

A Guided Walk-Through the Biblical Narrative

A synopsis of Genesis 1-11

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The pinnacle of this good creation was humanity; made in his image and given the glorious task of ruling everything as his royal representatives. The description of the garden – a slice of God's order in the uncultivated world – reinforces the special vocation human beings have been given. Alongside this vocation the Lord has given them wide permission as well as a single prohibition to observe. Tempted to question God's good intentions to them they transgress the prohibition, pervert the permission, and neglect their vocation and are driven from the garden.

This is not, however, the end of God's plans or of his commitment to them. In judgment there is grace, but destructive power of sin escalates until the whole the world is destroyed. Even this doesn't wash away the problem of the human heart and soon the world returns to its rebellious ways. Given God's commitment not to destroy the world again, the question becomes, what will he do to bring about his purposes in an unfaithful world?

The answer begins with Abram...

Part 2

6. Joshua 23:1-16

Why this text is important to the narrative.

The second generation of Israelites – who exhibit many of the same failures of the first generation – have been brought into the Promised Land and have conquered it. Under Joshua's leadership and the Lord's provision, they have received all that the Lord had promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The faithfulness of the Lord to his promises is a key part of this text as is the call to faithfulness to the Lord. This desired faithfulness is, once again, related to the Lord's purpose for his people in restoring all things.

The command to destroy the nations was, likewise, related to this purpose. They were to avoid, at all costs, the temptation of idolatry that would undermine their purpose to reflect a relationship with the Lord.

For further reading:

a. Joshua 2:1-14. In this fascinating narrative the Israelite spies make a covenant to spare the very first Canaanite they meet. Surprisingly, this is not condemned by either Joshua or the Lord. The reason appears to be Rahab's faith – she recognises the greatness of God and his plans for his people. This is an important proviso to the destruction of the Canaanites. In the description of the destruction of Jericho there is an alternation between the destruction of the city and the rescue of Rahab (repeated three times and ending with Rahab's salvation). The universal inclusion is also hinted at in the rescue of the Gibeonites who, despite deceiving the Israelites, are incorporated into their midst on the basis of their "faith".

7. Joshua 2:6-22

Why this text is important to the narrative.

This text describes the pattern that is at work in the book of Judges. The people are faithful while God's appointed rescuer is alive, but unfaithful when they die. The Lord, instead of destroying his people, hands them over to their enemies in the hope that it might spark their return to him. If you read the book of Judges, however, you will notice that there is another element to this pattern and that is a downward spiral. By the end of the book the people of Israel are no different to the nations they dispossessed. The plans and purposes of God once again are under threat.

For further reading:

a. Judges 17:1-6. This is the least offensive of the concluding stories with which Judges concludes. This is an almost comical portrayal of the Israelites who are incapable of even knowing how ridiculous their actions are and how little they reflect their relationship with the Lord. The narrator hints at what might be next when he observes that, "In those days Israel had no king, everyone did as they saw fit."

b. Ruth 1-4. This is just a beautiful story of an unexpected hero of the faith. Ruth is a Moabitess who demonstrates a Christ-like love for her mother-in-law in the period of the Judges when we expect nothing good to happen. Her example, and that of Boaz, is exemplary, but also leads to a genealogical ending that ends with her greatest descendant: David.

c. 1 Samuel 2:1-10. The song of Hannah is an important theological reflection that sits behind the story of the establishment of the monarchy and, in particular, David. The main theme is the Lord authoring reversals for his people (as she herself has experienced – see 1 Samuel 1:1-20). It is in these reversals that God brings justice to the nations. The last line is unexpected: "He (the Lord) will give strength to his king and exalt the horn (or 'strength') of his anointed."

d. 1 Samuel 16:1-13. In response to the Israelites asking for a king, the Lord had given them Saul. In many ways Saul was a successful king, leading them in battle and, more often than not, coming out victorious. However, his heart was not set on the Lord and after two acts of disobedience he is rejected (1 Samuel 13:1-15; 15:1-29) and another – David – is anointed by the prophet Samuel. This passage describes the somewhat secretive anointing and the unexpected choice of David over his brothers; a man after God's own heart.

8. 2 Samuel 7:1-17

Why this text is important to the narrative.

After David was anointed as king his rise to power is meteoric. Within a few chapters he is a fixture in the royal court, son-in-law to the king, successful general, beloved by the people, and a covenant partner with the crown prince. However, his success is met with jealousy by Saul and David is forced into exile. After Saul's death David is able to return home and is, eventually, accepted as king of Israel. When the kingdom is secure David, as an expression of his heart for the Lord, desires to build a temple for the Lord. Nathan the prophet informs David that the king will not be the one to build a temple, but that his son will. More importantly, the Lord promises to build David's "house"; making his name great and establishing his dynasty forever. Notice the links with the promises to Abraham upon which these are built. These promises to David, later referred to as a covenant, formed the foundation of the Messianic hope.

For further reading:

The following texts trace the development of the monarchy in Israel with a focus on David, both before and after the promises of God we just read.

a. 1 Samuel 8:1-22. In this text Israel asks for a king, much to the disappointment of Samuel. Curiously, the reluctance over the anointing of Saul disappears with David. As far as the narrator is concerned, Israel is waiting for one king: David!

b. 1 Samuel 13:1-15. This is one of the great turning points in all of Scripture. Saul's failure to wait for Samuel (one that seems justified, by the way!) leads to the rejection of Saul and the appointment of another. Almost, Jesus was the son of Saul! Talk about a turning point!

c. 1 Samuel 16:1-13. The prophet Samuel is led to anoint David, the youngest son of Jesse (another youngest son!). The most important feature of the young man is his heart – the thing that the Lord considers.

There is much more to David's story, but eventually, he is anointed as king over all Israel...

d. 2 Samuel 6:1-23. One of the indicators of David's "heart for the Lord" is reflected in his delight to bring the ark to his new capital in Jerusalem. Saul had left the ark in Keriath Jearim throughout his reign, showing little interest in it! David, on the other hand, makes this a priority of his reign and dances before the ark as it enters the city. Michal, his first wife, and Saul's daughter, represents her father's disdain in her remarks to David appearing foolish.

9. 1 Kings 9:1-9

Why this text is important to the narrative.

There are a few of reasons this is an important task. First, it demonstrates the short-term faithfulness of the Lord's promises to David. Solomon, David's son, is king over all Israel and has built the temple. In this second theophany at Gibeon the Lord reiterates his promises to Solomon.

Second, under Solomon the promises made to Abraham are fulfilled. His descendants have become a mighty nation, have possessed the land to the fullest extent, and there is evidence that all nations may indeed be blessed as they come to see the "living and breathing" display home that Israel was always meant to be.

Third, in the story of 1 & 2 Kings this text foreshadows what will happen. The people of Israel, led by their kings, will be unfaithful to the Lord; worshipping and serving other gods. In the end, the city is destroyed, the temple is burnt down, David's descendant was dethroned, and the people were exiled from the Promised Land.

For further reading:

a. 1 Kings 10:1-13. The Queen of Sheba comes to Israel because of all she had heard and learns that what she had heard didn't really begin to tell the story of what God had done for Israel. She is blessed with "things", but more importantly, with wisdom and answers to her every question. The blessing of God is being felt by the "whole world"!

10. 1 Kings 12:1-24

Why this text is important to the narrative.

Solomon, who started so well, doesn't finish strongly. His unfaithfulness brings the judgment of God on David's dynasty and the kingdom of Israel is divided into two: the northern kingdom of Israel ruled by Jeroboam and the southern kingdom of Judah ruled by Solomon's son, Rehoboam. This division is the work of God, not just a political failure by Rehoboam, and is also an extension of grace of David's house as a descendant of David would continue to reign over Judah until its destruction centuries later.

The division of the kingdom has momentous political on the two kingdoms and the narrator of Kings follows the two kingdoms to their destruction.