

GENESIS

A THEOLOGICAL COMMENTARY

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB

DR CHARLES VOGAN

PREFACE

In 1 Kings 22 we find a story about the rulers of Judah and Israel debating about whether to do battle against the nation of Aram. The king of Israel (Ahab) and Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah, called the prophets in to the consultation to find out the will of God concerning their plans. Four hundred prophets all predicted a resounding success for the venture. But Jehoshaphat, knowing that these prophets were not faithful to Yahweh, asked if there was a prophet of the LORD whom they could consult; so Ahab reluctantly summoned Micaiah to the meeting.

On the way to the meeting, the king's messenger warned Micaiah about what he should say to the king.

“Behold, the words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king. Let your word be like the word of one of them, and speak favorably.” (1 Kings 22:13)

But Micaiah's answer was telling.

“As the LORD lives, what the LORD says to me, that I will speak.”

Particularly with this commentary on Genesis, I feel like Micaiah with virtually the entire academic community against me. If they were using scriptural arguments then I would go back and re-do my notes. But their arguments are not from Scripture; they are instead an accumulation of opinions over the last several hundred years, created within the growing anti-Christian Western culture that has been forming modern democracies, individual rights, politically correct issues, and – more importantly – a Church that has been conforming more and more to the demands of the culture. Anybody with spiritual insight can see that our modern world has been created by a “lying spirit” speaking in the mouths of almost all the leaders and “prophets” of our current culture, including within the Church.

And, as in Micaiah's day, I've a feeling that the LORD has not only allowed this situation of ours to worsen, he has decreed it – in other words, we have failed him so badly that he has decided to destroy us. We also know from the Prophets that one way the LORD has of destroying a people is a famine of the Word of God.

“Now therefore behold, the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets; the LORD has declared disaster for you.” (1 Kings 22:23)

Without the Truth, our culture and, more seriously, our Church are headed for collapse.

For those who aren't aware of the situation nowadays, it's considered academic suicide to turn one's back on the accumulated wisdom of the sages who are in charge now and to strike out on one's own. And when dealing with the stories of Genesis, there are definitely two tracks to follow. The one track – the modern hermeneutic – is faulty on two counts:

- *First*, commentators almost always use our current culture's ethical and social standards to judge the Genesis characters – and, of course, the

Patriarchs almost always seem to fall short with their immoral behavior and lack of faith, as we moderns see it. The problem with this is that neither the Prophets nor Jesus and the Apostles took that approach. To them, the Genesis characters were models of the faith and to be emulated. So it's a battle of authorities: do we believe the Prophets and the Apostles, or do we believe modern scholars? The two are *not* saying the same things.

- *Second*, modern scholars appear to have a problem digging out all the facts, the data, of the Genesis stories. It's like having only one or two pieces of a puzzle and trying to figure out what the whole picture looks like from only that. It's no wonder they contradict the Biblical testimony of the Genesis message. Not only did God responsibly give us all the data we need to get the message, he also gave us guides who alone would know how to interpret that data and get the right point. We must have the *data* (all of it) plus the *interpretation* of the data – the second can't work without the first. And of course, if one fails to see all the data, one's interpretation will inevitably be wrong.

Since Genesis in particular is vulnerable to these errors of interpretation, simply because of the way it's put together and because of the nature of its message, it has become a favorite haunt for the moralists and pretty much of a mystery as to how it connects to NT Theology, in spite of Apostolic claims of its critical nature. Genesis, in the modern academic's hands, has become mostly useless for our faith: it's thought to be full of bad examples, lack of faith, following the ways and desires of the world, too much identification with the surrounding pagan cultures – so it's certainly not considered as food for Christ's sheep, except as a series of examples of how *not* to live. The downside of all this ignorance is a skewed modern NT Theology that may share many of the terms and concepts of Genesis, but almost none of their original meanings. We've invented, in other words, a new religion apart from the Patriarchs.

Personally I'm in favor of following the lead of the Prophets and Apostles. They saw amazing rescues, the hand of God leading his people, treasures of Heaven, wisdom from on high, faith illuminating the way of the Patriarchs, God's strategy for lifting up his own people at the expense of the pagans, spiritual benefits accruing to even those in proximity with the Heirs of the Covenant – so much positive material for the modern Christian to work with! Here is the very foundation stone of our Faith; Christ would have us learn from and emulate the Patriarchs.

This means, therefore, that in this study of Genesis I have indeed turned my back on the accumulated "wisdom" of today's sages and have come up with an entirely different interpretation of the book of Genesis from those you will find available elsewhere today. I'm not worried about that: the threat of "The words of the prophets with one accord are favorable to the king" holds no terror for me, because "what the LORD says to me, that I will speak." I am responsible to my God, not to modern man's cultural standards – as the prophet Micaiah has set the precedent.

I only say this because you will, no doubt, be alarmed that my interpretations run so counter to the prevailing opinions, and you may be tempted to write me off as heretical simply on the basis of being "different from everyone else." That's not a valid argument.

In Micaiah's case it was courage and faithfulness that enabled him to stand against the "lying spirit" in 400 prophets attending Ahab, who themselves were acting in ignorance and cowardice. The standard for God's people is always "what does God say?", not "what does everyone else say?" At least give my argument consideration and put it to the test: is this, in fact, what God thinks of Abraham and the Patriarchs? Why does he call himself the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? What spiritual skill or resource is necessary to unlock the message of Genesis? What is it in this book that is so crucial for our faith, that indeed only faith can see? Why did Jesus and the Apostles find the message of Genesis to be a solid foundation for our faith? Is this message, right at the very beginning of the Bible, what Paul claims of it – nothing less than the Gospel of Christ?

Listen to me, you who pursue righteousness,
you who seek the LORD:
look to the rock from which you were hewn,
and to the quarry from which you were dug.
Look to Abraham your father
and to Sarah who bore you. (Isaiah 51:1-2)

Copyright © 2018 Charles R. Vogan Jr.
All rights reserved

Scripture quotations (unless otherwise noted) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, Copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Genesis : A Theological Commentary

ISBN 978-1547101634



Ravenbrook Publishers

A subsidiary of
Shenandoah Bible Ministries

www.Ravenbrook.org

www.Shenbible.org