

Exegesis of Genesis 3:15; 12:3; and 49:10

Advent Texts

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Every season of the traditional church year seems to have its own flavor and powerful message. Advent is no exception. The theme of Advent is derived from the name itself, meaning "coming" or "arrival." It refers to the greatest arrival there ever was, the coming of the greatest "person" the world has ever known, or that it will ever know; the coming of the greatest event in all of human history: the coming of the promised Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. As we prepare to share the good news of the coming of Jesus Christ this Advent season, what better fountain of truth and source of joy and comfort could there be than the prophecies of his coming, recorded in the Old Testament, and fulfilled in the New?

Today we want to turn our attention to the book of Genesis, penned by inspiration through Moses some 1500 years before Christ's arrival as the incarnate Son of God. It is the book of beginnings. Not only does it contain the historical accounts of the beginning of the universe, the beginning of the world, the beginning of life, the beginning of mankind, and the beginning of sin and its consequences in the world. It also presents to us the beginnings of God's wonderful plan to redeem the world. We see there the very first prophecies of the Savior's arrival, the very first steps God took to fulfill those prophecies. We can also observe the attitudes and reactions of the first people to hear those prophecies. We see the promise handed down from God to Adam and Eve, to Abraham and his son Isaac, to Jacob and his sons, particularly Judah, to the first generations of the nation of Israel, and from there, out to the fallen world. This is primarily the progression that will be used in this paper, the scope of which includes the presentation of the promise at 3:15, 12:3 and 49:10. At the conclusion of the exegesis proper, some homiletical seeds and suggestions will be offered. Hopefully they and the intervening pages will serve as springboards to further study and appreciation of these inspired texts so that these beginnings of promise might continue to be proclaimed as they have been since nearly the beginning of time.

Genesis 3:15

וְאִיבָהּ אִשִּׁית בֵּינֶךָ וְיָבִין הָאִשָּׁה וְיָבִין זְרַעָהּ וְיָבִין זְרַעָהּ הִוא יְשׁוּפֶךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּשׁוּפְנֶנּוּ עֵקֶב:

WORD STUDY:

- וְאִיבָהּ -- noun, feminine, singular, as object, with conjunctive, from אָבָה (verb root אָב, to hate, be an enemy), enmity, hostile disposition
- אִשִּׁית -- Qal imperfect, first person singular from אָשַׁת to put, set, lay; order, appoint, send for; direct, fix, make
- הָאִשָּׁה -- noun, feminine singular, with article, object of the preposition, with conjunctive וְיָבִין, woman
- זְרַעָהּ -- noun, masculine singular, with second person singular suffix, from זָרַע (verb stem זָרַע, to sow), seed, offspring, descendant, issue, progeny
- זְרַעָהּ -- noun, masculine singular, same stem as above, with third person feminine singular suffix
- הִוא -- third person singular personal pronoun
- יְשׁוּפֶךָ -- Qal imperfect, third person masculine singular with second person singular masculine suffix, from שָׁף with the accusative, to crush, snap or snatch at, bruise, seize

תְּשׁוּפְנוּ	-- Qal imperfect, second person singular masculine with third person singular masculine suffix, same stem as above
רֹאשׁ	-- noun, masculine singular, "head," usually part of the body, though often extended to mean "chief," "first," etc.
עֶקֶב	-- noun, masculine singular, "heel," sometimes a euphemism for the genitals (Jeremiah 13:22).

POSSIBLE TRANSLATION:

And enmity will I establish between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring: he will crush your head, but you will bruise his heel.

COMMENTS:

These beautiful words stand up as roses among the thorns of the fall. The context has been the account of the beautiful creation of man, the crown of God's then perfect creation, and the terrible fall at the behest of Satan, who was concealed in the form of a subtle snake. Eve, then Adam, followed Satan and his wicked insinuations about God, a willing act which amounted to rebellion against God and his gracious will for them. Then came the aftermath of shame, hiding from God, denial, and blame shifting, with God being the ultimate scapegoat for their problems. Following this came the curse of the serpent himself, whom God consigned to eating dust and crawling on his belly. In the same breath, with a connecting ׀ as if to say, "And on top of all of this...", come the words of our concern here.

These words are with good reason called the "Protevangelium," the first gospel proclamation. That is exactly what they are, though to us who see so much of God's salvation plan through hindsight, they are unusual at best.

At first glance, the words in their appearance and delivery seem almost mysterious. They were spoken for the benefit of Adam and Eve, in the terrible new predicament they found themselves. God presented the message to them after he had brought them to a knowledge of their sin through the simple but searching questions he had asked them in their shame. Could there be any comparison between the sinking feeling we sometimes get deep inside of us after we recognize something we've done wrong and the feeling they must have had? These words, in contrast to God's searching questions, were intended to be a tremendous comfort for them. Although these words were spoken for them and their benefit, they were spoken to the serpent, as verse 14 indicates: "the Lord God said to the serpent... These were words of hope and promise to Adam and Eve; but they were words of doom and despair for the devil, here still in the guise of the serpent. This creature (and he is a creature), having fallen through his own haughtiness and rebellion, with good reason was called by Jesus "a murderer from the beginning" and "a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44). He deceived Adam and Eve by implying that they would be spiritually better off if they followed him rather than God. In doing so, he also brought physical, spiritual and eternal death to the first human beings, and thus to all human beings. He was and is a liar. He was and is a murderer. And he must have been "riding high" after this apparent victory. But this verse addressed to him by God must have knocked him off of his high horse when he realized that his victory was only apparent.

These words of promise and doom are emphatically headed with וְאֵיִבָּהּ "enmity," a hostile disposition or attitude toward someone or something. The word is also used in Numbers 35:21, where we see it is an attitude that can lead to murder. No wonder the word is used first for emphasis. There needed to be enmity between man and Satan, because at the time of the fall, quite the opposite attitude existed between them. Satan and man became "bosom buddies." Man seemed like so much putty in the devil's hands, fallen, knowing evil by experience. There was a newly found enmity in the Garden of Eden, but it was pointed in every direction but the right one, toward Satan. Adam and Eve now had enmity toward God, displayed in their actions before God earlier in this chapter. And there was even enmity toward each other too, as is seen in Adam blaming Eve and

ultimately God for their mishap ("the woman you put here with me"). This enmity would have to be redirected if Adam and Eve were to have a right relationship with God and between each other.¹

So lost, fallen and sinfully hostile were the minds of our first parents that the verb of which "enmity" is the object is **לָשֵׂט**, here "to establish, put or direct." Notice who is speaking. It is God. It was God and only God who could correct this seemingly hopeless situation. He would have to establish this enmity if it was to be established at all. He didn't counsel or coerce Eve or Adam on how they should redirect their hostility toward the devil; nor did God give them a command to do so. He knew they had no power to even try such a thing. Here we have a presentation in a nutshell of Scripture's teaching of the total depravity of man after the fall. God would do what man could not do. He would redirect their enmity toward the enemy who should have remained an enemy. It is also significant that this new "battle" was not so much between man and Satan as it was between God and Satan. If there was to be a victory, God would have to give it. God would begin by reawakening within Adam and Eve faith and trust in him and his goodness, a faith and trust which Satan had effectively undermined in his onslaught.²

Enmity or hostility usually exists between two or more parties or factions. There is no exception here. With the preposition **בֵּן**, the battle lines are clearly drawn. That enmity would be between the woman, the only woman on the scene at that time, Eve, and between "you," the one to whom God addressed these words, Satan, the serpent. These two, who had developed quite a fatal camaraderie, would again become enemies. This enmity, when properly functioning, would not be unlike two magnets of like polarity opposing each other. And isn't it ironic that the devil's downfall one at whom he had aimed his initial attack?³

This enmity would go a step further, however, beyond just the serpent and the woman. It would extend and be present **וּבֵין זַרְעֶךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ** "between your seed and her seed," or "between your offspring and hers," where "seed" or "offspring," **זָרַע**, is a collective noun in both instances, referring to a plurality of individuals. This is in marked contrast to the previous statement dealing with individuals, not some "class of serpents" or mere "womanhood," as some are wont to interpret it.

Who is meant by this "offspring" of the devil, and "offspring" of the woman is an interesting matter, particularly when the context of Scripture is taken as a whole. Eve's descendants certainly include the entire human race, that is to say, God's promise is intended for all of the woman's offspring, since she is by name the "mother of all the living." Potentially the woman's "seed" would be all of Eve's descendants. Yet in interpreting the passage, words like those of Jesus in John 8 need to be taken into consideration. Jesus was speaking to his fellow countrymen who prided themselves on being Abraham's "seed" or "offspring." Jesus responded, "If you were Abraham's children...you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. You are doing the things your own father does" (obviously, from the context, meaning the devil), (verses 39-41).

Though potentially the woman's offspring includes all humankind, actually, it refers to those who do what the woman did, or have what the woman had, and that was God-given enmity toward the serpent, Satan. Only those who experienced the same change of heart she did, enmity toward God changed to enmity toward Satan, are truly her offspring. They, like her, would need to be brought out of the darkness of their confidence in Satan and his promises (lies), and into the light of faith in God and his promises. Only then was Eve truly at enmity with Satan. She needed to be led by God to trust in his saving grace as expressed in this promise. This change of heart from unbelief to faith would be no different with Eve's true offspring, her spiritual offspring by faith, i.e., believers in the same promise.

The situation is similar with "your offspring," referring to the devil. His "seed" are really his followers. This might include the evil angels who also fell with Satan. But it certainly includes human beings, also enemies of God by nature, born doubters and deniers of his Word and promise. Leupold quips, "There would be something supremely trivial about this solemn utterance if it did no more in the expression, the serpent's 'seed,'

¹ Carl Lawrenz, "Genesis," (WLS Mimeo Co., nd.), p. 141.

² Werner H. Franzmann, *Bible History Commentary--Old Testament*, (Board for Parish Education, WELS, 1980), p. 47,

³ H. C. Leupold, D.D., *Exposition of Genesis*, (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1942), p. 165.

than to think of generations of snakes yet unhatched."⁴ Of course, it would be just as unthinkable to assume these words refer to physical descendants of Satan, since he himself is a spirit being, a fallen angel or archangel. Jesus reminds us in Matthew 22:30, "At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven." This understanding is carried through in the continuation of Jesus' words to the Jews noted above from John 8: "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire." What Jesus was denouncing was their unbelief and rejection of him as the fulfillment of God's promise.

How these words in Genesis flow together with what is recorded for us in the New Testament is an amazing tribute to the unity of God's inspired revelation. A highly significant passage is 1 John 3:7-13:

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous. He who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work. No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God. This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; neither is anyone who does not love his brother.

This is the message you heard from the beginning. We should love one another. Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own actions were evil and his brother's were righteous. Do not be surprised, my brothers, if the world hates you.

Notice the clear contrast between the "children of God" and the "children of the devil." Notice the immediate contrast between "devil's seed" and "woman's seed" in Eve's first physical offspring. Cain and Abel. Notice also how Jesus warns about "the world," the offspring of the devil, living in his domain, and under his control, hating Jesus' disciples. They are his "brothers," sons of God, that is, believing offspring of the woman. Notice also the victory for which the Son of God, Christ Jesus came: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." That leads us into the concluding portion of our passage.

The subject in this section is הוּא, "he," a return to the singular, the antecedent of which is still הַיְלֵדָה, the woman's offspring. This time, however, it is one individual "acting as the champion and substitute in behalf of all mankind."⁵ References and allusions to Jesus serving as a single "seed" are frequent in both Old and New Testaments. Isaiah 7:14 speaks of the virgin who would bring forth a Son who would be named Immanuel. Isaiah 11:1 speaks of the "shoot from the stump of Jesse." Isaiah 53:2 speaks of God's chosen servant growing up "like a tender shoot." Jeremiah 23:5 speaks of David's "righteous branch," as do Zechariah 6:12 and 13. In the New Testament, John compares Jesus' death and resurrection and their implications for believers to a kernel of wheat falling to the ground, dying, and producing many seeds. And what is probably the most striking reference comes from the pen of Paul in Galatians 3:16, "The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ." Is there any reason to exclude such a use of the term here?

What "he," this "seed," would do follows: יִשְׁוֹפֵךְ רֹאשׁ, "crush your head," actually "crush you in respect to your head." רֹאשׁ is essentially an accusative of respect, a second accusative which "sometimes more closely determines the nearer object by indicating the part or member specifically affected by the action."⁶ The same holds true for the converse action carried out by the devil. Ironically, the verb is exactly the same: וְאַתָּה תִּשְׁוֹפֵנִי "you will 'crush' his heel." Again, the curse returns to dealing with an individual, the serpent. It is the serpent, not his seed which would crush the heel of the woman's seed.⁷ Even after the enmity would exist

⁴ Ibid., 165.

⁵ Leupold, op. cit., p. 145.

⁶ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1910), p. 372.

⁷ C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, Volume 1, (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., Grand Rapids,

between the devil and Eve, the devil would live on, only to be defeated (though the serpent he made use of in the garden must have died a natural death).

The verb (root פָּוַשׁ) seems to have as its broadest meaning a crushing or damaging action. On the head of a serpent, it would be a death blow, the only sure way to kill a snake; enacted by a serpent on a human being's heel, it would inflict painful damage, albeit by teeth or fangs, perhaps in the form of a bruise. But it would not inflict fatal injury, unless venom were injected. Translations as early as the Septuagint and the Vulgate have used different words to translate פָּוַשׁ in each instance. Many commentators have connected each פָּוַשׁ with a different Hebrew root, one with a word meaning "to trample under foot," the other with a root meaning "to grasp," or "pant after."⁸ The usage in each respective context here needn't involve such extreme verbal gymnastics. The meaning is clear: the Seed of the Woman would destroy the devil, though the devil would severely injure him in the process.

Doesn't the New Testament make clear the Messianic nature of this verse, aside from the Messianic import attributed to it in Jewish tradition as found in the Targum? Yet, some have gone so far as to assume that all that is referred to by the passage is the natural enmity between man and snakes; some feel we have here "the protest of ethical religion against the unnatural fascination of snake worship."⁹ Others have dipped these words into the moralistic snake pit by assuming they are referring symbolically to man's struggle with the forces of evil, or the forces of "evil" in the world versus the forces of "good." Perhaps a reminder is in order that when it comes to any "battle" in which God is involved, dualism is an impossibility. (*God is the Victor, there is no even match between opposing forces.*)

As for the fulfillment of these words, we have already studied 1 John 3:8 which assures us: "The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work." Like unto it is Romans 16:20 where Paul assures his readers of the final victory over Satan which was theirs in Christ: "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet." Revelation 12:9 reminds us: "The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him." Revelation 20 speaks of Satan being held at bay throughout the New Testament age, a period of triumph for the gospel of the Savior's victory. Jesus speaks of his mission of destroying Satan in John 12:31, 14:30, and 16:11. Jesus' victory over the devil's temptations (in contrast to Adam and Eve's defeat) is seen in the account of Jesus' temptation such as Matthew records in 4:1-11.

Professor Lawrence quotes an unpublished essay by Professor Martin Franzmann in which Franzmann expresses the thought that Paul presupposed the Protevanagelium when he wrote Romans 8:20-21: "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself might be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God." Franzmann comments, "There Paul says that creation was subjected to futility and that when this subjection took place there was present a hope that the creation, too, would be liberated and participate in the glorious liberty of the children of God. Now if we look in Genesis 3 for a word of hope uttered before the cursing of the ground for man's sake, the only possible candidate is the word which speaks of the crushing of the Serpent's head by the heel of the Woman's Seed."¹⁰

The implications of these words, and their fulfillment in Jesus Christ embrace the whole of the gospel message. In the great potential for all of Eve's offspring being included in the promise, don't we see God's will that all be saved? Even in the first gospel promise, we see the cornerstone doctrine of universal redemption, and objective justification, the teaching by which the church either rises or falls. In the concept of the one offspring of the woman doing battle with Satan himself for the whole human race, don't we see a clear illusion to the vicarious atonement, the fact that "one had to die for the many"? Is the enmity between Satan's offspring and Eve's spiritual offspring any less present or necessary today than it was between Satan and Eve? Isn't this the

Michigan, 1978pr), p 101.

⁸ R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 2, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1980), p.912.

⁹ Leupold, op. cit., p. 169.

¹⁰ Lawrence, op. cit., p. 150.

core of subjective justification, believing in Jesus Christ and being saved, renouncing the devil and all his works and all his ways by faith in Christ? Has the fact changed that God has and always will be the only one who can instill that enmity? Can we not learn to appreciate God's grace even more when we see how, in the Garden, he demanded no penance or payment for sin; but after his searching law-questions he came with the Protevangelium to those first two lost souls, and thus to all lost souls? Has that grace been any different in God's dealings with us when he first welcomed us into his kingdom? Does God deal with us any differently on a day-to-day basis as we pour our sins upon sins before him, and he daily assures us of the forgiveness that flows from the "fountain filled with blood"? Through the victory of the Serpent-crusher, can we not say with Paul, "We are more than conquerors through him who loved us"?

All of these assurances are the result of this first gospel promise, and God's keeping it in full. Did Adam and Eve see their Savior in these seemingly veiled words? Granted, God gradually unveiled his saving plan for mankind. But do we see hints of their understanding in the naming of their offspring? When Cain was born, Eve made an exclamation which is embodied in Cain's name, literally translated "brought forth." Her exclamation is sometimes translated, "I have brought forth a man with the help of the Lord." But it might be translated, as Luther preferred, "I have brought forth a man, the Lord," perfectly allowable grammatically. Did Eve expect this first "seed of the woman" to be the Savior? We will probably never know for sure this side of heaven. Whatever the case, we can be sure that God revealed enough of his plan that Adam and Eve had enough to instill their faith in him as their Savior-God. At the core was complete reliance on God's grace and mercy, and a healthy respect and aversion to their reliance on it, would be handed down to all of Eve's natural offspring, so that they, too, might become her spiritual offspring. This thought finally takes us to our next passage.

Genesis 12:3

וְאֶבְרַכְהָ מְבַרְכֶיךָ וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ אֲאָר וְנִבְרַכְוּ בְךָ כָּל מִשְׁפָּחַת הָאֲדָמָה

WORD STUDY:

- וְאֶבְרַכְהָ -- Piel imperfect, first person singular with a paragogic ה, from בָּרַךְ, to bless, bestow power for success, prosperity, fertility; used of animals, men, etc.
- מְבַרְכֶיךָ -- Piel participle, masculine plural, second person singular suffix, from בָּרַךְ as above, "your blessers," the ones who bless you; those who bless you
- וּמְקַלְלֶיךָ -- Piel participle, masculine plural, with second person singular suffix, from קָלַל, declare someone cursed (root meaning: be slight, small, of little account), referring to slightness of provision, speed or circumstances, "intending a lowered position," perhaps by pronouncing a formal curse, or by belittling
- אֲאָר -- Qal imperfect, first person singular from אָרַר, to curse, antonym of בָּרַךְ, to be deprived of something
- וְנִבְרַכְוּ -- Niphal perfect passive, third person plural from בָּרַךְ as above
- מִשְׁפָּחַת -- noun, feminine plural, construct state from שִׁפְחָה, family (circle of relatives), clan, kindred, subdivision of a tribe or nation, usually larger than a family
- הָאֲדָמָה -- noun, feminine singular with article, "earth, land, ground"

POSSIBLE TRANSLATION:

I will also bless those who bless you, and those who belittle you, I will curse. Through you all families of the earth will be blessed.

COMMENTS:

God's presentation of the Promise resumes with Abraham, or Abram as his name was at this earlier time, some 450 years after the time of the Flood. It is worth noting how the world had developed into two basic types prior to the time of the Flood: those belonging to God (believers—offspring of the woman) and those "of men" (offspring of the devil). Genesis 6 calls our attention to how they intermarried to the point that God established a limited time of grace before he would destroy the world for its own good: "My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years" (6:3). We are told, "Every inclination of the thoughts of [man's] heart was only evil all the time" (6:5). And so came the Flood that destroyed mankind, yet saved the only believing family left, that of Noah, and his sons Shem, Ham and Japheth, "who themselves had sons after the flood" (10:1). One of the descendants of Shem was Terah, originally of Ur of the Chaldees, and his son Abraham, dealt with here. Abram, wife Sarai, and father Terah (and nephew Lot) moved from Ur to Haran. There Terah died.

It was then that God, seemingly "out of the blue," came to Abram with a twofold command, and a sevenfold promise. The command: "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show to you." God's promise: 1) "I will make you into a great nation;" 2) "I will bless you;" 3) "I will make your name great;" and 4) "You will be a blessing."

The final three portions of the promise fall into the words placed before us here for more careful consideration. The fifth part of the promise has as its agent the one who authored the other three, "I," that is the Lord, the God of free and faithful grace. One day he would reveal himself to Abraham's descendant Moses as "the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generations" (Exodus 34:5-7).

It was this God who came to Abraham and promised, וְאֶבְרַכְּהָ מְבַרְכֵי, "I will bless those who bless you." The shades and extent, of the meaning of בָּרַךְ can be gathered from the word study above, essentially, God's bestowing things tangible and intangible on a human being, further evidence of his grace and giving attitude. Not only would this be the case with Abram himself; it would also be the case with those who bestowed things tangible or intangible on Abram, be they possessions, wealth, a kind disposition or kind words. In view of Abram's special place in God's gracious eyes, such blessings toward Abram on the part of others were bound to be natural things. Abram as God's chosen was living and walking proof of God's grace and love. He was the heir of God's promise and was to be regarded as such. In blessing Abram, others, in turn, would be blessed by God. By knowing Abram as one who knew the one true God of grace, as one who trusted him, who was a witness to his promises, and who was appointed as his prophet and mediator for the people (Genesis 20:6,7,17), would God not bless others just by mere contact with Abram?¹¹

Conversely, God promised, וְיִמְקַלְלֶנּוּ אָרַר, "I will curse the one who belittles you." This translation has been chosen to reflect the different Hebrew words used for "curse" here. Of those who might curse Abram, the word קָלַל is used, a declaration of a curse, from a familiar root meaning "small," or make small." Those who would make light of Abram and who he now was in God's eyes, and who would downplay what God had done for him and was doing through him, would have to know that they were making a spiritually fatal mistake. God would אָרַר them, referring to God's judicial cursing (as opposed to man's blasphemous cursing) through which they would be deprived of blessing.¹²

Don't we see here the ongoing enmity which God established between the seed of the woman and the seed of Satan, expressed in a slightly different way at a different point in time?

That the participle יִמְקַלְלֶנּוּ is singular is certainly no coincidence. In contrast to the plural מְבַרְכֵי, it would seem to indicate that Abram's "blessers" would be in abundance compared to his "cursers." The words of

¹¹ Franzmann, op. cit., p. 98.

¹² R. Laird Harris, ed., *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Volume 1, (Moody Press, Chicago, 1980), p. 75.

these two parts of God's sevenfold promise closely resemble Jesus' own encouragement to his disciples: "He who listens to you listens to me; he who rejects you rejects me; but he who rejects me rejects him who sent me" (Luke 10:16). What effect did Jesus' words have on his disciples, going out into a world from which they could expect ridicule and rejection? What effect do Jesus' words of assurance have on us--knowing that our message is his message, our work is his work, and that if people reject us, they're rejecting him at the same time? The comfort and joy we have in knowing that our Savior stands so totally behind us and our message in every circumstance, go beyond words. His words give us encouragement in the face of fear and in the rigors of ridicule. These words must have had a very similar effect on Abram as he faced the unknown future, fueled only by the promises of his faithful God. And, as such promises serve to bolster our faith even more, so they must have bolstered Abram's.

As true as all of this was, none of this sevenfold promise could have been more thrilling, astounding or far-reaching than the last blessing. These words are the climax and capstone of them all, the one promise that really encompasses all of the others, since in reality all seven form a unified whole--The Promise. The Niphal verb is significant, particularly in view of the parallel readings in 22:18 and 26:4 which use the Hithpael הִתְפַּרְכוּ , a reflexive sense meaning to "wish oneself blessed," with the כּ of the person from whom the blessing is being sought or whose blessing is desired. This has led some negative critics to rob this passage of its Messianic import by translating as the Revised Standard Version does, "by you all the families of the earth will bless themselves." Not only does this do violence to the verb as it stands; it also changes the focus of the entire passage and section. God is the one at work with his blessing! Here the Niphal, in its normal sense, takes on the passive meaning. The כּ with its suffix does not denote a source, but rather a means. It was through Abram that God was going to accomplish his wonderful plan of salvation, Abram being nothing more than a tool in God's hands. When God repeated these promises sometime later, he filled in a few more of the details as to how he was going to do this: "through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed..." (26:18). This, of course, must have raised a few questions in Abram's mind, because he was old and childless. But God's promises are God's promises! Here, as there, this promise of blessing through Abram was for כָּל , "all families of the earth," or perhaps even "of the ground," recalling that from which all human flesh was originally formed. כָּל is all inclusive, indicating all the nations, or better, "families" of the earth. As popular a pastime tracing family trees and finding ethnic roots is in our day, how much more aware we can be of the full impact of these words. How important and comforting to know that no family line, no race, no class of people was left out of this blessing. It is as all inclusive as Jesus' Great Commission itself. Can we escape the concept of "the one for the many" brought home even in these words? Could anyone deny the universal nature of Christ's sacrifice on the basis of these words?

Could anyone read Galatians 3 and not see in Christ the fulfillment of these words? As Paul says, "The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you'" (3:8). And in the section we have already examined he reminds us: "The promises were spoken to Abraham and his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ" (3:16).

Did Abraham see in these words the promise of the Savior, here a bit more fully revealed and unraveled, a few more of the pieces of the jigsaw puzzle in place? His response of faith can't be denied. To God's command to "leave" and "go," we are told, "So Abram left..." And of God's promise, we are told in another place that "Abraham believed God, and he credited it to him as righteousness" (15:6). Even more directly, our Savior himself, who knew Abraham better than anyone else ever could, said to his countrymen, "Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad" (John 8:56). God did not leave his people in the dark, or expect them to conjure up a sort of blind faith. Though they didn't have the well-colored and shaded details which we do, they certainly had the picture of God's way of salvation. As with Adam and Eve and those who came after them, God gave Abraham and his descendants enough on which to build their faith. Their God-given faith merely received the blessings of life and forgiveness connected with God's promises, as surely as does ours.

To see ourselves included in this promise is a joy that comes from probing the deepest recesses of the grace of God. We are a part of "all nations on earth." We can pinch ourselves and see that we are from the same ground from which are our brothers and sisters throughout history and throughout the world. They and we are included here, and in the fulfillment of these words as they are found in all the "God so loved the world" words of Scripture. What a precious reminder these words can be, especially when our hearts become heavy with sin, when we doubt whether he really could love us that much, and when we wonder if grace could really be so free. We are a part of the blessing first spoken to Abram!

Genesis 49:10

לֹא-יָסוּר שֵׁבֶט מִיְהוּדָה וּמַחְזָק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו עַד כִּי-יָבֹא שִׁילֹה וְלוֹ יִקְהָת עַמִּים:

WORD STUDY:

יָסוּר	-- Qal imperfect, third person singular, masculine, from סור meaning to "turn aside, depart, be removed, pass away, set or put aside," here with the negative
שֵׁבֶט	-- noun, singular masculine, "stick, staff, rod, scepter"
מִיְהוּדָה	-- Judah, with partitive a son of Jacob, tribe comprised of Judah's descendants and the land they eventually occupied
וּמַחְזָק	-- Poel participle, masculine singular from חזק, basic meaning to "hew out, scratch out, decree, in Poel, as a participle, decree, leader or scepter"
מִבֵּין	-- בֵּין used primarily as a noun, meaning "interval," here masculine singular in the construct state; in this state, as a preposition meaning "between," here with מִן, so "from between"
רַגְלָיו	-- feminine dual noun, here in the construct state with the third person masculine singular suffix, from רגל, "foot"
יָבֹא	-- Qal imperfect, third person masculine singular of בוא, to "come, arrive, happen, be fulfilled," also to "come back" or "come home"
שִׁילֹה	-- Qere, called "unexplained," transliterated "Shiloh" -- See comments.
וְלוֹ	-- waw connective with the preposition ל with the masculine singular suffix
יִקְהָת	-- noun, feminine singular, construct of יְקָהָת with a Dagesh euphony in the meaning "obedience"
עַמִּים	-- noun, plural masculine absolute state from עַם, a people, also "family, tribe"

POSSIBLE TRANSLATION:

The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the rod from between his feet until "Shiloh" comes. And the obedience of peoples will be his.

COMMENTS:

Most of the history of the patriarchs, from whom we trace the beginnings of God's people Israel, has intervened between our last verse and this one. In the bygone chapters we see God fulfill the promises he made to Abraham before our very eyes. We may study the birth and life of Isaac and the conflict and resolve of conflict between his sons Jacob and Esau. We see the birth of twelve sons to Jacob, those who would become the twelve clans or tribes of Israel: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulon, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, Joseph and Benjamin. In the chapter before us, we find Jacob calling for his sons and inviting them, "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen in days to come" (49:1). And so Jacob spoke "blessings" or

prophecies concerning each one of his sons.

Although much of the Genesis account concerns itself with Jacob's son Joseph and how God used him to carry out his saving purposes for his people, our attention turns to Judah, the one through whom the Promise passed. This is indicated by the words of blessing spoken to him by Jacob, on which we will now focus our attention. His prominence among his brothers cannot be glossed over: "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you" (49:8). He and his descendants are compared to a strong and mighty lion, called "the Lion of the tribe of Judah" in Revelation 5:5. The reference is to the verse here which reads, "You are his cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him?" (49:9). His land would overflow in unprecedented fertility, if only the people in it remained faithful to their God: "He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk" (49:11-12).¹³

Prior to this reference, we have the majestic words we want to view more closely. **שֵׁבֶט** is a scepter or ruler's staff, symbolic of rule or dominion. In the case of ancient rulers, it was quite long, embellished with artwork and craftsmanship, positioned between the ruler's feet and resting against his shoulder as he sat on his throne, or spoke at public assemblies.¹⁴ We might get a better idea of the nature and position of the **שֵׁבֶט** from the illustration at the left.¹⁵ The term could denote a rod used as a weapon, a symbol of discipline or chastisement (Isaiah 11:4), or a shepherd's instrument used either to gather or count sheep (Leviticus 27:32; Ezekiel 20:37), or to protect them (Psalm 23:4; Micah 7:14). In Psalm 23, the term is used metaphorically of the Lord's protection. The Akkadian verbal cognate means to "slay" or "smite," showing a clear association between smiting and ruling.¹⁶ Compare the Apostle Paul's references to the government's "power of the sword" in Romans 13:4. Jacob here asserts that this capacity and propensity for ruling would not depart or be taken away from Judah. In the poetical form this verse takes (intact throughout this entire "blessing" section), the second phrase or stich is synonymously parallel with the first. The noun/participle **נָחֵקֵק**, though a synonym for **שֵׁבֶט**, meaning a rod or staff, can be extended to mean the "leader" or "ruler" himself, or, for that matter, his rule or leadership.

As indicated, Judah refers not only to Jacob's son Judah himself, but to the clan and tribe descended from him. After the division of the kingdom, Judah became an equivalent designation for the entire Southern Kingdom, with the inclusion of the tribe of Benjamin. At the time of the divided kingdom, Judah had a population of about 300,000, about half that of the Northern Kingdom, Israel. Judah's history throughout the Old Testament was essentially a "holding operation, somewhat more conservative than the Northern Kingdom, with better rulers and subjects who held on to the Lord longer and just a bit more faithfully than did those in the Northern Kingdom. Yet, even the Southern Kingdom succumbed to her own lack of fidelity to the Lord, for which the Lord used Babylon to chastise her, lest his Promise be lost.

Judah's capacity for ruling, however, would not depart, though it seemed it had during the time of the Babylonian exile. It wouldn't depart "until 'Shiloh' comes," **עַד כִּי־יָבֹא שִׁילוֹה**. The preposition **עַד** usually means "up to" a certain limit of time or space. Gesenius-Kautzsch remarks that clauses introduced by **עַד** sometimes express a limit which is not absolute, but only relative, beyond which the action or state may continue.¹⁷ This inclusive sense of this preposition is used elsewhere in Scripture (Genesis 26:13, 28:15; Psalm 112:8, 110:1).¹⁸ A less restrictive translation might be "up through the time when Shiloh comes." **כִּי** here is a relative conjunction connecting the preposition and the verb.

¹³ Leupold, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 1184.

¹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 393.

¹⁵ Merrill F. Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1954), p. 184. (Illustration not included here – image of a female figure with headress seated on a throne, holding a long scepter upright before her, length from floor to head of the seated figure – WLS Library Staff)

¹⁶ Harris, op. cit., Volume 2, p.897.

¹⁷ Kautzsch, op. cit., p. 503.

¹⁸ Leupold, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 1281.

The greatest dispute in this verse revolves around the translation of שִׁילֹה, usually given as a transliterative name, as in the King James Version, and accordingly taken as a proper name. Some have connected it to the rare Akkadian word SELU, "counselor," and have translated it in the same way, but this seems like a long shot. Another possibility is to keep שִׁילֹה as a proper noun, designating the place name of the familiar town in central Palestine where Joshua placed the tabernacle after the conquest of Canaan (Joshua 18:1). In this case, the translation would read "until he comes to Shiloh," referring to some expansion of the base of power beyond Judean borders, most likely under David's rule. It would then be considered an accusative of direction, as in the case of 1 Samuel 4:12 where the words are written as they are here. We need to ask, however: did Judah ever have this prominence in and of itself during this time period? Taken as the place name Shiloh, the passage would seem rather trivial. This is also the case if "his coming to Shiloh" would refer to nothing more than the people assembling there at Joshua's time when the tabernacle was set up.¹⁹ In addition to all of this, taking שִׁילֹה to be merely the place name is grammatically unlikely because the name here is spelled slightly differently than the way the town name is spelled elsewhere in Scripture. There are at least three different ways the name is presented in the Hebrew text.²⁰

Others have taken the word as a compound word of some sort. There is good company here, as this is apparently the route the translators of the Septuagint followed, as did the Peshitta and the Jewish Targums. This infers a slight change in the Masoretic text, from שִׁילֹה to שִׁלֹה, comprised of the relative particle שֶׁ (short for אֲשֶׁר) meaning "who, which or what," plus the preposition ל, and the third person singular pronominal suffix ה. The phrase would then read "until he comes to whose it is" or "to whom it belongs." Accordingly, the Septuagint translates: ἕως ἂν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκείμενα αὐτῷ, and the Vulgate renders it: QUI MITTENDUS EST, entirely altering the final consonant ה to ת, unwarranted at best. Luther renders the phrase "bis dass der Held komme," "until the hero (or champion) comes."

A similar phrase is found in Ezekiel 21:27, to which many feel this passage eludes. Speaking of the chastisement coming to God's people in the destruction of Jerusalem, the passage reads, "Take off the turban, remove the crown. It will not be as it was: The lowly will be exalted and the exalted will be brought low. A ruin! A ruin! I will make it a ruin! It will not be restored until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs; to him I will give it." Following the Revised Standard Version, this is the translation and interpretation the NIV translators preferred here. A similar offering, less plausible, would be to rewrite the consonantal text to שִׁילֹה "until tribute (thing asked for) is brought to him."

The old Jewish interpretation in the Targums, at one point favored by Luther and Calvin, takes the word as one based on the root שִׁלָּה, taken to mean "his son." Unfortunately nowhere else does this word ever have the meaning "son." Rather, it means "afterbirth," perhaps related, but quite a different word!

Whether we follow the King James Version and take שִׁילֹה to be a proper name, perhaps meaning "man of rest" or "bearer of rest" (from שִׁלָּה, "to rest"), or the NIV "to whom it belongs," the Messianic import and meaning is not lost. This latter reading is, granted, an interpretation favored only since the sixteenth century. However, the Messianic element has never been lost. The safest route by far appears to be to take the reading as a proper noun derived from שִׁילָּה as suggested above. Hebrew names packed with such meaning and pointing to the personality or work of the person bearing them are not at all unusual in Old Testament writing. In either case, the fulfillment of Jacob's words as recorded by Moses is found in none other than Jesus Christ, in whose hand the ruling scepter and the right to rule belongs. At the same time, through that rule he bestows the forgiveness of sins, complete peace between God and man, for all men. He is the one who said and still says, "Come to me you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest...rest for your souls" (Matthew 11:28).

Whichever reading is preferred, the final phrase attaches itself beautifully: וְלֹהֵם יִשְׁמָעוּ, "to him belongs the obedience of the peoples," יִשְׁמָעוּ denoting willing obedience. It is used only twice in Scripture, once

¹⁹ Keil-Delitzsch, op. cit., p. 397.

²⁰ Leupold, op. cit., Volume 2, p. 1181.

here and once in Proverbs 30:17.²¹ The Septuagint translates a similar word as προσδοκία, meaning "expectation."

What a beautiful way to designate the obedience of faith as spoken of in Romans 10:16, Acts 6:7 and Romans 15:18! The picture is one used often in the Old Testament of the crowds and masses of people flocking to the gentle rule and kingship of the Savior, trusting him for the forgiveness of sins he brought. His is a "kingdom" in every sense of the word, though it is "not of this world." Every passage in Scripture dealing with the Messiah's kingship and his office as king, whether in the Old Testament or New, ties into this passage. This would, then, be the first passage designating the promised Savior as King, unless Genesis 3:15 is also considered.²² Judah would never lose its capacity for having a king on the throne from her ranks. Final proof and fulfillment of this is the eternal reign of King Messiah, God and man, according to his human nature, physically descended from the line of Judah.

When this passage is placed side by side with Genesis 27:40, this fulfillment is all the more striking.²³ Here Isaac said to Esau, "You will live by the sword and you will serve your brother. But when you grow restless, you will throw his yoke from off your neck." Isaac foretold a day when an Edomite, a descendant of Esau, would come to sit on the Judean throne, and then the Savior would come. We have that Edomite king in Herod the Great who ruled when Christ was born. In the circumstances surrounding the coming of Christ, both passages stand fulfilled.

This truth holds the deepest meaning for us who live in the fulfillment of these words. The one holding the scepter still rules. As Paul told the Ephesians, "God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way" (1:22-23). In that rule, particularly as we speak of his kingdom of grace, he is still our Rest-Bringer from whom we daily derive the peace and rest he won for us by his life and death on the cross. This peace and rest will be ours in all its fullness when we enjoy the kingdom of glory our king is preparing for us at this very moment. For all eternity this portion of the word of our God will be perpetually fulfilled. Until that time, we continue to pray "Thy kingdom come," as we see more and more hearts turned to faith in their King, and more and more of his subjects grow in their faith and obedience. And until that time, may we do the same.

A Few Homiletical Suggestions:

Taking off on a similar series suggested back in 1984 in the *Wisconsin Lutheran Quarterly* (Volume 81, Number 3), a theme and parts for an Advent series might be:

GOSPEL GEMS FROM GENESIS

- Week 1: The Gospel Adam and Eve Heard
- Week 2: The Gospel Abraham Believed
- Week 3: The Gospel Judah Enjoyed

This suggestion has built-in application stressing the reception (how they reacted) of all of God's promises through a heart of faith. Another possibility which we have taken the liberty of expanding just a bit follows:

JESUS' ADVENT IN GENESIS

- Week 1: The Advent of Satan's Defeat and Our Victory
 - 1. The lines of battle
 - 2. The plan of battle

²¹ Harris, op. cit., Volume 1, p. 397.

²² Eugene P. Kauffeld, *Divine Footprints*, (Northwestern Publishing House, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1983), p. 75.

²³ Kauffeld, *ibid.*, p. 76.

Week 2: The Advent of Blessing for All People

1. It came from God
2. It came through Abraham
3. It comes through Christ

Week 3: The Advent of the King Who Brings Peace

1. His family
2. His title
3. His reign

These suggestions stress more the activity of the Messiah than the reaction of those who heard the first promises of that activity. Of course, these are only a few of countless possibilities. May they and the study which preceded them prove to be a starting place for your own study of the very first gospel promises made to our first spiritual ancestors. And may they lead to a deeper appreciation of the faithfulness of our God who has fulfilled every one of them, and an even greater desire to share these truths with all of the woman's offspring, Abraham's spiritual children, those who flock to the side of their Advent King. Soli Deo Gloria!

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- Unless otherwise noted, all Bible verses in commentary sections are from *The Holy Bible, The New International Version*. New York International Bible Society. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1978.