

N A N A D O L C E

the
S E E D
of the
W O M A N



30 narratives that point to Jesus



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Foreword

In her opening chapter, Nana Dolce draws our attention to the Bible’s first poem (Gen 1:27), the one that marvels at the wonderful and mysterious notion that humanity is made “in the image of God.” After all the divine work of creation in this chapter, this poem represents the pinnacle of the account leaving the biblical author simply overwhelmed with the “very-goodness” of it all. Some ideas are so wonderful, only a poem will do.

We talk a lot today about the dignity, beauty, and honor of humanity as *imago Dei*, but the true universality of the “image of God” is often lost in discussions about the women of the Bible. Women play a crucial role in the development of the Old Testament story, serving as the linchpins for so many of the events in redemptive history. I think of the creation of Eve in Genesis 2, Miriam’s song in Exodus 15, Deborah and Jael in Judges 4 and 5, Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 — 2 , and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, just to name a few. In each case, the female protagonist is presented, speaks, and acts in ways that might surprise us and even challenge our unexamined beliefs about what it means to be a man or woman in the service of God.

These stories about powerful women can remind us of how we as readers bring so much of our own cultural commitments (whether conservative, progressive, or other) to the act of biblical interpretation. As a result, we do well to allow ourselves and our cultural context to

be interrogated by the Word of God, always praying with the psalmist, “Search me, O God, and know my heart ... see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23–24). Be encouraged that this is exactly the kind of prayer that our loving Father is pleased to answer.

What is so profound about the book that you are holding in your hands is the direction that Dolce chooses to take with these biblical passages featuring women. She does not shy away from the difficult questions, but she is not constrained by them either. Rather, she takes the teaching about the image of God in Genesis 1 seriously and asks what the women in these stories tell us about the character of the God in whose image they are made. More specifically, she asks what their stories tell us about his Son, the full embodiment of the Godhead (Col. 2:9). As she explores these questions, she artfully develops her argument that the Old Testament is truly the pre-announcement of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

You are in the hands of an able teacher, and I commend this study to any true student of the whole counsel of God. As you follow her discussion, attune your ear to the voice of the Shepherd speaking to you through the lives of these biblical women.

Scott Redd

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Introduction

Why Old Testament women and Christ?

Jesus offered a sermon to two disheartened disciples in Luke 24. They presumed the Lord dead as they trudged along a road toward Emmaus. The risen Christ met them on that road and opened the Scriptures to them. These unseeing disciples had failed to perceive his coming suffering and glory in the Old Testament Scriptures. So “*beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself*” (Lk. 24:27). According to Jesus, all of the Old Testament was written to point to him.

The words of Old Testament Scripture are not merely the tales of the godly and godless, but a pre-announcement of Christ’s work in salvation. But does this include the narratives of Old Testament women as well? How do the stories of these women fit into the redemptive drama that culminates in Christ? Do women like Leah, Jael, and Abigail *also* point us to Jesus? This book shouts a resounding “yes”!

In *The Seed of the Woman*, we trace the gospel storyline through the narratives of women. Our goal is to follow the developing theme of the “promised Seed” across Old Testament history. We divide our journey into six periods of redemptive history: (1) Creation and the Fall, (2) Women of Genesis, (3) Women of the Exodus, (4) Women of the conquest and the time of the judges, (5) Women from Israel’s monarchy to the Exile, and (6) Women Between the Testaments to Christ.

Our chapters take us from Genesis to Jesus in the New Testament. We examine the narratives of thirty women along the way to find Christ, the promised Seed of the Woman (Gen. 3:15).

Why biblical theology?

The Bible is one book. Its forty different authors are inspired by one divine author. It was written on one subject: God's redemption of sinners through the person and work of Christ. Jesus is the interpretive center of the Scriptures and biblical theology helps us to see that. It takes us historically and chronologically across the pages of Scripture to reveal the "big picture" of God's work through his Son. This book isn't a mere "recap" of Bible stories but an intentional tracing of a progressive theme across Scripture. In other words, we follow a thread in the fabric of the story of redemption as it unfolds to display Jesus.

Women are part of that grand story. So, we study their narratives – not *just* as inspirations for faithful living, but to see Christ. Like the disciples of Emmaus, we want our hearts to burn as we recognize our Christ at the center of the big story that governs all human history – and who is also our hope for today (Lk. 24:32).

Good news that proves true

Readers of this book live in a post-Genesis 3 world. We are women with full hands, we battle noisy distractions, and face cunning temptations. We need books that preach Christ. We need the good news that proves true – not false promises that glitter then fade. *The Seed of the Woman* is a book on women that is ultimately about a Man. It's written to show Christ as the interpretive center of the Old Testament Scriptures. Each chapter begins with a reflection point – this isn't a chapter summary but a statement on God's character for your meditation. The back flap contains a visual timeline of Old Testament history which shows the historical placement of the women featured in this book, helping you to see the big picture of Old Testament history and where these women

in the Bible appear. As you consider their lives, I pray that you will recognize yourself as a woman whose life is also meant to point to Jesus within the unfolding drama of the biggest story ever told!

PART ONE:

Creation, Fall, the Promised Seed, and Eve

Creation (Genesis 1 – 2)

The Bible's first poem

Reflection

The God who acts alone in Genesis 1 is also the covenant Lord God who initiates relationship with his created beings in Genesis 2. God's plan from creation was to dwell with his people.

This book on women begins with God. In fact, as you read, you'll notice that we never really turn our attention away from him. He is at the center of every chapter. After all, the Bible isn't primarily about women (or men) – but about the God who creates women and men and who redeems them through his Son.¹ This God and his Son are our focal point as we journey across Scripture. We start in Genesis with the ancient story of creation, retold with a focus on poetry.

I'm no poet, but motherhood has made me a reciter of rhymes. Most Dr.-Seuss-loving mommas will tell you that poetry can convey new ideas to children more vividly than literal prose. A well-composed rhyme is a

powerful teaching tool. Perhaps that's why poetry fills the Bible from Genesis to Revelation (and shows up so early on in Scripture). God's creative work in Genesis 1 is ordered in a sequential flow that some would argue as poetic. But in Genesis 1:27, we read a line that appears to be a true poem. The verse has much to say about God and the people he makes.

Context for this poem begins in Genesis 1:1: "*In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.*" Moses is considered the author of these words (and the first five books of the Bible). He wrote to an unsteady nation of formerly enslaved people who were learning to trust God as his own possession (Ex. 6:7). This introductory sentence of Scripture is key to the story Moses tells. It reminds Israel, and us, of God's supremacy. The world isn't the result of chance but *his* direct and creative work. Moses refers to God as *Elohim* (the mighty One) throughout Genesis 1.² And indeed, here we meet a mighty God who commands a void nothing into a vivid something.

God is the only speaker and actor in Genesis 1. And this shouldn't surprise us – after all, he alone is self-existent and eternal. Like a designer – more masterful than Chip and Joanna Gaines – he used words to build three distinct settings in the first three days of creation. First, he made day and night, then sky and sea, and finally, dry land and vegetation (Gen. 1:2–13). In the following three days, he progressively filled each space with a matching creature: cosmological lights, birds and marine life, land animals and people – the crown of his creation (Gen. 1:14–26).

Our author shares all this with us in an orderly account. But when he gets to the making of humankind, he parts from prose into poetry. And here we have, what might be, the Bible's first poem. Genesis 1:27 is a verse that celebrates the hallmark of God's creation: the man and the woman.

*So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.*

The word "created" seems to serve as the refrain to Moses' song here. He repeats it three times. The poem appears to shout along with Genesis 2, "Yes!" It was *God* who *created* humankind! *He* took dust from the ground. He turned, formed, and molded it into a man (the word for "Man" is *Adam* in Hebrew). It was *he* who breathed life into Adam's nostrils. The man became a living creature because God *created* him (Gen. 2:7).

And God – seeing that it wasn't good for Adam to be alone (Gen. 2:18) – took his rib and fashioned a woman (she's named Eve later in the story). Man and Woman are created beings. Male and female God *created* them (Gen. 1:27). Scripture's first poem emphasizes God's preeminence as Creator and humanity as creature. But the verse has a second emphasis – here, a majestic God forms dusty people in his own likeness.

I have the joy of parenting daughters who resemble their mother. My eldest has been called her momma's "twin." She's a mini version of me with the same thick curly hair and broad smile. She looks like me and yet Someone far greater has placed his image on her. Human beings carry the distinction of the *imago Dei* (the image of God). We were created to be replicas and vice-regents of God – creatures formed with the unique capacity to reflect God's holy character in our rule and care for the world.³ And this is true of every human being, from the smallest embryo to the oldest amongst us. No age, ethnic, or social group bears more of God's likeness than another. Every human being is made to mirror God – and it starts at creation.

God blessed the first couple and commanded them to "*Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it*" (Gen. 1:28). Like God, these two were to order and stock the earth. God planted a garden in Eden and placed Adam there to work and keep it (Gen. 2:8–15). He provided

everything the man and woman needed to obey his creation, filling, and ruling mandates. They had marriage, work, abundant food, and something beyond our imagination – God’s visible presence.

The author seems to highlight this visible presence with the introduction of a new name for God in Genesis 2. He calls him *Yahweh Elohim* (“the LORD God,” Gen. 2:4). This is the personal and covenant name of God. The transcendent God who acts alone in Genesis 1 is also the omnipresent personal Lord God who initiates relationship with his created beings in Genesis 2. The Bible begins with a Creator who abides with his creation and will end with a God who dwells with his people in a new creation (Rev. 21:3). In between is a drama in which Woman plays a tragic key role. And yet, as we will see, the mercy of *Yahweh Elohim* will read like poetry in motion in this story of Scripture.

The Fall and the Seed (Genesis 3)

The Fall of mankind and the Seed of woman

Reflection

*God judged Woman and Adam – but not without mercy.
He covered the depraved woman and inserted her into this
glorious drama of redemption.*

The Bible introduces human speech with a serenade to Woman. Adam’s Genesis 2:23 song to his bride are his only words recorded before the Fall. Man was created first, but Woman wasn’t received as an inferior second. On the contrary, she was welcomed as the complementary gift that canceled God’s “not good” pronouncement of Genesis 2:18. The union of Adam and Woman completed God’s work of creation on the sixth day. Genesis 2 closes with the pair together, naked, and not ashamed (Gen. 2:25).

The next chapter opens in the same glorious setting: God’s Garden in Eden. But the splendor of Genesis 1 and 2 is followed by the treachery