Genesis - Commentaries by Walter Biggar Scott

Two Trees of Paradise: God's Grace And Man's Responsibility, Governmental Period: or, History of and Character of Its Responsibility., The

Article from https://bibletruthpublishers.com/bible-truth-study-bible/btsb

We will now take a rapid survey of the period lying between the flood and the call of Abram, By what characteristic title will we speak of it Suppose we term it the Governmental Age or Period. Now we enter upon the dispensational dealings of God, which date as an epoch from the establishment of the world, under the governmental authority of Noah—the first man ever invested with magisterial power.

"The world that was being overflowed with water perished;" plain statement this as to the universality of the flood (see also Gen. 7:19). The preserved remnant of eight souls of which Noah was head and representative, was the new stock to re-people the earth. None of the old responsibilities under which man was placed were, or could be, abrogated; but besides, additional and weighty responsibility was added, because of the new relationships in which men were set. The nature of the relationship determines the character of the responsibility, but the latter exists so long as the former continues. And here it may be well to inquire: Where was the evil lodged which, after the lapse of sixteen centuries and a half, and after the desolating waters of the flood upon the old creation still existed? Was it in the circumstances in which men were placed, or in the mere externals and surroundings of life? Nay, the besom of destruction had swept creation clean and clear of all, save the sheltered few in the ark. The tree itself was bad- irrecoverably so. The roots of evil are tangled and twisted round the very fibers of man's moral being. The source of man's badness and irremediable condition is in his depraved will, in his un-subject mind, which neither can nor will submit to God (Rom. 8:7, 8).

It is said: "Men cannot believe the Gospel—they lack the power." The proposition would be more fully and truthfully stated thus: "Men are responsible to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, but they will not;" you say, "He is bound in fetters of sin, and so he cannot come to the Savior." Why then does your powerless captive not invoke the aid of Him who came to "proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound?" Shall we tell you I It is because he hugs his chains and does not choose nor will to be delivered. The supper of grace—last meal before the midnight of judgment—was refused by all the invited guests. Why I Not because they could not come, but because they would not (Luke 14.) The waters of life are free to whosoever will.

Most touchingly did the Lord say to the Jews of old, "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life." Instead, therefore, of caviling at the sovereign elective purposes of God in the calling of some who, like the mass that perish, had neither claim upon grace nor the will to be saved, let us each see to it, that life and salvation, full and eternal, are ours in immediate and conscious possession.

Previous to Noah, individual relationship and responsibility as in Abel, Enoch, and others, was the principle which God recognized, and on which He acted; but in Noah household relationship, with its corresponding responsibility attached to the paternal head, was first disclosed: "Come thou and all thy house into the ark, for thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation" (Gen. 7:1). The importance of this principle in the introduction of the household into an external place of blessing and privilege, on the individual faith and responsibility of its head, cannot be too highly estimated and valued. It was a principle established by God for the blessing and good government of families, and one which obtained when mankind at large was the subject of divine dealing, as also under Judaism, and especially so under Christianity (Acts 16, &c). The Bible is full of it. Wherever this household relationship to God is practically owned blessing is the sure result. Where are the mass of professing Christians as to this truth? It has been deliberately abandoned save by a few. The sanctification of our children from earliest years, as Jeremiah, John the Baptist, and might we add Samuel and Timothy, should be the desired blessing—alas! it is now a rare one. Would that the responsibility of the Christian head and parent were more truly felt and lived out before the Lord (Prow. 22:6; Eph. 6:4). The house of God is the sphere, introduction into which is by baptism (Acts 2.), where training of the child and its Christian character are developed.

But there is a third character of responsibility flowing from an entirely new principle in which God set mankind. Civil government, or magisterial authority, was instituted to curb the natural violence of man, and to maintain the authority of God on earth, and which yet (Gen. 9:1-6.) remains in full force. It is not a Jewish truth, but one of universal application. The Christian, however, is not called to the exercise of magisterial or other governmental authority, but is taught cheerful subjection to, and prayer for the governing powers, however tyrannical, or whatever their character may be (Rom. 13:1-7; Titus 3:1; 1 Tim. 2:1, 2). We enjoy a rich boon in the quiet and peaceable life, under the sway of the beloved Queen—the sovereign of these realms—and surely the Christian, who above all should own the Lord's authority in His Word and government of the earth, ought not to sanction the trampling down of the safeguards and bulwarks of society. Capital punishment as part of God's civil government for man on earth has not been repealed by Him who alone has the right to do so. The judicial oath, which even the blessed Lord respected (Matt. 26:63, 64), and other institutions of divine ordering, are being rapidly disowned as obsolete institutions. The barriers are breaking down and soon the storm of anarchy and infidelity will burst upon us; the tide is gathering and will quickly roll in upon an apostate Christendom. What do men or Governments care for the authority of God? Christians above all others should respect the laws of the country under which they live—obedience to these powers and laws is subjection to God and His Word (Rom. 1 Pet. 2:13, 14). Sorrow-fully we have witnessed the marriage laws of this country trampled upon by Christians, and other human appointments practically set at naught. Is this to honor the Word of God? There is abundant evidence that the word to Titus is as needful now as then: "Put them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work" (Titus 3)

This was a period too, in which Satan displayed unusual activity. In order to frustrate the plan of God which was to distribute the race throughout the earth by families, Satan brought in the principle of concentration, and effected on the plains of Dura the first general confederacy amongst men. A human center of unity in the "tower" and of concentration on a universal scale in the "city," commenced in Babylonia; but God frowned on the impious attempt, and confounded the one language then spoken, and separated into distinct nationalities the one family of man. The Christian alone can account for the present and irregular distribution of mankind into nations and peoples, the result of the judgment of God upon the Babel attempt.

What a flood of light is thrown upon these questions in the first nine verses of the eleventh chapter of the book of Genesis. It may here be observed that chapter 10 shows the general result of the dispersion of the race; it affords a satisfactory answer to the notion which has gained credence with many to their exceeding loss, that we Gentiles are descendants of the scattered and lost ten tribes. Our progenitor is Japheth, eldest son of Noah, whose descendants were the Scythian races, the Greeks, Romans, Britons, and generally those who were to inhabit the Isles (verses 1-5); Ham, the youngest, was prophetically appointed as the father of the various African races and nations, also the Canaanites, Philistines, and generally the more subject races (verses 6-20). Shan, the second of the three brothers, has the Persians, certain Arabic nations, and all Israel-Judah as well as Ephraim, and the Messiah according to the flesh, as his descendants (verses 21-31). The chapter also is invaluable to the historian and student of the prophetic Word. The interesting fact that all the nations whose names are here recorded, although difficult to identify in some instances, are yet to re-appear representatively or in their descendants, in the future Jewish crisis, has been much forgotten; a little attention given to the subject would have saved historians from the rash assertion that many nations are totally extinct, and have forever passed off the scene of responsibility. There are national or collective responsibilities, as well as individual ones, and both will be inquired of by Christ in a day not far distant.

Satan suffered a total defeat in his effort to unite the race against God. The distribution of mankind into nations and tongues, having distinct and independent interests is an effectual check upon any general gathering of men as such, until allowed in the last development of evil at the close of the future era of glory (Rev. 20:7-9); then the promise to the woman's seed, the Second Man in the bruising of Satan's head will be fully accomplished (Gen. 3:15). It will be remembered that God linked Himself to the fallen creation, establishing a covenant of goodness with it—the rainbow in the cloud being the token (Genesis 9:9-17). Now Satan determined, if possible, to break up the relations of the Creator with "all flesh," to snap the link and separate man governmentally from God; hence after the flood-judgment, and after the dispersion of the race at Babel, Satan introduced into the world the most fearful and degrading of all evils—Idolatry. He first lowered the character of and conception of God in the mind of man to what was merely human, then lower still "to birds," and yet again, "to four-footed beasts;" is there a step yet lower in the scale of moral degradation? Yes, the heathen and philosophers of the ancient world "changed the glory of the un-corruptible God into an image made like to... creeping things" (Rona. 1:23). Ah! the point is reached at length. The thought of God is shut out completely from the conscience and mind of man, and Satan himself is deified and worshipped as the serpent, the most abject of "creeping things." Serpent worship was at one time universal over the whole earth. Its traces are everywhere found; in the British Isles, France, China, Africa, Russia, India, all over Asia. Frequently the serpent was associated with the sun in joint worship.

Sometimes serpent-idolatry gave place to sun-worship. Rapidly idolatry spread, so that even the highly favored Shemitic race was surely sinking into the awful abyss (Jos. 24:2). Satan gained his point. Demon-worship became universal, and the external governmental link with God on man's side was lost. All again is universal ruin and wreck. Adam deliberately chose Satan instead of God in the garden, and now the world has banished God from its thoughts and conscience, and worships as divine the declared enemy of God and man. This period, which, like the foregoing, commenced with sacrifice, closed up in an idolatrous and rejected world, hence Abram is called out to head a public witness against it—an event fraught with the gravest consequences to both Jew and Gentile—to the world at large.

Did men learn during this first of the dispensational periods to unite the two principles of life and responsibility? Was life and acceptance with God reached as a result? O what a terrible answer to the general responsibility of man, is furnished by God in the close of the age of conscience, by the judgment-flood, and in the governmental period, which at its end was divinely rejected, and only spared from immediate judgment on the ground of Noah's sacrifice. The old world left to itself perished, and the new world dealt with by God went right off into idolatry. The tree of responsibility spread its roots more firmly, covering with its ample shade individuals, families, nations, and the world at large, who all partook of its fruit; all produced was moral death.

Two Trees of Paradise: God's Grace And Man's Responsibility, Loss by the First Man.

Man's paradise forfeited, Gen. 3:23, 24.

Sin entered and innocence sinned away, Gen. 3.

Conscience in the knowledge of good and evil.

Death and separation from God.

Law could not procure righteousness from man.

Man in Adam and by works alienated from God.

Two Trees of Paradise: God's Grace And Man's Responsibility, Garden of Eden., The

The garden of Eden, which for situation was unequaled, it being the source of the four rivers whose waters fertilized the whole earth—and for beauty unexcelled by all then or since, because displaying the special husbandry of the Lord Himself (2:8), was the chosen scene in which the strength of the creature would be tried. There the innocent man was set as center of the vast terrestrial system which was placed governmentally under him as lord, and as knowing neither good nor evil, for that was information gained on the strength of Satan's word and acquired through conscience at the fall. Alas! man now while distinguishing between good and evil, yet lacks the power to do the good and can only do the evil.

In the magnificent scene of life, beauty, and fruitfulness the innocent and happy pair were established in responsibility. As yet no serpent's trail had defiled the walks of paradise, no withered leaf, no blight, no curse, no tear was there. "God is good" was warbled forth in joyous notes from every bird of song; and flower and fruit around, with cloudless sky above echoed, "God is good." The man, moreover, was made morally competent to hold intercourse with and enjoy communion with God—surely a blessing beyond all else, and one peculiar to him.

(The testimony of Paradise was—God is good. The witness borne by the Cross was—God is love. The utterance of the great White Throne is—God is righteous.)

Two Trees of Paradise: God's Grace And Man's Responsibility, Age of Promise; or, the History and Character of Its Responsibility., The

How will we designate the succeeding period which dates from the Call of Abram, and on to the promulgation of the law I Will we style it the age of promise to man (Gal. 3:16), and of public testimony for God? (Rom. 11.)

Previous to the deluge, the unity of the race had not to be proved; it was a palpable fact; there were neither tongues nor nations. Satan kept in the background, but filled the earth with corruption, and led on the ruined world to assert a proud, independent will of its own. God, as the moral governor, and in righteousness, wrapped up the whole scene in one huge winding sheet—a remnant alone preserved. Then on the ground of Noah's sacrifice, which surely pointed to Calvary's victim, founding in death a new and righteous ground of relationship with God, the blessings of the new world were secured, while man's sin was as fully recognized (Gen. 8:21). This was followed by the institution of civil government for the repression of evil, and God establishing a covenant with the earth—which was to be a perpetual one; then He spans the heavens with the rainbow—the sign that the earth will continue under blessing till destroyed by fire. Then in the providence of God the world is parceled out into nations, and the whole world system of today established. What next follows? Satan having reduced man to the lowest of all misery and wretchedness, now comes boldly before the world and sets himself up as its God.

O what a picture of hopeless ruin! Man has drifted away from God to the public acknowledgment of Satan and demons-the prince and leaders of the opposition to divine authority, and who, while on their way to their appointed doom (Matt. 25:41), ceaselessly labor to thwart the counsels of love, and to drag the race clown to their eternal ruin. Alas! these hearts of ours are capable of any piece of folly or wickedness. Satan, the liar and murderer, has been deliberately chosen by the world instead of the God of truth and life. Barabbas, the murderer, was the accepted man of the people, while the Lord of glory was the nation's rejected.

Now we are brought to a standstill. Idolatry is universal; the world has sold itself to Satan, Certainly if the world-system which God had in providence established will not have Him, He cannot have it. On the other hand, to go on with evil would be to deny Himself as light (1 John 1:5). Will He therefore execute summary judgment and so vindicate the majesty of His name and character? Triumphantly we reply, that He will not, so long as the heavens are arched by the rainbow. Could the Israelite confiding in the Word of Jehovah, be stricken on the terrible night of Egypt's doom with such a Word searching the depths of his soul: "When I (Jehovah) see the blood I will pass over you" (Exod. 12:13)? No more can the fallen and degraded creation be buried in one common destruction, while God looks upon the "bow" and remembers "the everlasting covenant" with all flesh (Gen. 8:16). But God did judge the idolatrous world. Ah! what a God is ours! How rich are His resources I How endlessly diversified are His ways of grace! He morally judged the whole scene of iniquity by the introduction of a new and hitherto unknown principle in His dealings with men. By glory and the authority of His Word He called one of the demon worshippers out to Himself, out from the entire system which He had just set up in His providence. God did not destroy the ordered system, nor break it up, but called Abram to leave it altogether; not to improve it, but to disown it. How peremptory How precise in terms was the call! "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee" (Gen. 12:1).

Abram then, was called out from the surrounding darkness, and constituted the depository of promise. The thoughts of God are communicated to the man of faith. Heaven displaces Canaan; and grace is announced rich, full, free, sovereign in character, and eternal in results, instead of governmental goodness to man. Both grace and government, however, are running on, but in their application, the world enjoys the governmental blessing of God under the Noachic covenant, which is for time only; while the unconditional blessing under Abraham is enjoyed by the household of faith—a blessing eternal. The principles of grace and of civil government do not unite and center in the Christian or in the Church. Government was committed to the Gentiles, while grace is as truly characteristic of the Church.

But Abram was not only called to blessing, but to be a blessing (Gen. 12:2), and for this end he was constituted the head or stock of a new race, and the root of the olive tree of testimony on the earth (Rom. 11). Thus we have three headships revealed: Adam, of the race fallen; Abram, the father of all who believe; Christ as risen, of the new creation race. We have also a double headship in Christ; namely, creation and the body (Col. 1:15, 18); as also a double aspect of the fatherhood of Abram—the Jewish nation; hence he is the fret in Scripture termed a Hebrew (Gen. 14:13), and also head of the family of faith; thus he is the first one of whom faith is spoken of (Genesis 15:6).

It is affirmed that promises were made to Adam when fallen; the women's seed, the bruiser and conqueror of the serpent, being alleged as the first of all the promises. But is this theology or Scripture? Let us see. The Lord God set up the bema or judgment seat in the scene of ruin, the garden, and after tracing the evil to its source-the serpent, gave judgment accordingly (Gen. 3:14-19). The serpent was cursed and doomed to perpetual degradation (verse 14); millennial glory will bring it no relief (Isa. 65:25); and then comes a promise to the Second Man, or woman's seed of final triumph over the enemy and his power (verse 15). But to whom were the words addressed, to the man or to the serpent? To the latter, undoubtedly. That the listening Adam had faith in the glorious revelations thus given, however dimly announced, is evident from the fact that while death had now enveloped the creation in its folds, Adam gazed beyond, even into that deathless region where God and the Lamb are the light thereof; he named his wife "Eve"—mother of all living. Then the woman comes up for judgment (verse 16), and the governmental consequences to her as witnessed in daily life are too apparent to require comment; under Christianity the sorrows of childbirth are conditionally ("if they continue") alleviated (1 Tim. 2:14, 15); the place of subjection is also assigned to the woman; this under grace is firmly maintained (1 Cor. 11: 3-10). Lastly, the ground is cursed for man's sake, and he sent to labor in it by the sweat of his brow, and thus procure a subsistence (verses 17-19); under Noah the ground was made more productive, and could be wrought with less toil, while under grace the resources of creation are unrestrictedly placed at man's disposal (1 Tim. 4:4, 5). There is nothing in all this of eternal consequences in weal or woe to the human race. Governmental judgment and for time, is the point of chapter 3 of Genesis. The eternal issues of good and evil were afterward unfolded in the Scriptures.

The first person to whom promises were made, and in whom they were deposited, was Abram (Gal. 3:16). “There is no promise to Abram and his seed as to our blessing, but there was to be a seed like the stars for multitude, but that is not ' one.' What you get in Genesis chapter 22. is, Because thou hast done this thing,' when Isaac was offered up, and has not withheld thy son, thine only son, in blessing, I will bless thee, and in multiplying, I will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the seashore, and thy seed shall possess the

gate of his enemies, and in thy seed (this now is the one seed-Christ) shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice.' The promise was given to Abram and confirmed to Christ, the seed: it was never given to Abram and the seed, but confirmed to the seed. The offering up of Isaac was the occasion, for then the promise was given in resurrection, and it is confirmed to the seed when we come to the Lord. In Galatians 3. Change the order of the words, ' Now to Abraham were the promises made, and to his seed,' which is Christ."—Bible Treasury, vol. 9, page 259.

One other point. The promises become more full and rich until they culminate in chapter 22. figuratively Christ in resurrection—the source of all blessing, and heir of all things—this as typified in Isaac; made to Abram (chapter 12.), confirmed to Christ (chapter 22.) And what yields such sustainment to the heart, and lifts one far above the evil around, is the fact that the blessing is absolutely unconditional. God is the promiser; Christ the seal and confirmation of all, and we believers the subjects of blessing.

About 430 years after the promises were given, and long before their accomplishment, the law came in by the bye—a provisional covenant entirely. The blessings under the Abrahamic covenant depend upon the faithfulness of God; those of the Mosaic covenant rest upon the fidelity of the people. The former will be made good, because God is the promiser; the latter never were, because man's obedience was in question. The former was the fruit of sovereign and Divine goodness; the latter, for the moral testing and trial of the people.

Now, in Abram the Lord sets the tree of life before the faithful, and that publicly before all. God's grace is displayed. Previously, the tree of life had been hidden away in the paradise of God, and the Abels, and Enochs, and Noahs had been secretly called to eat of its life-giving and life-sustaining fruit. The one family of mankind gathered around the tree of responsibility, ate of corruption and violence, and perished in the flood; then afterward the nations flocked around the same tree, and idolatry of the most degrading kind, accompanied with civilization of the highest character, was the result. The world sold itself to Satan; that was their responsibility,. But now having demonstrated to mankind, that life could not be gained as a human result—that death and misery were the fruit of all man's labor; God publicly calls believers-whether Jews or Gentiles—to repose under the ample shade of life's tree, and eat of its living fruit. We have had earth's nations dying around the tree of responsibility; but, O what a prospect I there through the vista of ages, I see the living gathered around the tree of life (Gen. 12:3). Wait yet a little moment, dear child of God and heir of eternal glory, and thou wilt personally enjoy a scene where all is life and there is no responsibility-tree (Rev. 21.)

clickbible.org