

RODERICK A. GRACIANO

CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ

**An in-depth look at the truths
that will define our eternal destiny...**

REDEMPTION

By

JESUS

And The Restoration Of All Things



Psalm 119.105

TIMOTHY MINISTRIES

Redemption By Jesus

And The Restoration Of All Things

An In-Depth Look At The Truths
That Will Define Our Eternal Destiny

UNABRIDGED VERSION

RODERICK A. GRACIANO
with PASTOR CARLOS SAMUEL MARTÍNEZ
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Dedication

To the friends of Timothy Ministries, a wonderful group comprised of family members, colleagues, personal friends and a few strangers. In manifold ways, you have each contributed to making it possible for me to follow my calling and enjoy my “dream job” for fifty years. My sincere hope is that you will be encouraged and your faith strengthened by the contents of this book.

Roderick A. Graciano, Lakewood, WA, January 2026

To Flor, my beloved wife, and to my three dear children: Esdras, Hadasha, and Esteban. I have walked with you through every paragraph of this book. Your questions refined the way I presented the content to the church, and your enthusiasm for what God will do led me to love more deeply the hope we have in our blessed Redeemer. May God use this book to form in you a robust faith and an ever-increasing love for Him.

Carlos S. Martinez, Cabo San Lucas, BCS, January 2026

**But above all,
to our Lord Jesus Christ, God’s “beloved Son, in whom we have
redemption.”**

Colossians 1.13-14

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Abbreviations: General

AD	<i>anno Domini</i> , [designating a year or period] after Christ's birth
Adj.	adjective
ANE	ancient Near East, ancient Near Eastern
BC	[designating a year or period] before Christ's birth
C.	circa, around OR century
Ch.	chapter
Cf.	compare [with]
Eng	English
Esp	Spanish
Ed.; eds.	Edition or edited, or editor; editors
Et al.	and others
Fem.	feminine gender
Ff.	following pages
Grk	Greek language
HB	Hebrew Bible, i.e., any Hebrew edition of the Old Testament
Heb	Hebrew language
Ibid.	In the same source previously cited.
Lat	Latin
Lit.	literal, literally
Masc.	masculine
Ms, Mss	manuscript, manuscripts
P.; pp.	page, pages
Perf.	perfect tense
Pl.	plural
Prep.	preposition, prepositional
Sing.	singular
V.; vv.	verse; verses
Vol., vols.	volume, volumes

Abbreviations: Written Works

DSS	<i>Dead Sea Scrolls</i>
ISBE	<i>The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , Edited by Orr, 1915
LBD	<i>The Lexham Bible Dictionary</i>
MBIOS	<i>Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin</i> by Graciano
NPNF	<i>A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church</i> , Edited by Schaff
NSHERK	<i>The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge</i>
NT	The New Testament
OT	The Old Testament
PRE	<i>Pirkê de Rabbi Eliezer</i>
TDNT	<i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i>
TDOT	<i>Theological Dictionary Of The Old Testament</i>
TWOT	<i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i>

Abbreviations: Bible Versions

NOTE: Unless otherwise indicated, Bible passages quoted are from *The New American Standard Bible* (abbreviated in this document as NASB95), © 1995 by The Lockman Foundation.

ASV	<i>The Holy Bible, American Standard Version</i> 1901
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i> © 1966/77 Deutsche Bibelstiftung Stuttgart
ESV	<i>The Holy Bible, English Standard Version</i> , © 2016 Good News Publishers
FBM	<i>The Five Books Of Moses</i> (by Everett Fox), © 1995 Word Publishing
GNT	<i>The Greek New Testament: SBL Edition</i> , © 2011–2013 Lexham Press; Society of Biblical Literature
HCSB	<i>The Holy Bible: Holman Christian Standard Version</i> , © 2009 Holman Bible Publishers
HNT	<i>Ha-Berit Ha-Hadashah</i> (Hebrew New Testament), © The Bible Society in Israel, 2000
ISV	<i>International Standard Version</i> , © ISV Foundation, 2011.
KJV	<i>The Holy Bible: King James Version</i> , Electronic Edition of the 1900 Authorized Version, © 2009 Logos Research Systems
KJVS	<i>King James Version Study Bible</i> , © Thomas Nelson, 1997.
LBLA	<i>Santa Biblia: La Biblia de Las Américas Con Referencias Y Notas</i> , © 1998 Casa Editorial para La Fundación Bíblica Lockman
LES	<i>The Lexham English Septuagint</i> , © 2012 Lexham Press
LSB	<i>Legacy Standard Bible</i> © 2024 The Lockman Foundation
LXX	The Septuagint (<i>Septuaginta</i> , ancient Greek version of the OT), © 1979 Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft.
NASB95	<i>The New American Standard Bible</i> , © 1995 The Lockman Foundation
NIRV	<i>New International Reader's Version</i> 1st ed., © 1998 Zondervan
NIVO	<i>The Holy Bible: New International Version</i> , © 1984 International Bible Society
NLT	<i>Holy Bible: New Living Translation</i> , © 2015 Tyndale House Publishers
RAG	Translation by the author, © 2025 Roderick Graciano
REB	<i>The Revised English Bible</i> , © 1996 Cambridge University Press
RV95	<i>Reina Valera Revisada</i> (1995), © 1998 Sociedades Bíblicas Unidas
TEV	<i>The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation</i> , © 1992 American Bible Society (formerly <i>Today's English Version</i>)
TNK	<i>Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures</i> , © 1985 Jewish Publication Society

Abbreviations: Biblical & Apocryphal Books

1Ch	1 Chronicles	Is	Isaiah
1Co	1 Corinthians	Jas	James
1En	1 Enoch	Jdg	Judges
1Jn	1 John	Jdt	Judith
1Ki	1 Kings	Je	Jeremiah
1Ma	1 Maccabees	Job	Job
1Pe	1 Peter	Joe	Joel
1Sa	1 Samuel	Jn	John
1Th	1 Thessalonians	Jon	Jonah
1Ti	1 Timothy	Jos	Joshua
2Ch	2 Chronicles	Jub	Jubilees
2Co	2 Corinthians	Jud	Jude
2Jn	2 John	La	Lamentations
2Ki	2 Kings	Le	Leviticus
2Ma	2 Maccabees	Lk	Luke
2Pe	2 Peter	Mal	Malachi
2Sa	2 Samuel	Mk	Mark
2Th	2 Thessalonians	Mt	Matthew
2Ti	2 Timothy	Mic	Micah
3Jn	3 John	Na	Nahum
3Ma	3 Maccabees	Ne	Nehemiah
4Ma	4 Maccabees	Nu	Numbers
Ac	Acts	Ob	Obadiah
Am	Amos	Php	Philippians
Col	Colossians	Phm	Philemon
Da	Daniel	Pr	Proverbs
Dt	Deuteronomy	Ps	Psalms
Ec	Ecclesiastes	Re	Revelation
Eph	Ephesians	Ro	Romans
Es	Esther	Ru	Ruth
Ex	Exodus	Sib	Sibylline Oracles
Eze	Ezekiel	Sir	Sirach or Wisdom of Ben Sira
Ezr	Ezra	So	The Song of Solomon
Ga	Galatians	Tt	Titus
Ge	Genesis	Tob	Tobit
Hab	Habakkuk	Wis	Wisdom of Solomon
Hag	Haggai	Zec	Zechariah
Heb	Hebrews	Zep	Zephaniah
Ho	Hosea		

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Preface

Every theologian feels the need to emphasize certain aspects of the great doctrines of the Bible, aspects which he feels have been overlooked or misunderstood in his own time. In the best cases, those emphases are eye-opening. In the worst cases the emphases distract from the central truths of the given topic. We hope that the particular emphases appearing here and there in this book may be of the former and not of the latter. In any case, I, Roderick, take full responsibility for the emphases in this work, as well as for errors of any kind that may have snuck their way into the final draft.

To my friend and fellow laborer in Christian ministry, Carlos Samuel Martinez, goes the credit for inspiring this theological study, for providing many of the questions that form the framework of the narrative, and for providing countless insights, theological and practical, in connection with the main topic and its many aspects. His insights frequently generated material that would not have appeared in this work without his prompting.

We have both prayed our way through this project, and unhesitatingly acknowledge that if any part of this book results in benefit to the church of our Lord Jesus, then all the credit for that goes to Him and to His Holy Spirit.

In this treatise, several things may seem peculiar to the reader:

1. We have used the nouns *man* and *men*, and the masculine pronouns *he*, *him* and *his*, more or less as Scripture does, in statements requiring a generic, inclusive term for a human person of either sex (see, for example, the pronouns *he* and *his* in the opening sentence of this preface).
2. In English, we write God's personal name, the Tetragrammaton יהוה, as *Yahveh*. The V in this spelling, in place of the W of *Yahweh*, reflects the modern Hebrew pronunciation, *were the name to be pronounced* by a Hebrew speaker.
3. **Pronunciation:** When giving the pronunciation of Greek words, we do so according to the conventions of Modern Greek. When we transliterate the guttural *ch* of Hebrew (which sounds like the *ch* in German *Bach* or Scots *Loch*) we use *ḥ*, the letter *h* with a subscript dot.

Introduction: The Ancient Solution To Bondage And Property Loss

If a citizen of ancient Israel became impoverished, he could sell himself into servitude. Depending on the poor man's abilities, he could potentially sell himself for enough money to pay off his debts. The downside of the arrangement was that he would have to work like a hired hand for an Israelite master for up to six years (Dt 15.12) or for a foreign master for up to 49 years (Le 25.47-54).

Similarly, an impoverished Israelite could sell the land divinely allotted to his family in Joshua's time.¹ In this case, he could lose the dominion over his property for up to 49 years, until it reverted to him in the 50th year, the year of jubilee (Le 25.10,13,28). If he happened to sell his property very soon after a jubilee year, he likely would not live long enough to regain it in the next jubilee. Depending on the man's circumstances, his family line might lose that portion of their ancestral lands forever.

The Mosaic law graciously provided a solution to the potential problems of long servitude and permanent property loss by its **rules of redemption**. The biblical word *redemption* refers to the act of redeeming, and to *redeem* simply means "to buy back." In the ancient Israelite world, if the man who had sold himself or his property somehow regained the means to redeem, that is, to *buy back* his own freedom and property, he had the right to do so (Le 25.23-27,49). However, if the man was unable to redeem himself or his property, the law prescribed that a near relative, a kinsman (in Heb a *goel*) who had the means, could redeem both man (Le 25.47-52) and property (Le 25.24-25; cf. Je 32.7-8), thereby restoring his poor relative's freedom and dominion. The kinsman would thus be recognized as a *redeemer*.

A poignant provision in the Israelite laws of redemption had to do with the case of a widow who had no surviving male heir. Such a widow, if impoverished for lack of husband or sons to work her land, could sell her land directly to a kinsman

¹ See Nu 34.13-15; Jos 18.10.

redeemer (the *goel*), and live by the fruit of her land as the redeemer restored it to productivity for his own profit. The added proviso, however, was that the kinsman redeemer had to marry the widow, in the hopes of raising up a male heir, who would resume ownership of the land in the name of the original family line. The Bible describes this kind of redemption in the romantic book of Ruth.

Of course, the words *redeem* and *redemption* are also used figuratively, in various scriptural contexts referring to *rescue* as from enemies, oppressors or even from death.² Most relevantly for the entire human race, the Bible also uses the idea of redemption in connection with sin: *to be redeemed* can mean *to be rescued from the tyranny or consequences of sin*.³ If we follow this theme in the Scriptures, a cosmic drama opens up before us. We realize that Adam and Eve sold our race into bondage to the Serpent (the devil) and surrendered man's dominion over the earth to that evil taskmaster. Like the truly impoverished Israelite of old, the human race has never had its own means to redeem itself. Man's efforts to redeem himself by keeping God's laws has only brought death to anyone attempting to establish his own righteousness in that manner. No, the law has left us all destitute like helpless widows (Ro 7.4-5). By the principles of divine justice, we need a kinsman redeemer who can pay the redemption price that humanity itself could never afford. Such a redeemer must be a human descendant of Adam, else he could not qualify as a kinsman. Yet, he must be something more than human, else he would be as impoverished and impotent as the rest of mankind. Thankfully, God has provided just such a kinsman Redeemer. As Job confessed, millennia ago, **"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will take His stand on the earth."**⁴

So, we can all rejoice that a Redeemer has been provided for us. However, we mustn't forget that since the word *redeem* means "to buy back," the idea of cost is inherent in the idea of redemption. Nothing can be redeemed without the

² Ex 6.6; Ps 69.18; 72.14; 103.4; 106.10; Ho 13.14; Mic 4.10.

³ Is 44.22; Ro 3.24; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7; Col 1.14; Tt 2.14.

⁴ Job 19.25.

redeemer incurring a cost, and the Redeemer that God has provided for mankind was not exempted from this reality.

This book has emerged from an in-depth study of the Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who was willing to incur an incomprehensible price to redeem human beings. We have looked carefully into His role as Redeemer, and into the redemption that He has — *and is* — accomplishing. We have distilled the observations and insights from our study into a narrative that documents the primary benefits to God and man that accrue from the redemption, and that also explains how a person can receive Christ's redemption and begin to experience its benefits. In the course of this treatise, we will touch on many topics familiar to people living in a Christian culture, including the topic of regeneration (new birth), a phenomenon that intersects with our redemption, but that lies within the more general sphere of God's works of *salvation* (see "The Salvation Of God" diagram below).

We note that the Bible word *salvation*, in this context, speaks of a benevolent agent intervening for someone or something in a situation of danger, risk or other serious need. In Scripture, *salvation* is a comprehensive term, and can apply to nation, property, body or soul. This book focuses on how **God, through His Son Jesus Christ, our kinsman Redeemer, saves fallen people from sin and death, and brings them into a familial and royal relationship with Himself.** The redemption described in this treatise, then, is *a particular kind of salvation*. As such, it has multiple components, including, substitution, expiation, propitiation, justification, reconciliation, and more, all of which we will examine in due course. **Facets of our redemption to which we will give special attention, however, are the *familial* and *royal*.** We will look closely at these facets of redemption because, along with everything else forfeited in the Garden of Eden, our first parents lost (1) their pristine familial intimacy with God *and* (2) their kingly dominion of the earth.

As to the loss of the former, mankind has always yearned for a restoration of the idyllic, Edenic family of God, and has often attempted to restore it by human effort, *without* a Redeemer. However, only the heavenly Father Himself, through

His redeemer Son, is able to restore what theologians call the *familia Dei*. No coterie of human idealists can ever launch a utopian experiment that will fully satisfy the human heart, or long keep itself from decaying into a means of selfish fulfilment for the few. Thankfully, as the following chapters will explain, the Trinity has been progressively restoring the *familia Dei* over the course of millennia, through the phenomenon of the *covenants*.

As to the loss of the latter, Christian scholars and theologians have given scant attention to the redemption of mankind's original grant of coregency "over all the earth" (Ge 1.26). It seems that few Christian authors, through the centuries, have remembered that the biblical phenomenon of redemption includes the restoration of one's sovereignty over his land, not just the liberation of his own person. Though some now "see dominion as the defining characteristic" of "what it means to be made in God's image,"⁵ little is ever said about how that dominion — and thereby the divine image — is to be fully restored. Christian theology books say much about an individual's redemption from sin and the oppression of Satan, less about the redemption of an individual's physical body (Ro 8.23), and almost nothing about the redemption of mankind's dominion over all the earth — *and yet biblically speaking, Christ's work of redemption is not complete until those he has purchased for God with His blood once again "reign upon the earth"* (Re 5.9-10). Of those scholars who have addressed this matter, some have reduced the redemption of mankind's dominion to Christian stewardship (tithing),⁶ others to a postmillennial dream of social improvement in the world as people and their institutions finally submit fully to "the inherent power of the gospel."⁷ Then there are the aggressive theories of the Christian Reconstructionists and their dominion theology,⁸ proposing that, "society will be reconstructed by the Law of God as preached in the gospel and the Great Commission." The

⁵ *Lexham Survey of Theology*.

⁶ W. Clyde Tilley, "A Biblical Approach to Stewardship," in *Review and Expositor* 84 (1987).

⁷ Aiken, Charles A. "Christianity and Social Problems," *The Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 3, no. 9–12 (1892).

⁸ Also known as theonomy, also essentially a postmillennial teaching.

already/not yet aspect of God’s redemptive works, that is, the progressive fulfilment of God’s purposes, plans and promises, teaches us that there is indeed a sense in which the redeemed “reign in life” now,⁹ and are indeed responsible to aid the poor and downtrodden,¹⁰ and to positively influence the world’s institutions in every manner that is consistent with our central mandate of proclaiming the gospel and making disciples.¹¹ However, theologians and commentators have lost sight of the fact that God’s grant of dominion over “all the earth” was to *sinless humanity*. The Postmillennial and Reconstructionist expectation that the church in this age, by law and gospel, will bring about the redemption of mankind’s dominion of the earth will fail, for the simple reason that not-yet-glorified saints are unfailingly fallible, and — as history has amply shown — they remain vulnerable to the corruption of power. No, the full redemption of mankind’s royal status over all the earth, (and humanity’s full recovery of the divine image) awaits the ***parousia***¹² of the King, who will first redeem the bodies of His saints in resurrection and transformation, and then bring “all rule and all authority and power” into submission under Himself and His sinless, glorified saints.¹³

Key Term

PAROUSIA

A royal coming in glory, to reward and to judge.

So, please come in, Lord Jesus, and dine with us (Re 3.20). As we study these great truths, be present with us in the person of your Holy Spirit, and feed us as the Bread of Life that You are (Jn 6.48), because we ask it in Your name. Amen.

⁹ Ro 5.17; cf. Mt 10.1; 28.18-20; Lk 10.19; 2Co 10.3-5.

¹⁰ Gal 2.10; Jas 1.27.

¹¹ Mt 28.29-10; Lk 24.45-47; Ac 1.8.

¹² Grk pronunciation: pa·roo·sē·ə. Eng pronunciation: pə·roo·zēə.

¹³ Cf. Ro 3.23; 1Co 15.24.

The Salvation Of God

REGENERATION
Jn 3.3,5; Eph 2.5;
SANCTIFICATION
Ro 15.16; 1Pe 1.2

Grain in time of famine

Healing for the sick

Rain in time of drought

Victory in war
2Ki 5.1

REDEMPTION

The Saving Work Of Jesus Christ

SUBSTITUTION

RANSOM - BEARS INIQUITIES - MADE A CURSE

Mt 20.28; 1Ti 2.5-6; Is 53.4-6,8; Ro 3.24; 1Co 1.30; 1Pe 3.18

EXPIATION - PROPITIATION

Le 16.22; Dt 32.43; Da 9.24; Jn 1.29; Ro 3.25; Ga 3.13; Eph 1.7;
Heb 2.17; 1Jn 2.2; 4.10; Re 5.9

HEALING of *SHALOM* - DELIVERANCE

Ps 51.14; Is 53.5; Ro 5.1; Col 1.13,20; 1Th 1.10; 2Pe 2.9

*FROM SIN, GUILT,
TEMPTATION,
DOMAIN OF DARKNESS,
WRATH TO COME*

JUSTIFICATION

Is 53.11; Ro 3.24; Tt 3.5-7

RECONCILIATION

Ro 5.1,10-11; 2Co 5.18-21; Col 1.20-22; 1Pe 2.25

ADOPTION - SANCTIFICATION

Mt 25.34; Jn 1.12; Ac 26.16-18; Ro 6.5; 8.14-16,23; 1Co 1.30; Ga 3.26; 4.5; Eph 1.5,11; 5.26; Tt 3.7; Heb 2.10-11; 10.10,14; 13.12; 1Pe 1.1-4; 1Jn 3.1-2

SEAL OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

2Co 1.22; Eph 1.13; 4.30; 1Jn 4.13

DEVIL DEFEATED - SAINTS GLORIFIED

Lk 20.36; Jn 12.31; 16.11; Ac 26.18; Col 2.15;
Heb 2.14; 1Jo 3.8; Re 5.10; 11.15; 21.7

EXAMPLE

Jn 13.15; 1Pe 2.21

THE PROMISE
OF THE FATHER
Ac 1.4-8

WIDOWED HUMANITY
MARRIED TO THE REDEEMER
Ro 7.4; Re 19.7-9

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1. God has our best interests at heart and no ulterior motives.

Two Things About God's Character

If you were to read the whole Bible from beginning to end, when finished, what would you say were the most important two things to know about God's character?

The apostle John didn't have the 66 books of the Bible all in one convenient volume like we do, and so would never have read it "from cover to cover" like we can. However, he was the longest surviving of the original disciples of Jesus, and was an ardent student of the Scriptures. He knew all or most of the books that our Bible contains today, and himself wrote four of the final ones. He may have never read all 66 books of the Bible in the order that we have them now, but he certainly meditated at length on the overarching themes and messages of the entire scriptural corpus. In the latter part of John's life, God gave him the privilege of writing the final gospel,¹⁴ and what we might call the "famous last words" of the Bible, that is, his epistles and the book of Revelation.¹⁵ John's words carry profound significance because of the copious antecedent revelation that informs their content.

Therefore, we will find it beneficial to contemplate *all* that John shared as he approached the end of his life and the completion of the Bible. However, in this chapter we single out *only two things* that he said, and these relate to God's eternal character. In his first epistle, John strikingly used two identity statements to tell his readers that:

- ◆ God is light (1Jn 1.5)
- ◆ God is love (1Jn 4.8,16)

The succinct simplicity of these statements veils their profundity. What do they really mean?

¹⁴ Probably between the years AD 70 and 90.

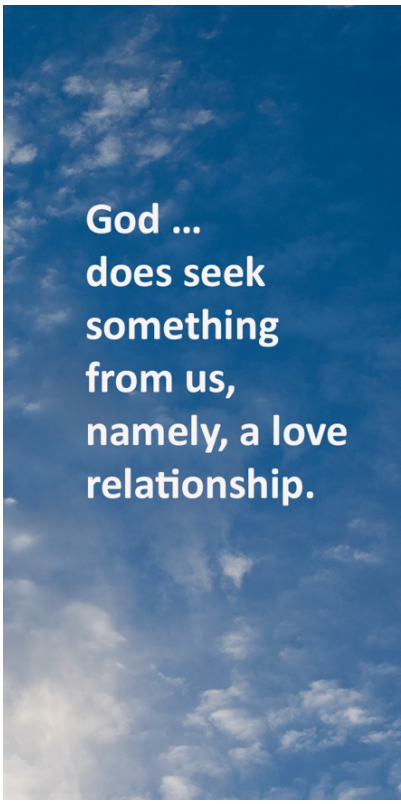
¹⁵ John's last works were probably written between AD 90 and 100.

Consider the statement *God is love*. It implies that love is inherent to God's nature, such that He is love personified. John helps us understand this truth further by characterizing the *love* of which he speaks. He wrote, "We know love by this, that [God's Son] laid down His life for us...." (1Jn 3.16,). In other words, **love is inseparable from who God is, and His love is *self-sacrificing love***. That is, the love that emanates from God's eternal character is the opposite of the so-called "love" that is self-seeking and has ulterior motives for its shows of affection.¹⁶ As we contemplate this, we realize that the consistent proposition of all John's writings, the proposition that God's love is altruistic, rings true because God is eternal and almighty. If God loves, then He loves *without needing anything in return*.

This fact, that God loves without needing anything for Himself, helps us understand John's other point, that "God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all" (1Jn 1.5). It means that God is truthful in everything He says about Himself and about His plans and purposes for us. When He expresses His loves for us, He does with no hidden motive or agenda tucked away in a secret pocket of darkness. God's character thus contrasts sharply with the character of those who *say* they live in the light, pretending to love, but in reality, hate their brother. John wrote that such a person "is in the darkness until now" (1Jn 2.9-11), pretending to be something they are not. God is not like that, however: He is love, and the love He expresses is absolutely truthful and always desires the very best for those He loves. How wonderful! God's love is the love for which all our hearts yearn. It is the love that brings security, peace and joy, and it is available to us through God's Son, Jesus Christ.

Now, to say that God loves without *needing* anything in return, does not negate the fact that He does *desire* something. **He does seek something from us, namely, a love relationship**. Nevertheless, that He doesn't *need* anything from us lends credence to the Bible's consistent teaching that God loves us prior to

¹⁶ Cf. 1Co 13.4-5, "Love [Grk, ἀγάπη] ... is not self-seeking ...," NIVO.



**God ...
does seek
something
from us,
namely, a love
relationship.**

our loving Him; if we love God it's "because He first loved us."¹⁷ This is why Jesus could teach,

... love your enemies ... so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.¹⁸

In other words, if we intend to act like children of God, we will love even our enemies, because He expresses His love even to the unrighteous, by providing their most fundamental needs for physical sustenance. Much more than that, as the apostle Paul wrote, "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Ro 5.8). God does not wait until people become righteous, or do something that pleases Him, before

He loves them; He loves people because He is love.

This wonderful truth should astound us by its contrast to the way pagan religions, from antiquity to the present, have characterized their gods. As Paul Copan and Douglas Jacoby explain,

... the biblical depiction of a God who desires to know his creatures clashes strongly with the pagan concept of divinity. Pagan gods and goddesses, such as the Greek and Roman ones we learned about in grade school, do not love us. The Norse myths present a similar scenario, as do the Celtic, Inuit, Mesoamerican, and gods of other religions — in fact, all pagan religions. One gets the impression that the gods of the ancient Near East don't particularly like humans — let alone desire a relationship with them.¹⁹

¹⁷ 1Jn 4.10, 19; cf. Jn 3.16-17.

¹⁸ Mt 5.44-45.

¹⁹ Copan, Paul; Jacoby, Douglas. *Origins: The Ancient Impact and Modern Implications of Genesis 1-11*, p. 50, (Morgan James Publishing; Kindle Edition).

A Counterintuitive Aspect Of God's Love

Something that may at first cause us consternation, though, is that God's wrath against evil is an expression of His love.²⁰ This connection between God's love and His wrath may seem counterintuitive, but when the Scriptures speak of God smiting the wicked, the recipients of His wrath are usually those who had harmed or threatened God's people. In other words, **God's wrath frequently has the purpose of protecting those whom he loves.** For example, in the book of Revelation, when God in His wrath sees to the destruction of the wicked entity called "Mystery Babylon," Scripture says,

"Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, because God has pronounced judgment for you against her."²¹

The passage goes on to explain,

"... in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on the earth."²²

The apostle Paul put it this way, in his second epistle to the Thessalonians,

For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire²³

We see that wrath pours forth from our heavenly Father when He must protect the children He loves. The Israelites were grateful for this protecting wrath, and sang,

Let sinners be consumed from the earth and let the wicked be no more.
Bless the Lord, O my soul. Praise the Lord!²⁴

²⁰ As Chris Thurman writes, "I know it's hard to think of God's wrath this way, but God is righteously angry about sin because He loves us." Or as Arthur T. Pierson wrote, in *Many Infallible Proofs*, p. 284, that in the teaching of Christ, "God's anger was seen to be, not a [vindictive and cruel] passion, but a principle — the eternal hatred of wrong, which corresponds with the eternal love of right, and which is only another aspect of love."

²¹ Re 18.20.

²² Re 18.24.

²³ 2Th 1.6-7.

²⁴ Ps 104.35.

It was because God loved Israel that He poured out His wrath upon Egypt in the ten plagues (Dt 7.8), and it's because God loves followers of Jesus today that He will bring fiery judgment upon their unrepentant persecutors (cf. 2Ti 4.14). No wonder Solomon wrote that,

Love *is* strong as death,
Jealousy *is* fierce as Sheol,
Its flashes *are* flashes of fire,
A flame of Yahveh.²⁵

The flame of Yahveh is the fire of His love. When God's love is jealous (= zealous) to protect His children in Zion, His wrath is ready to break out like fire against their enemies (Zec 8.2).

The Consuming Fire

God's children are not the only object of His love, however, and therefore it is not only on their behalf that His wrath blazes forth. God also loves all His own virtues of truth, faithfulness and goodness, and above all He loves His Son.²⁶ Therefore, anything that is contrary to faithfulness and goodness (such as sin and suppressing the truth, Ro 1.18), and anything that is contrary to God's purposes for His Son, is subject to destruction by God's wrath. This is why Scripture describes God as "a consuming fire" (Dt 4.24; Heb 12.29), and why He has manifested Himself on different occasions as a smoking furnace, a flaming torch, or a fiery cloud.²⁷ **From eternity to eternity He is love personified, and so He is forever and always opposed to everything that jeopardizes what He loves.** Thus, when God went before the Israelites into the promised land, the Canaanite nations were consumed before Him because of the Canaanites' wickedness (Dt 9.3-4). At a later time, when wicked king Ahaziah sent a captain with fifty soldiers to arrest

²⁵ So 8.6b, RAG.

²⁶ Ps 91.14; Mt 3.17; 17.5; Jn 3.35; 5.20; Col 1.13; 2Pe 1.17. As Sam Storms writes, "one may speak of *divine wrath* as a function of *divine love*! For God's wrath is His love for holiness and truth and justice." *Attributes of God*, § Wrath, part A.

²⁷ Ge 15.17; Ex 13.21; cf. Eze 1.4; Da 7.9-10.

God's beloved prophet Elijah, fire descended from heaven and consumed that captain and his soldiers, and a second captain and his fifty after that (2Ki 1.9-12)! As king David wrote of the Lord in Psalm 21.8-9,

Your hand will find out all your enemies;
Your right hand will find out those who hate you.
You will make them as a fiery oven in the time of your anger;
The Lord will swallow them up in His wrath,
And fire will devour them.

Indeed, anyone who acts against what God loves by unrepentantly committing sin will find that "it is a terrifying thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb 10.31).

This should concern every human being who has not yet experienced redemption by Jesus, for as the apostle Paul wrote, **we have all "sinned and fall short of the glory of God"** (Ro 3.23). Obviously we all want to be among those who are *protected* and *vindicated* by God's fiery love, and not among those who are *consumed* by His holy wrath. So, we must resolve our sin problem without delay, if we haven't done so already!

Thankfully, since God is light and God is love, that is, since He has our best interests at heart and no ulterior motives, we know that He is predisposed to help us address our problem with sin. But ... we need to back up a bit. We've repeatedly mentioned sin, and quoted Paul's declaration that "all have sinned," but what is sin exactly? And how did it become a universal problem for mankind?

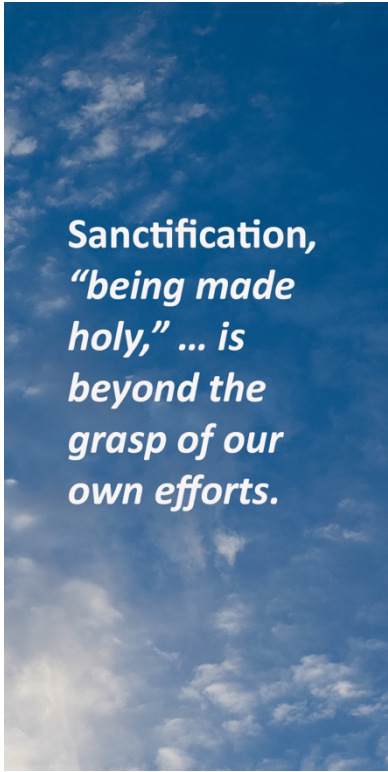
2. Every descendant of Adam except Jesus was born with a sin problem.

What Is Sin?

S*in* refers to humanity's general enmity toward God, and to specific acts expressive of that enmity. The Heb and Grk Bible words translated by our word *sin* have their roots in the ideas of **going wrong** or **missing a mark**. So with regard to specific acts, near synonyms for *sin* in the Bible include *transgression*, *unrighteousness*, *iniquity*, and *doing evil*. The Bible regards as sin any thought or action (or inaction) that is contrary to the laws, will, and character of God. Any act contrary to what God loves is sin. Furthermore, any prioritizing of self above the will of God, and any action that ignores or violates God's right to direct our lives is *sin* (1Jn 3.4).

The Penalty Of Sin

The Bible sums up the penalty of sin with one word: *death* (Ro 6.23). We must understand, however, that the death which results from the commission of sin is multifaceted.²⁸ Sin initiates and exacerbates a progressive physical, moral, psychological, intellectual and relational death in the human being. Our moral deadness makes us “unholy” (cf. 2Ti 3.2), alienates us from our holy God (Le 11.45; cf. Josh 24.19) and leaves us in desperate need of what the Bible calls **sanctification**, “being made holy,” the attainment of which is beyond the grasp of our own efforts.²⁹



Sanctification,
“being made
holy,” ... is
beyond the
grasp of our
own efforts.

²⁸ Roderick describes the different aspects of death that result from sin in his book, *Magic Baptism And The Invention Of Original Sin*, Part III: “Understanding Human Fallenness.”

²⁹ We will see in ch. 7 that the Christian has some responsibility in the process of his own sanctification, but that sanctification is impossible for anyone apart from the gracious, working of God.

Furthermore, sin robs our lives of meaning and purpose. Finally, if we are not rescued from its grip, sin guarantees our condemnation when we face our Creator, the Consuming Fire!

Sin And Human Fallenness

The Origin

The emergence of sin in our universe is shrouded in mystery, but the Bible connects it to the prideful rebellion of one of God's angels.³⁰ Having lost his citizenship in God's heaven, that angel, now known as "the devil and Satan" (Re 12.9) but called "the Serpent" early on (Ge 3),³¹ entered the Garden of Eden, man's first home, with the intent to destroy the human race while it consisted of only two persons, Adam and his wife Eve. The devil had no right to kill, nor even to touch Adam and Eve,³² but he knew that God had given the man a commandment which would result in death if broken. So, the devil approached Eve, who had only heard about God's commandment second-hand, and attacked her with inuendo and lies. He seduced her into breaking the commandment herself and then induced her to involve Adam in the violation. **We refer to this first sin of humanity and its consequences as "the fall."**

When our two progenitors chose the devil's counsel over God's command, death ensued, as they had been warned. Adam and Eve's bodies did not suddenly drop dead, but their whole constitution suffered a fatal impairment. The biblical evidence suggests that this impairment involved a detachment of God's Holy Spirit from their human nature.³³ When this occurred, Adam and Eve *began to die* in all

³⁰ Is 14.12-15; Eze 28.13-17. We speculate that envy of humanity's destiny entered into Lucifer's rebellion.

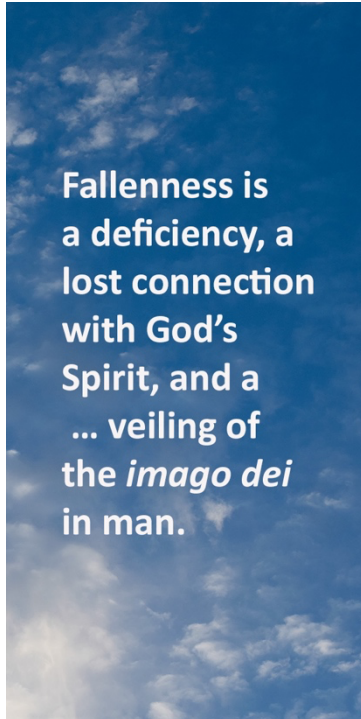
³¹ The devil was first called the Serpent (שָׁדָן) because of his whispering, hissing speech, not because of his appearance. Whispering speech would soon become associated with divination, cf. Isa 8.19. See Gesenius and Tregelles, *Gesenius' Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament Scriptures*, pp. 544-545.

³² Cf. Job 1.12; 2.6.

³³ For a deeper exploration of human nature, and how it was affected by the fall, see **Appendix 1: Human Nature And The Fall**.

the ways listed in the preceding section: physically, morally, psychologically, intellectually and relationally. They found themselves in a pitiable condition we describe as “fallen.” Tragically, this condition has been inherited by all their descendants — except Jesus Christ.

What Fallenness Is



Over the centuries, theologians have speculated much about the essence of human fallenness and how it is passed down through the generations. Biblically speaking, however, fallenness is not a substantive thing like a disease that is conveyed by means of a germ, but is instead the lack of a thing. **Fallenness is a deficiency, a lost connection with God's Spirit, and a consequent veiling of the *imago Dei*, the divine image in man.**³⁴ Our parents “pass down” this deficiency to us, only in the sense that they are unable to genetically bequeath to us that which is now missing from the human constitution. Man was created “in the likeness of God” (Ge 5.1), but fallen Adam was only able to father children “in his own likeness, according to his [own] image” (Ge 5.3).³⁵ The difference manifests itself in fallen humans as a lack of spiritual vitality, a distortion of their God-given aptitudes, *and* an inability to consistently choose and do what is right and good. **Thus, human fallenness is a spiritual deadness that has left us susceptible to sin, to our own unrestrained drives and impulses, and to the devil's compulsions.**³⁶ Compare the following diagrams:

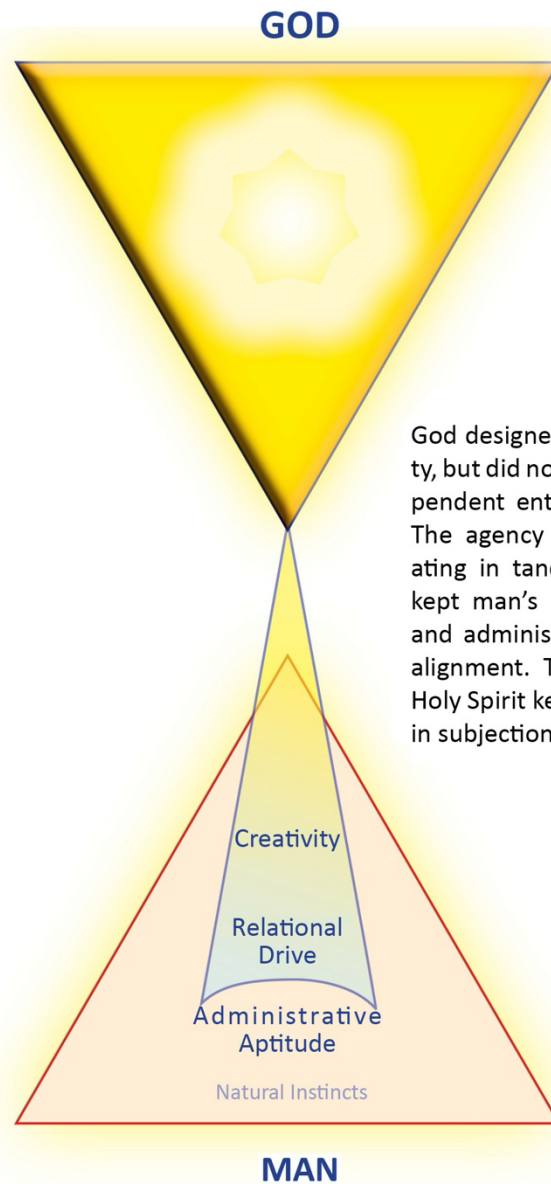
³⁴ With the veiling of the *imago Dei*, fallen man cannot reflect his Creator as he ought. In contrast, the divine image is still perfectly visible in the ideal “son of man,” Jesus Christ (2Co 4.4; Col 1.15; Heb 1.3; 2.7).

³⁵ Ge 5.3 does not imply that the *imago Dei* is absent in Adam's posterity (see Ge 9.6; 1Co 11.7; Jas 3.9), but only that Adam, in and of himself, was not capable to reproducing it in his sons.

³⁶ Jn 8.34; Ro 7.5; Eph 2.1-2; cf. Jn 8.44.

ORIGINAL STATE OF CREATED MAN

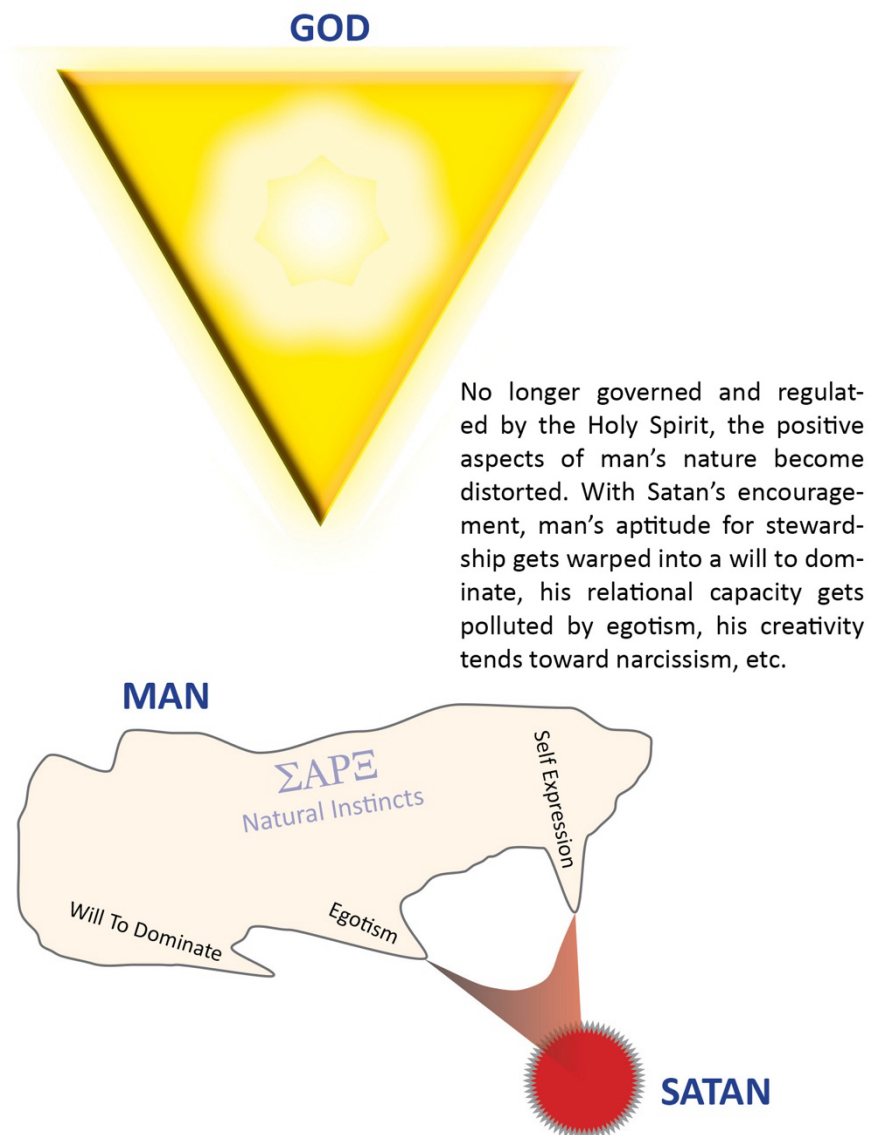
A vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit is an integral component of man as the *imago Dei*. As a creature, man is also endowed with natural instincts that enable him to maintain his physical life on earth. The Holy Spirit gives spiritual life to man and draws man's faculties toward God, aligning those faculties so that the whole man reflects his Creator, and is clothed in divine light.



God designed man to have individuality, but did not design him to be an independent entity having self-sufficiency. The agency of the Holy Spirit, operating in tandem with human nature, kept man's creativity, relational drive and administrative aptitude in proper alignment. The same working of the Holy Spirit kept man's physical instincts in subjection to his spiritual drives.

CURRENT STATE OF FALLEN MAN

By submitting himself to the Serpent, man broke his vital connection to God via the Holy Spirit. Relative to his original design, man is no longer whole. He is denuded of the divine light and deprived of God's palpable presence. Man's faculties are no longer properly aligned by the Spirit, but are now perverted by the overwhelming pull of his now ascendant natural instincts, "the flesh," and by Satan's blinding deceptions. The *imago dei* in fallen man is veiled such that he cannot reflect God's glory as he ought. Spiritually dead, insofar as his responsiveness to God, man is also dying physically, and is judicially under condemnation.



None of what we have just described should be interpreted to mean that our natural drives are inherently bad; we affirm the opposite! God endowed human beings with *good* physical and emotional drives so that we would have the necessary instincts to thrive together on planet Earth. It's only because we're born lacking the spiritual power to govern those physical and emotional impulses that they become a problem. They get into the driver's seat of our lives when we're born and steer us into all kinds of trouble. From the earliest moments of our lives, we cannot help but feel and think, first and foremost, about what our *self* wants, in order to satisfy our good, *but out of control*, physical and emotional cravings.

In other words, it is due to the lack of an inner "impulse regulator" — not to our physical and emotional drives being inherently evil — that we are born selfish. Tragically, the opportunistic devil and his minions exploit our lack of inner spiritual guidance and control, and add their urgings (usually imperceptibly) to our own selfish cravings. Therefore, without societal deterrence we are apt to live overtly self-centered lives; without divine intervention, we will remain selfish at heart even if we hide it well from the people around us and even from ourselves.

Problems That Stem From Fallenness

We Forget About God

When our physical and emotional impulses control us, and the "god of this world" blinds us (2Co 4.4), we forget about God and ignore His agenda for our lives. This breaks the greatest of God's commandments, which is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength" (Mk 12.30). This commandment is the reasonable dictate of our Creator, since He brought us into existence for His own purposes. As the apostle Paul reminded the Roman Christians, "from [the Lord] and through Him and to Him are all things" (Ro 11.36). Likewise, to the Corinthian believers he wrote, "there is but one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we exist for Him" (1Co 8.6). People already in heaven cry out this same truth, saying, "Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all

things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created” (Re 4.11). **Our obligation to love and honor God is inherent in the simple fact that He created us**, but we so easily forget this. Jesus had to remind even the Pharisees of this obligation, and they were the arbiters of Jewish religious practice! In Jesus’ famous saying, “render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s; and to God the things that are God’s” (Mt 22.21), the implication was that just as the coin for paying taxes had Caesar’s image on it, and so should be given back to Caesar, in the same way whatever has God’s image stamped upon it should be given back to God. The only thing in all creation explicitly said to bear God’s image is mankind. Jesus tells us that we must give ourselves back to God.

However, we must give ourselves to God not *solely* because He created us. We also owe our whole lives to Him because He purchased us “with His own blood,” as the apostle Paul so graphically stated (Ac 20.28). On this basis, Paul instructed the Corinthian Christians, saying, “you have been bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body” (1Co 6.20). To the Romans he put it this way: “I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Ro 12.1). We realize, therefore, that floating along complacently on the current of our selfish drives and impulses, while withholding from our Creator the sacrifice of ourselves, compounds the debt that we already owe Him (cf. Mt 6.12a). But that’s not the only problem that ensues from the selfish bent of our fallen state.

We Start Wars

While we were still working on this treatise, the news broke that Russia had invaded Ukraine. Evidence points to the selfish ambitions of one man, Vladimir Putin, as the impetus for this war (characterized as the biggest war in Europe since WWII). There are political, economic and military factors that point to pride and fear as part of Putin’s motivation, but they still add up to his selfishness pulling the trigger. Currently, Putin’s selfishness has created a living hell for countless innocent civilians, and apart from our God’s gracious intervention, the number of casualties for both sides in this conflict can only continue to climb.

We might think that a selfish man starting a war is an aberration, and not related to the spiritual fallenness shared by all humanity; after all, not everyone is so bellicose. But Vladimir Putin is no aberration. The selfish impulses that start wars between nations are the same unrestrained urges that start conflicts between neighbors, friends and family members. The Bible puts it this way:

What is the source of quarrels and conflicts among you? Is not the source your pleasures that wage war in your members? You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel.³⁷

Notice the phrase, *pleasures that wage war in your members*. This phrase refers to those out-of-control hungers and impulses at work in the members of our physical bodies. Notice also the words *lust* and *envious*. These words refer to the selfish physical and psychological drives that come forward and cause harm when our God-given instincts are not brought under spiritual control. Each of us have the potential within ourselves to plunge our world into a war, but even more so when we act under the witting or unwitting compulsion of an external and malignant spiritual power!

We Act Under The Devil's Compulsion

As we've hinted above, fallen human beings are *not* apt to think that they are influenced by evil spirits! Even when a fallen man is confronted about his ignobility by the disapprobation of others, or by more direct consequences of his actions, he takes comfort in the belief that at least he is his own boss, at least he lives autonomously without letting anyone tell him what to do. He imagines that at the end of his life he will say, in the words of the Frank Sinatra song, "I did it my way."

However, **autonomy is impossible for fallen man, because the spiritual realm abhors a vacuum**. The idea that spiritual interlopers are somehow barred from the steering wheels of our souls is just another deception to which our spiritual deadness leaves us vulnerable. We are mistaken if we think

³⁷ Jas 4.1-2.

that, while our own spirit lies all but dead in the trunk, some other “higher faculty” of human nature comes forward to take the driver’s seat; our incapacitated spirit is the “higher faculty”! We imagine maintaining the control over our own life by sheer power of will, but this does not happen. Instead, the “god of this age,” the spirit of evil, comes into the spiritual void of our impaired constitution to stimulate and guide the base instincts of our flesh, to blind our minds, and to distract us from the redemptive overtures of God’s grace (2Co 4.4, NIVO).³⁸

The devil with his minions steers the souls of fallen men, *and he has had the right to do so*. Satan’s authority over fallen men derives from the fall itself, briefly described above: Adam and Eve despised God’s authority and shifted the allegiance of the human race over to the deceiving Serpent. As Augustine put it, man “joined the faction of the fallen angels.”³⁹ Thus, Jesus said to the hypocritical seekers of His day, “You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father’s desire” (Jn 8.44 NIVO), and John affirmed the wider principle that all who habitually practice sin demonstrate thereby that they are “of the devil” (1Jn 3.8).

Obviously, not all fallen people are demonized to the extent of the Gerasene man who was driven mad by Legion (Lk 8.26-33). The passages quoted in the preceding paragraph do not imply any such a thing. Rather, as the apostle John wrote, “... the whole world lies in *the power of* the evil one” (1Jn 5.19). That is, Satan assumes the right to afflict all unredeemed persons, and *influences their lives*, whether subtly or overtly. Not everyone abandons themselves to that evil influence, but no fallen person can escape it entirely. Instead, fallen people yield to it unwittingly in what seem like the most human of behaviors, such as jealousy and ambition (Jas 3.14-15). However, when a person *does* embrace the demonic impulse, he soon finds himself in the grip of an overpowering compulsion to evil. The spiritual deadness of fallen humanity is catastrophic; if people yield to Satan’s exacerbation of their selfish lusts, it becomes horrific (see Eph 2.2-3).

³⁸ See more about God’s grace at the beginning of ch. 4.

³⁹ In *The City Of God* 14.15.

God Intends Something Far Better

But war and oppressive manipulation by the devil are not God's intention for humanity. **We must understand that failing to address our sin and fallenness jeopardizes our participation in a far more wonderful plan.** We will look extensively into the destiny that God has planned for His people in chapter 7, but while we are thinking about human fallenness, let us share a preview, a brief summary of what the Bible tells us about the destiny of those who have been, and will have been, redeemed from their fallen state. We want to whet our readers' appetites for learning about a plan that is so much better than capitulation to the selfish pursuit of personal autonomy.

God's plan for His people far surpasses our countless "happy ever after" fairy tales, *while fulfilling all their best elements!* In God's plan for His people, there is a Prince,⁴⁰ a royal wedding,⁴¹ and a golden city.⁴² The love and joyous fulfilment that awaits the inhabitants of that city will totally eclipse the shallow infatuation and temporal happiness imagined in worldly romances. After all, the heirs of God's heavenly destiny will not only enjoy everlasting fellowship with one another, but more importantly, the loving company of their Creator and of the human-divine Savior who has forever tied His destiny to theirs. Together, God and His people will embark upon an adventure that will span heaven and earth, *and then a new heaven and earth.* God's planned adventure will so enthrall His people that the sorrows *and pleasures* of this present life won't even come to mind (Is 65.17)!

We reiterate, though, that anyone who chooses to continue living selfishly, insisting upon his own autonomy,⁴³ and refusing to face his problem with sin and

⁴⁰ Is 9.6; Da 9.25; Ac 5.31.

⁴¹ Ps 45; Re 19.7-9.

⁴² Heb 11.16; Re 21.10-21.

⁴³ It may seem that we over emphasize fallen man's prioritization of personal autonomy. After all, globally speaking, don't most people submit themselves to the god or gods of one religion or another? Yes, humanity's innate religious impulse dictates that most people adhere, at least nominally, to some form of religious observance. However, if a man's religion does not call upon him to repent (Ac 17.30), and if it does not address the fundamental problem of his

fallenness, is liable to cheat himself out of this glorious destiny. Left unaddressed, a person's fallenness, and the sins that emanate from it, will not only ruin his life in the present (whether precipitously or by attrition), but will ultimately bring him to a state of fathomless regret when he meets his Maker, the Consuming Fire. Thankfully, redemption from ruin and regret has been made possible by the one human being whose nature was never impaired by fallenness and whose character was never twisted by sin.

Why Jesus Wasn't Fallen

Jesus successfully remained in control of His physical and emotional drives and impulses throughout His entire life, even though He was tempted to give in to them, just like we are (Heb 4.15). Though tempted like us, He was not born fallen like us, but was instead born physically and spiritually whole. How so? His mother did not pass down spiritual vitality to Him — she needed a Savior like everybody else (Lk 1.46-47). Jesus' mother, Mary, godly as she was, could not bequeath spiritual wholeness to Jesus, because she herself was born with the same spiritual deficiency as the rest of humanity.⁴⁴ Her inability, in and of herself, to birth “unfallen” children is apparent from the occasional bad attitudes of her other sons.⁴⁵ However, Jesus did not need the missing component from Mary. He was born spiritually whole, full of spiritual vitality, because His Father is God. It was God Who first created a spiritually vibrant human nature in Adam, and it was impossible for God to not share His own spiritual vitality with His Son, conceived by the Holy Spirit. This is good news, because it was through this one un-fallen man that God would provide a solution for our pressing problem of sin.

fallen condition (cf. Eze 18.31; 36.26-27), it surreptitiously allows him to remain the captain of his own soul, or at least to maintain the illusion that he remains at the helm of his life.

⁴⁴ Contrary to the Roman Catholic dogma of the Immaculate Conception, which teaches that Mary was born without any stain of original sin. This idea was invented by some English monks between AD 1121 and 1130, and was made an official doctrine by Pius IX in 1854. See Hastings et al., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*.

⁴⁵ Mk 3.21; Jn 7.3-5.

Why God Won't Overlook Sins

Because Of His Character

Many have asked, “If nothing is impossible for God, why can't He just overlook our sins?” The answer is: nothing is impossible for God except acting contrary to His own eternal character and nature. For example, because He is the God of truth, God cannot lie. Since God is also love, He cannot allow people to inflict evil upon one another unchecked. Any adult understands that people who are not held accountable for doing wrong will only perpetrate ever worsening atrocities. We have also observed, what God has always known: moral evil brings about increasing degrees of death, both for those who commit it and for those upon whom it is inflicted. Therefore, **God cannot overlook evil in a world He intends to bless with abundant life** (cf. Jn 10.10).

Because Of His Plan For His Son

Of course, instead of overlooking evil, God could simply annihilate all sinners in the first instant of their first transgression. To completely rid His world of all those who sin and cause death would be an act consistent with His loving character, and He very nearly did this with the flood of Noah. However, God has a plan for creation, and that plan has deeper objectives than simply keeping evil out of the world. His plan centers upon His Son, and it involves a great redemption — a redemption that allows Him to *not destroy all sinners*, but a redemption that is nevertheless *incompatible with overlooking sins*. For that redemption to proceed, **the sins of mankind must, at some point, be expiated**, that is, covered and removed (we will look more closely at the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4).

Is An Expiatory Sacrifice Really Necessary?

The expiation of human sin was not absolutely necessary, in the sense that God had *no external obligation to redeem mankind*. As already stated, God could annihilate all sinners in the first moment of their transgression. At the fall or at the flood, He could have righteously allowed the entire human race to perish as a result of their sins, just as He allows the rebellious angels to perish without any hope of

salvation (2Pe 2.4). However, because of God's of plan to provide a suitable bride for His Son (more on this in [chapter 7](#)), and in view of His attributes of both love and justice, there is a sense in which there is an inherent necessity *within* the Godhead to justly redeem at least a part of humanity.⁴⁶ **God's plan to justly redeem sinners is what makes an expiatory sacrifice on mankind's behalf truly necessary.**⁴⁷ However, the magnitude of humanity's collective affront against God makes the necessary expiation beyond any mortal person's ability.

Excursus On The Kingdom Of God

The kingdom of God, also called the kingdom "of Heaven" or "of the heavens," is a subject that will enter more and more into our study of redemption. While this topic comes to the forefront in the book of Daniel (2.44; 7.13-14) and in the synoptic gospels (Mt 4.17; etc.), it nevertheless constitutes a thematic stream that flows through the whole of Scripture. When we follow that stream to its source, it takes us back to the Garden of Eden (that Paradise we will say more about when we describe the tabernacle in [chapter 7](#)). When we follow the stream to its end, it takes us to the Day of the LORD (a subject we will also delve into in [chapter 7](#)).

Essence And Original Expression

Fundamentally, **the kingdom of God is the rule of God**. Therefore, biblical references to "the kingdom of God" can refer to God's sovereign rule over all of creation.⁴⁸ However, passages that speak explicitly about the kingdom of God (or

⁴⁶ As Leon Morris wrote, "the salvation that was wrought in Christ is something that proceeds from the loving heart of the Father," *The Cross In The New Testament*, p. 369. Our point is that the impetus for redemption and for the requisite expiatory sacrifice was all internal to the Godhead; neither man nor angels twisted God's arm to get Him to act for man's salvation. Morris' specific point about the Father's love is welcome in opposing the false view that "a loving Son ... [won] salvation for men from a just, but unrelenting, Father."

⁴⁷ As determined from long ago (Lk 22.22; 24.26; Ac 2.23; 4.27-28).

⁴⁸ Ps 47.2; 98; Is 6.5; 1Ti1.17; cf. Je 46.18; 48.15; 51.57. Got Questions Ministries summarizes this idea:

Broadly speaking, the kingdom of God is the rule of an eternal, sovereign God over all the universe. Several passages of Scripture show that God is the undeniable Monarch of all

of God ruling as king) usually refer to the sovereignty of God *as it affects the world of humanity* (Da 4.2-3,34-35; Re 11.15-17; 15.3). More specifically, when the OT prophets wrote about the kingdom of God, they often had *a restored Davidic dynasty* in view.⁴⁹ Of course, the hope of a *restored* Davidic reign reflected not only the moral and practical collapse of the Davidic rule in Israel's history, but also the rejection of God's divine rule by Israel and the rest of humanity.

However, the kingdom of God existed at the beginning of creation, before anyone had even thought of rejecting God's rule. The biblical story of God's kingdom begins with the brief information given in the book of Genesis about God's perfect rule over the first human beings in the Garden of Eden. In the garden, before Adam and Eve sinned, not only did God and humanity dwell together in a perfect familial relationship, the *familia Dei* mentioned in [the Introduction](#) of this book, but they also lived and worked together in a perfect kingdom. The LORD God was king and lawgiver, both *de jure* and *de facto*. At the same time, the man and his wife ruled over the earth and its animals as God's vicegerents (Ge 1.26; 2.19). Under God's authority, they also cared for the garden (Ge 2.15-17).

Current And Historical Distaste For Kings

Now, in many modern countries, like the United States, people don't like the idea of having a king. Some nations still have a beloved king and queen (who often only serve as figureheads alongside a democratic style of government). Other countries, however, have autocratic kings not particularly esteemed by their subjects. So, the question arises, "What's the difference between an autocratic king and a dictator?" Some autocratic kings *are* tantamount to dictators, but to answer the question:

creation: "The LORD has established his throne in heaven, and his kingdom rules over all" (Ps 103.19).

⁴⁹ God saw the Davidic kingdom as "My kingdom," 1Ch 17.11-14. For the prophetic expectations, see Is 9.6-7; 11.1-5; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 17.24-25; 22.2-4; 23.5-6; 30.8-9; 33.14-26; Eze 34.23-30; Ho 3.5; Am 9.11-12. This OT theme is reflected in NT expectations: Mk 11.10; Lk 1.31-33; Ac 15.15-17; cf. Ac 1.6.

- **A dictator** is generally someone who has seized control of a country by force or intrigue, and has assumed the absolute right to dictate the laws while having no political interests beyond selfish ones.
- **A king**, on the other hand, is in principle someone who assumes the leadership of a nation on the basis of mutual benefit between sovereign and citizens. In a smaller monarchy, the king may have extensive family connections with his subjects, and those relationships instill in him a concern for the people's well-being.

The pre-fall Garden of Eden had the character of a small monarchy. A family connection existed between sovereign and subjects, since Adam was the son of God by virtue of his creation (Lk 3.38). God ruled as king on earth in the person of His Son, the eternal Word and agent of creation, described in John 1.1-3. This was the One whom early Christian theologians called the *Logos Asarkos*, the pre-incarnate Word, who would later “become flesh” and dwell among us as Jesus Christ (Jn 1.14). In Eden, as in all His pre-incarnation manifestations, the *Logos Asarkos* appeared in tangible, human-like form, even though his body did not yet consist of the same material as ours. He was able to do what flesh-and-blood people do, from walking and wearing clothes to performing surgery. As Creator He brought the earth into existence, and then as king, He formed His first human subject, Adam, “of the dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (Ge 2.7). He also planted the garden and placed Adam in it (Ge 2.8,15). He later built Eve from organic material taken from Adam's side (Ge 2.21-22). As divine king, the *Logos Asarkos* remained near His subjects, “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Ge 3.8). Far from being an autocrat with selfish interests, the divine king of Eden concerned Himself with the well-being of His subjects, even when there was only one (Ge 2.18). Furthermore, while there was not yet any such thing as a constitutional monarchy nor any human assembly to propose laws to which even the king should submit, the LORD God acted, as always, according to the immutable “law” of His own nature. Because the divine king is love and truth personified,⁵⁰ **there has never since been a more benevolent government than the monarchy that was the Edenic kingdom of God.**

⁵⁰ Ex 34.6; Ps 25.10; 31.5; 40.11; 115.1; 117.2; Is 65.16; 1Jn 4.8; 5.20.

Still, after mankind fell into a state of sin, it became natural for human beings to rebel against all rule other than that of their own selfish impulses. Fallen human beings do not wish to submit to any government, no matter how benevolent it may be — they do so, but only because they must.⁵¹ Fallen people do not desire external government, they desire autonomy; every individual wishes to rule himself without having to submit to anyone else. After the fall, this commitment to autonomy eventually led to ubiquitous wickedness and chaos in the primeval world. This devolution was inevitable because autonomous man cannot help but serve his own depraved inclinations as well as the promptings of Satan, the “god of this world.”⁵² The resulting calamitous moral disintegration finally compelled our good and holy God to bring the judgment of the flood upon mankind (Ge 6.12-13).

God Rebuilds His Government By Covenant

When the human race started over with Noah and his sons, God began to rebuild both the *familia Dei* and His earthly kingdom through a relational instrument called a *covenant* (we will say more about God’s use of covenants in [chapter 7](#)). In time, Noah’s descendants through a particular family line, the line of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, so increased in number as to constitute a nation, the nation of Israel. As a nation, Israel became willing (thanks in part to the oppression they suffered under the government of Egypt’s Pharaoh) to accept life under God’s rule. Using Moses as a mediator, **God instituted a government for Israel that we call a covenantal theocracy**. A theocracy is a system of government in which God is recognized as king, while priests and prophets rule in His name.⁵³ In a covenantal theocracy, the covenant bond provides assurance that God will do His part to bless the people as His adopted kindred, while they do their part to honor Him as their king, by worshipping Him and keeping His statutes. In this theocracy, God initially reigned through the mediation of Moses as His prophet. After the passing of Moses, the day-to-day governing of the people was done by the priests and prophets who taught and directed the people, sometimes through the elders and

⁵¹ The final proof of this will be demonstrated in the Gog and Magog invasion that will occur *after* a thousand years of God’s ideal rule over mankind (Ps 2; Eze 38-39; Re 20.7-10).

⁵² Cf. 2Co 4.4; Pr 17.11.

⁵³ Cf. Ex 19.5-6.

leaders of Israel's tribes and clans.⁵⁴ **As groups and individuals within the nation of Israel embraced God's rule over their lives, and as God dealt directly with those who violated the covenant, this covenantal theocracy served as a powerful expression of God's kingdom on earth.**

Birth Of The Covenantal Theocratic Monarchy (CTM)

Even so, the Moses-mediated covenantal theocracy was not a *flawless* expression of God's kingdom, because many people did not allow God to write His laws on their hearts,⁵⁵ and they all too readily violated the laws that God had written for them on stone tablets. Therefore, after the Israelites had settled in the promised land, they suffered more and more calamities for failing to uphold their part of their covenant with God. In time, the people decided that their lives would be better if, instead of a theocracy, they could have a monarchy like the other nations around them. So, they asked Samuel, the leading prophet-priest of the time, to give them a king (1Sa 8.4-5). This request by the people did not catch God by surprise. God had always intended to reestablish a monarchy for His people, this time under a *human king*, and had made provision for this eventuality in the law (Deut 17.14-20). However, God had also always known that Israel struggled with submitting to Him (1Sa 8.6-8; 10.19), and that the people needed to learn the difference between life under a human king and life under a divine king.

So, God directed Samuel to appoint Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, as Israel's first human king, *and* to tell the people what it would cost them to have a man rather than God ruling over them (1Sa 8.10-18). Nevertheless, **Israel's government remained an expression of the kingdom of God**, because it did not transform from a covenantal theocracy into a *secular* monarchy, but into a *covenantal theocratic* monarchy (henceforth CTM) in which king and people remained in covenantal relationship with God and with one another (1Ch 11.3). The offices of the priests and prophets also remained in place, to check and balance the power of the human king.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ex 18.25-26; Nu 10.1-4; 30.1; Deut 1.9-18; 5.23-28; 27.1; 31.9,28.

⁵⁵ Contrary to the exhortation of Deut 32.46.

The Immutable Requisite Of A Divine King

As the biblical story progresses, we discover that, while God *did* intend a man to rule as king over His people, He *did not* intend just any man to serve as that king. No mere man holding the office of king could bring about the reestablishment of a truly Edenic monarchy, not even with the help of priests and prophets. The king that God had in mind would have to combine in his own person the best human qualities of the great kings David⁵⁶ and Solomon,⁵⁷ and at the same time would have to *be God*.⁵⁸ **A full restoration of both the pristine Edenic family and the ideal kingdom of God would require the presence of God Himself, walking and reigning among His people in human form.**

By the time the political sovereignty of the old Davidic dynasty came to its end during the Babylonian exile (c. 586 BC), a few of the Jewish people had come to understand that the just and righteous king who would restore kingdom *might be divine* (cf. Jn 1.15; 11.27; 12.34). After all, some of the prophets had spoken of that coming ruler as though he might be the LORD God Himself (Is 9.6-7; Mic 5.2). Still, such an idea was hard to comprehend. How could the coming king be *both* human and divine? Nevertheless, little by little, with the help of Jesus' own teaching about Himself, and the subsequent teaching of His apostles, we now understand that Jesus Christ, the awaited Messiah and King of God's kingdom, is both truly human and truly divine (Heb 1.1-12).

The Eschatological Kingdom

Israelites in antiquity may have lacked understanding about *the nature* of the coming king, but they eventually set aside all doubt about his lineage. With help from the prophets, Israel came to know that the messianic king would be a descendant of king David. By the first century, the Jews (and even some Gentiles), had begun to refer to the hoped-for messianic ruler as the "Son of David."⁵⁹ They generally believed that this messianic Son of David would unveil himself in a royal coming (*parousia*) that would restore political sovereignty to Israel (cf. Ac 1.6).

⁵⁶ Je 23.5; 30.9; 33.15; Eze 34.23-24; 37.24-25; Ho 3.5.

⁵⁷ Is 11.1-5; cf. Mt 12.42.

⁵⁸ Is 9.6-7; 24.23; Mic 4.7; 5.2-4.

⁵⁹ Mt 22.41-46; 9.27; 12.23; 15.22; cf. Psalm of Solomon 17.21, of c. 40 BC, "See, Lord, and raise up for them their king, the son of David, to rule over your servant Israel."

They expected this restoration to bring “this age” to a close and inaugurate “the age to come” (Mt 24.3; cf. Mt 12.32).

In “the age to come,” according to the popular understanding, the Davidic Messiah would lead the nation of Israel into a golden era of Edenic peace and prosperity. If anyone gave thought to how the Gentile nations fit into this popular hope, they probably focused upon the expectation of “salvation from our enemies and from the hand of all who hate us” (Lk 1.68-74). Only a few, like aged Simeon, thought of the Messiah as “a light of revelation for the Gentiles” (Lk 2.32). Not even the disciples of Jesus understood, at first, that there would yet ensue a period of Gentile ascendancy in the land (“the times of the Gentiles,” Lk 21.23-24) before Israel’s “golden age.” The Scriptures reveal, however, that the glorious day for Israel will come, when the Davidic king will reign from Zion, not only over Israel but over all nations, and will restore not only Judah but the entire cosmos to its Edenic state. That still future expression of God’s kingdom in its global fullness is what we refer to in this book as **the eschatological kingdom of God**.⁶⁰

The Kingdom Of God And The New Covenant

Few of Jesus’ contemporaries anticipated that the Messiah would be divine, and almost none imagined that there would be a lengthy interval between Messiah’s coming and the eschatological fullness of His kingdom. The lack of understanding in both of these matters was tied to a third blind spot having to do with the connection between the Messiah and the New Covenant. First-century Jews seemed unaware that the Messiah would arrive as the Messenger and Mediator of God’s New Covenant (Mal 3.1-4; Heb 9.15; etc.). Since any post-fall expression of the kingdom of God on earth, including the eschatological kingdom, is of necessity a *covenantal* kingdom,⁶¹ the disciples of Jesus should have been as excited about the imminent establishment of the New Covenant as they were about the coronation of the messianic king. However, even after Jesus told them explicitly that He was establishing the New Covenant with His outpoured blood (Mt 26.27-28), the focus of the disciples remained on their hoped-for restoration

⁶⁰ The term *eschatological*, comes from the root ἔσχατος, meaning, “extremity, limit, end.” The **eschatological kingdom of God** will be realized after the *end* of our present age.

⁶¹ We will clarify this principle with our in-depth look at covenants in [chapter 7](#). For now, please see Is 55.3; Eze 34.23-25; 37.24-28.

of “the kingdom,” i.e., the arrival of the kingdom of God in its eschatological fullness, with Israel in political ascendancy (Ac 1.6).

Israel’s subjugation under a succession of pagan empires had undoubtedly kept the hope of the eschatological kingdom simmering in the Jewish mind. The first-century oppression by the Roman government seems to have brought the hope of a restored Davidic dynasty to a full boil, at least among the more zealous Israelites. It appears that Jesus’ countrymen were confident in their covenant status, and apparently content with the provisions of the Abrahamic and Sinaitic covenants, but they desperately desired to see the fulfilment of the prophecies about the coming Davidic kingdom.⁶²

So, first John the Baptist and then Jesus made the kingdom of God the focal point of their proclamation. “Repent,” they preached, “for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”⁶³ In what sense was the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of God, at hand? John explained, “I am the voice Isaiah predicted, telling you to prepare the way for Yahveh, the LORD God!”⁶⁴ In other words, the kingdom of God was near in the sense that the divine king of that kingdom was arriving. Once having arrived, Jesus announced not only that the kingdom of God was near (Mk 1.15), but that it had, in fact, come (Mt 12.28; Lk 11.20).

However, the more we study the canonical Gospels, the more we realize that the Jewish people of the first century had submerged whatever knowledge they had of the New Covenant beneath their hope in the *external aspects* of the eschatological kingdom. **For this reason, much of what John the Baptist and Jesus taught about the kingdom of God was *corrective*.** John the Baptist directed the people of Israel back to their covenant calling as a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and away from thoughts of raising an insurrectionist army. Jesus, in His turn, also taught the *spiritual realities* of the kingdom, many of which overlap with elements of the New Covenant. Jesus taught, for example, that the subjects of the kingdom were to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, not armed zealots (Mt 26.52).

⁶² Is 9.6-7; 16.5; cf. Is 32.1-5; Je 23.5-6; 30.7-10; 33.15-22

⁶³ Mt 3.2, 4.17.

⁶⁴ Roderick’s paraphrase of Jn 1.23, which quotes Is 40.3.

The Kingdom Of God Is Already And Not Yet

What then is the current state of the kingdom of God? A glance at the current state of our world tells us that the kingdom of God is obviously ***not yet*** here in its eschatological glory. So, we remind ourselves that the realization of the kingdom of God among human subjects, in all its phases, past, present and future, required the eventual establishment of the New Covenant. The establishment of the New Covenant, in turn, required the New-Covenant sacrifice, the final expiation for sin that would propitiate the Father.⁶⁵ Jesus Christ accomplished and fulfilled all these requirements with His first coming. Now, with further teaching from Jesus and the apostles, we understand that **the eschatological culmination of the kingdom of God also awaits the second coming of Christ** (His *parousia*). At that time, King Jesus will transform the redeemed by giving them immortal sinless bodies. He will also completely remove Satan and his minions (the chief opponents of God's rule) from the human domain (more on all this in [chapter 7](#)).

Nevertheless, with all that Jesus accomplished with His first coming, many aspects of the future eschatological kingdom have become a present reality, at least incipiently. As the teaching of John the Baptist, Jesus, and the apostles implied, the kingdom of God took a giant step forward and entered a new phase with the first arrival of the "son of David." **It's as if the future fullness of the eschatological kingdom had in some measure overflowed into the present.** Therefore, we can say with Jesus that the kingdom of God is ***already*** here among us (Mt 12.28; Lk 17.21), even if it is ***not yet*** revealed in its full eschatological glory.⁶⁶

In the present time, therefore, wherever people, both Jews and Gentiles, have submitted themselves to the rule of King Jesus, wherever Christian believers love God and neighbor, wherever Holy Spirit's miracles of provision, healing or deliverance occur, there we can see a manifestation of the kingdom of God. We see this manifestation most readily in the organized church, but also in more informal groups that are fully committed to Jesus and His word in the Scriptures

⁶⁵ See more about the key terms *expiate* and *propitiate* in ch. 4.

⁶⁶ See the table following this excursus. For an extensive treatment of viewpoints regarding both the already present and still yet future aspects of the kingdom of God, see George Eldon Ladd's, *The Presence of the Future: The Eschatology of Biblical Realism*. Ladd also provided much helpful insight regarding the kingdom of God in his *A Theology of the New Testament*.

(Jn 8.31-32). However, this is not to say that the visible church, nor any Christian organization, provides a perfect picture of God's rule. To the contrary, and much to our grief, Christian organizations throughout history have shown as great a propensity to act contrarily to God and His word as the nation of Israel ever did. Therefore, whether Jew or Gentile, we still long for the ultimate peace and righteousness that will prevail when our King returns and rules in person from Jerusalem. He will rule with both love and grace, but also with a rod of iron, so as to set all things right on our planet (Is 11.4; Ac 3.21; Re 19.15).

Until then, those whom God has graciously drawn to Himself seek out the fellowship of faithful servants of Jesus. They do this so that together they may enjoy the countless benefits of the kingdom of God that King Jesus has already made available to His subjects by His redemptive sacrifice. However, for those who have not yet been born again⁶⁷ and converted⁶⁸ to Jesus in humble dependency, the kingdom of God and its benefits remain out of reach (Mt 18.3; Jn 3.3). For those still unrepentantly pursuing personal autonomy, exclusion from the kingdom's blessings remains one of the grievous consequences of sin.

⁶⁷ For an explanation of what it means to be born again, see ch. 6.

⁶⁸ For an explanation of what it means to be converted, see ch. 5, the section entitled, "I've Repented; Must I Also Be Converted?"

The Already/Not Yet Aspects Of God's Kingdom

Already In “This Age”⁶⁹	Not Yet Until “The Day Of Redemption”⁷⁰
Davidic king enthroned in heaven (Heb 8.1)	Davidic king enthroned in Zion (Ps 2; 110)
Kingdom of God established, inaugurated (Mt 4.17; 12.28; cf. Eph 2.19-20; Heb 10.19-20)	Kingdom presented whole to the Father (1Co 15.24; cf. Mt 6.10)
Believers bow to Jesus as king (Jn 1.49)	Every knee will bow to Jesus Christ as Lord (Php 2.9-11)
Believers made righteous (Ro 5.1)	Believers receive all the hoped-for blessings of righteousness (Ga 5.5; cf. Col 1.3,27), ⁷¹ chiefly the presence of Jesus (1Ti 1.1; Tt 2.13)
By grace through Christ, the righteous reign in life (Ro 5.17; Lk 10.19)	The redeemed reign with Christ over the nations (2Ti 2.12; Re 2.26-27)
Jesus and believers cast out demons (Mt 12.28; Lk 10.17)	Satan bound and removed from humanity's domain (Re 20)
All things subjected judicially to Christ (Eph 1.20-22)	All things fully subjected to Christ in the world to come (Heb 2.8-9)
Many Israelites believe (Jn 2.23; 7.31; 10.42).	All Israel saved (Ro 11.26)
Believers saved (Eph 2.8)	Salvation completed (Ro 5.9; 1Th 5.8)

⁶⁹ 1Co 2.6.

⁷⁰ Cf. Eph 4.30.

⁷¹ See Stott, *The Message Of Galatians*, p. 134.

Believers “have redemption” in Christ, redeemed spiritually (Eph 1.7)	Redemption complete, including redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)
Believers children of God and have received spirit of adoption (Ro 8.15; 1Jn 3.2)	Adoption completed with redemption of the body (Ro 8.23)
Believers know God (Jn 17.3; 1Jn 5.20)	Believers have full knowledge of God (1Co 13.12)
Believers sealed with Holy Spirit of Promise (Eph 1.13; 4.30)	Believers receive their inheritance (Eph 1.13-14)
Healing available for the sick (Jas 5.14-15)	No more pain or death (Re 21.4)
Material needs provided by God (Mt 6.33; Php 4.19)	“Unfailing treasures in heaven” (Lk 12.33)
Followers of Jesus rewarded (Mk 10.29-30)	Believers receive full reward at Christ’s coming (Re 11.18; 22.12; cf. 2Jn 8)
Believers betrothed to Christ (2Co 11.2)	Believers participate in the marriage supper of the Lamb (Re 19.7-9)
Believers being glorified (2Co 3.18)	Believers resurrected in full glory (1Co 15.42)
Believers sanctified (1Co 1.2)	Sanctification entirely accomplished (1Th 5.23)
Believers becoming conformed to Christ (Ro 8.29; 2Co 3.18)	The redeemed fully like Christ (1Jn 3.2)
Believers citizens of heavenly Jerusalem (Heb 12.22)	Heavenly Jerusalem visibly present (Re 21.2)
Death judicially abolished by Christ’s death and resurrection (2Ti 1.10; cf. Heb 2.14-15)	Death eliminated from the universe (Re 20.14)

3. We can't save ourselves from sin and its consequences.

No man can redeem the life of another or give God a ransom for him —
The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough — that he should
live on forever and not see decay.⁷²

Our Impaired Nature Cannot Keep Itself From Sinning

When I, Roderick, was a teenager, I knew only enough about Christianity and the Bible to make me feel guilty for my sins. During my final years of high school, I felt increasing guilt in connection with my selfish, self-indulgent habits. The obvious solution was to break those bad habits, so that's what I attempted to do. Try as I might to leave them behind, however, I would always succumb again to those shameful pleasures that so pricked my conscience. I felt caught in a vicious cycle of sin, guilt, and failed attempts at reform. Because of that, I will never forget how I felt the day I first read the words of Jesus in John 8.34:

"I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave of sin."⁷³

I was stunned! I wondered how Jesus could possibly know the current circumstances of my life and how enslaved I was to my bad habits.

Only later, when the Lord had suppressed some of my arrogant self-absorption, would I realize that Jesus *had not* spoken those words just for Rod Graciano to read in the Bible 2,000 years later. I came to understand that He had instead articulated a universal truth regarding our fallen race, namely that, ***no sinner can free himself from the tyranny of his own sins***. In other words, no person can lift himself up by his own bootstraps so as to rise above the base tendencies of his inherited fallenness! As long as our human nature remains impaired, *and its cravings unconstrained*, we simply cannot, in any consistent manner, act contrary to our resultant selfish character. Sure, we can cage a tiger, but forcefully keeping it from acting according to its character does not make it less

⁷² Ps 48.7-9, NIVO.

⁷³ NLT.

of a predator; it will return to its normal behavior as soon as it is released from constraints. Likewise, our family's house rules, along with our community's social *and religious* taboos, can temporarily constrain the impulses of our selfish, self-indulgent character, but they cannot remove the unconstrained impulses and the cravings that shape the character of fallen man from within. Even when externally restrained, we will still act out our selfish desires in our minds. As soon as we distance ourselves from external restraints, by going away to college or joining the service, we're apt to unleash our inner libertine. Apart from a radical repair of our impaired nature, and a new governor for our inner drives and impulses, the best we can be is like the Pharisees whom Jesus described as "whitewashed tombs — beautiful on the outside, but filled on the inside with ... all sorts of impurity."⁷⁴

Our Good Works Cannot Outweigh Our Sins

In our unredeemed fallen state, we cannot help but continue sinning. Because of this, we often try to compensate for our misdeeds. We do this by adopting a "scales of justice" mentality. In other words, we attempt to outweigh our sins by good deeds.

History shows that this way of thinking provides the foundational principle of what we might call *the natural religion of fallen man*.⁷⁵ People seem to naturally believe that *if* they need redemption, they can redeem themselves by doing enough good deeds to outweigh their bad ones on the scales of moral justice. This idea has popped up in religions and cults from antiquity to the present. For example, The ancient Egyptian cult of the god Thoth imagined this deity as "present at the weighing of the heart of the deceased," and sometimes represented this god "as the

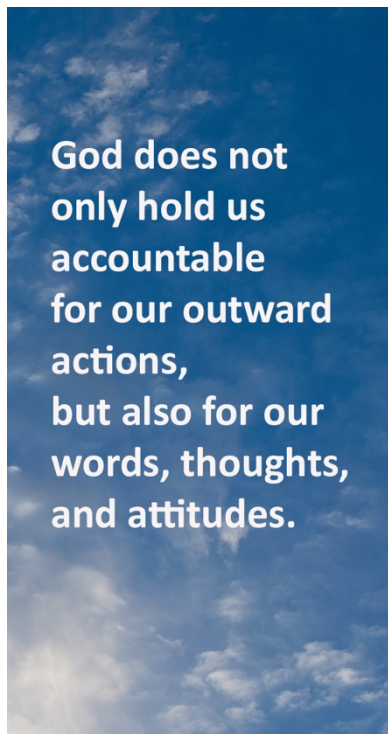
⁷⁴ Mt 23.27, NLT.

⁷⁵ "... a moralistic religion of self-salvation is our default setting as fallen creatures. If we are not explicitly and regularly taught out of it, we will always turn the message of God's rescue operation into a message of self-help.... So there are really only two religions in the world: a religion of human striving to ascend to God through pious works, feelings, attitudes, and experiences and the Good News of God's merciful descent to us in his Son." Michael Horton, *Christless Christianity*, pp. 42, 128.

scale of justice itself.”⁷⁶ In a much newer religion, some teachers of contemporary Islam say that,

The actions of each person are weighed on a scale of absolute justice by Allah. The good deeds are balanced against the evil deeds. The way the scale tips (to the “good” side or to the “bad” side) determines the person’s eternal destiny. If your good deeds outweigh your bad ones, you go to heaven; if your bad deeds are heavier, then you’ll be spending eternity in a place of unimaginable suffering.⁷⁷

While many faiths teach or imply a “scales of justice” principle, the idea is hardly restricted to the doctrines of recognized religions. Instead, even people of *no religion* naturally gravitate to the idea that they can redeem themselves by doing a sufficient number of good deeds. Fallen man, regardless of race or creed, believes he can save himself by his own merit, so long as he can stack up enough merit to outweigh his sins.



The Bible, however, while teaching that God certainly *does* hold people accountable for their actions, never suggests that a person can redeem himself by doing enough good deeds to outweigh his bad ones. When the apostle Paul wrote about God’s way of salvation for mankind, he insisted that it was “not on the basis of deeds which we have done,”⁷⁸ and certainly not on the basis of attempts at keeping God’s laws (Ro 3.20,28; 9.32; Ga 2.16). That we cannot redeem ourselves by our own good works becomes obvious when we stop to consider that **God does not only hold us accountable for our outward actions, but also for our words (Mt 12.37), thoughts and attitudes (Mt 5.21-22, 27-28).** None of us can even

⁷⁶ Vos in *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*, ed. by Karel van der Toorn, et al, p. 862.

⁷⁷ Bickel and Jantz, *World Religions and Cults* 101.

⁷⁸ Tt 3.5. See also Eph 2.9; 2Ti 1.9.

begin to recall, let alone tabulate, the wrong words we have spoken, or the wrong thoughts and attitudes we have had over the course of our lifetime. To maintain the hope of compensating for our sins by doing good is to live in denial of the fact that, if we were to face a scale of moral justice, *our words, thoughts and attitudes would be piled up against us*, together with our outward actions. We deceive ourselves into thinking that on the imaginary scale of divine justice, all we have to compensate for are those two or three really bad things that we have done. But God looks on the heart. Consequently, those who try to live by a “scale of justice” philosophy or religion are plagued throughout their lives by two haunting questions, “*Have I done enough good deeds?*” and “*How can I know that I’ve done enough?*”

Anyone who really wants the answers to these two bothersome questions, can find them in the Bible: The answers are *No* and *You can’t*. No one can do enough good works to compensate for his sins before God, and therefore no one can ever have assurance that they have succeeded in doing so.

Weren’t Israelites Saved By Animal Sacrifices?

The animal sacrifices offered by the Patriarchs, as well as the sacrifices later prescribed by the Mosaic law, had an important teaching role as typological symbols of the great expiation of sin that would come. They were also the practical means by which people could express their repentance toward God and their devotion to His covenant. Furthermore, in the Levitical system, the sacrifices and monetary gifts offered by the people provided for the sustenance of the priests and other temple workers, as well as for maintenance of the temple facilities, similarly to the way our Sunday offerings provide for the sustenance of our pastors, and maintenance of our church buildings today. However, the animal sacrifices of old did not save offerers from their sins and spiritual jeopardy any more than putting money in the offering plate saves us. As it says in Hebrews 10.4, “it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.” The expiation of sin and the salvation of sinners would require a much greater sacrifice, something we will

explore in detail in chapter 4. For now, let it suffice to say that the sacrificial death of any number of *animals* could not possibly save even one *human* sinner.

Even Our Own Death Cannot Expiate Our Sins

As already mentioned in chapter 2 above, the penalty of sin is death (Ro 6.23). But if death is the penalty of sin, why isn't each person's own death sufficient to expiate his sins? Doesn't Romans 6.7 say, "he that hath died is **justified** from sin"?⁷⁹

Some older Bible versions, like the one just quoted, do translate the Greek wording of Romans 6.7 *correctly*, and *consistently* with the rest of the epistle, using the word *justified* rather than the word *freed* (that we find in most Eng editions). Contextually, however, we must understand the phrase, "he who has died," as referring to a person "who has died *in Christ*." As the apostle Paul continues in the following verse, Romans 6.8, "Now if we have died **with Christ**, we believe that we shall also live with Him" It is death with Christ that justifies, not death apart from Christ. (We will say more about what it means to die *with* or *in* Christ in ch. 5 below.)

Nevertheless, the question remains, *Why isn't our own death sufficient to absolve us from the sins committed in our lifetime?* Before answering, let us take the following thoughts into consideration:

- God warned Adam that if he ate the forbidden fruit he would die (Ge 2.16-17). God declared to the prophet Ezekiel that the soul that sins will die (Eze 18.4). Paul said that the wages of sin is death (Ro 6.23). As we note these warnings, we should not assume that the death in view is only the death of the physical body, especially since in Romans 6.23 Paul contrasted "death" with "eternal life":

the wages of sin = death
↑ ↓
the free gift of God = eternal life

⁷⁹ Ro 6.7, ASV.

Furthermore, we should not assume that *one death* is sufficient to satisfy divine justice for *multiple sins*.

- Biblical law says that the thief must return double what he stole. For example, if he has stolen one sheep he must return two (Ex 22.4,7). Returning solely the stolen sheep would only address the tangible economics of the situation,⁸⁰ and the law recognizes that additional compensation is required to address the non-tangible losses of the offended party. By extension, we may infer that dying to compensate God for one's own sins would be like trying to make restitution by returning solely the sheep that was stolen, without the mandated second sheep. This is so because a man's physical death only pays a just penalty for his sin, and offers no compensation to God for any fruit He might have had from the man's life had it been holy.
- In other words, biblical justice requires both expiation *and propitiation*, that is, both payment for the offense *and* restoration of the offended party to a positive disposition toward the offender.

With these considerations in mind, we must now recall what we've already affirmed in connection with the greatest commandment, namely, that each person owes his Creator love and honor for as long as he lives. A person who lives his entire life in sin and then dies, never offers up to God the holy life owed to Him. How could this be just?⁸¹

Additionally, perusing the Scriptures confirms that the warnings about sin bringing death *do not* refer only to physical death, but also to a *second death* of

⁸⁰ And hardly that if the owner had been depending on the sheep for milk at the time.

⁸¹ In November 1979, I, Roderick, heard Francis A. Schaeffer relate a conversation he had with an abortion nurse who considered herself a Christian. She told Mr. Schaeffer, "the only way I can justify my job of assisting with abortions is by my belief that each of those aborted babies goes straight to heaven." I hope that nurse repented and won't have to stand before God and try to justify why she assisted in robbing Him of the holy lives that each of those aborted infants might have live for His glory.

everlasting suffering in the lake of fire.⁸² So, “returning the one sheep” by our physical death only pays part of the just penalty for our sins; it has neither satisfied the just sentence of suffering the “second death” nor has it propitiated God by presenting Him with the fruit of a holy life. Dying a physical death leaves a man no way by which to offer God any further restitution. After “returning the sheep he stole” by dying, he finds himself dead and forever unable to make restitution with “the second sheep” of a holy life! Clearly, any attempt to pay for our own sins by our own physical death would, in the end, leave us facing the second death *without recourse*.⁸³

The Bible presents us with a problem indeed. **Because we have sinned we must die, yet, in order to have a right relationship with our Creator we must live!** Dying for our own sins won’t solve our sin problem, so is there another solution? Thankfully, yes. There is a solution, already alluded to in the citation of Romans 6.8 above, but it’s not a solution of our own devising.

Excursus On The Gospel

One of the most familiar religious words in Western culture is the word *gospel*.

But what does the word *gospel* mean in biblical usage, and what does it refer to in the New Testament? Also, what’s the difference between *the gospel* and *the Gospels*? And what in the world are apocryphal Gospels? For anyone interested in these questions, we offer the following insights.

The Evangel- Root

The Greek word translated *gospel* in our English New Testaments is εὐαγγέλιον (ev·an·gel·yon). We recognize it is a cognate term with our word *evangelize*. In fact, in Greek the two terms *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον) and *evangelize* (εὐαγγελίζω) are respectively the noun and the verb that derive from the same root, *evangel-*.

⁸² Ro 1.18; 2.5,8; Eph 2.3; 5.5-6; Re 2.11; 20.6,14-15; 21.8.

⁸³ Contra universalist, Hosea Ballou, who “proposed that the event of death severed each human being from all misery or guilt associated with sinful actions.” See Michael J. McClymond, *The Devil’s Redemption*, Vol. 1, p. 572.

Words that use this *evangel-* root have to do with “announcing good news,” as becomes evident from examining the root’s components. The prefix *ev-* (which is the prefix *eu-* in Eng, as in *euphemism*), means *well* as an adverb, and *good* as an adjective. The rest of *evangel-*, the *-angel-* part, means “to announce” or “bring news” (as God’s angels are apt to do). So, our word ***gospel*** (derived from Grk εὐαγγελία and εὐαγγέλιον) means “**good news**,” of any kind,⁸⁴ though historically it often meant good news about victory in battle. Correspondingly, the word ***evangelize*** (Grk εὐαγγελίζω) means “**to announce good news**,” again historically often in connection with victory in battle (cf. 2Sa 18.26; Josephus, *Antiquities* 7.25,250; Is 52.7-10).

Studying words formed from this *evangel-* root reveals that people used the Greek words for *gospel* and *evangelize* in the Hellenistic world, before the time of Jesus.⁸⁵ These were not new terms coined by the Christian authors of the NT,⁸⁶ but were known in OT times. Thus, when the Spirit of Messiah spoke through Isaiah the prophet, saying, “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me ... to bring good news to the afflicted,”⁸⁷ the Grk verb for “bring good news” is the word *evangelize*. When Jesus, in Luke 4.18, quotes this verse from Isaiah, the NASB95 correctly renders the words, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me ... to preach the gospel.”

Defining The Biblical Gospel

With this lexical background in mind, we can define the biblical gospel generally as: ***the good news about God’s victory*** over mankind’s problems with sin, death and satanic oppression.⁸⁸ However, both the essence and the effect of the gospel

⁸⁴ See for examples, Lk 1.13-19; 2.9-11; 1Th 3.6.

⁸⁵ The word *gospel* (εὐαγγέλιον) appears in the LXX of 2Sa 4.10; 18.25,27; and 2Ki 7.9, though not with a religious meaning.

⁸⁶ Even though the NT would infuse them with new meaning.

⁸⁷ Is 61.1.

⁸⁸ This victory will be complete in the Day of the LORD, as Isaiah prophesied in Is 52.7-10. Rod renders the Grk of the LXX this way,

... as the feet of **one evangelizing**

making an announcement of peace,

As **one evangelizing** about good things,

Who will make *the* announcement of your salvation,

were clarified over millennia in the progressive revelation of the Scriptures. We can identify four major instances of the gospel's declaration that all lead up to its fifth and primary formulation:

1. The Proto-Evangel;
2. The Gospel Of Abrahamic Promise;
3. The Gospel Of The Suffering Servant;
4. The Gospel Of The Kingdom;

Followed swiftly by:

5. The Primary Gospel

God first announced the good news of a deliverer for humanity in Genesis 3.15, which verse is therefore traditionally known as the *Proto-Evangelium*, or *Proto-Evangel* for short. This rudimentary gospel, echoed much later in Romans 16.20 and 1 John 3.8, succinctly promised that a seed (descendant) of Eve would finally destroy the serpent who had brought about humanity's fall. We fully analyze the Proto-Evangel and its eschatological message in Appendix 2.

In the biblical record, God next "preached" the gospel to Abraham, summarizing it in the promise, "All the nations will be blessed in you" (Ge 12.3; Ga 3.8). God elaborated upon this good news to specify that the Proto-Evangel's promise of blessing for humanity would come through a *particular* seed descended from Eve. This descendant would come through the family lines of Abraham and Isaac: "In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed" (Ge 22.18; Ga 3.16).

After Abraham, the exodus of Israel from Egypt and the establishment of the Sinaitic covenant foreshadowed many gospel truths. However, the next highpoint in the revelation of the gospel's content comes to us in the prophecy of Isaiah 52.13 to 53.12. In this prophecy God revealed that His righteous, suffering servant would render Himself a "sin offering" and bear the sin of many. Furthermore, He would die and be assigned a grave, and yet would "prolong *His* days." It's no wonder that the book of Isaiah has been called "the fifth Gospel"! It was to prophecies like Isaiah's that the apostle Paul later alluded, when he referred to,

Saying, "Zion, your God will *now* reign!"

See also, Is 61.1; Lk 10.17-19; 24.46-47; Jn 6.50-51; 11.26; Ac 13.32-39; 26.15-18; 1Jn 3.5,8.

the gospel of God, which He promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son ... declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead ...⁸⁹

Centuries after Isaiah, John the Baptist and then Jesus Himself, appeared preaching “the gospel of the kingdom” (Mt 3.1-2; 4.23; cf. Lk 16.16).⁹⁰ The initial content of this good news of the kingdom, as we can infer from the scriptural record, was that:

- Various realities of the eschatological kingdom of God, including healing and deliverance from demons, have broken into the present age.
- The Lord (king) is coming/has come and will baptize in the Holy Spirit.
- The kingdom is available to the poor in spirit and the persecuted.
- Even many from outside the lineage of Jacob will enter the kingdom.

In short, *the good news* of the kingdom, preached by John the Baptist and Jesus, emphasized the blessings already or imminently available to subjects of God’s kingdom. Proclaiming this good news about kingdom blessings, gave opportunity for both John the Baptist and Jesus to impart much more teaching about the kingdom of God, both in its present and coming aspects. As explained in the “Excursus On The Kingdom Of God,” in ch. 2, much of their teaching about the kingdom was corrective of misconceptions held by their contemporaries.

⁸⁹ Ro 1.1-4.

⁹⁰ Within God’s plan of redemption, **there is only one eternal gospel** (Re 14.6), progressively revealed through the ages, and designated by various titles in the NT. The promises and their fulfillments that produced this gospel have multiple aspects, and the gospel itself has countless implications for the present and the future, **but it is a unified message**. To preach any *other* gospel puts one in danger of Paul’s curse (Ga 1.8, KJV).

Contrary to traditional Dispensational teaching, therefore, “the gospel of the kingdom” is not something apart from “the gospel of the grace of God” (see the juxtaposition in Ac 20.24-25). Instead, it is a proclamation of the one and only gospel, while nevertheless an articulation of it that intentionally emphasizes its kingdom aspects both for Israel and for the nations (cf. Ac 19.8-10; 28.17-31). As Dispensationalist H. A. Ironside wrote, in taking a more biblical stance on this issue than some of his predecessors,

I recognize, in common with others, a distinction in *aspect* between “the gospel of the kingdom” and “the gospel of the grace of God,” but I regard it as a mistake to say that the gospel of the kingdom is not, or should not be, preached *now*. Each are but different aspects of the one gospel; and Paul preached both (*The Midnight Cry!*, p. 22).

Finally, with the redemptive work of Jesus Christ at long last accomplished, the apostle Paul was able to crystallize the core of the primary or foremost (ἐν πρώτοις) gospel for us. He set this forth in 1 Corinthians 15.1-8⁹¹:

Now I would remind you, brothers, of the gospel I preached to you, which you received, in which you stand, and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you—unless you believed in vain.

For I delivered to you as of **first importance**⁹² what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me.

We see from this passage that **the content of the primary gospel is the apostolic report of four historical facts about Jesus:**

1. Christ died for our sins in accordance with the [Old Testament] Scriptures.
2. He was buried.
3. He was raised on the third day in accordance with the [Old Testament] Scriptures.
4. He appeared [after His resurrection] to hundreds of witnesses.

Let us understand that, this primary gospel summarized by Paul declares the historical events that **(A)** reveal how the Proto-Evangel is being fulfilled, **(B)** provide the basis for the fulfillment of the Gospel of Abrahamic Promise and the Gospel of the Kingdom, and **(C)** fulfill Isaiah's Gospel of the Suffering Servant. In

⁹¹ ESV.

⁹² The phrase ἐν πρώτοις, used only here in the NT, is common in the LXX. The minority adverbial rendering of Paul's phrase by the KJV, NKJV and RV95, "at the first," "primeramente," has a precedent in Pr 20.9b (LXX), "at the beginning" (Pr 20.21 in Eng versions). If this were the correct translation in 1Co 15.3, then Paul would only be saying that the following gospel summary was what he had preached to the Corinthians at the beginning of his ministry to them. However, as Gordon Fee argued (NICNT Commentary, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, p. 722), and as all other current English translations concur, Paul's phrase should probably be understood adjectivally, as describing his summary as of *the primary content* of the gospel.

other words, the primary gospel of 1 Corinthians 15.3-8 sheds light upon, provides the basis for, and crowns all the previous biblical expressions of the gospel. As such, **this four-point proclamation should stand as our default articulation of the gospel**, and as our first answer to the question, “What is the gospel?”

The Gospel In Our Milieu

Understanding the gospel as a message about historical events that fulfilled numerous biblical foreshadowings and prophetic predictions (cf. Ac 13.32-35), dramatically differentiates it from what is often thought of as “the gospel” in our current Evangelical milieu. Sadly, erroneous ideas about the gospel and its content come to light as soon as we begin to query church people on the subject. Greg Gilbert writes that, when asked to define the gospel, “too many Christians would answer” with something like, “‘The gospel is that God will forgive your sins if you believe in him.’ Or they’d say something like, ... ‘The gospel is that you are a child of God, and God wants his children to be abundantly successful in every way.’”⁹³ Gilbert goes on to quote statements of “the gospel” he has found in evangelical preaching and writing, including these two samples:

The good news is, God wants to show you his incredible favor. He wants to fill your life with “new wine,” ...

The good news is that God’s face will always be turned toward you, regardless of what you have done, where you have been, or how many mistakes you’ve made. He loves you and is turned in your direction, looking for you.⁹⁴

In Gilbert’s examples of faulty expressions of the gospel, we see a general principle at work, namely that, **unbiblical presentations of the gospel tend to err on the side of highlighting the gospel’s potential benefits, and what we can do to receive them, rather than emphasizing the gospel’s historical record of what Christ did to accomplish God’s victory over sin, death, and oppression.**

We realize that while our world has always had trouble with false “gospels,” i.e., *overtly wrong messages* substituted for the biblical gospel (cf. Ga 1.6-9), our current problems of misstating the gospel may have more to do with *wrong emphases*. Greg Gilbert expresses his concern for the misplaced focus, writing,

⁹³ *What Is The Gospel?*, pp. 15-16. These examples echo “definitions” that we too have heard.

⁹⁴ *What Is The Gospel?*, p. 18.

“one of the greatest dangers the body of Christ faces today is the temptation to rethink and rearticulate the gospel in a way that makes its center something other than the death of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners.”⁹⁵ Indeed, we have seen the central facts of the gospel sometimes take second place to assurances that,

- God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life, or
 - God wants you to prosper and be in good health,
- or obscured by exhortations to,
- Raise a hand to indicate a desire to be saved, or
 - Recite “The Sinner’s Prayer,” or
 - Come forward to the front of the auditorium to accept Jesus.

However, as we underscore the fact that such assurances and exhortations have sometimes shifted the center of the gospel for the audience to something other than “the death of Jesus on the cross in the place of sinners,” ***we do not at all imply*** that we should keep silent about how we should respond to the gospel or about the benefits it offers. On the contrary, when we preach the gospel, we should certainly imitate the Lord and His apostles in sharing the benefits made possible by the gospel (e.g. eternal life; 2Ti 1.10) and in explaining how people should respond to the gospel (i.e., by believing; Mk 1.15).

Nevertheless, we must keep two things in mind: (1) No one can respond appropriately to the gospel if they have not heard the gospel clearly and accurately presented; and (2) only biblical responses to the gospel will bring salvation. In other words, **any “evangelistic” message that says nothing about Christ’s death for sin, burial, and resurrection, has not proclaimed the gospel,** and can hardly be expected to open the Door of salvation to the hearers. Likewise, any end-of-sermon invitation that reduces believing in the gospel to nothing more than raising a hand to register assent to the message, or to the idea of accepting Jesus, probably won’t produce a transformed life. Whether we preach the gospel or share it informally, if we want the message to be effective we will do well to follow the New Testament precedents. To do so means that we will continually

⁹⁵ Ibid., p. 102.

identify the gospel's core historical facts, and we will share the appropriate biblical responses to those facts.⁹⁶

The Canonical Gospels

We find the gospel's core facts, not only in the apostle Paul's succinct summary of 1 Corinthians 15, but also in the books we call *the Gospels* (and here we use a capital G since we're using the word *Gospel* in the titles of written works). **The Gospels are the first four books of the New Testament, titled after their authors, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.** These Gospels record the primary events of Christ's death for sin, His burial, and witnessed resurrection, all within their ample historical contexts. We often refer to these books as the *canonical* Gospels, which simply means that they are the Gospels included in the canon, i.e., the officially accepted corpus of the Bible.

That the canonical Gospels and the rest of the New Testament enlarge upon the implications, results and applications of the gospel, has great value for us. It help us understand how **everything essential to the Christian life emerges from the gospel's historical core.** None of God's promises to humanity, regarding salvation and restored relationship with Him, could have been fulfilled without the core events of the gospel having occurred. Without the expiating death of Jesus and the corroboration of His resurrection, the kingdom of God would never exist for the human race (cf. Is 52.7).

The corollary of this observation is that to the extent that any of the four central points of the gospel are obscured, to that extent vital aspects of the Christian life are apt do drop out of our experience in the church. For example, if we preach only that "we can be saved by putting our faith in Jesus" (emphasizing an application of the gospel), while deemphasizing the core truth that "Christ died

⁹⁶ In the book of Acts, **the eight major apostolic sermons** and testimonies about or including the gospel are the following: Peter on the day of Pentecost, Ac 2; Peter in Solomon's Portico, Ac 3; Peter before the Sanhedrin, Ac 4; Peter and others before the Sanhedrin, Ac 5; Peter in the house of Cornelius, Ac 10; Paul at the Pisidian Antioch synagogue, Ac 13; Paul on Mars Hill in Athens, Ac 17; Paul before King Agrippa, Ac 26. Every one of these presentations explicitly mentions Christ's resurrection, five explicitly mention His death while three imply it, seven explicitly mention witnesses to the resurrection while one implies witnesses, one explicitly mentions Christ's burial while that fact would be implicit in the others, and six mention the forgiveness of sin (implying a purpose of Christ's death).

for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,” the audience is apt to mentally fasten upon the idea of salvation from hell, and lose sight of the biblical emphases upon repentance, reconciliation with God, and growing in holiness (sanctification). If we preach only that “God can forgive us because Jesus died for our sins,” and do not mention Jesus’ resurrection and its implications regarding His lordship (Ac 2.36), the audience is apt to think that they can receive forgiveness without personal submission to Jesus as king.

Apocryphal Gospels

We must not alter, diminish or obscure the core historical events of the gospel nor its historical and religious context as conveyed in the four canonical Gospels and in the rest of the New Testament. For this reason, the church of antiquity did not include apocryphal Gospels in the New Testament. The apocryphal Gospels, are designated *apocryphal* (from the Latin meaning *hidden*) for two reasons:

(1) These works often revealed their Gnostic origins by purporting to contain *hidden knowledge* to which the church at large was not privy. The prologue of the apocryphal Gospel of Thomas provides an example of the claim:

These are the hidden sayings that the living Jesus spoke and Judas Thomas the Twin recorded.⁹⁷

(2) Those who valued these works, considered them sacred and kept them hidden in their religious precincts away from general public contact.

In our time, the designation *apocryphal* conveniently distinguishes these Gospels from the *canonical* Gospels.

As to their dates of origin and content, the apocryphal Gospels are pseudonymous works that originated after the time of the apostles, and that generally convey a sectarian agenda or simply an intent to entertain with legendary material. The apocryphal gospels include (to give some examples),

- the mid-2nd-century *Gospel of Thomas* (quoted above) which mixes canonical sayings of Jesus with Gnostic sayings also attributed to Him,
- the 2nd-century *Infancy Gospel of James*, which emphasizes the sanctity, purity and perpetual virginity of Mary, and

⁹⁷ Marvin Meyer translation. Both Greek and Coptic mss exist for *The Gospel Of Thomas*, hence many variations in the Eng translations.

- the late 2nd-century-or-later *Infancy Gospel of Thomas*, which relates legendary stories of the five-year-old Jesus who is “repeatedly ... angry, malicious, flippant, and arrogant,”⁹⁸ and curses and smites playmates who offend him.

These apocryphal Gospels have historical value, and to the extent that they borrow from the canonical Gospels they do convey some truth. However, their introduction of fictional events and counterbiblical ideas, obscure the core of the Christian gospel for anyone who reads these works as though they were genuine. Thankfully, since the core of the true gospel consists of historical events that can never be changed, the biblical gospel is in no ultimate danger from these later Gospels, recognized by the world as apocryphal.

Conclusion: Gospels, The Gospel Proper, And Its Demand For A Response

In summary, the **apocryphal Gospels** are fictional and sectarian writings produced after the time of the apostles and are rightly excluded from the official books of the Bible. The **canonical Gospels** are the true, authoritative and officially recognized accounts of the life of Jesus, which are placed at the beginning of the Bible’s New Testament. **The gospel proper** is the good news about the victory of Jesus over sin, death and the devil, and the essential core of that good news is that Jesus died for our sins, was buried, rose from the dead on the third day, and was seen alive after His resurrection by many witnesses.

Now, though we have differentiated the biblical gospel from formulas about how to be saved, and from the superficial responses audiences are sometimes invited to make at the conclusion of an evangelistic sermon, we recognize that **the gospel does demand a response**. As we mentioned above, though, only biblical responses to the gospel will lead to a transformed life. Therefore, we will look more closely at appropriate responses to the gospel in chapters 5 and 6.

⁹⁸ Markus Bockmuehl, *Ancient Apocryphal Gospels*, p. 76.

Appendix 1: Human Nature And The Fall

The Nature Of Things

All things have a nature. We learn this fact by osmosis, as we listen to how people use the word *nature* in conversation. We understand that even a rock has a nature, in the sense that it has a set of physical properties that distinguishes it from other things, including other kinds of rocks. Most often, though, when we hear the mention of something's nature, the context has to do with a living thing¹¹⁰³ and the comment refers to something deeper than — *though not unrelated to* — its physical properties. The nature of a living thing, we have learned, determines aspects of its typical behavior. For this reason, we have a particular interest in human nature, and present the following investigation into what the Bible tells us on the subject. To begin our investigation, however, we must define what we mean by the phrase *human nature*.

The Nature Of Human Beings

What Do We Mean By Human Nature?

In everyday speech, and even in theological writings, we use the phrase *human nature* to express a variety of vague notions. However, when we speak with philosophical precision, *human nature* refers to **the whole complex of species-specific potentialities with which a human being is conceived**.¹¹⁰⁴ We speak of potentialities, because human nature does not consist of the actualization of human qualities but precedes them. For example, all human beings have the potentiality of grammatical speech, but if a member of our species is born with defective vocal chords, we do not reject him as non-human. We see him as having a human nature, like the rest of our race. We see him as fully human, only vocally impaired. Likewise, a human fetus in its mother's womb has a human nature, even

¹¹⁰³ The Eng word *nature* derives from Lat adjective, *natus*, "born."

¹¹⁰⁴ As opposed to the potentialities of a horse or a housefly. Cf. Adler, *Ten Philosophical Mistakes*, ch. 8, part 3.

though only a fraction of its human potentialities have already been actualized (including the potentialities of an effective circulatory system and a responsive nervous system). Furthermore, if we hold to the biblical teaching of creation (contra Darwinian evolution), we can infer that **the God-given natures of living creatures are immutable**, and that therefore, when we speak of *human nature*, we refer to something that is not susceptible to change.

We further clarify our definition of *human nature* by distinguishing between *nature* and *character*.¹¹⁰⁵ **Character is a person's psychological and moral disposition, and unlike nature, character is mutable.** In other words, two dogs, obviously with the same canine *nature*, may have very different *characters*, one friendly and gentle, the other mean and aggressive. The friendly dog can have his character changed by mistreatment, and the mean dog can likewise be gentled by love and patience; these changes would not alter the fundamental canine nature of either dog. Similarly, the Bible recognizes individuals as having differing characters, and calls for change in the characters of those who are manifestly foolish or sinful. Significantly, Scripture constantly admonishes for radical change in the lives of sinners *without ever suggesting that they should become something other than human, or that they should recover a lost humanity*.¹¹⁰⁶

Human Nature And Our Propensity For Sin

With these definitions and distinctions in hand, we can proceed with our biblical investigation into *human nature*. We have no interest in mere speculation on the subject. Furthermore, though we inquire into the general phenomenon of human nature, we have a particular concern to discover whether or not human nature is *sinful*. We know that human nature as created by God was good (Ge 1.31), but the sinfulness of all human beings but Jesus Christ indicates that something fundamental within man changed after the fall. Either human nature has changed — in a stunning departure from the divine design of nature as immutable — or

¹¹⁰⁵ We sometimes use *personality* as a near synonym for *character*.

¹¹⁰⁶ The Bible does not speak as we do when we decry the “inhumanity” of individuals or groups, though it does speak of certain behaviors as unnatural, that is, “against nature” (Ro 1.26).

something associated with human nature has been altered.¹¹⁰⁷ This troubling thought begs the following questions:

1. Since only the Creator integrates natures into living creatures, did God, after the fall, replace Adam's good nature with a different *not-so-good* one?
2. If God did not install a different nature in Adam after the fall, did the devil or sin itself somehow transform good human nature into a sinful nature?¹¹⁰⁸
3. If, after the fall, man's original nature was neither replaced by God, nor transformed by some other power, how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining a good nature?

Before we can respond biblically to these questions, we must briefly survey the biblical terms relevant to our topic.

The Relevant Biblical Terms

The Bible is our supreme source for understanding human nature. Nevertheless, tracing the Bible's teaching on this subject is challenging for reasons including: (1) the lack of any doctrinal passage that explicitly defines *human nature* and identifies its qualities; (2) the polyvalence of the relevant terms (that is, the use of a potentially relevant word to mean different things), and (3) the occasional lack of distinction in Scripture between the ideas of *nature* and *character*. Therefore, as with all biblical terms, we must interpret Bible words that might refer to "nature" by their usage in specific contexts.

γένος (*ye·nōs*)

We recognize our English word *genus* in this Grk term, which translates the OT Hebrew word מִין (*mēn*), *kind*. In the OT, we could translate this word as *species*, and in the food laws it is used taxonomically, without reference to *nature* as such.

¹¹⁰⁷ A similar inquiry could be made into Lucifer's metamorphosis. Created perfect, he became unrighteous (Ez 28.14-15). How that could happen without a change in his God-given nature is shrouded in mystery, and certainly beyond the scope of our present study.

¹¹⁰⁸ Setting aside Darwinian theory, and assuming that God created man as *Homo sapiens* from the beginning, did man after the fall somehow become *Homo peccator*, something other than human?

It has a similar usage in Matthew 13.47 that refers to “fish of every **kind**.” The NT also uses this term to speak of family descent. Related to this nuance it can refer to *ethnicity* or to a nation of people (γένος is unhappily translated *race* in Mark 7.26, Acts 7.19 and 1Peter 2.9 by the NASB95). With reference to a demon in Mark 9.29, it seems to refer to *character*, in differentiating one *kind* of evil spirit from another.

εἰκών (ē·kōn)

This word, familiar to us as the English word *icon*, means *image* or *likeness*, and by extension can refer to *an idol* (Da 3.1; Re 13.15). The term εἰκών takes us back to Genesis 1.26-27 and is used strategically in Luke 20.24-25, Romans 8.29 and other New Testament passages to teach about man being created — and in Christ *recreated* — in the image or likeness of God. For our present topic, we recognize that *image* is something distinct from *nature*, though it can refer to aspects of both nature and character. When we speak of two acquaintances, and say that one is the *image* (or the “spitting image”) of the other, we do not mean that they share the same *nature* (in a technical sense), because that is obvious. Instead, we mean that the two look or act very much alike.

On the other hand, Colossians 1.15 tells us that the Son of God is “the image of the invisible God,” and in this case it was *not* always obvious that the incarnate Son and the invisible God share the same essential nature. Yet, the following verses, Colossians 1.16-17, indicate that they do. Therefore, we might think that Paul here used “image” to mean *nature*. In this passage, however, the point the apostle made with the word *image* is that in Jesus Christ we can *see* the divine character and at least some aspects of the divine nature. As the NLT puts it, “Christ is the **visible** image of the **invisible** God.”¹¹⁰⁹

We must be clear: the word *image* does not express the idea of *the whole essential nature*. After all, images on coins portray only a person’s head or bust, and convey almost nothing of the person’s character or nature. Similarly, when God created man *in His own image*, He did not duplicate the whole of His *divine*

¹¹⁰⁹ Emphasis added.

nature in man. Nevertheless, the fact that God created man distinctively in His own image, implies that God created man with *some* potentialities that also exist in the deity. In other words, God gave man some capacity for experiencing His communicable attributes such as rationality, relationality, and creativity, along with a sense of morality and justice, and an administrative aptitude. These potentialities do represent components of human nature.

θεότης (the·ō·tēs), θειότης (thē·ō·tēs), And θεῖον (théōn)

These terms refer to the state, nature or character of deity. Thus, the LXX uses θεῖον, the adjective, in reference to the *divine* law, *divine* will, *divine* providence, etc. In Colossians 2.9, Paul used the noun, θεότης, to speak of “the fullness of *Deity*,”¹¹¹⁰ and in this instance it can be understood as “God’s nature” (HCSB and NIV). Likewise, in Romans 1.20, the noun can refer to the “divine nature” (NASB95 and others), or the “Godhead” (KJV), or “deity” (RSV). Once more, in Acts 17.29, Paul used the noun to affirm that the “Divine Nature” (NASB95), or the “divine being” (ESV), or the “deity” (NRSV), does not consist of “gold or silver or stone” like the idol images formed by people.

καρδία (kar·dē·ā)

We recognize this Grk term as underlying our Eng *cardiac*, and in Scripture it can refer to the physical organ, *the heart* (as in the LXX of 1Sa 25.37). However, normally in the Bible *heart* refers to a person’s center of consciousness, the seat of the thoughts, will and emotions. We can often translate καρδία with the Eng word *mind* if we think of mind as involving not only thoughts and emotions, but also motives, desires and conscience. The human καρδία or *heart*, in its common biblical sense, can be “hardened” or “softened,” worsened or improved. Evil thoughts and actions emerge *from it*, such that God called apostate Israel to acquire a new καρδία, in Heb לֵב (lāw, Eze 18.31; 36.26). However, ideas and fears can also be put *into it*, and it is with the καρδία that a person believes the gospel (Ro 10.9-10).

¹¹¹⁰ So the NASB95 and other versions.

μορφή (mōr·fē) And σχῆμα (schē·mā)

These terms refer to the form or appearance of something (see Job 4.16 and Is 44.13 in the LXX; see 1Co 7.31 and Php 2.7 in the NT). They may hint at underlying character or nature, but strictly speaking, they refer to *form*, whether physical or metaphysical. The NIVO committee was hasty in translating μορφή with *very nature* in Philippians 2.6. They could not translate the same term consistently in the next verse, and had to add a footnote: “or *in the form of*.” While we agree that the pre-incarnate Christ Jesus *did exist* in “the very nature of God,” the NIVO risked implying that after His incarnation Christ Jesus *did not exist* in the very nature of God.¹¹¹¹ Our standard versions do better by consistently translating this term as *form* in both Philippians 2.6 and 2.7. The preincarnate Son existed in the *invisible form* of God, and in His incarnation took upon Himself the *visible form* of human likeness.

μορφόω (mōr·fō·ō) And σύμμορφος (sēm·mōr·fōs)

The verb μορφόω, cognate of the preceding noun μορφή, expresses the idea of *forming* something. In our Bible this word only appears in Galatians 4.19, where Paul speaks of Christ “being formed in” the Galatian believers. Since aspects of Christ’s divine nature, like omnipotence and omniscience, cannot be infused into finite creatures, Paul’s apparent meaning in this passage is that he labored to see the moral-spiritual *character* of Jesus formed in the believers. This is consistent with Paul’s teaching that God is conforming us to the image (εἰκόν) of His son, that is, to the *character* of Jesus. The verb itself, though, like the related adjective σύμμορφος, has nothing to do with the idea of *essential nature* nor even with *character*. The words only refer to something being *formed* or *conformed*.

ὁμοιοπαθής (ō·mē·ō·pa·thēs)

In this compound Grk term, we see the basis for our words having to do with homeopathy. In its two biblical occurrences (Ac 14.15; Jas 5.17), it is well translated in the KJV with the phrase, “like passions.” Newer translations, however, including

¹¹¹¹ The NLT takes a similar risk.

the NKJV, tend to translate with *like nature* or *a nature like ours*. This latter translation seems warranted in Acts 14.15, which recounts how the apostles insisted to a crowd of idolators that they, Barnabas and Paul, were “merely human beings” (NLT) and not gods. However, it seems superfluous in James 5.17 to say, “Elijah was a man with *a nature like ours*.” Instead, emphasizing his like aptitude for fear and uncertainty, with the phrase “like passions,” seems more meaningful. In 4 Maccabees 12.13, the term is used to speak of men of like *feelings*, and in Wisdom 7.3 to speak of “the *kindred* earth” upon which all little children stumble and fall. It seems best to retain the KJV rendering of this term in its biblical instances, and since it speaks only of having “like passions,” it contributes only indirectly to our goal of understanding the Bible’s doctrine of human nature.

σάρξ (sarks) And σαρκικός (sar·kē·kōs)

This word, together with its Hebrew counterparts, has a vast semantic field in Scripture. In its strict literal sense, it denotes the soft tissues of animals and humans, that is, *flesh*. By extension, however, it can refer to the *physical body*, *humanity*, or to *all living creatures*. It can also refer to the physical, weak, and limited aspects of human personality. The apostle Paul used *sarx* extensively to refer to **the controlling principle that opposes the spirit within fallen human beings**. In this usage *sarx* relates entirely to earthly and physical impulses. As the driving force in a person’s mind, it cannot help but give rise to a selfish personality, if not somehow restrained. According to the apostle Paul, there is *nothing good* in the *sarx* as a ruling principle for human character (Ro 7.18). Let us be clear, though: for Paul, *sarx* did not denote *human nature* but the driving force *behind* human nature in its fallen state.

σπέρμα (sper·mā)

Familiar to us as our English word *sperm*, this word in Scripture always speaks of *seed*, whether of plant or animal, and by extension often means *child* or *descendant*. For our present topic, this word only concerns us as it appears in 1 John 3.9:

No one who is born of God practices sin, because His **seed** abides in him;
and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Because this verse affirms that it is *God's* seed that is within the born-again believer, we know that we are not speaking of seed in its fundamental and literal sense. The RSV translates with, "God's nature abides in him," and the NIrV says, "God's very nature remains in them." Likewise, the TEV (*The Good News Translation*) says, "God's very nature is in them." Since the word σπέρμα never means *nature* elsewhere in Scripture, we question this interpretation in 1 John 3.9. Because the preceding verse has to do with destroying "the works of the devil," it makes better sense to recognize John's use of σπέρμα as a reference to Genesis 3.15 (LXX) and to God's prophetic Seed who would crush the serpent's head. That prophetic Seed came as Jesus Christ to strike the fatal blow against the devil, and He now comes to dwell in believers in the person of His Holy Spirit.¹¹¹² Assuming, then, that σπέρμα in 1 John 3.9 refers to God's Son Jesus, we *can* say that "God's very nature" is in the believer, but only in the sense that Jesus Himself is abiding and working in the believer. We certainly cannot interpret this verse as implying deification of the believer or the infusion of any of God's *incommunicable* attributes into the nature of the believer. The word σπέρμα does not mean *nature* and cannot convey the theological idea of *infusing divine nature* into believers.

ὑπόστασις (ē·pō·sta·sēs)

The basis for our English word, *hypostasis*, this noun has meanings as diverse as *a project* and *a ground for hope*. Relating to our present topic, however, we find it in Hebrews 1.3 referring to God's *essential nature* as truly appearing in Jesus Christ.¹¹¹³

φύσις (fē·sēs), φυσικός (fē·sē·kōs) And φυσικῶς (fē·sē·kōs)

The noun φύσις and its cognate adjective and adverb are important for this investigation but they are quite polyvalent. They can express the diverse ideas of:

- *Species* (Jas 3.7)
- *Native*, i.e., *natural* with regard to a species in view (Ro 11.19-24)

¹¹¹² Jn 14.17; 15.4-5; 1Jn 2.27; 3.24; 4.12-13,15-16.

¹¹¹³ Cf. Ps 8.8.48(47) in the LXX.

- *Instinct* (Ro 2.14; 2Pe 2.12; Jude 1.10)
- *Cultural norm* (1Co 11.14)
- *Divine character* (2Pe 1.4)
- *Natural* (in contrast to *perverted*, Ro 1.26-27)
- *Ethnic heritage* (Ga 2.15)
- *Essential nature* (Ga 4.8; in this instance Paul uses φύσις to deny that pagan idols have the essential nature of deity)
- *Cultural-moral character*; Eph 2.3

Sadly, φύσις in Ephesians 2.3 is translated *nature* in all our standard versions. We would translate Ephesians 2.3 as follows:

Among whom we ourselves all formerly conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, continually doing the desires of the flesh and of *our own* reasonings, and we were **by character** *deserving* of wrath, even like the rest.

This verse employs the familiar idiom, *son of* or *children of*, used to express character or merited destiny. It's an idiom Paul used repeatedly in Ephesians. The “children of wrath” of Ephesians 2.3 are roughly equivalent to the “sons of disobedience” in Ephesians 2.2 who are also deserving of wrath, according to Ephesians 5.6 (cf. Col 3.6). All of these verses in their contexts are about evil *character* that is outwardly manifest and sometimes demonically motivated—they are not about *essential nature*.

We see that the φύσις word family can have relevance for our study of *essential nature*, but each term from this group must be carefully interpreted according to context.

ψυχικός (psē·kē·kōs)

Sharing the same root as our English *psychological* and *psychic* terms, this word has to do with the life force or soul (ψυχή). The apostle Paul used it to contrast the purely *natural* with the *spiritual*, whether speaking of mind or body (1Co 2.14; 15.44,46), and James used it to contrast heavenly wisdom with the *natural* and *demonic* wisdom of selfish people (Jas 3.14-17). Jude 1.19 uses this word to speak

of wicked people and their *worldly-mindedness* (NASB95) or *sensuality* (KJV) or habit of following their *natural instincts* (NLT, NIV). This word, then, can refer to any aspect of humanity considered as earthly apart from the influence of the divine Spirit. In this capacity, it speaks of the human condition (of body and mind) apart from God. The term's usage tells us implicitly that human nature apart from God is in deep trouble, but it does not refer explicitly to *human nature* as such.

What Do We Learn From These Terms?

From a perusal of these biblical terms at least loosely connected with the idea of a living entity's *nature*, we find that:

1. Scripture rarely speaks of something's *nature* in the modern sense of species-specific *essential nature*. However, in the few instances that it does, it uses the terms ὑπόστασις, φύσις, and θεότης or θειότης, *but only with regard to divine nature*. Regarding *human nature*, Scripture says very little directly, but implies something vitally important by affirming that man is created in the image (εἰκὼν) of God.
2. The biblical authors were much more interested in *character*, touching upon it with the terms εἰκὼν, γένος, μορφή with its cognates, and φύσις. As stated above, the Bible recognizes individuals as having differing characters, and calls for change in the characters of those who are manifestly foolish and sinful.
3. The prophets and apostles also express vital interest in the *heart* (i.e., the person's center of consciousness). They also concerned themselves with the driving principles that direct the heart, which in turn directs a person's character. The two great driving forces in this regard are the flesh (σὰρξ) on the one hand, and the *Spirit* (possibly equivalent to "God's seed," in 1Jn 3.9) on the other.

The biblical evidence, then, indicates that it is man's *character* that has been corrupted since the fall, rather than his *essential nature*. In saying this, we do not deny that phenomenologically, that is, from the perspective of our own observations of humanity, the corruption of man's

character is tantamount to the corruption of his *nature*. We also recognize from the biblical evidence that man's *character* has been universally and thoroughly corrupted ultimately because of some disabling "disconnect" of the Spirit's governing influence over human *nature*.

Nevertheless, the biblical distinction between the impairment of man's *nature* and the corruption of his *character* has important implications. The first of these is that **human nature still bears the divine image**, as implied in Genesis 9.6,¹¹¹⁴ and as pointedly affirmed by Jesus in His "render unto Caesar" saying (Lk 20.24-25). Thus, human nature retains the qualities of the divine image mentioned above:

- rationality,
- volition,
- relationality,
- creativity,
- sense of morality and justice,
- administrative aptitude.

The moral sense expresses itself in the conscience and an instinctive impulse to keep God's laws (Ro 2.14). The moral sense working with rationality and relationality contributes to humanity's "incurable" religious impulse and need to worship, such that Paul can affirm that human nature is still capable of knowing and perceiving enough about God so as to be without excuse for failing to honor and give thanks to Him (Ro 1.19-21).

Second, so far as we can tell from Scripture, **human nature has remained stable, and thus intrinsically good in its design and intended purpose**. It's external governance has changed, but this does not warrant characterizing man's nature as a "sinful nature."

¹¹¹⁴ The perfect verb, *has made*, in Genesis 9.6 expresses a settled reality (NIV84, NIV, NIV), as opposed to simply a past event.

Answering The First Two Questions

These implicit truths answer the first two of our opening questions:

1. **Did God, after the fall, replace man's good original nature?** *No.* Scripture provides implicit evidence that man retained his original nature by affirming that man yet retains the divine image. At the same time, Scripture presents no explicit evidence indicating that man received a different nature after the fall. Consider also the sheer absurdity — if not blasphemy — of imagining that God would remove Adam's good nature and replace it with a sinful one, thereby making Himself the Creator of *sinners by nature*. Surely we can dismiss the idea of God replacing man's original *nature* with a different one.
2. **Did something else transform man's good nature into a sinful nature?** *No.* The biblical evidence that the sin problem has more to do with man's *character* than with his *nature*, implies that human nature has remained unaltered.¹¹¹⁵

At the same time, it is clear that since the fall, and apart from redemption, human nature is severely hindered in actualizing its *good* potentialities. Human beings constantly violate their consciences and fail to keep God's laws. There is only One Who actualizes *all* of His good potentialities (Mt 19.17), and He is not a fallen person. In contrast to that One, everything that fallen human beings "think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood" (Ge 8.21, NLT). So, we must still answer the third of our opening questions:

3. If, after the fall, man's original nature was neither replaced by God, nor transformed by some other power, **how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining his good original nature?**

¹¹¹⁵ Contra Augustine who wrote that by the first two people "so great a sin was committed that by it the human nature was altered for the worse, and was transmitted also to their posterity, liable to sin and subject to death." A little further on, he creatively attempted to explain why "other sins do not alter human nature" (*The City of God*, Book 14, chapters 1 and 12).

The Enslavement of Human Nature

Scripture describes the current problem of man's nature as an enslavement, that is, as a spiritual bondage, captivity and oppression. Jesus explicitly identified the problem of enslavement in John 8.34:

Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is the slave of sin.

Notice that in this saying, Jesus did not specify some *part* of the sinning person as enslaved, but implied that the whole person, including his nature, was in bondage. If, however, man's sinful *character* is attributable to the enslavement of the whole person (including their nature), we must ask, "to whom?" or "to what?" are fallen people enslaved?¹¹¹⁶

Enslavement To Sin Itself?

The wording of John 8.34 implies that the sinner is enslaved to sin itself. Genesis 4.5-7 seems to point in the same direction: "... sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you but you must rule over it."¹¹¹⁷ The apostle Paul also spoke of enslavement to, and mastery by, sin (Ro 6.6-7,12-14,16-22). However, though Scripture has occasionally personified sin, as though it were a living entity, we find no indication that sin exists independently of people and evil spirits, nor do we find any suggestion that human accountability will be lessened on the basis that sin "made me do it." Sin is either an abstract idea without any discrete existence, or it is the state or act of a personal being. Phenomenologically, we have all *felt* enslaved by our sins, but there must be something concrete behind the sinful drives and impulses that compel us.

Enslavement To Satan?

Jesus pointed to the devil as the one whose desires sinners are compelled to pursue (Jn 8.44). The idea that human nature is enslaved to Satan makes sense in light of

¹¹¹⁶ The genitive phrase, "slave of sin," probably employs a genitive of relationship, expressing only that the sinner is a slave in relationship to sin. However, it could employ a genitive of product, *a slave producing sin*, or a genitive of producer, *a slave made so by sin*. The point is that "slave of sin" does not unequivocally identify the slave's master.

¹¹¹⁷ Notice, "you must rule over it"; you must act consistent with your God-given nature to rule.

our first parents having turned from allegiance to the Creator, and thereby having given their allegiance to the Serpent. This reality of human enslavement to the devil is mentioned by Paul (2Ti 2.26), and is implicit in passages like 1 John 3.8, “the one who practices sin is of the devil,” and 1 John 5.19 (NRSV), “...the whole world lies under the power of the evil one.” It is also consistent with passages that speak of Satan as the ruler or god of this world (Jn 12.31; 14.30; 2Co 4.4) and as the one “working in the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2.2), and as the one from whose dominion people must turn (Ac 26.18; cf. Col 1.13).

Still, we suspect that for Satan to enslave us and rule over our actions, he must have some handle by which to manipulate us. Scripture gives no hint that we will escape accountability because “the devil made us do it.” Instead, it points us to that driving principle that the apostle Paul referred to as “the flesh” (σάρξ), mentioned above.

Enslavement To The Flesh

The term *flesh* (σάρξ), when used in reference to humanity in its fundamental and general sense, only points to the physicality or frailness of human persons (e.g. in Mt 26.41; Lk 24.39). However, even the general usage of the term hints at a distinction between *flesh* and *spirit* (Jn 3.6), and points to the problem that occurs when *flesh* rules the inner person (Jn 8.15; Ro 6.19). Paul, addressed the distinction and the problem directly, describing unbelievers as in *a state* of fleshliness (literally, “in the flesh”), which involves sinful passions aroused in connection with bodily organs (Ro 7.5). If we crystalize what Paul means by this usage of *flesh* (σάρξ), it appears that **the *flesh* in this sense is the whole complex of human drives and hungers ungoverned by God’s spirit** (Ga 5.16). The drives and hungers are not intrinsically evil, but good; they were integrated into human nature to enable human thriving in the physical environment of this world. However, these good drives and hungers, unleashed and ungoverned by the Spirit, have no limiting switch — unless it’s one that is highly unreliable! For example, everyone who has tried to lose weight knows that the human digestive system has a built-in limiting system that tells us when

enough food has been consumed and the mouth should stop eating, but we also know that the limiting switch in our mind is defective. We find that it requires us to utilize all manner of psychological tools, and even pharmaceutical devices, in the attempt to keep food consumption under some semblance of control. If our hunger for food and for other diverse pleasures (including our hunger for human intimacy), are not somehow brought under control, they corrupt the whole human character.¹¹¹⁸ Fallen persons, without the Spirit of God, can indeed be characterized as enslaved by the “flesh” (2Pe 2.18-19).

Answering The Final Question

So, returning to the third of our opening questions, **how can we account for man being bent toward sin while yet retaining his good original nature?** — we can now formulate an answer:

Since the fall, human beings are bent toward sin because human nature has been enslaved both by Satan and a fleshly mind, each hostile toward God.¹¹¹⁹ Satan takes advantage of the drives and impulses that are built into human nature but left ungoverned by the Spirit. Though enslaved to all kinds of selfish and devilish impulses that pervert the mind and will, human nature remains intrinsically good in its divine design and purpose, and the image of God remains stamped upon it. This amalgam of a good nature and anti-God masters, explains why, on the one hand, all people sin and fall short of God’s glory (Ro 3.23), but, on the other hand, human nobility still occasionally shines through, even if feeble and tarnished. Enslaved human nature produces Hitlers and humanitarians, and all manner of sinners in between. Nevertheless, for all those whose nature is in bondage, even their good works are tainted by selfish motives and cannot expiate their sins before a holy God. Human nature is good; it’s the enslavement of that nature, and the

¹¹¹⁸ Ga 5.17, 19-21; Eph 2.3; 2Pe 2.10.

¹¹¹⁹ Ro 8.7; cf. Lk 8.12; Ac 13.9-10; Eph 6.11-12; 1Th 2.18; 2Ti 2.26; Re 12.9.

consequent restraint upon its good potentialities, that explains humanity's bent toward sin and the universal corruption of human character.¹¹²⁰

Implications And Applications

Jesus Shared Our Nature

Affirming the abiding goodness of *human nature*, in spite of the utter corruption of *human character*, allows us to affirm the true humanity of Jesus without casting doubt upon His sinlessness. We must realize that positing a “sinful human nature” leads to a Christological problem. We can exhibit that problem with two syllogisms (based on the unbiblical presupposition of a sinful human nature):

Human nature is sinful.
Jesus had a human nature.
Therefore, Jesus had a sinful nature.

Or:

Human nature is sinful.
Jesus did not have a sinful nature.
Therefore, Jesus did not have a human nature.

The problem is summarized well by Adam Harwood, whom I quote here at length:

The problem with affirming that people inherit a sinful *nature* is that if human nature is essentially and inherently sinful, then Jesus (who was truly human and divine) would have been a person whose human nature was sinful. However, Scripture is clear there was no sin in him. Not only did Jesus not sin, but he also was not sinful in any way. If one affirms that human nature is essentially and inherently sinful *and* one denies that Jesus's human nature was sinful, then one would be affirming that Jesus's

¹¹²⁰ Stephen Charnock described the tension of fallen man's ability-inability in terms of faculties lacking moral goodness and a lute with untuned strings: “In Adam, by creation we were possessed of [certain faculties]. In Adam, by his corruption, ... we have not lost the physical but the moral nature of these faculties; not the faculties themselves, but the moral goodness of them.” And, “Sin hath untuned the strings, but did not unstring the soul; the faculties were still left, but in such a disorder, that the wit and will of man can no more tune them, than the strings of an untuned lute can dispose themselves for harmony without a musician's hand.” Charnock, *Works*, Vol. 3, p. 172.

human nature was not truly human — a conclusion which would fail tests for orthodoxy that have been in place since the early ecumenical councils. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for human sin because he was both truly divine and truly human. **The property of being sinful is common to fallen humanity but not essential to authentic human nature. Though it might be proper to refer to my human nature as corrupted and twisted, this is different than arguing for the existence of a thing called an inherited sinful nature.**¹¹²¹

Jesus, as God the Son and simultaneously a true son of Adam, not only serves as the perfect Redeemer for fallen humanity, but also as the perfect example of a person whose human nature is directed fully and unceasingly by the Holy Spirit. Jesus Christ shows us what true humanity is, what God intended a human being to look like in nature and character.

How To Describe Humanity's Sinful State

Since all Christians agree that human nature was created good, and since Scripture does not warrant the idea that human nature (as distinct from human character) has ever been sinful, we should not use the phrase “sinful nature” nor “evil nature” with reference to human beings. To do so raises unnecessary theological questions and causes unnecessary confusion. Nor should we incautiously speak of “the corruption of our [whole] nature,” without clarifying our meaning.¹¹²²

When we wish to refer to the sinful state and actions of humanity, we should speak of the corruption of human *character* rather than the corruption of human nature. If we refer specifically to the woeful, post-fall state of human *nature*, we can biblically speak of it as *captive* or *enslaved*, or *in bondage to sin*. This

¹¹²¹ Adam Harwood, “A Critique of Total Depravity,” emphasis added.

¹¹²² *The Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*, in its brief entry on *sarx* provides us with an example of scholarly use of the phrase “human nature” in an incautious manner (as is often the case when scholars expound a traditional view regarding which they expect no disagreement). The entry says that *sarx* is used “in Paul’s writings, for sinful human nature as it exists apart from relationship with God.” What is troubling are the citations offered, namely, Ga 5.17,19 and Eph 2.3, which neither define *flesh* nor mention *nature*.

terminology of enslavement will direct the mind to the importance of Biblical redemption in its aspect of buying back the freedom of a person in servitude.¹¹²³

Subscribing to the abiding goodness of human nature does not jeopardize the doctrine of total depravity. That doctrine does not affirm that man is totally sinful or “as sinful as he can possibly be,” but only that *the totality* of man’s faculties, including his will and his reason are corrupted by sinfulness. We see, therefore, that at least with regard to its central idea, the doctrine of total depravity does not require the presupposition that human nature has become sinful *in itself*. Though human nature after the fall remained intrinsically good in its design and intended purpose, its state of bondage and the consequent depravity of human character still leaves man incapable of saving himself.

Human Bondage Calls For Redemption In The Present

Our understanding of the human condition inevitably shapes our approach to evangelizing those who are yet unbelievers. A biblical understanding of the state of fallen man’s nature and character encourages us to emphasize people’s need for right-now, this-life redemption. They don’t just need to know that “they’ll go to heaven when they die”; they need to know that they are a slave in a prison they cannot see, and the urgency of being set free *now*. Consider two metaphorical scenarios:

SCENARIO 1: An unregenerate man is being chauffeured in his Cadillac limo by two mild-mannered drivers who take turns driving and opening the doors. They are driving the man to the Pleasure Palace where all manner of carnal delights are available. While the man sits comfortably in the back seat, his cell phone rings, and he answers. It’s his Christian friend John. John says, “I know you’re busy but I’d like to bless you. In the next five minutes I can do one of two things for you. **Either I can hack your car’s electronics and kill the ignition system so that your drivers can’t take you**

¹¹²³ Cf. Olshausen, et al., “The term ἀπολύτρωσις, *redemption*, ... Paul generally employs this form (Eph 1.7,14; 4.30; 1Co 1.30) since the ἀπό expresses the idea of making free more strongly than the simple λύτρωσις. At the foundation of this word lies the figure of *slavery*, from which man must be redeemed by a ransom (whence ἐξαγοράζω is used, Ga 3.13, 4.5), in order to attain to freedom,” *Biblical Commentary on the New Testament*, Vol. 3, p. 542.

to bad places, or I can share with you how to receive forgiveness for your sins so you'll go to heaven when you die." Which will the man choose?

SCENARIO 2: An unregenerate man is locked in the trunk of his Cadillac limo that is careening down the road at 120 mph. Two insane creatures are in the front seat of the car wrestling for control of the steering wheel and gas pedal. The man in the trunk is being thrown about as the car zig-zags, hits bumps and sometimes goes airborne. The man gets a phone call, and answers his cell. It's his Christian friend John. John says, "I know you're busy but I'd like to bless you. In the next five minutes I can do one of two things for you. **Either I can hack your car's electronics and kill the ignition system so that your car will coast to a stop and your drivers can't keep endangering your life, or I can share with you how to receive forgiveness for your sins so you'll go to heaven when you die."** Which will the man choose?

Thankfully, the redemption that God has provided through Jesus Christ does not limit the salvation seeker to only one kind of kind of rescue, either for this life or the next. The gospel, properly understood, offers redemption in this life as well as the forgiveness that opens the door to blessedness in the next. The problem occurs when we preach an empty shell of "the gospel," and imply to our audience that people can receive assurance of the forgiveness of their sins without having to repent nor replace the drivers at the steering wheel of their lives. It also occurs when we preach therapeutic moralism in a way that implies that the bondage of human nature and the corruption of human character are fixable if we only apply ourselves to the problem with enough willpower.

We must preach and teach the biblical assessment of both human nature and human character. We must do so with clarity, and thoroughness. We must stop referring to "sinful human nature," lest people assume we are describing a problem with no solution. Instead, we should preach about human nature enslaved, and do so in such a way as to help people understand the immediate relevance of the Good News about how they can be set free by the Son (Jn 8.36). In our preaching we should make full use of the Bible's passages about God and Christ as Ones who

deliver the oppressed and set the prisoner free *in the present*.¹¹²⁴ The fact that many of these passages had specific application for ethnic Israel or had reference to external circumstances rather than to spiritual enslavement, does not diminish what they reveal about our Redeemer's inclination to deliver those in bondage of whatever kind, and those oppressed by whichever tyrant.

Fallen People Need A New Birth And A New Lord

Human beings, after the fall, do not need a *new* nature, but they most certainly need a *redeemed* nature. That is, they need to have their nature bought back and liberated from its bondage to sin, the devil and the flesh. Thus, though the corruption of fallen humanity centers in their character rather than in their nature, the fact that the essence of fallenness relates so directly to *nature*, explains why Scripture articulates the solution for our fallenness in terms of birth and creation, the very phenomena during which *nature* is normally embedded. The release of human nature from its bondage is accomplished by way of a new birth of the Spirit (Jn 1.12-13; 3.5-6; Tt 3.5) that is equivalent to a new creation of the inner self (2Co 5.17; Ga 6.15; Eph 4.24; Col 3.10) and is tantamount to a personal resurrection (Ro 6.4-11).

Integral to the liberation of human nature from its old masters is the installation of a new Lord at the “steering wheel.” There is no redemption of the human person that leaves human nature autonomous. There are only two possibilities: man's nature is ruled by the devil and its own misdirected desires, or it is ruled by Jesus Christ through the agency of the Holy Spirit. No one can presume to have escaped their fallen state, the enslavement of their nature and the corruption of their character, apart from the direct and abiding involvement of Christ Himself working within them by His Spirit (Eze 36.26; Jn 14.23; Col 1.27). Thankfully, with the new birth of the Spirit (Jn 3.5-6), comes the gift of faith that receives Jesus Christ as Lord. Now, with the Spirit of Jesus at the steering wheel of human nature, the rebuilding of the character begins.

¹¹²⁴ Ps 68.6; 72.12-14; 102.19-20; 103.6; 146.6-8; Is 42.6-7; **61.1**; **Lk 4.18**; 13.12-16; **Ac 10.38**; 12.6-9; 16.25-26 ff. Cf. the responsibility of God's people to imitate Him in this regard, Isaiah 58.6.

God Values Human Beings

God's willingness to sacrifice His own Son should leave no doubt regarding the value that He places upon human beings (Jn 3.16-17). Why does God so love the world of humanity? If there is a reason, then one aspect of it is that human beings are made in His own image and still retain a nature that is good in its design and purpose. Not that these things constitute human merit. What is valuable in fallen man consists only of what God Himself put in man. Fallen man is like a dirt clod in which someone hid a gold coin. The clod is passive and can claim no credit for the gold within, but God sees the gold reflecting His own image.¹¹²⁵ God values the clod for the gold inside. So much so that he will hold accountable the man or beast that murders a human being, precisely because "in the image of God He made man" (Ge 9.5-6).



If we subscribe to the abiding goodness of human nature, we can and should preach the spiritual deadness of the human dirt clod (apart from Christ) while at the same time proclaiming the innate value of fallen humans. Never has the

¹¹²⁵ Were there no gold, that is, if human nature were indeed intrinsically sinful and corrupt, would God still deem mankind worth saving? If there is an answer to this question, we cannot discover it in this short study.

Christian message regarding the inherent value of *all* human beings been more needed than today. Though racism and prejudice have existed since deep antiquity, the threat to communities and nations from those ready to view other ethnicities as sub-human remains unabated. Though abortion, infanticide and the sexual enslavement of children have existed since at least Greco-Roman times, never has the world exterminated the unborn, nor trafficked children in the systematic way that it does today. Also, as a new phenomenon in Western society, we are beginning to see the deadly consequences of educating several generations in a Darwinian worldview that implicitly tells our children that they are biological accidents, with no objective meaning or purpose, and ultimately no meaningful value. Think of the adolescents who are cutting themselves “just to feel something,” and the teenage felons committing adrenaline-rush crimes, justifying their actions by telling themselves that nothing really matters anyway, but secretly wishing for significance and to just be noticed by somebody. Think of the white-collar embezzlers and swindlers who are intelligent enough to realize that from a Darwinian point of view, there is no objective right or wrong, nor any objective reason to care about what happens to the poor fools they’re defrauding. Preaching the biblical message of the innate value of all human life will not solve all these problems, but it can help stanch the life-draining wound within our circle of influence. And it cannot help but complement our proclamation of the gospel: “Jesus died for our sins, not because we are morally worthy, but because we are innately so valuable to Him that He seeks our redemption!”

We Can Appeal To Human Nature

Aspects Of God’s Image Still Discernable In Human Nature

The fact that human nature remains intact after the fall, to the extent that we can still perceive aspects of the divine image even in the unregenerate, provides us with an additional rationale for calling fallen people to faith and repentance. We can remind unbelievers of the evidence of their original nature, stamped with the image of God. We can press their responsibility of rendering “to God the things that are

God's" (Lk 20.25). We can preach the reasonableness of desiring a redemption that will allow one's character to become that for which human nature was designed.

The evidence that the divine image remains in fallen man includes the following qualities:

1. Rationality,
2. Volition with respect to abstract options (animals make instinctual choices about immediate realities),
3. Relationality,
4. Creativity,
5. Administrative aptitude,
6. Conscience, morality, justice, instinctive keeping of the law (Ro 2.14), the recognition of certain human crimes, abuses and perversions as *unnatural*,
7. The impulse to restore and beautify.

Contrary to the Darwinian doctrine that man is essentially no different from other animals, we can affirm human uniqueness and humanity's unique call to know and love the Creator.

Culpability For Living Contrary To Our God-given Nature

We can also affirm the inexcusable culpability of living contrary to our God-given nature. We do not have to confuse people by affirming, on the one hand, that God will hold us accountable for sinning, while admitting, on the other hand, that sinning is consistent with our "sinful nature." Notice the logical tension that Brauch feels on this point:

We are sinners by nature ... [and just] as Scripture affirms the total depravity and helplessness of human beings, it also affirms that God holds humans morally accountable for their sinful choices that are consistent with that nature. ... God will hold individuals accountable for their acts in this life — despite their sinful nature¹¹²⁶

¹¹²⁶ Brauch, *Flawed Perfection: What It Means to Be Human and Why It Matters for Culture, Politics, and Law*, p. 30-31.

No, on the contrary, God will hold individuals accountable for their deeds that were *incompatible with* their good nature, and that veiled the divine the image of God they were created to reflect. We can sound this warning confidently.

We realize that some of our readers may feel that we are splitting hairs at this point. Did we not just explain that in consequence of our nature's bondage to sin *our human character* has been corrupted? Whether it's our nature or our character that has been corrupted, isn't our sinful behavior nevertheless "in character" with our inherited human condition, and therefore hardly blameworthy?

The *practical* distinction is admittedly subtle. We must understand, however, that our sinful behavior is blameworthy simply for its affront to our holy Creator, regardless of whether we consider it is an expression of our "sinful nature" or our "corrupted character." The *theological* distinction is more important. The proposition that human nature remains good (though impaired), and that therefore it is our character that is "sinful," removes all possibility of impugning God for giving Adam and his posterity a "sinful nature" that no one could hope to rise above. This keeps the responsibility upon the sinner for his sins, and precludes the complaint, "Why does God still find fault? For who can act contrary to their nature?"¹¹²⁷

The Oughtness Of Living Consistently With Our Nature

We can also confidently echo the unbeliever's own conscience. All people have a sense of what they ought and ought not do. We can and should use this fact in our evangelism. We should not let the depravity of human *character* blind us to the still present receptors, embedded in every person's *nature*, that are capable of perceiving God's truths. The Greeks whom the apostle Paul addressed on Mars Hill gave no credence to the Hebrew Scriptures, but Paul did not hesitate to call them to repent **on the basis of what they knew intuitively about God and about their obligation to seek Him** (Ac 17.24-30). The noble aspects still discernible

¹¹²⁷ To borrow Paul's phrasing in Ro 9.19.

in human nature are enough to underscore that all people *ought* to be and do better, and not continue to yield to their fleshly instincts. It is *this tension* — between the oughtness of being better and the impossibility of being better by human strength and will — that the gospel so wonderfully addresses for those still held captive (Jn 8.36).

Christian Character Must Contrast With Fallen Character

If we appropriately exhort unbelievers that they are obligated to live in a manner consistent with their God given nature, how much more should we press this truth upon our fellow believers. Here in the United States, many have observed that divorce and moral problems are as common among church people as they are among non-church people. Friends have shared with me about how they have been financially defrauded by “Christian” businessmen. The common excuse of unbelievers for avoiding church attendance is that “the churches are full of hypocrites.” This current reality is diametrically opposed to what the church’s testimony to the world should be, as the New Testament epistles and the Revelation’s letters to the seven churches make painfully clear.

The reasons for the current spiritual crisis in the American church are complex, but perhaps one small part of the problem has to do with the tendency in some congregations to unguardedly emphasize Christians’ continuing status as “sinners,” albeit “saved by grace.” Is this the New Testament’s emphasis? Does the Bible depict believers as **sinners** who labor to do what is right, or as **saints** who sometimes stumble? “If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves,” wrote the apostle John (1Jn 1.8), but we are no longer sinners in the same sense that we were prior to our regeneration. The apostles describe the believers’ sinfulness in the past tense. We “were slaves of sin” but “became obedient from the heart” (Ro 6.17). “Such were some of you; but you were washed, but you were sanctified, ...” (1Co 6.11). We “were once darkness, but now ... light in the Lord” (Eph 5.8). We were “dead in [our] wrongdoings” but now “made alive” (Col 2.13). “You were continually straying, but now you have returned” (1Pe 2.25).

It appears that the distinction we have observed between immutable nature and mutable character should caution us as to how we speak about ourselves as Christians. In a true sense, we are no longer sinners but righteous (Ro 5.19), if our faith and new birth are authentic. This reality makes sense of the many biblical passages that contrast the sinners with the righteous and godly. Yes, there is a sense in which we remain sinners by virtue of the fact that we still sin; Paul spoke of himself as the chief of sinners in the present tense (1Ti 1.15). We must be clear in our preaching, though, and not speak of believers as still being sinners in the same sense that they were before being redeemed and set free by Christ. We do not want to encourage the trending belief that the Christian life need not differ from the non-Christian life of our surrounding culture.

Quote

... you are a slave, Neo. Like everyone else you were born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch. A prison for your mind.

— Morpheus to Neo, in the Warner Brothers film, *The Matrix*

Appendix 2: The Proto-Evangel

A Poem Of Varied Interpretation

Within the divine judgments pronounced in the garden of Eden (Ge 3.14-19), and more specifically within the decree against the Serpent (Ge 3.14–15), the LORD God said,

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.¹¹²⁸

Through the centuries, interpreters have explained these words in various ways, and as James McKeown writes, “this variation has usually more to do with the [interpreter’s] theological preconceptions than with the content of the text itself.”¹¹²⁹ If within the interpreters’ “theological preconceptions” we include presuppositions about the inspiration and unity of the Bible, the historicity of Genesis, and the reality of predictive prophecy and typological foreshadowing, then McKeown is quite right. On one end of the interpretive spectrum, those who have taken a low view of biblical inspiration and have disparaged the Bible’s first eleven chapters as non-historical, have reduced the words quoted above to nothing more than part of an etiological fable that explains why women hate snakes. More toward the middle of the interpretive range, Jewish and Christian scholars who have taken a more respectful and moderating approach to the passage have explained it as forecasting the perpetual war between good and evil, waged in the theater of human endeavor. But for us at the conservative end of the interpretive spread, who hold to a high view of biblical inspiration and unity, who take all of Genesis as historical, and who see predictive prophecy and typology as integral to God’s progressive revelation to mankind, God’s proclamation to the Serpent in

¹¹²⁸ Ge 3.15, NASB95.

¹¹²⁹ *Genesis*, p. 38.

Genesis 3.15 is the bedrock upon which all subsequent messianic prophecy builds and is also the first proclamation of the gospel in its most rudimentary form, rightly called *the Proto-Evangel*.¹¹³⁰

However, whether we take a conservative or liberal approach in interpreting Genesis 3.15 and its context, we must still exegete the canonical text responsibly. We must apply our hermeneutical principles consistently, while carefully distinguishing between what the text states explicitly and what it might imply. So, having acknowledged to the reader our conservative perspective, let us now offer a careful analysis of the judgment pronounced upon the Serpent and its promise of ultimate deliverance from his oppression. We begin by highlighting the significance of the shift in Genesis 3.14 from the *prose* of the preceding narrative to the *poetry* of the pronouncements of divine judgment.

Prophetic Purpose In Pentateuch Poetry

The Hebrew poetry of Scripture is characterized by “parallelism,¹¹³¹ terseness of expression, and figurative language.”¹¹³² The Scriptures use poetry for three primary purposes: worship (e.g. Psalms), wisdom teaching (e.g. Ecclesiastes), and prophecy (e.g. Isaiah). These purposes can overlap in a single passage (e.g. Psalm 2).

Poetry in Scripture can also serve the secondary purposes of helping to structure and interpret blocks of historical narrative. As John H. Sailhamer explains,

The technique of using a poetic speech to provide a thematic interpretation of a biblical narrative is well known in biblical literature. ... This technique occurs frequently within recognizable segments of the Pentateuch. The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2, for example, concludes with a short poetic speech (discourse) of Adam (2.23) followed by an epilogue (2.24). ... The account of the fall in chapter 3 concludes with a poetic discourse (vv. 14–19) and an epilogue (vv. 20–24). ... The fact that

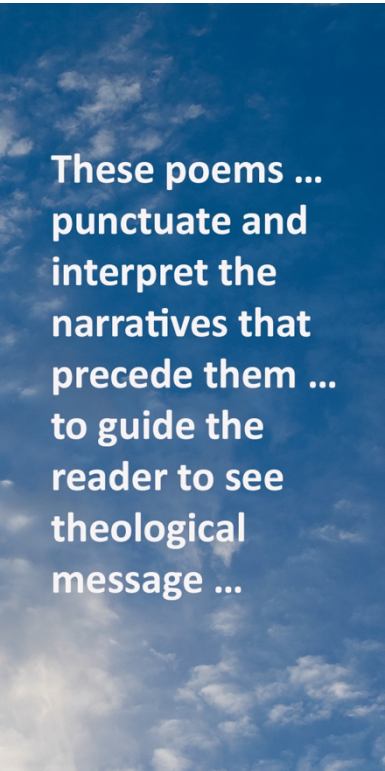
¹¹³⁰ Or *protoevangelium*.

¹¹³¹ I.e., verses comprised of two or more cola expressing synonymous, contrasting, or elaborating thoughts.

¹¹³² Michael B. Shepherd, *An Introduction to the Making and Meaning of the Bible*, p. 36.

this pattern can be found throughout Genesis ... suggests it was an important part of the compositional technique....¹¹³³

Focusing upon this interpretive use of poetry in the Pentateuch, Michael B. Shepherd suggests that, “The five major blocks of narrative in the Pentateuch” are (in our words) the Primeval History (Ge 1–11), the Patriarchal History (Ge 12–50), the Exodus Event (Ex 1–19), the Wilderness Experience (Nu 11–36), and the Deuteronomic Retrospective. Shepherd goes on to say that, “Accompanying these narratives are the major poetic units of the Pentateuch: Genesis 3.14–19; 49.1–27; Exodus 15.1–18; Numbers 23–24; Deuteronomy 32–33.”¹¹³⁴ He then explains, **“These poems serve to punctuate and interpret the narratives that precede them in order to guide the reader to see the theological message of the Pentateuch as a whole.”**¹¹³⁵



These poems ...
punctuate and
interpret the
narratives that
precede them ...
to guide the
reader to see
theological
message ...

Having affirmed that “the major poetic units” of the Pentateuch serve the *secondary* purpose of punctuating and interpreting their preceding narratives, we now ask which of the three *primary* purposes of biblical poetry is fulfilled by the poetic unit of our current interest, Genesis 3.14–19. Reading this passage in its context, we see that it primarily serves a *prophetic* purpose. In fact, Shepherd writes that *each of the major poems* “features [1] a major character from the

¹¹³³ “Genesis,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus (Revised Ed.)*, pp. 34–35.

¹¹³⁴ *An Introduction to the Making and Meaning of the Bible*, p. 71.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, emphasis added. Shepherd cites Sailhamer’s books, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (1992), and *The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition and Interpretation* (2009).

preceding narrative as the speaker, [2] an expectation of what will happen in the last days, and [3] a prophecy of a coming messianic figure.”¹¹³⁶

In this threefold characterization of the major poetic units, the first two aspects are easily verified (see the following table): the “major characters” in their preceding narratives are God, Jacob, Moses, and Balaam, and each of their proclamations touch on events that will occur at some point beyond the immediate future. As to each of the units containing “a prophecy of a coming messianic figure,” conservative Christian exegesis has certainly recognized this element in the Shiloh prediction of Genesis 49.10 and in the “star out of Jacob” prediction of Numbers 24.17. It is more difficult to find the messianic elements in the Song Of The Sea (Ex 15) and in the Deuteronomic Retrospective (Dt 32-33), but Kevin S. Chen does a masterful job of explaining them in his book, *The Messianic Vision of the Pentateuch*.¹¹³⁷ Regarding the poetic unit of Genesis 3.14-19, we hope to corroborate in this appendix what so many others have affirmed before us, namely that this passage not only contains “a prophecy of a coming messianic figure,” but that it provides the first and foundational messianic prophecy of the Bible.

As we embark upon this exegesis of verses within the Genesis 3.14-19 poetic unit, we take interpretive guidance from the extensive analyses scholars have made of the cohesive structure of the Pentateuch and of the literary role of its poetic passages:

1. Since the passage is poetic, we should anticipate figurative language;
2. Since the passage is prophetic, we should take to heart its expression of God’s holiness and any applicable reproofs, as well as analyzing any far-reaching prediction it may contain;
3. Since the major poetic units of the Pentateuch all arguably contain a messianic reference, we should anticipate that the verses we’re currently examining may contain a prediction of a coming deliverer. If they do, we

¹¹³⁶ Michael B. Shepherd, *An Introduction to the Making and Meaning of the Bible*, p. 71.

¹¹³⁷ See pp. 156-169; 247-269.

should not hesitate to interpret the prediction in the light of subsequent messianic prophecy.

Poetic Passage	Preceding Major Character	Future Happenings Expected	Messianic Prophecy
Ge 3.14-19	Yahveh Elohim	Multiple	"He shall wound your head"
Ge 49.1-27	Jacob (Israel)	Multiple	"Shiloh comes, ... to him ... the obedience of the peoples."
Ex 15.1-18	Moses	"the people ... You will ... plant them"	"YHVH is a man of war ... YHVH will reign forever."
Nu 23-24	Balaam	"his kingdom shall be exalted"	"A star shall come forth from Jacob"
Dt 32-33	Moses	Multiple	"Bring him to his people" (Dt 33.7)

The Immediate Context Of The Proto-Evangel

As stated above, the prediction we recognize as the first messianic prophecy appears in Genesis 3.14-15, embedded in God's pronouncement of judgment against the Serpent.¹¹³⁸ We give our own translation of the divine declaration here:

**Cursed *are* you apart from all the domestic animals,
and apart from all the animals of the wild.**

**Upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat all the days of your life;**

¹¹³⁸ As Derek Kidner writes in *Genesis*, p. 75, "There is good New Testament authority for seeing here the *protevangelium*, the first glimmer of the gospel. Remarkably, it makes its début as a sentence passed on the enemy ..., not a direct promise to man, for redemption is about God's rule as much as about man's need"

And enmity I will put
between you and the woman,
and between your seed (זרעך)¹¹³⁹ and her seed (זרען);
He himself¹¹⁴⁰ shall wound you, *your* head,
and you yourself shall wound him, *his* heel.

The final part of this decree against the Serpent became known as the *Proto-Evangel*, that is, the *First Gospel*,¹¹⁴¹ because of its promise that a wounded descendant of Eve would finally wound the Serpent's head. But the full decree is **a pronouncement comprised of five parts**, each of which warrants our attention. They are:

1. The curse upon the Serpent distinguished from what the animals would experience.
2. The sentence of dust-eating.
3. Enmity decreed between the Serpent and the woman (Eve).
4. Enmity decreed between Serpent's seed and the woman's Seed.
5. The Proto-Evangel proper: The wounding of the Serpent's head by the heel-wounded Seed of the woman.

Part 1: The Distinguished Serpent

Contrary to highly imaginative Jewish legends, millennia of tradition, and countless works of art, **the Serpent of Genesis 3 was not a reptile**. The Hebrew text of Genesis 3.1a does not speak of the Serpent as *one of the animals*, as the LXX implies: "the serpent was the wisest of all the beasts"¹¹⁴² Instead, the

¹¹³⁹ I.e., *descendant*, in both instances of the word. It is important to note that Biblical Hebrew does not maintain a systematic distinction between *seed* and *semen* as do English and Spanish. Nor does it distinguish between the male and female gametes. **The single Hebrew word *zera'* (זרע)** encompasses a range of meanings, including *botanical seed* and animal or human *semen*, *sperm* and *ova*. By extension it often refers to a *descendant* or multiple *descendants*.

¹¹⁴⁰ Both independent singular pronouns in Ge 3.15b are emphatic.

¹¹⁴¹ Or the *Primitive Gospel* or *Original Gospel*.

¹¹⁴² The ESV, CSB, NLT, NRSV, and TNK likewise imply that the Serpent was one of the animals. The LXX interprets the adjective זָרוֹם as a superlative, φρονιμώτατος, *wisest* or *most*

text associates the Serpent with the living creatures “which the LORD God had made,” only to mark the Serpent as a created being and not a divine one. The association is made *by contrast*, employing the Hebrew prepositional phrase מִכָּל (used again in Genesis 3.14) to distinguish the Serpent from the animals: “Now the Serpent was intelligent **in distinction from** all beasts”¹¹⁴³ The facts that he was distinct from the animals and was *intelligent* explain why the Serpent could talk.¹¹⁴⁴ We must not misunderstand Genesis 3.1 as telling us (contrary to all

intelligent, and thus includes the Serpent within the larger group of apparently less sensible animals. However, as d’Ermao mentions in *The Serpent Of Eden*, p. 9, biblical Heb “has no superlative *form* for the adjective.” Nevertheless, biblical Heb expresses the superlative idea in two ways, as explained in McAfee and Hardy’s, *Going Deeper With Biblical Hebrew*, p. 379: (1) **attaching the definite article to the absolute adj.**, *the young = the youngest* (Ge 42.13); (2) **using a construct chain**, *an old man of the house of him = the oldest man of his house* (Ge 24.2). Ge 3.1 employs neither of these grammatical devices.

When expressing a superlative idea, biblical Hebrew can use of the preposition בְּ (*in, among*) to anchor the superlative to a group or class: *the low family in Manasseh = the lowest family among the families of Manasseh* (Jdg 6.15). This tells us that, if the author of Ge 3.1 had intended to say that “The Serpent was the wisest of all the beasts,” he could have done so unequivocally using the normal way for expressing the superlative in Hebrew: וְהַנָּחָשׁ הָיָה מִכָּל הַחַיָּה הָעֲרֹם, *and the Serpent was the wise one (= wisest) in (the group) of all the beasts*. This construction would have left no doubt that the Serpent was the wisest (or craftiest), and that he was an animal.

The Heb prep. phrase that appears in Ge 3.1, מִכָּל, means *among all, from out of all, or in distinction from all*. By extension, it can be used **with a verb** to mean *more than all* (e.g. Ge 37.3). This phrase does not convert an adjective into a superlative, but it can enhance the superlative idea. The LXX correctly uses a Grk superlative in translating 1Sa 9.21, *the smallest tribe of the whole staff of Benjamin* In the Heb text, this clause does use מִכָּל, but it is not this prep. phrase but the definite article attached to the absolute adjective that conveys the superlative idea. The phrase מִכָּל only enhances the superlative idea by anchoring *the smallest tribe* to a large group: *among all the clans [LXX staff] of Benjamin*.

The point is that, the adj. עֲרֹם (*intelligent*) in Ge 3.1, since it is anarthrous (no attached definite article) should not be translated as expressing a superlative idea. The term עֲרֹם is simply a *predicate descriptive adjective*, and the following prepositional phrase, מִכָּל הַחַיָּה (*from all beasts*) marks the adjectival quality as distinguishing the Serpent from all the beasts.

¹¹⁴³ RAG. The NASB95/20, ESV, ISV, LBLA, RVR95, KJV, NKJV, and NIV all maintain the distinction of the Serpent as more “cunning, etc.” *than any beast*.

¹¹⁴⁴ Contra K. A. Matthews, in *Genesis 1-11:26*, “There is no explanation for the serpent’s capacity to talk” The HB and LXX terms describing the Serpent are עֲרֹם and φρονίμος. Both terms have nuances of *shrewdness* or *prudence*, but the underlying idea seems to be ability to act

zoological observation) that snakes as a class are the craftiest of all animals.¹¹⁴⁵ Instead, Genesis 3.1a describes a singular entity, *the Serpent*, as appearing for the first time on the stage of human history, and tells us why this being *could start a conversation* (until this point in the text, only the LORD and Adam had displayed the power of speech). The Serpent was a *rational* entity.

We reiterate that this intelligent entity was not a snake. Instead he was a personal being whose name was **Serpent** (normally referred to with the definite article, *the Serpent*, נָחָשׁ).¹¹⁴⁶ This name, *Nahash* (נָחָשׁ), is believed to have originated by onomatopoeia. Its two radicals, נ and ח, together make a deep-throated hissing sound, and are incorporated into a cognate word with נחשׁ, namely, the term נִחַשׁ, *to hiss, whisper, or enchant* (this last nuance due to the later use of whispering speech in the practice of divination). Therefore, the name *Serpent* (נָחָשׁ) could be interpreted as *Whisperer*.¹¹⁴⁷

on the basis of knowledge. Cf. d'Eremao's translation of Ge 3.1, *The Serpent Of Eden*, p. 6, "the serpent was intelligent among all living (beings)...." Note also the LXX use of συνετός, *intelligent, discerning*, for עָרוּם in Pr 12.23, and the synonym, φρόνιμος, in Mt 10.16 where Jesus echoes of Ge 3.1.

¹¹⁴⁵ Or most cunning (NASB2020, NKJV, CSB), subtle (KJV, RSV) shrewd (NLT) or clever (NirV). The great evangelist George Whitefield held this interpretation, saying that the devil "takes possession of a serpent, which was more subtil than all the beasts ...," in "The Seed Of The Woman, And The Seed Of The Serpent," Sermon 2 of *Fifteen Sermons*. For biblical references to snakes as a class, see Psa 58.4; 91.13; 140.3; Pro 30.19; 23.32; Ec 10.11. Such references can be made with or without the definite article.

¹¹⁴⁶ Cf. the anarthrous use of נָחָשׁ in Ge 49.17; Ex 4.3; Ec 10.8.

¹¹⁴⁷ Or alternatively, "the hisser," (Hastings, et al., *A Dictionary Of The Bible*, © 1911-1912).

The Messianic version of the Bible, the ISV, "translates" נָחָשׁ throughout Ge 3 as "the Shining One," and boldly states in a footnote, "The Heb. word *Ha-Nachash* means *the Shining One*," (and then acknowledges the other possibilities of *Diviner* or *Serpent*). Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book Of Genesis 1-17*, p. 187, provides the rationale for this speculative interpretation:

Possibly there is a connection between *nāhāš* and *nēhōšet*, "bronze." Indeed, in Nu 21.9 we read that Moses made "a bronze serpent" (*nāhāš nēhōšet*). Later religious tradition referred to this being as "Nehushtan" (*nēhuštān*, 2Ki 18.4). This connection with bronze suggests a shiny and luminous appearance, which would arrest Eve's attention.

By this name, *Naḥash*, the Bible first introduces us to that spirit who was as bright as the “star of the morning,” and who served as the anointed covering cherub, “until unrighteousness was found in [him]” and he fell from heaven (Is 14.12-15; Eze 28.14-15). Adam probably named him *Serpent*, after Eve had been deceived by him,¹¹⁴⁸ but they did not call him this because of his appearance.¹¹⁴⁹ Genesis 3 does not describe the Serpent’s appearance, and as far as we know, he appeared to Eve in his cherubic form, still wearing the bejeweled robe prepared for him on the day of his creation (Eze 28.13-14).¹¹⁵⁰ Our first parents called him *the Serpent* probably because of his whispering speech.¹¹⁵¹ However, after having shown himself through the ages to be the *slanderer* of God’s people and the *adversary* of mankind in general, “the serpent of old ... is [now] called the devil,

Interpreting the word נִחָשׁ as “the Shining One,” intrigues us because (1) it removes all suggestion of the creature of Ge 3.1 being a brute snake, and (2) it connects this being to passages that mention the Satanic “star of the morning” (Is 14.12), the bejeweled rebel in Eden (Eze 28.13), Satan who “disguises himself as angel of light” (2Co 11.14), etc. Sadly, however, no Hebrew lexicon after that of Gesenius and Tregelles (1846), and no rabbinical or DSS evidence supports the nuance of “shining” for נִחָשׁ in Ge 3. Even the Gesenius entry is added from the notes of his “Thesaurus,” saying that “a second root [of נִחָשׁ] probably [signifies] to shine.”

Whatever its nuance, *Naḥash* was later used as a proper name for others: 1Sa 11.1; 2Sa 17.25; 1Ch 2.16.

¹¹⁴⁸ Ge 3 presumably uses the name *Serpent* proleptically. Ge 49.17, Job 26.13, Ps 140.4, and Is 27.1 echo the name, and the sign miracle of the serpents commemorated it (Ex 4.1-5; 7.8-12), but by patriarchal times the title *the Satan* (שָׂטָן, in contrast to simply, אֹיֵב, *an adversary*) may have become the archenemy’s more common designation (Job 1.7, etc.; Zec 3.1-2).

¹¹⁴⁹ The king of Ammon probably wasn’t called *Serpent* because of his looks either, 1Sa 11.1.

¹¹⁵⁰ Speaking of Satan as described in Eze 28, Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum writes, “he had a covering of stones, which made him the “shining one” (*The Messianic Bible Study Collection*, Vol. 77, p 7). However, Fruchtenbaum does not here connect the idea of the “shining one” to the term נִחָשׁ, but only to Satan’s bejeweled covering.

¹¹⁵¹ On the other hand, E. W. Bullinger believed that Satan is called *the Serpent* in Ge 3 by use of the figure of speech called *hypocatastasis*, which expresses “an implied resemblance or representation,” as when “Herod is called a “fox” (Lk 13.32).” It is unclear whether Bullinger thought that the “implied resemblance,” in this case, was a negative one (i.e. to a slithering, hissing snake) or a positive one (i.e. to a shining celestial being). See Bullinger’s *Companion Bible*, vol. 2, pp. 24-25.

or Satan” (Re 12.9). That is, **the devil and the ancient Serpent are one and the same.**¹¹⁵²

Therefore, let us dismiss from our thinking, not only the idea that the Serpent was a snake, but also the idea proposed by so many that the “serpent” in view was a reptile used by the devil as his mouthpiece.¹¹⁵³ This latter idea has no basis in the Genesis 3 text, nor in later biblical references to the Edenic temptation. Revelation 12.9 tells us that, “the serpent of old ... is called the devil,” not “the devil’s mouthpiece.”¹¹⁵⁴



... the devil
and the ancient
Serpent are *one*
and the same.

Fully distinguishing the Serpent from the animals in our thinking helps us understand that, in **the first part** of God’s pronouncement against him, the Serpent was not cursed “*more* than all animals,”¹¹⁵⁵ but *apart and distinctly* from them (מִכָּל, as in Ge 3.1).¹¹⁵⁶ Neither the animals nor mankind were cursed, but only the Serpent (Ge 3.14) and the ground (Ge 3.17). Nevertheless, the animals are mentioned in Genesis 3.14 because the repercussions of the curse upon the Serpent

¹¹⁵² As J. P. Val d. 'Eremao explained:

It is not the Devil and Satan, who is also called the Serpent. Just the reverse. It is “the Serpent,” who is also called “Devil and Satan.” We are therefore compelled to conclude, that “the Serpent” is the primary name of this being; and that the Devil and Satan are only his secondary names.

¹¹⁵³ George Whitefield held this interpretation, saying that, “Though this was a real serpent, yet he that spoke was no other than the devil”; see “The Seed Of The Woman, And The Seed Of The Serpent,” Sermon 2 of *Fifteen Sermons*.

¹¹⁵⁴ As John Skinner astutely observed in *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, p. 73, Ge 3 “knows nothing of an evil principle *external* to the serpent, but regards himself as the subject of whatever occult powers he displays: he is simply a creature of Yahwe distinguished from the rest by his superior subtlety.” Also, as Michael Rydelnik observes, “God’s pronouncement of judgment (Ge 3.14) is directed to the serpent proper ... and not the dark force behind it” (*The Messianic Hope*, pp. 137-138).

¹¹⁵⁵ Ge 3.14, NLT and others.

¹¹⁵⁶ The TEV and REB have captured the nuance of the Heb, translating respectively, “you alone ... must bear this curse,” and “you are cursed alone of all ... the creatures”

would affect them, just as the repercussions of curse upon the ground would affect mankind. Indeed, because of these curses the whole creation is subjected to futility and decay (Ro 8.20-21). However, the animal kingdom will one day be restored to tranquility (Is 11.6-9), but the Serpent, Satan, who had exalted himself above man and usurped mankind's dominion, will forever go on his belly and eat dust.

Part 2: The Dust-Eating Serpent

In **the second part** of the pronouncement against the Serpent, we find the first instance of the anticipated *figurative language* in this poetic speech.¹¹⁵⁷ The couplet, “upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat,” does not imply that the Serpent was a snake that once had legs and must now slither legless.¹¹⁵⁸ As Andrew E. Steinmann writes, “While the curse is often understood as the serpent being made to move on his belly, it ought to be noted that the other judgments of God do not transform the basic nature of either the woman or the man”¹¹⁵⁹ Neither does this part of God's pronouncement condemn all snakes to literally eating dust, which none of them do. Instead, phrases about *going on one's belly* and *eating dust* are a common metaphorical expressions from the ancient world, conveying the idea of *abject humiliation*. As J. P. Val d'Eremao wrote,

Going, sitting, lying, and grovelling [sic] in dust and ashes, or on the earth; prostrating, placing one's body or putting one's mouth to the earth in dust and ashes; eating or licking dust and ashes; — all these are common scriptural expressions for misery, helplessness, degradation, servitude, humiliation, and defeat. One may easily convince one's self of this, by consulting any full Concordance of the Bible.¹¹⁶⁰

¹¹⁵⁷ We remind ourselves in the words of E. W. Bullinger, *The Companion Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 24, that “A Figure of speech is never used except for the purpose of calling attention to, emphasising, and intensifying, *the reality of the literal sense*, and the truth of the historical facts”

¹¹⁵⁸ Contra *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan* (eds. Cathcart, et al.), “Upon your belly you shall go about, and your feet shall be cut off,” and Ginzberg's *Legends Of The Jews*, p. 76, “the execution of the decree against him was entrusted to angels. They descended from heaven, and chopped off his hands and feet.”

¹¹⁵⁹ *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, p. 70

¹¹⁶⁰ See for examples, Ps 44.24-25; 72.9; Is 29.4; 49.23; Eze 28.17; Mic 1.9-10; 7.16-17; Na 3.18.

From the English language we can compare the figure of speech, *bite the dust*, which means to fall dead, or less seriously, to suffer a defeat.

As Steven W. Boyd writes, “The Biblical poet wants his readers to see, hear, smell, feel, and taste what he is experiencing. He is seeking to evoke his readers’ emotions and experiences. He does this by creating vivid unforgettable images, which resonate with his readers.”¹¹⁶¹ Thus, in Genesis 3.14 we “feel” the Serpent’s belly rasping on the ground, and we “taste” the powdery dust in his mouth, and imagine what an abject humiliation it would be for us, were we to *literally* experience this *figurative* degradation. The words of the curse are meant to evoke this emotional response, not to tell us that a primeval snake had its legs amputated!

Part 3: Enmity Between The Serpent And The Woman

Once we understand that God’s curse upon the Serpent was pronounced against no other than the fallen cherub we know as Satan, we see clearly that **the third part** of this pronouncement speaks of two particular *individuals*: the Serpent and the woman. This declaration of enmity is not about snakes and women, but about *Satan* and *Eve*.¹¹⁶² Furthermore, this third part of God’s decree has to do specifically with Eve *as distinct from* her husband (Adam) and her offspring (the matter of offspring comes next).

Therefore, we learn from this third part of the pronouncement that Satan would never again be able to represent himself to the woman, Eve, as a friend with her best interests at heart. For her part, as James E. Smith says, Eve “would never again be the pushover she had been in the garden. ... This was the beginning of the successful struggle against Satan. ... The woman’s enmity toward Satan smashed his dreams of recruiting all mankind for his rebellion against God.”¹¹⁶³

¹¹⁶¹ Quoted in Kelly, *Creation And Change*, p. 55.

¹¹⁶² Contra the Biblical Studies Press’ *The NET Bible First Edition Notes*, “The text anticipates the ongoing struggle between human beings (the woman’s offspring) and deadly poisonous snakes (the serpent’s offspring).”

¹¹⁶³ James E. Smith, *Old Testament Survey Series: The Pentateuch* (College Press, Joplin, 1992).

Part 4: Enmity Between The Seeds

Ambiguity Of The Singular/Plural Noun Seed

The fourth part of the pronouncement, the decree of enmity “between your seed and her seed,” presents a difficulty for the expositor. The problem arises from the numerical ambiguity of the word *seed* in this text. The Hebrew word *seed*, **zera’** (זֶרַע), like the English word *seed*, is a singular/plural noun whose *singular form* can refer to a single seed or to a plurality of seeds.¹¹⁶⁴ The word *seed* in the pronouncement clearly refers to offspring, but does it refer to multiple children of the Serpent and the collective posterity of the woman, or to an individual spawn of the Serpent and an individual descendant of the woman?

This question, at least with regard to the seed of the woman, can be answered, as Jack Collins has shown, on the basis of Hebrew syntax (see callout box below). When the Hebrew word *seed*, **zera’** (זֶרַע), refers to human offspring (as opposed to botanical seeds), whether it refers to an individual or a group is normally indicated by any contextual pronouns referring to the “seed” in question. **In Genesis 3.15, since the woman’s seed is referred to with the singular pronoun *he* (הוא), we should interpret her seed as an individual.**

¹¹⁶⁴ Just as the Eng word *seed* has a plural form *seeds*, so the Heb word *zera’* (זֶרַע) has a plural form, *zar’im* (זֵרַעִים), but this plural occurs only once in Scripture, in construct form, in 1Sa 8.15. In all other biblical instances, including its 59 occurrences in Genesis, this Hebrew noun only appears in its singular form. Nevertheless, not counting Ge 3.15, *zera’* occurs at least five times in Genesis with *singular* meaning, referring not to a group but to an individual. In Ge 4.25, for example, Eve refers to Seth individually as her *zera’*. The term *zera’* also has singular meaning in Ge 21.13, as confirmed by the masculine singular pronoun *he*: “he is your descendant (*zera’*).”

The number (one or many) to which *zera’* refers in Ge 22.18 is governed by the preceding verse, Ge 22.17b, which though incorrectly translated with plurals by many English versions, uses both a sing. verb inflection and sing. pronominal suffix. The apostle Paul dispelled all ambiguity regarding Ge 22.17-18 in Ga 3.16. Referring to the “seed” promised to Abraham, Paul wrote that God “does not say ‘and to seeds,’ as *referring* to many, but *rather* to one, ‘and to your seed,’ that is Christ.” The other instances of a singular *zera’*, that is an individual *descendant* in Genesis, appear in Ge 38.9 and probably in Ge 24.60 which echoes Ge 22.17 in its messianic blessing.

Dear reader, if the grammatical details that support the preceding paragraph would be useful for you, we invite you to read the supplementary technical material in the following callout box. Otherwise, please skip to the conclusion which follows, regarding the individuality of the woman's seed.

Syntactical Rules Relating To The Word Seed In The Hebrew Bible

The following syntactical "rules" are synthesized from Jack Collins' article, *A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is The Woman's Seed Singular Or Plural?* These rules only apply to the Hebrew noun *zera'*, *seed*, when it refers to people, i.e., human descendants, as opposed to botanical seeds.

1. When the Hebrew noun *zera'*, *seed*, refers to a group of offspring collectively, it can take a singular verb inflection *as it does when referring to an individual*, but only *zera'* referring to a plurality of offspring can take a plural verb inflection.
2. Whether *zera'* refers to a group of offspring or to an individual, any associated adjective or adjectival participle will occur in its singular form.
3. Associated *plural* pronouns (independent pronouns, object pronouns, and suffixes) always signal that *zera'* refers to a group.¹¹⁶⁵
4. (A) **Associated *singular* pronouns (independent pronouns, object pronouns, and suffixes) always signal that *zera'* refers to an individual,**¹¹⁶⁶ (B) In the LXX, the sing. pronouns will be masc., "even though the Greek word σπέρμα is neuter."¹¹⁶⁷

In the case of the woman's *zera'* in Genesis 3.15, Rule 4 is the key. The action of this seed is expressed by a 3rd person, masc. sing. verb, **he will wound** (יְשַׁפֵּד), which by itself could just as well fit with a collective use of *zera'* (Rule 1). However the woman's *zera'* is also referred to with the masc. sing. pronoun **he**, in both the Hebrew text (הוא) and in the Greek translation of the LXX (αὐτός), and is also

¹¹⁶⁵ Jack Collins, "A Syntactical Note (Genesis 3:15): Is The Woman's Seed Singular Or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 48, no. 1 (1997): 139–47. This rule does not apply to *agricultural seed*, a quantity of which can take a singular pronoun, Le 11.37-38; 26.16.

¹¹⁶⁶ See Ibid.

¹¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

referred to with a 3rd person, masc. sing. suffix, *you will wound him* (תִּשְׁפֹּן). These *singular* pronouns (Heb and Grk) and the *singular* object suffix (Heb) would not be used if a collective meaning of the woman's *zera'* was intended.

Consequently, Collins concludes,

From these data it becomes clear that, on the syntactical level, the singular pronoun *hû'* [the *he* that refers back to the seed of the woman] in Genesis 3.15 is quite consistent with the pattern where a single individual is in view. In fact, since the [independent] subject pronouns are not normally necessary for the meaning [of the verb], we might wonder if the singular *hû'* [he] in Genesis 3.15 is used precisely in order to make it plain that an individual is being promised, who will win a victory over the [Serpent] at cost to himself.¹¹⁶⁸ The evidence of the Greek translators makes it beyond question that the translator of Genesis 3.15 meant to convey that an individual was promised; this study indicates that his interpretation is consistent with Hebrew syntax elsewhere in the Bible.

The Ambiguity Dissolved

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the syntactical patterns relating to the word *seed* (זֶרַע) when it refers to human offspring, indicate that the woman's seed predicted in Genesis 3.15 is an individual. This of course refutes the collective interpretation, proposed by various commentators (we will further examine the collective interpretation below). The Hebrew syntax likewise invalidates translations of Genesis 3.15, like that of the Tanakh, which turn the promised seed of the woman into a murky collective, "**They** shall strike at your head ..., "¹¹⁶⁹ as well as the optimistic collective interpretation of *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan of Genesis*: "And when the children of the woman keep the commandments of the Law, they will take aim and strike you on your head."¹¹⁷⁰

¹¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the "unnecessary" independent pronoun serves to clarify the subject of the verb and to focus attention on that subject. See Williams and Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, Third ed. p. 46.

¹¹⁶⁹ Emphasis added. Heb syntax also contradicts Catholic versions that translate with the fem., "she shall crush thy head ..." (D-R).

¹¹⁷⁰ *Targum Neofiti 1: Genesis* reads essentially the same way.

No, **Genesis 3.15 predicts an *individual* descendant of the woman who will bring the just inaugurated battle with the Serpent to its decisive climax.**

Part 5: The Victory Of The Seed Of The Woman

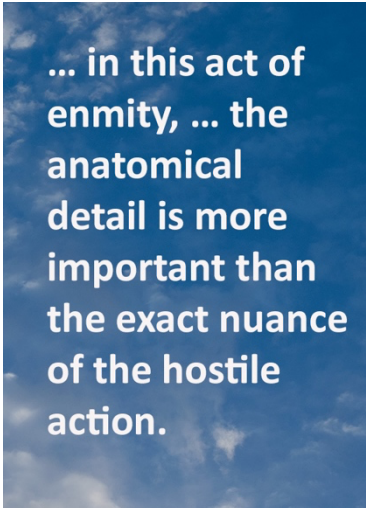
The Decisive Action

But what exactly will the seed of the woman do? English translations and commentaries differ widely, telling us that seed of the woman will **bruise**, **strike**, or **crush** the Serpent's head. The variety in translation is due to the very limited use of the Hebrew verb, *shuf* (שׁוּף), in the Hebrew Bible. This term only appears four times in Scripture, twice in Genesis 3.15, once in Job 9.17 and once in Psalm 139.11, and this last instance might involve a textual corruption.¹¹⁷¹ Without further discoveries of ancient manuscripts that provide more contextual examples of the usage of שׁוּף, we cannot confirm its precise nuances. However, in Genesis 3.15, we can say definitively that this obscure verb expresses (1) *a hostile action* that (2) *can impact a specific anatomical part* (at least figuratively). We know that שׁוּף expresses an action of hostility because it is implicitly instigated by the *enmity*¹¹⁷² that God irrevocably places between the named parties. We know that the hostile action of שׁוּף is one that can impact a specific anatomical part, because of the nouns *head* and *heel* serving as the indirect objects of the verb.

Therefore, since there is too little evidence to support translating שׁוּף as *bruise*, and because the Hebrew Bible uses more common words for *strike* (נָכַח) and *crush* (רָצַץ), we best use a more general verb like *wound* or *injure* (*herir*, LBLA, RVR95) in Genesis 3.15. The seed of the woman will injure the head of the Serpent, and the Serpent will injure the heel of the woman's seed. **We realize that in this act of enmity, it is the anatomical detail that is more important**

¹¹⁷¹ A polemical verb is nonsensical in Ps 139.11. The editors of the BHS assume that instead of שׁוּף the Heb verb in Ps 139.11 should be שָׁכַח = שָׁכַח, *to cover*. Most Eng versions follow that lead. Only the LSB translates with *bruise*, rendering the poetic couplet nonsensical.

¹¹⁷² There is no doubt about the meaning of the word *enmity* (אִי־בְרָה), which occurs with its cognate terms about 300 times in the HB.



... in this act of enmity, ... the anatomical detail is more important than the exact nuance of the hostile action.

than the exact nuance of the hostile action.

Though an injury to the heel can be fatal and even a severe wound to the head can be survived (cf. Re 13.3), the Scriptures generally speak of an injury to the head as the blow that defeats an enemy.¹¹⁷³ Therefore, the final couplet in Genesis 3.15, the Proto-Evangel proper, implicitly promises that **the seed of the woman — though he will himself be wounded in the skirmish — will triumph over the Serpent with a wound to the Serpent’s head.**

The Rest Of The Message

The Seed Of The Woman Not Yet Known As The Messiah

Is there anything more that we can say about the gospel content of this simple promise? Yes, but to rightly represent the message of the Proto-Evangel, we must acknowledge *what it doesn’t say*. For example, it doesn’t mention a *messiah*. When we say that Genesis 3.15 contains the first messianic prophecy of the Bible, we use the term *messianic* proleptically, since — as far as we know — the idea of a specially *anointed* servant of God did not enter the consciousness of God’s people until much later in the history of Israel. Neither does Genesis 3.15 say anything about a virgin birth or a divine incarnation, nor about Eve’s special descendant making Himself a sacrifice for sin.¹¹⁷⁴ It is inappropriate, therefore, to begin an exposition of Genesis 3.15 by saying, “this seed of the woman is Jesus Christ,” or, “this seed is the messiah who will die for sin,” as if such ideas would have been understood by the original readers of the text. As John H. Sailhamer writes, “Who is the ‘seed’ of the woman? The purpose of this verse is not to answer that question but to raise it.

¹¹⁷³ Jdg 5.26; 1Sa 17.45-46; Ps 68.21; 74.13-14; Je 23.19; 30.23; Hab 3.13-14; cf. Sir 33.12; Jdt 13.15-18. See a humorous example in 1Sa 5.4.

¹¹⁷⁴ Michael Rydelnik rightly cautions that reading more into the text than is warranted has “led many to doubt [its] messianic interpretation.” See *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 134-135.

The remainder of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch gives the author's answer."¹¹⁷⁵

A Battle Of Champions Announced

Nevertheless, a faithful exposition of Genesis 3.15 should focus upon its prediction of a battle of champions. We can and should say that, regarding the newly declared war, **the Proto-Evangel tells us prophetically that an descendant of the woman will become the wounded champion who will in some sense defeat the Serpent with a wound to the Serpent's head.**¹¹⁷⁶ Then, as we continue our exposition we can share our belief, *based upon subsequent messianic prophecy*, that the Proto-Evangel's prophecy of the Serpent-conquering Seed is fulfilled by none other than Jesus Christ.

The Seed Of The Serpent Decisively Wounded

Thanks to the benefit of retrospect, we can say even more. Access to the entire canon of Scripture allows us to confirm two implications of the Proto-Evangel that its earliest audiences would have puzzled over. Genesis 3.15 prompts two inferences that we now know to be correct: (1) the parallelism of the verse implies that the Serpent, like the woman, will have an *individual* seed as his champion in the foretold conflict, and (2) the verse's specification of the anatomical parts implies the *physicality* of both champions. Let us take a closer look at each of these ideas.

We infer that the mention of "your seed" (the seed of the Serpent) in Genesis 3.15 refers to an individual because of the verse's poetic parallelism:

**And enmity I will put
between you and the woman,**

¹¹⁷⁵ "Genesis," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus (Revised Edition)*, p. 91. James McKeown adds, in *Genesis*, p. 39, "The first readers of Genesis, unacquainted with the centuries of Christian theology, would expect the book of Genesis itself to explicate this promise of 'seed.' Since Genesis highlights the special status of one line of descent, a reference to the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman suggests that the remainder of the book will shed further light on this mysterious pronouncement."

¹¹⁷⁶ As Waltke and Fredericks put it, "God announces a battle of champions, and there will be a seed that conquers Satan." *Genesis: A Commentary*, p. 94.

and between your seed and her seed ...

Notice that “you” and “the woman” are entities of the same number, namely, singular: there is one “you” (the Serpent) and there is one woman. We have every reason to expect, therefore, that the entities of the following line will also be of the same number. If “your seed” is plural, referring to a collective group, then “her seed” must also be plural. But since syntactical elements indicate that the woman’s seed is singular, referring to an individual, then we must interpret “your seed,” the seed of the Serpent, as likewise referring to an individual.

This inference is justified, apart from some contextual indication that militates against it, and we find no such indication. Now, as many expositors have pointed out, the Serpent (if we accept that he is none other than Satan) is incapable of begetting descendants in the same sense as the woman. So far as Scripture tells us (speculations about Genesis 6.4 notwithstanding), created spirits, whether holy or fallen, cannot reproduce. Therefore, we understand that the seed of the Serpent must be a spiritual descendant, that is, an offspring *by an allegiance of wills*, not by the begetting of a new infant being. Thus, Jesus could rightly say to His murderous enemies, “You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father” (Jn 8.44). The Jews to whom Jesus spoke were not biological descendants of the devil, but were wittingly or unwittingly subscribing to the devil’s agenda. We can expect the same of the Serpent’s coming champion.

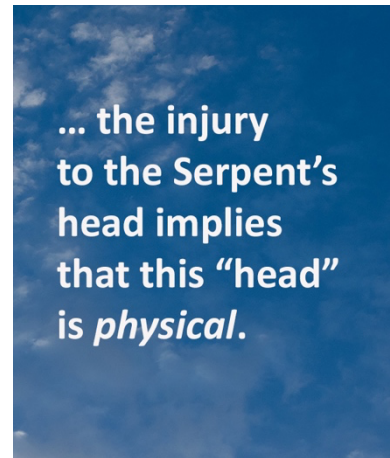
Anatomical Parts Imply Individuality And Physicality

Now let us consider the significance of the anatomical references in Genesis 3.15. First, while both anatomical references express extended meaning *beyond that of bodily parts*, they nevertheless implicitly reinforce the idea of each seed’s individuality.¹¹⁷⁷ This individuality is already established for the seed of the woman by the independent pronoun and the verbal suffix that refer to him, but the term *heel* strengthens the impression of individuality, since a heel is normally associated

¹¹⁷⁷ Waltke and Fredricks, whose logic is somewhat opaque, write, in *Genesis*, p. 93, “But since only the head of the serpent is represented as crushed, we expect an individual to deliver the fatal blow and to be struck uniquely on his heel.”

with an individual in Scripture (e.g. Job 18.9; Ps 41.9).¹¹⁷⁸ More importantly, the possession of a heel *that can be wounded* establishes the seed of the woman as a physical seed, a biological descendant, as opposed to a purely spiritual associate. Spirits, divine and created, can have feet (at least when visibly manifested, Is 6.2), and presumably heels, but not heels that can be wounded.

But this raises the question of the Serpent's "head." Does the reference to his head likewise establish the Serpent as a physical being? No. The Scriptures implicitly teach us that "the devil ... is not ... flesh and blood," but a member of "the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph 6.11-12). Therefore, though we reasonably infer that the Serpent, Satan, like the holy angels, manifests himself with a "head" when he appears to people, we assume that like his spiritual heels his spiritual head cannot be wounded. Nevertheless, **the injury to the Serpent's head implies that this "head" is physical.** The parallelism of Genesis 3.15 again influences our interpretation: if the heel of the woman's seed is physical (susceptible to wounding), then we can reasonably infer that the head of the Serpent is physical. How can this be?



"Your Seed" And "Your Head" Point To Future Antichrist

The working assumption of many commentators is that "your head," in the final couplet of Genesis 3.15, either refers literally to the heads of reptiles, or metaphorically to whatever aspect of Satan is vital to his existence. But let us consider: if the seed of the woman is revealed in time to be Jesus Christ, then at what stage of his existence did He possess a heel susceptible to wounding? He had no such heel as the eternal Logos, but only when He became the incarnate "**man** of sorrows" (Is 53.3). It follows that the Serpent, a non-physical spirit, will only have a physical "head" in his counterfeit incarnation as "the **man** of lawlessness,"

¹¹⁷⁸ The term *heel* (עֲקֵב) in Jos 8.13 has the nuance of an army's *rear guard* (a group), but it is the rear guard of an individual, Joshua.

the Antichrist (2Th 2.3-10). Interestingly, the Hebrew word *head* (רֹאשׁ) has a wider semantic field than the word *heel*, and often refers to the chief or leader of a group, often in a political or military context.¹¹⁷⁹ It appears, therefore, that both *head* and *heel* in Genesis 3.15 refer to the two individual seeds *in their human manifestation*: the Seed of the woman in His human-divine incarnation as **the Christ**, and the seed of the Serpent in his manifestation as Satan’s chief or leader of humanity’s penultimate rebellion, **the Antichrist**. In other words, the “head” of the Serpent is not a part of the Serpent’s spiritual “anatomy,” but is the Serpent’s human champion.¹¹⁸⁰ Let us note that this interpretation does not detract from the literal meaning of the terms *head* and *heel*. The Hebrew word רֹאשׁ has the literal meaning of *chief* or *leader* while simultaneously carrying the nuance of *the uppermost* or *vital part*. Likewise, the term עֶקֶב literally means *heel* while simultaneously carrying the nuance of *vulnerable part* (Ge 49.17,19; Job 18.9; Ps 56.6/HB 56.7), which for Jesus Christ was His humanity.

Someone might protest that interpreting the Serpent’s “head” as *his human champion* precludes a decisive wound to the Serpent himself. However, the books of Daniel and Revelation tell us that the wound to Satan’s human representative, while not ending the Serpent himself, is indeed the decisive blow to the Satan’s reign over humanity. The vision of Daniel 7 tells us that it is precisely at the moment of the destruction of the “little horn” (Da 7.8),¹¹⁸¹ that the usurped dominion over “all the peoples [and] nations ... under the whole heaven” is *forever* returned to the “One like a Son of Man” (Da 7.13-14) and to redeemed humanity (Da 7.24-27). Likewise, in the book of Revelation we see that it is the destruction

¹¹⁷⁹ E.g. Ex 6,.25; 18.25; Nu 7.2; **10.4**; 14.4; **Dt 20.9**; **Jdg 10.18**; **11.8-9**; 2Sa 22.44; **23.8,18**; Is 7.8-9; **Ho 1.11**.

¹¹⁸⁰ Though his exposition is confused and antipapal, Rand Winburn recognized in his article, “Forensic Science and the Antichrist,” in the Journal Of Biblical Apologetics, Vol. 3, p. 57, that “The [Beast] depicted in [Revelation] ... is that *head* of Satan’s kingdom [who] would be wounded ... (Ge 3.15 ...). This Beast is the Antichrist.”

¹¹⁸¹ Those who are futurists in their eschatology have long recognized the “little horn” in the book of Daniel as the one whom the apostle John would call “the Antichrist” (1Jn 2.18) and the “the beast” (Re 19.19-20).

of the beast (= the Antichrist) and his forces in Revelation 19.20-21 that occasions the incarceration of the Serpent in Revelation 20.1-3, thus ending the Serpent's usurped reign over the earth.¹¹⁸² No, the devil is not killed or annihilated as a result of this blow to his "head," but *his reign is ended and the day of the LORD's reign is begun*.¹¹⁸³

Again someone might object, saying, "It is not at the apocalypse but at the 'hour' of Christ's suffering and death that He inflicts the decisive wound, and that wound is struck directly against the Satan, not against the Antichrist. After all, Jesus said, 'The hour has come ... Now judgment is upon this world, now the ruler of this world will be cast out.'"¹¹⁸⁴ We respond by saying that it is true that by His suffering and death Christ struck a decisive wound against the devil. In fact, it was a wound apart from which the subsequent destruction of the Antichrist and imprisonment of the Serpent would not be possible. However, it is important that we understand this wound, inflicted against the devil by Christ's death, resurrection and ascension, as a *judicial* one. In any redemption occurring in the biblical world, the legalities must be settled first, then the redeemer can take physical possession of the redeemed persons and property. As we said above in ch. 7, **the restoration of "the kingdom of the world" to Christ, which occurred *judicially* at His resurrection and ascension (Da 7.13-14), will occur *actually* at His *parousia* (Re 11.15)**. If we look closely at John 12.31, we see (A) the emphatic repetition of the adverb *now*, and (B) the juxtaposition of

¹¹⁸² Some commentators want to see a chronological break between Re 19.21 and Re 20.1, but there is not objective basis for inserting a chronological gap between these two passages. When we take them at face value as contiguous, we see clearly the connection between the destruction of the Antichrist and the end of the Serpent's reign.

¹¹⁸³ It is true that the devil will be released and raise a final brief rebellion at the end of the thousand years (See "The Final Rebellion, The Devil Destroyed," in ch. 7 of this book). However, he will do this only as a rebel without authority and without a kingdom (as he was when he first approached Eve). As E. W. Bullinger wrote, *The Companion Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 25, "When it is said [Ge 3.15], 'He shall crush thy head,' it means something more than a skull of bone, and brain, and hair. It means that all Satan's plans and plots, policy and purposes, will one day be finally crushed and ended, never more to mar or to hinder the purposes of God."

¹¹⁸⁴ Jn 12.23-31.

a present tense verb *is*, and a future tense verb *will be cast out*. The adverb *now* connects both the judicial trial of the rebellious worldly system and the casting out of Satan to the hour of Christ's suffering. However, while that hour *is* the time in which the worldly system is judged reprehensible, it *will be* only the time at which Satan, "the ruler of this world," begins to be cast out. The future tense verb, ἐκβληθήσεται, *will be cast out*, has an ingressive *aktionsart*,¹¹⁸⁵ emphasizing the beginning of the verbal action. As history and Scripture confirm, although the redeemed have made spiritual gains against the usurper since the first century, "the ruler of this world" is not yet entirely cast out. As we noted in the "Already/Not Yet" table at the end of chapter 2, all things have been subjected to Christ judicially (Eph 1.20-22), but "we do not yet see all things subjected to him" practically (Heb 2.8-9), and while believers can already cast out demons (Lk 10.17), Satan is not yet bound and removed from humanity's domain. So, we reiterate that while the suffering of our Lord Jesus provided the judicial basis for the ending of the Serpent's usurped rule, it is precisely at the moment of the destruction of the Serpent's seed, his "head," the Antichrist, by the Seed of the woman, Jesus Christ, that the Serpent's reign is forever finished *practically*.

We are not the first to interpret the seed of the Serpent in Genesis 3.15 as referring to the individual whom the apostle John would one day label as the Antichrist (1Jn 2.18). Arthur W. Pink argued on the basis of biblical parallels for the idea that Genesis 3.15 was the first prophecy of Antichrist: "The very first prophecy of the Bible takes note of him, for in Ge 3.15 direct reference is made to the Serpent's 'Seed.'" ¹¹⁸⁶ Pink continued, "Is Christ called 'the Seed of the woman,' then the Antichrist will be 'the seed of the serpent.' (Ge 3.15) Is the Son of God also the Son of Man, then the son of Satan will also be the 'Man of Sin.' (2Th 2.3) ... 'Thy seed,' Satan's seed, refers to a specific individual, just as 'her seed' refers to a

¹¹⁸⁵ This *aktionsart* (kind of verbal action) is also called inceptive, incipient, or inchoative. Cf. Leah's words in Ge 29.32 LXX, νῦν ἀγαπήσει με ὁ ἀνὴρ μου, "now my husband will begin to love me."

¹¹⁸⁶ *The Antichrist*, p. 10.

specific Individual.”¹¹⁸⁷ Mark Hitchcock interprets similarly: “The offspring of the woman in [Ge 3.15] is a clear reference to the coming Messiah or Deliverer, who would crush the head of the serpent once and for all. But notice that there is a reference here to ‘your offspring,’ or the offspring of Satan, who would be the arch-adversary of the woman’s offspring. For [some], Genesis 3.15 is seen as the first prophecy of the coming Messiah as well as the first prophecy of the Antichrist.”¹¹⁸⁸ Also, Duffield and Van Cleave write, “The first prophetic reference to Antichrist is probably found in Genesis 3.15: ‘And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between THY SEED and HER SEED....’ Christ is the SEED of woman. Antichrist is the SEED of Satan”¹¹⁸⁹

The Advantages Of This Interpretation

The authors just cited focused on the Serpent’s *seed* as a prophecy of Antichrist, without delving into the matter of the Serpent’s *head*. However, interpreting the Serpent’s *head* as also a reference to the coming Antichrist has the advantage of allowing us to read the pronouncement against the Serpent as *elaborating upon the enmity* between the two seeds, rather than just mentioning this enmity and immediately dropping the mysterious Serpent’s seed from the equation. In other words, this interpretation of the Serpent’s “head” allows us to see *both seeds mentioned* in both part 4 and part 5 of the pronouncement.

If we understand the Serpent’s seed (אֲרֵרָע) and the Serpent’s head (רֹאשׁ) as referring to *one and the same* thing, i.e., to Satan’s human champion in the war, then the Proto-Evangel not only tells us that *there will be enmity* between humanity’s Champion and the Serpent’s champion, but that the Champion on the side of humanity will strike the decisive blow against the champion whom the Serpent will put forth. Another advantage of interpreting the Serpent’s “head” in this manner, is that **it allows the Proto-Evangel to present a scenario confirmed very specifically by subsequent revelation.** The shoot “from the

¹¹⁸⁷ Ibid., pp. 47-48.

¹¹⁸⁸ *The Complete Book Of Bible Prophecy*, p. 194.

¹¹⁸⁹ *Foundations Of Pentecostal Theology*, p. 536.

stem of Jesse ... will slay the wicked [one]" (Is 11.1,4). When the "man of lawlessness" is revealed, "the Lord will slay [him] with the breath of His mouth and bring [him] to an end by the appearance of His coming" (2Th 2.3-10). The Antichrist, the beast of Revelation with his wicked federation, "will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them, because He is Lord of lords and King of kings" (Re 17.11-14). The heaven will be opened and He who is called "Faithful and True ... with a robe dipped in blood, and ... called The Word of God" will come with the armies of heaven, and the beast will be "seized, and ... thrown alive into the lake of fire" (Re 19.11-20).

Interestingly, while the Scriptures ascribe *direct agency* to Messiah in the destruction of Antichrist, nowhere do we read of the Antichrist harming Christ physically and directly. Also, though we know that "the Son of God appeared ... to destroy the works of the devil" (1Jn 3.8), nowhere do we read specifically of Christ killing or destroying the devil, the Serpent himself. The devil will be finally thrown into the lake of fire, but we are not told by whom (Re 20.10). On the other hand, we are convinced of Satanic agency in instigating Christ's crucifixion (Lk 22.3; Jn 6.70; 8.40-44; 13.2,27). It appears, therefore, that subsequent biblical revelation supports the accuracy of the Proto-Evangel's identification of the inflictors and sufferers of the predicted woundings, as we understand them:

He (her Seed, Christ) will wound → Your (Satan's) head (the Antichrist)

You (Satan) will wound → His (Christ's) heel (Christ's mortal body)

The Collective Interpretations Of The Two Seeds

Of course none of this talk about Christ and Antichrist in the Proto-Evangel has any basis if we adopt one of the popular *collective interpretations* of the two seeds.¹¹⁹⁰ If we adopt a *purely* collective view, then the two seeds are groups of

¹¹⁹⁰ In the purely collective interpretation of the two seeds, the *he* (אִנִּי) that follows the mention of the two seeds becomes a masculine collective, as in Genesis 6.3, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, because he (אִנִּי) also is flesh ...," or a genderless collective *it*, as in Ge 9.3, "Every moving thing if it (אִנִּי) is alive shall be food for you," RAG translation.

spiritual or physical offspring, and the pronoun *he* of Genesis 3.15b should be translated *it* to indicate that the woman's offspring as a united whole will wound the Serpent's head. If we compromise and adopt the view that the two seeds in **part four** of the proclamation against the Serpent are *collective*, but *an individual representative* of the woman's collective seed emerges in the proclamation's **part five**, then we can salvage a messianic reference in **part five**, and simultaneously preclude questions about who the Serpent's individual seed might be (i.e., questions that would arise if we were to take the seeds in **part four** as both referring to individuals).

However, Hebrew grammar and poetic parallelism do not permit us to interpret the seeds of Genesis 3.15 as "all plural collectives," nor to see them as "plural collectives plus an emerging individual." **The predictions of the Proto-Evangel speak specifically about conflicts between individuals:** the conflict between the Serpent and Eve, and the later conflict between their respective individual seeds.¹¹⁹¹ Nevertheless, for our readers who might have further interest in the arguments for the *collectives* and *collectives-plus* interpretations of the two seeds in the Proto-Evangel, we provide the following inset that lists the arguments in support of these views and then explains why those arguments are invalid. **To our readers who feel no need for further technicalities, we offer the invitation to skip forward to our conclusions about the Proto-Evangel and its immediate context. These conclusion follow the inset.**

The Collective And Collective-Plus Interpretations Of The Seeds

Arguments In Support

Commentators who prefer the collective or collective-plus interpretations of the two seeds of Genesis 3.15, share arguments that include the following:

¹¹⁹¹ We do not imply that others, besides the primary individuals, won't be drawn into the conflict. On the contrary, through the millennia countless people have been drawn to side with the Serpent or to side with the Eve and her godly descendants and her messianic Seed.

1. Although singular in form, the Hebrew word zera' (זֶרַע) has a collective meaning in the vast majority of its instances in the Old Testament, and in these instances refers to a group of descendants or to posterity in general.
2. "... since all the other curses and consequences in [Ge 3] verses 14–19 are perpetual and long term, it seems odd to think of [Ge 3.15] as pronouncing an isolated occasion of enmity between an individual seed of woman and an individual seed of the snake at a later date."¹¹⁹²
3. "... the struggle between Cain and 'sin' that is crouching at his door (Ge 4.7) seems to illustrate what [Ge] 3.15 has in mind: a battle for humans to obey God in spite of temptation. It seems most natural, then, to interpret Ge 3.15 as referring more generally to the continual enmity between evil and the sons and daughters of Eve in general."¹¹⁹³
4. "Since the woman's seed struggles against the serpent's seed, we infer that [the woman's seed] has a collective sense."¹¹⁹⁴
5. "The seed of the serpent is not literal.... Neither is the seed demons, for ... Satan does not father demons. Rather, the seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity whom he has led into rebellion against God."¹¹⁹⁵
6. In support of the **"collectives plus individual" view** of the seeds, Michael Rydelnik writes, "... the term 'seed' ... **can oscillate** from the collective to the individual usage."¹¹⁹⁶ An earlier proponent of this view, Walter C. Kaiser, puts it this way: "the word [seed, zera'] designates the whole line of descendants as a unit, yet it is deliberately **flexible enough** to denote ... one person who epitomizes the whole group One such seed [in Ge 3.15] is the line of the woman as contrasted with the opposing seed which is the line of Satan's followers. And **then surprisingly the text announces a male descendant** who will ultimately win a crushing victory over Satan himself."¹¹⁹⁷ Waltke and

¹¹⁹² Abernethy and Goswell, *God's Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 13.

¹¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁴ Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, p. 93.

¹¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁹⁶ Michael Rydelnik, in *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 139-140, emphasis added.

¹¹⁹⁷ TWOT, p. 253, emphasis added. In *The Book Of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, p. 198, Victor P. Hamilton makes an understatement when he writes, "It would be difficult to prove that the word [zera'] is flexible enough to denote both a group of descendants and an individual who

Fredricks, after offering argument number 4 above, in support of the collective interpretation of the two seeds, continue by saying, “But since only the head of the serpent is represented as crushed, we expect an individual to deliver the fatal blow and to be struck uniquely on his heel.” With this statement, these authors also join the ranks of proponents for the “collectives plus individual” view.

7. Scripture indicates that there are many spiritual offspring of the devil (Jn 8.44; 1Jn 3.8) beginning with Cain (1Jn 3.12), and likewise many spiritual offspring of the woman (σπέρματος, Re 12.17), beginning with Seth (זֶרַע , Ge 4.25). Furthermore, the long line of elect “seeds,” beginning with Isaac (Ge 17.19; 21.12) and continuing on through David and his descendants (וְלִיזָרְעוֹ , 2Sa 22.51) implies that the decreed conflict between “your seed and her seed” is an ages-long war between two spiritual lines, not just between two individuals.¹¹⁹⁸

Evidence Against These Arguments

Let us briefly consider the problems attached to each of these arguments.

1. **The first argument** only supports that probability that *zera'* (זֶרַע) in the Old Testament is apt to have a collective meaning. But it simultaneously indicates that *zera'* doesn't *always* have a collective meaning, and therefore implies that in Ge 3.15 it may have a singular meaning. Other instances of *zera'* in Genesis have a singular meaning (Ge 4.25; 21.13; 22.17,18; 24.60; 38.8-9), why not the instances in Ge 3.15?
2. **The second argument** is correct in recognizing long-term consequences attached to the sentences pronounced against the Serpent (humiliation “all the days of your life”), the woman (pain in childbirth and relational stresses), and Adam (“cursed is the ground”). However, this argument disingenuously obscures the fact that in each case **the consequences pronounced upon the individual are primary**, and any consequences to others are secondary. Furthermore, the only explicitly *perpetual* consequence is that pronounced

is representative of that group. At least one is hard-pressed to find examples of this flexibility in the OT itself”

¹¹⁹⁸ Cf. K. A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11*, pp. 247-248.

upon the Serpent (“all the days of your life”); in the pronouncements against the woman and Adam, we only recognize the long-term effects for posterity after the fact. Therefore, properly recognizing the emphasis upon the individuals to whom these pronouncements are made, makes it entirely plausible that a prediction might be given in the pronouncements about individual offspring of the original “combatants,” offspring who would appear at a later date.

3. **The third argument** rightly recognizes a connection between Cain’s struggles and the enmity decreed between the Serpent and the woman. That connection is natural and expected, since Eve will certainly teach her children that the Serpent is an enemy who must be resisted. However, to use Cain’s struggles as a basis to argue that the two seeds should be reduced — on the one hand — to humanity in general and — on the other hand — to evil and temptation, goes far beyond the textual evidence. This conclusion is a non sequitur.
4. **Argument four** comes across as a grasping at straws. Neither the fact of the struggle, nor the fact that it is between the woman’s seed and the Serpent’s, tells us anything about whether the term seed has a collective or an individual sense in Ge 3.15. There is no logic to this argument — *unless* the exegete has already assumed that the seed of the Serpent has a collective sense; then the parallelism would imply that the woman’s seed has a collective sense as well. But exegesis based on an a priori assumption carries no interpretive weight.

Nevertheless, let us look again at the idea that the woman’s seed “has a collective sense,” referring to her descendants as a group. As T. Desmond Alexander writes,

If a plural interpretation of the woman’s offspring is adopted in [Ge 3.15], as many commentators favor, this must surely imply that all of Eve’s descendants will be responsible for the defeat of the serpent. This is the conclusion of Abernethy and Goswell, who write, “Victory in [Ge 3.15], then, anticipates the victory of humanity over evil through obedience to God resulting in restored relationships with one another, God, and creation.”¹¹⁹⁹ Such a reading, however, sits uncomfortably with the evidence provided in

¹¹⁹⁹ Abernethy and Goswell, *God’s Messiah in the Old Testament*, p. 13.

the rest of Genesis, especially the account of the flood in chapters 6–9 where only Noah is viewed as being righteous.¹²⁰⁰

Indeed, the idea that the woman's posterity as a whole, or even in general, will triumph "over evil through obedience to God," is wildly optimistic and biblically unsupported.

Let us note that Alexander's criticism is apropos for all who interpret the seed of the woman as having collective meaning throughout, without attempting to pull an individual out of the group to do the final head wounding. If nothing but the woman's collective posterity is in view, then how can we possibly imagine that humanity in general will decisively wound the Serpent's head? As John Calvin understood, if the Serpent's head is wounded by a group, then that group must be a subset of the woman's collective seed, namely the "Church of God."¹²⁰¹ But the text disallows us taking a collective subset out of the woman's seed for our exegesis: **the seed of the woman is either an individual or her whole posterity.**

Someone might argue that just as not every member of the collective *zera'* of Abraham inherited the holy land (Ge 13.15; 15.18), not every member of the collective *zera'* of the woman will participate in wounding the Serpent's head. That may be, if we assume a collective meaning for the woman's seed, but we would still have no basis for asserting which subset of her seed is the triumphant group. Genesis 3.15 says nothing about the character or era of a hypothetical subset of her posterity. Without Scripture telling us explicitly, or by a preponderance of implicit passages, that a particular group of humanity will deal the decisive blow against the Serpent, we are left to only speculate about which subset of the woman's collective seed might be envisioned by Genesis 3.15 as wounding the Serpent's head.¹²⁰² The issue is moot, though, since the subsequent Scriptures tell us that neither the church nor any other collective subset of fallen humanity deals the deathblow to Satan's rule.

¹²⁰⁰ Alexander, *Genesis*, pp. 114-115.

¹²⁰¹ *Commentary on the First Book of Moses Called Genesis*, p. 171.

¹²⁰² Ro 16.20, though it echoes Ge 3.15, identifies no such group; in Romans it is God who does the crushing. Nor are the "brethren" of Re 12.10-13 identified as the champions envisioned in the Proto-Evangel; even though they "overcome" the dragon, they are not credited with throwing him down from heaven (that is done by angels), nor with launching any other decisive blow against him.

5. **The fifth argument** commits the false-dilemma fallacy in order to arrive at a non sequitur. If we allow that “the seed of the serpent is not literal,”¹²⁰³ its non-literality does not define what it must mean; a non-literal entity can be interpreted in countless ways. This argument collapses into the affirmation of a mere opinion, namely, that “the seed of the serpent refers to natural humanity.”
6. **The sixth argument**, as we stated, is an attempt to support the “**collectives plus individual**” view of the seeds. This argument, in essence, proposes that the word *seed* (זֶרַע, *zera'*) in Ge 3.15 “shifts” or “oscillates” in mid-verse from a plural meaning to a singular meaning. As Michael Rydelnik writes, in Genesis 3.15a the word *seed* “is used in a general sense, referring to the collective offspring of both the woman (meaning humanity) and the tempter (meaning his followers), [and] ... Immediately afterwards, ... **the verse shifts the meaning of seed** from a collective group to a particular individual descendant of the woman. The evidence for this is that a singular pronoun and a singular verb are used to refer to the seed.”¹²⁰⁴ Let us see clearly what Michael Rydelnik is proposing, namely that, in Ge 3.15a1 we have,

זֶרְעֶךָ, “your seed,” the **collective seed** of the Serpent,

and in Ge 3.15a2 we have,

זֶרְעָהּ, “her seed,” the **collective seed** of the woman.

Then, the pronoun הוּא, *he* and the singular verb יִשְׁפֹּךְ, *shall wound you*, in Ge 3.15b1, *retroactively* “shift” the meaning of Ge 3.15a2 to:

זֶרְעָהּ, “her seed,” the **individual seed** of the woman,

However, this is grammatically impossible. **No pronoun or verb has the power to “shift” the number of an antecedent noun**, even if that noun is a singular/plural noun that can be used either as a singular or a collective term. If the number of a noun is plural, a following pronoun or verb cannot change it to singular. If the number of a noun is singular, a following pronoun or verb cannot change it to

¹²⁰³ Lexically there is no reason for not taking it literally as referring to *spiritual* “offspring.”

¹²⁰⁴ Michael Rydelnik, in *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 139-140, emphasis added.

plural. Instead, pronouns always (and verbs sometimes) *confirm* the number and gender of their antecedent noun (see the “Syntactical Rules” inset above).

No wonder, then, that Walter C. Kaiser did not offer grammatical details when he wrote that, one seed in Ge 3.15 “is the line of the woman as contrasted with the opposing seed which is the line of Satan’s followers. And **then surprisingly the text announces a male descendant** who will ultimately win a crushing victory over Satan himself.”¹²⁰⁵ Kaiser never explained *just how* the text “surprisingly ... announces a [singular] male descendant” This omission brings to mind the classic 1977 Sidney Harris cartoon, in which two scholars stand at a blackboard, upon which a lengthy mathematical formula is written. In the center of the formula are the words, “**then a miracle occurs ...**” One scholar says to the other, “I think you should be more explicit here in step two.”

We know what it looks like when the Scriptures “announces” an individual who emerges from a group. Consider another messianic prophecy from a subsequent poetic section of the Pentateuch:

I see him, but not now;
I behold him, but not near;
A star shall come forth from Jacob,
A scepter shall rise from Israel,
And shall crush through the forehead of Moab,
And tear down all the sons of Sheth.¹²⁰⁶

In this verse we have a collective use of the proper noun, Jacob. This noun does not refer to the individual man long deceased, but to his collective progeny, that is, the whole nation of Israel, visible from the top of mount Peor as they encamped in the wasteland below. To announce “a male descendant who will ultimately win a crushing victory over” Moab, the text uses explicit prepositional phrases: this champion “shall come forth from Jacob, ... shall rise from Israel.” The language leaves no doubt about their being two protagonists in the text: a collective entity and an individual who emerges from that group.¹²⁰⁷ Therefore, if the intent of Ge 3.15 were to describe a collective group and then indicate that an important

¹²⁰⁵ TWOT, p. 253, emphasis added.

¹²⁰⁶ Nu 24.17.

¹²⁰⁷ Cf. Is 11.1.

individual would emerge from that group, we would expect the verse to read something like this:

And enmity I will put
between you and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
A son from her seed¹²⁰⁸ shall wound you, *your* head,
and you yourself shall wound him, *his* heel.

This kind of language, not a subsequent singular pronoun and singular verb, would announce a male descendant emerging from the supposedly collective seed of the woman.¹²⁰⁹

We do not understand why the proponents of the “collectives plus an individual” interpretation of the seeds in Ge 3.15 ignore relevant biblical examples of sentence structuring and violate the grammatical rules governing the Hebrew pronoun. We reemphasize that a pronoun can neither retroactively shift the number of an antecedent noun, nor by itself announce or create a new subject. The reason for this grammatical fact is that pronouns “are inherently deictic,”¹²¹⁰ that is, they are governed by their immediate speech context, and normally refer *back* to an antecedent noun. A pronoun “reactivates” characters already mentioned in the story.¹²¹¹ In other words, the pronoun *he* in Genesis 3.15b cannot be detached from its antecedent noun, *her seed*, nor alter that noun’s meaning. ***He and her seed are one and the same entity; whatever her seed is, that is what He is.***

¹²⁰⁸ The emphatic fronting of the pronoun *he* militates against suggesting a more neutral phrase like, “One from her seed”

¹²⁰⁹ There are rare verses in Scripture in which a noun with singular inflection is used twice, once with plural meaning and once with singular meaning, thereby introducing a new individual entity (Jdg 9.2; 1Sa 14.24). However, **the inflexible rule in these cases is that *the noun itself* is repeated to express the second meaning**; the second meaning cannot be expressed solely by a pronoun or verb.

¹²¹⁰ Merwe, et al., *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, 2nd ed., p. 291.

¹²¹¹ Ibid., p. 295.

As already stated, although no pronominal element or verb inflection has the power to “shift” *the number* of an antecedent noun, pronominal elements *do confirm the number* of their antecedent noun. We see this in Genesis 15.13:

“A sojourner will be **your seed** (זֶרַעְךָ) in a land not *belonging to them*, and they will have served as slaves”¹²¹²

In this verse, the word *seed* (*zera'*) is in its normal, singular form (with the 2nd p. sing. suffix), and the descriptive noun *sojourner* and the verb *will be* also have singular inflections in the Hebrew text, agreeing with the grammatical number of *seed*. However, it is not an individual seed (descendant) that is in view here, but a great many descendants of Abraham. Therefore, the elaboration upon the initial prediction switches immediately to the plural form of the pronominal suffix — *them* — and the plural verb *they-will-have-served-as-slaves*. The pronominal suffix *them* clarifies and confirms that the seed in view will not be a particular individual, but that the whole collective offspring of Abraham will suffer enslavement.

What all this means for the exegesis of Genesis 3.15 is that:

- If “your seed” and “her seed” in Ge 3.15a are collective plural nouns, then the *he* in Ge 3.15b is a collective pronoun and should be translated *it* to convey that a group — not an individual — is in view.
- If “he” in Ge 3.15b refers to a particular individual seed, then “your seed” and “her seed” in Ge 3.15a should be interpreted as referring to individuals (the parallelism in Ge 3.15 implies that the number of “your seed” and “her seed” will agree).
- Since the pronominal elements used in reference to “her seed” are all singular, and are decisive in establishing the number of “her seed” as singular and as referring to a particular individual, all the seeds in Ge 3.15 are particular individuals, including the seed of the Serpent.

We have individual seeds or collective seeds in Genesis 3.15, not both.¹²¹³

¹²¹² RAG translation.

¹²¹³ Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope*, pp. 139-140, supports the “oscillation” idea by citing 2Sa 7.12, but the use of *seed* (זֶרַע) in this context (2Sa 7.12-16) is followed by *eleven* grammatical indications of *singular number*. There is no indication whatsoever that in this prophecy David’s “seed” is collective in meaning. The seed in view is Solomon. The prophecy

7. **The seventh argument** does not prove a collective meaning for the seeds in Genesis 3.15, but only provides evidence that the Serpent has many spiritual offspring, and that the woman also has many offspring who have embraced her enmity toward the Serpent. However, recognizing that Scripture describes both sons of the devil and human champions who have warred against him can be instructive for us if we accept such examples as **biblical types**. A biblical type (τύπος or παραβολή) is a historical person, event, thing or institution, that appears in the biblical text and serves as a pattern that foreshadows (or commemorates) something similar but of greater importance in the biblical redemptive story.¹²¹⁴ For example, Adam was the first type of Christ (Ro 5.14), and Isaac, in his willingness to be sacrificed, in his carrying the sacrificial wood on his back, and in his virtual resurrection, was another (Heb 11.17-19).

We understand, though, that however many biblical types may exist that foreshadow something of the life and work of Jesus Christ, they do not negate that He alone fulfills, i.e., *makes full*, the Bible's messianic prophecies. Likewise, no matter how "many antichrists have appeared" (1Jn 2.18), in biblical or in subsequent history, only "the man of lawlessness ... whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders, and with all

is not "applied 'individually' to each of the sons of David who assume his throne," as Rydelnik affirms (citing W. Wifall), for God's lovingkindness (v. 15) *does depart* from most of those sons. Rydelnik also cites Is 6.13 in support of the oscillation theory, but *seed* (זרע) in this verse clearly has a collective meaning, referring to the Jewish remnant, the "tenth portion" left in the land. In neither of Rydelnik's citations is the relevant noun repeated in order to make a number oscillation possible, according to the rule for this phenomenon mentioned above in the inset.

¹²¹⁴ Ray Zuck, in *Basic Bible Interpretation*, lists five characteristics to help us recognize a biblical type, to which we add a sixth:

1. Resemblance, similarity or correspondence between the type and its fulfilment.
2. Historical reality in both the type and its fulfilment. (This would exclude symbolic imagery as typological.)
3. A prefiguring or predictive foreshadowing of the fulfilment by the type.
4. A heightening in which the fulfilment is greater than the type.
5. Divine design (presumably suggested by the unlikelihood of the degree of correspondence having occurred by chance).
6. Something like the bread and wine of the Lord's supper that commemorates a redemptive reality; types can look backward as well as forward.

the deception of wickedness for those who perish” (2Th 2.3-10) will fulfill the many prophecies about this ultimate “seed” of the devil. The great value of biblical types, especially those about either Christ or antichrist, is that they each give us insight about the one they foreshadow. Therefore, while neither Cain (1Jn 3.12) nor the antagonistic Jews of John 8.44 *fulfill* the prophecy of the Serpent’s seed in Genesis 3.15, they do provide insight into the character of that still coming, ultimate human “head” of Satanic enmity toward the prophesied Seed of the woman. Likewise, though neither Seth (Ge 4.25), nor Isaac, nor king David *fulfilled* the prophecy of the woman’s Seed who would deal the decisive blow against the Serpent’s head, they all foreshadowed the great coming Champion for humanity, and provided insight about His character.

Conclusions

If we imagine Genesis chapters 1 to 3 as a single sentence, then the switch to poetry in Genesis 3.14 provides a giant semi-colon toward the end of the sentence. What follows the semi-colon, is the major poetic unit of Genesis 3.14-19 and five more verses of narrative. These final verses of Genesis 3 present us with the theological truths we must derive from the preceding narrative, and also provide us with glimpses of the future to guide our steps and give us hope.

Looking Back

The truths we must learn from Genesis 1.1 to 3.13 are sobering. The first is that God is holy, and “will by no means clear the guilty” (Ex 34.7; Nu 14.18; Nah 1.3). The interpretive poetry of Genesis 3.14-19 consists entirely of pronouncements of judgment upon the three rebels in Eden. The judgments decreed were not token punishments, like mere slaps on the hand to express the Father’s displeasure. Instead they are judgments of everlasting abject humiliation for the Serpent and sentences upon Adam and Eve that entail suffering for themselves and all their descendants. Up until this first major poetic unit interprets its preceding text for us, we are not explicitly told in the story whether the consequences for eating the forbidden fruit derive from the fruit, in that it is poisonous, or from disobedience to the LORD God. Now we learn that God’s instruction about “the tree of the

knowledge of good and evil” was not simply paternal counsel, but involved a divine ordinance, and that the violation of any divine command will be brought to account by the LORD Himself.

The second sobering truth is that no person who sins does so in a relational vacuum. In our time we have often heard the refrain, usually in connection with sexual choices, “What does it matter what we do, so long as we’re not hurting anybody?” However what the biblically illiterate don’t realize is that in God’s world our sins not only adversely affect the people around us, but in a mysterious way they even affect our environment, including the animals that inhabit it. Our sins have a rippling and cumulative effect, and if unrepented of, they harm generations.

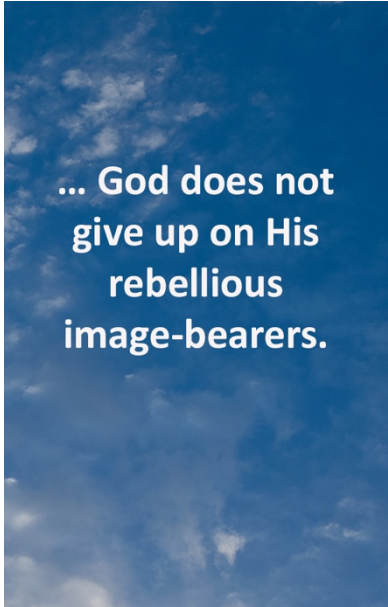
A third truth, known since the time of Adam and Eve, and succinctly articulated millennia later by the apostle Paul, is that Satan masquerades as an angel of light (2Co 11.3,14). It is clear in Genesis 3.14-15 that God, while having sentenced the Serpent to perpetual humiliation, did not at that time remove him from the sphere of humanity. Instead, God decreed an ongoing enmity between the Serpent and the woman, and between their respective seeds. The battle with the Serpent in the garden was only the first engagement; the war will continue until the promised Seed of the woman ends it with a wound to the Serpent’s head. Therefore, all intervening generations must be prepared to resist temptations that emanate from someone pretending to have our best interests at heart.

Looking Ahead

God Is A Redeemer

The heartening theological message of the first major poetic unit of the Pentateuch is that **God does not give up on His rebellious image-bearers**. This is the message of the Proto-Evangel and the verses that follow it in Genesis 3. God will not allow the human race to die out, but promises children. Most importantly, one

of Eve's descendants will end the Serpent's oppression of humanity. Also, God's sentences of hardship for the woman and Adam will turn out for good in the rebuilding of their character. Furthermore, God continues His compassionate care for Adam and Eve by clothing them. Also, though it is not stated in the text, we infer that God taught our first parents the principles of animal sacrifice as a ritual expression of repentance and continued communion with Himself. We note that there is not yet an explicit promise of resurrection in the face of Adam and Eve's newly decreed mortality, but the hope of perduring relationship with their Creator appears to us as implicit in God's loving actions toward the two sinners.



**... God does not
give up on His
rebellious
image-bearers.**

The Foundation Of “Messianic” Prophecy

With the prediction of a particular Seed who will defeat the Serpent, this first major unit of poetry lays the foundation for the wealth of messianic prophecy that will follow in the Pentateuch and beyond. As John H. Sailhamer observed, “The purpose of [Genesis 3.15] is not to answer that question [of who the seed of the woman is,] but to raise it.”¹²¹⁵ In other words, the Proto-Evangel in Genesis 3.15 piques the curiosity of God's people regarding this coming deliverer. We can imagine the faithful, through the ages of Bible history, eagerly awaiting further revelation about this individual (cf. 1Pe 1.10-11). With each new layer of messianic prophecy to be added, both the anticipation of the coming One and the means to recognize Him would increase. Finally, the day would arrive when people would be

¹²¹⁵ “Genesis,” in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: Genesis–Leviticus (Revised Edition)*, p. 91. James McKeown adds, in *Genesis*, p. 39, “The first readers of Genesis, unacquainted with the centuries of Christian theology, would expect the book of Genesis itself to explicate this promise of ‘seed.’ Since Genesis highlights the special status of one line of descent, a reference to the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman suggests that the remainder of the book will shed further light on this mysterious pronouncement.”

able to say, “We have found the Messiah,” and “We have found Him of whom Moses in the Law and also the Prophets wrote — Jesus of Nazareth ...” (Jn 1.41, 45). This “messianic” prophecy in Genesis 3.15 was the foundation for all that would follow, and presented the initial insight that along with whatever else this promised Seed might accomplish, He would end the war that the Serpent had begun. Though not enlarged upon in this brief prediction, we infer that when the woman’s Seed ends the Serpent’s power, He, the woman’s Seed, will simultaneously restore the usurped dominion of the earth to mankind.¹²¹⁶

The Current And Coming Battle Between Christ And Antichrist

The fact that the individual seeds of Genesis 3.15 — the Antichrist and Christ — will bring their enmity to a crescendo at the apocalypse, does not blind us to the reality of the ages-old, perpetual warfare between the human deputies of the devil and the spiritual children of the Serpent-hating woman. That warfare is real because “the mystery of lawlessness” has long been “already at work” (2Th 2.7) in our world, and “many antichrists have [already] appeared” (1Jn 2.18). Pharaoh, Goliath, Sennacherib, and Nebuchadnezzar arose as antichrists in their time. Likewise, God raised up Moses, David, Isaiah, and Daniel, as holy champions to combat them. We can say that, through their human agents, the spirit of Antichrist and the Spirit of Christ have maintained the decreed enmity between the two seeds of Genesis 3.15 *through the ages*. Obviously this enduring battle has drawn in countless human combatants on both sides. Nevertheless, the war will come to its climax and conclusion when **Antichrist and Christ, *both as incarnate men*, will face one another on the hills around Jerusalem (Zec 14.1-3), to decide once and for all which “line” of the human race will rule the earth forevermore.**

Why have the Scriptures seen fit to make us aware of this cosmic conflict and its end *from the beginning*? Why wasn’t it enough for the Proto-Evangel to

¹²¹⁶ With this point of reference, we surmise that Ge 3.15 provided a bit of the impetus for the kingdom preaching of Jesus (cf. Lk 11.20).

promise that a deliverer would descend from Eve? Did God's people really need to know that an Antichrist would also arise? We answer these questions with another: If the Serpent's first ruse in the Garden of Eden was so effective as to lead the entire human race of the time into rebellion against their Creator, can we imagine that he will he raise up a particular "seed," an individual human likeness of himself, for any other reason than to once again attempt to corrupt the entire human race? The apostle Paul implied that "the man of lawlessness" will appear for this very reason. This spawn of the Serpent will not disguise himself merely as "an angel of light," but will come "displaying himself as being God ... with all [Satanic] power and ... with all the deception of wickedness for those who ... did not received the love of the truth"! If the people of God from earliest times took to heart that another attempt to fatally deceive the human race *at the hands of a seed of the Serpent* could be just around the next corner of time, we would hope that for them to be so forewarned would amount to being spiritually forearmed, both for the final deception of the devil and for any lesser deception that might intervene along the way.