VOCATIONAL PARTICIPATION
AN ETHICAL PARADIGM IN THE NARRATIVE OF GENESIS

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent decades, Old Testament ethics has shifted attention to the moral address of "narrative." One of the chief modes of narrative ethical address is the artful use of paradigms. A narrative analysis of the rhetoric of Genesis (with special attention given to repetition, motifs, and structure) reveals an ethical paradigm of *vocational participation.* This model is inaugurated in the promise-call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) and then climactically fulfilled in the structural highpoint of the Joseph narrative (Gen. 45:1-15). This pattern of vocational participation involves a summons to join God in "overcoming curse with blessing." As such, God's people are called to alleviate the conditions and effects of curse while working to establish the conditions of blessing. Within the narrative cast of this summons, there is a discernable moral *ethos* featuring faith, obedience, wisdom, and the *imitatio Dei*. This story-formed paradigm is intended as an ethical charter of identity for the people of Israel. Typologically, the paradigm is also programmatic for Israel, Christ, and the church. The ethical task of the church is to faithfully and imaginatively appropriate the pattern and texture of the Genesis paradigm into new situations.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The academic study of Old Testament ethics is in many ways a new venture. Ethics

refers to the principles or patterns that govern a person or group's moral behavior. When we

speak about Old Testament ethics we refer to the elements in the Hebrew text that contain

directives unto this end. While it is common practice for Jewish and Christian communities

to study such directives, Old Testament ethics (as a formal discipline) has long been

neglected. The field was altogether ignored by the emphases of the Enlightenment period and

subtly overshadowed by the modern developments of source and redaction criticism.

However, this lack of attention, frequently referenced and lamented by scholars, has started

to become a thing of the past. Within the last 30 years, numerous articles and book-length

volumes have begun to appear that contribute in various ways to this subject. The earliest

work in this area seemed to focus almost entirely on the legal materials of the Old Testament.

However, this tendency has more recently been called into question. The focus on explicit

imperatives and legal codes often occurred at the relative neglect of other important genres.

These genres also possess ethical address. Moreover, it has been questioned as to whether a

legal code can be regarded as a comprehensive description of a culture's ethics. Can the

highest norms of a society really be codified in its legal abstractions?

Consequently, many OT scholars have begun to study and commend the "narrative"

material with respect to ethics since all of the legal texts are in some sense contextually

"storied." It would seem that understanding the narratives would at least shed light upon the legal material. Yet scholars have suggested even further that the narratives themselves (and not just their immediate relationship to the legal texts) ought to directly concern ethical studies. The Jewish people understood *all* of Genesis to be *torah*; but in what sense? The shift to narrative material seems to increase the scope and difficulty of our enterprise. Attempting to extrapolate timeless maxims from cultural and time-bound laws already presents difficulties, how much more from texts that *prima facie* do not offer any explicit ethical imperatives? In what way can a narrative even impart ethical directives? The biblical stories certainly do not read as straightforward "moral parables," nor do their characters seem to consistently portray an ethical ideal.

Old Testament scholars such as John Barton, Brice Birch, Waldemar Janzen, Christopher J.H. Wright, and Gordon J. Wenham have sought to address many of these questions by offering a variety of "narrative approaches" to OT ethics. Wenham and Wright's work in this area seems to have especially benefited from the recent attention in Biblical studies given to literary and rhetorical considerations. Drawing upon their work in particular, this thesis proposes a narrative reading of Genesis that reveals an ethic in the form of a "storied paradigm."[1] This paradigm is internal to the arc of Genesis and cannot be reduced to any one person or story without proper reference to the whole. The paradigm collectively develops within the narrative succession of the text and is signaled through the intricate threading of motifs, structures, and narrative analogies. The whole paradigm is intended as a charter of identity for ancient Israel and directly addresses the ethical ideals of the nation.

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[1] A paradigm is an exemplary pattern or model meant for multiple applications (similar to a blueprint or template).

The Paradigmatic Calling of Genesis

Embedded within the structural and motific tapestry of Genesis is an ethical model of *vocational participation*. This calling is explicitly established in the promise-call of Abram (Genesis 12:1-3) and then, in a literary sense, fulfilled within the climactic moments of the Joseph narrative (Genesis 45:1-15, 50:15-21). At its most basic level, the term vocational participation describes the text's insistence that the ethics of covenant Israel are bound up in a partnership with God's redemptive intentions and activity. The author of Genesis depicts this membership as joining God in "overcoming curse with blessing." Overcoming curse is both something that God has promised, as well as something to which he calls his people. God's redemptive intention is to re-make the world into a place of blessing. God's people are thus to join him in actively alleviating the conditions/effects of curse while also seeking to establish the conditions of blessing. God responds to the presence of evil and curse by calling a people to "be what He intended" and so live in such a way as to mediate his blessing to all the families of the earth.

This "storied-paradigm" functions as the ethical ideal to which Israel is to conform. Furthermore, this thesis contends that the paradigm functions programmatically for the people of God throughout the Old and New Testaments, and even into the present day. If this is the case, the storied-theology of Genesis is of critical (and perhaps even primary) importance for beginning to understand the overarching ethical vision of the Bible.

CHAPTER 2

OLD TESTAMENT NARRATIVE ETHICS

As noted in the introduction, there has been a general shift in Old Testament ethics towards the moral address of "narrative." Below is a brief literature review of scholars who have endeavored to take the ethical address of OT narrative seriously. [1]

A Literature Review

John Barton is a major figure and pioneer in the field of OT ethics. He is sensitive to the diversity and difficulty of the OT texts and therefore resists approaches that seem to "purchase coherence and system at the price of historical objectivity and verifiability" and then force "recalcitrant materials into a predesigned mould."[2] He has also made very helpful contributions in studying the "basis" of Old Testament ethics (i.e. what does the text say regarding the rationale for adhering to ethical norms). In characteristic fashion, Barton believes "simple answers falsify" and remains skeptical of any approach that would force all rationale into a single heading.[3] While "obedience to the declared will" of God is the traditional chief-norm, Barton suggests that the Bible is not so monolithic in its approach. In 1978, Barton began to suggest a trifold approach, which in his mind, at least began to

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[1] For a larger more general literature review, see Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 415-440.

[2] John Barton, "Understanding Old Testament Ethics" *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament 9* (1978): 44-45.

[3] Ibid., 61.

describe the pluriformity of OT ethics.[4] The conceptual models that he suggests are: 1) Obedience to God (in grateful response); 2) Conformity to a pattern of natural order; and 3) Imitation of God.[5] Each of these models can be traced in the Old Testaments laws, prophets, wisdom texts, and narratives.

Barton contends that the law cannot be the only subject of ethical reflection. Narratives make up a large bulk of the OT, and the narratives themselves "presuppose and help to establish a pattern of moral behavior."[6] Indeed, *torah* (which Barton describes as "narrative"*)* functions by "providing materials that, when pondered and absorbed into the mind, will suggest the pattern or shape of a way of life lived in the presence of God."[7] He offers these conclusions as foil to any models that would equate the OT's ethical force with its abstract legal principles.[8] He even explores the idea that certain ethical ideals cannot be communicated through abstractions and thus, require narrative formulations.[9] Barton describes OT ethics as essentially "a matter of imitating the pattern of God's own actions, in salvation and in creation" which "springs from a pattern that always exists in his own mind

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[4] Barton, 59-60.

[5] See also John Barton, "Approaches to Ethics in the Old Testament" in *Beginning Old Testament Study,* ed. J.W. Rogerson. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982): 114-132; "The Basis of Ethics in the Old Testament" *Semeia* 6 (1994): 11-22; "Imitation of God in the Old Testament" in *The God of Israel*. Ed. R.P. Gordon. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 35-46.

[6] Barton, "Approaches to Ethics in the Old Testament" in *Beginning Old Testament Study,* ed. J.W. Rogerson. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 128.

[7] Barton, "Approaches," 128.

[8] To do so would miss the point. Barton writes, "The Law affords an insight into the contours of God's own ideal will for his people and all mankind." (Ibid, 129.) But this Law is storied into a larger narrative whole in which the legal materials echo God's established creational order and intention.

[9] John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 3-4.

and by which he governs the world with justice and mercy."[10] *Torah,* with its "strange mixture of law and narrative" is "a system by which to live the whole of life in the presence of God, rather than a set of detailed regulations to cover every individual situation in which a moral ruling might be called for."[11] This system is a pattern or model made up of various, and often diverse, strands of ethical material. This consideration has some kinship with the "paradigm" models to be addressed below.

In a *Festschrift* for Brevard Childs, Bruce Birch wrote an article entitled "Old Testament Narrative and Moral Address." This article eventually subsumed into his book, *Let Justice Role Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and the Christian Life.*[12] Birch affirms Child's canonical approach while bemoaning the relative neglect of narrative analysis (and especially of narrative *ethical* analysis).[13] Birch finds this neglect strange since most of the OT is narrative, and the rest of the OT takes place within a "storied" framework of Israel's relationship with God. He also finds narrative particularly suited to address ethical issues since "human experience . . . is inherently narrative in form."[14] One of the main modes of ethical address occurs through the way a text creates a story-formed way of seeing of the world. He terms this way of seeing the world as "paradigmatic,"[15] and understands the ethics

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[10] Barton, "Approaches," 130.

[11] John Barton, "Law and Narrative" *Communio Viatorum* 51 (2009): 128.; Barton, "Approaches," 128.

[12] Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991).

[13] Ibid., 40, 51.

[14] Birch, 53.

[15] Ibid., 55.

of God's people to be related to our ability to live out of these patterns, which take the eventual shape of "story-formed identities."[16]

Another important contributor to this field of study is Waldemar Janzen. In *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach (*1994) Janzen contends that the OT as a whole forms a canon of wisdom that can be divided into five composite "models of right living."[17] Just as a modern reader might have a mental conception of a "good driver" so also the texts of scripture provides us with multiple "ideal" models. These models consist of a *familial* paradigm as well as *priestly, wisdom, royal,* and *prophetic*. With Abraham as his chief character, Janzen argues that the *familial* model ultimately subsumes the others and represents the "comprehensive end of all Old Testament ethics."[18]

According to Janzen, the task of a Christian is the "internalization" of these paradigms. This occurs when one pays proper attention to the diverse fabrics of the OT narratives. The paradigms are not an exhaustive list for every potential ethical situation, but internalized and storied models of right behavior that must be worked out in everyday life. Janzen believes that the people of the OT were not primarily shaped by law, but rather, through internalized paradigms that are rooted in God's story.[19]

Working in a similar vein is Christopher J.H. Wright**,** who has also proposed a paradigmatic approach to OT ethics. According to Wright, "A paradigm is something used as a model or example for other cases where a basic principle remains unchanged, though

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[16] This is reminiscent of the work of Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).

[17] Janzen Waldemar, Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994).

[18] Janzen, 2.

[19] Janzen, 28, 44.

details differ."[20] He states further that the scriptures "render to us a paradigm, in one single culture and slice of history, of the kinds of social values God looks for in human life generally."[21] Wright suggests that "Israel" itself functions as the overarching ethical paradigm for mankind. His conception of "Israel-as-paradigm" has two senses. Wright suggests that it can refer to "either the total conceptual matrix of Israel's faith, or the concrete model by which Israel was to be an exemplar for the nations."[22] In short, Israel functions as a paradigm in their "worldview" and in their "vocation."[23]

According to Wright, Old Testament ethics are built upon Israel's worldview.[24] It is then our duty to "outline the broad contours of the worldview that lie behind the wealth of laws and exhortation in the OT, as well as the moral values implicit or explicit in the narratives, worship, and prophecy."[25] For Wright, discerning the constants of Israel's worldview is an essential step towards proper OT ethical reflection.

Wright also helpfully states, "In the OT…ethics is fundamentally theological. That is, ethical issues are at every point related to God — to his character, his will, his actions, and his purpose."[26] In the overarching narrative of the Bible, God's good purpose is to redeem and restore fallen mankind. The vehicle of his intention is the calling of Israel. According to Wright, Israel was elected in order to become an exemplar of human community before God.

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[20] Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God.* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1983), 43.

[21] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*, 65. See the larger argument, 64-65.

[22] Ibid., 431.

[23] A worldview can be defined as a governing set of beliefs, values, and assumptions concerning God, self, and the world.

[24] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics,* 17.

[25] Ibid.,

[26] Ibid., 23.

As such, they were elected "to an ethical agenda."[27] This agenda is first spelled out in

Genesis as part of God's intention "to bring the blessings of redemption to humanity as a

whole."[28] Elsewhere Wright states, "God's answer to the international blight of sin was a

new community of international blessing, a nation that would be the pattern and model of

redemption, as well as the vehicle by which the blessing of redemption would eventually

embrace the rest of humanity."[29] Wright thus believes that the narratives demonstrate that:

> Israel as a society, was intended from the start to be a paradigm or model to the nations, a showcase of the way God longs for human society as a whole to operate. We are not only justified we are indeed expected to make use of the social patterns, structures, and laws of the Old Testament Israel to help us in our thinking and choosing in the realm of social ethics in our own world.[30]

Paradigms are thus not so much imitated as they are applied. The particularity of the model is

not a problem as a "paradigm by its very nature is a particular, specific, concrete case that

has wider relevance or application beyond its own particularity."[31] Therefore, the modern

church does not imitate Israel so much as adopt and apply the larger and broader worldview

(and therefore identity) of the people of God as laid out in the contours of national Israel.[32]

In close kinship with these approaches is the work of Gordon Wenham. In *Story as

Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically* (2000), Wenham registers serious

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[27] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics*., 50. "Election means election to an *ethical* agenda . . ."

[28] Ibid., 74.

[29] Ibid., 49.

[30] Ibid., 74.

[31] Ibid., 65.

[32] According to Wright, approaching Israel paradigmatically "protects us from two opposite dangers" (*Living,* 43). Firstly, it cautions us against a facsimile imitation of Israel. The nexus between the socio-ethical life of Israel and the modern church is not a binary relationship. A paradigmatic approach helpfully reminds us that application will be by analogy. And secondly, "Israel cannot be dismissed as relevant only within the confines of historical Israel." (*Living,* 43) Israel was meant to be a normative "pattern or model" for all families of the earth.

concern with any approach to OT ethics that would foreground the Law and instead promotes a literary-narrative approach to OT ethics.[33] Wenham concurs with Birch and Wright in seeing the intention of the narratives as "forming the character of Israel as a nation."[34] According to him, the highest ethic of a people cannot be found in its prohibitions and punishments, but rather in the patterns of behavior commended by the implied authors.[35]

Wenham suggests that the individual stories, when not divorced from one another, have immense ethical value through their ability to subtly signal the virtues that God approves and vices he does not. "Thus out of the stories of Genesis we can build up a catalogue of the virtues as they are perceived by the author, an identikit picture of the righteous."[36] Wenham sees the stories as working together in the promotion of "ethical ideals" or even "paradigms of behavior that apply in various situations."[37] Yet in order to hear "what" is being said, Wenham insists that we must pay very close attention to "how" it is being said. Wenham excellently models this approach with insightful results.[38]

This thesis has been inclined to follow Wenham's lead in paying special attention to the literary artistry of the text in order to better hear its ethical import. While Wenham's

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[33] Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading the Old Testament Ethically*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 79-81.

[34] Wenham, *Story*, 103.

[35] See Ch. 5, "Ethical Ideals and Legal Requirements" in *Story as Torah,* especially 79-107. Wenham believes that there are gaps between the ethical ideals heralded by the authors and the coded legal requirements.

[36] Ibid., 100.

[37] Ibid., 104. Hearing the ethical address of an author means being able to discern how they feel towards certain behaviours. Wenham has proposed a model that weighs behavior by three criteria. 1) The pattern of behaviour should be repeated in a number of different contexts; 2) it must be exhibited in a positive context; and 3) Positive attestation in a legal, psalm, or wisdom text. Admittedly, the second criteria can often be hard to determine, especially in light of literary gaps, blanks, and perhaps even moments of intentional ambiguity. This is where the hard work of rhetorical/literary criticism comes into play.

[38] See Wenham's detailed analysis of the rhetorical function of Genesis and Judges as well as the chapters which follow in *Story*, 17-127.

ethico-literary analysis focuses more on particular virtues, his approach relates significantly to our overall task. In many ways, we stand on his shoulders as we hope to gain a clearer picture of how Genesis' ethical address inaugurates the moral vision of the OT.

<div style="text-align: center;">Biblical Narrative</div>

Throughout our literature review there has been a recurring call for OT ethics to reclaim the moral address of the OT narratives. In 2009, Barton wrote a short paper entitled "Law and Narrative in the Pentateuch" in which he suggests that "when two genres are intertwined and embedded one in the other, the interpreter allows one of them to predominate in the mind and to set the norms by which to interpret the other."[39] Barton believes that readings which have foregrounded the Law have all too often had the consequence of interpretative misdirection. Barton thus asks whether it might be appropriate to instead foreground the narratives of the Old Testament. This foregrounding places special emphasis on the nature of elect Israel, rightly contextualizing the Law as integral to a special relationship being worked out in history.[40] In this way, election and blessing properly precede and condition law-keeping.[41] The law occurs not above, but within the narratival frame of the Pentateuch. Law is not to be displaced, but rather to be seen as contextually storied. This should rightly draw attention to the rhetorical import of the larger narratives in which the laws are embedded.[42]

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[39] Barton, "Law and Narrative," 127-129.

[40] Ibid., 132.

[41] Barton, "Law and Narrative," 133.

[42] T.E. Fretheim suggests as much in "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus" *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 354-365.

Before we proceed, however, we must firstly consider the question, "What is narrative?" According to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*, narrative is:

> A telling of some true or fictitious event or connected sequence of events, recounted by a narrator to a narratee…A narrative will consist of a set of events (the *story) recounted in a process of narration (or *discourse), in which the events are selected and arranged in a particular order (the *plot).[43]

In simplest terms, narrative is story. Yet notice that "story" (the given set of events) is communicated through a "process" of story-telling. This process involves decisions as to *how* one will communicate the story. Artful stories, such as Biblical narrative, are intentional in *how* they are designed. The forming of a narrative depends upon how an author purposefully selects and arranges the events, characters, and dialogues at hand. Mark Allan Powell states, "Stories concerning the same basic events, characters, and settings can be told in ways the produce very different narratives."[44] A narrative is thus a story told in a particular way for particular ends.

Michael Goldberg defines narrative as "the telling of a story whose meaning unfolds through the interplay of characters and actions over time."[45] This definition adds to the *Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* definition by alluding to a sense of "meaning" above the mere recounting of events and yet communicated through these very same events. Narrative is not a cold-atomistic form of event-report. Narrative is social discourse; purposefully and artfully constructed to mean in a certain way and for a certain purpose. Sternberg states, "Like all social discourse, biblical narrative is orientated to an addressee

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[43] Chris Baldick, *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 219.

[44] Mark Allan Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress,1990), 23 as quoted in Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 94.

[45] Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction.* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 35.

and regulated by a purpose or a set of purposes involving an addresser."[46] It is therefore "a means to a communicative end, a transaction between the narrator and the audience on whom he wishes to produce a certain effect by way of certain strategies."[47] These "strategies" are what we will refer to as the "rhetoric of narrative."

The Rhetoric of Narrative

Powell defines the rhetoric of a narrative as the "aesthetic by which its ideology/message is communicated."[48] Simply described, rhetoric refers to the artful arrangement of narrative material to communicate a particular message, or series of messages. Waltke adds in even simpler terms, "The "meaning" of a narrative is determined by *how* the narrator tells the story."[49] Paying attention to the rhetoric of a text, that is, *how* the narrator tells the story, draws us towards important emphases and thus closer to the intent of the author.[50]

In *Story as Torah*, Wenham is quick to point out that Genesis is both narrative and *torah*. As *torah*-narrative, it has "didactic purpose," intended to instill both theological truth and ethical ideals into readers.[51] He believes, as we have already suggested, that in order to discern the "ethical norms and values embodied in the stories of the Old Testament," we must pay proper

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[46] Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative: Ideological Literature and the Drama of Reading.* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 1.

[47] Ibid., 1.

[48] Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?,* 23, as quoted in Waltke, Old Testament, 94.

[49] Waltke, *Old Testament*, 94.

[50] Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative.* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983),17. See also, Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture: A Literary Reading of Selected Texts*. (London: Oneworld Publications, 1998), xii-xiii.

[51] Wenham, *Story*, 3.

attention to their form.[52] For this task, Wenhan suggests a close-literary reading of the text that pays special attention to the narrative details signaled through repetition, motif, and structure.

<center>Repetition</center>

One of the main rhetorical features of biblical narrative is repetition. Biblical repetition takes many different forms and should not be mistaken for clumsy writing, ancient redundancy, or mere aesthetic flourish.[53] Berlin writes that artful repetition "is a key to perception, to interpretation; it calls attention to the similarity of two things or utterances, and may also be calling attention to their differences."[54] In this way, repetition, and its variations, often signal relationship between texts that contribute to the intratextual development of theme(s).

While repetition can occur in a single episode (perhaps at the simplest level of a recurring word, or root), there are also larger modes of repetition that draw important parallels between whole stories. These parallel relationships are often referred to as narrative analogies.[55] Fishbane helpfully summarizes these ideas in his preface to *Biblical Text and Texture* (1979):

> Such repetition, where it occurs, gives a text special texture; and it also serves to highlight major and minor features of content. A reader may thus be guided or provoked towards certain interpretations on the basis of theme-words recurrent in one or several texts which are thereby brought into association. And what applies to

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[52] Wenham states that the "techniques of literary criticism are necessary to appreciate the organization of a piece of literature, the ideas it embodies, and the standpoint of the writer."(5,3)

[53] Berlin, 136.

[54] Ibid.,

[55] Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 22.

words is equally pertinent with respect to larger themes or motifs. Through such stylistic means, latent networks of intra- and intertextual meaning may be perceived by an interpreter[56]If this is the case, we must pay special attention to the varying modes of repetition in the text.

Motif

Motif is a general rhetorical term sometimes distinguished from *leitwort*, *leitmotif*, keyword, and theme-word. At other times, these same phenomena can be described generally as motifs. We will use motif in this wider sense as referring to "a frequently repeated phrase, image, symbol, or situation in a literary work, the recurrence of which usually indicates or supports a theme."[57] The texture of the Biblical narrative abounds with the use of motif; learning to discern when and how they function will therefore be necessary to our task.

Structure

Structure refers to how the plot of a narrative is organized and articulated into meaningful literary units.[58] Again, repetition plays heavily in the structure of biblical narrative. Panel construction and chiasm, which rely on varying modes of repetition, feature prominently and are often part of larger narrative analogies and thematic enterprises.[59] As we approach the *torah*-narrative of Genesis, we will be examining these rhetorical features while suggesting how they contribute to the overriding ethical import of the text.

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[56] Fishbane, *Texts*, xii.

[57] *ODLT*, 185.

[58] Fishbane, xii. "The stylistic structuring of literary texts is another compositional convention particularly common in the Bible, and affects the formation of single texts and larger literary cycles."

[59] See Appendix 1.1- Genesis Structures

OT Narrative and Paradigmatic Ethics

Many of our authors have suggested "patterns" or "paradigms" as an integral part of OT ethical address. Brice Birch believes that our convictions in life and our way of being (what we might define as ethical or moral vision) are ultimately governed by an "overarching, paradigmatic story."[60] The narratives of the Bible, and especially Genesis, teach such a story by developing a "way of looking at the world" while also "commending a way of being in the world."[61] As such, the texts develop a world by which Israel is intended to make sense of its own existence in the world. The ethical address of OT narrative is thus both embedded and revealed in its story. With Wright, I believe that the central way the OT then participates in modern ethical address is through a paradigmatic/analogical reading of the story of Israel. According to Birch, "Christian ethics is not just the abstract application of a decision-making process. Moral life flows from the way in which we engage the world, and this engagement is structured by our vision, the way we see the world as persons of faith."[62] The authoritative "vision" of how and what Israel is to be forms the paradigmatic ethical vision of the OT for the original audience and then by analogy, the modern reader. It is the contention of this thesis that the narrative casting of Genesis contains the primary form of this vision.

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[60] Birch, 55.

[61] This thought accords with Wright's "Israel-as-the-paradigm" approach that we will be adopting along with Barton's description of *torah* as "providing materials that, when pondered and absorbed into the mind, will suggest the pattern or shape of a way of life lived in the presence of God" (Barton, "Approaches," 128).

[62] Birch, 55.

CHAPTER 3

A LITERARY AND PARADIGMATIC READING OF GENESIS

The paradigm of vocational participation can be traced between the two poles of

Genesis 12:1-3 and Genesis 45:1-15. Literarily, these are both structural highpoints within

their respective episodes. And thematically, they hold together the ethical import of the book.

The Promise-Call of Abraham

The first of our two primary texts is Genesis 12:1-3. The Apostle Paul considered it of

particular value and termed the passage as "the gospel preached beforehand" (Gal. 3:8). OT

commentators have since joined Paul in noticing its unique significance. As a fulcrum, it

possess a "critical theological place" in the larger narrative.[1] Bruce Waltke describes it as the

"beginning of the salvific program" and even as the "key to salvation history."[2] Wenham

adds that it is necessary for understanding the whole of Genesis and that it even "sum[s] up

the theme of Genesis, if not the whole Pentateuch."[3] Longman, in a similar manner, writes:

> It is impossible to overestimate the importance of these words for Biblical theology.
> In the first place, they look back to Genesis 1-2…These promises also look ahead.
> They inspire the whole plot, not only of the Abrahamic narrative and the book of

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[1] Patrick D. Miller, "Syntax and Theology in Genesis 12:3a." *Vetus Testamentum* 34, no. 4 (Oct 1984): 472.

[2] Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology. (*MI: Zondervan, 2007), 315, 314; See also, Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis.* Trans. by John H. Marks. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1972), 160. Von Rad notes that it possesses "significance far beyond Abraham and his seed."

[3] Gordon Wenham, *Genesis. 1-15* vol. 1 of Word Biblical Commentary. (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987), 267; Gordon Wenham, *Exploring the Old Testament: The Pentateuch.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 40.

Genesis but of the Pentateuch, the rest of the Old Testament and, indeed, the whole Bible.[4]

The text is as follows:

> Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed (12:1-3).

The call of Abram serves as a *janus* text, climaxing the Primeval History while simultaneously beginning the Patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-50).[5] It is within this passage that the ethical vision of Genesis begins in earnest. The summons of Abram is both promise and calling (i.e. a grace-born promise with a contingent calling). The full weight of the promise-call depends largely upon what has come before it. In many ways, the narrative details of Genesis 1-11 serve as a theological exposition for the call of Abram. The ethical implications of this lynchpin text are difficult to overstate as they establish some of the key contours of the larger paradigm (charter of identity) intended for Israel. Thus in order to hear it aright, we will begin our study of Genesis 12:1-3 with a brief overview of Genesis 1-11. The dominant themes of the Primeval History are exile, death, and curse, and the conditions of curse are often marked by the motifs of violence, nakedness, and family breakdown. This is the world in which God will call his people to a *vocational participation* in his work.

Protology (Genesis 1-2)

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[4] Tremper Longman, *How to Read Genesis*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2005), 128; NT Wright adds, "The entire OT as we have it hangs like an enormous door on a small hinge, namely the call of Abraham" (*Evil and the Justice of God.* [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Books, 2006], 46).

[5] Von Rad helpfully notes, "it's real conclusion, indeed its key, is Ch. 12:1-3, for only there does the theological significance of this universal preface to saving history become understandable" (Von Rad, *Genesis,* 160).

In the beginning, God creates man "after his own image." He then places him into a garden where all manner of food is provided for him. The state of the garden is paradisiacal; all relationships are good and right. God and man dwell together. Man and women are one. Man has dominion over the animals, and the earth yields its fruit to man. Harmony exists in every dimension and the conditions are nascent for flourishing. This description is the *creational ideal*. Yet even in this state, there is still work to be done. Within God's economy, mankind is commissioned for the development of this new world. God establishes the world's *telos* [i.e. goal], and he calls mankind to participate in it. This is a striking and oft repeated pattern within Genesis. Within the borders of his grace and provision, God seeks to accomplish his will, at least in part, through human agency. In Genesis, the fullness of God's creational plan will always involve a participatory union.[6]

Related to this union is the key motif of *blessing*. Its first appearance is in Genesis 1:22 where God blesses the animals to be fruitful and multiply. The second occurrence of "blessing" occurs in a similar construction: "And God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, and subdue it and have dominion…'"(Genesis 1:28). This second instance occurs in relation to mankind. Here, the divine blessing precedes mankind's commission to pro-create, fill the earth, and rule over it. Whereas the animals receive only the first two mandates ("be fruitful and multiply and fill…"), mankind receives a royal vocation. God has blessed them to rule over the earth because mankind has been made "in the image of God."

There is much scholarly discussion regarding what it means to be made in the image of God. Anthony Hoekema has argued convincingly that the "image of God" refers to both

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[6] Paul Sands, "The *Imago Dei* as Vocation." *Evangelical Quarterly* 82 (2010): 28-41.

"being" and "function."[7] More recently, this view has been further filled in by comparative studies between Genesis and other ancient Near Eastern texts. John Walton states, "In the ancient world, an image was believed to carry the essence of that which it represented," and also "the deity's work was thought to be accomplished through the idol."[8] Ian Hart writes, "In the ANE, it was widely believed that a god's spirit lived in any statue or image of that god, with the result that the image could function as a surrogate for the god's dominion wherever it was placed."[9] The image of a god was its physical representative on earth. In the ancient world, this was often a designation for kings. So as a king was a physical representative of a god's rule on earth, so also a king was "an image" of a god. In Genesis, all mankind is "made in the image of God," and this royal function is democratized in such a way as to describe what all human beings were made to be. Wenham believes this strongly suggests that mankind is meant to be God's representative or vice-regent.[10] Von Rad agrees, "Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claim to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire…so man is placed upon the earth in God's image as God's sovereign emblem."[11] In this understanding, mankind functions as under-kings or royal stewards of God's good creation.[12] In the creational ideal, all mankind is meant to image God by fulfilling their God given roles of filling the earth and representatively ruling

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[7] Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1986), 66-69.

[8] Walton, John H., *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament*. (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2000), 18.

[9] Waltke, *OT Theology*, 218.

[10] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 31-32.

[11] Von Rad, 60.

[12] Craig G. Bartholomew, and Michael W. Goheen, *The Drama of Scripture: Finding Our Place in the Biblical Story*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2004), 37.

over it. Implicit in this vocation is that man must rule as God would rule— wisely, and for the good of his servants. Thus, "being human" in its fullest sense implies a "way of being" that mirrors the character of God while working alongside of him for his intended plans for creation.

In chapter 2, God places Adam into the garden and likewise commissions him to "work it and keep it" (Genesis 2:15). All manner of food has been provided for Adam, and yet he must still work the ground and develop the garden. In Genesis, God seldom makes a promise without a contingent summons to then "live into" the benefits.

Adam is then granted the gift of Eve, forming the first marriage and family. This family is created to bring about God's purposes of filling and ruling (Eve being the necessary helpmeet to accomplish the vocation of mankind). Adam and Eve are also given a law, restricting them from eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Here the law states only the minimum requirements of God's standards: "avoid x." The ethical ideal, however, is found embedded in the essence and vocation of what it means to be an image bearer of God. The tasks can be briefly summarized below:

1). Procreation
   The expansion of life, the blessed filling of the earth with image-bearing representatives
2). Dominion
   Royal stewards ruling in God's likeness under the sovereign dominion of God
3). Cultivation
   Working, guarding, and developing the created matter of the earth in accord with God's intention.

Each of these is undertaken within the borders of God's grace and for his divinely intended ends. From the beginning then, God's purposes for the earth are inextricably connected to mankind's fulfilling of its commission. And from the beginning, God's divine blessing is what enables his people to fulfill their vocation.

The *creational ideal* is the beginning of the paradigm of Israel. Already, within the creational ideal, mankind is adopted into a vocational role by which he participates in the very plans and intentions that God has for the world. This first episode contributes a foundational layer to "the overarching narrative" which will make up the formative matrix of Israel's theology and self-identity. Man is made to dwell with God and create families. Together they reflect his character, accomplish his will (develop and protect his world), and so spread the state of blessing/rule to the ends of the earth. This early pattern adumbrates the redemptive calling that will be soon be given to the children of Abraham (12:1-3).

The Fall (Genesis 3-11)

Textually speaking, the *creational ideal* is short-lived. The garden-paradise and the abundant fruitfulness of crops and wombs (i.e. the conditions of blessing) are very soon overtaken by "curse." Whereas the creational ideal is an unhindered state of blessing, the fall of man results in a state of worldwide curse. Adam and Eve fail to submit to the kingship of YHWH and instead listened to the voice of the serpent. Though prohibited, they see, take, and eat from the forbidden tree. This breaking of the law of God disrupted the shalom-like conditions of the garden and resulted in an inversion of God's good intentions.

Ironically, Adam and Eve, who were created to "image God" by reflecting his character and intentions, fall prey to a desire to "be like him." After having begun to mistrust the goodness of God, they then transgress the norms of the created order. Mankind is meant to reflect and represent God, even to rule in his stead. But mankind is never to assume prerogatives specific to the Godhead. They are made to be godly stewards and under-rulers, but they are never to be "in the place of God." Within the narrative, this autonomous attempt

to seize the knowledge of good and evil, begins a steady decline. Their disobedience, mistrust, and pride bring about the judgment of God whereby they are exiled from the garden (and the fullness of God's presence previously enjoyed), and banished to live a life *under the conditions of curse, rather than blessing*. Whereas the initial state was one of perfect relational harmony, the subsequent state is one of relational breakdown on every level.

The effects of the curse correspond directly to the creational vocation of mankind. To the women, pain and difficulty in childbearing, and to the man, pain and toil in cultivating the earth for food. And whereas they were originally commissioned to perpetually expand life, they must now submit to the end of life. The curse does not entirely negate their calling, but it does seem to severely handicap their ability to fulfill it. The state of the world is now one of *exile, death,* and *curse.*

The immediate ethical import for Israel is the deduction that obedience, blessing, and vocational fulfillment are all part of the same nexus. Thus, disobedience, vocational failure, and curse correspond as well.

<u>Tokens of Grace</u>

Borrowing from Von Rad, Wenham suggests that Genesis 3-11 represents an ever expanding avalanche of sin (emanating out from the initial fall).[13] But before considering this, we must note two "tokens of grace" amidst the judgment.

Covering and Provision

In 3:21, God demonstrates his continued provision by clothing Adam and Eve. Whereas they were once both "naked" and "not ashamed" (2:25), their disobedience resulted in a new awareness where "they knew that they were naked" (3:7).[14] This shameful awareness impedes their relationship with God. When God appears, Adam hides from the presence of God because he "was naked" and "afraid" (3:11). God demonstrates his post-fall grace by covering their nakedness with clothes. This begins a pattern of *providing clothes/covering nakedness* that will become an interesting motif throughout the rest of the text.

Divine Promise and Vocational Calling

The larger token of grace takes a somewhat subtler form. Although it is rightly heralded as the *protoeuangelion* of Christ himself, the initial annunciation is fairly subdued. God says to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the women, and between your

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[13] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15,* lii.

[14] For a helpful overview of the image of nakedness/clothed motif, see the entry "Naked, Nakedness" in Ryken, Leland, Jim Wilhoit, Tremper Longman. *et al*., *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery. (Downers Grove*, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 581-582. Pre-fall: nakedness connected to innocence; Post-fall: nakedness connected to shame and vulnerability.

seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Genesis 3:15).[15]

Commentators from all different ages have interpreted this as God's announcement that the

serpent and his seed will ultimately be defeated.[16] And if in any sense the serpent possesses

some sort of rulership over man, this would then signal the end of that kingship. While much

can be said on this topic, let us consider it sufficient to note two things: 1) God is announcing

an overthrow of the serpent; 2) God is announcing that a child of Eve will do the

overthrowing. Therefore, even in redemption, God intends to address the evils of this world

from within it. The serpent will be overthrown, in some measure, through human agency.

Sailhamer also points out that the means of God accomplishing his promise are "indeed,

through the creational vocation" of child-bearing.[17] God's promise will come to pass when

Eve's seed delivers the blow.

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4-5)

In the next episode, the history of mankind continues its tragic downfall. With the

birth of children, we have our first glimpse of a family with all of its life-giving potential.

Horribly, this glimpse ultimately ends in envy-driven fratricide and family breakdown.

Though incredibly terse, the story of Cain and Abel plays an important role in the narrative

of Genesis.

Adam||Cain

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[15] For an excellent discussion on the *seed* motif, see T. Desmond Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed, and the Compositional Unity of Genesis." *Tyndale Bulletin 44.2* (1993): 255-270.

[16] Mary, J. Streufert. ed. *Transformative Lutheran Theologies*. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 57.

[17] John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 108.

Several commentators have noted the abundance of linguistic and thematic parallels between the fall of Genesis 3 and the violence of Genesis 4.[18] Matthew Schlimm relays but a few:

> In each case, God brings a warning (2:16-17; 4:6-7), which humans refuse to heed (3:1-7; 4:8). In response, God initiates a series of questions that begin "Where are you?" (3:8-9) or "Where is Abel, your brother?" (4:9a). The humans reply by denying responsibility (3:10-12; 4:9b) before YHWH asks, "What have you done?" (3:13; 4:10). Next, YHWH issues various punishments pertaining to both the disobedient humans and the ground that contain the words, "Cursed are you" (3:14-19 and 4:11-12). Finally, both episodes conclude with an expulsion from previous locales, making reference to what is east of the Garden of Eden (3:22-24; 4:16).[19]

Just as before, *exile, curse,* and *death* seem to be the reigning condition, and their reign is expanding. This is demonstrated through Cain's punishment being described in terms even stronger than Adam's. To Adam, God announced that that the ground was to be cursed, but to Cain, he himself is "cursed from the ground." And whereas Adam was to have difficulty in his vocation, Cain's is made impossible ("the ground will no longer yield its strength to you"). Cain is sentenced to be a perpetual wanderer, his vocation is taken from him, and he is further driven "from the presence of the Lord" (4:16).

One way to describe these repetitions would be to say that they are instances of "intratexutal allusion."[20] Allusions of this sort often serve as signals of a larger device known as "narrative analogy."[21] Wenham suggests that repeated linguistic and thematic structures between stories demand that they be read together. Narrative analogy is a pervasive feature

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[18] See Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, 96*; Atler, *Genesis,* 18; Olsen, "Sibling Rivalry," 104. Smith, "Structure and Purpose," 314; Von Rad, 106; Van Wolde, 250; Schwimm's "Fratricide to Forgiveness," 223-224; Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 26-27.

[19] Schlimm, Matthew Richard. "From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis." (PhD diss., Duke University, 2008), 222-223.

[20] A later section drawing upon elements of an earlier section in order to shape its meaning.

[21] A literary feature in which one "text provides oblique commentary on another." See Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*. (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 23. Adele Berlin defines it as "reading one story in the terms of another" in *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative*. (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 136.

of Genesis and often serves to elucidate, or draw together various themes within the book. It also continually warns us from reading any one episode a-contextually. The analogies of Genesis 4 signal to the reader a second "fall" narrative and demonstrate that the conditions of curse are expanding. Later analogies will continue to operate in a similar way, drawing our attention to the authors' emphases and intentions.

Violence and Family Breakdown

Cain falls short of the "ideal" represented by Abel. His refusal to "do what is right" then results in violence. We will define violence as intentional harm done to another. Violence is an anti-creational force directly opposed to God's intentions. Man was meant to expand life, mediating God's creational intention. Instead, Cain shows himself to be an author of de-creation, taking away from the world as it was meant to be. Family is meant to care for one another, yet Cain refuses to be his "brother's keeper."[22] Cain's violence fragments the first family, further demonstrating that the creational ideal has been lost. That which was meant to be whole is being rent apart. From this point on *violence* and *family breakdown* will serve as key motifs for our author's purposes. The motif's first repetition occurs just verses later. Lamech (a descendant of Cain) composes a poem that celebrates how his violent acts of retribution are stronger than God's (4:23-24).[23] And then, by chapter six, we see that the whole earth has been engulfed in violence (6:11-13). The text thus describes the whole earth as being corrupt. It has fallen from its intended state, it has become a twisted

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[22] Louth, Andrew, John Chrysostom writes that Cain **"**committed the same evil as the serpent". See, Andrew Louth. *Genesis 1-11* (Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture: Old Testament, Volume I). Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 2001, 109.

[23] Lamech is characterized as a callous mocker, glorying in his violence. He kills when struck and boasts about it.

and distorted caricature of itself. Instead of the world "being filled" through pro-creation, it is "filled" with de-creation (1:28/6:11-13). Death reigns (see chapter 5), and all of the hearts of mankind are described as "evil." So far, our initial post-fall picture is of a world totally gone wrong. The righteous are slain, brother kills brother, families break down, men image the serpent, and all manner of evil has taken over the human heart (6:5)

Noah (Genesis 6-9)

Things seem to ramp up further with the mysterious "sons of gods" going into the "daughters of men." This linguistically echoes the fall narrative; each party "saw…good… took" (3:6/6:2). We thus see sin and its cursed effects emanating further out into the larger world. In judgment, God sets out to flood the earth, returning the creation to its initial watery void. Sarna insightfully notes, "Because humanly wrought evil is perceived to be the undoing of God's creativity, numerous elements in the story are artful echoes of the Creation Narrative."[24] As the conditions of curse continue their universal expansion, the text suddenly shifts our attention to a single man. This is a divinely given token of grace whereby God puts into motion a plan to deliver a people in order to accomplish his creational will.[25]

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[24] Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis.* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 49.

[25] In describing the Primeval History, Waltke suggests a pattern of [Rule, Rebellion, Judgment, Mitigation], *OT Theology*, 308. In a similar manner, Longman presents a pattern of [Sin, Judgment Speech, Token of Grace, Judgment], *How to Read*, 114.

<u>Adam‖Noah</u>

The sudden shift to a single blameless man through whom God will accomplish his purposes strongly echoes the call of Adam. Noah "walks with God" (Gen. 6:9) and hears God's voice (Gen. 6:13). Like Adam, Noah is given a stewardship over the animals to protect them, and he is soon to be the "father of a new humanity." Noah and his family also inherit the vocation originally given to Adam. Sailhamer remarks, "The similarities between the two narratives are striking and show that Abraham, like Noah, marks a new beginning as well as a return to God's original plan of blessing."[26] Following the flood, "God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, 'be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth'" (9:1). This explicitly references the original creational blessing (1:26-28).[27] From there, God provides food for Noah and grants him a world ripe with possibility. This recapitulation of events signals Noah as the new Adam of a refashioned creation.

<u>Violence</u>

While Noah and his family receive the Adamic commission, they do so in the midst of a fallen world. Because of this, there is a degree of dis-analogy between the two episodes. There are now new problems to be faced. Among these problems are: the difficult conditions of curse, the evil of men's hearts, and world-wide violence. Notice how the structure of the flood narrative draws particular attention to the problem of violence. In both A and A', violence is one of the main subjects:

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[26] Sailhamer, 139.

[27] Aside from the mandate of procreation; dominion is also discussed, cultivation is alluded to, and there is a reference to man being made in the image of God.

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                Transitional introduction (6:9–10)
        A       Violence in creation (6:11–12)
            B       First divine speech: resolve to destroy (6:13–22)
                C       Second divine speech: "enter ark" (7:1–10)
                    D       Beginning of flood (7:11–16)
                        E       The rising flood (7:17–24)
                            F God remembers Noah
                        E'      The receding flood (8:1–5)
                    D'.     Drying of the earth (8:6–14)
                C'      Third divine speech: "leave ark" (8:15–19)
            B'      God's resolve to preserve order (8:20–22)
        A'      Fourth divine speech: covenant (9:1–17)
                Transitional conclusion (9:18–19)[28]
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The center of the chiasm is reflective of God's mercy and faithfulness. The latter half

of the chiasm (masterfully, yet subtly signaling "new creation") is concerned with the state of

the new world.[29] Yet the problem that initiated the flood was the evil and violence issuing

forth from man's heart (A'). In the end, while the flood deals with violent offenders by

expelling them from the land of the living, we are told that "the problem of men's hearts"

remains. God thus seeks to mitigate the evil of men's heart (and the subsequent violence) by

establishing the *lex talion* (Genesis 9:2-6). This anti-violence ruling is couched between two

commands to be fruitful and multiply:

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        A God's resolve never again to destroy the earth or humanity (8:20-22)
            B Command to be fruitful (9:1)
                C Legislation with regard to life/blood and the lex talion (9:2-6)
            B' Command to be fruitful (9:7)
        A' God's covenant sign never again to destroy all flesh (9:8-17)[30]
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The rule reads, "whoever sheds the blood of man, for that man shall his blood be shed"

(Genesis 9:6a).[31] The taking away of life is a divine prerogative not belonging to humans.[32]

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[28] Taken from Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 156. For a more detailed chiasm which emphasizes specific linguistic parallels, see David A. Dorsey, *The Literary Structure of the Old Testament: A Commentary on Genesis-Malachi*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 52.

[29] Sailhamer, 113.

[30] Waltke, *Old Testament Theology*, 127.

[31] I follow here J.P. Fokkelman's translation of the passage. See J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*. (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975), 35. See also Robert Neff, "Paradigms of Peace in the Book of Genesis. *Brethren Life and Thought* 23.1 (1978): 42.

[32] There are times when certain acts of violence are permitted, though they are not what was intended from the beginning. This is perhaps akin to Jesus' teaching on divorce in Matthew 19:3-9.

Fokkelman notes that the "shedding of blood is, moreover, obstructing the commandment given in 9:1 and 9:7."[33] According to the narrative, men ought not to kill each other because it is contra-vocational. Each man is made in the image of God. This image, and its subsequent blessing, was made for life and the expansion of life. It was made to mediate God's character and blessing through the administration of a godly rule. This ideal is lost in mankind's submission to violence. The judgment/salvation of the flood was meant to directly address the prevailing conditions of the fallen world. Violence is a signal of a world cursed, and the *lex talion* is a reminder of how things ought to be.

Alleviation of the Conditions of Curse

This recapturing of the creational intention is strongly echoed in the Noah narrative. After the flood, Noah, as a refashioned Adam, stands on the brink of a new creation, poised to mediate God's rule and blessing.[34] Sailhamer remarks that the "implications of such similarities and recursions in narrative structures is that the world depicted by the narratives also has the same design and purpose."[35] God has in no way abandoned his creational intention. To the contrary, he is seeking to recover it, and to do so through human agency. Especially important to our study is the initial introduction of Noah: "When Lamech had lived 182 years, he fathered a son and called his name Noah, saying, 'Out of the ground that the Lord has cursed, this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the painful toil of

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[33] Fokkelman, 35.

[34] Several commentators, point out the parallels between the accounting of the receding flood waters and the initial creation. See John Sailhamer, 127.

[35] John Sailhamar in Leland Ryken *et al.*, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993), 113.

our hands'" (Genesis 5:28-29). From the fall of Cain to the calling of Noah, only two male characters speak: Lamech from the line of Cain and Lamech from the line of Seth. The similarity in detail certainly calls for a parallel reading. Lamech of Cain is shown to be *part of the problem* that leads up to the flood. He is a God-mocker and an executor of violence. The Lamech of Seth, however, is among those who "call upon the name of the Lord" (Gen 4:26). And when he speaks, it is evident that he longs for "curse-reversal." He longs for a *solution to the problem*. The problems in view are the effects of the curse. Lamech hopes that Noah will bring rest/relief from painful toil associated with working the ground.[36] Here, the hopes of the righteous are connected to reversing the effects of this curse. Though difficult to be sure of the details, the narrative does depict Noah as bringing about such relief:

> And when the Lord smelled the pleasing aroma, the Lord said in his heart, "I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man's heart is evil from his youth. Neither will I ever again strike down every living creature as I have done. While the earth remains, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease (Genesis 8:21-22).

The second clause ("Neither will I…strike down…") refers to the flood and distinguishes it from the first clause. The first clause ("I will never again curse…") appears to be a fulfillment of Noah's annunciation in 5:29.[37] In some uncertain way, the curse of the ground has been mitigated. Noah's obedience and acceptable worship prompts the Lord to then declare fixed patterns that will be conducive to the planting and maintaining of crops. This mitigation is further emphasized by Noah's planting of a vineyard. A signal that the world will indeed yield it's good fruit to mankind.

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[36] It is very interesting to note that, according to the genealogies of Genesis, Noah is the first *zerah* to be born after the death of Adam.

[37] Gary V. Smith, "Structure and purpose in Genesis 1-11." *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 20 (1977): 316.

<u>Violence, Nakedness, and Family Breakdown</u>

Yet just as the Noah story echoes the creation narrative, so also does it echo the fall narrative.[38] Noah's use of the newly re-created world results in drunkenness and exposure. His sin and nakedness echo that of Adam and Eve's. Following the pattern of Genesis 3-4, Ham (playing the Cain-like role of sinful son) preys upon Noah's vulnerability and sins against him.[39] Like the serpent, he exposes/exploits nakedness, and like Cain, the result of his transgression is family breakdown and curse. Instead of taking part in Ham's iniquity (which would compound and expand the effects of Noah's sins), Shem and Japheth instead work to fix the problem. They take a cloak, walk in backwards, and cover the nakedness of their father. In this way, they echo the divine covering of Adam and Eve. This again hints towards an ethical pattern of *imitatio dei* for the righteous.[40] The result of this covering is a pronouncement of blessing.

Babel (Genesis 10-11)

The next episode is commonly referred to as the tower of Babel. Here we have mankind gathering together to build a city and a tower. The usage of such a tower in the aNE would almost certainly be religious, and the city and tower are built so "as to make a name for ourselves" (11:4). Babel is the prototypical "city of man" built on the auspices and

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[38] Though many commentators suggest the same, I find Sailhamer's analysis particularly persuasive. See Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 114.

[39] This sin is described ambiguously and perhaps euphemistically.

[40] For fuller discussions on the *imitatio Dei* in the OT, see Joseph Ryan Kelly, "Orders of Discourse and the Function of Obedience in the Hebrew Bible." *The Journal of Theological Studies* ns 64, no. 1 (Apr 2013): 1-24; Walter J. Houston, "The Character of YHWH and the Ethics of the Old Testament: Is *Imitatio Dei* Appropriate?" *Journal of Theological Studies* 58, Pt 1, (April 2007): 1-25; John Barton, "Imitation of God in the Old Testament" in *The God of Israel*. ed. R.P. Gordon. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 35-46.

pretention of human pride without due reference to God. This fulfills the primeval pattern of sin emanating out from one man, to his son, and then on to the rest of the world.

God, however, thwarts this contra-vocational endeavor by separating mankind through the mixing of their languages. This judgment again takes the form of a "dispersal" that echoes the exiles of the earlier episodes. The divine action then leads directly in to a very important genealogical introduction. Waltke sees this as the "token of grace" moment in the narrative.[41] Out of the figurative rubble of Babel, a new character emerges.

Abram of Ur (Genesis 12:1-3)

Here the narrative finally reaches its highpoint, and many authors are quick to point out the parallels between the fall of Babel and the call of Abram.[42] The inhabitants of Babel sought to make for themselves a great name. In Genesis 12:1-3, God explicitly promises to make Abram's name great. This issues forth as a cosmic "no" to Babel's city of man. Instead, Abram is going to become the vessel by which God's blessing will be reintroduced into the world. This becomes even clearer when one examines the larger literary structure of the Primeval History:

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[41] Waltke, *OT Theology*, 308. Waltke uses the language of "mitigation". See also Waltke, *Genesis*, 191 (chart).

[42] Janzen remarks, "In the related and contrasting stories of the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9) and the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), we see particularly clearly how God rejects humanity's attempt to entrench its security in Mesopotamian royal-religious superstructures (the city and the [temple-] tower). He chooses, instead, a family line to become instrumental in his plans." Waldemar Janzen, *Old Testament Ethics: A Paradigmatic Approach.* [Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994], 45).

A Creation story: first beginning; divine blessing (1:1-2:3)
  B Sin of Adam: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness; curse (2:4-3:24)
    C Younger righteous son Abel murdered (no descendants) (4:1-16
      D Descendants of sinful son Cain (4:17-26)
        E Descendants of chosen son Seth: ten generations from Adam to Noah (5:1-32)
          F Downfall: unlawful union (6:1-4)
            G Brief Introduction to a faithful savior (Noah), through whom God will bless mankind (6:5-8)

A' Flood story: reversal of creation; new beginning; divine blessing (6:9-9:19)
  B' Sin of Noah: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness; curse (9:20-29)
    C' Descendants of younger, righteous son of Japheth (10:1-5)
      D' Descendants of sinful son Ham (10:6-20)
        E' Descendants of chosen son Shem: ten generations from Noah to Terah (10:21-32)
          F' Downfall: rebellious union (Tower of Babel) (11:1-9)
            G' Brief introduction to a faithful savior (Abraham), through whom God will bless mankind (11:27-
32)[43]

The oblique mirroring of Gen. 6-11 with Gen. 1-5 sets up a series of patterns that prepare the

reader for the call of Abram. This happens not only in the story and plot but also for the

purposes of embedding his call with a certain theological significance. Effective use of

rhetorical strategies "enables a skillful author to embed meaning in his text without explicit

articulation."[44] This is exactly the case here, we are never explicitly told that the call of

Abraham is a response to the failures, curses, and evils of Genesis 3-11. Also, we are never

explicitly told that Abraham becomes the "new Adam" and "new Noah." However, the

careful arrangement of the texts certainly reveals these to be the case.[45]

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[43] Adapted from Bruce K. Waltke, and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 19-20; Waltke, *OT Theology*, 307-308; and Dorsey, *Structure,* 55.

[44] Waltke, *OT Theology*, 114.

[45] For further discussion of the parallels between the Adamic and Noahic episodes see Dorsey, 55; Smith, 316-317. See also Waltke, *OT Theology*, 296; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 207.

The Promise: Land, Seed, Blessing

In a subtle recapitulation of the type scenes of Adam and Noah, the author demonstrates that God is choosing to bring about his creational intentions through Abraham.[46] In Genesis 12:1-3, the dominant motifs of judgment (which are exile, death, curse) are met with a corresponding three-fold promise of land, seed, and blessing.[47] The problems of curse are overtaken by the promises of blessing.[48] Without direct articulation, the author of Genesis communicates that God's response to the problem of evil is embedded in the calling of Abraham. Wehnam notes, "He, like Noah before him, is a second Adam figure. In this way the advent of Abraham is seen as the answer to the problems set out in Gen. 1-11."[49]

Let us consider each verse. Verse 1 states:

Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you."

This verse features the passage's central command. Wenham summarizes, "Grammatically, the main verbs—'make,' 'bless,' 'make great,' 'be,' 'bless,' 'curse,' 'and blessing'—are all subordinate to the imperative 'Go' (v 1)."[50] The seven-fold promise (indicated in the seven subsequent verbs) is directly connected to Abraham's willingness to follow God's command. While the existence of God's command presupposes God's active grace, Abram *must* trust

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[46] Wenham adds "The promises to Abraham renew the vision for humanity set out in Gen. 1-2. *Story as Torah.* (*Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 37.

[47] See Appendix 1.4. These promises echo the creational ideal as well as serving as reversals to the conditions of curse.

[48] As Alter notes, "human history reaches a turning point with Abraham, as blessings instead of curses are emphatically promised." See Alter, The Art of Biblical Narrative, 50.

[49] Wenham, *Torah*, 37.

[50] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 275.

God and "go" if these promises are to occur. Our author thus immediately highlights an "obedience of faith" as integral to the redemptive vision of God.

Verse 2 follows:

And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.

Here, Abraham is promised many descendants and a great name. This directly contrasts the desire of Babel and also faintly echoes the creational commands to "be fruitful and multiply" which will be recapitulated in the narratives to come. The statement, "And I will bless you," is a key moment in this passage. Everything is contingent on the blessing of God. Just as in the creation mandate, the divine "blessing" is what enables the recipients to fulfill their vocation. Abram will be blessed so that he "will be a blessing." Some commentators have translated this last clause as an imperative to, "Be a blessing!" This has the result of making vs. 3 contingent on the imperative. T. D. Alexander suggests, "In such contexts the cohortative normally expresses purpose or result."[51] In this reading, the two imperatives embedded in the matrix of the promise are "Go" and "Be a blessing".[52] The result/purpose of each is illustrated below:

Imperative 1: Go to the Land!
Purpose-Result 1 (so that)-great nation, blessing, great name
Imperative 2: Be a Blessing!
Purpose-Result 2: (so that)-blessing to friends, dishonor to enemies, blessing to all nations

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[51] T. Desmond Alexander, *From Paradise to the Promised Land: An Introduction to the Pentateuch.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 154.

[52] "For an interesting, if not wholly convincing attempt to connect "blessing" in Genesis with the theme of "God's Kingdom" See Thomas Potter, "Blessed to Build God's Kingdom: The Blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) in Light of the Primeval History." (MA Thesis., Concordia University, 2014): "in light of the Primeval History, the command for Abraham to, "be a blessing!" was a command for Abraham to partner with God, in building God's Kingdom" (501).

In either translation, it is clear that under the power of God's gracious promises, Abraham is meant to become a blessing for the world. In order to become so, he must accept his vocation through faith and obedience. The ethics of Israel are forever tied to this pre-Law commission.

Verse 3 refers to the world's reception of Abraham and his descendants:

I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The first two clauses offer protection while also further revealing the special status of Abram's family.[53] The final clause, "in you all the families of the earth/ground shall be blessed," serves as the climax of the passage. Universal blessing is the eschatological purpose of Abram's calling, and Abram himself will be the means through which it will be accomplished. The promise and calling of Abram are clearly resuscitations of the creational ideal particularized onto one man.[54] Just as with Adam and Noah, this one man has a function intended for the many.[55] Genesis 12:1-3 "…looks back to the primeval history, announcing the divine intervention that will bring blessing to all the families of the world."[56] God has promised that though Abraham, blessing will swallow up curse.

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[53] Even though the text promises "curse" for his enemies, the overall leaning of the passage is towards blessing. Patrick Miller Jr. writes that the "…call of Abraham helps to make clear that God…is clearly bent towards blessing and mercy…When YHWH sent Abram out, it was to bring about blessing, not curse" (Miller, 475).

[54] See Wenham, *Torah*, 22; Smith, 318, Sailhamer states "The "promise to the fathers" is none other than a reiteration of God's original blessing of humankind (1:28)." See Sailhamar, *Narrative*, 139.

[55] Vos states, "The election of Abraham, and in the further development of things, of Israel, was meant as a particularistic means towards a universalistic end" (Geerhardus Vos, *Biblical Theology: Old and New Testaments*. [Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1948], 77).

[56] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 281.

The Call: Mediators of Blessing

Bruce Waltke describes Genesis 12-50 as featuring "the formation of one family from which God creates a new people, places them in a new land, and invests them with the potential to bless all humanity."[57] In this way, he deems that "the story of the fall poses the challenge; the patriarchal narratives…are God's definitive response."[58] As God promises a new world of blessing, he also calls his people to be a part of the process. Just as in the beginning, Man was meant to co-operate with God's activity in the world. God created the world, but it was man's vocation to develop and guide the world into what God intended it to be. This pattern is here recapitulated in the redemptive activity of God. Abraham is to "be a blessing" so that "in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed." This masterful tying of the story of Israel to the story of Adam is the essential moment of salvation history and serves as the centerpiece of Israel's identity. At the very bottom of OT ethics lays this cornerstone of *vocational participation*. God's world has been overtaken by curse, but through his elect, blessing will once again reign.

The rhetoric of the primeval history demonstrates that the people of Israel are to become a corporate Adam. They are to be re-blessed with the contours of Eden (paradise like-land, seed, blessing, God's presence *etc*.) so as to become a living prototypical microcosm of what God intends for all mankind. Israel is going to model the redemptive form of the *creational ideal* to the world. This is part of God's redemptive intention to re-make the world into a place of blessing.[59]

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[57] Waltke, *OT Theology,* 307.

[58] Ibid.,

[59] "The promises first made to Abraham in 12:1–3 begin to repair that hopeless situation. The fivefold blessing here counteracts the five curses that have been pronounced earlier. What is more, the promise of land, nationhood, the presence of God, and blessing to the nations restores what has been lost by man through his

However, in order to do so, the conditions and effects of curse must be overcome. As the Genesis narrative continues, God calls his people to participate in this work by living in a certain way before him. The result of this "way of being'" alleviates the conditions of curse and bring blessing to others. It is from this point that one can begin to organize and understand the post-fall moral vision of the OT. By the grace of God and the promise of a new world, Israel will be called to an ethical agenda. The end result of this type of life will be blessing and not curse; homecoming and not exile; life and not death. N.T. Wright describes God's response to evil in Genesis saying, "What is God doing about evil? On the one hand he is confronting it, judging it, and doing something to stop it from having its desired effect. On the other hand he is doing something new, beginning a new project through which the *underlying problem of curse and the disunity of the human family will be replaced by blessing*."[60]

This new project is inaugurated in the election of Abram and will be traced throughout the patriarchal narratives. Taken all together, the author continues to present a charter of identity for the nation of Israel. As recipients of God's grace and blessing, they are intended to be representative mediators of God's blessing to the world. Each of the narratives of Genesis are threaded together to form a collective picture of God's ethical ideal. They are faithful, obedient, God-imitating people who participate in the very redemptive work of God.

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misbehavior recorded in Gen 3–11" (Wenham, Genesis 1-15, li.). Blessing is arguably the most important key word in Genesis. Wenham reports that "The root ברך occurs more frequently in Genesis than in any other part of the OT: 88 times in Genesis as against 310 times elsewhere." Wenham also sees all the key words of the Primeval History as present within the call of Abram. See, Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 275. See also Trevor Potter's tracing of the root's use in the Primeval History and therefore its theological implications in Genesis 12:1-3 (Potter, "Blessed to Build God's Kingdom: The Blessing of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3) in Light of the Primeval History" [MA Thesis., Concordia University, 2014]).

[60] NT Wright, *Evil*, 48-49. Emphasis added.

Thereby, they alleviate the conditions of the curse, and mediate divine blessing to all the world. This pattern, established in Genesis 12, is most clearly seen in the Joseph narrative.

The Rule of Joseph

Within the cohesive narrative of Genesis, the ethical ideal of vocational participation is inaugurated for the redemptive community in Genesis 12. It is then fulfilled (in a literary sense) in the climactic reconciliation scenes of Genesis 45:1-15 (and 50:4-8). This climax highlights a certain way of being before the Lord that accords with the story-formed identity of Israel. Joseph, as a conduit of righteousness and blessing, participates in God's intentions to overcome the conditions of curse with blessing.

Reading the Joseph narratives as the climax of Genesis stands in opposition to traditional critical approaches that isolate the Joseph narrative from the rest of Genesis[61] or see it primarily as a bridging narrative between Genesis and Exodus. It is my contention that removing it from its canonical context robs the text of its rhetorical and, therefore, didactic purposes. Allowing the narrative to unfold before us as a whole, we instead see the diverse themes of Genesis coalescing into a unified conclusion.[62]

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[61] Timothy Stone, "Joseph in the Likeness of Adam: Narrative Echoes of the Fall," in Nathan MacDonald, *et al.*, *Genesis and Christian Theology.* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012), 65.

[62] See Bruce Dahlberg, "The Unity of Genesis" in *Literary Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* Vol. 2. Ed. Kenneth R. R. Gros Louis, with J.S Ackerman and T. S. Warshaw. (Abingdon Press, 1974), 74-119. See also Stone, Joseph in the Likeness, 62-73; Stephen B. Chapmen, "Food, Famine, and the Nations: A Canonical Approach to Genesis" in *Genesis and Christian Theology.* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub., 2012), 323-333.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob: Narrative Analogy

The stories which precede the Joseph narrative are commonly referred to as the patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-36). The narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (and even Joseph) are all bound together by a variety of similar features:

1. All these heroes leave their home-land (12:1; 28:2; 37:28)
2. All quarrel with their brothers (13:7; 27:41: 37:4)
3. Three go down to Egypt, one to Gerar, i.e., toward Egypt (12:10; 26:1; 37:28; 46:6)
4. Two patriarchal wives are seduced or nearly so; an Egyptian wife attempts to seduce Joseph (12:14–16; 20:1–14; 26:1; 39:6–18)
5. Their wives are barren and quarrel (in Abraham's and Jacob's cases) (16:1–6; 29:31–30:8)
6. The younger sons are divinely favored (also Joseph's sons)(17:18–19; 25:23; 48:14; 49:8–12, 22–26)
7. Brides met at well (24:15; 29:9)
8. Promises of children, land, divine blessing (e.g., 12:1–3, 26:2–5; 28:13–14)
9. Gentiles acknowledge God's blessing on the patriarchs (21:21–22; 26:28–29: 41:39–40)
10. Buried in cave of Machpelah (23:1–20; 25:9; 35:27–29; 49:29–32)[63]

These events are not coincidental, but are rather essential to the overall purpose of Genesis. Just as in the Primeval history, each episode is tied together through a series of narrative analogies (i.e. result of varying modes of repetition and recapitulation at several levels (plot, structure, theme, key-word, motif). These connections subtly invite us to examine thematic emphases, which in turn, help us to determine the meaning and intention of the author. We will examine a few of these motific and narrative threads as they develop towards the conclusion of Genesis.

Exile Death and Curse

Even in the lives of the elect patriarchs, the ramifications of the Fall continue to expand into the world. As the focus shifts to one particular family, the effects of curse are particularly felt in the sub-motifs of "barrenness" and "famine." These serve as recapitulations of the initial curse upon childbearing (3:16) and the ground (3:17-19).

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[63] Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 257. These are but just a few.

The Abrahamic narrative is almost exclusively concerned with the birth of a son in the midst of a seemingly impossible situation. Abraham is promised a son, but Sarah is afflicted by barrenness (11:30), as well as Rebekah (25:21) and Rachel (29:31). The fact that each of these women eventually bear children is attributed to God's intervening into the affairs of man to turn curse into blessing.[64] Aside from general barrenness, Rebekah suffers intense pains in her womb (25:22) and Rachel loses her life during the birth of Benjamin (35:17-19). These episodes are employed as tragic reminders of the curse.

Abraham and his children are also very often homeless sojourners. They have a landless status within Canaan and are often forced to leave the land or move within the land. Many of these "leave-return" sequences are initiated by famine.[65] With the original fecundity of the earth hampered by the curse, the patriarchs must weather regular crop failure and drought. Here too, God displays his intentions by divinely leading them to places of abundance and preserving the "seed." Though exile and homelessness are "curse-results," God is "with them" and ordains that each leave-return sequence results in an increase of blessing.

Violence, Nakedness, and Family Breakdown

Underneath the general conditions of exile, death, and curse are the motifs of violence, nakedness, and family breakdown. Unfortunately violence and family breakdown

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[64] Rebeckah is described as giving birth after the prayer of Isaac were given (25:21) Sarah too is directly visited by the Lord before she can conceive (21:21).

[65] The exception to this rule is that Jacob's initial sojourn away from home is to escape the violent threat of Esau. Otherwise, there are three instances in which a patriarch leaves Canaan due to famine. (12:10, 26:1, 46:1-4).

become a regular part of the patriarchal dynamic.[66] Interestingly, the author keenly attaches "deception" as a major contributor to family violence and breakdown. This draws upon a pattern already sketched out in Genesis 3 and 4.

In a subtly dressed fall narrative, Abraham births Ishmael resulting in conflict and intense family breakdown (16:4-8; 21:9-12). Later, Esau and Jacob struggle in the womb (25:22) anticipating the familial strife that will characterize their lives. As they grow up, Jacob takes advantage of Esau (25:29-34), and then, through his mother's design, deceives his own father into granting him the family blessing due Esau. In response, Esau intends to kill Jacob. Olsen remarks, "The Jacob-Esau relationship is a replay in many ways of the Cain-Abel story—two brothers, different vocations, an experience of perceived injustice by the elder brother, envy and anger, and a plan to kill the younger brother."[67] This recapitulation also fragments the family. The fruit of Jacob's deception is the threat of fratricidal violence. Jacob thus must flee (exile) from his brother to take up residence with his uncle Laban. In Padam-Aran, Laban deceives and cheats Jacob into marrying Leah before Rachel. Laban and Jacob then repeatedly mistreat and trick one another resulting in a breakdown of this family (which may have resulted in violence had not God directly intervened [Genesis 31:29]). In the midst of all this, there is immense strife between Rachel and Leah who repeatedly do violence to one another as they compete for the children and the affections of their husband.[68]

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[66] See George W. Coat, "Strife and Reconciliation: Themes of a Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis" *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 2 (1980): 15-37.

[67] Dennis Olsen, "Revenge, Forgiveness, and Sibling Rivalry: A Theological Dialogue Between Scripture and Science." *Ex Auditu* 28 (2012): 108.

[68] Ibid., See the latter half, 103-119.

When back in the land, Dinah is raped by a Canaanite prince who then seeks her hand in marriage (Genesis 34). In a notoriously difficult to interpret story, the sons of Jacob demand that all of Shechem be circumcised.[69] To the dismay of Jacob, the older sons of Leah viciously murder every living male as they lay healing.[70] These patterns of violence (often connected to deception or envy), family strife, and breakdown continue into the final section of Genesis. It is a tragic pattern that reaches a terrifying high point in the Joseph narrative.[71]

Nakedness as a motif does not seem to play as large a role as violence and family breakdown. But there is the possibility of the motif floating beneath the surface. While God and Shem "clothed" nakedness, most of the subsequent characters use clothing to deceive one another. Jacob is covered with animal skins, but only in order to deceive. Though speculative, Laban perhaps deceives Jacob with a "veiled" Leah. The brothers deceive Shechem by requiring an "unclothing" of their loins. Tamar will soon deceive Judah with a prostitute's veil/dress. And Joseph's brothers will soon strip him of his clothing and deceive their father with the same garment.[72] Like the serpents temptation of Eve and Ham's exploitation of Noah, each clothing-related instance results in further family breakdown.

As we have seen, the family that has been blessed to be "curse-reverses" seems to be stuck in the throes of curse. The general failure of the patriarchal family creates a backdrop

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[69]Circumcision is the covenant sign (with perhaps some interaction with the nakedness motif). The Rape-Vengeance story is difficult on a number of accounts. Is this "violence" the sort that has been almost universally condemned by the author? Or is this the sort that is commended, like Abraham's saving of Lot in Genesis 14? Due to the conflation of "deception" and "violence," not to mention Jacob's deathbed references to the event, I cannot help but see the Rape-Vengeance episode as being cast in a negative light. I thus find Sternberg's approach, through intriguing, ultimately untenable. (Sternberg, 445-476) (For a detailed discussion of Sternberg's approach, see also, Wenham, *Story,* 110-119.

[70] They also accrue for themselves all the livestock, women, and children.

[71] There, out of envy, Joseph is stripped by his own brothers and murderously thrown into a pit, only to be later sold as a slave.

[72] Potiphar's wife also uses Joseph's garment to deceive her husband.

though which the author can draw special attention to the grace of God. God's plans are ultimately built on the foundation of God's gracious promise. This, however, does not in any way negate the significance and necessity of their paradigmatic calling.

Land Seed Blessing

The Edenic promises given to Abraham are one of the central themes of the book, even though in many ways, they are hardly realized. The promise-call of Abraham is repeated in each patriarchal narrative (12:1–3; 26:2–5; 28:13–14). Yet the promise is ultimately eschatological. The original recipients participate in the promises, but not in the fullness of them. The patriarchs only acquire relatively small patches of *land*. Even so, as an echo of the Edenic mandate, they cultivate it well and acquire for themselves much livestock and property.

Although exiled from the garden-temple, God's covenant presence continues to be near the patriarchal family. This is part of both the creational ideal and the redemptive economy. God's sovereign presence is reiterated several times.[73] The Lord is with them in order to overcome barrenness, mortal threat to the seed, and the danger of famine. God's directly intervenes to overcome the effects and conditions of curse in order to bring about a blessed future. The gift of God's gracious intervention results in Abraham's family being preserved and continued through children (*seed*). However, within the main body of Genesis, Abraham's children do not become a great nation, and procreation itself is often very difficult.

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[73] God's abiding presence with the Patriarchs is mentioned in 17:1, 26:3, 26:24, 28:15, 39:2, 46:4.

In terms of Abraham's descendants becoming a *blessing* to all the nations, we see only various glimmers throughout the patriarchal narratives. Each receives the promise-vocation, and is blessed unto this end. The patriarchs join the Sethites and Shemites in "calling upon the name of the Lord." Though not always perfectly pious, each patriarch worships at various holy sites (e.g., oaks of Mamre, Bethel). And as they move from place to place, God's blessing works through their virtuous behavior to those around them. We first see Abraham rescuing, interceding for, and blessing his pagan neighbors.[74] Abraham is described by a Canaanite as a "prince of God among us" (23:6). It is also recognized that God is with Jacob; Abimelech calls him "the blessed of the Lord" (26:28-29). Laban realizes also that he himself is blessed by God because of Jacob (30:27). Additionally, Lot is spared from judgment because of Abraham (19:29). Wenham stresses that the patriarchs almost always attempt to live at peace with their neighbors.[75] Robert Neff notes, "The stories of the patriarchs serve as paradigms of peace in a disruptive and disorganized world."[76] It is a fundamental theme that each patriarch is called to be a blessing; this is their vocational call. But in the patriarchal narratives (Genesis 12-36), we only see glimpses of fulfillment. One such instance is Abimelech's recognizing of Abraham "that God is with you in all that you do," and his subsequent desire to make a covenant with him (21:22-23).

Faith and Obedience

Throughout Genesis, faith and obedience are tied to vocational fulfillment. This pattern (adumbrated in the Noah narrative) is made explicit in the Abrahamic narrative,

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[74] Genesis 13:8-18, 18:22-33, 20:17, 21:22-34.

[75] Wenham, *Story*, 39.

[76] Neff, 42.

which begins and ends on notes of radical obedience. Following the promise of 12:1-3, Abraham (like Noah) does "as the Lord had told him" and leaves Ur. At the end of the narrative, Abraham is called to go "go forth" once again. This time, to sacrifice his son. The root "Go Forth" occurs only twice in Genesis, once in Genesis 12:1-3 and then in Genesis 22:2.[77] These two passages form an *inclusio* in which calls to radical faith/obedience result in affirmations of the covenant blessing/vocation. The *inclusio* of faith-obedience-blessing is part of a larger chiastic structuring.[78] Near the center of this structure we are shown that it is Abraham's faith that is "credited to him as righteousness" (15:6).

After the fall of Genesis 16, Abraham is told to "walk before" God and "be blameless" (17:1), which echo the Adam/Noah commission. This way of life is again referenced in the very important Genesis 18:17-19:

> Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do, seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him? For I have chosen him, that he may command his children and his household after him t*o keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice, so that* the Lord may bring to Abraham what he has promised him. (emphasis added)

The language is explicit. God has chosen Abraham for a task, which is to train his seed to "keep the way of the Lord," and is described in an active sense as "doing righteousness and justice"[79] (i.e. the very things that God does). In this passage, the accomplishment of God's larger promise is then specifically tied to Abraham's call and his subsequent obedience.[80] The centerpiece of his obedience is when he is declared righteous on account of

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[77] See Shimon Bar-Efrat's comments on the rarity of this construction and its literary-theological purpose (Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Almond Press, 1989), 212-213).

[78] See Appendix 1.3. Adapted from Waltke, *Genesis*, 20.

[79] This adumbrates the purpose of law-keeping.

[80] Robert Alter writes, "This is the first time in the narrative that the fulfillment of the covenantal promise is explicitly made contingent on moral performance" (Alter, *Genesis*. [New York: W.W. Norton, 1996], 80).

his faith. But it is clear that this faith must be an obedient and active faith. God's people are to "keep the way of YHWH" and "do righteousness and justice" *in order that* the promises may come about. Just as in creation, God's intention that blessing be brought to all the nations of the world is connected to mankind's fulfillment of their vocation.

The ethical demand of Israel thus finds its deepest rationale in the fulfillment of God's gracious promise. Blessing for them and their neighbors comes through the channel of their faith and obedience. Their ethical calling is thus directly connected to God's redemptive plan for the world.

Blessing and Reconciliation: A Foreshadowing

Even so, familial strife dominates the main body of Genesis. The elect mediators (those intended to teach "the way of YHWH") are often embroiled in self-wrought discord and strife. However, there are particular moments of hope amidst the general discord. Of particular importance is the reconciliation scene between Jacob and Esau. We know for certain that young Esau was determined to avenge himself by killing his brother Jacob. Yet by Genesis 33, the two brothers are embracing and weeping upon one another (33:4). While the story has many ambiguities, it is at least clear that the author wants the reader to feel the danger of Jacob's situation. In view of the Cain and Abel incident, the potential for an envy-driven instance of fratricide with Jacob and Esau looms over the promised seed. When Jacob recognizes his danger, he is led towards the Lord. His fear then leads him to a humble prayer of repentance and gratitude (32:9-12). Admitting his unworthiness, he calls upon the Lord for a divine rescue from his brother's anger.

The next day, Jacob prepare to meet his brother by sending ahead "gifts" from the abundance with which the Lord has blessed him. He also comes "bowing himself to the ground seven times." Each of these actions is meant to be a token of contrition and humility before Esau. In Genesis 33:11, Jacob describes his gifts to Esau as *berakah*. This is the same word used twenty years earlier to describe that which Jacob stole from Esau.[81] In reference to his gifts, Jacob says to Esau, "Please accept my blessing (*berakah*) that is brought to you" (33:11). Though he had stolen a "blessing," he now returns with a gift of "blessing." All of this appears to indicate an unspoken apology (likely in accord with the convention of the day).

As Jacob symbolically repents and returns a blessing, the threat of violence is overturned. Esau righteously refuses to enact revenge, and becomes willing to accept Jacob into his family. This episode indicates godly development within the life Jacob (humility, repentance, prayer) while also introducing a pattern of "blessing" overcoming violence as well as family reconciliation.

The fullness of reconciliation, however, is somewhat brought into question by Jacob's refusal to dwell with Esau (33:12-17). There is a peace, but not a full reconciliation of the families. Nevertheless, the trajectory away from violence and family strife is a welcome relief and important to the ethical import of the text as a whole, foreshadowing and adumbrating the climactic reconciliation of Genesis 45.

The Joseph Narrative (Genesis 45)

As John Barton has noted, OT ethics are essentially a call to imitate the "pattern of God's

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[81] Olsen, 109.

own actions, in salvation and in creation."[82] This is clearly demonstrated in the Joseph

narrative whereby he fulfills the pattern of vocational participation by overcoming the

conditions of curse with blessing. The Joseph story is the necessary climax to the larger

thematic and ethical purposes of the book. The author draws our attention to this in a variety

of ways. Firstly, there are certain narrative analogies between the Jacob and Joseph cycles.

These serve to connect the Joseph story with the narrative trajectory of the whole book. Each

of the episodes features a parallel "three-part plot structure":[83]

> 1) Deception of Father, treachery amidst brothers (threat of violence)
> 2) 20-year separations, younger brother exiled in foreign land
> 3) Reunion and reconciliation of estranged brothers[84]

On top of this, all of the dominant motifs from Genesis climax in the Joseph

narrative.[85] Indeed, it is true that all of the "conditions of curse" are confronted in this

narrative. The theme of exile is featured, as are the themes of violence, family breakdown,

nakedness, curse (famine), and death. Bruce Dahlberg argues that the Joseph story is a

"completion and consumption to everything in the book of Genesis preceding it,"[86] whereby,

in a literary sense, "the events of Eden are reversed and resolved."[87]

This convergence of themes prepares the audience for the climax of the book when

Joseph reunites his violence-torn family, rules wisely over the land/ground, and mediates

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[82] John Barton, "Approaches to Ethics in the Old Testament." in *Beginning Old Testament Study.* ed. J.W. Rogerson. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982), 130.

[83] Peter D. Miscall, "The Jacob and Joseph Story as Analogies." *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 6 (1978): 32.

[84] Ibid.,

[85] There also appears to be some sort of narrative typology occurring between the call of Abram and the descent of Joseph. See Sailhamar, *Narrative*, 116.

[86] Dahlberg, 363. Stone concurs stating, "In my view, the Joseph story is the culmination and conclusion of Genesis" (Stone, 62).

[87] Dahlberg, 363.

blessing to all the nations of the earth. Chapman sees the Genesis theme of "being a blessing" as illuminating "the narrative logic undergirding the three major portions of the book."[88] He states, "And it leaves us…with the tantalizing possibility that the first (and best) exegesis of 12:1-3 was perhaps Genesis 37-50."[89] It is my contention that this is certainly the case. The Joseph story will demonstrate a faithful fulfillment of vocational participation (i.e. the paradigm inaugurated in Genesis 12:1-3). In accord with the call of Abraham, Joseph will be depicted as a faithful Adam and Noah figure, overcoming the problems of curse (exile, death, curse [famine], violence, nakedness, family breakdown) through submitting to God, imitating his ways, and bringing about salvation/blessing for all the earth. This gives us the final and climactic chord in the paradigmatic melody of Genesis.

<center>Violence, Nakedness, Family Breakdown</center>

The story begins with the motif of familial strife. Joseph is hated by his brothers for being the favored son of their father. Tensions increase to the point where "they cannot speak peaceably with him." Then, as Pierre Berthoud notes, "the family crisis that had been simmering for quite some time surfaces with extraordinary violence."[90] Joseph's brothers abuse him with murderous intent. Out of envy, they strip him of his cloak (a symbol of paternal favor), throw him into a pit, and eventually sell him into slavery. These Cain-like actions of violence bring about intense family breakdown. The brother's conclude their misdeeds by deceiving their father with Joseph's cloak. This recapitulates the many

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[88] Chapman, 332.

[89] Ibid.,

[90] Pierre Berthoud, "The Reconciliation of Joseph with His Brothers: Sin, Forgiveness And Providence." *European Journal of Theology* 17 (2008): 6.

conflations of violence and deception as well as the recurring pattern of deception by clothes. Jacob is seized with grief and refuses comfort from his sons. Violence, nakedness, and family breakdown (which have thus far been indicators of the conditions of curse) are shown to be in full swing. Like Abel, Joseph is the innocent brother, yet he experiences the consequences normally reserved for the wicked. Joseph is stripped of his clothes and then exiled to the land of Egypt. There he is sold as a slave into the house of Potiphar. Yet just as God promised to be with each of the patriarchs, so also the narrator is quick to point out that God is with Joseph in his travail (39:2, 21).

A Righteous Seed: Hope in Exile

In exile, Joseph quickly finds favor with his lord. Like the patriarchs before him, God's blessing is mediated through him. Potiphar's house thus experiences blessing while Joseph rules the household (Gen. 39:5). Joseph is given authority over all things except for Potiphar's food. The plot of the story seems to suggest that Potiphar's food is a euphemistic description of his wife.[91] Like Adam, Joseph is ruler over all things except those which are the clear property of their given lords. Adam was to resist the knowledge of good and evil in the form of food, while Joseph must resist the voice of Pharaoh's food/wife. Whereas Adam, Noah, and Abraham all fell prey to various temptations, the pattern takes "a surprising turn in the Joseph's story."[92] In contrast with Adam and Abraham, Joseph does "not listen to the voice of the women" (39:10) and refuses her saying, "No one is greater in this house than I

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[91] Stone, 66. (cf. 39:6 with 36:8-9) This euphemism may also be employed in Proverbs 9:5.

[92] Ibid., 64.

am. My master has withheld nothing from me except you, because you are his wife. How then could I do such a wicked thing and sin against God?" (39:9).

Unlike Adam, Joseph fears God completely and refuses to transgress the boundaries of his role. Joseph therefore offers a stark contrast to the repeated failures of the other patriarchs.[93] Sailhamer notes, "At many points in the story, Joseph seems to be represented as an ideal of what a truly wise and faithful man is like."[94] Yet even though Joseph refuses to de-robe himself, he is stripped of his cloak anyways. With a token piece of clothing, Potiphar's wife is able to deceive her husband, and have Joseph thrown into prison. However, by the sovereign hand of God, this unjust turn of events puts Joseph in a position by which he will later be able to save all of the known world. This story demonstrates the godly character of Joseph (who is also foiled with Judah's sexual exploits and harsh treatment of his family; cf. Gen. 38/39), and it begins to hint at Joseph taking on an Adam-like role.

Exile, Curse, Death

Through a strange series of events, Joseph is given the chance to interpret the Pharaoh's dream, and the dream reveals that a world-wide famine will soon occur. The *famine* motif and its inevitable threat of *death* thus continue, but now with increasing magnitude. "All the world" will experience this famine (a token condition of curse).[95] Back

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[93] The Patriarchs each "repeatedly fell short of God's expectations...In the Joseph narratives, however, we do not see him fall short" (Sailhamar, *Narrative,* 211).

[94] Sailhamar, *Narrative,* 211

[95] A decent case can be made for purposeful flood/famine analogies in Genesis. See Dahlberg, "The Unity of Genesis."

in Canaan, Jacob realizes the situations, and says to his sons: "there is grain in Egypt. Go down there and buy some for us, so that we may live and not die." (42:2)

While in *exile*, Joseph continually functions as an ideal character. He prospers in prison because "the Lord showed him kindness" and "was with him." (39:21) Just as in Potiphar's house, Joseph becomes an ideal under-ruler over all of the prison. Both of these instances adumbrate his eventual rule over Egypt while also faintly echoing the initial creation mandate.[96] As he continues to trust in God, he is again lifted out of the pit in order to ascend to a rulership larger than before. By the time Joseph's brothers arrive, he has become a wise ruler and good steward of the whole land of Egypt. He is an Adam-like vice-regent, wisely governing the land so as to provide rescue/food for the people of Egypt and beyond. In this way, he is beginning to fulfill the vocational calling by "ruling" over the land and alleviating the conditions of curse for all the nations of the earth. While many scholars see Joseph as an anti-type to Adam, Chapman notes that "he is even more the culmination and fulfillment of the ancestral blessing beginning with Abram."[97]

Blessing and Reconciliation: Genesis 45:1-15

Throughout Genesis, one of the central indicators of the world gone wrong has been the motif of violence. Especially heinous have been portrayals of familial violence. This motif comes to a startling conclusion in the dramatic highpoint of the Joseph narrative in 45:1-15.[98] When Joseph first encounters his brothers, he "speaks roughly with them," accuses

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[96] For more on the Adamic "rule" motif, See Sailhammer, *Narrative,* 215, and Chapman, 646.

[97] Chapman, 330.

[98] Walter Brueggerman, *Genesis* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2010), 345, 290. See also, Appendix 1.3.

them of wanting to "exploit the nakedness of the land," and refuses to reveal his true identity. As Joseph's brother supplicate him, he stands in a position of absolute power over them. He first uses his position to deceive and test them, hanging over us the possibility of yet another cycle of familial violence. But for Joseph, the perfect occasion for a seemingly just vengeance is suddenly turned into a scene of family reconciliation.

Just as he resisted Potiphar's wife, so now he resists the "right" of violence. Conditioned by his brothers' penitent sorrow (42:21-24) and Judah's impassioned speech and transformation[99] (44:14-34), Joseph refuses to enact a violent revenge. Instead, Joseph calls his fearful brothers to "Come close to me, please," and urges them not to be distressed over their past sins since "God sent me before you to preserve life" (45:4-5). Joseph is able to glimpse the larger workings of God, and chooses to forgive his brothers. Joseph then "weeps upon their necks" and they once again "speak to each other" (45:14-15).[100]

Overcoming Curse with Blessing

In an Adam/Noah-like role of "ruler" and "savior," Joseph overcomes the effects of curse in several ways. As a wise steward of the land he is able to be his brother's keeper and provide food and land for all of his family. He thus overcomes the effects of famine [curse] and promotes the conditions of blessing. Following his reveal, he immediately promises provision for all of his family (45:10-11). In an ironic twist, he also gifts each of his brothers with a change of clothes. Whereas clothing has been used for deception and violence, here it

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[99] Judah is transformed from the "seller of Joseph" and an evil father in-law to a man deeply concerned about his family and willing to sacrifice himself for them. His speech leads directly to Joseph not being able to contain himself.

[100] The "weeping on necks" echoes Jacob and Esau's reconciliation. Their "speaking" forms a key-word *inclusio*; going from not being able to speak peacefully to him to speaking in peace.

functions as a token of gracious acceptance and reconciliation. Joseph thus takes the consequences of their poverty upon himself and provides for them in their time of need. Like God, Joseph blesses by providing food, clothing the guilty, and forgiving them of their sins against him.

Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers is also a direct reversal of the motifs of curse. His non-violence signals an end of familial violence in Genesis, and instead brings the family of God into one. The family which has been perpetually fragmented through cycles of violence is now restored through Joseph's faithfulness and refusal to take vengeance into his own hands. This recapitulates and advances the pattern glimpsed in the Jacob and Esau story (i.e. active blessing overcoming the threat of violence). Instead of fragmentation amongst sons, the twelve now come to dwell together. This stands in contrast with both Ishmael and Isaac, and Jacob and Esau. Within this state of blessing, the family is finally able to "be fruitful and multiply."[101]

Taken together, Joseph is participating in curse-reversal, that is, he joins God in his work of overcoming curse with blessing. Throughout, Joseph gives God the rightful credit. Joseph understands that it is God who is working to save the seed of Abraham (41:16; 45:5; 50:19-20). Nevertheless, God is shown to be working through the faithfulness and wisdom of Joseph. This accords with the patterns of co-participation that we have seen throughout the book of Genesis as well as the insistence that right living is a necessary element. It is also reminiscent of the Noah story whereby God saves mankind through the faithfulness of one representative man.

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[101] Genesis 47:27; Sailhamar remarks "Such a picture appears to be an obvious replication of the intended blessing of the early chapters of Genesis: 'Be fruitful and multiply you and fill the land' (1:28)." (*Narrative*, 228).

Sailhamer comments, "The Joseph narratives are intended then to give balance to the narratives of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Together the patriarchal narratives and the Joseph narrative show both God's faithfulness in spite of human failure and the necessity of an obedient and faithful response on the part of human beings.[102] Joseph's faithful response to the evils in his life is the channel through which God brings about his intentions.

Like Abraham and Jacob, Joseph is rightly recognized by others as possessing a unique relationship with God. Upon interpreting Pharaoh's dream, "Pharaoh said to his servants, 'Can we find a man like this, in whom is the Spirit of God?' Then Pharaoh said to Joseph, 'Since God has shown you all this, there is none so discerning and wise as you are" (41:38-39). Joseph, as a righteous representative, draws attention to the way of YHWH, and begins to fulfill his family's paradigmatic calling as moral exemplar.

As the seed of Abraham, Joseph is the elect mediator of God's good intention. After forgiving his brothers, Joseph states, "for the next five years there will be no plowing and reaping. But God sent me ahead of you to preserve for you a remnant on earth and to save your lives by a great deliverance."[103] Like Noah and Abraham, God has chosen Joseph to be the means of his salvation. Joseph understands that all of his miseries came about in such a way that God might save for his family a remnant (45:7).

Joseph is a model ruler of the land and through his wise cultivation of the earth he is able to ensure the preservation and multiplication of the remnant (like Noah). As a member of the remnant himself, he also becomes the mediator through whom God brings blessing to all the nations of the earth, thus fulfilling the call of Abraham. Joseph overcomes and

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[102] Sailhamer, 211.

[103] Von Rad, 389-399.

alleviates conditions of curse (famine) and saves the life of the world. As such, "Joseph has

played his part in a measure of restitution of the divine vision of the 'good'" and "brought a

blessing to all the nations of the earth."[104] Prior to this, God's mediate blessing to others had

only been glimpsed in the lives of the patriarchs, but here, God truly saves the world through

the faithfulness of Joseph.

Brian O. Sigmund sees both Joseph's forgiveness and his famine relief efforts as

being deliberately modeled as "reversals" of the events of Genesis 2-4: "Joseph's relationship

with his brothers ends with reconciliation, while his activities as governor of Egypt preserve

life through the provision of food. Both of these results emerge as reversals of the narratives

in Gen 2-4, where the humans' disobedience led to death and fraternal conflict ended in

murder."[105] Instead of death, Joseph's actions have brought about life and the conditions for

the continuance of life and blessing. From this state of *shalom*, his father pronounces

blessings upon Pharaoh, and eventually upon all of his sons. They do not have the promised

land but they do have a home, and they will become a great nation in that place. We are thus

shown a steady development of the Abrahamic promises as they come to fruition. The

promise-call of Abram is what God originally gave in response to the curse of Gen. 3. In

dramatic fashion, Joseph has alleviated the conditions of curse, reconciled his family, and

mediated blessing to all the nations of the earth.[106]

In the *denouement*, there is a recapitulation of the initial reconciliation scene. In

Genesis 50, Joseph's brothers consider that Joseph might perhaps be like Esau, biding his

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[104] J. Gordon McConville, "Forgiveness as Private and Public Act: A Reading of the Biblical Joseph Narrative." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 75 (2013): 648; Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 493.

[105] Brian Osborne Sigmon, "Between Eden and Egypt: Echoes of the Garden Narrative in the Story of Joseph and His Brothers" (Ph.D diss., Marquette University, 2013): 340.

[106] Echoing both the Adamic rule of Gen. 1-2 and Abrahamic blessing of Genesis 12:3.

time until his father died, before enacting his violent revenge. But Joseph again refuses to shed the blood of man/his brothers and instead "covers" their sin/shame with grace. As an Anti-Cain, he says, "'Do not fear, for am I in the place of God? As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones.' Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them" (50:19-21).

In a subtly woven *inclusio*, the author of Genesis ends his story where it began. Adam and Eve sought to "become like God" by seizing the "knowledge of good and evil."[107] Joseph is instead cast in a notably anti-Adam role. He submits wholly to God's sovereignty and does not aspire to God's prerogatives. Joseph concludes rightly that he is not in the place of God. He thus does not take judgment into his own hands (refusing violence) but instead entrusts all things to the true Judge of the earth. Instead of repaying violence for violence, Joseph absorbs the evil of his brothers. He overcomes their curse-like actions by responding with the divine-like actions of forgiveness and blessing. Joseph is able to see what they cannot. God has somehow used both their wickedness and Joseph's faithfulness to bring about his good purposes. In this way, Joseph rightly submits himself to the will of his sovereign.

Unlike Adam, Joseph refuses the food of temptation, ascends to the throne as under-ruler, wisely governs/cultivates the ground, and creates the conditions by which his family may be fruitful and multiply. Unlike Cain, Joseph is not overcome by violent impulses that would shred his family apart and instead works to bring about reconciliation and peace. Like Noah, God brings about a great deliverance for the many (including the remnant/seed) through the faithfulness of the one. And in fulfillment of the call of Abraham, Joseph's

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[107] In Genesis, the words for good and evil only appear together in two places. 1). in the garden, where they strive to be like God, and here 2). where Joseph refuses to "be God."

faithfulness under trial and testing results in blessing to all nations of the earth. Like God, Joseph grants tokens of grace from his throne; he clothes his brothers in their shame, providing them with abundant land and food, and establishes the conditions of blessing.

The story thus concludes with Joseph overcoming curse with blessing by responding to their violence and deception with truth and forgiveness. Though the end of Genesis seems anticlimactic (not yet being in the land), it does end on a note of tremendous hope. The family of God is united again, and it is through them that God will continue to bring about his promises.

CHAPTER 4

THE ETHOS AND TYPOLOGY OF VOCATIONAL PARTICIPATION

Genesis' primary mode of ethical address comes to us in the narrative cast of a "story-formed identity" for Israel. This identity is the ethical ideal of *vocational participation,* whereby Israel is chosen (by grace) to model "Eden" to the world. They receive the blessing of God through faith, and then live in such a way as to alleviate the conditions of curse and to promote the conditions of blessing. The end goal is that Israel will be God's means of bringing his redemptive blessing to all the families of the earth.

Within the storied-paradigm, each narrative episode contributes in some way to the text's overall moral import. As Barton has noted, *torah* functions by "providing materials that, when pondered and absorbed into the mind, will suggest the pattern or shape of a way of life lived in the presence of God."[1] This "way of life" can partly be discerned in the unique way that the author participates in moral reflection.[2]

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[1] Barton, Approaching OT Ethics, 128. Barton suggests that approaching OT ethical consideration as *torah* in this way, is the best model.

[2] Though a character may act in an exemplary way, the Bible seldom operates in anything like pure moral exemplum. See John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics: Approaches and Explorations* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003),7.

Ethos: Discerning the Moral Texture

The moral texture of Genesis can be referred to as its *ethos*. Barton describes the *ethos* of a text as the way in which a text "breathes a particular moral atmosphere, rather than merely laying down the law."[3] Barton, like Christopher Wright, is willing to suggest that there is a particular and consistent enough moral worldview in the backdrop of the OT narratives to allows us to discern "patterns of behavior" that are deemed as pleasing to God.

This accords with McConnell's assessment that "it is possible to speak of Old Testament ethics in terms of the manner of life which is approved by the writers of the Old Testament."[4] This too, is where the Wenham's "identikit" (i.e. a composite sketch pulled from multiple sources to make one representative whole) comes in to play.[5] The text provides for us a composite picture of a particular type of life lived before God. It never commands "thou shall forgive" or "thou shall be pray" but it does offer us narratives that portray these things as pleasing to God and as bringing about good consequences. In this way, these things are promoted in the general ethos, or "moral thrust," of the text. Like any artful narrative, it does not tell you, it shows you.[6] I suggest that the ethos of Genesis' storied-paradigm can be

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[3] Ibid.,

[4] Walter L. McConnell, III, "The Problem of Methodology For Old Testament Ethics" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Evangelical Theological Society, Valley Forge, Virginia, November 16-18, 2005), 3.

[5] Wenham contends that careful attention to the rhetorical elements of Genesis will provide us with a composite picture of a righteous life. See Gordon Wenham, *Story at Torah*. (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 100. This task can be difficult, see Appendix 2.

[6] Barton suggests that there are some truths that *must* be told in this way—therefore we must pay close attention to the rhetorical contours of the text. See John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 4.

generally summarized by four major categories.[7] These are chords played within the overarching paradigmatic melody, and are essential to the ethical address of the text.

Faith

The Oxford Dictionary defines faith as "complete trust or confidence in someone or something." Biblical faith is a lived out trust in God. This involves a commitment to a certain way of understanding God, oneself, and the world; and how these things relate. Faith thus involves a commitment to the story of the world as it is presented in the Bible. It's only explicit mention occurs in Genesis 15:9.[8] In response to God's promise, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness." Even so, it clearly undergirds many of the narrative episodes.[9]

Many characters are portrayed positively as being men of *worship* and *prayer*. These elements are the lifeblood of a sincere faith in God. Abel worships the Lord though sacrifice (4:4). The Sethites distinguish themselves from the Cainites by "calling upon the name of the Lord" (4:26). Following the flood, Noah erects an altar and sacrifices to the Lord (8:20). Abraham also "calls upon the name of the Lord" (21:33), and each of the patriarchs erect alters to the Lord (Abraham: 12:7, 8 13:8, 22:13; Isaac: 26:25; Jacob: 33:20, 35:7). Regarding prayer, Abraham makes requests of the Lord (15:3, 8; 18:22-37) and prays on

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[7] Barton holds to his categories loosely. They are not biblical terms, but rather general headings to help us organize and consider. He notes that some categories could likely be subsumed into others, and that they are perhaps even awaiting better titles. See John Barton, "The Basis of Ethics in the Hebrew Bible" *Semeia* 6 (1994): 11-22.

[8] The word "faith" is not mentioned here, but the NT uniformly describes this scene in the terms of "faith." In NT language, Abraham is declared to be in right relationship with God through his acceptance of God's promise through faith.

[9] The author of Hebrews describes many of the patriarchal actions as being done "by faith" (Hebrews 11:4-40).

behalf of Abimelech (20:17). Isaac meditates and effectively prays for the barrenness of his wife (25:21; 24:63). And Jacob humbly praises God for his steadfast love as he cries out for deliverance (32:9-12).[10]

While explicit discussions of "faith" as a concept are more likely to be found in the NT, faith is the foundation of all Biblical ethics. Noah would not have built an ark had he not believed in the words of the Lord. By faith, he remained blameless in his generation and was able to save mankind. In the stories, Abraham obeys God because he trusts him. By faith, Abel offers the best of his flock. By faith, Noah builds the ark. By faith, Abraham leaves his home so that God might bless all humanity with gospel hope (Romans 4:18-22). The author of Hebrews demonstrates these things, and shows that the same could be said of many of the characters in Genesis (Hebrews 11:4-22). It is by *faith* that the patriarchs were motivated to obey the Lord.

Obedience

In both the OT and NT, obedience is often connected to gratitude and recognition of the redemptive activity of God on one's behalf. Obedience is the immediate result of a living faith. Traditionally, "obedience to the revealed will of God" is considered the central element of OT ethics. It is certainly one of the most pervasive, but it is not broad enough to cover the whole ethical spectrum.

The text of Genesis initially promotes obedience by offering counter-examples. In Genesis 3-4, nakedness, exile, curse, violence, relational breakdown, and even death are

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[10] Other instances of prayer are Rebekah's inquiring of the LORD (25:22) and the prayer's of the servant of Abraham (24:10). The conversation of Abraham and God in Genesis 18 could also be considered a form of intercessory prayer.

described as results of disobedience. Following this, positive examples can be found in the episodes featuring Noah and Abraham.[11]

The text emphasizes Noah's continual obedience several times, noting, "Noah did all that the Lord commanded" (6:22; 7:5, 9,16). He is also described as righteous, blameless, and as one who walked with God (6:9). Noah builds the ark as he is commanded and becomes the means by which God perseveres mankind. In the story, the saving grace of God works through Noah's faithful obedience.

The stories of Abraham are framed by two instances of radical obedience. The patriarch is twice commanded to "go forth," once to leave his family and venture into the unknown and then to head towards Mt. Moriah with Isaac. Both tasks border on the unthinkable, and yet each instance of obedience is affirmed by a declaration of blessing. The latter blessing is as follows:

> By myself I have sworn, declares the Lord, *because you have done this and have not withheld your son*, your only son, I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, *because you have obeyed my voice*. (22:16-18, emphasis added)

Throughout Genesis, God's purposes work through the "faithfulness" of the characters.[12] Waltke comments on this idea saying:

> Salvation history depends ultimately on God's grace and his intervening initiatives but never apart from individual heroes of faith. God in his sovereign grace chooses

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[11] Noah and Abraham are heralded as paragons of virtue, and yet a facsimile imitation of them would foolish. Biblical characters are never flat moral exemplars. This sort of black and white picturing falls short of the complexity and mimesis we find in the Biblical stories. That is not to say that certain character seem to be described in negative and non-exemplary terms while others seem to be put forward as models of faith. Abraham, who twice deceived foreign kings at great risk to his wife and seed, and who took Hagar to himself, is clearly depicted as a paragon of virtue. This does not mean he is to be imitated at every step. Clearly not, but the text does describe the general thrust of his life as being towards faith and obedience.

[12] Recall commentary on Genesis 18 above.

individuals as his partners for his great undertaking to redeem humanity. In other words, God is the first cause of every good and perfect gift, including faith; yet he so orders historical events that the always conform to the second causes, "either necessarily, freely, or contingently, including human responsibility to respond to him in faith and to embrace his covenant of Grace."[13]

The ethical ideal of *vocational participation* requires an obedience of faith. For it is through his faithful representatives that the Lord works.[14] God intends to address the problems of evil and curse through his representatives, from *within* the world.

Wisdom

Like Barton's use of "natural law," I use *wisdom* "to draw attention to places in the Bible where ethics is not obedience to revealed or 'positive' law, but rather an accommodation of human actions to principles seen as inherent in the way things are."[15] The phrase "the way things are" refers to the constitutional moral order of God's good world. It is clear that human persons are, with some measure of accuracy, able to define ethical behavior apart from explicit or special revelation.[16] The moral fabric of our world is often culturally discerned, or personally observed/intuited. Within Genesis, there are instances of positive character portrayal without the language of command or obedience. This accords with wisdom, i.e. the skillful ability to intuit the nature of the world while navigating towards the good. Two antediluvian instances are Abel's sacrifice and Noah's commitment to non-

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[13] Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2007), 287.

[14] This is the ethical ideal, we certainly we have plenty of instances where God works over, against, or in spite of his representatives. These instances are "through" them in another sense, displaying the glory of his grace and sovereignty.

[15] Barton, "Basis," 15.

[16] C.f. The significant overlap between Ancient Near Eastern (aNE) and Biblical law.

violence.**17** Abel worships God with the best of his flock. There are no explicit commands regarding sacrifice in the primeval history. It is certainly possible that God did command sacrifice from the first family, but the text makes no attempt to say so. It is quite possible that it was culturally discerned, and therefore, a general fact of their existence.[18]

Noah is described as blameless within in his generation. From this we can infer that he did not participate in the "evil and violence" that characterized his contemporaries.[19] Was Noah commanded to not be violent? The text gives us no indication. We do know, however, that he participated rightly in the moral order of things and thus "found favor with God."

As far as we know, Abraham was never explicitly commanded by God to rescue the oppressed kings of Genesis 13. Abraham's routing of the enemy required courage and commitment to his family. The action results in deliverance for both Lot and others, and it is commended by the Melchizadekian blessing.

Likewise, Abraham demonstrates a respectable measure of aNE hospitality by quickly entertaining the three visitors of Genesis 18. Two of these same men receive a very different sort of reception in the next chapter. Here the author of Genesis contrasts the kindness of Abraham's feast with the abusive designs of Sodom. Instead of welcoming and blessing their guests, they seek to overtake, abuse, and exploit them (Gen. 19:4-11). The hospitality of Abraham is thus promoted, while the abuse of Sodom deplored. One results in life (promise to Sarah), and the other in death (the judgment of Sodom). Notably, there are no directives concerning hospitality.

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[17] The general terseness of the narratives often results in many of our questions being underdetermined. Also, blanks and gaps feature regularly in Biblical narrative, leaving only what the author deemed essential to his rhetorical purpose.

[18] Noah also makes an offering pleasing to the Lord.

[19] It is possible he received direct revelation as he "walked with God" but it is unclear.

Before God reigns down judgment upon Sodom, Abraham questions the justice of God's intention (18:23-44). Abraham thus displays a deep-rooted sense of right and wrong that appear to be innate to his character rather than the direct result of revelation. Indeed, without a law code, God intends for Abraham to teach his children "justice and righteousness" and the "way of YHWH."[20] This assumes that Abraham understands these things himself. So also the command for Abraham to "walk before God and be blameless" (17:1), which involves only an explicit command to circumcise. Abraham also is able to rightly seek peaceful relations with his neighbors, and conduct himself honorable with them so that he is known as "a prince of God among [them]" (Gen. 23:6). Another notable instance occurs as Jacob wisely sends tokens of penitence to Esau in the form of "gifts/blessing" (Gen. 33:8-11). These actions had good results, and seem to be approved by the rhetoric of the author.

Later, Joseph's brothers rightly discern a just moral order in the universe as they connect their misfortunes in Egypt to their mistreatment of Joseph (Gen. 42:21). Jacob reluctantly, yet rightly, sends Judah back to Egypt for the sake of his children (Gen. 43:11-14). When in Egypt, Judah powerfully and effectively chooses the words that affect Joseph, determining that he should sacrificially take Benjamin's place. Joseph himself is never told exactly how one ought to "rule," or how to govern Potiphar's house, the prison, or all of Egypt. However, he is able to do so with a moral excellence that is obvious to everyone around him. In the end, Joseph is even able to discern (without any indication of explicit revelation) that God is able to turn evil into good as he righteously forgives and embraces his brothers (Gen. 50:15-21).

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[20] This could be a "Mosaic addition" intended to express continuity between Abraham's teaching, the way of YWHW, and the Mosaic Law. Regardless, Abraham was to teach them righteousness.

In these instances, the characters wisely navigated numerous possible options. They chose actions that were wise, in that they trended towards the good in their given situations. They exhibit wise living before God and men. We are given living examples of people who were able to navigate their particular situational factors with moral excellence. The family of Abraham is to be a blessing through their faith, obedience, and wisdom. As we are shown, the moral *ethos* of Genesis promotes things like hospitality, courage, family commitment, honor, repentance, humility, forgiveness, and prayer, and are each part of rightly living according the moral order that God has established. All of these exist within the "atmosphere" of the larger paradigm.

Imitation

As image-bearers of God, *imitatio dei* is embedded into the human essence. The creational vocations of dominion, procreation, and stewardship each reflect the character and activity of God (i.e. ruling, wisely governing, and creating/filling). These are part of the creational ideal whereby man participates in the plan of God. As we have seen, this pattern certainly continues into the post-fall narratives. Abraham is called to imitate God through mediating blessing. He is blessed in order to then be a blessing, and by teaching his children the way of YHWH. Barton remarks that "imitation of God may indeed lie near the heart of what the Hebrew Bible has to say about human morality."[21] It is by no means a center, but it provides a helpful vantage point by which to summarize certain aspects of the ethical ideal of Genesis. Vocational participation overlaps significantly with the concept of *imitatio dei*.

God's "covering" of Adam and Eve's shame/nakedness is positively imitated in

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[21] Barton, "Basis," 20.

Genesis 9. Shem and Japheth's covering of Noah's nakedness share linguistic similarities and parallel placements within the narrative.[22] The narrative also contrasts their actions with the misbehavior of Ham. Ham's sinfulness leads to curse, while Shem's godliness results in blessing. Noah's nakedness reminds the reader that though a new world has been born, sin is still operative. However, Shem and Japheth also remind us that God is still operative. Just as he mitigated the original condition of nakedness, so also do those who are called by his name. This is but a faint adumbration of the larger paradigm given to Israel through Genesis. As God has blessed them, so also each patriarch is to mediate blessing to "those who bless them" and sometimes even beyond. Joseph certainly serves as a conduit of God's blessing to all the families of earth when he mitigates the effects of the famine. Joseph's wise rule over Egypt and "provision of food" likewise echoes the creational ideal and thus also image-bearing and imitation. Joseph is also pictured as providing land, food, and clothing for his sinful brothers, and as echoing the redemptive grace of God as he uses his authority to grant forgiveness rather than condemnation.

The concept of *imitatio dei* receives further development in the motive-clauses of the Law codes. For now, we merely suggest that this idea is part of the ethos of Genesis. The collective moral atmosphere is part of the "picture of the world" meant to disclose the true state of affairs to elect Israel concerning God, the world, and their place in creation. In summation Wenham states:

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[22] See Appendix 1.2, recalling discussions above.

Genesis thus sets out a very lofty ideal of human behavior. It does not show its heroes simply keeping the law in their individual actions or illustrating typical human virtues. Rather it sets out a vision of human beings made in the image of God, his representatives on earth, and therefore obligated to try and imitate God in their dealings with one another and with other creatures.[23]

This calling as "representatives on earth" has led scholars such as Barton to comment, "Thus the moral life is envisaged, it seems, as a co-operative venture between God and people…. Any comprehensive treatment of ethics in the Hebrew Bible would need to give some account of the idea of vocation, the singling out of people to be God's agents."[24]

T. E. Fretheim likewise terms the Sinai covenant as "vocational." He adds, "In the obedience of the law, Israel in effect becomes a created *co-reclaimer* of God's intentions for the creation."[25] This calling is unique to Israel, and is for the sake of the whole world. Barton concludes:

> Such a calling gives them special obligations, which we can certainly understand on an obedience model—hardly, perhaps, on any other model. But it also gives them a special way of life and an insight into the intentions and character of God, and empowers them to be in the place of God for the people at large…speaks of the possibility of the divine life and human life running in parallel; and this may be connected with the idea of the imitation of God. To imitate God in *this* sense is not the role of the ordinary person, but is a quite special vocation. Nevertheless, it implies an affinity between the divine and human; it implies that the human is *capax dei.* And thus it suggests that the imitation of God may indeed lie near the heart of what the Hebrew Bible has to say about human morality.[26]

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[23] Gordon Wenham, *Story as Torah.* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), 107.

[24] Barton, "Basis," 20.

[25] T. E. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation: Redemption and Law in Exodus." *Interpretation* 45 (1991): 365.

[26] Barton, "Basis," 20.

The thoughts represented in the present thesis are in many ways an attempt to draw nearer to Barton's idea of a proper OT ethic by giving (as noted above) "some account of the idea of vocation."

<div align="center">Typos: The Paradigm as Programmatic for The People of God</div>

God has chosen to work in this world through the seed of Abraham. Birch helpfully comments, "Christian ethics is not just the abstract applications of a decision-making process. Moral life flows from the way in which we engage the world, and this engagement is structured by our *vision*, the way we see the world as persons of faith."[27] This vision is initially cast in the book of Genesis. Israel's vision and self-perception within the world was to be shaped by the storied paradigm of Genesis. Genesis teaches the people of God to "understand themselves as called into being to play a part in God's redemptive purposes for a broken creation."[28] This story-formed identity is programmatic for the moral vision of the entire Bible.

<div align="center">Israel</div>

Following the exodus event, God ratifies a covenant agreement with the nation of Israel. Before the Law is given, the Lord declares, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:4-6). Here God demonstrates that Israel (the seed of

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[27] Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press,1991), 55. Emphasis added

[28] Ibid,, 96.

Abraham) has been chosen for his good purposes. Specifically, they are to be a "kingdom of priests" and a "holy nation." This priestly calling is their vocation. The role of a priest in Israel was to mediate the presence of God while also teaching the laws of righteousness. As a nation, Israel is thus being chosen to be God's priest to the world, mediating his presence and demonstrating his righteousness and holiness.[29]

In the Law, Israel is explicitly commanded to imitate and reflect God in his holiness.[30] They are to be a holy nation that represents the character of God to the nations. However, in order to live into the fullness of this, Israel must "obey his voice" just as Abraham (Ex. 19:4).

This calling precedes the promise whereby God intends to dwell with Israel in a paradise-like land (Ex. 29:45; 3:8). In this land, the people are to obey his voice and represent him to the nations. This is a redemptive continuation of the initial Edenic program taken up again in the call of Abram. Israel is to function as a redemptive symbol of the creational ideal. Their vocation, now termed as "priests to the world,"[31] continues the paradigmatic ideal of Genesis. The world-wide scope of this calling is again referenced in Deuteronomy 4:

> See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the Lord my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, "Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people." For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today? (4:5-8)

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[29] Israel is to function as an Edenic and typological microcosm/exemplar

[30] Leviticus 20:26, "Be holy as I am holy." See also Deuteronomy 10:12-22.

[31] Echoing the priestly subtleties of *abad* and *shamar* as used together in Genesis 2. See Beale, *NT Biblical Theology*, 32-34.

Israel's representative righteousness is to be "in the sight of the people" and is to draw people towards the Lord. In like manner, the prophet Isaiah envisions the nations being drawn to the ways of YHWH that emanate out from his temple:

> It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be lifted up above the hills; and all the nations shall flow to it, and many peoples shall come, and say: "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and shall decide disputes for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. (2:2-4)

As all nations draw near to learn the ways of YHWH, all the instruments of war (death-instruments) are turned into agricultural tools (life-instruments). Later in Isaiah, a single servant is described as a representative of the whole nation. He is given a commission to bring about a rule of "justice and righteousness" and to be "a light for all the nations" (Isaiah 42:1-6; 49:6).

In each of these examples, Israel's obedience and imitation of God is meant to bring blessing to the other nations of the earth. In this way, they are to continue the calling of Abraham/vocational participation by living rightly under the kingship of YHWH. They are thus tasked as exemplars of God's intention for all people.

Just as the *lex talion* was given to restrain the sin of violence, so also God gives Israel the Law to restrain their sin and promote his ethical agenda. The particulars of the Law are meant as borders for how Israel was to live in their specific time and place. In the New Testament, the ethical thrust of the Law is perfectly summarized as "loving the Lord your God" and "loving your neighbor as yourself." In some way, every aspect of the Law is concerned with either right worship (vertical orientation) or right behavior (horizontal

orientation). Faithfulness to the Mosaic code can thus be summarized as 1) the right worship of *YHWH* alone, or 2) the just and right treatment of neighbor.

In accord with aNE custom, the Pentateuchal law codes each initially conclude with a "blessings and curses" section. Israel merits blessing or curse depending upon her obedience or disobedience to her calling (Lev. 26, Dt. 28). This major theme of Genesis is especially echoed in Deuteronomy 28. In this section, it is clear that vocational fulfillment (i.e. right living before God and man) will usher in the conditions of blessing:

> And if you faithfully obey the voice of the Lord your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. (Dt. 28:1-6)

The text goes on to describe that there will be blessing "in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the Lord swore to your fathers to give you" (28:11). These details indicate that submission to the Kingship of YHWH results in Eden-like conditions of blessing. Vocational fulfillment is thus again tethered to the covenant fulfillment of God's promises (Land, Seed, Blessing). However, just as in Eden, failure to fulfill one's commission will result in exile, death, and curse. Among the curses listed are disease, famine, drought, being overtaken by enemies, death of children, the eating of one's own children,[32] becoming a byword of curse, and then eventual expulsion from the land (28:15-68). Deuteronomy 28 clearly demonstrates that obedience leads to covenant fulfillment, but disobedience to covenant reversal. The writing prophets of Israel

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[32] This image is likely metonymic of siege warfare. It is a direct "inversion'" of the command to be fruitful and multiply.

regularly allude to the contours of Deuteronomy 28 as they challenge the reigning conditions of "false worship" and "social injustice" (curse-bringers) with "true worship" and "justice and righteousness" (blessing-bringers).

Sadly, like Adam, the history of Israel tends towards this state of "covenant reversal" and "curse." The chosen mediators of God's blessing consistently misrepresent God, listen to the voices of other "gods," and violently exploit one another for personal gain. In 722 B.C., the Northern Kingdom is destroyed, and in 586 B.C., Jerusalem is sacked and all the people are exiled from the Land.

The Christ

In the New Testament, the tragic history of vocational failure takes a sudden turn with the incarnation of the Christ. We come to learn that all of the redemptive patterns of the OT have been operating on more than one level. God's dealings with Israel have been "means of grace" to them, but they have also been functioning typologically for future redemptive purposes. This is one way in which we can speak of OT patterns being programmatic for all the people of God. Typology refers to the historical phenomena by which God uses characters, events, institutions, and patterns within salvation history to adumbrate and anticipate fuller redemptive realities.[33] This shaping of redemptive history ultimately provides us with the theological substructure to understand the salvation of God in Christ.[34] It also functions practically to provide the general "vision" or "worldview" which will be taken

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[33] Paradigm and Typology can go hand in hand. Both are patterns meant to be analogically applied in future settings.

[34] Salvation through covenant mediators, the priesthood and sacrifices, the temple, salvation through judgment; each of these point ahead to fuller redemptive realities.

up by the body of Christ. This occurs not only on the level of symbol, but there is concrete historical continuity between the call of Israel and the call of the church. As Richard Hays notes, "The story that the New Testament tells makes sense only as the continuation and climax of the story of Israel."[35]

In the New Testament, Jesus is the true and faithful Israel who fulfills the promise/call of Abraham (Gal 3). In his character and actions, Jesus epitomizes the ethical ideal of vocational participation.[36] He always does what is pleasing to the Lord, and only does that which he sees the Father do (Jn. 8:29; 5:19-21). He is the living paradigm who co-partners with God in truly overcoming/alleviating the conditions of curse with blessing. Jesus appears to "undo the works of the devil" and to usher in the kingdom of God (1 Jn. 3:8; Mt. 3:2).

Throughout his ministry, Jesus restores things that have been corrupted by evil. He heals the sick, raises the dead, feeds the hungry, exorcises demons, and preaches peace and love in a world of violence and hate. The miracles are living symbols of God's original intention for the world, and his teachings are ethical directives unto this same end.

In his life, Jesus perfectly embodies the love of God and neighbor. Unlike Adam, Jesus never fails to submit to YHWH, and is able to overcome the direct temptation of Satan. As True Israel, Jesus obeys the law perfectly and thus draws people of all nations to God. In accord with the *torah*, he is also especially compassionate with the weak, needy, and marginalized.

Curse-Bearer

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[35] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 309.

[36] If Israel is the paradigm in the OT, then Christ, the True Israel, becomes the paradigm in the NT.

The climax of Jesus' ministry is the cross where Jesus addresses the evil of the world by taking the consequences of mankind's failure upon himself. As we have seen, both Adam's and Israel's sins and failures resulted in exile, death, and curse. In the Law, curse was promised for those who failed to obey the Lord. As a representative in the likeness of Adam, Jesus, as True Israel, takes the consequences of the world's sin upon himself. He is cursed by God and exiled from the land of the living. Before this moment, he is envied, stripped of his clothes, and violently tortured by his own people (violence, nakedness, family breakdown). However, even as his life slips away from him, Jesus intercedes on behalf of his oppressors saying, "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Lk. 23:24).

In his epistles, Paul describes Jesus as the "last Adam" (1 Cor. 15:21-28, 45-56; Rom. 5:12-21). Just as Adam's initial disobedience brought curse and death to the world, so now, the righteous obedience of Jesus (the new representative man and firstborn of the new creation) brings life and blessing to the world. In Galatians, Paul writes that "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us… so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles" (3:13-14). These verses reveal that Christ's representative death and resurrection bring about a fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise-calling. Paul notes, "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring…who is Christ" (3:16). By taking the curse upon himself and overcoming the grave, Jesus fulfills the vocation of Israel and mediates blessing to all the nations of the earth. Like faithful Joseph, Jesus is lifted from the dungeon and granted new authority by which he announces forgiveness and reconciliation. While Joseph offered salvation from the effects of famine, Jesus is able to offer a much fuller salvation. Like Noah, Jesus can bring his family

safely through God's judgment into a new creation.[37] Jesus, as the life-giving being, is able to

promise a rescue from death completely. Jesus perfectly models the paradigm of vocational

participation. He overcomes the effects of curse for the world and offers salvation and

blessing in their stead. The fullness of these promises has been connected to human agency

since the beginning (Gen. 3:15, 12:3). God has intended to address the worlds evil from

within the world. Christ fulfills what sin-bound mankind could not. In so doing, he also

offers us the fullest revelation of God's ethical ideal. Jesus is God in the flesh, and he is also

the man who fulfills the grace-born "obedience of faith" on which the promises were

contingent. As such, he lives out the story-formed identity of Israel as it is narratively cast in

Genesis.

The Church

In Galatians 3, Paul writes:

> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith . . . And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise. (3:7-9, 29)

Any person, whether Jew or Gentile, who places their faith in the risen Son of God is adopted

into his family. Paul thus describes the "blessing" of Abraham as God's gracious acceptance

of sinners by grace though faith. If a person has true faith in Christ, "you are blessed along

with Abraham" and are "Abraham's offspring." As such, he or she finds himself or herself

grafted into the storied paradigm of vocational participation. If one is in Christ, then they

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[37] In keeping with the typology of Genesis, Jesus is the new Adam, the new Noah, the true seed of Abraham, and therefore also the new Joseph.

belong to his body, the church. As the "Israel of God" through faith, the purpose of the church is to continue the work of Christ.

The Great Commission

As Christ ascended to his throne, he gave the church a "new-creation" mandate.[38] From his position of power, Jesus announces, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" (Mt. 28:18-20). The central task given to the church is the task of "making disciples of all nations." As before, the scope of the directive is universal. When people come to know Christ through the gospel, they "are blessed along with Abraham" (Gal. 3:9). The church is to continue to "bless all the nations of the earth" through gospel proclamation. Under the kingship of the last Adam, they are "to be fruitful and multiply" through gospel procreation.[39] This rescues people from death and curse and places them into life and blessing in Christ.

According to the Great Commission, making disciples also includes "teaching them to observe all" that Jesus has commanded. In Acts 3, Peter likewise proclaims to the Jews, "You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, *to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness*" (3:25-26; emphasis added). Here the Abrahamic "blessing" (as

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[38] John Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2008), 173; G.K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 57, 390.

[39] Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology,* 57.

given through Christ) is termed as "turning every one of you from your wickedness." In both instances, instructing someone in the gospel and the "way of Christ" is part of God's mission of blessing to the world. The blessing meant to overcome the curse involves instruction in Christian ethics. The church is to teach people to turn away from false narratives, constructs, theologies, habits, thoughts, affections, passions, actions, *etc.*, and instead turn towards the truth in Christ.

As expected, the ethical address of the NT retains the essential contours of the OT paradigm. The language, though, becomes essentially Christ-centered.[40] The key elements are *faith* in Christ (Rom. 4:16), *obedience* to Christ (Lk. 6:46; Jn. 13:34), the *wisdom* that is hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3), and the *imitation* of Christ (1 Jn. 2:6). Like in the OT, each of these elements is bound to a model of vocational participation within the story of God's redemptive purposes. Christ is the head and the church is his body who representatively advances his will on this earth. Like Israel, the church "in Christ" is to become a "kingdom of priests" (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10). The nation of Israel thus typologically adumbrates the church of Christ in the world. Both are rescued from slavery in order to dwell with God and mediate his blessing to the ends of the earth. Thus, if you are in Christ, your vocation is to advance his kingdom rule of blessing into every area of life. It is no coincidence that Jesus proclaims both himself and his church as being "the light of the world" (Jn 8:12; Mt. 5:14).

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[40] On the basis of a Spirit-wrought union with Christ.

<u>Participating in Christ's Work</u>

Christ is the promised seed of Abraham who "crushes the head of the serpent." However, in Romans 15, Paul promises the church that "the God of peace will soon crush Satan beneath *your* feet" (emphasis mine). This imaginative allusion to the *protoeuangelion* places the church in the very position of Christ.[41] Therefore, it seems that in some measure this image depicts the church as participating in the work of Christ.

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul describes the gift of "new-creation" saying, "All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation… entrusting to us the message of reconciliation" (5:18-19). Just as in the Abrahamic blessing, God reconciled them so that they might in turn reconcile others. Paul goes on to describe their work as "ambassadors for Christ" (i.e. authoritative representatives) through whom God makes his appeal (5:20). In this image, God's work on earth (through Christ) is being carried out by ambassadors who are "*working together with him*" (6:1; emphasis mine). This is explicitly the language of vocational participation.

In an even more striking passage, Paul and Barnabas inform their Jewish audience that they are "turning to the Gentiles. For so the Lord commanded us, saying, I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth" (Acts 13:47). Paul quotes directly from the servant song of Isaiah 49 (49:6). This passage belongs to a series of songs that the NT uniformly interprets as messianic. Paul, however, takes the Christ's commission as his own.[42] His gospel calling is to be a light to the nations, echoing Genesis 12:3 and the servant songs of Isaiah.

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[41] The image illustrates the church as either representatively crushing or participating in Christ's crushing.

[42] As noted above, the servant songs describe the ideal Israel in the person of a singular servant. The descriptions of the Servant in Isaiah II directly echo the messianic figure of Isaiah I.

<u>The *Imitatio Dei* and the *Imitatio Christi*</u>

Unlike the patriarchs, Jesus is the perfectly blameless seed of Abraham, who in every way is worthy of imitation. According to Richard Hays, "the New Testament texts witness univocally to the *imitatio Christi* as the way of obedience."[43] In the NT, there are several direct commands to imitate Jesus, or to imitate the actions of God as revealed in the message of Jesus. Christ himself commands the disciples to "love one another as I have loved you" (Jn. 15:1-12) and to wash one another's feet, "just as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:14-15). In the epistles Paul, tells the Corinthian church to "imitate me, as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). Also, the apostle John writes, "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn. 3:16), and again, "Everyone who claims to be in him must walk as he did" (1 Jn. 2:9).

Another key element of imitation is the command to forgive. Forgiveness is an action almost exclusively associated with God in the OT, though certainly promoted in the Joseph narrative.[44] In the NT, forgiveness becomes one of the central commands of Christianity. Jesus says, "if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Mt. 6:15).[45] Forgiveness is particularly challenging as it calls us to relinquish the right of taliation and actively love someone who has just harmed us. The teaching is than clear: "Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against one another, forgiving each other as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also

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[43] Richard B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in the New Testament Ethics" *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 48.

[44] John Barton, *Understanding Old Testament Ethics* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003), 6-7.

[45] See also Matthew 18:21-35

must   forgive" (Col 3:12-13). Just we have been forgiven, so also must we forgive in imitation of the Lord. As we have been loved, so also must we love. This pattern of *imitatio dei* has been established from the beginning. Abraham was blessed by God so that he might bless others. God is holy, so his people must be holy. God looks out for the vulnerable and oppressed and so must his people (Dt. 10:12-13). While we were still enemies, God loved us, and Jesus insists that we do the same. Paul echoes this idea once again in the letter to the Ephesians: "Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. Therefore be imitators of God, as believed children. And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for as, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God" (4:31-5:1). One way in which the church is not to imitate God is in his sovereign judgment and vengeance. Just as Joseph refused to be "in the place of God" so also must we entrust ourselves to "him who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:23). This applies even in situations where one suffers unjustly. Peter remarks, "For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you" (1 Pt. 2:21). Christ innocently suffered, and so also will his followers. By his sufferings, "Christ left you an example, so that you might follow in his steps." Peter continues, He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Pet. 2:21-23). Like Jesus, we are not to respond to violence with more violence. When someone sins against us, we are not to sin in return. Like Joseph and Jesus, we are called instead to end cycles of violence. In order to do so, we must often absorb the violence of others so that we might respond with kindness, forgiveness, and blessing. The only way to overcome evil is through a love that is committed to non-retaliation, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The highest ethical ideal is thus to become like Christ, the faithful seed of

Abraham. Indeed, the work of the Spirit in our lives is to conform us to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28).

Within this ideal, the cross becomes the central paradigmatic symbol for the Christian life. It is the king who conquers though suffering, sacrifice, and forgiveness that we called are to imitate. According to Hays:

> Jesus' death on a cross is the paradigm for faithfulness to God in this world . . . Jesus' death is consistently interpreted in the New Testament as an actor of self-giving love, and the comment is consistently called to take up the cross and flown the way that his death defines. The death of Jesus carries with it the promise of the resurrection, but the power of the resurrection is in God's hands, nor ours. Our actions are therefore to be judged not by their calculable efficacy in producing desirable results, but by their correspondence to Jesus' example . . . .[46]

Blessing Overcoming Curse

In imitation of him, Jesus calls his followers to respond to curse with blessing. This directly echoes the Genesis paradigm of participating with God in "overcoming curse with blessing." In 1 Peter 3:8-9, it is written, "Finally all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this who were called, that you may obtain a blessing." When someone brings evil upon us, we are to respond with blessing. In Romans 12:9-20, Paul writes, "Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good." In a similar manner to Peter, Paul then tells them to **"Bless those who persecute you;** *bless and do not curse them."* Curse is never the appropriate response to curse. We are to "Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." Paul

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[46] Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community," 47.

concludes this pericope with a summary directive: **"**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (Rom 12:21). As in Genesis, the servant of God is not to be overcome by evil (like Cain) but rather is to "overcome evil with good" (like Joseph). This is the path of Christ and, therefore, also the ethical vision of the Christian.

Conclusion

The storied paradigm of vocational participation that is inaugurated in the book of Genesis functions as programmatic for the nation of Israel, Christ himself, and the church. Each is called to participate in the work of God, being used in accord with his grace to be vessels of blessing and restoration. Christ truly fulfills the calling of Israel by bringing about the promise given to Abram that all the families of the earth shall be blessed. These promises were initially given in response to the fall of mankind. The work of Christ thus anticipates the eschatological overturning of all evil that is glimpsed in Revelation 21 and 22. Through cross-like love, the Christian community continues to the ethical paradigm of mediating God's blessing to the world. This "blessing" is to function as a proleptic sign of the ultimate restoration of all things.

CHAPTER 5

A BRIEF SURVEY OF THE CHURCH'S USE OF OT ETHICAL ADDRESS

The suggestions of this thesis are far from novel. Throughout history, the Old

Testament has consistently been used as a moral/ethical resource by the church of God.

The NT Church

The church of the New Testament regularly appealed to the OT for its ethical address.

We can see this in the authors' use of laws (Rom. 13:8-10; 1 Pet.1:15-16, note: "*as it is*

written") principles (1 Cor. 9.9), typologies (temple, priesthood, sacrifice) and analogies

(based either on thematic similarities or redemptive continuities, i.e.1 Cor. 10). The authors

of the NT also frequently use characters as ethical examples. Cain and Balaam are used as

negative examples (1 Jn. 3:2; Jude 11; 2 Pet. 2:15; Jd 11; Rev. 2:14) while Abraham and

Noah are used as positive examples (Heb. 11:7-8).

The existence of the Judiazing faction, however, represents that there was very real

conflict regarding how one ought to use the OT for ordering one's life. These discussions

were primarily concerned with Law proper, but they also relate to the general discussion of

the OT's ethical authority. In the NT, the Law is seen as "fulfilled" and yet also as "God-

breathed and useful for training in righteousness" (Mt. 5:17; 2 Tim 3:16). Throughout the

entire history of the church, there has been debate about "how" the OT is normative for

Christians, and especially for Christian praxis/ethics.

The Early Church

In several publications, Christopher Wright has followed Richard Longenecker in organizing the early church's approach into three major traditions that have continued to operate throughout the whole history of the church.[1] The first of these representative categories is Marcion.

Marcion

Marcion rejected any ethical teaching from the OT *a priori*.[2] Starting from Galatians, we are "are under grace, not law." In his view, the teachings of Jesus were antithetically different from the Old Testament. The OT then, was to be completely rejected as being in the service of another god.[3] His spirit lives on in various approaches that divorce the Hebrew OT entirely from the Christian NT, and therefore, posit (whether in theory or practice) that the Hebrew scriptures have little to no relevance for Christian faith and practice.[4]

Alexandria

The Alexandrian approach particularly flourished during the late-second to mid-third century A.D.[5] This school tended towards more allegorical interpretations of the text, often transcending the literal sense. The Spirit inspired the words of the OT to have deeper spiritual

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[1] Wright, *Old Testament Ethics and the People of God.* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 388.

[2] Wright, 388.

[3] See Tim Doyle ed., *Introduction to the History of Christianity*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 104. Marcion taught that the OT featured a sub-Christian god of vengeance; one who was the author of evil and cared only for the Hebrew people.

[4] I.e. Certain forms of liberal theology, various gnostic traditions, extreme law/gospel dichotomies, extreme forms of dispensationalism.

[5] Wright, *OT Ethics,* 388.

meanings, and these were pulled out through a method of allegory. Allegory was especially

concerned with the application of OT texts that seemed sub-Christian in some way, or were

just impossible to "apply" in a new setting. Origen and Clement are two of the more famous

proponents of the Alexandrian hermeneutic. While the Alexandrian approach is often

criticized for abandoning the self-set boundaries of a given text,[6] they at least rightly

understood an essential continuity between the two testaments. Therefore, they took seriously

the issue of OT moral address. The OT was certainly authoritative for Christian faith and

praxis, though mostly through the allegorical sense of a passage. The rhetoric of the

scriptures was unfortunately neglected in favor of allegorical interpretations that made

Christian sense, even if they were not explicitly indicated in the form of the text. In some

cases then, the principles being taught were good, right, and true. However, one would be

hard pressed to suggest that the original author intended any such meaning.[7]

Antioch

The Antiochene school rejected the allegorical approaches of Alexandria in favor of

paying closer attention to the historical and literal sense of the text.[8] This school overtook the

Alexandrian in influence during the fourth and fifth centuries A.D.[9] The Antiochene school

saw "development" between the testaments, and would use the NT to abrogate certain

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[6] The Alexandrians were not practicing a free-for-all reader response approach. They understood that the allegorical meaning was in some way tethered to the initial literal reading. Even so, it appears that the allegorical interpretations often strayed far from the grammar of the text.

[7] The Alexandrian approach still lives on in certain liberal-theologies and various forms of *moral exemplum*.

[8] The division between Alexandria and Antioch is a standard generalization in patristic studies. For a critical discussion of its use in church history, see Donald Fairbarin. "Historical and Theological Studies: Patristic Exegesis and Theology: The Cart and the Horse." *Westminster Theological Journal* 69 (2007): 1-19.

[9] Wright, 389.

teachings from the OT.[10] Some, like John Chrysostom, believed that the OT no longer had moral authority for Christians.[11] So while they paid closer attention to the grammatical-historical details of the text (and thus their inherent restraints). They were generally less inclined to look for authoritative ethical address from the OT.

The Medieval Church

The Medieval period was dominated by the Roman Catholic *quadriga*.[12] Drawing from Origen, the church used a four-fold schema to discern the full value of a given text of scripture. In a manner reminiscent of the Alexandrian school, these categories were the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. To her credit, the church was looking to all the texts of scripture for ethical authority. But, they were not paying close attention to the rhetoric of the text or the larger paradigmatic narrative of the Bible.

The Reformation

Christopher Wright believes that the ghost of Marcion lived on in certain tendencies of the radical Reformers, while the Alexandrian school continued through Calvin, and the Antiochene in Luther (who strongly rejected an allegorical approach)[13]

Martin Luther

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[10] Ibid.,

[11] Ibid.,

[12] James Arne Nestingen. "Luther in Front of the Text: The Genesis Commentary." *Word and World.* 14 (1994): 190.

[13] Wright, 390. Calvin certainly rejected the more extreme allegorical methods of the Alexandrian school. He did however, join with them in seeing the continuous nature of the OT into the NT.

Martin Luther is hard to place into any clear categories. Like certain proponents of the Antiochene school, he taught that the NT superseded the OT, and he did not teach a formal schema for OT ethical appropriation. However, in practice, Luther often used OT heroes and examples for ethical teaching within the church.[14] Luther's shorter catechism is even organized under the headings of the Ten Commandments.[15] In other places, however, it seems as if Luther is explicitly set against using OT examples for ethics (not to mention the Law) in any sort of authoritative manner. Luther writes, "You are not Abraham. Therefore you should not imitate what…Abraham did."[16] He likewise chastises the Catholic defense of monasticism for using OT passages exclusively (i,e. "Prove your case from the New Testament. The Old Testament has been set aside through Christ and is no longer binding"), and yet he will use OT examples from Genesis to defend a parent's involvement in a marriage.[17] Luther did see the church as parallel to Israel (both being eschatologically oriented communities), and Luther frequently drew from Genesis for ethical examples (i.e. "Joseph's saintly life").[18] Nevertheless his commitment to a strict Law/Gospel schema seems to have often obfuscated his method.[19] Christopher Wright labels Luther as "not always

[14] Robert Kolb, "Models of the Christian Life in Luther's Genesis Sermons and Lectures." *Lutherjahrbuch.* Volume 76 (2009): 216-217.

[15] Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism, with Explanation* (St. Louis: Concordia Pub. House, 1991).

[16] David Wright, "The Ethical Use of the Old Testament in Luther and Calvin: A Comparison." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 36 (1983): 465.

[17] Ibid.,465, David Writes quotes this from Luther's "An Answer to Several Questions on Monastic Vows"; See also Kolb, "Models," 215.

[18] Nestingen, 191,193.

[19] A common critique is that Luther never spells out his method for appropriating ethical material from the OT. See Kolb, "Models," 203 and Wright, *OT Ethics,* 391-392.

consistent." He rejected the moral authority of the OT, but "in practice, he made extensive use of the Old Testament…when dealing with requirements of Christian behavior."[20]

Luther did, however, understand the *proto-evangelian* to be formative for mankind's vocation. Humans were meant to live under faith in God's redemptive promise, fighting against the work of the serpent.[21] He also much emphasized "the priesthood of every believer" in their various vocations.[22] These conclusions are at least analogous with the paradigmatic-narrative approach represented here.[23]

John Calvin

Calvin made much more consistent use of the OT for ethical address. Calvin (like the Alexandrian school) emphasized "the Bible as one continues narrative" and "a single covenant of saving grace — the Abrahamic promise — running throughout the Bible."[24] With Luther, Calvin understood the second use of the Law and rightly understood the gospel of grace, yet he also heavily employed the third use of the Law.[25] Calvin's use of the OT for the church certainly included the narrative of Genesis. He rightly understood the books of the

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[20] Wright, 392.

[21] Kristen E. Kvam, "God's Heart Revealed in Eden: Luther on the Character of God and the Vocation of Humanity." In Mary, J. Streufert, ed *Transformative Lutheran Theologies: Feminist, Womanist, and Mujerista Perspectives. (*Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2011), 62-65.

[22] See Gene Edward Veith, "Vocation: The Theology of the Christian Life." *Journal of Markets & Morality* Vol. 14(2011): 119–131.

[23] For a fuller discussion on Luther's use of OT narrative, see Robert Kolb "Luther the Storyteller: The Reformer's Use of Narrative" in Robert Kolb, *Luther and the Stories of God.* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 29-64.

[24] Kathryn Greene-McCreight, "'We Are Companions of the Patriarchs' or Scripture Absorbs Calvin's World." *Modern Theology 14.2* (1998): 214; See also Wright, 393.

[25] David Wright, 473.

Bible to have their own particular arguments and intentions even as they were part of the larger canon.

In the "Argument" section of his Genesis commentary, Calvin writes of the book saying, "But it was also his will to testify to all ages, that whosoever desired to worship God aright, and to be deemed members of the Church, must pursue no other course than that which is here prescribed."[26] Calvin understood the narrative of Genesis as *prescribing* a certain way of life in accord with the promises of God. Greene-Mcreight writes that his commentary "turns on the assumption of the coherence of wholeness of the book of Genesis, and indeed the unity of the overall story of Israel, the people of God, the Church."[27] Calvin thus writes that "we are companions of the patriarchs" and "holds up the lives of the Patriarchs as examples to his readers which illustrate the struggle of the Christian life."[28] According to Greene-Mcreight, Calvin understood Genesis as "both an episode within and a proleptic vision of the Gospel story as a whole."[29] Genesis is the start of a continuous historical narrative of God's people that develops right into the Church. Calvin had a very positive view of the OT, and often made use of OT laws, characters, and analogies for positive ethical address. Without using the terms, Calvin perhaps draws closest to our paradigmatic understanding of Genesis.

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[26] John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* vol. 1. Translated by William Pringle. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 66.

[27] Greene-McCreight, 216.

[28] Calvin, 66. See also McCreight, 216.

[29] McCreight, 217.

The Radical Reformers

The radical reformers understood the law of Christ as superseding every other law. This did not mean that they neglected the OT altogether, but it does mean that "the overwhelming priority in moral authority was given to the New Testament."[30] In practice, this could often lead to Marcionite-like tendencies. These three approaches can essentially be traced, in various forms, throughout the history of the church.

The Modern Era

The Enlightenment marks the "completion of the transition from the ancient to the modern eras."[31] Revolutions in science and philosophy sparked an intellectual shift away from the hierarchies of traditions and towards a belief in autonomous human reason.[32] As a result, "natural religion" (i.e. belief in God's existence and a discernible moral law in the universe) soon overtook the traditions and concerns of "revealed religion" (i.e. belief in the teachings of the Church and Bible).[33] In regards to ethics, "intellectuals of the Enlightenment sought to stream-line religious affirmations to those universally discernible and carrying

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[30] Wright, 399.

[31] Grenz, Stanley J., and Roger E. Olson, *20th Century Theology: God & the World in a Transitional Age*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 15.

[32] Matthew Richard Schlimm, "From Fratricide to Forgiveness: The Ethics of Anger in Genesis" (Ph.D diss., Duke University, 2008), 151.

[33] Grenz, 22.

positive moral import."[34] This shift towards "principles accessible through pure reason" essentially removed the Bible from the discussion altogether.[35]

Biblical criticism born in the Enlightenment period thus shifted its attention to historical and sociological concerns. Gordon Wenham summarizes the scholarship of the 19th and 20th Century saying, "the emphasis on historical criticism focussed attention to the events behind the text, and the genesis of the text, rather than the meaning of the text itself."[36] The Bible was thus seen as a window into the ancient world rather than a text containing authoritative ethical address. Wenham goes on to say, "This meant that the didactic purpose of the texts, including their teaching about ethics, was neglected too."[37] The modern period is dominated by the development of various "historical" approaches to the text such as "source criticism." As noted earlier, the assumption of several layers of redaction often obscured the rhetorical strategies employed by the Biblical authors. This misdirection hampered any attempt at serious OT ethical reflection until the 1960's.[38]

The Canonical Approach and Postmodernism

[34] Ibid., 15.

[35] This is not to say that there were not faithful remnants still submitting to the Word of God as the rule for faith and practice. This is only to note that the dominant trend was to reject former authority structures in favor of the principles of science and mathematics— the "waking up" of mankind's reason.

[36] Gordon Wenham, "The Contribution of Narrative to Old Testament Ethics." Last modified June 2006, accessed August 2016 (essay on-line) accessible at http://www.jubilee-centre.org/contribution-narrative-old-testament-ethics-gordon-wenham/

[37] Ibid.,

[38] See Introduction in Christopher Wright, *Living as the People of God: The Relevance of Old Testament Ethics* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 1983).

Brevards Childs, arguably one of the most influential theologians of the last fifty years, helped to rescue OT ethics from its exile. Childs championed an approach to OT study often termed as the "canonical approach." This approach focuses on the final form of the text and how it possesses an authoritative theological function for the community of faith. Childs helpfully cast doubt on the usefulness of sociological approaches, and instead, argued that "the task of Old Testament Ethics is to acknowledge this canonical corpus as a theological construct…"[39] He writes also that the "authoritative norm lies in the literature itself as it has been treasured, transmitted and transformed…and not in 'objectively' reconstructed stages of the process."[40] Child's call to pay attention to the theology and moral import of the "final form" began a steady shift within Biblical Studies. This shift away from an exclusive focus on sources and layers of redaction in many ways allowed the study of OT ethics to exist in its present form.

This renewed attention on the ethico-theological import of the canonical form seems to have functioned dialectically with the resurgence of literary, rhetorical, and narrative approaches to the Old Testament.[41] The late 70's and 80's saw a renewed interest in literary analysis and narrative theology that also corresponded with a resurgence in OT ethics. While

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[39] Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments.(*Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1992), 676.

[40] Ibid., 71

[41] For a history of literary approaches to the Bible, see Tremper Longman's survey in *Literary Approaches to Biblical Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books,1987), 103-123. See also the introductory chapters of Leland Ryken, *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1993),15-107, especially the historical survey in chapter 3. For a very simple primer, see the first chapter of Leland Ryken's *How to Read the Bible as Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Academie Books, 1984), 11-32. A few OT scholars who have paid serious attention to literary considerations are Bruce Waltke, Gordon Wenham, and Tremper Longman III. See also Robert Alter *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (1981); Shimon Bar-Efrat's *Narrative Art in the Bible* (1989)*;* Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983); Meir Sternberg, *The Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985); J.P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis (*Assen: Van Gorcum, 1975); (continued)
Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982); Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Texture* (London: Oneworld Publications, 1998).

early OT ethics seemed to search the legal codes for modernist propositional maxims, it became much more common to look towards the rhetorical features of the narratives themselves. As noted in our brief literature review, attention has shifted towards the nature of narrative and how artful *mimesis* participates in ethical address. These developments also seem to have accorded with general cultural trends. Generally speaking, there has been a steady shift away from modernistic-deontological approaches and toward narrative-based virtue ethics. Postmodern emphases generally highlight issues of identity, narrative (over principle), community (over individual), symbol (over proposition), praxis (over theory), and especially, how these things are worked out in a particular community.

These particular emphases seem to accord more readily with our paradigmatic approach to the ethic of Genesis. Thus far this thesis has contended that the book of Genesis illustrates and inaugurates an ethical vision of "vocational participation." This paradigm, embedded in the narratives of Israel, is intended as a charter of identity for the community of God's people, equipping them with a way of seeing the world while also calling them to a certain way of being in the world (revealed in its rhetorical contours and its general ethos). As the body of Christ, the church inherits and is summoned into the paradigmatic promise-call of Abram. The final chapter of this thesis will begin to suggest the analogical implications of this fact. That is, we will now consider how the paradigm of vocational participation ought to shape the particular praxis of our church communities

CHAPTER 6

CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND THE PARADIGMATIC IMAGINATION

As demonstrated in Chapter 4 the ethical paradigm of vocational participation continues to be a part of the story-formed identity of the people of God. Our question, then, is how does the storied-paradigm of Genesis directly inform Christian praxis and continue to shape the corporate identity of the people of God?

A Paradigmatic Imagination

A narrative approach to paradigmatic ethics works primarily by *analogy.* In *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?*, William C. Spohn proposes that "the entire story of Jesus is normative for Christian ethics as its *concrete universal.*[1]" As Jesus was the faithful seed of Abraham who fulfilled his ethical vocation, we can agree that he becomes the center of Christian ethical reflection. He is the ultimate Joseph figure. In following him though, we do not imitate him in some facsimile manner, attempting to do exactly as he did. Rather, we appropriate the patterns of his life, by analogy, into the particulars of our own.

Spohn notes that most recent articulations of the ethical meaning of Israel and Jesus "express the activity of *patterning*, of extending to new material the shape which was inherent in an original."[2] The pattern of vocational participation, as it is developed in the life of Israel, Jesus, and the NT church, provides us with a particular shape of life that is meant to

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[1] William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying about Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1984), 98.

[2] Ibid,, 98.

be worked out into the particulars of our situation. This process is fundamentally analogical. In his book on the moral vision of the NT, Richard Hays notes that Christian communities that allow narratives to speak in their own form will "find [themselves] drawn repeatedly to the paradigmatic mode… seeking to shape analogies between the story told there and the life of the community."[3]

According to Spohn, "We extend a pattern by analogy since we move from the recognizable shape in the first instance to novel situations," allowing it to "guide the actions and dispositions of Christians in new situations."[4] This requires guided and imaginative transfers between the contours of their lives and ours.[5] None of us are in exactly the same situation as Abraham, Joseph, or Jesus. No Christian will be asked to take the sins of the world upon themselves in order to die a substitutionary-atoning death. Followers of Jesus will, however, be asked to take the consequences of someone else's poverty upon them. They will also likely be asked to overcome unjust curses with intercessory prayer, and they will certainly be asked to carry each other's burdens. In the same manner, very few people will ever be in a position just like Joseph's. Nevertheless, the Christian will be asked to forgive the unforgivable, to end cycles of violence through costly love and forgiveness, and to apply wisdom to difficult situations in order to ensure blessing for others. Spohn adds, "Because biblical patterns combine a stable core with an indeterminate, open-ended dimension, the

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[3] Richard B. Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament.* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 295. See also pages 304-305.

[4] Spohn, 99.

[5] See Literature review above. This analogical transfer accords with Barton's "pattern of life," Birch's "paradigmatic vision" Janzen's "internalizations," Wenhman's paradigmatic "indetikit," and Wright's "analogical worldview appropriation."

moral response can be both creative and faithful."[6] With Jesus, we have a determined core of

sacrificial love, but the real-life application of this love is largely open and indeterminate.

Regarding Genesis, our specific questions become: what does it look like to be

mediators of God's blessing to all the nations of the earth? How can I, while empowered by

his blessing, begin to alleviate the conditions of curse in order to promote the conditions of

blessing? How can I join God in the work of overcoming curse with blessing? As we have

seen in chapter 4, the narratives of Jesus and the letters of Paul give us many answers to these

questions. Nevertheless, in reference to our particular cultural situation there is still much to

be worked out.

This process requires what Richard Hays refers to as an "*integrative act of the

imagination*"[7] or what we might term as a *paradigmatic imagination*. Spohn writes, "the new

response harmonizes with the prototype, but in order to be responsive to the actual needs of

the day, it cannot copy the original as it were a completely determined archetype."[8] The task

then is to determine how the church shall appropriate the authoritative pattern of vocational

participation for the "actual needs of the day."

<u>Imaginative Implications</u>

Our work is to continually imagine and embody faithful and creative appropriations

of the paradigm into our lives and communities. These need to be dispositions and behaviors

that are faithful to the core while also being creatively open to the contingencies and

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[6] Spohn, 99.

[7] Richard B. Hays, "Scripture-Shaped Community: The Problem of Method in the New Testament Ethics." *Interpretation* 44 (1990): 45-46.

[8] Spohn, 100.

demands of new situations. The open-ended dynamic of paradigmatic application renders it impossible to exhaust the paradigm's ethical implications. Here, we will merely hint towards potential appropriations that respond to the problems of curse (as they manifest themselves in particular cultures and occasions) with a paradigmatic imagination.

Faithful Communities of Gospel Proclamation

One of the central ways that Christian individuals and communities participate in the work of God is through gospel proclamation. Telling the story of God's grace is the most profound way to rescue someone from the conditions of exile, death, and curse. In Galatians, Paul terms the Abrahamic blessing as the gospel message (Gal 3:9). Those who accept the message of the cross by faith are indwelt by the Spirit and transferred from a state of curse to a state of blessing, that is from "death" to "life." Gospel proclamation to the nations is a direct of fulfillment of Genesis 12:3. In Acts 3, Peter terms this same Abrahamic blessing as "turning people away from wickedness." The "making of disciples and teaching them everything that Jesus commands" is certainly work of "blessing". Through the gospel, the shame of sin (nakedness motif) can be covered with the robes of Christ's righteousness.

Communities that are truly shaped by the gospel story are to become paradigmatic microcosms of God's intentions: Spirit-dwelt communities of justice and righteousness proleptically signaling the eschaton. The ethical demand of analogical patterning is not simply the appropriation of a mythical archetype. Rather, as demonstrated in chapter 4, it is the development of an ongoing historical-typology.[9] The church is the Israel of God, and called to be exemplar and mediator for the nations. The central element of this calling is to be faithful in gospel proclamation as well as gospel living. Like Israel, this will point people to

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[9] Spohn, 100.

the Christ while further anticipating the eschatological fullness of God's redemptive intention.

Gospel living is rightly living in accord with what is true about you in Christ. Faith, obedience, wisdom, and the imitation of Christ are the normative expectation for a person in Christ. The church of Christ is to be a community in which the ethical ideals embedded in the *ethos* of Genesis are actually practiced amongst each other. It must be a place where people use their power, gifts, and resources to serve and reconcile rather than to deceive and exploit. It should therefore also be a place of compassion, truth, worship, prayer, repentance, hospitality, courage, non-retaliation, sacrificial love, and forgiveness. These ideals are to permeate the life of the church and promote family unity in the Spirit (a symbolic inversion of family breakdown.) A church marked by these things will draw people to the goodness, truth, and beauty of Jesus.

Social Justice

Christians are to help alleviate the conditions of curse while promoting the conditions of blessing. This summons does not only refer to the "spiritual" plane (1 Jn. 3:16-18). According to the scriptures, the naked are to be clothed, the hungry are to be fed, and the marginalized are to be cared for (Mt. 25:31-46; Jas. 1:27; 1 Jn. 3:16-18). Those with resources (gifts from God) are called to rule wisely for the good of the many. This is what it means to "love our neighbor." This calls for creative and faithful solutions and/or balms for systemic poverty, regular patterns of violence, third-world hunger, rampant drug addiction, and any other curse-wrought issue. How exactly to respond to these problems is not specified, only that we must respond. The open- endedness of paradigmatic appropriation is

where we need imaginative commitment to the pattern. Our obedience to Christ must discern the needs of a place and respond with a praxis of wisdom and the *imitatio Christi,* one that is continually learning and relearning how to reach out to the least of these.

Like Joseph, we ought to be involved in "famine-relief," bringing about good for families and cities regardless of their religion, lifestyle, or creed. Christians should be working to alleviate the specific conditions of curse manifesting in their particular locales. The overcoming of violence, family breakdown, and nakedness will take new shapes in new situations. In the same manner, "famine-relief" may very well take the shape of job training, disaster-relief, bread-pantries, family counseling, conflict mediation, addict sponsorship, agricultural development, protection of widows and orphans, special programs for the disabled, visiting the elderly, community access programs for adults with special needs, tutoring for underprivileged youth, art-therapy for veterans, and much more. The Christian is called to partner with God in overcoming the conditions of curse with blessing.

As we have noted, this demands a paradigmatic imagination. Take for instance the simple action of giving alms. When someone gives to the true poor in the name of Christ, they "pattern" Christ by taking the consequences of someone else's poverty upon themselves. It is not their fault that the other person is poor, but nevertheless, they can compassionately bear the economic burden and provide for someone that was previously without any hope of economic or social mobility.

Vocations of Blessing

Within the promise-call of Abraham/Christ, Christians can now see their own vocations as part of the larger paradigm embedded in the Genesis narrative (and developed throughout the canon). This meta-narrative provides new meaning for vocations of all kinds. Each of these must creatively work out their roles within the summons of vocational participation. Nurses work to alleviate the curse-condition of sickness, teachers work to subvert dangerous cultural narratives, artists explore the ambiguities of life through beauty, counsellors ward off self-destruction and family breakdown, and so on. Christians can be a faithful priesthood within any human vocation and activity. The Genesis paradigm provides a helpful vantage point from which to translate any vocation into the sphere of vocational participation. Teachers, researchers, glaziers, politicians, musicians, marketers, and farmers can each creatively and faithfully define their employment within the overarching paradigm. This may be directly tied into the telos of their job, or it may translate into how they learn to love their colleagues. They might ask, how can I become a person who confronts the effects of curse in the pattern of Christ for the good of the world? How can I overcome curse with blessing (in the office? in the classroom? *etc*.)

In the Fall of 2017, a new school is opening in the Bayview/Hunter's Point area of San Francisco.[10] This area is considered one of the most violent areas in SF and also one of the "most economically disadvantaged areas…"[11] It also boasts the cities highest density of children.[12] The new school is not a "Christian" school, but it is unashamedly Christian. The

[10] Rise University Preparatory *http://www.riseprep.org*

[11] See *http://sfbayview.com/2011/09/court-blocks-hunters-point-shipyard-redevelopment-until-navy-completes-toxic-cleanup/* and also *http://hunterspointfamily.org/who-we-are/our-history/*

[12] *http://www.sfgate.com/education/article/BAYVIEW-HUNTERS-POINT-S-F-s-invisible-majority-2495699.php*

school is being started by a very small church that has been worshipping in and investing in the Bayview area for the past ten years. With a core of Stanford alumni and experienced teachers, this small church plans to offer a top-notch education for only 2,000.00 dollars a year. The socio-economic inequalities associated with this area typically make access to quality education nearly impossible. This leaves many without any hope of social mobility. This is exactly the problem these Christians are hoping to alleviate. Though they could all teach at University level, they have decided to provide real relief and training for the morally, psychologically, socially, and economically vulnerable children of the Bayview/Hunter's Point area. This is famine-relief effort *par excellence*. They are a Christ-patterned community willing to sacrificially love and serve people in order to alleviate the conditions of curse with patterns of divine blessing.

Radical Obedience in The Pattern of Christ

On the night before Jesus died, he spoke to his disciples saying, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (Jn. 13:3'4). Just before this, Jesus instructed them to follow his example in washing one another's feet: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you" (Jn. 13:14-15). Jesus is their ruler and Lord, yet he puts on a servant's towel and humbly serves his brothers. In both instances, Jesus commands his disciples to imitate him. Though he had just washed their feet, Jesus then demonstrates the fullest extent of his love by voluntarily going to the cross. The *imitatio Christi* is the most

challenging element of the paradigm for right at its very center is the symbol of the cross. The cross is the ever present reminder that doing good in a broken world is costly.

I am convinced that the cross of Christ will forever affect, inform, and direct the Christian life anew. We will never be able to exhaust the paradigmatic function (and therefore analogical application) of the cross. Just as feet washing, it is the Lord's pattern for individuals and communities called by his name. Our self-perception and "way of being" is to be cross-shaped in every way.

The heart of God's will for us is demonstrated in the fact that the overcoming of the forces of sin and evil could only be accomplished through a Lamb-like self-sacrifice. He overcomes the evil of this world through acts of costly love and costly forgiveness. In the death of Christ, we learn, among many other things, that true forgiveness and love in a fallen/cursed world will always be costly. Jesus took the consequences of other people's sin upon himself; the cross entailed rejection, suffering, loss, and dying. And it is to this very pattern we are called: "By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers" (1 Jn. 3:16).

In the cross we see the beauty of God's love for us demonstrated in a variety of ways. First, we certainly are given an illustration of his teaching to "love one's enemy" (Mt. 5:43-48; Rom. 5:8; Lk. 23:24). We also see a perfect picture of "non-retaliation" that returns "good for evil" (Mt. 5:38-42; 1 Ptr. 3:8-22; Lk. 23:24). We see also a Joseph-like willingness to bear the burdens and consequences of others, as well as a posture of radical forgiveness towards those who tortured and killed him (Gal. 6:2; Lk. 23:24).

In all of this we see that God's response to the problem of evil was to take the consequences upon himself, forgive and love his enemies, respond to curse with blessing,

and pour out his life for others. Truly addressing the problems of curse and evil in this world will require the humble power of costly love and forgiveness in the pattern of Jesus. The chief way of addressing evil is through the cultivation of faithful and creative appropriations of Jesus' costly, sacrificial, and forgiving love into our homes, families, and communities. This is the hidden wisdom of Christ that overcomes the world

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

The ethical ideal of Genesis is inaugurated in the promise-call of Abram and then climactically modelled in the "rule" of Joseph; whereby God brings blessing to all the nations of the earth. In these climactic scenes, the patterns of violence, nakedness, and family breakdown are overcome through non-retaliation, forgiveness, and family reconciliation. The Genesis narrative, as a whole, illustrates this in an ethical paradigm of *vocational participation*. In a world of curse, God promises to bring about blessing. Yet he chooses to do so though the faithfulness of his people (who are to model faith, obedience, wisdom, and *imitatio dei)*. Vocational participation is at the very foundation of the story-formed worldview of Israel. And according to Wright, Israel's worldview and vocation are at the very foundation of our ethical calling.

Israel was called by God to "be a paradigm or model to the nations, a showcase of the way God longs for human society as a whole to operate."[1] With Birch, we can agree that "Moral life flows from the way in which we engage the world, and this engagement is structured by our vision, the way we see the world as persons of faith."[2] In Genesis, we are given this vision in a paradigmatic story intended to function as a "charter of identity" for the

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[1] Christopher J.H. Wright, *Old Testament Ethics for the People of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 74.

[2] Bruce C. Birch, *Let Justice Roll Down: The Old Testament, Ethics, and Christian Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991), 55.

people of God. The story-formed identity of Israel is founded upon the gracious promise

given to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3. Close attention to the literary elements of the text reveal

that God's promise also includes a summons to a particular "way of being." In response to

the conditions of exile, death, and curse, God calls the seed of Abraham to be mediators of

his divine blessing (through faith, obedience, wisdom, the *imitatio dei,* justice and

righteousness, famine-relief *etc*.). Wright comments:

> God's answer to the international blight of sin was a new community of international blessing, a nation that would be the pattern and model of redemption, as well as the vehicle by which the blessing of redemption would eventually embrace the rest of humanity.[3]

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[3] Wright, 49.

The storied-paradigm embedded in the rhetoric of Genesis illustrates a vision of a people blessed by God to be his representative mediators who co-partner with him in his good purposes for the world. (See Chapter 3) This is a *concrete universal* of Christian ethics. The ethical promise-call given to the seed of Abraham is intended to be typologically programmatic for all of the people of God. The paradigm is introduced in Genesis, commanded of Israel, fulfilled in Christ, and then continued by the Spirit through the church (see Chapter 4).

The children of God are still meant to be a "pattern and model" of God's intentions as well as a vehicle for God's purpose of "overcoming curse with blessing." The process of appropriating the contours of the paradigm (as developed in the OT and climaxed in Christ) is through a particular mode of analogical reflection based on historical/typological continuity. It is the Christian's duty to internalize and appropriate the ethical paradigm of vocational participation through faith in the promise, and work into the calling. If we are in Christ, then we are grafted into this story. Our ethical duty, as members of the church of God is learn how to "live into" the larger story of *vocational participation*. The task of faithfully and creatively discerning and applying the paradigm (i.e. learning how to live into it) is the continual work of the church. (See chapter 6) In order to be shaped by the story, we must first know the story and then be willing to submit ourselves to the narrative as God's authoritative word for Christian praxis.

In a world of curse, Abram is told to "be a blessing" and so are we; suffering, forgiving, feeding, preaching, clothing, teaching, blessing, serving; all in the pattern of Christ. The church is called to be mediators of God's blessing to all the nations of the earth, partnering and imitating him in his redemptive intentions. In a fallen world, this calling, like

the lives of Joseph and Jesus, will inevitably lead to suffering. Yet all of this is undertaken

under the grand eschatological promise of ultimate curse-reversal. So by the sovereign will of

a gracious God, Christians fight joyfully and expectantly for a victory that is already assured

APPENDIX 1:

Structures in Genesis

1.1 Literary Structure in Genesis

       Panel (parallel):

                             A
                                B
                                   C
                           A'
                                B'
                                   C'

       Chiastic:

                             A
                               B
                                C
                                   D
                                C'
                               B'
                           A'

1.2 The Abrahamic Narrative

A Genealogy of Terah (11:27-32)
   B Promise of a son and start of Abraham's spiritual odyssey; *"Go forth"* (12:1-9)
     C Abraham lies about Sarah; the Lord protects her in foreign palace (12:10-20)
       D Lot settles in Sodom (13:1-18)
         E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily (14:1-24)
           F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael (15:1-16:16)
           F' Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac (17:1-18:15)
         E' Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer (18:16-33)
       D' Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab (19:1-38)
     C' Abraham lies about Sarah; God protects her in foreign palace (20:1-18)
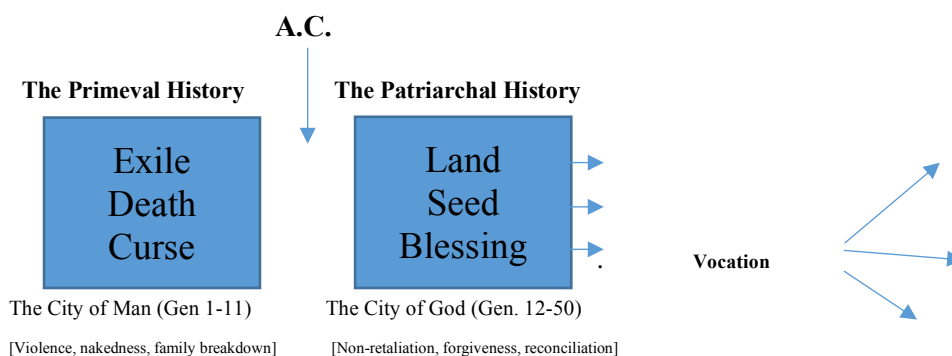   B' Birth of a son and climax of Abraham's spiritual odyssey; *"Go forth"* (21:1-22:19)
A' Genealogy of Nahor (22:20-24)

1.3 The Joseph Narrative

A Introduction: beginning of Joseph story (37:2-11)
  B Jacob mourns "death" of Joseph (37:12-36)
    C Interlude: Judah signified as leader (38:1-30)
      D Joseph's enslavement in Egypt (39:1-23)
        E Joseph savior of Egypt through disfavor at Pharaoh's court (40:1-41:57)
          F Journey of Brothers to Egypt (42:1-43:34)
            G Brothers pass Joseph's test of love for brother (44:1-34)
            G' Joseph gives us his power over brothers (45:1-28)
          F' Migration of family to Egypt (46:1-27)
        E' Joseph savior of family through favor at Pharaoh's court (46:28-47:12)
      D' Joseph's enslavement of Egyptians (47:13-31)
    C' Interlude: Judah blessed as ruler (48:1-49:28)
  B' Joseph mourns death of Jacob (49:29-50:14)
A' Conclusion: end of Joseph story (50:15-26)

1.4 Motifs in Genesis

A.C.

The Primeval History   **The Patriarchal History**

Exile
Death
Curse

Land
Seed
Blessing

Vocation

The City of Man (Gen 1-11)   The City of God (Gen. 12-50)

[Violence, nakedness, family breakdown]   [Non-retaliation, forgiveness, reconciliation]

APPENDIX 2

Difficulties in Discerning the Ethos of a Text

We always consider a story within the whole context of its book.[1] Repetition,

allusion, and analogy are regular features of biblical literature. They provide cues towards

meaning as they signal relationships between various texts. In order to hear these cues, we

must not separate or divide the episodes of the text from each other. Consider the ambiguous

wife-sister type scenes (Gen. 12, 20, 26). Are these instances of wisdom? On the basis of the

whole book, they more likely serve as testimony to God's grace over-against the patriarchs'

failures. Deception is associated with the serpent, and portrayed as contributing to regular

occurrences of violence and family breakdown. The fact that these scenes eventually work in

favor of the patriarchs is testimony to God's covering protection rather than their wisdom.

The Vengeance of Tamar is also an ambiguous passage, but reading it in light of everything

Genesis has to say regarding violence and deception casts a certain shadow upon the text.

The end of Genesis likewise features a negative assessment.[2]

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[1] In discerning the ethos of a text, we must follow Wenhan and remember that in order to "explore the ethics of the implied author, it is necessary to reach an understanding of the messages of the whole book" (*Story*, 17). Janzen likewise states, "it is important to observe the narrative contexts within which the Old Testament places its ethical models. A story presenting an exemplary action is not a self-contained whole yielding an encapsulated and timeless ethical principle. Instead, the exemplary action emerges from a situation shaped by a preceding story and in turn contributes to the ongoing movement of that story" (*Paradigm*, 11). Isolating a single episode into a form of moral exempla that is divorced from the rhetorical contours of the whole of Genesis is likely to rob the text of its full meaning; and therefore mitigate or even corrupt its theological and ethical value.

[2] In Jacob's death bed speech, Simeon and Levi are passed over for leadership, and their violence deplored (Gen. 49:4-6) .

Reading a text in light of the whole will help us to pay better pay attention to the artful literary cues provided by the author. Take for instance the narrative of Hagar and Abraham's union. Upon first glance, the text seems to offer no moral reflection. Yet the linguistic repetition of "and she listened to the voice of his wife" signals that another "fall" is afoot (Gen. 16:2 and 3:17). Following this, there is relational breakdown between Abraham and his wife, as well as Hagar and her mistress. And in the end, Ishmael is rejected from being a son of promise. Each of these indicates a negative evaluation of Abraham's willingness to sleep with Hagar.

There are other passages that are not so immediately accessible. Consider Joseph's testing of his brothers. Was he planning evil and then did good? Wisdom would forbid a person to recreate scenarios meant to "test" someone's character before they forgave. Cleary, closer attention is required. The text certainly promotes forgiveness, but we must caution ourselves from thinking that every element of the story is thus exemplary. Another instance is Joseph's management of the land of Egypt during the latter years of famine. From a modern perspective, it seems as if he has "preyed upon the vulnerable" and made all of Egypt to be like slaves. The Egyptians, however, (though perhaps unreliable) universally considered it as blessing, nonetheless, further study is necessary.

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