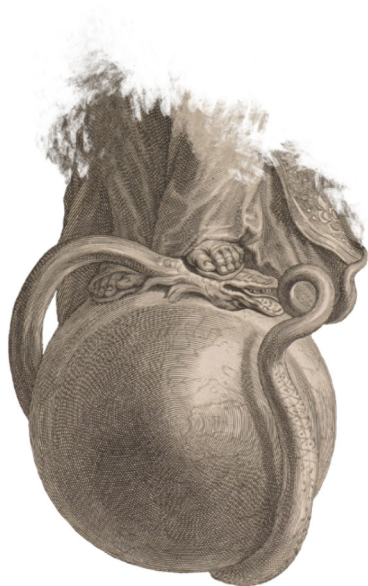


AS FAR AS
THE CURSE IS FOUND



14
*devotions on
the Bible's big story*



FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH • Devotions
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As Far As the Curse is Found: 14 Devotions on the Bible's Big Story

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*No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found*

Isaac Watts, 1719

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One, Big Story

“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. And there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him.” Revelation 22:1-3

Did you read that? We are told that “there will no longer be any curse.”

The purpose of this book is to celebrate together the fact that Jesus Christ was born to remove all the effects of the curse.

It's a rather simple statement, but it takes the entire Bible to tell the story. The statement “Jesus Christ was born to remove all the effects of the curse” can't make sense unless we are able to hold all of Scripture together as one, big story. *What is the curse?* We need Genesis to understand that. *Who is Jesus and why is He called the Christ?* We need the history and covenants of Israel and the four Gospels to understand that. *How will He remove all the effects of the curse?* We need the rest of the New Testament and the book of Revelation to understand that.

All 66 books of the Bible are ultimately telling one story that was written by one Author. We believe this because all of Scripture has been breathed out by God (2 Tim 3:16). Another way to say this is that the Bible is inspired. That means all the words are totally trustworthy and true, without any mixture of error, because “men being moved

by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Peter 1:21). And not only did God by His Spirit superintend the entire process of the writing and preservation of Scripture, but He also oversaw the *unity* of Scripture so that it would be a cohesive message.

The story of Scripture is ultimately a story about God’s salvation in Jesus Christ and the redemption of creation and His people. Therefore, we can expect while reading the Old Testament to find things that would point forward toward “the revelation of the mystery which has been kept secret for long ages past, but now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God” (Romans 16:25-26).

These are the things that speak of “the mystery of Christ, which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it was now revealed to His holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit” (Eph 3:4-5). God has now revealed to us what was not fully understandable in the Old Testament, namely “the unfathomable riches of Christ, and to bring to light for all what is the administration of the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things; so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose which He carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Eph 3:8-11).

Even Jesus read the Old Testament in light of Himself, knowing that “all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled” (Luke 24:44). And not only are all the major sections of Scripture ultimately a story about God’s redemption and restoration in Christ, but all things in the universe—things past, present, and future; things seen and unseen; things great and small—are all serving a purpose as parts of the bigger story of God’s salvation through Christ. God is “making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him for an administration of the fullness of the times,

that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth in Him” (Eph 1:9-10).

Its All About Jesus

Therefore we do not look on the many and memorable stories of the Bible like a collection of fables or morality lessons. We should not treat stories like Adam and Eve, Noah and the flood, David and Goliath, and Daniel in the lion’s den like Aesop’s Fables. We understand that they are parts of the singular story of salvation history that progressively unfolded over many covenants and seasons. In the word of Dr. Jim Hamilton, we approach the Old Testament with the assumption that it is “a messianic document, written from a messianic perspective, to sustain a messianic hope. Adopting this perspective might go a long way toward explaining why the NT seems to regard the whole of the OT as pointing to and being fulfilled in the one it presents as the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth.” [James M. Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” SBJT 10.2 (Summer 2006), 30.]

God has acted within history to redeem a people for Himself, and we have a reliable record that is totally trustworthy, without mixture of error, inspired by God, and superintended to teach us how it all fits together. This means that even the stories of the Old Testament contain glimmers of the gospel. For example, the Apostle Paul encouraged Timothy to “continue in the things you learned and became convinced of, knowing from whom you learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim 3:14-15). Paul told Timothy that the Scriptures he knew as a child would lead him to Jesus. In these Old Testament stories, we can read of things that would give us wisdom toward salvation. But what is salvation? Salvation is trusting in the person and work of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. But Paul said the

sacred writings of the Old Testament are able to make one wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

Where in the Old Testament can we read of Christ? We can read of Him in the story of Jonah (Matt 12:40), in the story of the rock that was struck and gave water in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:14), in the story of the bronze serpent that was lifted up (John 3:14), in the story of the manna that came from heaven (John 6:32), in the story of Adam who was the fountainhead of humanity (Romans 5:14), in the stories of festivals and sabbaths (Col 2:16-17), in the story of Melchizedek, who was the king of righteousness and king of peace (Heb 5:6), in the story of Jacob's ladder to heaven (John 1:50-51), and in many, many more. "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that bear witness about Me...For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me" (John 5:39, 46).

The stories of Joseph, Samson, David, Jonah, and Daniel are all ultimately about Jesus. The story of David and Goliath is not about the little boy who was brave and faced his giants but about God's anointed warrior who would crush the head of the seed of the serpent and give His people rest. [More on this in *Going Deeper: Why Step on Snakes?*, page 57].

Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Restoration.

This one, big story can be summarized in four plot points:

1) *Creation*. All of history and creation, including you and me, are a part of this one story. As we read the Bible we discover that Jesus, as the eternal Son of God, is the One *through Whom* creation was made. And, furthermore, all of His creation has a purpose: it was made *for Him* and His glory (Col 1:15-16).

2) *Fall*. But Adam and Eve did not want the Lord to rule over

them. Being seduced by the serpent they willingly and witfully fell into disobedience, for which “death came upon all, and reigned over all, so that all since the Fall are conceived in sin, and brought forth in iniquity, and are by nature children of wrath, and servants of sin, subjects of death, and all other calamities due to sin in this world” (1st London Baptist Confession of Faith, 1646, Article 4). We languish under the curse of sin. The whole of creation is subject to futility, and even now it groans and suffers the pains of childbirth (Rom 8:20, 22).

3) *Redemption*. Yet the One through whom and for whom creation was made also had a plan to redeem His creation. We are told that a son born of woman would crush the head of the serpent, being crushed himself in the process (Gen 3:15). Throughout Scripture we are given a progressive revelation of God’s dealings with humanity and learn that the answer to the curse is through the line of Abraham. The seed of the woman is also the seed of Abraham, who is also the seed of David, who will have dominion over the whole earth (Psalm 72:8). The line of descent from the woman ultimately culminates when the God who made creation entered into His creation. Jesus Christ was born under the law to redeem “us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree’” (Gal 3:13).

4) *Restoration*. But Jesus Christ did not stay dead. He was raised as the firstborn from the dead to reconcile all things to Himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven (Col 1:18). Through His incarnation, sinless life, death, and resurrection the world and His people will be redeemed from the curse. The God of creation entered into creation so that He might also be the One who would usher in the New Creation. One day “creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (Rom 8:21). “And He who sits on the throne said, ‘Behold, I

am making all things new” (Rev 21:5).

Jesus Christ was born to remove all the effects of the curse, as the One for Whom and through Whom creation was made, and as the One who took on human flesh as the seed of the woman, the seed of Abraham, and the seed of David to usher in the New Creation.

The late, professor Dr. Edmund Clowney put it best this way:

Only God’s revelation could maintain a drama that stretches over thousands of years as though they were days or hours. Only God’s revelation can build a story where the end is anticipated from the beginning, and where the guiding principle is not chance or fate, but promise. Human authors may build fiction around a plot they have devised, but only God can shape history to a real and ultimate purpose. The purpose of God from the beginning centers on His Son: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...All things were created by Him and for Him” (Col. 1:15-16).

God’s creation is *by* His Son and *for* His Son; in the same way His plan of salvation begins and ends in Christ. Even before Adam and Eve were sent out of Eden, God announced His purpose. He would send His Son into the world to bring salvation (Gen. 3:15).

God did not accomplish His purpose all at once. He did not send Christ to be born of Eve by the gates of Eden, nor did He inscribe the whole Bible on the tablets of stone given to Moses at Sinai. Rather, God showed Himself to be the Lord of times and seasons (Acts 1:7). The story of God’s saving work is framed in epochs, in periods of history that God determines by His word of promise. God created by His word of power. He spoke and it was done; He commanded and it stood fast. God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. In the same way God spoke His word of promise. That word has no less power because it is spoken in

the future tense. God's promises are sure; they will be fulfilled at the appointed time (Gen. 21:2). [Edmund Clowney, *The Unfolding Mystery: Discovering Christ in the Old Testament*, P&R Publishing (1989), 11-12.]

As Christians, we trust in that same word of promise. We look forward to the day when we read in Revelation 22:3, "And there will no longer be any curse."

1 | The Very Good Beginning

Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, so that they will have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”²⁷ And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that creeps on the earth.”

Genesis 1:26-28

In the very good beginning, God created all things by His word. In God’s good wisdom He first *formed* the boundaries of the earth on days 1-3. He separated the light from the darkness, He separated the waters above and the waters below, and He separated the waters from the dry land. In this work of *forming*, God brought order, rule, and boundaries to the world.

Then God *filled* the earth on days 4-6. He filled the skies with beauty by the sun, moon, and stars, He filled the waters with fish below and birds above, and He filled the dry land with cattle, creeping things, and with the crowning jewel of creation: humanity.

God made the man and the woman in His image to rule upon the earth as an extension of His own character and His own rule. Just like how God created, filled, ruled, and organized, so the man and the woman were to have dominion and fill the world with life. But the man and the woman had unique roles in how they would do this.

They were *both* made in God's image as equals, and yet they had different job descriptions.

God named the light and named the darkness. So also, Adam named the animals since he was made in the image of God. God oversaw the boundaries of the light and the darkness, the boundaries of the waters above and the waters below, and the boundaries of the waters and the dry land. So the man was made first to provide and protect the boundaries of the garden. The words God used in Adam's job description were to "work" and to "keep" the garden (2:15). The word "keep" implies watchfulness and guarding of the garden. This same pair of verbs ("work" and "keep") is used of the Levites in how they were to work and keep the tabernacle, and this included defending the boundary of the tabernacle to the death against those who were unclean (Numbers 3:7-10).

So also Adam oversaw the boundaries of the garden by cultivating it. The Lord God *formed* the earth and then *filled* the earth. Therefore the man was made first and then the woman. Adam would take initiative and provide the structure of the boundaries of the garden, and the woman was made as his helper, following her husband's leadership and filling the boundaries with glory, beauty, and life. On days 4-6, the Lord filled the boundaries of His creation with life and beauty, so also was Eve given the unique responsibility, as also made in God's image, to be the mother of life so that the earth would be filled and teeming with human life.

The man and the woman, as *both* made in God's image, would oversee the boundaries of the earth and fill the earth, in their own unique ways, according to God's good design and wisdom. They needed each other to fulfill their purpose. Both were needed to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, having dominion over all things of the earth. Adam couldn't do it on his own. Eve couldn't do it on her own.

With his wife, Adam was to fill the earth and subdue it, implying

that the areas *outside* Eden's garden were not organized like they were *inside* the garden. Things needed to be subdued outside the garden, and the world was in need of dominion. It was God's plan for them to fill the earth, and God would receive glory as His renown reached every corner of the world through His people. Thus, the land of Eden needed to grow beyond its current boundaries, and the beautiful authority of Adam and Eve's rule would fill the earth with God's glory.

In the very good beginning, there was blessing. Humanity had peace with God, peace with each other, and peace with the creation. This three-fold relationship of *God*, *man*, and *creation* shows us how the world was at rest.

They had peace *with God*. They trusted in His character, never doubting whether God truly cared for them. They trusted in His word, never questioning whether what He said was true. The Lord walked in the garden in the cool of the day and the man and his wife did not hide themselves from Him.

They had peace *with each other*. There was no shame, no conflict, no suspicion, no hatred, no envy, and no pain. The man and woman did not blame each other. The man was grateful to have received a helper suitably made for Him.

They had peace *with creation*. The land was bountiful and provided everything they needed. The man worked the earth and expanded the garden. The animals did not harm the man or the woman. The man knew them and called them whatever he named them as one who had dominion over them. All was at peace.

Within this three-fold relationship, we see a three-fold blessing. They experienced the blessing of peace with each other, peace with God, and peace while enjoying the bounty of the earth.

The book of Genesis teaches us that God has a purpose for His people. They are to be fruitful and multiply. They are to fill the earth. They are to subdue and have dominion over it. The trajectory we should expect from the account of creation is that one day all the

world will be filled with the glory of God as God's people live in an obedient and trusting relationship with Him.

We learn from Genesis that humans are not an accident in the universe. God made the man and the woman as His special creation, and all of us were made with purpose and for His glory. Humanity is not a disease upon the earth, as the mantra of our world would have us think. God made us and said it was *very good*.

Human progress and human civilization is not to be regretted. God made us to have dominion over the earth and to gain mastery over the unknown. Exploration and research of the world are rightful ambitions for humans. We are not just "one of the animals." God made us uniquely in His image because we are made for God's glory through our work, through our relational community, and through our rightful worship and obedience of the Lord.

How good is God! How good to make such a wonderful creation!

Take a Moment

1. What things do we learn about God because He created all things out of nothing?
2. What general differences do you notice between men and women that are related to God appointing Adam the task of forming and Eve the task of filling?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Lord, for making me.
- Thank You for wisely designing us in Your image.
- Help me to reflect Your wisdom in how You made us in our unique roles.
- Give me greater joy in living in this world that You have made for Your glory.

2 | The World is Cursed

Then they heard the sound of Yahweh God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of Yahweh God in the midst of the trees of the garden.

⁹Yahweh God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”

¹⁰And he said, “I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.” ¹¹And He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²And the man said, “The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave to me from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then Yahweh God said to the woman, “What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴And Yahweh God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you more than any of the cattle, and more than every beast of the field; on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat all the days of your life; ¹⁵and I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” ¹⁶To the woman He said, “I will greatly multiply your pain and conception, in pain you will bear children; your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”

¹⁷Then to Adam He said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you will eat of it all the days of your life. ¹⁸Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field; ¹⁹by the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

²⁰ Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living. ²¹ Then Yahweh God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and He clothed them.

²² Then Yahweh God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us to know good and evil; and now, lest he send forth his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat and live forever"— ²³ therefore Yahweh God sent him out from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ So He drove the man out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 3:8-24

The people of God disobeyed the word of God, rebelled against the rule of God, and were exiled from the blessed land of God. When tempted they disobeyed God's Word willingly and witfully. This point is important to note. The serpent did not trick them. Adam and Eve knew what they were doing was wrong. And they did it anyway. They were fully aware of their actions and chose to disobey.

The problem was that they allowed themselves to be seduced by the serpent's lies. God said that He had given them all the good things they needed to have. The serpent said there was something good God didn't let them have. God said they would die when they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent said it wasn't true, and that they wouldn't die.

Adam and Eve were led to believe that God was holding out on them. They thought there was something good He wouldn't let them have. They believed that there was a way to become wise like God. They should have instead remembered that they were already like God because they were made in His image.

And so Adam and Eve no longer believed that God had good intentions for them. They no longer trusted in His character. They doubted whether God truly cared for them. They no longer trusted in His word. They questioned whether what He said was true. And so they ate, and the eyes of both of them were opened.

After eating they realized how wrong they were. They realized for the first time that they were naked. They were ashamed. They were deceived. They were fools. And so they ran and hid, but had nowhere to hide. God knew and saw. The Lord God walked over to them so that the man and woman would know He knew.

What happens next is a three-fold curse, mirroring the three-fold blessing of the three-fold relationship. The curse of sin has affected all three relationships: God and man, woman and man, and man and creation. Previously God, man, and the creation were all at peace. But sin has thrown each relationship into disorder, and each relationship is now marked by conflict.

Now God and man are separated, as humans hide from God. Mankind has rebelled *against God*, doubting His goodness.

The relationship between the only two humans is unsettled and filled with mistrust. Mankind is in conflict *with each other*, as the man blames his wife.

The relationship between man and *the creation* will now be full of frustration and scarcity when before it was full of bounty. The earth would be full of thorns and thistles, resisting man's dominion.

They now had enmity with God, with each other, and with the creation. Everything must have seemed to be ruined and undone to Adam and Eve that day. Who can repair what they had broken? To this day we are still under the effects of the curse. There is still conflict, pain, mistrust, sweat, and futility. Mankind is by nature enemies of God. Humans fight with each other. The earth will not easily yield to our work, and there is disease and natural disasters.

As we continue through Genesis we will see how the creation

mandate is still in effect. The tasks God gave humans are still to be done, but they would now be done in much pain. The man and woman are still to have dominion, yet the creation (and the serpent) would attack and rebel. Man and woman are still to fill the earth, yet there would be pain in bearing children and their relationship is strained and distorted. There were still to subdue the earth, yet thorns and thistles would grow up to frustrate their work.

And yet, there is a word of hope in Genesis 3:15. “And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.” Within the curse laid on the serpent, the man and the woman hear a word about a baby.

The woman will bear a son! That means they would not die that day! Instead of a sentence of death, they heard a promise of life! Adam heard and believed in that hope. In faith, he called his wife Eve, the one who would give life. She would live to conceive and give birth to a son. More than that, Adam realized that he would not die that day. He was necessary to help conceive and raise this child. The man and woman, both undeserving sinners, were given a message of hope: a promise that the serpent that seduced them into sin would be crushed by the seed of the woman.

Yet this promise of an avenger is mixed with pain. The heel would crush, but the fangs would bite. In this act of triumph, the son would be wounded on his foot. One day the avenger would trample underfoot the vile serpent, yet it would come at a great cost. Victory and sorrow would be mixed together. The seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent, but he would be wounded as well.

At this point, we are left with more questions than answers. We will have to see how this promise develops throughout Scripture. Like Adam we need to trust in God’s promises, trusting in the One whom God promised to provide and who would bring an answer to the curse of sin.

Take a Moment

1. What are some areas of your life where you feel the painful effects of the curse of sin in the world?

2. What are some of the ways that God is redeeming these painful areas in Christ and is glorifying Himself through them in your life?

I can pray...

- Thank You for not abandoning Your people or Your creation when sin entered the world.
- Thank You for the plan to redeem us and the world.
- Help me to have hope in Christ in the middle of my troubles.
- Give me the grace to glorify You in my weakness.

3 | In Abraham the Nations are Blessed

And Lamech lived 182 years and became the father of a son. ²⁹ Now he called his name Noah, saying, “This one will give us rest from our work and from the pain of our hands arising from the ground which Yahweh has cursed.”

^{9:18} And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth...Now the sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem and Ham and Japheth; and Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹ These three were the sons of Noah, and from these the whole earth was scattered abroad. ²⁰ Then Noah began to be a man of the land and planted a vineyard. ²¹ And he drank of the wine and became drunk and uncovered himself inside his tent. ²² Then Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father and told his two brothers outside. ²³ But Shem and Japheth took the garment and laid it upon both their shoulders and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces were turned backward, so that they did not see their father’s nakedness. ²⁴ Then Noah awoke from his wine, and he knew what his youngest son had done to him. ²⁵ So he said, “Cursed be Canaan; a servant of servants He shall be to his brothers.” ²⁶ And he said, “Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Shem; and let Canaan be his servant.” ^{10:6}, “The sons of Ham were Cush and Mizraim and Put and Canaan...The beginning of his kingdom was Babel...Assyria...Nineveh...”

^{12:1} And Yahweh said to Abram, “Go forth from your land, and from your kin 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 will be blessed.” So

Abram went forth as Yahweh had spoken to him; and Lot went with him. Now Abram was seventy-five years old when he departed from Haran.

^{15:3} And Abram said, "Since You have given no seed to me, behold, one born in my house is my heir." ⁴ Then behold, the word of Yahweh came to him, saying, "This one will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir." ⁵ And He brought him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your seed be." ⁶ Then he believed in Yahweh; and He counted it to him as righteousness.

^{17:1} Now it happened that when Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram and said to him, "I am God Almighty; walk before Me and be blameless, ² so that I may confirm My covenant between Me and you, and that I may multiply you exceedingly." ³ Then Abram fell on his face, and God spoke with him, saying, ⁴ "As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. ⁵ And no longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations. ⁶ And I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make nations of you, and kings will go forth from you. ⁷ And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. ⁸ And I will give to you and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Genesis 5:28-29, 9:18-26; 10:6; 12:1-4; 15:3-6; 17:1-8

Everything must have seemed to be ruined and undone to Adam and Eve on the day that they sinned. They were cast out from the garden,

separated from their God, and forced to endure the painful effects of sin in their bodies. Who could repair what they had broken? Who would give relief to their pain and the pain of their children—pain in their wombs from difficult pregnancies, pain in their hands from hard labor, and pain in their hearts from the conflict with each other?

There were some in the generation after Adam and Eve that had hope in the same promise Adam heard in Genesis 3:15—one day a seed of the women would be born to crush the serpent. The story of the seed of the woman was passed down from one generation to the next. Lamech hoped for a son of the woman to be born who would give them relief from the pain of the ground that Yahweh has cursed. They knew that this seed of the woman would undo the effects of the curse. Maybe Noah was this son! Just like Adam, they were trusting in God's promise. They believed that one day there would be one born to give them rest from the evils of sin in the world.

Noah was indeed a savior for them, and with his generation we have a “restart” from Adam and Eve. Noah's family was told to be fruitful and multiply, just like Adam and Eve. He was a man of the soil and worked the land. But just like Adam, he became naked and ashamed from the fruit of the garden. Like Genesis 3, curses are spoken. Therefore we as readers should identify Ham and his descendants with the seed of the serpent. Battle lines are being drawn. The conflict between the two seeds is deepening. The list of Ham's generations is a blueprint of future conflict throughout the entire Old Testament. Babel, Egypt, Canaan, and Assyria all descended from him (Gen 10:10-11). These are the ones who would align themselves with the serpent and set themselves in conflict with the people of God.

Also like Genesis 3:15, there is a word of hope in the midst of the judgment and curse. A blessing is given to Shem and his descendants. As readers, we should expect the blessing to descend from Shem and his line. These are the ones we should identify as the seed of the woman. The genealogies of Genesis matter, because the people of God

carefully traced and kept records of the line of descent from the seed of the woman because they also believed like Adam and Lamech that one day there would be a son born to give them relief from their pain.

Moses relayed these genealogies when writing Genesis because we as readers must also trace our hope through the line of descent. Eventually, this line of descent leads to Abraham (at that time named Abram). At last, the path of blessing is revealed! What we learn throughout Genesis is that the question of the curses of Genesis 3 is answered in the promises to Abraham in Genesis 12.

The effects of the curse will be rolled back through their family! The way back into the blessed land is through the seed of Abraham! The world will be fixed by a son of Abraham. This whole arrangement puts on display God's choice and God's glory, not Abraham's might or ability. Abraham and Sarah couldn't produce a son, but God's blessing comes by His grace alone and through His people's faith alone.

The three-fold blessing of Abraham in Genesis 12 corresponds exactly to the three-fold curse in Genesis 3. Abraham was promised land, seed, and blessing to all nations. The curses of Genesis 3 spoke of land, seed, and conflict with the nations.

Seed

Eve was told how her childbearing would be difficult. It would be with much pain that she would produce children. Yet God promised to Abraham so many children that they would become a nation. They would outnumber the stars in the night sky and be more than the grains of sand on the shore of the sea. Abraham can't do that! He's old and his wife is barren. How will God keep His promises? God will overcome their barrenness. God will roll back the effects of the curse.

And not only was Eve promised pain in childbirth, but she also was told of how her husband would cruelly rule over her and she would desire to usurp his authority. Just as sin was crouching at the door and desired to have Cain like a wild animal might desire prey

(Gen 4:7), so also Eve, and all women after her, would be tempted to desire to control and master their husbands. If God is going to bring many children to Abraham and reverse the effects of the curse, then the man and the woman would also need to have a restored relationship. In reversing barrenness, God also would give the grace needed to restore their marriage. God will roll back the effects of the curse.

Land

But where would this nation of sons and daughters live? What land would have enough natural resources to support so many people? Adam was told how the land would resist his dominion, and that by the sweat of his face he would work land that would produce little. It would be through great effort and pain he would make his bread. Yet God promised Abraham to take him to a land that would support this great nation. It would have to be a land no longer full of thorns and thistles but full of bounty and abundance. There would have to be enough pastureland for their cattle so that the land would be flowing with milk. There would have to be an abundance of natural resources so that the land would be full of wild honey. God will roll back the effects of the curse.

But in this land flowing with milk and honey, there would also be danger. The nation of Abraham's children would be a prime target for invasion from enemy nations. Everyone would want this land. Everyone would be jealous of Abraham's descendants. The seed of the serpent would strike them.

Blessing

Adam and Eve were told how their seed would be in conflict with the serpent's seed. In fact, conflict was not far from the first generation of humans. Cain killed Abel. The seed of the serpent struck and the boy lay dead. Yet God promised Abraham that whoever desired to curse him and his seed would themselves be cursed. God promised

that they would have dominion over their enemy nations. The seed of the serpent would be thwarted in their attack against the seed of the woman. God will roll back the effects of the curse.

This leads to the most amazing part of the blessing to Abraham. The blessing would be not only for Abraham's direct, genetic line of descent, but it would be a blessing for *all the peoples* of the earth. Remember, the entire earth is under the effects of the curse, and now God has shown a way forward for all tribes and peoples to experience the blessing of God and the rolling back of the curses.

The condition that they must follow is to bless Abraham's seed. They must join Abraham's side. In effect, those who are of the seed of the serpent are given the opportunity to switch their allegiance and join the family of Abraham. They must swear allegiance to the king that will come from Abraham's line. It is through blessing the kingly son of Abraham, who is the seed of the woman, that there will be a worldwide blessing. By bowing in submission to the king of Abraham's seed any person can experience the blessing of God: peace with God, peace with man, and peace with the creation.

This is good news indeed! Peace on earth and goodwill to man is through the birth of the seed of Abraham. Through this line of descent, the earth will be restored to harmony.

Take a Moment

1. In what ways does God's unmerited favor to Abraham and Sarah teach us about salvation?
2. In what ways do we see God's love to all nations in His promises to Abraham?

I can pray...

- Thank You for Your sovereign choice.
- Like Abraham, we admit that we are no better or deserving of Your love.
- We pray that a richer understanding of Your grace would make us more humble and grateful people.
- May Your freedom to save the world draw us into deeper devotion and love for You.

4 | The Conflict of the Curses

Now there was a famine in the land, besides the previous famine that had occurred in the days of Abraham. So Isaac went to Gerar, to Abimelech king of the Philistines. ² And Yahweh appeared to him and said, “Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land of which I shall tell you. ³ Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you and bless you, for to you and to your seed I will give all these lands, and I will establish the oath which I swore to your father Abraham. ⁴ And I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and I will give your seed all these lands; and by your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed; ⁵ because Abraham listened to My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws.”

^{28:12} Then Jacob had a dream, and behold, a ladder stood on the earth with its top touching heaven; and behold, the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And behold, Yahweh stood above it and said, “I am Yahweh, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie, I will give it to you and to your seed. ¹⁴ And your seed will also be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and in you and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. ¹⁵ Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go. And I will bring you back to this land; for I will not forsake you until I have done what I have promised you.” ¹⁶ Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, “Surely Yahweh is in this place, and I did not know it.” ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, “How fearsome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.”

^{35:9} Then God appeared to Jacob again when he came from Paddan-aram, and He blessed him. ¹⁰ And God said to him, “Your

name is Jacob; Your name shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name.” Thus He called his name Israel. ¹¹ God also said to him, “I am God Almighty; be fruitful and multiply; a nation and an assembly of nations shall come from you, and kings shall come forth from your loins. ¹² And the land which I gave to Abraham and Isaac, I will give it to you, and I will give the land to your seed after you.”

^{50:18} Then his brothers also came and fell down before him and said, “Behold, we are your slaves.” ¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, “Do not be afraid, for am I in God’s place? ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to do what has happened on this day, to keep many people alive. ²¹ So now, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones.” And he comforted them and spoke to their heart.

Genesis 26:1-5; 28:12-17; 35:9-12; 50:18-21

God had given great promises to Abraham. He was promised land, seed, and blessing. But throughout the rest of Genesis, we see the languishing of the world under the curse. We see the pain of Genesis 3 multiplied in each generation. There is trouble in the family of Abraham, conflict with nations, conflict in relationships, and distress with famine.

During the lifetime of Abraham there was a famine (Gen 12:10). Abraham’s son, Isaac, also endured a great famine (26:1). Abraham’s grandson, Jacob, was also beset by famine, sending his sons to Egypt to buy food (41:54). The effects of the curse were felt deeply by the generations after Adam. The land was cursed and would not easily be mastered or subdued. With our “Genesis 3 glasses” we should see all of this as the effects of the curse of sin.

Yet through it all, God was protecting the generations of Abraham. He provided food and cared for their little ones. Within the

great and wide world that was cursed the little family of Abraham was sheltered by the blessing of God.

Each generation of Abraham also felt the pain of childbirth and barrenness. Sarah was barren (11:30) and was only able to give birth to a son by God's intervention: "Yahweh visited Sarah as He had said, and Yahweh did for Sarah as He had promised. So Sarah conceived and bore a son" (21:1-2). God reversed the effects of the curse. Abraham's son, Isaac, also had a wife who was barren. But "Isaac entreated Yahweh on behalf of his wife because she was barren; and Yahweh was moved by his entreaty. So Rebekah his wife conceived" (25:21). This is now the second time God reversed the effects of the curse so that He would be able to keep His promise to multiply Abraham's descendants. And yet the pain of childbirth remained. She conceived "but the children struggled together within her" (25:22).

The twins in her womb were a parable of the cursed world: two nations, two seeds, struggling in conflict. The seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent are at war with each other. One will be blessed and the other cursed. God uses this as another occasion to display His sovereign grace. The God who chose Abraham, a man weak and fruitless, is the God who chooses the weak to show His strength. And so God chose the younger son to inherit the blessing. God went against custom, against natural expectations, and against all human impossibilities to show how He will be God and bless those whom He chooses to bless, and curse those whom He chooses to curse. His grace relies on faith and not on works or human merit.

Abraham's grandson, Jacob, married two women. Leah eventually was unable to have children, but God sovereignly opened her womb (29:13). Rachel was unable to have children, but God sovereignly opened her womb also (30:22). Generation after generation, God was reversing the effects of the curse.

Genesis 3 also teaches us that marital strife and dysfunction between the man and woman is a part of the curse. Abraham was not

a good husband and often put his wife in danger (12:13, 20:2). Like Adam, Abraham used his wife as a shield to save his own neck. Isaac in his old age had conflict with his wife Rebekah, choosing his older son, Esau, to receive the promised blessing of God, in defiance to God's word that the younger son, Jacob, would be master over the older.

Like Sarah, Rebekah used her own clever devices to "make" God's promises come true, conspiring with her son to trick her blind husband to give the blessing to Jacob. In poetic justice, many years later, Jacob the trickster is himself tricked into marrying another woman, Leah. The sisters Leah and Rachel, just like Sarah and Rebekah, conspire to usurp their husband's authority. They try to control him, vying for his affection with superstitious mandrakes and bearing children like bargaining chips for his love. In the ancient world, having many wives was seen as a blessing, but many wives ensnared Jacob's family in conflict.

The things that the ancient world counted as blessings were turned on their head to become snares. *Having many wives?* God let them be a source of much conflict. *The eldest son?* God let Esau be the lesser and without an inheritance.

The things that the ancient world counted as curses were turned on their head by God to become the channels of His blessing. *A barren wife?* God can make her bear a child. *A younger son?* God can make him receive the blessing of the firstborn. Through it all, God was displaying His sovereign grace. He will bless those whom He chooses to bless. After all, is anything too difficult for the Lord? (18:14). It depends not on man, but on God who has mercy.

The Seed of the Woman

God's Word is true and He repeats His promise from Genesis 12 throughout Abraham's family line. Each generation is told to be fruitful and multiply. Each generation is told that they would be a blessing

to the nations. The mandate first given to Adam and Eve is given again to every son of Abraham. It is as if they were being commissioned as new Adams. By placing the words spoken to Adam and the words spoken to Abraham side-by-side, God is showing us how the snake-crushing seed of the woman would be through the seed of Abraham.

Eventually, God raises up Joseph. Through a long pathway of unexpected events, God kept his promise to Abraham through Joseph. The beloved son of his father, Joseph was hated by his brothers. They refused to accept him as their prince or bow down to him. They conspired together to end his life, but God was with Joseph in the pit. God raised him up and sent him to Egypt as a slave. In Potiphar's house, Joseph blessed them with his wisdom and skill. In prison, Joseph blessed a prisoner. In Pharaoh's palace, Joseph blessed the nation with his wisdom and insight. Eventually, Joseph will bring blessing to all the peoples of the earth, and even blesses his Jewish brothers with salvation from famine. What they meant for evil God meant for good.

The land of Egypt flourished for seven years of abundance and had enough food for seven years of famine. The surrounding nations would come to swear their allegiance and bow down to this Jewish prince and are blessed by him. God's promises were coming true! A descendant of Abraham is living like a new Adam, having mastery and dominion over the earth, blessing the nations, and rolling back the effects of the curse.

Perhaps Joseph is the seed of the woman! we as readers might think. The promises seem to fit. He was raised by God to a kingly position ("kings will go forth from you", 17:6). The nations swear allegiance to him ("I will bless those who bless you", 12:3). Yet not all of God's promises have come true. The people of God are still not in the land that was promised to them. They are foreigners in a strange land.

But despite the insurmountable obstacles of the curses—hard land, hard labor, and conflict with the nations—God is overcoming them all and accomplishing His purposes. Genesis teaches us that we

should expect a prince from the seed of Abraham to roll back the effects of the curse, but only for those who will bow in submission to him and choose to align themselves with him.

Take a Moment

1. What are some areas of your life where you see God's blessing as you have submitted to the Lordship of Christ and to His teaching?
2. In what ways do you see "blessing" in the eyes of the world is actually a snare and great trouble? In what ways does God's blessing flow through what the world considers pathetic, foolish, and undesirable?

I can pray...

- Thank You for giving me Your Spirit so that I can see what the world considers foolish is actually the wisdom and power of God.
- Thank You for working Your sovereign will in the world, and that what others mean for evil You mean for good.
- Help me to see Your sovereign hand over my life, for my good and Your glory.
- I pray that You would help me trust that the Judge of all the earth will do what is right (Gen 18:25).

5 | Out of Slavery

Now these are the names of the sons of Israel who came to Egypt with Jacob; they came each one with his household: ² Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah; ³ Issachar, Zebulun, and Benjamin; ⁴ Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher. ⁵ And all the persons who came from the loins of Jacob were seventy in number, but Joseph was already in Egypt. ⁶ Then Joseph died, and all his brothers and all that generation. ⁷ But the sons of Israel were fruitful and increased and multiplied and became exceedingly mighty, so that the land was filled with them.

⁸ And a new king arose over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. ⁹ And he said to his people, “Behold, the people of the sons of Israel are more and mightier than we. ¹⁰ Come, let us deal wisely with them, lest they multiply and it be in the event of war, that they also join themselves to those who hate us and fight against us and go up from the land.” ¹¹ So they appointed taskmasters over them to afflict them with hard labors. And they built for Pharaoh storage cities, Pithom and Raamses. ¹² But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and the more they spread out, so that they were in dread of the sons of Israel. ¹³ So the Egyptians brutally compelled the sons of Israel to slave labor; ¹⁴ and they made their lives bitter with hard slave labor in mortar and bricks and in all kinds of slave labor in the field, all their slave labor which they brutally compelled them to do.

Exodus 1:1-14

It is necessary for us to read the story of the Exodus while wearing our “Genesis glasses.” From the perspective of the first book of the Bible (which Moses also wrote), the story of the Exodus begins with the seed of the woman being afflicted by the seed of the serpent.

The nation of Egypt sought to curse the seed of Abraham, and yet they find themselves being cursed instead. The people of God are being fruitful and multiplying, and Egypt is living in dread of them, just like how God promised to bless Noah and how God said that the animals of the earth would live in fear of humans in Genesis 9:1-2—“Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given.” Israel was like a new Adam, being fruitful and multiplying, and Egypt was the beasts of the field (or should we say the *snakes* of the field?) living in fear of the seed of the woman. Even as slaves, the Jewish people, as the seed of the woman, are having dominion over the hearts of the Egyptians.

Throughout their painful slavery, God was keeping His promise to bless them. He was multiplying them, overcoming the effects of the curse and the attack of the nation that sought to destroy them. They become abundant like the sand of the seashore or the stars in the night sky.

We read that Egypt even tried to stop them from leaving the land, lest they “go up” to the land God promised to Abraham. With our “Genesis glasses” on, we should interpret this as the actions of the seed of the serpent, opposing the will of God, just like how humanity gathered at Babel and refused to disperse and fill the earth. And just as how God dispersed the inhabitants at Babel, so also God will defeat the Egyptians who rebel against His will.

In the story of the Exodus, the effects of the curse are greater than before. The serpent is directly attacking the seed of the woman, even killing her children. The people of God experienced the pain of losing

their children. They are subjected to bitter labor, even making bricks without straw by the sweat of their brow. The solution is that God has raised up another one like Joseph as the seed of the woman, one who will come to deliver them from the effects of the curse.

Moses is raised up as a prince over God's people. And just like Joseph, his brothers rejected him. Just like Joseph, God preserved Moses' life from his enemies. Like Joseph, who was able to understand visions and give God's word, so also Moses is able to speak on behalf of God. Yet Moses is a greater prophet. Joseph received dreams from God but Moses spoke with God face to face.

In the progressive revelation of God, we are learning more about Him and about His way of salvation. The people of God need a prophet of God to lead them into the promises of God. We learn about God's purpose for His people. God intends to restore their relationship with Him in the land of their father, Abraham. They will go up from there to serve the Lord. And in order to return to the land, they needed one who spoke for God. But more than that, they needed a redeemer. They couldn't serve God while in slavery. God sent an instrument of His judgment against His enemies, redeeming God's people from slavery.

In Genesis, God delivered His people through Noah, bringing salvation through judgment. The world was destroyed by a flood, but the people of God were preserved in an ark. And just as it was the hope of Lamech for Noah to deliver God's people from their bitter labor and the pain of their hands from the cursed ground, so also is the hope of God's people placed in Moses, a son born of a woman and precious in the eyes of God (Acts 17:20). Through Moses God delivered them from the pain of their hands and from bitter labor. In fact, the Hebrew word that Moses chose to describe the baby basket that he was placed in among the reeds is the same word used for the ark of Noah. Moses' role fulfills similar purposes as Noah's: through him God's people are saved while the enemies of God are judged.

Through Moses God delivered His people in a salvation through the judgment of His wonders against the Egyptians. This is seen most clearly in the final wonder at the Red Sea. The armies of the serpent pursued Israel. But those who cursed Abraham's line were themselves cursed. Their chariots were stuck in the mud and the waters of the sea crushed their bodies in judgment. The serpent struck but he was crushed beneath the heel. Like with Noah the waters of judgment again flooded over the enemies of God, and the people of God were safely delivered.

After Noah's deliverance through the flood, God entered into a covenant with him, promising not to destroy the world again through a flood. The creation order would be preserved and maintained season after season. The covenant with Noah is the stage upon which the Lord would display His glory on earth and redeem the world. After Israel's deliverance through the flood of the Red Sea, God entered into covenant with them at Sinai. The covenant He made would be the stage upon which the Lord would display His glory in Israel and redeem the world.

In Exodus, we see that God's Word is true! His people are fruitful and multiplying. They go from slavery in Egypt to the freedom of serving God. Through Moses, God took His people out of their futile labor and would plant them in a good land. He protected their little ones. He preserved the seed of the woman.

God's purpose is to have the people of God live in the land of God under the rule of God by the Word of God. But God's people also need a leader of God's own choosing—one who is a prophet and a redeemed—who will ensure God's promises come to pass, striking the snake and leading the people into God's promises.

Take a Moment

1. What are some ways that you are living for the Lord as one redeemed for His glory?

2. What connections and lessons should we draw between Pharaoh killing the male children (Ex 1:22) and Herod killing the male children (Matt 2:16)?

I can pray...

- Thank You for redeeming me to live for Your glory.
- Help me not to live my life my way but to submit it all to You.
- Help me to live like one set free from sin.
- Give me greater joy in my salvation and in the costly redemption that Jesus purchased by His blood.

6 | Curses and Counsel

“So now, Israel, what does Yahweh your God ask from you, but to fear Yahweh your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul,¹³ and to keep the commandments of Yahweh and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good?...¹⁶ So circumcise your heart, and stiffen your neck no longer.”

^{30:1} “So it will be, when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you cause these things to return to your heart in all the nations where Yahweh your God has banished you,² and you return to Yahweh your God and listen to His voice with all your heart and soul according to all that I am commanding you today, you and your sons,³ then Yahweh your God will return you from captivity and return His compassion on you, and He will gather you again from all the peoples where Yahweh your God has scattered you.⁴ If those of you who are banished are at the ends of the sky, from there Yahweh your God will gather you, and from there He will take you back.⁵ And Yahweh your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers.

⁶ “Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live.

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and calamity;¹⁶ in that I am commanding you today to love Yahweh your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that Yahweh your God may bless you in the land where you are

entering to possess it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you will not listen, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your seed, ²⁰ by loving Yahweh your God, by listening to His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.”

Deuteronomy 10:12-13, 16; 30:1-6, 15-20

After Egypt, the people of God were given another chance to live according to God’s Word and to experience the restoration of the blessing Adam and Eve knew in the garden. God offered them peace with Him, peace with each other, and peace while living in a bountiful land of blessing. They were given another chance—and they failed yet again.

The first generation of Israel that left Egypt approached the promised land, ready to receive the blessings. But what they saw made them flinch. They saw the giants living in the land and did not believe what God had said when He promised to drive the inhabitants out for them. The giants were too large and the cities were too fortified. The bad report from the spies made them tremble. Just like Eve, they allowed their eyes to convince them not to believe what God had promised to their ears. God said “I will give the inhabitants of the land into your hand, and you will drive them out from before you” (Exodus 23:31). But all they could see was “a land that devours its inhabitants; and all the people whom we saw in it are men of great

size...and we became like grasshoppers” (Numbers 13:32-33).

Joshua and Caleb pleaded with them to have faith in God’s Word: “Their protection has been removed from them, and Yahweh is with us; do not fear them” (Numbers 14:9). But the entire company of God’s people listened to the voice of another, like how Adam and Eve listened to the serpent. They had no faith in the God who delivered them from Egypt. They no longer trusted in His character. They doubted whether God truly cared for them. They questioned whether what He said was true. And so they wept, complained, grumbled, and plotted to return to Egypt. They sinned and disobeyed God’s Word.

God in His anger denied them access to the land, and just like Adam and Eve, they would be barred from entry. What they heard from the Lord was a sentence of death—that they would die outside the garden like their first father and mother. After complaining they realized how wrong they were. They were ashamed. They were fools. And so they tried to take the land in their own power, and they failed.

We’ve seen this same story play out before in the book of Genesis. In the “restart” after the flood, Noah was like a new Adam, a man of the soil. But he too failed like Adam. He too became naked and ashamed. Abraham was given the promises of land, seed, and blessing, but he often stumbled. He was afraid and hid behind his wife, lying and saying she was his sister. Isaac fell into the same pattern of sin, saying Rebekah was also his sister to save himself. Jacob was a trickster and heel-grabber, tripping his opponents to get ahead. The sons of Jacob were liars and slave-sellers, willing to deceive their father with a torn and bloody coat of many colors. Even Moses, the man of God, in anger struck the rock and was denied entrance into the promised land (Numbers 20:11-12).

Standing outside of Canaan, the people of God had been given so many more blessings than previous generations. They had a tabernacle and an altar for their sins. But can these sacrifices and rituals cleanse their hearts? The laws of God and His promises were on the

outside of their hearts, as it were, shouting at them to obey. “Know the Lord, know the Lord!” the Law of God cried. But the cry fell on deaf ears and stony hearts. What they needed was to have God’s laws placed on the inside of their hearts—for their hearts of stone to be replaced with hearts of flesh.

And now, in Deuteronomy, after 40 years of wandering, a new generation that would be led by Joshua stood outside of the land and they were given a second chance to enter the land. In the final words of Moses in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses tells them “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse” (Deut 30:19).

They had a choice before them. They would either experience the blessing of God if they believed and obeyed His Word, or they would experience the curse if they rejected God’s Word. This is the same choice that Adam and Eve had. Obey and receive the blessing, or disobey and be exiled from the land. Will this be the generation that chooses rightly? Will they love the Lord their God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their might? (Deut 6:5). Will they choose life and live in the land?

As a prophet, Moses knew what would happen. He writes as if it is a certainty they will choose death and the curses. “*When* all of these things have come upon you...Yahweh your God will return you from captivity.”

What hope could they possibly have in obeying the Lord when so many before them had failed? What man had the power to place the words of the living God inside his own heart? Which one of them can do what God commands? “These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart” (Deut 6:6). Their hearts often strayed from the Lord. What they needed was heart surgery. God told them to circumcise their own hearts, and then they would be able to obey and love Him (Deut 10:16).

But how is it possible to perform this kind of heart surgery and live? The words of Moses must have seemed strange and cryptic to

them. *Circumcise our hearts? How can a man open up his own chest and cut away parts of his heart and live? This is impossible!*

In the surprising conclusion to Moses' speech, he said that God is willing to do heart surgery. "Moreover Yahweh your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live" (Deut 30:6). God would give them the hearts they needed to obey His Word and to love Him. God was willing to cut away the parts of their hearts that were callous and resistant to His Word.

In Deuteronomy, we learn that if we are to love the Lord, then God must be the One who changes our hearts to love Him. Until our hearts are changed by God we cannot love Him. Until His words are placed in our hearts we will not obey Him. Nicodemus must have thought similar things the night he spoke with Jesus. Jesus said that he needed to be born again. But how is it possible for a man to reenter his mother's womb and be born a second time?

Like Nicodemus, the people of God in Deuteronomy needed an inward work of God's grace. They would choose death and the curse, but on the other side of their exile God would restore their fortunes. He would remedy His people's fundamental error. He would give them a new heart. He would write His laws upon their hearts. He would take out the heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh. He would give them "a circumcision made without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh, in the circumcision of Christ, having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised up with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you being dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive with Him, having graciously forgiven us all our transgressions" (Colossians 3:11-13). Ultimately these promises are fulfilled in Christ and in the New Covenant.

Take a Moment

1. What are some of the changes in your life from before you were a Christian to now?
2. What are some situations you are facing where you may be like Israel—staring at giants and feeling like a grasshopper—tempted to believe what your eyes see and ignore what the Lord has said?

I can pray...

- Thank You for giving me a new heart to love You, Lord.
- Thank You, Jesus, for the new day of the New Covenant that has dawned.
- Help me to trust Your Word and not listen to the lies of the world.
- Give us the grace needed to submit to Your lordship in every area of life.

7 | In Need of a King

“Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land which I swore to their fathers to give them. ⁷ Only be strong and very courageous to be careful to do according to all the law which Moses My servant commanded you; do not turn aside from it to the right or to the left, so that you may be prosperous wherever you go. ⁸ This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way successful, and then you will be prosperous.”

^{18:1} Then the whole congregation of the sons of Israel assembled themselves at Shiloh and set up the tent of meeting there; and the land was subdued before them.

^{23:14} “Now behold, today I am going the way of all the earth, and you know in all your hearts and in all your souls that not one word of all the good words which Yahweh your God spoke concerning you has failed; all have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed. ¹⁵ And it will be that just as all the good words which Yahweh your God spoke to you have come upon you, so Yahweh will bring upon you all the calamitous words, until He has destroyed you from off this good land which Yahweh your God has given you. ¹⁶ When you trespass against the covenant of Yahweh your God, which He commanded you, and go and serve other gods and bow down to them, then the anger of Yahweh will burn against you, and you will perish quickly from off the good land which He has given you.”

^{2:11} Then the sons of Israel did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh and served the Baals, ¹² and they forsook Yahweh, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed

other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked Yahweh to anger. ¹³ So they forsook Yahweh and served Baal and the Ashtaroth. ¹⁴ And the anger of Yahweh burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. ¹⁵ Wherever they went, the hand of Yahweh was against them for evil, as Yahweh had spoken and as Yahweh had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

¹⁶ Then Yahweh raised up judges who saved them from the hands of those who plundered them. ¹⁷ Yet they did not listen to their judges either, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of Yahweh; they did not do as their fathers.

^{21:25} In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.

Joshua 1:6-8; 18:1; 23:14-16. Judges 2:11-17; 21:25

As the people of God were about to enter the promised land they were commanded to meditate on God's Word (Joshua 1:8). The book of Genesis began with the powerful Word of God, and now a new section of Scripture begins anew with a reminder of the powerful Word of God.

They subdued the land before them, just as Adam was also commanded to subdue the earth. The Hebrew word that the author of Joshua chose ("and the land was *subdued* before them" 18:1) is the exact same word given to Adam in his commission: "fill the earth, and *subdue* it; and have dominion" (Genesis 1:28). And just like how

the Lord through Moses had defeated the seed of the serpent, so also Joshua and the people were having victory over the enemy nations that opposed the Lord. The Egyptians were in dread of the people, and the men of Jericho also had their hearts melted in fear of the Lord and His people (Joshua 2:11).

Maybe things would be different this time! Maybe the people of God will finally dwell in the land and obey God's Word! But there were ominous warnings that things were not to be so. One man, Achan, took something he was commanded not to have. God's Word had forbidden the stealing of anything that was supposed to be put to destruction. The Lord instructed the people to destroy all the beautiful things in the city of Jericho. Nothing was to remain. The silver and gold and articles of bronze and iron were to be given to the Lord, but everything else was forbidden.

But in his heart, Achan didn't think God's Word made much sense. He saw things that were good in his own eyes, things that God didn't allow him to have. Achan no longer believed that God had good intentions for him or his family. He became convinced that the Lord was holding out on them. He no longer trusted in His character. And so he took what was forbidden.

The story sounds familiar. Adam was told, "From any tree of the garden you may surely eat; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat from it" (Gen 3:16-17). Achan and the people were told that all the city was placed in their hands, "only keep yourselves from the things devoted to destruction" (Joshua 6:18).

The dreadful aftermath sounds familiar as well: "Then Joshua said to Achan, 'My son...what you have done. Do not hide it from me'" (Joshua 7:19). "The man and his wife hid themselves...Then Yahweh God said to the woman, 'What is this you have done?'" (Gen 3:8, 13).

"I saw among the spoil a beautiful mantle from Shinar and two hundred shekels of silver and a bar of gold fifty shekels in weight; then I coveted them and took them..." (Joshua 7:21). "Then the

woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable...so she took from its fruit and ate" (Gen 3:6).

The woman saw what was desirable to her eyes and took it. Achan saw the spoil and coveted with his eyes and took it. The man and his wife hid. They tried to cover their shame. Achan hid his sin as well. But no one can hide from the Lord. The tragedy of Achan was a foreshadowing of things to come. The people of God would do what was right in their own eyes. They would not have the Lord as king. This incident revealed that the people of God could subdue the land, but they still needed someone to subdue their sinful hearts. The greatest threat to God's people would come from within, not without.

What they needed was a king. They needed someone to lead them into obedience and restrain their sinful appetites. They needed someone who would represent them and be righteous in his heart. God had planned for such a man to sit upon the throne. In Deuteronomy, the Lord made a provision for how a king of Israel was to lead the people. He needed to be a man who desired to know the Lord and love Him with all his heart and mind and strength. How would he do that? This king would need to know the Law of the Lord word-by-word:

"Now it will be when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law on a scroll in the presence of the Levitical priests. And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear Yahweh his God, to carefully observe all the words of this law and these statutes" (Deut 17:18-19).

If the people were to meditate on God's laws day and night (Joshua 1:8), then they needed a king who had his own copy of the law, one who kept God's Word close to his heart as his faithful companion all the days of his life.

The books of Joshua and Judges teach us that God's people needed a king—someone who could subdue their unruly hearts and lead

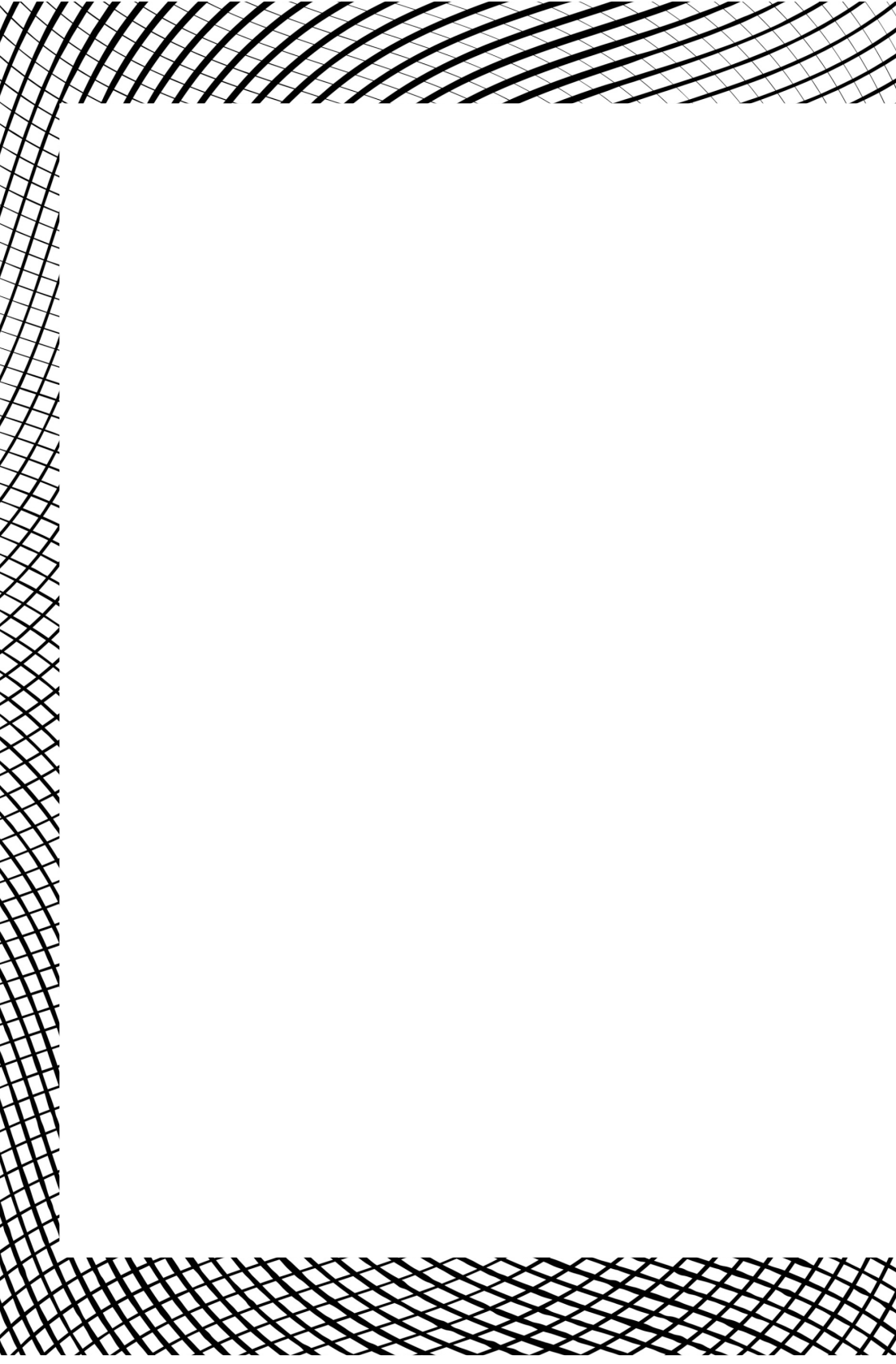
them in obedience to God's Word. The short-lived and temporary tenures of the judges were not enough. The people needed a king to sit upon the throne and have an enduring reign. They needed a king to change their hearts, to even give them a new heart to love God's laws, if that were possible. They needed a king who would be like a son of God, representing them and shepherding God's people into joyful obedience to the Lord. But where can we find such a king—a man after God's own heart?

Take a Moment

1. Why do you think good intentions are never enough to stop unsaved people from sinning?
2. What are some of the reasons you are glad that Jesus is your king?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Jesus, that “the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of Your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness above Your companions” (Hebrews 1:8-9)
- Thank You for giving me a new heart.
- Help me to not desire what You have forbidden, Lord.
- Help me to be content with what I have.



Going Deeper: Why Step on Snakes?

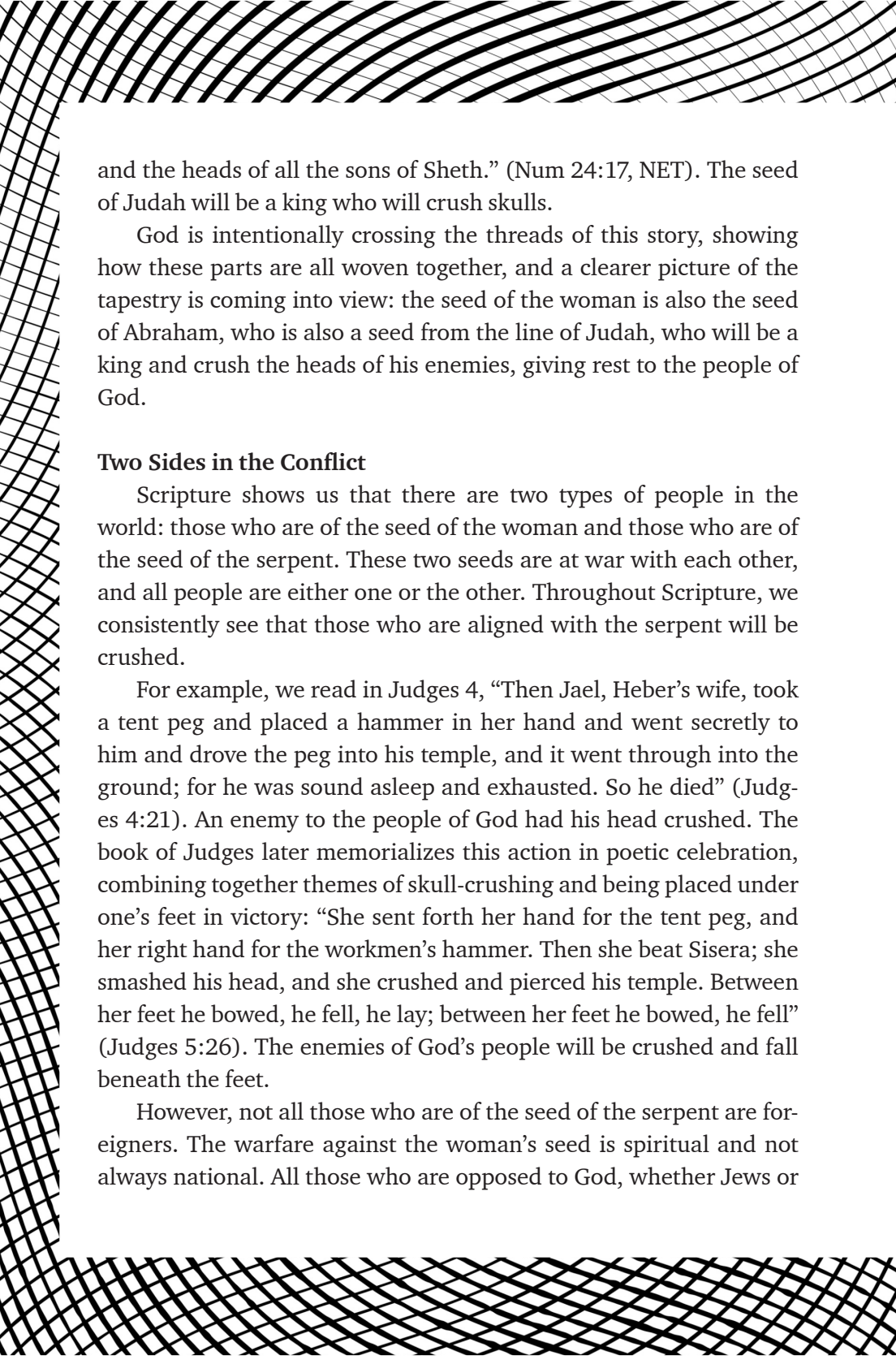
“And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel.”

Genesis 3:15

Why is the Bible so preoccupied with stepping on snakes? The simple answer is that the authors of the Bible were also readers of the Bible. They read previous Scripture, believed in God's promises, interpreted their lives according to the promises of the Bible, and wrote further parts of Scripture in such a way as to demonstrate their faith in God and to encourage others to interpret their lives along the promise-shaped patterns of the images of Scripture. They saw their world through the eyes of faith. And it all began with the promise that there would one day be a son born of the woman who would step on a snake.

If the Bible is all one, big story, then we can expect unity. In this devotional, we track how the skull-crushing seed of the woman would be a part of the line of Abraham. As the story progresses we discover stories of skull-crushing appearing in surprising places.

Abraham was told that his lineage would contain kings. Jacob, Abraham's grandson, prophesied that his son Judah would have the scepter of kingship (Gen 49:10). Balaam, when looking out upon the masses of Israel, prophesied of a king: “I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not close at hand. A star will march forth out of Jacob, and a scepter will rise out of Israel. He will crush the skulls of Moab,



and the heads of all the sons of Sheth.” (Num 24:17, NET). The seed of Judah will be a king who will crush skulls.

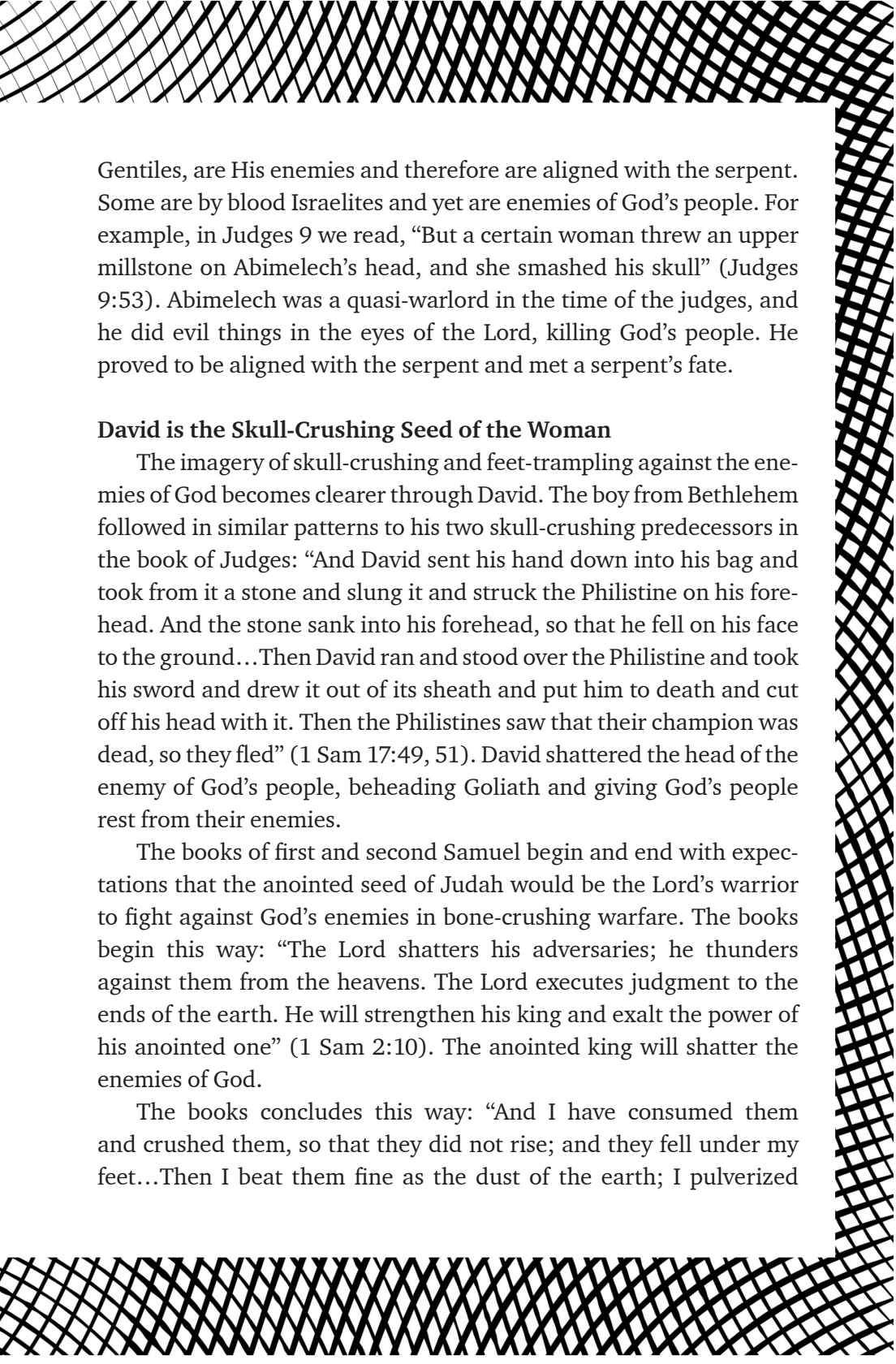
God is intentionally crossing the threads of this story, showing how these parts are all woven together, and a clearer picture of the tapestry is coming into view: the seed of the woman is also the seed of Abraham, who is also a seed from the line of Judah, who will be a king and crush the heads of his enemies, giving rest to the people of God.

Two Sides in the Conflict

Scripture shows us that there are two types of people in the world: those who are of the seed of the woman and those who are of the seed of the serpent. These two seeds are at war with each other, and all people are either one or the other. Throughout Scripture, we consistently see that those who are aligned with the serpent will be crushed.

For example, we read in Judges 4, “Then Jael, Heber’s wife, took a tent peg and placed a hammer in her hand and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died” (Judges 4:21). An enemy to the people of God had his head crushed. The book of Judges later memorializes this action in poetic celebration, combining together themes of skull-crushing and being placed under one’s feet in victory: “She sent forth her hand for the tent peg, and her right hand for the workmen’s hammer. Then she beat Sisera; she smashed his head, and she crushed and pierced his temple. Between her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay; between her feet he bowed, he fell” (Judges 5:26). The enemies of God’s people will be crushed and fall beneath the feet.

However, not all those who are of the seed of the serpent are foreigners. The warfare against the woman’s seed is spiritual and not always national. All those who are opposed to God, whether Jews or



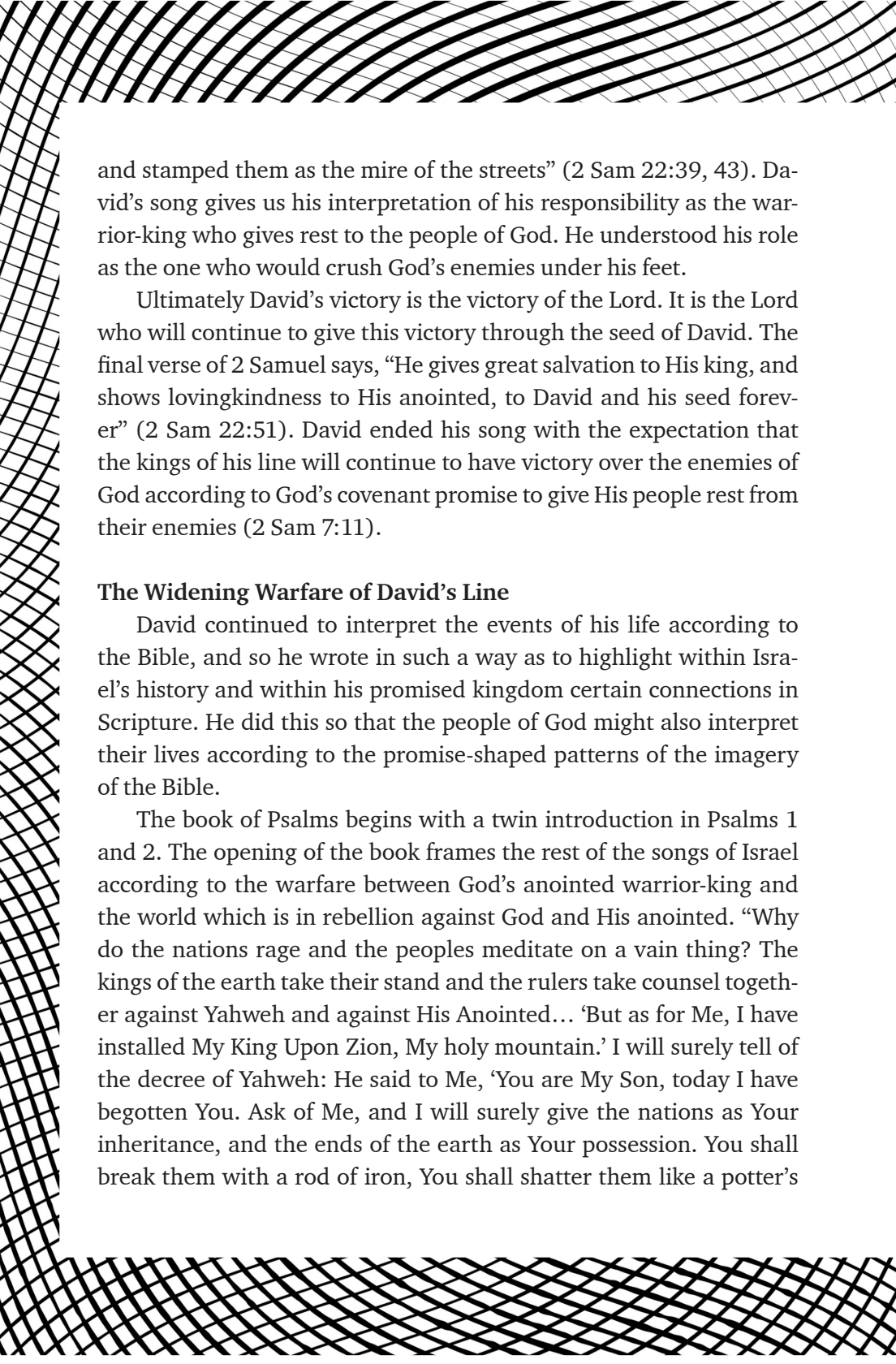
Gentiles, are His enemies and therefore are aligned with the serpent. Some are by blood Israelites and yet are enemies of God's people. For example, in Judges 9 we read, "But a certain woman threw an upper millstone on Abimelech's head, and she smashed his skull" (Judges 9:53). Abimelech was a quasi-warlord in the time of the judges, and he did evil things in the eyes of the Lord, killing God's people. He proved to be aligned with the serpent and met a serpent's fate.

David is the Skull-Crushing Seed of the Woman

The imagery of skull-crushing and feet-trampling against the enemies of God becomes clearer through David. The boy from Bethlehem followed in similar patterns to his two skull-crushing predecessors in the book of Judges: "And David sent his hand down into his bag and took from it a stone and slung it and struck the Philistine on his forehead. And the stone sank into his forehead, so that he fell on his face to the ground... Then David ran and stood over the Philistine and took his sword and drew it out of its sheath and put him to death and cut off his head with it. Then the Philistines saw that their champion was dead, so they fled" (1 Sam 17:49, 51). David shattered the head of the enemy of God's people, beheading Goliath and giving God's people rest from their enemies.

The books of first and second Samuel begin and end with expectations that the anointed seed of Judah would be the Lord's warrior to fight against God's enemies in bone-crushing warfare. The books begin this way: "The Lord shatters his adversaries; he thunders against them from the heavens. The Lord executes judgment to the ends of the earth. He will strengthen his king and exalt the power of his anointed one" (1 Sam 2:10). The anointed king will shatter the enemies of God.

The books concludes this way: "And I have consumed them and crushed them, so that they did not rise; and they fell under my feet... Then I beat them fine as the dust of the earth; I pulverized



and stamped them as the mire of the streets” (2 Sam 22:39, 43). David’s song gives us his interpretation of his responsibility as the warrior-king who gives rest to the people of God. He understood his role as the one who would crush God’s enemies under his feet.

Ultimately David’s victory is the victory of the Lord. It is the Lord who will continue to give this victory through the seed of David. The final verse of 2 Samuel says, “He gives great salvation to His king, and shows lovingkindness to His anointed, to David and his seed forever” (2 Sam 22:51). David ended his song with the expectation that the kings of his line will continue to have victory over the enemies of God according to God’s covenant promise to give His people rest from their enemies (2 Sam 7:11).

The Widening Warfare of David’s Line

David continued to interpret the events of his life according to the Bible, and so he wrote in such a way as to highlight within Israel’s history and within his promised kingdom certain connections in Scripture. He did this so that the people of God might also interpret their lives according to the promise-shaped patterns of the imagery of the Bible.

The book of Psalms begins with a twin introduction in Psalms 1 and 2. The opening of the book frames the rest of the songs of Israel according to the warfare between God’s anointed warrior-king and the world which is in rebellion against God and His anointed. “Why do the nations rage and the peoples meditate on a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers take counsel together against Yahweh and against His Anointed... ‘But as for Me, I have installed My King Upon Zion, My holy mountain.’ I will surely tell of the decree of Yahweh: He said to Me, ‘You are My Son, today I have begotten You. Ask of Me, and I will surely give the nations as Your inheritance, and the ends of the earth as Your possession. You shall break them with a rod of iron, You shall shatter them like a potter’s



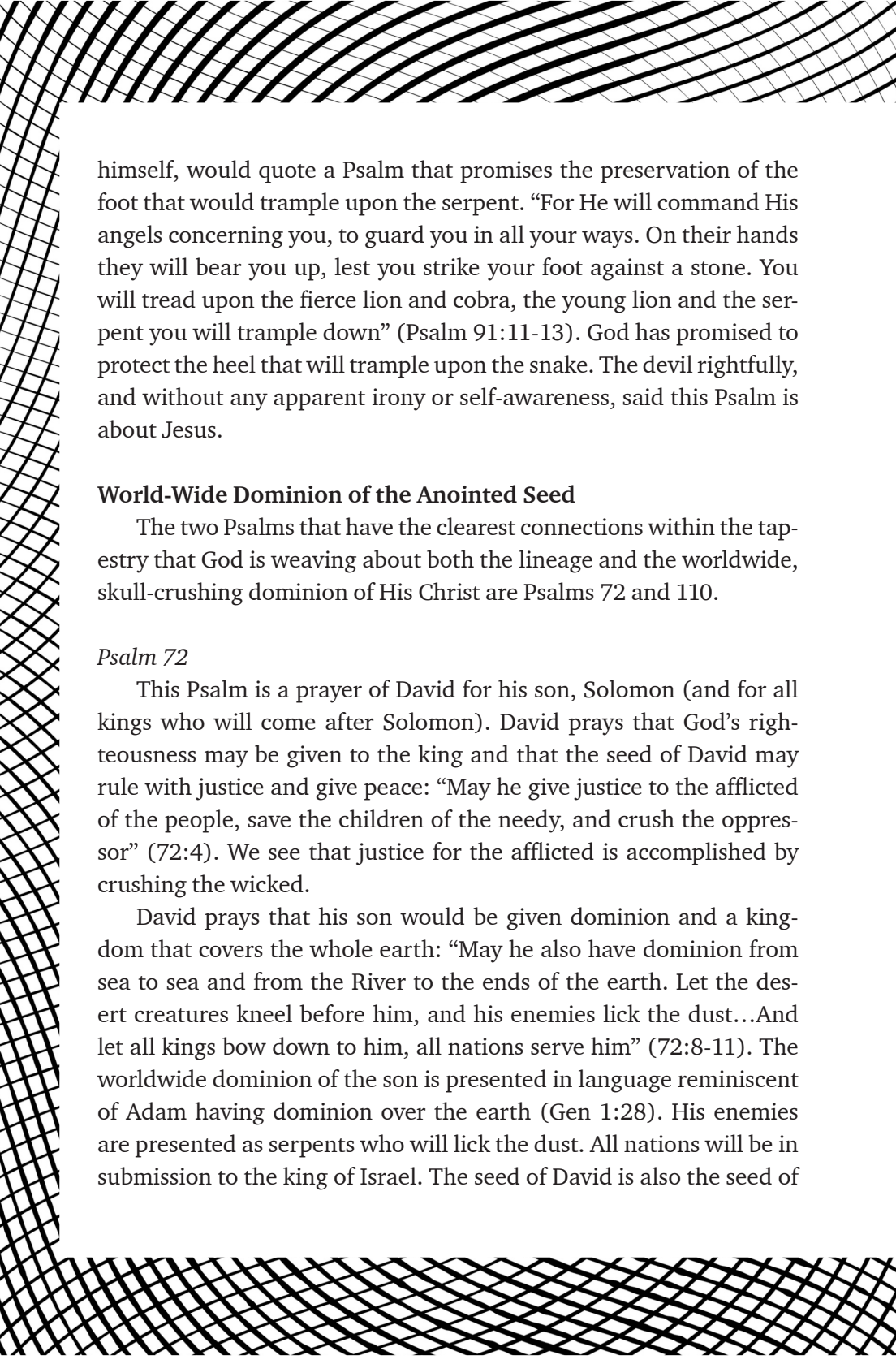
vessel” (Psalm 2:1-9).

Israel’s existence is framed as being in conflict with all those who oppose God and His king. Yet the Lord will have the victory and give to His Son the nations through shattering warfare. They arrogantly oppose the Lord, but His king will break and shatter them as the instrument of God’s judgment. All the ends of the earth will one day be under the dominion of the king of Israel.

The only way to escape God’s judgment is to align oneself with the King of Israel: “So now, O kings, show insight; take warning, O judges of the earth. Serve Yahweh with fear and rejoice with trembling. Kiss the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!” (2:10-12). The nations are blessed by aligning themselves with the Son. In essence, there is an open offer for them to switch sides from being in league with the serpent to becoming those who are in submission to the Son. It is through the Son that the nations will be blessed.

Elsewhere in the Psalms there is repeated imagery that is used by the authors who interpreted Israel’s life in terms of the skull-crushing warfare between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman and his heel. “I crushed them, so that they were not able to rise; they fell under my feet” (Psalm 18:38). “They have venom like the venom of a serpent; like a deaf cobra that stops up its ear...O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; break out the fangs of the young lions, O Yahweh...The righteous will be glad when he beholds the vengeance; he will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked.” (Psalm 58:4, 6, 10). “Surely God will crush the head of His enemies, the hairy skull of him who goes on in his guilty deeds” (Psalm 68:21).

In one familiar Psalm quoted by the devil in the New Testament, we read of the heel of the one who trusts in the Lord that will be preserved from striking against a stone. But when the Psalm is read in its context it is curious, to say the least, that Satan, the ancient serpent



himself, would quote a Psalm that promises the preservation of the foot that would trample upon the serpent. “For He will command His angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways. On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone. You will tread upon the fierce lion and cobra, the young lion and the serpent you will trample down” (Psalm 91:11-13). God has promised to protect the heel that will trample upon the snake. The devil rightfully, and without any apparent irony or self-awareness, said this Psalm is about Jesus.

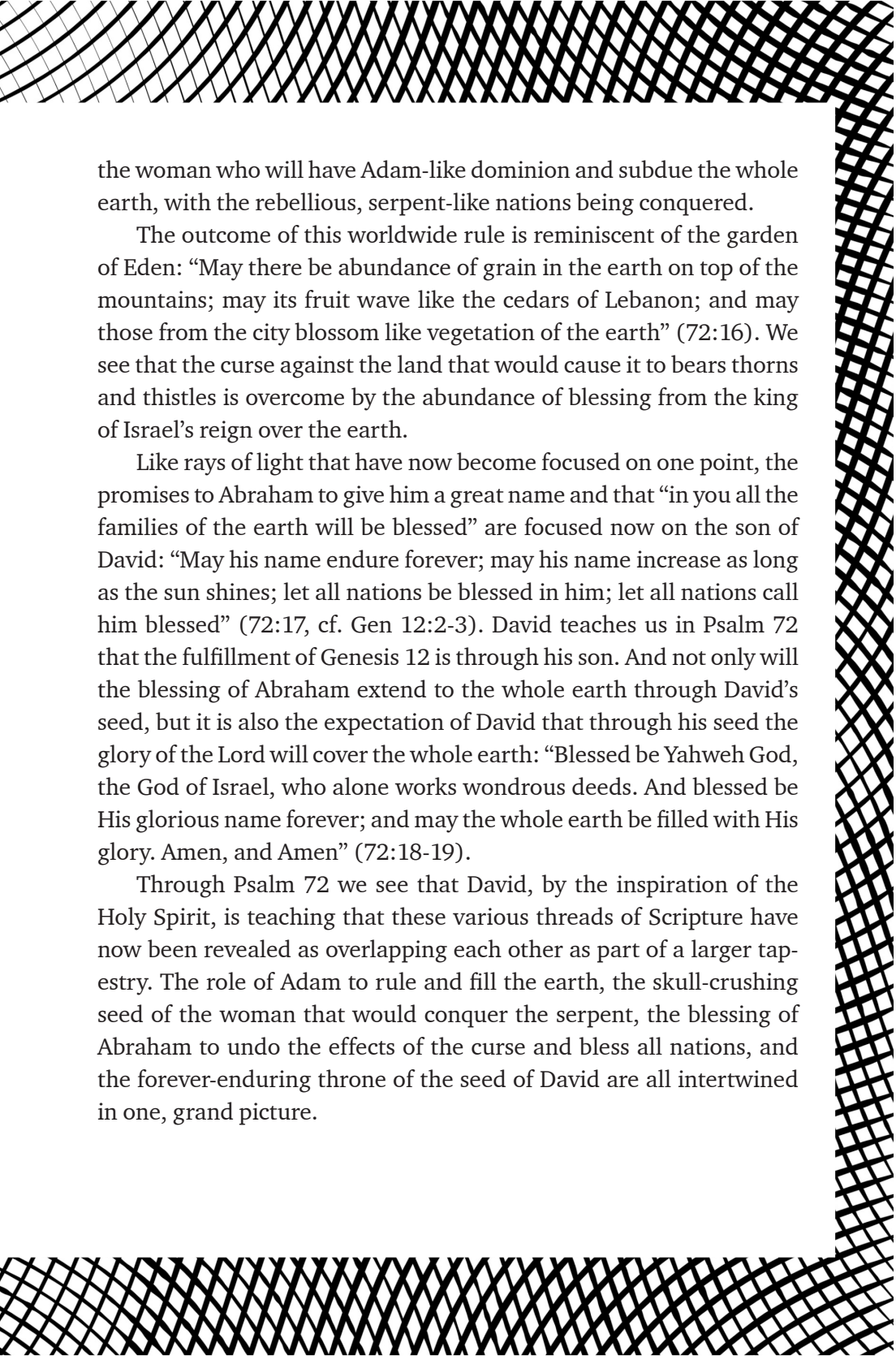
World-Wide Dominion of the Anointed Seed

The two Psalms that have the clearest connections within the tapestry that God is weaving about both the lineage and the worldwide, skull-crushing dominion of His Christ are Psalms 72 and 110.

Psalm 72

This Psalm is a prayer of David for his son, Solomon (and for all kings who will come after Solomon). David prays that God’s righteousness may be given to the king and that the seed of David may rule with justice and give peace: “May he give justice to the afflicted of the people, save the children of the needy, and crush the oppressor” (72:4). We see that justice for the afflicted is accomplished by crushing the wicked.

David prays that his son would be given dominion and a kingdom that covers the whole earth: “May he also have dominion from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. Let the desert creatures kneel before him, and his enemies lick the dust...And let all kings bow down to him, all nations serve him” (72:8-11). The worldwide dominion of the son is presented in language reminiscent of Adam having dominion over the earth (Gen 1:28). His enemies are presented as serpents who will lick the dust. All nations will be in submission to the king of Israel. The seed of David is also the seed of



the woman who will have Adam-like dominion and subdue the whole earth, with the rebellious, serpent-like nations being conquered.

The outcome of this worldwide rule is reminiscent of the garden of Eden: “May there be abundance of grain in the earth on top of the mountains; may its fruit wave like the cedars of Lebanon; and may those from the city blossom like vegetation of the earth” (72:16). We see that the curse against the land that would cause it to bear thorns and thistles is overcome by the abundance of blessing from the king of Israel’s reign over the earth.

Like rays of light that have now become focused on one point, the promises to Abraham to give him a great name and that “in you all the families of the earth will be blessed” are focused now on the son of David: “May his name endure forever; may his name increase as long as the sun shines; let all nations be blessed in him; let all nations call him blessed” (72:17, cf. Gen 12:2-3). David teaches us in Psalm 72 that the fulfillment of Genesis 12 is through his son. And not only will the blessing of Abraham extend to the whole earth through David’s seed, but it is also the expectation of David that through his seed the glory of the Lord will cover the whole earth: “Blessed be Yahweh God, the God of Israel, who alone works wondrous deeds. And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen” (72:18-19).

Through Psalm 72 we see that David, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, is teaching that these various threads of Scripture have now been revealed as overlapping each other as part of a larger tapestry. The role of Adam to rule and fill the earth, the skull-crushing seed of the woman that would conquer the serpent, the blessing of Abraham to undo the effects of the curse and bless all nations, and the forever-enduring throne of the seed of David are all intertwined in one, grand picture.

Psalm 110

David also prophesied of his son: “Yahweh says to my Lord: ‘Sit at My right hand until I put Your enemies as a footstool for Your feet.’ Yahweh will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, ‘Have dominion in the midst of Your enemies’” (110:1-2). David’s son is also David’s Lord. The seed of David will be greater than David, being seated at the right hand of Yahweh. God will put all things under the feet of this king of Israel. He will have dominion over his enemies. Again, this language is intentionally reminiscent of Genesis 1-3.

And, surprisingly, this king will also be a priest: “Yahweh has sworn and will not change His mind, ‘You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.’” (110:4). The priest-king will rule on behalf of the Lord and mediate the presence of the Lord before His people. David continues: “The Lord is at Your right hand; He will crush kings in the day of His anger. He will render justice among the nations, He will fill them with corpses, He will crush the head that is over the wide earth” (110:4-6). Through Psalm 110 we learn that the king who rules at the right hand of Yahweh will execute God’s justice upon the earth by crushing the heads of the enemies of God and exercising a world-wide dominion.

Yahweh is the Serpent-Crushing Warrior

Not only is the Lord’s chosen king the one who crushes the heads of the wicked, but also the Lord Himself. In several places in the Old Testament Yahweh is the One who assumes the role of the warrior. “In indignation You marched through the earth; in anger You trampled the nations. You went forth for the salvation of Your people, for salvation with Your anointed. You crushed the head of the house of the wicked” (Habakkuk 3:12-13). God is pictured as trampling underfoot the wicked nations that are aligned with the serpent, thereby crushing their heads.

Through the eyes of faith, God’s people poetically recast their

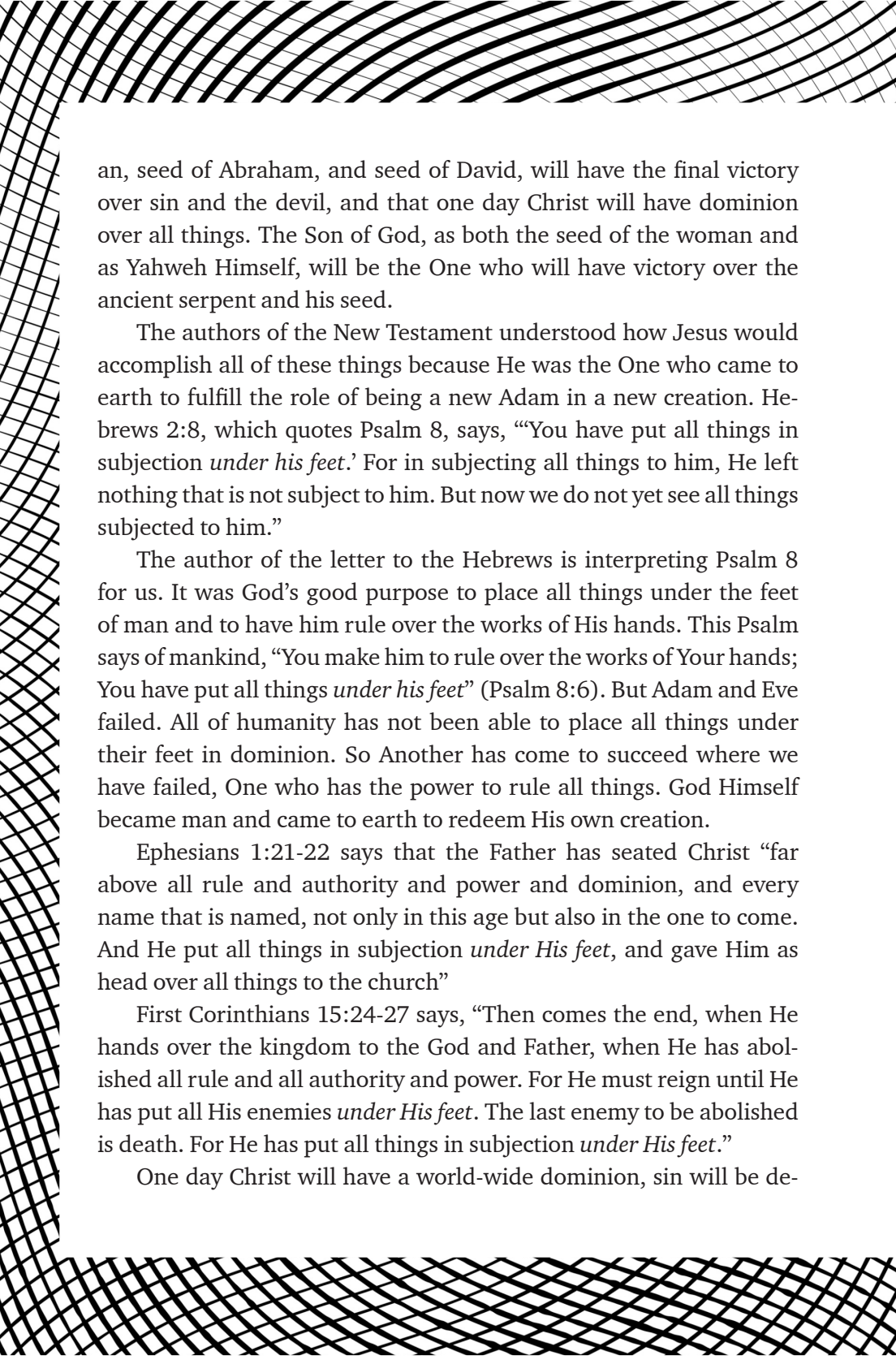
lives within the unseen cosmic struggle with Satan and his followers. At times the language they used is set within grand, poetic mythology: “Yet God is my King from of old, Who works deeds of salvation in the midst of the earth. You divided the sea by Your strength; You broke the heads of the sea monsters in the waters. You crushed the heads of Leviathan. (Psalm 74:12-14).

Where does this idea of Leviathan come from? Ultimately, the Psalmist knew that the stories of the surrounding pagan cultures, which contained a fable of an ancient, seven-headed dragon, were in truth the stories of God’s warfare against Satan. In these pagan myths, the Leviathan was a sea creature that symbolized the destructive waters of the sea and, in turn, the forces of chaos that threatened the established created order. [NET Bible footnote 31, Psalm 74:14]. The Psalmist knew that the ultimate battle against God’s created order would come from Satan, who is the true and ultimate Leviathan, the ancient snake. Further authors of Scripture also picked up on these themes, and by God’s inspiration, Daniel wrote about a vile beast that emerges from the sea (Daniel 7), and in Revelation 13 there is a seven-headed beast that comes from the sea.

God’s people in Isaiah looked forward to the day when Yahweh would win the final, decisive victory over the ancient dragon: “In that day Yahweh will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, with His fierce and great and mighty sword, even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea” (Isaiah 27:1). The longed-awaited victory of Yahweh over His people’s enemies is depicted as the smashing of an ancient snake: “Wake up! Wake up! Clothe yourself with strength, O arm of the Lord! Wake up as in former times, as in antiquity. Did you not smash the Proud One? Did you not wound the sea monster?” (Isaiah 51:9, NET).

The Final Battle

The hope of the Christian is that Jesus Christ, as seed of the wom-



an, seed of Abraham, and seed of David, will have the final victory over sin and the devil, and that one day Christ will have dominion over all things. The Son of God, as both the seed of the woman and as Yahweh Himself, will be the One who will have victory over the ancient serpent and his seed.

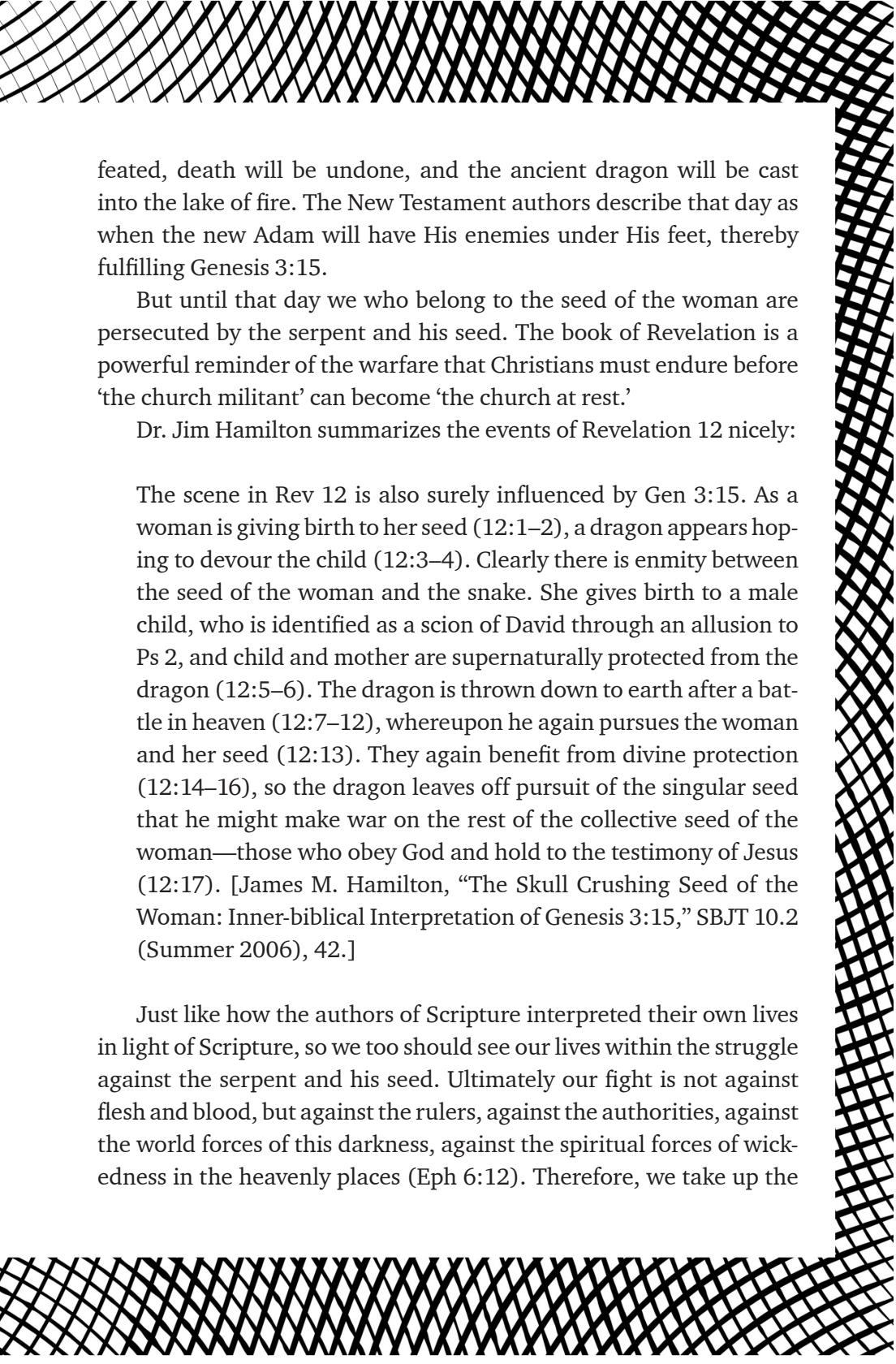
The authors of the New Testament understood how Jesus would accomplish all of these things because He was the One who came to earth to fulfill the role of being a new Adam in a new creation. Hebrews 2:8, which quotes Psalm 8, says, “You have put all things in subjection *under his feet*.’ For in subjecting all things to him, He left nothing that is not subject to him. But now we do not yet see all things subjected to him.”

The author of the letter to the Hebrews is interpreting Psalm 8 for us. It was God’s good purpose to place all things under the feet of man and to have him rule over the works of His hands. This Psalm says of mankind, “You make him to rule over the works of Your hands; You have put all things *under his feet*” (Psalm 8:6). But Adam and Eve failed. All of humanity has not been able to place all things under their feet in dominion. So Another has come to succeed where we have failed, One who has the power to rule all things. God Himself became man and came to earth to redeem His own creation.

Ephesians 1:21-22 says that the Father has seated Christ “far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. And He put all things in subjection *under His feet*, and gave Him as head over all things to the church”

First Corinthians 15:24-27 says, “Then comes the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign until He has put all His enemies *under His feet*. The last enemy to be abolished is death. For He has put all things in subjection *under His feet*.”

One day Christ will have a world-wide dominion, sin will be de-



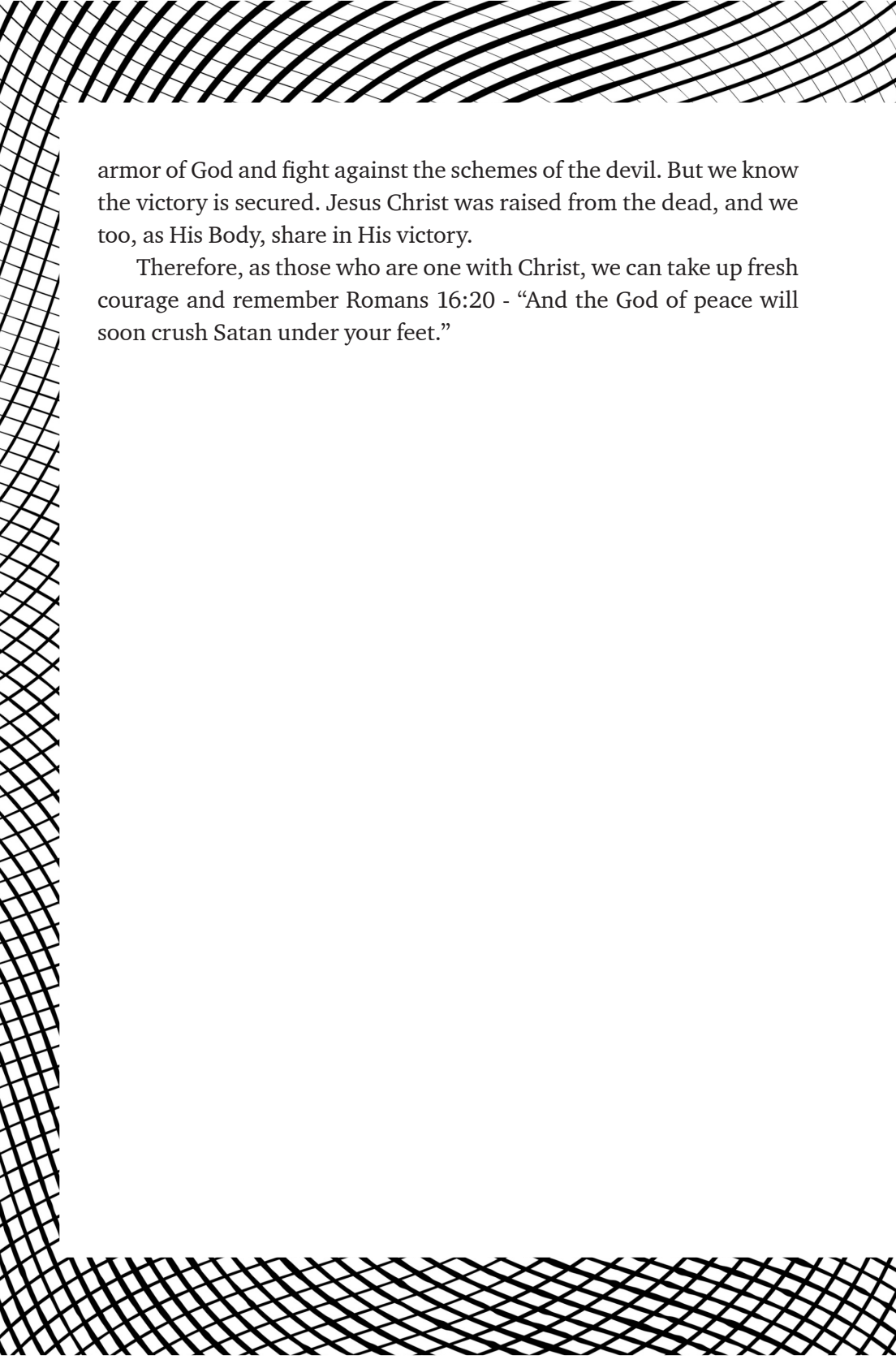
feated, death will be undone, and the ancient dragon will be cast into the lake of fire. The New Testament authors describe that day as when the new Adam will have His enemies under His feet, thereby fulfilling Genesis 3:15.

But until that day we who belong to the seed of the woman are persecuted by the serpent and his seed. The book of Revelation is a powerful reminder of the warfare that Christians must endure before ‘the church militant’ can become ‘the church at rest.’

Dr. Jim Hamilton summarizes the events of Revelation 12 nicely:

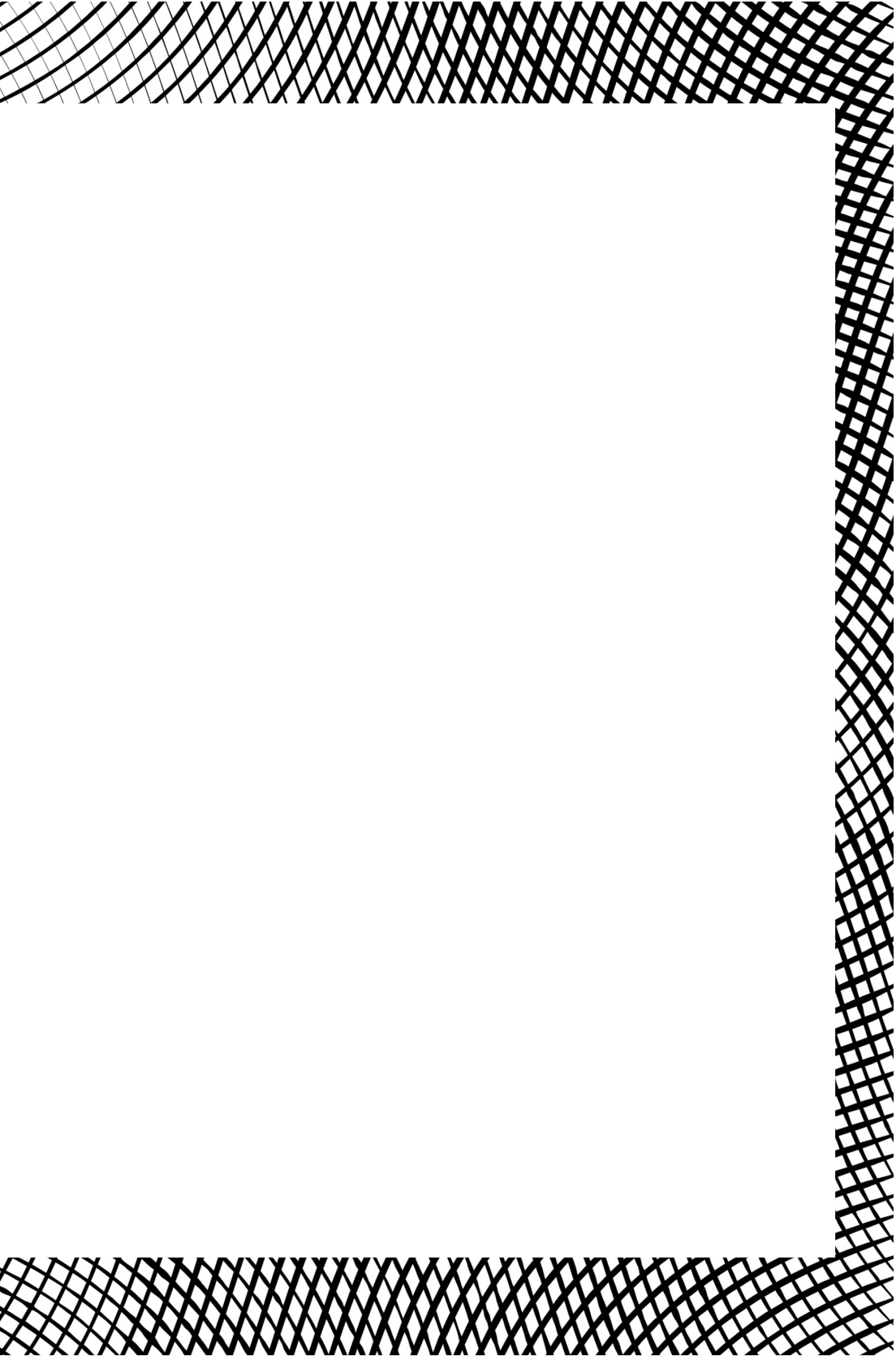
The scene in Rev 12 is also surely influenced by Gen 3:15. As a woman is giving birth to her seed (12:1–2), a dragon appears hoping to devour the child (12:3–4). Clearly there is enmity between the seed of the woman and the snake. She gives birth to a male child, who is identified as a scion of David through an allusion to Ps 2, and child and mother are supernaturally protected from the dragon (12:5–6). The dragon is thrown down to earth after a battle in heaven (12:7–12), whereupon he again pursues the woman and her seed (12:13). They again benefit from divine protection (12:14–16), so the dragon leaves off pursuit of the singular seed that he might make war on the rest of the collective seed of the woman—those who obey God and hold to the testimony of Jesus (12:17). [James M. Hamilton, “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *SBJT* 10.2 (Summer 2006), 42.]

Just like how the authors of Scripture interpreted their own lives in light of Scripture, so we too should see our lives within the struggle against the serpent and his seed. Ultimately our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places (Eph 6:12). Therefore, we take up the



armor of God and fight against the schemes of the devil. But we know the victory is secured. Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and we too, as His Body, share in His victory.

Therefore, as those who are one with Christ, we can take up fresh courage and remember Romans 16:20 - "And the God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet."



8 | A Throne Forever

Now it happened when the king inhabited his house, and Yahweh had given him rest on every side from all his enemies... that the word of Yahweh came to Nathan, saying, ⁵“Go and say to My servant David... ‘Thus says Yahweh, “Wherever I have gone about [literally, walked] with all the sons of Israel, did I speak a word with one of the tribes of Israel, which I commanded to shepherd My people Israel, saying, ‘Why have you not built Me a house of cedar? So now, thus you shall say to My servant David, ‘Thus says Yahweh of hosts, “I Myself took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel. ⁹And I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth. ¹⁰ And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place and not be disturbed again; and the unrighteous will not afflict them any more as formerly, ¹¹ even from the day that I commanded judges to be over My people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Yahweh also declares to you that Yahweh will make a house for you. ¹²When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³ He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴ I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me; when he commits iniquity, I will reprove him with the rod of men and the strikes from the sons of men, ¹⁵ but My lovingkindness shall not be removed from him, as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall endure before Me forever; your throne shall be established forever.””” ¹⁷ According

to all these words and according to all this vision, so Nathan spoke to David. ¹⁸Then David the king went in and sat before Yahweh, and he said, “Who am I, O Lord Yahweh, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far? ¹⁹And yet this was a small thing in Your eyes, O Lord Yahweh, for You have spoken also of the house of Your slave concerning the distant future. And this is the law of man, O Lord Yahweh.”

2 Samuel 7:1, 4-5, 7-19

The story of the Bible is like a straight line, moving from Genesis to Revelation. But along this line are key moments in the progress of salvation history, called covenants. These covenants are like individual vertebrae (a series of small bones) along the spine. The backbone of Scripture is two things at the same time: it is a straight line and it is divided into sections, just like our own backbones are a single column but made of many parts. The story of salvation history is both a single unity and the progress of different eras, sometimes called dispensations. These administrations and orderings of the ages were according to the plan of God.

From the perspective of those living within the progress of salvation history, it may not have been always so clear and obvious how the Lord was working His will. But along the way, especially in the moments when He established a covenant, God was connecting the dots and leaving clues along the trail. Somehow all things were moving in an orderly way along the seemingly twisted path. Golden coins were being left along the trail for God’s people to find and follow on the path by faith. The Apostle Paul tells us that the Father has been “making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him for an administration of the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things

in the heavens and things on the earth in Him” (Ephesians 1:9-10).

Each covenant meaningfully connects together to tell one story. So far we have seen the story move from the garden, to Noah, to Abraham, to Moses, and now to David. In the covenant with David, we see God summarizing previous covenant promises. God is moving the story forward at this crossroad, now focusing many of the promises that have come before onto David’s line of descendants. In nearly every verse we hear an echo from the past.

We are told that David will be given a great name like how God promised a great name to Abraham. *To David*: “I will make you a great name, like the name of the great men who are on the earth” (2 Sam 7:9). *To Abraham*: “And I will bless you, and make your name great” (Gen 12:2).

In the garden, we heard of the conflict between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman. Abraham was told that those who attempt to curse his family will themselves be cursed. God promised protection to Abraham’s line from their snake-like enemies. But how would God continue to protect His people? The answer is that He would raise up a warrior to crush His enemies, even a shepherd who knew how to grab a lion by the head and kill it, even crushing the forehead of a Philistine giant. We now see in David a seed of the woman who can crush the head of the serpent.

God told David “I have been with you wherever you have gone and have cut off all your enemies from before you” (2 Sam 7:9). Because God raised up a king His people would “not be disturbed again; and the unrighteous will not afflict them any more as formerly” (2 Sam 7:10). Israel’s rest and peace in the land from her enemies is guaranteed because of the covenant with David. It is through David’s seed that the promise to Abraham would be guaranteed.

And not only did God promise protection from the serpent’s seed, but He also promised His people land. “To your seed I will give this land” (Gen 12:7). Because David was their protector God’s people

would be allowed to stay in the land like a vine of God's own planting and flourish. "And I will appoint a place for My people Israel and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place" (2 Sam 7:10).

The continuation of the covenant with Abraham is seen in another surprising way. Abraham was promised seed that would be as many as the stars of the heavens and the sand upon the seashore. David is promised seed also, but David's seed is one man—not many. "I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:12-13).

The word *seed* can mean one seed, or it can mean many. Although Abraham was promised many descendants elsewhere in Genesis, the Lord is connecting the promise made to him in Genesis to the His covenant with David. The singular seed of Abraham is also the seed of David (see Gal 3:16). The language God uses for each promise is intentionally the same. *To Abraham*: "but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir" (Gen 15:4). *To David*: "I will raise up one of your seed after you, who will come forth from your own body" (2 Sam 7:12). Through this one man, the seed of David, God meant to fulfill His promises to Abraham.

In the previous devotional chapter, we explored Psalm 72, where David taught that his royal line would fulfill the blessing of Abraham to all nations. The royal seed will be the channel and fulfillment of the blessing of Abraham to the world. As God promised Abraham an "everlasting covenant" (Gen 17:6-7), so also God promised to David's son to "establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Sam 7:16). The everlasting covenant will be guaranteed through the everlasting kingdom.

God begins His covenant declaration to David by saying He is One who is "*walking*" with Israel, which is the same Hebrew word used when God was "*walking* in the garden in the cool of the day." David

also had been given “rest” by God, like how God had rested on the 7th day. These words are evocative clues left by the author, intending for us to pick them up.

And so our minds naturally turn to Adam, the one made in the *image* and *likeness* of God. We read later in Genesis that Adam also became a “father of a son in *his own likeness*, according to his *image*, and named him Seth” (Gen 5:3). Genesis teaches us that fathers make sons in their own image. That is part of what it means to be a father. So God declared to David in the most surprising part of the covenant “I will be a father to him and he will be a son to Me” (2 Sam 7:14). The son of David would also be the son of God. The seed of David will be a man in the very image and likeness of God.

And how does David respond to this amazing news? He worshipped, appearing before the ark of the covenant. “Then David the king went in and sat before Yahweh” (2 Sam 7:18). David, in his worship, summarized all that he heard from the Lord with a declaration: “And this is the law of man, O Lord Yahweh” (2 Sam 7:19). We should note that this sentence is a statement and not a question. David understood that this is now God’s law of man. This is how God will deal with all humanity. This is the new law of man—literally, the Torah of Adam—the charter for humanity. All of God’s future dealings with humans will be through the son of David. All nations and peoples will now relate to God through the David’s son.

The dazzling and broad covenants of the past have now been focused upon a single prism in David’s son. Just like how the light of the sun can be focused through a prism and refracted into a rainbow on the other side, so also is God summing up all His promises through the royal seed. All the blessings will flow through him. The Son of David will bless the world.

Take a Moment

1. What ways are we able to trust the Father with the details of our lives, knowing that He is the Lord of times and seasons (Acts 1:7)?
2. What insight do we gain about the exclusivity of salvation in Christ through this passage?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Lord, that You have been in control of the ages and seasons of the world, so I know I can trust You with the details of my life.
- Thank You that I can know You, Father, through the Son.
- Help me to share the gospel with others, knowing that “there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).
- Give me greater love and amazement for Your plan of salvation through Christ.

9 | Curses and Consequence

Judah and Israel were as numerous as the sand that is on the seashore in abundance; they were eating and drinking and being glad.²¹ Now Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the River to the land of the Philistines and to the border of Egypt; they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life.

^{4:25}, So Judah and Israel lived in security, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon...And God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of understanding in his heart, like the sand that is on the seashore.³⁰ And Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt... and the renown of his name was in all the surrounding nations.³² He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.³³ And he spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish.³⁴ And men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

^{8:46} "When they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin) and You are angry with them and give them over to an enemy, so that they take them away captive to the land of the enemy, far off or near;⁴⁷ and if they cause these things to return to their heart in the land where they have been taken captive, and return and make supplication to You in the land of those who have taken them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and have committed iniquity, we have acted wickedly';⁴⁸ and if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies...⁴⁹ then listen in heaven Your

dwelling place to their prayer and their supplication, and do justice for them, ⁵⁰ and forgive Your people who have sinned against You...”

^{11:9} Now Yahweh was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from Yahweh, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, ¹⁰ and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not walk after other gods; but he did not keep what Yahweh had commanded.

1 Kings 4:20-21, 29-34; 8:46-53; 11:9-10

In the very good kingdom of Solomon, God ruled all things by His Word. As promised to David, God was like a father to the seed of David, and Solomon was like a son to God. Solomon ruled the earth like God Himself, after His own image and likeness. Solomon had dominion upon the earth as an extension of God’s own character and His own rule. Just like how God created, filled, ruled, and organized, so Solomon had dominion and filled the known world with life, beauty, and wisdom. He was like a new Adam.

Just as Adam named the animals, so also Solomon spoke of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Just as Abraham had a great name, so also Solomon’s name had renown over all the earth. More than that, God’s people finally were abundant like the sand that is on the seashore, as was promised to Abraham.

In the very good kingdom of Solomon, there was blessing. Israel had peace with God, peace with each other, and peace with the creation. This three-fold relationship of *God*, *man*, and *creation* shows us how the world was at rest.

They had peace *with God*. They trusted in His character and knew that God truly cared for them. They trusted in His word, not questioning whether what He said was true. They had peace *with each other*. They were “eating and drinking and being glad” (1 Kings 4:20).

They had peace *with creation*. The land was bountiful and provided everything they needed. “So Judah and Israel lived in security, every man under his vine and his fig tree, from Dan even to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:25). Solomon worked the earth and expanded the borders of Israel. The people of Israel even had peace with the surrounding nations. The nations of the earth blessed the seed of Abraham, swearing allegiance to him, and in turn, they were blessed by Solomon’s wisdom. For one, perfect moment in the history of Israel all was at peace.

But the peace would not last. Solomon knew that the hearts of the people were fickle. There would come a day when they would be treacherous and disobey the Lord, turning to other gods. Solomon knew that one day, if that happened, then God would send the people into exile, just like how Moses said so at the end of Deuteronomy. What Solomon did not foresee was that he himself would turn away from the Lord.

And so the people of God disobeyed the Word of God, rebelled against the rule of God, and were eventually exiled from the blessed land of God. The problem was that Solomon began to question the wisdom of God’s Word. After all, shouldn’t a king have many wives and many horses? How else would he make alliances with the nations and defend his kingdom? And so “Solomon’s import of horses was from Egypt...” (1 Kings 10:28), and he even married Pharaoh’s daughter.

He ignored God’s Word: “Moreover, he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor shall he cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses...And he shall not multiply wives for himself, or else his heart will turn away...” (Deut 17:16-17). Instead of trusting in God to defend his kingdom Solomon trusted in his own ability to defend his borders.

Solomon allowed himself to be seduced by the voices of his many wives. Just like how Adam was chastised by the Lord for listening to

the voice of his wife instead of to the Word of God, so also Solomon was led astray by the many women he married who worshipped foreign gods. “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife...” (Genesis 3:17). “Now it happened at the time that Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to Yahweh his God” (1 Kings 11:4).

What happened next in Israel’s history is the sad story of unfaithfulness, generation after generation. The kings and people disobeyed the Lord and began to experience the curses of the covenant. They experienced enmity *with God*. Many of the kings led the people into idolatry, provoking the Lord to anger. They experienced enmity *with each other*. The north and south were at war with each other. Sons tried to kill their fathers. Brothers plotted to steal the throne. Royal mothers tried to kill all the line of the seed of David. They experienced enmity *with the creation* and *with the surrounding nations*. There was drought and famine. Enemy nations besieged them.

Yet the Lord was compassionate to Judah because of His sure covenant to David. He gave them many chances to repent. He sent prophets who appealed to the covenants and called on them to return to the Lord. But many of the kings refused to repent. The history of the kings of Israel and Judah had a repeated phrase that often described the reign of a new king: “And he did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh,” just as the history of the judges had an often repeated phrase: “Then the sons of Israel again did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh.”

But through it all, the Lord provided them with another refrain: “But for David’s sake Yahweh his God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem...” (1 Kings 15:4). “However, Yahweh was not willing to make Judah a ruin for the sake of David His servant, since He had promised him to give a lamp to him through his sons always (2 Kings 8:19). God’s promises can never be revoked or cancelled.

Although the people would go into exile, being driven out from

the land, the Lord still wanted their hope to be placed in Him as their covenant-keeping God. The people could hold onto two things: first—the unbreakable promise of God to have a son of David on the throne forever, and second—that the Lord might give them a new heart.

Solomon had said at the dedication of the temple that if the people would return to the Lord with all their heart and with all their soul, then God would hear their pray while in exile and bring them back to the land—“and if they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who have taken them captive...then listen in heaven Your dwelling place to their prayer and their supplication, and do justice for them, and forgive Your people who have sinned against You” (1 Kings 8:48-50).

But how would they be able to turn to God with all their hearts? How could they love the Lord with all their hearts, as Moses had said in Deuteronomy 6? The only answer is if God would give them a heart to love Him. They would need God’s laws written on their heart.

Take a Moment

1. At this point in the storyline of God’s redemptive history, what lessons should we learn about the titanic power of sin?
2. If the Lord’s people would win victory over the serpent, then what supernatural things would have to happen so that the victory would not rely upon human strength or goodness?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Lord, for not forgetting Your promise to David.
- Thank You for leaving a lamp in Jerusalem in the darkness of human sin, “to shine upon those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to direct our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

- Help me to keep my eyes on the promise that ties Christ and me together in an unbreakable union and not to be distraught over my circumstances.
- Give me peace, as the old hymn says*, that though storms may sweep my skies, this blood-sealed friendship changes not, the cross is ever nigh.

1. *I hear the words of love,
I gaze upon the blood,
I see the mighty sacrifice,
and I have peace with God.
2. 'Tis everlasting peace,
sure as Jehovah's name;
'tis stable as His steadfast throne,
for evermore the same.
3. The clouds may go and come,
and storms may sweep my sky;
this blood-sealed friendship changes not,
the cross is ever nigh.
4. I change — He changes not;
the Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place;
His truth, not mine, the tie.
5. My love is oftentimes low,
my joy still ebbs and flows,
but peace with Him remains the same;
no change Jehovah knows.

I Hear the Words of Love, Horatius Bonar, 1861

10 | Into Slavery

Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he became king, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. ¹² And he did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh his God; he did not humble himself before Jeremiah the prophet who spoke from the mouth of Yahweh. ¹³ He also rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar who had made him swear allegiance by God. But he stiffened his neck and hardened his heart against turning to Yahweh, the God of Israel. ¹⁴ Furthermore, all the leaders of the priests and the people were very unfaithful following all the abominations of the nations; and they defiled the house of Yahweh which He had set apart as holy in Jerusalem.

¹⁵ And Yahweh, the God of their fathers, sent word to them again and again by the hand of His messengers, because He had compassion on His people and on His habitation; ¹⁶ but they continually mocked the messengers of God, despised His words and scoffed at His prophets, until the wrath of Yahweh arose against His people, until there was no remedy. ¹⁷ Therefore He brought up against them the king of the Chaldeans who killed their choice men with the sword in the house of their sanctuary, and had no compassion on choice man or virgin, old man or infirm; He gave them all into his hand. ¹⁸ And all the articles of the house of God, great and small, and the treasures of the house of Yahweh, and the treasures of the king and of his officials, he brought them all to Babylon. ¹⁹ Then they burned the house of God and tore down the wall of Jerusalem, and burned all its palaces with fire and destroyed all its valuable articles. ²⁰ And those who had escaped from the sword he took away into exile to Babylon; and they were slaves to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, ²¹ to fulfill the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days

of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were fulfilled.

²²Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia—in order to complete the word of Yahweh by the mouth of Jeremiah—Yahweh stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he had a proclamation pass throughout his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying, ²³“Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, ‘Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. Whoever there is among you of all His people, may Yahweh his God be with him, and let him go up!’”

2 Chronicles 36:11-23

The people of God were exiled from the land of God because they would not obey the Word of God. And yet all through their disobedience, the Lord was faithful because of His covenant to David. God gave prophets to His people so that they would have the opportunity to repent of their evil ways. But they stiffened their necks and hardened their hearts against the Lord. They were once slaves in Egypt, and now they would again go into subjugation to the nations.

This was all according to the Word of the Lord to Moses: “But it will be, if you do not listen to the voice of Yahweh your God, to keep and to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I am commanding you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: ...Yahweh will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose tongue you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young...Moreover, Yahweh will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth. And Yahweh will bring you back to Egypt in ships...And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your

enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer” (Deut 28:15, 49-59, 68).

The Lord promised that if His people were faithless, then He would reverse the exodus from Egypt. They would again become slaves. And yet we see that where they were faithless, God was faithful. Although they chose to disregard His Word, God alone would be the One to keep His own commandments. If they would not keep the sabbath years, then He would.

The Lord had commanded them in the first paragraph of Leviticus 25 to take an entire year off from work every seven years. Just like how they would work six days and then rest on the seventh day, so also God commanded them to work six years and to rest on the seventh year. They were not to sow seed into their fields or prune their vines. They were to live off the natural abundance of the land, trusting in God to provide for them. However, they seldom trusted God to do this and broke the commandment for 490 years. Therefore the exile in Babylon would be 70 years—one year of exile for every seven of their sin. The land would lie fallow and undeveloped, making up for every year they did not trust in God’s Word.

This was also according to what the Lord had said: “Yet, in spite of this you do not obey Me, but walk in hostility against Me...Then the land will make up for its sabbaths all the days of the desolation, and you will be in your enemies’ land; then the land will rest and make up for its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it will observe the rest which it did not observe on your sabbaths, while you were living on it” (Lev 26:27, 34-35).

God’s Word will be kept, even if God is the only one keeping it. The way of righteousness will be known on earth, even if God alone must demonstrate His righteousness. We learn through the exile that if God’s Word and promises are to be fulfilled, then ultimately God must be the one to do it. He alone will fulfill His purposes. We also see in the exile that God was pleased to preserve a remnant. A small band

of faithful people would learn to trust Him in difficult circumstances. We can see God's faithfulness to His people in several stories during the exile.

In the book of Esther, there was a threat against the lives of the Jews. Haman sought to exterminate the seed of the woman. But in the Lord's kind and beautiful providence, it was Haman who was instead destroyed. The Lord raised up Esther, a Jew, to be the queen, and through her and her kinsman, Mordecai, they convinced the king to protect the Jewish people. The Lord crushed Haman, who was of the seed of the serpent, and protected the seed of the woman. Like Joseph in Egypt, Mordecai and Esther, as the seed of Abraham, are a blessing to the king of a foreign nation, and they are raised up to high positions.

In the book of Daniel, four boys were sent to Babylon's government training program to serve in the administration of the king. They had a choice: either forsake their Jewish identity or remain true to God's Word. They chose to remain faithful to God's Word, not defiling themselves with unclean foods which were forbidden according to Jewish dietary laws. God gave them favor, and they surpassed the other students. Like Joseph in Egypt, these boys trusted in the Lord in a foreign land, and God protected them. Also like Joseph, Daniel was given visions and could interpret dreams, earning the trust of the king and being promoted to high positions. The Lord crushed the high officials and the governors who conspired to kill Daniel by making prayer unlawful. They and their families were thrown into the lions' den, and they were crushed like the seed of the serpent. God protected the seed of the woman.

In the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, the Jewish cupbearer to the king prayed toward Jerusalem, remembering what Solomon prayed at the dedication of the temple. He presented a plan to go back to his fathers' land and restore the city. Like Joseph in Egypt, who proposed a plan to gather food for storage and the plan "was good in the eyes

of Pharaoh and in the eyes of all his servants” (Gen 41:37), so also the plan of Nehemiah “was good before the king and he sent me” (Neh 2:6). The people of God would leave the land of their exile with abundant treasure and articles for the temple (Ezra 1:5-11), just like how the people of God left the land of Egypt with treasure for the building of the tabernacle (Ex 12:35).

The seed of the serpent, Sanballat and Tobiah, conspired to stop the work, but their plans were frustrated and their conspiracy was brought to nothing. Eventually, Tobiah is driven out from the temple and disgraced, along with Sanballat’s relatives (Neh 13:8, 28). God had again protected the seed of the woman, blessing those who bless them and cursing those who curse them.

And yet things are still not as they should be. The returned exiles had shown themselves to be unfaithful to God’s Word. They were beginning to repeat the same sins of their fathers that led them into exile in the first place. Both books of Ezra and Nehemiah end with questions:

“Did not Solomon king of Israel sin regarding these things?...Do we then hear about you that you have done all this great evil by acting unfaithfully against our God by marrying foreign women?” (Neh 13:26-27). “So now, our God, what shall we say after this? For we have forsaken Your commandments...” (Ezra 9:9-10).

How will this people love the Lord with all their hearts? How will it be possible to ever roll back the effects of the curse? What had happened to God’s covenant with David? When will God’s people see the kingdom of God upon the earth and a king from David’s line sit again upon the throne? How will the Lord cover the dry lands with His glory if His people are unable to keep His Law? How will they be washed cleaned and be forgiven of their sins? How will they ever have a heart to obey God’s Law? The people are left wondering, and they must turn to the prophets for answers.

Take a Moment

1. In what ways does the New Covenant anticipate the questions of the Jewish exiles?
2. If you were living in Israel under the Law do you think you would have had difficulty obeying the law about the sabbath year?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Lord, for demonstrating Your righteousness on earth.
- Thank You that the unfaithfulness of Your people did not abolish the faithfulness of God. As Paul wrote, “let God be true and every man a liar” (Rom 3:4).
- Help me to rest more fully in the perfect righteousness of Christ.
- Give me the courage of Daniel, Esther, and Mordecai. I would rather be on Your side, Lord, than on the side of the world, no matter the cost.

11 | The Conquering of the Curses

Then a shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. ² The Spirit of Yahweh will rest on Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of Yahweh. ³ And He will delight in the fear of Yahweh, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, nor render a decision by what His ears hear; ⁴ but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with uprightness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will put the wicked to death. ⁵ Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.

⁶ And the wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a young boy will lead them. ⁷ Also the cow and the bear will graze, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. ⁸ And the nursing baby will play by the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child will put his hand on the viper's den. ⁹ They will do no evil nor act corruptly in all My holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of Yahweh as the waters cover the sea.

¹⁰ Then it will be in that day, that the nations will seek the root of Jesse, Who will stand as a standard for the peoples; and His resting place will be glorious.

¹¹ Then it will be in that day, that the Lord will again acquire the second time with His hand the remnant of His people, who will remain, From Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Ethiopia, Elam, Shinar, Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

Isaiah 11:1-11

How do the promises of the prophets, and especially Isaiah, relate to the big-picture story of God's people? We have to go all the way back to the garden of Eden. We must remember how the Lord promised that the seed of the woman would triumph over the serpent. The avenger would bruise the snake's head, but it would come at a terrible cost. The heel of the woman's seed would be bruised by the fangs of the vile snake. The joyful act of triumph would be mixed with sorrow. The redeemer would himself be wounded in the very act that wounds the serpent.

Because God's purposes would be fulfilled through the seed of the woman, God would certainly preserve Eve's lineage, and they would never be extinguished. This promise is passed on to Abraham and his seed. He was promised land, seed, and blessing. The tribe of Abraham would grow and bless the whole world. As time passed, the Lord showed His people how the seed of the woman and the seed of Abraham is now also the seed of David. It is through David's son that the world would be blessed.

But now the promise is in jeopardy. It looks like God's promises might fail. The people who were given the blessing and the promises have acted treacherously to the Lord. They worshipped other gods and followed after the ways of the world. Both Israel and Judah were sent into exile for their disobedience. And yet the Lord had not abandoned His promises. He tells us through the prophets that a new David is coming. The tree of Jesse may have been cut down, but there would arise a branch that will fulfill God's promise. God preserved the lineage of Eve because it is through this seed that God will accomplish His purposes.

We are told in Isaiah 11 that this Spirit-anointed king from David will usher in a new creation. Through his reign, the effects of the curse will be rolled back. The wicked nations who have oppressed the people of God will be put to death and the earth will no longer resist the dominion of humanity. All the predators of the earth will be made

gentle and tame. The wolf will dwell with the lamb, and the seed of the woman will play next to the cobra's den without fear. The enmity of the serpent against the seed will be brought to an end. No evil thing will be allowed on God's holy mountain.

In fact, the glory of the Lord will cover all the dry land as the waters do the sea. The entire earth, and not just the promised land, will be full of God's glory. It is as if through the Spirit-anointed seed of David the entire world will return to the peace it knew before the fall into sin. All will be made right. All will be at rest. All things sad will become untrue.

The book of Isaiah concludes by looking forward to the day when in a new creation there will no longer be any curse. "For behold, I am creating a new heavens and a new earth; and the former things will not be remembered or come upon the heart" (Isa 65:17). The Lord will enact a new exodus so that His people may join Him in the new creation, even people from all tribes and tongues: "The time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and see My glory...Then they shall bring all your brothers from all the nations" (Isa 66:18, 20).

But how will the people of God join this king who has the Spirit of God in the new creation? How can they possibly share in his reign if they themselves are sinful? The answer is that the seed of David will give the Spirit of God to his people. They will be made fit for the kingdom of God and will know God and love Him with all their heart. In places like Joel 2, God promises to pour out His Spirit on all His people. In Ezekiel we are told that He will "give them one heart and give within them a new spirit. And I will take the heart of stone out of their flesh and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11:19). "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to do My judgments" (Ezekiel 36:27).

But what about their sin? How will they be forgiven? The prophet Jeremiah spoke of a New Covenant that would put an end to sin:

“Behold, days are coming,’ declares Yahweh, ‘when I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah...I will put My law within them, and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people...they will all know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them,’ declares Yahweh, ‘for I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more” (Jeremiah 31:31, 33-34).

But how can God simply forgive His people’s sin? How will He put away their sin when everyone has turned aside to his own way and like sheep have gone astray? The answer is that the royal seed of David will deliver God’s people from bondage, rescuing them with a new exodus, giving them God’s Spirit, and ushering in the new creation—and he will do so in the most amazing way. He will suffer. He will bear upon his body the sins of the nation. The Lord will cause the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He himself will be crushed like an enemy of God. “But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our peace fell upon Him, and by His wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5). The Spirit-anointed servant of the Lord is also a suffering servant.

Although it was God’s people who sinned, this man instead would be struck. “That for the transgression of my people, striking was due to Him?” (Isa 53:8). He would suffer for sins that were not His own. He would take the place of sinners and bear their punishment. Although He had done no wrong and no deceit was in His mouth, He would be assigned to stand in the place of the wicked (Isa 53:9).

And this striking would also overflow with blessings for the people of God, because one chapter later, after the descriptions of the suffering servant, a call to drink is lifted up. “Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money come, buy and eat” (Isa 55:1) Isaiah writes in such a way as if this suffering servant is like the rock in the wilderness that Moses struck despite the peoples’ sinful grumblings that deserved a striking for their backs. And in this

striking of the substitute, a fountain of water opened up so that they would not die of thirst.

It is through the suffering of God's chosen servant that the people of God will find blessing. "By His knowledge the Righteous One, My Servant, will justify the many, as He will bear their iniquities" (Isa 53:11). The Righteous One will bring the status of "righteous" upon the guilty by Himself being counted as the guilty One.

But who could understand the end of all these things? How would all these marvelous things come to pass? The prophecies of Isaiah were strange and mysterious to the people of God. There was indeed good news! *No longer would they be forsaken by God!* But this good news is paired with grim news about the Lord's servant. They are told how they would no longer be forsaken, but they are also told of One who would be despised and forsaken. *No longer would God's people carry grief or sorrow!* But they are told of One who would be a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. *No longer would God's people fear chastisement from God!* But they are told of One who would be crushed and pierced in their place. *God's people would finally be healed!* But they are told of One who would be wounded for their healing.

God, through His prophets, spoke powerful words of hope. There would be a new exodus, a new creation, a new covenant, and a new David. He will give God's people new hearts so that they may obey His laws and love the Lord. He would put His Spirit within them. The curses will be rolled back through the Man anointed by the Spirit: "The Spirit of Lord Yahweh is upon me because Yahweh has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim release to captives and freedom to prisoners" (Isa 61:1).

The One who brings good news of the crushing of the serpent would Himself be crushed in the process. The One who brings good news to the afflicted would Himself be afflicted.

Take a Moment

1. In what ways can the story of the Lord's dealings with His people in Isaiah give you hope and fresh courage to face your circumstances—to know that after the destruction of their nation they were given hope for a restored city and, ultimately a new creation?

2. In what ways is God more glorified by slowly accomplishing His promises over the centuries, rather than all at once?

I can pray...

- Thank You for the promise of a new heaven and a new earth.
- Thank You, Jesus, for bearing our guilt and carrying our sorrows.
- Help me to see now, more than ever, the wisdom and beauty of Your substitutionary death, Jesus.
- Give me the strength to endure these days as I wait for You to make all things new.

12 | In Christ the Nations are Blessed

And the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the scroll and found the place where it was written, ¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are oppressed, ¹⁹ to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord.” ²⁰ And He closed the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down, and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹ And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.”

^{9:29} And it happened that while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. ³⁰ And behold, two men were talking with Him, and they were Moses and Elijah, ³¹ who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure [literally, exodus] which He was about to fulfill at Jerusalem. ³² Now Peter and his companions had been overcome with sleep, but when they were fully awake, they saw His glory and the two men standing with Him. ³³ And it happened that as they were leaving Him, Peter said to Jesus, “Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three booths: one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah”—not realizing what he was saying. ³⁴ While he was saying this, a cloud formed and began to overshadow them; and they were afraid as they entered the cloud. ³⁵ Then a voice came out of the cloud, saying, “This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!” ³⁶ And when the voice had spoken, Jesus was found alone. And they kept silent, and reported to no one in those days any of the things which they had seen.

^{24:25} And He said to them, “O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Was it not necessary

for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory?”²⁷ Then beginning with Moses and with all the prophets, He interpreted to them the things concerning Himself in all the Scriptures.

^{24:44} Now He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”⁴⁵ Then He opened their minds to understand the Scriptures,⁴⁶ and He said to them, “Thus it is written, that the Christ would suffer and rise again from the dead the third day,⁴⁷ and that repentance for forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name to all the nations, beginning from Jerusalem.”

Luke 4:17-21; 9:29-36; 24:25-27, 44-47

At the inauguration of His ministry, Jesus read from Isaiah and declared Himself to be the Spirit-anointed redeemer of God’s people. He would end the exile that Adam and Eve disastrously caused by their sin and return God’s people into a right relationship with Him. They would have peace *with God*, peace *with each other*, and peace *with the creation*.

Jesus alone is able to do this because He acts *as the Lord Himself*. He alone can bring God’s purposes to pass because He *is God*. By being born in human flesh, the Eternal Son is able to keep God’s promises to redeem the world through the seed of the woman, despite humanity being unable to produce a son that is capable of defeating the serpent and ruling God’s kingdom.

The solution is that God Himself became a man and fulfilled His covenants *as a man*. Where all other covenant heads failed Jesus alone would succeed and complete all the things left undone. Jesus was the perfectly obedient son of God, as the Lord promised to David that David’s son would be like a son to Him. “I will be a father to him

and he will be a son to Me” (2 Samuel 7:14). Now at last the son of David is truly the Son of God.

The powerful Word of God that formed the earth has come to earth. The One who made all things is born a man so that He may make all things new. He is the last Adam and in Him is the new humanity of the new creation. David’s son is also David’s Lord.

At His baptism, Jesus was demonstrated to be the One upon Whom the Spirit rests: “Jesus was also baptized, and while He was praying, heaven was opened, and *the Holy Spirit descended upon Him* in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came out of heaven, ‘You are My beloved Son, in You *I am well-pleased*’” (Luke 3:21-22). This same Jesus is the One of Whom Isaiah spoke: “Behold, My Servant, whom I uphold; My chosen one in whom My soul is *well-pleased*. I have *put My Spirit upon Him*; He will bring forth justice [righteousness] to the nations” (Isa 42:1). The well-pleasing Son of the Father was sent to earth to bring righteousness to the nations of the earth.

He alone is the One who can pour out the Spirit from on high to His people, restoring the earth in a new creation: “Until the Spirit is poured out upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful orchard, and the fruitful orchard is counted as a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness will live in the fruitful orchard” (Isa 32:15-16). John the Baptist tells us that it is Jesus alone who gives the Spirit, for, “He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Luke 3:16).

Jesus repeated events in Israel’s history in His own life to show how He would succeed where they had failed. He was tempted by the devil in the wilderness but resisted. Jesus succeeded where Adam and Eve failed. He hungered for 40 days in the wilderness and trusted in God’s Word and conquered. Jesus succeeded where Israel failed during their 40 years in the wilderness.

And then this Spirit-anointed seed of David begins to teach. He announces the forgiveness of sins and demonstrates His power to

forgive (Luke 5:17-24). Jesus condemns death and reverses it (Luke 7:15-17). He calms wild winds and wild men. (Luke 8:22-39). He has control over what appears to be out of control. He triumphs where no one else can succeed. He has dominion over the disordered creation and disordered man. He reverses the effects of the curse.

Who is this man? The disciples are asked to give an answer. Peter spoke up. He said that Jesus is not like one of the prophets from of old. He is the anointed Son of God. He is David's heir. He is the redeemer sent by the Father who has come to rescue God's people. The disciples get the answer right. But they still knew so little. Imagine their surprise when Jesus then told them how He must die. He will be rejected by the elders of the Jewish people and be killed. But He will be raised on the third day (Luke 9:18-27).

Eight days after this pronouncement, Jesus ascended a mountain with three of His disciples (Luke 9:28-36). While the disciples slept Jesus had two visitors. When the disciples awoke they saw Moses and Elijah talking with their Master. The appearance of Jesus was changed to be filled with glorious light. Do you remember how Moses' face glowed after being with the Lord on Mount Sinai? Moses was merely reflecting the glory he had seen, and that glory soon faded. But now the disciples were seeing the very source of that glory radiating out from Jesus Christ.

Why were Moses and Elijah speaking with Jesus? Of all the men in the Bible, why these two? Perhaps because they represent the Law and the Prophets, and they point to Christ as their fulfillment. Perhaps because the pattern of both Moses' and Elijah's lives pointed to Jesus. They both performed mighty miracles, spoke authoritatively the Word of the Lord, rescued the people of God from their enemies, and were both rejected by Israel. Jesus now in His earthly ministry was walking on the same path as those who had come before Him. But the disciples are not able to understand any of these things. They can only come down from the mountain in silence, and they did not

speak of these things with anyone in those days.

It was not until after Jesus' resurrection that they were finally able to understand. Jesus walked along the road with two of His disciples, hiding his appearance and interpreting the Scriptures that point to Him. We're not given the details of this Bible study, but the hearts of these disciples burned within them as they spoke with Him along the road. The Scriptures were opened to them and they saw how Jesus fulfilled what was written in the law, the prophets, and the writings. Later, Jesus appeared to the full number of His disciples and explained the Scriptures to them.

What passages did Jesus turn to? What Psalms did He quote? In what way did the Law of Moses predict the Christ and His sufferings? We must turn to the rest of the New Testament and learn the lessons that Jesus taught them that evening and the following 40 days.

The rest of the New Testament teaches us how the long and winding story of Scripture has finally found its end in Jesus. He is the key to open every lock. He is the Lamb of God, who fulfilled the pattern of the high day of atonement, whose blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat. He is the temple, the special meeting place between God and man, giving access to God. He is the High Priest, who went into heaven itself to present His own blood. He is the better Moses who enacted a better exodus from a far worse slavery. He is the rock in the wilderness that was struck so the people would not die.

And He has come to bless the nations. He is the promised seed of David and the seed of Abraham, through whom the blessings will flow. And now this gospel must go out to all the nations. In Him we can have peace with God, peace with each other, and peace proclaimed to all nations.

Take a Moment

1. What lessons do we learn about our discipleship to Jesus in the

ordering of Luke 9—that the call to take up our cross daily (9:23) is immediately followed by a demonstration of Christ’s glory on the mountain (9:29).

2. What the disciples found mysterious and puzzling could only be understood through Scripture. What lessons should we learn about attempting to interpret our own lives?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Jesus, that You died for our sins according to the Scriptures (1 Cor 15:13).
- Thank You, Father, for giving us the light of the gospel in the face of Christ (2 Cor 4:6).
- Thank You for the Holy Spirit so that we may have freedom and that the veil is taken away (2 Cor 3:17).
- Give my unsaved loved ones the grace to see the light of the gospel of the glory of God.

13 | The Son Was Cursed

So then, does He who provides you with the Spirit and works miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

⁶ Just as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness, ⁷ so know that those who are of faith, those are sons of Abraham. ⁸ And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, proclaimed the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the nations will be blessed in you.” ⁹ So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer.

¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to do them.” ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; rather, “He who does them shall live by them.” ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree”— ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we would receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

¹⁵ Brothers, I speak in human terms: even though it is only a man’s covenant, yet when it has been ratified, no one sets it aside or adds conditions to it. ¹⁶ Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say, “And to seeds,” as referring to many, but rather to one, “And to your seed,” that is, Christ. ¹⁷ And what I am saying is this: the Law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to abolish the promise. ¹⁸ For if the inheritance is by law, it is no longer by promise, but God has granted it to Abraham

through promise.

Galatian 3:5-18

Only those with the faith of Abraham can enjoy the blessing of Abraham. The worldwide blessing that would come from the seed of Abraham we now learn is through Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God and the Son of Man. Only He can make God's promises come to pass. Ultimately the promises given to Abraham will be fulfilled by Jesus. He will be given the great name. He will inherit the nations. He will give His people rest. Through His death and resurrection, we can have peace *with God*, peace *with each other*, and peace *with the creation* in a new heavens and a new earth.

We learn from Paul that simply being born as a Jew does not guarantee the blessing of Abraham. The true children of Abraham are those who have faith in Jesus Christ. The life of Abraham shows us how all people, whether Jews or Gentiles, are made right with God through faith alone. Through Abraham, we see that there is only one way of salvation, and there *always has been* one way of salvation—by God's grace and through faith in His promises.

On a night many hundreds of years ago Abraham was told to look up into the night sky and to count the stars if he was able (Gen 15:6). God gave Abraham assurances that one day he would indeed have a son from his own body. His descendants would outnumber the stars in the sky. Abraham heard the promise of God. Abraham knew he couldn't have a child. It was not possible! But Abraham believed that God could do it. He trusted in God's character and in God's Word.

We are told that God counted that simple, child-like faith as righteousness. Righteousness was given to Abraham because he believed. He was made right with God because of faith, not because of works. Although Abraham was a sinful man and often would fail to do the

right thing, being fearful and lying to others, God counted his faith as righteousness. Abraham was considered righteous in God's eyes, even though he was still a sinner.

Abraham was saved by grace and through faith in God's promises, and not of his works. So also, we are saved by grace and through faith in God's promises. The progressive unfolding of God's plan through the centuries has not changed the way of salvation. Old Testament believers looked forward to God's salvation in the seed born of the woman and in His promises. New Testament believers look backward on the finished work of Christ and in His promises. Christ's death and resurrection is the basis of salvation for all, whether Jew or Gentile, past or present.

Abraham was told that all the nations would be blessed through him. Paul said this blessing is through the gospel, provided by Jesus, who is the seed of Abraham. The Gentiles can be included in Abraham's blessing when they stand justified before God by faith alone in Jesus Christ. This was the plan from the beginning. God would do all the work necessary, and we are to rest and trust in His work by faith.

But how should we think about the Law that was given through Moses at Mount Sinai? Paul tells us that the Law can't change a covenant that was sealed 430 years before. What came before supersedes what comes after. But what about Jews who choose to ignore the New Covenant and Jesus? Can they be saved through works? First of all, Paul writes, we should understand that when Jews lived under the Law they were required to keep *all of it*.

The fact that God gave animal sacrifices for the cleansing of sins shows us how the standard of the Law is perfection. If we break it, then we must die, or another take our place. The sacrificial system was God's gracious provision to cover their sins in Israel. But now that Jesus has been offered as our sacrifice, the Temple sacrifices don't cover our sins. Without Christ, we are on our own, left to keep with Law with no provision of mercy. Adam and Eve broke God's com-

mand—just one—and were under the curse. So also, Moses said that those who break even *one* command are under a curse: “Cursed is everyone who does not abide *by all things* written in the book of the law, to do them.”

But what was the function of the Law? One of the uses of the Law is to condemn us and help us to realize we’re sinners. No one can keep this Law. In fact, Paul tells us that even those without the Jewish Law are still accountable to this Law! All people know what is right in their conscience, which shows that the entire world is under the Law, whether given on tablets of stone or imprinted on the conscience (Rom 2:15, 3:19). And yet we still choose to do wrong. Not one of us has loved the Lord with all our heart. We deserve the curse and punishment of the Law.

The German reformer Martin Luther once wrote, “trying to be justified by the Law is like counting money out of an empty purse, eating and drinking from an empty dish and cup, looking for strength and riches where there is nothing but weakness and poverty, laying a burden upon someone who is already oppressed to the point of collapse, trying to spend a hundred gold pieces and not having even a pittance, taking clothing away from a naked man, imposing even greater weakness and poverty upon someone who is sick and needy.” (Luther, *Galatians 1535*: Chapters 1-4, 406-407.)

But the good news of the gospel is that Christ chose to take our place. He absorbed our curse as lawbreakers. The One who loved the Lord perfectly and lived a sinless life took our sin and punishment. And more than that, His righteousness would be counted as ours. This great exchange is the good news of Christianity. Christ took our place so that we could stand in His place.

In the great mystery of the gospel, the serpent-crushing seed of the woman defeated the enemies of God’s people by being Himself crushed like an enemy of God. He took away our curse by becoming a curse. He drained the cup of God’s wrath against us by drinking

the cup of wrath. He swallowed up death itself for all time by being thrown into the mouth of death (Isa 25:8). He defeated the serpent by being lifted up like the serpent of brass in the wilderness, so that all who look to Him will be saved (John 3:14). “But Yahweh was pleased to crush Him, putting Him to grief...and was numbered with the transgressors; yet He Himself bore the sin of many” (Isa 53:10, 12).

Christ is the seed of the woman who crushes the head of the serpent. His heel was bruised. But He rose again in victory. The heel that the vile serpent sunk its fangs into was protected by God, so that the heel that treads the serpent would rule the nations, because all things will be placed under His feet.

By His atonement we are saved, and now by the power of the Spirit we walk in love, having God’s laws written on our hearts, loving the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

*A rigid matter was the law,
demanding brick, denying straw,
But when with gospel tongue it sings,
it bids me fly and gives me wings*
—Ralph Erksine, 1778

Take a Moment

1. In what ways does the faith of Abraham contradict all religions of the world—knowing that his righteousness came not by working for God, but by believing in God?
2. What things should we remember when the devil attempts to deceive us as Christians with thoughts like “You are no good. You are a failure. You are the greatest”?

I can pray...

- Thank You that our faith justifies us because it unites us with Christ, who is the righteousness of believers.
- Thank You, Father, that my good standing before you is not based on my performance.
- Help me to live a righteous and self-disciplined life as a response to Your amazing goodness to me.
- Give me opportunities to help tell others about their need for Jesus.

14 | The Very Good Ending

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ²And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things passed away.

⁵And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.” ⁶Then He said to me, “They are done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give to the one who thirsts from the spring of the water of life without cost. ⁷He who overcomes will inherit these things, and I will be his God and he will be My son.”

^{22:1} Then he showed me a river of the water of life, bright as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ²in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³And there will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His slaves will serve Him; ⁴and they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads.

Revelation 21:1-7; 22:1-4

The King has come. The dragon is defeated. The turbulent sea of the dark unknown is drained. The liars and tempters are exposed. The Warrior has put down the final rebellion. The first heaven and earth, full of sin and pain, have passed away.

The bride has been made ready. The final exodus is complete. God tabernacles among His people once again. The wedding between the Lamb and His bride is at hand. The new Jerusalem is descending. The universe will be made clean. The new heavens and new earth will be full of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Does the thought of this day fill you with joy? Does the certainty of Christ's victory and Satan's defeat help you endure whatever difficulty you're facing right now? That's the purpose of the book of Revelation. The Lord gave a revelation of the last things to the Apostle John so that God's people would have the strength to endure. God wants us to continue to trust in His Word and to continue to be witnesses for Jesus.

John opened his letter by identifying himself as one who had experienced suffering on account of his trust in the Word of God and for being a witness of Jesus. And yet he persevered despite his difficulty. "I, John, your brother and fellow partaker in the tribulation and kingdom and perseverance which are in Jesus, was on the island called Patmos because of the word of God and the witness of Jesus" (Rev 1:9).

The word of God and the witness of Jesus got him into trouble. It will get us into trouble, too. Because those who are on the side of the serpent hate Jesus and His followers. The same dragon that opposes Jesus opposes those who follow Him. "So the dragon was enraged with the woman and went off to make war with the rest of her seed, who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus" (12:17). Those who keep the commandments of God and have the witness of Jesus are Christians. They are identified with Jesus and are also the seed of the woman, and are protected by God. But who is

this dragon? John tells us that he is none other than “the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world” (12:9).

He deceives the world. Just like how Satan deceived Adam and Eve, seducing them to sin, so also the devil continues to weave lies in the world today. The strategy of Satan is still the same: he appears reasonable, wise, and gentle. He wants us to doubt God’s Word and God’s character. He wants us to think that God is holding out on us. He wants us to think that blessing can be ours if we step outside of God’s commands. But we need to be discerning and hear behind the gentle voice the venomous lisp of a serpent’s tongue. John tells us that although the beast “had two horns like a lamb,” (appearing good and wise like Jesus), “he was speaking as a dragon” (13:11).

How do we endure in this battle of voices? John tells us that “they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their witness, and they did not love their life even to death” (12:11). We will endure this life as Christians only through the power of the sacrifice of Jesus, the faithful encouragement and witness of the church, and the hope of the life everlasting.

The people to whom John wrote also experienced difficulty like him. He wrote for them to have hope, to hold out, and to endure suffering. “Here is a call for the perseverance and the faith of the saints” (13:10). “Here is a call for the perseverance of the saints who keep the commandments of God and their faith in Jesus” (14:12). Don’t give up yet! Endure to the end! One day there will be justice. The martyrs will have their reward. The devil and all his hellish crew will be thrown into the lake of fire.

And so to help us endure to the end the Lord graciously gave to His people a picture of the beauty and joy of the very good ending that He has planned. There will no longer be any curse. In the very good ending, there will be blessing. God’s people will have peace *with God*, peace *with each other*, and peace *with creation*.

One day there will be peace *with a new creation*. All that is wrong with the earth will be set right. In our resurrected bodies we will live in a land that will be bountiful and provide everything we need. There will be no disease, suffering, pain, or reason to cry. No more will thorns and thistles infest the ground.

One day there will be peace *with each other*. There will be no shame, no conflict, no suspicion, no hatred, and no envy in our relationships. John tells us that there will be a tree of life whose leaves are for the healing of the nations. Every division and war will be put to rest. Racism and bitterness will be healed. People from all tribes and tongues and nations will join together in the worship of the Lamb.

It will be like Eden but better. Just as there was “a river [that] went out of Eden to water the garden” and “the tree of life also in the midst of the garden” (Gen 2:9-10), so also in the New Heavens and the New Earth there will be a river and a tree.

Don’t you want to drink from that river of the water of life? Don’t you want to eat of the tree that brings healing to the nations? The bad news is that you can’t—at least not without an invitation. You and I have been barred from the garden. There is no way back into the presence of God, unless God makes a way. The good news is that Jesus has told us the way: “To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God” (Rev 2:7). We must overcome and conquer the world. But how is it possible to gain this kind of victory? How can anyone triumph over the powers of hell, the lies of the devil, the sway of the world, the weight of our own sinful flesh?

The way we overcome the world is the same way the faithful saints of centuries past have overcome the world: “And they overcame... because of the blood of the Lamb...” (Rev 12:11). We will gain the victory because Jesus has already won the victory. If we are in Him, then we have already won. “He who overcomes, I will grant to him to sit down with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne” (Rev 3:21). The One who was raised from

the dead will raise us from the dead. The One who resisted the devil in the wilderness will take us into His triumph. The One who trusted in His Father perfectly will carry us over the finish line.

It is through our simple, child-like faith that we will overcome the world. “Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?” (1 John 5:5).

But there is something better than the water of life that flows from the throne and the tree of life for the healing of the nations. There is something better than the glory of the New Jerusalem and its walls of jasper.

Best of all, John concludes the book of Revelation with the greatest joy of the very good ending. One day there will be peaceful and everlasting fellowship *with God*. We will see His face. We will have His presence. He will dwell among us. The Lord will walk among us, as if in the garden in the cool of the day, and there will be no reason to hide ourselves from Him.

Don’t you want that kind of relationship with God? Don’t you want to be close to Him and to know Him without any barriers? The kind of relationship that we will experience with Him in that day will be closer and more intimate than what Moses experienced when speaking with God face to face. What we will experience in that day will be better than what the disciples experienced when traveling and hearing from Jesus for over three years as His friend. What we will experience in that day will be better than what Mary Magdalene felt in her heart when she was surprised by joy when meeting her risen Lord in the garden beside the empty tomb.

If we imagine the joy of heaven as seeing departed loved ones first, and Jesus second, then we need to reevaluate our priorities. A heaven without Christ is no heaven at all. May Christ even now be our joy in all of our joy. Do you feel that joy now in your prayers? Do you feel the joy of His fellowship now when you read your Bible?

Until the day when our faith is made sight, let us remember that

Jesus declared He is the One who is making all things new. And that new creation is inside us already, as believers, as we have been made new and united to Christ by faith. He has given us the Holy Spirit, Who is the down payment of the world to come. There will one day be the new heavens and the new earth. God's good rule will one day be over all the earth, and the people of God will live in the land of God under the rule of God. And there will no longer be any curse.

Take a Moment

1. When Christ died and was buried it looked like God's plan had failed. But out of death came life, and out of the darkness came light. What do the dramatic reversals in Scripture teach us?

2. What things should a Christian keep in mind when he or she is surrounded by bitter circumstances, in view of the lessons of Revelation and God's delight in reversing fortunes?

I can pray...

- Thank You, Jesus, for promising to come back soon.
- Thank You that You have invited me to eat of the tree of life which is in the Paradise of God.
- Help me to endure whatever I will face in life for Your glory.
- Give me peace as I wait for You to make all things new.

