

The Book – Tapestry and Trajectory

Luke 24:25-27

Beginnings are hard things. Some beginnings are small and insignificant leading to great things. Some beginnings are doorways to mazes. Some beginnings are videos panning over the landscape. Some beginnings are train stations – just a place to get on the train and start the trip.

This beginning about the Book of Beginnings, the Genesis of all not God, will unfold through two images, two metaphors. I aim to be a sort of travelogue to the book. Here is the map. Here is journey. Here are some delights. Here are some dangers. Now, meet me here next Sunday and we will board the train and take off down the track.

Tapestry – Its Place in the Scripture

Our approach to Genesis can be like that of understanding a tapestry. A tapestry is a superb and useful decoration woven with consummate skill, intricate design, both common and quality materials, lasting service and stunning beauty. While each thread is necessary, it gains its significance, importance and beauty as it is intertwined with all the other threads. The weaver intends a design and implements a process so that the end product reflects his love and wisdom.

So how is the tapestry we have in our Bibles called Genesis made so as to display the manifold wisdom and beauty of God?

Its Maker – the Biblical Author

We must begin with a larger affirmation grounded in the Scriptures as a whole. We affirm that the Bible in all its parts is the very plenary inspired Word of God, inerrant and infallible. The Bible was given by through human instrumentality as men wrote the Scriptures, using the physical, logical, rhetorical materials and methods in their own personalities and styles yet so attended and borne along by the Holy Spirit that what was written is God's Word.

This affirmation is critical to guide and guard our investigation into who the human author was.

- *IT MUST GUIDE US* so that our investigation begins with and relies on the testimony of the Bible itself. If the Bible tells who the human author was, then that settles the issue. The human author is assumed to have developed his materials using the ordinary methods common to his day. But what was produced was still the Divinely inspired work of that person.
- *IT MUST GUARD US* so that we reject the kind of critical research which first denies Divine inspiration and Biblical integrity so as to challenge the claims for authorship made by the Bible. There are many theories of origins, of source documents, of altered myths all being compiled into Genesis in such a way *as to deny the inerrancy and infallibility of the text*.

The Bible itself declares and attests that Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. This is attested to in both the Old Testament and in the New Testament. Numerous verses attest to the direct Mosaic authorship of Exodus through Deuteronomy.

However, there are no direct attributions of Genesis to Moses. Even the most conservative of scholars will generally say that Moses is the compiler, editor and unifying writer. He had many sources including traditions, writings and direct words from God. So, under the direct work of the Holy Spirit, Moses produced the book of Genesis so that what we have is the very Word of God. God had uniquely prepared him through his education in Egypt at Pharaoh's court. God also enabled him through his prophetic gift given by the Holy Spirit.

Its Fabric– the Foundational Materials

A tapestry is woven together from many threads and materials. Most human composition is the result of investigation, compilation, reflection and then production. This is certainly the case with many books in the Bible. Attempting to ascertain where those materials came from and what they were, is almost always a speculative enterprise at best. It is often agenda driven aimed at undermining the Bible's authenticity and authority.

However, when there are clear seams in the material often along genre lines, then we must acknowledge these as being in the text. They may be very helpful to us in unpacking the text.

Genesis is primarily narrative material. Please note that I am avoiding the word, "history". The way their culture wrote history and the way our culture thinks we write history is very different. However, all history is written from within a cultural and philosophical stand-point and is always making a point. The Bible authors tend to be self-conscious that they are choosing their narratives and linking them together to serve a thematic and theological purpose. Genesis is no different. Moses has at his disposal a wide array of narratives from both written and oral sources. He places them in the book according to God's plan, God's instructive and illustrative purposes.

Genesis is also comprised of genealogical material. The genealogies serve to establish lineages. They are very important to serve the theme of the "Seed" in Genesis. The importance of these genealogies is picked up in Matthew and Luke who rely on them to establish Jesus' connection to Adam, to Israel and to David. The genealogies also establish a time-line. I know that many disagree with this. Regardless of whether generations are being skipped, the early genealogy from Adam to Noah and then Noah to Abraham can be used to calculate the year of Adam's creation, the year of the Flood and the year Abraham leaves Ur.

Genesis contains some poetry. The book opens with a long creation-epic poem. It also contains the lyrics of some songs. Curiously, the Psalms record a song by Moses, so it should not surprise us that this genre was used as well.

Its Design – the Structural Makeup

The structural makeup of Genesis is very complex. There appear to be three primary designs interlocking so as to give unity and strength to this long work. The amazing intricacy of the composition of the Book should cause us to celebrate the genius of Moses and the wisdom of God. These three designs are not three ways of seeing the book – they are woven through-out the book with all three present in any given unit of text (pericope).

Tol*Dots – The Physical Arrangement

After the prologue in which the creation of all things is described, Moses announces ten initiatives by God in salvation history with the words, "these are the generations of ____." These headings are known as Tol*Dots. At the end of each unit, Moses gives a transition

that moves his argument and theme forward in preparation for the next unit. These units are about the descendants of the person referred to rather than the person themselves. These provide clear textual breaks almost like chapters in a modern book.

*See page 8 for a table of these Tol*Dot Units.*

Chiasms – The Literary Arrangement

Chiasms are the alternating patterns or parallel arrangements of the ideas or subjects of the text. They occur in five cycles with two sets of linking materials parallel to one another. The five cycles are as follows:

Pre-Flood Cycle	1:1-11:26	→	alternating structure
Abraham Cycle	11:27-22:24	>	concentric structure
Transitional	23:1-25:18		parallel with 35:23a-36:43a
Jacob Cycle	25:19-35:22	>	concentric structure
Transitional	35:23-36:43a		parallel with 23:1-25:18
Joseph Cycle	37:2-50:26	>	concentric structure

This literary arrangement was a common literary device in the Hebrew language. Hebrew poetry's rhythm and repetition are built on the kinds of structures. While we use indented outlines to show the logical arrangement and order of ideas, a Hebrew thinker and writer would use these for the same purpose.

See page 8 for examples of these cycles.

Motifs – The Thematic Arrangement

Like threads through a tapestry, running through the whole book are the themes or motifs. If you think of the Tol*Dot as chapters and the Chiasms as cycles, then these are the ideas that are being developed, chapter by chapter, layer by layer, cycle by cycle.

Let me just briefly list some of the most important motifs. Hopefully, you will also be able to see them running through the Pentateuch and through the whole Bible. Many of these threads are brought to a conclusion or climax in the Book of Revelation where they are clearly and specifically referred to.

Failure and Hope – man's problem and God's provision

Cursing and Blessing – living before the face and in the presence of a Sovereign God

Promise and Fulfillment – A covenant making and covenant keeping God

Descendent and Land – God's people and their dwelling place

Sacrifice and Salvation – Death and life dealing with sin

There are many other themes, but we will leave them to unfold as we work our way through the book.

Its Audience – the Intentional Message

Who is the book intended for? An improper use of some study methods (hermeneutics) would say that the message of Genesis is only what the original hearers were intended to understand. I am in significant disagreement with that. Yes, we must understand what God intended to communicate to the original audience. We have to have that right first. But, the Scriptures consistently demonstrate that later revelation illuminates the message so that later audiences understand the message in a deeper, richer and more Christ-centric way than the original hearers could possibly understand.

Immediate Target – Israel

First, there is the immediate audience. The nation of Israel is in the wilderness and needs to know their God and their history. For them, the essential message is one of identity. Who are they and how did they get here. Genesis and Exodus as Volume 1 and Volume 2 of Israel's early history answer those two great questions.

As we walk through the Tol*Dot units and the literary cycles, we will be looking for what was important for Israel to understand so as to rightly worship and walk with their God. Genesis will provide for them a Biblical Theology imbedded in salvation/redemptive history as an interpretive key to their lives.

Wider Spectators – Gentiles

There is also the wider audience of the Gentiles around Israel. The book of Genesis functions to expose their myths, exhibit the righteousness and wrath of God, and explain the way to be restored to God. It also calls them to hope in the God of Israel who is pleased to redeem for Himself those people who will bow to His rule.

Long-Term Audience – God's People

As the rest of the Bible unfolds, the earlier books are given more and more light. The creation narrative is made much more clear by later texts. But most importantly, the New Testament declares that the Old is intended for us. God had its words written in a way that is for us. The reason for this is the coming of the Lord Jesus to whom all the Old Covenant points. Under the supervision of the Holy Spirit, the events that are recorded were selected and written down in such a way as to show us the greater realities later.

Now, this is easy to demonstrate. Israel, the son of God, was sent down to Egypt, called up out of Egypt, crossed the Red Sea and was tempted in the wilderness, failing at every point. But Matthew shows us Jesus, the new Israel and God's true son went down to Egypt, came up out of Egypt, was baptized in Jordan and was tempted in the wilderness, succeeding at every point. The events of Genesis and Exodus, the events of Jesus life are chosen and recorded in order to show us that Jesus is the true Son, the Israel of God.

It is important for me to remind you at this point that we do not teach the idea that God has one purpose for Israel and another for the church. Nor do we teach the idea that the church has replaced Israel. We teach that Israel and the church are both brought into Christ so that there is a true eternal union between them that exhibits the manifold wisdom of God and the displays His very great glories.

Trajectory – Its Place in Redemptive History

Let us think together with the image/idea of a trajectory. A trajectory is the direction or path something will take as a result of design and movement. The trajectory of an arrow is its flight path resulting from the type of arrow, the head on its fore, the fletching on its tail combined with the power of the bow that launches it and the eye of the shooter who aimed it.

Its Foundational Importance

And he left there and went to the region of Judea and beyond the Jordan, and crowds gathered to him again. And again, as was his custom, he taught them. And Pharisees came up and in order to test him asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife?" He answered them, "What did Moses command you?" They said, "Moses allowed a man to write a certificate of divorce and to send her away." And Jesus said to them, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote you this commandment. But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together let not man separate." Mark 10:1-9 [ESV]

Genesis is foundational to our understanding of redemptive history. It is the Divinely inspired, infallible, inerrant record and interpretation of the beginning.

It is foundational to the understanding of origins. From the book of Genesis we learn the origins of the cosmos, of sin, of Israel, of the themes of redemptive history. We know how and why the sacrifices began. And we know that when everything begins, God is.

It is foundational to the unfolding of Biblical themes. Most Biblical themes begin to unfold in Genesis. The themes of sin, sacrifice, covenant, a people of God, the land, God's rule, the world all emerge through the narratives.

It is foundational to the placing of the Old Covenant. Genesis anchors the Old Covenant in the redemptive story line and in history. It provides the historical backdrop for the Old Covenant, particularly, the development from individuals, to families, to a nation. It is clear about the limitations they experienced in walking with God while occasionally showing glimpses of the greater that is to come.

It is foundational to the identity of God's people. Genesis establishes what it means to be related to God as a people through promises and covenants. It identifies God's people individually and corporately. Through these identities, types and metaphors are defined and described that later are used to give an identity and self-description to God's people who are both Jew and Gentile. These metaphors point to Christ and to the church in Christ.

Its Christological Center

And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. Luke 24:25-27 [ESV]

For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. Ephesians 5:29-32 [ESV]

Genesis is the fountainhead of truth about Jesus. He and His redeeming work are beginning to be revealed, albeit in the shadow land of the Old Covenant.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus' sovereign rule. We find that God expects to rule and to be the titular king over His people. He establishes that rule through His covenant and His Word.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus' personal identity. All through the book, the Spirit shines on characters in the narratives who are shadows of the substance, the Lord Jesus.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus' saving mission. Flowing from the words of sacrifice, come the streams of saving mercies through a Savior. By the end of Genesis, all readers are expected to understand that animals being sacrificed are a substitute until the true Sacrifice comes.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus' marital union. Through the metaphor of marriage and the stories of marriage, we begin to have a glimpse into the union of Christ with His bride. The great mystery that Paul explores in Ephesians is tied to the marriage of Adam and Eve, to the institution of marriage itself.

It is the fountainhead of Jesus' ultimate victory. While fallenness and failures tend to dominate the text, there are grand moments of victory over sin and the enemies of God. In these we begin to see the Great War our soul's enemy has waged and his eventual defeat.

Its Eschatological Aim

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth. Ephesians 1:7-10 [ESV]

Genesis shapes the eschatological trajectory of the redeeming and ruling purposes of God. What God aims to accomplish through history, Genesis launches from the powerful bow of its text.

It has an aim grounded in future expectation. Since we are to read Genesis with Hebrews in our hands, we know that the characters in the book believe greater things than the book actually records. We know Abraham is looking for a heavenly city, not only because Hebrews tells us this, but also because Abraham lives as a nomad in his own land.

It has a force empowered by Divine character. Over and over again, Genesis grounds the deeds of God in the character of God. The path of all that is launched in Genesis moves with the powerful force and energy and inertia of God's great character.

It has a flight shaped by metaphorical expressions. The metaphors used in Genesis are not themselves the realities. The realities are spiritual and Divine. If there are fathers in earth, it is because there is a Father in heaven. If there is a people of God on earth, it is because there will be a people of God in the heavenlies. If we are going to understand a great deal of the New Testament, we have to read the Old Testament to see what God meant by these images and types. And the New Testament more clearly shows us what those images and types point to.

Its Practical Use

Genesis also has an important “for us” aspect. Genesis (and all the Old Testament) was written with both its immediate and ultimate audiences in view. There are not multiple intention-abilities or interpretations for the different audiences. The grand message of Genesis is for both audiences, but with an ever so much greater light for us.

For our Instruction

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus, that together you may with one voice glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God. Romans 15:4-7 [ESV]

It was written so that its instruction for us would bring endurance and encouragement to us. Through its narratives, God illumines His own character with intensely practical implications and hope fueling motivations. God has given us a pipe, a Biblio-conduit through which what He intends to give flows. Its teaching us is intended to transform us.

For our Illustration

Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come. Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall. No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it. 1 Corinthians 10:11-13 [ESV]

It was written so that its illustrations to us would graphically and visually warn us of our dangers from sin and our delights in God. In addition to all we have already said, the narrative of Genesis powerfully exemplifies what can happen to God’s friends and to God’s enemies. Through them we are morally warned and spiritually equipped to recognize the common lot of fallenness, the shared experience of temptations and the glorious power for victory through the promises of God believed in an obeying way.

So let us bend our hearts, the attention and focus of our thoughts, so that Genesis heard and heeded will instruct us for our faith and illustrate for our practical profit.

The Tol*Dot Units

The following is taken from *Genesis* by Bruce Waltke.

The Account of	Passage	Transition
The heavens and the earth	2:4-4:26	4:25-26
Adam's Line	5:1-6:8	6:1-8
Noah's Line	6:9-9:29	9:18-29
Noah's Sons Line	10:1-11:9	11:1-9
Shem's Line	11:10-11:26	11:26
Terah's Line	11:27-25:11	23:1-25:11
Ishmael's Line	25:12-18	25:1-11 (dual transition)
Isaac's Line	25:19-35:29	35:23-29
Esau's Line	36:1-37:1	37:1
Jacob's Line	37:2-50:26	46:2-50:26 Transition to the Book of Exodus

Examples of the Chiastic Cycles

THE PRIMEVAL CYCLE

- A Creation story: first beginning; divine blessing 1:1-2:3
 - B Sin of Adam: nakedness; seeing/covering nakedness; Curse 2:4 – 3:24
 - C No descendants of murdered younger, righteous son Abel 4:1-16
 - D Descendants of sinful son Cain 4: 17-26
 - E Descendants of chosen son Seth: ten generations from Adam to Noah 5:1-32
 - F Downfall: unlawful union 6:1-4
 - G Brief introduction to Noah through whom God will save humanity 6:5-8
- A' Flood story: reversal of creation; new beginning; divine blessing 6:9 – 9:19
 - B' Sin of Noah: nakedness, seeing/covering nakedness; curse 9:20-29
 - C' Descendants of younger, righteous son Japheth 10:1-5
 - D' Descendants of sinful son Ham 10:6-20
 - E' Descendants of chosen son Shem: ten generations from Noah to Terah 10:21-32
 - F' Downfall: rebellious union (Tower of Babel) 11:1-9
 - G' Brief introduction of Abraham, through whom God will bless humanity 11:27-32

THE ABRAHAMIC CYCLE

- A Genealogy of Terah 11:27-32
 - B Promise of a son and start of Abraham's spiritual odyssey 12:1-9
 - C Abraham lies about Sarah; the Lord protects her in foreign place 12:10-20
 - D Lot settles in Sodom 13:1-18
 - E Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot militarily 14:1-24
 - F Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Ishmael 15:1-16:16
 - F' Covenant with Abraham; annunciation of Isaac 17:1-18:15
 - E' Abraham intercedes for Sodom and Lot in prayer 18:16-33
 - D' Lot flees doomed Sodom and settles in Moab 19:1-38
 - C' Abraham lies about Sarah; god protects her in foreign palace 20:1-18
 - B' Birth of son and climax of Abraham's spiritual odyssey 21:1-22:19
- A' Genealogy of Nahor 22:20-24