

CWV-101 Topic 3 Overview

Human Nature and Purpose

Introduction

This week you will read in the textbook, the lengthy section of biblical history where humanity relentlessly departs from the path God had intended for them. True wisdom is only found when you are aligned with God's will. People always think they know better. Much of the Old Testament tells of case after case of people and nations departing from following God, and thus departing from a life of wisdom with all the blessings that would accompany it.

In Genesis 3-9, you can find that all did not go so well in the garden for very long. Adam and Eve had been given a number of commands: to be fruitful and multiply (Gen. 1:28), to take dominion over the earth (Gen. 1:28), to tend and care for the garden (Gen. 2:15), to name the animals (Gen. 2:19), and to be faithful to each other (Gen. 2:24). All of these made sense to them, so obedience came easy. But one command, to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17), perhaps did not make sense to them. Satan took advantage of this and tempted Eve, accusing God of holding back from them what was good.

This same test came later to Job, and comes into your life, and you must determine if you love God only for the blessings and obey only when you agree with his agenda, or do you love and obey him even when you do not fully understand or do not like what is happening to you? Satan, "the deceiver of the whole world" (Rev. 12:9 ESV), twists what God says. As he did to Eve (Gen. 3:4-5), so he did to Jesus (Matt. 4:1-11), and so he does to you—raising doubts in your mind as to God's goodness. But the now popular saying makes the truth clear: God is good—all the time. All the time—God is good.

Humanity: Fallen Image Bearers

God's first words to Adam after the fall were, "Where are you?" (Gen. 3:9), indicating not that God really had no clue where he was, but that Adam and Eve were no longer where they should have been—walking with God. To the serpent, God pronounced the earliest prophecy, known as the proto-evangelium or first gospel, that although Satan would strike the seed of the woman (Jesus) on the heel, Jesus would strike Satan on the head—a mortal blow (Gen. 3:15). So even from the earliest of time, God gives you hope that he is in control and will ultimately triumph.

Note also that the fall introduced pain into the world—pain in childbirth and pain in work (Gen. 3:16-19). Work was always part of the plan for humanity. As the Father is working and Jesus is working (John 5:17) so are you to work. It is good for you to find fulfillment in your work (Ps. 90:17; Eccles. 2:24; 3:22), whatever you feel called to do.

Genesis 4 tells the story of Cain murdering Abel, his younger brother, in a fit of jealous rage. When God questions him as to the whereabouts of Abel, Cain responds with a lie,

"I do not know," and questions God with "Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes, of course you are to care for others, and control yourself even when you are feeling jealous or angry. Human flourishing or well-being requires that you look after others. But the ultimate flourishing that lasts for eternity is found only in the provision he has given, namely himself, found preeminently in the God/Man Jesus Christ. In Hebrew, the word that even better captures the sense of human flourishing is the word *shalom*, which means "peace and wholeness," and is a blessing used for greeting or saying goodbye.

This sinful condition of rebellion (often called original sin) manifested itself quickly and strongly. Genesis 6-9 is the story of Noah and the Great Flood, where God judges the earth for the out-of-control wickedness of humanity. Righteous Noah and his family are on the ark for just over a year, and life is sufficiently preserved for a fresh start. God's promise to never again flood the earth, as symbolized in the rainbow, brings new hope (Gen. 9:11-17).

The Patriarchs: Abraham to Joseph

The remaining chapters in Genesis cover the period of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. God called Abraham and made a covenant (think of a marriage covenant) to bless him such that he would be a blessing to "all the families of the earth" (Gen. 12:2-3). God made a number of covenants, the heart of which may be summarized in the words you find repeated in various forms throughout Scripture, "I will be your God, and you will be my people." From Genesis 17:7-8 with Abraham, Exodus 6:7 with Moses, Jeremiah 31:33 with the prophet, all the way to Revelation 21:3 with John, this theme is repeated. The phrase is sometimes referred to as the "Immanuel Principle" (Robertson, 1980, p. 46) because it is culminated in Jesus who is called Immanuel—"God with us" (Matt. 1:23)—and ultimately in the new heavens and new earth of Revelation 21 when God and his people are literally dwelling together for eternity.

The Exodus and the Wilderness

Genesis closes with the Israelites in Egypt, where eventually they became enslaved for over 400 years until God raised up Moses (a type of Christ) to save the people and lead them to the Promised Land. The book of Exodus tells the story of the Israelites' departure from Egypt and their miraculous crossing of the Red Sea, as well as the receiving of the Ten Commandments (Exod. 20).

The first five books of the Bible are known as the Pentateuch, or Torah, and include the following books: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. The last four of these include extensive listings of genealogies and explanations of laws, in addition to rich history of the times as the chosen nation of Israel wandered in the wilderness of Sinai and struggled to heed the voice of God. Deuteronomy includes the greatest law, "Hear O Israel, the LORD your God, the LORD is one. And you shall love the LORD with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might" (Deut. 6:4; Mark 12:29-31). Deuteronomy closes with the death of Moses as the Israelites had finally come to the Jordan River, across from what was the Promised Land.

The Conquest and the Judges

God called Joshua to lead the people of Israel into the land and to conquer and destroy those living there, not merely to provide them with the land, but as a judgment on the wickedness of those nations (Deut. 9:3-6). God promised to be with Joshua and to give him success (Josh. 1:1-9). The land was conquered and God led and protected the people by raising up a series of judges, some of whom were like superheroes (Samson). But it became a very chaotic time as the Israelites cycled from rebellion to repentance and redemption through a judge, only to fall back into sin again. The book of Judges ends with these memorable words, "In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 21:25).

The Monarchy

Eventually the Israelites demanded a king, and Samuel the priest anointed Saul to be the first, followed by David and Solomon. After these 120 years of a united monarchy, the kingdom became divided and the northern kingdom endured for another 200 years, falling to the Assyrians in 722 BC, and the southern kingdom of Judah for another 150 years after that, falling to the Babylonians in 587 BC.

Throughout these nearly 500 years of monarchy, there were very few good kings; in fact, the northern kingdom never had one. David, the first and greatest good king, is the standard by which all other kings were evaluated in the accounts you can find in 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. David, who Scripture says was a man after God's heart (1 Sam. 13:14), wrote most of the Psalms, which are a collection of poems and prayers to be set to music for worship. Solomon, his son, wrote other wisdom literature including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

During those many centuries when Israel was governed by judges and then kings, there were also a number of prophets who God raised up to lead the people in spiritual matters. They proclaimed God's will and also spoke of coming events, most often of judgment. Some, like Elijah and Elisha, have no recorded writings to their name other than what is included in the historical books mentioned above. Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel wrote large volumes and are known as the major prophets, while others like Hosea and Joel have few writings to their name and are known as the minor prophets (the last 12 books of the Old Testament).

The Exile and Return

The exile in Babylon lasted some 70 years (Jer. 25:11-12), after which the people returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and temple under the rule of the Persian Empire, as recorded in the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The hope of the Israelites was in the prophecies of the coming Messiah, who they believed would deliver the people and usher in a new era of freedom. These prophecies, however, often were in conflict with what is now known as the first coming of Christ as deliverer from sin and the Second Coming of Christ as judge of the world (see Isa. 9:1-7; 11:1-16; 53; Jer. 31:31-34; 33:14-16; Mic. 5:2-5).

Finally, with the coming of Jesus Christ into our world, these passages were made more clear (Matt. 2:6; 4:15-16; 8:17; Luke 2:32; 22:37) as he fulfilled prophecies through his life, death, and resurrection—overcoming humanity's fall into sin and conquering death for all who entrust themselves to him.

Conclusion

What can be learned from this part of the biblical story (and all of human history) is that humanity has fallen, and continues in the same pattern of fallenness. Even with the commands and words of God, humanity perpetuates its propensity for disobedience and destruction. This is the reality of human nature, but God does not leave you there. It was this story that prepared the people to embrace their need for a Messiah, a savior who would save them from their enslavement to sin and foolishness and lead them into life and freedom, according to God's original design for humanity.

References

Robertson, O. P. (1980). *The Christ of the covenants*. Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed.