

# Genesis 1–11 and the Worldview of the Bible

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**A** biblical theology would naturally be the product of reading the Bible broadly, book by book. This would enable the student to recognize the progress of revelation from beginning to end. But is there any guide in the text of the Bible that would show an intended direction of the development of thought? Modern books include a title and a table of contents that summarizes the author's intended scope and pattern of thought arrangement. Does the Bible propose any such direction?

The proposal of this paper is that Genesis 1–11, as a prologue, is intended to be a presentation of the biblical worldview. As a worldview, it introduces the condition of the world within which history unfolds. Then each historical book advances the story until it reaches a fulfillment in the revelation of Jesus Christ. The worldview of Genesis 1–11 introduces the world as a good creation with unresolved issues of evil that God permitted, as creatures had rebelled. Then the canon of Scripture reveals God's intended resolution of mankind's conflict with sin and evil. The direction of resolution is introduced in the worldview in two roles for the human race.

Few would disagree that Genesis 1–11 provides a prologue to the book of Genesis. The literary style distinguishes it from the style of Genesis 12–50. But in my proposal, the content provides a plan in which God addresses evil. Rather than removing evil from human responsibility, God provides a plan that not only has a determined outcome but also invites mankind to freely participate in the responsibility assigned against evil. In

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the resolution of this mystery, the glory of God is revealed. And within this plan are seven predetermined truths.

The philosophical background of covenant and dispensational theological reasoning rests ultimately on Plato or Aristotle. The theological interpretations sought a foundation for knowing on different grounds. Plato had sought a heavenly ideal to find what can be known. What Plato sought in heaven, Augustine found in the New Testament revelation. It was the ideal realization of the OT introductory revelation. So, interpretation of OT expectation was retrospective, allegorizing texts in the Old Testament based on terms of the ideal fulfillment, the covenant of grace. This covenant was not mentioned directly in the OT context but recognized in the new covenant.

Aristotle sought the foundation of knowledge in terms of a basic framework based on the first laws of reasoning present in what can be known: “All instruction given or received by way of argument proceeds from pre-existent knowledge” (*Posterior Analytics* 1.1). Aquinas found this foundation of knowledge in terms of *causae veritatis* (causes of truth).

If my proposal of the role of Genesis 1–11 as a worldview is correct, then it will provide principles to be found in revelation. These principles will guide our understanding of the progress of revelation that unfolds in the dispensations that follow. The promises of God and the obedience of man to the laws of the government will resolve the problem of evil.

### **What are the principles in Genesis 1–11?**

#### ***The state of human existence is framed within the following eight truths:***

1. God is the Creator and universal Ruler of the creation.
2. God permits the existence of evil within the good creation.

3. Adam was given responsibility to mediate God’s rule but lost that position of mediating rule to Satan when he obeyed Satan’s word (Gen 3:6, 7). As a result, the human race fell and would be ruled by Satan. Satan’s usurping of Adam’s role is

acknowledged in the NT: “the prince of the power of the air, who rules over the sons of disobedience” (Eph 2:2).

4. After the invasion of evil, God pronounced judgment on Satan, in which hope for the judgment was to be worked out in the seed promised to the woman (Gen 3:15). This promise began to be fulfilled immediately in a line of descendants which was introduced as an elect line, beginning with Seth, and followed by one in each generation (5:1–32; 11:10–32).

5. Based on this promise, by faith Adam named his wife Eve, mother of the living, even though they had died when they ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. In response God provided a skin covering for each one (3:20, 21). Now both could approach God by sacrifice, even though they would be cast out of the garden. So, Abel followed the sacrifice but Cain did not. Thus, God is Savior of those who believe in God and the promise of Eve’s seed.

6. The human race, male and female, was now fallen and depraved due to Adam’s sin, living with a sentence of death. As a result, sin progressed climaxing in the distortion of the race, which threatened the promise of the seed to Eve. Then God judged the race except for Noah and his family who were saved from the worldwide flood. Noah was appointed to occupy the cleansed earth. But rather than ruling, he was given the Noahic covenant.

7. Human government was delegated to the collective humanity in the Noahic covenant, responsible to protect human life. A death penalty was instituted to enable the nation to enforce the nation’s law (Gen 9:1–9). Government law opposed evil in the population, as a means of avoiding another worldwide flood.

8. God’s glory will be revealed in his rule through promise, involving Jesus Christ who rose from the dead in order to overcome and defeat evil in righteousness. Believing mankind will be delivered from judgment following this pattern. Following his first advent, believers will be enabled to overcome

evil as Christ had in resurrection. Evil will be defeated in Christ's second advent.

Thus, there are three issues that will be resolved in the progress of revelation:

- (1) The judgment of the enemy of God, Satan, through the seed of the woman,
- (2) The reconciliation of the world to himself, through the sacrifice of seed of the woman,
- (3) The re-establishment of God's mediated kingdom on earth, judging all nations through the revelation of the seed of the woman.

These issues will be realized in history.

***Genesis 1–11 does not adequately represent three dispensations***

1. The first three dispensations are defined by characteristics of a dispensation rather than by an economy in God's outworking of his purposes.<sup>2</sup> This interpretation involves a change in the criteria of definition from Scofield to Ryrie's own definition.

2. Ryrie questioned whether Conscience and Government are distinct dispensations. What were the distinguishing features to justify the two? I agree that the institution of government is new in holding mankind responsible for opposing evil by law, but it is not new in God's governance. When God sent the worldwide flood, was God not governing evil in the population?

3. Scripture provides direct evidence for four dispensations (administrations):

- Ephesians 1:10: the administration of the days of fulfillment—to bring everything together in Christ (kingdom).

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<sup>2</sup> Charles C. Ryrie, *Dispensationalism* (Chicago: Moody, 1995), 33–35.

- John 1:17, “The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (law and grace).
- Genesis 18:18–19, “Abraham is to become a great and powerful nation, and all the nations of earth will be blessed through him. I have chosen Abraham so that he will command his children and his house after him to keep the way of the LORD by doing what is right and just. This is how He will fulfill to Abraham what he promised him” (promise).

These Scriptures identify four dispensations: promise, law, grace, and kingdom.

### **What is the Worldview?**

#### ***The Adam Phase***

Adam was created with the responsibility to populate the earth and to mediate God’s rule on earth (Gen 1:28). This realm of rule included the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The threat not to eat was to be enforced by the penalty of death: “in the day you eat from it, you shall surely die” (2:17). God’s intent was that Adam would rule by the knowledge of good and trust God to deal with evil.

When Adam ate from the tree, he lost the position of rule to Satan, whose words, Adam now had begun to obey. To obey Satan was to disobey God. So, if Satan was now ruling, mankind was now ruled by Satan in disobedience.

In God’s pronouncement of judgment on the fallen world, he began with a judgment of the evil one, Satan. God spoke without any questioning of the serpent, which implied that the serpent was already guilty. Further evil was to co-exist in conflict with God’s promised line:

Stage one: the woman in conflict with Satan

Stage two: the descendants of the woman; with the descendants of Satan,

Stage three: the seed of the woman; with Satan. (3:15)

These stages are the pronouncement of judgment on Satan. This appears in the third stage, a promise of the seed of the woman is introduced, which invites mankind to believe. That seed will strike the head of Satan. However, this is only after Satan strikes the heel of the seed. So, the first response to evil featured the promised seed of the woman. God does not disregard man; instead, he promises one to defeat evil from the human race. While the seed is human, he will defeat Satan by the promise from God and in that sense is uniquely enabled by God.

When Adam named his wife, he believed the promise that the woman would be the mother of the living, even though God had threatened death on the day they ate. Adam believed God would deal with the threat of death, while Eve would mother offspring. In response to faith, God provided skin coverings so fallen mankind could still approach him through sacrifice. Abel offered such a sacrifice that God introduced, while Cain did not. After Abel was murdered, God provided Seth, and this chosen one is the first in a line. So, an elect line began with Seth followed by Enosh who began to call on the name of the Lord (4:25–26).

The fallen population followed the sin of Cain as reflected in the pattern of sin that succeeded Cain's murdering Abel but pleading for God's protection.

Lamech killed two lads but celebrated it with his wives. Sons of God impregnated daughters of man to begin to pollute the human race with Nephilim.

This development represents an intensification of evil in the world. God's judgment responded to the intensifying presence of sin with a worldwide flood in which the whole population was judged, except for Noah and his family. As a result, God's response alone addressed evil using the promised descendant of Eve, Noah, who was righteous to be delivered and to deliver his family.

### *The Noah Stage*

Noah in the line of the elect ones, was linked to the preflood world. Having been delivered in the ark from that judged world, so that after the flood, he stepped into a new world with a changed climate and growing season (8:22). He was also linked

to Adam by an altar, by which Noah approached God through sacrifice with thanksgiving (8:20).

Like Adam, Noah was appointed to populate the earth (Gen 9:1). But unlike Adam, he wasn't appointed to rule. That rulership had been lost to Satan. Rather Noah was given a covenant for the worldwide population. There were these conditions in the covenant:

- Animals are now fearful of mankind,
- Animal life was given to man to eat, but without the blood,
- Promise of no more worldwide floods, evidenced by a rainbow,
- Human government, encompassing responsibility for humanity, will address the evil which Cain introduced.
- A Law code protecting human life was instituted and enforced by the death penalty of the guilty one. That penalty would be applied to animals or mankind and administered by man. (Gen 9:1–17).

So, in the second response to evil, God included the responsibility for all of humanity, as included under human government prescribed in the Noahic covenant. It was by man that the guilty party was to be slain. God required the life of the guilty party, but mankind was to execute it.

The outworking of the covenant rested in the descendants of Noah. Although it was occasioned by Noah's own sin, which remained unresolved, yet Noah designated the order to follow in God's plan. The next generation was worked out in his sons: Shem is the elect, Japheth is blessed, and Ham is cursed in his offspring Canaan.

At this time the whole earth spoke the same language and vocabulary. Collectively they were building a tower to confront God. But God descended to confuse their language and thereby separate the peoples into nations, each with their own self-interests and law. This world of nations under the Noahic covenant was fashioned to replace Adam's responsibility on earth, not to rule over evil, but to govern the emergence of taking human life.

This responsibility to govern established nations each with a pattern of law in the history that followed (Gen 10). When God

established Israel as a nation, the centerpiece was the law code in a more complete form (Exod 20–24). However, early dispensationalists overlooked what Paul said about the giving of the law:

Why then was the law given? It was added alongside of promise, for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the Promise was given, would come.... Is the law contrary to God's promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of law. But Scripture imprisoned everything under sin's power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. (Gal 3:19–22)

The initial promise of the seed was in completed form the promise of Christ.

### **The Conclusion**

The Noahic stage addressed evil in nations, but in spite of law, sin overcame the nations in evil. This narrative was completed in Daniel. Israel had just been deported into the Gentile world. Israel had been overcome by evil, even though the law code in Israel combined with the provision of sacrifice, revealed that human obedience alone would be insufficient. Rather that inability of fallen mankind will need the promised One to deal with evil efficaciously. This revelation was clarified at Jesus Christ's first advent when "Jesus who was chosen before the foundation of the world, but was revealed at the end of times for you" died for mankind. What evil posed as a contradiction, God could control in a plan that included man with a responsible and free choice. God resolved the contradiction as the mystery unfolded. Jesus was chosen before the incarnation to have a role of death in redemption, a role which Jesus prayed could be removed. Yet he freely accepted the role, since he chose what was not decided by his will but God's will that would be accomplished (Luke 22:36–46). The mystery was resolved as the contradiction had been removed. The resurrection realized Jesus will. "So that your faith and hope are in God" (1 Pet 1:20–21).

The Revelation of Jesus Christ completed the narrative as God defeated evil and the evil one through Jesus Christ. The



resurrected One in God's plan returned to complete the story. This conquest will be followed by the millennial kingdom of heaven come to earth in the Son of Man and God's creation plan having been fulfilled despite evil having been permitted.

Thus Genesis 1–11 introduces a worldview consisting of the essential truths that frame the human existence that would follow. While the essential truths are introduced in the unresolved problem of evil, the development of God's purposes to overcome evil awaited history and the progress of revelation. Ryrie identified the one purpose of God to be the mediated rule of man, finally realized through the kingdom of God come to earth. But Genesis 3:15 also implies another purpose of deliverance from evil, as Satan strikes the promised One, yet this struck One is the agent of deliverance for fallen mankind. By his death, the sin of mankind will be redeemed. So, the promised One must be delivered. Daniel envisions the first advent of Messiah when he was cut off (Dan 9:25–26) and the second advent of the Stone, not cut out with hands (2:34–35, 44), or the Son of Man (7:13–14; 26–27), or Messiah the Prince (9:25–27), who will ultimately reign.

While the whole human race is responsible for evil, only the promised descendant of the woman will fulfill that responsibility. However, those who receive his redemptive provision will join him to rule for one thousand years (Dan 7:27; Rev 20:4–7).