



The Creation Text

Studies in Early Genesis

David P. Levin

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For my children

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Foreword

THE EARLY CHAPTERS of Genesis are filled with astonishing revelations about the God who made us all. They bring us face to face with life and death, forgiveness and mercy, judgment and justice.

It is an absolute delight to have someone lay bare just the text itself, to reveal and explain the power of the divine words in the original language. David Levin, by God's grace, has the knowledge and skills to do so. We have shared a number of intense, in-depth discussions on Genesis over many decades. David's long-time passion for Genesis and his analytical mind are evident in each of the studies.

It is with great pleasure that I recommend this book. Each study is short and focused to give you the opportunity to ponder a specific textual point. You may not always agree with David's conclusions, but you will not walk away disappointed. Your understanding and appreciation of God's ways will be greatly increased. As well, you'll have some persistent textual mysteries permanently cleared up.

Above all, expect to be challenged. The studies sometimes counter ideas that have grown up unchallenged in our thinking. The result, though, will be a deeper, more solid appreciation of God and his wise ways.

TED SLEEPER
San Mateo, CA

Preface

WHY ANOTHER BOOK on early Genesis? Isn't this well-trodden territory? Well-trodden and familiar, yes, but well understood, maybe not so much. The message and patterns of Genesis usually take second seat to extra-biblical issues, such as how the Bible matches up with science or the possibility of a pre-Adamic creation. Only the most obvious structural elements of Genesis have received due attention. In addition, some ideas that have been around for generations don't weather close inspection.

My approach is to take the text as it is (hence the title, *The Creation Text*), setting aside the usual external issues that accompany discussions of early Genesis. This allows the text to live and breathe on its own. As you read through the 49 studies that comprise this book you will find no mention of any matters of science or time periods or such external matters. You will mostly find adherence to the details and structure of the text itself, which is much harder to challenge as an apologetic approach.

Although early Genesis does represent an historical reality, I do not think that forcing the text into some scientific or historical model, or vice versa, is a fruitful pursuit. An examination of the text reveals how different Genesis is from other ancient documents that attempt to explain the origin of the universe and humanity, and draws attention to the design features of early Genesis. This perspective will, I hope, heighten your appreciation of Genesis as divinely inspired writing.

About the Format

I have used the term "studies" rather than "chapters," as the book does not march straightforward verse by verse through early Genesis. Some topics survey the whole tableau of Genesis, while others inspect a few words or

theme. The material ranges from tabular to narrative, from technical to devotional, typically expositional and sometimes exhortational. Thus, I have employed a variety of presentations, arranged primarily chronologically, but not necessarily flowing as a commentary. Each study has its own character, covering a variety of exegetical, expositional, linguistic, structural, and theological matters. Duplication of some material is inevitable, but I have limited this by referencing related studies.

The Hebrew text has many puns and wordplays, and I have used many of those, also. While the content of the book is foremost, I hope that your reading will be enjoyable and thought-provoking.

The text of early Genesis is bare-bones, leaving much room for speculation and possibilities. Some of my arguments are less than conclusive; others are well-attested. I only ask that you consider the perspectives I present and use those to advance your own thinking.

Bible passages are marked according to the version or translation used, and used according to standard copyright laws.

Acknowledgements

Before you even read any of the content of this book you were doubtless struck by the wonderfully expressive illustrations on the cover and opposite the title page. My friend Richard Norton of Lancaster created the art for this book, and I thank him greatly for enhancing the overall presentation of this work.

As to the writing itself, it was eight years in the process, reflecting some 30 years of investigations into the structure of Genesis. Along the way, many members of my family in the faith have contributed to what has now become this book. Ethel Archard of Ottawa, the book editor for the *Tidings*, masterfully transformed my rambling and tangential manuscript into a focused, readable text. You, the reader, should thank her for that too! Ethel's husband, Charles, was instrumental in the design and formatting of the final product. Ted Sleeper (San Mateo, CA), my first mentor in Bible study, and Steve Snobelen (Halifax, NS), both adept students of early Genesis, read the entire manuscript and made numerous helpful suggestions and corrections. Val Ifill (Ann Arbor, MI) and Peter Perryman (Ottawa, ON) also contributed to the editing process. My wife, Cora, made many corrections to the manuscript and provided

constant encouragement over the years. Ron Hicks of Bethesda, MD, took a keen interest in this book and supplied valuable resource information. I want to especially acknowledge Inez Schneider (Hampstead, MD) for her gentle insistence that I put my ideas about Genesis into a book, and for her continued patient encouragement (“David, how’s the book coming?”) during the many years of writing.

DAVID P. LEVIN
Lancaster, PA
September 2011

STUDY 1

The Greatest Sentence Ever Written

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

THE BIBLE'S FIRST verse reigns majestically supreme over all other writings just as God reigns majestically supreme over all creation. While we cannot compare mere written words with the realities those words represent, we can compare the Genesis narrative with other texts. No other writing, ancient or modern, so elegantly delivers truth, beauty, and order as the highly structured and multi-layered text of Genesis 1 to 4, which contains the creation account and its immediate aftermaths.

Starting from the most profound overall declaration, then thematically developing that declaration, the Creation Text (the first four chapters of Genesis) displays profound density of meaning, with the most compact statements at the beginning. The first verse is the keynote; the ideas it contains expand into the first chapter in greater detail. Chapters 2 to 4 add yet more detail, each word and phrase laden with meaning and far-reaching foreshadows. As dedicated Bible students know, the teachings of Genesis form the backbone of the entire Bible. Echoes of Genesis redound even to the conclusion of the New Testament.

Genesis 1:1, the first half of the two-verse Prologue, has the densest meaning of any verse in the Bible, as it covers the most territory in the fewest words. To fully appreciate the riches of this magnificent verse, this study will explore it from several perspectives:

Scope: Genesis 1:1 includes the entire realm of heaven and earth. What's left?

Theology: it's the most profound statement about God ever written or that *can* be written.

Impact: our overfamiliarity with Genesis dulls our awareness to its monumental impact.

Literary Structure: it simultaneously introduces the creation account, the book of Genesis, and the Bible as a whole.

Uniqueness: no ancient writing can compare with the orderly, elegant structure of the creation record.

Vision: it reaches all the way back to the inception of the universe to establish an historical and “scientific” account.

Let’s look at what each aspect brings to our understanding.

Scope

The most obvious feature of 1:1 is its universal scope. Encompassing heaven and earth, verse 1 includes the entire universe as the initial creation of God. We can read this verse three ways, not necessarily mutually exclusive, and each offers a very broad scope. The first reading that comes to mind is a picture of all the vast heavens, with Earth, our home, being singled out for particular attention. A second possibility is that the phrase “heaven and earth” is a figure of speech meaning “everything there is,” such as when you say you searched “high and low” to indicate “everywhere.” If this is an idiom for “the entire universe,” it describes the vast panorama of God’s creative enterprise.

A third possible reading would take us even further. The phrase “heaven and earth” could encompass even more than the physical universe! How could that be? What is there beyond the universe? The key word here is “physical,” for the word “heavens” can carry a meaning beyond the material universe; it can also express God’s creation of the spiritual realm. The word for “earth” in the first verse denotes not only our planet specifically, but also the material realm in general. Consider Ephesians 1:9-10, where “heaven” refers to spiritual matters concerning the Divine presence and “earth” refers to humanity. God’s purpose is to unite these two through Jesus his Son:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

This unity depends, in part, on our development of the spiritual values cited in Ephesians 4 and 5. These come from God, for from God flow all things, physical and spiritual, material and immaterial.

I don't know if the primary intent of "heaven" in verse 1 is to include the intangible realm of such virtues as love, grace, mercy, virtue, and compassion, but it does accommodate this idea, and succeeding studies will use this perspective. This concept of heaven, combined with the entirety of the physical universe, embodied in the word "earth," would embrace the complete expanse of all creation.

Theology

What can we know about God using only Genesis 1:1? The verse has no description or information about God, but it does tell what God did. From that we can at least attribute "Creator" status to God. However, this sentence employs with maximum effect the technique of *implication*. In this way, it can tell us much about God without a direct word. By stating that in the beginning (that is, when the universe began, and here we define universe as the sum of all time, matter, energy, and space) *God created*, it implies that God exists/existed outside the realm of that universe. It does this incidentally and almost offhandedly. God was already present at the moment of the beginning.

Given that the beginning included the entire universe that came into existence at God's volition, what does this tell us about God? The Prologue gives no explanation of God other than by implication: God existed already at the beginning and is the cause of the entire universe. No amount of words describing God could propound this fact more eloquently than to propose God as already existent at, and the cause of, the beginning.

What could one say about the essential nature of Deity that "in the beginning God" doesn't already imply? This is a statement of infinite sublimity, condensation of thought, and moral and metaphysical power. In the fewest possible words, and therefore with the densest of meaning, the Bible introduces one eternal and omnipotent creator God. It does this without any direct description, by placing God outside the realm of our existence. Outside, in the sense of beyond, before, above, and around; encompassing and bringing into being the universe as we can

barely comprehend it. Before the creative process starts, even before the statement describing the situation in which God began creation, God already existed. No more can be said on the matter.

Untold millions of words have spewed forth from the mouths and pens of theologians and philosophers, but none of them will ever say nearly as much as does the Bible in one sentence that simply presupposes God has the attributes of creativity *ex nihilo*, omnipotence, and eternity. As we in the twenty-first century sense our minuscule presence in an ever-expanding knowledge of our universe, we should have all the more awe and respect for the Deity who brought it all into being by his will alone.

Impact

The brief statement of the creation of the universe, featuring a creator God who stands outside the constraints of that universe, makes an impressive and comprehensive opening. Imagine a first-time reader picking up a book, looking at the first page, and reading no less than a declaration of the creation of the universe! What kind of book is this going to be? Genesis 1:1 is almost proverbial in its familiarity, so you may not appreciate its impact when you read it. Do not let familiarity dull your sense of the magnificent. It is not only a colossal declaration; it is also the very first sentence, with a massive impression upon the aware reader.

Yet no other statement or sentence could come first, at least not in a book that (to use human terms) audaciously and ambitiously sets out to teach us everything we need to know about God and life! Genesis 1:1 has no peer for an opening sentence. Only overfamiliarity dulls our sense to its power and impact.

Literary Structure

As a first verse, Genesis 1:1 not only grabs our attention, but also introduces the text that follows. This verse fulfills four literary functions:

1. It sets the schematic stage for the shift of focus in verse 2.
2. It introduces the creation account of Genesis 1 and 2. It gives the broad picture of the creation of the universe after which the first two chapters specify the details.
3. It introduces the entire book of Genesis, which ends with the

embryonic nation of Israel. The God of creation works out his purpose through Israel.

4. Ultimately, Genesis 1:1 introduces the entire Bible. It is a synopsis of the entire plan and purpose of God (to unite things in heaven and earth, Eph 1:10), including events as far distant in time as those depicted at the end of the Revelation. The last chapters of Scripture are still within the context (and explicit language) of the heaven and earth declaration of the Bible's first verse.

The Prologue (verses 1 and 2) extends its overview from 1:1, first densely and strongly through chapter one, then it tapers to a guiding line through Genesis and all of Scripture. This feature alone displays the unsurpassed magnificence of verse one. It is the Prologue of the Creation Week *and* the Prologue of Genesis *and* the Prologue of Scripture. Regardless of where we are in the Bible, we are always in the shadow of the Prologue and the purview of the one creator God.

Uniqueness

Despite this profound declaration, many critics have placed the Bible on the same order as other Near-Eastern Creation epics. Nothing in mythology comes even close to the precision, theological sophistication, literary sublimity, and exquisite structure of early Genesis. Those who study such matters know that no other ancient writing approaches the expression of thought evinced in Genesis 1:1.

Read this assessment from one scholar who concedes that the Bible's creation account far exceeds primitive mythologies:

These foreign (Phoenician, Egyptian, Babylonian) creation myths recount not only the origins of the visible world, but, at the same time, of the Gods. Genesis 1, however, distinguishes itself radically from these all since there is no such theology. This observation indicates the grandeur of Israel's religion.

The surrounding nations believe in gods who came into being at a most ancient time. Israel's God, however, lives from eternity to eternity. Furthermore, all these creation accounts are mythological in nature . . . There is no greater contrast, then, than between the colorful, fantastic mythology of these peoples and the intellectually clear, prosaic supernaturalism of Genesis 1.¹

1 Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997), p. 126.

“Intellectually clear, prosaic supernaturalism” refers to the structured text and understated activity of God. We will focus as often on the structure as on the message, because Genesis is uniquely structured.

Vision

Some defenses of early Genesis assert that the text is not intended to be a scientific account of how the world came to be. They dismiss the simplistic picture of God making stars and giraffes and say the narrative is figurative or symbolic.

To appreciate the issue of “vision,” set aside your familiarity with the text and assume the role of a first-time reader. Also set aside concepts of the division of knowledge that treat “scientific” and “religious” as separate realms of inquiry requiring different modes of investigation. The question of origins leads us to the nexus of science, philosophy, and theology. The first verse of the Bible clearly implies that moral and theological matters depend ultimately upon the question of origins. As the French scholar Henri Blocher observed:

In the last analysis one cannot make an absolute separation between physics and metaphysics, and religion has to do with everything, precisely because all realms are created by God and continue to depend on him. To oppose ‘doctrine’ and (factual) ‘history’ is to forget that biblical doctrine is first of all history. Faith rests on facts, objectively asserted.²

The Bible doesn’t recognize the assumptions most modern readers bring to it. The resurrection of Jesus is the most pertinent example of the principle expressed in the quotation above. The resurrection is a matter of faith and theology only because it is first a matter of history and biology. Likewise, the idea of a creator God is a religious matter only because it was first a matter of physics.

A fair reading of Genesis requires this expansive vision. The fullness of God’s message involves matters that we, in this age, consider matters of “science,” those that deal with the material, observable world. We may not know the details, but we do know that the Bible considers the origin of the universe a theological issue. By including a precisely formed creation account the expansive vision of biblical narrative

² Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning: the opening chapters of Genesis* (trans. D.G. Preston; Downer’s Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1984), p. 24.

intends to relate the physical world and its Creator to issues of faith. That is why we want to ask not only questions about the creation account, but why it's even in the Bible. The studies in this book will often ask broad conceptual questions, such as "Why does the text go here?" "What would the Bible be like if this section was not included?"

Now let's look at two chronological aspects of the prologue.

Context of the Creation Sequence

The Prologue is not part of Day One. Structurally, chronologically, and conceptually, verses 1 and 2 form a separate unit that precedes the first day. The Prologue has a different structure than the daily accounts, and its scope of activity includes the entire universe, not just one aspect. Conceptually, the Prologue includes the entire creation week, the remainder of Genesis and even, in figure, the entire Bible. Also, it describes the condition of the earth upon which the creative program begins to act. Therefore, verses 1 and 2 precede Day One. The structure of the creation week places the Prologue as the counterpart to Day Seven, the Sabbath. The Prologue introduces the six-day creative program and the Sabbath concludes it. Study 20, "Sabbath," covers this idea in detail.

Chronology of the Prologue

I do not use chronology to answer questions such as "How old is the universe" or "How much time elapsed between the creation of the universe and the first day of creation?" The text takes no interest in such matters, and neither do I (in this book). We will look at the concept of chronology not from a quantitative cosmological perspective that would provide an age in years, but from a textual perspective that will clarify a relational sequence.

The Prologue covers a period of "time" prior to Day One. Time would have no relevance prior to the first day, so we must use the concept cautiously. The following observations come from a chronological consideration of the first three verses.

- God is eternal, so the constraint of time does not apply to the existence of God. Eternal represents a quality that goes beyond time without end; it means existing in a realm that has no concept of time at all. God is outside our physical and mental scope in

this regard, because the human mind cannot understand a self-existent eternal entity. We can understand that the text says this of God, but we have no experience of such matters. In a realm where all time exists at one point, to refer to a sequence of time is without meaning.

- At God's volition the universe began. This universe includes the physical parameters such as space/time and matter/energy. Time now existed, so "before" and "after" become meaningful; however, the Prologue offers no indication of measuring time. But what can we call the "time" during which the eternal God did not create the world? How do we understand anything before the creation of the physical parameters through which and by which we understand our universe? In other words, how can we understand anything when the very structures through which we come to understand don't even exist? When only God existed, that was the case, and that fact tells us how little, save for divine revelation, we can know about God. All we need to know is that at some point the universe had a beginning and thus it is not eternal;³ only God is. The facts of an eternal God and a known starting point for the universe proclaim a transcendent personal creator God.⁴
- A second event occurred, after the creation of the universe. Because time now exists, we can use the word "subsequent" safely and conformably to how we conceive time. At this event God announced light upon the Earth, and also initiated the reckoning of time, as indicated by the phrase "evening and morning" on the first day.

Time (as measured in years) only becomes a Bible topic in Genesis 5. Before then we have certain days specified, but no counting or measuring of calendar time. Certainly the Prologue itself intends to impress that

3 That the universe is not eternal does not mean the universe will end. "Not eternal" in this context means that the universe had a beginning and thus has not existed forever. It can continue to exist forever from its inception, and this seems to be a reasonable viewpoint if the universe is an extension of the eternal Creator.

4 A specific starting point of the universe argues for a personal self-existent eternal Creator. William Lane Craig develops this idea in "The Cosmological Argument," Paul Copan and Paul K. Moser, eds., *The Rationality of Theism* (New York : Routledge, 2003) pp. 128-9.

issue upon our minds. Before the era of time, eternity existed, the eternity of God's domain. The events described in the Prologue occupy a "time" preceding Day One; that's all we can say. We can only make the three relative statements above: God exists eternally, the universe had a specific beginning, and the creative week began after the creation of the universe.

A Concluding Thought

Genesis 1:1 stands without equal to any words ever written. I can say this confidently, having read only a small fraction of the great writings of the world, because it *cannot*, in principle, be exceeded. This verse, encompassing all heaven and earth in its grand sweep, takes us to a realm even beyond our reckoning of time and space. Genesis 1:1 goes to the absolute limit of anything the human mind can conjure, and places God beyond that—all in a mere handful of words. No other thought could possibly start the Bible. It is the sentence of sentences in the Book of Books.

STUDY 2

Genesis as Genealogy

This study takes a broad view of Genesis in its entirety, locating its purpose within the canon of Scripture and making a case for its essential genealogical structure, with the historical narratives to be read as annotations.

THE TWO MAIN words in the title above have a common root, and others might come to mind: *gene*, *genetics*, *generate*, *generation*, and *progeny*. All of these have the common idea of “producing” or “passing along” regarding animal, including human, reproduction. They all derive from an ancient Indo-European root; other related words include *genus*, *kind*, *kin* (the hard “g” of the original root shifting to “k” in Germanic languages), *indigenous*, and even distant words such as *generous*, which originally meant “of noble birth.”

Genesis is fundamentally a book of generations, in both senses of the word, whether we consider the Hebrew word *toledot* or the English translation, “generation.” Genesis records the succession of human descendants, and it also records that which is produced, or generated. Genesis 1:1 states what God generated, heaven and earth. The first use of the term *toledot*, in 2:4, recounts the generations of heaven and earth. In 5:1 the generations of Adam appear, and several more genealogies follow.

Most readers would say that Genesis consists primarily of historical narrative punctuated by genealogies to identify the lineages of the main characters. Narrative sections cover selected episodes in the lives of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his family, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and his wives and children. That’s it; a few thousand years and only a handful of people get any ink. What they do get is hardly comprehensive, only sample biographical episodes, not

always flattering, of the development of their lives, faith, and relationship with God.

Genealogical listings appear to serve as linking elements that situate the main characters in time and family relationship. Without the genealogical listings, we would not know, for instance, what (historically) became of the descendants of Noah, or that Joseph had a lineage from Abraham through Jacob. One scholar opined this concerning the Bible's use of genealogies:

Nothing reveals the difference of the biblical conception of literature from later Western ones more strikingly than the biblical use of genealogies as an intrinsic element of literary structure. As J.P. Fokkelman (1987) has noted, the genealogical lists or "begats" (*toledot*) in Genesis are carefully placed compositional units that mark off one large narrative segment from another.¹

While noting the importance of genealogical sections, the commentator he quotes considers them "compositional units" that separate the large narrative sections. The historical narrative sections in this model would comprise the main part of the text, while the genealogies serve an important, but secondary function.

Inverting the Perspective

I propose an alternative viewpoint that flip-flops the subject and background. I see Genesis not so much as an historical book punctuated with or linked by genealogical records, but as a genealogical record annotated with historical accounts. Specifically, Genesis is the continuous genealogical pedigree of the nation of Israel, with historical annotations of important events and persons.

By verse count, Genesis is, of course, largely history and secondarily genealogy; only one-eighth of the text is strictly genealogical. However, that figure underestimates the importance of the genealogical material. Counting all the history that has at its core family matters such as births and inheritance, over one-third of Genesis is occupied by either genealogy or historical material bearing directly upon family issues such as births and inheritance. In the broadest view, almost all of Genesis concerns family issues of one form or another. From the sparse interactions

1 Robert Alter, *Genesis: Translation and Commentary* (New York: Norton, 1996), p. 22.

of Abel and Cain, through the lengthy narratives of Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph, Genesis is, on the whole, a family affair. Very little is history *per se* or national-level accounts. The creation account of chapters 1 to 3, the Flood, Babel, and Abraham's rescue of Lot are the only significant narrative sections that don't qualify strictly as genealogy or family affairs. It is not at all a stretch to consider Genesis as a heavily annotated genealogy, like an academic work that has lengthy and numerous footnotes that occupy the bulk of the text for pages on end.

Another metaphor might help here. Think of the genealogical records of Genesis as the spine upon which the remainder of the story hangs. Like a human torso, the spine occupies only a small part of the total mass, but upon it hangs all else. Thus, we can also consider the genealogical records of Genesis as spine, upon which hang all the various patriarchal and historical narratives.

In other words, the genealogies are the essence of Genesis. They trace the lineage of Israel back to its origin and identify Israel's God as the Creator of the universe. The narrative sections are annotations. They expand on the core text with content that ultimately becomes the basis for the New Testament Gospel: the promises to the patriarchs, and personal accounts that point the way to justification by faith.

The *Raison d'Etre* of Genesis

The Hebrew Scriptures ("Old Testament" to Christians) document God's relationship to the nation of Israel, starting with the book of Exodus when God brings them out of Egypt. But where did this nation come from? Answering this question constitutes a main purpose and meaning of Genesis—to explain how Israel attained national status, and how it arose inside another nation.

A primary role of Genesis in the scriptural canon is to document the continuous historical development from creation up to the formation of the nation of Israel. Inasmuch as the nation itself draws its name from a specific individual (Jacob/Israel) whose progeny constituted the original nation, the genealogical perspective arises as a main perspective, taking us pointedly from the creation in chapter 1 to Israel in Egypt at the end of Genesis, in chapter 50. It records the flow of history through the *toledot* formula ("these are the generations of") and other family records.

It contains historical digressions, such as the lives of the patriarchs, to emphasize which people had a particularly important role in the flow of history from creation to Israel.

Genesis provides family history that will eventually develop into a national history. We have continuous generations from Adam and Eve through fetal national Israel in the womb of Egypt. Genesis emphasizes genealogy, and genealogy properly belongs in the realm of family history, not national history—yet Israel is God’s family, God’s firstborn (Exod 4:22) and Israel is the name of both the patriarch and the nation. We must therefore read the national history of Israel as a continuation of the genealogical account.

Tribal God, or Creator of the Universe?

Imagine what we would have if the Bible *lacked* Genesis, and instead started with Exodus. This is not at all a silly speculation. The Bible could well have started with Exodus, especially insofar as the Jewish faith would reckon the matter.

If the Hebrew Scriptures started with Exodus, we would still have the entire national history and heritage of the Jewish nation, including: the account of the Passover and departure from Egyptian servitude, the Ten Commandments and the Law, Israel’s dwelling in their land, occupying Jerusalem, building a Temple, and all the subsequent history. Very little Jewish law or national history would be lost. Even the covenant of circumcision, though initiated in Genesis (Gen 17:9-14), is also stated in the Law (Lev 12:3) and in Acts 15:1 some early believers cited Mosaic authority for circumcision. The patriarchal stories would be wanting, but they don’t figure to any great extent in Judaism, because they predate the main Jewish points of identification: the law of Moses, the nation, and the land. (The Temple has not been available as a point of national identification for about 1940 years.) This would be a grand history, but without Genesis it’s just a tribal account of another people of the Ancient Near East.

Here’s where Genesis comes to the rescue, for without Genesis *yhwk*² becomes just another tribal god, the god of the Hebrews, as Pharaoh

2 Hebrew has no capital letterforms, so whenever I transliterate a Hebrew word, even one that would be capitalized in English, I use lower case only. This avoids awkward constructions like *YHWH elohim*.

vainly tried to minimize him: “Who is *yhwh*, that I should heed his voice and let Israel go? I do not know *yhwh*, and moreover I will not let Israel go” (Exod 5:2). Pharaoh is saying that he hasn’t heard of this particular deity. Without Genesis, establishing *yhwh* as the one true God becomes problematic. However, we do have Genesis as the first book of Scripture, not Exodus. Besides the genealogical continuity from Adam to Israel, it also directly connects the God who brings about Israel’s deliverance with the God who created the universe. The God of Genesis 1:1 is the God whom Pharaoh impudently dismissed, to his own destruction.

Without Genesis *yhwh* cannot be established as any more than another tribal god with no history antecedent to the nation that worships him. With Genesis, the God of Israel is the Creator of the Universe. The nation of Israel brings to fruition the command to “be fruitful and multiply.” Much later in history Paul proclaims a New Israel, a Spiritual Israel, whose pedigree is also of Adam and Abraham, but after the lineage of faith, “a new creation” (Gal 6:15-16). All this flows from Genesis 1:1.

I’m not saying that without Genesis *yhwh* wouldn’t exist or that Israel would have had a tribal god, but as far as the *text* goes, this would be the state of affairs. On a purely literary level, Genesis connects Exodus back to the Creator of the universe. From an historical standpoint, it establishes the reality of the Creator’s involvement with humanity from the very beginning.

Listing of the *toledot* Entries: Those Who Have Generations

The genealogies of Genesis appear in two different formats: those introduced by the phrase “these are generations (*toledot*)” and those that lack this formula. The second category has three entries, consisting of a person’s name followed by his offspring. We will focus on the former. If genealogies are the spine of Genesis, then each *toledot* entry is a vertebra. They total 11, ten of which comprise human generations, plus the generations of heaven and earth in 2:4:

- 2:4 the generations of heaven and earth
- 5:1 the book of the generations of Adam
- 6:9 the generations of Noah
- 10:1 the generations of the sons of Noah
- 11:10 the generations of Shem

- 11:27 the generations of Terah
- 25:12 the generations of Ishmael
- 25:19 the generations of Isaac
- 36:1 the generations of Esau
- 36:9 the generations of Esau
- 37:2 the generations of Jacob

The KJV consistently renders the Hebrew word *toledot* as “generations” while the NIV uses “account.” These two choices reflect the two basic areas of meaning of the Hebrew word. The RSV translators, on the other hand, yielded to the inherent flexibility of the word, going with “generations” for the first four, then switching to “descendants” for the next six. Finally, in Genesis 37:2, where no list of descendants follows, but instead the narrative centers on Joseph and his brothers, we read, “this is the history of the family of Jacob.” These genealogical markers neatly set off the biographical entries.

A Colophon?

During the British administration in Iraq after World War I, P.J. Wiseman, a British military official and amateur archaeologist, studied ancient tablets from that area and developed a thesis from these tablets about the usage of *toledot* in Genesis.³ He argued that the formula “these are the generations” was used as a colophon, or sign-off, by the writer, as it appears at the end of many cuneiform tablets. Briefly summarizing Wiseman’s main points:

1. Ancient writings probably were first recorded in cuneiform on clay tablets.
2. The writer of the tablet added his name to the bottom of the tablets. The sign-off included words to the effect of “this [that is, what is written above on the tablet] is the account of . . .”
3. The person’s name would indicate the author of the above material and the owner of the tablet.⁴

3 P.J. Wiseman, *New Discoveries in Babylonia About Genesis*, 7th ed. (London: Marshall, Morgan, & Scott, Ltd., 1958). Wiseman’s son, Donald, a professor of Assyriology, updated this book and reprinted it in 1985 under the title *Ancient Records and the Structure of Genesis* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1985).

4 Two examples of this can be seen in James B. Pritchard, ed. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press,

4. The material on the tablet often contained family histories.
5. The word *toledot*, typically translated “generations,” indicates family history.
6. Every instance where the phrase “these are the generations” occurs in Genesis refers to material immediately preceding, not the genealogy following.
7. The author of the preceding section would be the person named in the phrase “these are the generations of.”
8. In all cases, the author would have had direct or immediate access to the historical period covered in the preceding sections.
9. The amount of detailed and personal information in the early chapters of Genesis necessitates that these accounts were originally recorded in their immediate historical times.
10. Moses compiled Genesis from clay tablets of the patriarchs, and the formula “these are the generations of” represents places where he finished one historical section and moved on to the next, in each instance citing the source of his information.
11. The conclusion for us, then, is to read, “these are the generations of” not as introducing the following genealogy, but signing off on the preceding family history.

In short, Wiseman proposed that the phrase “these are the generations of” belongs to the preceding section of Scripture, not the following, and that the person named would have been the original author of that section. However, the colophon may not always be a true colophon; a critic of Wiseman’s theory points out that the colophon may also appear at the head of the tablet, not just the end.⁵

The real issue for us, in any event, is how the phrase is used in Genesis. We have no direct evidence of how Moses (or even if Moses)

1969) pp. 340-341. One of them reads, “[colophon:] Tablet belonging to Anubelshunu, son of Nidintuanu (Written by) his own hand.” The tablet’s text contained Akkadian rituals concerning setting up gods and idols.

5 Duane Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Fearn, Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2000), p. 90. “These tablets often began or ended with catch-lines as titles or colophons.” Garrett argues that the *toledot* entries mark the beginning of each new genealogical section. He believes the narrative sections between the genealogies came from other sources, because they vary greatly in length and usually could not be accommodated on one tablet.

compiled Genesis.⁶ It contains much history and doubtless used many source documents. It should not surprise us that the compilation retained internal textual evidence of its assembly.

Despite Wiseman's archaeological support, all occurrences of the phrase "these are the generations" can be understood as referring to what follows, if we take *toledot* more in the sense of "that which is generated from, the begetting." For example, (à la Wiseman) we could take Genesis 5:1, "This is the book of the generations of Adam" to mean "The preceding is the history written by Adam," and refer it to the first four chapters of Genesis, all of which would be familiar firsthand to Adam during his lifetime. Conversely, we could take the same phrase to refer to the begettings or that which came forth from Adam, and thereby establish 5:1 as the heading to the genealogy that immediately follows. The same applies to each of the remaining entries listed above. In every instance equal, if not better, sense is obtained by reading the *toledot* entry as an introduction, not a conclusion.

Outside of Genesis, Ruth 4:18 is an instance where the phrase must refer to the genealogy that follows rather than the preceding history in the Book of Ruth. Clearly, the Book of Ruth could not have been an historical account written by Phares, the great-great-great-great-great grandfather of Boaz, the lead male role in the book. Other non-Genesis instances of the phrase where it is clearly used as a lead-in include Numbers 3:1 and 1 Chronicles 1:29.⁷

If Moses, or some other compiler, used the *toledot* formula in the same way as the ancient secular sources, we should always look at it as a completion to the previous narrative. Yet the *toledot* in Ruth, many centuries after Genesis, is obviously not a completion but rather an introduction to subsequent family history.

Apparently "these are the generations" can conclude one account and at the same time introduce the next account. This double usage makes it a useful literary tool to give structure to a long text. The *toledot* passages in Genesis join various accounts by both referring to the preceding

⁶ The New Testament has many references to what Moses wrote or said, but none of these are from Genesis; they are all from Exodus through Deuteronomy.

⁷ See Derek Kidner's commentary (pp. 22-24) in *Genesis in the Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* series for an expanded case on this view. The editor of the Tyndale series is Wiseman's son, Donald. According to Henri Blocher (op. cit., p. 30) most evangelical opinion sides with the idea that the phrase is a heading.

history (possibly or probably written by the named individual) and also recording the writer's own descendants in the list that follows (obviously not recorded by the person at the head of the list, but by the compiler).

Summary

Genesis is genealogy with a capital "G," reaching all the way back to the inception of the universe to identify the God of the fetal nation of Israel in the womb of Egypt as the God of creation. Without Genesis, the Hebrew Scriptures would lack any background for its centerpiece nation, Israel. The narrative sections of the Creation, Flood, patriarchs' lives, the promises, and other historical accounts are annotations providing important information along the genealogical flow.

STUDY 3

The Prologue Word by Word

This study considers words and language use in general, and introduces the Hebrew text of the Bible's first sentence.

THE GENESIS TEXT is immediate; it is directly in front of you, on your lap or desk, or perhaps on a computer screen or a hand-held device, a here-and-now experience each time you read it. The physical reality of the events that the text describes, however, is distant in time and place. We were not at the creation nor were we in Eden; we simply cannot know what actually happened then and there. Even assuming that our Bibles provide an accurate representation in English of the original Hebrew writings, they still consist of *words*, as we understand them in our own language and culture. Thus, it's a good idea to remind ourselves about the nature of words and language.

Language and Reality

Never confuse any set of words, which are always abstractions, with the objects and concepts they represent. Scrupulously examine the text to recreate the actuality to your best approximation, but never mistake the map for the territory—especially when there are many maps of the same territory. English has no advantage over any other of the thousands of current or extinct languages. To a native speaker, each language represents the same truth.

Below is Genesis 1:1 in six languages, all closely enough related to English so that an English speaker with no knowledge of any of them can still recognize some connections:

English: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Italian: *Nel principio Iddio creò il cielo e la terra.*

German: *Im Anfang, schuf Gott den Himmel und die Erde.*

French: *Au commencement Dieu créa les cieux et la terre.*

Latin: *In principio creavit Deus caelum et terram.*

Greek (transliterated): *En archē epoiēsē ho Theos ton ouranon kai tēn gēn.*

The languages shown above are too closely related to English to help English speaking readers fully appreciate the notion of representational language; all have some familiar roots and cognates. The point is that the very nature of language is representational and arbitrary. Any set of words will do, and to show this, here are examples from languages that have no relation to English:

Hungarian: *Kezdetben teremté Isten az eget és a földet.*

Polish: *Na początku Bóg stworzył niebo i ziemię.*

Russian: *В начале сотворил Бог небо и землю.*

Maori: *He mea hanga na te atua i te timatanga te rangi me te whenua.*

You will recognize no form of any English word, but you might see in the first two a common syntax with English, and guess which word means “God.” Most of us can’t even read the Russian example, written in Cyrillic letterforms. If I had included Japanese or Sanskrit examples, English speakers would be at a loss to know if those lines meant *anything*. Yet, each is equally meaningful to a speaker of the language.

Words, grammar, syntax, and orthography are arbitrary conventions that allow us to exchange ideas. Any set of sounds and symbols will do the job. Russian and Polish are closely related languages, but they look different because Russian represents its sounds with Cyrillic characters while Polish uses Roman characters. The letterforms, an arbitrary set of symbols, disguise the close relation of the languages. Any sound or any written representation of that sound can carry the same force and meaning that English speakers understand in the sentence, “In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.”

No language is reality; at best words can only approximate and represent the real world. Not even the original Hebrew is the reality. The

Hebrew text of early Genesis is a marvel of structure and meaning, but it's just the map. The territory is what actually happened, the physical outworking of God's creative activity and subsequent events. Although we weren't there at the creation, we can learn what we need to know about the territory from the map. If we accept the Bible as the inspired word of God, then we also accept the implication that the map is sufficient for our faith. Faith, however, is not a relationship to the printed text, but to the God of whom the text speaks, and his son, the Lord Jesus. We read about a transcendent creator God, but our faith is in God, not in the written text. The text is the means to the end, not the end in itself. We believe the map, but we believe *in* the mapmaker.

Behind the word is a reality, behind the reality a purpose, and behind the purpose the God who ordained it. The "word of God" is not primarily the printed page, for if the text is only a text—that is, a narrative that represents no real events, but just a teaching story—then its meaning is vastly deflated. If God as proclaimed in Genesis does not exist, or did not perform those acts of creation ascribed to him, then we have a misplaced trust and a vacuous basis for faith. I accept that the text represents a true, historical reality, even if defining or understanding that reality is beyond my capabilities.

Language and linguistic issues constitute a significant portion of any Bible study. To keep perspective, remember that the text is just the map, but it's an extraordinary map, deserving of the utmost respect and careful investigation.

Genesis 1:1 in Hebrew

The Bible's first sentence in Hebrew has no fat; it is a precise, measured, profound, and comprehensive expression. The text does not start with any introductory phrase such as "This is the account of the beginning of the world," or "Once upon a time, long, long ago." The first sentence, though a mere ten words in English and seven in Hebrew, dominates the page with intensity and focus of meaning. It is a thundering opening chord to the symphony of Scripture.

For readers not familiar with Hebrew, I will explain how the first sentence of the Bible works in Hebrew. For a non-Hebrew reader, the line of text below will reinforce the lesson about the representational

nature of language. It probably looks like a line of cryptic scratches, yet it contains the greatest thought ever expressed.

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

In English transliteration: *b'reshit bara elohim et hashamayim v'et ha'aretz.*

Hebrew, which reads right-to-left, is a language of great economy in syntax, vocabulary, and orthography. Hebrew has 22 letters; these are generally thought of as consonants, with the little dots and dashes (points) in and around the letters to indicate the vowels. That's an oversimplification, but good enough for our purposes. Ancient Hebrew texts have consonants only, like the sentence above. Pointing didn't come about until the tenth century when scholars known as the Masoretes added vowel markings in an attempt to recover the original vowel sounds and to standardize the text, hence the term Masoretic Text for the Hebrew Bible.

Below is the same verse, with the vowel points:

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

Using affixes to indicate prepositions, conjunctions, verb cases, gender, and other grammatical and semantic inflections, Hebrew requires fewer words than English for a given expression. For instance, “In the beginning” is one word in Hebrew, *b'reshit*. The *b'* indicates “in” and the definite article is understood, as only one prefix is permitted here. The next word, *bara*, is the verb, followed by the subject, as is the usual pattern in narrative contexts. Hebrew indicates the definite article “the” with the prefix *ha*, which you see attached to the root words for heaven and earth.

A two-letter word occurs immediately before the direct object nouns, *shamayim* (heavens) and *eretz* (earth). This small word, *et*, sometimes called by grammarians a “particle,” has no lexical meaning and will not appear in any concordance; it indicates that the following word is the direct object. The same word has other uses also, but here it is a direct object marker. You will note that the second *et* is actually *v'et*. The *v* prefix is the conjunction “and,” which gets affixed to the particle, not the noun itself.

Setting aside the two *ets*, the sentence has five vocabulary words:

<i>b'reshit</i>	In the beginning
<i>bara</i>	created
<i>elohim</i>	God
<i>hashamayim</i>	the heaven
<i>haaretz</i>	the earth

The only difference between Hebrew and English is the subject-verb order.

The Force of the First Word

What else *could* come first than a statement of complete panoramic sweep declaring God's creative power? "In the beginning" means more than the beginning of the Bible. This word does not correspond to "once upon a time." It envelops much more than a beginning of a saga or a history. This is *the* beginning, the beginning of the universe.

An uncreated eternal God—for that is the only God that can indeed be God—is ready to create. The existence of God comes with no explanation or account of origin. No other explanation or justification need be or can be given. Genesis 1:1, a simple sentence of five vocabulary words, gives us the most expansive view of monotheism that language could possibly express. Using a simple tool of syntax and the inherent economy of Hebrew, the Bible can express amazingly profound thoughts very simply.

The root of the word "beginning" (*rosh*) means "head," "chief," or "first." It is familiar to us as the *rosh* in Rosh Hashanah, or "Head of the Year." The word for "beginning" occurs about 50 times in Scripture, usually translated "beginning," "first," or "firstfruit." The exact word occurs in Jeremiah 26:1 and 27:1, "in the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim." In both of these cases *bereshit* is followed by a noun, not a verb, as it is in Genesis, thus making these construct states, functionally equivalent to a possessive in English, hence the translation "the beginning *of* the reign."

"When God Began" . . . Really?

The generally accepted English version captures the necessary direct force of the first words. However, another viewpoint exists that removes verse 1 far from this profundity. Various scholars and translators (some going back many centuries) have proposed an alternate grammar for

verse 1, a translation in which the opening declaration, usually understood as an independent or absolute statement of creation, becomes a dependent or subordinate clause to the next verse. In English, this comes out as something like “When God began to create the earth, the earth being without form and void” or “At the beginning of God’s creating, when the earth was without form and void.”

I do not think any of these alternates have validity. Neither did Julius Wellhausen, the nineteenth century German scholar and major proponent of the Documentary Hypothesis, hardly a friend to conservative biblical scholarship. He’s quoted in a more recent book:

“Wellhausen’s dictum in regard to this modern translation [When God . . .] is worthy of being preserved; he called it a ‘desperately insipid construction’ (*verzweifelt geschmacklose Construction*).”¹

This verse has produced much heat. Generally, conservative, evangelical exegetes favor the traditional reading, and on the other side are those who do not hold inspiration. Scholars have made a great brouhaha over it, and William Brown picks up on the significance of the matter when he states that “the vigor with which both ancient and modern commentators² have argued opposing positions betrays the fact that more than simply syntactical precision is at stake; there are also deep-seated theological conflicts over the way in which God is to be viewed in relation to the cosmos.”³

What he’s getting at is the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo*, for if the alternate view is accepted, then the universe already existed when God began the work of creation. How the matter got there in the first place could have still have been an act of God, but the Genesis account would lack the clear statement of a transcendent God.

The alternative rendering, as promulgated, for example, by Robert Alter and the Jewish Publication Society (JPS) translations, seems to rely mostly on the desire to remove the idea of creation *ex nihilo* from Scripture and reduce Genesis to a mythological status or a product of

1 H.C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis* (Columbus, Ohio: The Wartburg Press, 1942), p. 45.

2 Although “When God began” is favored by some modern scholars, it is not a modern translation; it dates at least from the rabbinical scholar Rashi in the eleventh century.

3 William P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1-2:3* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), p. 62.

the culture as opposed to divine revelation. A comparison is made to the Mesopotamian creation epic, *Enuma elish* which begins, “When on high the heaven had not been named.”⁴ While there are a few basic elements in common, *Enuma elish* is polytheistic mythology replete with warring gods in the first few lines. The heavens come from the body of a slain god, and humanity from the blood of another. It has no comparison at all to the Bible’s concise elegance, and there’s little reason to let it influence the opening verse of Genesis. Moreover, the Hebrew grammatical arguments that support this reading at best allow for the possibility of the “When God” reading, but in no way prove it.

More convincing lines of argument support the traditional interpretation. First, and conclusive in its own right, is the quotation of Genesis 1:1 in John 1:1: “In the beginning was the word.” Even aside from the issue of inspiration, John shows us how to understand this verse, quoting directly from the Septuagint. The quotation could not exist without the source, and the source is the traditional reading of Genesis 1:1. Edward Young further adds that without exception all of the ancient versions understood the first verse as an absolute, not a construct modifying the next phrase.⁵ If it were the intention to express this as a subordinate clause, then the second clause should have a different verb-subject structure.⁶ Another line of evidence is the structure of Hebrew narratives. The first statement of a narrative section is routinely stated in the absolute sense, and not as a relative clause. Collins presents and develops this argument at some length;⁷ combined with the other grammatical evidence it adds up to a convincing case.

Lastly is the fact that if the writer had wanted to indicate “When God began,” Hebrew is capable of that expression. It occurs just a few chapters later, in Genesis 6:1, “when men began to multiply.” The two sentences have not exactly parallel construction, but the point is still valid. If the text had meant to indicate that the parameters of the universe already existed when God began his creative work, it could have said that. There are at least two Hebrew constructions to express that idea, but here we have a straightforward sentence about creation *ex nihilo*.

4 E. A. Speiser (translator) in Pritchard, op. cit., pp. 60-72.

5 Edward J. Young, *Studies in Genesis One* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), pp. 1-7.

6 Cassuto, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

7 C. John Collins, *Genesis 1-4* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P&R Publishing, 2006), pp. 50-55.

The grammar favors the traditional reading. The citation of John 1:1 is conclusive. The majesty of the Bible's first verse is aptly captured in all widely used English versions.

Created

The Bible's second word, *bara* (created), alliterates with the first; the first three letters are the same in each word. Grammatically, *bara* is in the third person masculine singular completed action.⁸ Wherever this verb occurs in Scripture, the subject is always God. Only God creates; never is this verb used to denote a person's work of art or artifice. Sometimes "God" or sometimes the name of God is the subject, but never any human.⁹ Another important point about the verb *bara* reinforces the theme of reserving true creative power for Deity: no passage reads, "God created this *out of that*,"¹⁰ or anything similar. Thus, *bara* is a word that clearly connotes creation *ex nihilo* (out of nothing), an attribute reserved solely for the eternal Creator.

The word occurs in Scripture about 45 times, with almost half of these occurrences in Isaiah chapters 40 to 65, repeatedly emphasizing God's supremacy by virtue of his status as Creator. For example, Isaiah 42:5a (RSV) rings clear:

Thus says God, the LORD
Who created the heavens and stretched them out,
Who spread forth the earth and what comes from it.

Elohim

The text uses the word *elohim* to denote the singular omnipresent, omnipotent, eternal being who transcends our physical, temporal, sensible universe. *Elohim* is the Old Testament's most common designation of Deity, with over 2,000 occurrences. Its use as the subject of the Bible's first sentence goes a long way to helping us understand its connotation. However, while most uses of *elohim* refer to God in his capacity

8 Hebrew does not have past and present, as we understand verb tenses, but indicates completed or uncompleted action. These generally correspond with past and present but technically should not be labeled as such.

9 There are a few times *bara* is not translated "create"; in those cases it does not have God as the subject. These instances represent grammatically different forms of the root that place them in another semantic slot.

10 For the creation of Adam "dust from the ground," see note on Gen 2:7 in Study 23.

as the omnipotent Creator and ruler of the universe, the word itself is not necessarily synonymous with “capital ‘G’ God.” It sometimes references other gods (e.g., Deut 13:2, “let us go after other gods”), and occasionally has other meanings.

What is *elohim*? What does it mean? Is it a name? It’s a plural form that comes from a root that signifies strength or might. The singular form of *elohim*, *eloah*, occurs mainly in Job. This root, *el*, is used as a name for some Canaanite gods and in Hebrew in combining forms. In the Bible, *elohim* is not a name, nor is it a personal designation for the one true God. Think of *elohim* as a position or office, like “president.” While almost all the time *elohim* refers to the one true God, that is not inherent in the word itself. Like our English word “president” it emphasizes the power and position of the office. In the first mention, Scripture refers to Deity not by personal name, but by the position or office of God. In Genesis 2:4 comes the first mention of the divine personal name *yhwh* in the combined form *yhwh elohim*.

Although *elohim* has the masculine plural ending, every verb associated with *elohim* (except “let us make” in Gen 1:26) in Genesis is singular. Most likely, the plural form connotes the attribute of infiniteness and expansiveness. The words for “water” and “heaven” that occur frequently in the creation account also have the same plural ending, apparently to indicate the inherent vastness and fluid continuity of the domains of the ocean and sky. Using a plural form as the primary designation of Deity reflects an omnipresence and infinite nature. In the context of the creation of the universe and throughout every activity of Genesis 1, Scripture uses only *elohim* as the designation of Deity.

Heaven and Earth

Owing to their importance and density of meaning, I have accorded this pair a separate study (Study 16, “Heaven and Earth”). For now, consider the phrase “heaven and earth” to represent an all-inclusive designation of every aspect of existence. These words describe the constituent components of all God brought into existence. Each of them will take on another meaning in the creation account. In verse 1, heaven denotes all that pertains to the spiritual realm and earth denotes the material sphere, in both the literal and figurative connotations of “sphere.” That is, earth

denotes both our planet and also all matters and issues related to the physical universe.

The Hebrew words used here are common and multifarious in meaning. Heaven, *shamayim*, can denote the atmosphere, the skies, the abode of God, or it can stand for God. Like the English word earth, *eretz* can denote either the soil or the entire planet. Most famously it will come to stand for the land of Israel (*eretz yisrael*).

That these two words should occur in the first verse and figure so prominently throughout Scripture, representing inscrutable theological ideas in such simple language, testifies to a form of thought and writing vastly superior to the mythologies of the Ancient Near East.

STUDY 4

The Prologue Word by Word, continued

This study continues the previous one, with a detailed study of the key words of the second sentence of the Prologue, “and the earth was without form, and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters.”

THE SECOND VERSE, given above in the RSV, has fourteen words in Hebrew, divided into two clauses. The first clause describes the state of the earth at its creation and the second clause records God’s presence upon the earth. The conjunction that connects verses 1 and 2 carries more force than a simple “and.” The one-letter prefix conjunction here has the force of “and as for the earth.” The narrative listed “heaven and earth” in verse 1, and now goes on to describe the earth in detail. A full paraphrase might extend to “and as for the aforementioned earth.”¹

The Original State of the Earth

Three words describe the original state of the earth: *tohu* and *bohu* (rendered “without form and void”), and *chosbech* (“darkness”). This third word is straightforward; it means that light has yet to come into the picture. As a concept and as a translation, conveying the meaning of *chosbech* is a simple black and white matter. However, the phrase *tohu v’bohu*, though familiar, defies both ease of understanding and rendition in English.

The classic KJV “without form and void” has become almost proverbial, but other versions and translations² attempt to set the mood

1 Compare Cassuto’s rendering of verse two, which runs along the same line of thought: “As for the earth, it was without form or life”, Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

2 In modern usage, the difference between a version and a translation is that a version is done by a committee, sponsored and supported by an organization, whereas a translation is an individual effort.

by using terms such as: “formless and empty” (NIV), “void and vacant” (Moffat), and “welter and waste” (Alter), to give a few examples. The Septuagint (Bagster edition) has “unsightly and unfurnished.” The variety of renderings testifies to the uncertainty surrounding these words.

It’s hard to know if *tohu v’bohu* is an idiomatic phrase with a single meaning, or if it should be understood as designating two separate conditions. Moreover, if *tohu* and *bohu* describe separate conditions, “without form” and “void,” might not represent the most likely meanings.

The second word of the phrase, *bohu*, has no independent occurrences. It appears in only two other places in Scripture, both times in the same phrase, *tohu v’bohu* (Jer 4:23 and Isa 34:11). Jeremiah and Isaiah use it to allude to God’s judgment of his people and the nations as a complete undoing, returning them to primal emptiness. Inasmuch as *bohu* only occurs these three times and always coupled with *tohu*, its meaning is subsumed into a phrase, as in the English phrases “rough and tumble” or “vim and vigor.” In these constructions the exact meaning of the component words takes a secondary role to the meaning of the phrase as a whole. Thus, “without form and void” might not represent two distinct conditions. Rather, it may be a phrase indicating that the earth was a completely desolate waste.

On the other hand, *tohu* does have a life of its own; it appears over twenty times and accrues a variety of English words to describe its bleakness. The KJV translates it as thing *of naught*, *nothing*, *waste*, *vanity*, *confusion*, and *void place*. Looking at the passages where the word occurs (mostly in the latter chapters of Isaiah), “nothingness” or “waste” would likely suffice in most of them, but “formless,” its best-known translation, would be awkward or meaningless. Even though “without form” or “formless” seems a standard rendition of *tohu* in Genesis 1:2, it’s hard to come up with an independent meaning of “formless,” either from cognate languages, its use in Scripture, or the Hebrew root.³ Save for its usage in the phrase “without form and void,” there is little evidence that *tohu* denotes or connotes “formlessness.” The lack of evidence for *bohu* specifically meaning “void” and *tohu* specifically meaning “without

3 R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr, and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980), pp. 964-5. Gesenius’ *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon* and Thayer’s *Hebrew Lexicon* also concur. David Tsumura, *The Earth and Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament, Supplemental Series, 83, 1989), pp. 30-41 further supports this view.

form” further argues against understanding “without form and void” as two separate conditions. A general idea like “completely a waste” or “uninhabitable and uninhabited” might be closer. The rhyming of the two words (in Hebrew) also supports the idea that the two together form an single expression.

If *tohu v'bohu* is meant to be understood as a phrase, it means something on the order of “a void wasteland.” Void still means devoid of life or inhabitants, and a wasteland would well describe the globe. It was unfit for inhabitation, having neither continental landforms nor atmosphere. The fact that the formless water covered the earth would be somewhat of a secondary issue.

Nonetheless, “without form and void” could be intended to denote two separate conditions, with just those meanings. Groupings of three occur frequently throughout the creation account; we will encounter many of them in the next several studies. It would make sense in that light to have another one here, establishing three specific descriptors for the original condition of the earth: formless, void, and dark. The earth had no light; and it was empty, that is, devoid of life. It was just a sphere of water, and the formless nature of water would fit nicely as the third “deficit” that God would address during creation week. The days of creation address each of these issues consecutively.

The Septuagint favors three distinct words. The first of the three, *aboratos*, means “not seeable,” “invisible.” As a water-encased sphere, the dry land part of the earth would be “not visible” due to its submerged status. This word would then fit ideally with the notion of “without form” as meaning “formless by virtue of being covered in water.” Water, of course has no form; in contrast to the formlessness of water we have the terms “landforms” and “terra *firma*.”

Given the highly structured nature of Genesis 1, I favor reading the three words of Genesis 1:2 as indicating, respectively and specifically, formlessness (covered with water), void (no life or inhabitants), and dark (no light). These three conditions are critical to the flow of the creation week. However, whether we see a general wasteland, or the three words in one-to-one correspondence with those three conditions, either would describe the situation on Earth. Perhaps this ambiguity yielding two perspectives is intentional.

In any case, the link between the description of an utterly destitute earth and the sequence of activities that will lead seven days hence to the proclamation of “very good” comes in the last phrase of verse 2: “and the Spirit of God hovered over the waters.”

And

Yes, you read the heading correctly. This section is about the little word “and” in the phrase “and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the water.” Hebrew has only one standard conjunction, a very common one-letter prefix usually translated “and.” It serves both as a conjunction as we know it in English, and also as connector of narrative thoughts, occurring thousands of times in the Hebrew Scriptures. As a conjunction it suffices for both “and” and “but” (and occasionally other nuances: since, then, now, and a few others).

In English, we use “and” to link propositions of similar or complementary content, and “but” to separate dissimilar, contradictory, or contrasting content:

Theresa wanted to go to the Indian restaurant, *but* Moshe preferred Thai cuisine.

The mountain lake was frigid, *and* all the triathletes wore wetsuits.

Changing “and” to “but” or vice-versa in the above examples would give them either a different sense or no sense at all. Hebrew, with its sole conjunction, gives us some room to think. In the first clause of verse 2 it has the meaning of “and as for this earth.”

The second part of verse 2 starts with “And the Spirit.” However, I prefer “but” here because this sentence stands not as complementary (that is, repeating the same condition as the previous sentence), but contrasting. The first sentence of verse 2 describes the original condition of the newly created earth: formless, void, and dark. Despite the bleakness, a ray of hope prevailed upon the scene, God’s presence. Earth was bleak, *but* God was there. A paraphrase would read, “This earth was an utter waste, completely void, and dark, but God’s spirit was present, moving over the waters.”

Spirit

What is this manifestation of God, labeled “spirit?” Throughout the Bible, in both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, this word and its Greek equivalent maintain a chameleon-like character, with numerous shades of meaning depending on the context.⁴ They both carry the double primary meanings of “wind or air movement,” and “spirit.” It is the latter meaning that can yield such richness of nuance.

The semantic connection between the tangible “air movement” and the intangible “personal spiritual essence” parallels our English word “inspiration.” Depending on context, “inspiration” can refer to either taking in air or being filled with lofty thoughts, especially from God. Physical breathing makes a ready metaphor for the intangible processes of filling the mind with higher thoughts.

Some exegetes plump for “great wind” instead of “spirit of God” in 1:2. If that were indeed the intention of this verse, Genesis would have been forgotten long before the Christian era. Are we to think that this magnificent book had no further agenda than to tell us that wind blew over the ocean? If “great wind” were the intention, then simple Hebrew has the resources to convey that idea—*ruach g’dolah*, “big wind,” which is used in Jonah 1:4 and Job 1:19.⁵ The Jewish Publication Society (JPS) version has “wind from God,” and Alter opts for “God’s breath,”⁶ which at least connotes a personal presence. Although the root of the word is certainly in the idea of “moving air,” it seems that both meanings stand. God could be manifested as a physical presence, moving over the waters, and, indeed, moving the waters. The verse just as easily invokes the personal presence of God, tending to his creation, as the next word in the sentence informs us. The context implies that God, through his spirit (*ruach*) both physically created and spiritually nourished the earth.

4 The Hebrew word (*ruach*) and its Greek equivalent (*pneuma*) occur just under 400 times each. Vine’s *Expository Dictionary* lists 18 shades of meaning for *pneuma*, and Bullinger’s *Critical Lexicon and Concordance* enters this word under 15 heads.

5 These examples from Young, op.cit., pp. 36-37. He also reminds us that in all cases of *ruach elohim* the phrase refers to the Spirit of God, not a mighty wind (e.g., Gen 41:38, Exod 31:3). However, as noted in my comments, while the phrase *ruach elohim* refers primarily to God’s presence, there is no problem in an accompanying wind in Gen 1:2. The point remains, though, that the wind is secondary.

6 Alter, op. cit., p. 3.

What does the text gain by recording that “the spirit of God” hovered over the waters as opposed to “God hovered over the waters?” I think the latter would suggest a spatial location for an infinite God, an idea to be avoided when considering a potential comparison to the local gods of the Ancient Near East. Also, the phrase “spirit of God” adds the dimension of “spirit” to a being that we could otherwise esteem as entirely separate from humanity. Of the two designations for Deity used in early Genesis, *elohim* represents the magisterial, infinitely powerful Creator. The memorial name, introduced in Genesis 2:4, has a more personal connotation. The phrase “spirit of God” portrays an infinitely powerful God who has a personal presence in creation through his spirit.

Hovering

The KJV reads, “the Spirit of God moved over the face of waters.” “Moved” might be a little weak here. The RSV uses the participle “was moving”; this more accurately reflects the form of the verb, but it’s still too weak. The NIV uses “hovering,” an excellent choice. This word occurs only two other times in Scripture, but it has a story that reinforces the preceding point. The first is Deuteronomy 32:11, where the word is translated “flutter” (RSV):

Like an eagle that stirs up its nest,
that flutters over its young,
spreading out its wings, catching them,
bearing them on its pinions,
The LORD alone did lead him.

This passage describes God’s care of Israel in the Sinai desert after they left Egypt. It likens God to an eagle protecting its young by brooding over them. Gesenius says this word has a connotation of tender love and cherishing. It seems to be a rich word that implies not just God’s presence but his concern and care for his creation.

The other place the word occurs is Jeremiah 23:9 “all my bones *shake*,” which is hardly a comforting context. It describes Jeremiah’s distress at the prospect of the LORD’s judgment on an adulterous land. It might be an ironic way of describing the prophet’s loving care for his people and his inability to stem the tide of their backsliding.

The Deep

This word occurs about three dozen times, twice in the Flood narrative (Gen 7:11 and 8:2), but predominantly in poetic contexts. Twelve are in the Psalms, two more in the Song of Moses (Exod 15:5, 8), and most of the remainder in similar situations in prophetic or poetic sections. This could be one of its rare occurrences in straightforward narrative, but I suspect the appearance of *t'hom* here gives the creation account a touch of poetry, inasmuch as it alliterates with *tohu* of the previous phrase. The Prologue to Genesis is at once narrative, dramatic, poetic, literal, and metaphorical.

The word *t'hom* itself rather straightforwardly means “the deep.” Like the English word “abyss” it has a technical meaning and is also quite at home in poetry. It is more specific than *yam*, the word for seas or oceans. As David Tsumura observes,⁷ *t'hom* never replaces *yam* in the many instances where the three elements of creation—earth, sky, seas—are listed together, such as in Exodus 20:11 or Psalm 96:11.

A final paraphrase

Let's summarize the first three studies with an expanded paraphrase of the Prologue:

In the beginning God, who was already eternally existent, created everything: a spiritual realm (heaven) and a natural realm (earth). Now as for this earth, it was constituted thus when God first made it: formless (that is, completely covered with water) and void of life; it was uninhabited, uninhabitable, and wrapped in darkness. But even though it was in that desolate condition, God was present as his nurturing spirit hovered over the surface of the water.

The Prologue sets the stage for the next event. God is present, the text has attested his power, and we wonder what his spirit, hovering over the blackened face of the deep, will next perform.

⁷ Tsumura, op. cit., p. 58. He also has a lengthy section comparing *t'hom* to cognates in other Semitic languages.

STUDY 5

Structural Relationship of the First Two Verses

The shift in focus to spotlight the earth in verse 2 fits in with the standard Genesis pattern for genealogies and creates a context for the entire creation account and beyond.

THE FIRST VERSE of Genesis says God created the heaven¹ and the earth, a powerful, comprehensive, and sublime opening. What happens in the next verse slips by without overtly announcing its enormous import. Verse 2 switches to a context that encompasses the entire remainder of Scripture, all the way through to the very end of Revelation.

Here's what's happening. First, God creates heaven and earth. The second statement goes on to describe the condition of the earth: "and the earth was without form, void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep."

That seems clear and direct. Is there a hidden message? Yes, there is, and it comes in the shift of focus from the heaven and earth perspective of verse 1 to an earth-only perspective in verse 2. Think of a zoom lens. In the first verse, there's just a speck in the midst of the vast expanse of a void universe. Then you zoom in and take a close look at the one little speck. The earth now dominates and fills the field of vision. The speck becomes a large sphere, although you can't literally see it because it is in total darkness. God has yet to cast light on the work, but if you could see the earth, it would fill your view.

1 The Hebrew word *shamayim* has a plural ending but is often treated as a singular noun. That is why you will sometimes see "heaven" and sometimes "heavens," even in the same translation. For instance, the KJV uses the singular in Genesis 1 but the plural in Genesis 2. Except in quotations that use the plural, I will use the singular form in these studies.

By focusing on the one speck, the Bible leaves the rest of the universe out of the picture. It gives no description of the heaven; all the action now occurs on the earth. The remainder of the creation text is silent about any account or description of the heaven. God created the heaven and the earth, then the text goes into detail about the earth. It never returns to discuss heaven, at least not until Revelation 21. We'll look at that in Study 16, "Heaven and Earth."

The Genesis Genealogies

The shift of perspective between the first two verses is pivotal yet easily missed. To understand its significance, let's look at a pattern used in the other genealogies.

As discussed in Study 2, Genesis is fundamentally a genealogy, starting formally with Adam, the figurative descendant of earth and heaven. Subsequent genealogies list the primary descendants of a given personage or couple. The order in which offspring come in the list provides the key to the pattern. Descendants are not listed in birth order, but rather in order of importance. The descendant most important to the overall purpose of Genesis *always comes last*.

The record of Adam and Eve's offspring is the first instance of this model. It names three children, and two of them, Cain and Seth, have children. Genesis 4:1-2 records the birth of Cain and Abel. Abel dies at the hand of Cain, leaving no descendants. The lineage of Cain comes next, in verses 17 to 24. Then comes the lineage of Seth in verses 25 and 26. The long genealogy of chapter 5, which stretches from Adam to Noah, lists only Seth as a descendant of Adam, because through Seth comes the lineage central to the design and purpose of the Genesis account.

In discussing this pattern, I use the term "continuing line" to refer to the person through whose lineage the main focus of biblical narrative unfolds. In Genesis, this means the line from Adam through Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The term "secondary branches" refers to descendants contemporary with the continuing line whose lineages develop into other groups of varied scriptural significance. For example, Seth is designated as the continuing line, while Cain is the secondary branch, as his offspring have a much less important role than Seth's.

The pattern of the genealogies has three major characteristics:

1. *The account does not treat all offspring equally.*

Abel has no (recorded) children. Cain's account has descendants to the seventh generation. Seth has no (recorded) family tree other than his son Enos, through whom flows the lineage to Noah. As the families develop historically, the Bible records a continuing saga of selection, with one branch carrying forth the overall purpose of developing God's nation, and the other branches filling other roles.

2. *The priority is thematic, not chronological.*

The entire account of Cain's line comes before any mention of Enos's birth. The Bible goes hundreds of years into the future from Cain before it returns back to Cain's time to record his brother Seth's offspring. Chronologically, most events recorded in 4:17-24 occur after 4:25-26. The lines of Cain and Seth grow in parallel chronologically, but the Bible deals with the one first *in toto*, then it moves back to pick up the other. Always be aware of thematic rather than chronological organization.

3. *The continuing line comes last.*

The firstborn does not necessarily come first, although in this instance Cain's line does come before that of last-born Seth. However, the basis for the pattern is the continuing line's position in the narrative. The secondary branches always come first, then the continuing line appears in the narrative and carries forth the action. It's as if to say, "Now that we've dealt with the secondary issue of listing Cain's offspring and lineage, and their history, let's get back to the main story line and pick it up again with Seth and his offspring." The text of chapter 4 goes back to Seth, and moves forward to Noah with just two brief annotations on the lives of Enoch and Lamech.

The Family Trees

Let's look at each instance of this pattern. This may seem like a long excursion, but a key point in verse 2 rests on understanding the big picture of Genesis architecture. Five lists of family records appear in Genesis (these encompass the *toledot* entries listed in Study 2):

1. *Genesis 4:17-26*

See above, Cain comes before Seth.

2. *Genesis 10*

Among the Sons of Noah, the descendants of Japheth come first (vv. 2-5), then Ham (vv. 6-20), and finally comes Shem (vv. 21-31). Shem may have been the firstborn, but his genealogy comes last as it is his line that will carry the main plot line, to Terah and then Abraham.

3. *Genesis 11:10-32*

The genealogy of Shem goes straightforwardly from Shem to Terah, then lists the three sons of Terah: Abraham, Nahor, and Haran. After this, in verse 27, it becomes the genealogy of Terah. Here the distinction is not so clear, as Lot, Haran's son, has a prominent role in the life of Abraham, and Nahor marries his niece Milcah, Lot's sister. The family is a complex unit; later Isaac will marry Rebekah, the granddaughter of Nahor and Milcah. Thus there is no genealogical division of Terah's line.

4. *Genesis 25*

In the list of Abraham's descendants, the sons of his concubine Keturah come first, in verses 1 to 6. Next comes the account of Ishmael's family (vv. 12-18), and lastly Isaac, starting at verse 19. Again, the continuing line comes last, after the secondary branches are discussed and placed aside. Genesis focuses on the descendants of Isaac, so his line gets the priority position, that is, last.

5. *Genesis 36 and 37*

Two chapters list the descendants of Jacob. Chapter 36 gives the entire family of Esau, and then chapter 37 begins: "These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old . . ." Esau's descendants will figure in Bible history, but the line to the nation of Israel is through Jacob. Joseph goes into Egypt, and a few years later his family follows and grows into the nation of Israel. After chapter 36, which goes well beyond the remainder of Genesis in time, the chronology reverts back to Joseph's youth at the beginning of chapter 37.

Each of the above exemplifies the principle "the natural first, then the spiritual" (1 Cor 15:46).

Heaven and Earth

Does this pattern apply to Genesis 1:2? Look at Genesis 2:4, which reads, “These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” This verse introduces the section that records in detail the creation of Adam and Eve. Adam was the first generation of heaven and earth, the progeny of the dust of the ground (*adamah*) and the breath (*neshemah*, not *ruach* here) of God. Of the eleven instances of the phrase “these are the generations,” this passage is the only one that does not refer to human generations. It’s also the first instance of the phrase, so even before we have any literal generations of human parents, Adam is designated as the generation, or that which is generated by, heaven and earth.

With heaven and earth treated in the text as if they were parents, it is not a large stretch to consider them as offspring in their own right. We can read Genesis 1:1 as the first instance of the “generation” model, where the heaven and the earth become, in a figure, the offspring of God.

The Prologue as Genealogy

Applying this pattern brings to light the sublime message of the Prologue when it segues from the first sentence to “and the earth was without form and void.” God had two offspring, heaven and earth. As the secondary branch, earth becomes the next topic of discussion. Heaven never does come back into the picture, at least not in Genesis.² The record continues with the account of earth, but we never get back to the continuing line. Why? The natural creation of the earth, its inhabitants and history, does not represent God’s ultimate purpose. Although the material universe is a divine creation, a purely material creation is not God’s ultimate purpose. Heaven is the continuing line, the spiritual realm, the abode of *elohim*. Earth, as a natural creation, is but a step along the way.

Let’s put this into a simple paraphrase: “In the beginning, God created (or begat) two realms, heaven and earth. We will discuss earth first, as it is the secondary branch. As for heaven . . .” As for heaven, we need to go to Ephesians or Revelation to find out when heaven at last comes back into the picture. Ephesians talks about the spiritual aspect of heaven, the state of affairs for those in Christ, God’s new creation

2 The heaven discussed on Day Four is part of the natural creation; the firmament forms in the midst of the waters on Day Two. Details in the relevant studies.

(Eph 1:3, 10, 20; 3:11, 15). They live on earth, known by the Father, having access by grace to his throne in heaven. Later, Revelation 21 describes the consummation of God's plan. Heavenly Jerusalem descends to earth. Here is the account of heaven, so long delayed. Earth receives the triumphant Savior. Jerusalem is transformed and earth becomes an eternal blessing. The spiritual realm, the presence of God, finally comes back in tangible reality in the form of Jesus reigning on the renewed earth. The union of heaven and earth is complete. Faithful life on earth can lead us to the heavenly kingdom when the earth itself becomes part of God's eternal plan.

The transition from "heaven and earth" in verse 1 to "earth" in verse 2 is more evidence of the teleological structure of Genesis; it prefigures God's ultimate plan and offers a perspective for the discussion of all that will transpire upon the earth.

Summary

The Genesis genealogies always list the subordinate characters first, followed by the key figure through whom God develops his ultimate plan. In the Prologue, God created heaven and earth. Because earth is discussed first, it could not be the main "lineage." The Revelation and Paul's letter to the Ephesians complete this Genesis pattern by focusing on the heavenly realm associated with the presence of God and its generations.

STUDY 6

The Structure of the Creation Week

The structures of early Genesis provide a framework for the individual creative acts, and clues to help us understand key words and ideas. The uniquely organized text contrasts with mythological creation accounts.

THE FIRST THREE days of the Creation correspond thematically with the second three days, and combine with the Prologue and the Sabbath to fill out the entire precisely structured account of the creation week.

The creation week starts with a set of initial conditions, goes through a series of intermediate steps that sequentially change the starting conditions to the end conditions, and finally ends with a closing statement. The Prologue, which states the initial conditions, and the Sabbath, which states the closure conditions, bookend the creation week. They do not include any creative activities, and thus technically do not stand as parts of the creation week, but they do form an integral part of its literary and thematic structure.

Between the Prologue and Sabbath, the six creative days fill in the details and move the initial conditions to the concluding conditions. The big picture of the Genesis creation account follows:

Table 1. Simplified Plan of the Creation Week

Prologue, or Initial Condition Statement	Chapter 1:1-2
Creation Week of Six Sequential Statements of Change	Chapter 1:3-31
Sabbath, or Final Condition Statement	Chapter 2:1-3

That’s easy enough to readily understand, but not terribly informative. Let’s take the next step and fill in the details of the initial and final condition statements:

Table 2. Initial and Final Conditions

Initial Conditions—Prologue	Final Conditions—Sabbath
In the beginning God	God finished his work
Heaven and Earth incipient	Heaven and Earth finished
Earth without form and void	Earth formed and filled
God created	God rested

The following table adds one more level of detail: the results of the six creative days and their structural bookends, the Prologue and the Sabbath.

Table 3. The Complete Plan

God Created	
Earth Formless, Uninhabited, Dark	
Day 1 Light	Day 4 Lights in the heavens
Day 2 Firmament separates waters	Day 5 Population of sea and sky
Day 3a Dry land appears	Day 6a Terrestrial animals
Day 3b Dry land vegetated	Day 6b Humans
Earth Formed, Inhabited, Lighted	
God Rested	

The above table has twelve cells. The two shaded cells describe the initial and final conditions. The remaining ten cells are “scenes” comprising the creative activities that move the initial conditions of dark, formless, and void to light, formed, and inhabited. The Prologue is scene one, and each day provides another scene, save for the third and sixth days, which have two distinct creative actions. The Sabbath day has no creative activity in the same sense as the other six days, but it describes the work from which God rested.

Matching Up the First Three Days with the Last Three Days

The rows in Table 3 show correspondences by tracking across from Day One to Day Four, Day Two to Day Five, and Day Three to Day Six. Still, it is hard to establish the exact principle for the pairs. You could quibble that on Day Two God did not *create* the seas; they were already there, so the correspondence isn't so tight. Or, you could point out that the seas were really formed on Day Three when God gathered the waters below and called them Seas, in which case you would expect to find the sea creatures created on Day Six, not Day Five. Likewise, if the heavens (in the form of the firmament) first appeared on Day Two, then the stars should accordingly have debuted on Day Five. These objections to what *prima facie* seems obvious invite further investigation. Is there indeed a designed symmetry between the first set of three days and the second set, and if so, what is its basis?

In the overall structure as set out in Table 3, the top shaded row describes the initial conditions or “deficits,” although that word might seem pejorative in this context of God’s magnificent creation. It’s not that God erred in the first attempt, but that he had an initial set of conditions from which to fashion the creation. If the earth had come complete and furnished at the first, no further work would have ensued. A creation week implies an initial set of conditions and a final set of conditions, and the final conditions must constitute an improvement upon the initial conditions. The six days remedied the three initial deficits of darkness, formlessness, and voidness (uninhabitable and uninhabited), so that at the end of the six days earth had light, form, and inhabitants.

The left hand column, which summarizes the first three days of creative activity, shows that after one day the earth had light. After two more days, it had light and form. The creative activities of the first three days, taken as a whole, result in remedying two of the three initial deficit conditions: the earth is now formed and lighted. However, it is still void of inhabitants, so we move to the right hand column and see that it took three days to populate the realms of heaven, sea, and dry land. One day to give light, two days to give form, three days to inhabit. The first three days gave earth light and form, the second three days provided inhabitants. Genesis 1 has multiple layers of structure!

How the Pattern Works

Reading across reveals the primary correlation of realm and corresponding inhabitants. The creation of light did not produce ecological realms in the same manner as did the work of Days Two and Three, so the match between Days One and Four has a different character than the other two pairs, Days Two and Five, and Days Three and Six. Nonetheless, the correspondence between “let there be light” on Day One and “lights in the firmament of heaven” on Day Four seems fair enough. Day One gave light as a principle; Day Four worked in the same realm, embodying the concept of light into specific lights: the sun, moon, planets, and stars.

What can we say about the remaining two pairs? Day Five saw God create marine life and fowls of the air, the inhabitants of the waters and sky. If the correspondence pattern follows, then we ought to locate the creation of the waters and the sky on the second day. But what did God create on Day Two? He created the firmament that he set in the midst of the already existing waters that covered the earth.

This is where it’s possible to get too technical and miss the point. The main consideration is not what God makes, but the functions, or ecological realms, that come into existence. The water is already present at the start of Day Two, but God sets the firmament in the watery covering of the earth and separates the waters into the waters below and the waters above. Thus, the two ecological realms of sea and sky come about. The waters do not receive their name “seas” until Day Three, but that is not the key issue here. On Day Three nothing changes with the waters below regarding their suitability for population. The two realms of sky and sea demarcated on Day Two have their respective populations set within them on Day Five.

Similarly, Days Three and Six have an apparent slight mismatch until we examine the essential activities of the days. Generally, both days focus on events concerning the dry land realm. The fact that the text sets these two days, and only these two days, in two scenes each, or a pair of creative acts, also creates a natural pairing. However, the match-up of the respective pairs does not seem quite perfect. Let’s look deeper.

The first scene of Day Three involves gathering the waters into one place so that the dry land can appear. It seems that Day Three involves two realms: the sea and the dry land. Therefore Day Six should

correspondingly bring forth both marine and terrestrial animal life, with only the fowl on Day Five. However, as we shall see in the detailed accounts of Day Three (Studies 9 and 10), the formation of the sea is secondary to the formation of the dry land. The dry land appears not because God brings it out of the sea, but because he removes the sea and the dry land appears: “let the waters be gathered together into one place and let the dry land appear.” Day Three has nothing to do with forming the sea. The created ecological zone is the dry land, and so the population of the dry land occurs on Day Six.

What happens when we consider the two parts of Days Three and Six separately? Can we map across from 3a to 6a and 3b to 6b? In Table 3, the appearing of the dry land corresponds to the terrestrial animals, and the appearance of the vegetation corresponds to the appearance of human life. Biologically this doesn’t match up, but another approach seems more fruitful.

The description of the vegetation that earth produces *does* match up with many Bible passages that use botanical and agronomic figures to illustrate human spiritual potential: the parable of the sower, Psalm 1, the fruit of the spirit, and many others. The terrestrial animals enjoy no such metaphoric treatment, as their cognitive characteristics preclude any spiritual capabilities. So the correspondences between Day Three and Day Six point to a spiritual application. Examining the correspondences between the pairs of creative days reveals a true and designed match, once we know what to look for—the key features involved in creating the realms that God will populate three days later.

Prologue and Sabbath

Since the Prologue is not a day, how does it correspond to the Sabbath? They both provide the necessary beginning and closure to the creative process, so they fill like functions. Also, even though the Sabbath is a day, it lacks the formula, “evening and morning,” so it has a hint of timelessness. Finally, the Sabbath has no work done on it; it has only the recording of completion. The completion could have been recorded on the sixth day, when God surveys his entire creative handiwork and declares it “very good.” Yet, the need for a day of closure prevails upon the scheme, and so we have a separate day to commemorate completion. Study 20, “Sabbath,” discusses these matters in detail.

What is important here is the symmetry between Day Seven and the Prologue in the overall structure of the Genesis 1 creation account.

Another Structural Feature

A different perspective yields yet another pattern with its own structure and interpretation. Let's shift from the symmetry and parallel perspective of Table 3, that emphasizes the orderliness and patterning of the creation account. Next we'll move to a linear reading that highlights the progression of the text toward an ultimate goal (*telos*). This perspective reveals the Creator is not just orderly, but has an end in mind from the beginning. A theatrical metaphor will set the scene for the linear, telic reading. Imagine that the creation account is about God preparing to put on a theatrical show. "All the world's a stage,"¹ and God is about to open a new production.

At first, there is no stage, not even any construction materials, so God first makes that. He needs to see what to do, so first he turns on the lights and sets out to build the stage, which includes a sky, some *terra firma*, and bodies of water, an infrastructure to hold the props. Next, he fashions the props, or furnishings, for the areas of the stage. With the stage now completed and furnished, God adds the players for the drama: first comes the background players who have no individual parts but provide the context for the others. Then come the players: the supporting actors, and finally the featured actors, the lead male and female upon whose character, activities, and fate the plot depends. With everything in place, God approves the whole arrangement, and then deploys himself both to observe and direct the ensuing drama.

God first makes the raw materials even before he sets out to work. On the first day God makes light so the project can be seen, the next two and a half days suffice for building the stage (the sky, seas, and dry land), then come the props (vegetation and heavenly bodies), followed by the extras (swarms of birds, sea life, and smaller terrestrial animals), then the supporting actors (larger animals, including the serpent) and finally, of course, Adam and Eve, the leading players.

The linear perspective fills out our view of the Creator: not only orderly and systematic, and but also dramatic, sequential, and telic.

1 William Shakespeare, *As You Like It* 2.7.149 (Folger Library Edition).

Why Structure?

What does the presence of structure teach us? Would the creation be any less magnificent if the record had no pattern, but was a random narrative of God making this and that? What if each day didn't begin and end with the same formula? The overall structure of Genesis is highly significant.

First, the very presence of order and structure places Genesis 1 in contrast to other ancient creation accounts. It is a unique text, and one of the facets of its uniqueness is its organization. The lack of any theology (account of how God came to be) is the most obvious.

Second, the structure gives Genesis a crispness, straightforwardness, and elegance unmatched by any creation legend or myth. That we can even subject Genesis to the scrutiny of searching for order alone separates it from other accounts. While the presence of structure doesn't in itself demand inspiration, it does demand we see this as a unique document, unlike mythological accounts.

Contrast Genesis with this creation excerpt from Hesiod's (eighth century B.C.) *Theogony*, for example, a long, flowing narrative that tells us that in the beginning earth and heaven begat the gods!

Come thou, let us begin with the Muses who gladden the great spirit of their father Zeus in Olympus with their songs, telling of things that are and that shall be and that were aforetime with consenting voice. Unwearying flows the sweet sound [40] from their lips, and the house of their father Zeus the loud-thunderer is glad at the lily-like voice of the goddesses as it spreads abroad, and the peaks of snowy Olympus resound, and the homes of the immortals. And they, uttering their immortal voice, celebrate in song first of all the revered race of the gods [45] from the beginning, those whom Earth and wide Heaven begot, and the gods sprung of these, givers of good things. Then next, the goddesses sing of Zeus, the father of gods and men, as they begin and end their strain, how much he is the most excellent among the gods and supreme in power. [50] And again, they chant the race of men and strong giants, and gladden the heart of Zeus within Olympus—the Olympian Muses, daughters of Zeus the aegis-holder.²

2 *The Theogony of Hesiod*, translated by Hugh G. Evelyn-White. www.sacred-texts.com/cla/hesiod/theogony.htm (accessed April 30, 2011).

Third, the presence of pattern is useful for further investigation and as a memory aid. It invites the reader to explore the reason for the correspondences and to delve into the bases of the structures. The value of a memory aid is obvious.

Finally, the pattern is evidence that God is not only creative, but also orderly. God loves structure, order, and pattern. The Bible shows repeated instances of various forms of textual structure. These structures bring harmony and unity to the account and guide our understanding. Our Bible studies are richer when we appreciate not only what is said but how the message is presented.

We praise our Heavenly Father for not only for the wonders of creation, but also for the wonder of the record of that creation. “You alone are the LORD, you made the heavens, even the highest heavens, and all their starry host, the earth, and all that is on it, the seas, and all that is in them” (Neh 9:6 NIV).

STUDY 7

Fiat Lux

Light appears on Day One, the foundation of God's work in the physical and spiritual creation.

God's Activity on Day One¹

God speaks

God views

God separates

God names

THE WELL-KNOWN PHRASE *fiat lux*, the Latin for “Let there be light” originates in Genesis 1:3. From the Latin verb *fiat*, “let it be done,” comes the English noun *fiat*, “a declaration or order made by singular authority.” In current English usage *fiat* usually has a negative, sometimes arbitrary connotation: “The dictator issued a fiat claiming ownership of all sugar plantations.” In Genesis 1:3, however, *fiat lux* represents the very first communication from the eternal Creator of the universe. LET THERE BE LIGHT! *Lux* derives from an Indo-European root that gave us *leuko*, as in “leukocyte” (white blood cell) and eventually our word “light.”

Directness of Thought and Action

The full sentence consists of just four short Hebrew words. Rendered literally but stiffly, it would read, “Let be light, and was light.” When so few words say so much, the impact resounds. The first act of the creation

¹ The study of each creation day starts with a list of what God did. Instead of a translation, the verbs give the sense of the activities performed. God said, “Let there be light” but the activity was speaking, not saying. Likewise, God “saw,” but the activity was viewing. On Day One “separates” is the meaning of “divides,” and “names” for “calls.” I want to capture the flavor of the activities that bring creation to fruition, to give a fuller perspective of God's work in creation.

week comes with the utmost possible brevity and therefore the maximum impact. The declaration is short, direct, and pithy.

God, by fiat, opened the beams of heaven. Nowhere else in the creation account does anything come into being by the mere agency of God's spoken word. In all other instances where God says, "Let there be," another verb (usually "made" or "created") follows. Here the simple expression of will produced the desired result, and without any apparent physical source. Of course, God is light, and thus needed no source. Though the sun will not show up for three more days, the creation account seems comfortable with this arrangement. Light has an origin greater than Earth's sun.

If God had said "Let there be light," followed by the sentence, "And God created light," how would that differ from "God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light"? Physically the act would look the same to a hypothetical observer, but the text wants to emphasize the directness of the action.

God is Light

An obvious starting point to discuss this subject is 1 John 1:5, which equates God with light. In this passage (and in 1 John 2:9), light represents walking, or living, in love and fellowship. More important than any specific attribute, however, is the aspect of identity: God *is* light. God is also righteous, just, and merciful, but those are character qualities or attributes. The identity with light (and also love) seems of a different order. Light is a noun, not an adjective. Moreover, natural light is a complex phenomenon, as is spiritual light. In the context of creation, God said let there be light, but light was already present in the divine identity.

If God *is* light, it follows that he does not need to create or make light. God dwells in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). Any physical representation of God brings to mind blindingly bright light. So how did he create that which is tightly associated with his presence, if not completely integral with it? Probably the Bible is not talking about *creation* here, but the *revelation* of light, by divine fiat, upon the earth. Thus the brevity of the first act of God: he didn't make light out of nothing. Rather, he revealed his light upon the earth.

The Meaning of Light

Two other sections of 1 John use the light metaphor. In 1:5-7, light represents a state of fellowship with God. Because God is light, we must also be in the light to have fellowship with him. We are to walk in the light, not in darkness. The context continues with three statements about confession of our sins, and thus links walking in the light with an honest assessment of who we are, and our need for forgiveness through confession so we can have fellowship with God. The second section, 2:8-11, also uses the metaphor of light and darkness, but here the context is fellowship with other people: “He who says he is in the light, and hates his brother, is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light.”

These two teachings use light metaphorically to symbolize fellowship with God and with other believers, both the vertical and horizontal aspects of fellowship. John uses these two aspects to represent the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor (Matt 22:35-40, 1 John 3:17). Light, as used in 1 John, encompasses the full spectrum of love and fellowship. Light demands metaphorical consideration, and, as a metaphor, it carries a full spectrum of meaning.

Physical light when passed through a prism yields a spectrum. Collectively all the wavelengths of light give us white light, which has no “color.” Perhaps spiritual light bears some resemblance to this phenomenon. It represents the fullness of God, but in itself has no specific character. God *is* light, comprising all attributes of the divine spectrum. In the Bible “light” has an enormously richer significance than merely a knowledge of certain facts about God’s plan and purpose.

Context of “Let There be Light”

At the end of the Prologue, God, manifested in the Spirit, hovers over the surface of the water. Earth at this time is completely covered with water, so when the text states that the Spirit of God hovers upon the face of the water, it means that God hovers over the earth. With nothing before Day One to mark any kind of time, it would be fruitless to speculate “how long” before the first day God created the earth. The text reveals three facts:

1. God created the earth before Day One.
2. The earth is dark and desolate, but God is present.
3. Then God brings light to the earth.

These three facts connect the hovering of God's Spirit with the fiat that brings light. The last statement of verse 2, "the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the waters," leads into the first statement of verse 3, "And God said, "Let there be light." Imagine the darkness, then suddenly light! God is present upon the darkened earth. At the revelation of his will our planet becomes full of his glory. A hypothetical observer can now see the water-covered globe.

Separating Light from Darkness

The first of the original deficiencies is corrected when darkness gives way to light. Next, God does something remarkable: he separates, or divides, the light from the darkness. Possibly the light diffuses throughout the visible heavens so there is no longer any darkness, but rather a grayish crepuscular haze exists until God separates the light from the darkness. The light makes the earth visible, but is diffused into a subdued glow that will not suffice for the divine plan. God needs yet to separate the light. I think, however, the text presents a different picture of this separation.

Why does God even need to separate light from dark? Aren't light and dark completely different already? Don't they naturally separate one from another? What do we learn from this activity?

God's separating light from dark is the first of two steps to define the function of light. On the fourth day, he will further localize the light into discrete heavenly bodies. For now, God must first separate the light from the darkness. Also, the act of separation itself is a key feature of the creation week, as well as the entirety of Genesis. God is continually separating and selecting to achieve his ends.² Separation is inherent in the activities of creation. Making a thing implies that it be defined, at least in part, by what it is not or what it is separated from.

The notion that the light diffuses dimly through the darkness until God separates them may or may not be the case. However, the one clue we have to the process of the separation is not spatial, but temporal. In the cycle of light and dark on the earth, night is dark and day is light. Dark and light occur in the same space, separated in time as Earth rotates on its axis. Darkness and light will naturally fall on different areas of the

2 Consider the separation of the waters on the next day, the separation of Abram from his family, Abram from Lot, Isaac from Esau, etc. God separates and selects to achieve a specific purpose.

planet when Earth begins to rotate. Thus, the separation of light from the dark might be a way of referring to Earth commencing its rotation.

Time

Given a rotating Earth and the phrase “evening and morning,” God establishes the concept of time by using alternating periods of light and dark at the same locality. Light follows dark follows light and so on. Evening is listed first (evening and morning) because evening represents the dark that was already in place when light appeared.

As a by-product, the separation of light from dark creates the concept of “time.” Time is an abstraction, but it can only occur in a physically ordered universe. The creation of light, and its subsequent separation from darkness, installs a parameter that perhaps as no other defines the limitation of our mortal physical world. We live in a world defined by the passage of time. The eternal realm has no reckoning of time. The declaration of “evening and morning” brings the single most defining limit of our existence—time. It runs (for us) only one way, always forward, never backward. Time is the fundamental feature that distinguishes the realm of earthly life from the realm of eternal life.

The activity of separating signifies something profoundly spiritual. The text records this act to teach us that once light exists, it needs also to be *specified* so that its full role and function will be fulfilled. Darkness is the prevailing natural condition into which God brings the light. However, simply having light there won’t do. He also has to specify its role and location so that it can fulfill its purpose.

Naming and Approving

Part of specifying the role of light includes giving it a name. God makes the light appear, and he gives it the name “day.” The darkness (the natural state, or the absence of light) becomes “night.” Thus light is named and designated so it can function, awaiting further developments on the fourth day.

God’s approval introduces a new concept. Seeing that the light is good does not involve any creative action. It does not need to be in the text to move the account along. Declaring something good is a value judgment. Study 28 explores this idea in detail.

The text reads that God sees that the *light* was good. This is the only one of the six “it was good” statements that specifies the object of God’s approval. The remaining five times this formula appears, God sees that “it” is good; the “it” being absent but understood in Hebrew.³ This unique construction emphasizes the connection between God and light. The light is good because God is light and God is good.

Thus the first day ends, with evening coming first, then morning. Evening, or dark, the natural state that prevailed until God commanded light, has to come first, then the dawn of the first morning as God directs his light upon Earth. Presumably, and inferred from the phrase “there was evening and morning,” but not stated in the text, the first day ends after one revolution of the planet. At the close of Day One, the earth has light, but it is still without form and void. The work will continue.

3 A seventh approbation occurs in 1:31 where God sees that “everything he made” is very good.

STUDY 8

Firmament and Water

It is hard to understand what happened physically on the second day of creation (Gen 1:6-8). This study examines the nature and function of the firmament.

God's Activity on Day Two

God speaks

God makes

God separates

God names

UNDERSTANDING THE REALITY behind the text of Day Two is a challenge, as this day presents the strangest physical act of the creative week. Again, we will focus on the text itself rather than trying to determine what actually happened physically. Obviously there was some way in which the universe came into existence, but trying to figure out the mechanism can distract us from understanding the fundamental spiritual lessons.

The chief event of Day Two is the appearance of the firmament, which has three features:

1. It arises within the water that covers the earth.
2. It separates the waters below from the waters above.
3. It assumes the name "heaven," although with a different meaning from the heaven of verse 1.

Earthly Origin of the Firmament

The second day starts with God speaking: "Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters." While the firmament is puzzling in other respects, its location is unequivocal—within earth's covering of water,

probably near the surface. It divides the waters into the “waters below” and the “waters above.” This is invisible to a hypothetical viewer, as the firmament would be under water. A viewer of Earth from outer space, like an astronaut, will see just a blue sphere, a completely blue planet as the water completely concealed any land surface.

A planet covered with water to a depth of several thousand meters is perfectly reasonable. Today the oceans hold sway over the earth in both surface area and volume. Earth has an average surface elevation of about 2,440 meters below sea level. If we could drain off all the ocean water and flatten all the earth’s surface, including the ocean bottoms, completely smoothing the entire surface of Earth’s crust, and then replace the water, all landmasses would be submerged to a depth of about 2,440 meters.¹ Within this covering sphere of water God places the firmament.

It might take a little effort to picture exactly what God makes here, as the end product is a firmament under water, an awkward situation. What then *is* a firmament? How can it be in the midst of the waters? And what is its function there?

A Spherical Plane

The Hebrew root for firmament means “a flattening, an expanse, something spread out flat.” The word evokes the idea of an expanding plane. Scripture uses this root in two places to describe the making of gold leaf for overlay: “the goldsmith *overspreads* it with gold” (Isa 40:19 NKJV) and, “they *did beat* the gold into thin plates” (Exod 39:3 KJV). The firmament, in its original form, may have had no vertical element. The word itself has a two-dimensional connotation, and the fact that God installs the firmament under water to divide the water harmonizes with this notion. As of Genesis 1:6, the firmament is apparently a two-dimensional affair.

To visualize the firmament, think of the concentric layers of an onion. The membranous skin between the layers of the onion flesh itself can represent the original firmament. The skin layer is very thin, and approximates a spherical plane. Imagine that the outermost two layers of the onion flesh represent the waters that cover the earth, and the remainder of the onion represents the solid part of the earth. The firmament is that thin membranous skin that divides the outer two layers.

1 P.J. Herring and M.R. Clarke, *Deep Oceans* (New York: Praeger, 1971), p. 13.

It is not certain that the firmament even has a physical presence. At the least, it has a functional presence; in this regard it is similar to the Continental Divide.² The firmament may not be an actual sheet of some substance, like the gold overlay of the tabernacle equipment or the skin of an onion, but it is a spherical plane that divides the waters.

The Word “Firmament”

The word appears five times in the account of the second day (balanced by five uses of the word “water”). The last of these is where God calls the firmament “heaven.” Thereafter the text always refers to it as “the firmament of heaven.” This phrase, “firmament of heaven” occurs four more times, in verses 14, 15, 17, and 20. The first three of these are on the fourth day; they refer to what we would call outer space, the abode of the heavenly bodies. The account of Day Four employs the phrase “firmament of heaven” exclusively; neither “heaven” nor “firmament” is used alone. The last reference, 1:20, is on Day Five, where it describes the lower levels of the atmosphere, closest to the earth. This occurrence adds the notion of “surface” (“open firmament of heaven” KJV), which seems to indicate the immediate sky above us, where birds fly. Literally, it is the “face” of the firmament of heaven. In all of its uses, “firmament of heaven” denotes the area above the earth, that is, the sky.

Both birds and stars occupy the “firmament of heaven.” How does this square with a submerged firmament? To address this question, let’s start with a recap. The earth is covered with water, and that’s where God put the firmament; it arises from within the water that covers the earth. It separates waters above and below it, but there is no atmosphere yet; these are still the waters that cover the earth. Nonetheless, God calls the firmament “heaven.” This sequence seems to imply a vertically expanding firmament, one that at first is just the dividing plane within the oceanic covering of earth (firmament, in the strict sense of the word) and then expands to become the atmosphere and above (firmament of heaven).

2 For readers not familiar with U.S. geography, the Continental Divide is that imaginary line that runs roughly along the crest of the Rocky Mountain Range in the western states. Any precipitation that falls west of the divide will eventually drain into the Pacific Ocean; precipitation on the east side drains into the Atlantic.

A Clarification of Terminology

Note that the “firmament of heaven” is not the same as the “heaven” of verse 1; that heaven designated everything that *isn't* earth. In the phrase “heaven and earth,” heaven was the non-earth component. The firmament, called heaven—a different heaven from that in verse 1—originates within the waters that cover the earth. The heaven of 1:1 denotes the spiritual realm of God, but the heaven referred to after that is part of the earthly domain.

How do we know that the heaven of verse 1 is not the firmament *called* heaven of verses 7 and 8? How do we know that verse 1 isn't just giving us an overall description, and the rest of the account fills in the details? As explained in Study 5, the narrowing of view from “heaven and earth” in 1:1 to “earth” in 1:2 specifies that the remaining action occurs on earth. The creation of the firmament is therefore part of the earthly realm.

However, the heaven of verse 1, suspended from the narrative at the beginning of verse 2, needs to re-enter the scheme at some point. In the other examples of Genesis genealogy, the text eventually covers *all* the offspring of a given generation. If 1:1 speaks of heaven and earth, and then the text discusses only earth in verse 2, we know that the focus must eventually return to the account of “heaven.” Could the formation of the firmament here supply the details of what verse 1 painted in general? No, because the remainder of the creation week still describes the development of the earth. The text has no markers that indicate a conclusion to the discussion of earth and then a return to pick up the discussion of heaven, as characteristic of the human genealogies of Genesis. We're still demonstrably in a section given to recording the events on earth.

The heaven mentioned in verse 1 represents an entity outside of the earth. In contrast, the firmament *called* heaven in verses 7 and 8 is part of the earth. Consistent with the narrative sequence and patterns of Genesis, the account focuses on the earth in 1:2, and remains there throughout the remainder of the creation week.

Two Meanings of Heaven

Another reason that the firmament in verses 7 and 8 differs from the heaven of verse 1 stems from the word “called.” God called the firmament heaven. This indicates that the firmament was in fact the firmament, but

God gave it the name heaven. When God called light “day,” and dark “night,” “light” and “dark” did not have other meanings, but the word “heaven” already has another denotation. In 1:1 it stands for the spiritual realm, the realm of God, the realm of the intangible Divine attributes. Now, “heaven” takes on a secondary meaning, that is, of the firmament. The firmament is not the true heaven, but it will be *called* heaven. Calling it “firmament” would have been adequate. If God simply wanted to label the various parts of the universe, he would have just continued to call it “firmament.” However, God’s plan of creation has a role for the firmament, and in that role it assumes the character of “heaven.”

On Day Four the firmament will receive the host of stars and planets as its inhabitants, as well as the sun and moon. The firmament will come to represent heaven to us. We cannot conceive of the eternal infinite God whose realm is heaven, but the vastness of the starry sky at night provides a sense of our minuscule place in the universe. As vast as the heavenly realm is, it is only a physical representation of an infinite Deity. Since the time of Galileo and the first telescopes, knowledge of the heavens has increased enormously. The fact that there are some 100 billion galaxies each with a 100 billion stars³ is staggering. Images from the Hubble Space Telescope show a universe of incomprehensible magnitude, beauty, and energy. Take the next step beyond physical incomprehensibility and attempt to fathom the God who made it all and dwells in yet an infinitely greater heaven. Does the thought utterly overwhelm your imagination? That’s exactly the intention of calling the firmament “heaven.”

The firmament of heaven, which God makes on the second day and populates on the fourth day, does not *need* to be called “heaven.” It has a distinct and functional designation in the word “firmament.” However, by calling the firmament “heaven,” God connects the apparently infinite physical heaven, with its immeasurable distances and uncountable stars (Gen 15:5) to the truly infinite God who made it all. The naming of firmament “heaven” allows the firmament to testify to its infinite Creator.

Waters Above and Below

A submerged firmament runs counter to the usual first impression of this verse: the firmament on the surface of the water-covered sphere. The

3 A conservative estimated population of the visible universe.

waters below would be the seas and the waters above would be atmospheric waters. Initially, however, both the waters above and the waters below comprise the one vast ocean that covers our planet. Atmospheric water comes later when the firmament expands.

The text locates the “waters above” *above* the firmament, not *within* the firmament. If the intention was to differentiate between oceanic versus atmospheric waters, the firmament would be an imaginary layer upon the surface of the earth. This doesn’t seem to fit the magnificence it will come to have as the home of luminaries on Day Four.

One solution is to postulate an expanding firmament that originates as an imaginary divide within the seas that will come to include both the atmosphere and space beyond.

Careful attention to the text makes this picture easier to understand. The firmament that God makes within the water is an intangible dividing or separating spherical plane. Not until Days Four and Five does the firmament take on, with the addition of “heaven” to its name, the full phrase “firmament of heaven.” God calls it “heaven” on Day Two to indicate its important future and imply that it will *expand* into an atmosphere for the earth. On Day Two, the original and narrower denotation of “firmament” governs the location of the waters above. This water need only be above the original division within the earth’s sea covering. The waters above don’t have to be above the “firmament of heaven.”

If the firmament is the sky and the waters above are always above the firmament, then the waters above would be in outer space. If the firmament is outer space, the waters above would not only be outside the water cycle, but totally out of the picture, above the firmament that contains the entire universe. That’s why it’s important to distinguish between “firmament” and “firmament of heaven.” However, water beyond our physical system could answer spiritually to the water of life that descends from heaven (Rev 21 and 22) and figuratively represents the living water of eternal life.

From a physical or hydrologic standpoint it would be impossible to separate the “waters above” from the “waters below.” However, the Genesis depiction focuses on biomes and major ecological structures for the inhabitants of the earth. Day Three will feature the appearance of dry land, in the sense of terrestrial environment. The waters above will form,

or perhaps occupy, the atmosphere, particularly the troposphere.⁴ The lowest stratum of the troposphere is the domain of birds and insects, the flying animals. “Waters below” at this time must refer only to the watery mass called the seas, but the intent seems to be to differentiate between aquatic and marine environments on the one hand and aerial environments on the other. The phrase “waters above,” as used in Day Two in all probability refers to the lower atmosphere. If it seems odd to designate a fundamentally “air” environment as “waters,” remember that atmospheric water is fundamental to life. The main issue is that the firmament arises within the water, and that is essential to the rest of the account.

At first glance, Day Two describes the firmament separating the seas from atmospheric waters. A closer look reveals the possibility that a firmament forms within the sea-covered earth, and then expands to form both the atmosphere that includes the waters above the (original) dividing firmament, and also the vastness of space.

A Spiritual Lesson

Whether or not the above scenario is correct doesn't really matter. What is important is the spiritual lesson. As part of the earth in its origin, the firmament is therefore earthly, and of the same “stuff” as we are. We are part of the universe, albeit especially blessed by God as the focus of his creation. The visible, physical heaven can convey to us an idea of eternity. The stars seem uncountable in number and unlimited in extent. Our current state of knowledge of the heavens makes their vastness far more astounding than anything imaginable to the ancients. We need to be more impressed because the same technology that reveals to us the vastness of the heavens, and therefore the God who made them, also in many ways disguises and distracts us from that very same God.

When we consider the heavens, the work of God's hands, we are looking at the expanse of what God calls heaven, that is, the full extension of the firmament. This representation of the true heaven should help us appreciate the concept of an infinite and eternal God. The heaven of verse 1 is yet another order even beyond the physical firmament, which is only *called* heaven. “The heavens are the LORD's heavens, but the earth he has given to the sons of men” (Psa 115:16 RSV).

⁴ The troposphere is the lowest zone (mostly below 14,000 meters) of the atmosphere; it contains nearly all the water vapor, clouds, and determinants of weather.

The Steadfast Love of the Lord (Psalm 33:1-9 ESV)

Shout for joy in the LORD, O you righteous!
Praise befits the upright.

Give thanks to the LORD with the lyre;
make melody to him with the harp of ten strings!

Sing to him a new song;
play skillfully on the strings, with loud shouts.

For the word of the LORD is upright,
and all his work is done in faithfulness.

He loves righteousness and justice;
the earth is full of the steadfast love of the Lord.

By the word of the LORD the heavens were made,
and by the breath of his mouth all their host.

He gathers the waters of the sea as a heap;
he puts the deeps in storehouses.

Let all the earth fear the LORD;
let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of
him!

For he spoke, and it came to be;
he commanded, and it stood firm.

STUDY 9

Dry Land Appears

The first event of the third day is the revealing of the dry land (Gen 1:9-10). God calls the dry land “earth,” but with a different meaning than in the first verse.

God’s Activity on Day Three

God speaks
 God names
 God views
 God speaks
 God views

ON DAY THREE the waters that covered the sphere of the earth move aside to reveal the dry land, and then the land brings forth vegetation. Why did God at first make earth water-covered with all the landmasses submerged? What’s the point of putting landmasses, the home of humans and the main focus of creation, under water until the third day?

The answer to these questions reveals a profound spiritual lesson and demonstrates the purposeful design behind the creation text. Although this day has no human activity, it both presages God’s national activity with his people Israel and also carries a practical spiritual lesson for disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Organization

Day Three has two parts. God speaks twice and twice declares the results “good.” First the dry land appears, and next it produces vegetation. These two parts could each merit their own creative day. Or, perhaps the text would make more sense if the dry land had appeared along with the separation of the waters on the second day. Those two activities would then prepare earth for bearing plant life on Day Three.

Of course, the program is laid out the way God intended. This sequence follows an important pattern that testifies to the unity of Scripture and the divine hand at work in not only creating, but also recording the events of that creation. The close relationship between dry land and its vegetation is the key to the arrangement of the narrative.

Dry Land Emerges

God starts by revealing the dry land, or the continental landmass. Hebrew calls it “the dry,” as it is the opposite of the sea, but the issue is not wet versus dry. Rather, the text emphasizes the qualities of *formlessness* and *form*.

Water, a fluid, has no shape of its own; it acquires the shape of its container. In the case of an ocean overlying the entire planet, the surface of the water would spread out evenly. The water represents formlessness, thus the original description of the entirely water-covered earth as “without form.” With the emergence of dry land, earth obtains form. It now has on its surface visible and workable solid ground: soil, dirt, mountain and plain, valley, and all the great variety of geographical and ecological features that a watery cover just can’t provide.

“Form” refers to the solid aspect of the continents and their ability to have *landforms*. It also refers to a geographically fully-developed planet, with land and sea.

The text has primary interest in this ecological connotation. As with the demarcation of the atmosphere on the previous day, the emphasis is on a domain to accommodate life. The sea, sky, and land will all become, as they are populated on Days Four, Five, and Six, habitats or places for life rather than stark geographical features. The population of the earth on Day Six will depend on the plant life that emerges on Day Three.

A New Meaning for “Earth”

Just as the word “heaven” took on a secondary meaning when God called the firmament heaven, the word “earth” takes on a secondary meaning. In the Prologue, earth meant the whole planet; now its meaning is restricted to the newly-exposed land of the planet. In English, earth also has two meanings: it can mean the planet we live on or the soil that grows our food.

The importance of this secondary meaning, however, goes beyond a matter of usage. In the beginning, when God created heaven and earth,

he appointed earth as the realm of humanity and other terrestrial life forms. Although the oceans also support life, God locates his purposes on the dry land. An expanded paraphrase of “God called the dry land earth” might read, “God selected the dry land part of the planet to represent his intentions for creation and therefore invested it with the name Earth.”

How Dry Land Appeared

God commands that the waters gather together into one place so that the dry land can appear. How this happens is hard to fathom. They already are in one place; it’s just that the one place is global. An observer would see waters withdrawing and dry land rising up. However, we will focus on the text itself and the images it presents, to draw out spiritual implications.

The directive “let the water be gathered together into one place” implies waters being moved aside. God moves the waters for the purpose of making the dry land appear. If the text had stated, “let the dry land appear” with no mention of the water, it would create a mental picture of land arising out of a passive ocean. As it is, we visualize the water moving aside, gathering itself, perhaps peeling away and exposing the solid landform that lays hidden under the surface. Owing to the spherical “form” of the water, we can even imagine a parting of the water—pulling back from a landmass in each direction, yet still being gathered into one place.

As water recedes from east and west, it will inevitably meet again on the other side of the globe. I think the text is inviting us to think in terms of a parting of the waters and the uplifting of the landmass. The water still has one place, but the text now focuses on the newly revealed dry land. In other words, the dry land doesn’t just arise, it is revealed when God removes a layer of water.

Notes on the Hebrew Words

The word translated “dry land” will play a significant role in the account of the Exodus from Egypt, when Israel crosses the Red Sea on “dry land.” The word for “seas” (*yamim*), like the word for water (*mayim*), has a plural ending, but unlike *mayim*, it isn’t of necessity a plural. Water always occurs with a plural ending, but sea is usually singular. It is the usual word for sea, and, because in Israel the Mediterranean on its west

coast was *the* sea, the word *yam* also came to denote “west.”

The word “gather” and its noun form “a gathering” are used here in reference to the gathered-together waters. The noun, *mikveh*, from the verb “to gather” later comes to mean a place of ceremonial washing, and also the ritual of ablution itself. In modern usage, Orthodox Jews have strict rules for establishing a *mikveh* and its ritual use, while Messianic Jews will use any convenient pool of water as a baptismal *mikveh*.¹

Form

With the appearance of dry land, planet Earth now has form. The work of the third day is not complete, though, for dry land is not an end in itself. So closely related are the appearance of the dry land and the production of its vegetation that these two occur on the same day. Dry land without vegetation might as well never have emerged from the water. The emergence of dry land satisfies the requirement that the formless, water-covered globe will give birth to the earth as we know it, with oceans and continents. Earth now has form and light. The dry land has a purpose, to bear vegetation.

A removal of water also occurred on the previous day, when God separated off the waters above from the earth’s surface. The dry land appears after the second removal of water. It was there all the time, but had to be revealed.

This is the fifth step of creation:

1. Heaven and earth
2. Earth (the planet)
3. Lighted earth
4. Earth with firmament
5. Earth (land)

Now above sea level, the dry land “earth” is ready for vegetation.

1 *Mikvot* (plural of *mikveh*) are known from at least as early as the time of the Essenes, which is why some historians believe John the Baptist might have been associated with that sect. For the Essenes though, the *mikveh* established ritual purity and would have been used on a regular basis. It has little connection in any theological sense with Christian baptism and all of its implications, though they both involve immersion in water related to purification.

STUDY 10

Earth Brings Forth Vegetation

In the second scene of Day Three (Gen 1:11-12) the earth produces vegetation. This advent of life comes with a far-reaching spiritual lesson.

AFTER THREE DAYS, the earth has both light and form, but amazingly, nothing new has yet been *created!* God had already created the earth prior to the first day. On Day One light came, but God did not create light; being himself by nature light, he revealed it. Then God made the firmament, but that was not a new entity, only a separation in the waters of earth. On Day Three the dry land appears, but it was part of the earth created in the Prologue. Finally, vegetation arrives on the scene, and again—even if perhaps by way of technicality—we find that God does not create plant life. With that odd-sounding idea we will begin our next discussion of the second half of Day Three.

On Day Three God twice “saw that it was good.” The appearance of dry land is a necessary, but not sufficient, outcome of this day’s work. The dry land, however, is not the end product. The narrative continues after the first approval statement with more activity instead of the summative “there was evening and morning.”

A New Subject

What happens next reveals a new concept in the creation week, one that can pass by unnoticed but has immense spiritual implications.

Let’s start with a simplified reading of the text. God says, “Let the earth bring forth vegetation. And the earth brought forth vegetation.” That’s it. What’s new and significant here? For the first time, a verb has *something other than God* as the subject. God performed the previous

sixteen activities. But God does not make or create the plants. Rather, the earth brings them forth. Earth now becomes a co-creator with God. Acting in full accord with the divine will, the earth produces vegetation. I would like to say this *is* something new under the sun, except the sun isn't created yet; it's on tomorrow's agenda.

What if the text read, "And God made plants to grow on the Earth"? What difference would it make? The difference lies in the fact that the earth responds to God's will. On the physical level, this means little. An observer would see the same action in either case: plants starting to grow. The key is the mode of causality, and what that represents in a much larger spiritual frame.

Whether God makes plant life, or the earth brings it forth at God's command, we should pause for a moment to celebrate the presence of life on earth. The barren ground is now rife with greenery of all sorts. Imagine what this might have looked like and the significance of life itself, even if that life is, at this point, confined to the plant world.

A Spiritual Parallel

The spiritual teaching unfolds thus: God brings forth dry land, and then gives dry land a command. Dry land responds. This basic model eventually leads to the New Testament ordinance of baptism. That might seem quite a stretch, but there *is* more than just water connecting the two ideas. The design and specificity is hard to dismiss as coincidental. Before discussing baptism, however, let's visit the historically and theologically intermediate account of Israel's departure from Egypt.

The Exodus account uses the same word for "dry land" to describe how the Israelites walked through the Red Sea. God parted the waters with a great wind, and let the dry land appear. This idea clearly reflects the Genesis portrayal. Wind (spirit) indicates the presence of God, the waters withdrew from their normal position, and the dry land remained as a highway to deliverance. Then, the Israelites, faced with imminent danger at the hands of the encroaching Egyptian army, walked across.

The Egyptian host pursued them on foot, horse, and chariot, on the very same seabed the Israelites trod. However, the text doesn't record the event this way. Nowhere is the word "dry land" used when speaking of the Egyptians. Only Israel crosses on dry land though their tormentors

followed directly after them, right in their footprints. In Exodus the word (it's one word in Hebrew) "dry land" is used in 14:16, 21, 22, 29 and 15:19 with respect to the Israelites' passage. The Egyptians—physically on the exact same route—never have this term associated with their passage. They always go "into the sea" (14:23, 27, 28; 15:1, 4, 9-10, 19). Thus we have a pointed association of Israel with the word and concept of "dry land."

The text thus treats the Exodus as not only an act of redemption, but also an act of creation, in which Israel as a nation corresponds to the dry land—they come out of the sea. And what arises from the sea, what God brings out of water, he intends to bear vegetation, to bear fruit. That applies whether it's land (as in the creation account), or a nation "Israel will bud and blossom and fill all the world with fruit" (Isa 27:6 NIV), or an individual (the fruit of the Spirit). The theme of bearing fruit continues in such familiar texts as Psalms 1 and 92, the parable of the sower, and John 15.

Returning to our main point, Creation, Exodus, and baptism all link together. The Exodus account, by virtue of its repetition of the dry land emerging in the midst of the sea, connects to the creation account. Paul links baptism to the Exodus in 1 Corinthians 10:2. That which arises from the water is not a final product in itself, but the beginning of a process that God intends should eventually bear fruit.

On the individual level, when a person participates in the rite of baptism, he or she emerges from water—very well, but not the end in itself. In fact, the Bible likens baptism to a new birth, a new beginning (1 Pet 1:23, John 1:13). It is the end of one way or condition of life, but the beginning of another. We are newly minted believers, mandated to produce spiritual growth. This spiritual growth is metaphorically called the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5:22-23).

Additional passages in Galatians tie these ideas together. Shortly after describing the fruit of the Spirit, Paul writes that "neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; what counts is a *new creation*. Peace and mercy to all those who follow this rule, even to the *Israel of God*" (Gal 6:15-16 NIV). Paul identifies baptized believers (Gal 3:27) as part of a new creation and the Israel of God. He charges them to bear spiritual fruit, the metaphor Paul uses for the various aspects of godly character listed in the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience,

kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23 RSV). Fruit of the Spirit is the end product of a spiritual life; as with the fruit of nature, it is the end result of a long growth process.

What God Can't Do

We return now to Genesis to pick up on the point that vegetation is a result of the earth's activity. The text reads "the earth brought forth" rather than "God caused the plants to grow" or the like. This implies that there is something that God doesn't do, won't do, and, if we may use the term in a limited sense, *can't* do. God can't make his people love and obey him. The text could have had God directly creating the plants, but that would preclude any lesson concerning free will, love, and obedience. Having the earth "cooperate" with God (remember, we're focusing on the text as written) teaches that we must also cooperate with God in the process of spiritual growth. He cannot make individuals love him and live faithfully. If he did, that love wouldn't be love, and that faith wouldn't be faith. We would be the proverbial automatons that could not reflect the freely given heart of love. But God gives us free will, and challenges us, like the antitypical earth, to produce fruit.

The earth here, that is, the dry land bearing the name "earth," the focus of God's creative enterprise, responds to God and bears fruit. The natural earth, of course, has no free will, but this is a metaphor. God is establishing a principle: he does not, and will not, directly create the fruit of faith. That process is left up to the individual. We do have the will to cooperate or not.

Lastly, the words "and the earth brought forth" imply a purposeful vision. This statement looks forward to both the Exodus and baptism. It looks forward to an ethic of faith, not works. It points to the significant role that the metaphor of fruit will have later in the Bible.

With so many evidences of true design within the text, how could anyone dismiss it as a sophisticated but derivative attempt at primitive monotheism? I find the thinking of such critics perverse. The creation text is nothing at all like the fables and myths of other cosmogonies. This is not just a polished version of a Mesopotamian myth. This is sublime text, presaging the New Testament from the very beginning of history.

STUDY 11

Classifying the Vegetation

The classification of the vegetation produced by the earth (Gen 1:11-12) shows a high degree of design and order, and further testifies to the extraordinary composition of the creation account.

THE GENESIS ACCOUNT attributes the origin of vegetation to the earth itself, and does not present it as a direct act of God. The description of the vegetation offers much detail, and in that detail is yet another example of purposeful design, telling the end from the beginning.

Below is the relevant text. The first triplet is God's command, the second, earth's response (my translation):

And God said
 Let the earth sprout grass
 Herb seeding seed according to its kind
 And trees making fruit in which is its seed according to its kind

And it was so
 And the earth brought forth grass
 Herb seeding seed according to its kind
 And trees making fruit in which is its seed according to its kind

Command and response correlate very tightly; the only difference is the verb of the first line. The familiar KJV misses this minor point, translating both verbs "bring forth." The first verb, however, has the same root as the noun that immediately follows, which is translated "grass." The word probably implies new growth. To give the flavor of the Hebrew text we would say in English, "let the earth sprout spouts," or "grow growth." The word translated "brought forth" in the first line of the second triplet is a common word used to indicate anything brought out or set out.

A key issue in verses 11 and 12 is whether the text describes two forms of vegetation or three. The above array uses three, so you know which interpretation I favor. The other idea is that the first category does not denote grass specifically, but only plant life in general, or, perhaps, new plant life. Under that scheme, verse 11 would read:

Let the earth sprout new growth: herbs with seeds according to their kind and trees with fruit containing seeds according to their kind.

This arrangement takes the word translated “grass” and renders it with the more general “new growth, something sprouted.” At issue is whether that contains the other two categories (herbs and trees) or whether it indicates a third category so that we have three total (grass, herbs, and trees). Biblical Hebrew has no punctuation, so the decision to opt for a colon or a comma must come from other evidence. It’s like looking at this sentence in English, without punctuation:

Let the earth bring forth new growth herbs and trees

This could mean either of two things:

Let the earth bring forth new growth: herbs and trees.

Let the earth bring forth new grass, herbs, and trees.

Is “new growth” a general category containing the other two (the “colon” option) or are there three different categories (the “comma” option)? This word is usually translated, or should be translated, “grass,” especially with the implication of new tender green grass. Psalm 23 is perhaps its best-known occurrence, “he makes me lie down in green pastures,” literally, “pastures¹ of green grass.”

It wouldn’t be the most natural reading to use this word as an inclusive for all forms of vegetation, even given that the emerging new plants of the earth would all fall into the category of new growth. But the text describes the reproductive aspect of mature herbs and trees. In chapter 2, trees are already fully mature and fitted out with fruit (2:8-9, 16-17). Moreover, nowhere else in the dozen other places this word occurs would it seem to be an inclusive term for all plant life.

The three-part division of plant life accords well with design patterns seen in Genesis 1 and establishes the rudiments of a spiritual picture developed in Deuteronomy and the prophets.

1 The root of the word for “pastures” is also the place name Naioth, where David fled from Saul’s wrath (1 Sam 19:18); possibly it was then that he wrote this famous psalm.

Three Levels of Vegetation

I will look at three aspects of the description of the vegetation: the overall landscape picture, the progression of description, and the examples of each of the three and their symbolic meaning.

First, a brief note about the physical appearance of the new vegetation. The three-part description indicates a ground covering of grasses, a middle layer of bush-size plants, and then the trees. These three correspond to the ground cover, understory, and canopy zones. There's also a detritus layer which forms from the decaying plant life on the ground, and, of course, variations and details, but the three layers of growth indicated broadly in verses 11 and 12 still suffice to describe the major types of plant life.

The second point is the progression of description: (1) grass; (2) herbs with seed; (3) trees with fruit and seed.

All seed comes from fruit; botanically speaking, the seed is in the mature ovary of a plant, which is the fruit. Grass has fruit, herbs have fruit, trees have fruit. For a pine tree, the cone is its fruit. For oats or wheat, which are grasses, the head of grain is the fruit. The emphasis here, however, is on the functional and spiritual aspects, not technical botanical description. It is generalized, as is the first listing in the preceding verse, and shows a general progression in harmony with other biblical uses of plant life, especially as metaphors of human spiritual growth.

The progression corresponds to Jesus' comment about the good seed in Mark 4:8. The seed "produced a crop, multiplying thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times." The idea is that different people, like different plants, produce at different levels. It doesn't make one better than the other; they all contribute something to the whole. What is important is that they (we) all contribute according to the means God supplies.

The progression also indicates a design in segregating the three classes according to increased complexity of description. While fundamentally all these plants reproduce by means of fruit and seed, regardless of their botanical specifics, the text sorts them categorically by complexity of seed and also by overall size. Grasses, in general the smallest (although bamboo is a grass) have the least obvious fruit. The next level, the "herbs" which generally connotes plants of the mid-story, or bush size, typically have flowers, and thus, fruit, although they may not have edible fruit.

Most edible fruit comes from trees. If you think of our common fruits, they almost all come from trees—bananas, oranges and other citrus, apples, stone fruits (peaches, plums, and kin), and, biblically, pomegranates and figs to round out the fruit bowl. The major groups of edible fruit from the second level would be berries and grapes.

The bigger the plant, the larger the produce, and therefore, the description “fruit containing seed” for trees, but only “seed” with respect to the bush-level plants. The emphasis seems not to be on the details of botanic reproduction but on the size of the plant and its fruit.

The Three Foods Represent Israel

These three levels collectively come to represent God’s dealing with the nation of Israel. Among the lowest level, the grasses, are the grains, such as wheat, barley, and oats. The head of a grass yields its seed; when harvested and threshed it’s called grain. People grind grain and make flour, and from flour they can make bread. The middle-level, the bush or shrub category, would include grapevines. Grapes can be eaten for food, or used to make wine. Wine is a product of the middle group of plants. Among the biblically significant trees, the olive would be on the top of the list. From olives, of course, comes olive oil.

Perhaps now you can see the picture: the familiar Bible trio, “the grain, the wine, and the oil” has its roots in the third day of creation. These three, therefore, also connote an aspect of creation. They appear most often in one of two contexts describing God’s relationship with his people Israel. When Israel has an abundance of grain, wine, and oil, it represents a time of prosperity and time of God’s blessing. When the grain, wine, and oil fail, that indicates a time of waywardness due to their forgetting their God, and the resultant withdrawal of God’s blessing. The land, therefore, representing the state of the nation, produces no fruit. The crops fail; famine and invaders take what’s left.

We’ll look at one example of each, and list several other verses of each category that reinforce the idea that grain, wine, and oil represent the nation of Israel. First, the blessing:

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today—to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul—then I will send rain on your land in its season,

both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine, and oil. (Deut 11:13-14 NIV)

See also Deuteronomy 7:13, 12:17, 14:23, 2 Chronicles 31:5, 32:28, Nehemiah 5:11, Joel 2:19, and Jeremiah 31:12; this last reference takes us into the blessings of God's coming kingdom on earth.

When the Israelites spurn their God, they come to distress, as represented by a want of these products of the land. The curse of Deuteronomy removes everything from the land, including the grain, the wine, and the oil:

The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle, swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. (Deut 28:49-51 NIV)

Joel echoes this curse (1:10), but also uses the three produce types in a prophecy of restoration and encouragement (2:24). The trio occurs other places, too; the figure serves to carry the metaphor of the blessing or judgment of God on Israel. If his people bear spiritual fruit, then they receive the increase of the land. If they are barren of good fruit, God shows his displeasure with drought or famine or locust. The land thus parallels the spiritual state of the people.

Fruit in the New Testament

The figure of three categories of fruit extends into the New Testament in the form of the fruit of the Spirit. Here we have not three categories, but three times three: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23 NIV). In Galatians, Paul has his mind on the concept of Israel and creation. He speaks of the new creation in Christ as being the Israel of God (6:15,16). He has added another dimension to the three-level description of natural fruit. The spiritual creation in Christ fulfills God's intention for his people, whether Jew or Gentile, bond or free, male or female (3:28). All those who have the faith of Abraham (3:29) become Christ's family through baptism, or

emergence from water (3:27), and consequent spiritual growth bearing fruit (5:22-23). They represent the good seed of the parable of the sower (Mark 4:8) and become the Israel of God. All this is foreshadowed on the third day of creation.

The Genesis account of the third day cannot be dismissed as a primitive attempt to account for life on earth. In describing the greening of the earth, couched in entirely natural phrases, it also speaks of love, joy, peace, and a personal response to a creator God.

STUDY 12

“It Was So” and “It Was Good”

*These two short phrases crop up repeatedly during the creation week.
The slight variations in their use are significant.*

EVERY READER OF Genesis notices the phrases “it was so” and “it was good” throughout the creation account. Casual readers will think they each occur once every day. Careful readers will note that is not quite the case. Careful and inquisitive readers will wonder why this isn’t the case and will attempt to explain the pattern that we do see in Genesis 1. This study is for the inquisitive reader.

These two phrases appear in the six days of the creation week. Only in Day Seven, the Sabbath, which records the cessation of work, are these phrases absent. Do the six days of creative work repeat these two phrases in a pattern?

The following items or activities were “so.” All the verses are in chapter 1.

Table 4. “It was so”

Verse	Day	Item
7	2	Firmament made within the waters
9	3	Announcement: let waters be gathered and dry land appear
11	3	Announcement: let vegetation appear on earth
15	4	Announcement: let there be heavenly bodies for lights
24	6	Announcement: let the earth bring forth animals
29-30	6	Announcement: plants given for food

The following items God pronounced "good."

Table 5. "It was good"

Verse	Day	Item
4	1	Light
10	3	Separation of water and dry land
12	3	Vegetation
18	4	Sun, moon, and stars
21	5	Sea animals, fowl
25	6	Terrestrial animals
31	6	Everything altogether very good

Note the lack of a one-to-one correspondence between days and phrases. Each phrase occurs six times, but nothing that was "so" happened on Days One or Five, and nothing declared "good" happened on Day Two. Days Three and Six have each phrase twice, consistent with the fact that both days have two separate scenes.

The table for "good" has seven entries. The last reference does not refer to a specific act or item of creation, but is the final "very good" that encompasses the entire creation and the implicit harmonious functioning of its components.

Should We Expect Uniformity?

Genesis 1 is splendidly orderly and structured—but do order and structure necessarily dictate uniformity? The expectation that each day should follow precisely the same format would depend on each day's activity being amenable to the same format. That would be appropriate if God performed equal acts of creation on each of the six days, in which case the pattern would be something like this:

1. God said, "let there be x."
2. It was so.
3. God made "x."
4. God called x "y."
5. God saw it was good.
6. Evening and morning, the *n*th day.

This pattern would yield uniformity, but could it accommodate the various aspects of creation? Evidently the Septuagint (LXX) translators believed so, and they adjusted the text accordingly [Table 7]. However, the creation account has a bigger job at hand than to assiduously adhere to a rigid protocol.

The task of the six-day account is to take us from unformed, unfilled, and dark to formed, filled, and lighted. Different parts of creation require different treatment; the revelation of light employs a different plan than creating elephants. Likewise, creating the environment for the animals differs procedurally from making the inhabitants themselves. Also, not all things are created equal. The process culminates at “male and female created he them,” that is, the creation of humans. The creation week subjugates all other aspects of creation to the ultimate goal of creating human beings. Differing daily formats reflect the nature of each day’s work.

Don’t look for uniformity of the text from day to day, but for an overall purpose that reflects an ordered flexibility of the basic format. Instead of expecting to find “it was good” or “it was so” in the same place on each day, you should see a general pattern that indicates a planned design, neither random occurrences nor uniform to the point of artifice.

The Meaning of “It Was So”

The word translated “so” is the regular Hebrew word for “yes.” It is a neutral term that carries no moral connotation or spiritual benefaction, as does “it was good;” “it was so” simply moves the process along. It indicates the immediately preceding item was on the agenda and has been dealt with. It denotes a partial completion of a given act, as if to say that everything is coming along.

The position of “it was so” on each day also contributes to our understanding. The chart below shows the text immediately before and after each occurrence. This might seem nitpicking to some, but in Genesis 1 every detail has a story.

Table 6. Context of "It Was So"

Day	Preceding Event	Following Event
2	Firmament made within the waters.	God names the firmament "heaven."
3	Announcement: let waters be gathered and dry land appear.	God names dry land "earth."
3	Announcement: let vegetation appear on earth.	Land produces vegetation.
4	Announcement: let there be heavenly bodies for lights.	God makes heavenly bodies.
6	Announcement: let the earth bring forth animals.	God makes terrestrial animals.
6	Announcement: plants given for food.	God surveys entire creation and pronounces it "very good."

Observations:

1. The formula is used as an intermediary statement indicating "work in progress," from the initial declaration of intent to the production of the intended matter.
2. This formula is absent from Day One because there was no temporizing step. Light appeared solely by the expression of divine will, without any physical steps of creative activity.
3. The phrase "it was so" does not occur between announcement and creative act in the two instances that use the special verb *bara*, "created." These exceptions are the creation of the great sea animals and sea creatures on Day Five (v. 21) and the creation of humans on Day Six (v. 26). It seems that *bara* carries enough force and immediacy to preclude an intermediate step.
4. The first instance of the formula "it was so," on the second day, seems out of place. It comes after the making of the firmament (end of v. 7) and before the naming, (v. 8). To be consistent with later uses, it should occur between the announcement of intention (end of v. 6) and the production step (v. 7)—before, not after, God made the firmament. The LXX translators corrected what

they thought was a mistake or transcription error and relocated “it was so” to that spot. However, this placement of “it was so” on Day Two is not likely the original position, as evidenced by other unnecessary changes made in the LXX.

5. One possible explanation of the apparently out-of-place occurrence on Day Two: this day also lacks, for reasons explained below, “it was good.” Therefore, on this day, “it was so” occupies a position later than it otherwise would, as if it in some way were to suffice for both phrases.

The Meaning of “It Was Good”

Why does the text even mention something so obvious? Could God make something that was *not* good? Perhaps he could, for the firmament did not receive the “good” tagline. What then does “it was good” actually tell us?

- That everything came out right and God was pleased with his handiwork?
- That it was good because it marked another step of progress toward the goal God had in mind?
- That the created earth and its components had some inherent moral goodness?
- That earth enjoyed a better condition prior to the evil that would come about as a result of human activity?

Probably all of the above: moving toward a specific goal, God being pleased, moral goodness, and contrast with human evil.

Of course everything God made was good in the sense that it came out exactly as he planned. The phrase also has a tinge of anthropomorphism, as if God looked upon the Earth, as a potter with a fine vase, and was very pleased with his craftsmanship. It’s nice to think that God took pleasure in creating our planet and its contents.

As detailed in Study 6, the creation pattern moves with a purposeful vision from dark, unformed, and unfilled to lighted, formed, and populated. The plan specifically focuses on the earth and the creation of the humans. When the text records that God saw something was good, it in part means that what God made had advanced the program toward his ultimate goal.

Moral Goodness

To attribute inherent moral goodness to creation might imply that morality extended into the non-human realm. The notion of inherent not-goodness of the material creation has surfaced often in the history of religions,¹ but the origin of the material world carried no such sanctions or labels.

Consider the instances of division and separation in Genesis 1: light and dark, day and night, waters above and below. It would have been easy for God to label any part of creation "bad" or "evil." The text could have read: "And God saw the light that it was good, but the darkness was evil." Or, "God saw that some of the animals were good, but others evil." Genesis has no such statements. Any discrimination between good and not good entities, or even the dismissing of the entire material world as not good, must be seen against the original declaration that every item was good, and all material creation together was very good. The New Testament declarations regarding clean and unclean (e.g., Mark 7:18-19, Acts 10:15, Rom 14:14, 1 Cor 10:25-26) have their basis in Genesis 1.

God's material world is entirely good from the beginning, even allowing for the ritually unclean beasts and foods enjoined by the Law. The human desire to establish legalistic righteousness by observing laws, especially those that required abstaining from certain items, provides an easy avenue to "righteousness"—one merely avoids the unclean. Avoiding the unclean implies that the default setting for a human must therefore be good, or clean. All such posturing only obscures the one avenue of salvation, the grace of God extended to those who recognize themselves as "not good" by virtue of their sinfulness.

The implications of "it was good" lead to the doctrine of the Kingdom of God on Earth. The Bible does not sever the natural and spiritual realms, but endorses their complete eternal coexistence. From the beginning, the material world is good, and will continue so forever.

¹ Gnosticism and Manichaeism are two religious movements that eschewed the material world. Gnostics, who flourished in the second century A.D., believed that the material world was the mistake of an inferior God. Their pathway to righteousness was to ignore any bodily desire and give credence only to the pursuit of an esoteric mystery known as spiritual knowledge, or *gnosis*. Manichaeism developed a few centuries later from Gnosticism and Persian influences. The Manichees held a staunch dualism, wherein the soul was good but the material body was evil.

Nothing in creation is inherently evil. It is all for our welfare, sustenance, and enjoyment, that we might become aware of dependency on the Creator and rejoice in his provisions. Everything God made was good, but it didn't take long for the activity of humans to infect the creation with evil. Within the creation that God made was a small sphere in which he gave sovereignty to humans, and into that sphere they created a situation that was incompatible with his goodness. God made good, but we made bad. Read "and God saw everything he made, that it was very good" with a prophetic lens that adds the ellipsis "... but it wouldn't be for long."

All of the above nuances of "it was good" are value judgments. These declarations are not necessary for the creation work to continue; they provide no action. The concept of value judgments deals with an abstract idea, not the physical created world or any empirical statement about any part of the physical world. It is one thing to note that light exists; that is verifiable and public. Likewise for trees, banana slugs, and so on. We can describe the appearance, features and behavior (e.g., multiplying, filling the earth) of created entities. To pronounce them "good," however, is a value judgment that goes beyond physical description and attributes some intangible quality to created entities. Much more to come on this subject in Study 28, on the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The Occurrences of "It Was Good"

Days One, Four and Five have "it was good" once each, and Day Three has it twice because of the two separate activities on that day. Day Six also has two acts. The first is followed with "it was good," but the second, the creation of humans, does not have a separate approbation. Instead, the encompassing "very good" covers the entire creation of which humans were the main object. Only Day Two lacks any activity that God deemed good.

The LXX solution to the problem was simply to "correct" the text by adding "and God saw that it was good" at the end of verse 8. The Hebrew-to-Greek translators of Alexandria thought the creation account needed more uniformity, so they happily provided additions to where they reckoned the original had a vacant spot (Table 7).

Back to why the firmament failed to obtain "good" status:

1. the firmament itself was not a tangible entity;
2. making the firmament was an incomplete act; and
3. the firmament will come to represent separation between God and humanity.

The first two reasons are technical, and the third spiritual. The firmament was a division within the waters. It didn't even have a manifestation, such as light. It would have been awkward to note that God saw that it was good when there wasn't anything there to see or call good. Moreover, it didn't assume its fullness and significance until Day Four when it "became" the firmament of heaven, to contain the heavenly bodies.

Day Two lacks "it was good" because the firmament was not something God could look upon with approbation. It was uniquely incomplete at the end of Day Two, therefore, the phrase "it was so," the process marker, comes later than its normal position, in place of "it was good." This shift of position is in keeping with the nature of what God did on that day. The LXX additions are unnecessary acts of hyper-correction, that is, correcting something that only appeared defective.

Final Thoughts

The little phrases "it was so" and "it was good" move the narrative along and offer a repeated structure, varying only as necessary with the nature of the created entities of each day. Like links of a chain, they carry the creation account. Do not consider the phrases mindless drones or unnecessary details. They form part of the rich meaning of the creation text.

Table 7. Differences between LXX and Masoretic Text in Genesis 1:1-2:3

Words in *italics* are added in LXX and do not appear in the Masoretic Text.

Day One

No differences between LXX and Masoretic.

Day Two

LXX moves “it was so” from end of verse 7 to end of verse 6.

(v. 8) And God called the firmament heaven, *and God saw that it was good.*

(end of v. 9) *And the water which was under the heaven was collected into its places, and the dry land appeared.*

Day Three

(v. 11) grass bearing seed, *according to its kind and according to its likeness,*

(v. 12) seed according to its kind, *and according to its likeness* and the *fruit* tree bearing fruit whose seed is in it, according to its kind *on the earth.*

Day Four

(v. 14) LXX reverses first two phrases: to give light upon the earth, to divide the day from the night.

Day Five

(end of v. 20) *it was so*

Day Six

No differences

Day Seven

(2:2) LXX changes “finished on the seventh day” to “finished on the sixth day.”

STUDY 13

Populating Heaven

*God places the sun, moon, and stars in the firmament of heaven.
Some thoughts on the unique designations of the sun and moon.*

God's Activity on Day Four

God speaks
God makes
God places
God views

THE FIRST HALF of the week has given Earth light and form. Dry land has sprouted layers of vegetation. Creation, though now potentially inhabitable, remains uninhabited. Days Four, Five, and Six will fill the void and complete the program.

Although the account of Day Four (Gen 1:14-19) has but the four verbs above, it is second only to Day Six in length. Therefore, the text contains much in the way of ancillary information that describes the role and functions of the heavenly bodies, details that must have a significant purpose.

God will now fill the prepared earth and universe. The stars and planets inhabit the firmament of heaven. They will be the population there, as God begins the four-step process of turning “void” into “filled.” It might seem strange to think of the stars as inhabitants. Here is the rationale for this concept:

- 1. Visual Perspective.** Looking at the sky at night, it takes little imagination to think of the stars as the population of heaven. We even give them familiar designations, naming patterns of stars after their likeness to objects such as a dipper or living beings such as a bear or a hunter.

2. **Literary Structure.** Days Four to Six describe how God filled each niche he created on the first three days. The firmament of heaven could have no living population, but the stars occupy the analogous role.
3. **Spiritual Symbolism.** Several details concerning the heavenly bodies match up with details concerning humans. The text itself anthropomorphizes the stars.

God places the heavenly bodies in the firmament of heaven. This phrase differs slightly from the firmament God made on Day Two. The firmament of heaven, known to us as “outer space,” is so vast that it leads the mind to contemplate eternity and infinity.

Heavenly Bodies: Made or Created?

Surprisingly, the heavenly bodies are the first “things” made during the creative week. Light is revealed, the firmament is intangible, and the dry land is also revealed when the waters part. The vegetation comes forth from the earth at God’s behest. Finally, the sun, moon, and stars are tangible entities that God directly makes.

Why then does the text read “and God *made*” instead of “and God *created*”? You might not even notice the difference. Some say that the words are interchangeable and no difference is intended. Others think that the stars have been there since 1:1 and are now just being revealed.

“Made” is weaker and more general than “created.” The two words have different uses in early Genesis, so the use of “made” is doubtless deliberate and according to a plan of writing. A look at the three uses of the word “created” in Genesis shows that the text reserves this word for only the most special of occasions. It occurs in verse 1, with respect to the initial creation of the entire cosmos, then not again until Day Five, when animal life appears in sea and sky. The third and final occurrence brings forth humanity on Day Six.

The heavenly constituency does not merit “created,” probably because light already existed. Light giving is the primary role of the heavenly bodies, so they do not, in that sense, represent something new. Light already existed prior to Day One; light, integral to the Creator, always existed, at least in God’s realm. On Day One light comes to earth, and on Day Four God installs the sun, moon, and stars, as light-bearers

to provide light to the physical creation. The choice of “made,” not “created,” affirms that the appearance of the heavenly bodies represents a continuation of the work of the first day.

The text does not support the idea that God “revealed” the heavenly bodies originally created as part of 1:1, though light clearly did exist before Day Four. When God made the heavenly bodies, part of the work was to relocate the light into discrete bodies.

Three Sources of Light

The text for verses 14 to 18 (KJV) reads:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.

This paragraph is a complex of ideas regarding the details and purposes of the day’s work. The text on three successive days describes the inhabitants of the three realms of creation—sky, sea, and land. Day Five will have three categories of animals in sky and sea, Day Six will have three categories of land animals. Also, Day Three divided the plant life into three categories. Likewise God makes three categories of heavenly bodies.

The first two categories have one member each: the sun and moon. The third contains the myriad stars, though the Hebrew *cocabim* includes planets, stars, galaxies, and whatever appears as points of light.¹

The Heavenly Bodies as Lights

The text uses greater (or bigger) and lesser (or smaller) light to indicate

1 In the 1920s, Edwin Hubble verified that some of those stars out there were not stars, but galaxies well outside of our own Milky Way. Until then the Milky Way was considered the extent of the universe. This website has a nice comparison of our sun to other stars and also pictures and graphics that show the vastness of the known universe: sci.gallaudet.edu/Science/relativesizes.html (accessed May 7, 2011).

sun and moon.² Although “sun” (*shemesh*) and “moon” (*yareach*) are common Hebrew words, they do not appear in the Bible until Joseph’s dream in Genesis 37:9. The stars, however, are called stars; they do not receive a moniker such as “very small lights.”

The use of “big light” and “small light,” and the collective term, “bigger lights” for both sun and moon lends a primitive tone. Why would the text use alternate descriptive labels for the sun and moon but just call a star a star? What does the text indicate by using such terminology? It could have just as easily said, “God made the sun, moon, and stars.” At the least, the use of the apparently naive “bigger light” and “smaller light” instead of “sun” and “moon” requires more thought from the reader.

Of course, the text must have reasons to use “greater light” instead of “sun” and “smaller light” instead of “moon.” Let’s look at those reasons.

1. Emphasis on Light

The account begins by stating that God mandates lights in the firmament of heaven. The generic “light” covers all three categories of heavenly bodies, followed by the classification: the two big lights and the stars. Of the two big lights, one is the “big big light” and the other is the “little big light.” By using “lights” as the generic category of the entirety that God brought forth in “let there be lights,” the text reinforces the nature of the firmament’s occupants; they are all lights.

2. Structural Reinforcement

The term “lights” calls back to the first day of creation. “Let there be lights in the firmament” echoes “Let there be light.” The lights of Day Four now designate the physical repositories of that light. God parcels and localizes his light into the sun, moon, and stars. Thus, the use of the term “lights” reinforces the connection to the first day of creation, and points to the heavenly bodies as the physical agents of light.

3. Connection with the Divine

The usage of “greater and lesser lights” rather than “sun and moon” links these bodies directly to God. They now have the elevated role of giving light, previously emanating only from him. The light of Day One that sundered the darkness represented the quality and presence of light but

² Psalm 136:7-9 yields internal biblical evidence, as if it were necessary, that the greater light and lesser light are equivalent terms for sun and moon. It also establishes that the stars are integral to the purpose of ruling, along with the sun and moon.

had no specific physical source; it was God manifested as light. The text uses a word from Day One, “light,” a word intimately and only associated with God. Now this physical body will be a source of light.

4. Probable Pagan Pre-emption

Ancient peoples worshiped either entities such as the sun, moon, and all sorts of animals, or deities associated with various aspects of nature. People came to worship the created rather than the Creator. For instance, Abraham’s Ur worshiped the moon god Sin. Does the text attempt to address this corruption of worship? If so, does the use of “greater light” and “lesser light” in any way speak to this issue?

If the text had used the word *shemesh* (sun), one could say, “*elohim* created *shemesh*, but that’s just the Hebrew account.” However, by using the terms “greater light” and “lesser light” instead of the specific names sun and moon, the text casts a wider nomenclatural net about the created heavens. The use of generic terms for two of the most obvious candidates for idolatry addresses the issues of idolatry and various forms of polytheism before they ever start. Regardless of one’s culture or language, the text lays out the clear fact that these entities came forth from the will and power of God. They are part of the creation, not objects worthy of worship in themselves or representing a specific god among a pagan pantheon.

5. God, Jesus, and the Redeemed

No reference explicitly likens the Father to the greater light or to the sun and his son, Jesus, to the lesser light or to the moon. However, several passages to a greater or lesser degree allude to a greater father and lesser son, with these two together comprising the two great lights of creation, augmented by a multitude of believers. The following list provides some evidence for this symbolism based on the hierarchy of the fourth day:

- “The Father is greater than I” (John 14:28). This places Jesus as the smaller of the two great lights. See also John 5:19, 30; 13:16; 1 Corinthians 11:3.
- “One glory of the sun, one glory of the moon, another glory for the stars” (1 Cor 15:41). This passage is preceded by Paul’s statement (v. 27) that God has put all things in subjection to Jesus, except, of course, for him [God] who put all things in subjection

to him [Jesus]. Then Paul likens our resurrection body to that of the stars and the now immortal body of Jesus our Lord (v. 49), the man from heaven. It seems certain that Paul was reflecting on Genesis when he wrote this magnificent passage.

- “Only as regards the throne will I be greater than you” (Gen 41:40). This statement describes the elevation of Joseph in Egypt. Only Pharaoh, who gave him the throne, remains greater. This applies to Day Four only in the sense that they both describe in symbolic, prophetic terms the relationship of Jesus and the Father. Likewise, the moon, which is the second largest and second most important heavenly body, derives all of its light (power) from the sun.
- “He reflects the glory of God” (Heb 1:3 RSV). The point here is the relationship between God as the source of light and Jesus the manifestation, but not independent source, of that same light. The word translated “reflect” appears only here in the New Testament. Bullinger’s lexicon gives it the meaning “reflection” or “brightness,” and Liddell and Scott’s says “efflux of light.” The context indicates the perfect representation of God is in the character of Jesus.

STUDY 14

The Heavenly Bodies

The internal structure of the fourth day (Gen 1:14-19), and the role of the sun, moon, and stars as rulers and timekeepers.

GOD ASSIGNS DUTIES to the heavenly bodies, which invites us into anthropomorphism, for the only other created entities assigned any particular duties are humans. The animals and plants are just told to reproduce. Moreover, the roles of the heavenly bodies resemble those assigned to humans, suggesting analogies between humans and heavenly bodies.

The duties for the heavenly bodies are given in seven declarations divided into three groups. These numbers reinforce the value of looking for the structure of the text. In straight prose form, Genesis 1:14-18 (KJV) reads thus:

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and for years: And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth, and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth.

The simplest analysis reveals three sections, each marked by the word “God” (*elohim*) and a verb:

Declaration of intent (vv. 14-15)	<i>God said</i> . . . three functions
Production (v. 16)	<i>God made</i> . . . one function
Placement (vv. 17-18)	<i>God set</i> . . . three functions

The three active verbs each have God as the subject. As on all days, God first declares his intention, then performs the creative act. This day has the addition of God placing or setting, which gives the impression that he makes the stars in one location and then carefully arranges them in the heavens.

In these three sections, seven specific phrases describe the functions of the heavenly bodies. The three phrases that immediately follow God's declaration of intent form a comprehensive statement that includes the three functions assigned to the heavenly bodies: dividing light from dark, giving light, and marking time.

The following breakdown highlights key words that show the symmetry of Day Four:

God spoke: let there be lights
in the firmament of heaven

to divide between day and night;

and let them be for signs and for
seasons and for days and years

And let them be for lights
in the firmament of heaven
to give light on the earth.

God made the two great lights,

the greater light to rule the
day, and the smaller light to
rule the night. [and the stars]

God placed them in the
firmament of heaven

to give light on the earth,

and to rule by day and by night
and divide between the
light and the darkness.

The seven phrases grouped under the three headings reveal another layer of structure, called a chiasmus.

To appreciate a chiasmus, arrange the text in pairs as a series of corresponding indentations, with capital letters for labels, the second member of each pair marked with the "prime" sign ('). The seven items of the right hand column in the above chart appear thus in chiastic layout:

- A. **divide** between day and night.
 B. and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days
 and for years.
 C. And let them be for lights in the firmament of
 heaven to give **light on the earth**.
 D. The greater light **to rule** the day, and the
 smaller light to rule the night, and the stars
 C'. to give **light on the earth**,
 B'. and **to rule** by day and by night
 A'. **divide** between the light and the darkness.

This array omits the three section headings, and includes only the seven statements describing the functions of the heavenly bodies.

The first and last items (A and A') form a classic pairing with the common element "divide." "The light and the darkness" of A' corresponds to "day and night" of A. As well, C and C' form a pair, with the common phrase "give light on earth." The center item, D, forms a natural hub, as it is the only statement that mentions all three classes of heavenly bodies. That leaves B and B' but these don't look like much of a match, as "rule by day and night" doesn't seem to correspond to "signs, season, days, years."

Closer inspection reveals an overlay of another common structural format, alternation. Entries C, D, C', and B' alternate on the theme of light and ruling:

- C. to give light on the earth
 D. and to rule the day and night
 C'. to give light on earth
 B'. and to rule by day and night.

These four consecutive entries, embedded within the larger seven-part chiasmus, tell a story of their own. They emphasize the connection between providing light on earth and ruling by day and night. This is helpful, because it clarifies exactly what "ruling" entails in the context of heavenly bodies.

Functions of the Heavenly Bodies

The four headings below describe the three main functions of the heavenly bodies, as the first two (ruling and light-giving) are two ways of describing the same task.

1. Ruling

What exactly does “ruling” mean if you are a heavenly body? What do you rule? How do you rule? The word translated “rule” means just that, so there’s nothing hanging on the translation, even though these are the only occurrences in Scripture where something other than God or a person does the ruling. In the alternation pattern above, ruling parallels giving light. Yet it is an added nuance, for the text could have omitted “ruling” altogether. Obviously, the sun is the dominant feature of the daylight and the moon is the dominant feature of the night sky. The idea of ruling points to the importance of the heavenly bodies as light givers.

The sun and moon become rulers, but their regency, even their existence, is from the Creator. Those who worshipped the sun and the moon worshipped the created, not the Creator (Rom 1:25).

Marking the religious calendar is another aspect of ruling. For instance, “on the fourteenth day of the first month at even is the LORD’s passover” (Lev 23:5). The annual feasts and other holy days are marked by month and day of the month on the lunar calendar. Even when keeping the special days is merely a token of worship without true reverence, it shows the rulership of the heavenly bodies over the house of Israel. The prophet Amos decries God’s people impatiently biding their time during the new moon and sabbath, eager to resume their deceit in commerce (Amos 8:4-5).

2. Giving Light

This is the most straightforward of the functions. The greater light, or sun, holds a special place; our planet derives life from its energy. The moon produces no light itself but reflects light from the sun. As Earth rotates, half of the globe faces away from the sun and receives a small amount of light from the moon and stars. The cycle of day and night is essential for life, yet even in the darkness we have some light. When we face away from the sun, the darkened sky reveals the stars that are always there, but too faint to see except when the sunlight wanes.

Thus, the necessary arrangements for life-giving solar energy and light come to Earth, shared by all as our planet rotates, and during the night hours we still have a bit of light for navigation, romance, and wonder. God makes not only the rain but also the sunlight fall on the just and the unjust.

3. *Dividing*

The text states this function twice: dividing light from darkness and dividing day from night. It fits with the cycle of morning and evening that had existed since Day One. On Day Four, as we have seen, God invested the light inherent in his person into the heavenly bodies. They became the bearers of light. As the earth rotates, its inhabitants get the sense of the sun dominating the day while the moon shines at night.

From an astronomical perspective, the light output of the heavenly bodies is constant. Therefore, the dividing of light from dark relates to human perspective on a rotating planet. Earth itself does the dividing as it rotates on its polar axis. An observer on earth, though, sees the division of light and dark, day and night, as a function of the sun, moon, and stars.

Dividing also hearkens back to the first two days. Day One marked the first dividing, when God divided the light from the dark. On Day Two, the firmament divided the waters above from the waters below. All instances use the same Hebrew word. The material entities of creation were not the end product. Rather, the end product was their orderly and specified function. Throughout creation, God is separating, specifying, and refining his work.

4. *Signs, Seasons, Days, Years*

Two New Testament passages, both in contexts where Paul is striving to dislodge the believers from their entrenchment in Jewish ritual observances, allude to this timekeeping function:

You are observing special days, and months, and seasons, and years.
(Gal 4:10 NIV)¹

1 The Interlinear Greek New Testament reads: “days ye observe and months and season and years.” This seems to indicate that the Galatians retained Sabbath keeping. A possible paraphrase might be, “You still think it’s necessary to keep the Sabbath—not to mention the other holidays!” Some of the believers evidently insisted that everyone should keep the Sabbath.

Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration, or a Sabbath day. (Col 2:16 NIV)

Paul refers to the Jewish holy calendar as having special days at set intervals, all determined by astronomical data. “Days” would refer to the most frequently occurring special day, the Sabbath. Each seven-day period, or week, is marked by a lunar phase: new moon, waxing half-moon, full moon, and waning half-moon. Each new moon, every four weeks, is the Feast of the New Moon, or new month. “Seasons” would represent those holidays that mark seasons, such as Firstfruits. Finally, “years” indicates Rosh Hashanah (New Year’s Day), an annual event marked by the lunar calendar. It commemorates the cycle of the calendar rather than an agricultural season.

In Colossians 2:16, the word “festival” appears to equate with the seasons, referring to the Feast of Firstfruits, the Passover, and the annual cycle of feast days. The use of Sabbath in Colossians explains the use of the word “days” in the Galatians passages, and, obviously, a new moon is the same as a month.

Paul admonishes the believers in Galatia and Colossae for thinking it was necessary to keep the holy days. Comparing the Greek text of Galatians 4:10 to the LXX of Genesis 1:14 shows that he uses the terminology of Day Four to describe these events. Three of the four key words (days, seasons, and years) are the same. Paul does not repeat the word “signs,” because, obviously, the Jews didn’t celebrate any observance called “signs.” Paul adds “months” as the fourth element. There’s no apparent match between “signs” and “new moons,” but the three calendar markings in 1:14 are definitely linked to Jewish observances.

The word translated “sign” cannot refer to any regularly occurring feast or holy day.² In all instances of this word, it refers to an extraordinary event or happening, a miracle, a special event or an unusual marking, such as the sign placed on Cain (Gen 4:15). If days, seasons, and years are the regular heavenly events, that would perhaps leave signs

2 The NIV confuses signs and regular events: Let there lights in the heavens . . . and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years. Blocher (op. cit., p. 55) offers a similar translation that also places “signs” as a collective for the remaining three: “let them serve as signs, both for festivals and for the days and years!” Paul’s indication of four time frames for the Jewish observances militates against these translations.

to include events such as eclipses, meteors, and comets, or special juxtapositions of stars and planets. Jeremiah 10:2 might be the only place in the Hebrew Scriptures that explicitly connects signs and the heavens, and that passage seems to be metaphorical. Still, the heavens do have a “sign” function, but to be a sign, an unusual astronomic event must indicate something special. Just being unusual doesn’t make something a sign; it must have a specific divine purpose.

From this standpoint, the messianic signs of the gospels take on added significance. Signs in heaven are associated with Jesus’ birth (Matt 2:2, 9; Luke 2:8-9), baptism (Matt 3:16), crucifixion (Matt 27:45), and return (1 Thess 4:16, Matt 24:29). The last reference, from the Olivet prophecy, is the most explicit:

Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken; then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven. (Matt 24:29 RSV)

While there might be additional symbolic meanings to the sun, moon, and stars here, there must be at least some real astronomical phenomenon. This sign must of necessity be a singular and unmistakable event.

The role of the heavenly bodies anticipates both the Jewish ritual system and the new covenant of grace. Days, seasons, and years form the structure of the Jewish calendar and cycle of holy days, and signs in the heavens are uniquely associated with Messiah. The new covenant replaces (in one sense) and fulfills (in another sense) the Jewish ritual system.

The tension between these two—the orderly events of the regular movements of the heavenly bodies on the one hand, and the occasional unusual signs in the heavens on the other hand—appears in Jeremiah’s prophecies. Jeremiah uses the constancy of the astronomical movements to express God’s undying love for Israel (31:35-37; 33:20-21, 25-26). He also prophesies there must be a change, a new heart, a new covenant so that God can be Israel’s God forever, to fulfill his eternal plan (31:31-34); this would be accomplished in Messiah (33:14-15).

Jeremiah’s messianic prophecies indicate both a renewal and a continuance. Yes, Israel abides forever, but not the Israel of the Old Covenant of ritual and works. This is the plan of God suggested by the role of the heavenly bodies, as expressed in their role to provide signs and season,

days, and years. The abundant prophetic and symbolic use of heavenly phenomena surely has its roots here in Genesis 1:14.

Heavenly Bodies and Humans

God populates the heavens, and assigns tasks to the heavenly bodies. The only other created entity that receives such a commission is humans. Like the heavenly population, God will create Adam and Eve, then set them in their appointed location. Only to heavenly bodies and humans does he give specified tasks and a place to do those tasks. Both involve dominion: Adam is to rule the animals; the sun, moon, and stars were to rule over day and night. Both are made in the image of God. (God appointed the heavenly bodies as “lights,” so they are also in his image who *is* light.)

Finally, both systems have an inherent hierarchy: the order of sun, moon, stars parallels that of God, Jesus, and the body of believers. This correlation between heavenly bodies and earthly bodies (people) underpins Bible analogies likening humans to light-giving bodies, such as Matthew 5:14, “You are the light of the earth.”

The evening of Day Four reveals the starry multitude and the next morning brings the first sunrise. At this point in the creation account we have a populated heaven, vegetated *terra firma*, and seas and skies with tides of the moon.

Earth is complete, a running and operating system with every natural feature needed to support animal life. Now it is ready for God to create the animals, a project that will occupy the next two days, culminating with Adam and Eve at the close of Day Six.

STUDY 15

Living Beings

The events of Day Five (Gen 1:20-23) result in a new thing under the sun: the amazing world of animal life.

God's Activity on Day Five

God speaks

God creates

God views

God blesses

THE FIFTH DAY of the creation week brings a new development of such signal importance that it merits the reappearance, for the first time since 1:1, of the verb *bara*, “created.” That “something new” is animal life. In the first of three creative stages encompassing four general categories over two days, animals enter earth’s stage to play out their lives.

On Day Five, a single episode brings forth the first two of these categories, the animal populations inhabiting sea and sky. Tomorrow, on Day Six, two additional creative scenes will bring terrestrial life: first the land animals, and then the ultimate species of creation, humans.

One creative scene occurs simultaneously in two realms, the seas and the sky. This format stands in contrast with Day Six, in which the appearance of humans, although they are biologically similar to other terrestrial animals, receives its own creative scene. The animals of Day Five are, in general, more distant from humans in terms of biological, ecological, social, and economic concerns, so the text combines the populating of the sea and sky into one scene.

Continuing the overall pattern of the creation week, where Days One to Three are paired respectively with Days Four to Six, Day Five brings

the populating of the elements formed on Day Two. The firmament and seas receive their inhabitants.

God's plan seems to start off like Day Three with an intention statement (v. 20). "Let the waters bring forth" parallels "let the earth bring forth" (v. 11). However, this English parallelism is not as tight in Hebrew.

The KJV has "bring forth" in both places and on Day Six (verses 11, 20, and 24), but Hebrew has three different words. The RSV has "put forth" in verse 11 and "bring forth" in 20 and 24, hardly an improvement. The NIV does better with "produce vegetation," "teem with living creatures," and "produce living creatures." Alter's translation is similar and also reflects the differences: "let the earth grow grass," "waters swarm," and "bring forth living creatures" respectively.

On Days Three and Five, ecologically-specific words describe how the earth brings forth. On Day Three, when denoting the appearance of plant life on the dry land, the Hebrew verb indicates "sprouting," whereas on Day Five, the seas "swarm." Also, on Day Three the dry land brings forth on its own; on Day Five, God creates the sea animals.

Life Fills Sea and Sky

That we are animals, there is no doubt; that we are a special kind of animal there is likewise no doubt. The interrelationships between animals and humans run along several lines. We are to have dominion over the animal world, some of us eat other animals, they serve us as transporters, aides, companions, suppliers of many commodities, and as a source of agricultural power. In the book of Job, animals are a measure of wealth in chapter 1, lessons from the Almighty in chapters 38 to 40, and symbols of human pride in chapter 41.

The two broad categories, sea animals and fowl, bear little resemblance and relationship to human beings. They aren't, as we are, terrestrial, and most of the animals created this day aren't mammals. We don't share our lives with catbirds and catfish in the same way that we do with cats and cattle. The first installment of animal life comprises, very generally, those groups least "like us."

A few words describe the sea creatures, but one word covers all birds. The first word used to describe the sea animals, *sheretz*, occurs both as a

verb and a noun: “swarm with swarms” (“bring forth abundantly” KJV). Its primary designation is little things that live in great swarms, such as school of fish or a cloud of gnats.

What is it that is going to swarm? The term used here for the sea animals is *nephesh chayyah*, which will also be used for tomorrow’s terrestrial animals. “Living creature” might make a good translation, or maybe “living, breathing entity” as root idea of *nephesh* is breathing and *chayyah* is a form of the word for “life.” The term is first applied to sea animals, followed closely by the birds.

The one word used to denote avian life appears as both noun and verb; “winged [things] that wing above the earth” or “flying [things] that fly” would capture the flavor of the Hebrew of verse 20. Thus, the declaration of God’s plan for animal life for the major life zones of sea and sky is given in the broadest of strokes.

Structure of the Paragraph

The three sentences that comprise the account of Day Five are:

1. Declaration of intention
2. Creation of the sea and air animals
3. Blessing upon the sea and air animals

This pattern differs from the structure of Day Four. The content and purpose differ because the created items differ. The text does not have boilerplate redundancy, but a flexible structure as each day requires.

The intention statement mentions water and its proposed population (“let the waters swarm with living things”) as well as the flying fowl to occupy “the face of the firmament of heaven.” The intention statement uses an inversion pattern:

Let swarm the waters
 Swarm of living creatures
 And birds to fly
 Over the earth, upon the surface of the firmament of heaven.

This is an example of a simple *a-b-b-a* pattern, niche-animal-animal-niche, a small chiasmus.

What’s the “surface of the firmament of heaven”? The Hebrew idiom is based on the word for “face.” It can carry meanings such as “on the surface of” (as in vv. 2 and 29), “above the surface,” “upon,” and the like.

Its inclusion here distinguishes the lower strata of the atmosphere where the birds fly from the firmament of heaven (the niche for the population of the stars). This zone is demarcated as being “above the earth” and on the “surface” (as seen from human perspective, looking up from below) of the firmament of heaven. Alter’s “let fowl fly over the earth across the vault of the heaven” says it best. An observer on earth could look up at the sky and see the lower “surface” of the firmament of heaven. Thus this phrase describes the realm for avian life. The text seems to say, “the birds live up there, above the earth but not as high as the stars.”

To describe zooplankton and huge schools of fish, “swarm” does fine. Not all fish come in great schools, though, so this possibly explains the mention of the great sea creatures in verse 21. What does the text gain by using “swarms of living things,” instead of simply “living things?” Or, for that matter, why doesn’t it just say, “Let there be fish?” The word “swarm” must have some important meaning; moreover, it applies to the sea creatures but not to the birds. And the production statement introduces a second word for swarms, too, a word that is repeated for the crawling creatures on Day Six. Could there also be some metaphoric, poetic, or symbolic meaning? Although birds are capable of massive aggregations,¹ they are not described this way.

Created!

As per the intention statement, the waters are to swarm with life and birds are to fly in the sky. God now creates not just the sea animals, but specifically, the “great sea creatures and all the [other] living things that move and all the winged birds according to their kind.” The text details the creative act emphasizing key items omitted in the declaration of intention; the thrust of verse 21 could be “all creatures great and small.”

In addition, the phrase “after their kind,” or “according to their kind” appears here. A similar phrase occurred on Day Three vis-à-vis seeded plants for their reproduction. Here, the phrase indicates about the same

¹ King and other penguin species come to mind, as do many migratory waterfowl. I have seen upwards of 100,000 snow geese and tundra swans covering a lake during early spring migration. Passenger pigeons may have been the most numerous of any bird, with population estimates in the billions, and flocks that would darken the sky for hours at a time. Incredibly, they were hunted to extinction, the last one dying at the Cincinnati Zoo in 1914.

thing, as the blessing of fecundity follows. From a genetic standpoint both plants and animals transmit their likeness via the same DNA replication scheme, but the mating of animals is often more exciting.² Hence, we have the blessing “be fruitful and multiply,” which would seem an odd thing to say to plants.

The fulfillment of God’s intention is stated in verse 21. The first two words of this verse are (in Hebrew) nearly identical to the second and third words of Genesis 1:1, “and created *elohim*.” The signature word “created” is used here for the second time in the creation account, and, as always in any Bible text, God is the subject of the sentence. Here, though, the heavens and earth are not the direct objects of the sentence (as in 1:1). Instead the “great whales” or “sea monsters” (RSV, Alter) and “living animals” are the direct objects of God’s creative work.

Whereas the intention statement for the sea life only mentions swarms of living creatures (“let God bring forth swarms of living creatures”), the production statement includes the great sea monsters, too (“So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm”). The production statement puts them in the first position, before the smaller swarming creatures. These two direct objects (great sea monsters and living creatures) together may provide a clue as to why the text employs the verb *bara*, “created,” echoing 1:1. The creative program has advanced to living beings. Plants came on Day Three, but plants aren’t “beings.” The Creation Text is unquestionably both teleological (moving toward a goal) and anthropocentric (human-centered). All the creative activity is sequentially structured to place the creation of the humans as the centerpiece or the focal point. Using “and God *made*” (instead of “created”) would weaken the sentence. The text emphasizes the supremacy of God the Creator to created beings (Rom 1:25).

The Hebrew word *tannin*, variously translated “whale” (KJV), “sea monsters” (Alter, RSV), “great sea monsters” (JPS), or “great creatures of the sea” (NIV) appears in several Bible contexts. This word describes the snake that was Aaron’s rod (Exod 7:9), a dragon (Ezek 29:3), a sea creature (Psa 148:7), or even a jackal (Lam 4:3). The phrase *tanninim*

2 Plants that rely on insect pollination are interesting in their own way, especially complex symbiotic relationships such as the fig and the fig wasp.

bag'dolim, “big sea creatures,” indicates creatures of significant size and power. It is also the narrowest category (except for humans) in the creation account. Does it refer to whales, giant squid, or any large sea animal?³ Or does this word couple with the smaller, swarming creatures, the two phrases together forming a complete description of all sea life, as in “all creatures great and small?”

The symbolic uses of this word (e.g., Isa 27:1, 51:9; Ezek 32:2) sometimes represent “in a figurative sense God’s most powerful opponents.”⁴ The Genesis usage reinforces God’s superiority over *all* things, especially those who would appear formidable. The rabbinic scholar and commentator Umberto Cassuto takes this idea further, citing the mythological usage of this word in other texts of the Ancient Near East, especially creation sagas. He suggests the word *tannin* is used to counter mythologies that had great monsters involved in creation. Saying that God specifically created the great sea monsters was a strike against any idolatry, mythology, or pagan worship of a sea divinity:

It is as though the Torah said, in effect: far be it from anyone to suppose that the sea monsters were mythological beings opposed to God or in revolt against Him; they were as natural as the rest of the creatures, and were formed in their proper time and in their proper place by the word of the Creator, in order that they might fulfill His will like the other created beings.⁵

Whatever life forms *tannin* denoted, God created them, and the text wants to make that very clear. Thus it places *tanninim bag'dolim* at the head of the list of all the sea creatures.

Some Biological Considerations

What taxonomic level does “kind” indicate? Is it species, genus, family, or even higher? Instead of asking this probably unanswerable question, let’s turn it around and ask, “What does the inclusion of ‘after their kind’ teach us?”

The text only provides the broad categories of fowl, swarming sea

3 The blue whale is the largest animal that has ever existed, much larger than the estimated mass of the dinosaur Apatosaurus (Brontosaurus). A blue whale can exceed 30 m (over 100 feet) in length and weigh on the order of 185 metric tonnes (200 U.S. tons). Its tongue weighs about as much as five Holstein dairy cows.

4 Harris et al., op. cit., p. 976.

5 Cassuto, op. cit., pp. 50-51.

creatures, and great sea creatures, with “kinds” as smaller division within them. Different kinds of animals need various niches in which to live. Earth does not have uniform topography. It has many different habitats, and God makes plants and animals appropriate to each. So the specification of “kinds” implies also mountains, oceans, deserts, plains, wetlands, forests, jungles and all manner of ecological habitats, with their various climates and factors that support life, even though at this point only plants, sea animals, and birds exist.

Those two groups alone can inhabit many life zones. For the birds, the preceding list of habitats will suffice. Sea creatures occupy many depths of waters, each with their own life zones. Ocean bottoms have incredible diversity of animal life rarely seen by humans. There are fresh, salt, and brackish water environments, tidal zones, positions in the food chain, and so on. The myriad niches all contribute to ecological balance and continuation of life. While “kind” might not match up to any particular level of scientific classification, the text suggests that different kinds went to different niches.

Ecologists and taxonomists who try to figure out such matters have estimated that up to 50 million different species of life (including plants, animals, fungi, and bacteria) live on the earth. The number of extinct species is incalculable, and even the concept of what constitutes a species is flexible. Suffice it to say that the number of different life forms is enormous. In the world of beetles alone there are over 300,000 known species; this may be only ten percent of the total number of beetle species.

Blessing

After God created the sea animals and the fowls of the air, he blessed them, saying “be fruitful and multiply and fill your niches.” This is the first instance of a blessing, as it is the first instance of something to bless. Blessing is closely associated with sexual reproduction. The first instance of blessing involves the simple act of multiplying. This hardly seems to be a spiritual idea, as sexual reproduction is a biological process. In this new world, however, the animals are going to complete the work that God has begun: he has created some creatures, but he did not fill the entire available realms. The text indicates that when living creatures come, they will come in abundance. The animals he created must procreate in

order to complete the filling of their ecological zones. In carrying out their potential for reproduction, the animals will complete the work of creation.

Such reproduction can only continue if the previous generations die off. We have no indication of death coming onto the scene as of yet, but it is possible that implied in the first blessing is a sad prospect of eventual demise.

STUDY 16

Heaven and Earth

Heaven (in the sense of the spiritual realm) and Earth (the material realm) work together to further God's purpose until their final complete unification in the Kingdom of God.

IS “HEAVEN AND EARTH” in verse 1 to be taken as a single phrase that means “everything” or “the entire universe”? Or do the words have individual meanings, with “heaven” denoting the entire universe and “earth” specifying our lone planet within that vastness?¹ These two questions see the pair through two slightly differing lenses. One is inclusive, or “Earth within universe” and the other exclusive, “Earth and the rest of the universe.” In both of these views earth stands in contrast with the remainder of the universe. It deserves special mention, as it is the focus of God’s purpose for creation.

The exclusive view makes a convincing first reading. It is a geocentric statement that gives primacy of place to our planet within the vastness of the universe that envelops us. Geocentrism hasn’t been fashionable in cosmology or astronomy for a few centuries now, but in theology it remains the dominant perspective.

Beyond the Physical Universe

These options provide useful insights concerning the totality of the physical universe. As one expositor wrote, summarizing a widely held viewpoint, “The heavens and the earth” likely refers to “everything in the material universe.”² However, the universe is more than a purely material entity.

1 This study advances from ideas first treated in Studies 3, 5, and 8. You will find it helpful to refer to those studies for relevant background.

2 Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

How does Genesis accommodate the spiritual realm of love, grace, and faith? How can a purely physical description of the world include concepts like God's existence, or reconciliation in Christ, or the fruit of the Spirit? These entities are real, though intangible, so they need a place. The "heaven" of Genesis 1:1 is likely that place. Heaven refers to the realm of the spiritual or immaterial, and earth refers to the physical or material realm. In their most general meaning, these two words still comprise the entirety of the creation program, but include more than just created material entities. This does not, however, invalidate the other levels of meaning described above.

Remember, the text zooms in from "heaven and earth" to focus on "earth" only. All physical aspects of the universe, insofar as the text presents, derive from the earth. The firmament arises out of the earth. If "earth" represents the entire physical creation, then "heaven" must refer to something else, and that would be a spiritual realm that encompasses love, grace, and other divine values and attributes.

Another way to put this: God's two original created entities, his two offspring, consisted of a physical realm and a spiritual realm. Out of the physical realm, earth, developed the entire physical universe. Out of the spiritual creation, heaven, developed spiritual concepts as ultimately manifested in the life of Jesus, who "descended from heaven" (John 3:12-13 RSV) and spoke of heavenly things. Thus, in its fullest meaning, the phrase "heaven and earth" in Genesis 1:1 refers to more than the physical universe.

A personal God would not create an impersonal world. God created human persons as the special focus of his work. For personhood to exist, and for people to stand in relationship by grace with a personal Deity, we need to transcend the material world. Human persons and the personal God meet in that intangible holy place, the true tabernacle, not of this creation, but heaven itself (Heb 9:11, 24).

Secondary Meanings of Heaven and Earth

Later in Genesis 1, the text assigns these words narrower meanings by giving the names heaven and earth to other created entities. The progression of the name "earth" is thus: (1) the physical universe, (2) our planet, (3) the dry land part of our planet, and even later than

Genesis, (4) a small designated area of that dry land, Israel. Heaven seems to have only two steps, shifting from its primary meaning, the spiritual, intangible realm, to its secondary meaning, the vastness of the universe.

The third created element, the waters, which he calls seas, does not have such levels of meaning. Of note, heaven and earth abide, but the sea will eventually be no more (Rev 21:1).

New Heaven and Earth

How do passages that speak of the destruction of heaven and earth (e.g., Isa 51:6, Psa 102:25-26) or a new heaven and new earth (e.g., Isa 65:17, 2 Pet 3:13) fit with the idea that heaven represents the spiritual realm? If heaven pertains to the spiritual realm, shouldn't the prophets just be calling for a new earth? Even if heaven and earth describe strictly the physical universe, that can hardly be the same heaven and earth that will be replaced.

Clearly, the phrase has acquired yet another meaning, similar to "this order of things." The earth will abide; it must abide if it will be renewed in the kingdom age. The old heaven and earth that will be destroyed represent the system of human rule on earth. This is the travesty that must be replaced in the kingdom. People vaunted themselves to the heaven as early as the tower of Babel—"Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves" (Gen 11:4)—thus appropriating the use of heaven for their vain pursuit. This is the meaning of the heaven that will be destroyed and replaced by the new heaven and earth "wherein righteousness dwells."

The Collaboration of Heaven and Earth

Unlike some religions and philosophies that eschew the natural creation, or atheistic movements that entirely reject the spiritual frame, the Bible teaches that heaven and earth work together to carry out God's purpose.

At the end of a lengthy sentence, Paul in his letter to the Ephesians states the final purpose of the work of God in Christ: "to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ" (Eph 1:10 NIV). Christ's work involves uniting these two realms, bringing together two apparently disparate and incompatible entities. Consider how God intends to unite heaven and earth:

- 1. Creation of Adam.** The breath of God and the dust of the ground come together to produce a human being. Adam is then cloned to produce Eve; not cloned in our modern sense of a genetic identical, but cloned in the sense that whatever Adam's nature was, Eve's was the same. Adam and Eve become the first humans. They bear earthly bodies physically comparable to any other beast of the earth. The Hebrew phrase describing Adam's becoming a living being in Genesis 2:7 also applies to the terrestrial animals in 1:24. As the "generation" (that which is generated) of heaven and earth, they have another side, the divine breath that made them "in the image of God." (See Study 24 for a fuller account.) This unique synthesis of heaven and earth produces a unique being of animal physical nature but with the cognitive resources to recognize that they have a creator and to communicate with a personal God.
- 2. The Birth of Jesus.** Paralleling the creation of Adam, heaven and earth collaborate to create the second Adam. The Lord Jesus is the offspring of heaven and earth. In the angel's words to Mary, "the Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you, therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God" (Luke 1:35 RSV). Inside the womb of Mary, in nature identical to any other female human, God's Holy Spirit begets the Lord Jesus. Just as God's spirit formed Adam from the dust of the ground, God's spirit creates the embryonic Jesus. The unique nature of Adam and the second Adam, each born of the earth by divine intervention, tells us much about the meanings of heaven and earth in the Genesis account.
- 3. The Spiritual Mind.** A human being can entertain a spiritual thought, grow in faith, appreciate God's presence, respond to God's love, and develop the fruit of the Spirit. This testifies to yet another uniting of heaven and earth. Though imperfectly and sporadically, earthly humans, when touched by God's grace and directed by his word, can think like God, see the world from the eternal perspective, and devote their life to the pursuit of love, kindness, self-control, peace, service, and helping. Jesus was the one perfect example of a heavenly mind in an earthly body. Paul

reminded the Colossians, “Set your minds on the things above, not on the things on the earth” (Col 3:2). Heaven and earth unity occurs now whenever God’s people reflect his grace in their lives.

4. The Resurrection Body. Paul discourses at length on the resurrection body in 1 Corinthians 15. He develops the exposition with continual references to heaven and earth, or more specifically, earth and heaven. Paul uses “earthly” to represent that which is animal, natural, unspiritual, unregenerate, mortal, and doomed to perish. “Heavenly” stands for that which is godly, spiritual, eternal. The first Adam is earthly, of the dust. The second Adam, Jesus the Messiah, is heavenly, a life-giving spirit. The two become united in the resurrection when the physical body is resurrected in an imperishable form. It is still a physical body, but not a mortal, perishing one. The resurrection body is not a disembodied spirit, but a tangible, material-yet-imperishable body, the ultimate gift of God’s grace, the eternal home of the faithful mind.

5. God’s Kingdom on Earth. Matthew’s gospel uses the phrase “kingdom of heaven” where the other gospels use “kingdom of God” (for example, compare Matt 13:31 with Mark 4:30). This kingdom refers to the rulership of Christ, which occurs in this present age in a spiritual, intangible manner for those who recognize the Lord Jesus as their master, and which finds ultimate realization when the Lord returns to this earth to assume his rulership (Acts 1:11). The Kingdom of God is heavenly in that Jesus is the king; it is, however, located on a regenerated and renewed Earth. This is the vision: Yet truly as I live, the glory of *yhwh* shall fill the entire earth (Num 14:21).

These instances do not exhaust the collaborative work of heaven and earth. A further list would include miracles, prophecies, providence, the life of Jesus as a manifestation of God (Emmanuel—God with us), and the atonement.

Heaven Returns to the Narrative

Finally, at the end of the New Testament, comes the explicit statement of the ultimate uniting of heaven and earth.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a great voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people."
(Rev 21:1-3a RSV)

The language and structure of the opening verses of Genesis conclude the book of Revelation. The words of the creation text describe the final work of God's new creation, begun in Jesus, continued in the lives of all those who have faithfully responded to his grace, brought to completion individually in their resurrection, and brought to fullness in God's renewal of Earth. God dwells with his redeemed. New Jerusalem, the heavenly Jerusalem, is the praise of all humanity. The sea, the boundary between heaven and earth is gone (Isa 57:20-21). Pain is gone. Death is gone. Tears are gone. Only glory, beauty, praise and love dwell on Earth.

The heaven of Genesis 1:1 re-enters the picture at last. Everything in the Bible so far has described the affairs of earth. Now starts the story of heaven, left untold and suspended since Genesis 1:2. With heaven and earth united, earth will no longer be a planet breeding succeeding generations of mortals with all the heartaches and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to. Instead it will be God's jewel, a fit dwelling for his son, King Jesus, and all those who have come to God through him.

Thus the creation of the heavens and the earth will be truly finished, and on that Sabbath, God will rest.

STUDY 17

Terrestrial Animals and/including Humans

The overall structure of Day Six (Gen 1:24-31), the creation of life on land, and the spiritual distinctiveness of humans.

God's Activity on Day Six

God speaks
 God makes
 God views
 God speaks
 God creates
 God blesses
 God speaks
 God speaks
 God views

THE SLASH IN the title indicates two ways to frame what happens on Day Six. The sixth day is the day God creates the animals *and* the humans. Or is it the day God creates the land animals *including* the humans?

The “animal/not animal” identity tension that originates with the creation of Adam and Eve provides a productive line of investigation from a biblical perspective, and from extra-biblical perspectives, including psychology, sociology, behavioral zoology, cognitive science, and anthropology. We humans just can’t figure out if we belong to the other animals, if we’re separate from them, if we’re sometimes animal and sometimes human, if we’re part animal and part human, or whatever other model might describe our unique nature. We clearly have some claim to animality by virtue of our biology and all too often our behavior.

Can we in any significant way classify ourselves as “human-separate-from-animal?” If so, what would account for this distinction? Is our

cognitive perception distinct from other animals? Do differences such as social structure and self-awareness make that crucial difference that places *Homo sapiens* in a favored niche, a higher rung on the ladder of existence, a step closer to the divine as in the old great chain of being notion? We are the only species with rape, religion, and retirement. Do features such as these place us in the category of human-separate-from-animals?

The text both balances and contrasts our unique combination of the animal and the divine, of the heavenly and the earthly, of the carnal and the spiritual. These contrasting pairs establish the basis from which we will eventually develop our theology, religion, and morality. The animal realm is not on earth solely to fill the environments. Animal life will provide some background against which we can formulate our ideas about human personhood.

The structure of Day Six accents the importance of humans. Consider the long list of performance verbs at the head of this study. The sixth day, as the partner of the third day (both involve the dry land), has two sets of creative acts. In addition, the creation of humans supplies more than usual detail: information concerning the human relationship to the Creator, the two sexes, and the blessing of nourishment. In the Hebrew text, this adds up to the longest account of the six days, more than double the word count of second place Day Three: 149 words to 69.¹ Day Six, with twice as many words as the next most detailed day, grabs attention not only with its subject matter, the creation of our species, but also with its length, detail, and depth of divine involvement.

Pattern of Animal Life

Day Six concludes the creation of animal life. Together with Day Five it covers the inception of four major divisions of animal life. Day Five produced the sea animals and the birds, and Day Six adds the terrestrial animals. That makes three. So what's the fourth division? The temporal marker "God saw that it was good" separates the creation of Adam (vv. 26-27) from the creation of the other terrestrial animals (vv. 24-25), giving him his own textual niche.

The three divisions of ordinary animal life correspond to the three primary realms of nature: the sea, the sky, and the dry land. The fourth

1 Day Four comes in third longest with 68 words, followed by Day Five with 57 words, Day Two at 38 words, Day One with 31 words, and lastly Day Seven with 30 words.

major life division is delimited not by its physical ecology, but by its psychosocial and theological capabilities. Humans, the capstone of creation, formed in the image of God, inhabit a realm of which the other creatures know nothing. The fourth animal division differs in a significant way from the first three, even though in many respects it belongs with the set of four.

This format of four items in which the fourth belongs to the series but differs in a significant way occurs frequently in Scripture. Consider, for example the three synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, followed by the distinctive gospel of John. John is both clearly different, yet one of the four; these are three of one kind capped a by fourth, distinctive item. The Bible has numerous examples of this pattern.²

Animal Life Appears on the Land

God commanded *ha'aretz*, the dry land, to bring forth living creatures, paralleling yesterday's command to the seas. The verb of Day Five indicates an abundant swarming of animal life, whereas this one is a generic "bring forth," a distinction missed in the KJV and RSV. They translate both "bring forth"; the NIV does better with "teem" on Day Five and "produce" on Day Six.

The command contains, not surprisingly, three categories of terrestrial animal life, all subsumed under the heading "living creatures": cattle, and creeping things, and beasts of the earth."³ First comes *behema* (from which comes the English word "behemoth"). This covers the large animals. The word is usually translated either "cattle" or "beast"; the latter idea is used as the contrast to human life, as in the phrase "neither man nor beast." Then come creepy crawly things, and finally, *nephesh chayyab* or "beasts of the earth."

This last category is hardest to pin down. By elimination, it probably includes all the terrestrial vertebrates smaller than the behemoth category:

- 2 Other examples of this under-appreciated biblical structure include the parable of the sower, with three failures before the successful good seed (Matt 13:3-8), Jotham's parable of three good plants and then the bramble (Judg 9:7-15); the four questions of Matthew 22:15-46; God's four manifestations to Elijah (1 Kings 19:11-12), Job's three friends and then Elihu; and dozens more encompassing many contexts.
- 3 Day Three has a similar situation with the plants, but there the three descriptors are three categories rather than a general heading with two sub-divisions. The difference is that the phrase "living creatures" is a generic, collective phrase that will also be used to describe humans.

cats, rodents, marsupials, smaller primates, maybe even amphibians and reptiles. The word “beasts” is somewhat misleading, for the Hebrew phrase only implies living creatures, not necessarily anything of a beastly or unpleasant nature, as we would understand it in our contemporary English. The NIV’s three categories are livestock, creatures that move along the ground, and wild animals. Alter has cattle, crawling things, and wild beasts.

The word *nephesh*, usually translated “life” or “soul,” has a root connotation of breathing. It refers in general to the life essence or principle of life in any being. It’s a common word that occurs some 700 times and has a variety of nuances pertaining to human or animal life. Used alone, it can mean a person, as in Exodus 1:5, “all the souls that came out of the loins of Jacob,” which refers to the persons descended from Jacob. In Genesis it is paired with the word for “life,” *chayyabb*, to indicate a living organism. Verses 20, 21, 24, and 30 of Genesis 1 all have the same expression and refer to various groups of animals, although the translation varies, at least in the KJV. In verse 20 it is translated “have life,” in verses 21 and 24 it is “living creature,” and in verse 30 it comes out as “wherein there is life,” with “living soul” as the marginal reading. It occurs twice more in chapter 2 to denote the human being.

The three categories of terrestrial life parallel other groups of three: three kinds of plants, three types of heavenly bodies, and the three categories of sea life and fowl. The text stresses the totality of life in broad categories, so there’s no need to try to figure out where every organism belongs. God made all the animals, all the plants, all the heavenly bodies; three types of entities now populate each of the three realms of creation: sea, sky, and land.

Order of Appearance of the Animals

God made the animals in this order: beasts of the earth, cattle, and creeping things. This differs from the intention order: cattle, creeping things, and beast of the earth. You would have probably expected a chiasmus here (see Study 14), with creation of the animals coming in reverse order from the intention statement. Alternatively, a straightforward repetition of the same sequence would make sense, even if this would be less aesthetic. Why then does the sequence change from 1-2-3 to 3-1-2?

The production statement for the creeping things specifies “creeping things of the ground” (*adamah*). The KJV unfortunately translates *adamah* here as “earth,” confusing this distinction. Translating both *eretz* and *adamah* as “earth” in consecutive verses obscures an important issue.⁴ Let’s set this out textually so we can pick out what might be the reason for the unusual order of the production statement. God said, “Let the *eretz* bring forth living creatures according to their kind.” Next come the three categories:

cattle;
creeping things; and
beasts of the earth according to their kind.

Then, the production statement, with further clarifications:

beasts of the earth according to their kind;
cattle according to their kind;
all the creeping things on the ground according to their kinds.

The production statement inverts the last two elements from a chiasmus and adds further detail. The addition of “*all* the creeping things *on the ground* according to their *kinds*” emphasizes God bringing swarms of creeping things from the *adamah*. This might be our clue, for this statement immediately precedes the formation of Adam from the same substrate, although *adamah* is not mentioned (regarding the creation of Adam) until 2:7. The text moves “creeping things” to a position immediately preceding Adam’s creation, and inserts the key word *adamah*.

It seems, then, that a link between the two is intended. The paraphrased meaning here might be “God made crawling things on the ground, *and* he also made humans of the same stuff.” Or it could have an opposite meaning, “God made crawling things on the ground, *but* he also made humans from the same stuff.” The emphasis might be on our association with worms and the like, or it might spotlight God’s handiwork as unlimited by its source material. Either interpretation offers a possible reason for the change in order between verses 24 and 25. Moreover, the use of *adamah* indicates a designed connection between chapters 1 and 2.

⁴ Translators’ choices are never simple; they are always faced with some trade-offs regarding technical fidelity, clarity, consistency, nuance, and expression. Robert Alter, in the introduction to his *Genesis* translation and commentary, gives an excellent account of some of the issues involved in reproducing Hebrew thought in English.

The declaration of the intended work has a single “according to their kind” attributed to the general classification of “living creatures.” Then, when God performs the creative work, the text ascribes this tagline to each of the three specific categories, thus underscoring the detail in which the Creator formed the uncounted millions of life forms.

Scene Two of Day Six introduces the culmination of creation: human life. So important is this that the text restores the verb *bara* in verse 27. This is a startling usage inasmuch as humans are just another form of animal life, and the text only uses this word to describe signally new developments in the creative program. We are (biologically) just another mammalian species. Yet in the purpose of God we are no less than the potential heirs to divine nature itself.

STUDY 18

Male and Female Created He Them

God's intention statement for the creation of the human, and the three unique features of humans: made in the image and likeness of God, given dominion over all creation, and specified as male and female.

But all the work was not complete;
 there wanted yet that wondrous being,
 that God's design might thankful see
 and grant his goodness joyful praise.¹

THE STAGE IS set for the creation of humans, the culmination of the creation week. Genesis records significant detail about the creation of Adam and Eve. Their story runs about 374 words in the Hebrew text (in chapters 1 and 2), contrasted with the rest of the creation combined, about 330 words.

Plurality and Self-Reference

The most striking and difficult textual feature of this section is the plural in God's statement of intention (v. 26): Let *us* make man *in our* image. This is also the first instance of self-reference in an intention statement; before no other act has God said anything like, "I will" or "Let me." God prefaces the intention statement with a self-reference, and it's a plural form, no less. Genesis 1 has 28 singular verbs up to this point with God (*elohim*) as the subject. Now a plural enters, and the suffixes to "image" and "likeness" are plural as well, "our image" and "our likeness." In verse 27 order is restored, so to speak, with singular verbs again and singular suffixes to image and likeness. If *elohim* represents a singular noun with

1 From Haydn's oratorio "The Creation" (based on Milton's *Paradise Lost* VII:505-515).

a plural suffix form to indicate not plurality but infinity, then to whom does “us” refer? Why the self-reference, and to whom or what does the plural refer? Why this sudden, brief shift in the text?

Assuming that the plural “us” refers to the angels creates more problems than it resolves. If the angels were God’s active executors, we would have expected plurals from the first verse. On top of this, it’s hard to locate any actual work for them to do. Events happen by divine fiat, “let there be.” Even in verse 26, invoking angelic mediation adds nothing, and detracts from exaltation of the singular creator God. If angels were involved, the text could have easily said so, even given the spare syntax of Genesis 1. More than finding angelic agency in the creation, we would have expected at least to find some statement about *their* creation! God could have worked through his angels; however, the text is silent regarding angelic intervention.

Humans do look like angels; when they appear observers often can’t distinguish them from ordinary mortals (e.g., Gen 18). It could be God speaking with the angels in some rhetorical sense of image and likeness. The “like us” in 3:22 does suggest an angelic host, but in context angels are an unlikely explanation of the plural in 1:26. The plural must meet two conditions: it cannot negate the singularity of *elohim* established in the first 25 verses, and it must relate to the specific context of the creation of the humans.

A Contextual Clue: “Male and Female”

The context provides enough information to make an educated guess. Adam will soon be born from the dust, followed shortly by Eve’s formation from the substance of Adam himself. Even though the details of humanity’s creation remain for the next chapter, the text here emphasizes the male and female versions of this new creature. Obviously, the other animals were both male and female, but the text only records this regarding humans. God told the animals of sea and sky to multiply and fill their habitats; this is as close as the text gets to indicating sexes. With the advent of humans, the text is explicit: “male and female created he them.”

This clue suggests a contextual reason for the plural “let us make.”

The image of God comprises both male and female.² God invested a single species out of all the creation with his image and likeness. This species is also the only one specifically described as coming in male and female editions. When God said, “Let us make *adam* in our image,” the specifier “male and female” follows shortly, in verse 27, the production statement. There are two new textual features here: plurality (“let *us*”) and self-reference (“let us make” vs. the previously employed “let there be”). These textual features appear only in the context of human creation and not at any other time, for at no other time did God make anything in his own image and likeness. One implication of the image and likeness of God is the concept of the two sexes.

The economy of heaven, the realm of perfection and completeness, lacks nothing and loses no one to death, and thus has no need to reproduce (Luke 20:35-36). This is another reason the “us” in “let us make” is unlikely to refer to the angels. Would angels, being neither male nor female, appropriately serve as a model for humans, whose initial instantiation is specifically and pointedly designated as male and female?

New Testament Teaching

If angels aren’t the models for our sexes, is the person of God the template for both male and female? This doesn’t work any better than having angels as the “us.” Maybe it is a good option, though, because God intends humans to multiply and create families and social structures that will preserve, teach, and disseminate the knowledge of the Creator. In this way we magnify, or enlarge God. God desires to increase, or multiply his nature in sentient, responsive human beings, not to fulfill anything lacking in himself, but to extend his love.

Jesus brought all these points to bear in answering a trap question from the Sadducees, in Luke 20:27-38. The question concerned which of seven husbands a certain woman would have as her one husband in the resurrection. The Sadducees, who denied the resurrection, put forth this question in an attempt to prove the fallacy of a world in which such a situation could occur. Their reasoning ran like this: a wife can have only one husband, but they all have equally valid claims to her under levirate law (Deut 25:5). This would create an impossible situation, push has

2 This is an issue quite apart from the grammatical use of male for God, or the frequent and critically important New Testament figure of God as Father.

come to shove, and the resurrection gets shoved off the table. Satisfied that they had Jesus in a trap, the Sadducees confidently delivered the question.

Jesus never directly answered any such questions. In his reply, he made two points. The one that concerns us here is about the marriageless state in the resurrection. His response went something like this: “You entertain a wrong premise about marriage, because you think that such a state exists in the resurrection. However, the resurrection is part of that perfect world that hosts neither sin nor death, and therefore has no need of sexual reproduction. People who attain to the age to come will have no need for marriage and all it implies, they will be like the angels, neither female nor male.”

In this present world, *reproduction* sustains life through a succession of like mortal beings of each species. In the divine economy, *resurrection* sustains life through the perfection of character and body of each individual forever. Reproduction is thus a poor substitute for immortality. It gives ongoing life to a species, but not any individual, and it never, of itself, attains to the perfection that requires no replacement. Sustenance of the natural creation is manifested through sexual reproduction, but eternal life is manifested through the resurrection of the dead.³ Reproduction is a plural function in the sense that it requires both male and female and also in the sense that it can increase the population. “Let us make the human in our image” introduces the plural function of reproduction, hence the plural construction.

The filling of the new habitats of land and sea requires sexual reproduction; soon enough, a dying population will require replacement. The text as yet gives no reason to suspect anything will go awry. Nonetheless, the mechanism to deal with death, the result of sin, is in place, in a textually innocuous form. The command to be fruitful and fill the earth is reason enough to justify sexual reproduction. When sin does bring death into the world, with the consequent emphasis on childbearing, the mechanism is already on hand to provide for a continuum of generations.

Thus in the sentence, “let *us* make man in *our* image,” God’s image as manifested in humanity is plural in the sense of male and female and

3 These two notions merge in Paul’s account of Abraham’s faith in Romans 4. Paul segues from Abraham’s faith in God’s power to give him a child when his reproductive facility had failed through old age (vv. 18-21) to faith in the resurrection of the dead (vv. 23-24).

children and family. Through the family comes the continuing line that is Genesis history, and through Genesis history comes the unfolding of God's ultimate plan to fill the earth with people who bear his name.

Dominion

Dominion is cognate to words such as "dominate" and "dominant"; therefore the phrase "let them have dominion" carries a strong hierarchical sense. Some people see in this a mandate for hunting and carnivorous behavior, while others read into it a social responsibility and guardianship ethic that embraces our furry friends. Still others find the notion of dominion repulsive or appalling to their sensibilities, as if promoting a dated dogma of speciesism.

None of this has anything to do with the intent of the text. So, what does the addition of "let them have dominion" signify? As the creation narrative develops, two manifestations of the idea of dominion emerge. The first comes when Adam names the animals (2:19-20), the second during Eve's dialogue with the serpent. In the second case, the central idea is not so much that humans are to rule over other species, but that they are to rule over their inner animal nature, the natural desires of the flesh. We are the only species with the neural equipment to lead something other than an animal-like stimulus-response mode of life.

Created

This word appears thrice in one verse, but adds only a single species. By now we are used to, if not expecting, groupings of three in the text: three levels of plant life, three categories of heavenly bodies, three major groups of marine and aerial life, three groups of terrestrial animals, and the three realms of creation. Not everything comes in threes, however; we also have the rhythm of pairs: night and day, heaven and earth, waters above and waters below, and male and female. Both the twos and the threes come from the unitary source of everything, the one Creator.

Scene Two of Day Six (1:26-31) is devoted to the appearance of one species, humans, presented in a unique three-fold production statement. Although Genesis 1 and 2 is about creation, the word "create" appears sparingly, to emphasize that what is made is indeed something new. It's in the Prologue, and then doesn't reappear until Day Five in the production

statement of the great sea animals. The great sea creatures are the first animals made, so they merit the formidable verb “created,” not just “made.” Then the text serves up, in rapid succession, the third, fourth, and fifth occurrences,⁴ strung together in an emphatic chant:

And God created the human in his own image
 In the image of God He created him
 Male and female He created them. (Alter)

Alter points out that *adam* is a generic term for human beings, and not a proper noun,⁵ hence the choice of “human,” especially in this case, where *adam* comes in both male and female formats.

The first *bara* (v. 1) brought everything into existence; it marked the onset of time and space, matter and energy. The second *bara* signaled the first living being (v. 21). Now the third *bara*, in a set of three, announces the first being capable of reflecting upon its own existence and having awareness of its dependence upon its Creator. One species with a three-fold repetition, specifying their sexes, and declaring them to be in the singular image of God! In Hebrew, each of the three lines has four words (discounting the grammatical particle indicating the direct object in the first line), and each line has the verb *bara*, “create.” The passage comprises an elegant statement upon which all further interactions between the Creator and the created will be formulated.

Image and Likeness

Exactly what is (or are) the image and likeness of God? The usual method for starting to investigate a problem like this includes looking the words up in a lexicon and using a concordance to determine the biblical usage. In this instance, these methods will yield minimal results. For the record, “image” means “an impression of something.” It usually shows up in the context of idolatrous images, but not because the word in itself has that connotation. “Likeness” means “something resembling.” An image is something that *represents* something else, and a likeness is something that *resembles* something else.⁶

4 The verb *bara*, “create,” occurs twice more in Genesis 2 for a total of seven, plus three more times at the beginning of chapter 5.

5 Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 18. Neither is *adam* a name—not yet. In this verse, and in Genesis 2 and 3, it appears with the definite article.

6 The prepositional prefix to “image” generally means “in” and the prefix to “likeness”

You can look at these two as either half-full or half-empty theological glasses. You can say, “We are in the very image of God!” Or you can say, “We’re just in the image of God, a mere reflection and not the real thing.” Both are valid perspectives. To emphasize our uniqueness among all created entities and exhort ourselves to a high spiritual calling, drink from the former glass. To stress our weakness and our dependence on God and hence our need for humility, drink from the latter glass:

An image *is only an image*. It exists only by derivation. It is not the original, nor is it anything without the original. Mankind’s being an image stresses the radical nature of his dependence.⁷

Genesis leans toward the half-full glass. Even though we fall short of the truly spiritual nature, and are dependent on God, in the context of the creation we are special creatures invested from the beginning with a connection to the Creator foreign to all other life forms.

This special standing brings with it duties and responsibilities inappropriate to the rest of the animal world. The Lord’s words, “From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded” (Luke 12:48), includes our very humanity. We, *Homo sapiens*, the entire species, male and female of every nation and location on Earth, all possess a pedigree “in the image of and likeness of God.” We have been given very much—the privilege of divine connection. When animal passions of physical drives run our life and we fail to employ our distinctly and uniquely human capacities, we might as well be animals. This is not our calling in Christ.

What sort of representation and resemblance of God do we enjoy—physical, moral, cognitive, spiritual, all of the above, or other? We can eliminate physical. If God has some corporeal form, we don’t know it and it’s certainly not an issue in Scripture. Moral values make a good choice; when God revealed himself to Moses (Exod 34:6-7) he displayed his moral attributes. Humanity does not have these by nature, so if we are created in the moral image and moral likeness of God, it’s as a potentiality.

would probably mean “as” or “according to.” Blocher, (op. cit., p. 85) cites a view indicating that the intent might be to read these as “in our image, our likeness.” That would make Adam God’s likeness, not made according to God’s likeness. This interpretation cuts out the middleman, so to speak, and puts Adam one step closer to God: he *was* God’s likeness. However, in Genesis 5:1 and 5:3 the prefixes are reversed.

7 Blocher, op.cit., p. 82, italics his.

The context hints at how Adam and Eve related to God and their unique capacities. God gave them dominion over other animals (which Adam named), God gave Adam a specific job to do, God gave them a special blessing, and God prohibited them from eating the fruit of a certain tree. Any or all of these peculiarities separated Adam and Eve from other animals of the created realm. Transforming these unique features into a list yields at least the following: exercise of power, rational capacity, and responsibility to law.

At the end of Day Six, God declares all that he has made “very good,” a global perspective incorporating all the constituent parts of creation as well as their interactions. It refers to the immediately preceding declaration of the union of Adam and Eve. However, “very good” does not inform what aspects of “image and likeness of God” imbue human nature, because “very good” applies to all of creation, not exclusively to humans.

Role and Position of “Image and Likeness”

The best way to determine what it means to be in the image and likeness of God is to identify the role and position of this phrase in the structure of the text. Where it appears, it corresponds to another phrase used in similar contexts. Compare the structure of these declarations:

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit *according to its kind*.
 And God created the great sea creatures . . . *according to their kind*,
 and all the winged fowl *according to their kind*.
 And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creatures *according to their kind*.
 And God said, Let us make man in our image, *according to our likeness*.

I fudged a little by translating different Hebrew constructions “according,” but the meaning is the same. In the last entry, instead of the expected “who will bear children according to their kind” we find “in our image and likeness.” The salient teaching is right before us: humans have a potential to achieve a divine likeness.

As for the other animals, their identity is within themselves. They reproduce “according their kind,” that is, according to what manner of animal they are. They have no higher calling or potential. They can

neither escape their nature nor elevate themselves in any moral, ethical, cognitive, or spiritual manner. What they are born as, they will die as (save for some behavioral tricks such as salivating at the sound of a bell), but they will never acquire character reformation, spiritual growth, regeneration, piety, contrition, or any aspect of the uniquely human path to a godly orientation. Other animals remain whatever they are at their conception. In contrast, when God created humans, he did not command us to reproduce after *our* kind, but rather after *his* kind.

Study 24 develops this notion in more detail, but not even an entire book on this one idea could explore all the aspects of this magnificent program of God, to elevate one of his created species to equality with the divine nature. Genesis 5:3 records that Seth was born in the image and likeness of Adam. We too are born in the image of Adam. It is our choice and God's work to be reborn in the Divine image.

What is it to be made in God's image and likeness? It is to be a *person*, a human person, fashioned in the form of the divine person, with the capability of not only physical multiplication through sexual reproduction, but the potential of spiritual elevation through a recognition of the Creator's role in our lives.

What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable! in action, how like an angel! in apprehension, how like a god! the beauty of the world! the paragon of animals! And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?⁸

8 William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 2.2.319-323 (Folger Library Edition).

STUDY 19

God Blesses His Creation

This study covers God's blessing, begins to document the integration of the first two chapters of Genesis, and discusses the intention and scope of God's concluding observation that all was "very good."

THE CREATION OF the human species, male and female, occupies a scant three verses in Genesis 1:26-28, while the same episode absorbs most of the text in chapter 2, some twenty verses. Each text provides information appropriate to its context and intention.

In Genesis 1, the human is the crowning achievement of the creation week. Nothing else, not even the light on the first day, the very essence of Deity, rates the degree of kinship of being made in God's image and likeness. Chapter 1 does not name the humans or record any of their activities. It only lists them as part of the overall creation, separated and distinguished by position. Genesis 1 lacks any interaction between God and the humans.

Are the first two chapters of Genesis two separate creation accounts, as secular scholars almost universally assert? Absolutely not. That theory fails to account for the internal evidence and must be rejected. Genesis 2 is an account of Day Six, with no intention whatsoever to cover the entire creation week. The Genesis 1:26-28 account of the creation of humans is fully compatible with Genesis 2. These are not two discrepant accounts from different traditions, but two complementary accounts. Genesis 1 takes a global perspective, placing the creation of the humans within the overall context of creation. Genesis 2 narrows the scope, recording only the creation of humans and the relevant contextual information. (See Studies 21 and 22.)

The creation of Adam and Eve, and the blessings given to them (1:27-31) cover the same territory as Genesis 2. “Male and female created he them” includes the whole process by which God first formed Adam of the dust of the earth and then formed Eve from his side. The blessing of verse 28 clarifies the more detailed information recorded in 2:7-25.

God Blessed Them

The blessing statement parallels Genesis 1:22, the only difference being that the domain to be filled is the terrestrial earth instead of the waters. The KJV uses “fill” in verse 22 and “replenish” in verse 28, but the Hebrew word is the same, and is accurately rendered “fill” in the RSV, NIV, and Alter, to cite a few. The misleading “replenish” (which only meant “fill” in the early seventeenth century) has led some to believe that the earth had previous inhabitants, but this has no textual support. The blessing on the humans adds the command to subdue the earth and have dominion over the other animals. Far from being a license for despotism and habitat destruction, this is the foundation behind God’s specific command to Adam to keep and serve the garden (2:15; details in Studies 25 and 26).

In Genesis 1:28, the list of animals over which humans are to exercise dominion is abbreviated from the full description of those created on the fifth and sixth days. All animals are covered in three entries: one for water animals, one for fowl, and one for terrestrial animals (“all that moves on the earth,” which indicates only the smallest of creatures). The great sea beasts and the behemoths are not on the list. The plants are listed in only two of the three categories of Day Three, namely, the herbs and trees; the grass is missing. There’s an apparently over-detailed description of the vegetation, “every herb bearing seed upon the face of the earth and every tree in which is the fruit of the tree bearing seed.” Something like “every green plant” could have sufficed to identify the intended food sources. However, the emphasis on fruit trees foreshadows the untoward events of chapter 3, thus suggesting that chapters 1 and 2 form one literary unit.

The blessing of provision continues on to the other animals, or at least the other terrestrial animals and the birds. The list in verse 30 omits the sea creatures, as they wouldn’t share in the terrestrial vegetative largesse.¹

1 The archaic “meat” in verse 30 of the KJV meant “food” at that time, and it was a proper translation of the Hebrew word which means food in general.

Very Good

The last sentence of chapter 1 brings closure to God's creative work, but not to the architecture of the creation week, for the Sabbath is still to come. At the end of Day Six every created entity is in place. The three realms of sky, water, and land are filled. The earth has brought forth vegetation, the air clear, the water pure, the vegetation lush and full, niches and biomes and habitats of all sorts ready for the influx of the fecund populations that God had just commanded to be fruitful, and to multiply, and to fill the earth.

The text, by inserting the word "behold," reads as if the Creator evaluates his creation, rolling it about in his hands, inspecting it as a master craftsman would inspect a work of exceptional artifice, pondering, peering, examining the work from all viewpoints and for each aspect of its beauty, function, harmony, elegance, form, line, composition, intellectual depth, and impression on all the senses, collecting the individual components into a glorious gestalt, a work so sublime as to epitomize the very nature of its Creator. Only then, fully satisfied that at every level of assessment this Earth fulfills his intentions of expression, that he has brought light out of darkness, form out of incompleteness, and population out of void, does God pronounce his work "very good."

Each individual component he had declared "good," but now they form a functioning world. Think of a master designer who has built an intricate device of the finest materials, each part in itself the perfection of form and function. At last the fully-assembled final product is set in motion, and all the parts work together in seamless harmony. Those that were individually "good" together and in motion become "very good." That is the force and impression of this ultimate Divine approbation. It has a systemic quality that says, "each part is good, and working together they constitute a whole that I esteem very good."

Alas, "very good" has been hijacked for an altogether inappropriate usage. Expositors have turned it into a moral description of Adam and Eve before their transgression. God would not pronounce "very good" upon a system that had a flaw of any sort, and that would include the character of the humans. What is good for Adam is good for the aardvark, and if "very good" carries a moral connotation, it must do so for every creature, even the plants and rocks, because God beheld all that he had made and

called it “very good.” To say this describes Adam and Eve’s moral state or nature is to misread a straightforwardly contextual phrase. The words do not apply specifically to Adam and Eve. They have no moral implication. Even if they did, just what would “very good” actually entail?

The account of chapter 2 and 3, which deals with the first couple as persons in all of their blessing and travail, is mysteriously silent on the matter of their nature. Chapter 1, which sets out the orderliness of creation by the omnipotent and omniscient Creator, is not the place to look for a moral application of “very good.” And may I remind you that the “all” includes the serpent? I belabor this point because of the theological confusion that this mistake engenders. Study 33 will further clarify what “very good” entails.

STUDY 20

Sabbath

It seems superfluous to devote a day for God to do nothing but declare the creation complete (Gen 2:1-3). This study proposes several reasons for the Sabbath being a full day, and how the New Testament clarifies its true purpose.

God's Activity on Day Seven

God completes

God ceases

God blesses

God sanctifies

DAY SEVEN IS a day of no production; nothing new comes into existence. A short closure statement to sign off on all the vigorous activity of the creation week would have sufficed. Instead the text has a full day, nearly equal in format to the other creative days. What is the purpose of this? Day Seven is more than a perfunctory notice that the work is finished, for in it the Sabbath text reaches back to the Prologue (1:1-2) to inform us that the unformed is now formed, the dark now lighted, and the void furnished and populated.

Day Seven does not begin with “And God said,” as do the six creation days. It begins with “Thus the heavens and earth were finished and all their host.”¹ This is the first of three statements all declaring the work done. The KJV changes the same Hebrew word translated “finished” in verse 1 to “ended” in verse 2. Alter and the NIV use “completed,” a better word choice that reflects the connotation of coming to a full end or conclusion. The work doesn’t just stop, but it is fully complete, because it has

1 The oddly placed chapter break severing the Sabbath Day (Gen 2:1-3) from the first six days unnecessarily disturbs the Sabbath’s position in the creation week.

accomplished all of the goals implied in the Prologue.

Verse 2 has two sentences that focus on God's role. The first records his act of completion, this time with an active verb (it's passive in the preceding sentence), "God completed on the seventh day the work he made."² The second reads, "He rested on the seventh day from all the work he made." For emphasis, the sentence repeats an already repetitious phrase, "work that he had made." The second iteration adds the comprehensive "all," making quite sure the reader knows that the creation program is indeed complete. The misleading "rested" is translated from the verb form of the familiar *shabbat*. Again, Alter delivers the appropriate flavor by using "cease" in the two places (2:2, 3) where *shabbat* occurs.

The third and last statement, in verse 3, adds God's blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath. This statement also uses the "work he had made" phrase, but expands it to "all his work God created in making." Word tally for Day Seven: "work" three times, "make" three times, and "create" once, plus "ceased" and "completed" twice each.

A Whole Day to do Nothing?

It would be nothing unusual for the text to have a completion announcement, such as "the work of creation was completed." One-liners to this effect occur at the end of Job's discourses, "The words of Job are completed" (Job 31:40) and Book II of the Psalms, "The prayers of David, son of Jesse, are ended (Psa 72:20).³ The short sentence in verse 1 could do the job. Instead, the closure statement is raised to the same level as the production statements of the first six days, with its threefold structure using two different verbs, "complete" and "cease."

The five-word (in Hebrew) first sentence of the Sabbath account (2:1), which includes "the heaven and the earth," would make a fine bookend to the five-word opening sentence of the Prologue (1:1). This

2 The LXX translators evidently thought that if God ceased on the seventh day, he was still actively working up until that point. That implied the Sabbath wasn't a full day of rest, so they changed this sentence to read (literally) "And God finished on the sixth day his works."

3 The Hebrew word for "completed" in Job 31:40 is the same used at the beginning of the book to describe Job's complete (legalistic) righteousness (1:1). It is an iconic use of the common Hebrew literary device of repeating a key word for emphasis. The end of Book II of the Psalms uses the same word as Genesis 2:1, with the same nuance of "completed," not just "ended."

closure statement could have been set off from Day Six to stand alone as an Epilogue to match the Prologue (as formatted in Table 3 of Study 6). As it is, (and this is a matter of text itself, not of any later division of the text into chapter and verse), the conclusion receives its own “day.” This seems both odd and unnecessary; odd in that nothing happens creatively, and unnecessary because a simple Epilogue would make a symmetrical format. As it is, there’s an unusual asymmetry, or so it seems.

The key is that God’s work did *not* finish on Day Six. God’s activity on Day Seven requires its own “day,” although the nature of that activity is not defined until John’s gospel. The Sabbath is much more than a closure statement. Its “activity” involves a concept not fully developed until the New Testament: sustenance and restoration.

The Contrast Between Creation and Completion

A seventh day, in which God rests and pronounces all of his work completed, puts the work of active creation into perspective. The expression of closure is an element just as important as the creative activities. This parallels previous separations: light from dark, waters above and waters below, and the dry land earth from waters that covered it. The creation week is a program of not just *creating* entities, but also *separating* them to give them a distinct place and function. Each created item is separated, specified, and assigned a role or place. Day Seven introduces a larger and somewhat abstract teaching: the separation of creative work (activity) from rest (non-activity).

God separated light from dark. It might seem obvious that light is light and dark isn’t, but the text emphasizes the purpose of separating, specifying, and ordering. Light without dark has no meaning; it is only in contrast to darkness that light takes on meaning. Likewise, God’s rest gives relief and perspective to God’s work. If the text only recorded “work” as a unilateral condition, then we couldn’t consider it work, as it would be a constant state with no opposite or contrast to give it definition. All material items and abstract ideas need contrasting or limiting counterparts to give them meaning, perspective, and definition.

Thus, the rest on Day Seven gives definition to the activity of the preceding six days. Obviously God didn’t rest because he got tired, or because he had finished creating all he could create. An infinite God

could certainly have produced even more wonders of creation. However, he did finish what he needed to do for his purpose, and then made that clear by concluding with a day devoted to non-creation. Therefore, one important reason for a day of rest is to give meaning to the previous six days of work in the same way that dark helps define light.

What God Did on the Sabbath

Even though the Sabbath is counted as the seventh day, its verbs set it apart from the six days of God's work. None of the four verbs of God's activity on Day Seven has as its direct or indirect object any part of the creation. The first two verbs state that God did no work and the last two report what God did to the day itself, not to the creation. God *blessed* the seventh day and *sanctified* it. He did not bless any part of creation on this day, as he had done previously.

What does it mean to bless a day? What does sanctifying actually entail? Their meanings intertwine to give a picture that God set this day apart in the same way that he set the humans apart from the other animals. The two ideas put forward are *completion* and *sustenance*. The meaning of "sanctified" denotes being set apart, typically for holy purposes. Day Seven represents both the celebration of the completion of a full work of creation and also the continued presence of God with that completed work.

The idea of sustenance is implied in the fact of a day devoted to closure. God didn't cease his involvement; he continued his presence with the creation. This becomes obvious as you continue reading the text.

Jesus' Teaching on the Sabbath

New Testament evidence for God's sustenance is direct, conclusive, and deeply instructive. It arrives in the context of Jesus' use of the Sabbath as he encountered the Pharisees and countered their legalistic notions about what this day meant. I have treated this subject elsewhere at length,⁴ so I will only outline here the main ideas.

4 David Levin, *Legalism vs. Faith* (Canton, MI: Tidings Publishing, 2001). Out of print, but the articles relevant to this topic are available at: www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0699.htm, www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0799.htm, and www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0899.htm. (accessed March 15, 2011)

Jesus has several confrontations with the Pharisees on the Sabbath. In each case he chooses to cure someone with a chronic ailment. He could have easily waited until sundown to effect healing and not drawn any attention to himself. However, he selects the Sabbath day on which to cure chronic conditions such as lameness and congenital blindness. In so doing, he demonstrates that the holiness of the Sabbath does not imply a day of protecting oneself from any possible interpretation of “work,” but a day in which God’s healing power continued the work of sustaining the creation.

Jesus’ proclamation, “My father is working still, and I am working” (John 5:17), tells us that God continued to work on the Sabbath. His abiding presence with creation tended to its needs, all the more as humanity developed in all of the attendant frailties and needs of mortal, sinful human life. The work of forgiveness and providence attends us daily, as it has from the beginning.

The Ultimate Sabbath

Although Genesis records a sanctified day of no work, it *does not* establish the Sabbath as a commanded day of rest. It does not become legally encoded as a day when people should cease from their work until the Decalogue (Exod 20:8-11), but the principle upon which the Sabbath became sanctified refers to Day Seven (Exod 20:11). By citing the original creation reference (or the Exodus attestation thereof), the letter to the Hebrews hangs the Sabbath argument on a sturdier peg. It connects the ultimate Sabbath rest with not only the law, but also its Genesis precedent.

The letter to the Hebrews encourages believers to continue living under grace and not to relapse into the law. This epistle focuses on the role of the high priest as an example of the vast difference between the limitations of the law and the abundance of life available through faith in the atoning sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Before the high priest contrast, however, the text visits the issue of the Sabbath.

Even though the content matter differs from the high priest discussion (which begins immediately after the Sabbath discussion, in Hebrews 4:14, and runs all the way through chapter 10), the Sabbath issue of Hebrews 4 uses the same logic. If salvation were available through

keeping the Law, God would not have made provision for another program (compare Heb 4:8-10 with 7:11, 8:7, and 10:2). The writer offers considerable detail of how the high priests' sacrifices had to be repeated, serving only as a reminder of sin, but not really doing anything to ameliorate sin's effects or remove sin's root cause. In the case of the Sabbath, the writer reminds us that Scripture points to another Sabbath to come (Heb 4:3-5) with extensive quotations from Psalm 95, especially the key verse, 95:11 "they shall never enter my rest." The argument in Hebrews rests on the fact that if another rest remains, then the original is inadequate. This parallels the Scriptural usage and logic of the High Priest argument; if another high priesthood (Psa 110:4) remains to be filled, then the original is found wanting.

The metaphorical "Sabbath rest that remains" in Hebrews 4, yields two further meanings derived from the original Genesis treatment of the Sabbath as a day with its own rightful place in the creation week. The two themes announced in Hebrews are the rest from works and the ultimate Sabbath rest that is the Kingdom of God. Jesus invited those weary with the vain attempt to live by laws and rituals to come unto him, "all ye who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt 11:28). Hebrews says the stiff-necked Jewish nation "shall never enter my rest" (Heb 3:11). Never, that is, under the terms of the Old Covenant, the covenant of law, the paradigm of rituals, and ineffectual animal sacrifices. But God, through the grace offered in the covenant of faith based on the greater sacrifice of his Son, our Lord Jesus, gives rest.

We can never earn salvation by doing good deeds or keeping rituals. We trust in God's merciful forgiveness. We establish a relationship with a personal God, and the person of the Lord Jesus. We offer our lives in thanksgiving to his service, to purity, to love and faith, but not to do what only he can do for us by grace. Thus we have a present day rest in Jesus, because we have entered the covenant of grace (Heb 4:10).

Those who abide in his grace await his coming and his kingdom—the "day" of restoration, of healing, of renewal. The now blighted Earth, a place of corruption, violence, pollution, filth, pain, disease, misery, hatred, strife, and ungodliness will return to its pristine Day Seven state, and God will again pronounce it "very good." This ultimate Sabbath will restore the magnificence of the creation.

The “now” aspect of the Kingdom of God refers to the end of the Mosaic dispensation in favor of the more excellent program of grace through faith in Jesus. Those who no longer rely on their own works for salvation have ceased from work to enter into the covenant of grace. They will share in the final rest, the “later” aspect when God’s kingdom fills the Earth and his original purpose comes to completion. Hebrews 4:9-10 indicates the “now” and “later” aspects of the Kingdom of God, where it speaks both of those who have entered into his rest and ceased from works, as well as the rest that still remains. The connecting vehicle is faith; those who partake of the first by their faith also have a guarantee of the second when the Lord returns (Heb 9:28). The two are inseparable.

The priests’ doxology during Nehemiah’s restoration work intimates the current work of sustenance and the future work of renewal:

You alone are the LORD; You have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host, the earth and everything on it, the seas and all that is in them, and you preserve them all. The host of heaven worships you. (Neh 9:6 NKJV)

The first clauses summarize the creative week, recapitulating God’s creation of the three great realms and their corresponding inhabitants. The clause, “you preserve them all,” would naturally refer then to the Sabbath day of rest, the day of sustenance and restoration. The last sentence, “The host of heaven worships you,” takes us past the metaphorical capacity of the creative week, for now we have passed the seven days, and find ourselves beyond even the re-creative work of the Great Sabbath, the Kingdom of God, to the time when God is “all and in all” (1 Cor 15:28).

Thus Nehemiah’s priests, if they could see the furthest reaches of their glorification of God, are saying the same thing Paul would write some half a millennium later: God’s great plan concludes with a great Sabbath and beyond, a world of perfect beauty and love, where all creatures praise the Creator.

The Sabbath rest of the kingdom provides a thoughtful reason for according a calendar day to the cessation of God’s work. Furthermore, unlike the six days of active creation, the Sabbath day does not conclude with “there was evening or morning.” Like Melchidezek, it has no beginning or end, and thus points to an eternal fulfillment.

STUDY 21

The Relationship between Genesis 1 and 2

Genesis 1 and 2 fit together as a well-designed whole. Chapter 2 is a detailed account of the sixth day—not, as many claim, an independent creation account.

I AM LOOKING at a road map of Colorado. For those readers unfamiliar with United States geography, Colorado is a large, nearly square state in the west-central part of the country. Most of central and eastern Colorado is high, flat rangeland. The capital, Denver, has an altitude of 5,280 feet (exactly one mile) and thus is known as the Mile High City. West of Denver the spectacular Front Range of the Rocky Mountains runs north and south. My road map has an ample inset of Denver and the many suburbs and smaller cities that surround it, since it is the only large metropolis in Colorado.

The roadmap is therefore two maps: a large rectangle showing the major features of the state, and then, above that, a detailed inset of the Denver area showing many smaller highways and streets, parks, and the locations of schools, historical sites, and other features. The inset is about twenty times the size of the yellow area that indicates Denver on the state map, so it can accommodate details that won't fit on the main map. It appears on the map in the area that would be occupied by the western part of Wyoming, Colorado's neighbor to the north.

Map printers don't explain the convention of detailed, expanded insets. Anyone who uses a map will know how to read an inset, and will not be confused. Perhaps jokingly you might gaze over the map and exclaim, "I thought Denver was in Colorado, not in Wyoming—and I sure didn't think it was this big," but you wouldn't read an inset literally and conclude that Denver is a humongous city that lies north of Colorado.

You know how to read maps, but do you know how to read Genesis 1 and 2? Genesis uses a similar convention, although it might not be quite as obvious.

The map analogy represents the relationship between chapters 1 and 2. Simply put, Genesis 2:4b-25 is a detailed description of Day Six of creation. Like a map inset, it has no intention of being a complete description of the creation. Genesis 2:4b-25 is Denver to the Colorado of Genesis 1; it's the detailed expansion of 1:26-31. Its detail, however, is skewed, in that it focuses on the human pair and only incidentally mentions other creatures.

These two chapters are the headwaters of a torrential river called the Documentary Hypothesis. Bible critics consider Genesis 1 and 2 to be separate accounts of creation, written at different times, by different authors, based on different traditions and sources. Here is an example of this type of scholarship:

As is often noted, the so-called Yahwistic account of creation (Gen. 2:4b-3:24) differs remarkably from the Priestly cosmogony that precedes it (1:1-2:3). Whereas the latter begins with an "empty" mass of water darkness, 2:4b-5 depicts an arid landscape devoid of vegetation and rain. God's first act from the Yahwist's account is not the creation of light (1:3) but that of man (2:7). Only thereafter does vegetation spring forth (vv. 8-9). These two creation stories of differing historical contexts and ethical aims, though tightly linked, begin on opposite ends of the cosmic spectrum, as it were. Whereas the Priestly account concludes the six days of creation with the creation of the human race, the Yahwist begins with the anthropogony. Whereas the Priestly account is thoroughly cosmic in scope, the Yahwist recounts, in essence, the genesis of culture.¹

It is not the purpose of this book to argue against the Documentary Hypothesis.² For now I will only mention those features that directly affect our understanding of these first two chapters of the Bible.

1 William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), p. 134.

2 Readers who want more information about and evidence against the Documentary Hypothesis and its methods are referred to the relevant sections in the works cited by Cassuto, Collins, and Garrett.

Reverence Alone Won't Unlock Genesis

Another approach to these chapters considers them as independent accounts, but still written or compiled by Moses or another single author. This view looks at chapter 2 as a comprehensive account of the creation week, with obvious emphasis on the creation of Adam and Eve. Even though it attempts to keep a reverent eye on both the original texts and assembly process, it still makes the fundamental error of reading the chapters as differing perspectives on the same historical events, namely, the creation week. This approach ignores the internal cues and thus loses the richness of the text. Reverence for the inspired word of God is a good starting point, but it alone won't suffice to unwrap the fullness of the text.

The two chapters do not cover the same material. The transition from chapter 1 to chapter 2 shows deft literary skill. Chapter 2 is to be read not as another creation account, but rather as a detailed, expanded view of Day Six. You don't have a map in front of you when you read Genesis; you have a printed page. That means you have to examine the textual clues to see how the chapters fit together.

Keys to an Holistic View

Genesis 2:4 is the transition verse that joins the two chapters. The RSV, NIV, and Alter all insert a paragraph break in this verse to indicate the shift of the text. This shift ranks as important as that between 1:1 and 1:2, discussed in Study 5. The two parts of Genesis 2:4 read as follows with the paragraph division, as translated in the RSV:

These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens . . .

The Hebrew text contains no punctuation or capitals:

these are the generations of the heaven and the earth when they were created in the day *yhwh elohim* made earth and heaven³

The first sentence, "these are the generations of the heaven(s) and the earth," concludes the preceding account (1:1-2:3), and introduces the next section. It is a designed transition from the general account of creation to the specific account of Day Six that follows. One of the

3 The Hebrew does not have definite articles preceding earth and heaven.

details examined in the next study is the reversal of *heaven and earth* in the first part of the verse to *earth and heaven* in the second half. This and other textual details taken up in the next study present strong evidence that chapter 2 is an account of Day Six only.

Just as earth was selected out of the heaven and earth statement in 1:1 for closer inspection for the remainder of the creation week, so it is with Genesis 2. Day Six, because of its obvious importance in hosting the creation of the humans, is selected from the creation week for closer inspection.

STUDY 22

The Prologue to the Creation of Adam

The description of the conditions on earth in Genesis 2:4b-7 sets the thematic stage for the appearance of humans. Key textual features provide internal evidence that Genesis 2:4b-25 is a detailed account of Day Six.

THE VOCABULARY AND subject matter shift between 2:4a and 2:4b signifies a change of topic and perspective. Most significant among the nine new items introduced is the combined name and title of God, *yhwh elohim*.

1. The Use of *toledot* in 2:4a

Immediately preceding the list of conditions on earth that starts in the second half of verse 4 appears the formula, “These are the generations (*toledot*) of the heavens and the earth when they were created.” All other appearances of this word refer to human generations, that is, genealogical entries (see Study 2 for the complete list). This is the only instance of generation from non-human entities, namely heaven and earth. Humans are about to show up; we already know that, as many times as we have read Genesis. The text is using foreshadowing here, and we may miss it because of our familiarity.

2. Heaven-Earth Reverses to Earth-Heaven

Verse 2:4b continues, “in the day *yhwh elohim* made earth and heaven.” This reversal of the order from the previous sentence, where it was heaven-earth, is a signal that earth has shifted into the main focus. The text will shortly focus more closely on earth only, as in the great perspective shift of 1:1-2. This time, though, instead of starting with “heaven and

earth” and then focusing on earth, the text starts with “earth and heaven” and moves on to describe the situation on earth.

Also of note is the word “in the day” (one word in Hebrew), another clue that the narrative is about to focus on one day.

3. Plant of the Field

Do not confuse this category, plant of the field, with the plant groups of the third day of creation. This phrase has a specific meaning connected intrinsically with the appearance of humans. The key word is “field,” a word that occurs here for the first time in Scripture. How does a “plant of the field” differ from any other plant?

The word for field carries two main meanings. It can designate an agricultural field, i.e., one that is cultivated by human activity, such as one where reaping occurs (Lev 19:9). It can also designate any open space, which may or may not be cultivated, such as the field where Isaac went to meditate (Gen 24:63). The word occurs hundreds of times in the Bible. In the majority of cases, but certainly not exclusively, it implies a human connection to the field rather than simply the wild open country. People make their livelihood in the field, fields adjoin their cities and houses, God blesses them in the field, and so on.

The phrase “plant of the field” occurs only here. This Hebrew word translated “plant” only occurs three other times: Genesis 21:15 and twice in Job (30:4, 7). It indicates wild plants such as might grow in an otherwise barren area, plants that probably would be of a weedy nature, thorny and unpalatable.

4. Herb of the Field

The word for “field” is the same as above, and the same need exists to consider the entire phrase, not just the word “herb.” The word for “herb” occurs on Day Three and there denotes the middle level of vegetation. It occurs 33 times in Scripture, translated either as “herb” or “grass” in the KJV. It does not always indicate cultivated growth, but it almost always refers to edible plant life. The phrase “herb of the field” has an agricultural connotation, such as when the plagues of hail and locusts smote the herbs of the field (Exod 9:25; 10:15). As with the previous phrase, “plant of the field,” it seems certain that “herb of the field” denotes vegetation of

a more specified and restricted type than the broad category of “herbs” of Day Three.

All doubt is removed in Genesis 3:18 where the same “herb of the field” is in the catalog of consequences that came due to the transgression of Adam and Eve. “Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, and you shall eat the *herb of the field*.” The herb of the field denotes that which comes from human activity. It is a specific category of plant life, to be distinguished from the general vegetative cover of the dry land described on the third day.

Umberto Cassuto¹ takes this point further. He contrasts the herb of the field to the plants of Day Three in that the latter reproduce naturally by the means the text specifies, through their fruit and seeds. On the other hand, herbs of the field need human cultivation to succeed. He’s not speaking of botanical and agronomic technicalities, but referring to the sweat of the brow by which humans would eat bread. This is another way of distinguishing this specific list of plants from the general botanical world that sprung into being on Day Three of the creation week.

The “herb of the field” refers, then, to the necessity of agricultural activity on which humans will come to depend. In contrast, the word for “plant” in “plant of the field” indicates wild, thorny plants, and will come to refer to the thorns and thistles occasioned also by the transgression of Adam and Eve. Thus these two phrases together foretell the two principal effects of Adam’s transgression: humans will have to rely on agricultural pursuits, not the bounty of Eden; and the agricultural enterprise will be beset by unwelcome intruders from the plant world.

5. No Rain

While rain is a widespread phenomenon, the Bible seldom refers to its presence or absence as an ecological or hydrological issue. Rain almost always finds mention only in the context of its human benefit or detriment. God can bless the earth with rain (Deut 11:14), withhold it as a punishment (Deut 11:17), or distribute it freely in hopes that people will recognize its source (Matt 5:45), but in all events, rain has a definite “people” connection; it is not just a meteorological event. In this case, there was no rain because the Garden of Eden and environs had a natural irrigation system, as explained below under point 8.

1 Cassuto, op.cit., pp. 101-103.

The rain of the Bible, blessing though it is, serves as a constant reminder that we no longer live in paradise.

6. No Adam

This phrase, “there was not a human,” explicates what the previous phrases have been leading up to: God has not yet created a human. There is no *adam*. Following the common Bible pattern referred to in Study 17, the fourth item in a sequence is the one with a difference, the capstone. This list has four material entities, and of the four, *adam* is the last: plant of the field, herb of the field, rain, human. By putting the human in the fourth position the sequence emphasizes that the narrative is more concerned with humanity than ecology.

7. To Till the Ground

The word translated “till” in the KJV is a common Hebrew word with many nuances related to performing work. Most notably, it carries the connotation of service for another. In this instance, the ground, *adamah*, receives the service. The text uses the same word a few verses down to describe God’s command to Adam in the garden. There, the KJV switches to “dress” as in “dress it and keep it.” The NIV uses “work” in both instances. Inconsistency in the KJV obfuscates the intended connection between verse 5 and verse 15. This last phrase tells us plainly that God had yet to make Adam as the caregiver for his creation. All of the information just preceding this described the state of affairs just before his formation.

8. Irrigation

The “mist” of the KJV, RSV, and other versions is misleading. “Flood” (RSV margin) and “streams” (NIV) more fittingly describe the situation. Authorities are divided over the two options—water from above or from below. The biblical evidence is scant, as the only other reference (Job 36:27) is equivocal. However, an Akkadian cognate offers some help, as the quotation below indicates. The Hebrew word in question would transliterate as *‘ed*.

The Akkadian *edu* refers to the annual inundation of Babylon by the Euphrates as well as to irrigation. If Eden was watered by

floods and irrigation rather than rain, it may have been located in an area like southern Mesopotamia where it does not rain. Such a location would suggest that the paradisiacal situation was not worldwide but peculiar to Eden's immediate environs.²

Tsumura comes up with much the same conclusions: that the 'ed represented a periodic flooding of a local area from underground sources, and that the name "Eden" meant "a place of where there is abundant water supply."³ The LXX word (also used in John 4:6) means a spring or well.

The context speaks only of watering by a river system (vv. 10-14) whose lengthy description seems totally incongruous given the spare verbiage of Genesis so far. The water is most likely connected with this system. The head of the rivers originated as a spring or from an underground river. It then branched out and provided abundant water. This watering system has advantages over rain: it is readily available, can be directed and controlled precisely, and does not require a cessation of sunshine to produce hydration. Such a system of irrigation via floodwater matches the topography of the lower Euphrates delta.

9. Introduction of the Divine Name

This is the first usage in Scripture of the name of God, generally represented as Yahweh. Even if we knew the original vowel markings we would still be guessing how to reproduce the inflection of the ancient Hebrew tongue, so it's pointless to insist on any particular way of saying this name. The denotation *yhwh* seems to me the best way to transliterate the Hebrew consonants (of which we have assured accuracy), and I think that's probably as far as we can go.

Three issues exceed pronunciation in importance:

- the meaning of *yhwh*;
- its context of usage; and
- the fact that God even has a name.

As to meaning, Moffatt's usage of "the Eternal" in his Old Testament translation is on the mark.⁴ Inasmuch as *yhwh* appears to represent a

2 Harris et al, op. cit., p. 17.

3 Tsumura, op. cit., pp. 117-119, 160-161.

4 French translations render *yhwh* as *l'Éternel*. See *La Bible du Semeur*, Biblica, 1999; and *La sainte bible, par Louis Segond: nouvelle édition revue*, Alliance biblique universelle, 1959.

melding of tenses⁵ of the verb “to be,” it probably intends to connote an idea of timelessness of existence. The name *yhwh* directs our attention to self-existence, the fundamental difference between the divine and the rest of the physical universe, which is created and therefore contingent upon God’s will. The conventional reading “LORD” has some rationale behind it, notably the LXX usage of *kurios* (lord) for the divine name, but I think that “the Eternal” best represents in English the intention of the name.

How the name is used is best revealed by context, and the context here is the prologue to the creation of Adam. Throughout Scripture, *yhwh* will represent the aspect of Deity most closely associated with interaction with humanity: *yhwh* forgives, *yhwh* makes covenants, *yhwh* speaks to his people. This is a huge subject, and I will only comment on the text at hand. As to the two designations, *elohim* and *yhwh*, Duane Garrett’s brevity says it best: “To put it simply, Elohim is *what* God is, Yahweh is *who* God is”⁶ (*italics added*).

The simple fact that God even has a name is the sort of point that often gets assumed and overlooked. To have a name is to have a personality, to be a person. Having a name tells us that God is a person; not a human, but a person, and it is this personhood that will establish the personhood of Adam and Eve. Human persons, as revealed in Genesis 2, have interaction with the divine person, but they cannot exist without the divine template. God now becomes not only the Creator, but a personal God to those who recognize his personhood and divinity.

Throughout chapter 1 *elohim* only is used to designate Deity. At the onset of the prologue to the creation of Adam comes the designation *yhwh elohim*. This designation is the only one used for the next two chapters.⁷ Then, in 4:1 is the first stand-alone occurrence of *yhwh*, and the name continues throughout that chapter. The *elohim* of the universal creation account becomes *yhwh elohim* of the detailed sixth day account and the subsequent account of Adam and Eve in chapter 3. In the Cain and Abel account the text has *yhwh* as the sole designation of Deity.

This sequence “overlaps” the two primary designations of God to

5 The use of tenses in Hebrew does not match up directly with our system of past-present-future, but the point remains the same.

6 Garrett, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

7 In the narrative, Eve and the serpent use *elohim*. See Study 34 for details.

unmistakably associate the two. The text of Genesis 1 to 4 intends to leave no doubt whatsoever that the God of creation (*elohim*), the omnipotent Creator of the universe, is one and the same as the personal God (*yhwh*) who nurtures, forgives, interacts with, and loves his creation. Thirty-four occurrences of *elohim* alone followed by 19 of *yhwh elohim* before *yhwh* appears alone leave no excuse for thinking that the two represented two different deities, or that somehow this was just an artifact of composition.

Beyond the textual issue is a larger theological issue, the single identity these two designations represent. On the one hand *elohim* is primarily associated with the transcendent Deity; on the other *yhwh* denotes personhood. Despite God's transcendence, he is also connected to the creation in the most intimate way, later to take the image of "Father." The notion of absolute authority and transcendence coupled with a personal, parental role presents the complete image God would have us hold of him.

See the digression at the end of this study for a further consideration on the use of the memorial name.

The Stage is Set

The above catalog of specific words and phrases in the section from 2:4b-6 prepare the reader for the impending appearance of human life on earth. The account of the formation of Adam begins immediately after the end of this list, in verse 7.

The following annotated and expanded paraphrase summarizes this perspective.

Before God (now known by his personal name) made Adam on the sixth day, the Earth had particular characteristics that would soon change *as a result of the activities of the humans* that God created this day. Before Adam, Earth had no need of rain; rather, it had an adequate irrigation system. It had no specific agricultural growth, and especially, it had no weeds. It had no need of an agricultural system because the Garden of Eden would provide all that the humans would need. But all this would change as a result of their doings. Therefore, I [the inspired writer] want you, the reader, to know, via this literary device of setting the mood and place, that Earth was a different place before Adam.

This prologue does the same literary job as 1:1-2. Both introduce the next act of creation by describing the baseline conditions upon which God would work.

The stage is set, literally, for the formation of Adam and Eve.

USE OF YHWH IN GENESIS

SOME DOUBT THAT the memorial name was known in Genesis. They believe Adam and Eve could not have known the divine name because of the statement to Moses, “And I appeared unto Abraham, unto Isaac, and unto Jacob by the name of God Almighty, but by my name *yhwh* was I not known to them” (Exod 6:3). This seems to say that no one before Moses knew the name *yhwh*, and that God revealed it to Moses for the first time.

Yet *yhwh* occurs hundreds of times in Genesis. The solution to the problem lies in the correct application of the word *know*. The patriarchs in Genesis experienced God as *el shaddai*, and at the time of the Exodus, the Israelite community would experience God as *yhwh*. God did appear to Abraham as God Almighty, for example, when he gave the covenant of circumcision and promised the birth of Isaac (Gen 17:1). However, God also appeared as *yhwh*, as in 12:1 or 18:1, and many other places.

The patriarchs experienced God primarily as God Almighty because God nurtured the family line of promised inheritance, from the calling of Abraham to the sojourn of Jacob’s family in Egypt. The title God Almighty does not connote any particular power or might; *shaddai* comes from a Hebrew root meaning “to nurture,” and its noun cognate denotes the female breast. Thus this is the name of choice associated with promises God makes concerning offspring, or the continuation of the family line. God is the divine nurturer who maintains the ongoing genealogy and inheritance.

When the time came for God to deliver the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, God announced to Moses that through the great wonders and miracles of their deliverance that “you *shall know* that I am *yhwh* your *elohim*, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians” (Exod 6:7 RSV). The divine name *yhwh* is inextricably linked to the act of deliverance. Also see Ezekiel 20:9,12, “I *made myself known* to them in bringing them out of the land of Egypt. . . . Moreover, I gave them my Sabbaths, as a sign between me and them, that *they might know* that I *yhwh* sanctify them.”

The men and women of Genesis did know of the divine name *yhwh*, as it had been in use from the beginning. They experienced God primarily as God Almighty. In the Exodus, God revealed the fullness of His divine name in the acts of deliverance and redemption. Even though Adam and Eve lived well before the Exodus, they had the opportunity to experience God as a personal being, not just an impersonal creator.

STUDY 23

The Formation of Adam

This study discusses the creation of the human being (Gen 2:7), and the significance of the language used in the detailed sixth day account.

THE WORD “FORMATION” reflects the Bible language used to describe God’s creating of Adam: “and the LORD God formed the human (*ha’adam*) dust from the ground (*ha’adamah*).¹ In the briefer account of the creation of Adam in chapter 1, *elohim* was the subject, paired with the “divine-only” verb *bara*, “create.” The stylistic nuances of chapter 2 focus on the divine kinship to the created, not the separation from the creation as in chapter 1, which emphasizes the omnipotence of the Creator.

Chapter 2’s expanded account of the sixth day introduces the memorial name of God. A name signifies (in this context) a person, so now a personal God is creating, thus the verb for “formed” is *yatzar*, which Scripture uses with both God and humans as the subject. The essential idea is that *elohim* creates and *yhwh* fashions. The two accounts emphasize the contextual differences both with their different designations for Deity, and the verbs chosen to describe Adam’s coming into existence.

The Potter and the Clay

The substance which the hand of God fashioned into Adam’s physical body also gave him his name. Adam comes from the *adamah*. Actually, it is a double wordplay: first *adamah* (ground) is formed into *adam* (a

1 This translation is literal and correct. The Hebrew sentence lacks a preposition between “human” and “dust.” God didn’t make Adam from the dust or of the dust, he made him dust from the ground. When God pronounces judgment upon Adam in 3:19, the direct force of “you *are* dust,” not “you are made from dust,” is restated.

human); and later *adam* become the human's name. Alter's translation of verse 7, "The LORD God fashioned the human, humus from the soil" gives us a sense of the wordplay, even though his pun doesn't match up with the Hebrew.²

The verb translated "formed" appears later in Scripture as the noun *yotzer*, "one who forms," often in the context of fashioning a piece of work such as a potter making a vessel or a sculptor making an idol. The present usage likely bears the nuance of potter, for God is working with clay from the earth. Isaiah alludes to this in his denunciation of the alleged "wisdom" of his people Israel.

You turn things upside down,
 as if the potter were thought to be like the clay!
 Shall what is formed say to him who formed it,
 "He did not make me"?
 Can the pot say of the potter, "He knows
 nothing"? (Isa 29:16 NIV)

Paul cites this passage in his epistle to the Romans for the same purpose as Isaiah. People who question God's motives or justice ought to remember the basis of their relationship to God. The image of the potter and the clay is only half metaphor; given the origin of Adam, it's also close to literal.

Further, it is quite possible that the dust in question is from clayey soil used for pottery. Sarna observes that the word for dust can be synonymous for "clay," and that the connection between "clay" and being created by God appears several times in Job.³ Job 10:9 uses both as appositives in a couplet: "Remember, I pray, that you have made me from (or like) clay, and will you (or you will) return me to dust?" See also Job 4:19, "those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust." What kind of soil God used to make Adam is not important, but the allusions to clay are echoed in images such as the potter and clay later on in Scripture.

2 Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 8. His word "humus" = "dust" of most English versions, which is translated from the Hebrew *'afar*. "Soil" is from *adamah*.

3 Nahum Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 17. See also Job 33:6.

Progression of *eretz* and *adamah*

The statement “the LORD God formed Adam dust from the ground” connects to some earlier statements. This verse represents the continuation of a thematic line that reaches back to 1:1, where the creation of heaven and earth narrows quickly in 1:2 to the view of planet Earth only. On Day Three “earth” takes on the subsidiary meaning of dry ground. The birds of Day Five fly “above the earth” and “multiply in the earth.” In all these instances, “earth” is the same Hebrew word, *eretz*. On Day Six when God makes terrestrial animals, *eretz* is used in 1:24, “let the earth bring forth,” and in 1:25a, “the beast of the earth.” The second mention of earth (KJV) in 1:25b, “everything that creeps upon the earth,” introduces the word *adamah*, which most newer translations correct by using “ground” instead. The KJV achieves consistency in 2:4b-9, where it always reads “ground” for *adamah*, and “earth” for *eretz*. Each occurs four times.

These two words are near synonyms, with much common territory but often with distinct nuances and often complementing each other. Both can signify ground, land, or earth, but *eretz* frequently represents larger scale contexts. It also can connote a country or a land (particularly the land of Israel). On the other hand, *adamah* tends more towards the smaller scale ideas of ground as in soil, dirt, or earth in the agricultural sense. It also shows up where the Bible wants to reinforce the connection with humanity, such as in the Flood account (6:1, 7:4b) where one might have expected to find *eretz*.

Adam’s formation is the end point of the continuing refinement of God’s purpose. The text zooms in from planet to dry land to a specific location to a parcel of ground and then finally to the very dust—the finest topsoil—of that ground. Finally, those particles of reddish earth become the first human. Table 5 on the next page shows this sequence.

God Forms Adam

God forms Adam from the dust of the ground, and then gives him life via divine inspiration, in the literal meaning of the word “to breathe in.” Thus, the formation of Adam comprises three discrete steps: first, fashioning dust into the form of a human; second, organizing (again, in the literal meaning of the word) the dust into Adam’s constituent cells, tissues, and organs; and, finally, giving life to the anatomically complete figure.

Table 8. Earth and Ground

Verse	Text or Context	Significance	Hebrew
1:1	In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth .	Planet Earth, all that pertains to the physical aspect of creation	<i>eretz</i>
1:2	and the earth	Planet Earth, a water-encased sphere	<i>eretz</i>
1:10	God called the dry land earth .	Continental landmass(es)	<i>eretz</i>
1:11-12	Let the earth bring forth	Productive ground	<i>eretz</i>
2:5, 6	No man to till the ground . Ground watered by a spring or subterranean river.	Potentially agricultural land in the area of Eden	<i>adamah</i>
2:7	The LORD God formed Adam dust from the ground .	Very fine topsoil of a dry area near Eden	<i>adamah</i>

Without the final step, the human form would remain organized dust. The text implies that even when his body is complete, Adam is still inert and lifeless.

For the creation of Adam the divine hand works the most interactively, the most harmoniously with the substrate (indicated by the verb “formed”) of any act of creation. God reshapes dust into a perfect, complete, functioning, living, human form.

The three clauses of Gen. 2:7 relate the steps in the creation of Adam:
The LORD God formed man dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nose the breath of life,
and the human became a living creature.

God fashions every detail of the human, all the muscles and the skeleton, the incredible human brain, a heart, blood, lungs, kidneys, and a digestive system ready to convert the bounty of Eden into life-sustaining energy, billions upon billions of cells, each perfectly formed, without mutation, blotch, or defect. Yet even when the entire working body is complete, Adam still lacks what finally distinguishes life from non-life. He has a highly organized body, but it’s inanimate. Making the physical Adam from inorganic dust is a wonder of creation, but he still has no life.

Born of Heaven and Earth

How does God give his ultimate creation life? At this point God performs the unprecedented act of breathing his life-giving spirit directly into Adam's nostrils. In fulfillment of the divine intention that Adam should correspond to the image of God, God invests Adam with his own spirit, a physically unnecessary procedure, inasmuch as God made all the other creatures alive and functional without this step.

The English text reads, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life" (KJV, NIV, RSV). However, the Hebrew words for "breathe" and "breath" are not cognate as they are in English. Four different Hebrew words that appear in Genesis 1 and 2 are at some place in the Bible rendered by "breathe" or "breath" in English versions. Words pile on to express the importance of breath and its extended meaning of life itself. A prosaic rendition might read, "blew into his nose the life-giving air, and the human became alive." Alter's translation reads, "blew into his nostrils the breath of life and the human became a living creature."⁴

The association between air and life accommodates both the physiological and spiritual dimensions. Physically, the inert but fully formed body of Adam starts breathing. This implies a heart that responds to the flow of air into the lungs. As soon as it starts beating and moving blood, Adam can breathe on his own. Oxygen comes to his brain, his body temperature equilibrates, and he becomes conscious. Spiritually, the breath of life means no less than a unique connection between the Creator and Adam, in the senses of both blessing and responsibility. He only, among all the created animals, receives life by the kiss of God.

Can you imagine what thoughts occupy Adam's mind when he first opens his eyes? How much has God pre-loaded into his brain? How will he first experience his surroundings? These are questions to ponder, but certainly not to answer.

A Figure of Things to Come

The divine inspiration into the dust of the earth represented a union of heaven and earth. The birth of Jesus came about by similar means: the spirit of God came upon Mary. Also the resurrection of Jesus from the

4 Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

dead, styled “a birth” by Paul in Colossians 1:18 (“the firstborn from the dead”) falls into this category. Add all this to the first Adam/second Adam discourse in 1 Corinthians 15:45-49, with its citation of Genesis 2:7, and we have a rich teaching tracing the plan of God from creation to resurrection.

Resurrection, the reinstatement of life to the deceased faithful who have returned to the dust, occurs at the return of Christ to the earth (1 Cor 15:23, 51-53; 1 Thess 4:16), once again uniting the breath of life with the dust of the earth.

STUDY 24

Another Animal?

Is the newly created human just another animal? Or is this creature unique? Genesis 2 presents not a this-or-that view, but instead a model that establishes the potential for spiritual growth.

ADAM COMES ALIVE by the very breath of God. Then the text applies a description that anticlimactically deflates Adam's exalted status in creation. Adam is only a "living being," like every other creature God brought into existence on the fifth and sixth days of the creation week. The phrase "living being" in 2:7 is the same in Hebrew as the "living creature" designation used of the other animals in 1:20, 21, 24. The translators understandably use "being" instead of "creature" for humans, but the Hebrew text makes no difference between the human and the other creatures. Biologically, Adam belongs with the animals.

Table 9. Adam and the Other Animals

Similar to Other Animals	Different from Other Animals
Same category: <i>nephesh chayyah</i>	Made in God's image and likeness
Made on the sixth day like other terrestrial animals	Specifically stated to have male and female versions
Made out of the ground	Formed from dust
Same physiological principles: e.g., reproduction, eating, breathing	Receives life directly from God's breath
Same command to be fruitful and multiply	Given dominion over other animals
	Names other animals
	Given tasks to perform

Are humans animals? The answer depends on the criteria you choose. We have both animal and extra-animal components. We have an animal physiology, but whether or not we have an animal mentality resides within our will, which, in itself, represents a non-animal component. The text unambiguously places Adam and Eve in the ambiguous category of “animal—but something more.”

This background is essential to understand the events recorded in chapter 3. God wants us to know our fundamental constitution, for without knowing who we are, we cannot begin to form a relationship with him.

The animal part of our nature does not end with our material or natural aspects. It also invades our mental capacities. Within the mental arena lies the true contest of life, for we can do almost nothing to change the natural bodies in which the contest resides. We cannot change the fundamental physiological, sensate being that we call *Homo sapiens*. However, *sapiens* is Latin for “wise, sensible, judicious, discreet,” and refers to our thinking capacity. We *can* orient our minds to a large degree. To the extent that we allow our natural urges to drive us, we behave as animals. The interactions of the physiological, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual components of human existence are complex. Only humans experience challenge, dilemma, blessing, potential, expectation, and responsibility. None of those words apply to any other creature.

Significant dramatic and psychological tension will unfold in Genesis 3, where the narrative of Adam and Eve pits opposing forces of our nature against each other. We can call the protagonist our spiritual nature and the antagonist our human nature. This human nature is not just animal nature, it is animal drives resident within the human psyche. The contest in the Garden of Eden is the challenge of the human to do what no other animal can do: use our higher cognitive powers to ultimately control our way of life, to choose. How the drama plays out depends on the dynamics of the contest, and that in turn requires that we come back to the formation of Adam and Eve to find out just how God constitutes their nature.

What it Means to be Human

What is this quality we call human nature? As humans, we have an animal frame, more specifically mammalian, and more precisely yet, primate. We have access to the world via our five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch. We also have other senses that give us access to our internal states, such as proprioception¹ and balance.

Different animals perceive the world differently. For instance, dogs have no color vision, but they hear pitches far higher than humans, and dogs have vastly superior smell reception systems, sometimes many orders of magnitude more sensitive than humans. These differences constitute living in a different perceptual world. Some species use their hearing more than seeing, some use their smell and taste more than hearing, and so on. We humans can't even imagine what it might be like to have echolocation, a sense used by bats.

Like all the other animals, humans have various ways of receiving information that help us guide our way through the world around us. The big difference is what happens to the organism after the information comes in. This is what separates humans from the rest of the lot. Humans have the resource of a highly developed cortex, especially aspects of our frontal lobes which grant us the option to override the impulses that sensory experience dictates.

We flatter ourselves by speaking of other species as “lower” animals. Let's take a carnivore, such as a lion. The lion sees its prey, and goes into its instinctive hunting ritual. It cannot override this need to feed itself with such a thought as, “The kudu population is on the decline. Maybe I should look for a juicy gemsbok instead.” All of the animal world lives according to physical needs, such as hunger, thirst, and tiredness. All they can do is react to their senses. If you're a snake and you're “cold,” you either don't move until the sun warms you, or you crawl to the nearest warm, cozy rock, without thinking about it. The entire economy of hibernation, migration, and food gathering goes on at a stimulus-response level, each animal following the dictates of its environment and the internal programs we call instincts.

1 Close your eyes and raise your arm. You know where your hand is in space. That is one example of proprioception.

While many of our primate counterparts and a few other animals have substantial learning and memory capacities, none of them has the sort of reflective, decision-making capabilities that we routinely exercise each day. We are hungry, but we know that it is best not to eat overmuch an hour before an important meeting, lest we doze. As humans we can analyze, choose, forego, and modify our behavior in any number of ways. We are not stimulus-response organisms, or at least not necessarily so. We have the same sensory inputs, the same bodily needs and urges to eat, sleep, regulate our temperature, avoid pain. What sets us apart is that we have choice about how to deal with those urges and needs.

And please note that it is members of the species in question who are reading this right now, and evaluating information about their own nature that places them, at least for theological purposes, in a category of their own.

STUDY 25

Adam's Domain

Adam's surroundings in the garden included the trees, rivers, and park itself (Gen 2:8-14). These become the basis for spiritual lessons in Paul's letter to the Ephesians.

AS YOU READ Scripture, especially early Genesis, always consider the structure and content of the text. "Why is it this way and not another?" can lead you to important insights.

Why does Genesis give such a detailed geography of Eden and environs, when it gives so little detail on anything else? Wouldn't it be better to have more information about the two trees that have such a central role in the drama than the four rivers that don't figure in at all? There seems to be undue weight on an apparently peripheral matter. As it turns out, the details of the rivers and the minerals provide the background for spiritual lessons in Ephesians.

Let's look first at the structure. Inspection of this section reveals yet another chiasmus:

- A. God places Adam in the garden (v. 8)
- B. The trees of the garden (v. 9)
- C. The rivers (vv. 10-11a)
- D. The riches of the area (vv. 11b-12)
- C'. The rivers (vv. 13-14)
- A'. God places Adam in the garden (v. 15)
- B'. Command concerning the trees of the garden (vv. 16-17)

Entries B and B', about the trees, appear as subheads under A and A'. Structurally, this is an overlay of an alternation pattern within the chiasmus. The key players are A B and A' B' with the middle information, in this instance, of little importance in Genesis. The sandwiching of

Adam's placement around the geographical data reinforces that God has moved him from his origin outside the garden.

Adam Like the Stars of Heaven

The formation of Adam outside of the garden and his subsequent transfer to Eden repeats the same sequence as Day Four. God made the stars, and then placed them in the firmament of heaven.¹ Similarities between the creation of stars and the creation of humans include:

- * both are made in the image of God (God is light);
- * both are given tasks;
- * both are set with a hierarchical order
- * both receive dominion; and
- * both have God as their father (James 1:17, Luke 3:38).

These similarities add depth to Daniel's declaration, "those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament; and those who turn many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Dan 12:3 RSV). This is more than just a textual connection; it's also an exhortation.

The stars represent our spiritual potential, as the passage from Daniel implies. In the New Testament, Paul's great dissertation on the resurrection likens the resurrection state to the heavenly bodies (1 Cor 15:40-49). He also contrasts the first and last Adams (Adam and Jesus) and states that in the resurrection the faithful will have the same immortal status as Jesus, who, upon his resurrection, left the mortal realm behind forever.

The Garden of Eden, an Appreciated Paradise

The Garden of Eden (literally, the Garden *in* Eden), would become Adam's home. God took Adam from wherever he had made him and placed him in this special plot. Two words specify this locale: the type of place ("garden") and the specific location ("Eden").

Gesenius records "delight, pleasantness" as the root meaning of Eden. Aside from its use as a place name, this word occurs only three other places, including the phrase, "the river of thy delight" (Psa 36:8).

The Septuagint has *paradeisos*, the source of our familiar word *paradise*. According to Liddell and Scott's lexicon, the Greek word is

1 Different Hebrew words are used for the act of placing. The word used for Adam is a personal term, whereas that used for the stars generic and impersonal.

borrowed from Persian, meaning “a park,” though it is most often used in association with Eden or other very special gardens. Moffat uses “park” instead of “garden” in his translation.

A pristine environment, fresh from the Creator’s blueprint, the Garden in Eden manifested the physical concept of *paradise* in every way. Given the derivation of the word, the description of the four rivers, and the flood or spring that provided water, Eden probably looked like a lush wetland, a tropical paradise.

These observations support the internal evidence of Scripture itself. In Genesis 13:10, when Lot lifted up his eyes, he saw that the Jordan Valley “was well watered everywhere, like the garden of the LORD.”

Adam, formed of dust in a dry, dusty or sandy desert area and then transported to the garden, would notice the difference and appreciate this setting all the more. This deliberate transfer must involve some contrast between Adam’s place of origin and the lushness of his paradise. If you know only one environment, you have no contrast, and thus no perspective on your surroundings. Coming from his origin in the dust, Adam was doubtless overwhelmed by the beauty and fecundity of Eden.

The Trees of the Garden

Picture Eden this way: a beautiful park-like area with an outer ring of fabulous forest cover, even more desirable fruit trees in the middle, and the two special trees at the very center of the garden. The events described in Genesis 3 reinforce the likelihood of this landscape. The description of the garden covers only its watering system and the trees. It offers the following information about the trees:

1. They grew out of the ground (*adamah*) (2:9).
2. They were desirable to look at (2:9, 3:6).
3. They were good for food (2:9, 3:6).
4. The Tree of Life was in the garden, probably in the center (2:9).
5. The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil grew very close to the Tree of Life; both were in the “midst of the garden” (2:9, 3:3).

This sylvan description harmonizes with the general botanical format set out on Day Three. Earth brought forth, at God’s command, the three levels of vegetation: grasses, shrubs, and trees; these covered

the entire earth. Among this verdure God plants a special garden, in an abundantly watered area. Note the contrast between the phrase in 2:9, “God made to grow” and the earth bringing forth in 1:12. Within Eden was a garden, within the garden grew the trees specified as desirable for beauty and food, and in the midst of those trees stood the two specific trees, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil and the Tree of Life. Both of these trees bore fruit.

As the “earth/ground” theme culminates in the formation of Adam (and, shortly, Eve), the silvicultural theme culminates in the two specific trees. Given the formation of Eve from Adam, it’s possible that the Tree of Life arose as a shoot from the Tree of Knowledge. Just as Adam and Eve were of one flesh and bone, the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil may have been of one xylem and phloem.

Why Trees of Knowledge and Life?

Why not trees of enlightenment, contentment, power, godlikeness, or any other characteristic? Knowledge and life are basic enough to include many other choices, so that’s a start at narrowing the field. Attributes such as “power” or “dignity” would have generated pride in humans. “Godlikeness” or “contentment” are secondary attributes, dependent on more fundamental issues. You do not pursue happiness or contentment directly; they result from a sensible, sober, and spiritual lifestyle.

Knowledge and life represent basic, inclusive, and appropriate human attributes. They constitute an apt representation of God’s plan for humans. However, it would be by *not* eating, by abstaining, that Adam and Eve could reap the benefits represented by the tree. These two trees are the crux of Adam and Eve’s relation to God.

The Hebrew for “knowledge” is a common word meaning “to know.” It can connote knowledge of an intimate sort, as it also refers to sexual intimacy, the first example of which occurs in Genesis 4:1, “and Adam knew Eve his wife.” Biblical “knowing” exceeds factual knowing. Knowing God is not simply knowing about God. However, this tree is soon forbidden for the humans. If moral knowledge is the type of knowledge embodied in the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, this prohibition seems odd, as moral knowledge would be beneficial, even mandatory, for them. If the knowledge it represents is an intimate knowledge of God,

then that knowledge would in some sense have to be obtained by refraining from the tree, even if this seems counterintuitive. Study 28 covers another definition of “good and evil,” a category of knowledge exclusive to God and appropriately withheld from the humans.

The Tree of Life didn't just represent being alive, or sustaining ordinary, quotidian life. It even went beyond representing immortality. Like “knowledge,” “life” is a common word often used to express a higher purpose. Lexically, “life” can simply mean to “be alive,” but in biblical terms, it ultimately means that form of life bound up in the committed life of a disciple. Knowledge and Life, in the presence of God, ascend to a higher realm.

This quotation from the New Testament establishes a meaningful inherent connection between these two:

After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed:
 “Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal *life*: that they may *know* you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” (John 17:1-3 NIV)

Jesus' apparently general statement refers specifically to the two trees in the garden. His prayer contains many references to Genesis, taken up at length in Study 38. For now, suffice it to say that “knowledge” and “life” are as closely connected as Adam and Eve.

The Rivers of Eden

Verses 10 to 14 describe the four rivers that spring from one source in Eden, a lengthy description of apparently peripheral importance. What function does this serve?

It is likely that a compiler later than Adam added this passage. Genesis and the Hebrew Scriptures in general, contain many references of this sort to help later generations locate their way in place and history. Consider this list from the Genesis account alone:

- “The Canaanite was then in the land” (12:6).
- “The Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelled then in the land” (13:7).

- “It was well-watered everywhere, before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah” (13:10).
- “En-Mishpat, that is, Kadesh” (14:7).
- “The father of the Moabites to this day” (19:37).
- “Sarah died at Kiriath-arba, (that is, Hebron)” (23:2).

These glosses all suggest that later compilers of the tablets that eventually made up the full text of Genesis (which covers thousands of years of history) kept their readers current of name changes, demographic movement, and other historic and geographic data. Possibly 2:10-14 belongs in this category, although it is somewhat different in format.

In any case, the details here, while not directly involved with the account, help later generations locate a now-forgotten location of Eden, and substantiate the historical accuracy of the text. It gives a certain “grounding” and lets us know that the author wanted future readers to not only identify the location of the events, but also feel comfortable that they held in their hands an historical text, not a mythological account. The straightforwardness of Genesis makes it unique among ancient cosmogonies (creation accounts), and details of the sort presented in verses 10 to 14 attest to its authenticity.

The Riches of Eden

A spiritual consideration yields another reason for the profusion of detail. This lesson focuses on the gold and precious stones mentioned in verses 11 and 12.

Paul’s letter to the Ephesians bristles with allusions to early Genesis. The apostle uses many figures of speech to contrast the new status in Christ with the natural status of humanity: for example, the recurrent theme of Christ elevating believers to the “heavenly places” (1:3, 20; 2:6). Consider the allusions in 1:17-22: “spirit of wisdom,” “knowledge of him,” “eyes of your hearts enlightened,” “rule and authority,” “every name that is named,” “all things under his feet,” and “head over all things.” All these refer to specific aspects of the account of Adam and Eve in the garden. Paul writes with Eden in the front of his mind as he elevates the role of the Lord Jesus, contrasting him with Adam. The first Adam ushered in sin and death; the second Adam gives us redemption from that condition.

The “riches” Paul mentions in 1:7 and 18 allude to the gold and precious stones of Genesis 2:11, 12. Eden and environs offered humanity the best of the abundance of the earth. With luscious plant life, reliable and abundant water, delicacies of food, and gold and minerals for beauty and manufacture, Adam and Eve and their progeny would have the best of nature.

Paul reminds us that even the best of nature vaporizes in the presence of divine blessing. The riches of his inheritance in Christ infinitely surpass even the newly created Earth, for the riches of Christ offer us the eternal gifts of grace, mercy, forgiveness, and redemption (Eph 2:4-8). The phrase “riches of his grace” in 1:7 certainly takes us back to the Garden for contrast.

Compass Points

There may be one further allusion in Ephesians. The number four, especially in a geographic context, brings to mind the four compass points. Thus, the four heads,² or rivers, suggest a compass in distribution, even if the identities and exact locations remain uncertain. God instructed Abram to view the promised land in its entirety, in all four directions (Gen 13:14). Likewise, the rivers represent an entirety, a completeness of sufficient water for the region. Like a map, the text describes the blessing of the natural world in two dimensions, four compass points.

From the two dimensions—length and width—that describe the four map directions of the earth’s surface, Paul adds a third dimension—the vertical element (depth and height)—in describing God’s blessings to us in Christ (Eph 3:18-19). Paul doubtless wrote with one eye on Genesis 13, and maybe the four rivers of Genesis 2 underpin both the Genesis 13 and Ephesians 3 passages.

The extended physical detail in Genesis 2:10-14 provides a rich visual representation of God’s plan and purpose in Jesus Christ. New Testament references to these inspired details testify to the foresight and unity of Scripture.

2 “Heads,” KJV, literally renders the Hebrew *roshim*. This word has the same root, *rosh*, as the first word of the Bible, *b’reshit*.

STUDY 26

God, Adam, and Law

This study examines Adam's duties in the garden and places the command not to eat into the overall context of God's communication to Adam (Gen 2:15-17).

GOD MOVES ADAM into the garden, then bestows on him a career, a commandment, and a companion. New wife, new life, new home! Today, these would be called major life change stressors. So much going on in the lives of Adam and Eve compressed into so few verses gives ample opportunity to read between the lines and try to imagine the first human lives in Eden.

The section opens with God's placing Adam in the garden, which the text has already introduced in verses 8-9; this allows for the narrative to flow smoothly here. The background of the garden's landscape, critical to the events about to unfold, provides the staging and action of the drama. Verse 15 repeats God's placing Adam in the garden, so verses 8 and 15 frame the description of the rivers and the riches surrounding Eden.

God Places Adam in Eden

The text has two different words for God's placing Adam in the garden. Verse 8 uses a generic "put," but the second word (*nuach*), in verse 15, has an interesting set of uses. It can connote leaving something behind or putting something in a place and then departing, or it can connote purposefully placing an item in a protected spot. The English word "deposit" (which Gesenius uses in his definition) comes closest, covering aspects of both senses. In any case, the word goes beyond the simple physical denotation of "put" or even "place":

Basically, the root *nuach* relates to absence of spatial activity and presence of security In the Hiphil [the stem used in Gen. 2:15] the root moves in two directions, the causative and the permissive. First, in the sense of “deposit,” i.e., cause something (someone) to *nuach*. So God “deposits” man in the garden.¹

This word occurs several times later in Scripture in relation to items placed before the LORD, such as in the ark or the Holy Place. It’s used with the pot of manna (Exod 16:33, 34), Aaron’s rod that budded (Num 17:7), the firstfruits of the land (Deut 26:4, 10), the laws of the kingdom (1 Sam 10:25), the tables of the Ten Commandments (1 Kings 8:9), and offerings (Ezek 42:13). The word always implies a purposeful deposition.

God’s placing Adam in the garden is at least a parental, loving act, and possibly includes a sacred motive.

Adam’s Job Description

God charges Adam to dress and keep the garden. He has previously commanded that humans should have dominion over all the earth and its flora and fauna, and that they should enjoy the fruits thereof for sustenance (1:28, 29). Adam’s work in Eden will prepare him for this leadership. He must learn by experience; his character will gain depth and love from this God-provided apprenticeship. God places Adam in the garden to tend and keep it. This implicitly involves preparing him for his previously stated dominion, and also helps picture what dominion might entail. Do not suppose it was merely for the need of the plants in Eden that God placed him there.

The two tasks in God’s directive to Adam reinforce the idea that Adam was in Eden as a learner. The translators offer a variety of words here: the familiar duo “dress and keep” (KJV), “till and keep” (RSV), “till and tend” (JPS) “till and guard” (Moffat), “till and watch” (Alter), “work and take care of” (NIV), “tend and keep” (NKJV), and “cultivate and keep” (NASB). I favor looking at the big picture—the class or category of the tasks—rather than wrestling with specific words. I suggest a translation of “serve and protect.” Several verbs give a better sense of the actual work, but I want to emphasize the underlying principle.

Adam’s tasks cover both doing good and preventing bad. The first

1 Harris et al, op. cit, p. 562.

verb is a common Hebrew word usually translated “serve”; as a noun, it becomes “servant.” It conveys the idea of doing helpful and useful work. Adam became a servant to provide for the needs of the growing garden. Through his efforts, the garden would improve. If he didn’t serve, it would become overgrown and unproductive. The second word is also a common Hebrew word, usually translated “watch” or “keep” in the sense of “take care of” or “keep an eye on.” In Deuteronomy, it becomes the familiar “take heed.” As a noun, it becomes “watchman,” so Adam also had that title in his job description.

Together, these two verbs convey the sense of taking action to maintain and improve what is already present, and protecting to prevent harm or detriment. Adam has the charge to both serve and protect, to do something positive and prevent anything negative. In the most generic sense, he will act as both servant and watchman; his job description is caretaker-guardian, entailing both a productive and a protective function.

The Meaning of Stewardship

You can compare Adam’s duties to what we call “sins of omission” and “sins of commission.” It’s not enough to avoid doing evil; we must also do good. The two form an inseparable pair necessary to describe virtue. Likewise, God doesn’t want Adam just to keep something bad from happening; he also has to do good. Adam’s assignment may not seem to fit the context of possible sin, because God doesn’t specify any consequences if he fails in either of these duties. Only the command that forbids eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil has a specified consequence. In part, Adam’s neglect of one or both of these realms of duties leads to transgression. The sinful act, the moment of transgression—the eating of the fruit—can be traced back to his assigned duties in the garden. Adam’s deficiencies in both service and protection result in his being fired from his position as caretaker-guardian when God expels him from Eden.

If God saw that everything was very good, what threats would there be to the garden? Such a question assumes that “very good” was a static state that was good enough and only had to be protected. However, in the garden, as in our lives, maintaining the status quo won’t do. Eden is a living, changing, active arena prepared for Adam and Eve’s spiritual

development, requiring the first couple to deploy all of their faith and intellect. Unfortunately, their downfall will result from issues related to Adam's stewardship.

God's Complete Message to Adam

God's instructions to Adam form a complete program for his spiritual growth and well-being. The two parts of his job description complement each other, and together they complement the "law" that God gave Adam. (The quotation marks indicate that I am using this word figuratively.²) The prohibition on eating of the Tree of Knowledge is direct and explicit, given in clear behavioral terms, but it is far from being all that God communicated to Adam.

Viewing the command simply as a law Adam had to obey misses much of God's teaching purpose with Adam. It's within a context along with the rest of God's directives to Adam. Yes, it is a law, but it is also the beginning of the formation of human morality, and the richness of the teaching only emerges in the context of the whole picture. As with so much of the text in early Genesis, much meaning is condensed into a very few words.

A careful look at God's entire communication to Adam reveals Adam's moral responsibility to his Creator. Without this perspective, "as by one man sin entered the world" will fail to have its full meaning. Sin involves far more than eating forbidden fruit.

Let's summarize what we know so far about Adam's relationship with God:

1. God declared that he would create humans in his image and likeness, and that humans would have dominion over the remainder of the animal kingdom and over all the earth.
2. God formed Adam of the dust of the earth in a dry place, the first of his species.
3. He then transferred Adam from the arid desert to the verdant Garden of Eden; presumably Adam recognized and appreciated the change of venue.
4. God gave Adam the twin tasks of cultivating and guarding the garden.

2 For details, refer to *Legalism vs. Faith* (footnote 4, p. 137).

5. God offered to Adam all the food of the garden in abundance save one tree.
6. Should Adam eat of the one prohibited tree, certain death would ensue on that day.

This is the complete context, of which the prohibition forms only one part. What God is teaching about sin and morality is a product of his entire message to Adam.

STUDY 27

Implications of Law

The introduction of the prohibition (2:17) invites us to reflect upon matters of obedience, faith, relationship, and morality and other implications in a system where God gives law.

THUS FAR THE Genesis account has recorded God's activities in creation, with descriptions of the various created elements, their order, and place in nature. Now comes a new category of God's activity: the giving of a law. It comes in the form of a prohibition; it's a "don't," a restriction with penalty, a challenge to obedience. It introduces the moral dimension into the creation.

The command extends beyond the beauty and order of the created world and its workings. This is not entirely new, because the declaration "God saw that it was good" went beyond the material description of things and activities. The declaration that Adam is made in the image of God also goes beyond the physical realm of creation, and necessitates the prohibition.

The prohibition is far more than an isolated law to test Adam's obedience. The whole message is that God places him in the garden, gives him a job, blesses him with abundant food, and then invokes the prohibition. This completes the picture of what it means for Adam to be human.

The Possibility of Transgression

As soon as God gives this command, a new dimension of moral responsibility enters Adam's life—the possibility that he *could* violate the command. If Adam has free choice regarding his behavior, the establishment of a command implies the possibility of transgression. There is now

a law that could be violated, however remote the actual desire to do so. It becomes part of his thinking.

With the possibility of eating comes, of psychological necessity, the first hint of temptation—not a temptation in the sense of a strong urge, but temptation in the sense that the idea of eating becomes an option, a possibility. The door might not be wide open, but now there is a door. It's there in the neurons—I can eat of the tree if I choose to. This is not about Adam's desire to obtain something forbidden, only about the presence of an option in a mind that has freedom of choice. For an act to count as a transgression, it must be a behavioral choice over which the person has the option to do otherwise.

Adam has freedom of choice, and now, the ability to exercise that option. He also has freedom to eat of the other trees, and freedom about how he performs the work God assigned him in the garden. He is in control of his behavioral choices.

Mental Imagery of Negative Commands

The command to abstain from the one tree is specific, uses negative phrasing, and stipulates the penalty for transgression. The negative nature of the command makes it different from a command like “You must eat this fruit.” If you wanted to resist this thought, you would picture some avoidance behavior regarding the tree. You could imagine striding up to the tree and just staring at it in defiance, or perhaps picking the fruit, but then heaving it across the field. At the vilest end of the scale, you could imagine hewing down the tree. However, the command does not *necessarily* bring any of these to mind. There is nothing inherent in the command “You must eat of the tree” that conjures up any specific mental image not to eat. In other words, there are many ways to imagine how *not* eating might occur.

In contrast, with a negative command, one that requires avoidance for the command to be kept, the statement itself contains the very behavior to be avoided. There is only one way to break a negative command, and that is to do the prohibited behavior. However, whether your intent is to keep the command or to defy the command, you must imagine doing the actual behavior. The command “do not eat this fruit” contains the words “eat this fruit.” Here's the rub: the mental image of *not* eating fruit *of necessity entails eating it!*

Psychologically, there's a huge difference between positive and negative commands. Because the idea conveyed by the word "not" is abstract, unlike a tangible entity such as the fruit, you omit it from your mental imagery when you hear a negative command. The image of a negative command is just the positive part of the command.¹ Yes, this takes you to the old saw, "Don't think about pink elephants." You can't not think about pink elephants unless you . . . think about pink elephants! Whew!

The bottom line is that as soon as you think about a command stated as a negative, there is, at some level, a picture in the mind that wasn't there before of doing the very thing that is prohibited. This doesn't mean you're doomed to do the prohibited action, it just means that some sort of mental image of it is present.

How Prohibitions Engender Temptation

A negative command entails four levels of temptation. First and most basic comes the mental imagery discussed above. I call this the *eidetic* or image-forming level. We store memory as images, not as verbal codes. The mental picture associated with the command *necessarily* depicts the forbidden activity and thereby places in the mind the possibility of transgression.

The second level is the *volition* level. A person possessing the capacity of free choice has power over what he or she chooses to do. However, for a given action to constitute an option, said action must appear on the menu. In other words, if you don't conceive of an action, you don't have the possibility of doing it. If you do conceive of it, you may or may not do it. First, however, you must have the idea. The issuance of a prohibition immediately places the prohibited behavior on the menu. It has become an option. It is in the mind. Volition alone can now stop the behavior from occurring. This is where "free won't"² is just as important as free will.

The third level is the *prohibitive urge* level. This refers to the human tendency to desire what you cannot have. As soon as you can't have it, you want it. Something about an item or a behavior being prohibited

1 A negation by itself, such as "don't," "no" (as in "No Trespassing"), lacks any image quality. Therefore we store both a mental image of the sanctioned activity along with a purely abstract negation. One guess as to which part of the memory is the stronger!

2 The term "free won't" was coined by cognitive science researcher Benjamin Libet to refer to when we volitionally decide in a narrow window of time to overrule certain apparently subconscious impulses.

makes it more attractive. You wonder what it would be like to have the taboo item or to do the forbidden act.

As I'm writing this I am listening to a recording of Rudolf Serkin playing Beethoven piano sonatas. The liner notes contain this story concerning the early days of the "Pathétique" sonata:

The young pianist Ignatz Moscheles, age ten at the time, found a copy of this sonata, then newly published, and took it at once to his teacher in a rapture. He was immediately forbidden to study it and admonished to stay away from such musical "corruption." Naturally, he pursued it with all the more energy, but on the sly.

Moscheles' teacher had much to learn about human nature. If you want to get somebody to do something, tell them *not* to do it. It was not God's intention to trick Adam and Eve into sinning, nor is it possible to know how much of a role this prohibitive urge played in their temptation. For Adam and Eve some combination of doubt and desire led them to take that which was verboten.

Finally, the fourth level is *control*. We simply don't like other people to make our choices for us; it challenges our personhood and autonomy. This urge to resist might be the primary driver behind the urge to do or have that which is prohibited. Control works equally well with positive or negative commands, for you would feel just as restricted or dominated if someone said you *must* do something. You would respond, "No one tells me what to do."

The four factors operate in unison; in real life you can't separate them. Theoretically it makes a good exercise to help understand at least part of the process of temptation. We can only guess at the influence each of these four contributed in the case of Adam and Eve. All that is certain is that they were tempted and they did act on their temptation. The psychological factors that constitute the workings of our temptation process had some role in theirs, too.

I have attempted to give a psychological analysis of temptation. The terrible trio described in 1 John 2:16—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is unmistakably linked to Adam and Eve. We tend to think of temptation in these terms, but underlying them are the above psychological processes. As Paul admits in Romans 7:7, "I would not have known what sin was except through the law," and "I

would not have known what coveting really was if the law had not said, ‘Do not covet.’”

Why A Prohibition?

The prohibition is more than a test of Adam’s obedience. By employing this prohibition, God shows Adam the basic fact that would guide their relationship: God is unlimited, but Adam is limited. This teaching is so important that the next study covers it extensively.

God has already given Adam three positive commands: tend the garden, guard the garden, and eat of all the fruit. God gives Adam both positive and negative directives. The positive directives require Adam to do something; the negative command requires that he abstain from an activity. Together they provide a comprehensive test of his character. The positive and negative fit together psychologically and logistically.

The decision to eat forbidden fruit comes not so much because of the four levels of temptation instigated by the prohibition, but by Adam’s negligence in carrying out the positive commands. The prohibition itself is not unfair. (Of course, it is foolish to think God unfair, but on the other hand it is important to understand why God is fair.) It is a brief, clear, and unmistakable behavioral measure of obedience. Eat or not eat. Nothing about intention, amount eaten, or anything else. Don’t do it. Period. “What part of ‘don’t’ don’t you understand?”

Had Adam diligently observed the three positive directives, he doubtless would have avoided trouble with the fourth.³ You can’t focus on the negative prohibition as the culprit or as a biased test for Adam. It is part of the process, the business end so to speak, because the penalty for eating comes immediately after the prohibition. Yes, the punishment will follow the crime, but the crime will follow the negligence in keeping and guarding the garden, and failing to appreciate the bountiful blessing bestowed by *yhw h elohim*. Transgression has a preceding process, and that process directly links to Adam’s relation to the three positive directives.

Although much of this discussion remains for later studies, entertain this thought for now: imagine Adam fully comprehending and practicing

3 Here’s another example of the fourth member of a series being the different, emphasized item: three positive commands (serve, protect, eat) followed by the one negative command (tree of knowledge prohibited). The one negative command will come to bear the weight of the narrative.

“eat abundantly of all the trees.” Imagine Adam tending the trees, eating and enjoying their fruit, learning to depend on the goodness of his heavenly Father and realizing that God provided for his needs. Imagine Adam feeling abundantly sated with all the delicacies of the garden and not in the least yearning for the “forbidden fruit.” A mind full of positive spiritual thoughts best repels the desires and lusts of the flesh.

God blesses Adam abundantly with spiritual and physical resources. God gives him not only physical blessings, but the opportunity to grow in grace, trust, and dependency on his Creator. Adam has spiritual resources in the positive directives that can anchor his resolve against the possibility of transgression.

Righteousness involves much more than avoiding what is wrong, and sin entails far more than simply doing something wrong. God is not working to prepare Adam to avoid a single behavior, but to strive for a life of spiritual growth.

STUDY 28

The Knowledge of Good and Evil

The divine prohibition on the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil is to teach Adam that he has limitations, and God doesn't. What type of knowledge does the tree represent?

THE MOST FUNDAMENTAL teaching of early Genesis is that of monotheism: there is a single God. As Creator, God stands outside the universe, but God's presence, dominion, awareness, control, and power are coextensive with the universe. The universe in a sense is the planned, physical production of God. The second lesson from early Genesis is by implication: if there is one God, you are not God.

The Ability to Understand Limits

Humans are created entities. Like the other creatures, their presence, dominion, awareness, control, and power are insignificant within the universe. However, humans are unique in that they are the only creatures aware of their own insignificance.

Other animals do not know this limitation; they are not aware that the universe of their experience is the merest iota of the entire physical universe. A house cat, for instance has a territory and knows little beyond that. A cat does not have such ideas as "the limits of the universe," but if it did, it would consider its territory as the limits of the universe. Does a gorilla in a North American zoo have any comprehension of how far it is from its native homeland in Africa, let alone distances beyond Earth? Does even the Arctic Tern, whose annual migration runs from Greenland to Antarctica and back have any awareness of actual distance?

Only humans can comprehend a universe greater than the world of their own habitation. As a species, humans are unique in using technology

to further their understanding of the universe. In the past century alone, technology upon technology has expanded their spatial reality from infinitesimally small subatomic particles to the incomprehensibly immense universe.¹ Today's world of experience would be unimaginable to those who lived in pre-technological times.

God has complete awareness of the entire universe that he made. Non-human animals have no awareness of this whatsoever. Humans alone have the cognitive capacity to be aware of a universe beyond their experience. Because the other animals cannot make this judgment, they are excluded from matters of morality and theology.

As humans, our unique level of awareness places us in a unique place of responsibility and relationship to God.

Morality and Limitations

The basis of both morality and theology resides in the fact that as Creator, God has no limitations, no limits of power, experience, knowledge, or any other parameter. Humans have limits in every measure of their existence, from the cradle to the grave. Adam and Eve usurp the sole prerogative of God when they attempt to set their own limits, establishing their own law of the garden when they decide that the forbidden fruit is fair fare. By so doing, they transgress the boundary between themselves and God. They assert themselves as limitless, and thus violate the fundamental arrangements of the universe.

They have the mental and volitional capacities to live within their limitations, and are well aware of their usurpation, so God reckons them culpable. They become, in biblical parlance, "sinners." We have many ways to understand this word, but the first sinners are two people who fail to honor the limited/limitless relationship.

God gives a law not so much to test Adam's obedience, as to establish the basis of their relationship. Adam's obedience, though necessary, must be placed inside a larger box labeled "relationship." By limiting Adam's world with a prohibition, God establishes himself as the unlimited superior entity of the two. Adam must recognize this and trust God's discretion. God must show himself infinite and Adam finite. A law of prohibition suffices neatly to establish these dimensions, and thus a rela-

¹ A current estimate is at least one hundred billion galaxies. Andromeda, the nearest galaxy like ours, is some 2.5 million light-years away and contains one trillion stars.

relationship between the limitless and the limited can develop. The limitless/limited relationship is just another way of expressing the creator/created relationship, but stated in theological rather than cosmic terminology.

Connection Between Eating and Knowing

Although any restriction would suffice to teach the point that God is unlimited and they are limited, the taboo item is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. What sort of knowledge does this name signify? Whatever knowledge this entails, it symbolizes the difference between Adam and Eve's limitations and God's omniscience. What is the implication behind God withholding this knowledge from Adam and Eve? Does the prohibition against eating of the tree imply that Adam and Eve can acquire the knowledge of good and evil—whatever that is—if they eat of it?

A relationship between eating and knowing seems to be implied, but the text lacks any direct connection between the two. Even God's rueful assessment after they eat, "The human has become as one of us, knowing good and evil" (3:22) doesn't make the connection, as it is ironic. The knowledge that Adam and Eve eagerly hope for they do not obtain, instead learning of their own nakedness and futility and shame. They learn what it is like to feel horrible, to experience fear, to know the consequences of doing wrong. They do learn about evil by eating, but they do not acquire the knowledge reserved solely for God.

What would they have learned about good and evil had they not eaten? This is a paradoxical situation. It seems they learn the "wrong kind" of good and evil by eating (they learn of their own not-goodness). What would they have learned by not eating? Presumably they would at least learn to trust their maker and they would be in a position to grow in faith. Their relationship with God would remain intact as they would have honored the limited/limitless boundary.

What is the Knowledge of Good and Evil?

Determining what kind of knowledge is meant by the name of the tree will help clarify the relation between eating and knowing. Here are some possibilities:

1. All knowledge that God has; omniscience.
2. Knowledge of what situations or things are "good" or "evil."

3. Moral knowledge; moral good and evil.
4. Moral knowledge, but specifically referring to sexual morality.
5. The knowledge that God used in creation to declare things “good.”

Option 4 can be ruled out, although it has been a favorite of expositors who like to take the text for a ride through the moral countryside.² The fact that Adam and Eve are coupled in sexual union removes the rationale for declaring off-limits any knowledge of sexual morality. The Hebrew word “know” (as is also the case sometimes in English) can refer to sexual union (e.g., Gen 4:1), not that this is the knowledge referred to here.

The same argument can be made for Option 3, moral knowledge in general. If “good and evil” refers to moral good and evil, it seems more than odd that God would prohibit Adam and Eve from this knowledge. It could have been in the avoidance of eating that Adam and Eve would have learned moral goodness, and by eating they learned moral evil. In that sense, Option 3 might be appropriate. Nonetheless, it seems inapt to make the tree to represent something God would want Adam and Eve to know, something necessary for them to maintain their relationship with him, and then declare the tree the sole tree from which they should not eat.

Option 1 suffers because it lacks the modifier “good and evil.” It is not the Tree of All Knowledge, but the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, so this option doesn’t fit the key criterion. When the serpent entices Eve, he specifies “knowing good and evil.” The temptation would make little sense if the knowledge involved gaining the omniscience of God, a much larger concept than the knowledge of good and evil.

Option 5 has contextual merit. All other uses of the word “good” in Genesis 1 occur in the formula “God saw that it was good” (or “very good”), but this is the first appearance of the word “evil.” On numerous occasions God calls something “good,” starting with the light (1:4). Now God designates a Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and then immediately declares that it is “not good” that the man should be alone. Thus, you could reasonably make an association between this tree and that aspect of knowledge applicable to declaring the various aspects of

² Blocher (op. cit., pp. 126-132) has a decent summary of this point of view, and a few others, too.

creation “good.” It would also be reasonable to suppose that the “not good” of 2:18 would mean roughly the same as “evil.”

This observation leads to an important distinction: the distinction between moral good and evil and what I shall call situational (or experiential) good and evil. Option 5 puts us on the right track and leads us to Option 2, which I consider the primary meaning of “good and evil.”

Situational versus Moral Good and Evil

When Adam is alone, before God makes Eve, God declares his state of affairs “not good.” However, being in a “not good” situation hardly makes Adam morally corrupt. If it did, his sin would have come long before eating of the tree with Eve.

If the pair “good” and “not good” used in the creation week approximates the same meaning as the “good and evil” of the tree, that’s a solid lead to follow. There are many places where the Hebrew word translated “evil” denotes some unpleasant state, not necessarily a morally corrupt one.

The spare Hebrew vocabulary of Scripture uses words more freely than does English. The word translated “evil” can easily also mean “bad,” “ugly,” “unfavorable,” “disagreeable,” “rotten,” and a variety of similar ideas, depending on context. For example, this word denotes the sin of Nineveh in Jonah 1:2 (moral usage) and in Jonah 1:7 it’s used to describe the tempest on the sea (a very unpleasant situation).

The Joseph narrative amply demonstrates the flexibility of this word. It’s used for the “evil report” Joseph took to his father Jacob when he found his brothers doing who knows what in Dothan (Gen 37:2), to describe the wild animal his brothers inculpated as Joseph’s slayer when they presented his bloody tunic to Jacob (37:20, 33), for the sin of adultery (“great wickedness,” KJV) when denying Potiphar’s wife’s advances (39:9), to describe the seven cattle of Pharaoh’s dream (“ill-favoured” KJV) that portended the seven-year famine (Gen. 41:3), and other uses as well. Just as “evil” can apply to both moral and non-moral contexts, so can the word “good.”

The distinction between moral and situational good and evil is an important one. The good and evil of this tree is of the latter form. God proscribes the knowledge of situational good and evil, or more

specifically, the ability to declare what is situationally good and what is situationally evil. To help keep this distinction in your mind, remember that the “evil” in situational evil has no moral connotation; it merely means bad or unpleasant.

Moral evil covers issues of right and wrong, such as eating of a tree that God has made off-limits. The Bible has lists of moral good and moral evil. God represents his character with a list of moral attributes: merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth (Exod 34:6 KJV). The evils of humanity—such as violence, selfishness, adultery, sloth, covetousness—are moral evils.

Situational good and evil refers to aspects of life we find pleasant or unpleasant. In this sense, we call an event or situation a good event if it brings us pleasure, appeals to our senses, or gives us occasion for happiness, contentment, joy, enjoyment of life, and the like. Situational evil encompasses the opposites of those pleasurable experiences, and would include any circumstance that would lead to physical or emotional suffering or pain, loss, or even on a minor scale, distaste or discomfort.

Situational good and evil differ from moral good and evil in at least two significant ways. Morality is declared by God and is universal for all people. What is moral for me is moral for you.³ Situational good and evil, on the other hand, depends much on the individual. I expend myself on a hard bike ride and call that pleasurable; this might hardly be the case for someone else. A stressor that overwhelms my emotional capacities might be scarcely noticed by another person having the same experience. Situations in themselves are neither good nor evil, but what we make of them. A situational good is one you call pleasurable, regardless of what someone else, or everyone else, might think of the same situation.

Moral good and evil apply to what you do, but situational good and evil apply to how you assess what happens to you. For instance, if you get sick, that’s not a moral issue; it’s a situational evil. If you blame God or get cranky and nasty because you don’t feel good, that’s a moral issue.

Assessing Situational Good and Evil

God assesses situational good and evil differently than we do. We use our comfort as the measure; God uses our spiritual development. Our judgment of good and evil results from the physical and emotional pain

3 This applies to principles, not to every behavior (Romans 14:1-6; 1 Cor 10:23-31).

or pleasure of that experience. We call something bad when it feels bad. We are stuck in the same position as Adam and Eve just after their sin, when they first experience situational evil as a result of their moral evil, when they feel bad, consumed in fear, guilt, and shame. An under-appreciated facet of their sin is that the first consequence of it is that they are swamped with negative emotions.

God is more interested in our character than our comfort. What we call good or bad according to our measures of pain and emotion may not be how God views the situation. We can't take the long view to know if these are really "good" (leading us to God) or "evil" (taking us away from God). Only God knows, and only God can know, for only he can take the results of an event into the future.

Some examples might help with this definition of good and evil. You work hard for four years in university and get accepted to a professional school. Everyone thinks this is wonderful—but will it draw you away from God? What if failing to be admitted leads you to another more fruitful career and a deeper faith? Another situation: what if some personally devastating event, such as a terrible illness, leads, in the long run, to a stronger faith? What at first you would call bad because it is painful, expensive, and life-disrupting might be the best thing that ever happened to you spiritually.

The Joseph narrative offers abundant examples. His whole life was a series of what, by any human judgment, would be ups and downs, goods and evils. His father's favorite son—good, but it spawned jealousy from his brothers—bad. They plotted to kill him—bad, but instead sold him into Egypt—good. He rose to fame in Egypt—good, but then he was framed by Potiphar's wife—bad. And so on the account goes, until he reminds his brothers at the end, "You meant it for evil but God meant it for good" (Gen 50:20).

If the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil represents knowledge of situational good and evil, it is easy to see why God would declare it off-limits for Adam and Eve. Part of the limitation inherent in finite creatures is that they cannot have that knowledge. They have to trust that God's knowledge of those matters is sufficient for them. It is not possible for finite humans to have the infinite wisdom necessary to know which events are "good" and which are "evil" in the ultimate sense. Having

crossed the boundary between finite humanity and infinite divinity, Adam and Eve experience both in their minds and bodies the negative emotions, like a disharmonious chord, the tokens of their perfidy.

We all have many experiences of life that we just don't know how to assess at the time, and we shouldn't even attempt to call anything that happens to us either good or evil (we're not prophets like Joseph). Only God knows what will happen to us eventually as a result of the experiences of life. God does not judge experiential good and evil on the basis of emotions, but on the ultimate role events play in our lives. Only God sees the end from the beginning.

The Preacher addresses this in Ecclesiastes. The words for good and bad are the regular Hebrew words for good and evil: "When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future" (Ecc 7:14 NIV). The Hebrew is a little obtuse and translations vary for this verse, but it seems that the implication or ellipsis ("discover anything *from his present situation* about his future") is that we can't interpret the long-term meaning of events from their immediate emotional effect upon us.

It does not make sense that God would prohibit the knowledge of moral good and evil from Adam and Eve. However, knowledge of things beyond us, to declare events and situations good and evil in the experiential sense, is not, and cannot, be our lot. Our inheritance from the first transgression is that we by nature make judgments of experiences based on our emotional and physical pain or pleasure.

To grow spiritually, we must learn to accept whatever comes our way without making judgments good or bad, but this is much easier to say than do in the face of a heavy hit. Paul wrote to the Romans "in all things God works for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28 NIV). If we take this to heart, we can learn to see the ultimate good in all circumstances, regardless of their physical or emotional effects on us.

STUDY 29

You Shall Surely Die

God stated that Adam and Eve would surely die on the day that they ate (Gen. 2:17), but this didn't happen. Is it possible that this verse has a different meaning?

GOD'S BLESSING TO Adam comes just before the prohibition of eating. Adam is told to eat from of all the trees of the garden, and not just eat, but eat abundantly. Eat, eat, all you want! The colloquial usage of the Italian *mangia, mangia!* probably best conveys the Hebrew phrase.

This is a common construction, which repeats the verb to give it extra force. Typically when you encounter adverbs such as “absolutely,” “certainly,” or “surely,” the Hebrew text is using this construction, which serves to intensify the verb. *Englishman's Hebrew and Chaldee Concordance of the Old Testament* has this comment under the entry for “surely”: “surely is sometimes the translation of an infinitive used intensively” [*sic*]. This Hebrew device doesn't translate literally into English. It consists of a verb in the infinitive form followed by the same verb in its appropriate conjugation. You can't find a list of places where this construction occurs by using a concordance, even though it occurs hundreds of times, including in the next statement, “you will surely die.”

The death sentence has exactly the same construction as the blessing to eat abundantly. In this phrase, it means that if Adam eats from the forbidden tree, certain death will ensue on that very day. Yet Eve and Adam do eat, and remain alive. How can this be? Is there another way to interpret this sentence? Is this a translation issue, or is something else going on?

Because Adam didn't die that day, expositors have invented many explanations as to what the statement might mean. Some of them work

on the meaning of “die,” while some work on the time restriction that the death would occur on the day of eating. The following are the main candidates that have been put forward to solve the dilemma, but I will only comment on a few of them.

1. Adam died spiritually and became a sinner instead of becoming God’s highest creation.
2. What God meant was that Adam would become mortal on the day he ate of it.
3. Adam did die that day, if you figure that a “day is as a thousand years” and Adam only lived to be 930 (Gen 5:5).
4. Adam died figuratively in that God expelled him from Eden.
5. Adam died provisionally in the death of the slain lamb, from whose dead carcass came the skin that Adam wore, thus symbolizing his own death.
6. The statement didn’t mean he would actually die that day, but on the day he ate he would be sentenced to death.
7. The penalty is only a brief statement of the fuller penalty given in chapter 3 after the transgressions, when God sentenced Adam, Eve, and the serpent.
8. A day doesn’t necessarily mean a literal day; it could mean, “when you eat of it, you will eventually die.”
9. Adam and Eve would be denied access to the Tree of Life.

All the above show that Bible students take God’s promises seriously; they don’t like to have God say one thing and then do something else. If a verse says that “A” will result if “B” happens, and then “B” happens, we expect “A” to follow. When it doesn’t, a credible explanation must come forth.

First, I must state emphatically that the Hebrew construction for “surely die” leaves no wiggle room. This is a straightforward statement using a common grammatical construction that has an adverbial effect, intensifying the verb by repeating it. This intensification increases the

certainty or extent of the action.¹

The KJV margin shows the doubling with “eating thou shalt eat” and “dying thou shalt die.” These phrases make no sense in English, but the latter is usually taken to mean something like “mortality shall become operative within you” (Option 2 above). This is not a possible meaning. To render “surely die” as “become mortal” weakens the force of the verb!

The Time Element

Had the text just said, “If you eat you will surely die,” that would have been clear enough about what would happen, but it would leave room for when. However you understand the phrase “in the day,” it is there to emphasize the immediacy of death; death is a direct result of sin.

Trying to make “in the day” into a longer time doesn’t work in principle, and it doesn’t work as a matter of exegesis, either. Those who claim a day can mean a very long time (Option 8 above) usually cite Genesis 2:4 “in the day the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.” However, as shown in Study 21, this verse does not recapitulate the entirety of creation, but introduces the detailed account of the sixth day. Even if it does refer to the entire creative week, that’s still only six days!

The attempt to lengthen a day to a thousand years takes 2 Peter 3:8 entirely out of context. Going in the other direction, that is, making “day” shorter, not longer, the JPS translation renders the phrase idiomatically, “for as soon as you eat of it, you will die.”

The time element is a secondary issue. It could mean, as an idiom, “instantaneously,” or literally, “sometime that very day,” or even figuratively, “at that time.” It’s not a technical execution time (“at dawn you will face the firing squad”). In practical terms, it means that if they transgress they will be immediately apprehended, tried, and sentenced.

The punishment for transgression was the death sentence. “In the day you eat of it you shall surely die” is the only sustainable reading. When it came time to mete out the sentence, though, we find that God granted them continuity of life. The text describes the life that they will

1 In 2 Samuel 12:14 the same words occur concerning the son of David and Bathsheba. Also see Genesis 20:7, Numbers 26:65, Judges 13:22, 1 Samuel 14:39, 44, and 2 Kings 8:10, where the only meaning the text can admit is “surely die.” Alter uses “doomed to die” in Genesis 2:17, saying that it has a judicial connotation, but that meaning cannot apply in the above references.

live in some detail in 3:16-20. Adam calls Eve “the mother of all living,” a name incompatible with an immediate death sentence.

Studies 38 and 40 will show there is no need to evade the plain meaning of the sentence. A completely biblical, but largely ignored, explanation falls within the secure principles of confession and grace. They are the basis upon which God promised one thing but delivered another. To get there, though, we must first discuss the confrontation between God and Adam and Eve after they did eat. Stay tuned.

STUDY 30

Madam, I'm Adam

The phrase “it is not good that the human should be alone” prefaces the creation of Eve, and is the basis for the lessons of this account.

GOD SAYS IT is not good that the man should be alone (2:18). What a striking statement! For the first time, something is not good. What aspect of creation would the LORD God deem unfit for approval? The “not good” phrase serves as a textual landmark, setting the context for the formation of Eve.

Remember, Genesis 2 is a detailed account of the creation of humanity on the sixth day. The events of 2:4b-24 occur in Genesis 1:26-28. The text could label Adam's situation as “not good” only before God made Eve, not after. Likewise, the “very good” (1:31) of Day Six could only come after Eve's creation, not before. Eve's appearance remediated the “not good” situation; therefore, 2:18-25 must occur prior to 1:31. The phrase “it is not good” provides evidence that the first two chapters form a single literary unit, and helps clarify the relationship between the two chapters.

The seven previous proclamations of “God saw that it was good,” (including one “very good”) contrast sharply with “it is not good.” The words “not good” represent more than a statement disapproving Adam's solitary status. They tell us that this singleness is disharmonious with the remainder of the created universe. Read “not good” as if the text were saying, “Everything was good except for the human's unpaired status.” This appraisal instigates the search for an appropriate partner for him.

Context of Eve's Creation

The several statements of the preceding section (2:15-17) set the scene for Eve's creation. Everything God tells Adam and all the work God

assigns him now take on another dimension: Adam needs help. The word is generally translated “alone” (literally, “by himself”), although nothing in the text indicates loneliness per se as a reason for Eve’s appearance. Rather, the context emphasizes Adam’s need for help.

In the previous verse, the blessing of eating implies that the sharing of God’s bounty also calls for the joy of partnership. Verse 15, the tending and guarding assignment, implies the same reasons for God acting to remediate Adam’s solitude. To have someone with whom to share the work of the garden and the joys of its produce, and to mutually upbuild each other, will fulfill God’s intent for Adam and Eve.

The most immediate context, although somewhat attenuated by the paragraph structure of English versions, brings the prohibition of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil into play. The declaration that it is not good for the man to be alone follows directly after God gives Adam the prohibition. This sequence implies that the possibility of transgression requires a cohort to provide spiritual reinforcement. An expanded paraphrase would read: “It is not good that the man should face this situation alone; it would be better for him to have a partner to help him deal with maintaining this prohibition and the temptations it implies.” The desire to strengthen Adam’s spiritual well-being leads, at least in part, to Eve’s creation. She is to be a helper in resisting the temptation to transgress.

The partner, therefore, is to be a moral and physical counterpart to Adam, one with whom he can share the work of the garden, share the fruits of their labors, and together keep each other from harm and transgression. That was the ideal, anyway.

A Mirror Image

Following the declaration of “not good” comes the solution to the problem: “I will make him an help meet for him” (KJV). This archaic phrase has given us two regrettable words, “helpmeet,” and even worse, “helpmate,” but that’s the way language goes.¹ The issue for us, however, is that the phrase “an help meet for him” obscures the lovely intent of

¹ The Oxford English Dictionary aptly labels “helpmeet” as “a compound absurdly formed by taking the two words help meet in Gen 2:18 . . . as one word.” It started life as an hyphenated formation, help-meet, and has been used as a noun only since the last half of the 19th century. Helpmate, oddly, dates from the early 18th century. The phrase first came into English with the KJV. Coverdale’s 1535 translation has “an helpe to beare him company.”

the passage. Fortunately, most translations since the KJV offer a better phrase. The RV sticks with the old wording, but lists “answering to” in the margin. The JPS opts for “a fitting helper for him,” the NIV gives us “a helper suitable for him,” the RSV has “a helper fit for him,” and Alter suggests “a sustainer beside him,” with a useful explanatory note.²

The other Hebrew word (besides the word for “helper”) in the phrase conveys the notion of a person’s mirror image, or at least that seems to be the implication in this instance. God is about to create a partner for Adam, a partner who will come out of his own person and who will be like him in a way that none of the animals could be. Therefore the mirror image is appropriate, especially when that someone stands before the man and he exclaims, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

However, the mirror image belonged at Adam’s side, not in front of him, a seemingly contradictory geometrical arrangement. “Mirror image” and “at one’s side” are opposites, 180 degrees apart. A wonderfully imaginative metaphor emerges from this. Eve comes from the same mold as Adam; she corresponds to him in a way no other creature can. She is the same, but she is also different in that she represents, figuratively, a mirror image of Adam.

Body parts will help illustrate the analogy. Extend your arms in front of you, dorsiflex your wrists (point your fingers up), place thumb to thumb, and look at the backs of your hands. As your hands face away from you, they look forward together. They have mirror-image symmetry between them. As long as they remain in the outward-facing orientation, you cannot superimpose them. If you turn one hand so that the palm faces you, you can superimpose your hands one upon the other. The mirror images have become one flesh.

Side by side, Adam and Eve look out in the same direction with a binocular view on the world, each complementing the other’s existence in shared view but individual perspective. Face to face, they look at each other and they can superimpose upon each other becoming one

2 “The Hebrew *‘ezer kenegdo* . . . is notoriously difficult to translate. The second term means ‘alongside him,’ ‘opposite him,’ a ‘counterpart to him.’ ‘Help’ is too weak because it suggests a merely auxiliary function, whereas *‘ezer* elsewhere connotes active intervention on behalf of someone, especially in military contexts, as often in Psalms” (Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 9). Some of the references Alter might have had in mind include Psalms 33:20, 40:17, and 94:17. In these, and many others, “helper” connotes “rescuer” rather than “assistant.”

flesh. Normal human copulation captures this notion topographically. Animals typically copulate facing in the same direction and so do not enact a one-flesh orientation. The harmonic existence of man and woman is summarized in the sublime text of verse 24, and this has its seed in the Hebrew phrase used to describe their proposed relationship. That the translators have had so much trouble finding adequate equivalents testifies to the richness of meaning of “helper.” In view of the expanded description of their relationship in 2:24, “symmetrical personality and humanity completer” might come closest in meaning, although it’s hardly a phrase that will do in a translation.

Animals on Parade

The search for such a partner almost brings a chuckle. God says he will make someone just like him, and then has Adam select from a parade of animals! Of course, God is using the device of contrast to show Adam that none of the other created animals corresponds to him.

God would only need to bring the female of each species to Adam to provide the contrast and give Eve’s arrival the “wow” that Adam senses. I think, though, that the animals come in pairs. This extends Adam’s experience in two additional ways.

First, male and female together give a complete picture of what that species looks like, and perhaps he observes some behavior, also. By viewing both male and female he can see sexual differences within a species, necessary for his nomenclatural assignments. In birds, a group specifically mentioned (vv. 19, 20), the male and female often have substantial sexual dimorphism. For instance, the female of the ubiquitous Red-Winged Blackbird is neither black nor red-winged; it’s a streaked brown. Think also of the differences between lion and lioness, or bull and cow elk. It makes sense that Adam sees both sexes of each species.

Second, seeing both sexes together amplifies Adam’s sense of his own singleness. He sees all the animals in pairs and wonders where his mate is. Adam has many questions, wonderings, anticipations. Will he have a mate also? Is she to be found among the animals, perhaps at the end of the day? If not, how will God provide him with a mate? What might she conceivably look like?

Adam is to name the animals. This implies some familiarity with them, what they look like, what they do. As Adam names the animals, he studies them, considers their relationships and their ways. He learns about their attributes and characteristics. The names represent something distinctive about each that he observes, much in the way we name animals today, such as Red-Headed Woodpecker.

The names he gives, however, are secondary to the process. Take one step back to reflect on what it means for Adam to be in the role of “namer.” Thus far in the creation account God has done all the naming, so now Adam shares his image and likeness status in a tangible way. A namer has dominance over the named, although we shall see an unusual twist on this when Adam “names” Eve. God places Adam as the ruler of these creatures; his naming represents an aspect of his dominion over them.³

The naming event is not a repetition of the creation account in toto. The text reads, “And formed *yhw h elohim* from the ground all the beasts of the field and all the fowl of the sky and brought them to the human to see what he would call them.” A few key points to note:

- Adam did not see every animal God created on the sixth day. He saw a group identified by the new classification, “beast of the field” and also the birds.
- God brought them all to Adam, prefiguring Eve’s appearance before him in verse 22.
- The text calls them all “living creatures” at the end of verse 19, a name used earlier as a collective that includes humans.

It seems “beast of the field” would comprise those animals having the closest relation to Adam and Eve. One representative we know for sure it includes is the serpent, because Genesis 3:1 records the serpent was “more subtil than any beast of the field.” Yes, Adam would have named the serpent. He looked at it, studied it, and gave it the name *nachash*. It was an intruder, but not a foreigner when it came to Eve.

3 In Scripture we find several instances of naming, or renaming, besides the standard parental naming of newborns: Pharaoh Neco captured Eliakim and renamed him Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34), God renamed Abram (Gen 17:5), Sarai, (Gen 17:15) and Jacob (Gen 32:28) when he took them for his purpose, and Nebuchadnezzar’s chief officer renamed Daniel’s three friends after they were taken captive (Dan 1:7).

Adam Sleeps, God Builds

The remainder of the narrative (vv. 21-22) takes an unusual twist, and presents more opportunities to ask, “Why is it this way and not another?” Why Adam sleeping? Why Eve from his side? The preliminary animal parade gives Adam the same experience of contrast as when God transferred him from the dry place of his formation to the garden in Eden. What does he—or what do we—learn from the manner of Eve’s creation? Why doesn’t God make Eve from the dust of the earth from which he made Adam in the first place? Something that could only apply to Eve’s peculiar entrance, a truth evinced by the unique relationship of Adam and Eve, must drive the narrative at this point.

After Adam finds no one in his similitude among the beasts of the field, God puts him into a deep sleep.⁴ Adam will have a surprise when he awakens. Instead of creating Eve from the ground while he sleeps, God takes a chunk of flesh out of Adam’s side. The common translation “rib” doesn’t quite do the job, for Adam says, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” The word means “side,” as in the sidepiece of a structure. Nearly all of its uses in Scripture describe parts of the tabernacle or temple. Thus, the word used for Eve’s making is also a construction term. The metaphor of building informs the appearance of Eve.

On a pragmatic level, ponder what the experience holds for Adam and Eve. Adam has been around a bit, he probably has some familiarity with the garden, he knows the trees, and he names the animals. Weary after his day of naming and not finding a counterpart, he falls asleep, not knowing that God has put him down for surgery. He awakes, perhaps with a dull ache in his side, and feels a bit odd, like something is missing.

Meanwhile, God builds Eve from one structural component of Adam. We could barely speculate what Adam’s first aware moments might have been like, and even less for Eve. All of a sudden, there she exists. There is Adam sleeping; God brings her to him, and she recognizes someone like her. How long is it before he wakes up? God brings Eve to Adam—but she was made from his side. So where has she been while Adam slept? What has Eve seen of the garden? How much does God preload in her memory and ability to relate to her surroundings?

⁴ This type of deep sleep also fell upon Abram (Gen 15:12) when God showed him a vision of the covenant, and upon Saul when David confiscated his water jug (1 Sam 26:12).

That God gives her language capacity, as he does Adam, is implicit. How can we, having had developmental histories, ever imagine the condition of sudden appearance as an adult? What does “time” even mean to Adam and Eve? How can we even speculate what it’s like to be newly created?

One thing we know for sure is Adam’s reaction. AT LAST! Alter captures the power of the thrice-used “this one,” a feminine demonstrative pronoun (Hebrew *zot*, rhymes with “note”):

“*This one* at last, bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh,
This one shall be called Woman,
for from man was *this one* taken.”⁵

Adam’s experience with the animals pays off. He recognizes Eve is like him, and knows that somehow she had come from his very own flesh and bone. His exclamation, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” reflects as much on his awareness of her origin as her physical likeness to him. In giving her the name *ishshah*, he states this explicitly, “she was taken out of man” (*ish*). Doubtless he quickly recognizes *la différence*, but they are not ashamed.

What reaction might Eve have? Hers is not an “at last” experience. Imagine Adam telling her, “I spent all day looking at animals and giving them names, and then I got tired and dropped off, and when I awoke, Voilà! There you were!” The two of them take great delight in each other’s company.

A lovely blissful world greets the young couple. Adam tells her of the animals and the trees. He tells her of the forbidden tree. He tells her about how God has just created the world and they are the first inhabitants. God has given him the job of tending and protecting the garden, and she will be his partner in the endeavor. They will strengthen and accompany each other.

Eve has the relationship to Adam of a complementary clone, much closer than if God made her from the dust of the ground like Adam and all the other animals. She alone comes directly from the one creature God made in his image. This unique situation of the same yet complementary, of one flesh yet two minds, of a closeness that could come only from the method used, explains the peculiar creation of Eve from Adam’s side.

5 Alter, op. cit., p. 10 (italics added).

It would not be superfluous to repeat the old homily: “The woman came out of a man’s rib. Not from his feet to be walked on. Not from his head to be superior, but from the side to be equal. Under the arm to be protected, and next to the heart to be loved.”

He Calls Her Woman

Adam does not give Eve a name, at least not yet. The naming event comes in Genesis 3 after God pronounces his judgment on them for their transgression. At this point, Adam exclaims *ishshah*, “for she came out of man” (*ish*). It would appear that the suffix *-ah* carries the meaning “out of,” as the text reads, “He called her name woman (*ishshah*) for she came out of man (*ish*).” The two forms are the male and female forms of the standard word “person.” The suffix does not indicate directly that she came out of him. Nonetheless, the two words reflect what has already happened anatomically: they are alike, but slightly different. Adam must have known that he was an *ish*, and therefore it was appropriate to name this one who corresponded to him, but did not replicate him, *ishshah*.⁶

Naked and Not Ashamed

Chapter 2 closes with Adam and Eve’s unashamed nakedness. The situation could hardly be otherwise. Of course they were naked, and of course, in a still “very good” world, they were unashamed. This statement isn’t in the text to inform us what life was like in early Eden. Rather, it sets a dramatic stage again, as did 1:2 and 2:4b-6. Naked and unashamed will soon yield place to a far less satisfactory state of affairs, clothed and ashamed.

6 How could Adam affix a grammatical variation to a template that didn’t even exist yet, or at least hadn’t been used? Did Adam’s utterance become the template for the female ending in Hebrew? Were all the prerequisites of language built into Adam and Eve so that their very first oral communications were fully developed? This first instance of language use suggests as many questions as marvels.

STUDY 31

One Flesh

In one sentence the Bible sets forth a template that remains a model for family process to this day.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh. (Genesis 2:24)

OF ALL THE responsibilities that the man will have in the garden, the protection and care of the woman will be the foremost. The woman came out of him; therefore, he will protect her as he will his own flesh. Paul cites this verse in Ephesians 5:28-31, before he quotes Genesis 2:24.

Even so husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no man ever hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one” (RSV).

Undoubtedly, Adam understood the basis of these teachings more intimately than anyone else in history, for Eve *was* his own body. The content of Adam’s brief utterance when he first saw Eve—“at last, bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”—calls attention to three factors about Eve’s existence:

1. Her origin from his own bone and flesh.
2. The difference between Eve and the other animals brought to him.
3. The mutual attraction they had one for another.

These features all impart flavor to the declaration about marriage in verse 24. When a woman and man become a wife and husband, they also become one flesh, after the model of Adam and Eve. The reason for Eve’s coming from Adam’s side now becomes clear: God is teaching what the

sacredly united state of marriage implies. Nothing less than the physical extraction of Eve from Adam's body could suffice as the basis for the metaphor of marriage.

The spiritual symbolism of "one flesh," an abstract idea, requires a physical precedent, a literal instance of one flesh. Here is the record of the physical, the basis for the symbolic one flesh. Announced at marriages the world over for thousands of years, men and women become one flesh, using an ideal intended to exalt their marriage to the highest embodiment of unity.

The summary statement of marriage presumably was written after many generations of Adam and Eve's descendants had left their parents and had joined unto a spouse for the purpose of creating a new family. It offers a comprehensive statement of family and marital dynamics. In the most condensed way, it's all there. All theory of family study and family therapy revolves around the cycle of life so succinctly stated. From the beginning people have followed a three-step process.

1. A man and woman mate.
2. They have children.
3. Their children grow up and find mates who grew up in other families.

On and on the cycle continues, sunrise after sunset, generation after generation. What gives Genesis its sublime insight is not the obvious minimally descriptive parsing of human reproduction, but the key words that transform these steps from what could describe *any* animal's life cycle to one that is uniquely human and potentially divine.

1. The mating is termed *cleaving* and forming one flesh.
2. Having offspring is raising children.
3. Children grow up and leave their family of origin.

Leaving and Cleaving

The rhyming of "leave" and "cleave" is fortuitous in English. The two Hebrew words are relatively common words that don't rhyme or alliterate. As with many Hebrew verbs, they have a general meaning and are adaptable to a number of situations and contexts. The word for "leave (*ahzav*)," for instance, is the same as "forsake" in Psalm 22:1, "My God,

My God, why have you forsaken me?” The word translated “cleave (*davak*)” has a variety of meanings centered on the idea of attaching or adhering. It occurs in Psalm 22:15, “my tongue cleaves to my jaws.”

In Genesis, these words connote the successive creation of families based on a firm marital bond. Leaving means far more than moving out and cleaving connotes far more than sexual intercourse. They represent the breaking and establishing of family bonds, which include physical, psychological, logistical, emotional, and spiritual matters.

The Genesis model implies two kinds of bonds: the permanent marital bond, and the temporary parent-child bond. Children grow up and leave the family unit, uniting with a spouse and becoming one flesh in a permanent marital bond of their own. The true marriage bond as depicted in Genesis forms when a man and woman choose to come together on their own mutual accord and declare to the world in the act of marriage that they have become one flesh. That one flesh produces offspring, whom they raise for eventual independence.

Children do not choose their parents; thus, this bond is temporary. Children will always be their parents’ children, but they will form another family, separating, or leaving their original family. Paradoxically, the temporary bond is genetic and the permanent bond is societal and volitional. The marital bond, being volitional, represents a choice and a commitment to one’s spouse and is therefore permanent.

Family of Origin Influences

In some societies children leave home well before their marriage. In others, they live at home until they are married. In our western society it is not rare for a person to be away from home for several years before marriage. What else is there to marriage?

You might leave home physically, but you carry with you the culture of your birth family, or family of origin. During your early years, the years of your personality formation, you are immersed in your family’s ethics, style of living, emotional character, language, and many other factors. All of these contribute to your initial model of what “family” means. Also, during your early years, your family of origin sets, to a large extent, the limits of your world. You might remember some of your earliest experiences staying overnight at a friend’s or relative’s home, how weird and

different their home was—maybe even “wrong.” It smelled different, they cooked different food, they had different rules and it was clearly “other.” That’s because of the imprint of your own family situation on your early years. You retain these, but usually unaware and out of mind, lying at a subconscious level until later in life, when you marry and these become issues in your own relationship.

As you grow up, you become aware of other family of origin influences, such as your parents’ educational level, their jobs, their roles in the family, extended family dynamics, family finances, and religious life. All of these, and much more, combine with your genetic constitution and life experiences to form your personality, and most importantly for our present consideration, your expectations of what married life will be like for you.

Expectations of Marriage

Very few of us who are married would have been able to articulate our expectations of marriage while we were single, yet we had them. When you are single and looking for a mate, you have an ideal in mind. You want that person to be nice, intelligent, loving, physically attractive, and mutually attracted to you. You don’t think about all the nitty-gritties of actually what it would be like to share a life with that person. You probably assume that whatever kinks or differences there are in that person’s life will change once you get married. And even if not, your love will conquer all. We all have expectations of marriage, but they’re invariably romantic and idealistic, not pragmatic and realistic.

The reality is that every marriage is a cross-cultural phenomenon. Just putting one male and one female in a house together is enough to make it a real adventure, but when you add to this the inherent differences of disparate upbringings in unique families of origin, you have a bona fide test of the strength of their mutual love. Putting two very different people together into anything that can be styled “one flesh” will call for all the virtues of discipleship: love, patience, kindness, humility, forbearance, and forgiveness.

Cleaving

This part of the generational life-cycle means that a man and a woman, now a husband and a wife, mutually commit to a lifetime of support for each other as they forge their individual backgrounds into one new unit. They will become one flesh, and their children will be the product of that union. The strength of the family lies primarily in the strength of the marriage bond, and the strength of the marriage bond results from the couple's desire and ability to achieve marital unity.

This involves many aspects of ordinary family life, but the process to achieve that unity is far from ordinary; it is the work of discipleship applied in the home. He grew up one way, she another; together they must find their own path. It's not a compromise where each gives a little and takes a little, although that could be part of the process.

It doesn't matter how each spouse grew up, and what they have come to believe is the "right" way to handle finances, buy a car, dress on Sunday, or share emotions. They must now work out their beliefs and practices while living full-time with someone who might as well be an alien from another planet.

Can a couple ever fully "cleave" in this sense? This is the work of marriage; it is the work of discipleship in marriage. The wife and the husband will only achieve their unity through Christian virtue.

Problems of Not Leaving

When the wife or husband or both retain closer physical or emotional ties to their parents than they have for each other, they have not left their father and mother. They may have done so formally and logistically, but not where it really counts, in their hearts and minds. When a married woman still thinks of her mother as her best friend, that marriage is in trouble. If she is more emotionally open with Mom than with her husband, that's a warning sign. In terms of Genesis, she has not left her mother. Her bond to the past is stronger than her present commitment to her husband. It's wonderful when a mother and a married daughter retain a good relationship, but not at the expense of the primary marital bond. Did this daughter grow up in a house where the unspoken example was that her mother was emotionally closer to *her* mother than she was to her father?

It could be that the husband has not emotionally left his family, either. Perhaps he's part of a family business that claims most of his time and keeps him emotionally and financially enmeshed in his family of origin. Maybe his mother thinks she knows more about his wife and his marriage than he does, and she's glad to let him know what he should be doing.

Parents ought to prepare their children for independence so they can become functional adults and spouses. Parents will have a lifelong relationship with their children, but it will not always be parent-child. The parental bond changes as the child grows, and when the child is an adult and married, the bond is very different. Parents must recognize the sanctity of their own children's marriages and keep appropriate distance. Yielding control of children is difficult, but it is part of the sequence of life God commanded. The more emotionally independent adult children are from their parents, the more likely it will be that they will have meaningful adult relationships.

This study has merely sketched some of the main ideas of family process. The brief summary of family and generational life adumbrated in Genesis 2:24 is so far advanced that it can be considered evidence that Genesis is an inspired text accurately revealing the work of the Creator.

STUDY 32

Serpent

What's a serpent doing in the story? The serpent was not an external agent necessary to lure or test Eve, but an animal used for Eve's benefit to reflect her internal dialogue.

“NOW THE SERPENT”—these opening words of chapter 3 should stun you. Unfortunately, overfamiliarity with the text inures most readers to the sheer drama of this lead-in.

It's not the oddity of a talking serpent, or anything about the serpent at all, but the bare fact of the serpent's presence. Weren't you just reading about Adam and Eve's joyful union? You would expect the narrative to continue with a report of some aspect of their garden service or their family. The text would make sense if it skipped this chapter and went directly to chapter 4, “Now Adam knew his wife Eve and she conceived.” Instead, a third party shows up, and a serpent no less. It's a stranger to the party, an uninvited and unwanted guest in the garden. The serpent intrudes on your reading as much as it did on Adam and Eve's life of love, service, and joy.

Much of the Bible has a dramatic overlay, and Genesis has more than its share of highly dramatic moments. Abraham's offering of Isaac, Jacob's battles of cunning with Esau his brother and Laban his father-in-law, and Joseph's revelation to his brothers are some of the most dramatic moments in Scripture. The Bible is instructive and edifying, inspired and inspiring, and much of it also is narrative drama. It has a structured record that includes plot, characterization, setting, mood, and resolution. This allows for indirect teaching, so that the lessons arise out of the drama. Such is the case with the serpent. There's no reason to expect a serpent to show up at this point. Its sudden appearance tells you something out of the ordinary looms ahead.

This dramatic entry also introduces theological and moral content in the narrative. The subject matter of this section does not address Adam and Eve's life, but their love, faith, and obedience to God.

A moral episode offered in Act 1 of the drama of human affairs is unique to the Bible. Moral accounts, especially of the sophistication of the Genesis text, are not a feature of ancient mythologies. Contrast *Enuma-elish*, the "Babylonian Genesis"; it tells stories about the wars of the gods, vengeance, and the like, but offers no moral essentials.

Genesis doesn't fit the mold of ancient mythology by any amount of impress, because it didn't come from the same mold. It has a distinctly different flavor, and much of that flavor comes from the unexpected placing of the moral content up front, and from the manner in which the text develops the test of morality.

What We Know About The Serpent

Accounting for the serpent's presence in the narrative leads to many questions such as:

- Would Adam and Eve sin without the serpent's temptation?
- What role does the serpent play in the narrative?
- What kind of animal is the serpent?
- Is the serpent some sort of supernatural evil being in disguise?
- How does the serpent carry on a conversation with Eve? How can an animal talk?
- How does the serpent get its knowledge about God?
- What does "subtil" mean, anyway?

Let's look at what the text says about the serpent and its role and meaning in the narrative.

Beast of the Field

"Beast of the field" represents that group of animals that have closest connection to human life. The RSV's use of "wild creature" and the NIV's "wild animal" in 3:1 are unwarranted and misleading paraphrases.

The text actually does not say that the serpent was a beast of the field. It only records that the serpent was more clever than any beast of the field. The Hebrew text lacks syntax equivalent to English to distinguish

between “cleverer than any beast of the field” and “cleverer than any *other* beast of the field.” The sentence is technically ambiguous, although it implies that the serpent is a beast of the field.

Nachash

This word most likely simply means a snake or serpent. Moses turned Aaron’s rod into this creature (Exod 4:3), and Moses also made the famous bronze serpent to save Israel from the fiery serpents (Num 21:6-9). The narrative of Moses and Aaron before Pharaoh also uses another word, *tannin*, to describe their rod-turned-serpent, and that would also likely indicate a snake. Elsewhere, serpents (*nachash*) can be poisonous (Psa 58:4; the RSV says they “have venom”), have sharp tongues (Psa 140:3), sit on a rock (Prov 30:19), and lick the dust (Mic 7:17).

Most of the uses of this word don’t definitely indicate a snake, but the few cited above suggest a snake. The Septuagint translates *nachash* with *ophis*, meaning snake or serpent. Related roots and uses include: to divine, to augur, enchantment, shiny, bronze (brass, KJV).

This last group might yield a clue to the serpent’s nature. The KJV of Genesis 30:27 has “learn by experience” (*nachash*). This outlying translation fits the context there (Laban has figured out that God has blessed him for Jacob’s sake). Every other place it occurs clearly denotes some occult knowledge or enchantment.

Subtil

If it weren’t for the KJV of this verse, this archaism would be lost. The KJV uses *subtil* several other places, but this is the only time it is translated from *’arum*. “Subtil” comes from the Latin *subtilis*, a weaving term that originally referred to something with a very fine weave. It came to mean “able to discriminate fine distinctions.” Shakespeare (contemporary with the KJV translators) used the modern spelling “subtle,” but biblically “subtil” held on until the Revised Version in the late nineteenth century. The RSV goes only as far as updating “subtil” to “subtle.” Other renderings are: “cunning” (Cassuto, Alter, Moffat, NKJV), “crafty” (NIV, NASB) and “shrewdest” (JPS). The Hebrew word, *’arum*, puns on the word for “naked” in the previous verse (*’aromim*, essentially the same word with a plural ending), thus linking the serpent to the man and woman.

Despite what looks like a word with a negative connotation, most of the occurrences of the Hebrew word *'arum* (eight of 11) are in Proverbs, where they take the positive nuance of prudence. For example, “a *prudent* man sees danger and hides himself” (Prov 22:3). The other two occurrences outside of Proverbs are in Job, where the word is translated “crafty” in both the RSV and the KJV, and these seem appropriately chosen. The root form of the word is in a few other places, including Saul’s concern about David when he was chasing him down: “They tell me he is very crafty” (1 Sam 23:22 NIV). The word’s usage does not have an inherent pejorative connotation.

Even if the serpent’s subtlety has no inherent negative intent, it is one of a kind, for no other reference of *'arum* or its cognates applies to an animal.

The Serpent Knows God’s Words

Knowledge of God’s word is an impressive distinction for an animal of any stripe. Does the nature of the serpent possibly occupy some very special niche in the roster of animal life on Earth? It knows what God has said to Adam, which implies that it either overheard God speak these things to Adam or heard them as Adam related them to Eve. The serpent accurately quotes God’s words to Eve.

It Understands Abstractions

Beyond knowing what God spoke to Adam, the serpent also seems to have abstract comprehension of the issues. Questioning the veracity of content or fidelity or intent of God’s teaching to Adam rises to a higher cognitive level. The issue of “becoming like God” unquestionably leads to a realm of thought reserved for humans only. This cannot come from a mere repetition of overheard words, unless what the serpent heard was already in the very form it repeated.

If the serpent overheard Adam speaking the very words it quotes to Eve, it could be just parroting. On the other hand, if the serpent formulates the words from its own knowledge of what God spoke to Adam, it is one seriously clever beast. Of a certainty, no other animal except the human has awareness of its own death. How can a serpent introduce this? How can a serpent know what God will or will not do?

It Speaks to Eve

An animal that knows God's word and can speak it, too, is unique. Balaam's ass does not qualify as a parallel example because it is explained: "The LORD opened the mouth of the ass" (Num 22:28). This serpent speaks on its own, and speaks for itself. The verb translated "said," *amar*, common in the Hebrew Bible, almost always means "audible speech," and is usually translated "say." However, it also does service for situations in which the words are not necessarily audibly spoken, but just an expression of someone's mind (e.g., Gen 20:11, where the KJV translates it "thought"). It can indicate the thought process alone, as in "the fool says in his heart, there is no God" (Psa 14:1). Even in narrative, not poetic texts, *amar* can refer to the thinking process, e.g., "let not my lord, the king, take it to heart, *to think* that all the king's sons are dead" (2 Sam 13:33). The serpent need not have audible speech, but if not, then how does it communicate with Eve?

Context of its Appearance

The serpent's entry into the text in 3:1 should shock your literary, dramatic, and theological sensitivities. Absent the serpent's entry, the context would have been the ordinary affairs of Adam and Eve. Given the serpent's entry, the text reroutes instantly to a moral dilemma. It is therefore both a character in the account and a context-determiner. The serpent becomes God's first *satan*, or adversary, which is all the word implies.¹ The serpent contradicts God's instructions to Adam and Eve, and therefore stands as the adversary to God in this context.

Cursed Without a Trial

After the transgression by Adam and Eve, God calls all three parties to account. The serpent, however, does not get a chance to say anything. God asks it no questions as he asks the humans. Yet if it has within itself the capacity to formulate tempting statements, it has the ability to respond to God. Moreover, if it has any moral autonomy, it would

1 The Hebrew word *satan* does not appear in Genesis. It means "adversary," and is often translated that way (e.g., Ezra 4:1). It can refer to human or divine adversaries; even God himself at one point becomes David's adversary (compare 1 Chron 21:1 and 2 Sam 24:1). Others who bear the label *satan* include an angel doing God's will in opposing Balaam (Num 22:22), the Syrian King Hadad (1 Kings 11:14), and most famously, the Apostle Peter (Matt 16:23). Satan is thus a role, not an individual.

receive a hearing. Yet, the serpent receives nothing but a direct curse. It represents something that God could curse, but yet has no independent moral agency. God interrogates Adam and Eve and their answers are essential to the resolution of the sequence of events. The serpent has no place in this, yet receives the harshest judgment of the three.

Possibilities

Taking the above facts into account, which, if any of the following options might best describe the serpent?

1. A supernatural being in some form or disguise.
2. An extraordinary species of animal, now extinct. All individuals of this species had the powers of speech.
3. A single specimen of its species, made by God for the purpose of testing Adam and Eve.
4. A regular snake, but one imagined by Adam and Eve to have the power of speech.
5. An animal intended as a metaphor to represent Eve's mind.

Talking serpents appearing out of the blue (or out of the green, as it was in the lushness of Eden) have no simple explanation. This is an unusual situation. The best solution will be the one that fits all the evidence and doesn't create more difficulty than it solves. This includes, of course, conforming to other essential Bible teachings.

A Supernatural Being?

Is the serpent a manifestation or an agent of an evil, tempting, supernatural being? Option 1 represents an orthodox Christian interpretation: the serpent is the personal Satan who was at one time an angel of God and fell from his high estate through the sin of pride.

Genesis 1 and 2 reveal no mention of any angelic beings, let alone any angelic beings that have fallen from their heavenly estate. Angels do not die (Luke 20:36), and therefore do not sin. It follows that no angel can become fallen. Contrariwise, there is a clear account of the origin of the serpent in 2:19 when God made the various beasts of the field to bring to Adam for naming. The serpent belongs to the beast of the field category, with no indication of being anything else.

There is also the problem of dualism. If the Bible is famous for one thing, it's for preaching monotheism. Erecting a competing supernatural force, even if limited in its powers, still leaves competing forces. The Bible has nothing to do with this (see Isa 45:7, 18-22). The notion of a supernatural evil force in contest with a supernatural good force belongs in the realms of mythology.

One conservative evangelical author writes:

Regarding the serpent's origin, we are clearly told that he was an animal made by God. This information immediately removes any possibility that the serpent is to be viewed as some kind of supernatural, divine force. There is no room here for any dualistic ideas about the origin of good and evil. Clearly Genesis 1-3 makes no room for the idea that in the beginning there were two.²

The Bible does use the terms satan and devil and links them to the serpent in Genesis. However, the identity and biblical usage of these terms do not conform to that promulgated by conventional Christianity. There is no cosmic battle of good and evil in Scripture, only the constant battle of human will and lust versus the will of God.

The serpent is an animal. It's there for a purpose and it does engage with Eve. To call into play a supernatural being reduces the Genesis creation account to a mythological status similar to other creation legends from the Ancient Near East. The text thus far has manifested a clear, orderly, precise, factual, and straightforward style. The only supernatural being is the Creator who has full power and creates all things very good.

An Extinct Species?

Option 2 probably doesn't help us much; it requires an animal of which we have no like or experience. Extinct or not, it's hard to imagine that an animal with the mental capabilities of the Genesis serpent ever existed as part of the natural creation. Moreover, 3:15 speaks of the seed of the serpent, and this passage carries us down in history until the time of the Messiah. If such an incredible animal did live on the earth, it would be even more incredible that we would have no record of it.

² Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* from *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, R.K. Harrison, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), p. 188.

A Special Creation Made for Testing Eve?

Option 3 may make sense at first look but loses its appeal upon close inspection. If God endowed this one animal with the power of understanding and speech, what was the purpose? Some would say, “To test Adam and Eve.” Be careful not to say, “to tempt Adam and Eve,” because the Bible tells us it is not God’s way to tempt anyone (James 1:13). God will test people, but not tempt them, the difference being that the intention of temptation is to lure a person into sin. If it were God’s intention to tempt (deceive), he would always win a contest of deception. No one could overcome God’s deception. If this were the case, Adam and Eve would have been unfairly held guilty.

Testing, on the the other hand, implies giving people the opportunity to try their faith. The difference in intent between testing and tempting makes all the difference. By so endowing the serpent, God was testing, not deceiving, Adam and Eve, to help them find out what they were made of.

If you think the serpent is a special creation of God specifically to test Adam and Eve, be very careful how you structure the nature of testing. The serpent can’t actually *deceive* Eve; it’s only there to present another option and introduce doubt that God meant what he said. According to this model, Adam and Eve would have made out just fine in the garden except for the serpent. Without the serpent, the ideas of doubt and eating would not have entered their minds.

Maybe you can see where I’m going with this argument. The problem is that the plain intention of the serpent *is* to deceive Eve, not merely to present a disinterested alternative interpretation of God’s instructions. Moreover, “deceive” is the word Paul uses to describe this event in 2 Corinthians 11:3 and 1 Timothy 2:13 (same Greek word as in the LXX of Gen 3:13). If God made this one serpent specifically to test Adam and Eve, then it would seem he went a bit heavy on the project, for he made a deceiver, not a tester. The distinction between deception and testing may be more than this model can support.

What does this lead to? It points in the direction that the deception came from inside of Eve and away from the idea that God made a creature to tempt her.

Other questions that weaken the appeal of a specially made external

tempter concern the serpent's moral and cognitive capacities. Exactly what did God install in this creature? What does it know? Does it have no more moral capacity than a parrot, just repeating what it heard? If it learned God's instructions by overhearing, how does it come to question Eve about whether God is reliable? Is the questioning of God just a glitch in its playback mechanism, or an interpretation Eve puts on its inflection? Or does the serpent only repeat what it heard Adam say?

Either the serpent acts as an independent moral agent or it is simply a repeating device. Our moral responsibility to God only makes sense in light of our possessing independent moral agency, usually called "free will." Let's apply that model to the serpent. Does it have independent moral agency, which would make it a morally responsible creature, and therefore morally responsible for deceiving Eve? Or is it just an animal, which although endowed with the power to know, challenge, and rehearse God's words in contextually appropriate and deceptive manner, acts only as an automaton, doing exactly what God intended it to do? If the latter, then it has no independent moral agency; it has no more control over its actions than a salmon does when it swims up the river to spawn. It does it because that's what it does, period.

Either choice here leads to a theological quagmire. If the serpent has independent moral agency, it has something no animal has ever had, which is moral responsibility. This alone places Option 3 in the absurd column. God would therefore have heard its account before sentencing it, as he heard Adam and Eve's. He didn't; the serpent received no treatment as a moral being when God called all three to account.

Also, a morally independent serpent, able to choose its behavior, might refuse to suggest to Eve that she doubt God. In this case, the temptation would not arise, and the purpose for which God endowed the serpent would not come to fruition. What would God do if the serpent chose to disobey him and not entice Eve? Would that behavior earn a curse also? If the serpent has moral autonomy, it is literally damned if it does and damned if it doesn't (entice Eve). If God did not intend for the serpent to entice Eve, the serpent should be on trial just as Adam and Eve were.

The other possibility for Option 3 is that God makes the serpent a special vehicle to test Adam and Eve, but does not give it moral autonomy. In this scenario, the serpent only functions as God intends. It has no idea

itself that it is acting deceptively and it has no ability to restrain itself. It just hears a set of words and then repeats them. On the surface this makes much more sense than doling out moral autonomy to a brute beast, but it leads to difficulties of its own. First of all, the description, “craftier (more subtle) than any other beast of the field,” sounds like the serpent may be capable of moral intent, as implied by the word for “subtle.” The word for “subtle” never carries that connotation of hearing, comprehension, and contextually appropriate speech, so it’s not referring to the serpent’s cognitive powers.

If the serpent has no moral autonomy, then it is only doing what God intends it to do when it coaxes Eve into transgression. If it has no choice but to do what God created it to do, it seems awkward for God to curse it. The curse of 3:14-15, the fact that God gives the serpent no space to account for its behavior, and its questionable status vis-à-vis moral autonomy, all taken together cook up quite a stew. With this in mind, the notion of a talking serpent turns up less than appealing. It’s not ruled out, but this option goes to the sidelines pending further investigation.

There is one more problem with the idea that the serpent is a unique animal made by God to test Eve. How can it have only so much cognitive capacity that it remains amoral, yet sufficient to initiate doubt? It’s one thing to propose a serpent with the capacity to utter a sentence in a humanly intelligible language, but it’s quite another issue to propose a serpent that can serve up an enticement on the order of “Did God really say?” or “God knows” and yet not have abstract thought and moral responsibility.

Figurative Serpent?

Let’s consider a set of options in which the serpent plays more of a figurative role. These include Option 5 and part of 4. In these options, you don’t have to worry so much about technical details such as the power of speech and being cursed for doing a good job. Either the serpent is only a symbolic representation of Adam and Eve’s mental process, or if it is real, it is nothing more than a regular animal onto which the humans project their thinking. That is, the serpent doesn’t audibly say anything, but its presence and actions effect the temptation.

Take first the idea of a completely symbolic serpent. If this is the case,

the dialogue between the serpent and Eve is internal dialogue within Eve. This is similar to Jesus' temptations (Matt 4:1-11), which read much more naturally as internal dialogue rather than a conversation with an external tempter. The issue is the internal battle of will (Heb 10:10). You could easily justify a figurative serpent based on that model, for the texts in both cases are equal in apparently invoking an external entity. However, there is a difference between the tangibility of the serpent in Genesis and the elusive nature of the New Testament *diabolos*. The former is clearly a real animal; the latter an idea personified in many forms.

The serpent as an actual animal need not have special cognitive or vocal powers. Somehow, its presence causes Adam and Eve to doubt the certainty of death should they eat of the forbidden fruit. In this model, Adam and Eve, or at least Eve, sees the serpent (and perhaps other animals, too) eating the fruit without ill effect. The message to her then becomes, "Did God really say this fruit was lethal?" The serpent "speaks" to Eve by its observed behavior, the serpent survives its diet of fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and Eve rethinks what she has learned from Adam about eating the fruit.

The above explanation fails to explain how the serpent could communicate the second message, "Your eyes will be opened and you will become like God, knowing good and evil." Adam and Eve could not have "interpreted" that message out of the serpent's behavior no matter what it did. It might have partaken; the text does not preclude that possibility, but it remains conjecture.

The Serpent's Function

Returning to the original question: what role does the serpent play in the account? Determining the serpent's role is fundamental to determining its nature.

The serpent enters the narrative rudely and abruptly. Its appearance is an ominous harbinger. Something untoward looms within the garden precincts. But why is a serpent necessary? It clearly has to do with temptation. Does Eve need an outside tempter because as yet she doesn't have the internal mental mechanism to conceive temptation? Or does the serpent represent the internal process already at work within the minds of Eve and Adam? Briefly stated, the serpent either puts thoughts into

Eve's mind or reflects thoughts already there.

Another way to put this employs familiar terms from another theological issue. Does the serpent have a substitutionary role or a representative role? Does it substitute for what Adam and Eve lack, or does it represent what they have? Do they need an outside tempter because as yet they don't have the internal mental mechanism to conceive temptation, or do they need an outside source to realize a tangible picture of what temptation looks like? Is the serpent necessary as an outside stimulus to Adam and Eve? If so, without it they won't sin. In other words, temptation has to come from *outside* the human heart.

This explanation conflicts with Bible teaching on the source of sin, which decisively places the process of temptation and sin as internal. Notable citations include James 1:13-15 and Mark 7:14-23. Temptations are all around us, but Scripture places the process and responsibility within us. Is there any reason to suppose that this principle did not apply to Adam and Eve? Was there something fundamentally different about their thought process? Genesis fails to provide any evidence for this. Many things changed for Adam and Eve, but nothing essential within them changed because of their sin.

To opt for a *necessary* role for the serpent in the process of temptation and sin counters basic Bible teaching and also puts us back in that nasty situation wherein God made the serpent to deceive Eve. We must abandon this idea and look at Option 5, even if it seems strange at first.

Serpent as Reflector

This model of the serpent's role does not make it the initiator of the process of sin. Rather it comes to represent the thought processes of Eve and Adam. The plain reading looks the opposite of this. It appears that the serpent initiates the suggestion of eating. Still, there are compelling reasons to look at the dialogue differently:

- The serpent's knowledge of God's statement concerning the tree.
- The serpent's abstract handling of God's word.
- The serpent's punishment sans interview.

How does this work? Here's one reconstruction: the serpent is an animal endowed with the ability to speak, but it has no comprehension whatsoever of what it says. God makes it neither to tempt Adam and

Eve nor to test them. He makes it for another purpose altogether, one in harmony with how he deals with people. He is giving them a mirror of their own minds, for them to examine their own hearts. It also enables them to recognize their own animal nature if they behave amorally like the serpent, which lives under no constraint of law.

The serpent is in the garden. It eats from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. It hears Adam and Eve talking. It mimics what it hears. In the serpent, Adam and Eve see and hear exactly what God wants them to see and hear: that their attempt to live as if God hasn't spoken to them amounts to living as any other creature of his creation. They are to have dominion over the other animals, but God uses one to help them see they are failing in this charge. They have no dominion over their own nature.

This points to a good reason for introducing a third party into the narrative. It isn't to provide a source of temptation, but to provide a source of reflection.

The serpent doesn't introduce anything into the minds of Adam and Eve that isn't already there (detailed in the next study). What it does is to give a necessary perspective. The tension between the two propensities of human nature drives the narrative, and the serpent becomes the figure that represents the animal side.

The phrase "more cunning than any beast of the field" takes on new meaning. It doesn't refer to the serpent's slight-of-mouth. It refers to the precision with which Adam and Eve can see themselves and hear themselves think. It's as though they are watching a candid video of their own behavior, but the image they see is an animal. It might be a clever animal, but it's still an animal, a beast of the field. God wants exalted human behavior from Adam and Eve. In his attempt to rescue them from their own temptation he provides the serpent so they can see and hear themselves.

It's really not necessary to propose that the serpent even spoke audibly to Adam and Eve. Its mere presence and behavior could have done the job. The dialogue between Eve and the serpent may well be completely internal to Eve. As in the temptation in the wilderness, the temptation in the garden takes on a metaphorical character.

The special characteristic that the Bible attributes to the serpent is cunning, and since it does not ascribe any other quality to

him, it intends, apparently, to convey that the evil flowing from the serpent emanated only from his *cunning*. In the ultimate analysis, we have here an allegorical allusion to the craftiness to be found in *man himself*. The man and his wife were, it is true, still devoid of comprehensive knowledge, like children who know neither good nor bad; but even those who lack wisdom sometimes possess slyness. The duologue between the serpent and the woman is actually, in a manner of speaking, a duologue that took place in the woman's mind, between her wiliness and her innocence, clothed in the garb of a parable.³

The difficulty of how to explain the change from straightforward narrative to a non-literal reading is resolved because the text changes from creation narrative to moral account. As a moral account, the text deals with human and animal natures. The external animal antagonist, although as real as any other animal, in the plot represents something intangible within the humans, so that the dialogue reads as figurative language, or as Cassuto put it, "clothed in the garb of a parable."

3 Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

STUDY 33

The Nature of Adam and Eve

Adam and Eve were flesh and blood creatures of free moral agency who had a change of experience, but not of essential nature.

OFTEN THE FIRST issue raised when people discuss the nature of Adam and Eve is their “very good” status. This is unfortunate, for it inserts an unnecessary and misleading complication. The “very good” phrase occurs only once, in Genesis 1:31, where God sees all that he created and declares it “very good.” This could not describe an initial moral state, because it calls everything (serpents included) very good. Rather, the phrase describes the harmonious interworking of the physical creation and has no bearing on a discussion of human nature.

Adam and Eve did not have some sort of semi-mortal “very good” status. Before their transgression, Adam and Eve did not live under a sentence of death, but that is a far different matter than not being truly mortal. Let’s list what we do know about the physical and mental constitution of Adam and Eve as they were created, before they transgress:

- They are made [from] dust of the earth (2:7).
- They have independent moral agency—the capability to follow or disobey God’s instruction (2:16-17).
- They have the capability of understanding death (2:17).
- Adam and Eve are of one flesh and bone (2:23).
- Eve (at least) has the capability of being deceived (3:13).
- They have the capability of distorting God’s word (3:3).
- They have the capacity for lust of the eyes (3:6).
- They have the capacity for desires of the flesh (3:6).
- They have the capacity for desiring to be like God (3:6).

Every one of these points is established and evidenced *before* their transgression. The popular idea that “very good” has a moral application is inconsistent with the above facts. Adam and Eve clearly have human nature from their creation. There is nothing unique about them. They are people who can be tempted and deceived.

A Difference of Experience

They do have one important distinguishing characteristic. While they have the same nature as we have, they do not have the same experience. They have yet to experience sin. That’s a difference that makes a big difference. They bring sin into the world, and death enters through sin. They experience the first instance of the effects of sin. They find out by experience what it means to introduce sin into an adult mind.

The fact they are created as adults is another aspect of the great difference between Adam and Eve and us. Whereas they come into the world as adults, we enter the world as entirely dependent and selfish beings. We grow from infancy to childhood to adolescence to adulthood and in many respects never emerge from our inherent selfishness. We carry with us a self-centered worldview from our earliest days. Steeped and born in sin due to the natural processes of physical development, we have no experience of ever not being a sinner. Adam and Eve never go through physical development as we do. However, that does not mean they have a different essential nature that changes when they sin.

Moreover, they have no baggage from the past. No one has mistreated them or psychologically traumatized them. They didn’t live through the constant trauma of school bullies or abusive parents. They had no bad childhood memories, no insecurities, no complexes, no self-esteem issues or the like. They didn’t come from a broken home in a broken society. They are perfectly psychologically healthy, with no bad habits, ingrained reactions, short fuses, overworked stress defenses, or other psychological accumulation that all the rest of us deal with, even if we had a relatively benign upbringing.

Adam and Eve, before they transgress, have the only unsullied human subconscious minds until the Lord Jesus. These three—Adam, Eve, and Jesus—differ from us on the basis of experience, not on the basis of essential human nature.

What is Sin?

Definitions of sin usually come in behavioral terms: “sin is doing something God doesn’t like,” or “sin is breaking God’s law.” This is in part due to the KJV translation of 1 John 3:4. “Sin is the transgression of the law” focuses solely on behavior, and it’s also very misleading. The word “transgression” doesn’t even occur in the Greek text. The RSV and NIV have “sin is lawlessness,” which is more accurate.

Sin consists of far more than just doing something bad. It includes sins of omission, that is, failing to do what you ought to do. Even that idea expresses sin in strictly behavioral terms.

A full accounting of the sin process must include the cognitive and emotional precursors to sin behavior. It must include premeditated as well as impulsive sins. It must include planned acts of vengeance as well as immediate, knee-jerk reactions of anger. Visceral reactions, selfish pride, automatic emotional reactions, lusts, and a variety of habituated behaviors that seem to occur without any prior thinking all count equally as sin. Failure to take appropriate thought and action to control your weaknesses and desires is also sin.

For the present purposes, I will focus on the sin that originates in the mind before it becomes an action. Jesus taught this about adultery when he said that whoever thinks adulterous thoughts commits adultery (Matt 5:28). Jesus taught that all sin originates in the heart, with the statement, “From within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts” followed by a string of evil behaviors (Mark 7:15-23). The prophet Micah spoke of the same thing centuries before Jesus:

Woe to those who plan iniquity,
to those who plot evil on their beds!
At morning’s light they carry it out
because it is in their power to do it.
They covet fields and seize them,
and houses, and take them. (Mic 2:1-2 NIV)

God gave Moses the Ten Commandments, the last of which, concerning covetousness, is not an act; Paul reinforces this in Romans 7:7-11. Sin is a pervasive condition of the human heart that usually manifests itself in our behavior.

Adam and Eve transgress when they violate the injunction on eating of the fruit. That is a clear act of transgression, but the full process of sin comprises more than the eating. It is the result, the fruit of a pattern of flawed thinking. It is the thinking, the doubt, the desire unchecked that leads to sin. Even more than this, ultimately the first sin, and any sin, results from a lack of love and faith. Sin is not merely a bad deed, although bad deeds are indeed sins. Sin is that entire state of mind and being that ensues when our love for God is incomplete and the self takes over.

Temptation and Sin

The designed parallel between the first Adam and the second, the Lord Jesus Christ, distinguishes sin from temptation. Jesus' temptation at the beginning of his ministry was his psychological struggle with the same issue that faced Adam: taking on the divine likeness in an unsanctioned fashion. He had to go the way of the cross. He couldn't yield to the desire to misuse his unlimited power or retreat from his messianic role. He never sinned because his heart and mind were always in the right place. He didn't entertain the temptations. But he sure had them, for he had the same nature as the first Adam. He overcame temptation and lived sinlessly, in the highest definition of sin. Nonetheless, this would have no meaning if either his nature, or the first Adam's nature, wasn't susceptible to sin.

Where exactly is the line between thinking about the possibility of sin, or having the urge to do something wrong but rejecting it, and actually sinning? Only God knows, but it absolutely must entail love. Jesus always had complete love for his heavenly Father. Trying to establish a mechanical definition for an internal mental process is just as counterproductive as omitting the mental part altogether. For all of us, it's a moot point anyway. We engage in sinful thinking, sinful acts, and sinful attitudes all the time. God cleanses us because of our faith in his grace, mercy, and forgiveness. Only Jesus escaped the epidemic of sin endemic to all who live in human flesh.

Don't conclude that before Adam and Eve sin they are okay. The spiritual purpose of life does not focus on simply avoiding sin. That was the Pharisees' approach. The spiritual life is a struggle to establish the ways of God in our heart and head. Adam and Eve don't have a personal

history of sin, but that doesn't mean that they are exempt from the process of spiritual growth. Failing to grow before God would show their innate deficiency as much as an overt act of transgression.

They are not God. They are made to have free choice, but they clearly have deficiencies in exercising that free choice. Adam and Eve are not perfect beings; they can sin.

The Matter of Will

They are people, just like the rest of us, but they have no experience of sin and its attendant miseries. They have no experience of guilt, shame, or penitence. They have no memories of a life of sin. In that sense, they are pure. Yet, as the record evidences, and as catalogued at the beginning of this chapter, they have a repertoire of psychological and spiritual deficiencies. They doubt and distort God's word, they lust after the forbidden fruit and what it represented, and they fail to resist temptation. Living in this state cannot be described as "very good." If anything, it is *not* good. Why then does God pronounce everything "very good?" God makes them exactly as he intended. An aspect of being in the image of God and above all the other animals is that most defining feature of our character, popularly known as free will. I prefer to describe them as "independent moral agents." They have no restrictions on how they run their minds and operate their lives. They have no issues from the past clouding their perceptions and judgment. All this makes them 100 percent responsible for their own thoughts and actions.

By giving them moral autonomy, God allows human beings to bring to him the one thing that he cannot demand of them, the one thing that he can't do, and the only thing that can improve on the very good world that he made: they can offer him their wills. One way to define love is the offering of one's will to another. The sacrifice of human will is the supreme act of love and faith that ultimately separates you from your animalness and gives you footing in the divine realm. To offer your will means you must have a will to offer; that is, you must have complete moral autonomy. You decide what to do with it. If you are not free to decide, you're no more advanced than the instinctual migratory animal.

Love, faith, and self-sacrifice, the pinnacles of human spiritual existence, can only operate in the individual who possesses within his

or her own self the absolute power of moral discretion and behavioral choice. God gives this great blessing to Adam and Eve so that they can rise above the other animals and have fellowship with him. This same will, if misused, becomes the basis of estrangement from God. God, anticipating that Adam and Eve might not employ their independent moral agency to subject their will to his, has yet another provision ready by which the humans can still eventually share in the divine likeness and the eternal program.

Another dramatic stage is set, with all the ingredients for a potential disaster. On stage is a tree with desirable fruit, a commandment not to eat that fruit, and two people who have the moral faculties to either obey or disobey. We would like to feel the tension inherent in the scene, as if we don't already know the outcome. Use your imagination to recreate the moments leading up to the fateful bites.

STUDY 34

Dialogue in the Garden

This study carefully analyzes the brief dialogue between Eve and the serpent (Gen 3:1-5) and details Eve's failed attempt to shield herself from transgression.

THE DIALOGUE READS best as Eve's internal discourse. Regardless of the serpent's role, in the end what really counts happens between Eve's ears. She isn't in a verbal battle with an external serpent; she is in a battle with herself. Doubt and temptation work within Eve, and end in victory for sin and death.

Overview of the Dialogue

It's a short exchange, merely two statements from the serpent and one from Eve. In spite of this, it reveals much of the mind of Eve, and by implication, Adam. The serpent speaks first, posing a challenge to the veracity of God's limitation on Adam and Eve's food sources. Eve's reply answers the serpent's charge directly. Then the serpent counters Eve and proffers a second statement, an utter fabrication, taking the dialogue to another level. The first statements of each party parry over God's instructions. The serpent's second statement introduces a new notion and trumps Eve's defense. The now-deceived Eve puts forth her hand and seizes the fatal fruit. There's a back-and-forth escalation, even though the whole dialogue is almost too brief to establish any pattern.

Here's the text we are about to dissect under our expository microscope:

Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’”

Then the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:1-5 NKJV)

Table 10 shows the structure of the dialogue. The two columns labeled “Content Area” indicate the first and second topics addressed in each utterance. The table shows only in the broadest of terms the subject matter of each statement. We want to look at the big picture as well as the details.

Table 10. Analysis of the Dialogue

Speaker/Utterance	Content Area A	Content Area B
Serpent 1	Food supply restriction	
Eve	Food supply restriction	Transgression penalty
Serpent 2	Transgression penalty	Transgression penalty

The serpent’s initial statement deals with the issue of which trees, if any, God has placed off-limits. Eve stays on the same subject, “correcting” the serpent’s initial assertion. She then states the penalty for transgression. The serpent responds by staying on the death penalty issue, but negates it. Finally, the serpent introduces new material by stating an entirely different outcome if Eve should eat.

Here is another way to break down the dialogue into content areas:

Serpent: God said A

Eve: Not A, actually, B, and besides that, C.

Serpent: Not C, in fact, D.

“A” represents the serpent’s idea (which it ascribes to God) of what could be eaten; “B,” Eve’s version of the same issue; “C,” the death penalty for eating; and “D,” the benefit of eating.

The dialogue has a structure and a logical sequence of content matter. Something unusual, though, is that both the serpent and Eve listen well

to the other's statements. Although this is a brief interchange, this feature reinforces reading of the dialogue as internal dialogue, similar to the temptations of Jesus.

A Statement, Not a Question

The serpent opens the encounter by going on the offensive with a sly remark intended to draw Eve's attention to the limit God placed on their food supply. Most versions translate the words as a question, but the serpent's words don't take the normal form of Hebrew interrogative. Rather, they are a distorted declaration of God's intent. Two short Hebrew words start the sentence, one an interjection, and the other a multipurpose word that usually means "because," "for," "inasmuch," "since," and the like. Neither of these has an interrogative usage, and the normal interrogative verb prefix is nowhere to be found.¹

In view of this, Hamilton translates, "Indeed! To think that God said you are not to eat of any tree of the garden!" He asserts that this form never has interrogative force elsewhere in the Old Testament, and that the serpent's utterance amounts to "a feigned expression of surprise." So taken, Eve's words in verse 2 become a correction, rather than an answer.²

Alter takes a similar approach; in his rendition, Eve's reply interrupts the serpent in mid-sentence:

And he said to the woman, "Though God said, you shall not eat from any tree of the garden—" And the woman said to the serpent, "From the fruit of the garden's trees we may eat, but from the fruit of the tree in the midst of the garden God has said, 'You shall not eat from it and you shall not touch it, lest you die.'"³

Another line of evidence supports reading the serpent's initial thrust as declarative rather than interrogatory: the serpent's statement does not directly address the prohibition, but rather God's command that they may freely eat of every tree of the garden. Remember, God first gave a

1 Cassuto (p. 144) also notes the lack of the usual interrogative prefix, but states that the conjunction *ki* serves as the interrogatory particle, citing Isaiah 54:6. That reference, however, is doubtful; the KJV, RSV, RV, and NIV all translate that verse as a declarative, not interrogative.

2 Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 186.

3 Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

blessing (2:16), and then followed it immediately with the prohibition (2:17). To show this two-part declaration more clearly, I have italicized the prohibition section of God's complete instructions to Adam.

And the LORD God commanded the man saying, "Of every tree of the garden, eat in abundance! *But of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, you shall not eat of it, because in the day you eat of it, you will certainly die.*"

The discourse between Eve and the serpent focuses not on God's prohibition, but rather on the blessing. The serpent's words quote the statement of God's bounty wherein God tells Adam to eat abundantly "of every tree of the garden." It repeats this verbatim, but prefaces it with a negative. The serpent's statement now takes on the opposite meaning; "eat of all the trees" becomes "don't eat of any tree."

Even though the serpent is making a declarative statement, it intends to question either God's fairness or the accuracy (or both) of Eve's knowledge of what God said. The overall effect is still that of questioning God. The serpent has raised doubt, but not deception, the one word Scripture uses to characterize the serpent's activity. Deception will come in its next statement.

All Trees Off-Limits?

Another common misconception is that the serpent is referring to the command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Had the serpent intended to indirectly question the accuracy (in Eve's understanding) or the fairness of the prohibition, it would have said, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat of one tree?'" Instead, its statement includes all trees. The use of the key word "all" (or "every," sometimes also translated "any"), refers the serpent's quotation to God's abundance statement. The serpent is not questioning whether one tree in the garden is off-limits, but asserting that God has placed all the trees of the garden off-limits.⁴

If that were the case, how would Adam and Eve even survive? How could this make any sense at all? The fruit trees were not their sole food supply; in Genesis 1:29 God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food." They would have had other food supply

4 A review of the garden layout (Study 25) is helpful to contextualize this statement.

even if the trees were all off limits. The serpent's assertion, though harsh, is not inconceivable.

Put both of these ideas together—that the serpent was asserting, not questioning, and that its assertion covered all trees, not one tree—and the thrust of 3:1b emerges: “Aha, since God has said you shall not eat of any tree of the garden—.”

Eve interrupts this thought, countering it with her belief that only one tree is forbidden. Reading this as internal dialogue, how did Eve come to think that all the trees were banned? Was this another “fence law” (details later in this study) meant to accomplish the same objective as “neither shall you touch it?” Or is this what Adam had taught her to protect her from eating of the one forbidden tree?

However it comes to mind, she wrestles with the idea that all the trees are off-limits, and then corrects that idea to the one forbidden, and that tree was not even to be touched. Still there was that extra layer of protection, or so she thought.

Eve's Reply

Though it is but a single statement of 19 words in Hebrew, Eve's reply is replete with theological, psychological, and ethical issues. I will dissect Eve's statement in an ironically punctilious and legalistic fashion, as every small detail contributes to its meaning.

Eve cuts off the serpent in mid-sentence. No, she says, it's only one tree—the tree in the midst of the garden—that we must avoid; we must not even touch it. She correctly states that the prohibition covers only one tree, but the details of her statement tell another story. The omissions, distortions, and additions to God's original declaration to Adam are not cosmetic or stylistic; they represent a fundamentally flawed perception of God.

Paul, in Romans 5:12-19, repeatedly inculcates Adam as the progenitor of sin. Yet it was Eve who first transgressed. What role, then, did Adam play in bringing sin into the world? Eve's discrepancies must have had their root in Adam's transmission of God's word to her (details in Study 38). He was responsible for properly teaching her what God told him before her creation.

The First Two Details

The first part of Eve’s rebuttal differs in two ways from God’s original instruction to Adam (first two entries in Table 11). God said to Adam, “of all the trees of the garden you may abundantly eat.” Eve adds the word “fruit,” changing “of the trees” to “the fruit of the trees.” She also omits “all,” downscaling “all the trees” to “the trees.” The basic message is intact, but the details are revealing; this is early Genesis, where as a rule every word makes a difference.

Table 11. Discrepancies of Eve’s Statement

God Said (2:16-17)	Eve Said (3:2-3)
from all trees of the garden	from the fruit of the trees of the garden
eat in abundance	eat
from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil	from the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden
—	God has said
you shall not eat from it	you shall not eat from it
—	you shall not touch it
for in the day you eat of it	—
you shall certainly die	lest you die

The addition of “fruit” to the “the trees of the garden” poses the least problem of Eve’s variations. Obviously, God intended them to eat the fruit, not the leaves or the roots. However, the word “fruit” does not occur until Eve mentions it; not since the six-day creation account has this word appeared at all (1:29). That blessing stated that the humans would have for food “every tree that has fruit with seed in it.” Eating the fruit was obvious. Why didn’t God specify it, and why did Eve?

God didn’t, because the command focused on the trees: eat all you want from these, but don’t eat from this one. Specifying the fruit would have added no information to God’s intent. What’s the big problem with Eve specifying the fruit? Combined with other details, it suggests that Eve has an unhealthy attitude, a fixation if you will, about the fruit

itself. She is desperately focused on *not* eating of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. This idea will repeat itself shortly.

Her second change is omitting the “all.” Instead of reporting that she has the entire garden from which to select the delectable food described in 2:9 as “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food,” Eve reduces the blessing to “the trees of the garden,” a diminished description of the divine largesse.

The Third Detail: Eat vs. Eat, Eat!

Her next remark reinforces her failure to fully appreciate the abundance of the blessing. She alters the verb form for their eating. Study 29 described the Hebrew intensive verb forms used in God’s declaration to Adam. The force of the blessing means “eat abundantly, freely, of everything in the garden. Enjoy!” When Eve states her version of God’s blessing, she fails to use the intensive construction for the verb “eat.” Something significant has fallen out of Eve’s world. God has lost his position as the beneficent blesser; he has become instead an indifferent, if not restrictive, provider of Eden’s resources.

The first clause of Eve’s reply to the serpent’s challenge drops “all” and “abundantly” from her view of the garden’s comestibles. Her world has already begun to shrink.

Detail Four: Identifying the Tree

The third line of Table 11 lists her fourth and fifth discrepancies. Consistently, she again adds the word “fruit” to the sanction. Eve states they are not to eat of the fruit of the tree. Her fixation on the fruit remains.

The other discrepancy arises from the name of the tree. Eve does not use the name “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” identifying it instead as “the tree in the midst of the garden.” That is the precise location of the tree, but something is amiss here. This magnificent arboreal specimen, with the fairest of fruits, receives from her only a sterile locational designation.

Why does she not call the tree by its name? Perhaps she doesn’t know it. She may be afraid of the tree. Possibly she places more stock on the location of the tree than its nature. Or she may not know what the name signifies, so she thinks she has no reason to use it.

Her shift of naming is reminiscent of a similar situation in the parable of the Good Samaritan. When Jesus asked the young lawyer which of the three passers-by proved to be neighbor to the fallen wayfarer, the lawyer couldn't muster the name Samaritan, so odious were they to a full-blooded Pharisee. He could only say, "the one who had mercy on him (Luke 10:37)—excellent answer, but one that revealed an impediment in the throat and thinking of Jesus' interlocutor. Here in Genesis Eve gives a correct designation, but one that also tells of an impediment with Eve. She just can't use that tree's name. It's like saying, "You know which one I'm talking about, but I don't want to say the name." She is afraid of the tree.

Detail Five: The Big Addition

The next discrepancy, "neither shall you touch it," stands as the most theologically significant of her changes. Paul's letter to the Colossians helps unpack all the theology and human nature embedded here.

Eve adds the extraneous "neither shall you touch it" to God's command, immediately after she reinforces her statement with "God has said." Look again at her claim: "*God has said* that we shouldn't eat it or touch it." She buttresses her own doctrine with divine imprimatur. For her, the two prohibitions—don't eat and don't touch—both sit on the same footing, the word of God, even though the latter has no such origin.

The "don't touch" stipulation supplements what God said with a further condition that encircles the target behavior. She adds another layer of protection. If she abstains from even so much as touching the tree or the fruit, she could not possibly eat it, thus assuring compliance. This sounds reasonable, doesn't it?

The protective barrier proves to be a losing strategy. The particular form of her extra barrier, which in itself seems natural enough, received inspired interpretation from the Apostle Paul, a man who knew much about additional protective laws. Discoursing on the efficacy of such laws, he wrote the following:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (referring to things which all perish as they are used),

according to human precepts and doctrines? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting rigor of devotion and self-abasement and severity to the body, but they are of no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh. (Col 2:20-23 RSV)

The KJV is nearly unintelligible in this passage. Any newer version does better, and some of the more paraphrastic translations (like Philips) read with distinct impact. The passage has several points of contact with Genesis, but the force of it lies in its obvious quotation of Eve's very words, "do not touch."⁵ The context locks up the argument.

The Failure of Fences

Paul's argument in Colossians zeroes in on the oft-raised issue of legalism versus faith. In chapter 2 he explains how the sacrifice of Christ exceeds the Mosaic sacrifices and the legal system they represent. True circumcision is made without hands, it is a matter of subjecting one's will to God. The themes of Colossians 2:8-15 speak of the spiritual, inner meaning of religion, of a way of life, not just an outward show of religious ritual. No one knew the religious ritual directives of the law of Moses better than Paul (Acts 22:3). In verse 16, he refers to the laws concerning rules for the ritual observance of holy days and festivals. He then alludes, in verses 21 to 23, to the labyrinthine additions, clarifications, and extensions proposed by centuries of rabbinical tradition. All of this died on the cross, canceled in the crucifixion (Col 2:14). With the crucifixion came the end of the Law, through which no one could be saved.

Paul addresses the futility of legalistic religion in Colossians 2:16-23.⁶ Then he quotes Eve's words in Genesis, splicing them in amidst an argument largely leveled at the first-century Jewish concept of rules and rituals. By so doing, he takes the argument to a much broader level, regressing to a time thousands of years before Moses received the law on Mount Sinai. He takes the issue of legalism all the way back to the very first humans. He indirectly declares legalism—the substitution of

5 Paul uses the same word as the Septuagint of Gen 3:3; it is the word translated "handle" in the quotation above. The link to Genesis, then, should be "do not handle"; the KJV has "touch" and "handle" reversed.

6 I have written on this topic at length in the book *Legalism vs. Faith*. The relevant chapters can be found at www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0299.htm and www.tidings.org/studies/legalism0599.htm (4/4/11).

rules and rituals for faith—a human issue, not just a Jewish issue. The tendency to attempt to make life crisper and cleaner by creating a set of rules to follow has been a feature of humanity from the beginning.

Paul also uses the phrase “elemental spirits of the universe” in this passage, and previously in Colossians 2:8. Galatians 4:3 has the same phrase, “elemental spirits of the universe,” again used in connection with law and its inferior status to the covenant of grace. Other versions translate “elemental spirits” here as “basic principles,” “fundamental principles,” “rudiments,” and the like. It describes the inferior status of law to faith. In Colossians, Paul associates “basic principles” with ritualistic rule-based religion (both in 2:8 and 2:20), and connects rule-making all the way back to the garden episode and the very first rule ever made, “neither shall you touch it.” In one sense, Adam and Eve are the first Pharisees.

Eve may even consider that if God has restricted eating of the tree, it must have some inherent “not goodness” about it. That being the case, it would be better not even to touch the tree, for it was by nature, and despite its attractiveness, somehow not right. This must have engendered a tremendous conflict within her mind: the same tree that was good for food and a delight to the eyes could not even be touched. So her *modus operandi* becomes “we shall not so much as touch it, for that too, would be sinful.” The thinking of certain objects as inherently unclean or evil should not surprise us at all, and it would account for her addition to the law. Either Eve sees it as somehow “not good,” despite its appeal, or she sees it as so sacred that it cannot even be touched; in either case the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil becomes an object of exceedingly great attraction and repulsion at the same time.

Rules, Holiness, and Righteousness

The impressive outpouring of theological truth and psychological insight in Paul’s invective against the law in the above passage constitutes the greatest single anti-legalistic passage in all his epistles. In language that scarcely could be stronger, he trounces the sham of religion that invariably results from any attempt to install a system of rules and rituals. Rules merely beget more rules, and the more one erects and attempts to follow, the holier one looks—in the eyes of others, anyway.

People can pride themselves on their impeccable chastity, self deprivation, and rigorous adherence to restrictive rules designed to keep one at several arms' length from any contaminant, temptation, or potentially harmful circumstance. But, Paul tells us, with profound insight into human nature, these only promote an appearance of righteousness while failing to address the real issues. Rules fail to connect with the locus of sin, which is a matter of attitude. Rules only constrain behavior—maybe. Bad behavior results from bad thinking. Rules cannot counter bad thinking; indeed, as a surrogate for faith they are deceitful impostors. Paul's last words of this passage couldn't come stronger: they (rules) are of *no value* in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

In the case of Adam and Eve, it is obvious that impressing others with their holiness isn't an issue. However, they do have a commandment to keep (abstaining from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil), and they do attempt to bolster their likelihood of keeping that commandment by establishing an intervening rule—don't even touch. This cannot address the forces of temptation within.

The Pharisees had a name for such protective rules: "fence laws." It comes from the Talmud, which instructs keepers of the law to build fences around it.⁷ Fence rules were intended to prevent sin and preserve God's laws by keeping people away from even the possibility of sin. If eating a certain fruit constitutes a sin, ensure against eating by building a fence around the tree—a theological, behavioral fence, that is—that says "Don't even touch!"

What Paul wrote about the vanity of rule-making to check the indulgences of the flesh reaches back to the beginning, far predating the Pharisees. It applies to all humanity. It didn't work then and it still doesn't work, but people still use it, anyway.

Citing God

The next two points come from Eve's appeal to God's word. Remember, Eve reinforces her words with "God has said." She speaks about what they can eat, and then, as she shifts to the prohibited tree, she inserts "God has said," as if to make it clear that what she was about to say came from divine

⁷ The tractate *Avoth* (Mishnah 1:5), quotes the elders saying, "Be deliberate in judgment, raise up many disciples, and make a fence around the law. That is, to draw up cautionary regulations to act as a check against the committal of transgression."

revelation. At that point she inserts her own addition, “neither shall you touch it.” It is an example of claiming that God spoke something that he did not. She elevates her (probably Adam’s) own words to those spoken by God! She thinks that her addition to the law has equal standing with what God actually said, and that this further addition will prevent transgression. Again, it is a distinct parallel to the Pharisees thousands of years later, elevating their own laws to divine status, while losing sight of God’s intention (Matt 15:3). She departs completely from what God *did* say and inserts a law strictly of human origin, which she claims came from God!

The text could have easily omitted those few words, “God has said.” They do nothing for the narrative; these added words are not part of the action. They are there to emphasize the fact that Eve mistakenly thinks the added law came directly from God.

Moreover, Eve uses the title *elohim*, rather than the divine name-title combination, LORD God, or *yhwh elohim*. When God spoke to Adam, it was with the name and title combination (Gen 2:17). If Eve wanted to quote God, she should have cited her source accurately and said, “The LORD God has said.” This suggests she lacked the personal connection to God that using the divine name implies. Eve’s failure to use the divine name,⁸ the personal designation through which God communicates and upholds the humans of his creation, indicates a gap in Eve’s connection to her Creator.⁹

Denial of Death

The last two lines of Table 11 show Eve’s final two errors. Both relate to the sentence for transgression. Eve omits the immediacy of the punishment and also weakens the severity.

You really can’t “weaken” a death sentence, as death is not subject to gradations of severity. However, you can diminish in your own mind the likelihood that such a sentence would come to pass. God said that death would ensue on the day of transgression; Eve accepts that death might

8 See the digression at the end of Study 22 concerning Eve’s knowledge of the memorial name.

9 This does not mean there is anything special about uttering the name *yhwh*. The primary New Testament designation of God is Father. It is not just saying the word, but relating to the meaning that believers strive for.

ensue, but not necessarily on the day of transgression. God said, using the same grammatical structure that emphasized the verb “eat,” that they would absolutely die that day, but Eve merely reports that they would die. What God made perfectly clear to Adam has become weakened, perhaps to the point where Eve cannot even be sure if death is indeed a likely result of eating the forbidden fruit.

Summarizing Eve’s Stance

Eve’s misrepresentations fall into three categories: legalistic conception, diminishment of divine blessing, and weakening of divine justice. The first of these involves: addition of the regulation “neither shall you touch it,” addition of the unnecessary word “fruit,” use of the impersonal *elohim* instead of the personal *yhwh elohim*, and describing the tree’s location instead of using the name of the tree. As for the charge of diminishing divine blessing, she omits the word “all” when describing what they could eat, and reduces “eat abundantly” to just “eat.” As for the third allegation, she eliminates the immediacy of judgment and slackens the surety of death from “surely die in that day” to “die.”

When seen as a gestalt, these discrepancies point to a depersonalized, legalistic perspective serving an unseen and an uncertain God. Eve has a distant, impersonal, and technical version of a very personal God. Whatever your interpretation of the numerous errors in Eve’s credo, you cannot fail to note that they are there, they tell a consistent story, and they result in the act of transgression.

The Serpent’s Second Utterance

What does the serpent say that deceives Eve? By her own admission (3:13), she is deceived, but deception is hard to locate in the serpent’s statements. “God prohibited every tree,” and “You will not surely die,” are outright lies. Deception, on the other hand, connotes subtlety, sleight of mouth, head games, plausibility, half-truths, or exploiting a person’s weakness.

Eve should spot the serpent’s lies immediately. If that’s what deceives her, she is exquisitely gullible. However, the last thing it says, about her eyes being opened, passes for high-quality deception, as it offers a plausible reinterpretation of “you shall surely die.”

The serpent proposes that instead of death Eve will have a life equal to that of God himself. No, not dying, but the opening of the eyes! Divine knowledge! By supplying an alternative explanation, the serpent clothes the naked lie in deception. Death has a new meaning: enlightenment and elevation to divine status. What looks like death is not death at all, but merely a transformation to a higher plane. Is not the serpent's lie alive and well today? This deception has found a happy home in the human heart.

In this context, though, the death-is-not-death lie still fails to supply the conditions of true deception. Eve's concept of enlightenment and elevation to the divine status probably doesn't include a physical death. More likely, Eve believes that God has unduly appropriated the knowledge of good and evil to himself, when, in her view, he ought to have shared this with them, whom he made in his image.

Terms of the Serpent's Second Utterance

The serpent's first retort addresses the death penalty: you will not surely die. Does this mean that Eve surely won't die, or does it mean that the sentence of certain death won't be enforced? The result does not differ, but there's something to consider here.

The serpent continues by referring to the "same day" part of the death sentence, but now, instead of certain death on the day of infraction, the serpent offers an opening of the eyes, becoming like God, and knowing good and evil. That certainly is far from death, isn't it? Additionally, the serpent prefaces all of these benefits by informing Eve *that God knows that this will be the result*. This preface, "God knows" echoes, in a bizarre fashion, Eve's insertion of "God has said." What is the point of this insertion? Of course God knows all, but is this meant to indicate that God is somehow withholding from Eve something to protect himself? Should we read this, "God doesn't want you to be like him, that's why he put this tree off limits?"

The phrase "your eyes will be opened" is not necessary to advance the dialogue, but it adds a poetic touch. The serpent could have just said, "You will be like God." The addition seems to reference the rejection of the death sentence. "Instead of your eyes closing in death, your eyes will be opened in enlightenment" might be the intent of the message.

The text puts these words in the mouth of the serpent, but it's hard not to attribute them to Eve's internal dialogue.

What was the Deception?

Eve is deceived, but what is the mechanism for that deception? Deception requires an alternative explanation of a given fact, or else it won't pass for deception. Let's look again at what makes the statement deceptive. The serpent suggests that Eve will become like God, specifically knowing good and evil. A paraphrase would read, "You will have knowledge to make judgments of good and evil, and in that respect you will share a power reserved previously only for God." Possessing knowledge of good and evil is a real temptation, and a deception as well, for it would be easy for her to rationalize that this would be something good that God would want for her.

Eve wrestles with what to her is a more plausible explanation than death as the consequence of eating. Somehow the promise of Godlikeness replaces the threat of death should she partake of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The serpent deceives Eve by proposing an alternative that holds attraction for her because it shifts what God said to another meaning and a different outcome. Does the serpent's argument persuade Eve that God didn't really mean "die" in the physical sense, but rather sharing the divine nature? Does the serpent's argument play on Eve's emotions, appealing to the desires mentioned in Genesis 3:6? Or does the deception result from a combination of these and other factors, too?

Whatever Eve thought, one fact about the deception is for certain: it worked. Whatever conflict she had about eating, however she framed "I eat—I don't eat—I eat—I don't eat," the final answer, "eat," came about because she thought that eating was a better choice than not eating. It does not mean that she lacked any argument for abstention, but it does mean that at the end of the day the serpent's canard trumped God's commandment. The deception in Eve's mind soon gave birth, to use James' analogy (James 1:15), to the act of sin.

STUDY 35

She Took and Ate

The process that led Eve to sin has many parallels in our lives. The locus of sin and the driver of temptation—seeking equality with God—receive special analysis.

THE WOMAN SEES that the tree is good for food, a delight to look at, and desirable to make one wise. This threefold lust leads her to the very doorstep of transgression and the brink of disaster.

Suppose, however, that she approaches the tree, appraises its desirable qualities, and then, with outstretched hand ready to grasp the fruit, she has a moment of second thought, a moment of “free won’t,” and drops her hand to her side, whispering to herself, “I’d better not.” What if good conscience wins out? What sort of being would that make Eve? A person capable of internal struggle, doubt, and deception, but also having sufficient self-control to avoid disaster.

How close does Eve come to self-restraint? How much deliberation does she exercise? Does she grasp the fruit with full confidence that she will achieve equality with God? Or does she take it hesitantly, slowly and quiveringly, alternately extending and retracting her hand, conflicted and unsure of her action? The flood of fear, guilt, and shame that Adam and Eve experience after their transgression suggests the former.

Beforehand, Eve had no experience of the dreadful outcome of sin fulfilled. Therefore, she probably partakes in full innocence and full deception, without hesitancy or doubt, convinced that God will approve of her choice. Deception settles for no less than a 180 degree rotation away from God’s will. She convinces herself that she not only has permission in place of prohibition, but also that eating is God’s intent for her.

The Birth of Sin

Eve's threefold desire is often linked to 1 John 2:16: "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life." The apostle John is stating that lust is a necessary ingredient in the process of sin. Eve's deception can give birth to sin only in the presence of nurturing lust.

James describes the process of sin:

Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted with evil and he himself tempts no one; but each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin; and sin when it is full-grown brings forth death. (James 1:13-15 RSV)

The key word "desire" ("lust" in KJV) is the same Greek word that John uses to describe the lusts of the world. This passage tells how sin occurs, whether in the case of Adam and Eve or ourselves. Their sin is the common human experience of sin. We cannot distance ourselves very far at all from their experience.

James uses the metaphor of childbirth to illustrate the process of sin. Sin has two parents, but he only explicitly designates "desire" as one of them: desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin. Who is the other parent? Is it external temptation? Not according to Scripture. James locates temptation internally, as if nothing "out there" has any influence at all. This accords with Jesus' teaching (Matt 15:17-19).

James removes God from the process of sin, also effectively removing anything external as a source of sin. We could so easily reason, "God let this come into my life," or "God made this in the first place." James admonishes, "let no one ever blame God," and that would include God as a secondary cause.

James effectively excludes any outside source and lays it all on internal desire. Eve plainly manifests desire before her transgression (she saw that the fruit was "desired to make one wise"), so James's dictum includes Adam and Eve as well as us. He sets out the precise conception of sin. *Desire* and *deception* are the two parents of sin; deception impregnates desire, and gives birth to sin. We want, and then we fool ourselves into thinking what we want is good for us. When we do this enough we bypass the thinking and it becomes a habitual sin.

Why then an external tempter in Eden? Eve's world had both the serpent and the desirable, forbidden tree as external temptations. For us, it's the usual list of material and sensual pleasures. Why does the Bible exclude these as sources of sin when it seems that if they weren't there we wouldn't sin? It has to do with locus of control. You can't control what's out there to every degree, and even if you did, you'd just be saying to yourself (and to God), that the problem isn't with you, it's with your environment.

You are responsible for controlling what you can control: your own response to your external surroundings. Also, to an extent, you can control your exposure to those stimuli you know are too challenging for you.

The two forces of desire and deception cover all the bases of lust by dividing the sense-based passions and the cognitively- and emotionally-based passions. Lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes correspond to sensual drives—sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. In addition, we have the desires that stem from the drives of the mind and emotions (pride of life). These drives include pride, ego-fulfillment, control needs, status, and self-recognition—the need to be somebody, to be liked and esteemed. These drives exacerbate each other. Lust of the flesh and eyes, represented by the Bible word “desire” coupled with the cognitive dimension of “deception” answer to James's analysis of sin.

Paul's Analysis of Desire

Paul has a similar statement in Ephesians 2:3 where he speaks of the desires of body and mind. In this analysis, sensual gratification and ego gratification create sin. Paul's model is broader than James's “birth” metaphor. Paul writes that we sin either by acting on some unchecked physical desire or by some ego desire. These two categories of sin, one mediated by physical sensuality and the other by cognitive and/or emotional desires, can operate independently, but in most cases they work in tandem. For Eve, “good for food” would be a desire of the body, and “desired to make one wise” would be an instance of a desire of the mind. In either case, the desired item in itself is not the issue, and it might not even be sinful to have it, such as our normal need for food, shelter, or warmth. It is only when these desires run unchecked and become the focus of our lives that they become problematic.

Grasping and Eating

Imagine being a hidden observer watching Eve. You cannot see into Eve's mind, but you see her approach the tree, look longingly at the fruit, and put forth her hand. Your heart is racing, your mind is filled with horror. No Eve, DON'T! Yet her hand goes forth, tentatively at first, and then boldly, she plucks. Your dread mounts as she looks at the fruit, brings it to her lips, opens her mouth, and takes the fateful bite. The deed now done, she turns to find her husband, that she might share with him the spoils of disobedience. You are appalled at what has transpired. You have seen humanity disobey and die.

The exact wording of the transgression report, "she took of the fruit and did eat" entails each of the problem areas in Eve's understanding of God's commandment. Eve first says, "neither shall we touch it." Her mechanical understanding specifically mentions the fruit of the trees. When the text describes her act, it duly and quietly reinforces the fact that she doesn't merely eat from a forbidden tree, but that her act of transgression has its roots in her mistaken theology.

The text could have just said, "when Eve saw that the tree was good for food, pleasant to look upon, and desired to make one wise, she ate." Eating was the crucial issue, and this syntax would be entirely in keeping with Hebrew narrative form. However, the text expands to include "she took of the fruit and she ate." This clause emphasizes Eve's own additions. Of course she will have to pick the fruit before she can eat it, and that means touching it. She will have to transgress her own law first in the process of transgressing God's command!¹ The very act she has attempted to avoid by appending a proviso to God's command becomes her first transgression when her strategy proves utterly worthless in the moment of temptation. Remember Paul's assessment of additional laws: they have "no value in checking the indulgence of the flesh." Does she have indulgence? Yes. Do her additions check her indulgence? No.

What Goes Wrong?

What goes wrong when transgression wins the day? If we are to learn from this sorry episode, we must identify what she doesn't do that she should. Eve has placed the onus of abstinence on the object of the command (the

1 Alter (op. cit., p. 11) suggests that since no ill effect came after she touched the fruit, she then went ahead and ate.

tree) rather than the subject, herself. Instead of looking inside herself and the nature of her temptation, she derives a strategy based on the object of the prohibition. She erects a protective fence around it, just to make sure. Her mistake relates precisely to the fundamental human mistake regarding the locus of sin—we look for it outside ourselves, rather than inside in our hearts. Sin comes from within; it is a matter of the heart, and not of the external environment. Genesis is clear that the problem of mislaying the locus of sin started with Adam and Eve.

One part of Eve tries to avoid sin by creating a barrier between herself and that which is forbidden in her environment; the other part marches straight through that ersatz barrier. Obedience comes through faith, not through adherence to an external code of rules. Besides adding to the law, Eve also minimizes her connection with a bountiful God. A sensitivity to God's presence increases our love and faith, from which flows our obedience.

The apostle John, who referred so often to early Genesis, wrote, "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19 RSV). This verse applies both individually and globally. Individually, we recognize the primacy of God in being good to us so that we can respond in love. Paul's equivalent saying, "But God shows his love for us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8 RSV), gives shape to this level of meaning. In a global sense, God's love existed from the very beginning. God, who is love (1 John 4:8), loved first, giving abundantly to Adam and Eve.

However, love must encompass both giving and receiving. One can love and give abundantly, but it might not be reciprocated. If it is, the circle is complete. The receiving party responds with a sincere appreciation and a sense of debt and gratitude. If we respond to God's love, then we have an internally generated basis of obedience, which will prove valuable in checking the indulgence of the flesh.

Do Adam and Eve have the capacity to produce this love in response to the abundant love of God? Of course they do. They have just as much capacity for love as for any other response. Why do they go one way and not the other? There must be some cause. Do they fail to love God despite all his goodness towards them? That is not our judgment to make, but if we are to learn from their mistake, we can strive to develop an awareness of God's goodness. God does love us first, but unless we

become aware of his love, we will not complete the circle and develop our faith. Attempting to maintain a religious life without a true love for God will result, at best, in some sort of legalistic enterprise, and, at worst, in no religion at all.

Equality with God?

To Adam and Eve, equality with God means obtaining knowledge of good and evil and making their own laws. If Eve decides to eat, she is declaring the rightness of the act, and the right to decide what can be eaten. Beyond disobedience, itself a fatal error, this exemplifies a larger principle, namely that Adam and Eve usurp God's role as rule-maker. God has made all the rules so far: what can be eaten and what can't, what animals and plants belong where, and what Adam and Eve should be doing in the garden. Rule-making clearly belongs to God as the eternal, omnipotent, omniscient Creator. It does not belong to a creature with limited understanding of eternal matters. Thus, the sin of arrogance applies in this situation. As Eve grasps for Godlikeness, she in effect says, "We are like God. We can decide what is good for us. It is in our best interest that we make our own rules about what we can eat."

With this usurpation Adam and Eve forfeit any chance of a relationship with the true creator God. There is nothing magical about the tree that will make them like God; there is nothing in the eating *per se* that threatens God's supremacy. The main issue is whether Adam and Eve have, as finite beings, the wisdom of an eternal perspective to decide what is good for them. They do not, and their vain attempt only manifests the infinite gap between the Creator and the created. With this vain attempt and its consequences evaporates any possibility of a true relationship.

We still seek a deep relationship with God, and each of us is a created being in the image of Adam or Eve. We acknowledge that only God knows all. Our role in the relationship is to trust that God's omniscience is shown in his good will for us—not to make our own rules.

Summary of Factors in the Transgression

A multifaceted decision faces Adam and Eve regarding the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. The factors they must weigh include the following (at least):

- Obedience to God's commandment.
- Belief that God has acted in their best interest in placing the tree off-limits.
- Love for their Creator and faith in him.
- Self-control in the face of desire.
- Knowing their place in their relationship to God (they had no basis for usurping God's supremacy by making their own rules).
- Acting in faith to forego (as they would see it) the fruit, denying themselves Godlikeness.
- Supporting each other in the face of temptation.

Each of the above could play out as a positive or negative for them. Regardless of the outcome, the process of sin is complex. Adam and Eve's temptation encompasses far more than a simple test of their obedience. Obedience is at the top of the list, for disobedience means transgression. However, the list goes deeper than a test of obedience. It is a test of will, faith, love, relationships—the intangible complex issues that apply to human life.

To establish a proper relationship with the humans and to demonstrate their capacity for moral life, God places a limitation on them. He forbids arguably the most attractive tree of all the beauties of his creation. Eve desires to eat of it, both for its physical attributes and in the belief it will expand their knowledge so they will be like God. Will they trump desire with restraint?

Made of the same stuff as the other animals, but graced with a moral conscience, Adam and Eve face the opportunity to demonstrate their Godlikeness by exercising control. To help them grasp what is happening inside themselves, God introduces the serpent, a visible and tangible portrayal of unrestrained animal nature. This is what they need to conquer. The serpent represents their own internal process. Between their animal nature and their divine potential stands a choice: how will they respond to the challenge of trusting God and controlling self?

They attempt to maintain the commandment by erecting a theological fence around the tree, thus placing emphasis on the *object* of the prohibition instead of the *subject* of the prohibition. They are the subjects, and the struggle against sin always resides within the subject.

Only by attending to their own relationship with God can they hope to maintain obedience.

To consider Genesis 3 merely a test of obedience, a contest between a supernatural animal and a naïve but pristine Eve, reduces the sublime text to the mythology that it so utterly eschews.

A Little Lower than God (Psalm 8 NASB)

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth,
Who have displayed Your splendor
above the heavens!

From the mouth of infants and nursing babes You have
established strength
Because of Your adversaries,
To make the enemy and the revengeful cease.

When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers,
The moon and the stars, which You have ordained;

What is man that You take thought of him,
And the son of man that You care for him?

Yet You have made him a little lower than God,
And You crown him with glory and majesty!

You make him to rule over the works of Your hands;
You have put all things under his feet,
All sheep and oxen,
And also the beasts of the field,
The birds of the heavens and the fish of the sea,
Whatever passes through the paths of the seas.

O LORD, our Lord,
How majestic is Your name in all the earth!

STUDY 36

Eden Sinks to Grief¹

Eve takes, eats, gives to Adam, and he eats. Their eyes are opened to their nakedness and their hearts fill with fear, guilt, and shame (Gen 3:6-7).

THERE SHE STANDS, fruit in hand and juice on lips, looking for Adam so she can share it with him. Where is Adam, anyway? His presence beside her might have averted the tragedy, but the text also reads as if she ate and then gave it to him as one move. Deception took down Eve, but Adam knowingly chose to go with her, per Paul's statement, "Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim 2:14 RSV).

Eve, being deceived, thought she was doing the right thing, but Adam knew she had done wrong. He then chose to accept her invitation to sin rather than rebuke her and abstain. Possibly, his knowledge that they were one flesh drove his decision.

They represent two forms of sin. Eve's is the rationalizing kind; she deceives herself into thinking that bad actions are actually good. Adam's is the defiant sort, where he knows he's doing wrong but at the time just doesn't care. Together they encompass at a fundamental level all sin.

The results of transgression, but not God's judgment, fall swiftly upon both of them. The Creator lets Adam and Eve first feel the internal effects of having done wrong. The irony with which the text records their awareness of transgression highlights the essential features of their malfeasance. They discover that, unlike any other animal, they have a conscience, and it works perfectly well.

1 Adapted from Robert Frost's poem, "Nothing Gold Can Stay."

Sin's effects strike them simultaneously: "the eyes of both were opened." Eve eats first, and gives to Adam (in whatever time that may have taken). Then their eyes are opened and together they realize their nakedness. This reinforces the fact that the tree itself holds no magical power. If it did, Eve would sense her nakedness and guilt immediately, and perhaps Adam might not follow in her folly. As the text lays out the process, the sin comes to fruition only when Adam participates with her. Between the time she eats and he eats, she still thinks she is doing right, but when Adam eats too, their world collapses. Adam's flagrant transgression triggers the first effects of sin.

Naked with Open Eyes

Now what does she think of it? She probably never wants to see it again, and perhaps she never does. Open eyes? Yes, they are open. And, as the serpent also promised, Adam and Eve know good and evil. That is, they experience evil, and they know they are not good.

Noting that their eyes were opened is unnecessary for the narrative; the phrase is there to link back to Eve's dialogue with the serpent. Of course their eyes were opened. Hadn't they just looked at the tree? Hadn't Adam seen Eve and proclaimed her "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh?" Even the word "both" is superfluous, for the verb "opened" is plural, itself sufficient to denote two sets of eyes. However, the text inserts a reinforcer, translated "both" and literally meaning "the two of them," pointing back to the "one flesh" of 2:24. They are united—not in the service of God, but in rebellion.

What do they see with these opened eyes, these eyes which already have seen the beauties of the garden? What do they now see that they hadn't seen before? This is an opening of the eyes akin to the disciples on the Emmaus road: the two walking with Jesus can of course see him, but only when he opens their eyes, do they know what they are seeing.² Their spiritual perception changes, not their visual acuity.

What then do Adam and Eve see? They see that they are naked. Well, now isn't this interesting. Do you suppose that this was something that previously escaped their attention? Do you suppose for a moment that Adam didn't notice that Eve was naked when she first came before him?

2 Luke 24:31. See also Balaam's experience (Num 24:4).

This opening of the eyes is purely metaphorical: in their previous state of nakedness they had seen beauty and the love of the God who created them and brought them together to be one flesh. The awareness of their nakedness previously signified their separation from the other animals—remember again, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.”

Adam saw the naked Eve, and vice versa, and behold, she was not like the other animals; she was human. Now that same nakedness takes on a radically different meaning. Indeed, they are not like the other animals. In some respects, they are worse off. Do any of the other animals have a concern about their nakedness? No, only the human, the only animal with a conscience, the only animal with guilt, now feeling the burning shame and searing guilt of transgression. They know, by experience, that they are naked.³

With their ashamedly naked bodies in stark contrast with the hirsute primates, Adam and Eve quickly survey their surroundings and opt for fig leaves for a makeshift covering.⁴ The making of fig-leaf garments contrasts with Adam’s job to tend and keep the garden. Plucking fig leaves for their own protection was not likely a task they would have done in their guardianship of the garden. This first clothing continues the irony with which Genesis reports their transgression. Fig leaves! Not exactly “God-like.” Scripture says this of God’s garments:

The LORD reigns, he is robed in majesty; the LORD is robed in majesty. (Psa 93:1 NIV)

O LORD, my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

He wraps himself in light as with a garment. (Psa 104:1-2 NIV)

Quivering with fear and shame, Adam and Eve are far from Godlikeness. Their nakedness, previously a metaphor of their innocence, is now the beacon of their guilt.

The word translated “apron” (RSV, KJV), “coverings” (NIV) or “loincloths” (Alter) comes from a root meaning “to gird.” It appears in a

3 All commentators on Genesis 3 point out the pun between the word describing the serpent’s cunning (*‘arum*), and the word for nakedness (*‘arum*). Both are spelled and pronounced the same, although the word for Adam and Eve’s nakedness has the plural ending. This link further suggests the serpent’s role in mirroring the internal dialogue of Eve.

4 Sarna, (op. cit.) p.26 comments that the “fig tree has unusually large and strong leaves.”

variety of contexts, most of which support the common pictures of Adam and Eve with fig leaves decorously hiding their privy parts. In marriage, we are privileged to stand again naked and without shame, and to share in that special joy that God has provided.

Their Knowledge of Evil

The knowledge of situational good and evil is the kind of knowledge that Eve longed for and grasped (Study 28), but this knowledge belongs to God alone. Only God knows the ultimate outcome of events and situations we might label good or bad. Adam and Eve's partaking results in the impossible combination of knowledge of good and evil lodged in finite beings. This is an insoluble dilemma. Their attempt to attain this knowledge, but being unfit vessels for it, results in a horror of negative emotions. Fear, shame, and guilt become the signals that something very wrong has occurred in God's very good world.

In this first instance of human suffering, situational evil results from their awareness of sin. Their negative emotions represent more than their immediate situation. Human finitude and Divine foreknowledge are incompatible; we can't have what only God can know. The big-picture fact is that humans now associate emotional states with good and evil. Adam and Eve's fear, shame, and guilt become a sign of their attempted usurpation. This has passed to all humanity: we use our own physical and emotional states to assess what's good and what's bad. If it hurts, it's bad. If we don't like the outcome of an event, it's bad, even if somewhere in our thinking we can acknowledge that God might see things differently. We judge by our temporal senses, within the limited understanding of our finite lives and incomplete knowledge. We have no capacity at all to make those value judgments that only God can make in calling something good or evil.

The First Negative Emotions

Even before God sentences them, Adam and Eve already suffer greatly. Three negative emotions fill their hearts and overpower them: shame, the immediate cause of the fig-leaf covering; guilt, the dread of knowing they had done wrong; and fear, that they would be found out and punished. God allows them to stew in the juices of their disobedience. During the

time they are trying to hide from God they must be filled with utter dread.

The first reaction to transgression is emotional, but emotions are instigated by cognitive processes. Because they think, "We did wrong," they feel guilt. Because they think, "God will find us and punish us," they feel fear. Because they think, "We did something we shouldn't have done," they feel shame. Their emotions reveal a mind that knows right from wrong. If they have no conscience, they will feel no shame.

When they use their judgment awry, they experience the corresponding emotions. There is nothing wrong with their emotional system; their emotions are perfectly appropriate given what they have just done and what they think about what they have just done. Their psychological-emotional system is working just as it should for any human being that has done what they have just done. It would have been a much sadder account if they had transgressed God's word and then didn't recognize their sin or didn't feel bad about it. As it is, these sentient and conscientious individuals must now come face to face with the God whose command they transgressed.

STUDY 37

Confrontation in Eden

God would have been perfectly just in putting Adam and Eve to death. Instead, the narrative (Gen 3:8-11) crescendoes as God confronts them and inquires, indirectly and then directly, about their eating.

“AND THEY HEARD the voice of *yhwh elohim* walking in the garden.” Wait a minute! Drama and irony again enter the narrative. God is talking to them, and they are listening. This is not on the agenda. God has said that the day they ate of it they would surely die, not that he would surely give them a good talking to.

“You ate of the tree—you must die!” God could justifiably carry out the prescribed death sentence, and start over with another pair of humans. The earth could open up and swallow them alive into *sheol*, at least that is what the text has led you to expect. That way, God would be keeping his word and rightly punishing transgression with a sentence clearly stated beforehand. God asking them, in a loose paraphrase, “What’s up?” is, to say the least, on the soft side.

What you have just witnessed when you read the words “Where are you?” is the fulness of God’s character, both his justice and his mercy. As the judicial drama plays out, you will see God’s justice, embodied in holding Adam and Eve fully culpable for their crime while remitting the sentence.

Before God can or will remit the sentence, however, he must first hear what Adam and Eve have to say for themselves. That the transgression occurred is not in doubt; they did eat, both of them. God knows that, and they know that God knows, hence their hiding. They will not contest the fact of the transgression.

Cool of the Day or Afternoon Storm?

What does the Hebrew phrase *l'ruach hayom*, “in the wind of the day,” mean? What does this information add to the narrative? What’s really happening when Adam and Eve hear the *voice* of God walking in the garden? A serpent talking and a voice walking—strange place, this garden.

The phrase is usually translated something like “cool of the day.” Literally, it is the “wind of the day.” This English translation evokes a pleasant late afternoon or evening, with a mild breeze and comfortable temperature. You’ve almost certainly, no matter where you live, experienced the end of a hot day, when the temperature falls and a light breeze feels ever so comfortable. Moffatt’s translation has Adam and Eve walking in the park in the cool of the day. That sounds pleasant, but it’s entirely misleading, both on exegetical and contextual grounds.

This phrase occurs nowhere else in the Hebrew Scriptures. There’s nothing else even close to this construction, but we still have some exegetical traction. The word translated “wind” or “cool” is the familiar word *ruach* that occurs in 1:2, “The *spirit* of God moved over the waters.” This is the only instance of “cool” as the translation. It is translated “spirit” about twice as often as “wind” or “breath,” and in some instances it can indicate both meanings, that is, God’s spirit present by means of an unusual wind, such as the wind that parted the Red Sea (Exod 14:21).¹

In no instance where *ruach* bears the sense of “wind” could it mean a light wind or breeze; the context invariably demands a wind of some strength. Alter’s “evening breeze” and Sarna’s “breezy time of day” won’t do the job here, especially considering the dramatic scene. The context demands a theophany, with *ruach* indicating the presence of God both in an abstract theological sense as well as a strong wind ripping through the trees of the garden.

Adam and Eve try to hide among the trees and the wind strengthens. They move from tree to tree, looking for better shelter from the storm as well as hiding from God. As Adam and Eve scurry through the garden, they find some fig leaves and make their loincloths, but they can do nothing to stave off the impending storm. The day wears on, the winds intensify, they become more fearful and even perhaps panicky trying to hide from the terrible manifestation of the LORD God.

1 See footnote 4, Study 4.

It probably is toward the end of the day when God confronts them. However, a calm breeze is antithetical to what's going on in Eden. Think of somewhat parallel situations such as God confronting Jonah or Job, and you get the starkly dramatic picture.²

This view of a windstorm theophany also helps explain that odd phrase "the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden." The word translated "voice" is the regular Hebrew word for thunder.³ If the winds aren't frightening enough, they have also the thunder, almost certainly the vilest meteorological conditions they have ever experienced. It is an altogether frightful situation.⁴

God Speaks and Locates Adam

Finally, God speaks to Adam. Adam says he has heard the voice of God walking in the garden. He's probably referring to the thunder. Now he hears a distinct voice, a familiar voice, God's speaking voice. Why does God address Adam, when it is Eve who initiated the transgression? Why does God even engage Adam in discourse when all Adam deserves, by the stipulated conditions, is death?

God addresses Adam first because it was his responsibility to keep and guard the garden. As the judgment scene develops, Adam bears the greater responsibility because it is he to whom God gave the command concerning the garden before the formation of Eve. Therefore, God addresses the question to Adam.

Of course God knows where they are, a fact emphasized in the text, "The LORD God called *to the man* and said *to him*, "Where are you?"⁵ They attempt to hide; God speaks to Adam directly, asking him where he is! It is not the location of Adam that is in question, but the meaning

2 Jonah 1:4 and 4:8. As Elihu speaks at the end of the book of Job, the wind also increases, until God speaks to Job "out of the whirlwind."

3 Some examples: the eighth plague (five times, Exod 9:23-34), the theophany on Mt. Sinai (Exod 19:16, 20:18), also 1 Sam 7:10 and Job 38:25.

4 I was unaware when I wrote this section about the storm that this interpretation had already been proposed by Jeffrey Niehaus, "In the Wind of the Storm: Another Look at Genesis iii:8," *Vetus Testamentum*, 44(2): 263-267, 1994. A response in the same journal by Christopher Grundtke, "A Tempest in a Teapot? Genesis iii:8 Again" [51(4): 548-51, 2001] attempted to deflate this idea somewhat, but the context and biblical usage definitely support the view presented above.

5 "The commentators who consider the question to be *aimed at discovering* where the man was hiding have overlooked the words *to him*." Cassuto, op. cit., p. 155, italics his.

of their hiding. “Spiritually, where are you, Adam?” God is not trying to locate Adam geographically, but helping Adam locate himself spiritually. Adam on his own is lost; God initiates the process of recovery.

God’s questioning offers the first measure of his grace. He does not pronounce judgment, but instead begins to reveal for the first time his forgiveness and mercy. These concepts are new to Adam and Eve. To prime their minds, God asks a simple question, which can be lexically translated, “Where are you?” but semantically means, “What’s going on with you?” God intends to help Adam come to terms with his situation: naked and attempting to hide. The question forces Adam to think about how he will explain what has been going on in his world. This little question is the beginning of God’s invitation to forgiveness by asking Adam to reflect upon his situation and give answer to his creator and sustainer.

Naked and Hiding

Adam’s response to God reveals his spiritual position: guilty, but contrite. He tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Let’s first parse his statement into its four segments:

I heard your voice in the garden
and I was afraid
because I was naked
and I hid.

Four facts, all true, that bare the truth about his situation, and Eve’s, too, though she remains silent through the first two questions.⁶ He has heard God’s voice (the thunder). He admits to his fear. He is naked, at least metaphorically. He didn’t think much of his fig-leaf loincloth in God’s presence, and he attempts no cover-up about his hiding.

Adam’s first plea, given the density and brevity of early Genesis, is a statement of revelatory truth and plain fact. God gives him the opportunity for self-evaluation, and Adam responds straight up. How easy it could have been for him to bend the truth, or to omit some part of it. He might have not owned up to his fear. He could have reframed “hiding”

⁶ It is a hallmark of Hebrew narrative that only two interlocutors appear in one conversation. If there are more than two, such as in Job, only two engage in any interchange. The Book of Job is a series of duologues; there is no place where three or more of the participants all join in one conversation. So also here in Genesis; there are no conversations among three participants. It is God-Adam, or Serpent-Eve, or God-Eve, or God-Serpent. This pattern is consistent throughout the Old Testament.

as “walking in the garden and looking at the fruit trees you told us we could eat from.” He tells it as it is. God accepts Adam’s statement, and continues the examination to the next step, focusing on one aspect of Adam’s initial confession, his nakedness.

Who told Adam he was naked? This is an idiomatic way of asking, “How did nakedness become an issue for you? You used to be naked and not ashamed.” With his fig leaves, Adam is (ironically) less naked than he was before the transgression, but now he is very naked before God.

Who told him? His open eyes told him. This is what God is getting at. The real question is, “How is it that your eyes have become open to your nakedness?” The answer to this is well known to God and Adam, but now God explicates what Adam knows. God doesn’t ask Adam what he’s afraid of, or why he’s hiding; he asks about the nakedness. Upon that feature the questioning continues. Right on the tail of the question about the nakedness, God asks—apparently without giving Adam a chance to reply to the first question—“Did you eat of the tree that I told you not to eat of?”⁷

The drama escalates. I do not exaggerate when I say that the fate of the human race hangs on Adam’s answer. God has thus far not only withheld punishment for the crime, he hasn’t even hinted at it. Yet Adam and Eve are quite aware of the stated punishment of death, for Eve had reiterated a version of it in her dialogue with serpent, which couldn’t have been too many hours previous.

“Have you eaten of the tree which I commanded you not to eat?” Adam can hardly say, “No,” but he has that option nonetheless. What might Adam and Eve even know about lying? Their answers will decide their fate.

7 God asked Adam if he ate of the tree, not *the fruit* of the tree. Study 34 noted Eve’s fixation on the fruit, recorded in her response to the serpent in 3:2. Neither the prohibition nor the question here mention the fruit directly.

STUDY 38

Confession

Contrary to the universally held opinion that Adam blamed Eve, and Eve in turn blamed the serpent for their transgressions (Gen 3:11-13), they both made full admission of their guilt.

ADAM SPEAKS TRUTHFULLY when God questions him concerning his whereabouts and his naked condition. Next, God asks him directly, “Did you eat of the tree that I commanded you not to eat of?” If Adam confesses, God has a basis upon which to extend his forgiveness and mercy, and thus spare Adam’s life. If Adam fails to take responsibility for his misdeed, God will enforce the prescribed death sentence. The question gives Adam an opportunity for life. The question itself is a great act of God’s mercy, showing how God invites confession, but the sinner must supply it.

Here is my expanded interpretation of the interchange:

God: I have the right to put you to death, but I will ask you a question that gives you the opportunity to acknowledge your sin and confess. If you do confess, then according to my mercy, I will forgive your transgression. Here’s the question: Did you eat of the one tree that I declared to you was not be eaten from?

Adam: Yes, I did eat. Not only did I eat, but I also failed in my responsibility to the woman, the special woman who alone of all creation is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. I failed in my stewardship to her and when she ate, I made the further error of eating with her. I failed on every account of my tending and guarding the garden.

God: I accept your contrition and your awareness of how this transgression occurred and I forgive your sin. I will suspend the death penalty, but there still will be consequences.

Exposition of the above model occupies this and the next five studies.

The Conventional View

Adam and Eve both mention another party in their responses. The commonly accepted view is that Adam and Eve evade responsibility for their sin: Adam blames Eve, and indirectly God; Eve straightforwardly blames the serpent. This reading, however, has many difficulties. Even authors who allow for some attempt at a confession believe that they temper their confessions with extenuating circumstances, and that Adam and Eve try to show that they are not fully responsible.

Below are some typical interpretations of this passage. This list could be twice as long, all stating the same general position:

“If” he says, “Thou hadst not joined this woman to me, I would not have eaten.” Thus he again traces the sin he himself had committed back to God and accuses God of his own sin. . . . In short, Adam does not want to acknowledge his sin; he wants to be regarded as pure and innocent.”¹

Adam sought to lay whatever blame he could on others. Whilst he did not deny that he had done wrong, he tried to convince the angel that it was not altogether his fault. . . . Adam sought to shift some portion of blame on to both the woman and the God-given responsibility. Thus, he attempted a measure of self-justification.²

The man endeavors to lessen the gravity of his offence by emphasizing in the preface to his confession that it was not on his own, but on the woman’s, initiative that he committed the wrong. . . . Possibly there is also to be noted an attempt on Adam’s part to exculpate himself by alluding to the fact that it was the LORD God Himself who *gave* the woman to be with him, as though to say: *Thou didst give* the woman to be with me, and *she gave*

1 Martin Luther, *Luther’s Works*, vol. 1, Genesis 1-5 (ed. Jaroslav Pelikan; St. Louis: Concordia), 1958, p. 177.

2 H. P. Mansfield, *Christadelphian Expositor*, vol. 1 (West Beach, South Australia: Logos Publications, no date), pp. 75-76.

me of the fruit of the tree. This, too, is characteristically human: people are inclined to justify their conduct by pointing to the circumstances and fate that God has allotted to them in life.³

The repeated verb [gave] nicely catches the way the first man passes the buck, not only blaming the woman for giving him the fruit, but virtually blaming God for giving him the woman. She in turn of course blames the serpent.⁴

The third effect of the fall is revealed in the answers the couple give when questioned. The man and the woman avoid their responsibility by putting the blame on another party. The man accuses his wife, showing that the wine of their love has turned sour. At the same time he insinuates that God himself is not above reproach.⁵

The garden of delight has become the garden of dread, and their newly found fear initiates a tragic sequence of blame. The woman is excoriated by the man for offering the fruit. The woman, in turn, blames the snake for deceiving her.⁶

The lame reply that he does make causes us to blush for him. . . . It is a reply that in cowardly fashion refuses to admit plain guilt and in an entirely loveless fashion lays the blame for it all first on his wife and then by a wicked charge upon God himself. Evasion characterizes also the woman's attitude . . . She knows what she did was done of her own volition, yet she charges the serpent with it exclusively . . . by laying the blame upon the serpent she indirectly also charges the Creator for having let the creature cross her path.⁷

Not one of the above writers accepts the argument of extenuating circumstances. These writers are accusing Adam and Eve of blame-shifting, cowardice, false accusation, self-justification, and unloving behavior. One of them says the blame-shifting counts as yet another sin. All of them are entirely wrong. Their calumny against Adam and Eve is completely misplaced.

3 Cassuto, op. cit, p. 157 (italics his).

4 Alter, op. cit, p. 13.

5 Blocher, op. cit., p. 178.

6 William P. Brown, *The Ethos of the Cosmos* pp. 148-149.

7 H.C. Leupold, op. cit, pp. 158,160.

Adam's Confession

By invoking other parties into their statements of confession, Adam and Eve are not shifting blame, but citing important elements detailing their personal failures. They give full and specific confessions. There is not a breath of an attempt to exonerate themselves by assigning any responsibility to God, woman, or serpent. Four lines of evidence support this reading:

1. Take the text as it is.

The previous study showed that Adam's reply to God's question concerning his whereabouts comprised four truths. He continues in the same vein with four more truths:

The woman
you gave to be with me
she gave me of the fruit
and I did eat.

There was a woman, God gave the woman to Adam, the woman gave Adam the fruit, and Adam ate. That's exactly how the crime occurred. The plain reading of the text tells us that Adam tells the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. There are no verbal emphases in the text ("the *woman*, whom *you* gave me"), such as expressed by Cassuto (footnote above) and implied by just about everyone else. Neither can you assume that mentioning others amounts to shifting blame. The text, as it is, is a straightforward confession of the facts.

2. Would God have forgiven them if they had tried to shift the blame?

When you confess your sins to God, do you blame others or cite extenuating circumstances? Do you say, "Yes, I got angry, but only because . . ."? Of course you wouldn't allow that for yourself, and if you were God you know you wouldn't accept such excuses. We are supposed to rise above the temptations around us, period. James 1:13-15 is explicit here. Let no one blame circumstances, or directly or indirectly, the God who created or allowed those circumstances.

A confession that says the sinner fell victim to circumstances is only an acknowledgement that the person failed to overcome those circumstances. This is so fundamental to our Christian walk that it is inconceivable that in this primary instance of sin God would accept a plea for forgiveness

grounded on extenuating circumstances. I would dismiss the blame-shifting interpretation absolutely based on this principle alone. Study 42 covers the fact that God did forgive them.

3. *Testimony of 1 John 1:8-10*

These three verses form a small chiasmus, with the confession sandwiched between two denials of sin. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (v. 9 NIV). Contrasted with this are the claims of being without sin (v. 8) and not having sinned (v. 10). This says that if we fail to acknowledge our sins, or fail to acknowledge our sinful being, the truth is not in us and we make God out to be liar. We have no forgiveness if we fail to acknowledge our sinful condition.

This statement alone would be conclusive to help us rightly understand the words of Adam, and then Eve. God will not forgive them unless they come forward with a pure confession. The case is made yet stronger because while writing a general truth, John is also writing specifically with Adam and Eve and Cain in mind. Cain is cited explicitly in 3:12, and the letter abounds with references and allusions to early Genesis. Cain, as you remember, denied his murderous deed when God asked him about his brother’s whereabouts. John is saying Adam and Eve confessed and had their sins taken away. Cain didn’t confess, so he was exiled in an unforgiven state. There are many designed structural similarities between the sins of Adam and Eve, and Cain (Study 48). John draws this contrast, virtually interpreting for us what Adam and Eve said. 1 John 1:8-10 is a powerful lesson in letting the Bible interpret itself.

4. *Jesus’ prayer for his disciples*

This is another lesson in letting Scripture be its own guide. The prayer recorded in John 17 is well known, but its background might not be so well known. Jesus quotes from Genesis 2 and 3 at least a half-dozen times in his prayer, and positions his farewell message in the perspective of his role as the Second Adam.

The key phrase is the repeated “you gave me” or “you have given me” (vv. 2, 6, 6, 9, 24) that the Lord Jesus uses to describe his relationship to his disciples. He is not just alluding to, but quoting Genesis 3:12, the First Adam’s statement of his relationship to the first Eve, “the woman you gave me.” Just as Adam acknowledged God had given him Eve, so

Jesus acknowledges that God gave him the disciples. In the context of John’s writings, from the beginning saturated with references to early Genesis, these “givens” lead our thinking back to the First Adam.

Jesus’ service on behalf of the disciples contrasts with Adam’s service on behalf of Eve. Extending the principle set out by Paul in Romans 5:14-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:45-47, the Second Adam accomplished something that the First Adam didn’t. Table 12 lists the specifics of his ministry that Jesus cites in this prayer and contrasts them with what Adam apparently failed to do in his stewardship.

Table 12. Jesus’ Prayer and Genesis

JESUS John 17	ADAM Genesis
Manifested God’s name to the disciples.	Eve did not use God’s name (<i>yhwh</i>) in discourse with the serpent.
They have kept your word.	Eve made mistakes when quoting God’s word.
Gave them the words God gave him.	Adam would have had to teach Eve God’s word.
Kept them in your name and guarded them.	Keep and guard the garden.
Prayed for them.	No mention of this.
Keep them from the evil one.	Eve deceived by the serpent.

These references, plus others,⁸ to Genesis 2 and 3 leave no doubt that the Lord Jesus is telling the disciples that he has fulfilled the mission his Father set before him. By implication, Adam failed in these very points. He did not manifest God’s name to Eve, for she did not use it when speaking with the serpent. John 17:12 quotes the two verbs of Adam’s charge, to keep and guard the garden. Jesus did this; Adam did not. Eve did not know God’s word well. (See Study 34.) Adam was not beside Eve when she needed him most, and when he came beside her, he partook of her sin as well.

8 Other examples: granted authority (dominion), v. 2.; life/knowledge, v. 3. (cp. trees of life/knowledge of good and evil); completed the work (ct. Adam and Eve expelled from garden, worked outside); they may be one, vv. 11, 23 (cp. Gen 2:24).

Just as John 17 is a categorical statement of Jesus' victory, Genesis 3:12 is Adam's catalogue of confession. The First Adam ruefully discloses how he failed in his service; the Second Adam reminds the Second Eve, the disciples, that he has fulfilled his mission to them. Adam's statement, brief as it is in keeping with the sparseness of early Genesis, is an ideal confession. He not only admits the fact of his transgression, but outlines the manner in which the transgression came to pass. He's not blaming Eve or God at all; quite the opposite, he's acknowledging his failure to them in fulfilling the special relationship that God provided.

Eve's Confession

After Adam's contrition, God turns to Eve. He questions Eve indirectly, asking her an open-ended question, not a sharp yes-no question as he had asked Adam about his eating. Instead of asking her if she had eaten, he asks, "What have you done?" This opens the way for her to slide away, for he doesn't pin her down. In view of her legalistic approach to the serpent's guile we might expect God to ask something like, "Did you take of the fruit of the tree and eat it?" God is on a different track and is not going to work on that issue with her.

The open-ended question is a test of her relationship to God and her husband. Here is where the blame-shifting hypothesis capsizes and sinks completely. If she wanted to go for the blame, she would have immediately fingered Adam, not the serpent. It was Adam's just now confessed failure to adequately teach her what God spoke to him that led to her sin, or so she could have made it out to be. She could have easily, and quite truthfully said, "If Adam would have kept the serpent out of the garden, and if he would have been there with me, and if he taught me better what God had told him, I would not have eaten." All that would have been true.

God gave the Eve the opportunity to blame Adam, and she didn't take it. She resolutely stood by her own failure, and admitted that she was no match for the serpent. Deception had done its foul deed, and she knew it. It looked good, it looked right, it seemed right, but eating of the tree was dead wrong. Eve admits the stark truth: her own inability to filter out deception.

In admitting that the serpent deceived her, she is simply admitting what we know anyway, that the human heart is deceitful above all things and is not to be trusted. The simple acknowledgement of the serpent's besting her unfolds and lays open her contrition and awareness that in her vain attempt to become like God she was utterly deceived. Deception, thy name is serpent.

There's a positive side to this sad state of affairs. Eve, who earlier that day fed to her husband the forbidden fruit of doom now protects him with the armor of her own confession. "No, not Adam, it was I whom the serpent deceived. It's my fault, not his." What an absolute heroine, this fine woman.

Adam and Eve confess their sins, and much more. They protect each other, they stand up for each other, and trust in the mercy of their heavenly father. God, moved to compassion by their contrition, humility, and nobleness of character, forgives their sins. They live; they do not die. Their answers to God, standing naked before him, put right on the spot, reveal that although they are flesh and blood humans, they know how to act when they fail. Through their personal ownership of their sins, God will now continue to work with them to develop their faith.

With the defendants' pleas of guilt in hand, the judge pardons them. There will be no punishment, for that would mean immediate death. There will, however, be a different world for Adam and Eve.

STUDY 39

Curse on the Serpent

God's curse on the serpent (Gen 3:14-15) has a long-term messianic interpretation, but what did it mean for Adam and Eve?

THE TRIAL SCENE in Eden forms a broad chiasmus. God first interrogates Adam, then Eve, and next turns to, but does not question, the serpent. Then God pronounces judgment upon Eve, and finally returns to Adam, revealing an A-B-C-B'-A' chiastic structure, with the serpent at the hub. The reversed sequence of the sentencing places the three characters in the same order as they appear in the sin scene: serpent, Eve, Adam.

The talking tempter gets no opportunity to speak and says nothing. It has no moral accountability, and therefore can neither confess nor repent. What does this tell us about its nature and its role in the drama? If it reflected the internal dialogue of Eve and now has nothing to say, *that* says something—there is no more internal dialogue. The deed is done—Eve is tacit; *she* says no more. This simultaneous silence of Eve and the serpent further supports the idea that the serpent has a representational and mirroring role.

Of the three characters, God directly curses only the serpent.¹ This suggests there is something about it that is inherently wrong or bad. It is doomed to an ultimate destruction by the seed of the woman. The curse on the serpent, which immediately follows Eve's confession, involves Eve and her seed, but there is no reciprocal mention of the serpent in God's judgment upon Eve.

God curses the serpent “above all the cattle (*behemoth*) and all the beasts of the field.” This is a wordplay: “You were the most ‘*arum* (crafty or clever) animal of the field, now you will be the most ‘*arur* (cursed)

1 God does not curse Adam and Eve, but he does curse the ground because of their sins.

animal of the field.” It is not only cursed above all the field animals, but *behemoth* are also listed here, in this context indicating beasts, with the emphasis on the animal nature.

The untoward upshot (for the serpent) of the serpent’s intrusion is that it has lost its craftiness, or at least the power of its craftiness has been laid bare. It is condemned to crawl in the dust and to be despised more than any other wild or domestic animal. It is silenced, grounded, and doomed for destruction.

Diet of Dust

In English translation the curse occupies two verses, 14 and 15. It opens with a general statement “you are cursed above all beasts and all the animals of the field” as an inclusive remark, followed by four specifics:

1. Going on its belly;
2. Eating dust;
3. Enmity (a two-fold proposition); and
4. Bruising of its head (eventual destruction).

As for the particular animal that sat there on the ground in Adam and Eve’s presence when God pronounced judgment, there’s not much to say about what the curse meant for the serpent; it understood not a word of its fate. Our interests lie in discussing the representational meaning of the curse.

If a creature goes upon its belly it is likely to eat dust and get its head trampled, so these three items make sense taken together. The remaining part of the curse, enmity, is in a different category.

In general, creatures that “go upon their belly” are listed among the animals not to be eaten, unclean, an abomination (Lev 11:42). However, the phrase “dust you shall eat” suggests a figurative meaning; no creature literally eats dust. The phrase appears twice elsewhere: Isaiah 65:25 and Micah 7:17. Isaiah’s prophecy is a vision of God’s kingdom when the earth is renewed and at peace; Micah speaks of God’s judgment at that time. Even when all the other wild animals of the world have become docile and vegetarian, there’s no respite for the serpent; it is still destined to eat dust. A diet of dust is symbolic of natural, earthly life, a figure Paul uses in 1 Corinthians 15:47-49.

The serpent as a mirror for Eve's thinking fits with ideas that reinforce essential Bible teaching on the nature of sin. God cursed the serpent, but not Eve. She was responsible for her sin, but her essential flesh and blood nature could not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 15:50). If anyone—Eve, Adam, any of us—is to attain eternal life, the sin principle within us must die. Sin is cursed, but not the bearer of the sin nature.

The image of the cursed serpent illustrates the principle taught in Hebrews 2:14 and 1 John 3:8. Jesus destroyed the devil in his crucifixion in that his flesh, his human nature, died. He put sin to death. He destroyed it in himself throughout his sinless life, and ultimately through his death and resurrection to immortality. Jesus defeated the serpent not only in himself but also in principle, and by the death of sin in principle, the victory is expanded to others by their faith in that process.

How does all this come from a phrase about eating dust? Note the associations of key words in verses 14 and 15. Three of the four elements of the curse on the serpent also occur in the sentence on Adam—"eat," "dust," and the phrase "all the days of your life." The word for "eat" is the same as Adam's eating in sweat, "dust" is the same as Adam's dust to which he will return, and "all the days of your life" is repeated in the judgment upon Adam.

As Adam would eat in sweat and toil all the days of his life, the serpent would eat dust (the substance of Adam) all the days of its life. This might represent the same image as the first part of verse 15, "you shall bruise his heel." If the serpent eats dust, and Adam is dust, then the serpent is eating Adam, as long as both shall live. The serpent principle is alive in Adam as long as he lives; it is continually eating at him. The serpent can put Adam in the grave, but Christ, having crushed the serpent's head, can bring Adam to life again. The serpent principle consumes us, and eventually kills us, but that is not the end of the matter, for in Christ we have redemption from this body of death.

The Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpent

The most remarkable feature of verse 15 is that it has no essential connection with the sentencing at hand. Neither the serpent's seed nor Eve's seed existed at the time, and therefore neither had anything to do with the encounter between Eve and the serpent. If the serpent were an autonomous moral agent, it might protest its seed being named in the curse.

Familiarity with the messianic aspect of this verse makes it a mind-stopper to ask the basic question, “How does that get into the proceedings?” We should expect only a direct sentencing of the serpent; the extras about enmity and conflict take us to another dimension—the future. This part of the narrative is prophecy. This clear messianic reference is outside the realm of legend or myth. Prophecy is not a feature of mythology.

Christ destroyed the serpent principle in himself and thus the grave had no further claim on him (Acts 2:24). In that sense, the sin principle itself died, and so did death, the sting of sin (1 Cor 15:56). When Jesus rose from the grave, death remained dead; the power of death no longer had any claim on him. All this is a theological description of what Genesis 3:15 teaches in a pictorial metaphor: the seed of the woman bruising the serpent’s head after the serpent had bruised the heel of the woman’s seed. That’s the traditional understanding. Thus, even though death bruised Jesus in that he died, God raised him from the dead three days later, nullifying death for him personally and also nullifying death in principle. Jesus became the firstborn from the dead (Col 1:18), the firstborn of many who will be raised at his return to the earth.

That’s a good start, but there is more to the story. There are three levels of enmity, but only one conflict, and that conflict has two parts. Let’s set out the verse graphically:



God sets a state of enmity between two pairs of parties, one pair being the woman and the serpent, and the other pair, a generation or more later, is styled the woman’s seed and the serpent’s seed. The actual conflict, and assumed enmity also, is cross-generational, between the seed

of the woman and the serpent itself. The two parts of the conflict are the serpent's attack on the seed of the woman and seed's attack on the serpent.

In the well-known KJV rendering of the verse, "bruise" indicates both the serpent's action and the action of the seed of the woman. Only the site of the blow differs. Alter, however, notes the likelihood that even though the two verbs are spelled the same, they likely come from two different roots.² Noting the intended wordplay, he translates: "He will boot your head, and you will bite his heel."³ If these are two different roots, the inference is that the serpent's attack on the seed of the woman is far less serious than the fatal trampling it will receive. The part of the curse that relegates the serpent to going on its belly and eating dust fits in well with this rendering, as a serpent on its belly could snap at a heel and then get stomped on.

Another Translation

Leen Ritmeyer⁴ has proposed an alternative translation of 3:15 that solves a grammatical problem: neither the word for "heel" nor the word for "head" has a suffix to indicate who owns these body parts. Translated literally, the verse reads, "he shall bruise head and you shall bruise heel." Ritmeyer proposes to translate these nouns as adverbs, which meanings they can carry, as he demonstrates. Head can mean "first" and heel can mean "last." He recasts the sentence, "It shall bruise thee first and thou shalt bruise him last." This does read better, but leaves an enigma about its interpretation. Ritmeyer seems to agree on this enigma of how the serpent gets the last bruising. His thesis concludes:

There is no mention of heads or heels. There are no temporary or fatal wounds/bites/head-crushings. This phrase simply describes an order of bruising. The serpent is bruised first, and the seed of the woman is bruised last. What can this mean?

Exactly. What can this mean?

² Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 13. This view is also mentioned in Harris et al., *op. cit.*, p. 912. Gesenius, (or rather the translator Tregelles in his annotation) disagrees, and opines that "bruise" is the plain meaning in both.

³ It is a regular feature of Hebrew narrative (and poetry, too) to use alliteration and repeated root verbs with different contextual nuances to provide thematic cohesion and emphasize key phrases and ideas. For example, in the Joseph narrative, the account of his frame-up by Potiphar's wife uses the root for "forsake" ten times.

⁴ Leen Ritmeyer, "Genesis 3v15 Revisited," private communication, 1995.

What The Prophecy Meant to Adam and Eve

Eve and Adam could not have understood a messianic intention, but they could have understood, in some way, a victory over the serpent that had brought them low. They understood the serpent was condemned, and would be crushed by Eve's offspring. However dimly this light shone in their minds, it did shine, and brought them some relief from the despair and fear of their guilty status.

The most salient point, however, doesn't involve any interpretation of prophecy or speculation at all. It's right there in the text: *Eve will have children*. Why is this so signal a statement? Because at this point in the narrative, God has not yet said anything that will nullify the still-standing declaration that Adam and Eve will surely die on the day they eat of the fruit. Before God speaks to either Adam or Eve about their future, before Adam names his wife Eve because she is "the mother of all living," comes the indirect message that Eve will live and have offspring. Eve draws assurance about the continuity of her life from God's proclamation to the serpent.

Some New Testament References

Jesus identifies himself as the seed of the woman when he labels the Pharisees and Sadducees as a "brood of vipers" (= seed of the serpent). While the exact words don't match up with the LXX of Genesis 3:15, the idea is the same. There is one significant difference between Jesus' conflict with Pharisees and Sadducees and the conflict described in Genesis. In Genesis, the conflict is internal to Adam and Eve; the serpent represents to them the animal course of life that they must overcome. Jesus had to conquer that also, but in addition he had his external enemies. He had to overcome both foes without ever losing even the smallest encounter.

Another New Testament passage that bears on this verse is Paul's reference to the serpent in Philippians 3:19. This verse might be overlooked but for the fact Paul has cited Genesis 3:6-7 in Philippians 2:6-11. Evidently, Paul is thinking of early Genesis when he adds an odd throw-in that describes the enemies of the gospel: "their god is the (or their) belly."

Watch the key words in Paul's phraseology: "For many . . . live as *enemies* of the cross of Christ. Their end is *destruction*, their god is the *belly*, and they glory in their *shame*." The source of the enmity here is

the Judaizers, who were attempting to undo Paul's preaching of grace in Christ. In so doing they became enemies of the cross, the symbol of forgiveness and grace. Meanwhile, these same people were destined to destruction, although they felt comfortable with their lives and their worldly appetites. Paul's use of the key word "belly" (same as in the LXX of Gen 3:14) builds on his explanation of the preaching of Christ from Philippians 2. It signifies that the serpent principle, and its manifestations in real people, reached a climax in the life of Jesus and those who opposed and rejected his teaching and atoning sacrifice.

The most detailed New Testament citation of this passage comes in John 8:44, where Jesus rebukes the Pharisees by assailing their figurative pedigree: "You are of your father the devil." This passage also speaks of their father being a murderer and a liar, thus comparing the Pharisees with Cain, the first seed of the serpent. What is true of the serpent is also true of its seed. Jesus is reminding us that he is the seed of the woman.

Luke's genealogy traces the lineage of Jesus to Adam, and then concludes by saying that Adam is the Son of God. It hardly advances our knowledge to know that Jesus descended from Adam and Eve; that's not the purpose of Luke's genealogy. He wants us to know that Jesus is not a son of Adam, but *the* son of Adam. And if he is the son of Adam, his mother must be Eve. He is also *the* son of Eve, the seed of the woman.

Finally, and in the same vein, consider 1 John 3:8 (cited above as equivalent to Heb 2:14). John writes, "He who commits sin is of the devil; for the devil has sinned from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil" (RSV). Here he contrasts the spiritual nature of those born of Christ with those born of the devil. Jesus is identified as the Son of God. Nothing unusual there, but the name is actually a substitution for Seed of the Woman. He is of course both. John's intent is to remind us that being the seed of the woman, he is also Son of God.

STUDY 40

Consequences, Not Punishment

The sentencing of Adam and Eve (Gen 3:16-19) stipulates the consequences of their sin, but it is not the punishment of 2:17, which has been lifted. Despite the drastic shift from the bliss of Eden to the rigors of life, God's purpose with the first couple has not changed.

THE SERPENT NOW dismissed, Adam and Eve cling to the hope that they will have at least one succeeding generation. They await what God will say to them. God first speaks to Eve, then Adam, and finally adds a summary declaration addressing the situation that their misbehavior has caused.

Consequences

The end of Study 29 promised an explanation regarding God's abrogation of "in the day you eat of it you shall surely die." As obvious as this is to us, I don't think it was at all obvious to Adam and Eve that they wouldn't die that day, until God spoke to the serpent concerning their respective seeds. How do we then read 3:16-19? Are these particulars some kind of substitute for, or application, of the death sentence? Are they some kind of gradual death? God does say to Adam that he will return to the dust. Do these travails constitute a carrying out of the death sentence?

By no means. Instead, there's an important frame shift: the details of God's proclamations to Eve and then to Adam are *consequences*, not punishment. They do not in any way fulfill God's stated punishment for their transgression; that would have been death. They live, but they live with consequences.

When God gave Adam and Eve the opportunity, they confessed, and God accepted their confession. Now add the idea of consequences.

Even though God forgave them, transgression inevitably brings consequences. The details of Eve and Adam's ensuing lives do not answer to the sentence of death stated in 2:17. If that were so, their confession availed nothing. That is, if 3:16-19 is an expansion or fulfillment of 2:17, then Adam and Eve's confession meant nothing to God, for he meted out the same sentence anyway.

God pardons the sinners; as far as east is from west he puts away the iniquity of their sin. I find it beyond any argument that the initial episode of human transgression would lack the accompanying grace of God, and this must in turn be occasioned by a true repentance. Nonetheless, the consequences of their sin abide.

The Concept of Consequences

Suppose a husband commits the sin of adultery by having an affair. He has done something monstrously evil. He can repent, and his wife can forgive him. This will begin to heal the breach, but the trust between them has been shattered. Untrustworthy behavior destroys trust; this is a natural consequence of extra-marital affairs, and a major issue in the restoration of the marital bond.¹

Another example of having to live with the consequences of sin would be someone who abuses their body. If you are a drug user, you can repent, go clean, and pray for forgiveness. God will forgive you. However, you may have done permanent harm to your mental and physical health.

Biblical Examples

The Bible has many examples of people who sinned, who were forgiven, and who nonetheless had to deal with the consequences of their misdeeds. The Apostle Paul recognized his forgiveness in Christ from his evil ways as a Pharisee and persecutor (Acts 22:19-20, 26: 9-11, 1 Tim 1:13-14), but he seems to have carried an emotional burden nonetheless of his past deeds (note present tense of "sinner" in 1 Tim 1:15). The Samaritan woman (John 4) whom Jesus met and spoke with at Jacob's well believed in his testimony (John 4:39-42), but she still had a complex and unsavory past, with multiple marriages. She had to live with whatever webs she had become entangled in. And what of the men at the cross for whom

1 In real life, there is no such person as an "innocent party"; marriage problems are systemic and healing goes in both directions. This is just a simplified example.

Jesus appealed, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34)? If any of the people directly or indirectly responsible for the crucifixion later came to believe in Jesus, certainly they would obtain forgiveness, but live with a heavy conscience for what they had done to the Son of God.

The most extensive and instructive Bible case of consequences comes in the life of David. After Nathan the Prophet rebuked him for his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah her husband, Nathan announced (2 Sam 12:10-12) to the rueful king that the sword would not depart from his house, that evil would rise against him from his own house, and that the child born to Bathsheba would “surely die” (same construction as in Gen 2:17).

David confessed, and God forgave him, but this did not cancel the prophecies of evil. David’s sin carried the natural consequences of family strife. He had blown apart Uriah’s family, and now, with Bathsheba added to his family, the inevitable strife ensued among his offspring. Besides Bathsheba’s infant who died, Amnon, Adonijah, and Absalom all were involved in family strife and also met untimely deaths. Bathsheba still bore the designation “Uriah’s wife” (2 Sam 12:15) until after the child died and David completed his ceremonial and heartfelt repentance; then “David comforted his wife, Bathsheba, and went in to her, and lay with her; and she bore a son, and he called his name Solomon” (12:24 RSV). God accorded David the privilege of having Bathsheba as his wife and the two of them bore Solomon, but the consequences of his sins, notably the rivalry between Solomon and Adonijah, and between Absalom and Amnon, plagued the house of David all the rest of his years.

God forgives, but we must live with the consequences of our choices.

God’s Abiding Purpose with Eve and Adam

How do the particulars of verses 16-19 constitute consequences if they are not punishment? To get a satisfactory answer we need to ask another question: “What was God’s purpose with Adam and Eve?” The key idea here is that God’s purpose for Adam and Eve remained the same after they transgressed.

What did God intend for them when he created them male and female and placed them in the garden to till it and keep it? God wanted

them to have a relationship with him based on their understanding of who they were and who he was (Study 28). From this they will learn faith, trust, appreciation, and love. Their sin doesn't divert God from this goal. In view of the fact they did think equality with God was a thing to be grasped,² God will now work differently with them. Instead of working primarily through the avenue of blessing to develop appreciation and love for him, God will now figuratively transport them from Gerizim to Ebal (Deut 11:29), and work primarily through hardship to inculcate their dependence on him. The details of verses 16-19 (next two studies) show that much of their new form of life carries over from Eden, but in very different circumstances.

God's purpose with Eve and Adam is the same purpose he has with us: to make disciples, to grow our faith and love, to teach us his absolute sovereignty that we might find our lives in him. We live in the post-Edenic world and have never experienced paradise. God uses both goodness and hardship to develop us.

Similarly, Adam and Eve need development. As a consequence of their disobedience they will not learn these attributes within the blessed confines of Eden. Their transgression doesn't change God's purpose for their lives, but it does change his method of achieving that end. As sinners potentially estranged from fellowship with their creator, they will find their way back through his grace in forgiveness and through the toil of life that will teach them the lesson they failed to learn, their limitations as human beings.

There can be no surer way to enforce the lesson of human limitation than for God to introduce them to the world of woe.

2 As opposed to the Lord Jesus, who "did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil 2:6 RSV). This section of Philippians has several other allusions to early Genesis. The idea of equality reinforces the notion that equality was knowledge of situational good and evil, because they were supposed to Godlike in their moral knowledge.

STUDY 41

Thorns and Thistles and Labor Pains

The sorrowful life to ensue for Adam and Eve (Gen 3:16-19) will teach the same lessons that God intended for them at the outset.

GOD ADDRESSES EVE first, and then Adam. Eve's consequences concern relationships and childbearing, while Adam's concern the futility of his agrarian labor. What they have in common is the pain of their labor, Eve in producing a child and Adam in producing crops. They differ sharply, however, because the former focuses on life and the latter on death. Eve will bring forth children and continue *life*, whereas Adam's lot is to work until he *dies* and returns to the dust from whence he came.

Pain, Sorrow, or Hard Labor?

Several questions arise from God's statement to Eve in 3:16. Let's start with the familiar KJV, and for contrast, Alter's translation, which shows the poetic structure:

KJV

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

Alter

To the woman He said:

“I will terribly sharpen your birth pangs,
 in pain shall you bear children
 And for your man will be your longing,
 and he shall rule over you.”¹

1 Alter, op. cit., p. 13.

Is the distress physical, emotional, or both? What is meant by “sorrow and conception”? What is to be understood about Eve’s relationship to Adam? Also, does “greatly multiply” refer to certainty or intensity (it is the same grammatical construction as the “surely die” of 2:17)?

Taking the last question first, the verb means “increase or multiply,” but it could mean either that God will *certainly* increase the sorrow, or that God will *greatly* increase the sorrow. Both are possible, but I think that the echo from 2:17 tilts the case in favor of the former. If God says he will do something, he will do it. He doesn’t need to say that he will certainly do it, but the words are for Eve’s sake. They remind her that even though the death sentence has been lifted, she must face the consequences of her misbehavior.²

The two words that describe Eve’s difficulties concern her *children*, plural, a dramatic foreshadowing of the Cain and Abel account. “I will increase your *sorrow* (or suffering); in *pain* (or hard toil) you shall bring forth children.” These words at least indicate physical distress, and probably accompanying emotional duress, too.

These words alliterate, ironically and by design, with the word for “tree,” the object of Eve’s downfall.³ The first word occurs in only two other places in Scripture: the next verse (v. 17), describing Adam’s hardships in raising food, and Genesis 5:29, a reference to 3:17. The second word occurs only a handful of times, mostly in Proverbs, where it connotes either pain or toil: e.g., “In all *labor* there is profit, but mere talk tends only to want” (Prov 14:23 RSV). The meaning there clearly relates to hard work. A few verses down the page (Prov 15:1), the same Hebrew word indicates the familiar *grievous* (harsh, RSV) words that stir up anger, where the idea shifts to the emotional aspect.

Using two related words so close together (only one word separates them in the Hebrew text), connotes both hard labor and pain, which

2 Collins (op. cit., p.153) agrees, basing his conclusion on the pointing of the verb. He also notes an ironic echo of 1:28, “be fruitful and multiply” (same root).

3 Think of “trouble” and “travail” alliterating with “tree” to get a sense of the Hebrew wordplay. Cassuto (op. cit., p.165) lists several words normally used with birth that were not used in this passage, and he notes that the two alliterative words that do appear here do not appear elsewhere in connection with childbirth. Thus he observes, “The very fact that the Scripture does not employ here the usual phrases found in connection with the suffering of childbirth . . . proves that it was with some specific intention—for instance, to allude to the word [for tree]—that these words were selected.”

is the case with humans, whose travail in childbirth in general exceeds other mammals.

Desire and Rulership

The next section of Eve's fate is hard to read free from cultural bias. Our current version of Western society has little affection for male headship and female submission. This verse wasn't written with our tastes in mind, but that is true for all of the Bible. It is our duty to conform our lives to its teachings, not vice versa. This second half of the pronouncement upon Eve has two propositions: a statement about her desire for her husband, and a statement about her husband's ruling over her.

The verb "desire" comes from a root that means "run after"; it appears only here, once in the next chapter (4:7) in a reference to this verse, and once in Song of Solomon 7:10. This is a different sort of desire than what Eve experienced in "desired to make one wise" (3:6, also 2:9) which carries the connotation of "desirable, covetable." The idea here is that the object of her desire as well as the nature of her desire has changed as a result of her transgression. Her desire, of course, should have been for her creator, but it shifted to the desire for his omniscience.

With that relationship now on the shoals, the natural consequence of this disruption is a disruption of her natural relationship with her husband. It would work this way: procreation would become a trial; despite this suffering she would yet desire her necessary partner in procreation, her husband. Eve will have pain, toil, and suffering in this quest, yet her desire for her husband will remain.

The last phrase of the pronouncement to Eve is the proposition that Adam will rule over her, probably the most problematic from the perspective of today's sensibilities, yet the easiest to understand in its immediate context. The verse is less about male dominance than Adam saving Eve from future misdeeds. It is a statement about what went wrong when Eve led them both to failure.

The initial teaching about their roles together is in 1:26-28:

"Let us make man [humans] in our image and our likeness; and let them [male and female] have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth." So God created man in his

own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them . . . and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.” (RSV)

In the original declaration of male and female, God spoke nothing concerning hierarchy, but that both of them together shared custodial rulership over his creation. The more detailed account of the creation of the man and woman in Genesis 2 indirectly affirms this. The unity expressed there, “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh,” does not expressly address the issue of equally shared dominion over creation, but read in context with the account of chapter 1 it almost dictates that conclusion. Adam’s rulership⁴ over Eve is a departure from God’s original intention for them, a consequence of Eve’s usurpation of God’s authority over her.⁵ Their horizontal relationship has become a vertical relationship.

Paul’s Citations of Early Genesis

Paul addresses the issue of male and female roles, but never does he cite this passage. Arguments from silence are notoriously limited, but this one is strengthened by the observation that on at least three occasions the apostle refers to nearby passages in Genesis. He cites Genesis 2:24 in Ephesians, referring to the marriage bond as a joining as if one flesh. He speaks of the wife submitting to the husband as the head of the marriage (Eph 5:22-24), but remarkably does not invoke Genesis 3:16 for support. Colossians 3:18 parallels the Ephesians passage, but it is more condensed and lacks supporting Old Testament citations.

Elsewhere, Paul refers to Adam’s priority in the order of creation and Eve’s being deceived (1 Tim 2:11-14) as reasons for a woman to learn in silence. In an obvious place to deploy this verse from Genesis, he doesn’t. He’s right there in early Genesis, but he doesn’t universalize the matter or quote Genesis 3:16. We might also expect a reference to 3:16 in 1 Corinthians 11:3-11, where Paul writes, “the head of a woman is her

4 This is the same word as in 1:18 for the heavenly bodies to rule over day and night.

5 Collins (op. cit., p. 160) uses the parallel passage in 4:7 as the pivot of his interpretation, reasoning that if Cain must rule over the sin that wants to control him, then Eve must master her sin, the desire to control her husband. He cites the “struggle for control” that characterizes so many marriages. He views “rulership” (of Adam over Eve, and by extension, husbands over wives in general) not as a punishment for Eve, but as the solution for the control issue. “The proper remedy is a return to the creational pattern of the man’s leadership—loving not dominating.”

husband” and “man was not made from woman, but woman made from man.” Again, he has early Genesis in view, but in an obvious place to cite this verse, he doesn’t. What are we to make of this?

Adam and Eve’s relationship will now differ from the original intent implied in 2:24, yet the rulership of Adam is not intended as dominance, but nurturing. Even if Paul does not cite this passage in Ephesians 5, he compares the unity of male and female to the unity of Christ and the body of believers, and likewise compares the believers’ submission to Christ and Christ’s headship of the body to the marriage bond.

This statement of Adam’s rule over Eve, then, is for Eve’s protection and care. It becomes necessary because of transgression, as Christ’s relationship to the body of believers is mandated because of our transgressions. Adam’s ruling over Eve is not equivalent to their dominion over the rest of creation. That remained a task for both of them. Besides, the Hebrew words are different in 1:28 and 2:24; they are aptly rendered “dominion” and “rule,” respectively.

Adam’s rulership is an expedient given the sinful state of the humans. God brings in a new principle to guide their lives. The ideal marriage is one of true equality, but humans can’t pull it off. We need the structure and the exercise in discipleship to assume positions both of leadership and submission. This arrangement is actually a good idea, as long as we can rid our heads of the cultural bias toward fairness being defined in terms of equality. Another cultural bias that interferes with accepting this arrangement is the idea that headship or leadership is an inherently better position. Any human situation, whether it is a marriage, a business, a sport team, an economic institution, or whatever, functions better having one person as the ultimate decision maker or leader. In marriage, it is paramount that the husband carries out this responsibility with the proper attitude and behavior, as exemplified by Jesus’ self-sacrificing love for his bride, the body of believers.

Why is the husband and not the wife placed as the temporal head? I think this has to do with the woman’s undeniable and irreplaceable role as child bearer and mother. Biologically, it makes more sense to appoint the man as administrative head of the marriage and family unit.

God Addresses Adam

Adam's sentencing is three times as long as Eve's, 48 words in Hebrew to her 16. It does not contain a reiteration of his ruling over her nor does it mention any relation to Eve. It only deals with his relation to the ground from whence he came, and to which he shall return, in the time between serving it with perspiring brow for its meager produce.

The main message is harsh, but there is an implicit message of hope. The phrase "all the *days* of your life" tells Adam of a surety, if he needed more assurance at this point, that he would not die on that day. He would live out a full life, a hard life, but a full life nonetheless. Coupled with the promise that his and Eve's offspring would conquer the serpent, Adam would leave the premises not entirely crushed.

God's statement to Adam has some parallels with what he just said to Eve, and some unique features also. The most striking aspect of this paragraph is that God provides a reason for the ills to follow, which he does not do in the pronouncement to Eve. God's entire statement to Eve comprises her hardships, but with Adam he prefaces the hardships with "because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat of."

This preface has some implications:

- It reinforces Adam's culpability in failing as the instructor of Eve. Remember, she was not present when God instructed him concerning the tree, and anything that Eve would know about their blessings, duties, and restriction in the garden would have to come through Adam. Therefore Adam bears the greater guilt, a point Paul reiterates in Romans 5:12-19 and elsewhere (e.g., 1 Cor 15:21-22).
- There is a dual meaning in "listened to the voice of your wife." One meaning is that she was supposed to listen to his voice, not vice-versa, and the other is that Adam was supposed to listen to God's voice, not Eve's. Listening means not just hearing, but obeying.
- Unstated in 3:6, which only records that Eve "gave to her husband with her and he ate," there was apparently some spoken communication between them, also. He couldn't have "listened to her voice" if she hadn't said something to him, probably on the order of questioning the sanction on the tree or inviting him to eat.

Both Adam and Eve are guilty of transgression, but by prefacing only Adam's judgment and not Eve's, the text highlights his greater responsibility in allowing the circumstances that led to their demise.

In the charge against Adam, Eve's addition to God's instructions concerning the tree is conspicuously absent. God states that Adam "ate of the tree which I commanded you not to eat of." This accusation does not mention touching the tree, because that was not what God had prohibited and therefore was not part of the transgression. The way God phrases the accusation reminds Adam of his failure to teach Eve what was really important in their relationship with their creator. It's a shorthand way of saying, "I commanded you not to eat of the tree; you added a law thinking that would protect you, but it failed because you ultimately failed to trust me with your welfare."

The Curse: Toil, Weeds, and Sweat

These hardships constituted natural consequences of their transgressions. God at first desired to teach Adam to love him and trust him through the great blessings of the beauty and abundance of the garden. That method having failed, God delivers Adam to his own devices and the sparseness of his agricultural results. Hereafter he will not reap in abundance, but in relative paucity. Moreover, the ground—that ground from which he himself sprang—will now be the source of thorny plants and unfruitful weeds. Although Adam does not know it yet, this toil will occur outside of the garden. These consequences seem severe enough, but probably they haven't imagined that they will be exiled. In all this, God's purpose in working with Adam and Eve remains the same. Only the methods change.

One of the main differences between God's statements to Eve and Adam is the focus on life and death. Eve is promised children and the continuity of life, but Adam's fate is to work in hard toil until he dies and returns to the dust from which he was made. This must sound utterly bleak and dispiriting to Adam. The text uses the same word for Eve's painful labor and Adam's toil. They both will toil to produce. Eve will produce the next generation, Adam will produce food to keep them alive. Adam will still eat, but in hardship. Eve will still fulfill the blessing of Day Six to be fruitful and multiply, but in travail.

The text frames the promise of ill yield as a curse not on him personally, but on the ground, to which he had the closest association. From the ground God formed him, from the ground he took his name, from the ground he gained his sustenance. God comes just short of cursing him personally when he curses the ground. You might read this as an act of grace from God, an act that he will not extend to Cain (contrast 4:11, Study 46).

Thorns and thistles imply futility as well as hard work. Obviously the ground would yield some substance, but the yield of the earth will not come freely as it had in Eden. Adam will work hard, he will sweat and toil, he will sow wheat and reap weeds (Jer 12:13). The poetic and metaphorical use of the phrase “thorns and thistles” remains in current usage. Whereas Eve’s travail is literal, the pain of childbirth, Adam’s travail transcends agriculture to depict the general futility and despair of our lifelong struggle to survive.

Sweat, weeds, and thorns depict hard work and low yield. To Adam, this will be in contrast to the verdant abundance of Eden. Adam was placed in the garden from the place of his formation so that he would appreciate the blessing of Eden. He will know both paradise gained and paradise lost. It’s back to the outside world for him.

STUDY 42

Alive, Clothed, and Forgiven

Adam's naming of Eve and God's providing the garments (Gen 3:20-21) serve as the closure events for the garden judgment scene. A summary of Genesis 1-3 concludes this study.

AFTER GOD'S CONDEMNATION of the serpent and pronouncement of the consequences upon Adam and Eve, the judgment scene ends with a fourth statement,¹ this one from Adam. He gives Eve her name.

Eve's Name

This is the second time Adam names Eve. Upon her creation and presentation to him, when their future looked much rosier than it does now, when he exclaimed "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh," he first called her *ishshah* (woman) for she was taken from man (*ish*). Now, in the balm of God's grace, Adam hears what God says to her about bearing children (plural) and calls her Eve, for she will become the mother of all who are to become alive. In Hebrew, the spelling and sound of "Eve" is close enough to the word for "live" or "living" to connect her with her role. The Septuagint translators also understood it this way, for they rendered the passage, "Adam called the name of his wife Life, for she was the mother of all living."²

Naming or renaming someone is usually associated with having power or authority over the person.³ In this context, Adam's naming her is less about his headship than his hope. In calling her the mother of all living, Adam commemorates all the facets of God's grace: the pardoning

1 Another example of the 3+1 pattern described in Study 17.

2 The Greek word for "Life" is *Zoe*, Eve's name in the LXX and a lovely name to this day.

3 See footnote 3, Study 30 for examples.

of their transgression, the abrogation of the death sentence, the extension of their lives, the promise of Eve bearing progeny, and the prophecy of one of Eve's progeny conquering the serpent. Despite the thorns and thistles, Adam sees an optimistic future.

Coats of Skin

Animal sacrifice was in effect long before the law of Moses (e.g., Gen 4:4, 8:20, 15:9). Here, the concise early Genesis record leaves much for us to fill in, including the act of the slaying. An angel likely takes a clean animal from the beasts of the field, and slays it before them, kosher-style to drain out all of its blood. Possibly fire consumes the carcass after the angel removes and prepares the skin. The word for skin is singular, so the sacrifice is of one animal only.

The skin-coats remind them of their nakedness before God, the nakedness that they vainly try to conceal by hiding and with their fig-leaf loincloths. In 2:25, they are naked and feel no shame. Later, they are naked and feel fear, guilt, and shame. Then they are clothed with fig leaves and still feel fear, guilt, and shame. Finally their status passes on to their present state: they are clothed by God and feel the peace of forgiveness.⁴ The coats of skin serve as a symbol and reminder of God's forgiveness.

The concept of covering is one of the great metaphors of forgiveness and atonement. Taking the root meaning of the word "atonement," the Day of Atonement would be called the Day of Covering. In some cases it might be hard to say when the word should be translated "covered" or "atoned" (e.g., Lev 4:26, Psa 65:3). The word does not occur here in Genesis, but it may be that the covering God gives Adam and Eve prefigures this idea. You can think of the covering in the sense of protection or security, as in swaddling a baby, or in the sense of sin being covered and out of sight, gone. Both ideas seem apt in the present context; the final words of verse 21, "and clothed them," lean more to the former idea.

The word for "coat" implies a garment with sleeves, and covering most of the legs, like a nightshirt. It is the same word used for Joseph's coat (Gen 37:3) and the priest's garment worn under the outer robe

⁴ Sarna (op. cit., p. 29) has a note citing rabbinical authorities: "the Hebrew can also yield 'garments for the skin' [instead of 'garments of skin']." This would support the idea of a covering for their nakedness, and would not rule out that the coats were made of a slain animal, which seems almost certain.

(Exod 28:4). Genesis 4:4 implies that Adam performed sacrifices after this, and that Abel would have learned the practice and meaning of sacrifice from him. The coat would serve as Adam's priestly garment.

The episode of sin and forgiveness retains life for Adam and Eve, but alters their world and the world of succeeding generations. We are born into the world damaged by their transgression. Sin leaves consequences not only in our lives, but in the lives of our children and beyond as well.

This first episode of human history places transgression, confession, atonement and consequences into the context of God's righteousness and justice. This is the template for our own relationship with God. The wages of sin is death, as Paul reminds us, and all humans deserve this because all transgress. In Christ we confess our sins, we are freed from this outcome, but we must still live with the consequences of our actions. We live in a world of pain and toil, but we learn dependence on God, and we learn that he is a God of mercy and justice, a God of hope who allows us to experience misery in order to shape our hearts for service, faith, trust, and love.



Summary of Genesis 1 to 3

The following point-by-point account ties together the main thrust of these opening narratives of Scripture.

- The omnipotent God exists eternally.
- God creates the universe. The creation account narrows the scope of God's activity from the universe to our planet, Earth, to the dry land, to Eden, to a special garden in Eden.
- God fills the entire creation with entities appropriate for the realms they inhabit.
- Of all created entities, human beings are singled out as special. They are like the other land animals made on the sixth day in their physical constitution, but are given capabilities to recognize their place in creation and thus to have a relationship with the creator God.
- God gives the humans duties to perform in the garden. He also makes one limitation, a prohibition on one tree of the garden.

This tree represents knowledge that only an eternal creator God could know. Such knowledge is beyond the humans' capabilities as it concerns ultimate questions of good and evil.

- The limitation will test the humans' obedience, and demonstrate that only God is limitless and infinite, and the created beings are inherently limited and finite. If the humans fail to observe the prohibition, God says they will die on the day of their disobedience.
- The humans attempt to protect themselves against the possibility of eating from the prohibited tree by further stipulating that they shouldn't even touch the tree. Nonetheless, the humans seek to establish themselves as equals with God by eating from the prohibited tree. This act of disobedience shows their lack of active trust and also attempts to erase the inherent differences between creator and created. Thus, the very first narrative involving God's highest aim for his creation and the main reason for his creation involves their rebellion.
- Instead of immediately putting to death the rebellious humans, the merciful and just God first offers them the opportunity to confess their misdeeds. When questioned about their behavior, both the man and the woman offer full confessions.
- Based on their confessions, God abrogates the death sentence and pardons them for their transgression. God forgives their sins and covers the humans with animal skins.
- The death sentence is lifted, but the humans must live with the consequences of their deed. They will now live in a world of toil and pain. God's intention for them, to teach them love and obedience and trust, will now come primarily through hardship, not blessing.
- The humans can no longer live in the special place that God has made for them. They now will live on the outside, and their relationship to God will depend on a daily struggle to see God's purpose in a world that is far from the ideal paradise they once enjoyed.

STUDY 43

East of Eden

Adam and Eve's exit (Gen 3:22-24) is the final scene of the garden narrative. With language that is at once straightforward, poetic, and figurative, access to the Tree of Life is closed off. The cherubim displace Adam and Eve as the garden's guardians.

ADAM AND EVE stand before God clothed, but they are still in the garden. Their presence presents a pair of problems, one of which takes center stage in the narrative, and the other of which is only implied, but plays an equally important role. The stated, explicit problem: they have access to the Tree of Life. The unstated, implicit problem: paradise is not the place to promote thorns and thistles. God is not going to spoil Eden on their account; the ground that will be cursed will lie outside the precincts of Eden. Hence the exit function, centered on the possibility of their eating of the Tree of Life.

Like One of Us

This statement that the humans have become “like one of us” is peculiar in that the humans have proven themselves to be nothing like God. God is all-powerful; they are powerless. God is perfect; they are vastly imperfect. God cannot be tempted; they are tempted and succumb to temptation.

The text states that they have become like God because they have come to know good and evil, but what did they know about good and evil, and how did they come to know it? The fact that they ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil might not be the entire explanation. What they learned from eating was that they were in deep trouble, that they were naked, guilty, ashamed, fearful sinners.

The text might also be referring to what God had spoken to them (vv. 17-19). God's pronouncements about their forthcoming difficulties in life come immediately before "Behold, the human (singular, but inclusive of both Adam and Eve) has become like us, knowing good and evil." The humans now know that the evil projected for their lives has supplanted the good God originally intended for them. Now their lives will be filled with evil, not good, at least from a human perspective. This kind of life is incompatible with staying in the garden, thus God sends them away. God's pronouncements about their future are extensions of what they initiated when they ate. The consequences are a result of their knowing good and evil.

The fallout from their grasping leaves Adam and Eve in one sense like God in that they know good and evil, but alas, they know as humans. Some things seem good and some seem bad, but they do not know good and evil as divine beings.

It's an ironic, damning, pathetic comment on their situation. There they are, brought very low, and God says to them, "You have become like one of us, knowing good and evil." Adam and Eve scarcely consider themselves very divine at the moment. The first thing they know when their eyes are opened is that they are naked. The next thing they know is that they are in desperate straits before God.

The sad human legacy of their sin is that we call things good if they seem pleasant or beneficial to us and bad if they seem unpleasant or painful. We have only our human emotions, not divine insight, to make our judgments. That's our human scope, and that's what this statement is chidingly reminding us. It's a nasty business going against God.

Who are "Us"?

I doubt that angels are the "us" of 1:27 (Study 18), but that is more likely here. If this is so, the Bible must indicate somewhere that the angels have such knowledge. They don't know everything (Matt 24:36), but those who carry out God's work, especially his work among people, would know what is good and evil from the divine perspective.

If it is not referring to the angels, "us" would be the "plural of majesty." Cherubim are mentioned in the next verse, but for reasons that will become apparent, they are unlikely as the reference point of the plural.

Tree of Life: Off Limits

The statement that the humans might eat of the Tree of Life and live forever is one of the most difficult propositions in early Genesis. If the text just had “lest he put forth his hand and eat,” it would have been puzzling enough, but adding “and live forever” is completely baffling. How could a tree have power to change natural human life to immortal nature? It is not the way of Scripture that immortality can be attained by such a means. Eternal life is a function of faith, God’s grace, and the resurrection.

How could eternal life result from eating fruit, even as a possibility that never happened? Moreover, God has already told Adam that he would return to the dust. How then could Adam override that judgment and grasp eternal life from a tree? Besides the apparent power of the tree to give its partakers immortal life, we have the impression that God seems unable to prevent their eating of it short of dismissing them from the Garden of Eden, as if God is suddenly at a loss how to deal with his wayward children.

The Hebrew word (*olam*) translated “forever” is usually, but not always, translated “forever” or “everlasting.” The word itself does not carry an inherent and absolute sense of eternity; it sometimes means “a long time ago” or “in the distant past” (e.g., Gen 6:4, Prov 22:28, Mic 7:14). Also, when it is translated “everlasting” or “forever” the context may tell us that “age-lasting” would be a better choice. In many places it refers to ordinances of the Mosaic economy (Lev 3:17, 17:7, Num 15:15), which the prophet Jeremiah said would end (Jer 31:31-34) and be replaced with a new covenant. Contextually, we would understand “age-lasting” to be truly “eternal” and “forever” in passages such as the Abrahamic promises (Gen 13:15) or expressions of God’s characteristics (Psa 90:2), or his eternity (Psa 106:1).

Would eating of the tree impart eternal life, or does it represent the continuity of life so long as Adam and Eve reside in the garden? Part of the answer depends on whether or not they ate of the tree before eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. We can only speculate. The two trees are both in the “midst of the garden” (Gen 2:9), so they certainly could have. The phrase “lest he put forth his hand and eat,” recalls their putting forth their hand to take of the forbidden tree, and

shades towards their not having eaten of it. If they have, the situation has changed dramatically.

God doesn't want them to eat of it now, and ejecting them from the premises will prevent that possibility. Their current condition bars them from life inside the garden, as represented by the Tree of Life. God's rationale for its prohibition would be something like, "The humans have failed to acknowledge me as their creator, they do not know me, therefore they cannot have that form of life consistent with knowing me."

Adam and Eve will not reach out their hand and partake of the Tree of Life. They will have life, but not the life that would have been theirs had they not transgressed.

Adam and Eve Depart

The verb "sent forth" in 3:23 is the same word (in a different form) translated "put forth" in verse 22, forming another wordplay. Only Adam is mentioned; the language is all in the singular ("him," not "them"), apparently because he is held as the responsible party. Another possibility is that subsuming Eve in the generic "the human" (*adam* with the definite article, as used throughout the first three chapters) reflects that they are one flesh, with Adam as administrative head of the union.

The text does specify Adam as an individual with the phrase, "to till the ground from which he was taken," a repetition from verses 17 to 19, the judgment upon Adam. The phrase reinforces both his hard labor to come and his ultimate return to that same ground. It also reminds Adam that his original assignment, to serve and keep the garden, has now been transferred to the land east of Eden, where he will perform the same toil, but with far less satisfactory results. In his tilling (same word as in 2:15, where the KJV has "dress") Adam will work out his salvation with toil and sweat. God's purpose with Adam hasn't changed, only the method used to achieve that purpose.

As they march out of the garden, past the Tree of Life, past all the other trees, the fields and streams and animals and all the beauty of that special location, what might they be thinking? Eventually they come to some sort of natural feature that marks a portal, some demarcation point that indicates "Eden is on this side, and that is outside." Inside is Eden, inside Eden is the garden, inside the garden are the trees for fruit, and

in the midst of them, at the spiritual center of the garden, the most holy place, stand the abandoned Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. All this is no longer part of their lives. Do they realize that they will never return?

The text strengthens the force of their departure by using two verbs, “sent forth” in verse 23 and “drove out” in verse 24. These two words contrast starkly with the two verbs used to describe God’s placing Adam in the garden after his creation (2:8,15). God had carefully set him in his proper place, but now Adam’s actions cause God to reverse that placement. The NIV and JPS use “banish” for “sent forth”; this paraphrase gives the sense.

The verb translated “drove out” has a sharp negative tone. Moffatt uses “expelled.” Gesenius also gives a primary meaning of “expel,” and the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* agrees: “the root denotes an effective separation between person or groups, expulsion. . . . It would appear that although the context must supply the method, the word does include some idea of the use of physical means.”¹ It is used often of God and/or the Israelites expelling some other nation from their territory (e.g., Exod 34:11, Josh 24:18). In nearly every use it implies a forceful ejection of a person or people. God does not just send Adam and Eve out; there is an impelling force behind them, driving them away.

Cherubim Take Charge

It’s probable that the cherubim of verse 24 drive out Adam and Eve and then take up their station at the east gate of Eden. A review of what we know about cherubim will help clarify their role.

The word “cherubim” is plural; in Hebrew the singular form would be *k’roov*. Because the word almost always occurs as a plural, we are accustomed to seeing the plural form, which in Hebrew has the *-im* ending (for masculine nouns); thus the coinage “cherubims” of the KJV is redundant.² Cherubim don’t show up from time to time in a variety of human encounters, as do angels. Their natural history is much different.

We have no idea where these cherubim come from, for they are not mentioned in the creation week. Cherubim are manifestations of God;

1 Harris et al, op.cit., p. 173.

2 I can understand why translators would avoid the plural form “cherubs,” as that would conjure up fat, ruddy-cheeked infants, which is hardly where this word is going.

it may be that they have no continuing corporeal existence, but appear as part of theophanies (visible and auditory manifestations of God, often metaphorical). Their sudden appearance in the narrative is even more striking than that of the serpent, because the text at least tells us where the serpent comes from (“beast of the field”). These cherubim have no antecedent clues at all.

Of all the Scriptural occurrences of cherubim, this is the only place where they occur as some kind of living beings. All the other references come in two categories:

- material images of the cherubim that resided upon the ark in the most holy place of the tabernacle, in Solomon’s temple, or Ezekiel’s temple (and a few references to those images in the Psalms); and
- theophanic appearances mentioned in Ezekiel, almost all of them in Ezekiel 10.³

About three-fourths of the usages of the words refer to the tabernacle or temple, the remainder to the visions of Ezekiel. A couple of the passages in the Psalms might be debatable, but the garden scene is essentially the *only* place where cherubim have the appearance of corporeal entities. Both the images of the cherubim in the tabernacle and temple, and the theophanic cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision link to the Genesis account.

God instructed Moses to make the tabernacle and its furnishings (Exod 25-27). The tabernacle would serve many functions. Among them, it was the place where God would manifest his presence. God said to Moses, “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell in their midst” (25:8). The sanctuary arrangements included, most famously, the ark (25:10-22) where God localized his presence. Perched on the ark were two cherubim, facing each other, with wings outstretched to cover it:

There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are upon the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you of all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel. (Exod 25:22 RSV)

From the general statement “I will dwell in their midst” to the specific “I will meet with you from above the mercy seat,” God uses the images

3 There are also two references to the Genesis cherubim in Ezekiel’s prophecy against the King of Tyre (Ezek 28:14-16), a prophecy couched heavily in Genesis language.

of cherubim to represent his presence. God's dwelling place is at, or in, the tabernacle, especially the mercy seat of the ark with two cherubim. The Hebrew word translated "dwell" in Exodus 25:8 is *shachan*, from whence comes the word for the tabernacle itself (the noun cognate of *shachan*) and the post-biblical *Shekinah*, referring to the presence or manifestation of God. Lexically, *shachan* is a loaded word, used almost exclusively in poetic contexts or with God or a manifestation of God as the subject. It is not used to convey an ordinary notion of someone dwelling someplace. Taken literally, the tabernacle was the dwelling place of God, and cherubim were posted at the innermost and holiest place of the tabernacle, the spot chosen by God as the place where he would interact with the Israelite community.

The verb in Genesis 3:24, "at the east of the garden he *placed* the cherubim" is *shachan*, in the causative construction. Literally it would read, "at the east of the garden he caused the cherubim to dwell." The JPS's "stationed" makes good reading and good lexical sense.⁴ This use of *shachan* is the first in Scripture, and it imparts a sharp impression of God's presence in the cherubim. The use of this specialized verb is highlighted by the absence of two other common verbs that could have done the job if simply "placed" or "set" had been intended. These two verbs were available; one (*seem*) is used in 2:8 where God *places* Adam in the garden, and the other (*yashav*) occurs in 4:16, which says Cain *dwelt* in the land of Nod. Thus, God meets with Adam and Eve to usher them out at the special dwelling place of the cherubim—the garden portal at the east gate of Eden, which has replaced the two trees in the middle of the garden as the sanctuary.

Ezekiel's vision sheds further light on the cherubim theophany at the east of Eden. As he is in exile at the river Chebar, Ezekiel sees a vision (Ezek 1:4-28) that includes a stormy wind, a great cloud, a fire flashing forth continually, four living creatures, something that looks like burning coals, like torches moving to and fro, lightning coming out of the fire, and finally the four jeweled wheels, with eyes on their rims and wheels within the wheels. Above all of this is a firmament, and upon the firmament a throne, and upon the throne a dazzling likeness of a human form (all terms from RSV). This is summed up as "such was the appearance of the

4 The KJV, RSV, and NIV all use "placed." Alter has "set up."

likeness of the glory of the LORD.⁵ This overwhelms Ezekiel, and he falls on his face.

Later on, the prophet realizes that the living creatures he saw were cherubim: “These were the living creatures that I saw underneath the God of Israel by the river Chebar; and I knew that they were cherubim” (Ezek 10:20 RSV). Was it the living creatures alone who were cherubim, or was the entire theophany cherubim? How much of the vision comprised cherubim proper, and how much accompanied the cherubim is hard to say, but the totality of the experience was meant to overwhelm as a manifestation of God. Cherubim are essential in the theophany, and without any other limiting evidence elsewhere in Scripture, it seems that they *are* the theophany.

Two details stand out as relevant for our purposes here. One is the correlation of the flaming sword of Genesis with what Ezekiel saw, and the other is the location of the cherubim. In Genesis, the theophany consisted of two elements: the cherubim and the flaming sword. Ezekiel 1 has plenty of flames but no sword; the words are different, but the “fire flashing forth continually” is similar to the “fiery ever-turning sword.”⁶ The similarity is strong, but the clincher comes in Ezekiel 10:19:

And the cherubim lifted their wings and mounted up from the earth in my sight as they went forth, with the wheel beside them; and they stood at the door of the east gate of the house of the LORD, and the glory of the God of Israel was over them. (RSV)

Just as cherubim stand at the east gate of Eden, so the cherubim of Ezekiel’s vision stand at the east gate of Jerusalem. The glory of Israel departed from the house of the LORD and then from the city, all as a result of Israel’s sinful ways. The language of Ezekiel hearkens back to Genesis and likens Israel’s impending exile to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden.

The Way to the Tree of Life

There may have been some distance from the gate of Eden to the Tree of Life. Think logistically for a moment: the cherubim stand at the edge of

5 Ezekiel 1:28. I take “such was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the LORD” to mean the entire theophany, but it could just refer to the likeness upon the throne.

6 Quotations from Ezekiel 1:4 RSV and Genesis 3:24 JPS respectively. The verbs are different roots but the same grammatical form, so there is a parallelism.

Eden, but the Tree of Life is in the middle of the garden, and the garden is planted within Eden, so there is some distance to go from the edge of Eden to the middle of the garden.

The cherubim drive Adam and Eve from the garden and then take up their stations at the gate of Eden, guarding the way to the Tree of Life. In a certain sense, these cherubim replace Adam and Eve as the garden's guardians; "to keep the way to the Tree of Life" uses the same verb as Adam keeping the garden back in 2:15.

The way to the Tree of Life remains. First hinted at here, that way will ultimately be through faith in Jesus. In the first century the faith of those who followed Christ was known as "The Way" (Acts 24:22), and the Way will ultimately lead back to the Tree of Life in the Kingdom of God on earth (Rev 22:2, 14).

STUDY 44

Social Structures in Genesis

A watermark feature of Genesis is its use of increasingly complex social structures in successive narrative sections. This use of social structures reinforces the book's fundamental genealogical intent.

LOOKING AT GENESIS as a whole, the large narrative blocks reveal a pattern based upon social structures. For instance, Genesis 4 starts with Adam and Eve's nuclear family. The pattern shows increasingly more complex social structures.

The Narrative Blocks of Genesis

In Study 2, I proposed that Genesis is not primarily history separated by genealogical lists, but rather genealogy with extensive historical annotations. This conceptual approach to Genesis helps us see the flow from the first verse of creation to the inchoate nation of Israel. Within that flow are distinct accounts. Dividing Genesis into narrative blocks, and then looking at the social structure in each section is like dividing a drama into acts and scenes.

Omitting the genealogical lists (for our purposes they are not part of the action) the Genesis narrative sections break down like this:

1:1-2:4a	Creation of the physical universe
2:4b-3:24	Adam and Eve
4:1-17	Cain and Abel
6:1-9:17	Noah and the Flood
11:1-9	Babel Narrative
12:1-25:11	Life of Abraham
21:1-8; 22:1-19; 24:1-28:5	Life of Isaac

25:19-34, 27:1-49:33	Life of Jacob
34:1-31, 37:2-50:26	Joseph and his brothers

The account of Ishmael is included in the overlapping section of Abraham and Isaac, and likewise the account of Esau in the overlapping section of Isaac and Jacob. There is no real overlap in the first five sections, and there is considerable and progressively more overlap in the patriarchal sections.

The First Five Narratives

Table 13 shows the first five narrative sections and how they incorporate the four basic social structures:

Table 13. Sequence of Social Organization

Narrative Section	Social Structure
Creation of universe	none
Adam and Eve	couple
Cain and Abel	nuclear family
Noah and the Flood	extended family
Babel	community

The first narrative unit, the account of creation, has no people, and therefore no social structures. The second narrative unit, or Bible story,¹ involves one married couple, the smallest possible social organization. Although Adam existed before Eve, there is no Bible story that involves Adam as an individual. The first Bible story has a social background, and it is the minimum necessary for the plot.

The third story involves the next possible social organization. The smallest increment up from a couple is a nuclear family, and that is what we have in the Cain and Abel account. Again, this is the smallest possible social structure that can advance the main plot line of the narrative section, fratricide.

1 By "story" I don't mean fiction, but a section that involves such elements as plot, motive, and human interest. The Levitical laws are not a Bible story; Jonah is. A Psalm is not a Bible story; Moses receiving the Ten Commandments is. All of it is true and real, but some of the Bible is in the form of story.

After the Cain and Abel story, the very next Bible narrative section is the Flood. Once again, the story employs a basic version of the next possible social organization, the extended family. It is a small one, but it is an extended family by virtue of Genesis 6:18 “and your sons’ wives with you.” Noah’s three sons’ wives move the Flood narrative one step up on the social complexity scale from nuclear family. One more step up the scale of social organization comes in the Bible story after the Flood, the tower of Babel account. Of necessity, this story involves the community level of organization.

The first five story sections of the Bible sequentially the possible social organizational units: none, couple, nuclear family, extended family, community. Coincidence, artifact, or intentional pattern? move through It would be easy to argue that the pattern in Table 13 is a necessary artifact, given the Bible starts with no humans. We would expect to see a growing population, and therefore increasingly complex social structures. However, the first five Bible stories need not necessarily progress through the four natural forms of human social organization.

For instance, what if the Flood account had, instead of an extended family, Noah and some of his neighbors? What if there were a small God-fearing community at the time of the Flood? This could have been the case, as Genesis 4:26 says that at that time (many generations before Noah) people began to call on the name of the LORD. The Bible could have gone from the nuclear family of the Cain and Abel story straight to community, bypassing extended family. Alternatively, God could have started over after the Flood, not with Noah’s extended family, but just with Noah and his wife. Also, there is no necessary reason why the narrative section after Adam and Eve should be the nuclear family tragedy of Cain and Abel. This sequence of increased social complexity appears to be an unstated, designed watermark of the Genesis text. The stories are ordered along with the social structures that carry the plot.

There is also a parallel between the increasing flexibility of the size and complexity of the social structures and the increasing complexity of the narratives. Obviously, there’s only one way to have a married couple, and there’s a little more flexibility in the number of children they might have. An extended family can be as few as four people (husband, wife, child, child-in-law) or it could run into the hundreds. A community can

be as few as a handful of unrelated people or as large as a nation. In parallel with this observation, the Adam and Eve story is very short and pointed on one issue. The Cain and Abel story is longer and more complex, and the Flood account is longer yet, although focused on one issue. The Babel story, also focused on one issue, is shorter than the Flood account, but the most complex in terms of the psychological and theological issues it treats.

Another Chiasmus

The themes of the four social stories form a simple ABBA pattern, a mild form of chiasmus. All four center on how God deals with sin. The first and last of the four, Adam/Eve and Babel, deal with human hubris and their attempt to seek equality with God. The two middle stories, Cain/Abel and the Flood, have human violence (Gen 6:11 in the case of the Flood) as the primary sin at hand.

The Patriarchal Narratives

After the first set of five stories come the three patriarchal narratives. These differ from the first group in that they have considerable overlap of generations, and the divisions between them are less discrete. True, Adam and Eve are mentioned at the beginning of the Cain and Abel story, but only insofar as progeniture, to establish the nuclear family structure; they have no interaction with their children in the story. In the patriarchal stories, Abraham interacts with Isaac, Isaac much more with Jacob and Esau, and Jacob even more with his children.² The entire Joseph narrative is set inside the Jacob narrative.

The patriarchal narratives, which cover about 75 percent of the Genesis text, are of one fabric, whereas the earlier narratives have more or less discrete bounds, but all represent the flow of God's plan and purpose. After the first five stories, there are no further levels of social organization to introduce. Now the text focuses on the pulse of family history, staying within the scope of couple, nuclear family, or extended family to carry forward the themes of Genesis: the role of faith, and God's purpose in the serial selection and deselection of the seed of Abraham that plays such a central role in New Testament theology. In terms of social structures, God works with couples (e.g., Abraham and Sarah), with nuclear families (e.g., Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Esau), and

² This refers to the text, not necessarily what happened in real life.

with extended families (e.g., Jacob, Leah, and Rachel and their children in Laban's household).

Genesis begins with God alone. Through a succession of narratives featuring increasingly complex social structures, God's purpose advances. As Genesis ends, the extended family of Jacob is on the verge of becoming the community of Israel.

STUDY 45

Eve Gives Birth

Cain and Abel are the first born under the regimen of increased pain in childbirth, but Eve sees in Cain the promise of the redeemer (Gen 4:1-2a).

THE BIRTHS OF Cain and Abel represent a significant point in human history, as they are the first people who are truly like us, right down to the umbilicus. Adam and Eve were flesh and blood humans, but their unique origin makes it hard for us to entirely relate to them. Now the drama shifts to include childbirth, parents, siblings, development—entering fully into the world of our experience of life. Moreover, and theologically most importantly, Cain and Abel are the first people to be born and to live completely in a post-Edenic, sin-infested world, although there weren't many people around then, so the larger social structures of extended family and community looked a lot different. This minimalist world is the setting for the story of Cain and Abel.

The Birth of Cain

Genesis 4 starts with Adam and Eve having a child; this is what should have followed 2:24-25. Chapter 3, with its intrusive serpent and ensuing sin, is a dispiriting interruption in the narrative. Ideally and logically, “therefore shall a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they shall be one flesh” should lead directly into “Adam knew his Eve his wife and she conceived and bore Cain.” Unfortunately, this is no longer an ideal world. As of chapter 4, it is a world of thorns and thistles, pain and sorrow.

Adam and Eve's children arrive in the context of Genesis 3:15-16. Adam and Eve undoubtedly conceive the birth of Cain as the arrival of

the promised seed, for Eve says, “I have gotten a man from the LORD.” She will look no further. Cain will be the one who regains access to Eden, finds the serpent, and slays it. Or so Eve evidently believes.

The exact meaning of her proclamation is ambiguous. The Hebrew text reads, “I have gotten a man the LORD.” Translators’ efforts to fill in the apparent gap include “from the LORD” (KJV), “from the Eternal” (Moffatt), “with the LORD” (Alter), “with the help of the LORD” (RSV, NIV, JPS, NASB) and “with *the help of the LORD*” (RV, italics indicating words not in the Hebrew). Cassuto opts for “equally with the LORD,” explaining that Eve is commenting on her own procreative powers. He sees her as expressing that like God, she too is able to create human life.¹ I think, however, that the context bends towards Eve viewing her son as the fulfillment of the promise in 3:15. Also, Eve’s experience in the garden would deflate her hubris in declaring herself a creator like God.

The name Cain alliterates to the word for “acquired” or “gotten,” but Cassuto and others point out it comes from a different root, which means “shaper” or “one who forms.” Alter gives the meaning as “smith” and notes that it prefigures the line of metalworkers in Cain’s genealogy (4:22).²

The Principals in Genesis 4

The five principal roles of this drama are mentioned in the first two verses of Genesis 4: Adam, Eve, Cain, the LORD, and Abel. In this the sixtieth reference to God, the memorial name, *yhwh*, appears alone for the first time. Thirty-five times from 1:1 to 2:3 the text uses *elohim* exclusively, indicating God as the all-powerful Creator. Starting at 2:4b the double designation (name and title) *yhwh elohim* begins. It appears 20 times from there to the end of chapter 3, to the exclusion of either designation alone, except for the dialogue between the serpent and Eve (explained in Study 34). Now, at the beginning of the Cain and Abel episode, the text changes to *yhwh* alone, and continues this usage throughout the chapter. This indicates that the first four chapters are meant to be read together as one literary unit, with a designed overlap so that the reader will know of a surety that *yhwh* and *elohim* are indeed the one Deity.³

1 Cassuto, op. cit., pp. 198-202.

2 Alter, op. cit., p. 16. Alter also echoes Cassuto above, noting that “Eve, upon bringing forth the third human being, imagines herself as kind of a partner in man-making.”

3 This background literary device will continue through Genesis and support the claims that Moses and Aaron will make before Pharaoh. Taking an even longer view

Alter translates 4:1, “And the human knew Eve his woman.”⁴ That sounds sterile, but it is a straightforward translation. The common noun “human” or “man” is used with the definite article prefix, as in the first three chapters. In 4:25 the text has *adam* without the definite article, which makes it a proper name. Keeping the definite article in 4:1 helps connect this section with 2:24, where Adam and Eve are “the man and the woman.”

The name “Eve” serves as a further connection to the preceding narratives. It is part of the double designation of Eve, “Eve his woman.” “Eve” is a proper name and a reference to 3:20 where Adam named her. “His woman” (or wife) is a reference to 2:25, the statement about a man (*ha’adam*) cleaving to his woman (or wife, *ishto*). “The man and his woman” is the consistent formulation of the first three chapters. Eve has a real name, but Adam is still known as “the human.”

Abel is the final human character listed in this chapter. The births of Cain and Abel receive distinctly different treatment. Eve conceives and gives birth to Cain, and when he is born, she exclaims that the promised son has been born. Seemingly as an afterthought, the text continues, “and again (or “also,” or “additionally”) she bore his brother Abel.” Shortly after Eve gives birth to Cain and says he is from the LORD, Abel comes forth. She calls him *hevel*—“vanity”—the same word that peppers Ecclesiastes,⁵ the word of the fleeting, the useless, the unnecessary. Regrettably, it will describe his brief life.

Abel—an Afterthought?

Remarkably, the text does not record that she conceived first. It might seem obvious that women conceive before giving birth, but Genesis accounts almost always specify this sequence.⁶ Two possibilities emerge from the

through Scripture, any reference to *yhwh* has the assumption “*yhwh* he is *elohim*” (1 Kings 18:36-39). The dual form *yhwh elohim* is relatively rare.

4 Alter, op. cit., p. 16.

5 For example, Ecclesiastes 1:2, 2:1, 4:4, 8:14.

6 Compare 4:17, where Cain’s wife conceives and gives birth to Enoch. Hagar (16:4) and Sarah (21:2) both are recorded as having conceived before they gave birth. The account of the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob reports that Rebekah conceived, and stipulates twins (25:21-26). Conception is specified for each of Leah’s first four children (29:31-35) and Bilhah’s two sons (30:5-7). The text uses a different format for Zilpah’s two sons (30:10-12), but reverts to individual conceptions for Leah’s last two sons (30:17-19) and for Rachel’s bearing Joseph (30:23). One notable exception is

omission of “Eve conceived.” One is that the two boys are identical twins. One conception and two births answers to that procreative possibility.⁷ The other reading is that the text reflects Eve’s thinking on the matter. After she bears Cain (in her estimation the promised child), Abel is an afterthought, an add-on, an extra. Whether twins or not, Abel’s birth, in Eve’s mind, is superfluous.

The text records with indifference the arrival of Abel: no conception or pregnancy, no meaningful name. Abel simply shows up. This indifference foreshadows the same literary device used in the next two verses to describe Cain and Abel’s respective offerings, except they will be reversed, with the indifference marking Cain’s offering.

Unlike the Adam and Eve story, where the dramatic tension lies in an internal struggle with temptation, the dramatic energy of this chapter lies in the tension between the two brothers. Even though they are equals as regards their humanity, Scripture presents them as the seed of God and the seed of the serpent. They will become symbolic heads of the diremption (sharp dividing into two directions) of humanity. One will represent the life of faith and forgiveness, and the other the way of unbelief, self-righteousness, and rejection by God.⁸ Contrary to Eve’s expectations, it will be Abel, not Cain, who will become the hero of their generation.

Even if they are identical twins, they cannot be exactly equal, for one is older and one the younger. No two people are ever identically raised. No two people perceive the world the same way. Eve lays a huge demand burden on Cain when she takes him as being the promised seed. Later, with her second son slain and her world shattered again, she will understand that Cain is the seed of the serpent, not the promised seed.

Cain and Abel represent the contrast between the two ways of humanity. Both are offspring of Adam and Eve. Both are equally capable of choosing either good or evil. Both are free moral agents who can have faith or not. The difference is that one seeks what is from above and the other what is beneath.

4:25; “conceive” is omitted in Eve’s bearing of Seth.

7 The Hebrew word translated “conceived” can mean “became pregnant” as well as “conceived,” so identical twins is not a certainty. They could also have been fraternal twins.

8 Unlike Jacob and Esau (Rom 9:11), there is no New Testament statement concerning God’s choice of Abel. Cain and Abel represent individual responses to God. They were not the progenitors of nations through which God would work out his purpose.

STUDY 46

Red Meat or Red Herring?

Cain and Abel's sacrificial offerings (Gen 4:3-5) represent their differing views of religion. Why did God accept Abel and his offering but reject Cain and his offering?

THE BIBLE BYPASSES any information about the childhood of Cain and Abel, going straight to their adulthood and their respective occupations. Again the A-B-B-A chiasmus format appears with their birth notices, Cain-Abel-Abel-Cain (vv. 1-2).¹ The same chiasmus form returns for a description of their offerings and the LORD's regard for them: Cain-Abel-Abel-Cain (vv. 3-4), and there's a third in sheep-ground-ground-flock (flock-soil-soil-flock, NIV) in verses 2 to 4.

Amidst all the structure, a drama is building. You don't notice it because there doesn't seem to be much excitement about learning that one son becomes a crop farmer and the other a shepherd. However, a plausible account of the rivalry that led to Abel's murder emerges from a clue in John's first epistle, the handful of New Testament references to Cain and Abel, and some further structural clues from the narrative.

The Cain and Abel narrative has three sections. The first section covers their births, as described in the previous study. The second section concerns their respective offerings. The third section, about the murder and Cain's subsequent exile, is the longest, and is covered in the next study. In the first section, Cain comes out looking like the child of promise, but after that it becomes increasingly apparent that he is anything but.

1 In the Cain/Abel narrative (4:1-16), the name Cain appears 14 times, Abel seven times, and "brother" seven times. In the New Testament, Abel appears four times, and Cain thrice, a total of seven. Cassuto (op. cit., p. 192) lists several other key words from Genesis 2-4 that occur in multiples of seven and concludes, "It is inconceivable that all this should be pure coincidence."

A Religious Man

Cain rates as one of the great villains in Scripture, although we know nothing of his life or possible repentance after he departs the text in 4:17. There is something startling about this man, a feature of his character that tells us maybe more about ourselves than about Cain, a feature that certainly gives us cause for introspection. This debased, evil murderer is a religious person. He does acknowledge God and he does bring an offering. The text does not contrast religious Abel with irreligious Cain; that contrast comes later in Genesis in the Jacob and Esau narrative (Heb 12:16 cites Esau as “irreligious” [RSV] or “godless” [NIV]). As you proceed with the two men, their two offerings, and what happens between them, keep in mind that Cain was a religious man, not an atheistic mocker of Abel his brother.

Several facts emerge from the text. Cain chooses his father’s occupation: he is a tiller (literally, “servant”) of the ground. The word for “tiller” is the same word used to describe Adam’s original duties in Eden in 2:15 (to keep and till the ground), and it is reiterated upon his expulsion in 3:24. Cain undoubtedly works alongside his father, and although the land produces thorns and thistles, it is still productive, as the text reveals shortly. Cain has the opportunity to learn directly from Adam what Adam has learned by hard experience.

The text describes his offering as “the fruit of the ground” and this has no sinister element. The word for “offering” is used regularly under the Law to describe a variety of animal and grain offerings. Cain brings his offering “to *yhwh*,” reinforcing the point made above that the text presents Cain as a religious person. Lastly, the text notes that Cain brings his offering at the same time as his brother Abel, described enigmatically as “the end of days,” possibly referring to a seasonal or yearly event, at a time defined by the heavenly bodies (Gen 1:14).² At this point in the story, there is nothing suspect about either Cain as a person or his worship.

The Two Offerings

Each man brings from his occupation’s production, but Cain’s offering is marked by its indifferent description. Abel’s offering comes first, and it

2 In other Scriptural usages it has a more colloquial “after some time” connotation (1 Kings 17:7, Jer 13:6).

has three descriptors: it is plural, it is from the firstborn of his flock, and it includes their fat portions. What does this mean? He reserves the firstborn animals for the LORD, with the implication that the firstborn are the best or most prized. When he slaughters them for sacrifice, he brings the best parts, the fat portions. The JPS translation reads, “and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock.”

Table 14. Contrast Between the Two Offerings

Cain's Offering	Abel's Offering
fruit of the ground	from the firstborn of his flock
	the best part
	plural offering
	offered by faith (Heb 11:4)

Cain's perfunctory offering is marked by the same textual indifference that marked the birth of Abel. That literary device is now turned on its head and Cain comes up short. If Cain brings the firstfruits of his harvest, the text can easily specify that. If he brings the best of his crops, again, the text can accommodate this with simple vocabulary and syntax. The difference between the descriptions of the two offerings, the difference between indifference and thoughtfulness, is the difference that makes a difference.

Abel brings the best that he has; Cain brings whatever he has. Abel's offering is a personal sacrifice; Cain's is impersonal and superficial. Cain belongs to the species of worshiper that acknowledges God, but only on his or her own terms. Abel has faith (Heb 11:4); Cain doesn't, even if he goes through the motions of worship. Cain might convince himself this is real worship, but someplace in his heart there is another god, a god of his own invention, a god that accepts his indifferent sacrifice, a god he can worship and feel righteous about. Ultimately his is a powerless god who can provide neither sanctification nor redemption.

This very first instance of worship in the Bible contrasts true faith and ritualistic false piety. Cain represents every one of us who has a religious life, who worships every Sunday, who reads the Bible daily, and does enough good works to think that God owes him or her something. It's sobering to read about Cain, because his religious life could be ours.

It is Abel's plural offering that the writer of the epistle to the Hebrews emphasizes, "God spoke well of his gifts" (Heb 11:4). The plural could imply either that Abel brings something beyond the minimum, or that he brings an offering for Cain, or both. Offering on the behalf of others as well as oneself is a high priestly duty (Lev 16:11, 16) and a duty of the great high priest, our Lord Jesus Christ (Heb 9:12-14). Either Abel sacrifices directly on behalf of Cain, or Abel brings extra and offers some of his offering to Cain for Cain's use as a sacrifice to God.

Can Cain be justified with a non-blood offering? What if he were to bring of the firstfruits of his produce, the best that he has? What if he were to give abundantly? On the other hand, what if Abel brings any ordinary sheep of his flock, or what if he were to keep the best meat for himself and bring the entrails for his offering? It isn't the content of the offering that makes the difference.

Does God Demand Blood Offering?

The overt first impression of the brothers' offerings is to chalk one up for Abel because he gets it right—he realizes that God requires blood, and blood he brings. Cain's offering has no chance of pleasing God. It is true that blood can teach a lesson that broccoli cannot, and that Abel undoubtedly knows the symbolic meaning of his animal offering. However, do not let red meat become a red herring.

Isaiah's opening salvo against wayward Israel rebukes them for their sacrifices:

"The multitude of your sacrifices—what are they to me?" says the LORD.
 "I have more than enough of burnt offerings,
 of rams and the fat of fattened animals;
 I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats."
 (Isaiah 1:11 NIV)

Consider also the psalmist's similar words:

I have no need of a bull from your stall
 or of goats from your pens,
 for every animal of the forest is mine,
 and the cattle on a thousand hills.
 Do I eat the flesh of bulls
 or drink the blood of goats?

Sacrifice thank offerings to God,
 fulfill your vows to the Most High.
 (Psalm 50:9-10, 13-14 NIV)

There is nothing inherently proper in a blood sacrifice. The law of Moses contains many provisions for cereal offerings (e.g., Lev 2). What matters is the attitude that sanctifies the offering. Hebrews repeatedly asserts that the sacrifice of Jesus surpassed the Mosaic system because it dealt with a person's conscience, not with ritual offerings, plainly asserting that "it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins" (Heb 10:4). While we respect the type implicit in shed blood, we need to look at it through the lens of Hebrews. After quoting from Psalm 40, "sacrifice and burnt offering I have not desired," the writer tells us it is all about our will. Jesus sacrificed his will, and we must do so also.

After Cain murders his brother, God tells him, "When you till the ground it shall *no longer* yield to you its strength" (4:12). This, from ground that God has cursed for Adam's sin, implies that Cain did well in his agricultural endeavors. Ideally, Cain would have seen God's goodness and returned "a sacrifice of thanksgiving" (Psa 50:14). From the abundance of crops that he had at his disposal, Cain could have made an offering of true thanksgiving to him who provides all.

In our day we live in the hope and grace of God without having any blood rituals. Most of us have never seen an animal slaughtered. We only need to recognize that we must sacrifice our will that God's will might live in us; this is the shed blood that sanctifies us (Heb 10: 9-10).

Respect and Rejection

"And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: But unto Cain and to his offering, he had not respect" (Gen 4:4-5 KJV). God accepts Abel's offering, which represents an act of self-sacrifice. It costs him dearly to bring his gift to the altar. Cain's indifference, or possibly even worse, his denigration of sacrificial protocol, gives God nothing to respect, and that is what the LORD gives back to Cain, a lack of respect ("regard," RSV; "favor," NIV). However, the text goes beyond the respect and rejection of their offerings, to the core of the person. God respects Abel and his offering and has no respect for Cain or his offering. God is judging and he is showing us his judgment. He is rejecting Cain as a person.

We are not talking here about whether God loves Cain, but he is making a judgment upon Cain. In terse Genesis fashion, we learn that Cain's offering not only represents his indifference, but it also represents a reprehensible form of religion. Cain does not have a character flaw; he is a flawed character. This is divine judgment at its rawest; it is that assessment of the identity of a person. There are only two kinds of people in the world, those on the right hand and those on the left, those who are God's people and those who aren't. Even if we don't know who they are, God does, and sometimes he reveals that to us. Cain is rejected.

How God manifests this distinction is left unstated; the usual supposition is that fire from heaven consumed Abel's offering, but not Cain's. God did use this method later (Lev 9:24, 1 Kings 18:38), and it's a good guess that he uses it here, too. Almost certainly the statement that the brothers "brought their offerings to *yhwh*" implies that they came to the east portal of Eden where the cherubim were, for this would be the place where God would meet with them. The nature of their gifts requires an altar where the two brothers came to lay their offerings. A consuming fire from the flaming sword of the cherubim seems an apt sign of divine approval. One wonders how many times Cain witnessed the differential incineration but failed to get the point of it all.

God Encourages Cain

Cain knows that his offering is rejected while his brother's is accepted. Cain also knows that as the child of promise he holds the favored position of the two. Instead of learning from this incident, he falls prey to his emotions and goes into a state of deep despair, anger, and jealousy. He begins to hate his brother, and feels detached from God. The verb used to indicate his emotional state comes from a root that means "to burn," and is usually translated as someone's anger being kindled or waxing hot, such as Moses when he descended from Sinai only to be greeted by the sounds of the idolatrous Israelite congregation (Exod 32:10,11,19). Literally, the meaning is something like "anger was kindled in Cain." Alter's translation has "incensed," and Moffatt's "furious," indicative of the intensity the verb can show.³ His mood is revealed by the not so

3 The JPS has "distressed" and Sarna's comment (op. cit, p. 33) claims that in this construction the word should be understood as connoting depression, not anger. He gives no supporting references. Anger makes more sense in the context, especially given

metaphorical phrase, his “countenance (face) fallen.”

Despite all this, God speaks to Cain, perhaps through the cherubim. It is not too late for Cain to turn his life around. First, God responds empathically, not rebuking him, but rather acknowledging his anger and downcast countenance, repeating the key words: “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?”⁴ God’s simple offer to Cain is “do right, and you will be accepted.” The text again emphasizes the person, not just the act. It is not Cain’s sacrifice that will be accepted, but Cain himself. Doing right is left unspecified, but it must go beyond what he has done. God knows where Cain’s heart is, and evidently Cain does too. After God acknowledges and reflects Cain’s emotional state, he directly challenges Cain to do the right thing.

God’s offer then moves from the straightforward to the metaphorical. He tells Cain that if he does not do well, then sin will crouch like an animal at the door. (Alter realistically inserts “tent-flap” here.) Cain must rule over his desire. The allusion to Eve is pointed; the phrase uses the same words as in 3:16 for “desire” and “rule.” God is asking Cain to reflect on his mother’s experience; she survived her downfall and now Cain must buckle down and do right. If he does, it will go well with him and God will accept him and his offering. If he does not, then he will fall prey to sin, as if sin were a predatory animal crouching nearby. This word is almost always used elsewhere with animals, but not always predators, as the subject. It is also used figuratively, as in Psalm 23:2 “he makes me to *lie down* in green pastures.” Here in Genesis 4, the idea is that doing right is preventative of a life of sin, but in the absence of a life given to doing good, sin will make an easy prey of Cain.

It is not too late for Cain to repent and be accepted. Likewise, if it is not too late for Cain to repent and go right, it is possible that Abel can go bad. The lesson for us is that there is no guarantee in this life that our faith today will be our faith tomorrow. Never give up, and never think you have it made. The former error denies the grace of God and the latter

its straightforward use in verse 6 and in all other uses of the verb in Scripture. Cain was doubtless distressed and unhappy about the proceedings, as is reflected in the phrase “countenance fallen,” but the word used here indicates anger as the primary emotion.

4 Possibly because it is almost a verbatim repetition of Cain’s status as described in the last sentence of verse 5, the expected chiasmus is missing here, which would have been angry-countenance fallen-countenance fallen-angry. There is, however, another chiasmus just above, with a sub-repetition in vv. 4b-5a: respect-Abel-offering-Cain-offering-respect.

betrays a life of faith.

At this point, you should be hopeful for a positive outcome for Cain. At the worst, you will hardly be prepared for the tragic next act.

Children of God or Children of the Devil
(1 John 3:7-10 NIV)

Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. The one who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.

The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work.

No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God's seed remains in them; they cannot go on sinning, because they have been born of God.

This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not God's child, nor is anyone who does not love their brother and sister.

STUDY 47

Fratricide

The third act of the drama of Cain and Abel culminates in the murder of Abel and exile of Cain (Gen 4:8-16).

God was not unaware that man would sin and, being subjected to death, would propagate mortals destined to die; and that these mortals would go so far in the monstrosity of sin that even the beasts without power of rational choice, that had been created in numbers from the waters and the earth, would live more securely and peacefully among their own kind than men—even though the human race had been given a single progenitor for the very purpose of promoting harmony.¹

AUGUSTINE WANTS US to consider all murder as fratricide, for all of us are ultimately traceable to Eve. The relationship of Cain and Abel is not distant and abstract, but immediate and real, for both men literally spring from Eve's womb. What went wrong with Cain, that after hearing God's invitation to do good, he chooses the vilest possible behavior against his brother? With some hints from the immediate text and the New Testament commentary on the lives of the two brothers, we can reconstruct a plausible script.

Abel Was His Brother's Keeper

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Cain's infamous reply when God questions him concerning his slain brother smacks of sarcasm and suggests an ellipsis—"as he thought he was." We know from the epistle to the Hebrews that Abel operates at a higher spiritual plane than Cain, even though as the child of promise Cain should have been the spiritual leader. By

1 Augustine, *City of God* translated by Gerald G. Walsh et al (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1958), p. 262 (XII:23).

bringing offerings both for himself and for Cain, Abel tries to be his brother's keeper. Abel tries to teach Cain a better way, but Cain, relying on his primogeniture, rebuffs his younger brother at first, and then becomes outwardly hostile towards him. His anger builds to rage and then to murder. Then, when God asks him about his brother's whereabouts, he retorts that *he* is not *his* brother's keeper, whereas Abel has tried to be his.

Another detail that helps fill out the story comes in verse 12. Part of Cain's punishment is that the ground will no longer yield its strength when he tills it. This implies that despite having been cursed, the ground is still relatively fertile. Cain brings a middling offering although he is a successful grower, well able to bring a better offering than he does.

This fits well with yet another implication that comes from the treasury of commentary on early Genesis, 1 John. The one explicit mention of Cain and Abel is the entry key into John's teaching on Genesis. The lattice of John's repeated and interspersed themes and theme phrases reveals additional information for our speculative reconstruction. Let's look at the whole paragraph regarding Cain and Abel:

For this is the message which you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, and not be like Cain who was of the evil one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not wonder, brethren, that the world hates you. We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love remains in death. Any one who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But if any one has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth. (1 John 3:11-18 RSV)

Logically, the reason for the murder, that his own deeds were evil and his brother's righteous, doesn't make sense, but from a human perspective it makes perfect sense. Evil people harm good people. It's not a reason; it's a feature of human depravity. John exhorts us to love one another, and that means loving people who are evil.

In the above passage, John gives a practical example of how to love others. If you have the world's goods but close your heart against someone in need, you do not have the love of God within you. And if you don't love, you hate, and if you hate, you're as bad as Cain the murderer. This is strong language!

Follow the sequence, and link this practical example back to Cain and Abel. Cain, as a successful crop farmer, has the world's goods, and you can postulate that Abel his brother probably has a minimal flock. Following John's interpretation, Abel is the brother in need, yet he is the one who offers for both of them. When he brings his offerings, it really puts a dent in his flock. Abel makes true self-sacrifice, and even more so to tend to his brother's spiritual needs as well. This manifests Abel's righteous deeds and righteous character.

Put all the pieces together: Cain has material abundance, but pays lip-service to God and keeps his ritual religion. He thinks that as the promised seed, he is good enough. Abel, though, is abundant in spiritual insight, and acts on behalf of his brother, even though his brother contemns Abel's approaches. Cain closes his heart to Abel when Abel opens his heart to Cain. Cain repays good with evil, while Abel never falters in his love, hoping that eventually Cain will repent. Real people, real issues, real emotions, real lessons.

Cain's Anger Boils Over

The first part of verse 8 has an apparent lacuna (gap in the text), recording merely, "Cain spoke to Abel his brother . . . and when they were in the field." The Septuagint and some other ancient versions supply what is apparently missing, "and said, 'Let us go out to the field.'" We don't know when or where Cain speaks to Abel, or what he says, but they do end up in the field, and that's where Cain rises up against his brother² and slays him. The fact that Cain first speaks with Abel points to premeditated murder. Cain's anger and jealousy completely undo his moral reasoning, and he bares all the ungodliness resident in a human being. Presumably, he then attempts to hide the body by burying it. Hence God's call—not "Where is Abel?" but "Where is Abel your brother?" Even in death, Abel remains his brother.

2 The text emphasizes the word "brother" here, using it five times in verses 8 to 11.

Despite Cain's monstrous deed, God does not condemn him, but gives him the same opportunity to confess and repent that he gave Adam and Eve. This time, however, no acknowledgement of sin is forthcoming. Cain can acknowledge his sin by saying, "I became angry and jealous and I hated my brother and I killed him and I buried him in the wadi." You know what God would do: he would forgive Cain. Cain has none of it. Either he refuses to believe that God will forgive such a heinous crime, or he thinks that somehow he can hide from God (he certainly should have learned the folly of *that* from his parents), or he is in such a state of fury he doesn't care anymore what happens.

God asks Cain a second question. This one is rhetorical and he gives Cain no chance to answer. Instead, God answers for him and tells him he has murdered his brother, as evidenced by Abel's blood. Cain has tried to cover the crime, but no one can hide from God and no one can hide their deeds from God.

The most pitiable attempt at hiding from God is to deny he exists. Cain, however, is not an atheist; he is a religious man who just recently has offered to his God. Now he's trying to believe that God doesn't notice what he does. This is indeed pathetic, but rather than castigate Cain, look into your own heart.

Abel Finally Speaks

Scripture records no words of Abel. This silence becomes the basis for some remarkable teachings, playing on the fact Abel was a doer of the word who made no claims about his piety. Jesus refers to Abel's martyrdom (Matt 23:34-35 and Luke 11:49-51), and the letter to the Hebrews has another pair of references (11:4, 12:24). Finally, there's a subtle witness to Abel's tacit righteousness woven into the fabric of 1 John.

The first entry is here in verse 10, "the voice of your brother's bloods cries from the ground." As the KJV margin notes, blood is plural (also in v. 11), as is sometimes the case in references to shed blood.³ Abel, who never gave voice during his life, now speaks from the ground, testifying to his death and to Cain as the cause of his death.

3 Collins (op. cit., p. 193) says the plural is "typically used for shed blood." Sarna, op.cit., p. 34, notes that the plural is "a usage that, with rare exceptions, appears in a context of bloodshed or bloodguilt." This is true, but not the converse; some references to bloodshed (e.g., Gen 9:6) use the singular. The plural here, where a singular could have been used, reinforces Abel's plural sacrifices.

The mention of Abel's blood implies that Cain kills his brother by cutting his throat with a knife and letting him bleed to death, mocking Abel's sacrifices. This is the blood that Jesus refers to when he inculcates the Pharisees of the same perfidy as Cain: "that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed on earth, from the blood of innocent Abel to the blood of Zechariah the son of Berachiah, whom you murdered between the sanctuary and the altar" (Matt 23:35 RSV). Abel is called a prophet (Luke 11:50-51) whose blood "spoke" when he could not, incriminating not only Cain, but all those who work evil against God's servants.

The letter to the Hebrews also refers to Abel's silent faith and righteousness. His citation in the catalog of the faithful reads thus:

By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through the which he received approval as righteous, God bearing witness by accepting his gifts; he died, but through his faith *he is still speaking*. (Heb 11:4 RSV, italics added)

Abel never did speak, yet ironically "he is still speaking" to us of faith, of diligence, and of love (in offering for his brother). The writer alludes to the piety of Abel, noting that the blood of Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, "speaks more graciously than the blood of Abel" (Heb 12:24 RSV). Here the blood of Jesus is not contrasted with the ineffective blood of the Mosaic sacrifices, but is said to be better than the blood of Abel. Abel, righteous though he was (his brief account in Scripture records nothing negative about him), was not the perfect offering who conquered sin in himself. Righteous Abel died at the hand of his brother; this qualifies him as being a type of the perfect man Jesus.

John's first epistle has a subtle but telling point about Abel's righteous deeds and righteous attitude. John explicitly refers to Cain in 3:12, and by a chain of key words implicitly refers to the two brothers elsewhere. Cain and Abel illustrate the two opposing ways of life he had previously referred to as light versus dark (e.g., 1:6-7) or children of God versus children of the devil (3:10).⁴ The reference to Cain and Abel in 3:12 links Cain's murder to hate. "Not loving" is mixed in, so that not loving = hating = murder.

⁴ Reading 1 John is not like reading one of Paul's epistles; the logic and evidence do not move along linearly. John uses key words and phrases arranged in a network of ideas so that the reader can move forward or backward just as easily to tie together the pattern of thought.

Both ideas appear in 2:9-10: “He who says he is in the light and hates his brother is in the darkness still. He who loves his brother abides in the light, and in it there is no cause for stumbling” (RSV). This context adds another key word to the melange, “light,” drawing on 1:6-7:

If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not live according to the truth; but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin. (RSV)

The last passage then links directly, by introducing the word “sin,” to the next three verses (8-10) about confession versus denial of sin. Study 38 (under the heading “Testimony of 1 John 1:8-10”) discussed this regarding Adam and Eve’s confession and Cain’s denial. Verse 9 also reflects Abel’s attitude in recognizing a need for forgiveness.⁵

Continuing this expository strategy, you can see the account of Cain and Abel sprinkled throughout 1 John. Starting in 1:6-7 it is Cain who claimed to have fellowship with God (he did bring his offering), but who lived a lie and walked in darkness. Abel received forgiveness, walked with God, and had true fellowship with him. In 2:9, it is Cain who claimed to be in the light (again, he believed himself religious) but hated his brother and remained in darkness. Abel, who loved his brother, abided in the light. Read Cain again in 2:15, a lover of the things of the world, as evidenced by 3:17. On the other hand, every verse that speaks of loving God or loving one’s fellow human reflects the life of Abel.

As Table 15 (p. 327) shows, 1 John has a series of “if we say such and such” verses coupled with “but if we do” verses (1:6-7, 8-10; 2:4-6; 2:9-10). The “if we say” verses are all negative and can be read as comments on Cain. The positive verses, in which we see Abel, are all action statements; not a one of them starts with “if we say.”

Righteousness is shown by its acts and consistent lifestyle. You cannot love God if you hate someone. Abel, in one sense made the same “claim” as Cain in that they both brought offerings, but Cain hated his brother in his heart. Abel, who said not a word in his brief appearance in Scripture, now appears here in 1 John in this oblique way, speaking through his righteous life. “Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth”(1 John 3:18).

⁵ This contrast is taken up again in the following study.

Cain and Abel in John 8

The numerous connections between 1 John and John's gospel suggest that John wrote the epistle as a supplemental exhortation to accompany the gospel. Now, let's apply this background to the contentious discussion between Jesus and the Pharisees recorded in John 8:12-59. This dialogue has so many allusions to Genesis 4 that I consider it a reenactment of the exchange between Cain and Abel just before the slaying. Imagine Jesus in the role of righteous Abel trying to enlighten Cain, played by the Pharisees.

The confrontation begins after Jesus asserts that he is the light of the world, and whoever follows him will not walk in darkness. This takes you to 1 John 2:10: "He who loves his brother abides in the light and in it there is no cause for stumbling" (RSV). Imagine Abel demonstrating his love for Cain by offering on his behalf, only to be rebuffed. Cain touts his status as firstborn and the chosen seed; compare this to the Pharisees saying that they have Abraham as their father. Abel replies that anyone who continues in sin is a slave to sin, and that Cain will die in his sins unless he accepts Abel's ministry. Compare this to God's statement to Cain, that sin is crouching at the door and he must master it (or it will master him, implied). Jesus (v. 18) says that the Father bears witness to him; this matches up with God accepting Abel's sacrifice, which is all too apparent a witness to Cain. The contention rises, and eventually Cain's resentment grows so heated he slays Abel. It's all in John 8, except at the end the Pharisees only "pick up stones to throw at him." They do not, at this point, succeed in their vicious work against the Son of God, because his hour has not yet come.

God Curses Cain

When Cain does not repent, God pronounces judgment. Cain, in contrast to Adam, receives the curse directly. The ground (*adamah*), which he has cultivated with some success, will no longer yield its strength. Moreover, Cain won't be working one piece of ground as any permanent farm, for God exiles him to a fugitive's life. In so doing, God effectively cancels Cain's source of wealth. His life of stability and relative abundance is over. Now he will be an exile.

Cain's enigmatic statement in verse 13 reflects his inability to accept grace. Either he is saying his sin too great to be forgiven, or his punishment is greater than he can bear. Cassuto⁶ insists on the former, but Alter, KJV, RSV, NIV, and JPS all translate in favor of the latter. Collins wonders if the ambiguity is intentional, so that "the competent reader, in resolving the ambiguity, would see from several angles the tragedy of Cain."⁷

This ambiguity comes from the inherently flexible meaning of the Hebrew words. The word translated "sin" can also mean "the punishment for sin." The verb used for "bear" has a general meaning of "to lift up, carry," and a technical meaning to denote forgiveness (via the notion of bearing away). The meaning of this text is hard to sort out, but I like Collins' suggestion that the ambiguity might be intended. Cain likely harbored both thoughts, but neither was true. No sin is too great for God to forgive, and Cain did bear his iniquity, as we find him later settling in a city and raising a family.

Again we return to 1 John for comment, this time to 4:18-21:

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love. We love, because he first loved us. If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. (RSV)

John has Cain and Abel in mind again. The new information in this passage is Cain's fear, consistent with Gen. 4:14. People who are afraid of God rely on works, not grace. Such people are afraid they have not done enough good works, or that their sins are counted up and too weighty to offset their good deeds. Either that, or they smugly believe that they have earned God's merit. Cain prefigures the Pharisees in both his murder of God's chosen son and in his approach to worship. He thinks he is good enough and rejects Abel's work on his behalf. Cain does not really love God, despite his religious front. He lives in fear of God, but not reverential awe. He has no love to cast out fear, so God casts him out. He is a liar in the sense that his outwardly religious life is a lie.

Listen to this writer from the late nineteenth century:

6 Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

7 Collins, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

Cain, then, is the Jew, the formal worshiper of God, bringing the work of his hands, the fruit of his own toil, not doubting that it ought to be accepted of God. Not irreligious, as men would say, he ignores the breach that sin had caused between man and his Creator, but of which the very toil whose fruit he brought was witness. So coming, he is necessarily rejected of God; and such is Pharisaism, of whatever grade or time. Just persons, having no need of repentance; diligent elder sons, serving the Father, but without getting so much as a kid to make merry with their friends; self-satisfied legalists, ignorant of God and grace; such is the Lord's picture of a generation of which Cain was prototype and father.⁸

Cain's Exile

Cain is aware that his livelihood as a crop farmer is gone, and he fears for his life. As a murderer, he has a valid fear of someone avenging his brother's death. These avengers, of course, would have to be close relatives, perhaps not even born at the time; all we know is that Adam had other sons and daughters (Gen 5:4). Cain believes in a wrathful God who cannot forgive, who drives him from his presence. Cain is sure that he too will be slain, and uses the same word "slay" that denotes what he did to his brother.

God does not want Cain dead. He wants Cain to live so that someday he might yet repent. He therefore sets a sign upon Cain that will prevent an act of vengeance upon him. What the sign or mark might be is immaterial, but do read it in contrast to the coats of skin that marked Adam and Eve's forgiveness. Cain is not forgiven; he is punished, and no one else besides God is to exact punishment upon him. Thus Cain departs, leaving like his parents had, to the east. However, there's a huge difference: Cain goes "away from the presence of the LORD," unquestionably referring to the altar at the east portal of Eden. The text says nothing about a way back, such as Adam and Eve had. For him, no cherubim keep a way of return. Cain leaves, unforgiven, exiled, estranged, marked, a fugitive, a wanderer, a derelict who no longer has access even to the God whose worship he feigned.

⁸ F.W. Grant, *Genesis in the Light of the New Testament* (New York: A.C. Gaebelein, 1887), p. 55.

Adam and Eve are thus bereft of two sons. Abel is dead, asleep in Christ until the resurrection of the righteous (Heb 11:4, 39-40). Adam sinned and brought death into the world (Rom 5:12), but the curse of death is first visited on his son Abel, righteous Abel as Scripture memorializes him. Abel, the first person to die, has no recorded sin and dies unjustly, a martyr's death.

Adam and Eve once regarded Cain as the savior who would slay the serpent and restore their access to the garden. Instead he slew his righteous brother. In his exile he departs for the land of Nod, which means "wandering."⁹ We know not what becomes of his spiritual life; Scripture records only his lineage. Cain walks out of the Bible as a tragic figure with an unknown future.

Table 15. Cain and Abel in 1 John

There are numerous hidden references to Cain and Abel in 1 John. The table on the right shows that passages referring to Cain are all in the form of claims not supported by consistent behavior. On the other hand, positive behaviors have no claims of piety; the works speak for themselves. Abel did not speak in Scripture, so his actions speak of his righteousness. References to Abel are in italics. *References to Abel are in italics.*

9 Moffatt quaintly but accurately offers a parenthetical "Wanderland."

I John	Claim or Action	Content of Claim/Action	Reality	Outcome
1:6	If we claim	to have fellowship with him	yet walk in darkness	we lie and do not live by the truth
1:7	<i>But if we walk in the light</i>	<i>as he is in the light</i>		<i>we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin</i>
1:8	If we claim	to be without sin		we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us
1:9	<i>If we confess our sins</i>			<i>he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness</i>
1:10	If we claim	we have not sinned		we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives
2:1	<i>But if anyone does sin</i>			<i>we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One</i>
2:4	The man who says	I know him	but does not do what he commands	is a liar, and the truth is not in him
2:5	<i>But if anyone obeys his word</i>	<i>God's love is truly made complete in him</i>		<i>this is how we know we are in him</i>
2:6	Whoever claims	to live in him	must walk	as Jesus did
2:9	Anyone who claims	to be in the light	but hates his brother	is still in darkness
2:10	<i>Whoever loves his brother</i>			<i>lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble</i>
2:11	But whoever hates his brother			is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness; he does not know where he is going, because the darkness has blinded him
4:20	If anyone says	I love God	yet hates his brother	he is a liar

STUDY 48

Adam and Cain

Genesis 3 and 4 form one literary unit to exemplify the two great commandments, love of God and love of neighbor.

CAIN AND ABEL form an obvious contrasting pair from the same generation, much like Jacob and Esau. Somewhat less obvious are the contrasts between Cain and his father Adam. While their lives teach much individually, taking them as a literary pair adds another level of Bible instruction. Together, they represent the two great commandments, but in a negative fashion. Adam and Cain violate, respectively, love of God and love of neighbor. Adam, however, finds forgiveness and grace; not so Cain.

Contrasts and Comparisons

Table 16 offers a summary of the comparison, explained below.

1. The two men represent two kinds of “first” person.
2. Both are “tillers of the ground.” The same word is used in 2:15, 3:23, 4:2, and 4:12.
3. God makes Adam and Eve of the same flesh so they can spiritually strengthen each other, but it doesn’t work out that way. Cain takes a wife after his expulsion, and the two of them establish their lot not in Eden, but in a city named after their son.
4. Adam is the namer of Eve, “the mother of all living.” Eve in turn names Cain “maker.”
5. The two episodes center on, respectively, the two great commandments: love God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind, and love your neighbor as yourself (Matt 22:37-39). If there were

Table 16. Adam and Cain

	ADAM	CAIN
1	first person	first person born
2	tilled the ground	tilled the ground
3	God made a wife for him before his sin	took a wife after his sin
4	named Eve	named by Eve
5	violated the love of God	violated the love of neighbor
6	seemingly trivial offense	heinous crime
7	hid from God after he sinned	feared that God would hide from him
8	“Where are you?”	“Where is your Abel your brother?”
9	confessed his sin	denied his sin
10	“cursed is the ground because of you”	“cursed are you from the ground”
11	clothed by God	marked by God
12	driven out of Eden to till the ground	driven away from the ground
13	dwelt east of Eden	dwelt farther east of Eden
14	lineage continues to Jesus, the “last Adam”	lineage continues to another murderer, Lamech, the “last Cain”

nothing else to compare between these two narratives, this alone would connect them as a designed literary unit. Both of these commandments are put to the test. Adam fails but is forgiven. Abel demonstrates love of neighbor while Cain is a hater and a murderer. The two great commandments come together in 1 John 4:20-21:

If any one says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar, for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen. And this commandment we have from him, that he who loves God should love his brother also. (RSV)

6. Adam commits a trivial offense—eating one fruit from an abundant garden. No one gets hurt. The underlying issue is that Adam and Eve do not love God with all their heart. God commanded Adam not to eat, and that should have been the end of it. To counter God's explicit directive is as serious as any transgression. This would have been a capital offense if not for God's grace in accepting Adam's confession. Cain's crime, oddly, broke no stated law. At this point in the Bible there is no recorded "You shall not kill," and no stated punishment for murder. Cain violates an inherent moral law. He does the greatest of evil, but still can find forgiveness. The two offenses together show that any sin is sin. There are no degrees of sin, but our actions do lead to different consequences.
7. Adam and Eve attempt to hide from God after they realize the gravity of their situation. In response to his banishment, Cain cries that he will be hidden from God's face (4:14). These are different, but synonymous words.
8. The two questions are another clear link unifying the two narratives. God gives both men the opportunity to acknowledge their sin and begin the process of redemption. The questions are framed nearly identically to show that God treats all sin the same. Cain is not disqualified because of his egregious crime.
9. Here is the biggest contrast between Adam and Cain. The key is in 1 John 1:8-10, unquestionably written with Adam and Cain in mind. In this passage, two denials of sin frame one statement of confession and forgiveness. The small difference between verses 8 and 10 reflects the two domains of sin addressed by confession: who we are and what we do. Verse 8 addresses the former, "if we say we have no sin," and verse 10 the latter, "if we say we have not sinned." Cain overtly denies that he sinned, but how does he deny the fact that he has no sin? Cain's indifferent offering says he has no need of repentance because he is good enough. He shows no sense

that he needs personal redemption. You can't begin to have a relationship with God until you realize that you are a hopeless sinner, and apparently Cain lacks that realization. Verse 9 addresses both issues, "if we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (RSV).

10. The two curses represent two aspects of God's judgment. They are a contrasting pair, although they look similar. The curse on the ground is a consequence of Adam's sin; he will still till the ground, but because he had become unfruitful to God, the ground will now become unfruitful to him. This is a hard lesson, but it is not technically a punishment for Adam's sin (Study 40). Cain's judgment, on the other hand, is direct punishment. He is personally cursed, and the curse comes from the ground, the source of his wealth and livelihood.
11. God clothes Adam and Eve, but puts a mark or sign on Cain. Adam's covering represents a pardon of his offense, whereas Cain's sign represents his abiding guilt. Being kept alive is not a pardon; it is to ensure that no one usurps God's prerogative of judgment on Cain. The word customarily translated "mark" is the word used in 1:14 to describe the role of the heavenly bodies, "let them be for signs." What does God put on Cain? This is a great Bible mystery, fortunately of little import. I opt for some kind of aura or light, such as accompanied Moses (Exod 34:30).
12. The verb "driven" is the same in both verses (3:24 and 4:13), another link between the narratives.
13. Adam and Eve depart Eden but stay in the vicinity of the east gate, as that is where their sons bring their offerings. They live just east of Eden, but when Cain is driven away, he goes yet farther east. Most importantly, he leaves the presence of the LORD. Cain's new locale, in Nod, is far enough away to warrant a new place name.
14. Genesis lacks a complete list of Adam's children, but lists his lineage through Seth and on to Noah in Genesis 5. Luke's genealogy reaches all the way back to Adam, "the son of God" (Luke 3:38). Thus Jesus is the "last Adam," as he descends from Adam and reverses all the ills initiated by Adam's sin (Rom 5:12-19, 1 Cor 15:45-47). Cain's genealogy continues to Lamech, whom we can style the

“last Cain,” as he also is a murderer. Presumably all of Cain’s lineage perish in the Flood, although we do not know the ancestry of Noah’s sons’ wives.

The above verbal and thematic links show that the two accounts were written to be read as one. Adam’s story becomes clearer in light of Cain’s; together they tell a fuller story of sin and redemption than either tells by itself. One important lesson emerges from these accounts: you don’t have any choice whether or not you are in the lineage of Adam, but you can make the choice of being either in the line of Cain or in the line of Abel.

STUDY 49

The Lines of Cain and Seth

After Cain is expelled he finds a wife and has children. A small genealogy lists his descendants (Gen 4:17-22). This section contrasts with the lineage of Adam and Eve through Seth.

CAIN'S EXILE SEEMS a natural ending for his account, but the narrative continues with his lineage. Referring back to Study 5, you recall that the lineage (or genealogy) of Cain precedes the lineage of Seth, because Seth's genealogy continues the narrative to Noah and beyond. The lineage of Cain serves as the antithesis of the main concern, the lineage of Seth.

Cain's descendants are characterized by their technological, agricultural, and cultural accomplishments. Unfortunately, the capstone on this line is Lamech, whose contribution to society consists of murder.

Cain's Descendants

After Cain departs from the presence of the LORD, he abandons his agricultural pursuits and finds a wife. She conceives and gives birth to Enoch, whose name becomes the name of the first city in Scripture. This "city" is certainly just a handful of dwellings, but it is, relatively speaking, a city. Paralleling 4:2, which gives the occupations of Cain and Abel, Enoch is the subject of the sentence "he builded a city," though Cain names it.¹

Nothing is said of Cain's descendants until the sixth generation from Adam—Lamech, the "last Cain." Lamech's claim to infamy is that he too

1 Cassuto, *op. cit.*, pp. 228-230. He also notes that *built a city* better reads as *who became a city-builder*. "The Bible, it seems, does not intend to record a single event—the fact that once Enoch built a city—but to tell us what his occupation was over a long period, thus paralleling the earlier statement about the work of Cain and Abel, and the information given subsequently about the pursuits of the three sons of Lamech." The Hebrew construction confirms Cassuto's conclusion.

is a slayer. Some of his children receive credit for starting their trades: Jabal, a nomadic herdsman (the word can include sheep, cattle, and oxen), Jubal, a musician and doubtless also a maker of musical instruments, and their half-brother Tubal-Cain, who developed the metalworking trades.

The lineage of Seth in the next chapter has no parallels to these innovators. It is sometimes suggested that Cain's descendants are notable only for their worldly endeavors, but Seth's descendants have the spiritual bent. That's only slightly true. Enoch, the seventh from Adam (including Adam), walks with God (Gen 5:22) and prophesies (Jude 14). There's Noah, too, but in Noah's generation the earth is so filled with evil and corruption that God needs to wipe it clean and start over. God spares only righteous Noah and his small extended family, implying that the rest of the line of Seth is just like everyone else.

The Enoch of Noah's line (who prophesies) comes in the same generation as the Lamech of Cain's line, so they may be contemporaries. They make a unique contrasting pair as the only two of their lineages to have any words recorded. With this in mind, Jude's synopsis of Enoch's prophecy is all the more telling: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15 NIV). While Enoch speaks for the LORD, Lamech boasts of his murdering.

Seth, Enosh, and Revival

Adam and Eve have other children (Gen 5:4); hence Cain finds a wife and fears an avenger. The text singles out Seth because he is the one born after the death of Abel and the one through whom Adam's line will continue. With Abel dead and Cain in exile, Seth becomes his parents' new child of destiny. The Bible says nothing about Seth's life, but maybe he was a great spiritual leader. It's possible that the statement, "at that time men began to call on the name of the LORD," stated right after the birth of his son Enosh, reflects on his piety and reformational endeavors. That is only speculation, because we know nothing of him personally.

Chapter 4 ends the way it starts. Adam knows his wife. Eve gives birth to a son, names the son, and gives a reason for the name. Significant

here is her use of *elohim* rather than *yhwh*. Upon the birth of her firstborn, with great expectation, she exclaims that she has gotten a man-son from, or with the help of, *yhwh*. After the stress of losing both of her sons she retreats from the personal, covenant name of deity to the impersonal *elohim*. This is the designation she used when conversing with the serpent: “God has said.” It seems to signify a regression for her. Not that there is anything wrong with referring to God as *elohim*, but in this context *yhwh* would be expected.

It seems to reflect upon her somber, resigned disposition to detach herself from God. Her remark here, “and she called his name *shet* for God has appointed (*shat*) for me another seed in the place of Abel, for Cain slew him,” depicts her grief. Children born after the death of a sibling or other family tragedy often bear the burden of being the one who will in some way make things right again, and Seth seems to be the prototypical child in this regard.

On the other hand, her use of “seed” for the new child instead of “man,” as she used with Cain, reassures us that she remains faithful to the promise of 3:15, though probably much less certain about how this will work out. Even though Seth now carries the family hopes, she is not so bold as to suggest that he personally will be the savior. You can imagine his protected upbringing, and the anxiety that Adam and Eve must have had over his physical and spiritual welfare.

The text has one further note before launching into Seth’s genealogy. The birth of Enosh is associated with a religious revival, “then men first called on the name of the LORD.”² I think the purpose here is to take us back to the unfinished work of Abel in the worship of *yhwh*. The chapter would not be complete unless we know that even though Abel dies apparently childless, during the time of his nephew Enosh a religious revival occurs. Abel’s heritage of faith again flourishes.

This sentence about revival, the last clause of verse 26, has no subject, and Alter notes that the verb is passive. He thus renders it, “It was then that the name of the LORD was first invoked.”³ Cassuto makes a further refinement by stating that in classical Hebrew the word translated “first” or “began” can, depending on the context, mean “restarted”

2 The use of the divine name *yhwh* is not an anachronism, as many people (Alter included, *op. cit.*, p. 21) allege. See digression at the end of Study 22.

3 Alter, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

or “recommenced.”⁴ Here it would obviously mean the latter, given what we already know about Abel’s worship. More significantly, in the immediate context, it reflects Adam and Eve’s confidence that their line will continue through Seth and Enosh. The revival credited to Seth starts at the birth of his son Enosh (“person,” a near synonym of *adam*) and supplies a hopeful new beginning.

From Adam to Noah . . .

Genesis 5 is the first major genealogical list in Scripture, beginning with, “these are the generations of Adam.” Before it even gets going, it looks back at the beginning, to 1:27, “in the day *elohim* created *adam* in his likeness.” The mention in 5:2 of male and female recognizes the procreative success that the genealogy represents. After the first appearance of these words on Day Six, the text continues with, “and God blessed them, and God said unto them, ‘be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth.’” In this iteration, the specifics—the names and ages—replace the general “fill the earth.”

The line starts with Adam, omits mention of Cain (whose lineage has already been dealt with) and Abel (who apparently had no descendants), and records only Seth, for it is through Seth that the lineage will continue. Only one scion gets listed for each generation all the way down to the tenth generation (including Adam), that of Noah. The genealogy expands to include his three sons, for they will play significant roles in the next section, as heads of the geographical divisions of humanity after the Flood. Lamech, Noah’s father, prophesies that Noah will bring relief: “Out of the ground which the LORD has cursed this one [Noah] shall bring us relief from our work and the toil of our hands” (5:29 RSV). Contrast this saying with the murderous poem of the Lamech in Cain’s lineage (4:23-24).

If the degeneration of fertility and arability parallels the degeneration of civilization (6:5), agriculture has become a desperate endeavor by now. The word for “toil” in 5:29 echoes Adam’s sentencing in 3:17, “in toil you shall eat of it.” The roots of “relief,” “work,” and “toil” in 5:29 show up in the same order in 6:6 as “sorry,” “made,” and “grieved,” again creating a designed link from one section of Genesis to the next.⁵

4 Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

5 Cassuto, *op. cit.*, p. 303. “This is certainly no coincidence.”

... and Beyond

The alteration in genealogical pattern (three descendants of Noah instead of one) in the last verse of the genealogy might lead you to expect that the narrative is about to take a new turn, possibly expanding on the accomplishments of the three. Instead, you read on to learn that the creation so artfully created and meticulously recorded in the first two chapters has become so corrupt that God intends to wipe out every living thing and start afresh with only one pair of each kind of animal.⁶ The sin introduced by Adam and Eve and murderously multiplied by Cain has grown like cancer to strangle God's creation. God will once again cover the earth with water, and bring again a new dry land and a second creation. God starts over, but people are the same, and soon after the Flood they are again at their folly, evil, and pride.

This creation now groans in travail, awaiting the cleansing, healing, and renewal of God's kingdom. Eden will come to earth again to remain forever.

⁶ The ark has one pair each of unclean animals, seven pairs of clean, and equidistant between clean and unclean, four pairs of humans. They have the potential to go either way.

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Acronyms of Versions and Translations Used

ESV	English Standard Version
JPS	Jewish Publication Society Translation
KJV	King James Version
LXX	Septuagint
NASB	New American Standard Bible
NIV	New International Version
NKJV	New King James Version
RSV	Revised Standard Version
RV	Revised Version

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