

The Big Picture of Scripture

Lesson 8: Grace at Work in Man's Exile

Intro: The background to God's work of rescuing sinners is His commitment to His creation—a commitment that becomes clearer as the narrative progresses. There's no hint in the creation narrative that God created the universe on a trial basis or with a view to discarding it after a period of time. God created it as a sanctuary in which He would have fellowship with His physical image bearers.

I. The Exile

- A. When man sinned, God exiled him from the Garden, Gen 3.22-24. Having eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, man had no right to the tree of life.
 1. The tree of life was no more magical to give life than the tree of knowledge was magical to cause death. They were the sacraments—signs and seals—of the covenant of works made with Adam. The tree of knowledge signified the penalty of disobedience to the covenant and the tree of life signified the reward of obedience to the covenant.
 2. The tree of knowledge was *the probationary tree*. If man respected God's boundaries and didn't eat of it, he'd have the privilege of eating of the tree of life and enjoy the eternal life with God which it signified. But if he disregarded God's boundaries and ate of the tree of knowledge, he'd come under the penalty of death which it signified and forever forfeit access to the tree of life and the life with God which it signified.
- B. God denied man access to the tree of life because only the righteous can access it. But by exiling man instead of destroying him, God simultaneously reveals His commitment to mankind. As a sinner, man will have to live in exile. But the fact that God allows man to live in exile implies that He has a plan to—somehow—redeem a people from that exile and return them to Eden as His friends and give them the right to the tree of life, Rev 22.1-4.
- C. The narrative of Gen 4-5 depicts the effects of the fall on mankind and the mercy of God in the face of it.
 1. Cain murders Abel out of envy, 1Jn 3.12.
 2. Lamech takes two wives out of lust, Gen 4.19.
 3. Lamech murders a young man out of pride, Gen 4.23-24.
 4. Cain's line is utterly godless as every father has a son in his own image, Gen 5.3.
 5. Seth is born as a testimony to the persistence of the grace of God in and with fallen humanity, Gen 4.25-26.
- D. It quickly becomes clear that there will be two lines of descendants among mankind, the seed of the woman in Seth's line and the seed of the serpent in Cain's line, Gen 3.15.
 1. The godless line of Cain in Gen 4 is juxtaposed by the godly, though still sinful, line of Seth in Gen 5. Seth's line is shown to contain the legitimate descendants of Adam, the seed of the woman. In this line, God's plan of redemption begins to unfold, first in Enoch, Gen 5.24, and then significantly in Noah, Gen 6.8.
- E. In time, the two lines of Cain and Seth intermarried and the corruption of Cain's line polluted Seth's line so that the entire world was wicked, Gen 6.1-5.
 1. Committed to His purpose to restore His Kingdom, God set His favor upon Noah, Gen 6.8. Noah was not a righteous man whom God found, but rather a sinner whom God saved. Noah found favor with God because God saved Noah by grace. In other words, Noah's righteousness was not the cause of God's favor but the effect.

2. When God appeared to Noah, he believed His Word and obeyed it, Heb 11.7. Noah's faith was the fruit of God's grace.
3. As a testimony to His commitment to His ultimate purpose for creation, God formalized His promise to save Noah and his family with a covenant, Gen 6.18.
 - a) Covenant and Kingdom are closely related, but Kingdom is more properly the overarching theme—and persistent drive—of Scripture while covenant is the vehicle or medium through which the promise of God's Kingdom is conveyed to God's people. In other words, when God makes a covenant, it's in order to formalize His commitment to His Kingdom purpose.
 - b) Also, the making of a covenant by God reveals the *relationship* that existed between God and His creation from the beginning. As Creator, He's *already in covenant* with His creation and committed to His Kingdom purpose for it. Which is to say, God refuses to allow human rebellion to divert Him from His purpose to create a people to be *His* people in perfect fellowship with Him in a perfect universe, and the sovereign administration of His covenant with mankind testifies to this commitment.

F. The Preservation of God's Kingdom

1. The deliverance of Noah and his family from the flood shows that God's Kingdom purpose is being preserved in Noah's line with Noah's family under God's rule in God's ark.
2. After the flood Noah and his sons become a new beginning of the human race, Gen 9.1-7, 19.
3. Noah's drunkenness becomes the occasion for the Lord revealing that humanity will still be divided between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent, a people redeemed by grace and a people left in their sin, Gen 9.20-27.
4. Calling the LORD the God of Shem highlights the fact that the redemptive plan of God revealed in Gen 3.15 is at work in Shem's line, cf. Gen 11.10, 26. Cursing the line of Ham shows that the consequences of the fall are here to stay. Including the line of Japheth in the blessings of Shem reveals that God's saving purpose in Shem's line will also reach beyond Shem—a foreshadow of the Abrahamic covenant.
5. Noah's blessing of his three sons reveals that the mingling of sovereign grace with humanity involves three types of people throughout redemptive history:
 - a) *Shem*: the chosen covenant people as a nation of physical descendants *under the grace of God*. This is later clarified by the gospel to signify the spiritual descendants, or elect, among the physical descendants of Israel.
 - b) *Japheth*: others from non-elect nations who are *graciously included* in the covenant blessings of the nation of Israel. This is later clarified by the gospel to signify the Lord's calling of the Gentiles.
 - c) *Ham*: those nations that remain outside the covenant *under the judgment of God*. This is later clarified by the gospel to signify all those whom the Lord justly leaves in their sins and does not call to Himself.

G. At Babel, we see a collective expression of the original attempt of Adam and Eve to displace God from His rightful place as Lord of the universe, a daring and damning grasp after godhood, Gen 11.1-4; cp. 9.1.

1. God executes another judgment on the human race, not a flood this time (cf. Gen 9.11), but a confounding of man's desire for a united humanity in evil opposition against God. The confusion of languages and division of the nations will characterize humanity until the redemptive power of God unites a people drawn from all nations, Rev 7.9. God's purpose for

a united humanity in willing submission to Him is begun at Pentecost and will be consummated at Christ's return, Rev 5.9-10; 7.9-10.

- H. Gen 4-11 establishes the fact that God's plans for the rescue of mankind involve an ongoing distinction between those rescued by sovereign grace and those lost as a judgment on their sin.
1. The line of Cain, and then Ham, represent mankind without God. Shem and then Noah, and finally Abram, represent the sovereign election to eternal life by the grace of God.
 2. Mankind has fallen and lives in exile. Satan's Garden-assault on humanity was a glowing success. *But God.*
 3. Out of the mass of humanity under judgment, God keeps sovereignly choosing one and then another—first Abel, then Seth, then Noah, then Abram—to be vessels of His sovereign mercy; and He keeps sovereignly testifying to His Kingdom commitment to His creation by making covenants—first with Noah and then with Abram.
 4. Why does He do this? Because redemption is afoot and His Kingdom is coming.