

DEEP END - HIGHLIGHTS (text not audio)

Genesis 3:15 - Head Crushing?

Most of us are aware that biblical scholars often refer to the promise of God to Eve in Genesis 3:15 as the “proto euangelion” (“proto” being “first” and “euangelion” being “gospel”) as we seem to have here the first a promise of the cross, following right on the heels of the rebellion of Adam and Eve in the garden. For more....

The passage reads: “And I will put enmity between you(Satan) and the woman (Eve), and between your offspring (the deceiver will have offspring—those who follow he who was “a liar from the beginning”) and her “offspring”(literally “seed”, speaking of the Messiah); he (the Christ) will crush your head, and you will strike his heel.”

As we move on through scripture the promises of redemption get multiplied, but they are not usually couched in the language of “head crushing”. However, it is illuminating to track through some of the biblical events and personalities that clearly foreshadow the fulfillment of the original promise in Genesis 3:15. And it is interesting that they all surround the activity of kings.

The first would be the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. There is nothing about this being a foreshadowing of the crushing of the serpent’s head in text of Exodus itself, but it is describe this way, in both Psalm 74 and in Isaiah 27. (And in addition, Yahweh himself declares that he is king over Israel at the Exodus.)

In Psalm 74, speaking of the Exodus and the Red Sea, we read in verses 13-14 “It was you who split open the sea by your power; you broke [crushed] the heads of the monster in the waters.” (“The waters”, the restless power of the waves and oceanic forces, became a biblical metaphor for the godless powers and nations.) “It was you who crushed the heads of Leviathan”. (Leviathan refers to several things in scripture, but several of them are certainly symbolically speaking of Satan.)

Then in Isaiah 27:1 we read “In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, With His fierce and great and mighty sword, Even Leviathan the twisted serpent; And He will kill the dragon who lives in the sea.” (Leviathan is described as a serpent twice here.)

That such language is used of the Exodus should not surprise us, as it was an “earthshaking” event (Ps 74), an event that would birth a “new creation people” who would be a light to the nations and provide the “womb” of Israel through which the Messiah would eventually be born—the one who would fully and finally crush the serpents head.

The second incident concerns Abimelek in Judges 9 (again, note, a king is in view). However, although technically Abimelek was the first “king” over Israel, he was not appointed by God and was virtually an anti-king. He was one of the sons of Gideon and killed 70 of his brothers to make sure his throne was secure (only his brother Jotham escaped). However, in seeking to consolidate his power he attacked and captured the city of Thebez and the citizens locked themselves inside a strong tower in the city as a final defense.

The tragic story concludes when Abimelek went to set the tower on fire and a woman dropped an upper millstone on his head and crushed it. It is a curious incident, and while I would not want to push it too far, it does concern a “king” (one who is, tragically, “the seed of the serpent”, one who follows the lie) and he does get his head crushed.

The third incident concerns Israel's first true king, Saul, who started well but sadly ended up acting more like the seed of Satan than the anointed of the Lord. The relevant incident takes place in 1 Samuel 11 when Nahash, the king of the Ammonites, went up and besieged the city of Jabesh Gilead in Israel. Saul, still in his early days, and maintaining a degree of integrity and courage, (we actually read that in this incident "the Spirit of the Lord came upon him") went to their rescue and "crushed" Nahash and his army (although the word "slaughtered" is used in the NIV). And again, it is perhaps not without significance that the name Nahash means "serpent". So again, we seem to have some sort of foreshadowing of the early promise in Genesis 3:15 in the actions of king Saul.

The fourth incident concerns David when he went out to fight Goliath. In 1 Sam 17:5 Goliath is described as wearing "scale armor" (if I remember correctly, the only place armor is described outside Ephesians 6) hinting that Goliath is a giant serpent, a huge scaly python who is out to crush Israel, and who goes out daily to mock the people of God and all they stand for. And as we know, David's choice of weapon is a sling and with it he crushes Goliath's head.

(In passing we should note that Saul is from Benjamin, who's men could use the sling with the right or left hand. So we might have a hint here that David is the true "Saul", the true king, the true "son of the right hand"—the meaning of the word Benjamin.)

We should also note that after killing Goliath he cuts off his head and takes it to Jebus (Jerusalem). This could be to demonstrate that the Jebusites will one day suffer the same fate if they continue to oppose the people of God, but we should also be aware that there is some prophetic symbolism here as the "son of David", the one who will finally crush the serpents head, will be crucified outside this city, at Golgotha (which interestingly, as we know, means "the placed of the scull").

I am not suggesting that David is conscious that his acts foreshadow the fulfillment of Genesis 3:15. In fact, it is probable that he is unaware of all this. But he is "the son of David, being led and motivated by the Spirit of God, and his actions remind us again of the promise that will be fully and finally fulfilled in the generations to come.

Finally, as we know, the climax of all this is the crucifixion of the Jesus the Messiah, the last Adam, when the promise given so many years previously to Eve (and Adam) was fulfilled and the head of the serpent was crushed by the victory of the cross and resurrection. As we know, this does not mean that Satan is no longer active, but his power has now been decisively broken (his head has been crushed), and even though he still awaits his final destruction, the crucial work has been achieved by the hard dying of Jesus, the true "seed" and king, on the cross. As has often been said, "D" day has taken place and now a mopping up operation is in progress, and "VE" day is just over the horizon.

Which lead us to two final points: In Romans 16:20 Paul, speaking to the church, says that "The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet". The decisive work has taken place but we (as "kings and priests"- remember this was the work of Kings in the OT) still have a role in achieving the final victory as we pray and proclaim the victory of the gospel to every kindred, tribe, tongue, and nation. And as we know, when the gospel of the kingdom is preached to every nation then the end will come.

And "the end" is graphically described in Revelation 12:9 when "the great dragon was thrown down, the serpent of old who is called the devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him." And, as we know, the one whose head is already crushed, will be consumed in the lake of fire, and "the kingdoms of this world [will] become the kingdoms of our God and of his Christ."

Much more could be said, but this is yet another example both of the astonishing tapestry of scripture from Genesis to Revelation and of the hope it engenders in us that what we see all around us is not

“normal”. All that opposes human flourishing will be crushed at the end of the age. And for those of us who live in the conflict zone that might be the harbinger of worse to come in the 21 century, can lift up our heads and walk with confidence and joy and “shine like stars” in the midst of a “warped and crooked generation” (Phil 2:15).

End note:

Much of this article was provoked by some thoughts gleaned from Peter Leithhart’s book: A House for My Name. I have, of course, added my own study and reflection but wanted to acknowledge that Peter Leithhart was the one that primed the pump.