



The Beginning of Wisdom: An Introduction to Christian Thought and Life

Chapter 4: Departure from Wisdom

By Dan Diffey

"Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned ... Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come." —Romans 5:12, 5:14 (English Standard Version)

Essential Questions

- What are the effects of the fall of humanity into sin on the relationship between God and people?
- How does the second act of the biblical storyline portray God?
- What are some of the things that stick out about who God is and how God pursues relationship with his people?

Introduction

God created all things in his perfect wisdom. The creation account in Genesis 1 and 2 shows God's sovereign rule, the good nature of what he created, and what was expected of humanity who was created in his image. Genesis 1 and 2 shows creation the way that it was supposed to be in which God was the all-wise king, and everything was in right relationship. This is the beginning of the storyline of Scripture, but things quickly change. Genesis 3 through the rest of the Old Testament shows that God's creation, starting with humanity, falls into sin—the ultimate departure from wisdom. While God had given Adam and Eve dominion, in Genesis 3, they disregard God's only rule, and, because of that, sin and death enter into God's good creation. This sin would cause a separation between God and humanity, and, for the rest of the Old Testament, humans would show that they had departed from God's wise rule. God, however, is gracious and compassionate, and he works to reconcile humanity to himself. This chapter will examine the second act of the biblical story: the temptation and **fall** of humanity into sin. This chapter also will trace the pattern of humanity's departure from wisdom and into **idolatry** throughout the Old Testament.

Temptation and Fall: The Second Act of the Biblical Story



The second act of the biblical story is the temptation and fall of Adam and Eve into sin. The fall shows humanity's departure from wisdom and its affair with idolatry. Idolatry is the ascribing of ultimate value or worth to anything besides God, which, according to the Christian worldview, is putting anything before God. While this act begins in

Genesis 3, it unfolds throughout the entire Old Testament. While the first act of the biblical story was marked by God's wise creation and everything worked together properly in his kingdom, this second act is a departure from wisdom and is marked by sin, death, suffering, and separation from God. Humans were supposed to operate their lives according to wisdom under God's kingly reign. To live wise lives, Adam and Eve should have feared, known, and loved God, but, instead of seeking to know God, Adam and Eve wanted to be like God, knowing good and evil. So, Adam and Eve attempted to dethrone God and tried to make themselves like God. With this act, they plunged all of humanity into a history characterized by idolatry.

In Genesis 2:16–17, God gave Adam and Eve a command saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." God had given them this command to follow, and things appeared to be going well until the serpent appeared and tempted Eve into doubting what God had said. In Genesis 3, the created order is turned upside down. The serpent, which Genesis 3:1 says was the craftiest animal, went to Eve who then went to Adam. So, instead of Adam and Eve exercising dominion, they disobeyed God when they believed the serpent. The serpent deceived them into thinking that God was not to be trusted and that they could usurp God.

He [the serpent] said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?" And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." (Genesis 3:2–5)

The exchange between Eve and the serpent is telling. Satan twists God's words and brings doubt into Eve's mind, even to the point of saying that what God had said was wrong, that they would not die if they ate of the fruit, but that they would become like God. It is also important to note that Eve adds to the word of God by saying that they were not allowed to touch the tree. Eve's response to the serpent was rebellion against God's words:

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. (Genesis 3:6)

With this act, Adam and Eve plunge not only themselves into sin and death, but also all of humanity.

The irony of this whole scene is that the purpose of eating the fruit was to be like God and to know good and evil, but both Adam and Eve were already made in the likeness and image of God (Genesis 1:26–28), and they already knew and experienced goodness because the original creation was good. In the end, what they actually received was a familiarity with evil. "The flagrant rebellion of the divine word by the pinnacle of creation, which has just been invested with divine rule, is a heinous crime against the cosmos and its creator" (Dempster, 2003, p. 66). Humanity was created in the image of God to rule on God's behalf; however, humanity sinned against God by desiring to be like God and usurped their proper place in creation.

After the temptation and fall into sin, God brought curses against the serpent, Eve, and Adam. In these curses, God shows that their rebellion against his wise rule affects humanity's relationship with him, with each other, and with the rest of creation (Genesis 3:8–19). Adam and Eve's departure from wisdom by trusting in the serpent instead of God brought about dire consequences, the biggest of which was that sin had broken their good and harmonious relationship with God, each other, and the entire natural world.

Unanswered Questions

Often, it has been recognized that there are some unanswered questions in Genesis 3, most notably this: When did Satan, who in Genesis 3 appears in the form of a serpent, rebel against God? "Nowhere are we told why Satan became evil or why the snake should represent him in the Garden of Eden" (Goldsworthy, 1991, p. 102). This is true, but it is clear from Revelation 12:9 and 20:2 that the snake is Satan. While the Bible provides answers to life's ultimate questions, there are some questions that the Bible does not answer. This does not mean that there is not a suitable answer; it just means that the biblical authors were often concerned with answering different questions than those sometimes asked by modern audiences. When interpreting the Bible it is important to understand what the main points within the text are, as that is what the author wants readers to know. This can be compared to watching a movie. In a scene within a movie, a new character may come in who moves the storyline along, but because the main point of the scene is not to introduce who this character is or from where he or she came, often the character is not formally introduced. This is what is happening in Genesis 3 in the story about the Garden of Eden. The main point of the text is focused on the rebellion of Adam and Eve and not on the snake's origin.

Broken Relationship

Genesis 1–2 shows a world where everything was in right relationship. Adam and Eve had right relationship, humans had right relationship with the natural world, and humanity was in right relationship with God. Everything was in harmony. But with the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, that right relationship was turned into broken relationship. After the fall into sin, the relationships between people were devastated and broken. The relationship between God and humanity was also broken. These broken relationships are shown when Adam blames both Eve and God for his sin. In Genesis 3:12 Adam answers God's questions to him by stating, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." Broken relationship with God can also be seen when God expels Adam and Eve from the garden (Genesis 3:22–24). Things had drastically changed from Genesis 1–2 to Genesis 3, but fortunately this is not the end of God's story with his people.

Humanity: Fallen Image Bearers

Humanity was created to have life, but the fall introduced sin into the world, which led to the entrance of death in the world (Genesis 2:17; Romans 3:23). The fall was the ultimate act of rebellion that changed the very nature of humanity. Adam and Eve sought to change their position as the royal stewards over the created order and overreached. "Dissatisfied with their humanness, the couple reached for godhood. In lusting after a throne that was not theirs, they lost the privileges they already had. They degraded themselves by trying to become what they could

never be" (Goldsworthy, 1991, p. 105). Adam and Eve attempted to change who they were, and they accomplished that, just not in the direction they wanted. Instead of becoming like God, they separated themselves from God. The Apostle Paul reflected on the lasting effects of the fall in Romans 5. Paul stated that sin and death entered the world through Adam's sin, and because of this, as well as the sins each person commits, everyone is a transgressor, sinful by nature, and under the just judgment of a holy God (Romans 5:12–15, 5:18–21).

An important aspect of every worldview is how that worldview understands the nature of humanity. The Christian worldview has two major assertions about human nature. First, humans are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26–28). Second, after the fall of Adam and Eve into sin, all humans are sinful by nature (Genesis 6:5; Romans 3:9–23). This is often referred to as depravity or original sin. "Scripture diagnoses sin as a universal deformity of human nature, found at every point in every person ... Both Testaments have names for it that display its ethical character as rebellion against God's rule" (Packer, 1993, p. 91). Humans are created in the image of God; however, after the fall they became sinful by nature. Because humans are sinful by nature, humanity will behave in a sinful way. Different worldviews have different ideas about whether humans are good or sinful by nature. The Christian worldview says that humanity is sinful by nature and, therefore, will live and act in a sinful manner. Adam and Eve's rebellion brought about a separation in their relationship with God that became immediately apparent. This can be seen both in their hiding from God (Genesis 3:8–11) and in their **exile** from the garden out of the presence of God (Genesis 3:23). But even in the midst of humanity's desperate state of rebellion, God gave Adam and Eve hope that they would have a descendant who would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

The Protoevangelion

In Genesis 3:14–15, God pronounces curses against the serpent, but, in the midst of the curse, there is a bit of hope when God tells the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Genesis 3:15 is often referred to as the **protoevangelion**, a word that simply means "first **gospel**." This verse is generally regarded as the first promise of the Messiah in the Old Testament, and it anticipates the gospel, which is the good news of Jesus Christ's perfect life, death on the cross, and resurrection from the dead. This passage "that the seed of the woman would bruise the head of the serpent is full of promise" (Goldsworthy, 2012, pp. 107–108). Jesus is the seed, or offspring, of the woman, Eve, that would bring about the promises of God.

Divine Promise and Hope

The implications of the fall can be seen keenly throughout the remainder of the Old Testament. While the second act of the storyline of Scripture begins in Genesis 3, a trajectory of sin and death extends throughout all of Israel's history; however, humanity's constant sinful rebellion and departure from wisdom is only one side of the story. The other side of the story is a faithful God working toward the **redemption** of a fallen people. "Immediately after the fall God begins his work of restoring the whole created order to its right relationship to himself. He acts on the basis of his **covenant** commitment to creation, and reveals his kingdom" (Goldsworthy, 1991, p. 118).

While the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden would have a lasting impact on the trajectory of human history, it would not be the end of the story. The Old Testament tells a story of a fallen humanity that has departed from the wisdom of God, and it is a story of a fallen people and world that is in need of redemption and restoration.

The Results of the Fall: Sin and Death

Through the fall of humanity into sin, death entered the world. The effects of sin and death are immediately apparent in Genesis 4 with the murder of Abel at the hands of his brother, Cain. In Genesis 2:17, God said that death would enter the world if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and now, not only did sin and death affect Adam and Eve, but also their children. Narratively speaking, sin and death are immediately present when Cain kills Abel (Genesis 4:1–16). This narrative shows broken relationship not only from one human to another, but also between humanity and God. Cain and Abel gave offerings to God in worship, and God looked on Abel's offering with favor, but Cain's offering was rejected. Cain's worship, while seemingly externally correct, seems to show that true worship is not just an external conformity to what God desires, but a true heart change that is the result of love. "Although the form of Cain's worship seems to have been correct, the narrative suggests that Cain himself was the problem. The mundane description of his offering suggests that he was merely, perhaps dutifully, going through the motions" (Block, 2014, p. 61). Because Cain had a fallen nature that was inclined to sin, Cain was the problem. Cain's disregard for both God and his brother show the extent to which humanity has fallen. Cain, like Adam and Eve, is exiled from the presence of God (Genesis 4:16).

Cain's rebellion against God's wise rule is only the beginning, however, and things go from bad to worse with Cain's descendants throughout the remainder of Genesis 4. The genealogy, or list of Adam's children, in Genesis 5 shows the universal state of the human condition with an emphasis on death. While it is easy to be fascinated by the long lives portrayed in this genealogy, these are not the focus—the focus is on the recurring phrase "and he died" (Genesis 5:5, 5:8, 5:11, 5:14, 5:17, 5:20, 5:27, 5:31). This genealogy also leaves room for hope, in that humanity is still associated with the likeness and image of God (Genesis 5:1–3) and that Lamech, and, presumably, all of Adam and Eve's descendants, are looking for someone who will bring them rest and reverse the curse of the ground leveled in Genesis 3 (Genesis 5:28–31). Even among the ravages of death, they were looking to the divine promise of hope that God had given in Genesis 3:15.

The flood narrative in Genesis 6–9 demonstrates humanity's rampant sinfulness and self-centeredness. The flood is God's judgment on the sinfulness of humanity. "The LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the Earth, and that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Even though all people were wicked, God showed grace and favor toward Noah and his family (Genesis 6:8) by seeking to establish a relationship with him:

For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. (Genesis 6:17–18)

Even in the midst of judgment, God was working to reconcile humans to himself through the person of Noah, through whom he was going to establish a formal relationship known as a covenant. After the flood, the human condition had not changed (Genesis 8:21), but God was working to reestablish a Garden-of-Eden-like world with Noah and his family, which can be seen in the fact that God gave Noah the same commands he gave to Adam and Eve: to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 9:1, 9:7). He also gave him dominion over the animals and the plants (Genesis 9:2–3). He then told Noah that he was not supposed to shed innocent blood (Genesis 9:4–6). Here, God seems to be telling Noah not to be like Adam and Eve and their children but to be obedient. And, with this, God established a covenant relationship with Noah and all his creation saying that he would never again destroy all flesh with water (Genesis 9:9–12).

Both the flood narrative and the incident at the Tower of Babel, which is the next narrative in the biblical storyline, show that humanity was still concerned with their own self-serving and self-centered agendas (Genesis 6:4, 11:4). In these passages, humanity wants to make a name for itself, but God has a different plan: It will be through Abraham that all the earth will be blessed (Genesis 12:1–3).

Covenant

A covenant is a solemn agreement between two parties, often containing promises, in which each party agrees to keep their end of the agreement. There are five major biblical covenants between God and humanity:

1. Noahic covenant (Genesis 6–9)
2. Abrahamic covenant (Genesis 12–17)
3. Mosaic covenant (Exodus 19–20)
4. Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7)
5. New covenant (Jeremiah 31; Matthew 26:26–29)

It is through these covenants that the story of the Bible unfolds. "Interwoven into this story of redemption is a progression of five overlapping covenants, which portray the development of God's global purposes with humanity" (DeRouchie, 2013, p. 30). The covenants that God makes with humanity show that God is a relational God who is working to reconcile sinful humanity to himself. As God makes covenants with humanity, he shows that he has a plan for his creation, he has promised humanity certain things, and he will keep his end of the agreement. When God makes a covenant, his creation can be sure that he will bring about the completion of the covenant. Ultimately, covenants lead to God bringing humanity into right relationship with himself. From the perspective of the Christian worldview, the covenants that God makes with humanity, particularly the new covenant that is made through the death of Jesus on the cross, serve to redeem and restore the fallen created order.

Abraham: The Blessing of All the Peoples of the Earth



The Departure of Abraham, by József Molnár, 1850. The Hungarian National Gallery, Budapest, Hungary.

Divine promise and hope become evident with the introduction of Abraham and God's covenant relationship with him. In Genesis 12:1–3, God promised Abraham three things: land, descendants (a great name), and that he would bless those who blessed Abraham and curse those who cursed Abraham. Ultimately, it would be through Abraham that God would bless all the people of the earth (Genesis 12:3). Even though, at times, Abraham showed doubt and unfaithfulness (Genesis 12:10–20, 16:1–16), God was faithful to his promises and even made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15, 17). Near the end of the Old Testament period, the priests looked back on God's dealing with Abraham and summarized it by saying:

You are the LORD, the God who chose Abram and brought him out of Ur of the Chaldeans and gave him the name Abraham. You found his heart faithful before you, and made with him the covenant to give to his offspring the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Jebusite, and the Girgashite. And you have kept your promise, for you are righteous. (Nehemiah 9:7–8)

God was faithful to the promises and the covenant that he made to Abraham. God was also faithful in establishing a covenant relationship with Isaac (Genesis 26:1–5), Jacob (Genesis 28:10–17), and Jacob's sons (Genesis 49), just as he said he would. Nevertheless, while God was showing himself to be faithful to his promises, the people on whom he

had set his covenantal love were acting just like the children of Adam and Eve. Jacob's sons had departed from God's wisdom in the same way that Cain had, by acting on murderous intentions toward their brother Joseph (Genesis 37).

The Exodus: God's Redemption of His People

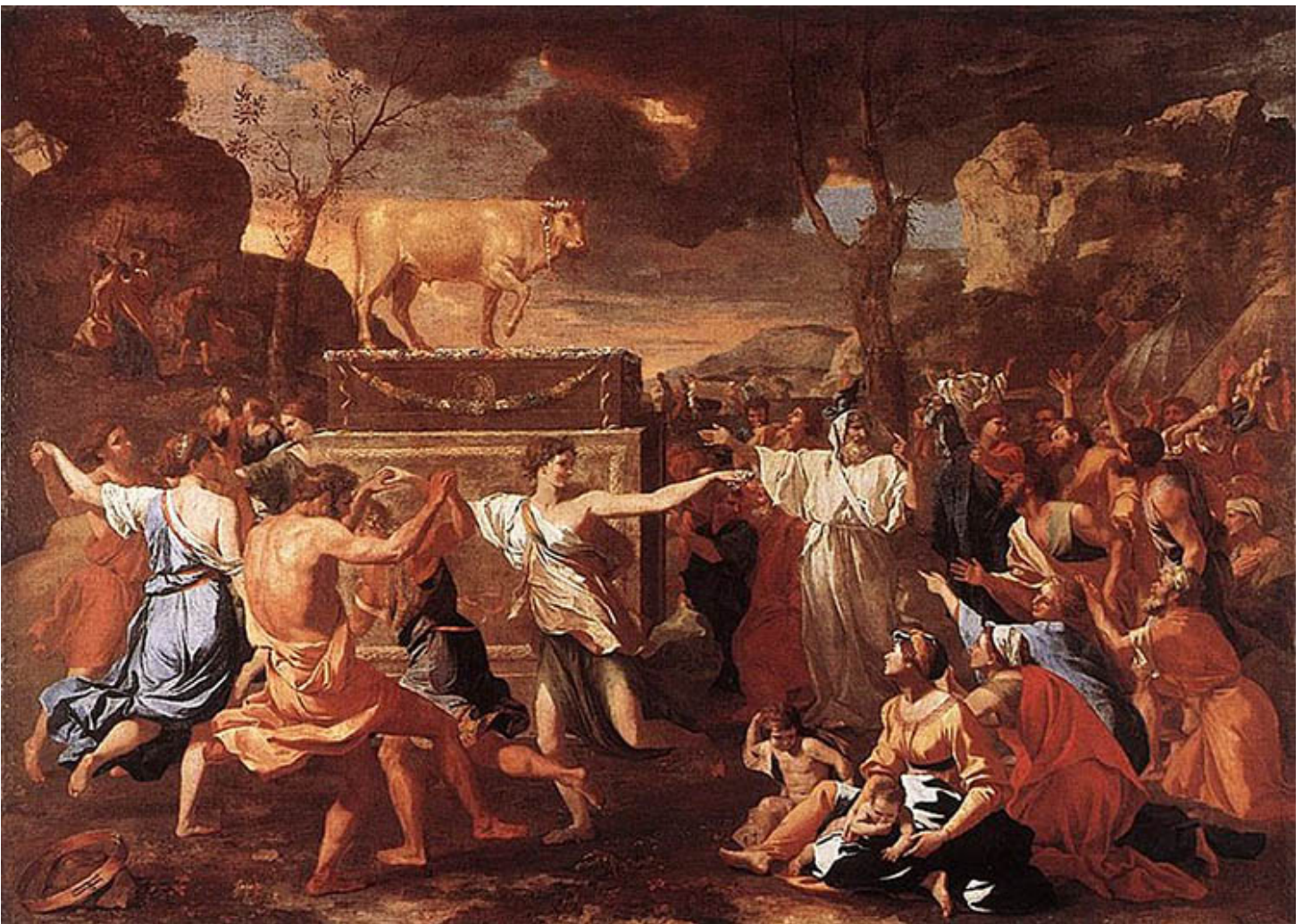


Passage of the Jews through the Red Sea, by Ivan Aivazovsky, 1891.

There is no greater Old Testament example of God working to redeem a people to himself than the **Exodus** of Israel from bondage and slavery in Egypt in order that they may be God's own people, his treasured possession (Exodus 19:4–6). However, instead, of being only a story of redemption, the Exodus and Israel's wilderness wanderings serve as a perfect example of God's relationship with his people. God redeemed Israel out of slavery and made them his people and then Israel rejected God's wisdom and fell into idolatry. After the Israelites were in bondage and slavery in Egypt for more than 400 years, God redeemed them and made them his people. The Exodus event served as the great act of God's redemption of his people throughout the Old Testament period, and this redemption was based upon the covenant promises that he had made to Abraham in Genesis 15.

God was faithful in his promises to Israel in bringing them out of Egypt and promising them the land; nevertheless, after God had delivered Israel from Egypt, they immediately fell into grumbling, complaining, and idolatry. After reflecting on God's saving acts, the priests retelling God's dealings with Israel in the book of Nehemiah reflected on the peoples' response by saying:

But they and our fathers acted presumptuously and stiffened their neck and did not obey your commandments. They refused to obey and were not mindful of the wonders that you performed among them, but they stiffened their neck and appointed a leader to return to their slavery in Egypt. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and did not forsake them. Even when they had made for themselves a golden calf and said, "This is your God who brought you up out of Egypt," and had committed great blasphemies, you in your great mercies did not forsake them in the wilderness. The pillar of cloud to lead them in the way did not depart from them by day, nor the pillar of fire by night to light for them the way by which they should go. You gave your good Spirit to instruct them and did not withhold your manna from their mouth and gave them water for their thirst. Forty years you sustained them in the wilderness, and they lacked nothing. Their clothes did not wear out and their feet did not swell. (Nehemiah 9:16–21)



Adoration of the Golden Calf, by Nicolas Poussin, c. 1633-1634. The National Gallery, London.

This passage shows that the people of Israel responded just like Adam and Eve, Abraham, and the **patriarchs**, but God did not forsake them or leave them. The people of Israel rejected God by grumbling and complaining (Numbers 11:1–14), by not trusting in him (Numbers 14:1–12), and by committing idolatry by forming a golden calf to worship

(Exodus 32). God provided for them in spite of their continual disobedience toward him. Even in the midst of fallen humanity's rebellious departure from wisdom, God was bringing about his promise and hope by redeeming his people to himself.

The Conquest and the Judges: God's Faithfulness and Human Idolatry

The period of the conquest and the rule of the judges of Israel, like what already has been discussed, contrasts the deliverance and hope that God brings through his covenant faithfulness with the departure from wisdom and idolatry of his people. In the book of Joshua, God fulfilled the promises that he made to Abraham in Genesis. As told in the book of Joshua, God led the Israelites into the land and fought for his people.

Thus the LORD gave to Israel all the land that he swore to give to their fathers. And they took possession of it, and they settled there. And the LORD gave them rest on every side just as he had sworn to their fathers. Not one of all their enemies had withstood them, for the LORD had given all their enemies into their hands. Not one word of all the good promises that the LORD had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass. (Joshua 21:43–45)

As this passage shows, God was completely faithful in doing everything he said that he would do. The description of the land found in Genesis to Joshua shows that the Promised Land was viewed in Eden-like terms. "The land is not paradise, but it is an anticipation of paradise regained, an outpost of Yahweh's lordship over his people" (Schreiner, 2013, p. 107). When Israel entered the land, God, once again, dwelt among his people; however, the people continually rejected God as king by constantly following other gods.

The time of the judges of Israel lies in sharp contrast to the conquest. During the time of the judges, despite God's faithfulness to his good promises, Israel was in a constant state of idolatrous disobedience. This can be seen in everything from them not fulfilling the conquest (Judges 1:27–36) to every person doing what is right in his or her own eyes (Judges 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, 21:25). This period is truly the darkest time in Israel's history.

And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. (Judges 2:11–12)

Things get so bad that, at one point, Israel is compared with Sodom and Gomorrah (Judges 19). The Israelites thought that they could lean on their own wisdom and understanding and, in the process, completely abandoned God and true wisdom.

The Monarchy



King David stained glass. St. Michael and All Angels Church, Fringford, England.

In the period of the monarchy, there are elements of promise with the reigns of good kings like David, Hezekiah, and Josiah, but, for the most part, the kings led their people into idolatry. The refrain in the Book of Judges revealed that what Israel needed was a king who would lead them in the right worship of God. David, the second king in Israel, set the pattern for what it would look like to have a heart for God. David was not perfect, but he loved God and sought to rule the kingdom as God wanted. God made a covenant with David and his descendants and promised that he would establish David's kingdom (2 Samuel 7). This is an example of God, again, seeking out right relationship with his people.

David's son Solomon sought to rule God's people in a wise fashion (1 Kings 3), and he did so for a time; however, instead of pursuing wisdom, Solomon went after false gods and led Israel into idolatry. "For when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father" (1 Kings 11:4). So, even though God was faithful, the people were not. Similar to God's dealings with Israel in the past, he judged the kingdom for their sins. Solomon's idolatry had spread throughout the kingdom, and, as a result, the kingdom was divided into the northern and southern kingdoms.

Several books in the Old Testament fall under the classification of Wisdom Literature. These books include Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and some of the Psalms. One interesting feature of the Wisdom Literature is that it is largely authored by David and Solomon. Books such as Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are reflections on the created order and life, while many of the Psalms are reflections on God's Law. A focus in these books is to teach the reader to live a life characterized by wisdom rather than foolishness. The central theme of the Wisdom Literature is the fear of the Lord (Job 28:28; Psalm 19:9, 34:11, 111:10; Proverbs 1:7, 1:29, 2:5, 8:13, 9:10; Ecclesiastes 12:13).

At the division of the kingdom, the sin of idolatry was intensified. Throughout the books of Kings, a refrain referenced more than 30 times is that the king did evil in the sight of the Lord. Within the Bible, there are different phrases that indicate idolatrous behavior, such as doing evil in the sight of the Lord. Immediately upon the split of the kingdom, the northern kingdom was led into idolatry by Jeroboam, the first king of the northern kingdom, who fashioned two golden calves and placed them in the northern kingdom cities of Dan and Bethel so that the people would not return to Jerusalem to worship (1 Kings 12:1–15). This idolatry characterized all the northern kingdom's history; from the division of the kingdom in 930 B.C. until the fall of the kingdom in 722 B.C., all of the northern kings were idolatrous. God sent the prophets Amos, Jonah, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah to warn them, but they would not listen. When God sent the Assyrians to judge them for their sins, he was fulfilling what he said he was going to do in the Law of Moses, particularly in Deuteronomy 28. God had been patient with them and had even sent them prophets to warn them and turn them back to God, but the people did not repent and turn to God.

The prophets' primary message was to get the people to flee from idolatry and return to God. The prophets often spoke in terms of adultery and used very graphic sexual imagery (Ortlund, 2002). By committing idolatry, God's people were compared to an unfaithful spouse. All idolatry is a departure from wisdom and reason and lacks an understanding of the true nature of God and his creation.

The southern kingdom fared slightly better because they had some godly leadership, but most of Judah's kings acted more like Jeroboam than they did David. Just as God had done with the northern kingdom, he sent prophets to the southern kingdom of Judah as well. After the first wave of prophets, whose messages were directed at both Israel and Judah (particularly Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah), God sent Nahum, Zephaniah, Habakkuk, and Jeremiah to turn Judah from their sins and to follow God. God's gracious patience can be seen in this passage from Nehemiah:

Many years you bore with them and warned them by your Spirit through your prophets. Yet they would not give ear. Therefore you gave them into the hand of the peoples of the lands. Nevertheless, in your great mercies you did not make an end of them or forsake them, for you are a gracious and merciful God.
(Nehemiah 9:29–31)

God had warned Judah and Israel through the prophets and told them that they needed to repent. When the people did not repent, God sent the Babylonians against Judah, and the people were taken to live in Babylon in 587 B.C. But even in the midst of the prophetic message of judgment, there was a message of hope that one day God would raise up a son of David who would rule over the people with wisdom, justice, and righteousness (Isaiah 9:1–7, 11:1–16; Jeremiah 33; Hosea 3:4–5; Amos 9:11–15; Micah 4:8–5:5).

The Ministry of the Prophets

The prophets ministered to God's people throughout the entire Old Testament, even from early chapters of the Bible. Moses was a prophet, and he gave Israel guidelines for determining who was a real or false prophet (Deuteronomy 18:15–22). There were also prophets before the writing prophets began to write. People like Deborah, Samuel, Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha served as God's prophets; however, from about 760 B.C. to 400 B.C., several prophets recorded their messages. These are the prophetic books found in the Old Testament today. While each of the prophets are distinct, most of them are concerned with God's people repenting and obeying God. Most people think that the prophets just talked about things in the distant future, but this is incorrect. The general message of the prophets is directed at their original audience and consists of three main points:

1. Israel and Judah have broken the covenant and need to repent;
2. If there is no repentance, then there will be judgment; and
3. There is hope beyond the judgment (Hays, 2010).

The Exile and Restoration

There is a clear pattern in God's dealing with his people: God is in relationship with his people (often in the form of a covenant), the people rebel, God exiles them from his presence, and then God works to bring people back into relationship with him because of his great mercy. These last two points can be seen keenly in the exile and the return of Judah from Babylon. During the exile (587–538 B.C.), the people of Judah lived in Babylon. While in exile, the people faced a crisis of belief in trying to understand how God's promises fit with their bondage in a foreign nation. While there are not many narratives about the Jews who were in exile, the book of Daniel shows that there was still the constant temptation of idolatry, though Daniel and his friends resisted. The Jews in exile knew the promise to Abraham and David, and they were sure the prophets had said that they would return to the land. "From the viewpoint of the Jews exiled in Babylon, the prophecies concerning the return to the Promised Land apply to their present situation" (Goldsworthy, 1991, p. 194). God delivered Judah from Babylon just as he had delivered the Israelites from Egypt, and he brought them back to the land.

After the people of Judah returned to the land, there was a great disappointment because "The return from exile results in only a pale shadow of the predicted glorious kingdom for the people of God" (Goldsworthy, 1991, p. 196).

Now, therefore, our God, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who keeps covenant and steadfast love, let not all the hardship seem little to you that has come upon us, upon our kings, our princes, our priests, our prophets, our fathers, and all your people, since the time of the kings of Assyria until this day. Yet you have been righteous in all that has come upon us, for you have dealt faithfully and we have acted wickedly. Our kings, our princes, our priests, and our fathers have not kept your law or paid attention to your commandments and your warnings that you gave them. Even in their own kingdom, and amid your great goodness that you gave them, and in the large and rich land that you set before them, they did not serve you or turn from their wicked works. Behold, we are slaves this day; in the land that you gave to our fathers to enjoy its fruit and its good gifts, behold, we are slaves. And its rich yield goes to the kings whom you have set over us because of our sins. They rule over our bodies and over our livestock as they please, and we are in great distress. (Nehemiah 9:32–37)

This passage affirms that God has been faithful and righteous in all that they have done while the people have been wicked and disobedient, and, even though God had restored them back into the land, they were still under the rule of a foreign power. The people were still awaiting the day when the son of David would rule them in wisdom, justice, and righteousness.

Human Suffering

The second act of the biblical storyline details a significant amount of human suffering with the introduction of sin into the world. God originally created the world good and everything was in harmony, but with the fall of humanity into sin, suffering was introduced. This suffering can be seen as soon as sin entered the world. The world of Genesis 2 was a world without shame (Genesis 2:25), but, immediately upon sinning, shame came into the world (Genesis 3:7). Human suffering is complicated. All suffering is a result of the fallen nature of the world, but not all suffering can be connected to a specific sin. This is the error that Job's friends make throughout the book of Job as they sought to understand why Job was suffering.

The Problem of Evil

The presence of human suffering often brings up the theological and philosophical question of the problem of evil. An argument will often be posed that goes something like, "If God is all-powerful and all-good, then why does evil exist?" This is a good question with which all worldviews must wrestle. Christians will answer this from several different perspectives, but the second storyline of the Bible does give some answers to this, particularly in the books of Job and Habakkuk. In particular, the prophet Habakkuk asked God why he was idly sitting by while evil is happening (Habakkuk 1:3). God responded to Habakkuk by saying that he was not idle, but was doing a work that if Habakkuk was told what he was doing that he would not believe (Habakkuk 1:5). Then God proceeded to tell Habakkuk what he was doing and what he was going to do. Upon hearing God's plan Habakkuk did not understand and objected. God then told Habakkuk that the righteous live by faith (Habakkuk 2:4). Habakkuk then responded to God by praising him, a response of faith (Habakkuk 3). This text, and other biblical texts like the book of Job, show that God sees the whole picture of things, and we only see small pieces. God sees and knows all things, and the Bible shows his character to

be beyond reproach. He is working out all things for our good and for his glory (Romans 8:28–30). When going through times of suffering and evil, God's people must understand that God is using this to refine and mature his people, and they need to seek God's good wisdom (James 1:2–8).

God's Character

When people talk about the second act of the biblical storyline, which comprises much of the Old Testament, they often assume things about God's character. People often incorrectly say things like "The God of the Old Testament is only wrathful and angry, bringing fire and brimstone." While God is just and wrathful (Nahum 1:1–2), he is most often portrayed throughout the Old Testament as patient, gracious, loving, caring, and full of kindness to his people. Recall Nehemiah 8:32–37 in which the people are portrayed as acting wickedly, but God acts in faithfulness. A clear picture of God's good character can be seen in Jonah 4 in which Jonah is upset with God because God has forgiven the Ninevites. Jonah was upset with God and said that he had fled from God's presence because he knew how gracious God was that he would forgive the sinful people of Nineveh if they repented. Jonah 4:2 notes,

And he prayed to the Lord and said, "O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster."

Jonah did not view God as many mistakenly do. Jonah sees God as merciful, patient, and abounding in covenantal love for those who repent of their sin. What this repentance and belief look like will be seen in the next chapter, which will discuss the third act of the biblical storyline: redemption through Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

The second act of the biblical story shows humanity's departure from wisdom through the fall of Adam and Eve into sin. After the fall, human history shows that the default nature of humanity is sinful idolatry. God is always faithful to his covenant promises. As Paul wrote, "If we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). God is always faithful because it is a part of his very nature. God's faithfulness should cause the Christian to live by faith, just as the author of Hebrews said, "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful" (Hebrews 10:23). The hope and trust of Christians is not on themselves, but on God who is always faithful. Just as the people of Judah looked forward to the consummation of the Kingdom of God and his covenant promises, those who hold to a Christian worldview look forward to the divine promise of God and his kingdom:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3–4)

The end of the story is the final consummation of the Kingdom of God. It is about God dwelling with his people and ruling over them. In this kingdom, there is a reversal of the fall, which means sin, death, and suffering are no more. But, before this kingdom is consummated, the third act of the story, the story of true redemption through the perfect life, sacrificial death, and resurrection from the dead of Jesus Christ, needs to be discussed. It is in this third act that God will, once and for all, reconcile and redeem his people to himself.

Chapter Review

Main Ideas

- The second act of the biblical storyline is the temptation and fall of humanity into sin through the sin of Adam and Eve.
- Humans are sinful by nature and are separated from God because of sin.
- The history of humanity is characterized by a departure from wisdom, but God brings hope, deliverance, and redemption.
- God was faithful to his covenant promises, and, despite the peoples' unfaithfulness, he did what he said he was going to do.
- While God is patient, gracious, and forgiving, he is also a just judge that does not let sin go unpunished.

Key Terms

- **Conquest:** The taking over of the land of Canaan by the Israelites, as recorded in the biblical Book of Joshua.
- **Covenant:** A relationship between two parties in which the greater extends grace with the expectation of loyalty and faithfulness. Covenants often involve promises and are formal in nature. They are often accompanied by signs that serve as visible reminders of the covenant relationship. Within the biblical storyline God, in grace, enters into covenant relationships with his people.
- **Exile:** The removal of a people from their land; within the Bible, God establishes a pattern of judgment of sin through exile. This can be seen in Adam and Eve's exile from the Garden of Eden and Judah's exile to Babylon.
- **Exodus:** A term meaning to go out, but, when applied to the Bible, it references God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt.
- **The Fall:** A theological expression that speaks to the second act of the biblical story in which Adam and Eve did not believe God and sinned when tempted by the devil.
- **Gospel:** Literally "good news"; the gospel as a message is an announcement of good news; the Gospel, as a book of the Bible, is an account of Jesus's mission, ministry, and message.
- **Idolatry:** The act of ascribing ultimate value or worth to anything other than God, which, within the Christian worldview, is to prioritize anything more than God.
- **Judges:** A political office in ancient Israel found in the Book of Judges; the judges in Israel were primarily rulers and military leaders who were raised up by God to lead the people out of bondage under foreign oppressors.
- **Patriarchs:** A term used to describe the early Israelite fathers of the faith, namely Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- **Protoevangelion:** The first gospel, or message of good news, which appears in Genesis 3:15.

- **Redemption:** The purchase of something or someone out of bondage by a greater party; the action of Jesus redeeming or buying people back from the bondage of sin by paying the penalty for sin through his death and resurrection in order to set them free from sin for relationship with him.

Application of Knowledge

- The fall had a devastating effect on all humanity and separated humanity from God. This should cause Christians to understand their complete need for reconciliation and redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ.
- Every worldview has an understanding of what human nature is. The Christian worldview sees humans as created in the image of God, but it also sees humanity as sinful by nature. Paul makes this clear when he said that all people have sinned and fallen short of God's glory (Romans 3:23).
- The history of humanity shows that God's people have departed from wisdom and sought out other things instead of seeking God. Paul reflected on how these stories should help Christians by writing, "Now these things took place as examples for us, that we might not desire evil as they did. Do not be idolaters as some of them were" (1 Corinthians 10:6–7).

Questions for Reflection

- According to the Christian worldview, what is human nature?
- What was the function of the prophets within ancient Israel?
- What does the history of Israel demonstrate about humanity?
- What does the history of Israel demonstrate about God?
- Why was the kingdom divided?

Resources for Further Reading

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GLOSSARY

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES