



Gospel in the Garden

Further Thoughts on Parashat Bereshit

by John J Parsons

Parashat Bereshit is always read on the Sabbath following the holiday of Simchat Torah, and therefore it begins Torah reading for the new Jewish year.... Right at the outset of the narrative of the Torah, then, we will read about the “proto-euangelion,” or the “first gospel” message of God’s redemption given through the Promised Seed of Eve...



THE VERY FIRST PROPHECY OF TORAH concerns the promise of the coming “seed of the woman” who would vanquish the serpent (*nachash*) that had originally tempted and deceived Eve (Gen. 3:15). This prophecy is sometimes called the *proto-euangelion* (“first gospel”), since it is the starting point of all subsequent prophecy and redemptive history that is revealed in the Scriptures. Indeed, since the mystery of the Incarnation of God the Son, the “Son of Man,” is foreshadowed here, this prophecy is linked to the original woman, Eve. Just as Eve became a carrier of the corruption of human nature by heeding the voice of the tempter, so she would be the carrier of God Himself for the deliverance of mankind through the advent of the Redeemer. In the tragic aftermath of the transgression of the first man and woman, then, God first announced His unfailing redemptive love for the human race that would culminate in the birth, sacrifice, and resurrection of Yeshua our Savior and Deliverer - “born of a woman, born under the law” (Gal. 4:4).

Our restoration begins with God’s love and passion. God’s first question to Adam after he broke covenant was: “Where (אֵינְךָ) are you?” - the voice of a loving Father in search of his son (Gen. 3:9). Of course the LORD knew exactly where his lost child was vainly attempting to hide, though He almost acted as if He was unwilling to believe that he would betray his love by disobeying His commandment. Therefore God’s poignant question was directed to Adam’s heart: “Oh my son, how did you get to this place?” God was giving Adam an opportunity to turn back to Him, to confess the sin, to undergo *teshuvah*, to become reconciled... This is the necessary prelude to any honest relationship with God.



Recall that the promise of the coming Savior was given within the context of the curse and *judgment upon Satan*: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall crush your head, and you shall crush his heel” (Gen. 3:15). That God’s promise was first directed to Satan is surely *by design*, since he “left his first estate” by becoming the “monster in the garden” and was therefore primarily responsible for the transgression of Adam and Eve in the first place (Ezek. 28:13-15,19). The promise delivered to Satan was therefore one of coming retribution and divine judgment: Evil would not have the last word in the matter of mankind, and therefore Satan’s schemes would be *avenged* by God in the fullness of time (Gal. 4:4-5). Notice, however, that Adam and Eve were not yet judged for their sin when the LORD God gave the promise of the coming of the Redeemer. Before a word of judgment was directed toward them, God’s love and light was *already* revealed. Indeed, immediately *after* their judgment was pronounced, “the LORD God made tunics of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them” (Gen. 3:21) - a clear picture of being compassionately “robed in righteousness” imparted by an innocent sacrifice. The very first sacrifice recorded in the Torah - *performed by God Himself* - prefigured the coming redemption by the “seed of the woman” who would die as a substitutionary sacrifice for their sins, and therefore Yeshua is rightly called “the Lamb slain from the foundation (or beginning) of the world” (Rev. 13:8). This further explains why Eve’s son (Abel) offered a blood sacrifice that was accepted by the LORD, whereas Cain’s offering the “fruit of the earth” was rejected.

The first prophecy of Torah therefore describes - in the most succinct form - the coming of the Savior and the great conflict of the ages. First, God declares that He would put *enmity* (אִכְזָּה) between Satan and the woman. This enmity, or “hostile hatred,” was based on the memory of Eve’s misguided trust she evidenced in the garden. When Eve first sympathetically listened to the lies of the *nachash* (serpent), she immediately began her descent into exile and became a temptress herself. Her first step toward sin was a gullibility or openness that ultimately resulted in a lack of trust of God (which is part of the reason why we must be saved by *trusting*, as a “like-for-like” reversal of the original sin). At the very dawn of human history, then, we see that “truth” (אֱמֻנָה) apart from God (אֱלֹהִים) leads to *death* (מוֹת). Eve was deceived because of Satan, but Adam deliberately chose to disobey God (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim 2:14). In response to her *teshuvah* (repentance), God *blessed* Eve before He judged her by imparting to her a God-given hatred for Satan and his lies, as well as the promise that she would take part in the birth of the Savior and Lord of mankind. The first promise of the gospel, then, focused on the woman and her role in the coming redemption. Notice that Adam later renamed his wife Eve (i.e., Chavah: חַוָּה, the “mother of life”) as an expression of *his* faith that the promised seed would come through her.



It is likely that Eve initially believed that her firstborn son Cain (קַיִן) was the promised Seed himself. After all, the miracle of birth surely came as a great shock to her, and Eve's faith in God's promise that through her seed would come the deliverer was doubtlessly upon her heart at this time. When Eve called her son "Cain" (wordplay from the verb *kana* (קָנָה), "to get"), she was expressing her faith in God's promise: קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת־יְהוָה / *kaniti ish et-Adonai*, "I have gotten a man - namely, the LORD!" (Gen. 4:1). Eve's faith was obscured by the translators, however, who rendered the Hebrew as "I have gotten a man *with the help of* the LORD" (i.e., they inserted the idea of "help" and translated the particle *et* (אֶת) as "with" rather than as the direct object marker for the verb). The ancient Jewish targums, however, agree with the original Hebrew. For example, Targum Yonatan reads: "I have gotten a man - the Angel of YHVH." Surely Eve, the first mother of humanity, was endowed with great wisdom from God, *especially* after she turned to Him in repentance after her disobedience. The straightforward reading of her words, then, expressed her hope that the LORD Himself would be made a man....

Despite her hope that Cain was none other than the God-Man and promised Deliverer, Eve's hopes were dashed when it became clear that her son was actually of the seed of Satan (1 John 3:12). His younger brother Abel (הָבֶל) was a shepherd who evidenced faith in the promise of the coming redeemer by offering blood sacrifice (Gen. 4:3-5). Abel was persecuted and finally murdered by his brother Cain "because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous." Their spiritual conflict is indicative of the ongoing warfare between the "sons of darkness" and the "sons of light."

The murder of Abel necessitated that the coming seed would descend through another child, and therefore the Torah describes the birth of Seth (שֵׁט, lit. "appointed"), the third son of Adam and Eve. The Scriptures further state that it was the descendants of Seth who "began to call upon the Name of the LORD" (אֲזָן הוֹחֵל לִקְרֹא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה), indicating that they had faith in God (אֱלֹהִים) as the Compassionate Covenant Keeper (יְהוָה) who would redeem humanity by means of the coming seed. Seth called his firstborn son Enosh ("man"), perhaps in the hope that his child would be the promised Savior (interestingly, *bar enosh* (בֶּר אֱנוֹשׁ), or "Son of Man," is the name for the Savior (Dan 7:13).

The Torah's statement, "I will put enmity between your (Satan's) *seed* and her seed" is somewhat ambiguous, however. The Hebrew word "seed" (i.e., *zera*: זֶרַע) is *singular* in form though it can refer to a collective group or kind (e.g., "offspring" in Isa. 1:4; Gal. 3:16). The "seed of the woman" therefore refers primarily to the promised Seed (i.e., Savior) to come but also to those descendants of Eve who would share her faith in God's redemption (i.e., the godly line beginning with Abel/Seth, Enosh...). This is consistent with



most prophetic utterances found in Scripture, which often foretell of temporal events that signify deeper spiritual truths. On the other hand, the “seed of the serpent” refers collectively to those descendants who are the spiritual progeny of the devil (i.e., the ungodly line beginning with Cain, Canaan... (John 8:44; Matt. 3:7; 13:38) as well as to the coming of the future Anti-Christ, or “Messiah of Evil” that will be revealed at the End of Days. The seed of the serpent therefore refers to corrupted and carnal human nature, whereas the seed of the woman refers to those who are regenerated by faith in God’s salvation.... Understood in the collective sense, the prophecy implies perpetual warfare between the descendants of Eve who shared her *teshuvah* (called the “children of light”) and the descendants of Satan who refused it (called the “children of darkness”). The ongoing enmity between these “two seeds” foretells the “tale of two kingdoms,” the Kingdom of God (מְלֻכּוּת אֱלֹהִים) and the kingdom of the devil (John 8:34-36). The Apostles likewise spoke of “children of darkness” and “children of light” (Eph. 5:8; Col. 1:13, 1 Thess. 5:5, etc.). The children of light are called to be *goy kadosh* (גּוֹי קָדוֹשׁ), “a holy people,” and *am segulah* (עַם סְגֻלָּה), a “select possession,” separate from the evil engendered by the fallen world and its forces, just as the very first creative expression of God was the separation of light from darkness (Gen. 1:3-4). The children of light “hate evil and love the good,” and conversely, the children of darkness “hate the good and love evil” (Psalm 34:21, Prov. 8:13, Amos 5:15, John 3:20-21). Politically speaking, St. Augustine described the cosmic conflict as one between the “City of Man” and the “City of God.”

Ultimately, however, the promise points to the final outcome of the battle between the coming Savior (the Seed of the woman) and the devil himself: “... he (i.e., the Savior/Messiah) will crush your head (רֹאשׁ), and you (i.e., the serpent/Satan) will crush his heel (עֲקֵב).” The crushing of Satan’s head refers to the destruction of his usurped dominion over mankind. Yeshua, the “Son of Man” and “Second Adam,” landed a mortal blow directly to the head of the evil one himself, and through His sacrifice has “destroyed the works of the devil” (Col. 2:15, 1 John 3:8). The “crushing of the heel of the Savior” referred to Yeshua’s suffering by being rejected and crucified for our sins. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons” (Gal. 4:4-5).





As I mentioned the other day, “God creates the cure before the plague.” Just as God created mankind only after He created the pathway of repentance (i.e., Yeshua is described as the “Lamb slain from the foundation of the world”: 1 Pet. 1:20, Eph. 1:4, Rev. 13:8, 17:8), so the purification from death and the nullification of the curse was likewise foreseen and provided by the Cross of the Messiah. Yeshua is the *antidote* to the venom delivered through the serpent’s bite (John 3:14-15). “For as in Adam all die, so also in Messiah shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). The “new seed” of life given to us in Yeshua makes us into a “new creation” (בְּרִיָּה הַדְּשָׁנָה) that fully restores the defaced image of God within us: “Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Cor. 15:49).

God’s redeeming love was present from the beginning. The midrash states that Adam was created from the “dust of the Temple.” After Adam’s sin, the Tree of Life (עֵץ הַחַיִּים) was “removed from reach” and guarded by cherubim until the blood that spoke a “better thing than the blood of Abel” was offered for the redemption of mankind (Heb. 12:24). This “better thing” was prefigured in many ways in Scripture: through the martyrdom of Abel, through the Akedah of Isaac, through the blood of the lamb that delivered Israel from the angel of death, through the blood sprinkled upon the *kapporet* (“mercy seat”) of the Ark of the Covenant, through the sacrifice of the Red Heifer, and most especially through the sacrificial death of Yeshua upon the Cross at Moriah.... Those who trust in the sacrifice and victorious resurrection of the Messiah are given access to eat of the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God (Rev. 2:7; 22:14).



Addendum: As has been noted by various scholars, Genesis 3:15 has historically been understood as a *Messianic* prophecy, not just by the early church fathers, but by the Jewish sages as well. The Septuagint (LXX) translated the verse with Messianic overtones, and the Targum of Jonathan and the Jerusalem Targum both speak of “a remedy for the heel in the days of the king Messiah.” Likewise the Apostle Paul regarded the victory of the gospel as a fulfillment of the promise made to Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden (Rom. 16:20). From the very beginning, then, we see that the promise of the coming Savior is mingled with victory and suffering, of glory and humiliation. This “dual aspect” of the Messiah is present in most of the prophecies of Scripture concerning our Savior.