Frederick Bradshaw Wright

Running Commentary on the Echoes Bible, Volume I: Genesis & Matthew

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Introduction

Matthew opens his Gospel with the words βίβλος γενέσεως (*biblos geneseōs*), "the book of the genesis." From his very first line the evangelist signals that he is not merely recording a life but retelling a beginning: the account of Jesus Christ is composed as a new Genesis. When the two books are set side by side, this impression is borne out again and again. Matthew appears to have taken Genesis as his structural template, so that the movements of the first book of the Torah reverberate through the first book of the Gospel.

Two echoes are proposed at the very outset. In the pairing of "the heavens and the earth," the heavens are matched with David — a man of the spirit, after God's own heart — and the earth with Abraham, to whom the promise of the land was given. It is suggested that the ordering is intentional: in Matthew 1:1 David is named first ("the son of David, the son of Abraham"), whereas in the genealogy that immediately follows, Abraham appears first. The inversion is not careless but chiastic — referring to a structural literary device where words, grammatical constructions, or concepts are repeated in reverse order, holding heaven and earth, David and Abraham, within a deliberate frame.

What follows is a running commentary keyed to the pages of the volume. It gathers philological notes on the Hebrew and Greek, rabbinic and patristic traditions, and observations on the echoes themselves — where they ring true, where they are strained, and where they open onto something deeper than the surface of the text.

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The Heavens and the Earth: David and Abraham

Two specific echoes are proposed. "The heavens and the earth" are paired with David and Abraham: the *heavens* with David, a man of the spirit and after God's own heart (echo 1), and the *earth* with Abraham, to whom the promise of the land was given (echo 2). In Matthew 1:1 David is named first, while in the genealogy that follows Abraham appears first — a suggestion of intentional, chiastic ordering.

> **Echo Note:** This is an excellent parallelism. The reversal of order between the superscription (David, then Abraham) and the genealogy (Abraham, then David) frames the whole book, binding heaven to earth at both ends.

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Nishmat Chayyim — The Breath of Lives

Gen 2:4 *This is the history of the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that Yahweh God made the earth and the heavens.* **5** *No plant of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb of the field had yet sprung up; for Yahweh God had not caused it to rain on the earth. There was not a man to till the ground,* **6** *but a mist went up from the earth, and watered the whole surface of the ground.* **7** *Yahweh God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives; and man became a living soul.*

An important detail is easily lost in translation: the "breath of life" is grammatically plural — *nishmat chayyim* (נִשְׁמַת חַיִּים), literally "breath of lives." The first man, Adam, becomes a living being (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:45). In Genesis 2:22–23, God uniquely brings the woman out of the man, in a strict sense separating her from the Adam.

A Living Being, Not a Soul

The rendering "soul" in the WEB translation is highly questionable, for the word carries different senses in the Tanakh and in the New Testament — a difficulty already noted in the commentary on Leviticus & Romans. The Hebrew reads *nephesh chayyah* (נֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה), which denotes a *living being*, not a disembodied "soul." Adam does not *receive* a soul; he *becomes* a living creature. The distinction matters for everything that follows about life, death, and resurrection. The tension arises because of the Hellenistic-influenced apologists' and early commentators' view of the soul, based initially on Platonism and subsequently on Neo-Platonism, where the soul is regarded as a disembodied identity.

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The Route of the Magi

Of the possible routes for the return of the Magi, the way was either north and then east, or northeast. The direct route is due east. Against the direct route stand the hazards of the terrain and the sheer size of the caravan, which by its nature would have been enormous — supplies, servants, armed guards, and spare animals. A large and richly provisioned company would sensibly have preferred the safer, longer road to the shortest and most exposed one.

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Echo 3: Cain and the Bloods of Abel

> **Echo Note:** Echo 3 expresses opposites, which strengthens the comparison. Cain is driven *away* from the presence of God — henotheism being the general understanding within the aetiological narrative — whereas Jesus is being *brought toward* where God's presence was assumed to dwell, by the very same measure.

A further point turns on a plural. In Genesis 4:10 the text speaks of Abel's *bloods* (דְּמֵי, *demei*), not his blood — implying not a single death but the deaths of the generations that would have followed him.

Genesis 4:10 ↔ Matthew 2:16–18

Genesis 4:10: Abel's "bloods" cry out from the ground — a death that carries within it the loss of unborn generations.

Matthew 2:16–18: Herod's slaughter at Bethlehem is not the death of one child but of many.

The Matthew echo therefore has two facets. First, it is not a single child in Bethlehem who is killed, but many. Second, the multi-generational aspect of Abel's "bloods" speaks to the coming multi-generational redemption that would be secured through the death of Jesus.

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The Flood and the Bounds of the Known World

In Genesis a physical flood deluges the earth. In reality, according to the geological record and attendant issues, it inundated the land between the two great rivers — a point developed at length

elsewhere. Therefore, it is better read as a flood of what was *considered* to be the earth at that time.

Far from weakening the pairing, this strengthens it. A more limited flood corresponds more closely to the limited compass of Jesus' early ministry. Syria, Galilee, the Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea, and the country beyond the Jordan — apart from Rome and Greece — comprised very nearly the whole of the world known to the average person, and encompassed all that was familiar. The bounded deluge and the bounded ministry answer to one another.

Covenants and Mountains — Is There an Edenic Covenant?

It might be tempting to add a further parallelism here. If the Sermon on the Mount builds upon the covenant at Sinai, then upon what did the Noahic covenant build? Did it rest upon an "Edenic covenant"? It did not; the parallelism does not hold.

> **Echo Note:** Strictly speaking — theologically and linguistically — there is no such thing as an "Edenic covenant." The single passage sometimes adduced is Hosea 6:7, "But like Adam they transgressed the covenant; there they dealt faithlessly with me" (ESV). The Eden narrative is better read as a conditional statement. The formal expression of a covenant, its ratification, and its attendant elements are simply not present. The received text of Genesis never uses the word *berith* (covenant) for Adam, unlike later with Noah, Abraham, or David. There is no notice concerning the formalities of covenant making. Covenant making is outside of the aetiological narrative.
>
> There has been a persistent and mistaken tendency to class conditional agreements as covenants.

That both addresses — Sinai and the Sermon — were delivered on mountains is significant in its own right. Mountains matter, both because of their height and emptiness and their assumed nearness to the deity. In addition there are legendary and historiographic considerations.

In the ANE, the concept of a high place revolved around the idea that the higher you got geographically, the nearer you got to the deity resident there. The higher and more remote one climbed, the greater the isolation — and thus the greater the intimacy.

Seventy Nations and the Gates

Seventy is the perfect number of the nations, and the Great Commission reflects the understanding. (The modern conception of "nations" is an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century notion and should not be read back into the text.) This harks back to Exodus Chapter 1.

On "Gates"

In Hebrew thought and literature the *gate* represents government: the elders met in the gateway of a city or town to render justice and regulation (e.g., Proverbs 31:23). Those who sat there were community leaders, judges, and respected witnesses who managed legal matters, land, and local governance. Matthew echoes this when he observes how few find the narrow gate: to enter the narrow gate is to enter the regulated place of justice — that is, of righteousness — while the broad gate is the idiomatic, unregulated place of spiritual anarchy.

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Nimrod and the Founding of Cities

The building of cities is presented as the foundation of the departure from theocratic rule. The name *Nimrod* is derived from the Hebrew root for "rebellion," מרד (*marad*).

The rabbinic commentary *Genesis Rabbah* casts Nimrod as Abraham's chief adversary: astrologers warned Nimrod that Abraham would surpass him. Jewish legend holds that Nimrod imprisoned Abraham for preaching monotheism and casting away idols; when Abraham miraculously survived being thrown into Nimrod's fiery furnace, the deliverance solidified his faith and exposed the emptiness of Nimrod's dominion. One of the earliest rabbinic versions of this story is preserved in *Genesis Rabbah* 38:11.

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Shem and the Semitic Line

It is from Shem that the term *Semite — Semitic* — is drawn.

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Lot's Daughters and the Continuity of the Line

The text observes on this page that the echoes in this section are unusually deep, perhaps beyond definitive interpretation. It may be that part of their purpose is to intimate that God perceives these events on a level far beyond what is immediately apparent. The section therefore deserves further fleshing out; the rabbinic tradition offers several avenues.

Chizkuni (France, d. 1310) laid the blame on the daughters, positing that they acted immorally. Rambam placed the blame on Lot. Rashi held that the daughters believed all humanity had been destroyed and acted to preserve the human race.

Better, however, is Radak (France, d. 1235), who points out that Tzoar — the city to which Lot and his daughters first fled after the destruction of Sodom — was itself not destroyed (Gen 19:20–25, 30). Despite their seclusion, then, the daughters must have known that only Sodom and Gomorrah lay in ruins, not the whole of humanity. This suggests that they were concerned not with perpetuating humanity at large but specifically with their father's lineage. Their anxiety for the continuation of the family line persists *despite* the trauma they have endured; measured against the abstract preservation of the race, the sustaining of a particular bloodline is the more personal motive. It may even imply a measure of forgiveness toward their father.

Their conduct follows the biblical trope of the heroic woman within a patriarchal system who possesses a keener awareness of sustaining the family line than do the men around her. Like Tamar (Gen 38) and Ruth (Ruth 3), Lot's daughters make extreme, out-of-the-box choices to perpetuate the line.

Genesis 19 ↔ Matthew 1

The pairing makes best sense when read along the lines of *life-continuity* and destiny persisting despite an apparent end — the same thread that runs through the irregular unions of Matthew's genealogy (Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, "the wife of Uriah").

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The Kingdom Breaking Through — Lindsey and Flusser

The late Robert Lindsey, a pioneer in the study of the Jewish Roots of the Gospels, proposed, in his personal notes, a Hebrew reconstruction of the saying that runs, in sense: "From the days of John the Baptist until now the Kingdom of Heaven is breaking through, and breakers-through break through with it."

The saying stands in line with the work of the late Jewish professor David Flusser (1917–2000), the influential Israeli professor of Early Christianity and Second Temple Judaism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and writer on the New Testament.

Flusser remarks that the issue is related to a verse in Micah that describes the return from exile in terms of a shepherd breaking an opening through a sheep pen, the sheep then bursting their way through it (Mic 2:13). The relevant root — פ-ר-צ (*p-r-tz*) — can mean "break through," "spread," "increase," or even "lash out." In Micah the shepherd who makes the opening is a redeemer figure who enables Israel's return; he is called *ha-poretz* ("the breaker-through"), and the sheep are then said to "break through" (*paretzu*) after him.

Playing on this imagery, Jesus (on this reconstruction) said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is increasing (*poretzet*), and breakers-through (*poretzim*) are increasing in it." Characteristically, Jesus avoided styling *himself* as the redeemer figure — he did not call himself *ha-poretz* — preferring to fix attention on the Kingdom of Heaven. The Kingdom was what opened the way for Israel's redemption; and as the Kingdom increased (a play on the root פ-ר-צ), so too did those embracing its ways: peacemaking, forgiveness, the prioritizing of mercy over ritual, and the sanctifying of the divine Name through unwavering obedience in the face of hostility.

Scholars such as Llewelyn and Lit read this as an anti-Pauline polemic. The difficulty is that the saying is dated "since the days of John the Baptist," which sits awkwardly with that reading — though a possible anti-Pauline dimension does surface in the Great Commission. On balance, the reconstruction above is to be preferred.

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The Three Wells of Isaac

This section may be expanded around the wells, three of which carry particular significance:

- **Esek:** Because the herders of Gerar quarreled over this well, Isaac named it *Esek* (עֵשֶׂק), meaning "dispute" or "contention."
- **Sitnah:** His servants dug a second well, and the locals quarreled over that one as well; Isaac named it *Sitnah* (שִׂטְנָה), "enmity" or "hostility."
- **Rehoboth:** Finally Isaac moved on and dug a third well. Because the locals did not contend over this one, he named it *Rehoboth* (רְחֹבוֹת), "broad places" or "room," saying, "For now the LORD has made room for us, and we shall be fruitful in the land."

p. 69

Shibah — Seven and the Oath

The word *shibah* (שִׁבְעָה) means "seven"; in Hebrew numerology, seven is the number of perfection. It shares a root with the word for *oath* (שְׁבוּעָה, *shevuah*), and so links the number seven to the concept made concrete in the naming of Beersheba, the "well of the oath" or "well of seven." It cannot be a covenant as there is no record or notice of it being so, or the necessary ceremony. According to Hebrews 6:13, because God had no one greater to swear by, **He swore by**

Himself. This unique act served to completely eliminate human doubt and demonstrate the absolute certainty of His plans.

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Laban's Daughters as Chattel

The sisters complain that Laban did not treat them as beloved daughters but regarded them as chattels, selling them as though they were no better than foreigners or servants. Jacob had to labor as a hired man for fourteen years to "pay" for them, and they received no dowry and no traditional security. Put plainly, Laban regarded them as being intrinsically worthless as people outside of saleable value.

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Mahanaim — A Place of Refuge

This location — identified as *Mahanaim* (מַחֲנַיִם), "two camps" — later became an important Levitical city and a place of refuge in Israelite history.

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Panim el Panim — Face to Face

"Face to face" is not a perfect translation. In Hebrew, *panim el panim* (פָּנִים אֶל פָּנִים) is literally a "face-touching-face," carrying an element of intimacy. In one sense this is where the Septuagint's *proseuchē* (προσευχή), "prayer," originates in the Greek — for at root it means *to kiss*.

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The Perushim as Revivalists

We need to remember that the *Perushim* were the revivalists of their day particularly during the Hellenisation programmes of the Graeco-Roman incursions. When the term "Pharisees" is used, it is often employed in a titular manner: The *yeshivot* of Shammai and Hillel carried high authority, and to be reckoned among the Perushim was to be reckoned among the era's most serious teachers of renewal despite their differing stances on the centrality of Intention (Hillel) and Rigourism (Shammai).

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Binding and Loosing — A Nation and a Company of Nations

In Matthew 16:19, the "binding and loosing" passage strongly reinforces the echo between the Matthew side of this pairing and the Genesis phrase "a nation and a company of nations" (Gen 35:11).

Genesis 35:11 ↔ Matthew 16:19

"Binding and loosing" is a Jewish legal term: societies and nations are held together by what is *bound* — that is, by the rules established to restrain — while to *loose* is to release, to permit.

The terms are plural throughout. The *ecclesia* is a corporate body; "nations" is likewise a plural. What is bound and loosed governs a *company* of peoples, not a single individual — exactly the Genesis promise of "a nation and a company of nations."

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The Reaffirming of the Name — Jacob and Peter

The reaffirmation of Jacob's name — the refusal to let go of the moment — in Genesis 35:10 corresponds to Peter's naming by Jesus, which is itself a play on words.

κἀγὼ δέ σοι λέγω ὅτι σὺ εἶ Πέτρος, καὶ ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ πέτρᾳ οἰκοδομήσω μου τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, καὶ πύλαι Ἅιδου οὐ κατισχύσουσιν αὐτῆς.

"And I also say to you that you are Peter (Petros, masculine), and upon this rock (petra, feminine) I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."

The masculine form *Petros* is the more appropriate for the name of a man; yet the masculine noun often carries the nuance of a smaller, movable, or isolated stone, while the feminine *petra* is used of a foundational rock. The wordplay is deliberate, and the distinction between the movable stone and the bedrock is the point.

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Seir — Esau and the Shaggy Mountain

In Hebrew, *Seir* (שֵׂעִיר) means "hairy" or "shaggy." It is most famously the name of a rugged, ancient mountain range in Edom (modern-day Jordan) and of a patriarch who originally inhabited the region. Seir is closely linked with **Esau**, whose own description shares a similar root; after Esau, ancestor of the Edomites, settled there, the mountainous land took on his name alongside its original designation.

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Judas and the Provocation

It may be added that Judas ran out of patience, and that his act was possibly one of provocation, namely a challenge to Jesus to prove himself an able man by leading the revolt against the Romans as *Mashiach ben David*. On this reading the betrayal is less a simple treachery than a forcing of the hand, an attempt to compel the Messiah ben David of current expectation to appear.

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The Priests of Egypt and the Plot Against Israel

Ancient rabbinic and midrashic traditions hold that the chief Egyptian priests and magicians actively plotted against the Israelites before Moses' confrontation with Pharaoh, specifically by advising the king to enslave and kill them.

According to the midrashic tradition (e.g., *Sotah* 11a), Pharaoh's wise men and chief sorcerers — traditionally named Jannes and Jambres — foresaw through astrology that a Hebrew child would soon be born who would destroy Egypt. On the strength of this occult foresight, they advised Pharaoh to enact the drastic decree of drowning Hebrew baby boys, and thereby initiated the systemic oppression and the possibility of revolt in Israel. Later, when Moses and Aaron arrived, legend records that the sorcerers taunted Moses, accusing him of trying to import foreign magic into Egypt, the very homeland of the occult arts.

Priests, Magicians, and Sorcerers

In ancient Egypt the roles of "wise men," "magicians" (*ḥarṭummīm*), and "sorcerers" were heavily intertwined with — or identical to — the high priesthood or the cultus. Their hostility towards

Israel — though "hostility" may not be quite the right term — manifests in several ways across the accounts.

The plot against the people begins collectively within the royal court. Before Pharaoh decrees the enslavement and infanticide of the Hebrews, he consults his advisors. In Exodus 1:9–10 the king addresses his people — which, in its ancient Near-Eastern context, implies his inner council of priests and nobles — saying, *"Look, the Israelite people are much too numerous for us. Let us deal shrewdly with them, so that they may not increase; otherwise, in the event of war, they may join our enemies…"*

Historically the Egyptian pharaohs rarely acted without consulting the priestly class, who served as supreme political advisors. The initial impetus to impose a corvée and to command the midwives to kill the newborn boys was born of this court consultation. Whereas the biblical text speaks of the "court," rabbinic comment is highly explicit concerning individual priests plotting against Israel.

According to the Talmud (*Sotah* 11a; *Sanhedrin* 106a), Pharaoh had three primary priestly advisors who advised how to handle the growing Israelite population: **Balaam, Jethro, and Job.** The Midrash names Balaam as the chief sorcerer-priest and the mastermind behind the plot who urged Pharaoh to drown the Hebrew boys in the Nile. A suggestion is that the reasoning was that since God repays measure-for-measure and had promised never again to destroy the world by flood, drowning the infants would leave the Egyptians immune to divine retribution. Jethro protested the plot and had to flee for his life; Job kept silent to protect his position, and later suffered for it. (Jewish sources suggest it is better to take this account metaphorically, rather than historically!)

When Moses and Aaron finally confront Pharaoh, the priestly magicians (*ḥarṭummīm*) were not passive observers; they actively worked to undermine the Israelite leadership. By using their "secret arts" to mimic the staff-to-serpent sign, the plague of blood, and the plague of frogs, the priests executed a deliberate strategy to validate and underpin Pharaoh's stubbornness. Their aim was to prove that the God of Israel held no unique authority, and that Egyptian state magic could match Him — thereby justifying the continued enslavement of the Hebrews.

Manetho's Egyptian Account

From an extra-biblical perspective, the third-century BCE Egyptian priest and historian **Manetho** wrote an account of the Exodus from the Egyptian side, preserved by Josephus in *Contra Apion*. In Manetho's version an Egyptian king was advised by a sacred priest, Amenophis, to "cleanse the land" of lepers and polluted people, whom Manetho associates with the ancestors of the Jews. The priest proposed to banish 80,000 of them to the quarries (obviously an exaggerated figure). The decree backfired, leading the outcast group to rebel under a renegade priest named Osarsiph, whom Manetho identifies as Moses and from there on the account becomes fictional. Egyptian memory, then, retained a tradition in which *priests* initiated the expulsion and oppression of this population. The work also contains defamatory references to the Jewish people.

Two Days — The Passover Chronology

Jesus' statement in Matthew 26:2, "after two days the Passover is coming," does not parallel the initial time frame given for the first Passover in Egypt.

Selection date: In Exodus 12:3–6 God commanded Israel to select the unblemished lamb on the **10th** day of the first month (Nisan/Abib).

Sacrifice date: The lamb was kept and inspected until the **14th**, when it was slaughtered at twilight.

Duration: This is an interval of **four days** between the setting-apart of the lamb and its sacrifice — not two.

"Two days": Speaking just before his arrest, Jesus notes that the festival is **two days** away.

The Typological Parallel

The "two days" statement does not match the four-day preparation rule.

Nevertheless a broader chronological parallel between the final week of Jesus' life and the Exodus timeline may be seen: the triumphal entry into Jerusalem corresponds to the 10th of Nisan — the very day on which the original Passover lambs were chosen and brought into the homes for public inspection. The Lamb is set apart on the day of selection.

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The Man Carrying Water

Mark 14:13–14 *And He sent two of His disciples and said to them, "Go into the city, and a man will meet you carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" (cf. Luke 22:10–12).*

Carrying water was a woman's work. The only man carrying a water pitcher would have been an Essene. One branch of the Essenes lived within the city, by the Gate of the Essenes. This is especially suggestive given the line of Essene influence running through the notice concerning John the Baptist and the heightened Messianic expectation of the Essenes at this time.

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Shechem — "My Dying Has Begun"

The City of Shechem. In the Hebrew of Genesis 48:22, the word rendered "portion" is *shechem echad* (שְׁכֶם אֶחָד), which literally means "one shoulder" or "one ridge of land." This is a direct wordplay on the actual **city of Shechem.** The tract is later identified in the New Testament as the very "parcel of ground that Jacob gave to his son Joseph" (John 4:5), where Joseph's bones were finally buried (Joshua 24:32). Modern translations render the phrase as "one mountain slope" or "one ridge of land" — ground won through conflict, whether physical or prophetic.

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Barabbas — Son of the Father

The name *Barabbas* is said to literally mean "son of the father," and functions as an idiom for one whose identity is unknown. Note that Greek has no indefinite article: one cannot say "son of *a* father," so it must be "son of *the* father" — and "the father" here carries no direct identifier. The construction is used precisely to avoid saying "one father," which would require an identifier and would make no sense. The anonymous "son of the father" is thus set opposite the true Son of the Father.

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Zebulun and the Sea

The Genesis blessing of Zebulun may be read as a foreshadowing of a future connection to maritime trade and influence. Historically, Zebulun's location near the trade routes — and especially the tribe's proximity to the ancient *Via Maris*, the great route linking Egypt and Mesopotamia — would have facilitated access to the sea, symbolizing prosperity and interaction with other nations, even if the territory did not directly border the coast.

Two clarifications are in order. The Roman-built coastal city of Caesarea lay on a stretch of land south of Mount Carmel that belonged to the tribe of Manasseh (historically overlapping the coastal spheres of Asher), significantly south and west of Zebulun's borders. And in the actual distribution of Joshua 19:10–16, Zebulun's allotment was inland, within Galilee, and did not directly touch the city of Sidon. The blessing is best understood as quasi-prophetic association rather than strict cartography.

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Dan the Serpent, the Bronze Serpent, and the Protoevangelium

The following note sets out the background for why we do not directly link the "serpent" to "the place called Golgotha."

Dan and Serpent Imagery. The tribe of Dan is described as a serpent in the prophetic blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49:17), symbolizing the tribe's cunning and tactical warfare, its capacity to overcome larger enemies by stealth, and — in later tradition — a leaning toward spiritual straying and judgment.

Jacob says: *"Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward."*

Rather than open-field cavalry or grand frontal assaults, the imagery describes a small snake that waits quietly and strikes the vulnerable heel, bringing down a heavily armed rider. Classical commentators such as Rashi connected the description to the tribe's most famous hero, Samson, who single-handedly brought down the Philistines through cunning and unconventional means.

Later history records the tribe of Dan introducing carved idols and alternative worship (Judges 18). Because of this leaning toward idolatry, some later Jewish and Christian writers read the serpent metaphor negatively, treating Dan as the "black sheep" of the tribes.

Certain early Christian writers noted that Dan is omitted from the sealed tribes of Revelation 7, interpreting the serpent prophecy as a foreshadowing of apostasy or end-time trouble — some going so far as to say the Antichrist would arise from Dan. However, modern scholars attribute the matter to a scribal error.

The Bronze Serpent. During the wilderness wanderings, Israel complained against God, who sent venomous "fiery serpents" among them. When the people repented, God commanded Moses to forge a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole; anyone bitten could look on it and live. Over the following centuries Israel kept the bronze serpent as a sacred relic, and gradually shifted from honoring the God who had healed them to worshiping the object itself, burning incense to it. When Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah he launched a reform to eliminate idolatry, and — as recorded in 2 Kings 18:4 — broke the bronze serpent to pieces, calling it *Nehushtan*. The name mockingly combines *nachash* (serpent) and *nechoshet* (bronze) to mean "a mere piece of bronze," reminding the people that it was nothing more than an inanimate chunk of metal.

In the New Testament, Jesus references this artifact in John 3:14–15, using it as a direct prophecy of his crucifixion: just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness to save people from physical

death, so the Son of Man must be lifted up that whoever believes in Him may have eternal life. The linkage is not the serpent *per se*; rather it is an instance of semiotics — the looking up to the sign of redemption.

The *Protoevangelium*. At this point we touch a non-biblical sacred cow, essential to the Church of Rome, Mariology, bound up with a high Christology (simplified). Genesis 3:15, which relates that the woman's offspring will crush the serpent's head while the serpent strikes the heel, is regarded by critical scholars and by Jewish tradition as an aetiological explanation for human–snake animosity, not a Messianic prophecy about Jesus.

Critical analysis considers that this text is no*t* a prophecy. The original Hebrew makes no mention of a Messiah, a virgin birth, or Satan — these being largely Second Temple ideas and early-church developments.

- **Literal snakes:** The passage explains why humans and snakes fear and attack one another — the heel that is bitten, the head that is crushed.
- **A created animal:** The aetiological text describes an actual talking animal created by God, not a fallen angel or the devil.
- **Collective descendants:** The Hebrew word for "seed" (*zera*, זֶרַע) refers broadly to future generations and progeny, not to a single individual. The phrase "offspring of the woman" uses standard biological terminology.

Identifying the serpent as Satan and reading the verse as the *protoevangelium* (the "first gospel") was developed centuries later, in early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, rather than from the original intent of the Hebrew author. This reading was subsequently drawn into the development of Mariology. Judaism reads the verse as an ongoing struggle between humankind and the hazards of the natural world, and rejects a Christological or supernatural fulfillment. The echo, then, is to be handled with care.

The Opened Tombs — Matthew 27:52–53

Traditional, literalist, and conservative scholars argue that Matthew intends the account of the raised saints to be understood as literal history — a genuine, physical miracle given as an immediate testimony and preview of Christ's power over death, the risen saints serving as a "firstfruits" of the resurrection.

Many critical scholars, by contrast, read the passage as apocalyptic imagery or a literary device rather than a literal event. Matthew deploys standard Jewish prophetic and apocalyptic motifs — earthquakes, split rocks, rising dead — to signal that Jesus' death is a cataclysmic turning point inaugurating the new creation and the final victory over death.

Among traditionalist and some conservative commentators, a further nuance holds that these saints experienced a temporary return to physical life (as Lazarus did) rather than an immediate entry into glorified immortality, and so would eventually have died again. Commentators also stress the chronological marker in verse 53: though the tombs opened at the earthquake during the crucifixion, the saints did not emerge or enter Jerusalem until *after* Jesus rose — preserving Christ as the true "firstborn from the dead."

It is unlikely that the event was a reality in the sensible world but should be understood within the apocalyptic genre of the writing.

The Guards at the Tomb

Pilate instructed the leaders to employ a guard. The text later explicitly calls them “soldiers” who accepted a bribe and were promised protection from the governor.

Jewish Temple Police? Some interpretations suggest the guards may have been the Jewish temple police: Pilate’s phrasing (“you have a guard”) could imply the use of the temple’s existing security, and the guards first reported back to the chief priests rather than to any Roman superior. Had they been Roman soldiers, dereliction of duty of this kind would undoubtedly have cost them their lives — a consideration that tells in favor of the temple-police reading.