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Q&A#14 How Does Genesis Anticipate Later History?

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Today's Question: "I loved your observations on how Gen 12-14 traces out the history of Israel (in advance of that history!). Fascinating stuff! Could you kindly elaborate some more on that? For example, is Sarai representative of Israel in Egyptian captivity? Who does Lot represent etc?"

See my 40 Days of Exodus series here: <https://alastairadversaria.com/larger-projects/40-days-of-exodus/>. Buy a copy of 'Echoes of Exodus' here: <https://amzn.to/2uUG9rC>.

If you have any questions, you can leave them on my Curious Cat account: <https://curiouscat.me/zugzwanged>.

You can also support me on Patreon: <https://www.patreon.com/zugzwanged>.

Transcript

Welcome back. Today's question is from my Curious Cat account. Hi Alastair, I loved your observations on how Genesis 12-14 traces out the history of Israel in advance of that history.

Fascinating stuff. Could you kindly elaborate some more on that? For example, is Sarai representative of Israel in Egyptian captivity? Who does Lot represent, etc.? The implications of what that typology might suggest is huge in terms of the anticipation the Old Testament builds as we look to Jesus, but also has something to say about the security of the church and the role of the church and the gifts of the church, and of course, end times. Thank you.

Well, if you want to read more about this, the place to go to see the thread that connects these things throughout the Old Testament and into the New, the place for that is the Echoes of Exodus book that I wrote with Andrew Wilson. We look at a number of these episodes and then we show how they thread together into a longer theme that is culminated in the New Testament, and also relate that to the current life of the church and its expectation of the future. If you want a more detailed discussion of these

particular parts of Genesis, I'd recommend you go to my 40 Days of Exodus series.

Not a complete series, but I think the first 22 sections were written, and you can find that on my blog. And I'll go into some detail in the relevant stories from that part of Genesis. Now, there are a lot of things that can be said on this, and I have said a lot in different contexts.

Some of the things to bear in mind are the deeper themes that are being played out within these stories, particularly the Eden account, the account of humanity placed within the world, given a calling, the fall, and then the different parts that are played within that, the part played by the man, the part played by the woman, and the part played by the serpent. And then we see this story playing out in different forms and being developed in different ways in the accounts that follow. So, for instance, in a post that I wrote a couple of days ago, I go into the example of the story of the woman, the witch at Endor.

And that's a replaying of the fall account. And the woman is deceived by the man or the serpent, Saul. And we see that story play out in a way that's fairly predictable, leading to death for the character of Saul.

But there's more to these patterns than that. It's not just a repeat of the existing pattern. You do have repetitions of the fall.

So, for instance, the story of Ham, the sin of Ham after the flood, Noah eating of the fruit of the vineyard, becoming naked, and then uncovering nakedness, all these sorts of themes and then judgment and then movement out. These things are repeated in that context and also elsewhere, but they're often developed in significant ways. So, for instance, we see the reversal of the theme of the serpent deceiving the woman as the woman deceives tyrants, whether that's Michael deceiving Saul or Jail deceiving Sisera or Haman deceiving or Esther deceiving Haman or Rahab deceiving the men of Jericho or the Hebrew midwives deceiving the men of Pharaoh.

We see these patterns playing out, but it's a reversal or an inversion of the pattern of Genesis and the fall. And so what I think we're seeing in the story of Sarai is not just a representation of Israel in Egypt and its captivity, but also something of a repetition and inversion of the fall pattern. So the serpent, Pharaoh in this case, attacks the woman, challenges the woman, and there is an assault upon the one who is the one through whom the whole promised people will arise.

And so that assault upon the woman is overcome, but it's overcome through deception in part. Now, this deception is a complicated thing to account for. Why does Abraham engage in this deception? Is it purely to save his own skin at the risk of Sarai's? Well, there's more to it than that.

I think that the situation that he was hoping for was one in which he would be seen as the brother of Sarai and he would bargain for her. Pharaoh would deal with him, but Pharaoh just takes Sarai. And we have this story repeated in various forms in two other occasions within the book of Genesis in the account of Abraham and Abimelech in chapter 20 and in the account of Isaac, Rebekah and Abimelech and Gerar in chapter 26.

So there are these patterns playing out that are repeated. And many people have wondered whether there's just a confused redactor scratching his head, wondering, well, we've got three different accounts in the tradition. We don't know which one is authentic.

Let's just throw them all in there. But these accounts are different and there's a development between them. There's a type pattern, a type scene, but that scene is different in each one.

So, for instance, in the original account of chapter 12 in the account of Sarai in Egypt taken by Pharaoh, she hasn't born any children. She's barren. In the account in Abimelech, around the time of Abimelech, she's about to give birth.

That's just after the announcement given to Abraham that within a year she will have a child. And so it happens at a very significant juncture in the story. This is a point where Satan is seeking to attack the woman and her seed before the seed can ever come out.

Later on, we see in Revelation this dragon attacking the woman and seeking to grasp her son and then him being snatched up to heaven. And so this is a similar pattern. And then in chapter 26, we already see that Esau and Jacob have been born by the time that this episode occurs.

And there are significant events that develop these stories even further. So in both the accounts of 20 and 26, they're followed by some period of sojourn within this location and blessing and the digging of wells and conflict over wells. It's a very significant theme.

And it might seem that this is just an odd detail, but the conflict of the wells is associated with the attack upon the woman. The woman and the well are very closely associated within Genesis and elsewhere. We have Isaac.

His bride is met at a well. We have Rachel is met at a well. Later on, Moses meets the seven daughters of Jethro, the priest of Midian at a well.

Jesus meets the woman at the well. These are significant locations. It's associated with women, but it's also associated with their fertility in particular.

And so in the Garden of Eden, the well or the spring at the heart of the garden is that which gives life. It springs up out of the earth, the Adamah, and then flows out into the

wider world to give life. And in the same way, the spring, the digging of water, the digging of a well to find water is associated with birth, with wombs.

The opening up of wombs is significant in these locations. And so when you get to chapter 20, for instance, the wombs of Abimelech's household are all closed up. And perhaps Abimelech is impotent too, but they realise that no one's able to give birth.

And then later on, the wombs are opened as Sarah is freed. And then later on, they dig wells. And these wells are significant as well.

They are given quite a lot of attention within the text. And these things are connected with each other. And it helps us to understand what's taking place.

When we get to the story of the Exodus, we have similar themes. There is an attack upon the woman by the serpent and the relationship between the woman and her seed, which is the fulfilment of the promise, and the serpent, which is seeking to attack that promise. And the enmity between the two of them, that is the thing that we see very clearly in each one of these episodes.

So the man is, as it were, taken out of the picture. He's seeking to save his life in part, not just for selfish purposes. He's... Abraham and Isaac both probably have sheepdoms of at least two, three thousand people around them.

Abraham has over 318 fighting men, even in chapter 14. So this is a quite considerable group of people. Later on, Isaac is asked to leave by Abimelech because they are such a multitude, such a powerful group of people.

We often think of Abraham and Isaac just going around in their tents by themselves. But these were large groups of people. This is a central family around which a large sheepdom has developed.

And so you have people who are serving alongside them and who are attached to them in various ways. Many servants, many people who work with them as herdsmen and other people like that. So this is a large group.

And Abraham is concerned that he will be killed for his wife. Now, that's not an unreasonable fear within the cultural context. And if she were taken, it would also be a way for power over his group to be taken.

It would be an excuse to take his life. But if he was the brother, he was the person who would be primarily bargaining with the person who would want to marry her. And that's a significant position to be in.

It's one that gives him significantly more power and leverage within a dangerous situation. And so that is something that can maybe help us to understand exactly what's

taking place and why he takes the actions that he does. But whatever we make of those actions, whatever we make of the deception, there is some deception of the serpent taking place here.

The serpent figure, the serpent figure who does not always turn out to be as bad as originally seen. So we see the serpent behind the figure of Pharaoh and Abimelech. And these aren't really good people, but they're not as fully serpentine as the serpent himself.

And so the serpent is using them for his purposes. But when the serpent's plan is foiled and God intervenes, we see that these people are actually often brought to acknowledge God's rule and brought to bless the people of God. And so there's an important thing to notice there that although these figures are serpent-like in certain episodes, they are not to be consigned purely to the side of the serpent.

There's a bit more going on than that. And so when we see these characters developing, there's a movement within the story, a movement with the serpent behind the scenes, this significant playing out of the enmity with the woman and her seed. And the attempt to attack the seed at the key points, the attempt to take Sarai at the beginning so that she would not be Pharaoh's wife, so the promise would not be fulfilled through her.

The attempt, just as the promise had been made that she would give birth to a child in a year's time. The threat that he would take, taking Sarai, taking Sara so that she won't be able to do that, so the promise can't be fulfilled. And then later on, we see again a threat to Rebecca.

And so at each point, the serpent is attacking the woman and her seed. And when we get to Exodus, this is the pattern we see again. Women at the heart of the picture, the Hebrew midwives, Miriam, Jochebed, and later on, Pharaoh's daughter.

All of these women who are involved in some degree or other in tension with the character of Pharaoh, who's the serpent-like figure within that situation. And notice the signs given relating to serpents in Moses' early ministry. That is significant too in that context.

But another theme that we see in the beginning of Exodus, up to chapter 14, is the theme of birth. So these women are struggling to give birth and there's the fruitfulness and multiplication of the people of God and then the threat that that poses to the Egyptians. Now, the Hebrew midwives are faithful and deceive Pharaoh and Jochebed is shrewd and she hides Moses as a beautiful child within the ark that she builds for him.

And then the child is rescued. And the theme of the rescue of Moses is connected with his birth. He's not named until after his rescue, the one who's drawn out because he's taken out of the water.

Later on, Israel is drawn out of the water, drawn out of the Red Sea. That is their birth event. And the significance of Israel groaning in birth and then God saying, let my people go and hearing their groaning, their travail.

And then also this connection with Israel is my firstborn son. And then right before the crossing of the Red Sea, there is the law given concerning the opening of the womb and the firstborn child. And then there's the threat upon the firstborn children at the Passover and the deliverance of Israel as the firstborn son.

And so there's the opening of the wombs, the firstborn child and the passing through this narrow channel as the waters are broken. And this theme of Israel being brought out of the land as a theme of birth. Now, if we go back to Genesis, all these themes are already in play.

The challenge between the enmity between the woman and the serpent and between the serpent and the woman's seed and the emphasis at the very beginning on. At the very beginning of the story, this tension that this frames the narrative and what happens next. We see this within the Gospels.

We see it also within Samuel that it takes root within the story of Genesis. These themes are playing out and they're familiar ones. What does a character like Lot represent? Lot is significant as a parallel to as a character who's juxtaposed with Abraham.

So we have a number of juxtaposed characters within the book of Genesis juxtaposed or connected or paralleled characters such as Cain and Abel. Or the characters of Abraham and Lot or Isaac and Ishmael or Esau and Jacob or people like Rachel and Leah. We have Judah and Joseph and all these characters as they're juxtaposed, they are placed events, significant events that occur to them are placed alongside each other so that we can compare and control.

So the story of Lot is one that is contrasted with the story of Abraham. Lot is Abraham's nephew, but presumably of the same age. Haran, Abraham's brother and Lot's father was 70 years older than Abraham.

And so by the time that Lot was born, it was probably around the same time that Abraham was born. These are their peers for the most part. And Lot and Abraham are going through similar life stages in certain respects.

Now, Lot chooses to settle in a particular part of the land. He does not ally himself with Abraham. He does not stay with Abraham.

And there's a parting of the ways between them. Abraham later rescues Lot in his defeat of the kings. And then we see later on the parallel between the meeting of the angels with Abraham and then the meeting of the angels with Lot.

In both of these situations, they're connected narratives from chapter 17 to chapter 19. And there's the movement of Abraham from death to life, from barrenness to fertility, and then the movement of Lot and Lot's family from fruitfulness and success to barrenness and the sterility of salt and then the incest that is also committed by his daughters. Lot is connected with the lands of Moab and Ammon.

And the daughters of Lot and the relationship that they have with him gives rise to these two nations. And so these are significant stories held alongside the story of Abraham. Later on, when we get to a book like Ruth, we see the story of the Moabites taken up there in certain respects.

The story of the Moabites and then the story of the Judahites and how God redeems both in a particular way within that account. So the significance of Lot is not just as an individual. As an individual, he's juxtaposed with Abraham.

But beyond that, he is a representative of other nations that are roundabout, other nations that stand as testimony to Israel of other possibilities. So you have Ishmael leads to a certain line of people. Esau associated with Edom.

Laban associated with Lebanon. You have characters like Lot associated with Moab and Ammon. And all these different places around about Israel are characterized, connected with these particular individuals within the story of Genesis.

We also have the different tribes of Israel and the significant relationships that they have. So, for instance, Judah interceding from Benjamin is a very significant event. Or the relationship between Judah and Joseph.

These are the relationships between the North and the South Kingdom when it divides. And the relationship between Judah and Benjamin is the relationship between the two tribes of the Southern Kingdom. And so destinies, longer term destinies, are being played out within the story of Genesis.

We see also significant developments on these fronts where the story of Isaac, for instance, replays the story of Abraham. In chapter 26, the story of Abimelech and Rebekah, we see the same pattern as we saw with Abraham, Sarah and Abimelech. In chapter 20, it plays out.

They're digging the same wells even at the end of it. And so there is a movement of Jacob upon the same, or Isaac upon the same path that his father walked. But he's taking that bit of a step further.

He's also anticipating the things that will come to pass in the future. And there's a development in each one of these stories, too. In the first, God intervenes on behalf of Abraham and Sarai, and he brings plagues upon Pharaoh.

And then they're sent away with many gifts. In the second, there is a requirement for Abimelech to get Abraham to pray for him. So in this point, Abraham becomes an intercessor, someone who acts on behalf of other people.

We've seen him play that role early in chapter 18. So there's a significant development within the story from God directly intervening to this later account of God asking Abimelech to get, telling Abimelech to get Abraham to pray for him. The later Abimelech, now this is probably a dynastic name like Herod or Pharaoh, rather than a name that is a personal name of the character of the king in question.

This, in this story, Isaac is actually sowing, not just managing herds, but he sows and he has great crops. And so there's a further rootedness within the land that's expressed here. And then there's a covenant between Abimelech and Abraham and the covenant between Abimelech and Isaac.

And so we see these stories developing, not just a repetition, but a development as the pattern gets played out further each time. Now, all of this prepares us for what happens later on in the story. It prepares us with the themes of birth, with the themes of wells and women.

It prepares us with the ideas of being rooted within the land and the significance of that and the blessing that God is giving and the way that God is blessing other nations through the people of God. And these are themes that are being unpacked already within Genesis in anticipation of what will happen later. And so when we get to Exodus, all of these themes should be fairly familiar.

This isn't anything novel. It's being played out on a bigger scale, but it's something that we've all seen before. And it also helps us to understand what these characters are doing.

Why is it that we're having this character of Lot juxtaposed with Abraham? Well, it helps to understand that Moab and Ammon are associated with Lot or that the land of Edom is associated with Esau. All of these help us to understand that what is in play is not just the destiny of an individual, but the destiny of nations, that God is forming his people. And in seed form, you're playing out the destiny of nations.

So just as Abraham goes into Egypt in time of famine and there's a threat upon the woman and her seed by the serpent, and then there's a delivery through plague and through many gifts and then a movement into the land where there's a conquest. There is a destiny of other nations round about being played out. A destiny that's seen in the actions of unfaithful men and women.

A destiny that's seen not just in unfaithful actions. There are people who are blessed. So Hagar, for instance, Ishmael has a blessing that is in many ways paralleled with the

blessing that's given to Isaac.

And so these characters are not entirely bad. There are ways in which they are redeemed or ways in which they are presented as blessed, but not part of the chosen people. And so it's important to see what is taking place that larger nations and groups are being characterized at this point.

And the whole story of Genesis, we're looking at the seeds of vast nations that we'll see later on. So, for instance, in chapter 10, the connection between the sons of Cush, that Mizraim is the father of the Philistines. That's significant.

It helps us to understand that Egypt and the Philistines are connected typologically. And all these themes develop later on in scripture. As you pay attention to Genesis in particular and pay close attention, you will be in a far better position to understand much that takes place later.

Because it all presumes that you have had this close attention to those details. So when, for instance, you see the significance of the relationship between Judah and Benjamin later on, you will look back to the story of Joseph and see within there seeds of that being sown. As you read the story of Ruth, you'll reread the story of Tamar and you'll reread the story of Lot and his daughters and you'll see the destiny that is set in course by those particular actions and those particular events is still being played out in the story of Ruth.

Often we read these stories in isolation from each other and we miss all of this. The danger for many Christians is that we want to short circuit all of these things. We want to draw a direct line between Lot and something in the present and between Abraham and Christ.

Now, those lines can be drawn, but often those lines need to go through the terrain of scripture, the terrain of the narrative as it develops. So I've described this in the past as it's like going through this path where you're going through wooded terrain as you're going through rocky terrain and you can't see very far ahead of you. And you follow this path for a long period of time until eventually you reach a great mountain and you climb up this mountain, watching the footholds and finally reach the summit.

And from the summit, you can see the entire path that you have walked traced out as a unity. And you can see how it all is connected to the point where you're standing at that moment in time. It's a unified reality and it all leads to that point.

And from that point, you can also see the whole. Now, that's how Christ stands in relationship to the Old Testament narrative. But you need to recognise that the unity is the unity of an itinerary.

It's a story that leads to this point, but it leads through this particular terrain. It leads

through these particular events, through these particular characters. It is not just a direct airlifting from Abraham to the summit of the mountain in Christ or from Lot to some other location.

Rather, it's a relationship between all these events, all these events being connected as a single itinerary of God's salvation played out throughout history. And as one that we're involved in, as one that will lead us to a greater and higher summit in the future, a summit that Christ himself beckons us towards. Now, maybe that's stretching the analogy a bit, but I hope that that helps to understand exactly how we can read these accounts and get a lot from them and relate them to our current situation without reading the passages against themselves, short circuiting the biblical text and seeking to jump from one place to another without actually paying close attention to what occurs in the context.

Within the book of Genesis, then, we have in embryo the history that will play out later on. We have the destinies of nations already set in course. We have stories and characters that are presented for us, the Exodus pattern.

Characters like Abraham as the father of his people who goes and experiences the destiny of his people in advance, a proleptic experience of the Exodus. And then when we experience all of these things, we are walking in the footsteps that they have walked. We are walking in the footsteps of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

And we know also that we have the same God, the God that worked in those situations and the conflicts that they experienced, the conflict with the serpent and the woman and her seed. It's the same conflict that Christ brings to completion. And so as we are reading scripture, reading it as this thematic unity enables us to see Christ better.

It enables us to read these original texts with more integrity without extracting them from their context, but while still connecting them to what happens next and what happens as we move into the New Testament. Now that was a rambling a bit, but I hope that that was of some help. I'll hopefully be back within the next couple of days.