

Short Studies in
BIBLICAL THEOLOGY



THE SERPENT

AND THE SERPENT SLAYER

ANDREW DAVID NASELLI

“The Bible’s narrative is essentially an unfolding of the conflict promise embedded in Genesis 3:15. Everything between the covers of Scripture is contextualized by the ways the serpent seeks to destroy the seed of the woman. But the end of the story is promised from the beginning: although the serpent grows large into a fierce dragon, its head is finally crushed by a Lion who, even before creation, was destined to become a slain Lamb. This conflict is not Scripture’s only unifying theme, but it is a fundamental one, and Andy Naselli highlights it wonderfully. He provides us with a key that will open the door to a new appreciation of the sheer thrilling nature of what God has done for us in Christ. Prepare, then, to be thrilled by *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer!*”

Sinclair B. Ferguson, Chancellor’s Professor of Systematic Theology,
Reformed Theological Seminary; Teaching Fellow, Ligonier Ministries

“Noted biblical scholar Andy Naselli draws readers into the biblical story through a fresh vantage point—snakes! In this enjoyable book there is considerable insight into Satan, the fall, Christ’s victory, and our future.”

Christopher W. Morgan, Dean and Professor of Theology, California
Baptist University; author, *Christian Theology*; editor, Theology in
Community series; coeditor, *ESV Systematic Theology Study Bible*

“Knowing our enemy is important. Read this if you want to understand the schemes of the serpent seen throughout Scripture. But even more importantly, we must know the serpent slayer. Read this if you want to see how Jesus defeats the dragon and rescues his bride. What a Savior!”

Abigail Dodds, author, *(A)Typical Woman*

“Snakes deceive; dragons devour! But the serpent slayer is greater still! This book traces the hope of the gospel from the garden in Genesis to the new Jerusalem in Revelation. It identifies the deceptive and devouring purposes of the serpent in Scripture’s storyline, but it magnifies how the Old Testament anticipates and the New Testament realizes the victory of Christ for and through his church. This book models well how to trace a biblical-theological theme through the whole of Scripture, and it is infused with hope in the one who triumphs through great tribulation.”

Jason S. DeRouchie, Research Professor of Old Testament and Biblical
Theology, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary

“In this slim book, Andy Naselli does what he does best: he gathers, organizes, and presents Scripture so that you can see for yourself what the Bible says about serpents and the serpent slayer. The Bible’s understanding of snakes and dragons is ‘thick’—it is woven into the fabric of redemptive history from Genesis to Revelation. If you love stories where the hero kills the dragon to get the girl, then this book is for you.”

Joe Rigney, Assistant Professor of Theology and Literature, Bethlehem College & Seminary; author, *The Things of Earth* and *Strangely Bright*

“Dragons and serpents have fascinated the human race from time immemorial, whether in secular or sacred literature. In *The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer*, Andy Naselli fascinates us again with intriguing observations and exegetical insights. Every reader will benefit from this concise biblical theology, understanding afresh that while the Bible is a simple story—as simple as ‘Kill the dragon, get the girl!’—it is also of dramatic interest from start to finish. Naselli also provides us with a timely reminder that the devil is real and active today, deceiving and devouring people; yet the church is not without hope: Christ has crushed the serpent, and one day so too will his church.”

Jonathan Gibson, Associate Professor of Old Testament, Westminster Theological Seminary

The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer

Short Studies in Biblical Theology

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The Serpent and the Serpent Slayer

Andrew David Naselli

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*To my daughter Kara,
who loves serpent-slaying stories
that echo the greatest story*

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Series Preface

Most of us tend to approach the Bible early on in our Christian lives as a vast, cavernous, and largely impenetrable book. We read the text piecemeal, finding golden nuggets of inspiration here and there, but remain unable to plug any given text meaningfully into the overarching storyline. Yet one of the great advances in evangelical biblical scholarship over the past few generations has been the recovery of biblical theology—that is, a renewed appreciation for the Bible as a theologically unified, historically rooted, progressively unfolding, and ultimately Christ-centered narrative of God’s covenantal work in our world to redeem sinful humanity.

This renaissance of biblical theology is a blessing, yet little of it has been made available to the general Christian population. The purpose of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to connect the resurgence of biblical theology at the academic level with everyday believers. Each volume is written by a capable scholar or churchman who is consciously writing in a way that requires no prerequisite theological training of the reader. Instead, any thoughtful Christian disciple can track with and benefit from these books.

Each volume in this series takes a whole-Bible theme and traces it through Scripture. In this way readers not only learn about a given theme but also are given a model for how to read the Bible as a coherent whole.

We have launched this series because we love the Bible, we love the church, and we long for the renewal of biblical theology in the academy to enliven the hearts and minds of Christ's disciples all around the world. As editors, we have found few discoveries more thrilling in life than that of seeing the whole Bible as a unified story of God's gracious acts of redemption, and indeed of seeing the whole Bible as ultimately about Jesus, as he himself testified (Luke 24:27; John 5:39).

The ultimate goal of *Short Studies in Biblical Theology* is to magnify the Savior and to build up his church—magnifying the Savior through showing how the whole Bible points to him and his gracious rescue of helpless sinners; and building up the church by strengthening believers in their grasp of these life-giving truths.

Dane C. Ortlund and Miles V. Van Pelt

Preface

This book is a biblical theology of snakes and dragons—especially *the* serpent. It may be helpful to state up front three beliefs I presuppose in this book:

1. The Bible is God-breathed, entirely true, and our final authority.¹
2. We must read any part of the Bible in light of the unified, noncontradictory whole. We might focus on a section of the Bible such as the Pentateuch or the entire Old Testament, but ultimately we must interpret any part of the Bible in its fullest literary context. At this stage in the history of salvation, when we read any part of the Bible—such as the episode of the serpent’s deceiving the woman in Genesis 3—we must read with *Christian* eyes,² with a whole-Bible canonical approach.³

1. See D. A. Carson, ed., *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016). For a more popular-level approach, see Andrew David Naselli, “Scripture: How the Bible Is a Book like No Other,” in *Don’t Call It a Comeback: The Same Faith for a New Day*, ed. Kevin DeYoung (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011), 59–69.

2. See D. A. Carson, “Current Issues in Biblical Theology: A New Testament Perspective,” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 5, no. 1 (1995): 40–41.

3. See Douglas J. Moo and Andrew David Naselli, “The Problem of the New Testament’s Use of the Old Testament,” in *The Enduring Authority of the Christian Scriptures*, ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 702–46; Aubrey M. Sequeira and Samuel C. Emadi, “Biblical-Theological Exegesis and the Nature of Typology,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 21, no. 1 (2017): 11–34.

3. Biblical theology is a fruitful way to read parts of the Bible in light of the whole. Biblical theology studies how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ. That is, it is a way of analyzing and synthesizing the Bible that makes organic connections with the whole canon on its own terms, especially regarding how the Old and New Testaments integrate and climax in Christ.⁴

I mention those three presuppositions because many biblical scholars reject them and consequently interpret parts of the Bible much differently than I do in this book. A good example is Professor James Charlesworth, who taught New Testament at Duke University 1969–1984 and at Princeton Theological Seminary 1984–2019. His 744-page tome on serpents took him six years to research.⁵ His book is a treasure for its detailed research on what serpents could symbolize in the ancient world, but Charlesworth’s main argument is feasible only if the above three presuppositions are false. His main argument is that serpent symbolism is primarily *positive* not only in the ancient Near East but also in the Bible, specifically that Jesus is the serpent in John 3:14 (“As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up”). More on John 3:14 later.

I thank the following friends for contributing to this book:

1. My mentor Don Carson fanned into flame my love for studying how the whole Bible progresses, integrates, and climaxes in Christ.

4. See Jason S. DeRouchie, Oren R. Martin, and Andrew David Naselli, *40 Questions about Biblical Theology*, 40 Questions (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2020).

5. James H. Charlesworth, *The Good and Evil Serpent: How a Universal Symbol Became Christianized*, The Anchor Yale Bible Reference Library (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

2. My colleague Joe Rigney gave me penetrating feedback as I prepared to research this book and after I drafted it. We almost decided to coauthor it, but he was preoccupied with other projects. Rigney coined the pithy phrase “Kill the dragon, get the girl!”⁶ He actually ignited my interest in this topic. In 2013, he emailed the Bethlehem College & Seminary faculty with a list of topics on which he thought our ThM students might want to consider writing their theses. One of the topics he suggested was a biblical theology of snakes and dragons. I’ve wanted to write this book ever since.

3. Dane Ortlund and Miles Van Pelt warmly welcomed this volume into their Short Studies in Biblical Theology series. Those two men deeply love the triune God. It’s so evident in their humility and ministry. (Miles also inspires me to do strength training. His biceps are as large as a python that just swallowed a caiman.)

4. Phil Gons, my close friend for nearly two decades and who is currently vice president of Bible study products at Faithlife, helped me use Logos Bible Software to study serpents efficiently and thoroughly.

5. Some friends graciously offered feedback on drafts of this book, including Charles Ackman, Brian Collins, Jason DeRouchie, Abigail Dodds, Scott Jamison, Jeremy Kimble, Marty Machowski,

6. It started with Dane Ortlund’s article that asked twenty-six scholars and pastors to summarize the Bible in a single sentence. See Dane Ortlund, “What’s the Message of the Bible in One Sentence?,” Strawberry-Rhubarb Theology, January 12, 2011, <https://dogmadoxia.blogspot.com/2011/01/whats-message-of-bible-in-one-sentence.html>. Rigney was intrigued with Doug Wilson’s sentence: “Scripture tells us the story of how a Garden is transformed into a Garden City, but only after a dragon had turned that Garden into a howling wilderness, a haunt of owls and jackals, which lasted until an appointed warrior came to slay the dragon, giving up his life in the process, but with his blood effecting the transformation of the wilderness into the Garden City.” That led Rigney to summarize the Bible with the phrase “Kill the dragon, get the girl!” He started including that tagline to the end of his emails, and his friend Doug Wilson loved it. Now on Saturday nights when Wilson asks his grandchildren a round of catechism questions, his last question is “Kids, what’s the point of the whole Bible?” The kids answer, “Kill the dragon, get the girl!” See Douglas Wilson, *Writers to Read: Nine Names That Belong on Your Bookshelf* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 144. Wilson’s publishing house even published a children’s novel with that title: Cheston Hervey and Darren Doane, *Kill the Dragon, Get the Girl* (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2015).

Charles Naselli, Matt Rowley, Mark Ward, and Matthew Westerholm. Special thanks to my teaching assistants, Matt Klem and Noah Settersten, for their detailed feedback.

6. My wife, Jenni, supports the research-writing-teaching-shepherding ministry to which God has called me. This project fascinated her, and she helpfully suggested ways to improve the book. She and our daughters also encouraged me to turn this book into a children's book.⁷

7. Andrew David Naselli and Champ Thornton, title to be decided (Greensboro, NC: New Growth, forthcoming in 2022).

Introduction

Why We Love Dragon-Slaying Stories

Who doesn't love a good dragon-slaying story? There is a reason that classic literature features such stories—we love them! But why?

Dragon-Slaying Stories Echo the Greatest Story

We love good dragon-slaying stories because they echo the greatest story—the grand story of the Bible. Stories that parallel the greatest story make our hearts soar with delight. Those stories are often fiction, such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. Epic stories resonate deeply with us because they echo the greatest story. And the greatest story is true.

A pithy way to summarize the Bible's storyline is “Kill the dragon, get the girl!”¹ The storyline features three main characters:

1. See my footnote 6 about that phrase in the preface (p. 15). “Kill the dragon, get the girl!” is not a misogynist saying or a cavalier cowboy phrase. It colorfully reflects classical literature like *Saint George and the Dragon* and the Bible itself. Jesus decisively defeated the dragon, and he will conquer the dragon and save his bride: “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25); “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb” (Rev. 21:9). The metaphor doesn't communicate every nuance (e.g., God helps his people fight the serpent), but it communicates a prominent biblical theme in a pithy way.

- 1. The serpent (the villain—Satan)
- 2. A damsel in distress (the people of God)
- 3. The serpent slayer (the protagonist and hero—Jesus)

The serpent attempts to deceive and devour the woman, but the serpent slayer crushes the serpent.

Serpent is an umbrella term that includes both snakes and dragons. It’s the big category. Snakes and dragons are kinds of serpents. The Greek word δράκων (*drakōn*), explains an expert Greek linguist, refers to “a monstrous serpent”—“the ancients Greeks did not visualize it as a winged, fire-blowing creature with claws.”²

A serpent has two major strategies: *deceive* and *devour*. As a general rule, the form a serpent takes depends on its strategy. When a serpent in Scripture attempts to deceive, it’s a snake. When a serpent attempts to devour, it’s a dragon. Snakes deceive; dragons devour. Snakes tempt and lie; dragons attack and murder. Snakes backstab; dragons assault (see table 1).

Table 1. *The strategies of snakes versus dragons*

Snakes	Dragons
deceive	devour
tempt	attack
lie	murder
backstab	assault

Here’s how the greatest story unfolds:

- The story begins with bliss. The damsel enjoys a beautiful garden in a pristine world. (Adam and Eve enjoy the garden of Eden.)

2. Moisés Silva, ed., “δράκων,” in *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology and Exegesis*, 2nd ed., 5 vols. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2014), 1:774.

- But the serpent employs the strategy to deceive, tempt, lie, and backstab. (The snake deceives Eve.)
- As the story develops, the serpent craftily alternates between deceiving and devouring. (For example, sometimes Satan attempts to deceive God's people with false teaching. At other times Satan assaults God's people with violent persecution.)
- At the climax of the story, the dragon attempts to devour the hero but fails. (The dragon murders Jesus but merely bruises Jesus's heel while Jesus decisively crushes the serpent's head.)
- For the rest of the story, the dragon furiously attempts to devour the damsel. (The dragon attempts to deceive and destroy the church.)
- The hero's mission: kill the dragon, get the girl. He will accomplish that mission. (The Lamb will consummate his kingdom for God's glory by slaying the dragon and saving his bride.)

That story never gets old.

Six Dragon-Slaying Stories That Echo the Greatest Story

Fiction is filled with dragons.³ In what follows, I highlight six of the most popular dragon-slaying stories in English literature.⁴ These stories echo the greatest and true story. (*Spoiler alert:* The following summaries highlight some turning points in the plotlines.)

3. See "List of Dragons in Literature," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_dragons_in_literature.

4. Cf. Joseph Campbell's thesis regarding the hero's journey in classic literature: Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 3rd ed. (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008). The British journalist Christopher Booker labels one of the seven basic plots of literature as "overcoming the monster." See Christopher Booker, *The Seven Basic Plots: Why We Tell Stories* (London: Continuum, 2004).

SAINT GEORGE AND THE DRAGON

A staple children's book in our home is an illustrated version of *Saint George and the Dragon*.⁵ It adapts the legendary story from Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene*,⁶ which flows from legends about King Arthur such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This is the classic dragon-slaying story in English literature.

Saint George was a Roman soldier who died as a Christian martyr in 303. Later traditions venerated him as a legendary dragon killer. The story has many variations in different countries and cultures, but this is the gist: A dragon terrorizes a community, which offers sacrifices to the dragon in order to access water to survive. (In some versions of the story, the people sacrifice all their farm animals and then desperately resort to sacrificing their children!) The dragon's next victim is a royal young lady. A knight (e.g., Saint George or Arthur) arrives on his horse, and the community's spirit transforms from despair to hope. The knight slays the dragon and thus saves the damsel. Then the knight marries her.

How does that story echo the greatest story? "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy" (John 10:10). Satan, the devouring dragon, is the ultimate thief who terrorizes God's image bearers. The dragon's next victim after Christ is the church, the bride of Christ (Rev. 12). A knight will arrive on a white horse (Rev. 19:11) to defeat the dragon (19:11–20:15) and rescue his bride (19:7).

BEOWULF⁷

Beowulf is an epic Old English story that may be as old as the 700s. A monster named Grendel is slaying warriors at night in the mead

5. Margaret Hodges, *Saint George and the Dragon* (New York: Little, Brown, 1984).

6. See Edmund Spenser, *Fierce Wars and Faithful Loves: Book I of Edmund Spenser's "The Faerie Queene,"* ed. Roy Maynard (Moscow, ID: Canon, 1999).

7. *Beowulf: A New Verse Rendering*, trans. Douglas Wilson (Moscow, ID: Canon, 2013); *Beowulf*, trans. Stephen Mitchell (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2017).

hall of the king of the Danes over a twelve-year period. Beowulf, a Scandinavian prince, arrives and heroically slays Grendel with his bare hands by ripping off Grendel's arm. The next night another monster—Grendel's mother—attacks the hall to avenge her son, and Beowulf decapitates her with a sword he finds in her cave under a lake.

Beowulf later reigns as king of his own people for fifty peaceful years, but then a dragon terrorizes his realm. Beowulf slays the dragon with the help of Wiglaf, one of his men, but the dragon mortally wounds Beowulf, who gives his life for his people.

How does that story echo the greatest story? Satan and his minions are monsters who seek to destroy God's people. Jesus unselfishly and sacrificially fights the monsters, and he gives his life for his people.

***THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS*⁸**

The Pilgrim's Progress is one of the bestselling books of all time. Its author, John Bunyan (1628–1688), was an English Puritan preacher who started to draft the allegory while he was in prison for preaching without the Church of England's sanction. The famous preacher Charles Spurgeon read *The Pilgrim's Progress* over one hundred times.

The allegory features a pilgrim named Christian who perseveringly journeys from his hometown, the City of Destruction, to the Celestial City. He starts off with a great burden on his back, and the burden falls off at the cross. He encounters many obstacles on his journey, including one with a dragon named Apollyon. Leland Ryken, professor emeritus of English literature at Wheaton College, argues that this horrifying serpent is likely “a composite of details that [Bunyan] found in his acquaintance with fictional chivalric romances and

8. John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which Is to Come*, ed. C. J. Lovik (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009).

in various parts of the Bible, including the description of Leviathan in Job 41 and various monsters in the book of Revelation.”⁹

Apollyon is lord of the City of Destruction, and he claims that Christian is his subject. Apollyon accurately accuses Christian of a series of sins, but Christian replies in a disarming way. He basically says: “You’re right, Apollyon. I’m actually even worse than that. But the Prince I serve and honor is merciful and forgiving.” Christian and Apollyon fight for over half a day, and Christian finally gives Apollyon a mortal thrust with his sword, declaring, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Rom. 8:37). This key scene in Bunyan’s allegory ends with a retreating serpent: “When he heard these words, Apollyon spread out his dragon wings and flew away, and Christian saw him no more.”¹⁰

The King enables Christian to finish the journey. Christian and his companion Hopeful receive a rich welcome (cf. 2 Pet. 1:11) when they enter into the Celestial City and, more importantly, the joy of their Lord.

How does this story echo the greatest story? Jesus mercifully forgives his people of their sins, and he enables them to persevere in the faith. Jesus is the ultimate serpent slayer, and he enables his people to fight the serpent. Christians must put on the whole armor of God so that they can stand against the serpent’s schemes (Eph. 6:11–18). “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (James 4:7).

THE CHRONICLES OF NARNIA¹¹

A seven-book fantasy series for children, *The Chronicles of Narnia* has sold over one hundred million copies. C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) masterfully tells the story of Narnia from its creation to its consummation.

9. Leland Ryken, *Bunyan’s “The Pilgrim’s Progress”* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 31.

10. Bunyan, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, 92.

11. C. S. Lewis, *The Magician’s Nephew* (New York: HarperCollins, 1955); Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* (New York: HarperCollins, 1950); Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1954); Lewis, *Prince Caspian: The Return to Narnia* (New York:

After the lion, Aslan, sings Narnia into existence, the witch, Jadis, attempts to kill the lion by throwing an iron bar at its head. When the bar glances off the unaffected lion, the witch realizes that she is unable to defeat him and runs shrieking into the forest. A boy named Digory is responsible for bringing the witch into Narnia. Aslan explains to the talking beasts: "Before the new, clean world I gave you is seven hours old, a force of evil has already entered it; waked and brought hither by this son of Adam. . . . Evil will come of that evil, but it is still a long way off, and I will see to it that the worst falls upon myself."¹²

"The worst" indeed falls upon Aslan when the witch executes him on the stone table. But Aslan willingly sacrifices himself for Edmund—a son of Adam whom the witch craftily deceived and now plans to devour. The next morning, Aslan rises from the dead, and Edmund's sisters, Susan and Lucy, don't understand how this can be.

"It means," said Aslan, "that though the Witch knew the Deep Magic, there is a magic deeper still which she did not know. Her knowledge goes back only to the dawn of time. But if she could have looked a little further back, into the stillness and the darkness before Time dawned, she would have known that when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backward."¹³

Aslan leads faithful Narnians to defeat the witch and her evil forces: "Then with a roar that shook all Narnia from the western lamp-post to the shores of the eastern sea the great beast flung himself upon the White Witch."¹⁴

HarperCollins, 1951); Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (New York: HarperCollins, 1952); Lewis, *The Silver Chair* (New York: HarperCollins, 1953); Lewis, *The Last Battle* (New York: HarperCollins, 1956).

12. Lewis, *The Magician's Nephew*, 148.

13. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 163.

14. Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, 177.

But the witch is not the only person who rebels against Aslan. At least four other types of foes are noteworthy.

1. Some people rebel against Aslan by *cursing him and worshiping other gods*. For example, the Calormenes, from the country Calormen, southeast of Narnia, worship the vulture-headed god Tash in Tashbaan, their capital. After King Lune of Archenland successfully defends his kingdom from a surprise attack from Calormen's Prince Rabadash, King Lune attempts to deal mercifully with his prisoner. But Rabadash curses the king. Then Aslan appears. Rabadash shrieks:

Demon! Demon! Demon! I know you. You are the foul fiend of Narnia. You are the enemy of the gods. Learn who *I* am, horrible phantasm. I am descended from Tash, the inexorable, the irresistible. The curse of Tash is upon you. Lightning in the shape of scorpions shall be rained on you. The mountains of Narnia shall be ground into dust.¹⁵

After several unheeded warnings, Aslan humiliates Rabadash by transforming him into a donkey.

2. Some people rebel against Aslan by *being skeptical and selfish*. For example, "There was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it."¹⁶ That gem is the opening line to a book in which Aslan transforms Eustace. "Eustace had read only the wrong books. They had a lot to say about exports and imports and governments and drains, but they were weak on dragons."¹⁷ Eustace changes from an obnoxious brat to a greedy, lonely dragon¹⁸ to a repentant dragon to a relatively pleasant boy. The turning point is when Aslan powerfully and mercifully de-dragons Eustace, who is unable to remove his dragon skin.

15. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, 217.

16. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 3.

17. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 87.

18. Cf. the dragons in C. S. Lewis, *The Pilgrim's Regress: An Allegorical Apology for Christianity, Reason, and Romanticism*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1943), 221–27.

It would be nice, and fairly true, to say that “from that time forth Eustace was a different boy.” To be strictly accurate, he began to be a different boy. He had relapses. There were still many days when he could be very tiresome. But most of those I shall not notice. The cure had begun.¹⁹

3. Some creatures rebel against Aslan by *terrorizing humans*. For example, the great sea serpent loops itself around King Caspian’s ship to snap it into floating matchwood, but the crew survives by pushing “the snake loop” off the end of the ship.²⁰

4. Some people rebel against Aslan by *attempting to deceive his creatures*. For example, the “Lady of the Green Kirtle” encounters Eustace, Jill, and Puddleglum. She is described as riding “on a white horse, a horse so lovely that you wanted to kiss its nose and give it a lump of sugar at once. But the lady, who rode side-saddle and wore a long, fluttering dress of dazzling green, was lovelier still.”²¹ She deceives the travelers by directing them to shelter with supposedly gentle giants who would actually eat the guests during the autumn feast. It turns out that the beautiful lady is both the evil queen of Underland and the serpent that deceived the long-lost Narnian prince whom the travelers are attempting to save. She has imprisoned the prince by enchanting him with her magic, and when the travelers attempt to free the prince, she almost enchants them to concede that Aslan is not real. But Puddleglum fights off the enchantment, and the witch changes her strategy from deceiving to devouring.

The instrument dropped from her hands. Her arms appeared to be fastened to her sides. Her legs were intertwined with each other, and her feet had disappeared. The long green train

19. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 112.

20. Lewis, *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, 116–20.

21. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 87–88.

of her skirt thickened and grew solid, and seemed to be all one piece with the writhing green pillar of her interlocked legs. And that writhing green pillar was curving and swaying as if it had no joints, or else were all joints. Her head was thrown far back and while her nose grew longer and longer, every other part of her face seemed to disappear, except her eyes. Huge flaming eyes they were now, without brows or lashes. . . . The great serpent which the Witch had become, green as poison, thick as Jill's waist, had flung two or three coils of its loathsome body round the Prince's legs. Quick as lightning another great loop darted round, intending to pinion his sword-arm to his side. But the Prince was just in time. He raised his arms and got them clear: the living knot closed only round his chest—ready to crack his ribs like firewood when it drew tight. . . . With repeated blows they hacked off its head.²²

How does the story of Narnia echo the greatest story? The Lamb will consummate his kingdom for God's glory by slaying the dragon and saving his bride. At the end of the series, Aslan explains: "The term is over: the holidays have begun. The dream is ended: this is the morning." Lewis continues:

And as He spoke He no longer looked to them like a lion; but the things that began to happen after that were so great and beautiful that I cannot write them. And for us this is the end of all the stories, and we can most truly say that they all lived happily ever after. But for them it was only the beginning of the real story. All their life in this world and all their adventures in Narnia had only been the cover and the title page: now at last they were beginning Chapter One of the Great

22. Lewis, *The Silver Chair*, 183–84.

Story which no one on earth has read: which goes on forever:
in which every chapter is better than the one before.²³

It's difficult to read that last paragraph without tears beginning to form.

THE HOBBIT AND THE LORD OF THE RINGS²⁴

The Hobbit by J. R. R. Tolkien (1892–1973), like Narnia, has sold over a hundred million copies; and its sequel, the three-book fantasy set *The Lord of the Rings*, has sold over 150 million copies.

Tolkien formed an extremely detailed background for his story. But here's the gist: The title *The Lord of the Rings* refers to the main villain, Sauron, the dark lord of Mordor. Sauron is the primary serpent figure in the epic story. He has forged a powerful ring to use as the supreme weapon, and a hobbit named Frodo attempts to destroy it.

After Frodo destroys the “One Ring” in the fire of Mount Doom, Frodo and his faithful friend Sam struggle to survive just outside Mount Doom as the area self-destructs. They assume they are about to die. They faint. Two eagles rescue them. Sam later wakes up. He sees a nine-fingered Frodo next to him, and then he remembers everything.

Sam and Frodo don't know what the readers know. They think the wizard Gandalf died way back in the mines of Moria. They don't know Gandalf is alive.

Gandalf informs Sam where he is and asks,

“Well, Master Samwise, how do you feel?” . . .

23. Lewis, *The Last Battle*, 210–11.

24. J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit; or, There and Back Again* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1937); Tolkien, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954); Tolkien, *The Two Towers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955); Tolkien, *The Return of the King* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956). For resources on Middle Earth that my family enjoys, see “Ten Resources for Enjoying Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*,” Thoughts on Theology, October 19, 2012, <http://andynaselli.com/ten-resources-for-enjoying-tolkiens-the-hobbit-and-the-lord-of-the-rings>.

But Sam lay back, and stared with open mouth, and for a moment, between bewilderment and great joy, he could not answer. At last he gasped: “Gandalf! I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself. *Is everything sad going to come untrue?* What’s happened to the world?”

“A great shadow has departed,” said Gandalf, and then he laughed, and the sound was like music, or like water in a parched land; and as he listened the thought came to Sam that he had not heard laughter, the pure sound of merri-ment, for days upon days without count. It fell upon his ears like the echo of all the joys he had ever known. But he himself burst into tears. Then, as a sweet rain will pass down a wind of spring and the sun will shine out the clearer, his tears ceased, and his laughter welled up, and laughing he sprang from bed.

“How do I feel?” he cried. “Well, I don’t know how to say it. I feel, I feel”—he waved his arms in the air—“I feel like spring after winter, and sun on the leaves; and like trumpets and harps and all the songs I have ever heard!”²⁵

“Is everything sad going to come untrue?” Answer: Yes!²⁶

How does the story of *The Lord of the Rings* echo the greatest story? Jerram Barrs suggests several “echoes of Eden” in the story. “The memory of Paradise as it originally was” echoes the good creation. “The loss of Paradise and the sad reality of the present fallen world” echo the fallen creation. “The hope of redemption and the regaining of Paradise” echo the redeemed creation.

25. Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 962–63. Italics added.

26. Cf. Timothy Keller, *The Reason for God: Belief in an Age of Skepticism* (New York: Dutton, 2008), 31–34; Keller, *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering* (New York: Dutton, 2013), 116–18; Michael J. Kruger, “Is Everything Sad Going to Come Untrue?: Eschatology in *The Lord of the Rings*,” Canon Fodder, October 31, 2012, <https://www.michaeljkruger.com/is-everything-sad-going-to-come-untrue-eschatology-in-the-lord-of-the-rings/>.

Tolkien's story treasures biblical virtues such as humility, serving others, and self-sacrifice.²⁷

HARRY POTTER²⁸

The seven-book Harry Potter fantasy series by J. K. Rowling (1965–) is the best-selling series in history—over five hundred million copies. While some people think Harry Potter is dark literature that Christians should avoid, I am convinced it is filled with implicit and explicit Christian themes.²⁹

The protagonist is Harry Potter, and the main antagonist is Lord Voldemort. Voldemort is the most powerful dark wizard—so dreaded that nearly everyone in the magical community fears to even say his name and instead calls him *You-Know-Who* or *He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named*. Voldemort's goal is to become immortal and rule both the wizarding world and the Muggle (i.e., non-magical) world. His servants are the Death Eaters, evil wizards and witches. But an unlikely obstacle is in his path—a boy named Harry Potter.

When Harry turns eleven, he learns that he is a wizard—and not just any wizard but a famous one in the magical community. He is famous because Voldemort cast a killing curse on him when he was an infant. Voldemort attempted to murder baby Harry because he understood a prophecy to say that if Harry lived, Voldemort must die. But Voldemort's curse did not harm Harry, because his mother's self-sacrificial love protected him. The curse rebounded

27. Jerram Barrs, *Echoes of Eden: Reflections on Christianity, Literature, and the Arts* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 118–24.

28. J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (New York: Levine, 1998); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (New York: Levine, 1999); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (New York: Levine, 1999); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (New York: Levine, 2000); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix* (New York: Levine, 2003); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince* (New York: Levine, 2005); Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (New York: Levine, 2007).

29. See John Granger, *How Harry Cast His Spell: The Meaning behind the Mania for J. K. Rowling's Bestselling Books*, 4th ed. (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2006)—*Time* magazine calls John Granger the “Dean of Harry Potter Scholars”; Barrs, *Echoes of Eden*, 125–46.

and hit Voldemort instead. It left a lightning-shaped scar on Harry's forehead, and it disembodied Voldemort. It takes Voldemort over a decade to regain his body and power.

Harry attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry to learn how to properly use his magical powers. He and his faithful friends Hermione Granger and Ron Weasley survive multiple encounters with Voldemort and his Death Eaters. (Each of the seven novels tells the story of one year of Harry's life, from age eleven through seventeen.)

Rowling's story makes selfish people look repulsively wicked, and unselfish people attractively noble.³⁰ Voldemort is the ultimate serpent figure in the series. Hogwarts has four houses. Harry is in the House of Godric Gryffindor, whose mascot is a lion; Voldemort was in the House of Salazar Slytherin, whose mascot is a serpent. In the second book, Voldemort opens the "Chamber of Secrets" to unleash a basilisk, a monstrous serpent that can instantly kill living things simply by making eye contact with them. Voldemort is a "Parselmouth"—that is, he has the rare ability to speak Parseltongue, the language of snakes. (Harry also has this ability because of his connection with Voldemort.) Nagini, Voldemort's loyal and terrifying snake, guards Voldemort's immortality. Voldemort is supremely selfish. His main strategies are to deceive and to devour.

Harry's wise and trustworthy headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, explains to Harry that Voldemort has split his soul into pieces and thus created a series of "Horcruxes." The only way to defeat Voldemort is to destroy those Horcruxes. Harry, Ron, and Hermione set out on a quest to destroy the Horcruxes, and near the end of that quest Harry realizes that *he* is one of the final Horcruxes. Because he loves his family and friends, Harry willingly surrenders himself to

30. Cf. Granger, *How Harry Cast His Spell*, 15, which displays the good-versus-evil relationships throughout the storyline.

Voldemort and expects to die in order to save the lives of his friends. But when Voldemort again casts a killing curse at Harry, the self-sacrificial Harry enters an in-between state in which he can choose whether to die and go on or to remain alive and try to finish off Voldemort. He chooses to return to fight because he loves his friends. When Harry and Voldemort duel for the final time, Voldemort dies from his own killing curse when his curse rebounds off Harry's defensive spell.

How do you think the story of Harry Potter echoes the greatest story? Here are two hints: (1) Harry defeats Voldemort with self-sacrificing love, and (2) Harry conquers death with his own death.³¹

On to the Greatest Story

Those six dragon-slaying stories echo the greatest story. That's why people love them.

Now on to the greatest story. It begins with God's creating the heavens and the earth as good. But a deceptive snake enters the garden.

31. See Barrs, *Echoes of Eden*, 142–44.

The Deceitful Snake in Genesis 3

The serpent theme spans the entire Bible—from the beginning of Genesis to the end of Revelation.¹ Let’s start with what the Bible teaches about the serpent at the story’s beginning. Genesis 3 teaches at least twelve notable truths about the snake.

Here’s a clarifying note about an aspect of this book’s format: *I quote the Bible a lot*. I do this for two reasons. First, it helps you engage directly with the Bible and not merely indirectly through what I say about the Bible. To help you connect specific God-breathed words with what I am arguing, I italicize portions of direct quotes. Second, it helps you realize, “Wow! The serpent theme is all over the Bible.” It is a prominent theme at the Bible’s bookends (the beginning of Genesis and end of Revelation) and in between.

The Snake Is Deceitful

Now the serpent was *more crafty* than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. (Gen. 3:1)

1. A logical way to begin studying the serpent theme is to locate all the relevant Bible passages that use various terms for serpent. Laying out that data is a bit technical, so it’s an appendix rather than a chapter: “How Often Does the Bible Explicitly Mention Serpents?” If you are more academically inclined, read the appendix before you read chapter 1.

The grand story does not begin with the deceitful snake in Genesis 3. It begins with God's creating the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1–2. The story begins with pure goodness. All is right with the world—until the crafty villain enters the scene.

In English, *crafty* means cunning or deceitful. But *crafty* in Genesis 3:1 translates a Hebrew word that is neutral on its own. It can be positive (e.g., Prov. 12:16—*prudent* as opposed to foolish) or negative (e.g., Job 5:12; 15:5). Here the word is initially ambiguous. But when you reread this story in light of the whole story, *crafty* is an excellent translation. The serpent is the craftiest wild animal. His first strategy is not to devour but to deceive.

The Snake Is a Beast That God Created

Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field *that the LORD God had made*. (Gen. 3:1)

God created the snake, so the snake is not God's equal. God is uncreated; the snake is created. Aseity is true only of God—that is, only God exists from himself without depending on anything else for existence.² Like every other creature, the snake is not independent of God.

The Snake Deceives by Questioning God

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:16–17)

He [i.e., the snake] said to the woman, “*Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’*” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the

2. Cf. John Webster, “Life in and of Himself: Reflections on God's Aseity,” in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 107–24.

garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” (Gen. 3:1–3)

The snake does not begin by directly *contradicting* God. He begins by *questioning* God.

The snake craftily reframes the situation. Instead of emphasizing that Adam and Eve may eat from every tree except one, the snake asks whether they may eat from *any* tree.

Instead of rebuking the snake, the woman entertains the idea that God is not benevolent and trustworthy. Maybe God made up that rule to limit her pleasure. Her words “neither shall you touch it” may even embellish what God commanded.

The Snake Deceives by Contradicting God

But the serpent said to the woman, “*You will not surely die*. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3:4–5)

After the snake *questions* God, the snake intensifies his deceitful assault by *contradicting* God. He lies and blasphemes God as having selfish motives. This serpent sounds like the devil: “When he lies,” explains Jesus, “he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

Yes, the woman’s eyes will be opened, but not in a good way. She will know evil by becoming evil herself, and thus she will die spiritually. Little does she know in her innocence that this death will start the countdown to her physical death.

The Snake Deceives by Tempting with Worldliness

But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be

opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that *the tree was good for food*, and that *it was a delight to the eyes*, and that *the tree was to be desired to make one wise . . .* (Gen. 3:4–6)

Worldliness is loving the world (see 1 John 2:15–17).³ For us to “love the world” today (1 John 2:15) is to delight in the anti-God culture that permeates this fallen world, to take pleasure in worldly ways of thinking and acting, to take pleasure in what theologian John Frame calls “the bad part of culture.”⁴ Eve is the first human in history to love the world, and the snake deceives her by tempting her with worldliness—much as Satan later tempts Jesus in the wilderness (see table 2).

Table 2. Comparing Genesis 3:6, Luke 4:1–13, and 1 John 2:16

Genesis 3:6: The woman saw that . . .	Luke 4:1–13 (cf. Matt 4:1–11)	1 John 2:16
The tree was good for food.	Command this stone to become bread.	The desires of the flesh
It was a delight to the eyes.	If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours.	The desires of the eyes
The tree was to be desired to make one wise.	If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here.	Pride of life

I am not certain that the three phrases in 1 John 2:16 line up exactly with Genesis 3:6 and Luke 4 or that John has these parallels in mind. But the three phrases in 1 John 2:16 seem to line up at least roughly with Genesis 3:6 and Luke 4, so the parallel seems legitimate.

3. Cf. Andrew David Naselli, “Do Not Love the World: Breaking the Evil Enchantment of Worldliness (A Sermon on 1 John 2:15–17),” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 22, no. 1 (2018): 111–25.

4. John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life*, A Theology of Lordship (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2008), 866. Cf. Albert M. Wolters, *Creation Regained: Biblical Basics for a Reformational Worldview*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2005), 64: “*World* designates the totality of sin-infected creation. Wherever human sinfulness bends or twists or distorts God’s good creation, there we find the ‘world.’”

The three phrases in 1 John 2:16 are broad and overlapping ways to describe “all that is in the world”:

1. “The desires of the flesh” are whatever your body sinfully craves. A person may crave forbidden food (like Eve did) or excessive food and drink or immoral sex or pornography or security in an idolatrous relationship. Our fundamental problem is not what is “out there” but what is “in here.” It’s not external but internal.
2. “The desires of the eyes” are whatever you sinfully crave when you see it. Basically, this craving is coveting—idolatrously wanting what you don’t have.⁵ My colleague Joe Rigney tells his sons that coveting is wanting something so bad that it makes you fussy. Eve idolatrously wanted what she didn’t have.
3. “Pride of life” is arrogance produced by your material possessions or accomplishments. Consequently, you may strut around like a peacock, proudly displaying your fashionable clothes or latest gadget or social status. Or you may not be a peacock, yet you still find your security in your raw talents or achievements or savings account. You are proudly independent; you don’t need God. In this case, Eve arrogantly wanted to be independent of God.

One Johannine scholar says of the three phrases in 1 John 2:16, “Translating this as ‘sex, money, and power’ may not miss the mark by much.”⁶

5. John Piper, *Future Grace: The Purifying Power of the Promises of God*, in *The Collected Works of John Piper*, ed. David Mathis and Justin Taylor, vol. 4 (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 241: “Covetousness is desiring something so much that you lose your contentment in God. . . . Coveting is desiring anything other than God in a way that betrays a loss of contentment and satisfaction in him. Covetousness is a heart divided between two gods. So Paul calls it idolatry.” Compare the last sentence of 1 John: “Little children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

6. D. Moody Smith, *First, Second, and Third John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville: John Knox, 1991), 66. Cf. John Piper, *Living in the Light*:

The Snake Deceives Eve to Rebel against God, and Adam Follows Eve

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, *she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.* (Gen. 3:6)

Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “*The serpent deceived me, and I ate.*” (Gen. 3:13)

But I am afraid that as *the serpent deceived Eve by his cunning*, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3)

Adam was not deceived, but *the woman was deceived* and became a transgressor. (1 Tim. 2:14)

God commissioned his image bearers to rule over the beasts of the field (Gen. 1:26–27), but his image bearers committed treachery. Instead of obeying the King, they followed the snake.

Eve was not alone. Adam “was with her” (Gen. 3:6). So when Adam ate, he rebelled against God not only by failing to obey what God commanded but also by failing to lead and protect his wife. “Adam should have slain and thus judged the serpent in carrying out the mandate of Gen. 1:28 to ‘rule and subdue,’” explains New Testament scholar G. K. Beale, but instead “the serpent ended up ruling over Adam and Eve by persuading them with deceptive words.”⁷

Money, Sex, and Power; Making the Most of Three Dangerous Opportunities (Washington, DC: Good Book, 2016).

7. G. K. Beale, *A New Testament Biblical Theology: The Unfolding of the Old Testament in the New* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011), 34–35.

When God calls to “the man” and asks, “Where are you [singular]?” (Gen. 3:9), he directly addresses Adam—not both Adam and Eve. Adam is primarily responsible because he is the head of the husband-wife relationship. Thus, later Scripture blames Adam for the fall into sin (Rom. 5:12–21; 1 Cor. 15:21–22).⁸ He should have killed the dragon and rescued the girl.

As a Result of the Snake’s Deceit, Adam’s and Eve’s Sins Separate Them from God

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and *the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God* among the trees of the garden. But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.” (Gen. 3:7–13)

Adam and Eve’s nakedness symbolized their innocence (see Gen. 2:25), but after they sinned, they clothed themselves because they were no longer innocent (Gen. 3:6). They hid from God because they were ashamed to be in his presence (3:8). God gives Adam and

8. Cf. Raymond C. Ortlund Jr., “Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3,” in *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1991), 107–8.

Eve the opportunity to confess their sins and take responsibility for them. But they justify themselves by making excuses: Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the snake (3:12–13).

As a Result of the Snake's Deceit, God Curses the Snake and Promises a Snake Crusher

The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
 and above all beasts of the field;
 on your belly you shall go,
 and dust you shall eat
 all the days of your life.
 I will put enmity between you and the woman,
 and between your offspring and her offspring;
he shall bruise your head,
 and you shall bruise his heel.” (Gen. 3:14–15)

God may have originally created the snake with legs and wings—as in our popular picture of dragons. But because of the snake's deceit, God humiliated the snake by forcing it to slither on its belly in the dust. As a result, now we describe a snake as a reptile that is long, limbless, and without eyelids that moves over the ground on its belly with a flickering tongue, which makes the snake appear to be eating the dust.

God cursed not only the snake but also the snake's offspring. He cursed them with “enmity” (Gen. 3:15). The rest of the Bible's storyline traces the ongoing battle between the snake's offspring and the woman's offspring. The first seed of the serpent is Cain, who kills his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1–16). The serpent, Jesus explains, “was a murderer from the beginning” (John 8:44), and Cain was the first

human murderer. Humans are either children of God or children of the devil (Matt. 13:38–39; John 8:33, 44; Acts 13:10; 1 John 3:8–10).

Instead of continuing through Abel, the seed of the woman continues through Seth: “God has appointed for me another offspring instead of Abel, for Cain killed him” (Gen. 4:25). That line continues through Noah (Gen. 6:9) and then through Abraham,⁹ Isaac, Jacob, and Judah (Gen. 11–50) and eventually through David all the way to Jesus the Messiah and his followers.¹⁰ The woman’s offspring can refer to a group of people (the people of God collectively—cf. Rom. 16:20) and to a particular person (the Messiah—cf. Gal. 3:16).¹¹ Although the serpent will bruise the Messiah’s heel (Jesus dies on a tree), Jesus is the ultimate seed of the woman who will mortally crush the serpent (cf. Gal. 3:16; Heb. 2:14–15; 1 John 3:8). “By going to the cross,” explains New Testament scholar D. A. Carson, “Jesus will ultimately destroy this serpent, this devil, who holds people captive under sin, shame, and guilt. He will crush the serpent’s head by taking their guilt and shame on himself.”¹²

As a Result of the Snake’s Deceit, God Punishes Eve and Adam

To the woman he said,

*“I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children.*

9. See James M. Hamilton Jr., “The Seed of the Woman and the Blessing of Abraham,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 58, no. 2 (2007): 253–73.

10. See John L. Ronning, “The Curse on the Serpent (Genesis 3:15) in Biblical Theology and Hermeneutics” (PhD diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997); Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope: Is the Hebrew Bible Really Messianic?*, New American Commentary Studies in Bible and Theology 9 (Nashville: B&H, 2010), esp. 129–45.

11. See James M. Hamilton Jr., “The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman: Inner-Biblical Interpretation of Genesis 3:15,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 30–55; Jason S. DeRouchie and Jason C. Meyer, “Christ or Family as the ‘Seed’ of Promise? An Evaluation of N. T. Wright on Galatians 3:16,” *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 3 (2010): 36–48.

12. D. A. Carson, *The God Who Is There: Finding Your Place in God’s Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2010), 37.

*Your desire shall be contrary to your husband,
but he shall rule over you.”*

And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife
and have eaten of the tree
of which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.
By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread,
till you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
for you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.” (Gen. 3:16–19)

God punished Eve and Adam with pain. He punished the woman with pain in childbearing¹³ and with pain in how she and her husband struggle to lead in a marriage relationship. Instead of gladly following her husband, the woman desires either to dominate him by usurping his leadership or to possessively cling to him by wanting him to be more for her than he can. And instead of responsibly exer-

13. See Jesse R. Scheumann, “A Biblical Theology of Birth Pain and the Hope of the Messiah” (ThM thesis, Bethlehem College & Seminary, 2014). Scheumann concludes:

As paradoxical as it sounds, birth pain is a redemptive judgment. Judgment is the dominant connotation of the imagery throughout Scripture. But birth pain is redemptive in that the Messiah would come through the line of promise, through birth pain (Gen 3:15–16; 35:16–19; 38:27–29; Mic 4:9–10; 5:2–3[1–2]; Song 8:5; 1 Chr 4:9; Rev 12:2), and he would bear the judgment in birthing the new covenant people (Isa 42:14; Isa 53:10–12; John 16:20–22; Acts 2:24), just as God writhed in birthing creation (Ps 90:2; Prov 8:24–25) and in birthing the old covenant people (Deut 32:18). (115)

cising headship by lovingly leading his wife, the man selfishly fails to guide and protect his wife—either by treating his wife in a harsh and domineering manner (3:16) or by lazily abdicating primary leadership to his wife (3:1–6).

By cursing the ground, God punished the man with pain in cultivating the ground. Adam sinfully ate forbidden food; consequently, it is now more difficult to grow food. God created the earth as abundantly productive, but now he has cursed it.

Further, God punished mankind with mortality. As a result of physical death, humans return to the very ground over which the snake must now slither.

As a Result of the Snake's Deceit, God Clothes Adam and Eve with Garments of Skin

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

... But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And he said, "I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself." He said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?" ...

... And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. (Gen. 3:7, 9–11, 21)

Where did the garments of skin come from? God killed animals to cover the shame and guilt of their sin. This appears to anticipate animal sacrifice under the Mosaic law (cf. Lev. 1–7) and ultimately the substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus himself (cf. Rom. 3:21–26).

As a Result of the Snake's Deceit, God Banishes Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" therefore *the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden* to work the ground from which he was taken. He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden *he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.* (Gen. 3:22–24)

This part of the story connects to two major themes in the Bible's storyline.

1. *Exile and exodus.*¹⁴ God banishes sinful people from his special presence (exile), and he redeems his people from exile (exodus). Here are some highlights of this theme that begin in Genesis 3: God exiles Cain to the land of Nod (Gen. 4), delivers Noah from the flood (Gen. 6–9), exiles rebellious people after the Tower of Babel (Gen. 11), brings Abraham out of Ur (Gen. 15), brings his people out of Egypt (Ex. 1–15), exiles the northern kingdom of Israel to Assyria (2 Kings 17) and the southern kingdom of Israel to Babylon (2 Kings 25), and delivers his people from exile in Assyria and Babylon back to the land. The climactic exile is Jesus's atoning death on the cross (Mark 15:34), and the climactic exodus is Jesus's resurrection. Now God's people have entered into rest (Heb. 3–4) while living as holy pilgrims in exile in this world (1 Pet. 1:17; 2:9–11). In the ultimate exodus, God's people

14. Cf. Iain M. Duguid, "Exile," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander and Brian S. Rosner (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 475–78; Rikki E. Watts, "Exodus," in Alexander and Rosner, *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 478–87; Thomas Richard Wood, "The Regathering of the People of God: An Investigation into the New Testament's Appropriation of the Old Testament Prophecies concerning the Regathering of Israel" (PhD diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2006); Alastair J. Roberts and Andrew Wilson, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing Themes of Redemption through Scripture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2018).

will forever enjoy God in the new heavens and new earth, and in the ultimate exile, God will forever banish his enemies from his presence.

2. *Temple*.¹⁵ The temple theme begins with the garden of Eden. When God creates the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1–2, the garden of Eden is his dwelling place. God’s dwelling place is associated with heaven, and he “comes down” to earth. The garden of Eden is the first temple, “the temple-garden,” “a divine sanctuary.”¹⁶ It’s the place where humans meet with God. There are many parallels between the garden of Eden and the tabernacle/temple. The Most Holy Place or the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle and temple kept the ark of the covenant surrounded by two elaborate, gold cherubim. This room was God’s throne room, and only the high priest entered the Most Holy Place once a year to make atonement for the people. When priests served in the Holy Place, the inner veil kept them from seeing into the Most Holy Place.

God instructed the Israelites to skillfully weave cherubim into the inner veil (Ex. 26:31; cf. 36:35). The Most Holy Place parallels the garden of Eden. After God expelled Adam and Eve from the garden, “He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life” (Gen. 3:24). In a similar way, the cherubim woven into the inner veil symbolized that sinful humans could not enter this temple either.

The temple theme climaxes in Jesus. Jesus, the God-man, “tabernacles” among humans. “The Word became flesh and dwelt [i.e., tabernacled] among us” (John 1:14). His body is the temple (John 2:18–22). And when he died on the cross, the veil between the Holy

15. See G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church’s Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, New Studies in Biblical Theology 17 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004); G. K. Beale and Mitchell Kim, *God Dwells among Us: Expanding Eden to the Ends of the Earth* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2014).

16. T. Desmond Alexander, *From Eden to the New Jerusalem: An Introduction to Biblical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2008), 20–21.

Place and the Most Holy Place “was torn in two, from top to bottom” (Matt. 27:51). Jesus’s death makes it possible for people to go directly into God’s presence (see Heb. 6:19–20; 10:19–22). The temple rituals and the Mosaic law-covenant are now obsolete. Jesus is our temple, our priest, our sacrifice.¹⁷

Now the church is collectively God’s temple (1 Cor. 3:16–17; 2 Cor. 6:14–7:1; Eph. 2:21–22; 1 Pet. 2:4–10). So is the individual Christian’s body (1 Cor. 6:19–20). The ultimate temple is the new Jerusalem (Rev. 21). “And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb” (Rev. 21:22).

The Snake Is Satan

I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil [cf. Gen. 3:5]. The God of peace will soon *crush Satan* under your feet. (Rom. 16:19–20)

But I am afraid that as the *serpent* deceived Eve by his cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. (2 Cor. 11:3)

And another sign appeared in heaven: behold, a *great red dragon*, with seven heads and ten horns, and on his heads seven diadems.

And the *great dragon* was thrown down, that *ancient serpent*, who is called the *devil* and *Satan*, the *deceiver* of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. . . . “The *accuser of our brothers* has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. . . . The *devil* has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!” (Rev. 12:3, 9, 10, 12)

17. See Timothy Keller, *King’s Cross: The Story of the World in the Life of Jesus* (New York: Dutton, 2011), 48.

And he seized the *dragon*, that *ancient serpent*, who is the *devil* and *Satan*, and bound him for a thousand years. (Rev. 20:2)

Many commentators on Genesis 3 highlight that the text does not explicitly identify the snake as Satan. Some concede that the New Testament identifies the snake as Satan yet are reluctant to interpret Genesis 3 in that way.¹⁸ Some insist that the snake in Genesis 3 is *not* Satan but instead embodies life, wisdom, and chaos.¹⁹ But when we read Genesis 3 in light of the whole Bible, we must identify the snake as Satan.²⁰

The Bible does not specify the precise way Satan and the snake in the garden of Eden relate, but Satan somehow used the physical body of a snake in Eden. He may have transformed himself into a snake-like creature, or he may have entered and influenced one of the existing snakes to accomplish his devious plan. Regardless of the precise means, the Bible presents the story of the talking snake as real history—not as a myth or legend or fable (and the Bible presents Adam and Eve as really existing as the first human beings in history).²¹

Transition: The Serpent after Genesis 3

At the story's beginning, the Bible teaches that the snake is deceitful. As the story progresses, the serpent's strategy alternates between deceiving as a snake and devouring as a dragon.

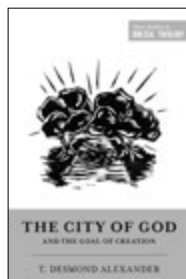
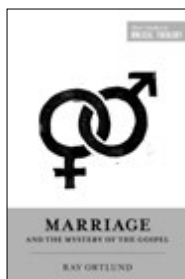
18. E.g., John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 210; Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 128–39.

19. E.g., Karen Randolph Joines, *Serpent Symbolism in the Old Testament: A Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Study* (Haddonfield, NJ: Haddonfield, 1974), 16–41, esp. 26–27.

20. Cf. Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, New American Commentary 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 234–35.

21. See James K. Hoffmeier, “Genesis 1–11 as History and Theology,” in *Genesis: History, Fiction, or Neither? Three Views on the Bible's Earliest Chapters*, ed. Charles Halton, Counterpoints (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2015), 23–58 (also 98–100, 140–49); Wayne Grudem, “Theistic Evolution Undermines Twelve Creation Events and Several Crucial Christian Doctrines,” in *Theistic Evolution: A Scientific, Philosophical, and Theological Critique*, ed. J. P. Moreland et al. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2017), 783–837; Vern S. Poythress, *Interpreting Eden: A Guide to Faithfully Reading and Understanding Genesis 1–3* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2019).

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"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

GENESIS 3:15

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