

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 5

21. Luke 4:1-13

Why this text is important to the narrative.

The temptation of Jesus marks the beginning of his ministry; the first activity after his baptism. The temptations that Jesus faces are similar to those faced by the people of Israel in the wilderness (see "For further reading"). They are hungry in the wilderness, but do not trust the Lord. Rather they complain. Though they have been promised the Land, they fail to trust the Lord and succumb to the temptation to worship other gods. They put the Lord to the test on several occasions and are judged for it. The parallels suggest that Luke wants us to see Jesus as the personification of Israel; the one who acts faithfully. The significance of this is to point to Jesus' fulfillment of Israel's purpose; to be a living, breathing display of God's plans in the world! This will become clearer and clearer throughout the gospel.

For further reading:

- a. Exodus 16:1-5. Hardly had the people of Israel been released from Egypt by the mighty hand of God they complain that there is no bread! The Lord responds by sending manna; bread from heaven (see Deuteronomy 8:3; Joshua 5:12).
- b. Numbers 13-14. Having come to the edge of the Promised Land the Israelites send spies into the land. They return with a good report of the land, but also with a report of the might of the inhabitants. The spies (apart from Joshua and Caleb) persuade the Israelites to abandon their journey, undermining the purposes of God and are condemned to wander in the wilderness until that generation has passed away.
- c. Numbers 20:1-13. The events at Meribah become a stereotypical failure of Israel (see Exodus 17:7; Deuteronomy 33:8; Psalm 81:7; 95:8; 106:32; Hebrews 3:8-9). The new generation of Israelites fail in almost the same way that their ancestors did – failing to trust God for daily provision and water.

22. Luke 4:14-21

Why this text is important to the narrative.

This text is sometimes called the Nazareth Manifesto. It is the first public appearance that Luke records and it outlines Jesus' understanding of his ministry. Taken from Isaiah 61:1-2 it picks up on Israel's purposes in God's plans. In the Isaiah text there is reference to the nations being in Israel's orbit and allusions to God's purposes for them in Exodus 19. This positions all that Jesus is going to do as the fulfillment of Israel's purposes.

For further reading:

a. Isaiah 61:1-11. Read this section in light of all that God had said about Israel! Consider then what it means for Jesus to quote it – and to state that it is fulfilled in him!

23. Luke 4:38-43

Why this text is important to the narrative.

There are a couple of features of this passage that are worth drawing attention to. First, that the summary of Jesus teaching at this point is not about his death and resurrection (that will come) but about the kingdom of God. This wide perspective is important because it draws our attention to God's kingdom purposes in Israel. Second, his work of healing is noteworthy because there are very few healings in the Bible apart from the work of Elijah and Elisha and Jesus! Just as the two prophets were sent to declare the reality and greatness of God to a lost people, so Jesus. Third, the exorcisms he performs points to his authority over all forces opposed to God and his purposes in the world.

24. Luke 5:17-26

Why this text is important to the narrative.

Here we have the first clear reference to forgiveness. It is linked to the healing of the paralytic; pointing to the link between human sinfulness and the disruption we experience in the world. It also points to his authority to forgive – before his death and resurrection!

25. Luke 7:1-10

Why this text is important to the narrative.

The centurion's faith is an important lesson that what unifies God's people is not their ethnic or cultural background but their faith in the person of Jesus and what he represents of God's kingdom. This centurion is one way we see the promise of God to Abraham fulfilled: all nations!