

Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow: How Food Advances the Plot of Genesis

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Abstract

In a previous article we established that food is central to the creation of the world and of humanity and integral to the vocation of men and women. In this article we will show that the task of farming the world drives the plot of the whole of Genesis, and is especially prominent in the promises made to Abraham. The lives of the Patriarchs are consumed with this task, and that constitutes the partial and progressive fulfilment of the Abrahamic covenant. We conclude with some brief reflections on modern ecological concerns and the mission of the church.

I. Introduction

We explored in a previous article why the book of Genesis is laden with food.¹ We showed that Gen 1–2 introduces the book in a way that prioritises food as integral to creation and to the purpose of mankind. The ground is the sphere within which people have a dual task: they are to fill the earth with their own offspring, and with animals. In order to fill the earth, they work the ground so that it

¹ 'Served to Serve: Why Food is Central to the Anthropology of Creation in Genesis 1-3 and to the Plot of Genesis', *ER* 3.1 (2011): 5-25.

produces edible plants, which are food for both people and animals. The dry ground is thus a cosmic farming project, with humanity as the farmers and the animals as the beneficiaries. This is what it means for people to rule over the animals (1:26–28): to farm them, by feeding them so that they are fruitful and so that they fill the earth. ‘Fruitfulness’ [root: פָּרָה] functions in Gen 1–3 in the dual sense of ‘multiplying’ and of plant life.

Our concern in this article is to notice how food drives the plot of the remainder of Genesis. Livestock is the responsibility of people, the beneficiaries of the farming project. People grow plants in order to multiply themselves and the animals. ‘[T]he task given to humanity in Gen 1:28 in relation to the rest of the created order is to be a shepherd.’²

II. Paradise Re-farmed: the Patriarchs Restoring the Blessings of the Garden Ecology to God’s Creation

We will see that the created relationship between humanity, food and creation is a major contributor to the progression of the theme of Genesis. We will take the theme of Genesis to be the partial fulfilment of the restoration of the Edenic blessing through the promise to the Patriarchs.³ These are stated in 12:1–3, amplified in Genesis, and include ‘the promise of new pasture, the promise of a cultivated land.’⁴

The apparent rest at the conclusion of the Patriarch narratives is

² John Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 19.

³ David J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (2d ed.; London: Continuum, 1997), 27; Gordon J. Wenham, *Story as Torah: Reading Old Testament Narratives Ethically* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000; repr., Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2004), 22; Terence E. Fretheim, “Genesis,” in *General & Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 1 of *Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*; NIB; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 328–29. Peter Leithart points out literary features of the lives of the Patriarchs in Genesis that in fact foreshadow the actual exodus (Peter J. Leithart, *Deep Exegesis: The Mystery of Reading Scripture*. [Waco, Tex.: Baylor University Press, 2009], 38), so that they not only partially fulfil but also prefigure the promise.

⁴ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 27.

not a complete fulfilment (50:25).⁵ In the Promised Land, only solitary plots belong to the Patriarchs, while they live in Goshen.⁶

If 'Land, descendants and covenant' are about blessing which is 'the overarching concept in [Genesis]',⁷ we notice that 'land and descendants' is the original plan for farming the world, while the covenant is needed because people, even Noah, sin and so a subset of mankind is being given the task.⁸ The blessing, therefore, consists in a restoration of the Adamic task to a redeemed humanity.

1. Cain & Abel

The brief account of Cain and Abel demonstrates that the livestock farming task remains at the centre of humanity's mandate even after the fall; we see this both in what goes well and what goes wrong.

All appears to begin excellently, in accordance with the master plan. The duo are introduced in terms of the Adamic task in 4:2: one works the ground (producing food for livestock), the other tends sheep (multiplying the livestock). Between them, they are a perfect team for filling the world with living things. However, in the very next verse we see the problem. What seemed at first to be a diversification of function for a common purpose, has rapidly become a cleaving of what God had joined. Cain brings an offering from his plants, but these plants were not to be the culmination of *his* work, they were a part of humanity's combined work, an intermediate step towards the multiplication and care of livestock. They both together should have brought an offering of food and livestock, the dual outcome of their diverse functions within the unified Adamic commission. This may be overlooked when commentators bifurcate between tilling the ground and being a shepherd.⁹ Adam's task was

⁵ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 25. Clines notes that this is true throughout the Pentateuch: each book approaches the fulfilment of the promises, but does not reach it (Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 27–29).

⁶ Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 46; Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 22.

⁷ Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 22.

⁸ John N. Oswalt, "Theology of the Pentateuch," in *DOTP* (ed. T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker; Leicester: IVP, 2003), 857.

⁹ 'For although Adam was appointed to till the ground (2:15), the elect patriarchs' preferred profession was shepherding (47:3) as David's was later (1 Sam 16:11)'

to do *both*; 'tilling the ground to produce food and feeding it to the cattle in their care' is the job description of humanity.

This is not an attempt to explain God's acceptance of the one offering over the other; the most plausible of the many suggested explanations focuses on the contrast between Abel's high quality offering (first-fruits and fat portions) as opposed to Cain's unmarked offering.¹⁰ There is no hint in these verses that plants rather than animals are the issue, and certainly by Lev 2 we have grain being offered; rather the selection from within each realm shows Cain's lack of regard for YHWH.

However, we might add that the grain offering of Leviticus always accompanied a burnt offering,¹¹ which might support the idea that in the overarching plot of the Pentateuch, Cain and Abel making their independent offerings, separating what God has joined, is a bad omen. Sure enough, the next time that blood is shed, it is not an acceptable offering of an animal, but the first murder.

As with Adam, so now with Cain, the punishment involves a further loss of the blessings of the ground: if the cursed ground yielded for Adam with difficulty and he was expelled from the garden, the ground will produce nothing for Cain and he is further geographically dislocated, cursed from the ground (11–12).

(Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* [WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987], 102). 'Jahve liebt den Schafhirten und das Fleischopfer, aber er will nichts wissen von dem Bauern und dem Opfer von Früchten.' Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis: übersetzt und erklärt* (9th ed.; Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 43. Matthews ups the ante by asserting that 'Abel's vocation is not anticipated in chaps. 2–3, though the garden narrative permits it, while Cain's is the one assigned to Adam (2:15; 3:17–19)' (Kenneth A. Matthews, *Genesis 1–11:26* [NAC 1A; Nashville: Broadman, 1996], 265). Keil suggests that Adam must have already engaged in both tasks, but for pragmatic reasons, needing animals in order to keep himself clothed (Keil and Delitzsch, 1:68)

¹⁰ It is hard to understand how Gunkel can write: 'Der Erzähler hat von Abel bisher nur gesagt, dass er Hirt gewesen sei und Fleisch geopfert habe, von Qain, dass er Bauer gewesen sei und Feldfrüchte geopfert habe.' His own translation reads: '...Qain Früchte des Ackers Jahve zum Opfer brachte; und auch Abel brachte *Erstgeburten* seiner Herde dar und das Fett davon' (italics added) and when he comments on the fact that it is obvious that one should bring the very best to God, showing how this is true in Abel's case but failing to show as much in Cain's (Gunkel, *Genesis*, 42–43).

¹¹ Anson F. Rainey, 'Offerings and Sacrifices', *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* 2:1577

Our thesis continues to bear fruit: humanity as farmer of the ground for the sake of the animals both explains how Cain and Abel are introduced, provides a hint of why the puzzling offerings are mentioned, and explains how the episode concludes. A relationship between people and creatures in the context of shepherd-farming was corrupted in Gen 3, an intramural relationship between people in the context of shepherd-farming is corrupted in Gen 4. If farming is the project against which progress is measured, it is also the standard through which sin is exposed.

2. Noah

Noah is a new Adam with a renewed creation.¹² This is most obvious in the way that dry ground reappears from amidst the waters¹³ and is populated by one family which is addressed by God in ways that strongly parallel the first creation.¹⁴

As our thesis has led us to expect, attention to food highlights this theme further. Noah returns to a fresh creation state where all living things are under his care, and where God has caused the ground to produce initial plants (8:11, cf. 2:8). Through the flood, Noah is doing the Adamic task of keeping the ground populated with all living things (6:19; 7:2–3; 7:14–16) and supplying them with food (6:21).

The repeated mention of every living thing as being destroyed by God yet being taken in pairs by Noah stresses that, as with Adam, animals are put by God entirely under Noah's stewardship and could not survive without him.¹⁵ The recreation of dry ground (8:14, cf. 1:9) brings an Adamic commission to Noah's family (8:17 cf. 1:28; notice

¹² Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (IBC 1; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 80; Gordon J. Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Exploring the Old Testament 1; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 21.

¹³ The relatively rare root יָבַשׁ (BDB, 386–87; HALOT, 384–85) is used of the dry ground in 1:9 and of the ground drying in 8:7, 14.

¹⁴ The parallels between 9:2–6 and 1:27–28, 4:8–24 are presented in Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 192.

¹⁵ It is therefore difficult to sustain Turner's conclusion that dominion in this chapter becomes despotic and that such despotism is congruent with the pre-fall dominion, "an intensification of the original command" (Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* [JSOTSup 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990], 48; italics his).

the repetition in vv 18–19).¹⁶

Even the reappearance of dry ground is connected with food: the signal that the ground is ready for Noah is a fruit tree (8:11). In 2:16–17 food is offered in generous, permissive terms: eat from *any* tree, *except the* tree of knowledge. In 9:3–4 a similar permission is given: eat *any* part of every animal, *except the* blood:

מִכָּל עֵץ-הָגֶן אָכַל תֹּאכֵל וּמֵעֵץ הַדֵּעַת טוֹב וְרָע לֹא תֹאכֵל מִמֶּנּוּ

כָּל-רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא-חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָהּ כִּי־רָק עֶשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם
אֶת-כָּל אֲדָמָתָאֲשֶׁר בְּנִפְשׁוֹ דָּמוֹ לֹא תֹאכְלוּ

This parallel with eating from all the trees suggests that 9:3–4 is less grudgingly concessive than some have argued.¹⁷ Moreover, much of the concession argument turns on the assumption that killing animals was not allowed until the permission to eat them was given, which is contradicted by the text: 3:21, 4:4.¹⁸ While killing animals is post-fall, it is not presented by Genesis as an overflow of the human violence that occasioned the flood.¹⁹ Moreover the focus in Gen 1 is not on what

¹⁶ Beauchamp's description is thus too one-sided in noting only that the fall has turned tenderness towards animals by humans into dread by animals, that people have gone from shepherds to hunters (cited in Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 21). There surely is such a change, and it is significant, but there is also continuity of the shepherding task, as argued by Erich Zenger (cited in Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 24). Keil suggests that the dread is needed because mankind has lost any other means of ruling animals (K&D, 1:96); it is not a change in people's disposition that is in view. Moreover, this section may be more to do with reaffirming the value of human life than denigration of animal life (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 83).

¹⁷ Nathan MacDonald, 'Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch', in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology* (ed. Rachel Muers and David Grumett; London: T&T Clark, 2008), 17–21, who sees a contrast between the vegetarian-oriented Priestly material in the Pentateuch and the carnivorous material in Deuteronomic texts. Seth Kunin points out that the permission itself is part of blessing and so should be assumed to be positive (*We Think What We Eat: Neo-Structuralist Analysis of Israelite Food Rules and Other Cultural and Textual Practices* [London: T&T Clark, 2004], 70).

¹⁸ Pace, e.g., Kunin, *We Think What We Eat*, 69.

¹⁹ Pace MacDonald, "Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch," 18–19.

may be *killed* but on what may be *eaten*; Gen 4:4 assumes sacrificial killing.

Noah's sacrifice that averts future floods is, once again, the farmer bringing security to the animals, just as Adam's tending the ground produced food for them (9:9–17). Thus, a major turning point in world history shows that God's project of filling the earth via people's food production is reset.²⁰

3. Patriarchs

Noah, however, responds to the renewed creation as Adam did to the old one: he falls.²¹ One of the most important international relationships for Israel is brought about by a copy of Adam's sin: Canaan is cursed (9:21–27) because of Noah's fruit consumption.²² Renewed humanity does not look promising: Noah cannot be relied on to restore mankind to farmer of the ground for the sake of feeding the animals and populating the world.

God's new strategy is to choose a subset of mankind and give them a subset of the earth to farm.²³ The Abrahamic covenant narrows the farming commission to one man's seed. A covenant with *one* man is made to channel God's purposes for the world through him, in *one* land.²⁴

²⁰ As Brueggemann observes, this story is not about the *flood* but about a 'change wrought in God which makes possible a new beginning for creation' (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 73).

²¹ The parallels are outlined by Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 35. This is all the more tragic for the promising start of 9:20, suggestive of Noah obeying the Adamic commission (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 89).

²² The parallel is described in Wenham, *Pentateuch*, 21; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 60.

²³ Brueggemann notes the election of Abraham's family as intending the provision of the original blessing on humanity (*Genesis*, 105). Kline points out that the formation of the nation of Israel as a theocracy amounted to placing mankind once again in the Edenic setting for the Adamic task (Meredith G. Kline, *Kingdom Prologue: Genesis Foundations for a Covenantal Worldview* [Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2006], 352).

²⁴ This would be supported by Brueggemann's contention that we see here the marrying of two traditions: 'God's *providential care* for the world and his *electing call* of Israel' (*Genesis*, 114; italics his). As Fretheim notes, the blessing to Abraham

Gordon Wenham has observed that the rest of Genesis tells the story of the partial fulfilment of these promises to Abraham.²⁵ In keeping with our thesis, what the Patriarchs do to fulfil these promises is farm cattle. They are not merely on the way to claim a land to become a multiplying people; they are multiplying the animals as they go. We will see this with each Patriarch in turn.

Abraham

The very statement of the Abrahamic promise should immediately call food to mind. Firstly, being a great nation (12:2a) implies being given ground to steward and thus grow food.²⁶ Secondly, Joseph's saving of nations from famine through food management is foreshadowed (12:3b).

When the covenant is ratified, God makes Abraham very *fruitful* (הַפְּרִי 17:6). Land (8) and offspring (16) are the very things that Abraham needs in order to begin an outpost of the commission of Gen 2, to farm the animals. The fall is being reversed: while the ground was a curse in Gen 3, now because the curse is being lifted, a plot of ground is a blessing.

During Abraham's travels, his farming is often in view. Of the various things that he acquired in Egypt, livestock is highlighted

is not a new project, but a continuation of the project of Genesis 1–11 ('Genesis', 329).

²⁵ Wenham, *Story as Torah*, 37; *pace* Dumbrell, who sees the nation promise as fulfilled and the land promise as entirely unfulfilled (William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* [2d ed.; Leicester: IVP, 2002], 31). Brevard Childs contends that the promises would originally have been fulfilled immediately but have been recast into a delayed-fulfilment storyline in the final form of Genesis (*Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 151).

²⁶ 'In the ancient world, land means food' (Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* [Oxford: OUP, 2008], 2), as is obvious from our reading of Genesis. See also Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*. (Rev. ed.; trans. Rex Warner; 1954; repr., London: Penguin, 1972), §I.2 (Warner, 35–36) on how agriculture and basic food production kept the early pre-Hellenic tribes on the move, and Thucydides, *Peloponnesian War*, §I.11 (Warner, 42) on the Greek army at Troy needing to divide between those who will engage in fighting and food-farming

(12:16, 13:2).²⁷ We have noted the special place of food in the war over Lot.²⁸ Abraham's role as multiplier of farmers is furthered by Abimelech (20:14) who not only gives sheep and cattle, but also extra people who, being male and female, are able to multiply themselves. In line with Gen 1–2, as the farmer multiplies animals, he needs to multiply people to tend them. Later, a treaty between them is sealed by cattle (21:27).

Gary Stansell argues that Abraham's wealth acquisition is in order to bestow gifts and obtain a daughter-in-law.²⁹ However, this focuses on the non-cattle wealth, which has been less in the foreground. While these gifts are explicit, the more obvious implicit activity is producing people and cattle for dominion. He notes that treasure in the ancient world is for giving away;³⁰ Genesis pushes us to observe that the 'treasure' (cattle) is what you serve, rather than what you serve with.

Isaac and Jacob

Isaac only gets one chapter exclusively to himself,³¹ and it centres on his livestock farming and resulting disputes with Abimelech. That

²⁷ It is not clear whether מִקְנֵה means 'cattle' or wealth generally: *HALOT*, 628 gives it as a second option, whereas *TWOT*, §2039b gives cattle as the only meaning, distinguishing from מִקְנֵה. This may be explained by William Koopmans: 'Of the 76 occurrences of the nom. מִקְנֵה, virtually all the references designate domestic livestock—herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. ... The possession of many cattle was a prime indication of wealth, especially in the patriarchal period (Gen 13:2, 7; 26:14) but also during the period of the monarchy (2 Chron 26:10).' מִקְנֵה, *NIDOTTE* 2:1090. The reference to possessions in 12:5 is less clear; Stansell argues that רֶכֶשׁ refers to 'cattle, flocks and booty' citing *BDB* (Gary Stansell, 'Wealth: How Abraham Became Rich', in *Ancient Israel: The Old Testament in Its Social Context* [ed. Philip Francis Esler; Minneapolis, Minn.: Augsburg Fortress, 2006], 97) which does highlight cattle, but *HALOT* does not even mention cattle (*HALOT*, 1238).

²⁸ 'Served to Serve', 5.

²⁹ Stansell, 'Wealth', 101, citing 15:2; 24:34; 24:10; 24:22; 24:30; 24:53.

³⁰ Stansell, 'Wealth', 101.

³¹ Victor P. Hamilton, 'Genesis: Theology', *NIDOTTE* 4:666.

chapter sees him beginning to experience the promises to Abraham.³² His success in carrying out the Abrahamic/Adamic task is clearly stated in 26:12–14: “And Isaac *sowed* in that *land* and *reaped* in the same year a hundredfold. The Lord *blessed* him, ¹³and the man became rich ... ¹⁴He had possessions of *flocks* and *herds* and many *servants*, ... ” (ESV). His success in farming the ground to produce food has yielded much cattle and, again, many people to tend the cattle.

However, if Isaac is to continue the farming role by multiplying himself and cattle, he must marry.³³ Food has a curious function in Rebekah’s betrothal³⁴ and one of the few things we learn about her is that she comes from a family of livestock farmers (28:2) who will be plundered by her son, after he marries a more conspicuously involved farmer (29:6).

Jacob’s return trip to Laban turns him into a large farming family, and farming is how he serves Laban and how God grows him; it is how he becomes *fruitful* (28:4). His growth in livestock (v29–31, 43) requires him to leave Laban. This constitutes the partial fulfilment of his father’s blessing.³⁵

Jacob contrasted with Esau

Further, the narrative stresses that it *is* Jacob who is fulfilling the blessing, and not Esau, precisely by showing attention to cattle.

Esau’s genealogy goes out of its way to show how uninterested they are in farming: only one man’s activity is described, suggesting that he is an exception, and he grazes livestock (36:24). Esau is the

³² Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994), 193.

³³ As Turner notes, one of two major recurring themes of blessing in Genesis is fertility (Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 125).

³⁴ Abraham’s servant finds Rebekah and his task is to take her away to be betrothed to Isaac. He is immediately invited in by Laban (24:31), who’s hospitality is accepted without delay, except food for the men: the camels, having completed their work, are allowed to eat (32–33). Surprisingly, at the very point when the business is concluded, and Laban bids them take Rebekah and go (50), then they take a meal together (54). The original refusal was obviously not for fear of delaying the mission. No food before the conclusion, and no conclusion without food, it seems.

³⁵ Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis*, 126.

Bible's paradigm of the ungodly rejected by God (Mal 1:3, Rom 9:13).

Jacob's return is a pointed contrast. First his attempt to propitiate Esau (32:1–21) involves a gift of livestock (5, 13–15), a prayer involving acknowledgement of prosperity in terms of livestock and people (9–11 cp. 7) and an effort to safeguard livestock and people (8). Once reconciliation with Esau is effected, it is his fragile cattle which prevent him expressing the reconciliation by travelling together (33:13, 17). Even the Dinah episode features livestock: livestock prevents Jacob from responding (34:5), greed for livestock ensnares the townsmen (23), and forms the plunder for Jacob's sons (28).

Attention to the food motif shows that Jacob, not Esau, will effect God's restoration of blessing to the world.

4. Joseph

We return to where we began: the Joseph narrative. Space prevents us from revisiting the function of meals in this narrative beyond Katie Heffelfinger's analysis.³⁶ Since food is so significant a part of the plot in the first two parts of Genesis, one would expect the theme to climax in the concluding part of the book.³⁷ Indeed so: Heffelfinger has identified 132 references to food in Genesis 37–50. That the whole plot is driven by an epic famine is obvious, and it is fitting that the concluding section of Genesis should step up the use of what is clearly a significant motif. What we will now do is examine the plot with the perspective which Genesis has caused us to adopt: people as farmers of the ground, growing food for the sake of the animals.

³⁶ It was Katie Heffelfinger's analysis of the function of food, and especially meals, in the Joseph narratives (Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing') that sparked this project: 'Served to Serve', 9.

³⁷ The commonly recognised parts to which I refer are: Primeval History (1–11), Patriarchal Narratives (12–36) and Joseph Story (37–50). See Tremper Longman III, *How to Read Genesis* (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 2005), 64; Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2006), 53. C.f. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel*, 13. Where a four-part structure is advanced, this consists of splitting the second of the above in two (e.g., Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2001], 20–21; Laurence A. Turner, *Genesis* [2d ed.; Readings: A New Biblical Commentary; Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2009], 5–6); either way, the Joseph cycle is the concluding part of Genesis.

Perhaps the most striking turn in the Joseph narrative is the close connection between world dominion and food production. This begins with Joseph's dreams: it is sheaves of grain that indicate his brothers bowing down to him (37:7). The food motif dominates, but the bowing indicates power. The second dream indicates power much more strongly (37:9): that celestial bodies are bowing down to Joseph is a reference to dominion. Genesis begins by assigning dominion to the sun and moon. While light and dark, and night and day, have already existed for several days, the sun, moon and stars are created with various functions, one of which is to rule, *לְמַמְשֵׁלָתָם* (1:14–18).³⁸ This would make good sense of the restatements of the Abrahamic promise: as the stars shall your descendants be (15:5), and kings will come from you (17:6, 16). The combined picture of the two dreams, then, is that the rulers of Israel (Jacob, wife and eleven tribal heads) are all subservient to one of the other tribal heads (Joseph) and this on account of his greater production of grain. While this is obviously how the Joseph story pans out, we should pause and notice that this fits precisely with the anthropology and ecology of Genesis that we have detected in the opening chapters of the book: dominion means *feeding* others.³⁹

The brothers pick up on this, as may be indicated by the emphatic use of *מָלַךְ* (inf. abs. + finite) at v8.⁴⁰ While kings have been regular characters in Genesis, this verb has not. It has appeared for the first time in the genealogy of Esau which immediately precedes the Joseph narrative. There it appears ten times, and the only other uses in the book are here. Strikingly, the verb is introduced with reference to Israel: "These are the kings who *reigned* in the land of Edom, before any king *reigned* over the Israelites" (36:31, ESV). The brothers' protest might then mean that no king has yet arisen in Israel and Joseph is certainly not going to be the first! In parallel with the use of *מָלַךְ*, the

³⁸ James B. Jordan, *Through New Eyes: Developing a Biblical View of the World* (Brentwood, Tenn.: Wolgemuth & Hyatt, 1988; repr., Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf and Stock, 1999), 53–56.

³⁹ 'Served to Serve', 10-17, 21.

⁴⁰ In this case, the emphasis is to strengthen the dubiousness of the question (Joüon §123f; GKC §113.q); a specific case of the general function of emphasis of this construction (cf., Joüon §123d; GKC §113.n).

brothers use the same emphatic syntax of לִשְׂמֹר, which links back to the dominion function of the celestial bodies in 1:18, as well as the cursed perversions of dominion in 3:16 and 4:7. This is a common Hebrew verb, but puts in rare appearances in Genesis: it is precisely what Joseph claims before his brothers when he is second only to the king (45:8) and what the brothers report to Jacob (45:26).

The way that the entire narrative is introduced shows that the farming project is what Jacob's family is about: immediately after the תִּלְדוֹת אֵלֶּה formula we find "Joseph ... was pasturing the flock with his brothers" (v2). The family is fulfilling Abraham's calling to take on the Adamic task of livestock farming. The brothers are again introduced that way at the start of the episode that sees Joseph's fall: they are shepherding the flock, told by the narrator (12), restated by Jacob (13)⁴¹ and Joseph (16).

Joseph's fall is painted as an undoing of the Adamic farming task. Water is one of the key features of the garden in 2:5–6, 10 and allows the human farming of vegetation to take place; yet this cistern (designed to hold water)⁴² is without it (24). For a brief period, when Adam and Eve were still in the garden but unable to farm it, they were naked, and now Joseph is stripped naked (23), which also undoes God's provision of clothing for farmers outside the garden. Lastly, the pretence that he has been devoured by an animal (31) turns the creation picture about as far round as it is possible to go: a man unable to farm the ground and produce food to feed animals is instead eaten himself by an animal. Worse, an animal that is supposed to be in the care of perpetrators is sacrificed on the altar of this travesty. That they sit down to eat bread when they believe their deed to be accomplished serves to underscore the irony: they have done anything they could to disrupt the human task of producing food. Not surprisingly, they will soon find themselves reaping what they have failed to sow: they will lack bread altogether.⁴³

⁴¹ Notice that he is as interested in the flock as in his children: he is in charge of human and animal offspring.

⁴² HALOT, 116; BDB, 92.

⁴³ Robert Alter tantalisingly comments that Potiphar's second label, שֵׂר, 'is associated with a root involving slaughter and in consequence sometimes with cooking ...' (Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary*

The same Judah who seizes the initiative in this anti-farming plot (v26) is granted an excursus, which functions as a *coup de grâce* to his character. The corruption of the farming task is evident here too, in the fatal marriage of Onan to Tamar. His task (38:8) is to raise up seed (זרע) for his brother. He is to farm people. Instead, he would **שָׁתָה אֶרְצָה** which interpreters take to mean that he wasted or spilled his semen on the ground, on the basis of only this use.⁴⁴ The literal sense of the idiom (if it is an idiom) is simply to “ruin the earth” which fits perfectly. A refusal to produce people ruins the ground which the people are supposed to tend. Onan has been commanded to “raise up seed”, which echoes the Adamic mandate to “raise seed from the ground” (1:29, 2:5) and is what he will not do (38:8). Everything about this episode is an abuse of the relationship between people and the ground.⁴⁵

Joseph, in the meantime, is using every opportunity to further the Adamic task and is feeding people. Joseph’s service of Potiphar frees his master up to think about nothing other than the food that he eats

[New York: Norton, 2004], 316 n36). It might just be, then, that Joseph is being handed over from brothers who have turned their back on the food programme and into the hands of a foreigner who is concerned with feeding people. This is uncertain, but certainly germane to the plentiful certain ironies in the story.

⁴⁴ HALOT, 1470; BDB, 1008, followed by, eg., ESV, NASB and NIV; so also Gunkel, *Genesis*, 413; Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 215. Reyburn & Fry fail to notice the accusative: ‘**spilled** translates a verb form meaning to let something go to waste’ (William David Reyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* [UBS Handbook Series: Helps for Translators; New York: United Bible Societies, 1997], 876; bold original). Keil oddly gets it right and then falls into the same trap without explanation: ‘... destroyed to the ground (i.e., let it fall upon the ground) ...’ (K&D, 1:219). Wenham is an accurate lone voice here: ‘he used to ruin the ground’ (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 361).

⁴⁵ I am attempting here to take up Stephen Dempster’s challenge: ‘The “interpolation” of the story of Judah and Tamar (Gen. 38) within the Joseph story (Gen. 37–50) may jar readers, but it nonetheless constrains them to connect it somehow to the Joseph story’ (Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible* [NSBT 15; Leicester: Apollos, 2003], 35). That the chapter is not a literary interruption but part of a seamless (if multicoloured) garment is demonstrated by, eg., Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 506–8; Keil and Delitzsch, 1:218; Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 11:27–50:26* (NAC 1B; Nashville: Broadman, 2005), 674–82, 703–5, 712–13, *contra* Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 307–8.

(39:6).⁴⁶ Once again, as with the tending of his father's flocks, Joseph is thwarted in his farming task. This time, it is the reproduction of people, rather than the shepherding of animals, which poses a problem: Potiphar's wife is intent on adultery. Once again, Joseph is shown to be dislocated as Adam at the fall by being stripped naked (12, 16, 18) and exiled from the place where his farming task was fruitful (20).

His imprisonment is in fact a social promotion. He had been keeping Potiphar happily fed, who was a servant of Pharaoh. Now, he comes into contact with the next rung of the feeding ladder: the very people who feed Pharaoh (40:3). If we read with the creation farming project in mind, we can already see a hint of where the imprisonment is leading. Unlike Potiphar, these two men are not named, but are repeatedly referred to as "[chief] cupbearer" and "baker". The one exception is when Joseph first addresses them, and the narrator calls them **סְרִיִּי פֶרְעָה** which is reminiscent of Potiphar's titles at 37:36 and 49:1. Promotion up the food chain is being announced. One dream involves harvesting of food and augurs restoration of the man's job; the other dream involves carelessly handled foodstuffs⁴⁷ and announces the end of the man's life. The anthropology of Genesis gives the interpretation.

Pharaoh's famous dreams are of course all about famine. The details show a complete break-down of the created ecology. We should see people growing plants, and animals and people eating plants. Instead, we see animals eating animals, plants eating plants, and people are nowhere to be seen, neither growing food nor eating it.

One of the clearest fulfilments of the Abrahamic promise, that

⁴⁶ Heffelfinger notes at this point: 'Westermann (*Genesis*, 64) asserts that Potiphar's attention to nothing but the food he ate is "a fixed expression, a *pars pro toto* to indicate his private affairs." While he may be correct about the expression's idiomatic meaning, within the context of the wide ranging food imagery in the Joseph narrative the choice of this particular expression can be seen as an expression of the leitmotif' (Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing,' §II n. 22). In fact, as we have seen, one can go further and tie it to the creation mandate and the ensuing anthropology that runs throughout the book of Genesis, and not just chapters 37–50.

⁴⁷ Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 228 n. 17.

Abraham would continue the Adamic task, is seen in Joseph's promotion to steward Egypt through the time of famine.

And Joseph stored up grain in great abundance, *like the sand of the sea* [כְּחֹל הַיָּם], until he ceased to measure [סָפַר] it, for it could not be measured [סָפַר]. 41:49, ESV.

I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring [זָרַע] as the stars of heaven and *as the sand that is on the seashore* [... וְכֹחֹל הַיָּם]. 22:17, ESV.

"Look toward heaven, and number [סָפַר] the stars, if you are able to number [פָּרוּ] them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring [זָרַע] be." 15:5, ESV.

We need to ask, what part of the plant is grain? It is seed, זָרַע (47:19, 24). Abraham was promised more seed than could be numbered, as the sand on the sea, and Joseph is storing more seed than can be numbered, as the sand on the sea.

Immediately afterwards (41:51–52), Joseph names his sons and links himself to the promise to Abraham: Manasseh refers to his father's house, and we remember that his father has inherited Abraham's promise, while Ephraim indicates that "God has made me fruitful in the land of my affliction" (ESV). To be fruitful in a land is precisely the creation mandate we have been exploring. To be made fruitful by God in a particular land, one which is away from one's own father's home, recalls the promise of Genesis 12:1–3:⁴⁸

Now YHWH said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonours you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

⁴⁸ Brueggemann notes the repeated emphasis of כָּל, all, especially in 41:46–57 to show the fullness of Joseph's life-giving dominion (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 328). So while the Abrahamic promise has not been globally realised, its *partial* fulfilment is seen by a *total* local fulfilment (within Egypt).

This makes us ask: what of the remaining promises in this statement?

- 1 Making his name great;
- 2 being a blessing to all the families of the earth;
- 3 retributive blessing and cursing;
- 4 being blessed by more than curse him.⁴⁹

The first and second are fulfilled as soon as the famine strikes. Joseph's name rapidly becomes great: Pharaoh's command means that any Egyptian who wishes to eat must know Joseph's name (55–56). Moreover, the *whole world* comes to Egypt, not to Pharaoh, but to *Joseph* to be fed (57). This not only makes him the most famous household brand of the time but is Joseph blessing the whole region, well beyond Egypt.⁵⁰

The third and fourth are also to some extent evident in what ensues. The whole known world serves Joseph, while his brothers who had harmed him are a tiny minority. Through the famine God both blesses the majority (through Joseph's food) and curses the minority. The one thing the brothers did not want was for Joseph to be King over them, bowing to him as in his dream (37:8). Yet the famine causes them to bow down to him because of the very grain that the first dream predicted, and with him being the highest ruler (42:6) as the second dream had foretold.⁵¹ Joseph's exaltation and God-like benevolence may be seen through the lens of the farming mandate. Joseph is the *only* functioning human left; all others are

⁴⁹ This last point is implicit in the change of number of the subjects of v3. 'This appears to imply that those who disdain Abram will be far fewer than those who bless him. He will flourish to such an extent that few will fail to recognize that God is indeed on his side' (Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 206; Wenham, *Genesis* 1–15, 277).

⁵⁰ This is probably more localised than the promise of 12:3, since there we had כָּל־הָאָרֶץ מְשַׁפָּחֵת לְפָנָיו whereas here we have כָּל־הָאָרֶץ.

⁵¹ This is underscored in chapter 43, when the ongoing famine forces them to return to him (43:1–2). His stipulation of conditions for being admitted to deal with him was phrased as 'You shall not see my face unless ...', which is the language of *royal* access (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 246 n3; Beat Weber, *Theologie und Spiritualität des Psalters und seiner Psalmen* [vol. 3 of *Werkbuch Psalmen*; Kohlhammer, 2010], 174–76; Wenham, *Genesis* 16–50, 420; Mathews, *Genesis* 11:27–50:26, 787). God has used the farming mandate (Joseph's success in it and the brothers' inability) to turn their curse into a counter-curse.

unable to grow food and must come to Joseph, like the animals, to be fed.

When Jacob instructs the brothers to return to Joseph, his instructions call to mind Joseph's sale to the Midianites in chapter 37: the transaction was for silver (כֶּסֶף 37:28) and the caravan was trading in יָצִיר balm; גִּזְאֵת gum; לִטְמִי myrrh (25). Now Jacob has them take the 'best yield of the land', which consists of silver (כֶּסֶף 43:12) and the three spices of the Midianites: יָצִיר balm; גִּזְאֵת gum; לִטְמִי myrrh (v 11). The additional items are all food: דְּבַשׁ honey; בִּטְנִים pistachio nuts and almonds. The best the land yields thus amounts to (a) the price for a person and (b) food.

Verse 16 again brings together food and power, as at Joseph's dreams. The brothers are to eat with Joseph at noon, the point when the supreme ruling celestial body is *highest* in the sky. It is at a meal that Joseph will be shown to have achieved not only world-domination, but also supremacy over his brothers. At this meal, we also see a hint of the realignment of the covenant people with Joseph, against the Egyptians. Joseph is excluded from the table of the Egyptians (32) just as much as the other Hebrews.

We see in 45:6–8 that famine has been the means of establishing Israel as cattle farmers: it is because of the famine that Joseph has arisen within Egypt and is able to give them the land of Goshen (10) which is precisely where those desiring the Adamic/Abrahamic task of cattle farming would want to dwell. It is this task, not the famine generally, that requires relocation: 47:4. Goshen is the best of the land (18, 20) and means that Israel can forget all their possessions (45:20). Yet, we find that they do bring all that they have (45:11–12, 46:5–6, 31–34, 47:1) even though only people and cattle are specifically mentioned (46:5–7). The basics for the Adamic farm come with them to a land that is ideal for that farming. Throughout the episode of moving Jacob out of Canaan and into Egypt, including the audience with Pharaoh and Joseph's instructions on how to speak with Pharaoh, two things are emphasised: they are cattle farmers and they desire the land of Goshen for that purpose.

It is frequently noticed how unusual the encounter between Pharaoh and Jacob is, in that it is Jacob who blesses Pharaoh (47:7).

This is, in fact, the obvious conclusion from the previous verse which shows the climax of Israelite supremacy over Egypt: “Let them settle in the land of Goshen, and if you know any able men among them, *put them in charge of my livestock*” (ESV). Here is Pharaoh rescinding the Adamic task, and putting Israel in charge of the one thing that, in the anthropology of Genesis, marks Pharaoh out as a functioning person. Egypt may not know it, but in the most important sense, they are under new management: food production is already under Israel (Joseph) and now cattle farming is too: the whole Adamic farming project of Egypt is Israelite. Not only so, but we are repeatedly told that the Egyptians despise their Adamic mandate: what seemed to be ethnic hatred in 43:43 is in fact a rejection of the divine mandate in 46:34, כִּי־תוֹעֲבַת מִצְרַיִם כָּל־רֵעָה צֶאֱן. It is fitting that precisely at the point when the Israelites wear their faithful identification of God’s commission to shepherd most publicly and emphatically (46:33–34) they receive blessing.

The phrase on Pharaoh’s lips is nicely ambiguous in v6: וְשִׁמְתָם וְשִׁי מִקְנֶה עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי. As we have seen, מִקְנֶה could mean ‘cattle’ specifically or possessions generally, because the farming mandate means that livestock is such a fitting indicator of wealth. In chapter 46 we have seen the term on three occasions, unambiguously meaning cattle (46:6, 32, 34) while in the next chapter, the Egyptians have only two categories of things with which to buy grain: money and cattle (16–18) so that when these are gone, they must resort to selling themselves. מִקְנֶה in that sequence thus covers all non-liquid assets. So when Pharaoh asks for some Israelites to be made ‘masters over’ מִקְנֶה and emphasizes that they are to have mastery עַל־אֲשֶׁר־לִי he may well be speaking better than he knows. To put someone in charge of your cattle is rather like putting them over your food, and Joseph has already risen to total dominion over Potiphar’s house and over all Egypt by having that charge. In fact, that is acted out on the Egyptian populace when Joseph does not merely take their cattle as payment but rather takes over the care for the cattle: in v17 the money is exhausted (תָּם), but the cattle is still around, in Joseph’s care.

Attention to food and to farming suggests that the relationship between Egypt and Israel is going to deteriorate rapidly, for two

reasons, both of them connected with Egypt's disdain for God's mandate to all mankind to be cattle farmers. First, they are giving away that charge to Israel, so that without realising it they are giving mastery over their nation to Israel. Secondly, their explicit hatred of that commission means that they will inevitably hate the nation that is committed to fulfilling it. It should be no surprise that the next event after the settlement of Israel in Egypt is the arising of a king who both realises that Israel is taking over and who also wants to destroy them. We are given a hint in that direction when Moses anachronistically identifies the land of Goshen, as 'the land of Rameses' (47:11).⁵² Another food-related clue to the ungodly clash between Egypt and Israel is seen in 47:22 where Egyptian priests stand in the opposite economic relationship to the people than do Aaronic priests in Moses' day: the Aaronides have to rely on the people's faithful generosity, while the Egyptians are able to float aloof of the people's famine-induced misery by having a stipend from Pharaoh.

Near the end of the book, as Jacob leaves his testament, he picks up the Abrahamic blessing that he has inherited, but in the language of the Adamic commission. "Behold, I will make you fruitful [מְפֹרֵךְ] and multiply you [וְהִרְבֵּיתִיךָ], and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land [הָאָרֶץ] to your offspring [לְזֶרְעֶךָ] after you for an everlasting possession" (48:4). These terms of fruitfulness, multiplication, seed and land are part of the Adamic commission in Genesis 2.⁵³ Even at the death and burial of Jacob back in the promised land of Canaan, when one would expect Joseph to own pretty much everything in Egypt that he desires, and we are given an inventory only people and cattle are mentioned.

Jacob's final verdict of Joseph sums up his successful observance of the creation mandate: Joseph is פֶּרֶךְ, fruitful (49:22 *bis*).⁵⁴

⁵² Alter suggests that the use here 'is intended to foreshadow future oppression' (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 273 n11). Conversely, being settled 'in a land of their own "property" (' *āhûzzâ*, "possession," v. 11), the imagery foreshadows the establishment of Israel in Canaan for a possession ...' (Mathews, *Genesis 11:27-50:26*, 847).

⁵³ See 'Served to Serve', 14-17.

⁵⁴ The repetition is noticed by Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing', §IV.

III. Genesis and environmental concerns

The book of Genesis speaks the first word concerning anthropology, ecology, soteriology and eschatology. We should expect, from what we have seen, that the standpoint of Genesis would encourage Christians to share the concerns of environmentalists, indeed to lead the way. Genesis has shown us that people were always to care for creation in a specific way, that the fall makes this harder, that sin makes people hostile to God's mandate, and that we who are Abraham's seed (Rom 4:16) would oppose the ungodly handling of creation and be busy stewarding the world.

However, "stewardship" and "care for creation" are too vague; the seed of the serpent is in the details. We need to ensure that the *biblical* set of assumptions undergirds 'stewardship'.

1. The worldview we live in

Our *Zeitgeist* takes it as axiomatic that multiplying people and the effective production of food are evil.⁵⁵ We speak of a sustainability crisis and of over-population; no-one ever needs to produce evidence

⁵⁵ A perusal of any issue of *Scientific American*, or any newspaper, will bear out these unquestioned assumptions. For example, Jeffrey Sachs argues that the world's population needs to stabilise, rather than more food being provided. He sees turning land into crops as damaging, and lists food as the key energy consumer and therefore evil: Jeffrey D. Sachs, 'Transgressing Planetary Boundaries', *Scientific American* 301, no. 6 (December 2009): 17. Dickson Despommier, in an article full of optimistic promise at increased food production, still views the fact that a land mass equal to South America has been turned arable as a problem, rather than as humanity's mandate being obeyed (Dickson Despommier, 'The Rise of Vertical Farms', *Scientific American* 301, no. 5 [November 2009]: 60). He notes that since the 1800s, an endless series of doomsday predictions at the planet's inability to sustain more people have been thwarted by increases in technology; yet in an article making the case for technological innovation on which 'the news is promising' ('The Rise of Vertical Farms', 67), he still sounds the alarm at overpopulation ('The Rise of Vertical Farms', 60).

to assert that the planet is over-crowded.⁵⁶

2. Recapping the pre-fall picture

Let us revisit, by contrast, the summary of the created world which we argued for previously, in the words of Walter Brueggemann:⁵⁷ 'At the root of reality is a *limitless generosity* that intends an extravagant abundance.'⁵⁸ He was of course describing the pre-fall world. But as we saw, Reformed theologians have been slow to see the end of such a description: '... there was something in the pre-redemptive eschatology that was not eliminated but reincorporated in the redemptive program...redemptive eschatology must be restorative and consummative.'⁵⁹

3. Genesis post-fall

Every stage of the fruitful farming project is marred in Gen 3, as we saw and summarise here:⁶⁰

- 1 * human reproduction will be painful, which hinders filling the earth and also means there is a shortage of farmers;
- 2 * working the ground becomes toilsome, with the ground being uncooperative;

⁵⁶ Noting the exponential growth of the population is not evidence of over-crowding. It is not even evidence of *crowding*. That it is taken to be so demonstrates the unchallenged assumption that population growth is a problem rather than a blessing. At the time of going to press, the world's population is believed just to have crossed the seven billion threshold, and opinion columns see nothing to celebrate.

⁵⁷ We argued for this in 'Served to Serve', 15-17.

⁵⁸ Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 559. See also, on God's generosity in creation being ongoing, John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (ed. John T. McNeill; trans. Ford Lewis Battles; 2 vols.; LCC 20-21; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1960), I.xiv.21-22 (Battles 1:180-82).

⁵⁹ Geerhardus Vos, 'Eschatology in Its Pre-Redemptive Stage,' in *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (ed. James T. Dennison; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2001), 73-74, again we argued for this in 'Served to Serve', 21-25 especially by showing how Jesus takes up the Adamic mantle.

⁶⁰ 'Served to Serve', 17-21.

- 3 * care over animals becomes spoiled by deadly enmity in the case of the serpent, and feeding them turns into a literal licking of the dust;
- 4 * the ground, a source of original life for Adam and ongoing source of life via plant-food, becomes a burial ground, a place of death.

Each of these negative interlopers into God's farming project is evident through the plot of Genesis:

- 1 * the lives of the Patriarchs are fraught with difficulty in producing their promised offspring;
- 2 * famines and lack of sufficient pasture for flocks are a recurring feature;
- 3 * the renewal of humanity with Noah begins with God filling animals with the dread of people;
- 4 * each of the Patriarchs is concerned with their own burial.

Seeing this, it would be easy to assume that the curses in Genesis 3 automatically fit the environmental movement's concerns. As Christians we should want to ask which matches the story of the Bible: the ecological *Zeitgeist*, or the Bible's vision of creation and redemption. Science is *never* religiously neutral: presuppositions are inescapable.⁶¹

The mandate to continue reproducing and filling the world with people and animals is evident at every turn. *Every* one of the patriarchs is shown to be *blessed* by the multiplication of people and cattle: that is in fact the plot of the book.

This is seen also in its antithesis. Esau's loss of blessing entails loss

⁶¹ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Always Ready: Directions for Defending the Faith* (ed. Robert R. Booth; Nacogdoches, Tex.: Covenant Media Press, 1996), 3–10, 19–22; Herman Bavinck, *Prolegomena* (ed. John Bolt; vol. 1 of *Reformed Dogmatics*; trans. John Vriend; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2003), 298–300; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (A Theology of Lordship; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 1987), 86–87, 125–26; John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Christian Life* (A Theology of Lordship; Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R, 2008), 745 n28; Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (2d ed.; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 111–16; Herbert Schlossberg, *Idols for Destruction: Christian Faith and Its Confrontation with American Society* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1990), 142–46; James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004), 121–26.

of fruitful ground and violence that prevents the multiplication of people (as we have seen, violence and reproduction are antithetical in the book) as well as loss of dominion to his brother (27:39–40). Cain's curse also involves a fruitless ground and fear of violence instead of multiplication (4:11–15). In fact, even while the fall curses are uttered, the ongoing mandate to multiply and grow food is affirmed: 3:16, 19. The destruction of the flood inaugurates a restated farming and multiplying mandate while the rebellion at Babel (11:8) consisted of *not* spreading out and filling the world.⁶²

The blessedness of having much offspring is a feature of the book, most notably in the promises to Abram: "I will make of you a great nation" (12:3), "like the dust of the earth/stars/sand of the sea" (13:16, 15:5, 22:17) "I will increase you greatly" (17:2), but even as early as 4:25, "God has appointed for me another seed", in the constant genealogies, in the way that *every* covenant graciously entered into by God is with someone and their offspring (6:18, 9:9–12, 15:8, 17:7–10, 17:19), while not having descendants is a fear (19:32). Even those who are outside the covenant line are *blessed* by becoming numerous (21:13), or invoke that blessing on others (24:60).

Turning from human reproduction to multiplying cattle and growing food from the ground, this also continues to the very end of Genesis. Indeed, at the close of the book, we are left with a promise that is still largely to be fulfilled, of increasing the population of the nation of Israel and of farming a greater portion of land.

We do see the effects of the fall throughout Genesis. Famines are commonplace. Matriarchs are barren and then die in childbirth. Violence brings anti-reproductive death to people and animals. And yet none of these are solved by rescinding the command to be fruitful and multiply, or the command to make the ground fruitful. Famines are met by population displacements (36:7) and *not ever* by suggestions that there are too many people on the planet. Famines are seen as temporary. No-one ever suggests that there is too much cattle in the known world or that producing more crops is a problem. Scarcity of life-giving water is answered by digging wells. Sustainability on a global scale is not in the vocabulary of Genesis. The very matriarchs who struggle to reproduce are also promised the

⁶² Keil and Delitzsch, 1:109–110; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 242.

blessing of many children. The same patriarchs who find strife over land are blessed by the multiplication of cattle and by land to graze. At the darkest moment of human history, when the whole of humanity has been executed, save one new seed-family, does God change tack? Notice the language God chooses to promise that there will not be another flood: it is seedtime and harvest, and the daily and yearly rhythms needed for them, which endure (8:22). This endures beyond Genesis: 'for all future generations' (9:12). If we are tempted to wonder whether it be time to see agriculture and the growth of people as a curse rather than a blessing, we need only to ask whether the rainbow remains in the sky. No indication is given of a time when the earth is already full or farmed to capacity.

I would like to suggest that the complex picture painted by Genesis is not made any simpler as the history of redemption unfolds in the Bible. An underlying created order and mandate is the substrate which has been complicated by the curses of the fall and also by human sin. God's election of a people to renew humanity in Christ, the new Abraham, the new Noah, the new Adam indicates that we should expect supernatural blessings and curses tied to our faithfulness, specifically in the Adamic realm of farming the ground for the sake of filling the world with people and animals: "Blessed shall be the *fruit* of your *womb* and the *fruit* of your *ground* and the *fruit* of your *cattle*, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock" (Deut 28:4, ESV). These will be alongside both (a) the created order, (b) the curses of the fall distorting that order and (c) sin (both of workers and those who oppress them) distorting the Adamic task further still.⁶³ The whole cosmos is eagerly awaiting our ongoing work to continue the creation mandate and to reverse the effects of the fall, all to be consummated at His return (Rom 8:18–25).

This ought to close some ecological avenues and invite reflection on others.

The idea that *any* means of increasing people, food and cattle is automatically godly neglects sin and the fall. (How did *Laban* grow?) Preventing sinful or incompetent practices from producing acid rain

⁶³ See Craig Blomberg's synthesis of the data in wisdom literature: Craig L. Blomberg, *Neither Poverty Nor Riches: A Biblical Theology of Possessions* (NSBT 7; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1999), 58–67.

and destroying the fertility of the land falls within our purview and responsibility.

An unbreakable connection between national godliness and agrarian blessing is negated by the constant famines that promote God's plan in Genesis. And yet, famine may well be the result of national sin: oppressive application of ungodly economic principles caused the deaths of millions in the USSR and PRC and continue to keep vast swathes of Latin America and Africa from feeding themselves from fertile land. (Pharaoh reduced Egypt to perpetual serfdom by confiscating a fifth of their crops *and then selling them back.*)

We will reject out of hand an anthropology, soteriology, eschatology and system of ethics that assumes the exact opposite of our creation mandate to fill and subdue the earth and the sovereignty of the One who gave us our marching orders.⁶⁴ A narrative that tells us to produce fewer people, less cattle and less food (in general, not just in a particular place during a temporary crisis such as Matt 24:19; 1 Cor 7:26) is one which we cannot appropriate. We should not label curse what is in fact blessing; we must not call evil good.

In fact, concerning the scarcity of resources which are not (yet?) renewable, we need to ask what the link is between reproduction and that scarcity. Is it the case that an excess of people makes these run out? Or is it that the very people who choose not to have children have that much more disposable cash and can spend it on such things, while those who raise families see their income rather more fully committed to the Adamic task of feeding their offspring?⁶⁵ That may be *one* contributory cause of the imbalance between the rich, consuming West and the impoverished Two-Thirds World, and it is the height of irony that Western singletons who fly all over the world on holiday, consuming jet fuel, and drive wherever they please,

⁶⁴ Seldom more strikingly presented than in the choice to have an abortion and then be sterilised because a living baby would have a carbon footprint: Natasha Courtenay-Smith and Morag Turner, 'Meet the Women Who Won't Have Babies - Because They're not Eco Friendly', n.p., [cited 23 September 2011]. Online <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-495495/Meet-women-wont-babies--theyre-eco-friendly.html>

⁶⁵ I am indebted to Gordon Wenham for this observation and, indeed for his gracious comments on this article.

consuming diesel, think the world's oil is running out because there are too many people *having babies in India*.

This clash of assumptions concerning the world may often mean that Christians are a lot less clear about the uprightness and wisdom of particular technologies. Data concerning the creation mandate may well be hard to come by, because scientists in the field are asking different questions based on different assumptions. It is far from easy to rule concerning organic farming and no-till agriculture.⁶⁶ Are they the unsustainable product of a worldview that wants fewer people around and doesn't care that they cannot all be fed? Or are they part of technological progress that will eventually produce more food?⁶⁷ It is also not always easy to differentiate between (a) doomsday warnings that run counter to God's sovereign concern and are based on overcrowding, and (b) calls to merciful action that will help the creation mandate continue.⁶⁸

The New Testament view of the godly life seems strongly rooted in the creation mandate for men as workers for food (Eph 4:28; Acts 6:2–3; 2 Thess 3:10–12) and women as workers for children (1 Tim 2:15, 5:10, 14; Titus 2:4), which brings us right back where we started, only better and with hope.

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⁶⁶ See, e.g., John P. Reganold, "The Next Revolution in Farming," *Scientific American* 303 no. 3 (September 2010): 79; David R. Huggins and John P. Reganold, "No-Till: The Quiet Revolution," *Scientific American* 299 no. 1 (July 2008): 50–57 who, while selling the idea of no-till, are up-front about the huge costs and difficulties.

⁶⁷ For example, organic farming may never produce the same yield as intensive farming acre-for-acre, but what if it is the acreage that increased, as suggested by Despommier, 'The Rise of Vertical Farms'?

⁶⁸ For example: we must spend 1.5% of *global* GDP each year for ten years to avoid running out of water (Peter Rogers, 'Facing the Freshwater Crisis', *Scientific American* 299 no. 2 [August 2008]: 35). The US should spend \$400 billion between 2011–2050 for solar power (Ken Zweibel, James Mason, and Vasilis Fthenakis, "A Solar Grand Plan," *Scientific American* 298 no. 1 [January 2008]: 54–55).