

The Storyline Sermon Series

The following is the outline that I will be following during this sermon series. Don't hold me to each of the titles and passages. This is just my outline, but it gives you an idea of where we are heading next.

Two Acts & Six Movements of the Creation Storyline/Worldview

Act ONE - The OLD Covenant			Act TWO - The NEW Covenant		
					
Creation	Conflict	Covenant	Christ	Church	New Creation

- 1 – **Creation** - God created everything with purpose & people with dignity
- 2 – **Conflict** - Human disobedience corrupts God's TOV creation
- 3 – **Covenant** - God reaches out to humanity with a promise
- 4 – **Christ** - Christ completes the redemptive work of God
- 5 – **Church** - God empowers the Church to be agents of reconciliation
- 6 – **New Creation** - God will restore the TOVness of original creation



ACT ONE-OLD COVENANT		
1	Gen 1:1-2; Eph 3	The Prologue: Before There Was Time
Movement 1: Creation		
2	Gen 1-2:4	Creation - Who NOT HOW
3	Gen 2	Image, Identity, & Purpose (Eden Story, Part 1)
Movement 2: Conflict		
4	Gen 3-11	Fracturing and Out of Control (Sin fractures relationships) Eden Story, Part 2
Movement 3: Covenant		
5	Gen 12 and 15:1-6	The Blessing Begins in a Nobody: Abram
6	Gen 16-36	Patriarchs and the Promise (God is faithful even when his people are not)
7	Gen 37-50	Family to Nation: Joseph (God using suffering)

8	Exodus 1-15	Rescued: from Slavery to Salvation
9	Exodus 19-20	The Covenant at Mt. Sinai
10	Ex 40; Num 9:15-23	Dwelling in the Wilderness with a Bunch of Rebellious Complainers
11	Joshua:1:1-9; 24:1-15	Choosing Life and Entering the Promised Land:
12	Judges (2:6-19; 21:25)	The Judges and the Cycle of Sin:
13	I Sam 16, etc.	The Kings (Saul & David)
14	1 Kings 3:5-14, 11:1-13, 12:16-20	A Divided Heart & The Split Kingdom
15	1 Kings 17-19; Isaiah 1:10-20; Amos 5:21-24, Hosea 11:1-9	A Call to Obedience & a Promise of Something New: The Prophets
16	2 Kings 17:6-23; 18:9-12 and 2 Kings 25:1-21; 2 Chronicles 36:15-21	Captured and Scattered (North and South)
17	Lam 3:19-ff; Ez 37, Daniel	Exiled: Being Faithful without compromise (Daniel):
18	Ezra 1-6; Nehemiah 1-8; Haggai 1-2; Malachi (Ezra 3:10-13 (or Nehemiah 8:1-12); Malachi 3:1; 4:1-6)	Returning, Rebuilding, and Waiting (Ezra & Nehemiah)

ACT TWO-NEW COVENANT

Movement 4: Christ

19	Genesis 3:15; Isaiah 9:1-7; Luke 1:26-38	Silence and Hope: The Promise.
20	2 Samuel 7:8-16; Isaiah 11:1-10; Luke 2:1-20	Peace: the promised King has arrived
21	Ex 12; Is 53; John 1:29-34; Luke 2	Joy: The shepherds and the Lamb
22	Matthew 1:18-25; John 1:1-18	Love: God With Us (The Word became flesh)
23	Luke 2:1-20	The Author Enters His Own Story.
24	Matt 4:1-11; Lk4	And So It Begins... in the Wilderness:
25	Matt 4:12, Lk 4:16-ff	The King Arrives, announcing an upside-down kingdom:
26	Mark 4:35-41	Authority Over Chaos and the fractured World:
27	Mark 4:35-5:43	Signs of the King: Power over the Effects of Eden
28	John 6:30-40, 51	The Manna of Life:

29	Matthew 16:13–25	The Identity and the Cost:
30	Luke 9:28-36	Preview of coming glory (Transfiguration)
31	Luke 15 and 19:1-10;	The Mission of Jesus - Coin, Sheep, Son, and Zaccheaus
32	Jn 11:17-27, 38-44; 14:1-6; LK 15	The Resurrection and the Life:
33	Matt 13; Mk 10:45	Kingdom Characteristics:
34	Luke 19:28-44; Ps 118	The King Enters (Palm Sunday)
35	Luke 22; John 13	The Lamb and Sacrifice:
36	John 20:1–18 (or Luke 24:1–12)	The New Creation and New Covenant Begin (Easter Sunday):

Movement 5: Church

37	Acts 1	Now What? The Story Isn't Over
38	Acts 2	The Invitation
39	Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37	A Different Kind of Community
40	Acts 3-5	Boldness in the face of opposition; Courage Under Fire
41	Acts 6	Growing pains:
42	Acts 6-7	The Good News Can't Be Stopped: Stephen and the history of Israel
43	Acts 8-9	"Judea" Spreading with persecution: Philip, Ethiopian
44	Acts 8-9	From Persecutor to Proclaimer: Saul
45	Acts 10-11	"Samaria" Blessing to the Nations - Cornelius (Abram's promise, finally realized)
46	Acts 11-12	The Multi-ethnic Church Multiplies
47	Acts 13-14	Missionary Journeys To the Ends of the Earth - SENT
48	Acts 15- Gal 2:11-21	Salvation by Grace, one family
49	Acts 16; Phil 1:1-11	Spreading Joy: The Gospel to Europe - Philippians
50	Acts 17 - 1/2 Thess	Kingdom Hope: Turning the World Upside Down
51	Acts 17	Engaging other Storyline Culture with the Creator storyline
52	Acts 18-I Cor	Holiness in a broken, secular Culture: Strengthening the churches-Corinth
53	Acts 18-I Cor	Life together

54	Acts 18-2 Cor	Grace is Enough
55	Acts 19 Eph	One body
56	Acts 19 Eph and Col	Walking Worthy of the Gospel, identity, church, armor, kingdom living
57	Acts 20-28	Gospel Reaches the Empire (the Occupiers headquarters)
58	Acts 28-"29"	The Mission continues: Acts 28 ends. We are in Acts 29
59	James	Faith in Action
60	I Peter	Hope in Suffering
61	2 Peter and Jude	Guard the Truth
62	I John	Walking in Love
63	Hebrews	Jesus is Better

Movement 6: New Creation

64	Rev 2-3	Faithfulness to the end
65	Rev 4-5	Our God Reigns over the entire Storyline
66	Rev 6-19	Rev 3 realized - All the battles behind the battle
67	Rev 20-22; Romans 8	All Things New; Creation is restored.

Six Questions asked of Each of the Three Stories

Question	Theism (<i>Creator</i>)	Atheism (<i>Chance</i>)	Oneness (<i>Everything is One</i>)
1. Where did everything come from?	A personal Creator made the universe.	Matter and energy have always existed or came about through natural processes.	Everything is part of one eternal spiritual reality.
2. Who am I?	A person created in God's image with purpose and value.	A highly evolved product of nature.	A divine spark or part of the One, temporarily living as an individual.
3. Why am I here?	To know, love, worship, and reflect the Creator.	Any purpose is one you create for yourself.	To awaken to your true spiritual nature and unity with all things.
4. How do I know right and wrong?	Morality flows from God's character and design.	Morality is developed by humans through evolution, reason, or society. There is no absolute truth.	Right and wrong are tied to harmony, karma, enlightenment, or reducing suffering.
5. What happens after death?	Eternal life, judgment, and resurrection.	Consciousness ends when the body dies.	Reincarnation, enlightenment, or absorption into ultimate reality.
6. Where is history going?	God is bringing history to a restored creation.	History has no ultimate destination beyond natural processes.	History is a cycle of spiritual awakening and rebirth until liberation.

Stephen's Storyline from Acts 6:8-7

One of the 7 chosen to serve the early church was a guy named Stephen. After he was arrested by the Jews for what they considered blasphemy against God, Stephen delivered his own Old Covenant Storyline: I will color the storyline part in blue below.

Now Stephen, a man full of God's grace and power, performed great wonders and signs among the people. ⁹ Opposition arose, however, from members of the Synagogue of the Freedmen (as it was called)—Jews of Cyrene and Alexandria as well as the provinces of Cilicia and Asia—who began to argue with Stephen. ¹⁰ But they could not stand up against the wisdom the Spirit gave him as he spoke.

¹¹ Then they secretly persuaded some men to say, "We have heard Stephen speak blasphemous words against Moses and against God."

¹² So they stirred up the people and the elders and the teachers of the law. They seized Stephen and brought him before the Sanhedrin. ¹³ They produced false witnesses, who testified, "This fellow never stops speaking against this holy place and against the law. ¹⁴ For we have heard him say that this Jesus of Nazareth will destroy this place and change the customs Moses handed down to us."

¹⁵ All who were sitting in the Sanhedrin looked intently at Stephen, and they saw that his face was like the face of an angel.

Then the high priest asked Stephen, "Are these charges true?"

2 To this he replied: "Brothers and fathers, listen to me! The God of glory appeared to our father Abraham while he was still in Mesopotamia, before he lived in Harran. 3 'Leave your country and your people,' God said, 'and go to the land I will show you.'[a]

4 "So he left the land of the Chaldeans and settled in Harran. After the death of his father, God sent him to this land where you are now living. 5 He gave him no inheritance here, not even enough ground to set his foot on. But God promised him that he and his descendants after him would possess the land, even though at that time Abraham had no child. 6 God spoke to him in this way: 'For four hundred years your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated. 7 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves,' God said, 'and afterward they will come out of that country and worship me in this place.'[b] 8 Then he gave Abraham the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham became the father of Isaac and circumcised him eight days after his birth. Later Isaac became the father of Jacob, and Jacob became the father of the twelve patriarchs.

9 “Because the patriarchs were jealous of Joseph, they sold him as a slave into Egypt. But God was with him 10 and rescued him from all his troubles. He gave Joseph wisdom and enabled him to gain the goodwill of Pharaoh king of Egypt. So Pharaoh made him ruler over Egypt and all his palace.

11 “Then a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan, bringing great suffering, and our ancestors could not find food. 12 When Jacob heard that there was grain in Egypt, he sent our forefathers on their first visit. 13 On their second visit, Joseph told his brothers who he was, and Pharaoh learned about Joseph’s family. 14 After this, Joseph sent for his father Jacob and his whole family, seventy-five in all. 15 Then Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors died. 16 Their bodies were brought back to Shechem and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem for a certain sum of money.

17 “As the time drew near for God to fulfill his promise to Abraham, the number of our people in Egypt had greatly increased. 18 Then ‘a new king, to whom Joseph meant nothing, came to power in Egypt.’[c] 19 He dealt treacherously with our people and oppressed our ancestors by forcing them to throw out their newborn babies so that they would die.

20 “At that time Moses was born, and he was no ordinary child.[d] For three months he was cared for by his family. 21 When he was placed outside, Pharaoh’s daughter took him and brought him up as her own son. 22 Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action.

23 “When Moses was forty years old, he decided to visit his own people, the Israelites. 24 He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian. 25 Moses thought that his own people would realize that God was using him to rescue them, but they did not. 26 The next day Moses came upon two Israelites who were fighting. He tried to reconcile them by saying, ‘Men, you are brothers; why do you want to hurt each other?’

27 “But the man who was mistreating the other pushed Moses aside and said, ‘Who made you ruler and judge over us? 28 Are you thinking of killing me as you killed the Egyptian yesterday?’[e] 29 When Moses heard this, he fled to Midian, where he settled as a foreigner and had two sons.

30 “After forty years had passed, an angel appeared to Moses in the flames of a burning bush in the desert near Mount Sinai. 31 When he saw this, he was amazed at the sight. As he went over to get a closer look, he heard the Lord say: 32 ‘I am the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.’[f] Moses trembled with fear and did not dare to look.

33 “Then the Lord said to him, ‘Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground. 34 I have indeed seen the oppression of my people in Egypt. I have heard their groaning and have come down to set them free. Now come, I will send you back to Egypt.’[g]

35 “This is the same Moses they had rejected with the words, ‘Who made you ruler and judge?’ He was sent to be their ruler and deliverer by God himself, through the angel who appeared to him in the bush. 36 He led them out of Egypt and performed wonders and signs in Egypt, at the Red Sea and for forty years in the wilderness.

37 “This is the Moses who told the Israelites, ‘God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your own people.’[h] 38 He was in the assembly in the wilderness, with the angel who spoke to him on Mount Sinai, and with our ancestors; and he received living words to pass on to us.

39 “But our ancestors refused to obey him. Instead, they rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. 40 They told Aaron, ‘Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who led us out of Egypt—we don’t know what has happened to him!’[i] 41 That was the time they made an idol in the form of a calf. They brought sacrifices to it and reveled in what their own hands had made. 42 But God turned away from them and gave them over to the worship of the sun, moon and stars. This agrees with what is written in the book of the prophets:

“‘Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings
forty years in the wilderness, people of Israel?
43 You have taken up the tabernacle of Molek
and the star of your god Rephan,
the idols you made to worship.
Therefore I will send you into exile’[j] beyond Babylon.

44 “Our ancestors had the tabernacle of the covenant law with them in the wilderness. It had been made as God directed Moses, according to the pattern he had seen. 45 After receiving the tabernacle, our ancestors under Joshua brought it with them when they took the land from the nations God drove out before them. It remained in the land until the time of David, 46 who enjoyed God’s favor and asked that he might provide a dwelling place for the God of Jacob.[k] 47 But it was Solomon who built a house for him.

48 “However, the Most High does not live in houses made by human hands. As the prophet says:

49 “‘Heaven is my throne,
and the earth is my footstool.
What kind of house will you build for me?
says the Lord.
Or where will my resting place be?
50 Has not my hand made all these things?’[l]

51 “You stiff-necked people! Your hearts and ears are still uncircumcised. You are just like your ancestors: You always resist the Holy Spirit! 52 Was there ever a prophet your ancestors did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now

you have betrayed and murdered him— 53 you who have received the law that was given through angels but have not obeyed it.”

The Stoning of Stephen

54 When the members of the Sanhedrin heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 “Look,” he said, “I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him.

Storyline Series Resources

GENERAL SERIES RESOURCES

- **Video/Movie**

- [Overview of the Entire Bible in 17 Min](#) - Christianity Engaged
- [Long Story Short](#) by Willow Creek
- Bible Overview from the Bible Project
 - [The Story of the Bible](#) • What It's About From Beginning to End [5:37 min]
- Bible Project Books of the Bible Overview Videos. Watch all 66 book videos (some are 2 parts). Each video is 6-8 minutes.
 - [Old Testament Videos](#)
 - [Genesis, part 1](#)
 - [Genesis, part 2](#)
 - [Exodus, part 1](#)
 - [Exodus, part 2](#)
 - [Leviticus](#)
 - [New Testament Videos](#)

- **Books**

- Lyonhart, Jonathan. *The Journey of God: Christianity in Six Movements*
- Kreeft, Peter. *The Journey*
- Franzee, Randy. *The Story*
- Sire, James. *The Universe Next Door*

Sermons 02-03 CREATION - RESOURCES

- **Books to Explore**

- Walton, John. *The Lost World of Genesis One*. - Here is a copy of the [intro and chapter one](#), which will be so very helpful for you. (see chapter one below).
- Imes, Carmen Joy. *Being the Image of God*
- Imes, Carmen Joy. *Bearing God's Name*

- **Videos/Movies**

- [Cosmology-The Fine Tuning of the Universe](#) [6:22 min]
- [The Story of Everything](#) - The Story of Everything is a cinematic exploration of the cosmos that reveals the hidden hand behind our universe. From the precise laws that govern the stars to the intricate patterns found in every living cell, the film traces evidence of intentional design throughout nature. Whether examining distant star-forming clouds or the spiral structure of DNA, we discover a consistent signature woven into the fabric of existence.
 - **Watch** the [Trailer](#) [2:09 min]
 - **Watch** the full documentary on Amazon - \$9.99.
- Bible Project Videos
 - [Image of God](#) [6:17 min]
 - [Tree of Life](#) [4:52 min]
- Tim Mackie teachings on Gen 1-3
 - [Teaching on Gen 1-Good.](#)
 - [Teaching on Gen 2-Why the Tree?](#)

- [Teaching on Gen 3-How Jesus Becomes the Human We Were Meant to Be](#)
- **Animated Videos about Creation.** The following short videos ask great questions specifically about Creation. Go to my website to access the [other animated videos](#) on other questions. They present logical arguments to some of the biggest questions that have been asked since the dawn of time. From one of the video's notes: "Reasonable Faith features the work of philosopher and theologian Dr. William Lane Craig and aims to provide in the public arena an intelligent, articulate, and uncompromising yet gracious Christian perspective on the most important issues concerning the truth of the Christian faith today."
 - The Kalam Cosmological Argument-Part 1: Scientific:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6CuIBuMCLg0> [4:12 min]
 - The Kalam Cosmological Argument-Part 2: Philosophical:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vybNvc6mxMo> [5:32 min]
 - The Fine-tuning of the Universe:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EE76nwimuT0> [6:22 min]
 - Impossible Universe: The Reality of Cosmic Fine Tuning:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk1pEHXnPsE> [5:53 min] (Oct 2020)
 - God and Mathematics: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QJBOiZXkKu8> [5:03 min]
 - Leibniz' Contingency Argument:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPCzEP0oD7I> [5:14 min]
 - The Ontological Argument: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xBmAKCvWI74> [4:40 min]
- **Google Slide Presentation**
 - [Ancient Cosmology-Part 1 and 2: The Great Origins Debate](#) (from a class I taught at LCU)

Sermon 04 FRACTURED - RESOURCES

- **Videos**
 - [Why God Withheld the Tree \(And What That Teaches Us About Desire\)](#) | Tim Mackie
 - The Bible Project Videos
 - [The Messiah](#) [5:16 min] - a focus on Gen 3:15
 - [The Test](#) [6:16 min]
 - [Tree of Life in the Bible](#) [4:51 min]
- **Books**
 - Walton, John. *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*
 - Longerman, Tremper and John Walton. *The Lost World of Noah's Flood*
 - See John Walton's chapter on the Serpent, in an indented tab/page

Sermons 05-07 A PROMISED RESTORATION - RESOURCES

- Videos
 - [Bible Project Overview-Genesis, Part 2](#) [8:07 min]

Sermons 08-09 RESCUED...FINALLY and MY TREASURED POSSESSION - RESOURCES

- Videos
 - [Bible Project Overview-Exodus, Part 1](#) [6:32 min]
 - [Bible Project Overview-Exodus, Part 2](#) [6:20 min]
- Music
 - [So You Want to Go Back to Egypt](#) by Keith Green

Sermons 10-11 TAKE THE LONG WAY HOME - RESOURCES

- Videos
 -

Walton, The Lost World of Adam and Eve. Chapter on the Serpent

Christian readers of Genesis have at times been confused by the serpent. Why did God allow such a creature to infiltrate the garden? How could this creature be in a "good" world? Based on New Testament references, the serpent is easily identified as Satan (Rom 16:20; Rev 12:9; 20:2), raising questions about where he came from and what he is doing in this account.

If we are going to understand Genesis as an ancient document, however, we have to read the text first in ancient terms. That means that we cannot immediately jump to the eventual conclusion that the serpent is associated with Satan, for there is no indication that the serpent was so identified during Old Testament times. Before considering the implications of later biblical interpretation, we should understand the ancient text on its own terms. Furthermore, we cannot read the text as if it is communicating in the world of Adam and Eve's knowledge because, as mentioned in previous chapters, we have an Israelite storyteller communicating to an Israelite audience. That audience would have made certain associations with the serpent imagery that are not necessarily natural to us.

Serpent symbolism was rich in the ancient Near East. We have already made reference to the serpent who stole the plant of life from Gilgamesh, but that is only the beginning. We have discussed the Tale of Adapa but have not yet referred to the serpent figure there. In that narrative, the serpent is not involved in any temptation and is not a main character. When Adapa responds to Anu's invitation to meet with him, one of the guardians of Anu's palace is Gizzida (= Nin-gishzida, "Lord of the Productive Tree"), who has the shape of a serpent and is accompanied by horned serpents (bašmu). He is known as the guardian of demons who live in the netherworld.'

In Egypt, we find serpents everywhere from the crown of Pharaoh to pictures on painted sarcophagi, as well as in the Book of the Dead (as deadly enemies along the path to the afterlife). These creatures are associated with both wisdom and death. Apophis was a serpent of chaos who tried to swallow the sun as it rose every morning. Other elements can be found in the Egyptian Book of the Dead that connect to ideas that are evident in the Genesis account, including crawling on the belly, eating dust, a crushing head and striking a heel. The following entries drawn from the Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Old Testament address some of the details in Genesis: Crawl on your belly (3:14). The Egyptian Pyramid Texts were designed to aid the pharaohs of the Old Kingdom (end of the third millennium) on their journey to the afterlife. Among the over 700 utterances are several dozen spells and curses on snakes that may impede the king's progress. These utterances contain phrases that are reminiscent of the curse on the serpent in Genesis 3. For instance, the biblical statement that the serpent will "crawl on your belly" is paralleled by frequent spells that call on the snake to lie down, fall down, get down, or crawl away (Pyramid Text 226, 233, 234, 298, 386).* Another says that he should "go with [his] face on the path" (PT 288). These suggest that when God tells the serpent that he will crawl on his belly, there is no suggestion that the serpent had legs that he now loses. Instead, he is going to be docile rather than in an attack position. The serpent on its belly is nonthreatening, while the one reared up is protecting or attacking. Notice that on the Pharaoh's crown, the serpent (uraeus) is pictured as upright and in an attack position. Nevertheless, I should also note that there are occasional depictions of serpent creatures with legs. There is no indication, however, of an occasion in which serpents lost their legs.

Eat dust (3:14). Eating dust is not a comment about the actual diet of a snake. It is more likely a reference to their habitat. Again the Pyramid Texts show some similarity as they attempt to banish the serpent to the dust. The serpent is a creature of the netherworld (that is why the pharaoh encounters it on his journey), and denizens of the netherworld were typically portrayed as eating dust. So in the Descent of Ishtar, the netherworld is described as a place where their food is dust and their bread is clay?

Crush your head (3:15). Treading on the serpent is used in Pyramid Texts 299 as an expression of overcoming or defeating it. Specific statements indicate that the "Sandal of Horus tramples the snake underfoot" (PT 378), and "Horus has shattered [the snake's] mouth with the sole of his foot" (PT 388). This reflects a potentially mortal blow to this deadly enemy. There is no suggestion that the Israelites are borrowing from the Pyramid Texts, only that these texts help us to determine how someone in the ancient Near East might understand such words and phrases.

Strike his heel (3:15). It is true that the ancients were aware that many snakes were not poisonous. But since harmless snakes usually were not seen as aggressive, if someone were bitten by a snake, it was assumed that the snake might be poisonous. Thus the strike to the heel is a potentially mortal blow.

As an example of several of these items, see the Pyramid Texts, utterance 378: O Snake in the sky! O Centipede on earth! The Sandal of Horus is what tramples the nî-snake underfoot... It is dangerous for me so I have trodden on you; be wise about me (?) and I will not tread on you, for you are the mysterious and invisible one of whom the gods speak; because you are the one who has no legs, because you are the one who has no arms, with which you could walk after your brethren the gods... beware of me and I will beware of you.?

In the above examples, we can see how information about the serpent in the Genesis account can be documented in various ways in the ancient Near East. A separate direction of inquiry could comb the ancient Near East for serpent symbolism, interpret it and then try to bring those elements into an understanding of the Bible without biblical precedent.

Unfortunately, such attempts are bound to produce unsatisfactory results because there are just too many different aspects to serpent symbolism. We would have no way to conclude confidently which ones the Israelites would prefer or which would be significant in any given context. Serpent symbolism has been connected to fertility, sexuality, protection, life, death and numerous other important attributes.^{1°}

While many of these motifs may well have been familiar to the mind of an Israelite, especially one who had been recently in Egypt, We want to explore the question of the nature of the serpent in Genesis

3. If the Israelites would not have thought of the serpent as Satan (and
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there is no evidence that they did—in fact, they have a far less developed idea of Satan than what we find in the New Testament"), then what would they have thought?

We can begin with the description that is given in Genesis 3. The main adjective used there identifies the serpent as 'ārûm, variously translated as "subtle," "wily," "cunning," "shrewd" "prudent" or "clever" It is an adjective that operates primarily in reference to wisdom and is inherently neutral (that is, it is a quality that can be used well—Prov 1:4; 8:5—or in questionable ways—Ex 21:14; Josh 9:4).¹² Ziony Zevit offers a helpful profile of someone who is 'ārim:

[They] conceal what they feel and what they know (Prov 12:16;

23). They esteem knowledge and plan how to use it in achieving their objectives (Prov 13:16; 14:8, 18); they do not believe everything that they hear (Prov 14:15); and they know how to avoid trouble and punishment (Prov 22:3; 27:12). In sum they are shrewd and calculating, willing to bend and torture the limits of acceptable behavior but not to cross the line into illegalities.

They may be unpleasant and purposely misleading in speech but are not out-and-out liars (Josh 9:4; 1 Sam 23:22). They know how to read people and situations and how to turn their readings to advantage. A keen wit and a rapier tongue are their tools. '3

Ultimately, such a descriptor does not aid us in determining the creature's nature. Other than that, we can only identify the serpent as one of "the wild animals the Lord God had made" (Gen 3:1). At the same time, we should notice that the serpent is not described as "evil." This devious creature does not become associated with evil until much later. '4

Recent study has focused attention on the serpent as a chaos creature. Chaos creatures in the ancient world were typically composite creatures that belonged to the sphere of the divine yet were not deified. 'S Their composite features gave them a combination of attributes. In the ancient world the chaos creatures are not thought of as
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evil. They are amoral but can be mischievous or destructive. They cause problems if left unchecked but can be domesticated and become associates of gods. Demons also function much like chaos creatures, as do liminal creatures (e.g., coyote, screech owl).¹⁶

It is true that the Hebrew word for the serpent, *nāhāš*, is one of the normal ways to designate a common snake. Furthermore, the snake in Genesis 3 is identified as among the creatures of the field that God created, and nothing in the text suggests it is a composite creature.

Nevertheless, all creatures in the Hebrew Bible, including chaos creatures, are created by God (Gen 1:21; Job 40:15-19; Ps 104:26). That *nāhāš* can also designate a chaos creature is evident from its usage in Isaiah 27:1, where it describes Leviathan.¹⁹ Such an understanding is confirmed finally in the apocalypse of John in which the serpent, now Satan, is described as a great dragon (Rev 12:9)—the chaos creature par excellence. We could therefore conclude that the serpent in Genesis 3 is a chaos creature on the basis of its role in the story and other supporting contexts.¹⁹

Richard Averbeck is then correct to observe that this is not just a snake story. "The Israelites would have seen a great deal more in Genesis 3 than a simple tale about snakes and mankind.... From their point of view, this would have been the very beginning of a cosmic battle that they were feeling the effects of in their own personal experience and their national history."²⁰ Though I am not ready to go as far as he does to conclude that this also represents the fall of Satan, I believe that entering the text from the ancient Israelite viewpoint should lead us to think of the serpent in terms of a chaos creature.

What is the result of such an approach?

- An Israelite reader would not identify the serpent as Satan. The consequences are far more significant in the account than the agent. The serpent is the catalyst more than the cause.
- An Israelite reader would recognize the deleterious effects of the (134) temptation but would not necessarily consider the serpent to be morally evil or bent on the destruction of humankind. An Israelite would not give any unique status to this serpent—he is just one of any number of chaos creatures rather than a spiritual, cosmic power of some sort.
- The Israelite reader would have thought of the serpent as a sort of disruptive free agent with less of a thought-out agenda. The Old Testament does not give the serpent an ongoing role. Like the serpent in the Gilgamesh Epic who did what its nature led it to do and then disappeared from the scene, no continuing role or place is recognized for the serpent in the Old Testament, though the consequences of the human act remain in place (again as in Gilgamesh).
- The serpent's insertion of doubt and his nuanced denial of the woman's understanding of the consequences stated by God would not be interpreted any differently than in our traditional understanding. Deception, misdirection and troublemaking are all within the purview of chaos creatures. It is important to note the syntactical subtlety that is evident in the serpent's words. He does not say "you will not die." Instead the placement of the negation results in something more like "don't think that death is such an immediate threat."²¹ God told the truth: when they ate from the tree, they were doomed to die. The words God used did not suggest immediate death (the syntactical expression that he uses, "on the day that," is simply the Hebrew idiom for "when"), but the penalty was carried out by removing their access to the tree of life. They were therefore immediately doomed to die (the force of the verbal construction).

The woman was not as careful in her wording, and the serpent therefore told the truth when he picked up on the discrepancy and contradicted her (not God) by saying that death was not an immediate threat. In this way the serpent's deception came in exploiting a misrepresentation by the woman and telling her of a benefit to

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eating the fruit without likewise including the deleterious effects.

Notice that the serpent does not suggest outright that Eve eat the fruit or that she should disobey.?

- At the same time there is no room for the suggestion that it was the serpent who told the truth (you will not die, you shall be like gods) and God who was wrong (in the day that you eat from it you will surely die).²² God's statement did not indicate immediate death ("in the day" is the Hebrew way of saying "when"). The construction often translated "surely die" expresses only that they will at that time be doomed to die, which is exactly what happened when the way to the tree of life was barred.

- The Israelite reader would understand that the result of the serpent's role was that evil took root among humanity. This is clear from Genesis 3:15, where an ongoing battle is portrayed between humans (generation to generation) on one side, and the "seed" or "offspring" of the serpent, which does not refer to future generations of serpents but to the evil that had resulted, on the other side. The fact that the two verbs in the verse that describe the antagonistic actions are from the same root (despite the fact that many translations render them differently) shows that the verse does not indicate who the victor will be. Instead it indicates that there will be the ongoing exchange of potentially mortal blows.
- We might well ask what a chaos creature was doing in the garden (the center of order in the cosmos). Surprisingly, when we examine the text closely, we discover that the text never suggests that the serpent was in the garden (let alone in the tree). If we inquire how then Adam and Eve would have encountered the creature, we must note that Adam and Eve's tasks in the garden do not necessitate their constant presence. Priests serving in sacred space do not live in sacred space. While the placing of Adam in the garden may suggest a more permanent residence, we would have to ask whether

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that meant he would never leave. Much is unspecified in the text.

- As a chaos creature, the serpent would be more closely associated with non-order than with disorder. Non-order has a certain neutrality to it, whereas disorder is evil in nature and intent. We might describe an earthquake or a cancer as forces of non-order with evil consequences. But they are not inherently evil. We do not control them, and therefore they can have disastrous effects. If the serpent truly is in the category of chaos creature, neither his contradiction of God's statement nor his deception about the consequences are part of an evil agenda. They are simply the disruptive, ad hoc behavior that chaos creatures engage in. More complete understanding is offered in intertestamental literature and New Testament theology, but if we limit our analysis to the ancient context of the Old Testament, things look very different.

ExCURSUS: MYTH/MYTHOLOGY

I remain uncomfortable applying the genre label "myth/mythology" to these biblical narratives. The designation has too many definitions, and therefore the words lose their ability to communicate clearly. Furthermore, we have so thoroughly adapted these terms to Western culture that their application to ancient culture becomes inevitably anachronistic. But the issue goes beyond the labeling of a genre of literature; it concerns the process by which literature of any genre is conceived and composed. The ancients think differently; they perceive the world in different ways, with different categories and priorities than we do.

In our culture, we think "scientifically." We are primarily concerned with causation, composition and systematization. In the ancient world they are more likely to think of the world in terms of symbols and to express their understanding by means of imagery. We are primarily interested in events and material realia whereas they are more interested in ideas and their representation.

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Some might suggest that the Israelites who crafted the early chapters of Genesis are historicizing myth (as can potentially be seen in Is 27:1), that is, presenting real events using imagery as a rhetorical means to capture the full range of truth as it is commonly conveyed in the world in which they live. Since the concept of myth (mythic/mythical/mytho-logical), however, is so volatile and diversely understood, we need to use it in connection with other qualifying terms. The word group image/imagery/imagination/imaginative would work well (though imaginary would be incorrect). A rhetoric using mythical imagery is easily discernible in biblical poetry (e.g., "from the heavens the stars fought" or "crushed the heads of Leviathan" [Ps 74:14]), and it becomes formalized in the genre of apocalyptic. Nevertheless, it is not absent from prose. To describe this sort of thinking, I would like to adapt the term *imagistic*. It offers a distinction that is easy to understand in today's culture as we find that students are increasingly visual learners—a fact that compels us to be more *imagistic* in our teaching and communication.

Rather than attempting to define it, in accordance with true *imagistic* thinking, I will instead describe it by illustrations. *Imagistic* thinking and representation would stand in contrast to scientific or analytical thinking. We can see the difference if we compare two visual representations of the night sky—one taken by the Hubble telescope, the other presented by Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night*. People would never consider doing astronomy from the van Gogh and could not do so even if they wanted to; the image contains nothing of the composition or position of stars. At the same time, we would not say that it is a false depiction of the night sky. Visual artists depict the world *imagistically*,

and we recognize that this depiction is independent of science but not independent of truth. The ancients apply this same imagistic conception to all genres of literature, including those that we cannot conceive of as anything other than scientific. Imagistic history, like that preserved in Genesis, is to history as *The Starry Night* is to a Hubble photograph.

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As another example, we would not try to reconstruct historically the bombardment of Fort McHenry in the war of 1812 by a detailed analysis of "The Star-Spangled Banner" Note how our national anthem is set in a historical context but uses the rhetoric of imagery and the power of symbol (the flag) in an artistic way to convey an enduring truth and value that reaches far beyond the War of 1812.

A modern-day example of terminology that offers an alternative to scientific/historical thinking would be what Lutherans today refer to as "sacramental" thinking, a highly controversial term that includes the mystical aspects of the sacraments but goes beyond it into the wider realm of religious thought. In such a context, they find it quite a natural way of thinking. In those traditions people realize that such thinking is not subject to scientific verification, and historicity is simply not a category that would have any meaning. People who are used to sacramental thinking (however defined) find it very hard to describe it (or defend it) to those who are not so inclined. The fact that this seems like a new and unfamiliar way of thinking to some readers who are not Lutheran (or connected with other traditions at home with sacramental thinking) demonstrates the point I am making.

Imagistic thinking presents similar difficulties. Israelites found no problems thinking about Ezekiel's vision of Egypt as a cosmic tree (Ezek

31). This does not warrant labeling the literature mythology, nor does it concern questions of reality or truth. Some might consider the trees, the garden and the snake to be examples of imagistic thinking without thereby denying reality and truth to the account. The author understands trees in a way that does not simply indicate a botanical species of flora with remarkable chemical properties. When we put these elements in their ancient Near Eastern context and recognize the Israelite capacity, and even propensity, to think in imagistic terms," we may find that we gain a deeper understanding of important theological realities.

Some scholars today believe that Israel was in the habit of borrowing other people's myths and transforming them into a mythology of their

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own. I do not share that perspective. What is sometimes perceived as a shared mythology is more often a shared propensity to think imagis-tically about the same issues using a shared symbolic vocabulary.

Nicolas Wyatt distinguishes between those who use the oral discourse of story to represent reality and those who analyze the observed world and formulate hypothetical paradigms to explain that which is ob-served. Imagistic thinking is not only to be contrasted with causation analysis. It also stands in contrast to metaphysics, which, though not a science, is a product of scientific thinking in that it is also interested in intermediate causation and systematization. These are varying ways to communicate ideas about identity and coherence.

This discussion quickly becomes very esoteric and is both out of my area of expertise and out of the range of this book. I have raised this issue not to solve the questions it entails but to elevate our consciousness of yet another way in which we think quite differently from how people in the ancient world thought. This generates the repeated warning that we have to take care not to impose our categories of thinking on the literature that was more at home in the ancient world than in ours.

Seeing the Person of God in the Ten Commandments

PRECEPT	PRINCIPLE	PERSON
No other gods	God deserves our ultimate allegiance	God is worthy and supreme
No idols	God cannot be reduced to something we create/control	God is incomparable
Don't misuse God's name	God's name deserves honor	God is holy
Remember the Sabbath	Humans need rest, worship, and trust	God provides; God is not a slave-driver
Honor parents	Families and generations matter	God values faithfulness and ordered relationships
Don't murder	Human life has sacred value	God is the giver and protector of life
Don't commit adultery	Covenants and sexual faithfulness matter	God is faithful
Don't steal	Respect what belongs to others	God is just
Don't bear false witness	Truth protects relationships and justice	God is truthful
Don't covet	Life isn't found in possessing what others have	God is sufficient and trustworthy