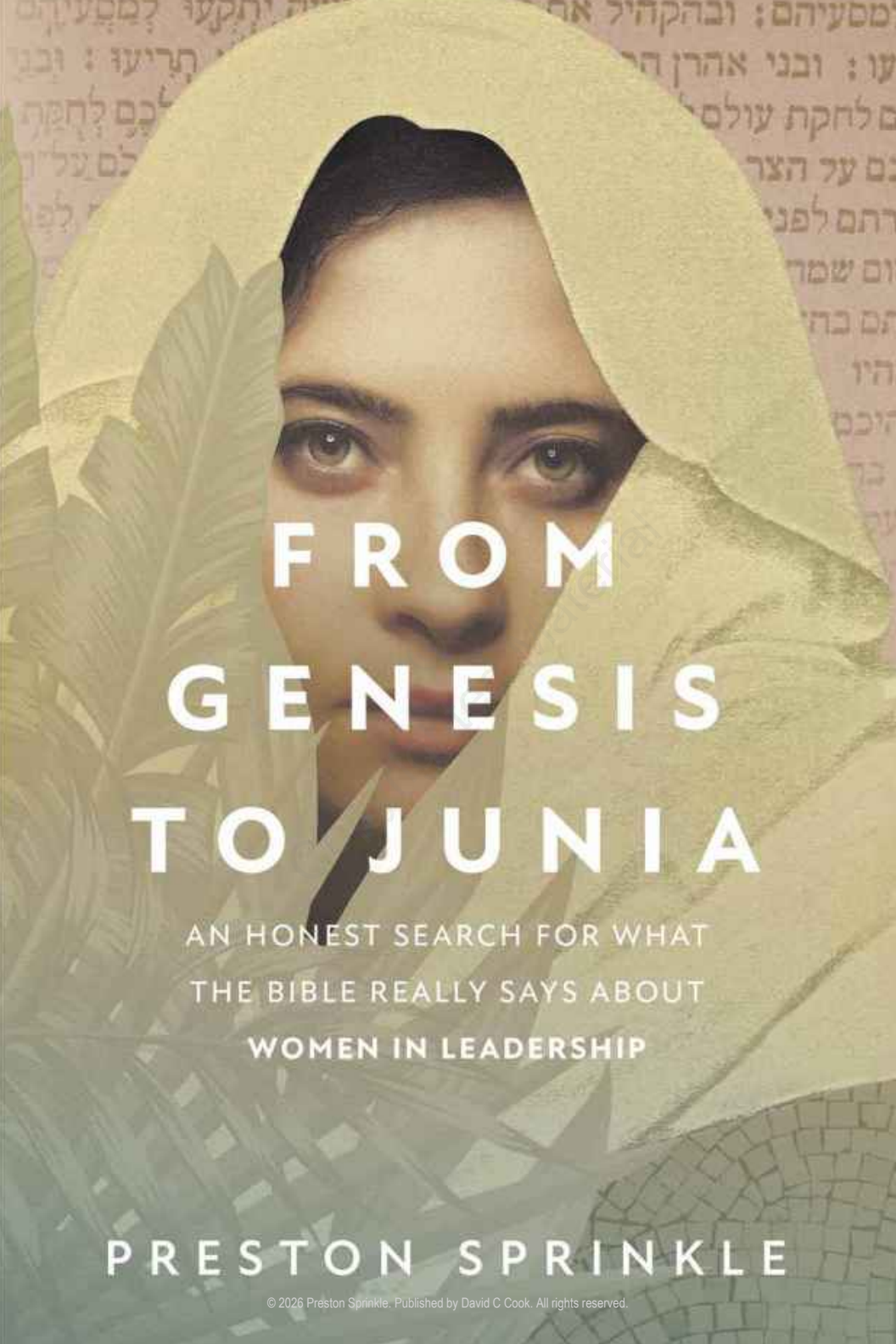
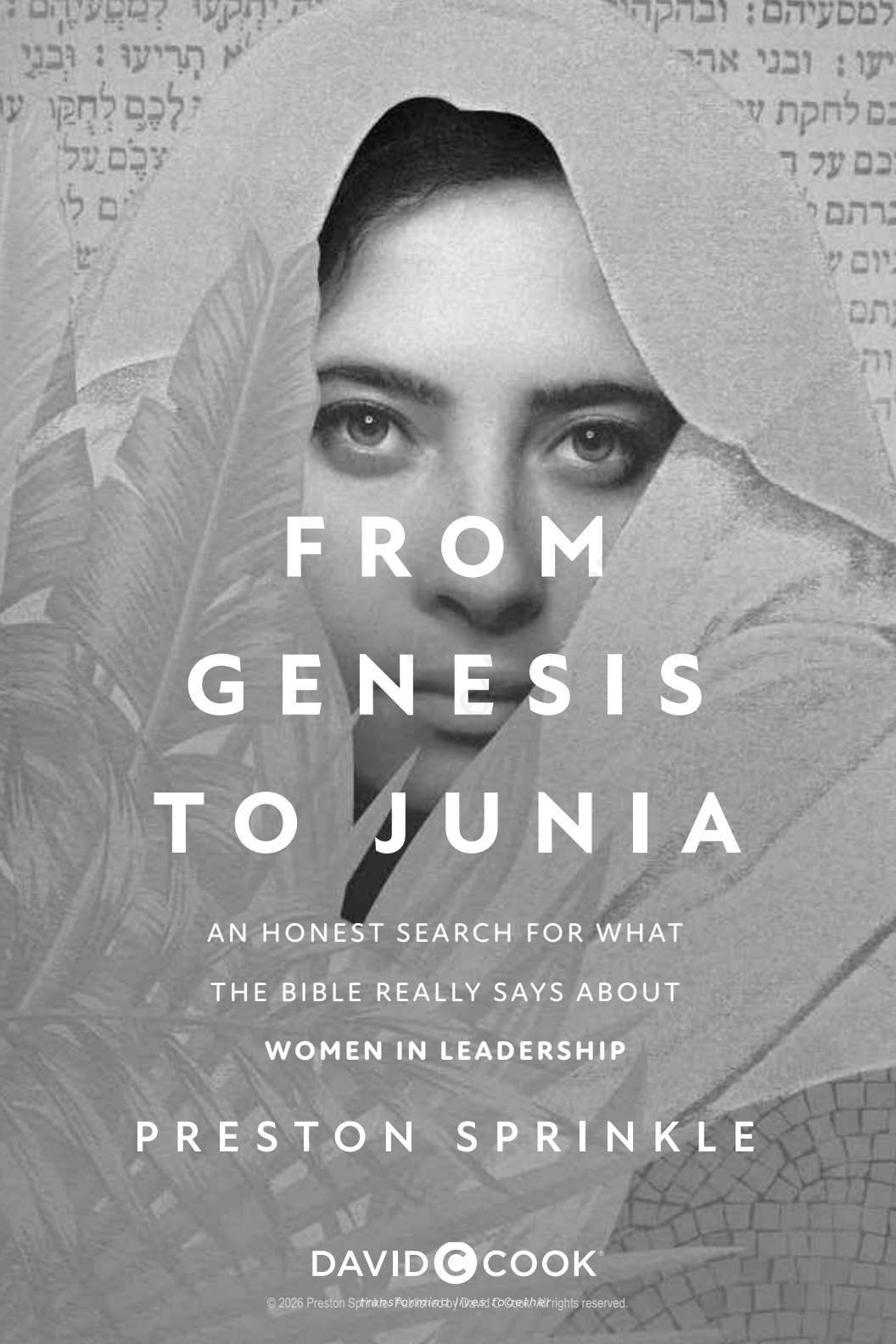


FROM GENESIS TO JUNIA

AN HONEST SEARCH FOR WHAT THE BIBLE REALLY SAYS ABOUT **WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP**

PRESTON SPRINKLE



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DAVID C COOK®

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MAY 2022: MY JOURNEY INTO THE WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP DEBATE

I'm writing this introduction in real time. It's May 2022, and I'm about to embark on a theological journey to figure out what I think the Bible says about women in church leadership.

I'm a bit nervous about this journey, since I don't know my destination. I honestly don't know where I'll end up. Authors typically write their book's introduction last, after they've written the rest of the book and sorted out their conclusions. That's how I wrote most of my previous books.

But this one is different. I'm not starting with a settled conclusion and then writing the book to convince you of it. Rather, I'm inviting you to peek over my shoulder as I journey through Scripture to figure out what I believe it says about this contentious issue.

Most Christians I know have strong opinions on the matter, and I used to be one of them. I grew up in a staunchly complementarian

context where only men could be pastors and leaders. I believed this was the only valid biblical position—any view that allowed women to teach and preach was a direct violation of God's Word. Over the years, though, I've seen some problems with this view. Some arguments seem solid. Others seem forced and unconvincing. I'm not sure it's wrong; I'm just not sure it's right.

The same goes for the egalitarian view. I've come across some compelling arguments for women in leadership. But I've seen some terrible arguments too. I'm not sure it's wrong; I'm just not sure it's right.

So, for the last several years, I've remained undecided about what I think the Bible says about women in leadership.

Why stay undecided for so long? Well, I'm a bit obsessive when it comes to researching a topic, especially a hotly disputed one. I want the depth of my study to determine the strength of my conclusion. I never want to give thin answers to thick questions. And there are a lot of thick questions surrounding this issue that I haven't had time to thoroughly research. Until now.

This fall (2022), I'm taking a sabbatical and setting aside my other ministry responsibilities to focus on the question of women in leadership. I doubt I'll be able to finish my book in six months, but at least I'll have a running start. After the sabbatical is over, I'll keep researching the topic until I feel like I can land on a view with some level of confidence.

I can't promise you that I'll be an unbiased researcher—nobody is totally free from bias! What I can say is that I don't have external pressures—a job, a church, relationships—nudging me toward one view over another. If I were teaching at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary (which is staunchly complementarian) or at Fuller Seminary (which is firmly egalitarian), I'd have a lot of financial and practical reasons to

arrive at a certain conclusion. If I were a pastor at a complementarian church, I'd need to agree with its view (unless I was looking for a job change). If my wife were a senior pastor, my motivation might be tainted. If all my friends were on one side of the debate, my perspective might be clouded.

But I don't work for a church or a seminary, my wife would rather stroll barefoot through a room filled with broken glass than be a pastor, and I have friends on all sides of this debate. And since my friends are real friends, I won't lose them if I end up on the "wrong side" of this question.

No matter what I conclude in this book, I expect to keep all my jobs and ministry roles, make the same amount of money, and keep speaking at both egalitarian and complementarian churches. I won't lose my ordination status (because I'm not ordained), and I won't be kicked out of my denomination (because I'm not part of a denomination). My wonderful publisher doesn't need me to uphold a particular position; they publish books that examine all sides of the issue.

Even personally—and I guess you'll have to take my word for it—I really don't have major leanings in either direction. As I said before, I see strong and weak arguments for each view. But all my thoughts and questions so far are half-baked and under-researched—hence this book. Maybe I'll become more convinced of arguments I've found unconvincing, and maybe I'll see problems with arguments I previously thought were strong. I might even be embarrassed by ignorant things I've said in this introduction!

Although I don't know exactly how this book will unfold, here are some key topics and passages I plan on studying. I'll need to spend time in Genesis 1–3 and the relationship between the first humans. Adam's alleged "headship" over Eve forms the bedrock for the complementarian

view that I grew up with, and I'm eager to see if the text actually supports this. I'm also curious what the rest of the Old Testament says about women's leadership, especially how it portrays female prophets like Huldah and Deborah. But since my main focus is *church* leadership, I'll probably devote more time to the New Testament.

Even here, I'll have to be selective. I know I want to look at how women participated in the ministries of Jesus and Paul. I'll also spend a good deal of time in three important passages: 1 Corinthians 11:2–16; 1 Corinthians 14:34–35; and 1 Timothy 2:8–15. I'm pretty sure I'll study the so-called household code in Ephesians 5:22–33, since *church* roles and *household* roles were sometimes related in the first century. And I want to understand the nature of New Testament prophecy, since women were clearly prophesying in the early church. Is prophecy akin to preaching or teaching? Is it an authoritative activity? These are significant questions I'll try to address.

In a study like this, it's important that we don't understand things like "leadership" and "church" from a modern perspective. I don't want to simply drape the New Testament in the robes of modern Western church structures and call it the same thing. Whatever Paul was saying to Timothy in the first century, it probably didn't involve deciding whether a woman could step under bright stage lights next Sunday and deliver a polished sermon to an audience of five thousand. My aim in this study is to step back into the dusty streets and crowded homes of the first believers and explore the question of women in church leadership according to *their* understanding of church and leadership, not ours. What today's churches choose to do with that portrait lies beyond the scope of my study.

What do I mean by *leader* and *leadership*? I'm hesitant to start with an overly precise definition and then project this definition onto the text of Scripture. I'd rather have the Bible itself shape our understanding of leadership as we journey through our study. But since I'll be using the term *leader* from the get-go, here's a general definition of what I mean at this early stage of our journey. A leader is a person who (1) holds a recognized title or position of authority (such as "king" or "elder"), (2) guides and directs a group of people toward a specific goal or mission, or (3) speaks or acts in a way that expects others to follow their direction.

I offer these descriptions only as flexible frameworks, not fixed barriers. Again, our understanding of leadership should arise from the text, not be forced upon it. I'll be sure to revisit and fine-tune this definition once we get to the portions of the New Testament that deal with leadership in the church. In any case, I'll try to be clear where and why I think someone is considered a leader, based on this general definition.

A few quick words before we dive in. First, I'll be wading through lots of academic literature on this topic, but I plan to write in a conversational tone. I want this book to represent the scholarly debates responsibly, but I also want it to be readable for people who don't have a seminary degree. If you're a scholar, you might find my tone too colloquial. If you're a non-scholar, you might be annoyed by the copious footnotes. Either way, I hope this book can help bridge the gap between the academy and the church.

Second, I know the terms *egalitarian* and *complementarian* are highly disputed. Some have ditched these terms for others like *mutualist* (instead of *egalitarian*) and *patriarchal* (instead of *complementarian*). But while *egalitarian* and *complementarian* may be frayed, the other

labels have their own loose threads.[1] Whichever term we use, I believe the most respectful approach is to call a view what its proponents call it. In other words, I don't think it's helpful when egalitarians label the other view *patriarchal* if its proponents don't use that label. Likewise, it's misleading to slap *feminist* on the opposing view if they don't use it themselves—that term carries connotations that many egalitarians reject.

Since most complementarians seem to prefer this term, it's the one I'm going to use. While *mutualist* is gaining traction, I think *egalitarian* is still the more recognizable term, so I'll use it throughout the book. But I want to be clear about what I mean by each word. In this book, *egalitarian* refers to the view that women can serve in all areas of church leadership, and *complementarian* refers to the view that certain positions of church leadership are reserved for men. Both terms can carry lots of other implications and assumptions, but when I use them here, I mean nothing more than what I've just said.

There are, of course, variations within both groups. For instance, "soft complementarians" believe that women can teach and preach in churches as long as they're under the authority of male elders. Some egalitarians believe that men and women are equal in every way, while

1 I don't mind *mutualist* (instead of *egalitarian*), but complementarians believe that men and women exist in a mutual relationship with different roles. I really don't like *patriarchal*, since there are so many definitions of this term. Plus, some who use *patriarchy* to mean male domination often fail to appreciate the sociological and economic complexity of the ancient patriarchal world. *Hierarchical* is problematic, since Christian leadership itself is not hierarchical. If only men are to be leaders, this does not mean they exist in some hierarchical relationship over those they lead. The term *egalitarian* can be problematic, since it can have secular connotations or imply that there are no male-female differences. And *complementarian* can suggest that non-complementarians don't believe that men and women complement each other. We can continue to dissect each term and show why it's good, bad, or ugly. But I'm simply going to use the familiar terms *egalitarian* and *complementarian* as I define them in this introduction.

others are happy to celebrate the differences between men and women. I'll tease out these variations where they're relevant.

Lastly, my study will be strictly exegetical in nature. It will focus on what the Bible says about women in church leadership *in its own context*. I'm not going to offer modern-day applications, nor will I address the modern problems that sometimes develop in complementarian or egalitarian churches. These issues are worth addressing! But it would take a whole other book to do so, and I'm not sure I'm the right person to do that. My goal here is to provide an honest evaluation of the biblical arguments—I'll leave the application questions to other scholars, and to readers like you.

I just ordered a truckload of books, which should be here in a couple of days. I'll spend the next few months reading as deeply and widely as I can. And then, once I've taken copious notes, maybe I'll start to think about putting pen to paper.

See you in a few months (or a few years)!

Chapter 1

ADAM, EVE, AND GENESIS 1–3

I know you just turned the page, but I've actually been shored up in my study for several months. I've combed through several books on women in leadership, just to get my head around the debate. And then I decided to delve deep into the most logical starting place: the creation of the first human pair and the implications they bring to our debate.

Studying Genesis 1–3 has felt like watching a theological Ping-Pong match: Egalitarians and complementarians rally back and forth with arguments, counterarguments, and counter-counterarguments. But there's one thing both sides agree on: Genesis 1–3 is pivotal for the debate. Some say it's the most crucial passage of all. "As Genesis 1–3 go," writes Ray Ortlund, "so goes the whole Biblical debate."[1]

I think Ortlund overstates his case, but I agree that Genesis 1–3 plays a key role in our topic. Paul refers to Adam and Eve's relationship

1 Raymond C. Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality and Male Headship: Genesis 1–3," *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood: A Response to Evangelical Feminism*, ed. John Piper and Wayne Grudem (Crossway, 1991), 95.

in two important passages about women in the church (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13–14). And this creation story is fundamental for Christian theology as a whole.[2] There are many shiny theological objects we could chase in this passage, so we'll have to stay focused on the question most relevant for our study: Does Genesis 1–3 depict Adam as a leader who exercises authority over Eve as part of God's original creational design for male-female relations in the home and the church?

Our answer depends in part on how Paul interprets the passage, but we'll address that later in the book. For now, I want to look at Genesis 1–3 on its own terms. What does it say about authority, leadership, and male-female relations? Much of this debate boils down to five key questions.

1. Do Adam and Eve Exercise Mutual Rule in Genesis 1?

Complementarians like to camp out in Genesis 2–3 to highlight Adam's authority over Eve, but egalitarians are quick to point out that Genesis 2–3 should be read in light of Genesis 1.[3] There, "male and female" are "the image of God"; both are commissioned to "fill the earth and subdue [*kabash*] it" and "rule" (*radah*) over the animal kingdom (1:26–28). There's no hint of man ruling, leading, or exercising authority over woman.[4] Both male and female are subduing and ruling.

2 I don't think it matters to our interpretation whether Genesis 1–3 is a nonhistorical myth or literal history (or a blend of both). I believe the passage is historical, though it may contain some mythical elements. But even if it were wholly mythical, it's still designed to establish theological truth. The New Testament writers and Jesus certainly understood this passage to be theologically significant.

3 Some see Genesis 1 as a different creation account than Genesis 2–3. I don't think this reading is correct, but even if it were, the final form of Genesis 1–3 suggests that we should read the passage as a cohesive whole.

4 See Gail Taylor, "Women in Creation and Redemption," *Journal of Christian Brothers Research Fellowship* 26 (1974): 17.

The authority structure is one where God rules over creation and commissions both man and woman to mediate his rule over the animals. "There is nothing in the first creation narrative," writes Mary Conway, "to indicate that the subordination of women, whether in regard to their nature or function, was part of Yahweh's original intention for humanity."[5]

Complementarians agree that Genesis 1 establishes ontological equality between man and woman and that both are called to mediate God's rule. But they argue that the chapter doesn't detail *how* man and woman will collaborate to subdue and rule the earth. It's in Genesis 2 where their individual roles are spelled out, and man's authority over woman exists within this framework of ontological equality.[6]

I can see the validity of both perspectives. The only explicit authority language used in Genesis 1–2 is ascribed to both male and female, as they "rule" over creation (1:26). And Genesis 1 precedes Genesis 2, so it naturally influences the interpretation of the latter. Genesis 1, however, doesn't delve into specific male and female roles, which Genesis 2 addresses more directly (though *roles* might not be the best term). It's possible that Genesis 2 depicts a scenario where man holds authority over woman, while both are ontologically equal and called to rule over creation (Gen. 1).

I think it's best to table a firm response to this first question until we've worked through the others.

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5 Mary L. Conway, "Gender in Creation and Fall: Genesis 1–3," in *Discovering Biblical Equality: Biblical, Theological, Cultural, and Practical Perspectives*, 3rd ed., ed. Ronald W. Pierce and Cynthia Long Westfall (IVP Academic, 2021), 39.

6 As Grudem notes, "Equal value and equal honor and equal personhood and equal importance do not require that people have the *same roles* or the *same authority*." Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth: An Analysis of More Than 100 Disputed Questions* (Crossway, 2012), 104 (italics in original).

2. Why Was Adam Created First?

Some argue that Adam occupies a leadership role in the created order because he was created first.[7] Genesis was written in a culture that held to a principle of primogeniture, which passed leadership to the firstborn son. Therefore, Tom Schreiner says, "the Hebrew reader would be disposed to read the second creation in terms of *primogeniture*," where the "firstborn male has authority over the younger brothers after the father dies."[8] Since God created Adam first, he had authority over Eve, who came after him.

I used to think this argument was compelling, but I now see several flaws with reading Genesis 2 through the lens of primogeniture. Eve is Adam's wife, not his sibling and definitely not his younger brother. Also, the primogeniture principle states that the firstborn male becomes the patriarch *after the father dies*. I guess we could say God functions like Adam's father in this story, but according to the Newsboys, God's not dead. Most significantly, God often subverts the primogeniture principle throughout Scripture, especially in Genesis. God gives priority to Isaac, not the firstborn Ishmael; to Jacob, not Esau; to Joseph, not his older brothers; to Ephraim, not Manasseh; to Perez, not Zerah. This pattern is repeated at key points elsewhere in the Old Testament story: God chooses Moses over Aaron and David over his seven older brothers. "In

7 It's not just conservative complementarian scholars who argue for Adam's authority over Eve in Genesis 2. Plenty of progressive scholars find Genesis 2 to be a male chauvinistic presentation of man's superiority over woman. See e.g., David J. A. Clines, "What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Irredeemably Androcentric Orientations in Genesis 1–3," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? And Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament*, ed. David J. A. Clines, *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series* 94 (JSOT Press, 1990), 25–48.

8 Thomas R. Schreiner, "Women in Ministry: Another Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. James R. Beck (Zondervan, 2005), 291 (italics in original). See also Craig Blomberg, "A Complementarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. James R. Beck (Zondervan, 2005), 128. On the definition of *primogeniture* and its occurrence in Genesis, see Udogu Chukwuebuka, "Primogeniture, a Cultural Tool for the Interpretation of Genesis Narratives," *International Journal of Social Sciences and Scientific Studies* 1, no. 1 (2021), https://ijssass.com/index.php/ijssass/article/view/7/2.

spite of the Near Eastern custom of giving preference to firstborn sons, at critical junctures God *almost always subverts* this custom," writes Philip Payne.[9] Even if early readers would have read Genesis 2 through the lens of primogeniture—and it's not clear they would have—it's unlikely that God was establishing a universal principle of primogeniture, since he was so fond of overturning it.

To me, the strongest argument for man's primogeniture status comes not in Genesis 2 but in the letters of Paul, who seems to ascribe some kind of priority or authority to man since he was created first (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13–14). The passages in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy will be significant for our study, and both are fraught with interpretive difficulties. It would be naive to simply cite these Pauline texts to prove Adam's primogeniture status. One would first need to hack through the interpretive jungle surrounding these two passages, which we'll do in later chapters.

For now, I'm mainly concerned with the author's intention in Genesis 1–3.[10] And I don't think Genesis alone demands that Adam's first-created status establishes male authority over woman. Later, we'll see if Paul begs to differ.

3. Does Eve Being Adam's "Helper" Imply That Adam Is in Charge?

Eve was created to be "a helper fit for" Adam (Gen. 2:18, 20 ESV). Some take this to mean that Adam held authority over Eve, whose created role was to support him. "The word 'helper' … suggests the woman's

9 Philip Payne, *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood: How God's Word Consistently Affirms Gender Equality* (Zondervan, 2023), 7 (italics in original).

10 I take the author to be Moses, whose work was revised by inspired editors, but I'll keep using "author" so as to not distract those who disagree with Mosaic authorship. The author's identity doesn't ultimately matter for our purposes.

supportive role," writes Ray Ortlund.[11] "The man was not created to help the woman, but the reverse."[12] Ortlund then raises the question, "Was Eve Adam's equal?" To which he responds: "Yes and no. She was his spiritual equal … but she was not his equal in that she was his 'helper.' A man," says Ortlund, "by virtue of his manhood, is called to lead for God. A woman, just by virtue of her womanhood, is called to help for God."[13]

Ortlund and other complementarian scholars stress that Eve's (and every woman's) status as "helper" does not imply ontological subordination.[14] All people are created in God's image and possess equal value, worth, and dignity. But relationships in which people have different roles, where one leads and another helps, can exist among people of equal worth.

I think this logic is reasonable. Just because your boss holds authority over you doesn't mean you're not both equal in worth and value as images of God. All humans are ontologically equal, even if some are called to lead, while others are to follow. The question is, Does the term "helper" imply that woman was created to follow man's leadership?

I don't think it does. The Hebrew word for "helper," *ezer*, rarely refers to the role of a subordinate. *Ezer* occurs nineteen other times in Scripture, and it most often refers to a stronger ally or a deliverer.[15] In

11 Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 104.
12 Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 101–2.
13 Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 102. See also Schreiner, "Women in Ministry," 292–94.
14 E.g., Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 102–3; Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 104, 117–21.
15 Philip Payne goes so far to say that *all* nineteen "occurrences of *ezer* refer to a savior or deliverer" (*Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood*, 3). Craig Blomberg, however, disagrees: *Ezer* refers "to someone in a subordinate role" in three other passages: Isaiah 30:5, Ezekiel 12:14, and Daniel 11:34 ("Complementarian Perspective," 129–30). I don't agree with Blomberg's take on Isaiah 30:5. Here, *ezer* describes Egypt, and God rebuked Israel for seeking an alliance with Egypt, a "people who can't *help*" and "are of no benefit, they are no *help*" (30:5 CSB). Egypt was not Israel's subordinate; it was clearly a more powerful nation than Israel at this time. Blomberg might be right about Ezekiel 12:14, where King Zedekiah's military troops (or possibly foreign allies) are described as his "helpers" (ESV). These "helpers" were subordinate to the king, though they were stronger than the king, which is why he wanted them at his side. As far as Daniel 11:34 goes, I don't think it's clear whether the ones who "help" were subordinate to the ones they were helping.

at least fifteen of the nineteen occurrences, it refers to God "helping" Israel.[16] Clearly, God is not subservient to Israel, nor was he playing a mere supportive role under Israel's leadership.[17] The Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament) supports the notion that *ezer* does not imply a subservient role when it translates *ezer* as *boethos*. In almost every one of its other forty-five occurrences in the Septuagint, *boethos* refers to help coming "from a stronger one, in no way needing help."[18]

Complementarian scholars are obviously aware of these other uses of *ezer*, but they still argue that Eve's status as "helper" implies that she is subordinate to Adam. For instance, Ray Ortlund recognizes that *ezer* is often used of God helping Israel, but he says, "It is entirely possible for God to subordinate Himself, in a certain sense, to human beings. He does so whenever He undertakes to help us. He does not 'un-God' Himself in helping us; but He does stoop to our needs, according to His gracious and sovereign will."[19] Ortlund illustrates his point by saying that he subordinates himself to his children whenever he helps them with their homework.[20] Wayne Grudem agrees: "The person

16 Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalm 20:2; 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, 10, 11; 121:1, 2; 124:8; 146:5; Hosea 13:9; cf. Payne, *Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood*, 3–4; Linda Bellville, "An Egalitarian Perspective," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, rev. ed., ed. James R. Beck (Zondervan, 2005), 27–28.

17 David Clines acknowledges that superiors can help inferiors but then makes the odd claim that "in the act of helping they are being 'inferior.'" He goes on to say, "Their help may be necessary or crucial, but they are *assisting* some task that is already someone else's responsibility" ("What Does Eve Do to Help?," 6, italics in original).

18 Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1–17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Eerdmans, 1990), 176, citing J. M. Higgins, "Anastasius Sinaita and the Superiority of the Woman," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 97, no. 2 (1978): 253–56. Hamilton notes three exceptions: 1 Chronicles 12:18, Ezekiel 12:14, and Nahum 3:9. See note 15 on Ezekiel 12:14. I don't know why Hamilton lists 1 Chronicles 12:18, since it clearly refers to God who "helped you" (CEB). Nahum 3:9 mocks Nineveh for having "helpers" (allies) like Put and Libya who fail to deliver.

19 Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 10.

20 Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 104.

doing the helping puts himself in a subordinate role to the person who has primary responsibility for carrying out the activity."[21]

I'm not quite convinced of Ortlund's and Grudem's logic here. The question is not whether a person in authority could ever stoop to meet the needs of someone under their authority. The question is whether the word *ezer* implies being under the authority of someone else. Ortlund's examples still portray God, the *ezer*, in a position of authority, not in a position of submitting to someone else's authority. Likewise, a father doesn't relinquish his authority when he helps his kids with math.

So I don't think *ezer* in Genesis 2 implies that Eve was subordinate to Adam, or that "women" were created to "help men by supporting the[ir] leadership," as Schreiner says.[22] The task Eve is created to "help" with in Genesis 2 is the creation mandate of Genesis 1:26–28: populating, cultivating, and ruling over the earth.[23] And Genesis 1 makes no distinction between male and female in their ruling roles. For instance, they're both given the same command to procreate (Gen. 1:28), which obviously requires both partners. Part of Eve's "help" toward Adam, then, is her role in procreation. I'll let the reader decide whether they want to say that women play a supporting or subservient role to men in bearing, delivering, and rearing children.

21 Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 37; cf. Blomberg: "What makes an *ezer* a 'helper' in each context is that he or she comes to the aid of someone else who bears the primary responsibility for the activity in question" ("Complementarian Perspective," 130).

22 Schreiner, "Women in Ministry," 293.

23 Clines argues that Eve's only "help" is her role in procreation (see his article "What Does Eve Do to Help?"). It does seem that her role in procreation is a point of emphasis throughout Genesis 1–3. But I disagree with Clines that Eve's only help is procreation. The commands to "subdue" the earth and "rule" over the animals are given to both male and female (Gen. 1:28), and Eve also "helps" Adam by creating community and thus solving the problem of his aloneness.

Moreover, in Genesis 2:18 and 2:20, *ezer* is combined with *kenegdo* ("suitable" NIV; "just right" NLT), which implies a mutual partnership, not a relationship where one exercises authority over another. *Kenegdo* occurs only here in 2:18 and 2:20, and it combines two Hebrew words, *ke*, which means "as, like, similar," and *neged*, which means "opposite," "in front of," or "against." The combination of both words (*ke* + *neged* = *kenegdo*) captures Eve's similarity to Adam and her difference from Adam.[24] She's "like" Adam, since she's human, and she's "different from" Adam, since she's a female. Together, *ezer kenegdo* refers to Eve's essential role as a fellow human whose sex difference is necessary for the human pair to procreate and fill the earth. This phrase by itself doesn't suggest a relationship between a person in authority (Adam) and his subordinate (Eve).[25]

As the narrative unfolds, Adam and Eve are treated as mutual partners in the task of ruling over creation. Both sin against God.[26] Both realize they are naked (3:7). Both hide from God (3:8). Both are ashamed of their actions. Both shift the blame (3:12–13). When God confronts them, he addresses them both. We do see themes of authority in Genesis 1–2, but it's an authority where God rules over humans and humans mediate God's rule over creation.[27] If we are going to identify Adam's leadership and authority over Eve, I think we need to find it elsewhere, not from the phrase *ezer kenegdo*.

24 See my book *Does the Bible Support Same-Sex Marriage? 21 Conversations from a Historically Christian View* (David C Cook, 2023), 39.

25 See Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Fortress Press, 1978), 90.

26 "The NT, intriguingly, blames Adam exactly twice (Rom. 5:12–14; 1 Cor. 15:22) and Eve exactly twice (2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14) in its discussions of the original sin" (Blomberg, "Complementarian Perspective," 131).

27 Carol Meyers, *Rediscovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 74.

4. Does Adam's Naming of Eve Demonstrate His Authority over Her?

Another argument for Adam's authority over Eve comes from Genesis 2:23, where he calls her "woman":

> Then the man said,
>
> "This at last is bone of my bones
> and flesh of my flesh;
> she shall be called [*qarah*] Woman [*ishah*],
> because she was taken out of Man [*ish*]." (ESV)

In the ancient world, giving someone a name often implied that the name-giver was exercising authority over the one named.[28] For instance, Nebuchadnezzar's chief eunuch changed the names of Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego (Dan. 1:7). Pharaoh Necho did the same when he changed the name of Eliakim to Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34).[29] Even in Genesis 1, God exercised his sovereignty over creation when he "called [*qarah*]" the light "day," the darkness "night," and so on (v. 5). The same is true of Adam when he named the animals: "And whatever the man *called* [*qarah*] each living creature, that was its name" (2:19). Some scholars therefore argue that Adam also exercised authority

28 See Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary*, trans. Dorothea Barton (Fortress Press, 1961), 80–83; K. D. Sakenfeld, "The Bible and Women: Bane or Blessing?," *Theology Today* 32 (1975): 225.

29 For other instances where the act of naming suggests authority, see Genesis 41:45; Numbers 32:41–42; Joshua 19:47; 2 Samuel 5:6–9; 2 Kings 24:17.

when he declared that his new fellow human "shall be *called* [*qarah*] Woman" (2:23 ESV).[30]

But there are several challenges to this argument. First, while naming often conveys authority, there are some notable exceptions.[31] The clearest is Genesis 16:13, where Hagar names God: "So she *called* [*qarah*] the *name* of the LORD who spoke to her, 'You are a God of seeing'" (ESV). Hagar was not exercising authority over God. Later in Genesis 26:17–21, Isaac named certain wells as he *relinquished* control over them. Naming here is the opposite of exercising authority. Other instances of naming show an awareness of God's presence[32] or commemorate an act of God[33] without the person giving the name appearing to exercise authority over the thing being named.

Second, the word *woman* is not a proper name but a common noun. It designates Eve's sex, not her personal name.[34] Adam doesn't name the woman "Eve" until Genesis 3:20, but this naming occurs in the context of the fall rather than God's original design. If Adam naming his wife "Eve" in 3:20 demonstrates his authority, it very well could be a kind of authority poisoned by the fall.[35]

30 Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary 1 (Word, 1987), 70; Ortlund, "Male-Female Equality," 103.

31 See e.g., George W. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 50, no. 1 (1988): 33–34.

32 When Jacob names Bethel (Gen. 28:19; 35:7, 15), Peniel (Gen. 32:31), and an altar (Gen. 33:20), the point doesn't seem to be that Jacob has authority over these places. George Ramsey is probably correct that Jacob "exhibits awareness of God's activity and presence" and that "there is no basis in the text for concluding that this act of naming by Jacob establishes for him a measure of control over the respective places named" ("Name-Giving," 34).

33 For example, the naming of Simeon (Gen. 29:33), Dan (Gen. 30:6), Gilgal (Josh. 5:9), and Ichabod (1 Sam. 4:21); see Ramsey, "Name-Giving," 33.

34 Phyllis Trible, "Depatriarchalizing in Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 41 (1973): 38; see also Richard Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Baker, 2007), 18.

35 Trible notes that the naming formula in 3:20 is very close to 2:19, which suggests that "the man reduces the woman to the status of an animal by calling her a name" (*God and the Rhetoric*, 133).

Third, Genesis 2:23 is followed by a curious statement in 2:24 that might challenge male authority: "That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh." In Israel's culture, it was the woman who would leave her family and join the home of her husband's father and mother. But Genesis 2:24 spins it around. The man leaves his home and joins his wife's home. Sandy Richter believes "this is an intentional reversal on the part of the biblical author."[36] The point, she says, is something like this: "Young man, although you have all the benefits and comforts in this system, from this day onward you shall live your life as though you too have left."[37]

I wouldn't go as far as some egalitarians do when they argue that the wife in 2:24 "seems to be a free agent, in command of her own life."[38] But I do think 2:24 would have been startling to the original audience. If the goal of 2:23 is to highlight the man's authority over his wife, 2:24 is a very strange way to follow it.

Some scholars have suggested that it's not so much the *act* of naming that conveys authority but the authority *already possessed* by the name-giver.[39] We see this dynamic throughout the Old Testament when parents name their kids.[40] So, whenever God names someone or something, it's an authoritative act because he's God, not because the act of naming ascribes him this authority. The same could be true of conquerors changing the names of the conquered.[41] It's their status as the conqueror that

36 Sandra L. Richter, *The Epic of Eden: A Christian Entry into the Old Testament* (IVP Academic, 2008), 38; cf. Davidson, *Flame*, 44.
37 Richter, *Epic*, 38.
38 Gilbert Bilezikian, *Beyond Sex Roles: What the Bible Says About a Woman's Place in Church and Family* (Baker Academic, 2006), 34; rightly critiqued by Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 126.
39 Hamilton, *Genesis*, 177.
40 We'll discuss this in chapter 2.
41 See Daniel 1:7, for example.

invests them with the authority to rename the conquered. This might make sense of most cases, but not all of them. The name-giver doesn't always possess authority over the thing or person being named, as in the case of Hagar.

In any case, if it's the *status* of the name-giver and not simply the *act of naming* that signals authority, where does this leave us with the man and woman? Some might quickly say: The man *is* the woman's authority and *therefore* his act of naming displays his authority. But this, of course, begs the question. We're evaluating the man's authority, not assuming it.

In sum, many acts of naming in the Bible signal the authority of the name-giver, but some do not. There's little clear evidence that the man in Genesis 2:23 was exercising authority when he named the woman. At the very least, we should be cautious about simply citing the naming of the woman in 2:23 as clear proof that the man was the woman's authority.

5. Does "He Will Rule over You" Mean Men *Should* Rule over Women?

"Perhaps no single verse of the Hebrew Bible is more troubling for issues of gender relations and women's roles than Genesis 3:16," writes Carol Meyers.[42] This is where God tells the woman: "Your desire [*teshuqa*] will be for your husband, yet he will rule [*mashal*] over you" (3:16 CSB).

Is Adam's "rule" (*mashal*) over Eve part of God's created intention, or is it a negative consequence of sin's curse? The verb *mashal* by itself doesn't give us enough information to answer that question. The

42 Meyers, *Rediscovering*, 81.

term can refer to a positive or negative kind of rule.[43] We need context to determine whether *mashal* is positive or negative.

Wayne Grudem rightly points out that the same two verbs from Genesis 3:16, "desire" and "rule," also occur together just a few verses later (4:7). The Hebrew construction of 3:16b is nearly identical to 4:7b:

> *Your desire* [*teshuqa*] will be for your husband, yet *he will rule* [*mashal*] over you. (3:16b CSB)

> *Its desire* [*teshuqa*] is for you, but *you must rule* [*mashal*] over it. (4:7b CSB)

I can't help but think that the author is intentionally drawing a parallel here. In 4:7, sin's "desire" for Cain is surely negative, which suggests that whatever is meant by the woman's "desire" for her husband is probably also negative.[44] Since Cain's "rule" over sin refers to his defeat or domination over it, the same sense could be implied in Genesis 3:16.[45] Thus, the man's "rule" over the woman is not a good sort of rule; it's one of domination and therefore part of the curse, not God's original design.[46]

43 Positive rule: Genesis 45:26; Psalm 66:7; 89:9. Negative rule: Judges 14:4; 15:11.

44 For various interpretations, see Susan Foh, "What Is the Woman's Desire?," *Westminster Theological Journal* 37 (1975): 376–83. *Teshuqa* occurs only one other time in the Old Testament, Song of Songs 7:10, where it's used positively. Given the Edenic imagery throughout the Song, it's likely that Song of Songs 7:10 represents the reversal of the negative "desire" in Genesis 3:16 (Davidson, *Flame*, 552–53).

45 Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 202.

46 One could say that Cain's "ruling" over sin would be a good thing and therefore Genesis 4:7 views such "rule" positively. This may be true, but "rule" would still convey domination. For Cain to defeat and dominate sin would be a good thing. But Adam defeating and dominating his wife would be a bad thing—not some kind of gentle godly leadership.

The larger context supports this reading. Genesis 3 is like a divine trial investigation, where God pronounces judgment on the snake (vv. 14–15), the woman (v. 16), and the man (vv. 17–19).[47] The husband's "rule" is announced alongside cursed ground, pains in childbirth, and snakes licking up dust, as part of God's judgment. I think it's more likely, then, that man's "rule" over his wife is one of domination, not godly leadership. It's tempting to wander down the rabbit hole of divine agency to figure out whether God is causing, allowing, or simply foreseeing that husbands will rule over their wives in a negative manner. But I'll leave this for the theologians to figure out. For our purposes, we only need to note that Genesis 3:16 probably isn't commanding husbands to exercise godly leadership over their wives.

It's not just egalitarians who hold this view—lots of complementarians say the same thing. Wayne Grudem, for instance, boldly declares: "We should never try to promote Genesis 3:16 as something good!" He emphasizes that this passage "should never be used as a direct argument for male headship in marriage."[48] According to this complementarian view, Adam's "rule" over Eve in 3:16 is a distortion of the godly leadership prescribed for husbands over their wives in Genesis 1–2. Obviously, egalitarians don't see any spousal leadership prescribed in the first two chapters of Genesis. But either way, both groups agree that Genesis 3:16 isn't a good way to defend a complementarian view.

47 Davidson, *Flame*, 67–70; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 230–31.
48 Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 40.

Other Interpretive Issues

In addition to the five major questions we've looked at, several other features in the text deserve to be mentioned at least briefly.

First, some scholars point out that God gave his command to Adam and not Eve in Genesis 2:16–17, suggesting male leadership. According to Tom Schreiner, God's command to Adam signals "Adam's responsibility for leadership and teaching in the relationship."[49] After all, God didn't speak the command directly to woman. She recalled it in her conversation with the serpent in Genesis 3, which means she must have learned it from Adam.

Was Adam, therefore, Eve's teacher? The text doesn't clearly say this. God might have given his command to the man simply because he was the only one around at that point (the woman was created later). Plus, whatever God's reason is for commanding Adam first in Genesis 2:16–17, God commands *both* male and female in his original mandate in Genesis 1:26–28. And after both have sinned, God addressed them individually (3:16–19) and held the woman accountable for her own sin. The man did not speak on behalf of the woman, nor was he the only one held responsible, even though the command was given directly to him. So I don't think we can draw too much out of God commanding Adam in Genesis 2—the only human alive at that point.

Second, what about the serpent approaching the woman and not the man in order to deceive her? Does this tell us anything about male authority and female submission? Some older interpreters say the serpent approached Eve because she was "inferior to Adam in knowledge, and strength and presence of mind."[50] But this argument could run both

49 Schreiner, "Women in Ministry," 291.
50 Matthew Henry, cited in Taylor, "Women in Creation and Redemption," 19n29.

ways. On the one hand, Satan might have targeted Eve because she was the intellectually weaker of the two, and he knew the man wouldn't fall for his tricks. On the other hand, it took the craftiest, most deceitful being in the universe to deceive the woman. All it took for the man to sin was for his wife to offer him some fruit. If the woman was so gullible, what does this say about the man?

Some recent interpreters suggest that the serpent approached the woman "to get her to take responsibility for leading the family into sin, and inverting the order that God had established at Creation."[51] But this seems to add more to the text than what's clearly stated. If anything, Eve's sin had to do with her lack of leadership, not with her exercising too much of it: She failed to "subdue" the snake as both woman and man were commissioned to do back in Genesis 1:26–28.[52] In the end, the passage simply tells us that the snake approached Eve and deceived her, but it doesn't tell us why. Perhaps we shouldn't read too much psycho-anthropology into why the narrative plays out the way it does.

Finally, some suggest that Eve's creation from Adam's "side" (*tsela*) implies that Adam has some kind of priority over Eve.[53] Indeed, Paul makes a point about the woman being created from man in 1 Corinthians 11:8, which we'll deal with later. As far as Genesis 2 goes, the word for Adam's "side," *tsela*, does not mean "rib," as is often assumed. *Tsela* is used more than forty other times in the Hebrew Bible, and it never refers to a person's "rib."[54] Most often, it refers to the side of a sacred

51 Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism*, 36.
52 See Carmen Joy Imes, "Eve's Legacy Is Both Sin and Redemption," *Christianity Today*, May/June 2023.
53 For example, Bruce Ware, "Male and Female Complementarity in the Image of God," in *Biblical Foundations for Manhood and Womanhood*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Crossway, 2002), 82–84.
54 See John Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (IVP Academic, 2015), 77–81.

piece of architecture, like the tabernacle or temple.[55] Eve's creation from the side of Adam, rather than his head or his feet, would seem to stress mutuality, not subordination. In the words of twelfth-century Bishop Peter Lombard, "Eve was not taken from the feet of Adam to be his slave, nor from his head to be his ruler, but from his side to be his beloved partner."[56]

In other words, it's very unlikely that the manner of the woman's creation suggests male authority. If anything, the word *tsela* argues against it. It's true that the woman was derived from the man, but derivation doesn't necessarily imply submission. Adam was derived from the ground, but this doesn't mean he should submit to the ground.[57]

Summary and (Lack of a) Conclusion

I resonate with what Francis Watson says about male headship in Genesis 2–3: "Certain interpretive statements are 'possible,' although not explicitly demanded by the text."[58] I might even offer a slightly stronger conclusion: Genesis 1–3 alone does not teach male headship over women, or husbands' authority over their wives, as some universal principle etched into creation. Some male-headship arguments have more merit than others, but none of them is without problems. The two times authority language is employed, it refers to the mutual rule of male and

55 An interesting use of *tsela* comes in 1 Kings 6:34, where it describes two halves of a double door. The doors are the same, except their hinges are on opposite sides. "The imagery is remarkably apt for Eve and Adam," notes Carol Meyers. "They are virtually the same, and their combination produces humanity; but a male or female 'side' without the other could never produce the whole" (Meyers, *Rediscovering*, 75).

56 See Davidson, *Flame*, 17.

57 Davidson, *Flame*, 16.

58 Francis Watson, "Strategies of Recovery and Resistance: Hermeneutical Reflections on Genesis 1–3 and Its Pauline Reception," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 14, no. 45 (1992): 92.

female over creation (1:26–28) and a negative kind of rule that husbands wield over their wives in a world cursed by sin (3:16).

Still, we need to suspend judgment until we consider Paul's two allusions to Genesis 2 (1 Cor. 11:8–9; 1 Tim. 2:13–14). My initial glance at these Pauline passages seems to support a complementarian reading of Genesis. But initial glances won't suffice for such an important topic. We'll need to roll up our sleeves and spend considerable time working through these texts. Before we get there, I want to keep exploring what the rest of the Old Testament says about women and leadership in ancient Israel.