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Reading a Protoevangelium in the Context of Genesis

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Some Thoughts on Reading a *Protoevangelium* in the Context of Genesis[1]

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[4:3]So also we, when we were minors, **were enslaved under the basic forces of the world.** [4:4]But when **the appropriate time had come**, God sent out his Son, **born of a woman**, born under the law, [4:5]to redeem those who were under the law, so that we may be adopted as sons with full rights.[3]

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[1] Interpretation in context invariably raises the question of which context? Critical scholarship has until recently defined this as the context of origin, the reconstructed historical event behind the text. Apart from the difficulty of such reconstructions such an approach ignores the literary- historical reality embodied in the text's final form. As Moberly puts it, "The point is to claim that the meaning of Israel's scriptures may vary according to context is not a matter of special pleading by the Christian theologian, but a recognition of certain facts of the nature of texts as texts." (R.W.L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology: Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture*, Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014), 156-158. To wed the meaning of the *Protoevangelium* exclusively to an at best hypothetical reconstructed version of the event behind the Genesis text potentially distorts the historical-literary meaning residing in the text's final form in the broader canonical context of Genesis first as a book, second as a part of the Torah, third in the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible) and finally in the light of the coming of Christ and the consequent New Testament revelation (cf. the discussions of interpretive context in John Sailhamer, *Introduction to Old Testament Theology: a Canonical Approach*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995, 154; Peter Gentry and Stephen J. Wellum in *Kingdom through Covenant: A Biblical-Theological Understanding of the Covenant*, Wheaton: Crossway, 2012, 100, who propose a tripartite interpretive context encompassing (1) linguistic-historical/literary, (2) redemptive-historical, and (3) canonical context.

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[3] Biblical Studies Press. (2006). *The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible* (Ga 4:3–5). Biblical Studies Press. (translation note Or "basic principles," "elemental things," or "elemental spirits." Some interpreters take this as a reference to supernatural powers who controlled nature and/or human fate; cf. Arichea, D. C., & Nida, E. A. (1976). *A Handbook on Paul's Letter to the Galatians*. UBS Handbook Series (88). New York: United Bible Societies, cf. 'ruling spirits of the universe' translates a phrase which can be literally rendered "the elements of the world" τὰ στοιχεῖα τοῦ κόσμου.

While many critical commentators suggest this passage affirms the true humanity of Jesus or wrestle with whether or not it implies the virgin birth, the statement that Christ came 'born of a woman' at the nexus of salvation history in 'the fullness of time' when humanity was under bondage to supernatural powers could also point to an Old Testament prophetic reading of the passage. As one respected pastoral expositor states it with respect to this text, "The ancient promise said that the Redeemer would be of 'the woman's seed" (Gen. 3:15); and Jesus fulfilled that promise (Isa. 7:14; Matt. 1:18-25)[4]

Whether Paul is referencing Gen. 3:15 in Gal. 4:4 as pastor Wiersbe opines or not, his understanding that Gen. 3:15 contains the 'first gospel' or *protoevangelium*[5] has a venerable history in both ancient Jewish and Christian interpretation.   The Jewish authors of the Septuagint and the Targums[6] propounded a messianic understanding as did the midrash *Genesis Rabbah*. In the church from the time of Ireneaus (2nd century A.D.), the details of this mysterious passage have been seen as pointing to Christ. Though Gen. 3:15 is never directly utilized in the New Testament in defense of the messianic claims of Jesus Christ, it is likely alluded to in several passages which cumulatively support the messianic nature of this text. Paul, for example, in his benediction to the church at Rome states, "The God of peace will shortly crush Satan under your feet." (Rom. 16:20). The apostle here apparently encourages the Roman church by reminding them that just as Christ, the seed of the woman has 'crushed' Satan's head through his victory

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[4]Warren Wiersbe, *The Bible Expository Commentary*. Wheaton, IL: SP Publications, 1996. Logos Bible Software 4.

[5] For the church, the Latin term means in essence the 'first proclamation of the good news (i.e. the gospel)' and encompasses the whole of redemptive history and prophecy.

[6]Though the Targums read the text in a messianic sense, only one finds an individual referent for the collective 'seed' in Gen. 3:15. This is not to say that the Targums do not read the Hebrew text with messianic eyes. While the Hebrew text uses the word (שׁוּף–to bruise) for the actions of the woman's seed, the Targums use the word (מחי—to strike from the Hebrew(מחץ) which as utilized in Numbers 24:17 refers to the activity of the coming king of Israel who will strike the nation of Moab, and reflects the idea that God will deliver his people and defeat their enemies in the age of the messiah (cf. Michael Shepherd, "Targums, the New Testament, and Biblical Theology of the Messiah," *JETS* 51:1 (2008): 53.

on the Cross, he will also 'crush' the work of the enemy that is being directed against His 'seed' the church, presumably in the imminent eschaton[7].

One final allusion arises in the Apocalypse where the apostle John envisions a woman in labor about to give birth who is threatened by a great dragon identified as the 'serpent of old' and Satan in 12:9. The woman is Israel and her seed (child) is Christ (Rev. 12:4). Frustrated that he has been unable to slay the messiah and being cast down to the earth after defeat in a cosmic war of angels, he persecutes the woman and her 'seed,' who are defined as those who believe in Christ (12:7-17). The apocalyptic imagery is 'pregnant' with allusions to Gen. 3:15[8]. The woman, her messianic seed, the Serpent (dragon) and the unsatiable enmity he has for God and his people is recorded therein. It is as if the *protoevangelium* has become the apocalyptic vehicle for portraying the entire panorama of redemptive history. Supporting this idea is the recognition by many that Revelation 12 is the central chapter of the Apocalypse.[9] This is even more striking when we observe that only one verse in this chapter connects the woman's child in the imagery to the Davidic messiah, namely v. 5 which quotes Ps. 2:7-9 describing his absolute rule over the nations.

While there is ample evidence of an interpretive trajectory in the New Testament that understood Gen. 3:15 in a messianic sense, sustaining a messianic viewpoint within the context of the Torah, let alone within the book of Genesis has been much more controversial. After summarizing the main interpretive opinions for the *protoevangelium*, this study will discuss several pieces of evidence derived from the book of Genesis which in my judgment cumulatively support a messianic reading of the passage. Such evidence includes lexical usage in the passage, innertextual interpretation of the divine judgment oracle in the adjacent chapters in Genesis, and emphases found within the *toledot* structure in Genesis.

<div align="center">Interpretive Views</div>

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[7] 'Crushed' συντρίβω follows the MT and not the LXX which has 'watch, keep an eye on' τηρήσει . Robert Mounce, *Romans*, NAC, Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995. Logos Bible Software 4.

[8] G.K. Beale, *The New International Greek Testament Commentary: Revelation*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999. Logos Bible Software 4. Cf. Martin McNamara, *Targum and Testament, Aramaic Paraphrases of the Hebrew Bible: A Light on the New Testament*. Eerdmans: 1972, 221-22.

[9] Ibid.

Four major views have been taken with regard to the meaning of this text.[10] The first, the naturalistic view sees the serpent as a literal snake and the term 'seed' as collective humanity. The broader story in Gen. 3 functions as an etiology that explains why people perpetually fear and hate snakes and why women experience pain in childbirth[11]. A second interpretation recognizes the symbolic language in the account and interprets the conflict between the serpent and the woman as a perpetual war between the representatives of evil and humankind[12]. A third understanding, s*ensus plenior* allows for a messianic interpretation latent in the text that would not have been recognized by the original author of Genesis but is revealed in the progressive unfolding of later divine revelation[13]. Finally, the messianic reading finds in the text God's promise of a coming 'seed,' as a designated individual who will destroy the works of the serpent at the cost of his own life.[14]

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[10] Cf. the summary of interpretations in Michael Rydelnik, *The Messianic Hope,* Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2010, 131-135.

[11] Representative of this widely held critical position is Speiser who in a textual note on the word he translates as 'offspring' writes, "Heb. Literally 'seed,' used normally in the collective sense of progeny. The passage does not justify eschatological connotations. As Driver puts it, 'We must not read into the words more than they contain." *Genesis*, Anchor Bible, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1964, 24. See however Wifall for a critical opinion that holds to standard source criticism while still recognizing the messianic import of this text in stating, "Many contemporary Biblical scholars have denied any 'messianic' significance to Gen 3:15. Yet, as valuable as their studies have been, the royal and 'Davidic' significance of this passage for both the OT and NT cannot be overlooked. Apparently, Gen 3:15 owes its present form to the Yahwist's adaptation of both the David story (2 Sam-1 Kgs 2) and ancient Near Eastern royal mythology to Israel's covenant faith and history. The Yahwist has thus presented Israel's history and pre-history within a 'Davidic' or 'messianic' framework." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 1974: 361-65.

[12] E.g. John Calvin, *Commentary* 170-71 accepted a modified collective understanding while still narrowing the term seed to the seed of Christ; John Walton, *Genesis* in The NIV Application Commentary, gen. ed. Terry Muck, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001, 226.

[13] Rydelnik, 134 notes that Wenham affirms an etiological and symbolic understanding while still allowing for a secondary messianic meaning in light of later revelation. G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, Word Biblical Commentary, Waco, TX: Word, 1987, 80.

[14] W.H. Rose, s.v., "Messiah," in *Dictionary of the Pentateuch*, ed. T.D. Alexander and Tremper Longman. Rose defines messianic expectation as a focus upon a

Text

14 וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶל־הַנָּחָשׁ כִּי עָשִׂיתָ זֹּאת אָרוּר אַתָּה מִכָּל־הַבְּהֵמָה
וּמִכֹּל חַיַּת הַשָּׂדֶה עַל־גְּחֹנְךָ תֵלֵךְ וְעָפָר תֹּאכַל כָּל־יְמֵי חַיֶּיךָ:

15 וְאֵיבָה אָשִׁית בֵּינְךָ וּבֵין הָאִשָּׁה וּבֵין זַרְעֲךָ וּבֵין זַרְעָהּ הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ
וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עָקֵב: [15]

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.
> [15] 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." [16]

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future royal figure sent by God who brings salvation to God's people and the world and establishes a kingdom rule of peace and justice. This understanding of a messianic expectation in the Pentateuch must be conceptual since the technical term "messiah" arose after the end of the Old Testament period. Rose's definition would not be broad enough to encompass the expectation in Gen. 3:15 since there is no mention of a regal figure. However, the co-regency, rulership of man under the divine King is already assumed in the dominion mandate in Gen. 1:28-31 and the royal nature of the chosen seed of Abraham is revealed in several divine oracles later in the Genesis narrative. Cf. David D. Pettus. "Abraham's Royal Seed in Genesis" Evangelical Theological Society. Jan. 2007. at: http://works.bepress.com/david_pettus/27; also Alexander, "Royal Expectation in Genesis through Kings," *Tyndale Bulletin* (1998): 191-212 . Representative of recent messianic readings of the *protoevangelium* are T.D. Alexander, "Messianic Ideology in the Book of Genesis," in *The Lord's Anointed*. Eds. P.E. Satterthwaite et. al. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995 and Ken Mathews, Gen. 1-11:26, NAC Broadman & Holman, 1996.

[15] *The Hebrew Bible: Andersen-Forbes Analyzed Text*. 2008 (Ge 3:14–15). Logos Bible Software.

[16] *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. 2001 (Ge 3:14–15). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

Immediate Context in Genesis 3

The *protevangelium* is part of a divine curse oracle pronounced on the serpent for his role in enticing Eve to violate God's command not to partake of the Tree of Knowledge in the midst of Eden. The chiastic structure of Gen 3:9-19 underscores the curse on the serpent which suggests the centrality of the judgment on the snake (*nāḥāš*) in the oracle. The poetic form of the divine monologue in (vss. 14-19) which follows on the prose dialogue in (vss. 9-13) emphasizes the importance of God's word.

A God interrogates Adam (vss. 9-12)

    B God interrogates Eve (vs. 13)

        C God CURSES the serpent (vss. 14-15)

    B1 God punishes Eve (vs. 16)

A1 God punishes Adam (vss. 17-19)

Unlike the Lord's questioning of the human pair, there is no divine interrogation of the serpent, no attempt to uncover his motive. He is simply 'cursed' (אָרַר)[17]. He is the only being in the oracle that receives God's curse.   In verse 14 the curse falls on the animal whose method of locomotion would now be a constant reminder to Adam and Eve and their descendants of the dire results of their rebellion in Eden. Cursed above all land animals, the serpent would crawl on its 'belly' as a sign of defeat and humiliation. The prophet Isaiah claims this divine curse would not be lifted, even in the messianic kingdom in which the serpent would still eat dust while at the same time being rendered harmless[18].

In verse 15, the oracle turns from the 'snake' to addressing the malevolent entity utilizing the hapless reptile. The serpent's supra sentient characteristics and his later identification in the NT texts with Satan have been enough to justify his

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[17] 'Cursed' is the typical way of introducing a decree of doom in the Hebrew Bible (4:11; 9:25, 27:29 and Deut. 27:15-16), Mathews, 244.

[18] Isaiah 65:25,   The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD. (ESV); Several additional OT texts describe the defeat of the Gentile nations at the hand of the Davidic Messiah in similar terms 'licking the dust like a serpent' (Micah 7:17) and 'let his enemies lick the dust' (Ps. 72:9) perhaps alluding to this text ('enemy' is within the same Hebrew root family as 'enmity' in Gen. 3:15).

identification with the Devil despite the lack of a developed doctrine of Satan in the Old Testament.[19] The snake can talk. He knows what God has been saying to the human couple and challenges the divine prohibitive. The serpent is cunning and uses his 'craftiness' to persuade the human couple to accept his viewpoint and disobey God.   At any rate, God states that he is going to put 'enmity' (אֵיבָה) between the serpent and the woman and between their respective 'offspring'. Enmity in the Hebrew Bible is always between moral agents and never includes an animal except in this case[20]. This personal hostility will be perpetual and is placed between them by divine edict. The serpent thought he had co-opted the woman and her descendants but now realizes that through her 'seed,' she will be his undoing.

In addition to assuming that the Serpent is Satan in this passage, messianic exegesis of this passage, in part, turns on the proper definition and usage of the word 'seed' in this verse. Though the word only occurs in the singular in the OT, it is a collective noun which means it can stand for both an individual/representative member of the category or a group within the category or the entirety of the category.   Hamilton observes that this verse contains the only incidence in the Hebrew Bible where *zera`* (זֶרַע) 'descendant, offspring, seed' occurs with the feminine, third person, pronominal suffix as 'her offspring.'[21] It is rare indeed for the Hebrew Bible to refer to female seed (see for example Gen. 16:10, Hagar's collective seed but note Gen. 5:1ff. as more common).   In addition, the Greek Septuagint translation renders the subject pronoun (הוּא) as 'he' (αὐτός) rather than the expected neuter 'it' (αὐτό) violating the rules of Greek grammar.[22] All of this

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[19] Job's description comes closest, since he identifies an angelic being as 'the satan', but even there the Hebrew noun taking the definite article denotes a title meaning 'the adversary' and not a personal name (Job 1:6ff.). If the wisdom book of Job is early, (a minority viewpoint), however, it would demonstrate an understanding of an adversarial celestial being dating back to Patriarchal times. In only one case, is Satan used as a proper name—the narrator in Chronicles charges him with inciting David to number the people 1 Chr. 21:1 (HALOT, sv. שָׂטָן). In the NT, the serpent is identified with Satan as Eve's enticer in 2 Cor. 11:3, 14; In a clear reference to the serpent's temptation, the writer to Hebrews 2:14 tells his readers that it was Christ's death that lead to the defeat of Satan who had the power over death.

[20] BDB, 33 defines it as 'personal hostility.'

[21] V.P. Hamilton, *Handbook on the Pentateuch*. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1983, 50.

[22] Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. *The Messiah in the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995 37-42;

would seem to point toward an individual reading of the seed in this verse. However, Walton is representative of others who disagree noting that a collective singular masculine noun antecedent would take a masculine singular pronoun as well[23]. This collective interpretation is reflected in the early NET Beta which translates 15c,d as:

הוּא יְשׁוּפְךָ רֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תְּשׁוּפֶנּוּ עָקֵב:

"They will attack your head but you will attack their heels."

The nature of the warfare between these seeds is described by the same Hebrew verb *šûp* which means 'bruise' or 'crush' or perhaps 'strike at'[24]. The image is one of the woman and her seed 'crushing' underfoot or striking at the serpent with a fatal blow, while the serpent strikes furiously at the same time. Because of this ongoing warfare, it is difficult for some to see any resolution or promise found in this text, especially in light of the mortal danger a poisonous snakebite poses. This problem, of course, is likely exacerbated by a non-individuated translation of this text and a group meaning for the collective noun 'seed.' If the pronoun is translated to reflect a single representative of the group the messianic door is opened. Rydelnik, doesn't see a problem with the serpent inflicting death on the messianic seed, since Christ does indeed die for the sins of the world.[25] Engaging in this ongoing lexical warfare, John Collins and T.D. Alexander have argued for an individual rendering based on the usage of singular verbs with the collective noun.[26]

At this point, we still await a final resolution to this lexical matter and no one has delivered a 'crushing' blow. But, the certain oscillation between a group or

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[23] Cf. John H. Walton, *Genesis*, NIVAC. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001, 233-35.

[24] TWOT, 912. HALOT .

[25] Rydelnik, 141, contra Kaiser, 41 who distinguishes between the wounding of the woman's seed and the destruction of the serpent.

[26] J. Collins, "A Syntactical Note on Genesis 3:15: Is the Woman's Seed Singular or Plural?" *Tyndale Bulletin* 48 (1997): 141-48; Also, T.D. Alexander's "Further Observations on the Term 'Seed' in Genesis." *Tyndale Bulletin* 48: (1997): 363-67 who attempts to explain syntactically the seeming exceptions to this rule in Gen. 22:18 and 24:60 noted by Walton and others. Alexander believes that the occurrence of the third person singular imperfect verb with a non-converting *waw* in both texts identifies the seed with its correlative pronoun as an individual (365) and the individual interpretation which is found in Ps. 72.

individual meaning for the collective word 'seed' allows for the plausibility, if not the likelihood of an individual interpretation for this passage and makes it at the very least a viable lexical option which is perfectly consistent with the concern to differentiate the one and the many in the larger corpus of the Hebrew bible[27]. Perhaps examining the verse in light of broad structural features in the book of Genesis will yield more definitive results.

Toledot *tôlēḏôṯ*

Interpreters have long noted that the book of Genesis contains ten similar phrases that appear to mark 'genealogies' or 'clan histories.' [28] Even though several of these *tôlēḏôṯ* usages are strict genealogical lists, most contain a combination of narrative and genealogy. The arrangement of these *tôlēḏôṯ* in the macrostructure of Genesis reveals some striking observations. For example, the ten *tôlēḏôṯ* are centered around the *tôlēḏôṯ* of Terah which is the narrative on the life of Abraham the founding father of Israel[29]. Setting aside such questions as are the *tôlēḏôṯ* source markers, in the final form of Genesis a primary function of these headings is revealing and tracing God's promised seed through the narrative story in Genesis[30]. These clan histories do so by tracing the favored descendants in the narrative and

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[27] Such an oscillation between the one and the many occurs multiple times within Genesis (15:3, 16:10, 21:13 etc.) and elsewhere in the Pentateuch with respect to the Lord's promise to raise up a prophet like Moses which in context clearly involves the prophetic office (Deut. 18:15), those whom God will raise up as prophets (Deut. 18:18-22) and a singular eschatological prophet who is still expected according to the Torah's author or editor (Deut. 34:10ff.). This apparent oscillation likewise figures strongly in the interpretive disagreements surrounding the identity of Isaiah's Servant who is seen as many when identified as corporate Israel, or a faithful remnant within Israel (Is. 42:19-20; 43:1; 45:4) or as one individual whether the prophet himself or the mysterious suffering servant (Is. 42:1-9; 52:13-53:12) who redeems his people and finds prophetic fulfillment in Jesus of Nazareth from a NT perspective. These facts in the broader Hebrew Bible at the very least show that such an oscillation in Genesis 3 would not be strange but characteristic.

[28] The phrase translated "These are the generations of" is found in 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1, 36:9; 37:2.

[29] The second Esau *tôlēḏôṯ* in 36:9 produces eleven sections with 5 occurring on each side of the Terah-Abraham *tôlēḏôṯ*.

[30] For a summary of the various functions of the *tôlēḏôṯ* structuring in Genesis see Sidney Greidanus, *Preaching Christ from Genesis.* Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007, 12-17 who proposes that the function of the structure is to narrow the range of the seed's identity.

genealogical lists and disavowing and setting aside the rejected seed/descendants. Every *toledot* is utilized in the service of this goal as seen in the layout below drawn from the Patriarchal History.

PROGENITOR (S) (Terah-Abram; Isaac; Jacob)

PROGENY (Abram, Nahor, Haran-Lot, Isaac; Jacob & Esau; Twelve sons and Dinah)

CHOSEN PROGENY (Abram; Isaac; Jacob; Judah)

REJECTED OR (BYPASSED) PROGENY (Nahor, Haran-Lot, Ishmael; Esau; Reuben-Simeon-Levi)

PROGENITOR	PROGENY	CHOSEN PROGENY	REJECTED PROGENY
Terah (11:27)	Abram,Nahor, Haran (Lot)	Abraham	Nahor, Lot
Abraham	Ishmael, Isaac	Isaac	Ishmael (25:12)
Isaac (25:19)	Jacob, Esau	Jacob	Esau (36:1, 9)
Jacob (37:2)	12 Sons and Dinah	Judah	Reuben, Simeon, Levi

If this focus on tracing the seed is the case with every *tôlēḏôt* in the rest of Genesis it would suggest that the *tôlēḏôt* of 'the heavens and the earth' might follow the same pattern, which it does.

PROGENITOR (God as Creator of ALL—the heavens and the earth)

PROGENY (Adam and Eve by direct creation; Cain, Abel, Seth--the seed of Adam and Eve)

CHOSEN PROGENY (Seth)

REJECTED or BYPASSED PROGENY (Abel-slain, Cain)

A recent proposal by Jason DeRouchie argues that the ten markers are organized into a still larger unit making up a five part macrostructure in the book of Genesis. DeRouchie builds his case on the occurrence and relationship between 'asyndetic' (lacking a conjunction) and *waw* 'fronted' *toledots* summarized as follows:

The Five-Part *toledot* Divisions of Genesis[31]

		Preface 1:1 – 2:3
I	Ø	These are the *toledot* of the Heavens and the earth (2:4-4:26)
Ii	Ø	This is the book of the *toledot* of Adam (5:1-6:8)
Iii	Ø	These are the *toledot* of Noah (6:9-9:29)
	waw	*And* these are the *toledot* of Noah's sons (10:1-11:9)
Iv	Ø	These are the *toledot* of Shem (11:10-11:26)
	waw	*And* these are the *toledot* of Terah (11:27-25:11)
	waw	
	waw	*And* these are the *toledot* of Ishmael (25:12-18))
	waw	*And* these are the *toledot* of Isaac (25:19-35:29)
		And these are the *toledot* of Esau (36:1-8; 36:9-37:1)
V	Ø	These are the *toledot* of Jacob (37:2-50:26)

DeRouchie supposes that each asyndetic *toledot* is linked to the preceding division in the five part macrostructure with the largest unit, chain of *toledots* (Iv) focused on God's covenant with the Patriarchs, as one might expect.[32] For our purposes, however, such a structural focus in the content within the five part macrostructure buttresses the progressive narrowing and tracing of the chosen/promised seed which is already found in the tenfold *toledot* structure. It moves from the 'heavens and the earth' (I), to 'humanity' (Ii), to 'Noah' as the remnant of humanity (Iii), to 'Shem' as a subset of humanity (Iv) and finally to 'Jacob' as the father of Israel (V). The first macro *toledot* ('the heavens and the earth') "highlights humanity's need for blessing" in light of humanity's rebellion through the actions of Adam and Eve and sets forth God's answer to this dilemma. In spite of ongoing strife between the spiritual seed of the serpent and the woman, God's promised commission blessing for those who bear His image (Gen. 1:26-28) would still come by way of a curse-overcoming deliverer who would put an end to

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[31] Jason S. DeRouchie, "The Blessing Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure of Genesis," *JETS* 56/2 (June 2013) 233.

[32] DeRouchie, 245.

the serpent's kingdom destroying schemes.[33] An expectation of an individual curse overcoming seed from the first *toledot* makes much better sense of the narrator's obvious endeavor to trace an individual 'seed' in the remainder of Genesis.

Context in the First *Toledot*

The *protevangelium* occurs within the first of 10 *toledots* (תולדות) in the book of Genesis. As pointed out in the previous section, characteristic of these structural markers in Genesis is the naming of a progenitor followed by a subsequent emphasis on the progeny and the fate of the progeny which is centered on validating God's covenant promises. The progeny's destiny in the narrative revolves around their election or nonelection which is ultimately evidenced by their faith or lack thereof in the case of the non-chosen seed.   This first structuring device (Gen. 2:4-4:26) places the *protevangelium* in a literary/structural context that also includes Genesis 4 which accents the fortunes of the initial seed of Adam and Eve after the Fall.

Toledot of the Heavens and the Earth (2:4 – 4:26)

The first *tôlēdôt* begins by reflecting back on mankind created as male and female, and made in the divine image as the apex of God's good creation stated earlier in Gen. 1:26-27. Chapter 2 then details the fashioning of the first human pair (2:4-25), their divinely sanctioned marriage and the consummation of their union sexually (v. 24) which shows the narrator's interest in their procreation and multiplication anticipated in light of the creation mandate recounted in the prologue in Gen. 1:26-28[34]. The narrative moves on to the tragedy of the Fall followed by God's judgment oracle targeting each of the guilty parties, which is

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[33] Ibid, 244 who states the main theme of Genesis as: "the means by which God's blessing-commission of kingdom advancement will be fulfilled in a cursed and perverted world is through an ever-expanding God-oriented, hope-filled, mission-minded community, climaxing in a single king in the line of promise who will perfectly reflect, resemble, and represent God and who will definitively overcome all evil, thus restoring right order to God's kingdom for the fame of his name."

[34]"The place of fertility and nourishment is also distinctive in Genesis 1. Contrary to the *Atrahasis Epic* 3.7, for example, where the gods are threatened by human overpopulation and thus devise various means of thinning out the human race (including infertility, stillbirth, and spontaneous abortion), the creator in Genesis 1 freely grants fertility to both human and nonhuman as permanent gift or blessing." (J. Richard Middleton, *Genesis 1-11 as Ideology Critique*, "The Social Context of the Image") Thus the primeval history is at one level a polemical recontextualization of Israel's core theological traditions critical of the pagan Mesopotamian traditions.

directed not just against the participants in the act but on their descendants (seed) as well[35]. In the final section of the first *tôlēḏôt* the chosen and rejected progeny are differentiated (4:1-26) in accordance with the stipulations of the divine oracle in (3:14-19). The section ends with a word of hope regarding the chosen seed line represented in Seth who has replaced Abel and is followed by his son Enosh who embodies those in the line of the woman who will worship God (vss. 25-26).

<div align="center">Genesis chapter 4</div>

In consonance with the *toledot* macrostructure of Genesis, if there is a conscious attempt to emphasize and trace the individual seed by the narrator in Genesis in light of Gen. 3:15, one would expect to find those concerns highlighted in the aftermath of God's judgment oracle on the participants and their subsequent expulsion from Paradise, which is exactly what we encounter in the narrative text. Eve's statements after the birth of her son Cain and later Seth suggest that she was anticipating an individual 'seed' sent by God and interpreting the birth of her progeny in light of the divine statement in Gen. 3:15. What is most curious is that the narrator places nothing on her lips concerning the divine judgment oracle directed towards her in Gen. 3:16. There is no mention of her pain in childbirth or of her struggle with her husband. Additionally, there is no mention of the contents of the divine pronouncements directed to her husband Adam after the Fall.

Instead her short monologues in Gen. 4 are focused on what might be termed 'seed of the woman' concerns derived from the divine oracle directed at the serpent in Gen. 3:15. Brief as they are, her statements concerning the birth and naming of her sons do not undergird an exclusive 'collective' plural understanding of *zera`* --seed. Her sons are named and highlighted as individuals and the one

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[35] The *Massora parva* for the word תולדות in 2:4 notes that the term occurs only twice in the Hebrew Bible fully written. Besides this text in Gen. 2:4, the second occurrence is in Ruth 4:18 which lists the royal ancestry of King David beginning with Perez. There is little doubt that there is an intentional connection in Ruth to the promised royal seed of Judah in Genesis 49:10; and to the sordid event with Tamar in chapter 38:. Whether this additional plene (full) spelling is accidental or intentional is difficult to determine but it is striking that if granted, it is connected to this initial particular *toledot* in Genesis with its incipient messianism. The rabbinical comments in *Midrash Rabbah* also join Perez to this text stating, "This is the history of Perez and it has a profound significance. ... When the Holy One created the world there was as yet no Angel of Death... But when Adam and Eve fell into sin, all generations were corrupted. When Perez arose, history began to be fulfilled through him, because from him the Messiah would arise, and in his days the Holy One would cause death to be swallowed up, as it is written, 'He will destroy death forever'(Is. 25:8)." See the discussion in Risto Santala, *The Messiah in the Pentateuch.*

time the word 'seed' is used in the chapter in Gen. 4:25, it clearly is singular;
referring to Seth as an individual.

To be sure, the collective seed is indeed present in the narrative as well,
epitomized by the murderous Cain who slays his righteous brother Abel and whose
descendants continue to prove they are the seed of the serpent. Using word play
Eve names her firstborn son Cain which sounds like the verb 'to acquire, get' and
counts his birth as a direct blessing from the Lord (4:1). Is Cain perhaps the one
who would fulfill the prediction of a seed that would 'crush' the serpent's head?
That Cain would not be the divinely promised seed is made clear in the contrasting
descriptions of Eve's conceptions and births which *bookend*, the activities of Cain
and his evil progeny in chapter 4 (Gen. 4:1-2a and 25-26). Eve's recognition at her
son's birth that Cain was acquired with the help of the Lord is filled with a mother's
hope which the subsequent murderous actions of her firstborn dash to the ground.
In light of the killing of his brother Abel and the later murders committed by his
descendant Lamech, Cain and his murderous seed are rightly rejected by the
narrator from consideration in the chosen line. His genealogy in terms of the
promise dies—his murderous seed is set aside in the narrative, though his wicked
seed lives on.

The statement by Eve at the end of the first *toledot* on the birth of Seth that
God had 'appointed' her another seed in the place of Abel redirects the attention
of the reader away from Cain's evil descendants to the vicissitudes of the seed of
Seth who will be reintroduced and highlighted at the beginning of the second
toledot in Genesis (v. 25). This is consistent with the larger goal of the *toledot*
structure in book of Genesis and reveals a strategy to single out individual
representatives or an individual representative *even from* the start—beginning with
the first *toledot* in Genesis. This intentionality fits well with an individual reading of
the passage in Gen. 3:15, and respects the authorial intent of the narrator.

Eve's use of the divine epithet (אלהים) Elohim at the birth of Seth recalls
her earlier temptation experience where she and the Serpent in their dialogue
appropriated it to question the veracity of God's word (Gen. 3:1-5). While her
existential sufferings after the Fall have demonstrated for Eve the veracity of
Elohim's word, the 'mother of all living' believes too that Elohim will also keep his
promise that her 'appointed' seed will one day undo the tragic effects of the first
couple's rebellion[36]. Her appropriation of this particular name for God at the

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[36]The use of Elohim to designate God only occurs in the first *toledot* in the
temptation narrative (2X) in Gen. 3:1-5 and in Eve's naming of Seth in 4:26.
Mathews believes 4:26 echoes the earlier uses in 3:1-5. This interpretation would
tie Eve's view of her son's significance to the entire pericope encompassing Gen. 3
(Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26*), 290.

naming of her son supports the view that she is interpreting his birth in light of Gen. 3:15 and as the fulfillment of the divine blessing on general procreation in Gen. 1. That Seth bears the marks of the chosen seed at the end of the 'toledot of the heavens and the earth' is cemented when the narrator reveals that Seth sires a son named Enosh in whose days men become worshippers of God (v. 26)[37]. Unlike the serpent's seed epitomized by Cain and his descendants, the righteous seed of the woman will worship the Lord in the proper manner. This dual understanding of the 'seed' as a righteous one who will worship Yahweh carries over into the next *toledot.*

<div align="center">

Toledot of Adam (Gen. 5:1-6:8)

Genesis chapter 5

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The second *toledot,* the *toledot* of Adam, continues the Genesis narrative's focus on tracing an individual seed within the line of Adam. The geneaological narrative begins by back referencing Adam and Eve's creation in the divine image for God's purposes, and alludes to the divine mandate to be fruitful and multiply and subdue the earth which though now marred by the Fall is still in force (Gen. 5:1-2). The beginning of Adam's *toledot* bypasses Adam's first two sons and highlights his siring of Seth. By doing so, the narrator carefully reminds the reader of Eve's earlier designation of Seth as the divinely chosen replacement seed whose son Enosh worshipped Yahweh (Gen. 4:26). Adam's Sethite lineage delineates righteous men like Enoch who walked with God and did not die but was instead taken by God (v. 24); being spared the narrator's epithet 'and he died' which was appended to every other name in the lineage (Gen. 5:21-25). Linkages between the first *toledot* section in chapter 4 and the section of the second *toledot* in chapter 5 abound. Enoch's piety in the 7th generation sharply contrasts with the wicked activities of Lamech who marks the 7th generation of Cain's rejected lineage. Interpreters have also noted the stark contrast between the wicked activities of the Lamech descended from Cain (Gen. 4:23-24) and the Sethite descendant with the same name.

While Cain's descendant is self-absorbed, sensual and a murderer like his distant ancestral father, Lamech's mind is directed toward the promises of God which were made to his forebears in Gen. 3:14ff.. At the birth of his son this man in

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[37] Worship is also a central concern of Gen. ch 4. Cain's murder of his brother Abel is instigated by the acceptance of Abel's worship and the rejection of Cain's attempt to come before God. The chapter ends with the narrator's assurance that the proper worship of Abel is carried forward in the descendants of his brother Seth. The woman's seed must be an obedient worshipper of the Lord.

the line of the righteous seed names him Noah 'rest' (נוֹחַ), which sounds like the consonants in the word for 'comfort' (נָחַם) and expresses his fervent hope that he will be the woman's seed who will undo the curse stating, "And he called his name Noah, saying, This same shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the LORD hath cursed (Gen. 5:28-29, KJV)[38]. It is not hard to see in Lamech's cry an embryonic eschatological belief that the Lord's judgment oracle directed against the participants in the Fall involved not just judgment and discipline but included a promise that relief would come through an individual descendent of Eve who would undo the effects of the curse--epitomized by God's curse on the ground (Gen. 3:17-19). Lamech's cry for God's comfort to manifest itself in the birth and activity of his son nicely weds the antediluvian hope for a day when Eden would be restored with the means for effecting that day—namely an individual seed descendant of Eve. This understanding finds additional support in the narrator's use of the naming formula which links back to the naming of Seth in 5:3 and 4:26 at the end of the first *toledot*. It seems these early interpreters viewed the stipulations of the curse and its resolution as a package and in its totality.

Lamech's statement implies that the crushing of the serpent's head by an individual descendant of the woman was understood by him as a part of the divine plan with far reaching effects. When the seed came, he would do away with the effects of the curse in its entirety, a notion that can certainly be supported by the conditions expected during Israel's messianic age in the paradisal last days as developed in the oracles of the Old Testament prophets (e.g. Is. 65:17-25). The emphasis on how Noah might have fulfilled his father's hope, it seems to me misses the point. Long before the Davidic covenant and the development of a full-fledged eschatological messianic hope, a canon centered reading of these early sections of Genesis reveal that Adam's godly descendants were already anticipating their deliverer. How this particular seed of the woman would 'crush' the serpent's work is not yet unveiled in Genesis but that he would do so is embraced by both Eve in 4:26 and her descendant Lamech in 5:29.

Conclusion

In my introduction, I suggested that the case for a 'messianic' reading of Gen. 3:15 is cumulative. No single individual argument is decisive and it is virtually impossible to sustain a robust *protevangelium* interpretation of this text within the context of Gen. 3 alone. However, as already pointed out, isolating Gen. 3 from its

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[38] Mathews, 316-17 who writes, "Reference to toilsome labor and the cursed ground reflects the verdict of God's judgment in 3:17-18, where 'cursed is the ground,' and the man is doomed to beat out his existence by 'painful toil.'

literary/historical context in the book of Genesis does not lead to a fruitful resolution of its meaning but at best creates a hypothetical reconstructed meaning behind the text which is difficult to sustain in light of the interpretation of the seed in the entire book. Though the lexical evidence by itself is somewhat ambiguous, the individual meaning for the term 'seed' is certainly plausible as demonstrated by its usage within the book of Genesis and in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. Further, when the text is read in the context of the first and second *toledots* in the Primeval History, not to mention in the *toledot* structure of the entire book of Genesis we would agree with T.D. Alexander's statement that in the "in the light of Genesis as a whole, a messianic reading of this verse is not only possible but highly probable."[39]

Perhaps the ambiguity in the so-called *protoevangelium* is intentional. John Sailhamer postulates that the ambiguous identity of the 'seed' in Gen. 3:15 is purposely intended by the narrator. The author leaves a gap in the story, so that he can gradually reveal it to the reader as the narrative progresses[40]. As we read on, the identity of this mysterious seed of the woman continues to unfold in the narrative. The careful reader learns that he is one who will dwell in the tents of Shem (Gen. 9:25-27), will proceed from the loins of Abraham to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 12:2-3), and will be a royal scion from Judah who ultimately receives the praise of his brethren and rules over the nations (Gen. 49:8-12).

At the end of the day, the *protoevangelium* becomes a presentation of the entire history of redemption in miniature[41]. Bruce Waltke defines the task of Old Testament theology as one that recognizes that "through the development and reformulation of biblical themes in authoritative texts, the biblical message becomes

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[39] T. D. Alexander, "Messianic Ideology in Genesis," *The Lord's Anointed: Interpretation of Old Testament Messianic Texts*, ed. P.E. Satterthwaite, R.S. Hess et. al. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995, 32.

[40] John Sailhamer, *The Meaning of the Pentateuch*. Downers Grove: IVP, 2009, 587-590.

[41] Hamilton's detailed work tracing the trajectory of Gen. 3:15 from its inception into the NT draws the same conclusion. As he puts it, "In my view, the seed promise of Gen 3 gave rise to the hope for one who would restore an edenic state (cf. Gen. 3:17 with 5:29). Genesis then carefully traces a line of male descent to Abraham in the genealogies of chapter 5 and 11 . . . The promises to Abraham in Gen. 12:1-3 and elsewhere (esp. the royal promises in Gen. 17:6, 16; 49:9-11) are then layered onto the earlier ones beginning from Gen 3:15." "*The Skull Crushing Seed of the Woman*," *SBJT* 10: 2006: 49, fn. 45.

ever clearer, richer, stronger, and more complete."[42] I suspect the apostolic writer of the Johannine portrait in Revelation 12 would agree. I for one would see it as a great loss, if the majority of evangelical scholars would one day deem the 'first gospel' exegetically unsound.

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[42] Bruce Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology: an exegetical, canonical, and thematic approach.* Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007. For Waltke, the 'seed of the woman' reveals itself in an ever widening circle of interpretation which ultimately encompasses the entire Christian canon. The trail of the 'seed' begins with Seth in the original historical context of the first *toledot,* broadens to focus on Judah by the end of Genesis and focuses on David in the context of the primary history (Genesis – 2 Kings).