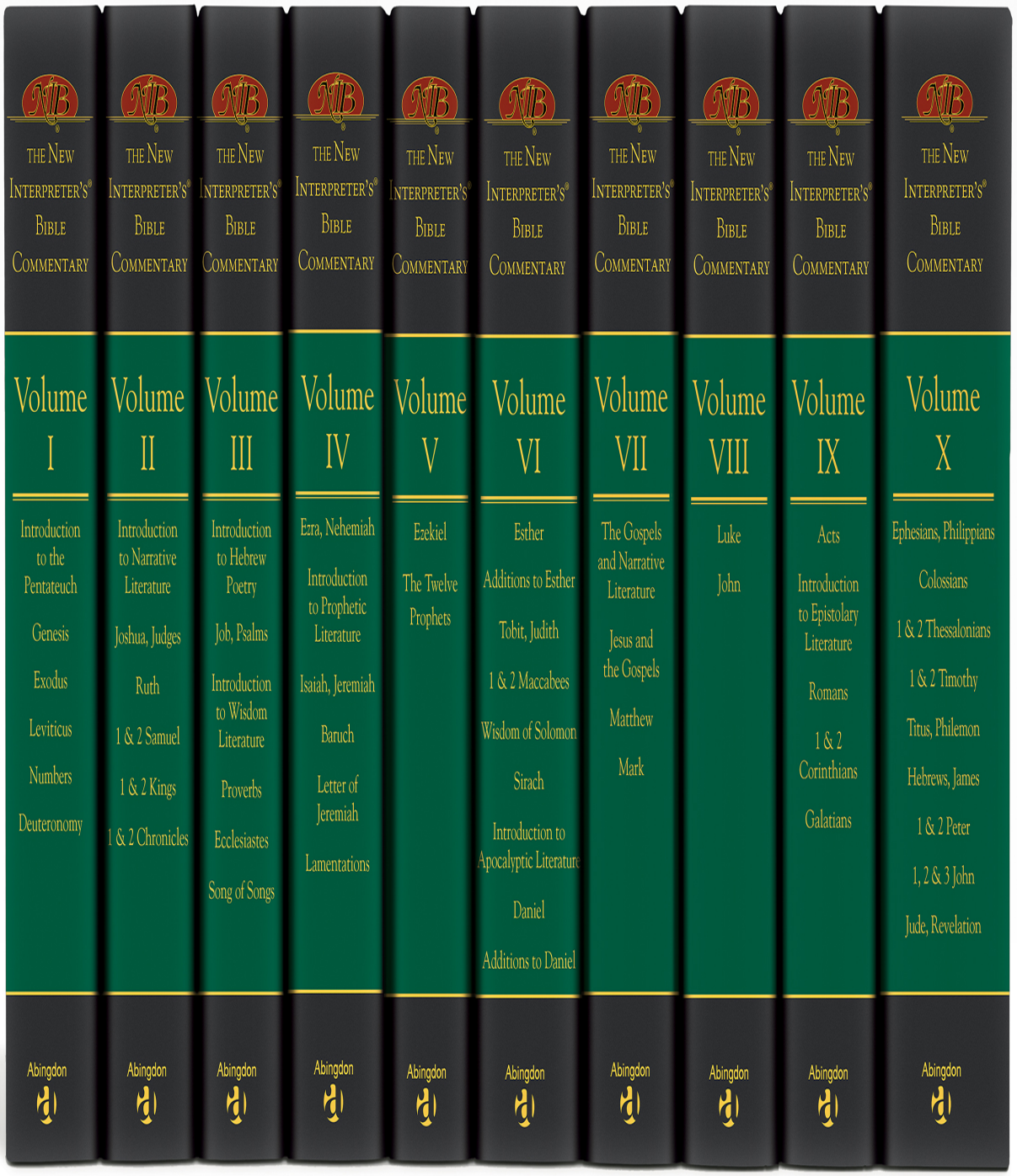
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THE BOOK OF GENESIS

INTRODUCTION, COMMENTARY, AND REFLECTIONS

BY

TERENCE E. FRETHEIM

THE BOOK OF

GENESIS

INTRODUCTION

The book of Genesis stands at the head of the canon. Its range is breathtaking, moving from cosmos to family, from ordered world to reconciled brothers, from the seven days of the creation of the universe to the seventy descendants of Jacob entering the land of their sojourn. Hence, it stands as a monumental challenge to the interpreter.

The canonical placement of Genesis is important for various reasons. Genesis is a book about beginnings, from the beginnings of the universe and various orderings of humankind to the beginnings of the people of Israel. It also witnesses to the beginnings of God's activity in the life of the world. But creation is more than chronology. Genesis stands at the beginning because creation is such a fundamental theological category for the rest of the canon. God's continuing blessing and ordering work at every level is creational. Moreover, only in relationship to the creation can God's subsequent actions in and through Israel be properly understood. The placement of creation demonstrates that God's purposes with Israel are universal in scope. God's work in redemption serves creation, the *entire* creation, since it reclaims a creation that labors under the deep and pervasive effects of sin. Even more, the canonical placement makes clear that God's redemptive work does not occur in a vacuum; it occurs in a context that has been shaped in decisive ways by the life-giving, creative work of God. Redemption can never be understood as *ex nihilo* without denigrating God's gifts given in creation.

THE CRITICAL STUDY OF GENESIS

For more than two hundred years, *source criticism* has provided the predominant literary approach to the study of Genesis and the Pentateuch. In fact, Genesis has often been studied only as part of this larger literary whole. Hence, Genesis is usually seen as a composite work, consisting primarily of three interwoven sources (Yahwist [J], Elohist [E], Priestly [P]), with some texts attributed to other traditions (e.g., chaps. 14 and 49). Genesis thus grew over time, with

these sources gradually brought together by redactors over five hundred years or more, from the United Monarchy to the post-exilic era.

This long-prevailing scholarly consensus has come under sharp challenge from a number of perspectives in the last generation. From within the source-critical perspective, the nature, scope, and dating of the sources have been regular subjects of debate. Few doubt that Genesis consists of traditions from various historical periods, but there is little consensus regarding the way in which they have been brought together into their present form.[1]

I view Genesis as a patchwork quilt of traditions from various periods in Israel's life. The earliest stories date from before the monarchy; over time certain traditions began to coalesce around key figures, such as Abraham and Jacob, and more extensive blocks were gradually built up. The fact that the major sections of Genesis (generally, chaps. 1–11; 12–25; 26–36; 37–50) remain identifiable clusters within a relatively thin, overarching framework sustains this theory. A redactor (probably J) wove these clusters of tradition together into a coherent whole, provided a basic framework (perhaps focused on the ancestral promises), and integrated them with the larger story of the Pentateuch. While J probably worked early in the monarchical period, arguments for a later date for the Yahwist are attractive (not least because of the sophisticated form of its anthropomorphisms). Over the centuries reworkings of this collection took place, drawing on other, as yet unintegrated, traditions (the Elohist may be one such supplementary reworking). One major redaction is to be identified with P (probably during the exile); this redactor drew on materials from a wide variety of sources, older and more recent, and placed a decisive stamp on the entire corpus. It is possible that deuteronomistic redactors worked over this material at a later time, integrating it into a still larger collection with only minor touch-ups.

The purpose of these retellings of the material is not entirely clear and may vary, involving sociopolitical and religious issues. Each reworking made it ever more difficult to discern where the inherited traditions and the retellings begin and end. It is likely, however, that theological and kerygmatic interests come more and more into play, so that finally one must speak of the essential testimonial character of the material, a witness to the complex interrelationships of divine action and human response.[2]

Newer literary approaches have also called into question many of the assumptions and conclusions of the source-critical consensus. These strategies focus on issues of literary criticism rather than literary history, on the texts as they are rather than any history prior to their present shape. Such readers attempt to hear the texts as we now have them and to discern their various rhetorical features as they work together to form a coherent whole. At times, this analysis has been undertaken with an eye to literary parallels in other ancient Near Eastern literature (e.g., the *Gilgamesh Epic*).[3]

The book of Genesis has been one of the most popular workshops for these approaches. Over the last two decades hundreds of articles and sections of books have mined the literary riches of these chapters and unearthed many insights into the ways in which they can be read with greater profit. Yet, it is not so clear how these gains are to be integrated with the more historical approaches. While historical issues continue to be important, this commentary will emphasize literary approaches in order to perceive what makes these texts work.

Literary studies and analyses of the theological movement within these texts have not kept pace with one another. For example, many literary (and other) studies simply work with the assumptions and conclusions of classical theism in the analysis of the theological material the texts present. On the other hand, some studies take pains to treat the theological elements at the same level as any other (e.g., God becomes a character like every other). I will attend to the theological dynamic of the text and recognize its special stature in view of the community of faith that produced it and the canonical place eventually given to it.[4]

1. For a recent survey, see R. N. Whybray, *The Making of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: *JSOT*, 1987); and J. Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch: An Introduction to the First Five Books of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992) 1-30.

2. See W. Brueggemann and H. W. Wolff, *The Vitality of Old Testament Traditions* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982).

3. On new literary approaches, see R. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books, 1981). On extra-biblical parallels, see D. Damrosch, *The Narrative Covenant* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

4. On theology and narrative, see Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus,* Interpretation (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1990) 10-12.

Another lively concern in Genesis studies has to do with ancient Near Eastern parallels (and beyond, possibly even Greece). Since the unearthing of the Mesopotamian accounts of creation and the flood over a century ago, augmented since by numerous discoveries, scholars have devoted considerable attention to discerning possible links with Genesis. While this is true of Genesis as a whole, parallels to chaps. 1–11 have constituted a special focus. Although direct points of dependence do not seem common, it is clear that Israel participated in a comprehensive ancient Near Eastern culture that had considerable impact on its ways of thinking and writing, both in details and with larger themes. Apart from more formal links, such as language, some have tended to view these parallels largely in negative terms. At the same time, Israel's deep dependence upon its cultural context extends even to theological matters (e.g., the understanding of moral order or creation by word) and to the very creation-disruption-flood structure of chaps. 1–11. Interpreters must maintain a fine balance between recognizing such dependence (finally, a witness to the work of the Creator) and Israel's genuinely new and imaginative ideas and formulations.

Feminist scholarship has produced important studies that have influenced this commentary at numerous points. This work has attended particularly to the place of the woman in chaps. 1–3 and the prominent role of women in the ancestral narratives. Phyllis Trible's work, in particular, has had an immense and salutary influence. In addition, anthropological and sociological studies have expanded our knowledge of the issues of kinship and culture.[5] Generally, a proliferation of approaches is elucidating ever new dimensions of these important biblical materials.

LITERARY FORM

There are basically two types of literature in Genesis, narrative and numerative, to use Westermann's language.[6] Poetic pieces are integrated into the narratives as well (e.g., 2:23; 3:14-19; 16:11-12; 25:23; 27:27-29, 39-40; 49:1-27).

1. Narratives. Little consensus has emerged regarding the proper label for these narratives, though *saga* has been used often. The issues in chaps. 1–11 are particularly complex (see below). "Family narrative (story)" emphasizes the family unit as central to these texts, and in a way that has no real parallel elsewhere in the OT. While not historiographical in character and with much imagination used in the telling, the narratives do possess certain features associated with history writing, e.g., a chronological framework and some cumulative and developmental character.[7]

The language of story may be most helpful in determining how these materials functioned for Israel.[8] They are told in such a way that they could become the story of each ensuing generation. The readers could participate in a great, yet often quite hidden, drama of divine action and human response. At this juncture of past story and present reality Israel came to know what it meant to be the people of God. The faith was not fundamentally an idea, but an embodiment, a way of life. The language and experience of faith thus remained concrete and personal. Thus it has the capacity to keep the reader anchored in this world. It does not dissolve into myth, into some mystical world of the gods that suppresses the human or the natural, or some religious world far removed from the secular sphere. By and large, the world reflected in these stories is ordinary, everyday, and familiar, filled with the surprises and joys, the sufferings and the troubles, the complexities and ambiguities known to every community.

At the same time, the story form allows (in a way that history proper does not) an admixture of Israel's story and God's story. But even the latter is seen to be this-worldly, as God works toward the divine purposes in and through less than perfect individuals and world. And God's

5. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 72-143; see also the work of R. Hendel and C. Meyers, listed in the bibliography.

6. C. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984) 6.

7. On the Pentateuch as a historiographical work in comparison with early Greek histories, see the assessment of John van Seters in Blenkinsopp, *The Pentateuch*, 37-42.

8. See T. Fretheim, *Deuteronomic History* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1983) 39-40; R. W. L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992) 130-46; D. Steinmetz, *From Father to Son: Kinship, Conflict and Continuity in Genesis* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1991) 134-55.

story has the ultimate purpose, not of bringing people into some heavenly sphere, but of enabling a transformation of this life.

The capacity of the story to draw one into it in such a way as to encompass the full life of the reader has the effect of overcoming the distance between past story and present reader; the horizons merge. At the same time, readers will encounter that which is often different from their own stories; there are surprises and discontinuities as past and present life stories come into contact with one another. Some hearers may reject the story, but for those who respond positively the story may provide a means of shaping identity (a constitutive function), a mirror for self-identity (a descriptive function), or a model for the life of faith (a paradigmatic function). One may thereby not only become a member of the people of God, but also come to know who one is, and what shape the life of faith ought to take in the world.

The narratives offer an exercise in self-understanding. They become a vehicle through which a new generation can learn its identity once again as the people of Abraham, a people who have trod in his footsteps, who have taken his journey. It is one more retelling of the past, not to find patterns for moral behavior, but to understand who we are as the people of God who have inherited these commands and promises, who have ventured down similar paths. We can thereby see where we have been, who we now are, and the shape of our paths into the future.

2. Genealogies. "Genesis is a book whose plot is genealogy."[9] Israel formulated family trees, often with social and political overtones. As with us, they were concerned about kinship interrelationships and tracking family origins and "pedigrees," especially for important figures. Also similar is the way in which genealogies are woven into family stories. Major portions of seven chapters in Genesis consist of genealogies, an interest evident in other OT texts (e.g., Chronicles) as well as in the NT (see Matthew 1; Luke 1).

The ten תולדות (*tôlēdôt* translated either "genealogy"/"generations" or "account"/"story")—2:4 (heaven and earth); 5:1 (Adam); 6:9 (Noah); 10:1 (Noah's sons); 11:10 (Shem); 11:27 (Terah); 25:12 (Ishmael); 25:19 (Isaac); 36:1, 9 (Esau); 37:2 (Jacob)—constitute a prominent structuring device in Genesis. These Priestly genealogies are supplemented by a few others (e.g., that of Cain, 4:17-26). Genealogies have an enumerative style, but at times they are "broken" by narrative pieces (e.g., 10:8-12). They usually introduce a section, but at times they look both backward and forward (2:4; 37:2). One type of genealogy is linear (one person in each generation, 5:1-32); the other is segmented (multiple lines of descent), characteristic of branches of the family outside the chosen line (table of nations; Ishmael; Esau). Because genealogies cut across the break between chaps. 11 and 12, they witness to the fundamental creational unity of Genesis.

The historical value of the genealogies is much debated, but their function of providing continuity over these chapters probably means that they were understood as some kind of historical anchor for the larger story. Their original setting was the family or tribe, those most interested in such matters, and within which they were often transmitted orally over many generations. They show that every character is kin to every other, a key to Israelite self-identity, especially in times of conflict or dispersion. Hence, Genesis is fundamentally about one big extended family. The genealogies also demonstrate that Israel is truly kin to all the surrounding peoples, a fact that helps to develop the meaning of the people's special role. The genealogies thus are integrally related to the essential concerns of the narratives.

Because genealogies order people into families, and witness to the continued existence of families in spite of much difficulty and dysfunctionality, they fit most fundamentally within a theology of creation (so explicitly in 5:1-2). They present "the steady, ongoing rhythm of events which stamp the course of human existence—birth, length of life, begetting, death" in which both God and human beings participate.[10] Moreover, because the first of the ***tôlēdôt*** includes the nonhuman, genealogies link human and nonhuman into a larger *creational family,* in which every creature is, in effect, kin to every other. Even more, because genealogies also encompass

9. N. Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis," *Semeia* 46 (1989) 41. Generally, see R. Wilson, *Genealogy and History in the Biblical World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977).

10. Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 7.

larger human groupings (10:1-32; 25:12-18), they witness to the range of the divine creative activity in the ordering of the world.

The narratives, on the other hand, "are inherently messy . . . take account of much that is problematic and contingent, all the vagaries of human life . . . pursuing a far less predictable course of surprise and unanticipated events."[11] Naomi Steinberg speaks of genealogies reintroducing equilibrium into such messy family lives, restabilizing them for the next journey into a volatile future. Yet, she shows that this perspective is too simple. Some genealogies also contain elements of disequilibrium, contingency, and open-endedness (see 11:30; 25:19-26; 37:2); hence, the genealogies do not witness so univocally to order and stability as one might initially think.[12] Indeed, most genealogies contain such an unusual element (e.g., 5:24 on Enoch; 5:29; 6:9 on Noah; 10:8-12 on Nimrod). Such features integrate narrative messiness into the very heart of the genealogical order. They show thereby that the genealogies do not witness to a *determined* order of reality. Cain's genealogy (4:17-26) testifies further to this integration; it *intensifies* the contingencies of the prior narratives. Genealogies are finally *insufficient* for ordering purposes; another type of divine activity will be needed in order to reclaim the creation—namely, redemption.

FAITH AND HISTORY IN GENESIS

The book of Genesis does not present the reader with historical narrative, at least in any modern sense. Its primary concerns are theological and kerygmatic. Those responsible for the material as we now have it (and no doubt at other stages in its transmission) were persons of faith concerned to speak or reflect on a word of God to other persons of faith. The voice of a living community of faith resounds through these texts. Rooted in history in this way, Genesis is not socially or historically disinterested; it was written—at each stage of transmission—with the problems and possibilities of a particular audience in view.

Although scholars have a difficult time discerning those audiences, the text is linked to specific times and places. While the latest redactors may well have made the witness of the text more generally available to ongoing communities of faith, the material has not been flattened out into generalities. The most basic shaping of Genesis probably occurred in exile. Traditions in Genesis are consistent with other examples of creation language during this era, as evidenced by Isaiah 40–55, which relates Israel's future to the universal purposes of God. Affirmations of divine faithfulness to ancient promises—a veritable litany in these texts—speak volumes in a time when the future appears to stand in jeopardy. In attending to Israel's ancestral heritage, both in narrative and in genealogy, the authors address sharp issues of communal identity. The various stories of the ancestors often seem to mirror the history of Israel, assisting the exiles in coming to terms with their own past (this will often be noted in the commentary; e.g., the parallels between 12:10-20 and the exodus). These texts spoke a clear word of God to exiled people.

The literary vehicle in and through which this word of God is addressed narrates a story of the past. Although the ancient writers were not concerned with reconstructing a history of this early era, modern scholars have had a great interest in determining the extent to which these texts reflect "what actually happened" (on chaps. 1–11, see below). This task has been made difficult by the nature of the texts themselves as well as by the difficulties of assessing extrabiblical parallels.

Scholarly efforts at historical reconstruction of the ancestral period have had mixed results.[13] A period of some confidence in the basic historicity of these texts within the second millennium BCE has faded in recent years in view of the character of the texts and challenges to the interpretation of putative archaeological evidence. Since the biblical texts underwent a long period of transmission, they reflect aspects of Israel's history all along the way. For example, relationships

11. R. Robinson, "Literary Functions of the Genealogies of Genesis," *CBQ* 48 (1986) 597.

12. Steinberg, "The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis."

13. See a survey in G. Ramsey, *The Quest for the Historical Israel* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 28-43. See also K. McCarter, "The Historical Abraham," *Int* 42 (1988) 341-52.

between these texts and other tribal and genealogical OT materials suggest that various historical realities from both before and after the United Monarchy are reflected in them. Various ancient Near Eastern parallels to patriarchal names, customs, and modes of life have at times been overdrawn; yet they are not finally without historical value, even for a second-millennium dating at some points. While it is not possible to determine whether the women and men of Genesis were actual historical persons, it seems reasonable to claim that the narratives carry some authentic memories of Israel's pre-exodus heritage. At the same time, Israel's valuing of these materials for its own faith and life appears not to have centered on issues of historicity; however, it is likely that Israel thought these traditions derived from pre-exodus times.

The religion of the ancestors reflected in the texts also figures in this discussion about historical background. The religious (and other) practices of these chapters are often distinctive when compared to later Israelite convention.[14] Hence, later Israelites did not simply read their own religious lives back into these texts (though nothing seems to be incompatible with later Yahwism). They preserved some memories of earlier practices, including worship of God under various forms of the name El (see 16:13; 21:33; 33:20; El is the high god in the Canaanite pantheon), referred to as the God of my/our/your father(s), the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. The ancestral God was understood to be a personal deity who accompanied this family on its journeys, providing care and protection. Some traditions understand that Yahweh was a name revealed only at the time of Moses (Exod 3:14-16; Exod 6:2-3) and that El was an earlier name for God (although the OT generally understands El to be an alternate name for Yahweh). The frequent use of Yahweh in Genesis is anachronistic in some ways, but it conveys an important theological conviction—namely, that the God whom the ancestors worshiped under the name El had characteristics common to Yahweh and, in fact, is to be identified with Yahweh.

UNITY, STRUCTURE, AND THEME

It has long been the practice in Genesis study to drive a sharp wedge between chaps. 1–11, the so-called Primeval History (Story), and chaps. 12–50, the Patriarchal (Ancestral) History. More recently, under the impact of literary-critical readings, there has been renewed interest in the integrity of Genesis as a whole.[15]

In some ways this division is appropriate, with chap. 12 marking a new stage in God's relationship with the world. Even those who sharpen this division often note that 12:1-3 is a fulcrum text, linking Abraham with "all the families of the earth." Hence, it has been common to claim that God's choice of Abraham had a universal purpose: to extend God's salvific goals through this family to the entire world. Even more, this theme has been tracked through chaps. 12–50, with particular attention not only to its verbal repetition (e.g., 18:18; 22:18; 26:4; 28:14), but also to the numerous contacts made between Israel's ancestors and the "non-chosen" peoples. Remarkably little polemic is directed against outsiders in the Genesis text. The promises of God to Abraham are intended for the world. The way in which Israel's ancestors did or did not respond to this intention served as a negative or positive model for every generation.

The focus of such discussion has been so sharply placed on "salvation history" that creation themes have been neglected. Even more, it is striking the extent to which the more emphatic themes of chaps. 12–50 are grounded in chaps. 1–11, wherein God promises and blesses, elects and saves. God first establishes a covenant and makes promises, not to Abraham, but to Noah (6:18 and 9:8-17); God's promissory activity in Israel participates in God's promissory relation to the larger world (see the manifold promises to Ishmael and Esau). God's work of blessing in the world does not begin with Abraham; it is integral to chaps. 1–11 (see 9:1, 26) and so God's blessing work through Abraham must involve intensification and pervasiveness, not a

14. For a review, see Moberly, *The Old of the Old Testament.*

15. See D. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch* (Sheffield: *JSOT*, 1978); B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 136-60; B. Dahlberg, "On Recognizing the Unity of Genesis," *TD* 24 (1977) 360-67; T. Mann, "All the Families of the Earth: The Theological Unity of Genesis," *Int* 45 (1991) 341-53; and Overview sections in this commentary.

new reality. Since God saves Noah, his family, and the animals (Ps 36:6), God does not become a savior with Abraham or Israel. Issues of creation and redemption are integrated throughout Genesis. God's promises and salvific acts must finally be seen as serving all of creation. God acts to free people, indeed the entire world, to be what they were created to be.[16]

Scholars have noted various forms of evidence for structured unity in Genesis, especially in the genealogies (extending from 2:4 to 37:2) and the divine promises (from 8:21 to 50:24). More refined efforts to discern structures throughout the book have been less successful, with the focus of attention on the four major, distinct sections.[17] Links within Genesis have been discerned in chaps. 1–11 and 37–50, from family discord/harmony, to fertility (1:28 and 47:27), to the extension of life to a flood/famine-filled world (41:57), to the "good" that God is about in the creation and through this family (50:20); in some sense Joseph functions as a new Adam (41:38).

At the same time, the Joseph story does not occasion a return to Eden. Sin and its ill effects remain very much in place. Human life, more generally, becomes ever more complex as one moves from Adam to Joseph. These developments are matched by shifts in the imaging of God, whose words and deeds become less direct and obtrusive. God's actions are never all-controlling in Genesis, but a more prominent role is given to the human in the Joseph story, from the transmission of promises to the exercise of leadership. These developments correlate with narratives that become less and less episodic.[18]

The following themes in Genesis as a whole may be gathered; creation themes remain prominent throughout. (1) The presence and activity of God in every sphere of life, among nonchosen and chosen, for purposes of judgment and salvation. These two themes tie chaps. 1–11 closely to chaps. 12–50: God responds to ongoing human sinfulness through sentence and judgment (often involving creational realities, from flood to plague to fire and brimstone); God also responds in a gracious way to humankind, even though their lives have been deeply affected by sin and its consequences. (2) Blessing is a creational category in which both God and humankind, nonchosen and chosen, are engaged. This theme includes the continuity of the family through the struggles of barrenness and birth, and the fertility of fields and animals, often juxtaposed with famine. Blessing also relates to land, raising ecological considerations that are not far from the surface (from the flood to Sodom and Gomorrah). (3) The pervasive concern for kinship and family, an order of creation. One contemporary way of looking at chaps. 12–50 is through the lens of family systems theory and the manifestations of a dysfunctional family one sees throughout. The various dimensions of family life belong within the sphere of God's concern. God is at work in and through family problems and possibilities for purposes of reconciliation (50:20). (4) Concern for the life of the nation also entails one of the most basic orders of creation. In the Joseph story especially, the writers devote attention to issues of economics, agriculture, and the dynamics of political and governmental life more generally, in and through which God is at work for blessing (41:53-57; 47:13-26). (5) The role of the human in the divine economy. It is not uncommon to denigrate the importance of human activity in these chapters. For example, von Rad states: "The story of Hagar shows us a fainthearted faith that cannot leave things to God and believes it necessary to help things along. . . . [A child] conceived . . . in little faith cannot be the heir of promise."[19] But divine promise, appropriated by faith, does not entail human passivity in working toward God's goals for the creation. The high place given to the human role, from creation to Joseph, testifies to the depth of God's engagement with human beings as the instruments of God's purpose.

16. See T. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation," *Int* 45 (1991) 354-65.
17. See Overview sections; G. Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1986).
18. See R. Cohn, "Narrative Structure and Canonical Perspective in Genesis," *JSOT* 25 (1983) 3-16.
19. Von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 196.

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OUTLINE OF GENESIS

I. Genesis 1:1–11:26, The Primeval Story

A. 1:1–6:4, The Creation and Disruption of the Universe
1:1–2:3, The Creation
2:4-25, Another Look at Creation

A. 37:1-36, Joseph and His Brothers
B. 38:1-30, Tamar and Judah
C. 39:1-23, Joseph, God, and Success
D. 40:1-23, Joseph, Interpreter of Dreams
E. 41:1-57, Joseph's Elevation to Power
F. 42:1-38, Joseph Meets His Brothers
G. 43:1-34, The Second Journey to Egypt
H. 44:1-34, Joseph's Final Test
I. 45:1-28, Joseph Makes Himself Known
J. 46:1–47:26, The Descent into Egypt
K. 47:27–50:26, The Emergence of Unified Israel
    47:27–48:22, Joseph and His Sons
    49:1-33, The Last Words of Jacob
    50:1-14, The Burial of Jacob
    50:15-21, The Full Reconciliation of Israel's Sons
    50:22-26, The Promise Transmitted

GENESIS 1:1–11:26
THE PRIMEVAL STORY

OVERVIEW

The last century has seen a proliferation of new directions in the study of these chapters, including comparative studies based on the discovery of ancient Near Eastern creation and flood accounts, new literary approaches and historiographical methods, innovative theological developments, and issues generated by scientific research, environmentalism, feminism, and other liberation movements. These realities have sharply complicated the interpretation of these chapters: Did Israel inherit theological perspectives from the larger ancient Near Eastern culture? How old is the earth? What about evolution? Does the dominion passage commend the exploitation of the earth? Are these texts inimical to the proper role of women in church and society?

It will not do to suggest that such questions violate the integrity of the text, which knew of no such modern problems. Every question asked of the text is contemporary; every reader will study the text through modern eyes. Indeed, personal questions can often make a text come alive. Nonetheless, the public canons of accountability, which historical-critical approaches provide, can introduce some objectivity into the interpretive process.

Even though the rest of the OT makes few specific references to these chapters (see Isa 54:9), rather too much can be made of this fact. The same may be said for other narratives in the Pentateuch. There is, for example, no mention of the Akedah (Genesis 22) and only passing reference to Jacob's wrestling with God (see Hos 12:3-4). This situation stands in some contrast to the prominent use made of these texts in intertestamental literature, which may explain NT interest in them, at least in part (e.g., Mark 10:6-8; Rom 5:12-21).[20] The NT use of these passages will, no doubt, shape one's angle of vision in some way. Yet, the fact that these NT citations cannot be allowed to have a privileged position in interpreting the OT seems clear from the use of Genesis 2–3 in 1 Tim 2:8-15. Each NT interpretation must be integrated with other evidence and methods as one attends to the meaning of these chapters.

20. For a survey of texts, see D. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel: A Commentary on the Book of Genesis 1–11* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 3-6.

TYPE OF LITERATURE

Determining the type(s) of literature present in these chapters has proven difficult. One confronts terms as diverse as a report of actual events or myth. Scholars generally agree that there is an admixture of narrative and numerative materials, but a more precise understanding of the former has been difficult to achieve, whether it be in terms of saga, legend, myth, fairy tale, etiology, story, or theological narrative. This discussion has not been very fruitful in helping readers understand the texts themselves, not least because there is no agreed-upon definition of words like *myth.* The word *story,* though imprecise, will probably serve us best.

One may identify these materials in two distinct, but not unrelated, ways:

1. They are *typical* or archetypical stories; that is, they explain aspects of human life in every age, including interhuman, human-nonhuman, and creature-Creator relationships. The various uses of the word אדם (*ʾādām*) point the reader in this direction (generic—1:26-27; 2:5; 3:22-24; 5:1-2; 6:1-7; the first man—2:7–4:1; Adam–4:25–5:5). This movement back and forth between humankind and first man suggests an effort to portray the human in both typical and atypical ways. The admixture of symbolic (e.g., the tree of knowledge) and literal language

also pushes in this direction, as do the parallels with ancient Near Eastern myth.[21]

Clines emphasizes this typicality. "Genesis 1-11 is not for [Israel], as it is for us, universal history; it is their own history."[22] For example, the flood symbolizes the destruction of Jerusalem for its sinful ways, and the dispersion in chap. 11 alludes to Israel's own Diaspora. Yet, while these texts may indeed mirror Israel's own reality, the claims of the text are more extensive. The past and the present are not simply collapsed into each other.

2. These texts tell *a story of the past,* more particularly a story of beginnings. They speak, not simply of the general human condition, but also of the beginnings of life.[23] This is not to say that the material is historical in any modern sense, nor does it necessarily make any historical judgments. Rather, these narratives offer Israel's own understandings.

(a) There are *atypical* aspects to some texts, showing that Israel did not simply collapse their own (or any later) time into the time of the text. The long-lived patriarchs would be one clear example; Israel knew that it would never live through such a time again. Such a reality belonged to the irretrievable past; indeed, to live such a long life was *totally* beyond Israel's experience. Other texts showing that the time of the text was understood to be different from Israel's own include 2:25 (nakedness and shame); 3:23-24 (driven from Eden, never to return); 6:1; and 11:1 (explicitly unique world situations). On the other hand, 6:4 speaks of continuity between the primeval era and a later time.

(b) There is an etiological concern, wherein the origins of later practices or phenomena are rooted in the distant past. We could cite 4:20-22 and the origins of certain cultural activities, or marriage practices (2:24), or national origins (10:2-31), even certain divine decisions that God will "remember" (8:21; 9:14-16). More generally, we could cite the creation itself; e.g., the actions of God in 2:7 and 2:22 will never be repeated. Creation is not an annual event, but a once-for-all moment that stands at the beginning of time. Somewhat different are the sentences in 3:14-19, which are etiological. They too are typical, but such typicality will not happen *whenever* people sin; rather, these distorted relationships reflect a *common* human reality.

(c) The concern for chronology is evident in the various genealogies, which allow us to track the years from Adam (5:5) through every generation to Israel. We can discern this same motif in the flood story (7:11; 8:13-14). The presence of such chronology in chaps. 1–11 and chaps. 12–50 means that these two sections of Genesis share a fundamental understanding regarding typicality and atypicality.

In sum, these texts present an interweaving of the typical and what belongs to the past. The interpreter must regularly walk a fine line between these two possibilities.

STRUCTURE AND THEME

Numerous efforts have been made to discern the structure in Genesis 1–11.[24] Most basic is the interweaving of genealogies and narratives.

Narrative pattern provides one type of structure. What transpires in 3:1-24 recurs in subsequent stories (4:1-16; 6:1-4; 6:5–8:22; 9:20-27; 11:1-9): Sinful Act (3:6); Speech (Decision) of Judgment (3:14-19); Act of Mercy/Blessing (3:21); Act of Punishment (3:22-24). While this pattern highlights a certain rhythm in the texts, it is not exact and leaves chaps. 1–2 dangling.

Another type of structure consists of parallel panels: A/A´—Creation from watery chaos (1:1–3:24) stands parallel to the flood (6:9–9:17); B/B´—discordant sons of Adam (4:1-16) to the sons of Noah, a second Adam (9:18-29); C/C´—technological development of humankind (4:17-26) to ethnic development (10:1-32); D/D´—ten generations, Adam to Noah/three sons (5:1-32) to ten generations, Noah to Terah/three sons (11:10-26); E/E´—downfall, Nephilim (6:1-8) to the Tower of Babel (11:1-9). The Shem genealogy and Babel story are reversed in order to connect Abram in 11:26 with 12:1-3. However, this theory presents difficulties,

21. See J. Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11* (Sheffield: *JSOT,* 1991) 41-55.
22. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 98.
23. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 65.
24. See Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, 61-79; T. Fretheim, *Creation, Fall and Flood: Studies in Genesis 1–11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969) 18-22; Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis.*

as may be seen in the prominent role given to 6:1-8 as over against 3:1-24, which is collapsed into the creation accounts.

These structures may be linked to a more general one wherein chaps. 1–11 depict an ever-increasing growth of sin and severity of punishment. Yet, the Babel story seems anticlimactic after the flood; this episode suggests a modification, with a distinct break after the flood, and then a recapitulation. The first movement is the primeval era, moving from sinful individuals (3:1-24) through family (4:1-26) out into the larger world (6:1–8:22), ending in catastrophe. Then there is another beginning (9:1-17, parallel to 1:1–2:25), moving also through sinful family and individuals (9:18-27) out into the world (10:1–11:9), only this time into a world that Israel clearly knows. The genealogy of Shem (11:10-26), once again, provides an individual point of reference that reaches out into the world (12:3*b*).

The larger structure is particularly helpful because it accounts for both stories and genealogies. It also attends to a variety of themes within these chapters: the growth and spread of sin, to which God's acts of judgment are explicitly related (and hence not arbitrary), accompanied by continuing acts of divine grace, as well as the themes of creation-uncreation-new creation (see 6:5–8:22).

Fundamental to Genesis is the divine creative activity, which involves not only the beginnings of the cosmos and all of its creatures but also God's continuing ordering and blessing activity within and without Israel. This anchor gives a horizon, scope, and purpose to God's particular act of election and words of promise to Israel's ancestors (see Reflections on 1:1). Indeed, even God's promises to Israel are grounded in God's promissory relationship to the world more generally (8:21–9:17), as is the activity of God as Savior (6:5–8:20).

Throughout these chapters issues of relationship are addressed from every conceivable perspective. Most basic are the relationships between God and the creatures, especially humans. The recurrent litany that all is created "good" stands as a beacon regarding the nature of God's creative work and the divine intentions for the creation. The *subsequent* entrance of human sin, while not finally effacing the God-human relationship or the important role human beings play in the divine economy, has occasioned deep and pervasive ill effects upon all relationships (human-God; human-human at individual, familial, and national levels; human-nonhuman) and dramatically portrays the need for a reclamation of creation. Through the experience of the flood story, God rejects annihilation as the means to accomplish this reformation and graciously opts instead for a more vulnerable, long-term engagement, working from within the very life of the world itself. The world continues to live and breathe because God makes a gracious, unconditional commitment to stay with the world, come what may in the wake of human sinfulness.

GENESIS 1–11 AND MODERN SCIENCE

To claim that God created the world and all that exists is a matter of faith, grounded fundamentally in God's self-revelation (see Heb 11:3). At this level the opening chapters of Genesis are a confession of faith. At the same time, in witnessing to God's creative activity the biblical writers made use of the available knowledge of the natural world. Israel had no little interest in what we today would call "scientific" issues (see 1 Kgs 4:33). These chapters are prescientific in the sense that they predate modern science, but not in the sense of having no interest in those types of questions. "Pre-scientific" knowledge is evident in God's use of the earth and the waters in mediating creation (1:11, 20, 24), the classification of plants into certain kinds and a comparable interest in animals, as well as the ordering of each day's creation. Despite claims to the contrary (often in the interest of combating fundamentalism), such texts indicate that Israel's thinkers were very interested in questions of the "how" of creation, and not just questions of "who" and "why."

Israel's theologians used this kind of "scientific" knowledge to speak of creation. They recognized that the truth about creation is not generated simply by theological reflection; we must finally draw from various fields of inquiry in order to speak the full truth about the world. The key task, finally, becomes that of integrating materials from various fields

into one coherent statement about the created order. In effect, Genesis invites every generation to engage in this same process.

Difficulties arise when it becomes evident that not everything in these chapters can be made congruent with modern knowledge about the world (recognizing that no field of endeavor has arrived at the point of full understanding). If our view of the Bible insists that all information in it, of whatever sort, must correspond to scientific reality, then we will have to engage in all sorts of exegetical antics to make it work. But if we recognize that those authors did not know everything about the world (e.g., a source for light independent of the luminaries; the age of the world), then we just recognize that and move on. We have to take all the additional knowledge we have gained or will gain about the world (e.g., some form of evolution) and integrate it with our confession about God the Creator.

We are not called to separate the theological material from the "scientific" material and rewrite the chapter from our own scientific perspectives (however much that task must be accomplished for other purposes). The Genesis text remains both an indispensable theological resource and an important paradigm on the way in which to integrate theological and scientific realities in a common search for the truth about the world.

GENESIS 1:1–6:4, THE CREATION AND DISRUPTION OF THE UNIVERSE

Genesis 1:1–2:3, The Creation

COMMENTARY

Many scholars consider the opening two chapters of Genesis as two creation stories, assigning 1:1–2:4*a* to the Priestly writer and 2:4*b*-25 to the Yahwist. Moreover, considerable effort has been expended in comparing and contrasting them (see commentary on 2:4-25). Newer approaches to biblical texts, however, have raised anew the question of the shape of the present form of the text. While the two accounts certainly have different origins and transmission histories, they have also been brought together in a coherent way by a redactor. As such, they function together to provide the canonical picture of creation. We cannot be certain that either account ever appeared in their present form, so theological perspectives based on these accounts in isolation are speculative and problematic.

Israel was not the only people in the ancient Near East to compose stories of creation. Sumerian, Mesopotamian, and Egyptian accounts have been unearthed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a result of comparing these extra-biblical texts with the biblical accounts, it is apparent that Israel participated in a culture with a lively interest in these questions. While in the past some claimed that Israel depended directly on one or more of these accounts, it is now more common to speak of a widespread fund of images and ideas upon which Israel drew and shaped into its own creation account(s). Early scholarly efforts focused on the Babylonian *Enuma Elish* in the century following its appearance in 1876; more recent efforts have concentrated on the Babylonian *Epic of Atrahasis* (about 1600 BCE), primarily because its sequence of creation-disruption-flood corresponds to the biblical account. Special attention has also been given to Egyptian parallels (e.g., creation by means of the word).

It is important to examine all such accounts and seek to determine their relationship, if any, to the biblical texts. The delineation of similarities and dissimilarities has long belonged to such work. Such dissimilarities as the basic purpose (e.g., the absence of explicit Israelite political interests), the lack of a theogony and a conflict among the gods, the absence of interest in primeval chaos, the prevailing monotheism, and the high value given human beings have often been noted.

At the same time, to conceive of the biblical account's relationship to these other stories fundamentally in disjunctive or polemical terms can miss their genuine contribution to a perception of Israel's own reflection about creation.

Israel itself conceptualized the beginnings of things and told creation stories in several ways. Creation by word (followed by deed) is majestically presented in chap. 1; God as potter and builder working with already existing materials occurs as a prominent image in chap. 2. We may also discern traces of a creation account in which God fought with and achieved victory over chaotic forces (see Ps 74:12-15). It is notable, however, that these references are allusive in character, may refer to the exodus, and are present only in poetic literature. To assume that Israel understood such imagery in a literal way is as profound a mistake as to think of these Genesis chapters as journalistic prose.

Despite this important comparative and historical-critical work, we must not forget that these texts are most fundamentally the product of a community of faith engaged in theological reflection on creation. God is the primary subject of this chapter, which relates God in various ways to every creature. Even more, the chapter, with its rhythmic cadences, has a certain doxological character. Hence, the material may have grown out of liturgical use and the regular round of the community's praise of God the Creator (see Job 38:7). Worship interests also clearly appear in the links among creation, tabernacle, and temple as well as in sabbath and religious festivals.[25] Although these roots seem clear, we should not identify this chapter as an actual liturgy. While it may be identified as a didactic account, it has been shaped by liturgical use and worship interests.

At the same time, we should not collapse every concern in chapters 1 and 2 into a theological mold. This material provides considerable evidence of what we today would call scientific reflection on the natural world. Israel takes the available knowledge of that world and integrates it with theological perspectives, recognizing thereby that both spheres of knowledge must be used to speak the truth about the world (see Overview).

Structure. The first account possesses an obvious seven-day structure, signifying unity and comprehensiveness (the number 7 also serves this purpose). But other structures have been observed. Eight creative acts on six days (two acts occur on days three and six) may reflect originally diverse accounts, though such a scheme is more likely a deliberate structure in view of certain natural correspondences:

Day 1: Light	Day 4: Luminaries
Day 2: Waters/ Firmament	Day 5: Fish/Birds
	Day 6: Land animals/ People
Day 3: Dry land/ Vegetation	Vegetation for food

In addition, the repetition of phrases provides a discernible rhythm: "God said . . . let there be . . . and it was so . . . and God made . . . and God saw that it was good . . . and it was evening and morning." It is important to note that this rhythm is not absolutely regular (additions in the LXX sought to make it so). In sum, various structures overlap and, together, betray a less than perfect symmetry.

1:1-2, The Beginning. The difficulties in translating vv. 1-3 are evident in the NIV and the NRSV, each of which is grammatically defensible. We may note three possible translations. (1) Verse 1 is a temporal clause, subordinate to the main clause in v. 3, with v. 2 a parenthesis regarding prior conditions (see JPS). When God began to create heaven and earth, God said, "Let there be light" (v. 2). Although this translation may be compared to 2:4-7 (cf. 5:1*b*-2) and ancient Near Eastern texts, each of these parallels is inexact (e.g., using the phrase "in the day"). Moreover, such a long opening sentence is uncharacteristic of the style of this chapter and other genealogies. (2) Verse 1 is a temporal clause, subordinate to the main clause in v. 2 (NRSV; also NAB; NEB; GNB). This rendering is less problematic, especially with the emphasis provided by the phrase "in the beginning." (3) Verse 1 is an independent sentence (NIV; also KJV; RSV; JB; NJB; REB). We could interpret v. 1 as depicting the first act of creation followed by further phases, though such a view breaks up the seven-day

25. See J. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988) 66-99.

pattern.[26] Or, preferably, v. 1 may be seen as a summary of the chapter (v. 2 describes the prior conditions and v. 3 narrates the first act of creation). The most convincing evidence for this position derives from the genealogies in 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; and 11:10, all of which begin with an independent clause that provides a summary of what follows.

The word *beginning* probably does not refer to the absolute beginning of all things, but to the beginning of the ordered creation, including the temporal order. Time began with God's ordering, and the seven-day time of God's creating establishes a temporal pattern throughout all generations (see 2:1-3). The author does not deny that God created all things, but God's creative work in this chapter begins with something already there, the origins of which are of no apparent interest. Also, the writer presupposes the existence and basic character of God.

The first of two primary words for God's creative activity is introduced in Gen 1:1 (ברא *bārāʾ*). Only God serves as the subject of this verb in the OT, and the verb has no object of material or means (though some uses refer to re-creation or a transformation of existing realities; see Pss 51:10; 102:18; Isa 41:20; 65:18). The word *bārāʾ* may be a technical term used to speak about the fundamental newness and uniqueness of what God brings into being. This view has sometimes led to the formulation of a *creatio ex nihilo* view of creation. While the word *bārāʾ* may speak of what only God can do, it remains metaphorical language. That God's creating is analogous to the human sphere is shown by the common use of the everyday word *make* (עשׂה *ʿāśâ*; integrated in 1:26-27; 2:1-3; Isaiah 41–45) and the images of creating present in chap. 2 (e.g., God as potter or builder). Yet, no analogy from the human sphere can exhaust the meaning of God's creative activity.

"Heaven and earth" specifies the ordered universe (see Ps 89:11), the totality of the world in which everything has its proper place and function. This phrase also testifies to a bipartite structure, wherein "the heavens are the LORD's heavens,/ but the earth he has given to human beings" (Ps 115:16). The heavens are an integral aspect of the world *as created.* Other texts show that heaven as God's abode is built into the very structure of the created order (Ps 104:1-3; Isa 40:22; Amos 9:6), a shorthand reference to the abode of God *within* the world.

Verse 2 describes the conditions before God began to order the cosmos. The language used to describe this pre-creation state of affairs is difficult to comprehend. There are three parallel descriptions: (1) The "formless void" (תהו ובהו *tōhû wābōhû*) is neither "nothing" nor an undifferentiated mass; the earth, the waters (deep), the darkness, and the wind are discrete realities (see Jer 4:23-26). As a parallel to 2:4-7, but with a watery image, it refers to the earth as "void/ empty" in the sense of something desolate and unproductive. The earth, present here, only "appears" in v. 9. (2) The "deep" (תהום *těhôm*) has often been compared with Tiamat of the Babylonian creation story, but a specific link seems unlikely in view of both language and content. Yet, the motif of water as the primal element in other ancient accounts no doubt influenced this writer. In Genesis 1, the "deep" may be equated with the waters that cover the earth (see v. 9; cf. 49:25; Deut 33:13; Prov 8:24). Darkness may not be an absolute absence of light, given the act of separation in v. 4. As with the other realities in this verse (except wind), darkness becomes an integral part of God's ordered world; darkness is not called "good" in v. 4, but neither are the creations of the second day; "everything" is included in the "very good" evaluation of 1:31.[27]

(3) A "wind/spirit from/of God" are common translations of the רוח אלהים *rûaḥ ʾĕlōhîm* (NIV's capitalized "Spirit" implies a Trinitarian view; the superlative "mighty wind" would be unique for this phrase in the OT). The verb (used in Deut 32:11 and Jer 23:9 for a hovering eagle and a drunken walk) may be translated in various ways—"move," "sweep," "hover over"—suggesting the ever-changing velocity and direction of the wind. But to what end? Since the wind is related to God, it involves purposeful movement. God was present, hence the activity was in some sense creative (which tips the translation toward "spirit"). A comparable

26. See G. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Waco: Word, 1987) 11-13.

27. See D. Tsumara, *The Earth and the Waters in Genesis 1 and 2: A Linguistic Investigation* (Sheffield: *JSOT,* 1989).

use of this language occurs in the flood story (8:1) and at the Red Sea (Exod 14:21; see the creative use of spirit in Job 33:4; Ps 104:30).

The writer placed the three clauses in v. 2 in grammatical parallelism; yet the third clause works differently because the wind is the sole entity not picked up in the rest of the chapter. The reference to God moves toward the rest of the chapter; it brings God and raw material together, in motion rather than static, preparing for the ordering process to follow.

1:3-13, Days One–Three. God as speaker is another key metaphor for God's creative activity (see Pss 33:6, 9; 148:5; 2 Esdr 6:38; 2 Cor 4:6). The centrality of the Word means that the creation is not an accident, but a deliberate act of the divine will; it expresses what God intends. The Word personalizes the activity; God enters into the creative deed. The Word bespeaks transcendence, expressing the separateness of God from the created order, which is not a divine emanation or birth. At the same time, God's speech reveals divine vulnerability, for God's speaking does not occur in isolation or function as command. The use of the jussive "let there be" leaves room for creaturely response (vv. 11, 24); the cohortative "let us make" leaves room for consultation (v. 26); the "let them have dominion" (v. 26) entails a sharing of power. God's way of speaking creation communicates with others, makes room for others, with the attendant risks. God no longer chooses to be alone.

God's speaking does not stand isolated from God's making (e.g., 1:6-7, 14-16; see also Ps 33:6; Isa 48:3). This speaking-doing rhythm may reflect earlier forms of the text that have now been decisively integrated. Hence, the word itself does not explain sufficiently what comes to be; the word is accompanied by the deed. God does not create by "word events" but by "word-deed events." Hence, existing in the image of God means having a vocation that consists of both word and deed.

The divine speaking often involves a speaking *with* whatever is *already* created (vv. 11, 20, 22, 24, 28) in such a way that the receptor of the word helps to shape the result. The earth itself assists importantly in creative activity (vv. 11, 24). While God's work creates the potential for this creaturely response, it is creation from within the creation, not from without. Both human and nonhuman creatures are called to participate in the creative activity made possible by God.

Light. On "day" and "evening and morning," see the commentary on 2:1-3. Inasmuch as the sun had not yet been created, this verse probably refers to a divine manipulation of light as a creative act. Light was thought to have another source (Job 38:19; Isa 30:26; e.g., light on cloudy days and before and after sunset). The sun, when created, augmented the already existing light. Israelites believed light, often a symbol of life and salvation (Pss 27:1; 56:13) and characteristic of the presence of God (Ps 104:2), was fundamental to the creation, pushing back the darkness and making life possible. Every morning was a kind of new creation.

"And God saw that it was good." God acts as an evaluator. In this remarkable and recurring phrase, God responds to the work, making evaluations of it (2:18 implies that the evaluation is part of an ongoing process, within which improvement is possible). The "subdue" language (1:28) implies that "good" does not mean perfect or static or in no need of development. This statement carries the sense of achieving the divine intention, which includes elements of beauty, purpose, and praise. This evaluative move (as with naming or blessing) means that God remains involved with the creation once it has been brought into being. God sees the creature, experiences what has been created, and is affected by what is seen. God's response leads to the further development of the creation and of intra-creaturely relationships. God's creative activity may thus in part be determined by that which is not God.

"And God separated . . . " (vv. 4, 7). In this activity, too, God works with what has already been created to develop the creation still further, suggesting a continued unfolding of the creation. This divine cosmic activity may be intended to ground certain ritual distinctions (e.g., clean and unclean).

God acts as name-giver in vv. 5-10; God names the day, the night, the sky, the earth, and the seas. God's naming stands parallel to, but does not overlap, the human naming in 2:19-20. The naming (either divine or

human) does not thereby create these realities. In naming, the deity *responds* to the creation. In effect, God looks at what has come into being, evaluates it, and discerns its place in the creation. The Creator thus not only speaks and acts, but also reacts to what has been brought into being and continues further. The act of creation constitutes, thus, no simple punctiliar act, but also involves a process of action and interaction with what has been created. In this process, naming entails knowledge of and relationship with the thing named.

Dome, Expanse, Firmament. Having no idea of infinite space, the writer thought the sky was something solid (Job 37:18), either metal or ice, held up by pillars (Job 26:11). This "dome" provided living space between the waters above (the source of rain and snow, flowing through windows, 7:11) and the waters on and below the earth.

The irregular placement of the recurrent phrase "and it was so" makes it likely that the divine speech announces the divine *intention* to create. Yet, the creative act is not complete until this phrase has so informed the reader.[28] Sometimes this phrase occurs as a summary; sometimes it occurs between God's speaking and acting (vv. 11, 14, 24). Even the creation of light is not complete until it is separated from the darkness (v. 4).

The creative word functions as an ordering word, especially in v. 9, where the dry land *appears* after the waters have been gathered into seas (the earth is already present in v. 2).

Verses 11-13 witness to a shift in God's way of creating; the earth itself participates in the creative process (see above). The description of the plants and trees with their capacity to reproduce by themselves gives evidence for a probing interest in what we would call "natural science" (see 1 Kgs 4:33). Israel had not yet related plant growth to the sun, ascribing it entirely to the powers of the earth.

1:14-23, Days Four–Five. In vv. 14-19—arranged in a chiasm—the heavenly lights are created to divide day and night, to give (additional) light, and to serve as signs (i.e., time markers) for days, years, and fixed seasons (the word for "season" is also the word for religious festival). The tasks of separating and ruling (משׁל *māšal*) are, notably, also divine roles, here delegated to certain creatures. Once again, the involvement of the nonhuman in the continuing ordering of the world achieves prominence. The fact that the sun and moon are not specifically named, and the stars are just mentioned, may reflect a polemic against religious practice in Mesopotamia, where heavenly bodies were considered divine and astrology played an important role in daily life. All are here acclaimed as the creations of the one God.

In vv. 20-23 two new elements are introduced: life and blessing. Animals and human beings alike (not plants, whose reproductive powers are inherent) share a blessing—the power of sexual reproduction. The NRSV and the NIV offer different understandings of the verbal form used in v. 20. In the NRSV, the waters would be parallel to the earth in vv. 11 and 24 in mediating the creative work of God. The NIV's "teem" specifies a more direct creative act. In either case, ultimate responsibility lies with God. The fact that the sea monsters (תנינם *tannînîm*) are specifically mentioned may polemicize theories of a divine chaos monster in other creation stories, ascribing their creation to God; imagery associated with this myth occurs in some poetic texts (e.g., Isa 27:1; Isa 51:9; Ps 74:13). In language similar to 1:28, God's blessing extends to birds and fish, focusing on the life-giving powers. That no land animals receive a specific blessing is something of a puzzle.

1:24-31, The Sixth Day. God's creations on the sixth day all share the habitat of dry land. It may be something of a disappointment to human beings that they have to share this day! As with the vegetation in v. 11, the earth mediates the creation of the land animals (2:19 will speak of God's forming the animals). The NIV interprets "creeping things" accurately with its "creatures that move along the ground."

On the last half of the sixth day, God creates human beings. God's way of speaking and acting signals the importance of this development—namely, inner divine reflection, the cohortative "let us make" (followed by "our"), and the speaking/doing rhythm continues. The plural may refer to the divine council or heavenly court (see Job 38:7; 1 Kgs

28. Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 58-60.

22:19; Jer 23:18-23).[29] Other interpretations of the plural are not convincing (the plural of *majesty* is without parallel, and the plural of *deliberation* does not account for 3:22; see 11:7; Isa 6:8).

The "let us" language refers to an image of God as a consultant of other divine beings; the creation of humankind results from a dialogical act—an inner-divine communication—rather than a monological one. Those who are not God are called to participate in this central act of creation. Far from either slighting divine transcendence or concealing God within the divine assembly, it reveals and enhances the richness and complexity of the divine realm. God is not in heaven alone, but is engaged in a relationship of mutuality within the divine realm, and chooses to share the creative process with others. Human beings are the product of such a consultation (אדם *ʾādām* is used generically here). The "let us make" thus implicitly extends to human beings, for they are created in the image of one who chooses to create in a way that shares power with others.

The phrase "image of God" has been the subject of much discussion over the centuries.[30] This language occurs only in Genesis 1–11 (though implied elsewhere, e.g., Psalm 8). In describing the relationship between Adam and Seth (5:3; cf. 5:1; 9:6), the words *image* and *likeness* are reversed, suggesting that the second word dominates. In 1:26, *likeness* may specify the meaning more closely, so that *image* should not be construed in the sense of identity. Fundamentally, it means that "the pattern on which [human beings are] fashioned is to be sought outside the sphere of the created."[31] The inner-divine communication, which makes interhuman and God-human communication possible, constitutes one basic element of the pattern. Generally, human beings are given such gifts that they can take up the God-given responsibilities specified in these verses. The "image" refers to the entire human being, not to some part, such as the reason or the will. As for likeness in body, one may suggest that this notion appears in the later physical appearances of the "messenger of God" (see 16:7).

The image functions to mirror God to the world, to be God as God would be to the nonhuman, to be an extension of God's own dominion. In the ancient Near East the king as image of God was a designated representative of the gods, ruling on their behalf. Genesis 1 democratizes this royal image so that all humanity belongs to this sphere and inter-human hierarchical understandings of the image are set aside. That both male and female are so created (see also 5:2) means that the female images the divine as much as the male; both are addressed in the command of v. 28. The reference to both implies that their roles in life are not identical, and that likeness to God pertains not only to what they have in common but also to what remains distinctive about them (the emergence of both male and female images for God could be grounded in this text). The fact that the words *male* and *female* are not used for animals indicates that both sexuality and procreation are involved.

The involvement in the creative process of those created in the divine image takes the form of a command (1:28). These first divine words to human beings are about their relationship, not to God, but to the earth. They constitute a sharing of the exercise of power (dominion). From the beginning God chooses not to be the only one who has or exercises creative power. The initiative has been solely God's, but once the invitation has been issued, God establishes a power-sharing relationship with humans. This initiative remains in the post-sin world as demonstrated in the use of God language in 5:1-3 and 9:6 as well as the use of these themes in Psalm 8. Hence, God appears less meticulously present in the life of the world; God serves as the supreme delegator of responsibility (for becoming like God in chap. 3, which bears negative connotations, see commentary on 3:22).

The command to be fruitful, to multiply, and to fill the earth immediately follows the word of blessing and involves a sharing of the divine creative capacities. God has brought the first human beings into existence, and the powers of propagating their own kind are now given over to the creatures (see 1:22; continued after the flood, 9:1, 7). The writer was obviously concerned about populating

29. P. Miller, *Genesis 1–11: Studies in Structure and Theme* (Sheffield: *JSOT,* 1978).

30. For a survey, see G. Jonsson, *The Image of God: Genesis 1:26-28 in a Century of Old Testament Research* (Lund: Gleerup, 1988).

31. G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York: Harper, 1962) I:145.

the earth. There was plenty of room for the human race to expand and grow. But should the point arrive at which the earth appears to be filled (the definition of which would need discussion), then the human responsibility in this area would need adjustment. New situations will teach new duties regarding the created order.

A study of the verb *have dominion* (רדה *rādâ*) reveals that it must be understood in terms of care-giving, even nurturing, not exploitation. As the image of God, human beings should relate to the nonhuman as God relates to them. This idea belongs to the world of the ideal conceptions of royal responsibility (Ezek 34:1-4; Ps 72:8-14) and centers on the animals. The command to "subdue the earth" (כבש *kābaš*) focuses on the earth, particularly cultivation (see 2:5, 15), a difficult task in those days. While the verb may involve coercive aspects in interhuman relationships (see Num 32:22, 29), no enemies are in view here. More generally, "subduing" involves development in the created order. This process offers to the human being the task of intra-creational development, of bringing the world along to its fullest possible creational potential. Here paradise is not a state of perfection, not a static state of affairs. Humans live in a highly dynamic situation. The future remains open to a number of possibilities in which creaturely activity will prove crucial for the development of the world.

When God conveys blessing (see 1:22; 2:3) God gives power, strength, and potentiality to the creatures. Such action, therefore, constitutes an integral part of the power-sharing image, a giving over of what is God's to others to use as they will. God will not pull back from this act of commitment, which God renews after the flood (9:1).

God as a giver (נתן *nātan*, 1:29-30) provides vegetation to human beings and animals to sustain their lives. When combined with 9:2-3, we discover that human beings were intended to be vegetarians (Isa 11:7; Isa 65:25 imply that animals would be herbivorous in the new creation).

2:1-3, Creation and Sabbath. The repetitive character of this segment stresses the importance of the seventh day. The divine *act* of finishing the creation occurs on the *seventh* day (the NIV's pluperfect, "God had finished," is possible but not likely). The divine resting concludes creation—namely, sabbath belongs to the created order; it cannot be legislated or abrogated by human beings. "Finishing" does not mean that God will not engage in further creative acts (the absence of the typical concluding formula cannot be appealed to, for the structure of the creation account is not exact). These days did not exhaust the divine creativity! The seventh day refers to a specific day and not to an open future. Continuing creative work will be needed, but there is a "rounding off" of the created order at this point.

The meaning of the word *day* (יום *yôm*) has occasioned much debate. The days, with evening and morning rhythm, are "to be understood as actual days and as a unique, unrepeatable lapse of time in this world."[32] Other possibilities (symbolic; sequential but not consecutive; liturgical) are less likely. While seven-day patterns of various sorts are present in ancient Near Eastern texts, no sabbath day or seven-day week or seven-day creation account has been discovered. Yet, the writer highlights not individual days, but the seven-day pattern. This very temporal framework, a work/rest rhythm, inheres as a part of the created order of things. Creation thus has to do, not simply with spatial order, but with temporal order as well.

Exodus 20:11 and 31:17 (which make sense only if the days are actual days) appeal to Genesis in order to claim that sabbath observance belongs to the creation as God intended it to be; hence its importance for all peoples, not just Israel. As with God, so with human beings; their six days of work are brought to fulfillment when integrated with keeping sabbath. On the far side of sin, resting on the sabbath becomes a *sign* that God's creative order continues to exist in the present. When all the world rests on the sabbath (a sign that all are in right relationship with the Creator—Exod 31:12-17), God's created order will once again be complete, will be realized as at the beginning. Yet, the noun for "sabbath" does not occur; this does not constitute its *earthly* institution (God does not command human beings about the sabbath here).

32. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 65.

The divine act of blessing the sabbath is an unspoken report of God's act of giving power and potentiality to a particular temporal order, in the sense that human honoring of the work/rest rhythm has the capacity of deeply affecting life itself (as does its neglect). The setting aside of one day when human beings attend, not to their own responsibilities and freedoms, but to God's ordering of life honors the larger creative purposes of God and integrating oneself into them. It acknowledges that God is indeed the Creator and provider of all things.

In the act of sanctifying, God sets aside one day as different from other days, the full significance of which becomes apparent only later in the Pentateuch (e.g., Exod 20:11; 31:17). This work stands parallel to other divine acts of separation in the account.

Genesis 2:4-25, Another Look at Creation

COMMENTARY

In the present form of the text, this section is probably intended to describe in detail several days of chap. 1, particularly the sixth one. Genesis 2 was likely not understood as a parallel creation account; it probably was once part of a larger story, evident particularly in vv. 5-6, which could describe a state of affairs after 1:9-10 (with dry land in place, but the separated waters not yet providing fertility).

Differences from chap. 1 have often been observed (e.g., literary type; structure, style, and vocabulary; center of concern). But there are also key similarities: God as sole Creator of a good and purposeful world, the key place of the human among the creatures, the co-creative role of the human and the non-human, the social character of the human as male-female. The chapter focuses on humankind and the particularities of their life, signaled by the shift from "heaven and earth" to "earth and heaven" (v. 4). Elohim, the generic term for the deity, occurs throughout 1:1–2:3. In linking the names Yahweh and Elohim in 2:4-25, the writer may have intended to identify Israel's special name for God with the creator of the world (allowing Elohim to stand alone in 1:1–2:3 makes clear that we are dealing with pre-Israel realities).

While no parallel to this story exists elsewhere in the ancient Near East, certain paradise motifs, e.g. the tree of life, may be found elsewhere. Other OT passages suggest that this was once part of a more comprehensive story (see 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 28:13-19; 31:8-9).

2:4-9, The Role of the Human. Verse 4 has long been considered the point of division between the two creation stories, with v. 4*a* usually associated with what precedes—with "genealogy" and "create"—and v. 4*b* with what follows. Some scholars view v. 4 as an introduction to the following story. I construe it as a hinge verse that looks both backward and forward (2:25 may play a similar role), signaled by the reversal of heaven/earth, the creation of which is *assumed* in chap. 2. The phrase "in the day that" (NIV, "when") in v. 4*b* reaches back into the account of the creation of earth and heavens at a point before everything had been sorted out. Verse 5 functions similarly to v. 18, providing a perspective on the creation process before "not good" became "good."

The word used for "generations"/"account" (תולדות *tôlēdôt*) is the first of ten such occurrences in Genesis (see Introduction), each of which introduces what is to follow. The phrase, though, remains linked with someone/something that has already been introduced in the narrative. The usage in Gen 2:4 functions most like 25:19 and 37:2, which also introduce new developments in story form.

Verse 5 startles the reader due to the parallel it draws between the rain and human labor (עבד *'ābad*), both of which are considered indispensable to produce edible plants/herbs ("stream[s]" is of uncertain meaning, but insufficient for vegetation). The earth remains in a pre-creation state, not only because God has not yet done something, but also because no human beings are active.

The divine purpose for the man in 2:15 is expressed with the same word (שמר *šāmar*, "keep," "protect"). This change gives responsibility to the human being, not simply for maintenance and preservation, but for intracreational development, bringing the world along toward its fullest possible potential. God intends from the beginning that things not stay just as they were initially created. God creates a paradise, not a static state of affairs, but a highly dynamic situation in which the future lies open to various possibilities.

Various images of God as Creator are presented in this section. (a) God as a potter (יצר *yāṣar*; see Isa 41:25; Isa 45:9; Isa 64:8; Jer 18:1-6) shapes the man according to the divine design (2:7) and forms *every* animal and *every* bird (2:19) from the dust or clay (see Job 10:9) of the ground. The writer uses the same verb to narrate both human and nonhuman creation. The image of the deity as a potter creating humankind from clay occurs elsewhere in the ancient Near East. This image reveals a God who focuses closely on the object to be created and takes painstaking care to shape each one into something useful and beautiful. At the same time, the product of the potter's work remains very much bound to the earth and bears essential marks of the environment from which it derives (see 3:19). This combination of being made from clay and the image of God, being made of the same substance as the earth but made for dominion over it, constitutes a profound statement about human identity (links to royal themes have been noted). (b) God as a bellows breathes life into what has been formed. This "breath of life" is not the air in general, but God's own living breath. God shares this divine "breath of life" with the human and with the animals (see 7:22, which adds רוח *rûaḥ*). The result for both human beings and animals is "a living being" (נפשׁ חיה *nepeš ḥayyâ*; 2:7, 19; 1:20-30; 9:12-16). The divine act of breathing into the human (though it may be implied in 7:22) provides the only distinction between humans and animals. (c) God as farmer/gardener (נטע *nāṭaʿ*, 2:8-9) plants a garden and makes the trees grow out of the ground (אדמה *ʾădāmâ*, the source of trees, animals, and human beings). Here the garden lies *in* Eden (probably meaning "luxuriant"), a wider geographical area (in 3:22-24 the garden and Eden seem to be equated). These verses refer to the trees of the garden and not to vegetation generally (see 1:11-12, 29, where the earth itself acts). Verse 5 refers to edible plants/herbs of the field, which God planted, but they do not grow apart from rain and human toil. The writer devotes special attention to the beauty of the trees and to their provision of food (two characteristics of the tree of knowledge noted by Eve in 3:6), and hence placed there for the good of the human inhabitants. God provides for bodily nourishment and also for other pleasures of life—more than food and clothing! People will find that they depend on that which is outside themselves in order to live fully. The theme of a primeval paradise occurs only rarely elsewhere in the ancient Near East.

The tree of life (2:9; 3:22, 24). The awkward syntax of these texts, which occur at the beginning and end of the story, suggests that stories with different trees have been combined. Some think that only one tree is intended ("the tree of life, namely, the tree of knowledge"), but most interpreters discern two trees in the middle of the garden. The first tree mentioned symbolizes the fullest possible life, the eating of which would grant continuing life (such a tree or plant occurs in the *Gilgamesh Epic* and elsewhere). The reference in 3:22 indicates that one would need to eat from that tree only once, as was also the case with the tree of knowledge.

The narrator gives no indication that the man and woman know of this tree's existence until 3:22. Readers encounter the tree of life in 2:9 and then again only in 3:22-24. Genesis 3:22 implies that the man and woman, having eaten of the other tree and knowing that death has become a near possibility, would with their new knowledge become aware of the tree of life and its import and, by eating of it, live forever.

The relationship between the tree of life and the breath of life (2:7-9; חיים *ḥayyîm*) remains uncertain. When humans are excluded from the tree of life (3:22), they obviously retain God's breath of life. Hence, the tree must represent possibilities for life not entailed in the breath of life. The fact that more is at stake than issues of quality of life seems clear since the deity expresses concern in 3:22 regarding the possibility of humans living forever. Having the breath of life does

not entail immortality. Human beings are created mortal, but eating of the tree of life was a means by which human beings might receive a special blessing—namely, ongoing life; no ontological change seems in view, hence *immortality* would not be the right word to describe the result of their eating the fruit. Some this-worldly form of "eternal life" (not an afterlife) may be in mind.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil (2:9, 17). (The woman refers to it in 3:3 as implied by 3:6; the changes she makes in the command mean that her description of the trees may be less than exact.) The name of this tree gives it a symbolic value, but that value has proved to be difficult to discern. In view of 3:22 (which the serpent affirms, 3:5), God knows good and evil, and human beings attain that godlike knowledge upon eating of the tree, though it is a knowledge with which they cannot live very well. Any meaning assigned to the tree must recognize that it has to do with a "knowledge" that God has. This makes it unlikely that it has to do either with sexual knowledge/experience, which 2:24-25 and 1:27-28 already imply, or knowledge of/experience with sin or wickedness.

The phrase "good and evil" functions as an idiomatic expression in which the individual words do not have their normal meanings (hence the phrase does not speak to the question of the existence of evil; a knowledge of the "good" is assumed from 2:9; 3:5). For example, the NIV translates the phrase in 24:50 with "one way or the other," referring to a divine decision, not the servant's (see 31:24, 29). The phrase with the verb *know* (ידע *yāda'*) occurs twice elsewhere (Deut 1:39; 2 Sam 19:35; cf. Isa 7:15-16), specifying those too young or too old to decide for themselves what serves their own best interests. Comparable phrases in 1 Kgs 3:9 and 2 Sam 14:17 speak of kings discerning the best interests of those who come within their jurisdiction.

For the writer, the key issue involves the discernment of what is in one's own best interests, not the fruit of the tree as fruit or any specific content of the knowledge or knowledge generally.[33] The text defines who finally decides what is in the best interests of the human. The tree and the command *together* define the limits of creatureliness; to transgress these limits entails deciding about one's own best interests, to become autonomous, independent of the will of God for one's life. To refrain from eating recognizes creaturely limitations and the decisiveness of the will of God for true human life. This creational command presents a positive use of law, wherein certain limits are recognized as being in the best interests of human life and well-being.

2:10-14, The Rivers. This material both retards the action of the narrative and prepares for the end of chap. 3. The narrator creates a specific link between the beginning of things and the later world (see 2:24); vv. 10-14 belong to an identifiable place on the map (though its location is disputed). The Garden of Eden does not equate with the world. We have a glimpse of the world outside the garden. The river that waters the garden flows out of Eden and through the major sections of the then known world, making the latter dependent on the former. Even more, things in the garden are "good" *in their own right* (v. 12), hence in continuity with the good and diverse creation of chap. 1. Moreover, the worlds out beyond Eden already have names, suggesting that they were believed to be inhabited (which would coincide with the fuller population in chap. 4). Rivers and places no longer known to us (Pishon, Gihon, Havilah, and Cush[34]) combine with the known—Assyria and the Tigris-Euphrates valley. Even life outside the garden (eventually to be home to Adam and Eve) has significant continuities with life inside the garden. The two humans will not move from a world of blessing to one devoid of blessing.

2:15-17, Permission and Prohibition. God places the man in the garden—resuming v. 8—to work/serve (*'ābad*) the ground and care for it (*šāmar*) in fulfillment of the command to subdue the earth (ארץ *'ereṣ* and *'ădāmâ* are often interchangeable). Given the use of *'ābad* in v. 5, this role involves not only simple maintenance or preservation, but a part of the creative process itself. The role

33. See W. M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good and Evil' in Genesis 2–3," *JBL* 88 (1969) 266-78; Fretheim, *Creation, Fall and Flood,* 73-77.

34. See Sarna, *Genesis* (Philadelphia: JPS, 1989) 19-20.

given the human in v. 15 may be compared to the dominion/servant role in 1:28.

God addresses the man in vv. 16-17 (given the anthropomorphisms, God is probably embodied), giving permission to eat from every tree (which would include the tree of life) except the tree of knowledge, and a prohibition; in effect, this constitutes a version of the first commandment (see commentary on 2:9), a concern not evident in chap. 1. God's first speech to humans does not center on God's place in the world, but focuses instead on the creatures, on their place and role, and the gifts they are given. The deity expresses no concern that the creature might exalt itself at God's expense.

The permission establishes an incredible range of freedom for the creatures; hence, the command that follows certainly does not seem repressive. The command may appear surprising, but it indicates the important role law has to play as a creational, pre-sin reality; command inheres as an integral part of the created order. To be truly a creature entails limits; to honor limits becomes necessary if the creation will develop as God intends. Yet, while the language takes the form of command, the issue involves trust in the word of God. Decisions faced by the humans will concern not only themselves, but also choices that have implications for their relationship with *God.* The command involves the visible and tangible (see the testing of Abraham, 22:1). Trust in God will often manifest itself in concrete matters.

Over against the tree of life, the tree of knowledge raises the possibility of human death. The two trees represent two possible futures: life and death. To be separated from the tree of life (3:22-24) represents the broken nature of the relationship, with death being inevitable. "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life,/ but lawlessness takes away lives" (Prov 11:30 RSV; see Prov 3:18; 13:12; 15:4; Dan 4:10-12). The metaphor of eating, so prominent in this text, signifies the taking of something into one's very self with effects on one's total being ("you are what you eat").

"You shall surely die" stipulates a negative consequence, a specific penalty for eating, but the meaning remains difficult to discern. It does not mean "you shall become mortal"; they already are mortal beings. Death as such belongs to God's created order. It seems to imply capital punishment without delay (though "in the day" could mean "when" more generally, so the NIV); yet, they do not die and God nowhere takes back the threat. It may be that death (and life) has a comprehensive meaning in this story (as in the OT generally; see Hos 13:1), associated with a breakdown in relationships to God, to each other, and to the created order.[35] This larger view of death comes to a climax when humans are excluded from the tree of life and lose the opportunity to overcome their natural mortality. So death does become pervasive within their lives even in the garden. At the same time, physical death would not have occurred had they managed to eat from the tree of life. If God had not acted, the serpent would have been right regarding physical death.

If humans obey the command, they recognize that they do have limitations in the exercise of their God-given responsibilities and that a right relationship to God provides an indispensable matrix for the proper exercise of that power.

2:18-25, The Creation of Woman. God evaluates the situation and declares that something is not (yet?) good; the man remains alone (God's presence does not suffice).[36] God, probably, speaks within the divine council; so the reader, again, overhears the inner divine reflective process (see 1:26). The man's not being alone correlates with God's not being alone. God identifies a problem with the state of creation at this point and moves to make changes that would improve it.

For the woman to be called "helper" (*ʿēzer*)—a word used by both God and the narrator—carries no implications regarding the *status* of the one who helps; indeed, God is often called the helper of human beings (Ps 121:1-2). The NRSV's "partner" may capture the note of correspondence more than "suitable" or "fitting." The notion of Eve as "helper" cannot be collapsed into procreation, not least because the immediate outcome specified in vv. 24-25 does not focus on this concern; the term does not offer evidence of a hierarchy.[37]

35. See R. Moberly, "Did the Serpent Get It Right?" *JTS* 39 (1988) 1-27.

36. See W. Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox) 47.

37. For an opposing view, see D. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?* (Sheffield: *JSOT,* 1990).

Initially, God "forms" *every* animal and bird. Indeed, God does not simply create them, but "brings" them to the human in a kind of parade (the same verb is used in 6:19). This is a remarkable image of God. Twice, God "brings" a creature—first the animals, then the woman—before the man. God thereby is placed at the service of the "good" of the human being, presenting creative possibilities before him. Twice, God lets the human being determine whether the animals or the woman are adequate to move the evaluation from "not good" to "good." And *whatever*— without qualification—the man called every living creature, that was its name (v. 19). Phyllis Trible observes that God, who dominates the narrative up to this point, now recedes into the background, "not as the authoritarian controller of events but as the generous delegator of power who even forfeits the right to reverse human decisions."[38] In the first case, the man does not accept what God presents; God accepts the human decision and goes back to the drawing board.

The man recognizes that the woman will address the stated need. God recognizes the creational import of this human decision, for no additional divine word or act follows. God lets the man's exultation over the woman fill the scene; the *human* word (the first one uttered) serves as an evaluation that this situation may be termed "good." The narrator (vv. 24-25) then draws the reader into the closeness of the male-female bond, citing the implication of the human decision for the future. These verses show that the bond involves more than issues of procreation; the relationship includes companionship, intimate and otherwise.

The naming by the human parallels God's naming (1:5-10); it belongs as a part of the creative process, discerning the nature of intra-creaturely relationships. For the woman to be named by the man does not subordinate the named to the namer, any more than does Hagar's naming of God subordinate the deity to her (16:13).[39] Naming involves *discernment* regarding the nature of relationships (the male "rule" over the female derives from sin, 3:16).

God designs and builds (בנה *bānâ*) woman out of already existing material. This image may be compared to that of the potter who both designs and fashions an object. The "rib" is only one step removed from the dust, and hence stresses common ultimate origins, but the different image may reflect differences in design (no known ancient parallel exists for the separate creation of woman). The relationship of the woman to the "rib" entails no subordination, any more than man's being created from the ground implies his subordination to it. (Some suggest "side," Exod 25:12-14, but "rib" best links with the bone/flesh reference. See "boards" in 1 Kgs 6:15-16; the word usually occurs in architectural descriptions.) Unlike the dust, the rib is living material. The theological force of this creation is implied in 1:26-27—namely, the explicit equality of man and woman in the image of God (being created first or last remains immaterial). This description of the human creation emphasizes the personal attention implicit in the image of God as builder.

Contrary to some recent opinions,[40] the אדם (*ʾādām*) ought not to be considered an "earth creature" without sexual identity until after the creation of woman. Without an explicit linguistic marker that the meaning of *ʾādām* changes from "earth creature" to "the man," this word should be read with the same meaning throughout. Indeed, the word *ʾādām* would have to be read with two different meanings *within* v. 22 if this distinction were licit. Moreover, v. 22, which speaks explicitly of God's creation of the woman, would lack a comparable creation account for the man. Verse 23 also refers to the man by the word אישׁ (*ʾîš*; unambiguously male) as the one from whom the woman was taken.

The point at which *ʾādām* becomes the proper name Adam remains uncertain. Genesis 4:25 provides the first unequivocal instance of *ʾādām* without the definite article (so NRSV), though the NRSV provides footnotes for 2:20 (NIV begins Adam here); 3:17 (so RSV); and 3:21 (so NEB). These three texts are ambiguous (the NIV also uses the proper name in 3:20 and 4:1, but footnotes "the man"). The movement of the meaning of *ʾādām* back and forth between generic

38. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 93.

39. See G. Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *CBQ* 50 (1988) 24-35.

40. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 79-81.

humankind (1:26-27; 5:1-2), the first man, and Adam probably reflects an effort both to tell a story of a past and to provide a mirroring story for every age.

The language of "one flesh" (v. 24) functions as a literal reference at one level. The man is less than what he was before this surgery, and yet humankind has become more than it was—i.e., now male and female. The writer has not depicted a "birth" of the woman from the man, as if the man's creative powers were now in focus. The man was in a deep sleep; not to guard the mystery, but to stress that *God* was working creatively! The deity's initiative remains as central in the creation of woman as it was with the man.

In the wake of this divine act, the man's first words are recorded (note the assumption of a full-blown vocabulary), unlike the "silent" naming of the animals. The naming entails a difference from but no authority over the woman. The use of אִישׁ (*ʾîš,* "man") and אִשָּׁה (*ʾiššâ*, "woman") in the naming discerns and formally *recognizes* the sameness and difference within humanity; the similarity in sound may emphasize equality. The narrator had already so named the woman in v. 22, contrasting the *ʾiššâ* with the *ʾādām* from whom she was made *and* to whom she was brought.

The man's words recognize that the "not good" situation of v. 18 has now become good. "Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh," a phrase that specifies kinship (29:14; 2 Sam 19:12-13; a broader reference than in English idiom), literally highlights mutuality and equality. The immediately recognizable bodily differences between them occasions the difference in the name. The man thereby has a new level of knowledge of his identity as a sexual being in relationship to the woman.

One Flesh. Verse 24 stands out from its context by the way in which it makes explicit reference to a later time—namely, when children are born and one can speak of fathers and mothers (the NRSV is more explicit than the NIV). The narrator thereby links God's original intention for creation and later practice in providing an etiology of marriage. The previous verses provide the reason for this practice—namely, a man leaves his parents and clings to his wife. Inasmuch as it was usually the woman who left the parental home, such departure probably does not have a spatial reference, but alludes to leaving one family identity and establishing another with his wife. These verses make no mention of children; rather, the writer focuses on the man-woman relationship, not on the woman as the bearer of children. God's creation values sexual intimacy as being good. Although the text does not speak explicitly about single human existence, it does not imply that, in order to be truly human, one must be married.

"One flesh" does not refer to sexual intimacy in a narrow way, but recognizes that man and woman constitute an indissoluble unit of humankind from *every* perspective. Hence the author refers to but does not focus on the sexual relationship. Leaving one's parents certainly implies marriage in that culture, and marriage certainly entails sexual intimacy. Being naked in the presence of the other was natural, with no embarrassment attached to total bodily exposure. Inasmuch as this is still generally true for married persons, nakedness must be understood in both literal and metaphorical senses (3:7, 10, 21); spouses also have no fear of exposure in the broader sense, no need to cover up.

REFLECTIONS

1. Is Genesis 1–2 an adequate statement about creation for the modern or postmodern context in which we live? In many ways this question must be answered in the negative. We have learned truths about the origins, development, and nature of the world from modern science of which the biblical authors never dreamed. We are confronted with issues never faced by these authors, from the environment to the role of women. In some ways the text, at least as it has been commonly interpreted, creates problems for any adequate consideration of these issues. While the commentary suggests that these problems have been created more by interpreters than by the text

itself, the reader must not discount the history of the *negative effects* of such interpretations, from the exploitation of the environment to a second-class place for women. It will take generations for newer readings to overcome these effects.

In seeking finally to address these issues in a responsible manner, we must go beyond the text and draw on insights from other parts of the Scriptures and from our own experience in and through which God continues to speak. At the same time, these chapters will continue to provide the modern reader with an indispensable foundation for these reflections, including the images of God and the human, the relationship between God and the world, and human and nonhuman interrelationships. Perhaps, above all, these chapters provide a paradigm that we can use to integrate truths about the world gathered from all spheres of life.

2. The fact that the creation account rather than the birth of Israel stands at the head of the canon remains of considerable importance. The theological factors reflected in this ordering include the following: (a) The Bible begins with a testimony to the universal activity of God. God's creative activity not only brought the world into being but also was effectively engaged in the lives of individuals and peoples long before Israel came into being. The canonical ordering reflects the actual sequence of God's activity in the world. God was at work on behalf of the divine creational purposes before Israel understood what this activity was all about. (b) *God's* actions in the world achieve priority of place over human knowledge of what God has done. When Israel does begin to articulate the place of creation in the divine economy, this amounts to Israel's "catching up" with what God has long been about. The development of a creation theology in Israel occurs secondary to God's actual engagement with the world. At the same time, such a creation theology probably emerged much earlier in Israel than has commonly been supposed. Creation theology seems to be a given for those who first formulated a theology of Israel's redemption (see Exodus 15). (c) This canonical ordering corresponds to human experience of God's activity. Human beings in all times and places have experienced (even if they have not known) God's creative acts prior to and alongside of God's redemptive acts. Human beings receive their life and all their native gifts from the Creator quite apart from their knowledge of its source. The redemptive work of God takes place within a world and individual lives that have been brought into being and sustained by God's care. God's redemptive activity does not occur in a vacuum, but within a context decisively shaped by the life-giving work of God within and without Israel. (d) The position of Genesis 1–2 demonstrates that God's purpose in redemption does not, finally, center on Israel. God as Creator has a purpose that spans the world, and since divine deeds are rooted in the divine will, God's redemptive activity must be understood to serve this universal intention. Israel's place in the purposes of God are clear only from within this creation-wide perspective. Israel's election furthers God's mission on behalf of the entire universe.[41]

3. Traditional interpretations of Genesis have tended to favor the lofty formulations and familiar cadences of chap. 1 at the expense of the more "naive" story in chap. 2. Critical decisions, which tend to see the latter as older and more primitive (J) while considering the former (P) to be the product of more sophisticated theological reflection on creation, tend to fortify this tendency. Such views reinforce the traditional image of God as a radically transcendent Creator, operating in total independence, speaking the world into being.

Whatever the history of the transmission of these accounts, they now stand together as a single witness to the creation of the world. In this canonical perspective on creation each chapter stands in interaction with the other. Praiseworthy language about a

41. Fretheim, "The Reclamation of Creation," 355-57.

transcendent Creator has been placed in a theological context in which other images for God and the God-creature relationship come more clearly into view, providing for a more relational model of creation than has been traditionally presented.

Both God and the creatures have an important role in the creative enterprise, and their spheres of activity are interrelated. God has shaped the created order in such a way that the Creator and the creatures share overlapping spheres of interdependence and creative responsibility.[42] Moreover, the creatures are interdependent among themselves. Both human beings and animals depend on vegetation for their food (1:29-30); humans are to preserve the independent role of the animals (1:22). In addition, the nonhumans depend on varying forms of dominion exercised by the humans.

God is God and freely brings into being that which is not God. The creatures depend on the Creator for their existence and continuing life. Chapter 1 stresses divine initiative, imagination, transcendence, and power in a way that chap. 2 does not. The position of chap. 1 implies that these divine characteristics should stand at the beginning and in the foreground in any discussion. Yet, no simple or static hierarchy emerges, since some features of chap. 1 already lean toward chap. 2.

On the other hand, the realm of the divine and the realm of the creature are not two radically unrelated spheres; there are overlapping powers, roles, and responsibilities, to which image language testifies. God is not powerful and creatures powerless, as if the Godness of God could be bought at the expense of creaturely diminishment. In the very act of creating, God gives to others a certain independence and freedom. God moves over, as it were, and makes room for others. Creation involves an ordered freedom, a degree of openness and unpredictability wherein God leaves room for genuine decisions on the part of human beings as they exercise their God-given power. Even more, God gives them powers and responsibilities in a way that *commits* God to a certain kind of relationship with them. Divine constraint and restraint operate in the exercise of power within the creation (e.g., God will not singlehandedly be involved in procreation), still further restrained by the promise at the end of the flood story.

Human beings have been given freedom enough to destroy themselves, though God does not will such destruction. God does not have a final and solitary will in place from the beginning regarding every aspect of the created order. Things may develop, divine and human creativity may continue (see Ps 104:30), in view of which God will make adjustments in the divine will for the world. Yet, these divine acts will always be in tune with God's absolute will regarding the life and salvation of all.

These chapters imply that the divine sovereignty in creation is understood, not in terms of absolute divine control, but as a sovereignty that gives power over to the created for the sake of a relationship of integrity. Such a view involves risk, since it entails the possibility that the creatures will misuse the power they have been given, which does occur. A reclamation of creation will be needed.

4. Some observations on "chaos": The "deep" is probably not related to Tiamat in the Babylonian story in terms of either language or content (see commentary). Yet, some claim that "chaos" is a reality that persists beyond God's ordering activity, providing a negative backdrop and/or a potential threat to God's creation. Such language of "chaos" seems problematic, since *God* decides when to destroy (and promises not to). No reality independent of God is a threat to the creation. Such allusions do, later, provide deeply negative *images* for the world (e.g., Jer 4:23-26), but these are subsumed under the wrath of God in response to creaturely wickedness. Moreover, once Noah finds favor with God (6:8), the deity no longer threatens to destroy all creation, and specific temporal limits are placed on the flood (7:4, 12, 17). In 7:11 the fountains and windows function in an intensive way; they do not break down. When the flood waters abate, the created order of chap. 1 emerges into the light of day.

42. See M. Welker, "What Is Creation? Rereading Genesis 1 and 2," *TToday* 45 (1991) 56-71.

A different perspective on v. 2 seems appropriate. God's creative activity in the rest of Genesis 1 makes use of the "raw material" in v. 2 for new purposes. The author may not have had the philosophical perspective to call it "matter," but this verse testifies to a pre-temporal reality. As such, it describes a state of affairs prior to God's ordering that is *not yet* consonant with the divine purposes in creation (see the "not good" of 2:18).

God relates to this pre-ordering situation in and through the wind/spirit. The writer thus confesses that God constitutes a reality prior to the "beginning," and in the form of an active reality (wind or spirit). Even at this point, God acts creatively. Genesis 1:2 thus leans toward the rest of the chapter when God makes use of raw materials. Hence, the situation does not run out of control or in opposition to God. God does not reject it or say no to it; God simply uses it as part of a more comprehensive creative activity. Once God has ordered creation, the realities of v. 2 become part of a new world order. No independent threat to the cosmos (or to God) occurs at any stage.

Although the doctrine of "creation out of nothing" has often been grounded in this verse (see 2 Macc 7:28; Rom 4:17; Heb 11:3), it speaks almost exclusively of the ordering of already existing reality. We may justify a very limited use of this notion, only if we think of certain creative acts (sky and its luminaries). God brings everything else into being out of the not-yet-ordered reality, in the ultimate origins of which the author has no apparent interest. Any comprehensive doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo* must be found in other texts or theological perspectives.

(On relationships between these chapters and contemporary science, see the Overview.)

5. In 2:18-23, God takes the human decision into account when shaping new directions for the creation. Divine decisions interact with human decisions in the creation of the world. Creation involves process as well as moment; it is creaturely as well as divine.

The future stands genuinely open here. All depends on what the humans does with what God presents. The question of not only *how,* but indeed whether humanity *will* continue beyond this first generation remains open-ended, suspended in this creative moment. What the humans decide will determine whether there will be a next human generation. Human judgment will shape the nature of the next divine decision, indeed the future of the world.

This situation is similar to our own, where ecological sensitivity or the use of nuclear weapons may have a comparable import for the world's future. Such decisions could put an end to the human race as decisively as the man's choice of the animals would have. Human beings do not have the capacity to stymie God in some absolute way. But God has established a relationship with human beings such that their decisions about the creation truly count.

Genesis 3:1-24, The Intrusion of Sin

COMMENTARY

This chapter does not stand isolated. It has long been recognized as an integral part of the story, stretching from 2:4 to 4:16 (24). Some scholars have suggested that the story had an earlier form, particularly in view of the role of the trees, but no consensus has emerged. Given the high value this text has had through the centuries, the reader may be surprised to learn that the OT itself never refers to it (Eden is mentioned in 13:10; Isa 51:3; Ezek 31:9, 16, 18; 36:35; Joel 2:3). The closest parallel to the story is Ezek 28:11-19, a lamentation over the king of Tyre: "You were in Eden, the garden of God . . . were blameless in your ways from the day that you were created, until iniquity was found in you . . .

and the guardian cherub drove you out" (vv. 12, 15-16). Ezekiel 28, however, includes no mention of prohibited trees, the serpent, eating, or cursing of the ground. Genesis 3 offers no mention of riches, precious stones, or holy mountains. Some version of Ezekiel 28 was probably a source for the writer of Genesis 3. Unlike the Mesopotamian parallels, this story develops a sharp sense of human responsibility for the disruption of God's good creation.

One may discern a similar structure in Genesis 3 and 4:7-16. There is an unusual ordering in the appearance of the principals: vv. 1-7: Transgression—serpent, woman, man; vv. 8-13: Inquest—man, woman, (serpent); vv. 14-19: Sentence—serpent, woman, man.[43] That the woman plays the lead role in the transgression and the man in the inquest may suggest an interest in balance.

No word for "sin" occurs in the chapter (though in some ways that would defeat the art of storytelling; to have to name the game means one has not told the story very well). This situation parallels, in some ways, the absence of language about feeling; the chapter focuses instead on what the humans see and know and hear and do.

3:1-7, The Temptation. Verse 1 reaches back into the previous chapter in several ways. The writer identifies the serpent ("snake" would probably present fewer connotations) as a "beast"/"animal of the field" that God had formed and the man had named (the NRSV and the NIV introduce the word *wild* in 3:1 but not in 2:19-20, probably reflecting the history of the interpretation of the serpent). The serpent is characterized as "more crafty" (ערום *ʿārûm*) than any of the others God formed; this is a play on the word for "naked" (ערומים *ʿărûmmîm*) in 2:25. The link suggests that human beings may be *exposed* at times to shrewd or crafty elements in the world, language often associated with temptation.

Much debate has centered on the identity of the serpent. While the OT has no interest in this question, the situation changes in the intertestamental period. The association of the serpent with the "devil" in Wisd 2:24 (see Rev 12:9; 20:2) has enjoyed a long history. While this interpretation may be a legitimate extension of the relationship between the serpent and temptation (see below), the text does not assume such metaphysical considerations.

The text does not focus on the serpent per se, but on the human response to the possibilities the serpent presents. As such, the serpent presents a metaphor, representing anything in God's good creation that could present options to human beings, the choice of which can seduce them away from God. The tree itself becomes the temptation, while the serpent facilitates the options the tree presents.

The author introduces the serpent abruptly, in a rather matter-of-fact way. The woman shows no fear or surprise or concern; conversations with snakes about God are presented as nothing unusual. Indeed, the reader receives an initial impression that the serpent is not a villain, but a neutral observer of the God-human relationship and a conversation partner, positively disposed toward the woman. The serpent only *becomes* a facilitator of temptation as the conversation progresses.

The reader appears to be overhearing the middle of a theological dialogue, leaving questions about the source of the serpent's knowledge unsettled, but suggesting that these words have grown out of a broader conversation. The reader first hears a question from the serpent to the woman (why the woman was chosen to play this role remains unknown, perhaps because she did not receive the prohibition firsthand; see 1 Tim 2:13-15; Sir 25:21-24). The question focuses on the prohibition, explicitly referring to God. The serpent raises a question about the amount of freedom God has given humans (always a sensitive topic). This tactic sets the agenda, which centers on God, and provokes a response by suggesting that the woman knows more about the prohibition than the serpent does: "Have I got this straight? Did God really say that you were not to eat of *any* tree?" The question is clever, to which a simple yes or no response is impossible, *if* one decides to continue the conversation (a key move in such situations). The "you" is plural in Hebrew, so that both the man and the woman are implied (the man stands "with her," v. 6, and so acts as a silent partner to the entire conversation).

43. Fretheim, *Creation,* 82.

Eve's response (vv. 2-3) seems motivated by an effort to explain the situation to the serpent. We may deem her response noteworthy in a number of ways. She evidences familiarity with the prohibition (not established to this point in the narrative); she both paraphrases the permission/ prohibition in her own words and quotes God directly. In quoting God, she uses the plural "you," understanding that the prohibition applies to her (as in the "we"), though God's original prohibition was in the singular (2:16-17). One puzzles over the reference to touching (the serpent interprets her indefinite reference to the tree in the middle of the garden—see commentary on 2:9—as the tree of knowledge). She may have heard it this way from the man; yet, because the text does not settle the issue, we do not know that *either* the man or the woman misstated it. The text does not offer a judgment or a defense of God, as the word order shows ("God" is delayed until after the second "garden"; the NRSV and the NIV advance the reference; see TNK, NAB). That she (or the man) makes the prohibition more severe than God made it has been explained in various ways (from anxiety to confusion to innocent defensiveness to hyperbole to a contribution in the search for truth). Most likely, the woman's reasons are revealed in the serpent's reply, which immediately focuses on death. The reference to touching thus reveals a key vulnerability—namely, anxiety about death. She exaggerates because she wants to avoid death at all costs (anxiety does not necessarily involve sin). The exaggeration offers evidence of reflection that the woman (and/ or the man) has had about the prohibition.

The serpent responds (vv. 4-5) precisely at the point of exaggeration and vulnerability, and with a promise at that: The humans will not die. This response could be a contradiction of what God has said (but not all that the woman has said). But it may be more subtle than that. In 3:22, God recognizes that they could eat and not die, *if* they eat of the tree of life. Expulsion from the garden becomes necessary for death to occur. So the serpent speaks a word that has the potential of being true (at least at the physical level). The reason: They will be like God/divine beings (1:26 and 3:22 include both), knowing good and evil (the phrase could refer either to God or to minor deities, and may be purposely ambiguous). Inasmuch as God said nothing about being like God(s) a new element has been drawn into the picture (3:22 confirms that the serpent was right); yet, because this issue plays no role in the woman's reflection (v. 6) we have difficulty assessing its importance. Hence, we should temper efforts to see the primal sin as a desire to become like God. The serpent was subtle in holding out the possibility of avoiding death, while not conveying all the possible futures, not least a broader definition of death and another option that God had available (expulsion).

The serpent, then, is correct in saying the humans would become like God(s), knowing good and evil, and that eating in itself would not necessarily mean death in at least some sense. The serpent speaks a key phrase: "God knows." It claims that God has not told them the full truth about the matter, that God keeps something back. In this, the serpent acts not as a deceiver but as *a truth-teller.* But what was God's motivation for not telling them the whole story? The serpent makes it sound as if God's motivation is self-serving; the humans will become like God. Has God, in keeping the full truth from them, divine interests more at heart than interest in humans? The issue of knowledge thus becomes at its deepest level an issue of *trust.* Is the giver of the prohibition one who can be trusted with their best interests? Can the man and the woman trust God even if God has not told them everything, indeed not given them every possible "benefit"?

The writer leaves the woman to draw her own conclusions. The serpent has only presented some possibilities. The serpent engages in no coercion here, no arm-twisting, no enticement through presentation of fruit from the tree; everything happens through words. The word of the serpent ends up putting the word of God in question. At the same time, the issue focuses on the visible and tangible, which belong to God's creation.[44]

The woman does not speak (the lack of communication reinforces the element of mistrust); she only looks, contemplates, and eats. She considers explicitly neither God nor the prohibition, in terms of either complaint

44. See H. White, *Narration and Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 133-37.

or rejection; she focuses only on the potential the tree offers. The observation that the tree was good for food and pleasant to the sight means, in view of 2:9 (see 1:29), that this tree becomes like other trees to her; it also happens to be "desirable for gaining wisdom." While one may "desire" (נחמד *neḥmād*, 2:9) the trees for their beauty, the humans shall not "desire" wisdom (i.e., knowledge of good and evil). The command seems to forbid an immediate acquisition of knowledge, though without suggesting that humans should not have wisdom. The issue involves *the way in which wisdom is gained.* The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (see Rom 1:20-21). By using their freedom to acquire wisdom in this way, they have determined that the creational command no longer applies to them. That command refers primarily, not to the intellect, but to success in making decisions in life—true wisdom involves knowing good and evil, the discernment of what is one's own best interests (see at 2:9). What it means can be seen from the result. Only God has a perspective that can view the created order as a whole; human beings (even with their new knowledge) will never gain that kind of breadth, for they make their decisions from within the creation.

The woman takes some of the fruit and gives it to her husband. As a silent partner "with her" throughout this exchange, the man puts up no resistance, raises no questions, and considers no theological issues; he simply and silently takes his turn. The woman does not act as a temptress in this scene; they both have succumbed to the same source of temptation. They stand together as "one flesh" at this point as well.

The result is fourfold: Their eyes are opened (as the serpent had promised, v. 5); they know that they are naked; they make loincloths for themselves (an interhuman act); and they hide from God's presence. With eyes opened, they see the world differently, *from a theological perspective.* They realize that, now having to decide for themselves what is in their own best interests, everything looks somewhat different. Having decided to be on their own, they see the world entirely through their own eyes. They now operate totally out of their own resources.

The humans first see each other's nakedness. It becomes clear (v. 10) that nakedness has more than a bodily reference. It reverses the lack of shame between them in 2:25 (see 9:21-23; Isa 20:4; Lam 1:8; Ezek 16:37). They respond initially by providing garments for themselves, which involves more than a physical act; they attempt to cover up their shame. This response addresses only the symptoms of the problem. Their human resources prove inadequate, as they recognize in seeking to hide their nakedness from God (3:10)—their clothing reveals more than it conceals—as God's action in clothing the already clothed indicates (3:21).

3:8-13, The Inquest. In this section God conducts a judicial inquiry. Whereas the woman functioned as the dialogue partner in vv. 1-5, the man serves that function in vv. 9-12. Hence, the author creates a certain balance between them in the story as a whole.

The Creator of the universe and all creatures chooses not to relate to the world at a distance, but takes on human form, goes for a walk among the creatures, and personally engages them regarding recent events. The writer presents no naive theology, but a deeply profound understanding of how God chooses to enter into the life of the world and relate to the creatures. Even more, this God comes to the man and the woman subsequent to their sin; God does not leave them or walk elsewhere.

Hearing God walking about in the garden, the man and woman try to hide from the divine presence. Not encountering the couple (as usual?), God calls for the man (the "you" is singular). The man interprets the question correctly as a probing inquiry and attempts to deflect the conversation away from what has happened. But his response reveals that something disastrous has occurred. He is afraid—the fear is explicit—because he was naked and, feeling shame at what has happened, hides himself, even though he is now clothed (v. 7). While the nakedness in v. 7 focuses on their relationship to each other, in v. 10 it shifts to their relationship with God. Although the feelings about nakedness are new, their clothing prompts the response; "clothedness" must be hidden from God. (It is ironic that the words for "hearing" and

"fearing" can also be used for "obedience" and "awe.")

God's response centers on their nakedness, not on their fear. How would the man have known that he was naked? Something must have happened so that nakedness had become a problem *to the someone who told him* so (namely, the woman). God immediately puts the right question (again, to elicit a confession), asking whether he has eaten of the prohibited tree.

The responses could be viewed as a consequence of achieving autonomy; the man could not handle the new "knowledge." He appears fearful, insecure, and ashamed, seeking to justify himself and deflecting blame, both to God for giving him the woman and to the woman for giving him the fruit to eat, which had been guaranteed to alienate them from each other. Yet he does admit having eaten (though without mentioning motives). This situation attests to a breakdown in interhuman relationships as well as in the relationship with God, whom he does not engage in a straightforward manner.

God then turns to the woman, again asking a leading question. The woman deflects the responsibility as well (though she does not blame God as the man does), this time laying the blame on the trickery of the serpent (blaming it on the source of temptation), yet admitting that she too has eaten. That there is no inquiry of the serpent may show that the purpose in the interrogation of the humans was to elicit confession.

3:14-19, The Sentence. God proceeds with the sentencing, accepting full human responsibility and bringing all parties within the scope of the announcement. God acts as judge, calling each of the participants before the bench (in the order of vv. 1-6) and pronouncing sentence on each in typical courtroom speech (which immediately takes effect). Yet, even in the sentencing, God remains in relationship with the creatures involved, connected and concerned enough to identify further what has just happened.

What are the effects of the sentencing? Most basically, the sentences pertain to their primary roles in life (in that culture), roles of stature among the animals, roles of wife and mother, roles of tiller of soil and provider of food. Every conceivable relationship has been disrupted: among the animals; between an animal and humans; between the ground and humans; between human beings and God; between an animal and God; within the individual self (e.g., shame). More abstractly, one could speak of humiliation, domination and subordination, conflict, suffering, and struggle. The sentences touch every aspect of human life: marriage and sexuality; birth and death; work and food; human and nonhuman. In all of these areas, one could speak of death encroaching on life. Disharmony reigns supreme.

We may deem the judgment announced to the serpent unusual in a number of ways. First, God does not interrogate the serpent, although the judgment recognizes some responsibility on the part of the serpent for what happened. Second, the serpent receives a curse, becoming isolated from the community of animals (a word play with the initial description: "more crafty" [ערום *ʿārûm*] becomes "more cursed" [ארור *ʾārûr*]), a moral order correspondence—what goes around comes around. Third, in the future the serpent will move on its belly and "eat" dust (given the role that eating plays in the temptation, this is moral order talk). While this sentence may present an explanation of why the snake crawls on its belly, it signifies humiliation; eating dust symbolizes degradation (see Mic 7:17; cf. Ps 72:9; Isa 49:23). In some sense, vv. 14-15 create a symbol out of the serpent, which will remind all who encounter it of the subtleties of temptation as well as of the humiliating and conflicting consequences.

God places enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between the offspring of both. On the surface, the writer may be offering an origin of the legendary revulsion human beings have for snakes, which may relate back to 1:28 and show how the human task of dominion has been much complicated (see 9:2-3). Interpreters through the centuries (who have often linked the serpent and the devil) have seen in this text an ongoing struggle at a deeper level, even considering the text messianic, foretelling the struggle between the seed of the woman (i.e., the Messiah) and Satan. Yet, the word for "seed" functions as a collective noun (9:9; 12:7) or refers to the immediate offspring (4:25), not

a distant one. It probably refers more generally to ongoing centuries of conflict between people and various sources of temptation. The "head" and "heel" are the natural targets against each other and point to no resolution of the conflict (the NRSV correctly reflects the fact that the same verb is used in both). Yet, striking the head of the serpent would more likely prove decisive and would give at least potential superiority to the human over the animal (perhaps reflecting 4:7).

The sentence on the woman—with whom no curse language is associated—has also been much discussed. Carol Meyers has placed this material in a sociohistorical setting just before the monarchy, a time when the place of women was related to the harsh realities of agricultural life in the central highlands.[45] She translates (with help from different versions) the first line of v. 16 to reflect the arduous field work in which women had to participate ("I will greatly increase your toil and your pregnancies"), and thinks it has an etiological force originally not present in Gen 3:16. While this view has not been fully tested, most scholars continue to translate along the lines of the NRSV and the NIV, so that the first clause in the poetry refers only to the pain of childbirth (hence paralleling the second clause). In any case, whatever the sociohistorical background of the text, the final literary context presents these verses as a consequence of the man's and the woman's sin. The fulfillment of the command to multiply in 1:28 has become more difficult.

The "desire" of the woman for the man remains unclear. It could involve a desire for mastery (as with this verb in 4:7), which will be thwarted by the husband. More likely, it means that, despite the pains of childbirth, she will still long for sexual intimacy. The "rule" of the husband could be a more general reference to patriarchy, which would be a departure from what God intended in creation (see 2:18-23). Trible states that the rule of the male "is neither a divine right nor a male prerogative. Her subordination is neither a divine decree nor the female destiny. Both their positions result from shared disobedience."[46] The "rule" of the man over the woman is part and parcel of the judgment on the *man* as much as the woman. This writer understood that patriarchy and related ills came as a consequence of sin rather than being the divine intention. How easy it would have been to build patriarchy into the created order!

God allocates the most extensive sentence to the man, whose attempt to pass off the blame to his wife the deity has rejected out of hand. One may discern moral order talk, since eating plays a role in both sin and sentence. Although the man does not receive the curse, the ground from which he was formed does. The ground brings forth thorns and thistles as well as the plants of the field, which human beings will continue to need for food, but the thistles will make it more difficult to obtain. This also means that God's command to subdue the earth will be more difficult to fulfill. A concern for relief from the curse on the ground appears in 5:29 and 8:21. The same word that was used for "toil" in v. 16 for woman's pain in childbirth occurs in this sentence as well (both striking at a primary role in life). The man's work does not receive a curse (he still does in 3:23 what he was called to do in 2:15), but it has become more difficult and more energy has to be expended to gain a living from the soil.

"All the days of your life . . . You are dust and to dust you shall return" expands upon "until you return to the ground." This part of the sentence stipulates that the toil shall not let up until death. Death seems to be assumed rather than introduced as a part of the sentence. While the word *death* does not occur here, certain features of death within life are evident, beginning even before the sentencing. It remains to be seen whether the still remaining possibility of eating from the tree of life and gaining immortality will be realized.

3:20-24, The Expulsion. The note about Eve in v. 20 seems intrusive, but it probably functions as a positive development in the midst of the judgment, anticipating that life will still go on (a negative assessment of this verse incorrectly associates naming with subordination). The NIV future tense seems correct (since the perfect verb expresses certainty). Adam gives his wife the more personal name Eve ("Eve" resembles the word

45. C. Meyers, *Discovering Eve: Ancient Israelite Women in Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 117-19.

46. Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, 128.

for "living"), as a way of expressing confidence that children will be born; indeed, the unity of the human race ("all") appears implied, which would fulfill the command in 1:28.

Verse 21 has both positive and negative dimensions. The use of clothing is a common thread throughout Genesis as a sign of many things (see Tamar in 38:14, 19; Joseph in 37:3). Here God is imaged as a tailor, using animal skins (not necessarily killing to procure them). This same image for God is used in Ezek 16:8-14, where it is a profoundly gracious act, assuring continuing divine presence in the midst of the judgment; that is likely one theme here. If nakedness has to do with shame, exposure, and vulnerability, and they already had made clothes for themselves, God's act of clothing them may relate to issues of salvation (Job 29:14; Ps 132:16). God acts to cover their shame and defenselessness. At the same time, this act recognizes continuity in their estranged relationship; this is something with which they must now live (the more substantial skins may also stress this).

Verse 22 introduces inner-divine communication once again (see 1:26 for the "us"; see also 11:6-7). The sentence could break off abruptly (see NRSV), matching the effect of the action—namely, expulsion from the garden. Or it could be concluded with an exclamation point (see TNK). We should note that *ʾādām* functions generically here. The expulsion becomes necessary because God envisions radical possibilities regarding the tree of life and human immortality. Expulsion does not mean that an innate immortality has been lost; rather, the possibility of ever attaining it has been eliminated. Preventing humans from living forever might seem to be a defensive move by the deity, yet if death (in the comprehensive sense) has already become a significant part of life, then never-ending life offers no blessing. God continues to protect human beings. In apocalyptic literature, this motif recurs in an eternal frame, and when eternal life becomes a reality, it is not accompanied by sin and its consequences.

The author provides no specific description of the apparently coercive means used to drive the humans out of the garden. Yet, the divine vocation for the human remains the same: tilling the ground (see 2:15) from which he was taken (2:7-8). Hence, the humans leave the garden with a certain integrity, remaining an integral part of the divine purpose for the world (2:5). While being "like God" carries tremendous burdens and ambiguities, it also bears some potential for good and advancement. The cherubim—a human and animal/bird composite (a common phenomenon in the ancient Near East)—are usually associated with sanctuaries in Israel, associated with the divine presence in the ark, the tabernacle, and the temple. They assumed various functions, including guarding the sanctuary from unauthorized intrusion. The turning sword (unique in the OT) may or may not be in the hands of the cherubim, but its purpose is clear: to prevent human beings from returning to Eden; paradise on earth no longer remains a possibility.

The ending of this chapter bears some remarkable similarities both to Israel's being sent/driven out of Egypt (Exod 6:1) and to Israel's exile to Babylon, a banishment from the land (see Leviticus 26). The latter, in particular, may have been viewed as a parallel experience to this primeval moment in Israel's eyes.

REFLECTIONS

1. Inasmuch as God made the serpent, the text raises the issue of God's responsibility for what happens. God holds ultimate responsibility in the sense that God did not create puppets, but made human beings in such a way that they could resist the will of God (human beings would not be commanded not to eat if they were unable to do so). The temptation to reach beyond the limits of creatureliness belongs to created existence for the sake of human integrity and freedom (and God does not have absolute knowledge of future human behaviors, 22:12). At the same time, the text does not bring God's responsibility closer to hand and speak of God as the tempter or

the instigator of the serpent's wiles or the source of sin and evil. The author does not use the language of evil to describe the serpent; indeed, the word about the serpent as God's creature recalls the litany of the goodness of all that God has created. Sin and evil have emerged only subsequent to the creation of the world. The first human beings are presented as individuals who are not sinful, but with clear choices available to them, with no response coerced or inevitable; they live in a world where choices count and God has not programmed the divine-human relationship.

We may see the serpent from a number of angles. The word *crafty* seems purposely ambiguous, as words like *clever, cunning,* and *shrewd* commonly are; it depends on the use to which these characteristics are put. Although used to describe human beings in both a good and a bad sense (e.g. Job 5:12; esp. Prov 12:16), no other biblical writer used this word for an animal; yet people often associate animals with characteristics usually reserved for humans (a sly fox; a wise owl). The serpent stands as an ambivalent symbol, associated with both life and death (see Num 21:4-9), often used figuratively for evil people (Pss 58:4; 140:3). Serpents were considered dangerous and probably always poisonous, a threat to life (Ps 91:13); they were "naked" in appearance, silent and "innocent" in their approach, suddenly there with little or no warning. As occasional symbols of deity, they could have been associated with that which was religiously seductive and hence dangerous to Israel's religious health.

The writer views the serpent as an animal of the field, and when God sentences the serpent (v. 14) it is included again among these fauna. Yet, this animal's knowledge and abilities seem not to outmatch those of any other animal. It may have been thought, however, that animals had unusual capabilities in paradise, or even beyond (see Balaam's ass [Num 22:22-30] and animals that have a knowledge of God, Job 12:7-9). When it comes to actions, however, the serpent seems to stand in a class by itself. Yet, a question remains: Is the serpent out to seduce human beings and challenge God or is it more of a neutral figure, serving to mediate possibilities within God's good creation? We should note that the woman occasions no surprise or fear or wonderment about the serpent. From every sign in the text, the woman understands it to be a natural part of her world.

The serpent, neither divine nor human, stands over against both as a "third party." In some sense, Genesis 3 reverses or makes less certain the dominion of humans over animals (1:28). God's sentence makes enmity a part of life. The serpent elicits certain characteristics in the human. "The serpent's 'subtlety' is the ability to provoke reflection on the true meaning of freedom, to reveal by means of conversation that the woman had the ability to think for herself, to suggest to her that she had the power to decide for herself. So it is the course of the conversation that is truly important, and not the existence of a talking serpent. . . . The serpent is a tempter in a sense, but only as a catalyst, assisting the woman's own mental processes to discover the freedom she had the power to grasp."[47]

The identification of the serpent as a "beast of the field" means that the reality embodied in the serpent should not be viewed as either primordial or transhistorical. It is not an evil being or supernatural/metaphysical force opposed to the divine purposes. The serpent exists within this world and is encountered by humans there. Nevertheless, the reality embodied in the serpent is transpersonal, not simply a product of the individual will. Language about the seed of the serpent, as well as God's judgment upon it, prevents us from seeing here *simply* an externalization of an inward struggle. In one sense, the serpent becomes transgenerational. The serpent may be a metaphor, yet no "mere metaphor"; it bears some correspondence with reality beyond the individuals involved.

47. Gowan, *From Eden to Babel,* 52.

2. Descriptions of paradise have, at times, been drawn in overly romantic terms. The text, however, shows remarkable restraint. It emphasizes basics: life, freedom, food, a place to call home, a family, harmonious relationships, and a stable natural environment. The contrast with the situation portrayed in 3:7-19 stands sharp and clear; yet, care must be used not to overdraw the differences. For example, suffering is often considered to be only part of the broken world. But it would be truer to the text to speak of the effects of sin as an intensification of suffering, so that it becomes a burden, tragic, no longer serving of life. Eden, though, does include suffering. D. J. Hall speaks of four Edenic dimensions of "the suffering of becoming" (and draws parallels with the life of Jesus): loneliness (2:18); limits (not only the command in 2:17, but the very nature of creaturely existence); temptation; and anxiety (of ignorance, dependency, uncertainty). "Life without suffering would be no life at all; it would be a form of death. Life depends in some mysterious way on the struggle to be."[48] Genesis 1 may recognize this reality in the language of "subdue" (1:28).

3 What is the sin? Although the word *sin* or other such words do not appear in the chapter (4:7 is the first occurrence), we should not overvalue its absence. Stories are similar to games in that certain things do not need to be named. Nonetheless, interpreters have had difficulty identifying the nature of the primal sin. The story remains complex and devoid of abstract reflection. Even God's responses focus on the act of eating itself and its effects (vv. 11, 13, 17). God deems what they have done to be clearly wrong. But no single word appears to be satisfactory to describe it.

Disobedience may be the most common suggestion. Yet, though humans transgress God's prohibition (2:17), that action symptomizes a more fundamental problem. The vocabulary of pride (or hubris) also appears frequently, centered particularly in the "becoming like God(s)" theme. The serpent does mention this issue (3:5), but as part of a larger point being made regarding the divine motivation for the prohibition (for "God knows"). Moreover, the woman does not mention it in her own reflection; she uses language that normally would not be associated with pride (3:6). Even God mentions their having become like God(s) in a matter-of-fact way (3:22). Finally, language of rebellion also presents problems. No storming of the heavens language occurs here, no expressed effort to take over the divine realm. We might speak of their desire for autonomy, but not to run the universe. Even then, the reader finds no declaration of independence and no celebration of a newfound freedom.

The primal sin may be best defined as mistrust of God and the word of God, which then manifests itself in disobedience and other behaviors (e.g., blaming others). The serpent, in telling the truth about God (v. 4, "God knows"), informs the humans of something that God had not conveyed to them. This information centers on certain benefits that would accrue to them upon eating from the tree, benefits that appear to be in their best interest. This raises the question of God's motivation; even more, it suggests that God's motivation might be more focused on God than on their welfare. Can the humans trust that God has their best interests at heart even if they do not know everything? Even more, can the humans trust that God will be able to discern that not all such "benefits" are in their best interests, that true creaturely freedom entails acknowledging limits?

4. Commentators often use the language of "fall" with reference to this chapter. Such language begins to emerge only in post-OT interpretation, both in Judaism (Sir 25:24; Wis 2:24; see 2 Esdr 3:7-22; 7:118) and in Christianity (Rom 5:12-21; 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49), and has been a staple of Christian theological reflection through the centuries.[49]

48. D. J. Hall, *God and Human Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986) 53-62.

49. See S. Towner, "Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall," *Modern Biblical Scholarship,* ed. F. Eigo (Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1984) 53-85; G. Tucker, "The Creation and the Fall: A Reconsideration," *LTQ* 13 (1978) 113-24.

Readers, thereby, have given this text a level of significance found nowhere else within the OT (some themes are picked up here and there). But care must be used not to overdraw this statistical observation (this would be particularly the case if the Yahwist wrote in the exilic period!). Canonical placement has given to this text a certain theological stature (as with chaps. 1–2). Moreover, frequency of reference does not provide an absolute criterion for determining theological importance (one thinks of the suffering servant songs in Isaiah). We can only decry the elevation of this story into a dogma, though that often develops on the basis of many other considerations. Further questions need to be raised: To what extent does the "Fall" constitute a metaphor grounded in this text? This question relates to issues raised by the postbiblical language of "original sin." We take up the latter first.

This chapter in itself cannot support a notion of original sin. "Original" refers to the universality or inescapability of human sinfulness, not to its point of origin or to a particular mode of transmission—say, genetic (though the claim has often been made). At most one could speak of an "originating" sin (see below). Chapters 3–6 together, however, support a view approximating this, especially as seen in the snowballing effects of sin, climaxing in the statement of 6:5, "Every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually" (reaffirmed in 8:21). This suggests a process by which sin became "original."

The text includes the image inside/outside the garden to probe this issue, with progressively greater distances from the near presence of God (3:22-24; 4:16; see also the decreasing ages of human beings).[50] Humans live outside the garden (3:14-19 describes such conditions). Cain makes his decision to kill outside the garden, in a state of alienation from the relationship with God that presence together in the garden implies; 4:7 even gives "sin" an enticing, possessive character. At the same time, 4:7 implies that being "outside the garden" does not exhaust the analysis of a sinful act. Hence, something approximating a distinction between "sin" and "sins" is made; at the least, sin cannot be reduced to individual acts in these chapters.

What, then, of the "Fall" as a metaphor for what happens in this text? At least two issues present themselves: (1) the congruence of this metaphor with the metaphors in the text, and (2) the idea of the sin of Adam and Eve as a decisive rupture in the history of the relationship between God and humans. I believe that we may speak of a fundamental disruption, though this specific metaphor finds no textual basis. The most basic theological issue at stake involves whether sin is collapsed back into God's creational work and intention.

"Fall" theorists commonly assume that the text presents straightforward chronological terms: creation, paradise, fall. I have sought to show that these chapters, for all their typological character, tell a story of the past. They are placed within a *temporal framework,* particularly in the distinctions drawn between past and present and in the common chronological references.

Other readers assume that human beings were not created as sinful or evil creatures. If they were "perfect," how could they have failed? Rather, they were "good," which entails considerable room for growth and the development of potentialities. By the way human responsibility for what happens is lifted up, the writer does not assign the problem of human sinfulness to God or consider it integral to God's creational purposes. Certainly God creates the potential for such developments for the sake of human freedom. Especially important are the effects of this human decision, which range in an amazingly wide arch; it disrupts not only their own lives, but (given the symbiotic character of creaturely relationships) that of the entire cosmos as well, issuing in disharmonious relationships at every level. The narrative signals some kind of fundamental break by the journey of the nakedness theme from 2:25 through chap.

50. Fretheim, *Creation,* 97-99.

3, to which 9:3-5 also testifies. At the same time, the attention given to "process" noted above means that such human developments are not simply collapsed into a single moment.

The metaphor of "fall" does not do justice to these texts. Traditionally, this metaphor has been used to refer to a fall "down." Others typically emphasize the "becoming like God" theme, where human beings strive for and, indeed, assume godlike powers for themselves. This kind of a fall "up" (see above) violates the basic thrust of the metaphor (perhaps one could speak of a reaching up only to fall down, for the humans are not able to handle what they have become).

Such an upward move in the texts has been interpreted positively (at least since Irenaeus) in the sense that human beings move out from under the parental hand of God; they are pioneers on the road to moral autonomy and maturity, a necessary move if they are to become truly human. "The position reflects the mounting consciousness of the last few decades that rebellion against the yoke of authority is both an inevitable and a necessary element in human maturation."[51] However, one has difficulty in sustaining a totally positive view of God's response to the human violation of the prohibition. We would have to assign the problem to God, who acts arbitrarily in the setting of limits, and who opposes maturity and overreacts to what has happened. There are, in fact, few signs that the human lot improves, from either the divine or the human perspective. All the signs are that death (in the comprehensive sense) has become a pervasive reality with which humanity must deal, and that far from being marked by a new maturity or freedom, human life now entails broken relationships with God and every other creature (see 9:3-5 as well).

Perhaps these themes allow a variation on the "Fall" metaphor—namely, a fall "out." The primary images in the text are those of separation, estrangement, alienation, and displacement.[52] In these respects, the story is written not only to reflect a story of the past, but also to claim that in fundamental ways it reflects the character of human life in every age, which is filled with disharmonious relationships at all levels of life. Human beings always "reject their God-given vocation, scorn their permission modestly to enjoy the good gifts of the Garden, and break across into the area of prohibition outside the sphere of human competence."[53]

In view of these suggestions, does the text wish to claim that these events have *universal* effects on *all* subsequent generations? This combination of considerations, particularly the cosmic motifs present in chaps. 3 and 6, suggests that it does (reaffirmed in 8:21). The possible negative consequences for one's view of God need to be considered in the light of the moral order rather than a forensic divine decision. To this end, a consideration of 3:14-19 is helpful.

5. Finding the right language to describe vv. 14-19 has been difficult. Some would say that the language functions descriptively, but not prescriptively. The language does describe what has been commonly true about the human situation; it serves more as a statement about *condition* than a typical effect of specific human sins. Hence, this dimension of the story has a more than typological force; it works as a story of the past, presenting consequences of human sin that have taken hold in human life.

Some interpreters have hesitated to use the language of judgment (or punishment), often narrowly conceived. Yet, God's judgment facilitates the moral order, the working out of the effects of sinful acts. The man and woman reap the consequences of their own deeds. They wanted control over their own lives; they now have control in grievously distorted and unevenly distributed forms. They wanted to transcend creaturely

51. Towner, "Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall," 80.

52. See A. Hauser, "Genesis 2–3: The Theme of Intimacy and Alienation," *Art and Meaning,* ed. D. Clines et al. (Sheffield: *JSOT,* 1982) 20-36.

53. Towner, "Interpretations and Reinterpretations of the Fall," 78.

limits, but they have found newly intensified forms of limitation. They now have the autonomy they so desired, but neither the perspective nor the wherewithal to handle it very well.

The language of prescription does not help if it means that God puts this particular state of affairs into place for all time to come. These judgments are not a divine effort to put a new order of creation into place. And these effects are not cast in stone, determining human fate forever. The judgment of Jerusalem in 587 BCE did not mean that it should remain forever in ruins, for it was soon rebuilt. Correspondingly, the toil of the man and the pain of the woman are not such that no effort should be made to relieve them. In fact, the intense efforts, particularly in recent years, to overcome these effects of sin harmonize with the creational intentions of God. At the same time, continuing human sinfulness impedes these efforts, and other forms of the distorting effects of sin break out among us with extraordinary regularity. We have a smoldering forest fire on our hands.

6. What about death in particular? In some sense this story includes an etiology of death (at least for human beings). Human beings were created mortal; nothing inherent in human beings would have enabled them to live forever. Death per se belongs as a natural part of God's created world. At the same time, the tree of life presents the possibility of continuing life as a special blessing. Since humans violate the prohibition, God cuts off that possibility by excluding them from access to the tree of life (3:22). In effect, sin leads to a death that would have been possible to avoid. It would be a mistake to think of death in these chapters as defined solely in terms of the cessation of heartbeat; death becomes a pervasive reality within life before the exclusion. Yet, these intrusions of death into life would not have led to physical death if the human beings had discovered the tree of life. Only God's act of exclusion in 3:22-24 forecloses that option.

The interpretation of Rom 5:12-21 ought not to be set up in such a way that it presents Paul as either all wrong or all right in his interpretation of the Genesis story. He certainly develops these themes beyond the scope of the story. Paul is, after all, basically interested in soteriological issues and develops an Adam-Christ typology as a way of interpreting the significance of what God has done in Jesus.[54] But, in some sense, he was right to read the story in terms of an etiology of *the reality of* death, if not death as such.

7. In vv. 17-18 the moral order bears a close relationship to the cosmic order, since human sin has ill effects upon the ground. While human behaviors today may affect the nonhuman order in ways different from then, or the cause-and-effect relationship may have been conceived differently, the link remains important.

The concern for the relationship between the human and nonhuman, often neglected, pervades these texts. This connection ranges from the deep concern evident in the detail regarding God's creating of the various creatures, to the assignment of the human to the further development of and care for the nonhuman world. The naming of the animals, while not finally solving human loneliness, establishes a "by name" relationship between the human and the nonhuman. God's continuing concern for the animals in the story of Noah's ark shows that God's delegation of responsibility does not issue in a deistic perspective regarding the divine care for the world. The symbiotic relationship among the creatures, in which humans participate, remains a prominent theme throughout the OT (see Lev 18:24-28; 26:14, 20; Hos 4:1-3; Rom 8:19-23).

54. See Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans,* trans. and ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 139-58 for a balanced view.

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