good for the family; as eventually, Hagar and her son Ishmael would be sent away from Abraham's family.¹⁶³

Another example of right relationships restored is shown by Abraham offering to let Lot choose which way he wanted to go when he and Abraham had to separate because of the prosperity of their flocks.¹⁶⁴ Abraham states, "Let there be no strife between you and me, and between your herdsmen and my herdsmen; for we are kinsmen" (13:8). He could have been greedy and chosen the best lands for himself, yet he allowed Lot to choose those. This was a

¹⁶¹ Branch Robin G. "Sarah." *DOTP*, 734.

¹⁶² Merrill, Eugene H. "Ishmael." *DOTP*, 450.

¹⁶³ Of the three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, only Isaac "remains fully monogamous" even while faced with his wife's barrenness. See Luter and Klouda, 446.

¹⁶⁴ We can also see Abraham's separation from Lot as final fulfillment of God's call to separate from his father's house. See Dan Rickett, "Rethinking the Place and Purpose of Genesis 13." *JSOT* 36 (2011), 31-53.

“mature and sensitive move” on the part of Abraham.¹⁶⁵ He desired to have harmony in their relationship over against being greedy for the well watered lands in the direction that Lot took. This scene illustrates how faith can help overcome and dissolve strife.¹⁶⁶

Blessings Returned-Be Fruitful & Multiply, Fill the Earth

Recall that we learned at the end of Genesis 11 that Sarah was barren. This meant Abraham had no children and his heir would likely be someone else’s child. Immortality was believed to come by having children through which one might live on in the land of the living. The ancients believed that when you die you went to Sheol, which was essentially nothingness. Their only hope was to have children and more specifically a male heir or heirs to carry on the family name. Barrenness was not just a sad thing for a couple because they could not experience the joy of parenthood as we might think today. It went beyond this and jeopardized their future. Barrenness was a threat to their immortality.

As we follow the narrative we learn that the issue of immortality will be divinely overcome as God promises to Abraham that He “will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing” (12:2). This promise is taken a step further when Abraham learns that he will have a son through whom the promise will be fulfilled and it will not be his nephew Lot, Eliezer of Damascus, or his son Ishmael, which was born to him by Sarah’s maidservant.¹⁶⁷ Instead it would be a son that his wife Sarah would deliver and they were to name him Isaac (17:16-19). Isaac would be the one through whom the covenant would continue. Through him would come “the perpetuation of a special line of

¹⁶⁵ Boice, James M. *Genesis, A New Beginning Genesis 12-36*. Vol. 2 An Expository Commentary. (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998), 481.

¹⁶⁶ Ross, 280.

¹⁶⁷ It was assumed that Ishmael would be the heir until God clarifies and affirms that it would be a son born to Sarah (Isaac). See Luter and Klouda, 448.

Abrahamic descent from which would come a special nation, a line of kings and, ultimately, a royal individual through whom the promise of international blessing would be fulfilled.”¹⁶⁸

It is interesting to note that Genesis 22 presents what at first may seem to Abraham as a threat to the promise that the Lord made as God commands him to sacrifice his son, his only son, Isaac (22:2). While the narrator clarifies for the reader at the outset that this was merely a test, Abraham would not have known this.¹⁶⁹ He is obedient to do as God commands to the point of raising the knife to kill his son upon the altar, while still hoping that God will stop him or that in the very least He would bring his son back to life. With no indication of hesitation in the text, Abraham passes the test.¹⁷⁰ However this was not just “a test of Abraham’s readiness to take Isaac’s life only, but of his readiness to sacrifice his own life as well. Isaac’s future is Abraham’s immortality.”¹⁷¹ Fortunately, an angel of the Lord stops Abraham and instead a ram is discovered with its horns caught in a thicket that could be used for the sacrifice instead (22:13). Since Abraham proved his faith in God, the promise is once again reiterated and new components are added to it. Abraham is told that God will bless him and the Lord also declares, “I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies” (22:17).

Abraham now has Ishmael (though not a son of the covenant) who will become a great nation and Isaac who will continue the covenant. Additionally, we also find out after Sarah’s death that Abraham remarries to a woman named, Keturah, and has several more children in his

¹⁶⁸ Williamson, Paul R. “Abraham.” *DOTP*, 14.

¹⁶⁹ While Abraham knows what he must do, Isaac questions where the sheep for the offering is since they have the fire and the wood (22:7). Does Isaac intentionally avoid mentioning the foreboding knife? See R. Alter, *Genesis—Translation and Commentary*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1995), 105.

¹⁷⁰ Jonathan Jacobs attempts to show in contrast to the traditional view that the narrative uses subtle literary devices to hint at the doubts and apprehensiveness of Abraham as went on this journey. See Jonathan Jacobs, “Willing Obedience with Doubts: Abraham at the Binding of Isaac.” *Vetus Testamentum* 60 (2010), 546-559.

¹⁷¹ Arnold, 203-4.

old age (25:1-8). The significance of this is that Abraham is fulfilling God's command to be fruitful and multiply as did his descendants, yet these children were not counted as heirs to the covenant.¹⁷² However, the issue of barrenness continued as a theme through Genesis with Isaac's wife, Rebekah being barren as well as one of Jacob's wives, Rachel. In both instances, it was God's intervention and answer to prayer that enabled a child to be born, a child that would continue the promise and covenant with God. These examples "illustrate that God, the creator, is in control of human reproduction, and thus humans must depend upon God for their very being;" even if we are made in such a way as to be able to reproduce.¹⁷³ We must still maintain a right relationship with God.

Boundaries Restored, Expectations Remain

As we have discussed earlier, God gives people boundaries and eventually laws for their own good with their best interest at heart. Boundaries or laws were established from creation. This theme is carried forward in Abraham's life as well. For instance, though it is not explicit God tells Abraham that he will have a son from his own house, meaning one born from Abraham (15:4). Instead, of trusting God to help him and Sarah have a child, Abraham and Sarah at first waver in their faith and choose to use a custom of other ancient Near Eastern cultures which was to have a concubine have a son for you.¹⁷⁴ However, this was not God's way, recall He desires for it to be one man and one woman. God did not condone this sort of relationship and therefore does not choose to make the resulting child of this relationship a child of the covenant. Abraham overstepped his boundaries and yet God was patient and taught him to get back into alignment with God's plan, which was for Abraham and Sarah to have a child of promise in their old age

¹⁷² Williamson, Paul R. "Abraham." DOTP, 14.

¹⁷³ Simkins, Ronald A. *Creator & Creation, Nature in the Worldview of Ancient Israel*. (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 92.

¹⁷⁴ Towner, W. Sibley. *Genesis*. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 159.

that could only be possible by God. In time, Abraham realigns with God and trusts Him to provide a child a promise. He is obedient to wait on the Lord to fulfill this after the God specifically told him he would have a child through Sarah.

Additionally, boundaries and expectations of a faithful response are evident in the narrative concerning Abraham. We do not have all the specifics of what God's laws are except that Abraham is to be obedient when God gives him a command.¹⁷⁵ Such as in Genesis 17:1 when God tells him to "walk before Me, and be blameless." Some "important covenant obligations" are revealed in verses 9-14, which speak to how Abraham and those after him may be found blameless and walk before God.¹⁷⁶ Notice that Abraham is called to "be blameless," thus implying that he had not yet reached that state.¹⁷⁷

Another example of how there was an expectation of righteousness and holiness anticipated on the part of Abraham is revealed in 18:17-19. Here the text declares that God has chosen Abraham in order that "he may charge his children and his household after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing righteousness and justice; so that the LORD may bring to Abraham what He has promised him." Again we do not receive all the specifics of how to "keep the way of the LORD," just merely that he is expected to do so by doing righteousness and justice. These two words are closely associated and characterize "individuals and communities that exemplify and promote life and well-being for all in every relational sphere, human and nonhuman. As such their lives would correspond to God's creational intentions for the world

¹⁷⁵ For a view that the "moral standards by which Israel's first ancestors were expected to act seem to come not so much by God's unique command but by expectations of the surrounding cultures," see Peter Enns, *Inspiration and Incarnation*, (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), 42.

¹⁷⁶ Arnold, 169.

¹⁷⁷ The exhortation by God to Abraham to "be blameless" could possibly imply that God was displeased with his relations with Hagar. See McKeown, 99.

order, including blessing on all nations.”¹⁷⁸ The idea of “righteousness portrays a way of living in community that promotes the life of all its members, a life promoting social order in recognition of God’s rule.”¹⁷⁹

Next, after Abraham’s death when God reiterates His promises to Isaac, he declares that he will fulfill the promise made to Abraham through Isaac “because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (26:5). Here we see the fact that God had commandments, statutes, and laws illustrated. Abraham listened to the Lord’s voice and kept them. Isaac would of course be expected to do the same. These words for God’s charge, commandments, statutes, and laws, are close to passages we find later in Deuteronomy, such as Deut. 11:1.¹⁸⁰ Thus, “in living by Torah, Abraham models the quality of response to God that should characterize the people of Israel” as they grow into a nation and beyond.¹⁸¹ “Abraham’s conforming to the will of God shows that his life is in tune with God’s creational purposes and models for later Israel the right response to the law.”¹⁸² This demonstrates that there were boundaries and expectations from the Lord. Humanity was expected to be obedient and walk in righteousness and justice as 18:19 emphasizes earlier.

We also notice a foreshadowing of the law concerning tithing, when Abraham gives to Melchizedek a tenth of all the possessions he brought back with him after rescuing Lot. Though it was not explicitly called for, we observe that it was pleasing to the Lord as shortly after this and Abraham’s refusal to take further goods for himself that God makes a covenant with him.

¹⁷⁸ Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 468.

¹⁷⁹ Waltke, Bruce K. *Genesis, A Commentary*. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 269.

¹⁸⁰ See Bruce K. Waltke’s *Genesis, A Commentary* page 368 for support for viewing these terms concerning the laws as referring more to the whole law of Moses.

¹⁸¹ Hamilton, 194.

¹⁸² Fretheim, “The Book of Genesis,” 529.

Abraham learns to be obedient to God and trust him to know what is best for him. The ultimate test of this trust came not when he left his family and homeland to follow wherever the Lord would lead him, it came when he was commanded to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham allows God to direct him, and he is obedient to the point of nearly going through with it, had it not been for the angel of the Lord intervening to stay his hand. This test demanded “that Abraham renounce any personal rights over Isaac and express unquestioning faith.”¹⁸³

Hope of Immortality

The issue of immortality was touched on somewhat in the section of being fruitful and multiplying. The reason is that they are closely connected. The belief of the ancients was that “the afterlife for an Israelite depended on leaving behind a son to continue one’s life in one’s ancestral land.”¹⁸⁴ They achieved immortality by having children that would live on with their name in the land of the living.¹⁸⁵ After the initial promise was given in Genesis 12, Abraham began to doubt that he would have an heir after it had been a long time and Sarah was now older and still barren.

Additionally, after separating from Lot he feared that Eliezer of Damascus might be his heir (15:2). However, this was not what God had in mind and in 15:4 elucidates upon the promise that he will indeed have an heir from his own body. He was concerned not so much with the future implications of whether his descendants would become a great nation; rather he was concerned more for the “immediate need for someone to inherit the wealth he has acquired” which would help him to achieve his immortality in the ancient worldview sense of the word.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸³ McKeown, 117.

¹⁸⁴ Arnold, 203.

¹⁸⁵ Arnold, 204.

¹⁸⁶ McKeown, 90.

Abraham was able to achieve this (with God's supernatural intervention) and his descendants truly became as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore as God had promised him.

Furthermore, it is through one of Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ, that all of humanity has the free gift of eternal life offered to it. One must simply believe that Jesus is the Son of God and that He came to earth as a man, lived, died, and rose again three days later. Now He sits at the right hand of God. We do not see this fulfilled in Genesis, this part of the story does not get revealed until the New Testament. However, there is a hope of the future implicit in Genesis. Abraham only has a few offspring at the time of his death, so we see the beginnings of the fulfillment of the promise of becoming a great nation. His descendants are his future and his immortality in the land of the living once he has passed away.

Conclusion

God intended humanity to live out their missional purposes for their creation which were to (1) rule over the earth as a representative of God, (2) be a creative participant with God, (3) care for the earth, (4) be relational, (5) be blessed by God and be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth (6) have boundaries or limitations, and (7) live forever with Him. In this chapter, we have looked at how God began to restore humanity back to their original mission. While it was not complete, it was begun nonetheless.

For instance, beginning with Abraham, God calls him and his family for the sake of all creation to return to humanity's original mission. Being made in the image of God, one was first to rule over the earth as a representative of God. He demonstrates this when he quickly goes to rescue Lot after he had been captured while living near Sodom. Additionally, Abraham gives a

tithe to the priest Melchizedek and then refuses to take a share of the possessions that he brought back.

The next original intention of God was for humans to be creative participant with him. Abraham does this by naming places, such as the well Beersheba. He also plants a tree there, which is a creative act as well. In addition, while it took many years, Abraham was able to finally have children, which is a creative act; though this act depended heavily on God when it came to a child born to Sarah and Abraham.

The planting of tree is also an act of a caretaker of the earth, which is the next original, missional intention for humanity's creation. Additionally, Abraham had tremendous success with his livestock and his flocks grew and multiplied abundantly. Lot's flocks did as well, since he was connected to Abraham when he was first called by God.

Another intention of God was for humans to be relational with each other, the other creatures, and God himself. Abraham expresses his obedience and trust in God by faithfully obeying him, to "go" where the Lord sent him as well as passing the test concerning whether he would sacrifice Isaac or not. It was his desire to be in right relationship with God that caused him to go. He also desired to have harmonious relationships with other as well. For instance, when his and Lot's flocks grew too large and they had to separate, he offered Lot the choice of which direction he wanted to go in order that there would be no strife among them.

Additionally, Abraham fulfills his mission to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. God blessed him and his descendants grew as numerous as the sand on the seashore and the stars in the sky, just as the Lord promised. While this was not completed while Abraham was still alive, it was set in motion and Abraham trusted God to bring the promise to completion.

Next, let us recall that God originally intended for humankind to have boundaries and limitations and be obedient to the Lord. Abraham was obedient. He trusted God and was faithful and entered into a covenant with God. He followed God's commands without delay. Also, he paid a tithe to a priest, Melchizedek, which while not explicit, we can assume that this was pleasing to the Lord as God enters into a covenant with Abraham right after this.

Finally, the last original, missional intention for the creation of humanity was for humans to live forever with God. This of course was transformed by the sin and disobedience of the first human couple. However, we see the hope of immortality achieved for Abraham with his numerous descendants. One of his seed will become the one who saves all of creation and pays the price for humanity's sin so that we can have the offer of salvation and eternal life once again. This seed of Abraham is Jesus Christ.

As we have mentioned already, humanity was not fully restored by the end of Genesis. However, the process of restoration was initiated. The rest of the Old Testament demonstrates that God is still working with the chosen family to bring about the restoration of all of humanity. It is not until the New Testament that one can finally see God's end goal being manifested in Jesus Christ and His actions of coming to earth as a man, to live and suffer and die for all of humanity so that we might be able to have our relationship restored with God. Yet while the victory has been accomplished, we still live in between, at a time where we are able to claim salvation in Jesus Christ while at the same instance still having to live in our fleshly bodies that are prone to sin and in need of our spirits to be led by God. The ultimate fulfillment of God's promises and complete restoration will not happen until Christ's return and we are able to live and dwell in His presence forever if we have chosen to accept Him as our Lord and Savior.

It is at that time that we will be able to rule and reign with Christ, be a creative participant with Him, be caretakers of the earth, be in a right and harmonious relationship with God and all of His creation, be continually blessed by God and see the fruitfulness of humanity, be obedient to God's boundaries set for us, and be able to live with God eternally. This is when God's original, missional intentions for humanity will be fully re-established. However, we are able to examine our own lives today to see if there are areas that we can bring back into closer alignment with these original intentions of God and more fully accomplish our mission here on earth.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Genesis, a book about beginnings, is foundational for reading the entire Bible. This thesis has demonstrated the book's importance in revealing to us God's original, missional intentions for the creation of humanity in Genesis 1-2. Furthermore, it has showed how these intentions were transformed by sin and evil in the world in chapters 3-11 and then, how God worked toward the beginning of restoration and redemption for all of humanity commencing in chapter twelve with the call of Abraham.

Recall that the narrative of 1-2 introduced us first to the creation of the entire universe, including the earth. This was followed by the creation of humanity, who were made in the image of God and entrusted with a mission to carry out here on earth. The Lord's original, missional intentions for humanity was for them to rule over the earth as representatives of God; be creative participant with God; be caretakers of the earth and all that was in it; be relational with God, with each other, and God's other creations; be blessed in order to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth; stay within their given boundaries; and have eternal life with God.

We explored in-depth how each of these missional intentions were evident in Genesis 1-2 when God created the first man and woman and placed them in the Garden of Eden. All was good in God's eyes in regards to His creation. Humanity was given a mission to fulfill, a purpose for being. They were to fulfill their purpose as God's ambassadors here on earth, being made in the image of God.

Unfortunately, we know the story went awry in 3-11 beginning with “the fall” of humanity. God’s original, missional intentions were transformed in ways they were never supposed to be. “God’s human creatures choose to rebel against their Creator, distrusting his benevolence, disobeying his authority and disregarding the boundaries he had set for their freedom in his world. The result of this human seizure of moral autonomy is radical fracture in all the relationships established in creation.”¹⁸⁷ Additionally, the ground is cursed and no longer will yield its fruit the way it did previously for humans. Furthermore, the disobedience led to being exiled from the Garden of Eden and the Tree of Life contained within it. Without access to this tree, humanity would now be susceptible to disease and death.

Humanity’s wickedness seemed to know no limits. Finally God had to do something and He chose to flood the entire earth in order to cleanse it from the wickedness of humans. The earth and all of God’s creatures suffered as a result of humanity’s rebellion against God’s intentions for their lives. Yet even beginning anew with Noah and his family after the flood waters had receded, God sees that the intent in mankind’s heart is still evil. The Lord must do something else now since He has promised to never flood the earth again.

God chose to call a man named Abram/Abraham and make him and his descendants into a great nation in order that through them God might bring about the redemption of all of creation. That was God’s mission. He was not merely choosing one man and forsaking the rest. No, God was choosing to work starting with one man and his family to call a nation to be set apart for him and be holy. So that through this family and later nation, He might send His Son, Jesus Christ, to earth in the flesh in order to redeem all of humanity.

¹⁸⁷ Wright, 195.

While Abraham was not perfect, he demonstrates and proves his faith in God and God's ability to provide for him. The narrative depicts slowly a restoration of humanity back to God's original, missional intentions for its creation. Abraham acts as an ambassador and represents the image of God here on earth and slowly begins to return to the original mission of humans.

Now that we have discovered what God's original, missional intentions were for the creation of humanity, we should examine our lives to see whether we are fulfilling our God given mission. Are we living the way God originally designed us to or as close as we can? God has called humanity to fulfill these missional purposes that we have explored in this study.

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