

# THE BOOK OF Genesis

Genesis is the book of beginnings—of the universe and of humanity, of sin and its catastrophic effects, and of God’s plan to restore blessing to the world through his chosen people. God began his plan when he called Abraham and made a covenant with him. Genesis traces God’s promised blessings from generation to generation, to the time of bondage and the need for redemption from Egypt. It lays the foundation for God’s subsequent revelation, and most other books of the Bible draw on its contents. Genesis is a source of instruction, comfort, and edification.

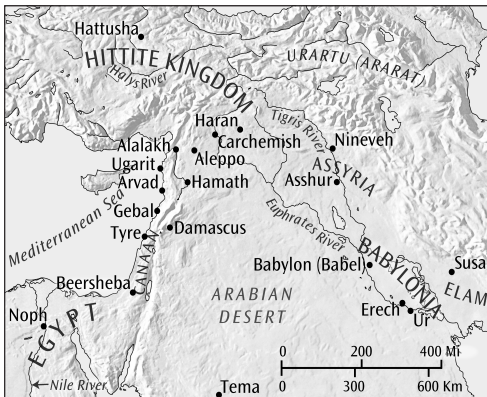
## SETTING

When Genesis was written, the children of Israel had been slaves in Egypt for 400 years. They had recently been released from bondage and guided through the desert to meet the Lord at Mount Sinai, where he had established his covenant relationship with them and had given them his law through Moses. Israel was now poised to enter the Promised Land and receive the inheritance that God had promised Abraham.

While enslaved in Egypt, the Israelites had adopted many pagan ideas and customs from their Egyptian masters (e.g., Exod 32:1-4). They were influenced by false concepts of God, the world, and human nature (e.g., Exod 32), and were reduced to being slaves rather than owners and managers of the land. Perhaps they had forgotten the great promises that God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or perhaps they had concluded that the promises would never be fulfilled.

Before entering the Promised Land, the Israelites needed to understand the nature of God, his world, and their place in it more clearly. They needed to embrace their identity as descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Genesis provided the needed understanding.



◀ The Ancient Near East, about 2100 bc. Humanity spread out from the mountains of URARTU (ARARAT) and populated the early centers of civilization. By the time of the patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), many of the cities were ancient.

ASSHUR 2:14; 10:22; 25:3; 25:18  
 ASSYRIA 10:11  
 BABYLON (BABEL), BABYLONIA 10:9-10; 11:1-9; 14:1, 9  
 CANAAN 9:18-27; 10:18-19; 12:5-10  
 DAMASCUS 14:15; 15:2  
 EGYPT 12:10-13:1; 15:18; 37:28-36; 39:1-50:26  
 ELAM 10:22; 14:1, 9  
 ERECH 10:10; Ezra 4:9  
 HAMATH 10:18; 2 Sam 8:9-10; 2 Kgs 14:28; 23:33  
 HARAN 11:26-32; 12:4-5; 27:43; 28:10; 29:4; Acts 7:2-4  
 SUSA Ezra 4:9; Neh 1:1; Esth 1:2; Dan 8:2  
 UR 11:28, 31; 15:7; Neh 9:7  
 URARTU (ARARAT) 8:4

## SUMMARY

Genesis traces God's work to overcome with blessing the curse that came on humankind because of sin. The book arranges family traditions, genealogies, historical events, and editorial comments into a single, sustained argument.

Every section but the first has the heading, "This is the account" (or *These are the generations*; Hebrew *toledoth*); each of the *toledoth* sections explains the history of a line of descent. In each case, a deterioration of well-being is followed by an increasing focus on God's plan to bless the world. This plan is the basis for God's covenant with his people; as the blessing develops, the covenant is clarified. By the end of the book, the reader is ready for the fulfillment of the promises in Israel's redemption from bondage (see Exodus).

## OUTLINE

1:1–2:3

*Creation*

2:4–4:26

*What Happened to the Creation*

5:1–6:8

*The Account of Adam's Descendants*

6:9–9:29

*The Account of Noah's Family*

10:1–11:9

*The Account of Noah's Sons*

11:10–26

*The Account of Shem's Descendants*

11:27–25:11

*The Account of Terah's Descendants*

25:12–18

*The Account of Ishmael's Descendants*

25:19–35:29

*The Account of Isaac's Descendants*

36:1–37:1

*The Account of Esau's Descendants*

37:2–50:26

*The Account of Jacob's Descendants*

The first section (1:1–2:3) does not have the *toledoth* heading, and logically so—it is the account of creation "in the beginning" (1:1). The work of creation is wrapped in God's approval and blessing as he fulfills his plan.

The next section (2:4–4:26) focuses on the creation of human life (2:4–25) and traces what became of God's creation because of Adam's and Eve's sin (3:1–13), the curse on their sin (3:14–24), and the extension of sin to their descendants (4:1–24). Humanity no longer enjoyed God's rest; instead, they experienced guilt and fear. So they fled from God and developed a proud civilization.

Independence from God resulted in the downward drift of human life (5:1–6:8). The genealogy of 5:1–32 begins by recalling that human beings were made in God's image and were blessed by him (5:1–2). As the genealogy is traced, the death of each generation reminds the reader of the curse, with Enoch providing a ray of hope that the curse is not final. In 6:1–8, we learn that God regretted having made humans and decided to judge the earth. Noah, however, received God's favor and provided a source of hope (5:29; 6:8).

The next section (6:9–9:29) brings the curse of judgment through the flood followed by blessing in a new beginning. A renewed creation began, purged of the abominable evil that had invaded and ruined the human race.

The world's population expanded into various nations (10:1–11:9) whose people were bent on disobedience. The population of the earth by Shem,

## TIMELINE

2166 / 1990 BC\*  
*Abraham is born*

2091 / 1915 BC  
*Abraham moves to Canaan*

2080 / 1904 BC  
*Ishmael is born*

2066 / 1890 BC  
*Sodom and Gomorrah are destroyed, Isaac is born*

2006 / 1830 BC  
*Jacob and Esau are born*

1898 / 1722 BC  
*Joseph is sold into slavery*

1885 / 1709 BC  
*Joseph begins governing Egypt*

1876 / 1661 BC  
*Jacob moves to Egypt*

1446 / 1270 BC  
*Israel leaves Egypt (the Exodus), moves to Mount Sinai*

1406 / 1230 BC  
*Israel enters Canaan*

\* The two dates harmonize with the traditional "early" chronology and a more recent "late" chronology of the Exodus. All dates are approximate. Please see "Chronology: Abraham to Joshua," p. 118.

Ham, and Japheth seemed fruitful (10:1-32), but the nations were divided by languages and boundaries (10:5, 20, 31). Because of their rebellion, God dispersed them to prevent greater wickedness (11:1-9).

After the chaos of the scattered nations, 11:10-26 brings the focus to Abram, through whom God chose to bring blessing to all. The rest of the book (11:27–50:26) tells of God’s blessing Abram and his descendants. God first made a covenant with Abram (11:27–25:11), promising him a great nation, land, and name. As time went on, God made the specific terms of the covenant clearer, and Abram’s faith grew deeper.

In each generation, Genesis gives a brief account of the families that are not Israel’s ancestors before turning to the line of Israel. After briefly reporting what became of Ishmael (25:12-18), Genesis traces in detail what happened to Isaac and his family (25:19–35:29).

True to the pattern of the book, Esau’s line (Edom) is dealt with briefly (36:1–37:1) before the chosen line of Jacob the heir. The final section (37:2–50:26) concerns Jacob’s family, centering on the life of Joseph. In the land of Canaan, the family became corrupt under Canaanite influence to the point of beginning to merge with them (ch 38). To preserve the line of blessing, God sent the family into Egypt where they could flourish, remain separate (43:32; 46:34), and become a great nation. The book closes with the promise of the Lord’s coming to rescue his people from Egypt (50:24-26).

*“God rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. And he blessed the seventh day. . . .” And we ourselves will be a “seventh day” when we shall be filled with his blessing and remade by his sanctification. . . . Only when we are remade by God and perfected by a greater grace shall we have the eternal stillness of that rest in which we shall see that he is God.*

**St. Augustine**

*City of God, sec. 22.30*

#### **AUTHORSHIP**

Both Scripture and tradition attribute the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) to Moses. No one was better qualified than Moses to have written this book. Since he was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians (Acts 7:22), he had the literary skills to collect and edit Israel’s traditions and records and to compose this theological treatise. His unique communion with God gave him the spiritual illumination, understanding, and inspiration needed to guide him. He had good reason to write this work—to provide Israel with the theological and historical foundation for the Exodus and the covenant at Sinai, and to establish the new nation in accord with the promises made to their ancestors.

Most scholars, however, do not accept that Moses wrote Genesis. The prevailing critical view, called the *Documentary Hypothesis*, is that Genesis was compiled from various sources by different groups of people. In such approaches, there is seldom a word about divine revelation or inspiration. For those who understand the Bible as God’s inspired word, such theories often seem unnecessarily complicated and conjectural. Genesis can be understood much more straightforwardly as the product of Moses’ genius under God’s inspiration with later editorial adjustments. (See further “Introduction to the Pentateuch: Authorship,” p. 12).

#### **COMPOSITION**

Biblical scholars of all stripes have always acknowledged that various sources were used in writing Genesis and other historical texts in the Bible (such as Kings and Luke). Moses used collections of family records, oral traditions, ancient accounts of primeval events, and genealogies to write Genesis. Those sources could have been incorporated as received, or the author may have changed their style and wording, stitching them together with additional material for the particular purpose of tracing the foundations of Israelite faith.

Genesis also includes passages and expressions that are obviously later editorial glosses. Some sections (such as the list of Edomite kings, 36:31-43) could have been added during the early days of the monarchy. There is no conflict in saying that Genesis was authored by Moses and augmented by subsequent editors whose work was guided by the Holy Spirit. Given these considerations, conservative scholars find it plausible that the biblical material accurately records actual events.

### LITERARY CHARACTER

Genesis includes various types of literature. Several suggestions have been made as to the nature of the materials.

*Myth.* Mythological literature explains the origins of things symbolically through the deeds of gods and supernatural creatures. For ancient peoples, myths were beliefs that explained life and reality. Whole systems of ritual activities were developed to ensure that the forces of fertility, life, and death would continue year by year. Some of these rituals gave rise to cult prostitution (see 38:15, 21-22).

It would be very difficult to classify the material in Genesis as myth. Israel had one God, not a multitude. The nation of Israel had a beginning, a history, and a future hope. They saw God, rather than gods and other supernatural creatures, as the primary actor in the world. Their worship was not cosmic, magical, or superstitious, but a reenactment of their own rescue from Egypt and a celebration of God's factual intervention in history and their hope in his promises.

If Genesis uses elements of mythological language, it is to display a deliberate contrast with pagan concepts and to show that the Lord God is sovereign over such ideas. For example, the ancients worshiped the sun as a god, but in Genesis the sun serves the Creator's wishes (1:14-18). The book of Genesis is a cemetery for lifeless myths and dead gods. Genesis is not myth.

*Etiology.* A number of scholars describe the Genesis narratives as *etiologies*, stories that explain the causes of factual reality or traditional beliefs. The implication is that such stories were made up for explanatory purposes and do not describe historical events. For example, if one says that the story of Cain and Abel was made up to explain why shepherds and farmers do not get along, the account loses its integrity as factual history.

Etiological elements certainly occur in Genesis, because the book gives the foundation and rationale for almost everything that Israel would later do. For example, the creation account of Gen 2 ends with the explanation, "This explains why a man leaves his father and mother. . . ." The event as it happened explains why marriage was conducted the way it was, but to say that a story explains something is quite different from saying that the story was fabricated to explain it. The stories of Genesis are not fictional tales invented to explain later customs and beliefs.

*History.* Many scholars object to regarding Genesis as history, for two basic reasons: (1) Genesis explains events as caused by God, and the inclusion of the supernatural is regarded as proof that the material is theological reflection and thus not historically reliable; and (2) the events in Genesis cannot be validated from outside sources; no other records have demonstrated that Abraham existed or that any of his family history occurred.

*Genesis is not interested in parading Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob as examples of morality. Therefore, it does not moralize on them. [Genesis] is bringing together the promises of God to the patriarchs and the faithfulness of God in keeping those promises.*

**Victor P. Hamilton**  
*The Book of Genesis:*  
Chapters 1-17, p. 46

Modern philosophies of history exclude the supernatural as an explanation of historical events, but there is no reason to do so arbitrarily. If God exists and is able to act, then he might very well be the ultimate cause of all historical events and the immediate cause of specific historical events. The Israelites were not as distrustful of supernatural events as are modern critics; they experienced such events frequently as God acted among them to fulfill the promises recorded in Genesis.

It is true that no direct evidence of the patriarchs or the events in Genesis has been found, but archaeology confirms the plausibility of Genesis by showing that the historical situation in that era (Middle Bronze I, 2000–1800 BC) corresponds closely to what Genesis portrays. It is unlikely that this would be so if Genesis were not an accurate record of the facts. When all the archaeological and historical data are assembled around the events, they fit perfectly within the setting, and the details of the narratives make perfectly good sense.

*Theological Interpretation.* Genesis was not intended as a chronicle of the lives of the patriarchs, a history for history's sake, or a complete biography. It is clearly a theological interpretation of selected records of the nation's ancestors, but this does not destroy its historicity. Interpretations of an event can differ, but the offering of interpretations is a good witness to the actuality of the events. The author retold the events in his own way, but he did not invent them.

*Tradition.* What was thus committed to writing is tradition in the reverent care of literary genius. Scholars prefer words such as "traditions" or even "sagas" to describe these narratives. Doing so only makes the claim that the stories preserve the memory of the people of Israel; it makes no claim that the events themselves are historical. The biblical understanding, however, is that these stories were recorded under divine inspiration and are therefore historically true and reliable.

In all probability, Abram brought the primeval accounts and the family genealogies from Mesopotamia, and stories about the family were added to these collections. Joseph could easily have preserved all the traditions, both written and oral, in Egypt with his own records. Moses could then have compiled the works substantially in their present form while adding his editorial comments. Since he worked under God's inspiration and guidance, the narratives record exactly what God wanted written and correspond precisely to reality.

*Instructional Literature.* Since Genesis is the first book of the Pentateuch (the "Torah" or Law), it may be best to classify it as "Torah Literature" (Hebrew *torah*, "instruction, law"). Genesis is instructional literature that lays the foundation for the Law. It is theological interpretation of the historical traditions standing behind the covenant at Sinai. In the way it is written, one may discern that Moses was preparing his readers to receive God's law and the fulfillment of the promises made to their forefathers. Genesis is therefore a unique work. Theology, history, and tradition come together to instruct God's people and prepare them for blessing.

## MEANING AND MESSAGE

Israel's most important questions were answered by the Genesis narratives. Life and death, the possession of the land of Canaan, and how Israel ended up in Egypt are explained as God's providential working in history. Israel was part of God's plan in this world. His plan had

a starting point at creation and will have an end point in the future when the promises are completely fulfilled.

*Israel, the Chosen People.* The central theme of Genesis is that God made a covenant with Abraham and his descendants. He promised to make them his own people, heirs of the land of Canaan, and a blessing to the world. Genesis gave Israel the theological and historical basis for its existence as God's chosen people.

Israel could trace its ancestry to the patriarch Abraham and its destiny to God's promises (12:1-3; 15:1-21; 17:1-8). Because the promise of a great nation was crucial, much of Genesis is devoted to family concerns of the patriarchs and their wives, their sons and heirs, and their birthrights and blessings. The record shows how God preserved and protected the chosen line through the patriarchs. Israel thus knew that they had become the great nation promised to Abraham. Their future was certainly not in slavery to the Egyptians, but in Canaan, where they would live as a free nation and as the people of the living God, and where they could mediate God's blessings to the people of the world.

*Blessing and Curse.* The entire message of Genesis turns on the motifs of blessing and cursing. The promised blessing would give the patriarchs innumerable descendants and give the descendants the land of promise; the blessing would make them famous in the earth, enable them to flourish and prosper, and appoint them to bring others into the covenant blessings. The curse, meanwhile, would alienate, deprive, and disinherit people from the blessings. The effects of the curse are felt by the whole race as death and pain and as God's judgment on the world.

These motifs continue throughout the Bible. Prophets and priests spoke of even greater blessings in the future and an even greater curse for those who refuse God's gift of salvation and its blessings. The Bible reminds God's people not to fear human beings, but to fear God, who has the power to bless and to curse.

*Good and Evil.* In Genesis, that which is good is blessed by God: It produces, enhances, preserves, and harmonizes with life. That which is evil is cursed: It causes pain, diverts from what is good, and impedes or destroys life. Genesis traces the perpetual struggle between good and evil that characterizes our fallen human race. God will bring about the greater good, build the faith of his people, and ultimately triumph over all evil (cp. Rom 8:28).

*God's Plan.* Genesis begins with the presupposition that God exists and that he has revealed himself in word and deed to Israel's ancestors. It does not argue for the existence of God; it simply begins with God and shows how everything falls into place when the sovereign God works out his plan to establish Israel as the means of restoring blessing to the whole world.

*God's Rule.* Genesis is the fitting introduction to the founding of theocracy, the rule of God over all creation that was to be established through his chosen people. Genesis lays down the initial revelation of God's sovereignty. He is the Lord of the universe who will move heaven and earth to bring about his plan. He desires to bless people, but he will not tolerate rebellion and unbelief. His promises are great, and he is fully able to bring them to fruition. To participate in his plan has always required faith, for without faith it is impossible to please him (Heb 11:6).

#### FURTHER READING

VICTOR P. HAMILTON  
*The Book of Genesis* (1990)

DEREK KIDNER  
*Genesis* (1967)

KENNETH A. MATHEWS  
*Genesis* (1996)

ALLEN P. ROSS  
*Creation and Blessing* (1988)  
*Genesis in Cornerstone  
Biblical Commentary*, vol. 1  
(2008)

GORDON WENHAM  
*Genesis 1-15* (1987)  
*Genesis 16-50* (1994)

**1. CREATION (1:1–2:3)**  
*In the Beginning (1:1-2)*

**1** In the beginning God <sup>a</sup>created the <sup>b</sup>heavens and the <sup>c</sup>earth. <sup>2</sup>The earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters. And the <sup>d</sup>Spirit of God was hovering over the surface of the waters.

*Six Days of Creation (1:3-31)*

*Day One: Light, Darkness*

**3** Then God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good. Then he separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light “day” and the darkness “night.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the first day.

*Day Two: Sky, Waters*

**6** Then God said, “Let there be a space between the waters, to separate the waters of the heavens from the waters of the earth.” <sup>7</sup>And that is what happened. God made this space to separate the waters of the earth from the waters of the heavens. <sup>8</sup>God called the space “sky.” And evening passed and morning came, marking the second day.

*Day Three: Land, Sea, Vegetation*

**9** Then God said, “Let the waters beneath the sky flow together into one place, so dry ground may appear.” And that is what happened. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground “land” and the waters “seas.”

**1:1**  
 Ps 89:11; 102:25  
 Isa 42:5; 48:13  
 John 1:1-2  
<sup>a</sup>*bara'* (1254)  
<sup>b</sup>Gen 1:27  
<sup>c</sup>*shamayim* (8064)  
<sup>d</sup>Exod 16:4  
<sup>e</sup>*cerets* (0776)  
<sup>f</sup>Gen 9:11

**1:2**  
 Isa 45:18  
<sup>a</sup>*ruakh* (7307)  
<sup>b</sup>Gen 45:27

**1:3**  
 Isa 45:7  
 2 Cor 4:6

**1:6**  
 Job 26:10  
 Ps 136:5-6

**1:9**  
 Ps 95:5  
 Prov 8:29  
 Jer 5:22  
 2 Pet 3:5

**The Creation (1:1–2:3)**

Ps 33:6-9  
 Prov 3:19; 8:22-31  
 Isa 40:26-28; 45:11-12, 18-19  
 Jer 10:11-16  
 John 1:1-4  
 Rom 8:18-25  
 2 Cor 5:17  
 Col 1:15-20  
 Rev 4:11; 21:1-5

The creation account in Genesis is foundational to the message of the entire Bible, not just of Genesis or the Pentateuch. Understanding the early chapters of Genesis is thus crucial to forming a biblical worldview.

This part of Genesis deals with fundamental questions: Who created the world, and for what purpose? Why is the world in its present condition? Genesis answers these questions, dispelling the idolatry that Israel had acquired from their pagan masters in Egypt. In the Promised Land, they would also be surrounded by people who believed in many false gods and worshiped created things rather than the Creator. Genesis taught Israel that the one true God created and has absolute authority over all things; he alone is worthy of worship.

Every worldview attempts to explain where the world came from, what is wrong with the world, and how it can be set right again. The creation account in Genesis teaches that as God made the world, it was “very good” (1:31). Through creation, God turned disorder into restful order and emptiness into the fullness of abundant life. In this environment, humans enjoyed unbroken fellowship with their Creator until their rebellion severed that fellowship and implanted evil in human hearts (ch 3; see chs 4–6). The world’s evil does not come from some defect in creation; God put the world under a curse because of human rebellion.

Since that first rebellion, humans have been alienated from the Creator and no longer recognize his presence and authority. This alienation results in shame, fractured relationships with God and other humans, estrangement from the rest of creation, and death (3:7-19). Since that time, God has been working purposefully in history to restore humans to fellowship with him, which he is doing through Jesus Christ. Restored humans are a new creation (Gal 6:15); through Jesus, eternal life is open to all and God will one day renew all things (see Isa 65:17-25; Rom 8:19-22). The whole cosmos will be made new (Rev 21:1).

**1:1–2:3** These verses introduce the Pentateuch (Genesis—Deuteronomy) and teach Israel that the world was created, ordered, and populated by the one true God and not by the gods of surrounding nations. • God blessed three specific things: animal life (1:22-25), human life (1:27), and the Sabbath day (2:3). This trilogy of blessings highlights the Creator’s plan: Humankind was made in God’s image to enjoy sovereign dominion over the creatures of the earth and to participate in God’s Sabbath rest.

**1:1** *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth* (or *In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, . . .* or *When God began to cre-*

*ate the heavens and the earth, . . .*): This statement summarizes the entire creation account (1:3–2:3). Already a key question—Who created the world?—is answered (see also Prov 8:22-31; John 1:1-3). Although the modern naturalistic mindset rejects this question and that of creation’s purpose, Genesis affirms God’s role and purpose in creation. • The common name for **God** (Hebrew *’elohim*) emphasizes his grand supremacy. The word *’elohim* is plural, but the verbs used with it are usually singular, reflecting the consistent scriptural proclamation of a single, all-powerful God. • **created** (Hebrew *bara’*): In the OT, God is always the agent of creation

expressed by this verb. It describes the making of something fresh and new—notably the cosmos (1:1, 21; 2:3), humankind (1:27), the Israelite nation (Isa 43:1), and the future new creation (Isa 65:17). • **The heavens and the earth** are the entire ordered cosmos.

**1:2** This verse gives the background for the summary in 1:1 and the detailed description in 1:3–2:3. God’s creative utterances bring order to the chaotic state of the universe. • **formless . . . empty** (Hebrew *tohu . . . bohu*): This terse idiom means something like “wild and waste.” It sets a stark contrast to the final ordered state of the heavens and the earth (1:1). • **deep waters**

1:10  
Ps 33:7; 95:5

1:11  
Gen 2:9  
Ps 104:14  
Matt 6:30

1:14  
Ps 74:16; 104:19

1:15  
Gen 1:5

1:16  
Ps 8:3; 19:1-6;  
136:8-9  
1 Cor 15:41

1:18  
Jer 33:20, 25

1:20  
Gen 2:19  
Ps 146:6  
<sup>e</sup>nepesh (5315)  
\*Gen 2:7

1:21  
Ps 104:25-28

And God saw that it was good. <sup>11</sup>Then God said, "Let the land sprout with vegetation—every sort of seed-bearing plant, and trees that grow seed-bearing fruit. These seeds will then produce the kinds of plants and trees from which they came." And that is what happened. <sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation—all sorts of seed-bearing plants, and trees with seed-bearing fruit. Their seeds produced plants and trees of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>13</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the third day.

#### Day Four: Sun, Moon, Stars

<sup>14</sup>Then God said, "Let lights appear in the sky to separate the day from the night. Let them be signs to mark the seasons,

days, and years. <sup>15</sup>Let these lights in the sky shine down on the earth." And that is what happened. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the larger one to govern the day, and the smaller one to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set these lights in the sky to light the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>19</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fourth day.

#### Day Five: Birds, Fish

<sup>20</sup>Then God said, "Let the waters swarm with fish and other life. Let the skies be filled with birds of every kind." <sup>21</sup>So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that scurries and

Formless	CHAOS	Empty
DAY 1 (1:3-5) Light, Dark	HEAVENS	DAY 4 (1:14-19) Sun, Moon, Stars
DAY 2 (1:6-8) Water, Sky	WATER & SKY	DAY 5 (1:20-23) Birds, Fish
DAY 3 (1:9-13) Sea, Land	EARTH	DAY 6 (1:24-31) Animals, Humans
Formed	COSMOS	Filled
	DAY 7 (2:2-3) Rest	

◀ **The Structure of the Creation Account** (1:1–2:3). God transformed chaos into the present cosmos. In the first three days, he transformed the formless void into the structured universe—the HEAVENS (outer space), the WATER and SKY, and the EARTH (cp. Exod 20:11; Ps 135:6). In the second three days, he populated each empty realm. The seventh day (2:1-3) stands apart: As God's day of rest, it provides the weekly pattern for human activity (Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17) and speaks of the rest that God promised to those who live by faith in him (see Heb 3:7–4:11).

two collections of water (cp. Job 37:18; Ezek 1:22). In the ancient Near East, the cosmos was understood as a three-tier system, with rain originating from the outermost tier (see 7:11-12 and note).

**1:9-10** *Let the waters . . . flow together:* Other ancient cultures viewed the sea as a hostile force. Genesis shows God as further restraining chaos (see note on 1:2) by prescribing specific boundaries for the sea. The flood—an act of God's judgment (6:7)—undid these boundaries and returned the earth to chaos (7:1-24).

**1:14-31** On days 4–6, God filled the domains that had been formed during days 1–3 (1:3-13).

**1:14** *Let them . . . mark the seasons, days, and years:* The movement of the heavenly bodies defined Israel's liturgical calendar, whose roots in creation gave a sacred timing to Israel's festivals and celebrations (see Exod 23:15; Lev 23:4).

**1:16** In the surrounding pagan cultures, the *two great lights* were worshiped as deities, but in Genesis they serve God and humanity (see Ps 136:7-9; Jer 31:35). The sun and moon are not named; they are simply called *the larger one* and *the smaller one*. Not including their names may have reminded Israel that they were not gods. • *govern:* Cp. 1:26, 28; Ps 136:9. • *the stars:* The starry heavens testify to God's creative power as they proclaim his glory (Ps 19:1; 148:3). They do not predict the future, as Israel's neighbors believed (see Jer 10:2).

**1:21** Contrary to the pagan idea that the *great sea creatures* were co-eternal with God, Genesis states that *God created* them and is sovereign over them. The Hebrew word *tanninim* ("creatures") elsewhere refers to crocodiles (Ezek 29:3), powerful monsters (Jer 51:34), or the sea creature, Leviathan (Isa 27:1; cp. Job 41:1-34).

(Hebrew *tehom*): Some scholars say this alludes to the Mesopotamian goddess Tiamat (representing chaos), but Genesis views *tehom* as inhospitable chaos, not as a deity or goddess that God engaged in cosmic battle. • *the Spirit of God:* God directly superintended the creation process.

**1:3-13** In the first three days, God formed the chaos into a habitable world.

**1:3** *Then God said:* Nothing in Gen 1 is created apart from God's powerful word (cp. Ps 33:6, 9). • *"Let there be . . .,"* and *there was:* God's command enacted his will to create the world. God is not a part of creation or limited by it; he is the supreme ruler over everything (cp. Neh 9:6).

**1:4** *Light* is antithetical to chaotic *darkness* (1:2); the light is declared *good* but the darkness is not (cp. John 1:5). God is the source of this light (cp. 1:14-19). God *separated* the light, as he did water

(cp. 1:6-8), by his creative word. Light is associated with life and blessing (Job 38:19-20; Ps 19:1-6; 97:11; 104:19-20; Isa 60:19-20) and sets a boundary on the darkness that would destroy cosmic order. Darkness often typifies terror, death, and evil (see 15:12; Job 18:6, 18; Ps 88:12; Eph 5:11-12; 1 Jn 1:5).

**1:5** *God called* (or *named*): To name something is to exercise authority over it (see also 2:19-20). • *day:* The Hebrew *yom* can refer to daylight (1:5a), to a 24-hour period (1:5b), or to an unspecified time period (2:4b, "When," literally *in the day*; cp. Exod 20:8-11). • *evening . . . morning:* The Hebrew day began at sundown, just as the first day began with darkness and brought the first morning light.

**1:6-8** The creation account describes the appearance of things from a human perspective. The *sky* is viewed as a shiny dome that is a buffer between

swarms in the water, and every sort of bird—each producing offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>Then God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply. Let the fish fill the seas, and let the birds multiply on the earth.”

<sup>23</sup>And evening passed and morning came, marking the fifth day.

*Day Six: Animals, Humankind*

<sup>24</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth produce every sort of animal, each producing offspring of the same kind—livestock, small animals that scurry along the ground, and wild animals.” And that is what happened. <sup>25</sup>God made all sorts of wild animals, livestock, and small animals, each able to produce offspring of the same kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make human beings in our image, to be like us. They will reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the wild animals on the earth, and the small animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God <sup>f</sup>created human beings in his own image.

In the image of God he <sup>f</sup>created them;  
male and female he <sup>f</sup>created them.

<sup>28</sup>Then God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground.”

<sup>29</sup>Then God said, “Look! I have given you every seed-bearing plant throughout the earth and all the fruit trees for your food. <sup>30</sup>And I have given every green plant as food for all the wild animals, the birds in the sky, and the small animals that scurry along the ground—everything that has life.” And that is what happened.

<sup>31</sup>Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good! And evening passed and morning came, marking the sixth day.

*Sabbath Rest (2:1-3)*

**2** So the creation of the heavens and the earth and everything in them was completed. <sup>2</sup>On the seventh day God had finished his work of creation, so he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>And God <sup>g</sup>blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because it was the day when he rested from all his work of <sup>h</sup>creation.

**1:24**  
Gen 2:19  
**1:26**  
Gen 5:1; 9:6  
Ps 8:6-8  
Acts 17:28-29

**1:27**  
\*Matt 19:4  
\*Mark 10:6  
\*bara' (1254)  
\* Gen 2:3

**1:29**  
Gen 9:3  
Ps 104:13; 136:25

**1:30**  
Ps 104:14; 145:15

**1:31**  
Ps 104:24

**2:1**  
Deut 4:19; 17:3  
Ps 104:2  
Isa 45:12

**2:2**  
Exod 20:11; 31:17  
\*Heb 4:4

**2:3**  
Isa 58:13  
\*barak (1288)  
\* Gen 12:2  
\*bara' (1254)  
\* Gen 6:7

**2:4**  
Gen 1:3-31  
Job 38:4-11

**1:22** *God blessed them:* God’s blessing commissions and enables the fulfillment of what God has spoken (see “Blessing” at 48:8-20, p. 113; see also 17:16; Deut 7:13). • *Let the fish . . . let the birds:* These directives define the blessing. The fish and birds are fertile by God’s command, not by pagan ritual, as some of Israel’s neighbors thought.

**1:26** *Let us make* is more personal than the remote “Let there be” (e.g., 1:3, 6). • The plural *us* has inspired several explanations: (1) the Trinity; (2) the plural to denote majesty; (3) a plural to show deliberation with the self; and (4) God speaking with his heavenly court of angels. The concept of the Trinity—one true God who exists eternally in three distinct persons—was revealed at a later stage in redemptive history, making it unlikely that the human author intended that here. Hebrew scholars generally dismiss the plural of majesty view because the grammar does not clearly support it (the plural of majesty has not been demonstrated to be communicated purely through a plural verb). The plural of self-deliberation also lacks evidence; the only clear examples refer to Israel as a corporate unity (e.g., 2 Sam 24:14). God’s speaking to the heavenly court,

however, is well-attested in the OT (see 3:22; 11:7; 1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6; 38:7; Ps 89:5-6; Isa 6:1-8; Dan 10:12-13). • *human beings:* Or *man*; Hebrew reads *’adam*. • The descriptors *in our image* and *like us* are virtually synonymous in Hebrew. Humans enjoy a unique relationship with God. • *They will reign:* Humans represent the Creator as his ambassadors, vice-regents, and administrators on earth. • *all the wild animals on the earth:* As in Syriac version; Hebrew reads *all the earth*.

**1:27** The first poetry of Genesis reflectively celebrates God’s climactic feat in creating humankind. • *human beings* (Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-’adam*): This term is often used to denote humanity collectively (see 6:1, 5-7; 9:5-6). Though traditionally translated “man,” gender is not at issue here; both *male and female* are included.

**1:28 said:** God’s message to humankind is direct and intimate; we are stewards of his delegated authority. • *govern. . . . Reign:* As God’s vice-regents, humans are entrusted with the care and management of the world God created (see also 9:2; Ps 8:5-8).

**1:29-30** These verses highlight the extent (*throughout the earth*) and variety (*every seed-bearing plant . . .*

*all the fruit trees*) of God’s provision for humans, *animals, and birds*.

**1:31** The Creator declares his work *good* seven times in ch 1; following the creation of human beings, God declares it all *very good*.

**2:1-3** Humankind is the high point of God’s creative acts (1:26-31), while day 7 is the climax of the creation week. When God *rested* (or *ceased*), he endorsed all of creation—there was nothing more to do! This seven-day framework structured Israel’s week, with the *seventh day* as the precedent for their weekly Sabbath. The Sabbath was intended to celebrate God’s finished work; the seventh day would be set apart as *holy* and dedicated to the Creator, who also rested (see Exod 20:8-11; 31:12-17; cp. Matt 12:1-8; Rom 14:5-6; Col 2:16-17; Heb 4:1-11).

**2:3** The first six days of creation involved separation (light from darkness, day from night, water from dry land). The last act of creation separated what is ordinary from what is *holy*, thus laying the foundation for Israel’s worship. It also anticipated a coming age of rest (Heb 4:1-11; 12:2; 13:14). • The absence of the usual “morning and evening” reflects the Creator’s willingness to enter into unending fellowship with humankind.

2:5  
Gen 1:11  
2:7  
Gen 3:19  
Job 33:4  
Ps 103:14  
Ezek 37:5  
Zech 12:1  
John 20:22  
\*1 Cor 15:45  
*inepesh* (5315)  
\*Deut 12:23

## 2. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE CREATION (2:4–4:26)

### *Superscription (2:4a)*

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the creation of the heavens and the earth.

### *Creation of Man and Woman (2:4b-25)*

#### *Creation of the Man*

When the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>neither wild plants nor grains

were growing on the earth. For the LORD God had not yet sent rain to water the earth, and there were no people to cultivate the soil. <sup>6</sup>Instead, springs came up from the ground and watered all the land. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into the man's nostrils, and the man became a living person.

## Human Sexuality (1:27-28)

Gen 2:18-25  
Lev 18:1-30  
Deut 22:13-29  
Ruth 4:11-13  
2 Sam 11:2-27  
Ps 127:3-5  
Eccl 2:8-11  
Song 1-8  
Mal 2:15-16  
Matt 19:3-12  
1 Cor 6:12-7:40  
Eph 5:31-33  
1 Thes 4:3-8

When God created the first human beings in his own image, he created them as sexual beings, male and female (1:27). Through their sexuality, they were to fill and govern the world (1:28) and provide intimate companionship for one another in marriage (2:18-25). Male and female sexuality is central to what it means to be human.

Sexual intimacy united the first man and woman as one being, an effect that sexual intimacy continues to have. Since biblical sexuality is not just physical but has the total person in view, it validates sexual relations only as part of the partners' mutual commitment to each other's ultimate good. The Bible speaks of engaging in sexual intercourse as literally "knowing" another person intimately (see note on 4:1). Since creation, the purpose of sexuality has been to join people in an intimate union of marriage—a permanent and loving heterosexual commitment—that God blesses and calls "very good" (1:27-28, 31). The sexual relationship cements the marriage bond in an intimacy that continues even when reproduction is no longer possible.

Although sexuality was created before sin, it did not emerge unscathed from human rebellion. Sexuality is a powerful force that is easily corrupted if not carefully channeled (see Lev 18; 1 Thes 4:3-8). Sexual intimacy apart from marital commitment perverts the order that God intended for creation. Incest, for example, violates sexual boundaries (see Lev 18:7-14), collapses family structures (see 19:30-38), and fragments the community. Whereas perverted sexuality tears the community down (see 38:1-30; 39:7-9; Judg 19:1–20:48) and exalts the individual (see 2 Sam 13:11-14), biblical sexuality builds up the sexual partners and the community.

Our sexual identity has been damaged through our fall into sin (ch 3), but God has redeemed it through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (see 1 Cor 6:12-20; Eph 5:31-33). He restores sexual wholeness in those who trust his work in their lives by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 6:9-11, 15-20; 1 Thes 4:1-5). Those who commit their sexuality to Christ can testify to God's love for his people (Eph 5:25-33).

**2:4–4:26** This account (see note on 2:4) of the heavens and the earth is not a second creation account; rather, it is a theological and historical expansion on 1:1–2:3. The focus is now on what the cosmos produced rather than on its creation. Special attention is given to the first man and woman. As the story progresses, it is colored by contrasts of good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, life and death, harmony and discord.

**2:4** *This is the account* (literally *These are the generations*): This or a similar phrase is repeated throughout Genesis, creating an internal outline for the book. In other occurrences, it introduces the genealogy or story of a key personality (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 37:2). • Some have argued that the first half of 2:4 belongs with 1:1–2:3, but it is more likely the

introduction to the account that follows.

• **LORD God** (Hebrew *Yahweh Elohim*) is the second name used for God in the early chapters of Genesis. *Elohim* (1:1–2:3) describes the all-powerful creator God. *Yahweh Elohim* speaks of the eternal God who formed a lasting covenant with Israel (Exod 3:6, 13-15). Accordingly, 2:4-25 focuses on God as provider more than as creator. The three themes of sexuality, dominion, and food in ch 1 are now addressed in reverse order (food, 2:8-17; dominion, 2:18-20; sexuality, 2:21-25).

**2:5** *cultivate*: Work does not result from sin; it was part of the original structure of creation and is directly tied to human identity and purpose (1:28; 2:15).

**2:6** *springs* (Or *mist*, as traditionally rendered): The word refers to subterranean springs that rose to the surface of the ground.

**2:7** In 1:1–2:3, creation happens at a distance, by divine command ("Let there be . . . and that is what happened"). In this account, the creative act is much more intimate (see also 2:8-9, 21-22). • *from the dust of the ground*: In Hebrew, *'adamah* ("ground") forms a wordplay with *'adam* ("man"). The earth remains the definitive reference point for humans, who in death return to dust (3:17-19; 4:11; Job 4:19; 10:8-9; Isa 29:16). • *breathed . . . into the man's nostrils*: God's *breath* is not imparted to other animals; only humans are formed in God's image (1:27) and enjoy dialogue with their Creator (2:16-17; 3:8-13). They alone have spiritual awareness and moral conscience (see Job 32:8).

*Creation of the Garden*

<sup>8</sup>Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he placed the man he had made. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river flowed from the land of Eden, watering the garden and then dividing into four branches. <sup>11</sup>The first branch, called the

Pishon, flowed around the entire land of Havilah, where gold is found. <sup>12</sup>The gold of that land is exceptionally pure; aromatic resin and onyx stone are also found there. <sup>13</sup>The second branch, called the Gihon, flowed around the entire land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The third branch, called the Tigris, flowed east of the land of Asshur. The fourth branch is called the Euphrates.

*The First Command*

<sup>15</sup>The LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to tend and watch over it.

**2:8**  
Gen 3:23; 13:10  
Isa 51:3  
Joel 2:3

**2:9**  
Gen 3:22  
Prov 3:18; 11:30  
Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14

**2:10**  
Rev 22:1, 17

**2:14**  
Gen 15:18  
Deut 1:7  
Dan 10:4

**2:15**  
Gen 2:8

## Biblical Marriage (2:18-25)

Gen 24:65-67  
Ps 45:8-15  
Is 54:5  
Hos 2:19-20  
Mal 2:10-16  
1 Cor 7:1-40  
2 Cor 6:14-16  
Eph 5:21-33  
Heb 13:4  
1 Pet 3:1-7

At the first wedding, God the Father gave the bride away to the groom and witnessed the couple's interaction in his sanctuary-garden (2:18-25). Married love is thus a binding covenant commitment before God. Breaching that covenant (e.g., through adultery) is a crime against persons and against God, who is a divine witness to and guarantor of the marriage covenant (see Mal 2:10-16; cp. Gen 39:6-9; Jer 3:1; 1 Cor 6:9-10; Heb 13:4). Although marriage is exclusive, it is not private. It is legally declared in public, with community recognition, witness, and accountability (see Lev 20:10-12; Deut 22:22; Jer 29:20-23).

Marriage is also a metaphor of the Lord's relationship with his people, first with Israel (see Exod 19:3-6; 20:2-6; 34:14; Isa 54:5; Ezek 16:1-63; Hos 2:19-20), and then with the church (see 2 Cor 11:2; Eph 5:21-33). A marriage points to something greater than itself—God's people (Christ's "bride") await the return of Christ (the "groom"). Married Christians are called to live in unity and dignity as they anticipate the wedding feast of the Lamb (Rev 19:6-9). Christ will live forever with his faithful people in glory (Rev 19:7; 21:2, 9).

**2:8-14** Analogous to the sacred time marked out on the seventh day of creation (2:2-3), the sacred space of the *garden in Eden* was separate from the surrounding world. It functioned as a garden-temple or sanctuary because the Lord manifested his presence there in a special way.

**2:8** *Eden* was the general location in which the *garden* was placed, not the garden itself. The term could mean "plain," "delight," or "fertility." The description that follows favors the idea of fertility. • *in the east*: The exact location of Eden is left to speculation, but it was east of Canaan, Israel's later home. • God *placed the man* in the garden for divine fellowship and physical blessing (see also 2:15 and note).

**2:9** Beauty and bounty characterized humanity's original environment (cp. 13:10). • The *tree of life* represented God's presence and provision. The one who ate of it would have everlasting life (3:22), which made it a rich image for later Israelite and Christian reflection (Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19). The candlestick in Israel's Tabernacle may have been a stylized representation of it (Exod 25:31-35). • Eating the fruit of the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil* enabled humanity's capacity for wisdom (3:6) and moral discernment (3:5, 22; cp.

Deut 1:39, "innocent"). Eating from it represented a human grasp for autonomy and wisdom that were God's alone (cp. Prov 30:1-4). Humans side-stepped God's revelation as the means of moral discernment, flaunting their independence rather than submitting to God's will (cp. Prov 1:7). Choosing human wisdom over God's instruction brings death and destruction (see Ps 19:7-9; Ezek 28:6, 15-17).

**2:10-14** This detailed description portrays the eastern region around Eden as a mountain with rivers flowing out to the world. Eden's beauty and fertility enriched the whole earth.

**2:10** The *river* that was *watering the garden* was a material blessing (bringing agricultural fertility) and a symbol of God's presence (cp. Ps 46:4; Ezek 47:1-12; Zech 14:8; Rev 22:1-2). • *dividing into four branches* (literally *heads*): The common understanding is that one river had its source in Eden, flowed down through the garden, and then split into the four rivers named.

**2:11** *The Pishon* and the Gihon (2:13) cannot be identified with certainty. If *the land of Havilah* was in southeast Arabia or on the African coast, as some biblical data suggest (see 10:7; 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7), then the Pishon was possibly the Nile River. Josephus thought that Havilah and the Pishon were in India

(*Antiquities* 1.1.3). Two other proposals suggest: (1) rivers in the mountains of eastern Turkey where the Tigris and Euphrates (2:14) also flow, and (2) the marshy delta near the Persian Gulf. Current geographical conditions make any theory impossible to prove conclusively.

**2:12** The magnificence and fertility of the garden are pictured as spreading to the surrounding regions through the rivers flowing out from it. The four rivers possibly imply that the garden's bounty flowed out to the four corners of the earth. • *Gold* and *onyx* were later used for decorating the Tabernacle, the Temple (Exod 25:3-9; 1 Chr 29:2), and the priests' clothing (Exod 28:9-14, 20). • *Resin* was used in sacred incense (Exod 30:34).

**2:13** *Gihon*: Though unknown, proposals have included the Nile (as in the Greek version of Jer 2:18; Josephus, *Antiquities* 1.1.3), the Jordan, or, according to Jewish tradition, a river that formerly ran through the Kidron Valley (1 Kgs 1:33; 2 Chr 33:14). • Although *Cush* is the name of ancient Ethiopia, Mesopotamian regions associated with Babylon seem to be the immediate setting (see 10:8); Cush is possibly the land of the Kassites, a dynasty ruling in Babylonia.

**2:14** *Tigris* . . . *Euphrates*: These well-known rivers flow from the mountains of eastern Turkey.

**2:16**  
Gen 3:1-3

**2:17**  
Gen 3:1, 16-17  
Deut 30:15, 19-20  
Rom 6:23  
Jas 1:15

**2:18**  
Gen 3:12  
Prov 18:22

**2:19**  
Gen 1:20-25

**2:22**  
1 Cor 11:8-9  
1 Tim 2:13

**2:23**  
Gen 29:14  
Eph 5:28-30

**2:24**  
\*Matt 19:5  
\*1 Cor 6:16  
Eph 5:31

**2:25**  
Gen 3:7, 10-11

**16**But the LORD God warned him, "You may freely eat the fruit of every tree in the garden—**17**except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die."

#### Creation of the Woman

**18**Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."**19**So the LORD God formed from the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and the man chose a name for each one. **20**He gave names to all the livestock, all the birds of the sky, and all the wild animals. But still there was no helper just right for him.

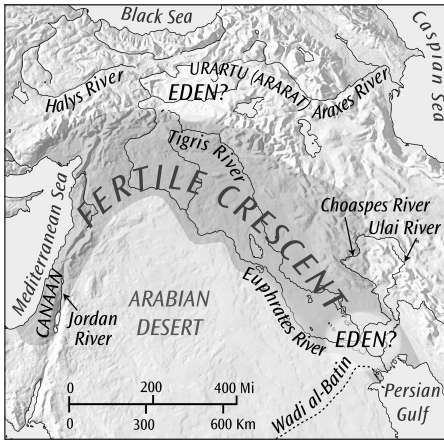
**21**So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep. While the man slept, the LORD God took out one of the man's ribs and closed up the opening. **22**Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib, and he brought her to the man.

**23**"At last!" the man exclaimed.

"This one is bone from my bone, and flesh from my flesh! She will be called 'woman,' because she was taken from 'man.'"

**24**This explains why a man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one.

**25**Now the man and his wife were both naked, but they felt no shame.



◀ The Location of Eden (2:8-14). Eden might have been located in the mountains of Ararat or near the Persian Gulf (see notes on 2:8-14). Possibilities for the four rivers (2:10-14) exist in either location (see note on 2:11). Eden represented God's presence on earth that was withdrawn at the Fall and re-inaugurated at Sinai (see Exod 3:1-6; 24:9-18; 40:34-38).

distinctions (cp. 29:14). • Adam declares that "She will be called 'woman' (Hebrew *'ishah*) because she was taken from 'man' (Hebrew *'ish*)." He understood the nature of their connection (see Eph 5:28-29). Adam had earlier assessed the animals without finding the characteristics he needed in a partner. How different this evaluation is!

**2:24** Marriage between a man and a woman is not just a human social construct but is rooted in the created order. • **a man leaves . . . and is joined:** Marriage entails a shift of loyalty from parents to spouse. • **the two are united into one:** Marriage and its commitments make it the most fundamental covenant relationship observed among humans. Marriage is a powerful image of Israel's covenant with God (Hos 2:14-23) and of Christ's relationship to the church (Eph 5:22-32). Marriage is designed as an inseparable, exclusive relationship between a man and a woman. The family unit it creates is the basic building block of human society.

**2:25 both naked:** Prior to the Fall (ch 3), nakedness reflected innocence and trust. After the Fall, it denoted vulnerability and shame (see 9:22-23; Lev 18:1-23; Isa 47:3). Shame is more than embarrassment; it connotes exploitation and humiliation (see Deut 28:48; Isa 58:7; Jas 2:15-16).

**2:15 to tend and watch over:** The garden required maintenance and oversight. Tending the Garden was humanity's dignifying work. These roles in God's garden-sanctuary were later applied to God's Tabernacle (see Lev 8:35; Num 3:5-10; 4:46-49).

**2:17 except** (literally *but you must not eat*): This prohibition is given in the same legal format as Israel's Ten Commandments (see Exod 20:1-17; Deut 5:6-21). The Lord built law and obedience into the fabric of his covenant relationship with humanity. • **the knowledge of good and evil:** See note on 2:9. • **you are sure to die:** The consequences of disobedience would be immediate spiritual death (loss of relationship with God) and eventual physical death (see 3:22-23; Eccl 12:6-7).

**2:18-23** As human creation was the climax of ch 1, so human intimacy is the high point of ch 2. God's concern for mutual human support and companionship finds no parallel in ancient Near Eastern literature.

**2:18 It is not good:** This is God's first negative assessment of an otherwise excellent creation (1:31). **The LORD God** is portrayed as a father who obtains a bride for his son (cp. 24:1-67). • The answer to the man's need is **a helper who is just right for him**; she is his perfect complement, made in the same image of God (1:26-27), given the same commission (1:28; 2:15), and obligated by the same prohibition (2:17). The man cannot fulfill his created purpose alone.

**2:19-20 to see what he would call them:** Following God's example (1:5; 8, 10), the man **chose a name for each** of the creatures. In so doing, he was exercising his reign over creation (1:26, 28).

**2:19 the man:** Or *Adam*, and so throughout the chapter.

**2:21 took out one of the man's ribs** (or *took a part of the man's side*): Cp. 2:23; Eph 5:28.

**2:23** Adam recognized the woman as a "helper just right for him" (2:20). His celebration of her in poetry and song observed his unity with her, not their

*The Ruin of God's Creation (3:1-24)*  
*Temptation to Sin*

**3** The serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild animals the LORD God had made. One day he asked the woman, "Did God really say you must not eat the fruit from any of the trees in the garden?"

"Of course we may eat fruit from the trees in the garden," the woman replied. "It's only the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden that we are not allowed to eat. God said, 'You must not eat it or even touch it; if you do, you will die.'"

"You won't die!" the serpent replied to the woman. "God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil."

*Man and Woman Rebel against the Creator*

**6** The woman was convinced. She saw that the tree was beautiful and its fruit looked delicious, and she wanted the wisdom it would give her. So she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her hus-

band, who was with her, and he ate it, too. **7** At that moment their eyes were opened, and they suddenly felt shame at their nakedness. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves.

*God Interrogates the Man and Woman*

**8** When the cool evening breezes were blowing, the man and his wife heard the LORD God walking about in the garden. So they hid from the LORD God among the trees. **9** Then the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?"

**10** He replied, "I heard you walking in the garden, so I hid. I was afraid because I was naked."

**11** "Who told you that you were naked?" the LORD God asked. "Have you eaten from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat?"

**12** The man replied, "It was the woman you gave me who gave me the fruit, and I ate it."

**13** Then the LORD God asked the woman, "What have you done?"

**3:1**  
2 Cor 11:3  
Rev 12:9; 20:2  
**3:2**  
Gen 2:16  
**3:3**  
Gen 2:17  
Exod 19:12  
**3:4**  
John 8:44  
2 Cor 11:3  
**3:5**  
Gen 2:17; 3:22  
Isa 14:14  
Ezek 28:2  
**3:6**  
2 Cor 11:3  
1 Tim 2:14  
Jas 1:14-15  
1 Jn 2:16  
**3:8**  
Lev 26:12  
Deut 23:14  
Job 31:33  
**3:9**  
Gen 4:9; 18:9  
**3:10**  
Deut 5:5  
**3:12**  
Prov 28:13  
**3:13**  
2 Cor 11:3  
1 Tim 2:14

**3:1-24** The rebellion of the man and the woman shattered their unity and harmony with earth, animals, each other, and God.

**3:1** Genesis describes the deceiver as a *serpent*, one of the animals God created (see also 3:14 and note). He is later identified as Satan, the great enemy of God's people (Rev 12:9; 20:2). His manipulative language and his disguise as a serpent, the *shrewdest of all creatures*, show him as a master deceiver. Satan has various methods for opposing God's people (see 1 Chr 21:1; Zech 3:1-2); deception remains among his key strategies (cp. 2 Cor 11:3, 14). The Hebrew term for shrewd (*arum*) can be positive ("prudent," Prov 14:8) or negative ("cunning," as here; Job 5:12). It forms a wordplay with "naked" (*arummim*) in 2:25. Adam and Eve were naked and vulnerable; the serpent was shrewd and cunning. • Probably the serpent *asked the woman* because the prohibition was given to Adam prior to Eve's creation (see 2:16-17). Adam was probably aware of the serpent's cunning, having assessed and named all the animals before Eve was created (2:19-20, 23). • *Did God really say?* The deceiver began by twisting God's language to cast doubt on God's goodness. God's original prohibition applied to only one tree (2:16-17), not to all (*any*) of them.

**3:2-3** The woman attempted to set the record straight; in the process, she belittled the privileges God had given her and her husband in several ways: (1) She reduced God's "freely eat" (2:16) to *may eat*; (2) she downplayed God's emphasis on the availability of fruit

from every tree but one (2:17); (3) she added not touching to God's prohibition against eating (2:17); and (4) she softened the certainty of death (2:17).

**3:4-5** *You won't die!* This is the exact negation of God's clear and emphatic words: "you are sure to die" (2:17). The serpent capitalizes on the woman's uncertainty by baldly denying the penalty and quickly diverting her attention to the supposed prize—to *be like God, knowing both good and evil*. The deceiver falsely implies that this would be an unqualified good for them. The term rendered God is *Elohim*; it can also mean "divine beings" (i.e., God and the angels; e.g., Ps 29:1; 89:7).

**3:6** *She saw . . . she wanted:* The woman made two grave errors. (1) She assumed the right to decide what was and was not good, though God alone has this right; and (2) she coveted God's wisdom (see Deut 5:21). • *her husband . . . with her:* Although Scripture is clear about the woman's central role in the Fall (cp. 1 Tim 2:14), the man was clearly present and culpable as well. He comes to center stage in the verses that follow and in biblical theology. The consequence of his sin for the entire human race was immense. The Good News is that in Jesus Christ, the "second Adam," God has made salvation universally available (Rom 5:12-21).

**3:7** *Shame* is opposite to the naked innocence Adam and Eve enjoyed prior to their rebellion (2:25). Their relationship with one another and with God was fractured. • *sewed fig leaves together:* These covered their physical bodies, but

not their shame. They could not mend their broken relationships (see also 3:21 and note).

**3:8** *When the cool evening breezes were blowing:* The Hebrew has traditionally been interpreted as referring to the cool part of the day, most likely the evening. Others think that the language refers to a powerful manifestation of God's presence (a *theophany*; see Exod 19:16-25; 1 Sam 7:10) as a storm. If this view is correct, the man and the woman were hiding from the sound of the Lord appearing in judgment (see 2 Sam 5:24; Ps 29). • *the man: Or Adam*, and so throughout the chapter. • God put *trees* in the garden as an environment for humanity to enjoy fellowship with God. Now the man and woman used them to evade the divine presence.

**3:9-10** *Where are you?* The true intent of this rhetorical question is revealed in the man's answer (3:10). The real question was, why are you hiding? (cp. 4:9-10). • *I was afraid because I was naked:* Modesty was not the issue. The shame brought on by rebellion drove Adam and his wife to hide. Possibly they also feared punishment (see note on 3:8).

**3:12** *It was the woman you gave me:* Rather than confessing, the man became evasive. He blamed the woman for giving him the fruit and God for giving him the woman.

**3:13** *What have you done?* is another rhetorical question that is really an exclamation of horror (cp. 4:10). • *The serpent deceived me:* As the man implicated the woman (3:12), the woman accused the serpent. The serpent did play

**3:14**  
Deut 28:15  
Isa 65:25

“The serpent deceived me,” she replied.  
“That’s why I ate it.”

**3:15**  
John 8:44  
Rom 16:20  
Heb 2:14  
izera’ (2233)  
\* Gen 12:7

*God Indicts and Convicts*  
14 Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this, you are  
cursed  
more than all animals, domestic and  
wild.

**3:16**  
1 Cor 11:3  
Eph 5:22  
1 Tim 2:15

You will crawl on your belly,  
groveling in the dust as long as you live.

**3:17**  
Job 5:7  
Eccl 1:3  
Rom 8:20-22

15 And I will cause hostility between you  
and the woman,

and between your offspring and her  
offspring.

He will strike your head,  
and you will strike his heel.”

16 Then he said to the woman,

“I will sharpen the pain of your  
pregnancy,  
and in pain you will give birth.  
And you will desire to control your  
husband,  
but he will rule over you.”

17 And to the man he said,

## Adam (2:4–3:24)

Gen 1:26-31;  
4:25–5:5  
Hos 6:6-7  
Luke 3:38  
Rom 5:12-21  
1 Cor 15:22, 45-49  
1 Tim 2:13-14

Adam was the first man, the father of the human race. God created the first couple in his image to populate the earth and rule the created order (1:26-31). God made Adam from earth and breathed life into him (2:7); he was to cultivate the garden (2:15), name the animals (2:19-20), and follow God’s instructions (1:28; 2:16-17). God created the woman as a companion and helper for Adam (2:18-22). Eve’s creation from Adam’s rib portrays the unity that God intended for man and woman in marriage (2:23-25).

After the serpent deceived Eve into rejecting God’s rule, Adam also rebelled (3:1-6). Their willful disobedience disrupted their relationship (3:7) and separated them from God. God looked for Adam after his rebellion; he was hiding among the trees, already aware of his alienation (3:8). When God questioned him, Adam blamed Eve and, by implication, God (3:12). Adam’s rebellion brought hardship in governing the earth as well as physical and spiritual death (3:17-19, 22). God provided animal skins to cover Adam and Eve (3:21), and promised that Eve’s offspring would defeat Satan (3:15; see Rom 16:20; Rev 12:1-9; 20:1-10).

Adam was a historical individual (4:25; 5:1-5; 1 Chr 1:1; Hos 6:7; Luke 3:38; Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22, 45; 1 Tim 2:13-14; Jude 1:14) who represents humanity as a whole. God’s mandates (1:26-30) and curses (3:16-19) affected not only Adam and Eve, but the entire human race. Adam represents the separation from God that all humanity experiences.

The apostle Paul contrasted those represented by Adam, the first man, with those who follow Christ, the “last Adam” (1 Cor 15:45-50; see Rom 5:12-21; 8:5-11, 20-22). Those represented by Adam live only in him; they partake of his sin, his alienation from God and creation, and his spiritual death. Those who follow Christ live by faith in him. They are recreated in Christ’s image and become “new people” who partake of a new creation (see Rom 8:29; 1 Cor 15:49; 2 Cor 5:17). The barriers Adam raised are removed by Christ (Rom 5:1; 2 Cor 5:19; Gal 3:27-28; 6:15; Eph 2:14-16); Christ restores what Adam lost.

a role and would be punished (3:14), but that did not release the woman or the man from their guilt.

**3:14-19** The parties were judged in the order of their transgression—serpent, woman, man. Each received a punishment unique to his or her situation, and each had a key relationship altered. God is principled in judgment, not fickle; each punishment is proportionate to the offense.

**3:14 to the serpent:** Though later revelation identifies the deceiver as Satan, it is the created animal who was cursed, like the ground (3:17). • **Groveling in the dust** is a posture of humiliation and defeat (Ps 72:9; Mic 7:17).

**3:15 hostility:** The prophet Isaiah envisions the day when the Messiah’s

kingdom will restore all of creation to a harmonious state like the Garden of Eden before humans sinned (see Isa 11:8). • **her offspring** (literally *her seed*): This collective noun can refer to a single descendant or many. The ancient Near Eastern concept of corporate solidarity (e.g., “you and your descendants,” 28:14) is also behind this description of the ongoing hostility that would exist between humans and snakes. The pattern is set using singular terms (*He . . . you*). Christian interpreters have traditionally understood this verse as a prophecy of Christ, the seed of Abraham and the culmination of the woman’s seed (Gal 3:16; 4:4). • **strike** (Or *bruise*, in both occurrences): The striking of *his heel* is a reference to the suffering of God’s servant (see Isa 53),

while striking the serpent’s *head*—a more definitive blow—is ultimately fulfilled in Christ’s death, resurrection, and final victory over Satan (1 Cor 15:55-57; Rev 12:7-9; 20:7-10).

**3:16** Judgment falls on the woman’s unique role of childbearing and on her relationship with her husband. • **And you will desire to control your husband, but he will rule over you** (Or *And though you will have desire for your husband, / he will rule over you*): The marriage relationship now included an element of antagonism rather than just security and fulfillment. New life in Christ allows for the restoration of a man and a woman’s marriage relationship (Eph 5:18-32; cp. Matt 20:25-28).

**3:17-19** God highlighted his original

“Since you listened to your wife and ate from the tree whose fruit I commanded you not to eat, the ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it.  
 18 It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains.  
 19 By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return.”

*Expulsion and Hope*

20 Then the man—Adam—named his wife Eve, because she would be the mother of all who live. 21 And the LORD God made clothing from animal skins for Adam and his wife.  
 22 Then the LORD God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!” 23 So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden, and he sent Adam out to cultivate

the ground from which he had been made. 24 After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And he placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.

**Results of Rebellion (4:1-24)**

*Cain and Abel*

**4** Now Adam had sexual relations with his wife, Eve, and she became pregnant. When she gave birth to Cain, she said, “With the LORD’s help, I have produced a man!” 2 Later she gave birth to his brother and named him Abel.

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. 3 When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the LORD. 4 Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The LORD accepted Abel and his gift, 5 but he did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

6 “Why are you so angry?” the LORD asked Cain. “Why do you look so dejected? 7 You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to

**3:18**  
 Job 31:40  
 Heb 6:8  
**3:19**  
 Gen 2:7  
 Ps 90:3; 104:29  
 Eccl 12:7  
 1 Cor 15:47  
**3:20**  
 2 Cor 11:3  
 1 Tim 2:13  
**3:21**  
 2 Cor 5:2-3  
**3:22**  
 Gen 1:26  
*k'alam* (5769)  
 \* Gen 9:16  
**3:24**  
 Ezek 10:1  
 Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14  
 \**kerub* (3742)  
 \* Exod 25:18  
**4:2**  
 Luke 11:50-51  
**4:3**  
 Lev 2:1-2  
 Num 18:12  
**4:4**  
 Exod 13:12  
 Heb 11:4  
**4:6**  
 Jon 4:4  
**4:7**  
 Rom 6:12, 16  
 Jas 1:15

command *not to eat* the fruit by speaking of eating several times in 3:17-19. The judgment affected humanity’s ability to get food, and it was proportionate to their offense of eating what had been prohibited. • *the ground is cursed*: The relationship of the man to the ground (see note on 2:7) was now antagonistic as judgment fell on his primary role (2:5, 15). He must labor and toil to work the ground, but with diminished productivity. Human sin has broad effects on creation (see 4:12; 6:7; Lev 26; Deut 11:13-17, 28; Rom 8:22).  
**3:20-24** Soon after they were judged for their sin, Adam and Eve were banished from the garden.  
**3:20** *Eve* (Hebrew *khawah*) sounds like a Hebrew term (*khayah*) that means “to give life.” Following God’s pronouncement of Adam’s impending death (3:19), Adam expressed hope by giving Eve a name associated with life. Adam’s naming of Eve in such close proximity to 3:16 may suggest that the narrator views it as Adam’s first act of ruling over the woman after the Fall (see note on 2:19-20).  
**3:21** God mercifully provided more substantial clothing for Adam and Eve (cp. 3:7) before expelling them into the harsh environment outside the garden.  
**3:22** *human beings*: Or *the man*; Hebrew reads *ha-adam*. • *like us*: The

plural probably reflects God’s conversation with his angelic court (see note on 1:26). • *the tree of life . . . live forever!*: Mercifully, God prevented humankind from eating of the tree of life and having to live forever in a fallen state. Through Jesus Christ, however, eternal life is once again made available (see Rev 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).  
**3:23** *So the LORD God banished them from the Garden of Eden*: Before the Fall, the garden was a sanctuary in which humans could move freely in God’s holy presence. Now their sin required expulsion from that environment. This same principle was behind the laws that restricted an Israelite’s access to God’s presence in the Tabernacle or Temple (e.g., Lev 16:1-2; Num 5:3).  
**3:24** *Cherubim* are a class of angelic beings that guard access to God’s presence (Exod 26:31; Ezek 28:14). • *east . . . of Eden*: In Genesis, movement eastward often implies leaving the presence or blessing of God, whether in judgment (see also 4:16), self-aggrandizement (11:2; 13:11), or estrangement (25:6).  
**4:1** *Adam*: Or *the man*; also in 4:25.  
 • *had sexual relations* (literally *knew*): In certain contexts, the Hebrew term meaning “to know” is an idiom for sexual knowledge of another person (4:17; 19:33, 35). It is never used of animals, which mate by instinct. • *With the*

*LORD’s help*: Eve fulfilled her God-given role of procreation despite the negative effects of the Fall (see 3:16, 20). • *I have produced*: Or *I have acquired*. *Cain* (Hebrew *qayin*) sounds like a Hebrew term (*qanah*) that can mean “produce” or “acquire.”  
**4:2** *his brother . . . Abel*: The name (Hebrew *habel*) means “breath,” “vapor,” or “meaningless,” anticipating his tragically brief life (cp. Eccl 1:2).  
**4:3** There was nothing wrong with offering grain to the Lord (Lev 2:14; Deut 26:2-4), but Cain brought only a token gift (*some of his crops*), whereas God requires the first and best (Exod 23:16, 19; 34:22, 26). Cain’s heart attitude made his offering inferior to Abel’s (cp. Heb 11:4).  
**4:4-5** *the best portions of the firstborn lambs*: Or *the firstborn of his flock and their fat portions*. Abel was giving God the best animals and the richest parts. Abel’s offering, in contrast to Cain’s, was the best he had to offer. True worship is a costly privilege.  
**4:7** *Sin is crouching at the door . . . you must subdue it*: Sin is pictured as a vicious animal lying in wait to pounce on Cain (cp. note on 3:16). Either sin will dominate Cain, or Cain will resist the temptation to sin. There is no neutral ground in that conflict.