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INTRODUCTION

This study guide will be most helpful if you work through it slowly with an open Bible, looking up all the references. Grab some friends and do it together!



KEY THEMES

KEY THEME

1

The plot tension driving the whole biblical story starts with a mysterious talking snake that gets humans to doubt God's goodness and disobey.

GENESIS 3

While the origins of this being are not described in the Bible, it is presented as a spiritual creature in rebellion against God who is bent on destroying humans.

SEE JESUS' COMMENTS IN
JOHN 8:44; 1 JOHN 3:8

Later biblical authors use various words to describe this being.

THE SATAN "THE ADVERSARY"

MARK 1:13; 4:15;
ACTS 5:3

THE DEVIL "THE ACCUSER"

EPHESIANS 6:11;
2 TIMOTHY 2:26;
JAMES 4:7

THE EVIL ONE:

MATT 6:13; 13:19;
2 THESSALONIANS 3:3;
EPHESIANS 6:16

THE TEMPTER:

MATTHEW 4:3;
1 THESSALONIANS 3:5

RULER OF THIS WORLD

JOHN 12:31, 16:11;
EPHESIANS 2:2

IN REVELATION 12:9 ALL OF
THE BIBLICAL IMAGES COME
TOGETHER TO DESCRIBE THIS
BEING AS THE SOURCE OF EVIL IN
OUR WORLD.

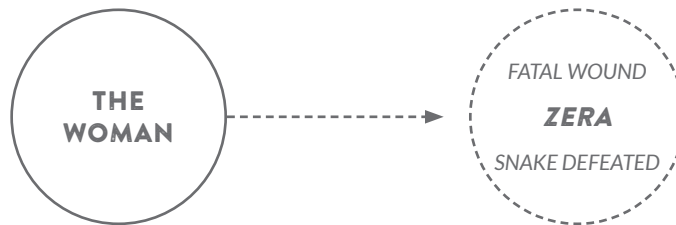
KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

2

God promises that a descendant will come from the line of the woman and destroy the snake, while suffering a fatal wound

GENESIS 3:14-15



This promised descendant is called the “offspring” (*zera* in Hebrew)

זרע

The word *zera*, like the English word “offspring,” can refer to a single descendant (“he”) or a group of descendants (“they”). God’s promise creates an ambiguity that is only resolved by reading further in the story.



The Hebrew word used in Genesis 3:15 to describe the battle between the offspring and the snake is *shuph* (pronounced “shoof”), meaning “to strike/crush.”

שׁוּף

The idea is that the offspring and snake each deliver fatal blows to one another in the battle.

“He (the offspring) will *shuph* your head, and you (the serpent) will *shuph* his heel.”

KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

3

The story of Genesis traces the promised line of the woman right to Abraham in Genesis 12.



GENESIS 3:15

An “offspring” will come from the woman’s family line and destroy the snake.

GENESIS 12:3 (REPEATED IN 18:18)

God’s first promise to Abraham is that “through you, all the families of the earth will be blessed” This family will be the way God restores humanity to his original blessing.

GENESIS 22:18; 26:4; 28:14

Later in the story, God specifies to Abraham and his sons that it will be “through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed”

SEE GENESIS 1:27-28

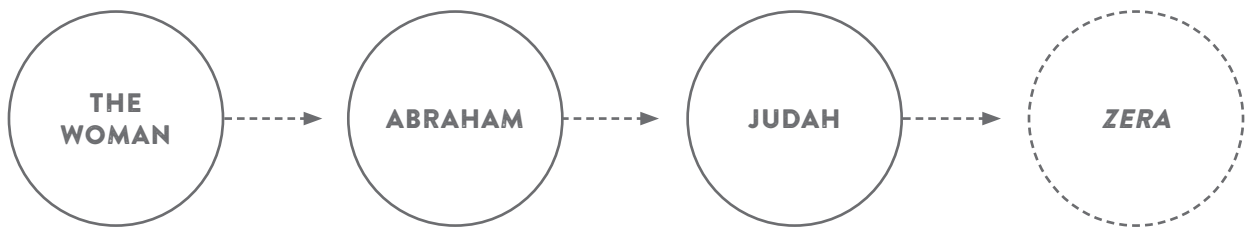
THE STORY DOES NOT CLARIFY WHETHER THIS “OFFSPRING” (ZERA) REFERS TO THE ENTIRE FAMILY OF ABRAHAM, OR TO ONE SPECIFIC DESCENDANT. YOU HAVE TO KEEP READING TO LEARN HOW THE PROMISE WILL BE FULFILLED.

KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

4

The story of Genesis traces the promised line from Abraham to his grandson Judah



In Genesis 49:8-12, Judah receives a promise from his father Jacob

VERSE 8

JUDAH WILL BE THE MOST EMINENT AMONG THE TWELVE TRIBES.

VERSE 9

HIS TRIBE WILL BE AGGRESSIVE AND VICTORIOUS LIKE A LION.

VERSE 10

JUDAH WILL BECOME THE TRIBE OF ISRAEL'S ROYAL LEADERS ("THE SCEPTER").

VERSE 10

A SPECIFIC ROYAL DESCENDANT IS COMING WHO WILL INHERIT ABRAHAM'S PROMISE, AND ALL THE NATIONS WILL OBEY HIM.

VERSE 11-12

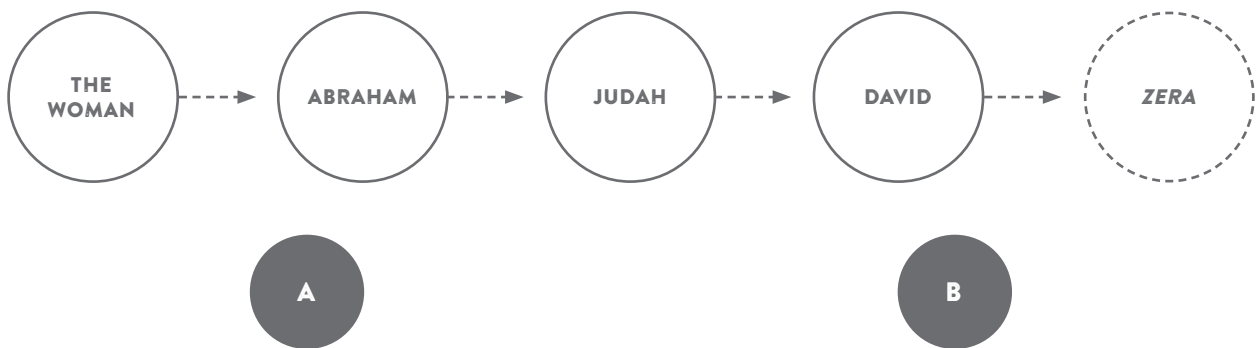
THIS KING'S REIGN WILL BRING A RESTORATION OF THE GARDEN AND ITS ABUNDANCE.

KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

5

The story the Old Testament traces the promised line from Judah to king David.



David is chosen to become the head of a royal line that will last forever. God promises to raise up a specific “offspring” (zera) from David’s line who will build a temple and rule as God’s son.

1 CHRONICLES 17:10-14
SEE THE PARALLEL IN 2 SAMUEL 7:11-16



The book of Psalms has many poems that reflect on these promises to David about a coming king.

PSALMS 2, 72, 89, 110, 132

The future king from the line of David will bring God’s justice to all nations.

PSALMS 2, 72, 110

God’s promise to Abraham is linked to this future king from the line of David: “all nations will be blessed through him”

PSALM 72:17

The future king will establish God’s eternal kingdom over all nations.

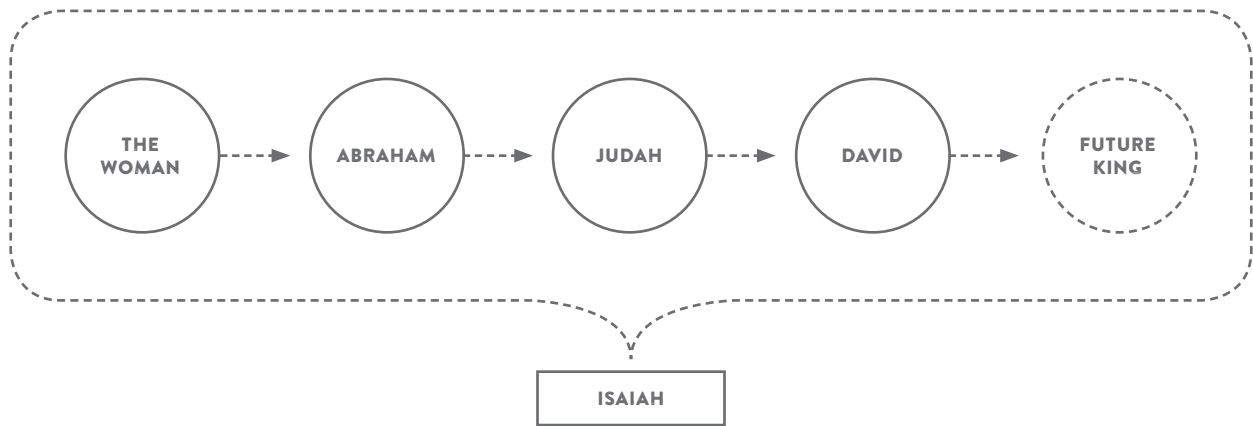
PSALM 72

KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

6

The prophet Isaiah takes up the hope of a future king from the line of David and connects it to the ancient promise from Genesis 3:15



God will bring all nations into his future kingdom of peace...

ISAIAH 2:1-4

...which will be ruled by a king from the line of David.

ISAIAH 9:1-7

This king will bring justice and full restoration to God's world.

ISAIAH 11:1-9

However, the king will come back from death to offer forgiveness, healing, and new life to others.

ISAIAH 53:11-12

Isaiah also said the future king would become a suffering servant, who will be rejected by his people and die for the sins of his people.

ISAIAH 42:1-7; 49:1-7; 53:1-10

When the future kingdom of God arrives there will be a new creation...

ISAIAH 65:17-19

...and "dust will be the serpent's food."

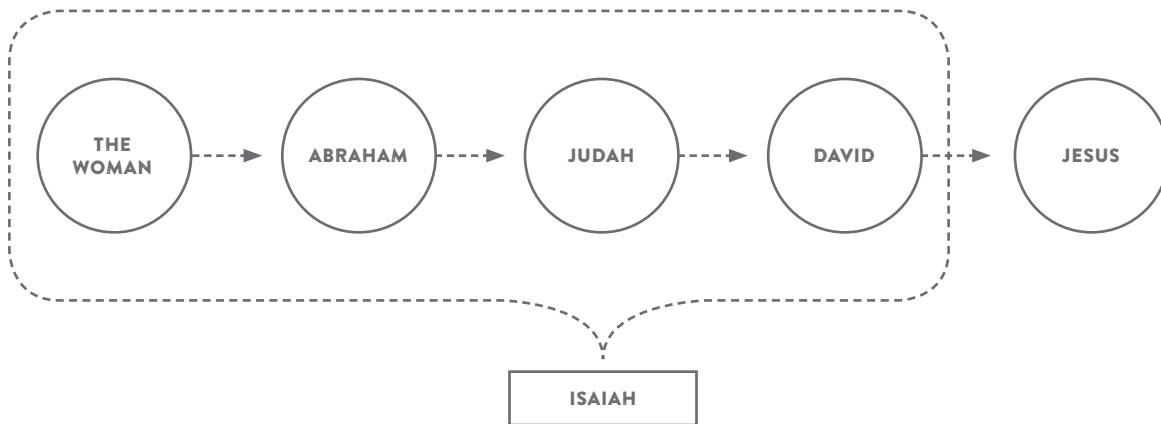
*ISAIAH 65:25,
ALLUDING BACK TO THE
SNAKE'S DEFEAT IN GENESIS 3:14*

KEY THEMES

KEY
THEME

7

Jesus arrives as Israel's messiah, announcing the arrival of God's kingdom and challenging the power of the snake.



A

Jesus overcomes the influence of the snake in the wilderness...

MATTHEW 4:1-11

...and then proceeds to announce the arrival of God's kingdom.

MATTHEW 4:12-17

B

Jesus' viewed his exorcisms and acts of healing as a challenge to the snake's power...

MARK 3:22-27

LUKE 10:17-18

...because he was liberating people from slavery to death and evil.

LUKE 13:16

ACTS 10:38

KEY THEMES

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8

On the cross, Jesus received the fatal wound from the snake on behalf of humanity, but then overcame its power by his resurrection from the dead.

FATAL WOUND

SNAKE DEFEATED

ZERA

JESUS

DEATH ON CROSS

RESURRECTION

THEN

Those who crucified Jesus unknowingly acted under the influence of the snake.

LUKE 22:3
1 CORINTHIANS 2:8

Jesus knew that the snake's power was limited, and that it was doomed to defeat.

JOHN 14:30-31
JOHN 12:31-32; 16:11

Jesus's death was actually his victory: His resurrection robbed the snake of its power over humanity, and he now offers new life to those who trust him.

HEBREWS 2:14-15
1 JOHN 3:8
2 TIMOTHY 1:10

NOW

The New Testament describes Christians as people who trust that Jesus' death and resurrection was for them.

1 CORINTHIANS 15:1-3

They have, so to speak, died and been raised with Jesus...

ROMANS 6:4-7

...and now have the same power to resist the influence of the snake.

LUKE 10:17-20
ROMANS 16:20
JAMES 4:7
1 PETER 5:8-9

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1

While the Bible doesn't describe the origins of the snake or how it became rebellious, it does offer insight into what this creature is all about. Look up all the biblical references under Theme One and ask the following questions: What kinds of tactics does the snake use to influence others? What are the results of the snake's impact on a human? What is the arena of the snake's current influence? How can the snake be resisted?

SEE KEY THEME 1

2

How are the themes of the "offspring of the woman", blessing for the nations, and the "offspring of Abraham" connected in the stories of Genesis? What is the future hope for humanity offered in these promises and stories?

GENESIS 1:27-28,
3:15, 12:1-3; 22:18

3

How are the promises to Abraham, Judah and David all tied together in Psalm 72? What kind of future hope is described in the promises to each of these two men?

GENESIS 12:1-3, 49:8-12,
1 CHRONICLES 17:10-14,
PSALM 72

4

How does Isaiah combine the themes of the future victorious messiah and the fatally wounded victor from Genesis 3:15? Read Isaiah 52:13-53:12: Where is the servant's victory described? Why does the servant die? What results from the servant dying?

5

Recall how Jesus saw himself as freeing people from slavery to the snake's influence (see Luke 13:16 and Acts 10:38). How does the rest of the New Testament describe that same freedom in the lives of Jesus' followers?

HEBREWS 2:14-15;
1 JOHN 3:8;
2 TIMOTHY 1:9-10

