



Class Notes

Adam to Noah

Genesis 2-5

Dr. Tim Mackie

What really happened in the garden with Adam and Eve and the snake? The early chapters of Genesis introduce a cycle of testing and rebellion that we'll see repeated throughout the Bible. Study Genesis 2-5 and discover how this failed test set God's plan to restore humanity as his partners into motion.

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Module 1: The Eden Story as the Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

SESSIONS 1-7

Think about the ideas you have about the first pages of the Bible and get familiar with the tools you'll be using to explore Genesis 2-5.

Session 1: Considering the Authors' Intentions for Genesis

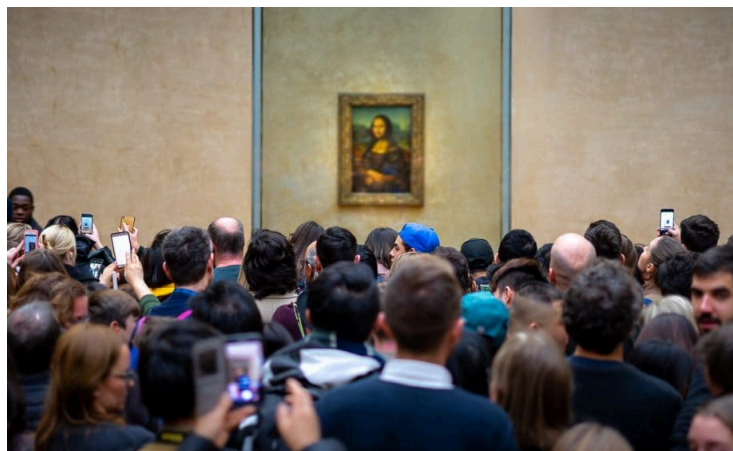
Key Takeaways

- It is helpful to be aware of our own assumptions and questions and pay attention to the intent of the biblical authors.
- These early chapters of Genesis form the introduction to the Hebrew Bible. The biblical authors crafted these stories to set the tone and expectations for what will come next.

The *Mona Lisa* Analogy

Every day, tens of thousands of people wait in line to see Leonardo da Vinci's famous painting *Mona Lisa*. In the five centuries since the masterpiece was created, the *Mona Lisa* has taken on a life of its own. People come from all over the world to see it—all with many different motivations and ideas of what the *Mona Lisa* means to them.

Much like the *Mona Lisa*, the early chapters of Genesis—the stories of Adam and Eve and the garden of Eden—have taken on a life of their own. While we all have important questions when we come to the biblical text, our priority is to intentionally focus on the questions the biblical authors were concerned about. We demonstrate love for our ancient Israelite neighbor by taking time to pause, recognize our questions, and set them to the side so we can really listen to what the biblical authors are trying to say.



Flickr Commons (2018). [Art Critique](#).

Reflection Question

Tim uses the example of people having all sorts of different questions when they visit the Mona Lisa. What does it mean to “step out of the Mona Lisa line” when talking about studying the Bible?

Session 2: Genesis 2-5 as the Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

Key Takeaways

- Jesus’ Bible was a three-part collection of scrolls called the TaNaK. (TaNaK is a designation for the Hebrew Bible taken from the first letter of its three major sections. T stands for *Torah*, which is Hebrew for “instruction”; N is for *Nevi'im*, meaning “prophets”; and K is for *Ketuvim*, meaning “writings.”)
- The Bible is like a patchwork quilt where each piece plays a part in the unified work.

The TaNaK as a Composite Unity

The Hebrew Bible is a set of ancient Israelite scrolls that were formed into an editorial unity over the course of their composition and collection. The three-part macro design dates to somewhere in the 3rd-2nd century B.C. This order is preserved in modern Jewish tradition and is well attested in Second Temple Jewish texts and the New Testament.

Sections	Scrolls
Torah (The Law)	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy
Nevi'im (The Prophets)	Former Prophets: Joshua, Judges, Samuel, Kings
	Latter Prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadaiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zaphaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
Ketuvim (The Writings)	Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ruth, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes, Lementations, Esther [The <i>Megillot</i>], Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles
Three-Part Collection of the Hebrew Bible. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

Jesus Refers to This Three-Part Design

When Jesus alludes to the order of the Hebrew Bible, he assumes a three-part design, which agrees with other contemporary Jewish authors who allude to the ordered sections.

Luke 24:44 NIV

This is what I told you while I was still with you: Everything must be fulfilled that is written about me in the Torah of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms.

The “blessed one” of [Psalm 1](#) is portrayed as the ideal Joshua seen in [Joshua 1:7-8](#), “one who meditates on the Torah day and night,” which results in success and a prosperous way.

Luke 11:51 NIV

Therefore, this generation will be held responsible for the blood of all the prophets that has been shed since the beginning of the world, from the blood of Abel to the blood of Zechariah, who was killed between the altar and the sanctuary.

Abel was murdered by Cain in [Genesis 4](#), and Zechariah son of Jehoiadah was murdered by Joash in [2 Chronicles 24](#), which corresponds to the TaNaK order.

Other published texts in this time period also refer to the three-part design of the TaNaK.

“Many great teachings have been given to us through the Law [Torah], and the Prophets [Nevi'im], and the others that follow them [Ketuvim] ... So my grandfather Yeshua devoted himself especially to the reading of the Law and the Prophets and the other scrolls of our Ancestors.”

Prologue to the Wisdom of Ben Sirach

“The scrolls of Moses, the words of the prophets, and of David.”

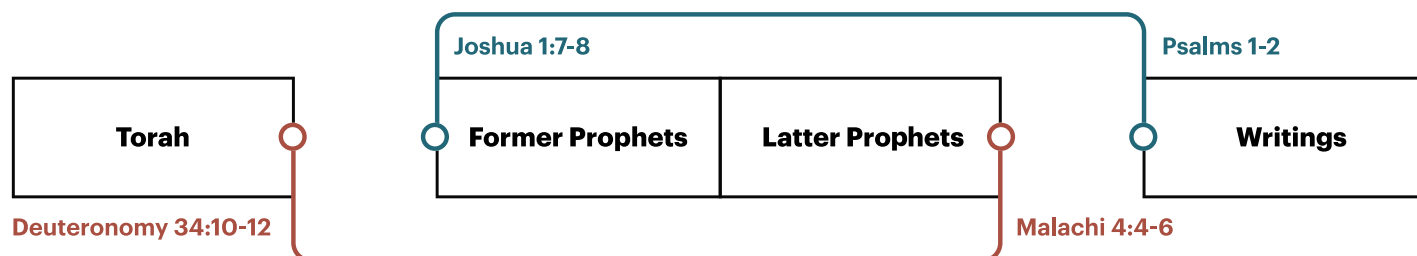
Dead Sea Scrolls (4QMMT)

“The laws and the oracles given by inspiration through the prophets and the Psalms, and the other scrolls whereby knowledge and piety are increased and completed.”

Philo of Alexandria (De Vita Contemplativa, 25)

The Editorial Design of the TaNaK

The three-part shape of the Hebrew Bible isn't simply a matter of arrangement. Rather, the books themselves have been designed to fit into this particular shape. If you look at the editorial seams of the major sections (remember the technology was papyrus or leather scrolls), you'll find intentional design clues at the beginning and ending of these sections.



Tanak Editorial Design. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Seam 1: The Final Sentences of the Torah and the Opening Sentences of the Nevi'im

- Deuteronomy 34:10-12: Anticipation of a coming Moses-like prophet who was promised but never came.
- Joshua 1:1-9: God's appointed leader, Joshua, who will lead the people into the promised land, must meditate on the Torah day and night to find success.

Seam 2: The Final Sentences of the Nevi'im and the Opening Sentences of the Ketuvim

- Malachi 4:4-6: Anticipation of a coming Elijah-like prophet who will call the people back to the Torah and restore the hearts of Israel before the Day of the Lord.
- Psalms 1-2: The righteous one who will be vindicated in the final judgment is one who meditates on the Torah day and night to find success (Ps. 1). This righteous one is the future messianic king from the line of David, who is appointed by God to rule the nations and overcome evil once and for all (Ps. 2).

The Hebrew Bible as a Family Quilt

A quilt is made of many pre-existing materials and consists of individual pieces (like the Eden story or the Abraham stories), collections of pieces (like the laws at Mount Sinai or the Psalms), or entire images (like the books of Ruth or Esther). These earlier materials can be incorporated into the collection as they stand, or they can be editorially reshaped to fit the new context. But, and this is the key point, it is this new overall context of the final quilt that gives each individual piece its meaning when viewed in light of the whole. Regardless of the meaning of any individual piece, the entire quilt is now the proper frame of reference for understanding every smaller piece.



In the case of Genesis 2-5 (the focus of this class), we must ask ourselves at every step of our reading: What is the meaning that is intended by the authors who formed the final shape of the TaNaK, as far as we can discern it? For the authors, Genesis 1-11 formed an introduction to the entire TaNaK. In this section of Scripture, we find the basic themes, vocabulary, and plot elements that will be developed throughout the rest of the collection.

Reflection Question

How is the Hebrew Bible like a family quilt? What might the patches, or the whole quilt, represent?

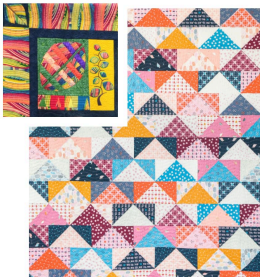
Session 3: The Difference Between Meaning and Significance

Key Takeaways

- Pay attention to the context and shape of the text to better understand the authors’ intended meaning.
- Prioritize questions of the text’s original meaning over questions of its significance for modern questions.

The Many Potential Contexts of the Adam and Eve Story

In our modern cultural setting, the Adam and Eve story has been made to speak to many topics that the biblical authors did not mean to address. We must be vigilant to make a distinction between asking what Genesis 2-5 means within the context of the TaNaK versus what it means for other areas of interest. The difference is one of intention. The biblical authors intended for the stories to address the main issues at work in the TaNaK, not our modern concerns. However, Genesis 2-5 may have significance for how we think about other topics in light of the biblical perspective, but we should not mistake this for the meaning of Genesis 2-5 in its native context.

Meaning		Significance		
Genesis 2-5	TaNaK	Introduction to Anthropology	A Primer on Gender Theory	A Theology of Original Sin
				

The Meaning Versus Significance of Genesis 2-5. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

What is the difference between meaning and significance when talking about studying the Bible?

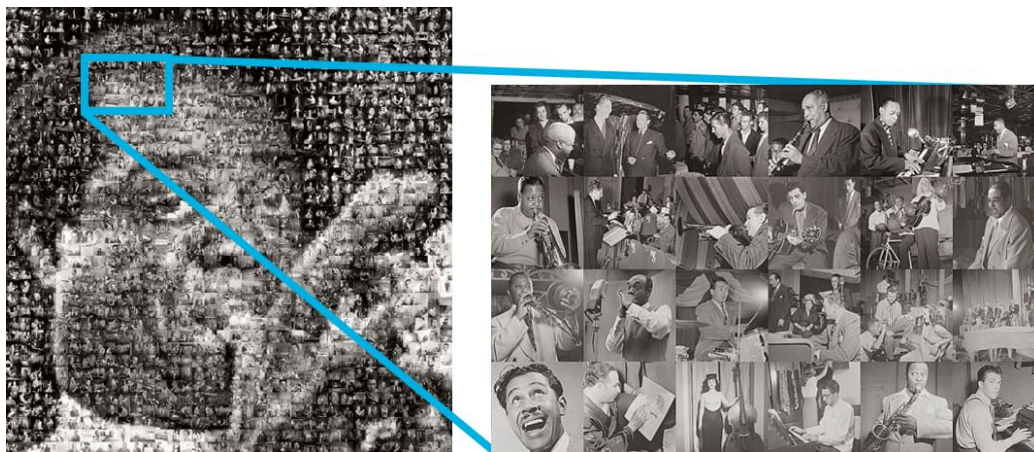
Session 4: Pieces and Patterns in Biblical Narrative

Key Takeaways

- The Bible is like a photo mosaic with identifiable smaller literary units crafted and arranged to work together and create a larger, overarching message.
- Biblical authors use repeated scenes, often with slight variations, to develop themes throughout the story.

Design Patterns and Literary Analysis

Recall our earlier exploration of the origins of the Hebrew Bible. It's a collection of collections that has been written, adapted, and edited into a unified whole. Consider two additional analogies that will help us understand the significance of this fact for how we read and interpret biblical literature.



Silvers, Robert (2000). *Louis Armstrong*. Photomosaic.com.

The unique unity of the larger photo mosaic is achieved precisely by its composite nature. The thematic arrangement of light/dark/great tiny squares becomes a tool to create larger patterns of color that provide an ordered, unified picture of the subject. The Hebrew Bible displays this kind of mosaic unity on a large and small scale.

Analogy 2: Repeated Motifs and Themes in Film

Movie directors often create a cohesive unity to the themes and plot line of a story by repetition and variation. By building up viewer expectations through repetition, the artist can introduce variation and surprise.

One example of this is the motif of the ring temptation scene in *The Lord of the Rings*. Some characters are tempted by the ring's power, and they succumb to it (Smeagol, Boromir, Frodo). Other characters resist its

power but in different ways (Bilbo, barely, Gandalf and Galadriel, through fear and trembling, and Aragorn, like it's no problem!). This diverse set of responses to the ring's power creates a rich palette of characters and a complex portrait of power in the story.



Jackson, P. (Director). (2001-2003). *The Lord of the Rings Series* [Film]. New Line Cinema.

The biblical authors were masters of this technique. In fact, this basic principle of patterned repetition and analogy is the most fundamental tool in their repertoire. And it's accomplished through the simplest of means: strategic repetition of key words.

Reading Strategies Based on Analogies

These two analogies illustrate different features of the TaNaK collection that create the need for two related reading strategies.

1. Identifying literary units: Just as a photo mosaic consists of hundreds of smaller photos, the epic biblical narrative consists of hundreds of smaller episodes. Learn to identify the beginning and ending of literary units that make up the larger mosaic of a biblical book.
2. Identifying repeated words and themes: Just as the smaller photos in a photo mosaic are organized according to patterns of color, light, and tone, the literary units of the biblical narrative are woven together through patterns of repeated words, themes, and images. These repetitions invite the reader to see continuity and an ongoing argument that develops throughout the course of the story.

Applying the Strategies to the Eden Narrative

When all the above principles are applied to a literary analysis, it yields the following outline of the Eden narrative.

Verses	Unit	Part	Movement
2:4-6 No garden, humans, or rain	2:4-17 From Wasteland to Eden	2:4-25 From Isolated Wasteland to Communion in Eden	2:4-3:24 The Eden Narrative: From Garden to Exile
2:7-9 God plants a garden and forms human			
2:10-14 The Eden river flows to become four rivers			
2:15-17 Human put in the garden + divine command			
2:18-20 Problem: a human alone	2:18-25 From Isolation to Communion		
2:21-23 Solution: two humans out of one			
2:24-25 Two humans married			
3:1-5 Dialogue between snake and woman	3:1-13 Folly and the Fall		
3:6-7 Woman and man eat from the tree			
3:8-13 Dialogue between God and humans			
3:14-15 Curse on the snake	3:14-24 The Fallout	3:14-24 The Fallout and Exile from Eden	
3:16 Consequences for the woman			
3:17-19 Consequences for the man			
3:20-21 Provision of garments			
3:22-24 Humans exiled from Eden			
Identifying the Literary Units of Genesis 2-3. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Reflection Question

Tim uses two analogies to show us some important Bible study skills. What can the photo mosaic help us pay attention to? What about the ring temptations from The Lord of the Rings?

Session 5: The Cyclical Pattern of Genesis 1-11

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 1-11 contains two cycles of a design pattern, emphasizing themes and questions that will drive the rest of the biblical story that leads to Jesus.
- Studying Genesis 1-11 trains you to see the sequence of themes that acts as a blueprint for later biblical writing.

Patterns in the Creation Story

The prologue of Genesis 1 (1:1-2) and the epilogue (1:31-2:3) have been designed as a macro frame around the internal sequence of six days, emphasizing the sevenfold symbolism of God’s actions and the culmination of the entire narrative in the seventh day. Notice how the key words of the opening prologue (“created,” “skies,” “land”) as well as the 1x7 and 2x7 design of 2:1-2 are taken up and completed in the prologue with the same words and the 3x7 design.

1:1 Summary Prologue
In the beginning, God **created** **the skies and the land** [7 words]

1:2 Exposition of Prologue in 3 Lines
Now, **the land** was wild and waste (תהו ובהו *tohu va-vohu*)
and darkness was over the face of the deep abyss (תהום *tehom*)
but the breath of *Elohim* was hovering over the face of the waters (המים *hammayim*) [7 x 2 words]

Day 1	Day 4
Day 2	Day 5
Day 3	Day 6

2:1 Summary Epilogue
Thus were finished **the skies and the land** and all their host

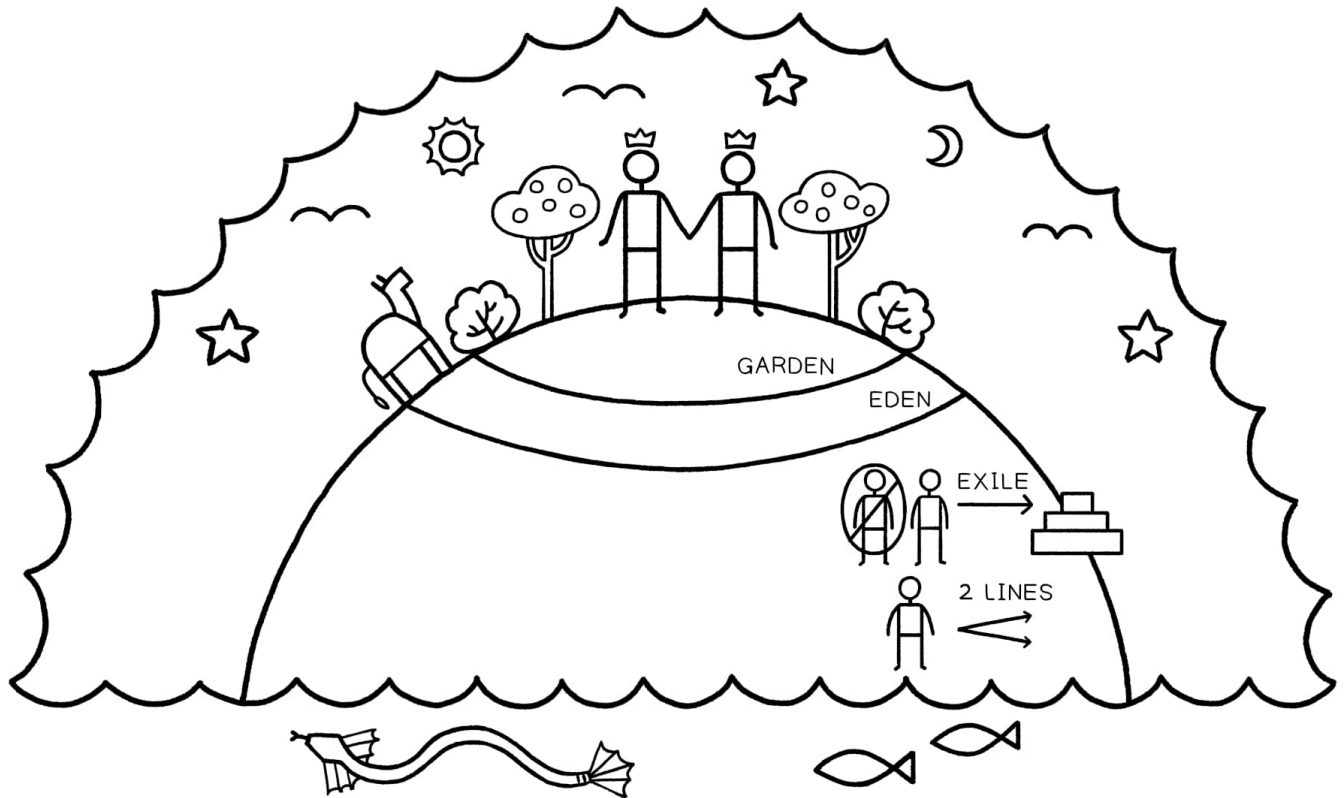
2:2-3 Exposition of Epilogue in 3 Lines
1. And God **completed on the seventh day his work which he had** **made** [7 words]

Genesis 1 Themes. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

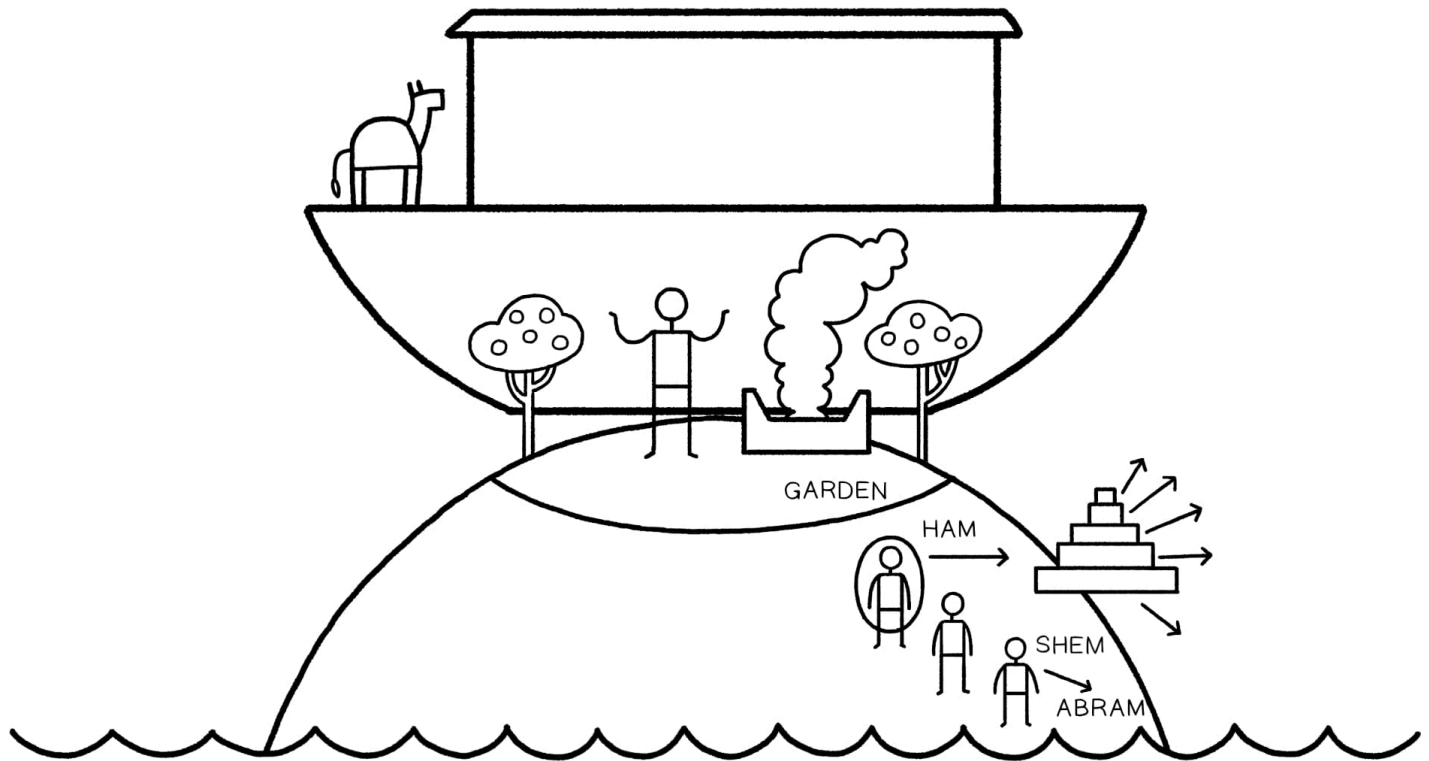
2. And he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had **made** [7 words]
3. And God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it [7 words]
because on it he rested from all his work which God **created to make** [key word of 1:1]

Genesis 1 Themes. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Exploring Genesis 1-11 Through Illustration



From Adam to Noah. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).



From Noah to Abram. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

The Cyclical Pattern of Genesis 1-11

The Adam and Eve story in Genesis chapters 2-5 fits within a larger pattern at work in Genesis 1-11. Chapters 1-5 play out a cycle of themes, and chapters 6-11 replay and develop the cycle. These symmetrical patterns are created by the dense repetition of key words that indicate the thematic arguments at work in the narrative and show important comparisons.

Unit	Theme
A1 1:1-2:3 Creation of sacred cosmos from chaos waters / human image of God / blessing / fruitful and multiply	Creation and Blessing
B1 2:4-3:24 Mountain-garden temple / sin, nakedness, curse, exile	Failure
B2 4:1-16 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, exile	Failure of Next Generation

Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Unit			Theme
	C1	4:17-26 Adam to Lemek: 7 generations + 3 sons / city of Cain / murder / 70 x 7	Non-Chosen
	C2	5:1-32 Adam to Noah: 10 generations + 3 sons / promise of comfort	Chosen
	B3	6:1-8 Cosmic rebellion in Heaven and Earth: sons of God invade the land, leading to the flood	Cosmic Rebellion
A2	6:9-9:19 De-creation by chaos waters and recreation / Noah as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply		Re-Creation and Blessing
	B1	9:20-21 Garden vineyard / sin, nakedness	Failure
	B2	9:22-27 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, scattering	Failure of Next Generation
	C1	10:1-32 Noah + 3 sons / 7 generations to Peleg / City of Babylon and Assyria / 70 nations	Non-Chosen
	B3	11:1-9 Cosmic rebellion in Babylon: sons of Adam invade the heavens, leading to the scattering	Cosmic Rebellion
	C2	11:10-26 Shem to Abram: 10 generations / 3 sons	Chosen
A3	12:1-9 Abram as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply		Re-Creation and Blessing
Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

“[T]he episodes culled from Hebraic traditions of early history were conceived in two matching sequences (Gen. 1-6 and 6-11) ... Each one of these sequences describes the manner in which humanity was removed progressively from the realm of God [i.e. the garden of Eden and flood], in which he initiated fraternal (and hence human) strife [i.e. Cain and Abel, and Noah’s sons], then divided into tribal and national groupings [Cainite and Shemite genealogies and the Table of Nations], then attempted to restore his divine nature or gain access to the divine realm, but was foiled in this by God [sons of God and Tower of Babel]. In each case, it is the consequence of this hubris which launched God into a decision to focus his relationship with humanity on one person. In the first case (Gen. 6), God destroys mankind, allows it to survive through his choice of Noah, but almost immediately recognizes (Gen. 8:21) that His measure was a shade too drastic. ... [In the second case,] distressed by man’s repeated attempt to unbalance the cosmological order, and no

longer allowing himself the option of totally annihilating mankind, God finally settles on one individual, uproots him from his own kin, and promises him prosperity and continuity in a new land.”

Sasson, J. M., Hess, R. S., and Tsumura, T. (1994). *“The ‘Tower of Babel’ as a Clue to the Redactional Structuring of the Primeval History (Genesis 1: 1-11:9).”* Eisenbrauns.

Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Hebrew Bible

“When understood as the introduction to the Torah and to the Tanakh as a whole, Genesis 1-3 intentionally foreshadows Israel’s failure to keep the Sinai covenant as well as their exile from the promised land in order to point the reader to a future work of God in the ‘last days.’ Adam’s failure to ‘conquer’ (Gen. 1:28) the seditious inhabitant of the land (the serpent), his temptation and violation of the commandments, and his exile from the garden is Israel’s story in miniature ... Just as it was in the beginning ... so it will be in the end. In the conclusion to the Pentateuch, Moses presents Israel’s future apostasy and exile as a certainty (see Deut. 30:1-10) ... This inclusio of pessimism at both ends of the Pentateuch with respect to human abilities to ‘do this and live,’ not only supplies the context for interpreting the Sinai narrative, but also provides the rationale for the need of a new work in the ‘last days,’ whereby God will heal the human heart. Moreover, the groundwork is also laid for the expectation of another ‘Adam’ (a future priest king) to arise from among the people of Israel who will fulfill the creation mandate in the last days. In other words, Genesis 1-3 ... forthrightly prepares the reader to expect that Israel will fail its covenant with God, and so to wait expectantly in exile for a new work of God in the last days.”

Postell, Seth (2011). [*Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*](#). Pickwick Publications.

Key Steps for Reading Biblical Literature

Reading Genesis 1-11 teaches us skills for reading the rest of the Bible.

1. Read and re-read, keeping track of two parallel sets of observations: 1) study the text’s cues to discern the design and boundaries of the literary unit and 2) pay close attention to repeated words, images, and narrative elements (plot, character, setting) within each individual literary unit.
2. Let the literary design guide your attention to how repeated words connect multiple literary units together.
3. Repeat, repeat, repeat.
4. Find someone to help you learn about the ancient cultural context of the main themes of the literary units you’re studying. Classroom can help you with this!

Reflection Question

Genesis 1-11 introduces important biblical themes through a cycle that repeats twice. What are some of these repeated themes?

Session 6: The Genesis 1-11 Pattern Throughout Scripture

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors craft the literary design of the text to make theological arguments.
- Tension between God's justice and his mercy drives the biblical storyline.

Reflecting on the Cyclical Pattern in Genesis 1-11

Unit		Theme
A1	1:1-2:3 Creation of sacred cosmos from chaos waters / human image of God / blessing / fruitful and multiply	Creation and Blessing
B1	2:4-3:24 Mountain-garden temple / sin, nakedness, curse, exile	Failure
B2	4:1-16 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, exile	Failure of Next Generation
	C1 4:17-26 Adam to Lemek: 7 generations + 3 sons / city of Cain / murder / 70 x 7	Non-Chosen
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B3	6:1-8 Cosmic rebellion in Heaven and Earth: sons of God invade the land, leading to the flood	Cosmic Rebellion
A2	6:9-9:19 De-creation by chaos waters and recreation / Noah as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply	Re-Creation and Blessing
B1	9:20-21 Garden vineyard / sin, nakedness	Failure
Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

Unit			Theme
	B2	9:22-27 Next generation sins / brothers divide / firstborn not chosen / curse, scattering	Failure of Next Generation
	C1	10:1-32 Noah + 3 sons / 7 generations to Peleg / City of Babylon and Assyria / 70 nations	Non-Chosen
	B3	11:1-9 Cosmic rebellion in Babylon: sons of Adam invade the heavens, leading to the scattering	Cosmic Rebellion
	C2	11:10-26 Shem to Abram: 10 generations / 3 sons	Chosen
A3		12:1-9 Abram as new humanity / blessing / fruitful and multiply	Re-Creation and Blessing
Macro-Design of Genesis 1-11. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			



This session has no other notes

Reflection Question

Genesis 1-11 introduces a tension between God's justice and mercy. Think of God's just judgment and exile of Cain in tension with the mercy of protecting Cain's life. Is this a contradiction? What do you think this says about the character of God?

Session 7: Reflecting on the Macrostructure of Genesis 1-11

Key Takeaways

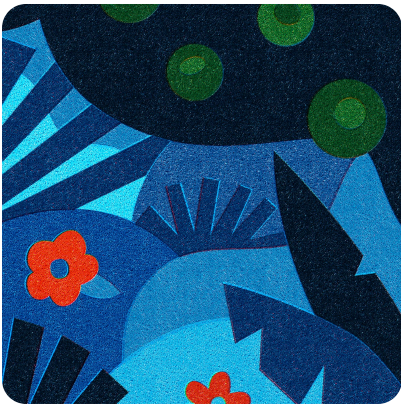
- The Bible is meditation literature, which means some themes and connections will become apparent only after repeated reading.
- The cycle of themes from Genesis 1-11 builds anticipation for a chosen deliverer. The Hebrew Bible points to a hope that is fulfilled in Jesus.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

For Simeon, the Scriptures built an expectation for the arrival of God's chosen one (Luke 2:25-26). What themes from Genesis 1-11 provide the groundwork for Simeon's expectation?



Module 2: Humanity Created and Placed in the Garden

SESSIONS 8-14

Unpack the Eden story, starting with its relationship to the rest of Genesis and ending with the divine command about the two trees at the center of the garden.

Session 8: The Structure of the Eden Narrative

Key Takeaways

- The Eden narrative is designed in seven distinct scenes that have been ordered in chiastic symmetry. The structure invites us to ponder how the events before and after the pivot in the story contribute to the main message of the literary unit.
- There are two common interpretations of how the creation account in Genesis 1:1-2:3 relates to what seems like a secondary account in the Eden story (Gen. 2:4-3:24). View one holds that Genesis 2:4-25 elaborates day six of Genesis 1:1-2:3. View two states that Genesis 2:4-25 follows as a sequel from Genesis 1:1-2:3.

Macro Design of the Eden Narrative

The garden of Eden story is found in Genesis 2:4-3:24. Key Hebrew scholars Jerome Walsh and David Dorsey are in agreement that the passage is designed with seven distinct scenes that have been ordered in a chiastic symmetry. This unique design invites the reader to contrast each scene with its corresponding partner. We'll be studying the narrative along the contours of this design.

2:4-17	Humanity Is Created and Placed in the Garden Characters: Yahweh, the human Setting: From outside the garden to inside the garden		
	2:18-25	Man and Woman Created and Unified Characters: Yahweh, the human, animals, woman Setting: inside the garden	
		3:1-5	Dialogue Between the Snake and the Woman Characters: snake, woman Setting: inside the garden
		3:6-7	The Woman and Man Eat from the Forbidden Tree Characters: snake, woman, man Setting: the center of the garden A and the woman saw that the tree was good for
Adapted from Jerome Walsh, <i>Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative</i> , 21-23, and David Dorsey, <i>Literary Structure of the Old Testament</i> , 49-50. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

			eating B and desirable to the eyes and desirable for becoming wise C and <i>she took</i> from its fruit and <i>she ate</i> C' and <i>she gave</i> also to her husband and <i>he ate</i> B' and the eyes of the two of them were opened and they knew they were naked A' and the leaves of a fig tree and made garments
	3:8-13	Dialogue Between God and the Humans Characters: Yahweh, man, woman Setting: inside the garden	
	3:14-21	Consequences For the Snake, Man and Woman Divided Characters: Yahweh, the man, woman, snake Setting: inside the garden	
3:22-24	Humanity is Banished from the Garden Characters: Yahweh (active), the human (passive) Setting: Inside the garden, moves to the land outside the garden		
Adapted from Jerome Walsh, <i>Style and Structure in Biblical Hebrew Narrative</i> , 21-23, and David Dorsey, <i>Literary Structure of the Old Testament</i> , 49-50. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Translation Comparisons of Generations

The first scene of the Eden narrative starts with what sounds like a heading, “these are the generations of the skies and land” (Gen. 2:4a). This verse is typically translated a couple different ways.

- NIV: “This is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”
- NASB: “These are the **generations** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”
- NRSV: “Th*is* is the **account** of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made earth and heaven.”
- NLT: “This is the **account** of the creation of the heavens and the earth. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”
- KJV: “These are the **generations** of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens.”

The word “generations” in Hebrew is *toledot* (תולדות), from the root *yalad* (ילד), meaning “to give birth.” It is used to refer to what issued and generated from the key character named in the formula. The occurrence of this word at the start of the Eden story raises a curious interpretive question. How does the narrative that

follows—the creation of the human and the garden—relate to the literary unit we just finished reading about creation?

The Relationship Between Genesis 1:1-2:3 and 2:4-3:24

Genesis 1:2:3 paints a large-scale picture of God’s establishment of cosmic order. This order allows the world to become a sacred space for God’s presence to dwell with his divine images who represent his rule. With no end to the seventh-day rest, it’s as if this creation account is giving us the ideal cosmic setup. So why does the Eden narrative fail to acknowledge the garden and the humans who were already created in Genesis 1?

The Not-Yet-Existent Plants of Genesis 2:5

Genesis 2:5 paints a portrait of unproductive dry land that is devoid of plant life (cf. day three of creation account in Gen. 1) and human life (cf. day six of creation account in Gen. 1). This line returns us to a state of *tohu-vavohu* from Genesis 1:2, but here the focus is on the dry land. What is the difference between “shrub of the field” (שיח השדה) and “plant of the field” (עשב השדה)?

- **Shrub (שיח):** non-edible shrubs, used mostly on uncultivated land and wilderness areas (see Gen. 21:15). In Job 30:4, 7, the scene involves starving people in desolate areas, eating plants that are hardly edible in order to survive. The shock of the scene is of people trying to eat and live off of “shrub.”
- **Plant (עשב):** edible plants and vegetables. In Genesis 1:11, it is the growth from the dry land after it emerges from the sea. In Genesis 1:29-30, these are the plants given to humans and animals as food (see also Gen. 9:3; Exod. 10:15).

The dual plant reference is a way of talking about any and all plant growth, inedible or edible—none of it was growing in the land because of lack of water. Two reasons are given for the absence of any kind of plants.

1. No rain (preview of the flood narrative)
2. No human to work the ground (preview of the human’s purpose in Eden in 2:15, and after the exile from Eden in 3:23).

The Hinge Function of Genesis 2:4

Genesis 2:4 functions as a hinge between the two large literary blocks of Genesis 1:1-2:3 and Genesis 2:4-3:24.

Reference	Text
Genesis 2:4a	These are the generations
<i>The Hinge Function of Genesis 2:4.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).	

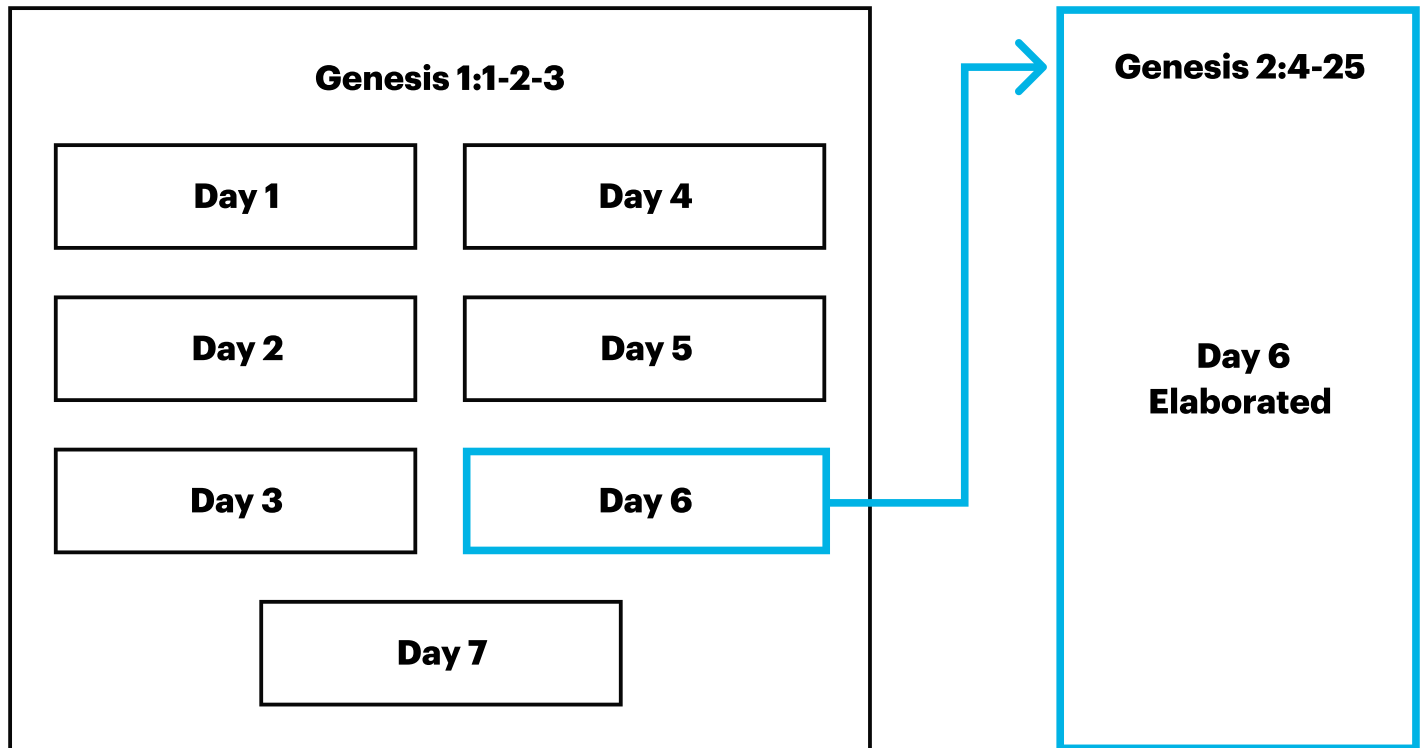
Reference	Text		
	A	of the skies and the land	
		B	when they were created :
Genesis 2:4b		B'	in the day Yahweh Elohim made
	A'	the land and skies ...	
The Hinge Function of Genesis 2:4. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).			

On its own, this line seems like a parallel design of two paired statements. However, when 2:4b is joined to the following verses, it becomes clear that the phrase “in the day Yahweh *Elohim* made the land and the skies” is a subordinate temporal clause that introduces all of 2:4b-6. This sets up the main clause that begins the narrative action in 2:7 with the creation of the human.

The point of Genesis 2:4a is to situate the following narrative of Genesis 2:4b-3:24 as taking place after the creation of the skies and land recounted in Genesis 1:1-2:3. The point of Genesis 2:4b is to link backward so that Genesis 1:1-2:3 becomes a prologue to the following narrative.

View 1: Genesis 2:4-25 Elaborates Day Six of Genesis 1:1-2:3

Many interpreters throughout history have read the Eden narrative (Gen. 2:4-25) as a recursive elaboration of day six in Genesis 1, where animals and humans are created on the land. In this view, the narrative technique of the author is to first present an overview narrative (Gen. 1:1-2:3), and then double back and provide a more in-depth presentation of a key moment in the previous narrative (Gen. 2:4-25).



Genesis 2:4-25 Elaborates Day Six. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Challenges with View 1

- If Genesis 2 is a recapitulation of day six of Genesis 1, then the statement in Genesis 2:5-6 makes little sense: "...and no plant of the field was yet in the land, nor had any vegetation of the field yet sprouted." In Genesis 1, God generates plants from the ground on day three, not day six.
- In Genesis 1, the animals are created first, then humans. In Genesis 2, the human is created first, then the animals.
- If Genesis 2 is re-presenting day six, it is hard to imagine that the author wants us to think of all the events of Genesis 2:4-25 as taking place in one day.
- The heading used in Genesis 2:4a "these are the generations of ..." occurs 10 times in Genesis in a similar way (it also occurs three times outside of Genesis).

Usage of Toledot in Genesis

The transitional heading "these are the generations of" is used in two primary ways in Genesis.

1. **A sequel:** To introduce a new literary unit by naming a key person who, along with their children, will be the focus in the following literary unit.
2. **A recursive/sequel:** To introduce the non-chosen son's family line through history (Cain in [4:17-22](#); Japeth and Ham in [10:1](#); Ishmael in [25:12](#); Esau in [36:1, 9](#)), and then double back and focus on the chosen son, Seth, Shem, Isaac, Jacob's sons ([5:1](#); [11:10](#); [25:19](#); [37:2](#)).

Reference	Verse	Narrative Role	Relation to Previous Literary Unit
Gen 2:4a	"These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens."	To be determined ...	To be determined ...
Gen 5:1	"This is the scroll of the generations of humanity. When God created human, he made him in the likeness of God."	Transition from Cain's line to Seth's line	Recursive/Sequel
Gen 6:9	"These are the generations of Noah."	Transition from pre-flood rebellion to Noah's story	Sequel
Gen 10:1	"Now these are the generations of Shem, Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah; and sons were born to them after the flood."	Transition from Noah and 3 sons to the descendants of Noah's 3 sons	Sequel
Gen 11:10	"These are the generations of Shem."	Transition from descendants of Noah's 3 sons to Shem's line	Recursive/Sequel
Gen 11:27	"Now these are the generations of Terah."	Transition from Shem's line to Terah's line and to Abraham	Sequel
Gen 25:12	"Now these are the generations of Ishmael, Abraham's son, whom Hagar the Egyptian, Sarah's maid, bore to Abraham;"	Transition from Abraham to Ishmael's line	Sequel
Gen 25:19	"Now these are the generations of Isaac, Abraham's son:"	Transition from Abraham to Isaac's line	Sequel
Gen 36:1	"Now these are the generations of Esau (that is, Edom)."	Transition from Jacob to Esau's family line	Sequel

Usage of Toledot in Genesis. Walton, John H. (2015). *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*. IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reference	Verse	Narrative Role	Relation to Previous Literary Unit
Gen 36:9	"These then are the generations of Esau the father of Edom in the hill country of Seir."		
Gen 37:2	"These are the generations of Jacob."	Transition from Jacob to Jacob's family	Recursive/Sequel
<i>Usage of Toledot in Genesis.</i> Walton, John H. (2015). <i>The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate</i> . IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

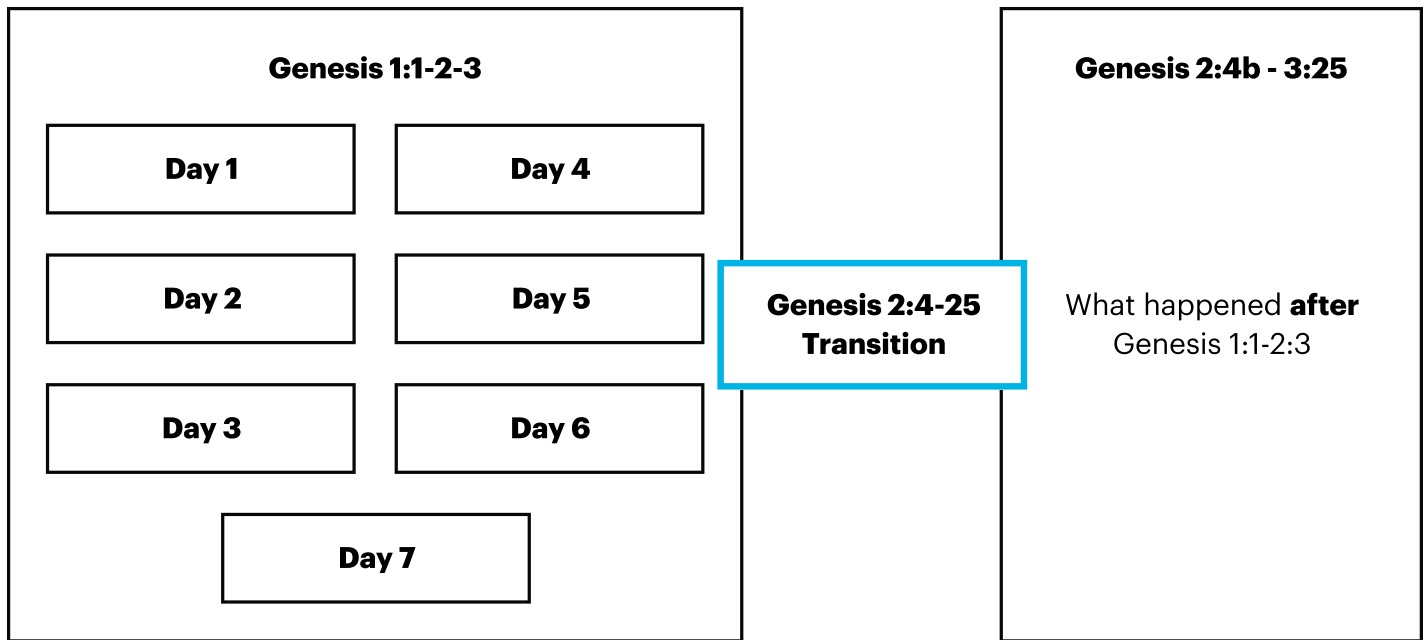
As we study this repeated phrase, we can see even in the recursive/sequel occurrence that the point of the overlapping text is not to elaborate or give a more detailed account. Rather, it aims to profile the non-chosen son's line far forward in narrative time so that the narrative can come back and focus on the chosen son's lineage. John Walton summarizes his key takeaway.

"There is therefore no precedent by which to conclude that the introductory formula in Genesis 2:4 is bringing the reader back into the middle of the previous account to give a more detailed description of a part of the story that was previously told. Such introductions never do this in the rest of Genesis ... Furthermore, Genesis 2 does not follow the pattern of the recursive examples that follow a genealogy of the unfavored line before returning to the story of the favored line. This evidence then leads us to give strong preference to the view that Genesis 2 is not adding further detail to what happened during the sixth day in Genesis 1."

Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

View 2: Genesis 2:4-25 Follows as a Sequel From Genesis 1:1-2:3

View 2 holds that the Eden narrative is the chronological sequel to the Genesis 1 creation account. The implications of this conclusion are extremely significant for the interpretation of [Genesis 2:4-4:26](#), the Adam and Eve and the Cain and Abel stories.



Genesis 2 As a Sequel to Genesis 1. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

1. It means that Genesis 2:4b-25 is not another cosmic creation story that parallels Genesis 1. Rather, the narrative focuses on one particular spot of the already created dry land and shows God preparing it as a special Heaven-on-Earth place. Genesis 1 begins with a disordered cosmos, while Genesis 2 begins with a disordered land. Genesis 1 portrays the entire cosmos as a sacred space, and Genesis 2 portrays one particular place within the cosmos as God's special dwelling place.
2. It means that Genesis 2-3 is focused not on the creation of the cosmos but on the story of how God's ideal for creation in Genesis 1 was ruined and distorted into the reality that the reader inhabits.
3. It means that Genesis 1:26-28 describes the creation and vocational role of humanity as a whole. This opens the interpretive possibility that Genesis 1 describes the creation of general humanity in the narrative past, distinct from the narrative of Adam and Eve's creation in Genesis 2:4-25. According to this interpretation, it is from among an already created humanity that God "forms and appoints" one particular human family as his royal priests to oversee the Heaven-on-Earth place.
4. It means that once Cain is exiled east of Eden, he joins this wider Genesis 1 humanity as he marries, begins a family, and builds a city and flourishing civilization.
5. It means that God's creation of a cosmic mountain temple (Eden) and the creation of a royal priesthood is presented as a terrestrial creation story, similar to other ancient Near Eastern temple building accounts (The Ba'al Epic from Ugarit, 13th century B.C.; Enuma Elish, 18th and 13th centuries B.C.).

View 2 Resources

- Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.
- Stordalen, Terje (2000). [*Echoes of Eden: Genesis 2-3 and Symbolism of the Garden of Eden in Biblical Hebrew Literature*](#). Peeters Publishers.
- Postell, Seth D. (2011). [*Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*](#). Pickwick Publications.

Challenges with View 2

There are some challenges with this interpretation. Later iterations of the pattern in Genesis 1 and 2 are repeated while seemingly talking about the same thing. For example, in the Noah story, imagery is repeated from both Genesis 1 and 2.

Genesis 1 Patterns

- Genesis 9:1: God tells Noah to be fruitful and multiply and fill the land.
- Genesis 9:3: God gives the animals as food just as he gave the plants.
- Genesis 9:6: Image of God language is repeated as the reason to not shed the blood of another human.

Genesis 2 Patterns

- Genesis 9:20: Noah gets off the boat and plants a garden.
- Genesis 9:21: Noah eats the fruit of the vine and it doesn't go well.

In this passage, Noah is representing a Genesis 1 and 2 humanity at the same time. The idea of what it means to be a human is not separated into pre-Adam and Eve and post-Adam and Eve humans. Within this pattern, it would seem the biblical authors are saying the humanity of Genesis 1 is the same as Adam and Eve in the garden of Genesis 2.

Patterns in Genesis 1:26-28

In Genesis 1, we meet a figure, Adam, which is often translated as "man." In English, the word man is closely associated with being a male. However, the biblical authors would have understood "*adam*" to be a generic category like "human." The image of God poem found in Genesis 1:26-28 sheds light on what it means to be a human.

Day 6: God Delegates Earthly Rulers

26 And God said,
"Let us **make human**
in our image,
according to our likeness;
and let them **rule**
over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the sky
and over the cattle
and over all the land
and over every creeper that creeps on the land ."

27 And God **created human** in his image,
in the image of God he created him ;
male and female he created them .

28 And God blessed them,
"Be fruitful and multiply,
and fill the land,
and subdue it;
and rule
over the fish of the sea
and over the birds of the sky
and over every living creature that creeps on the land."

Genesis 1-2:3. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Heaven and Earth (2020).

At the center of this literary unit (1:27) is a three line poem. Notice how each line has three key elements, inviting us to ponder the relationships between the concepts.

This poetic parallelism makes clear that the divine image is constituted in some crucial way by the duality of gender. Somehow God is imaged in a special way through the unity of humanity as one species that consists of a duality of distinct others. Humanity is one and more than one at the same time, and this offers an important image of God's divine identity. The following narrative of the Eden story then presents a dramatized narrative that expands on the concepts presented in this poem.

- The making of the one: Adam formed of the dust
- The one cannot fulfill his commission as only one: No helper is found suitable for Adam
- The one becomes two: Eve is formed from Adam
- The two become one again: Adam and Eve become one flesh

This portrait of humans as the divine and royal image of Yahweh is precisely the claim of [Psalm 8](#), which is the product of a sustained meditation on Genesis 1.

Genesis 1 (and the later reflection in [Psalm 8](#)) gives us the whole story of humanity in one opening movement. It functions as the ideal portrait of creation, and [Genesis 2:4](#) is the hinge that gets us into reality.

Reflection Question

Genesis 2:5 says, "Now no shrub of the field was yet on the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground." How do these details compare to the account in Genesis 1?

Session 9: The Relationship Between Genesis 1 and 2

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 1 introduces us to God's ideal for creation, and Genesis 2 introduces the characters who will be given the chance to live out that ideal.
- The importance of historicity questions changes when you prioritize the message of the story.

The Genesis 1 Ideal

Genesis 1 offers the ideal portrait of creation with humans imaging God. It is the cosmic set up that precedes [Genesis 2:4](#).

Psalm 8 as a Genesis 1 Reflection

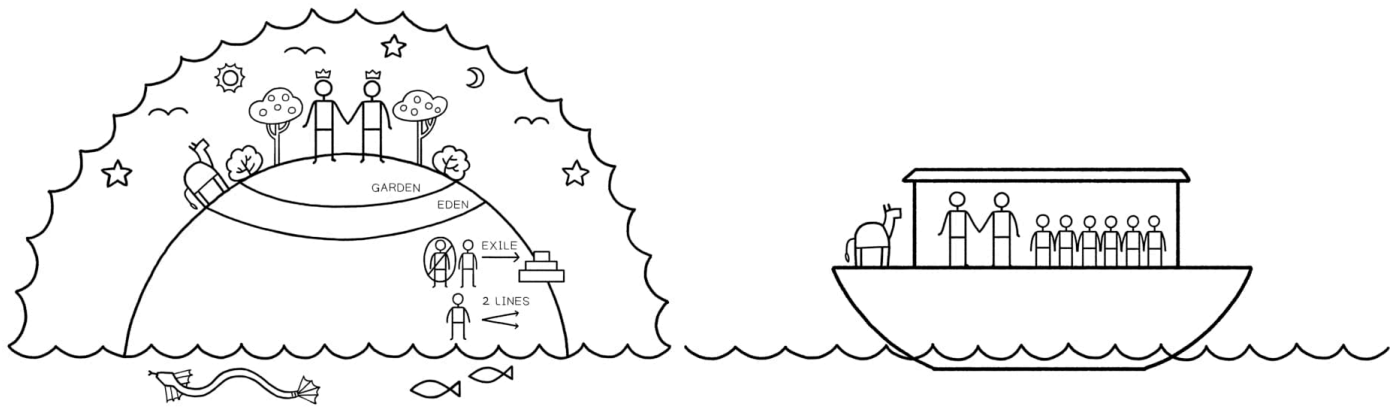
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Genesis 1 and the later reflection in [Psalm 8](#) give us the whole story of humanity in one opening movement. It functions as the ideal portrait of creation, and Genesis 2:4 is the hinge that gets us into reality.

Apostles Reflect on Psalm 8

The author of Hebrews has clearly meditated on both Genesis 1 and Psalm 8. In [Hebrews 2:5](#), the author nods to the unfulfilled ideal that was finally realized through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

View 3: Tim's Merger View



IDEAL

GEN 1



2:4

REALITY

GEN 2:4b...

Tim's View on the Relationship Between Genesis 1 and 2. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

How do Genesis 1 and 2 relate to one other? How would you describe the different purpose of each chapter?

Session 10: Literary Design in Genesis 2:4-17

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 2:4-17 introduces the repeated biblical theme of God's chosen one being "rested" in the divine refuge.
- Like biblical poetry, biblical narrative repeats details, often with meaningful differences, to give multiple perspectives on the same reality. The biblical authors symbolically link humans, trees, and water repeatedly throughout Scripture.

Humanity is Created and Place in the Garden: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 2:4-17

4a These are the generations of the skies and the land,
when they were created:

The Waters

A 4b In the day when Yahweh made the land and skies,
5 **now**, no shrub of **the field** was yet in **the land**,
and no plant of **the field** had yet sprouted,
for the Lord God had not sent rain upon **the land**,
and there was no **human** to work the ground,
6 but **a stream/flow would go up** from **the land**
and it would water the whole face of the ground,

Humans in the Garden and the Tree of Life

B a 7 **and Yahweh God formed the human** of dust from the ground,
and he breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and the **human** became a living being.
b 8 And Yahweh God planted a **garden in Eden**, toward the east/from of old,
a' **and he placed there the the human whom he had formed**
b' 9 and Yahweh God caused to sprout from the **ground**
every tree that is desirable to sight and good for **eating**
and **the tree of life** also in the **middle of the garden**.

and **the tree of** **the knowledge of good and bad**.

The Waters

10 **Now**, **a river went out** from Eden **to water** the garden,
and from there it separated and became four heads:

a 11 **The name of the** **first** is Pishon;

b it goes around the whole **land** of Havilah,
which has there gold

12 and the gold of that **land** is good;

there are the bdellium and the onyx stone.

a' 13 **And the name of the** **second** river is Gihon;

b' it goes around the whole land of Cush.

a' 14 **And the name of the** **third** river is Tigris;

b' it goes east of Assyria.

a' **And the** **fourth** river,

b' it is the Euphrates.

Humans in the Garden and the Tree of Death

15 **And Yahweh God took the** **human**

and he rested him in the **garden in Eden** to work (עבד • 'avad) and to keep (שמר • shamar) it.

16 And Yahweh God commanded the **human** saying,

a " **From every tree of the garden**

b **you may surely eat**

a 17 but from **tree of** **the knowledge of good and bad**

b **you shall not eat from it**,

a for in the day that **you eat from it**,

b you will surely **die**."

Genesis 2:4-17. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Observations on the Macro Design of Genesis 2:4-17

Pattern: The Waters

This symmetrical design invites the reader to compare the pre-garden waters (A) with the garden waters (A'). The stream/flow by itself does not create Eden in 2:4b-6, but it does create the clay and generates potential for Eden to exist. For Eden to emerge, God must direct the waters toward a purpose and then plant a garden (B), which then (B') creates an overflow of value for the nations (Israel, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Assyria).

Translation Comparison for "Stream" (2:6)

- NIV: “But **streams** came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.”
- ESV: “And a **mist** was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—”
- NASB: “But a **mist** used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground.”
- NRSV: “But a **stream** would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground—”
- NLT: “Instead, **springs** came up from the ground and watered all the land.”
- KJV: “But there went up a **mist** from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.”

Pattern: Humans Put in the Garden

The double placing (B and B') of humanity in the garden is intentional. The first placement in 2:7-9 and 2:10-14 is about God setting humanity in a cultivated environment which is ripe with potential. The second placement in 2:15-17 focuses on the test that the garden represents.

- 2:15: “And he rested him” (וינחהו) points forward to the story of Noah (נח), who will have to bring comfort (Gen. 5:29 [נחם]) to the land that is cursed because of humanity’s folly in the garden by offering a sacrifice on top of the sacred mountain. This comparison invites the reader to see how God is placing this human atop a sacred mountain of Eden in this story as well. It also hints forward to Noah’s own failure in his garden-vineyard (Gen. 9:20-24).
- 2:16: The divine command to eat from all trees except for one sets up the plot tension of the test.

“Rest” in the Hebrew Bible

The use of the verb “rest” continues throughout the Bible.

- Joshua 11:23, 23:1: Joshua gives the people rest in the promised land.
- 2 Samuel 7:1: David, God’s appointed representative, is given rest and placed on Mount Zion.
- 1 Kings 5:4-5: Solomon sees that there is rest in the land and decides to build the temple.

This is a common strategy used by biblical authors—intentional repetition with small differences. The second time, they can use a different verb in order to lay the groundwork for an important pattern. In this case, it is the pattern of God’s appointed one being rested in the divine refuge.

Pattern: Trees

Notice that the first introduction of the trees in (B) emphasizes the tree of life, while the introduction of the divine command (B') emphasizes the tree that could bring death.

Hebrew Wordplays with “From the Ground”

Notice the coordination of water/humans/plants by their common origins “from the ground.”

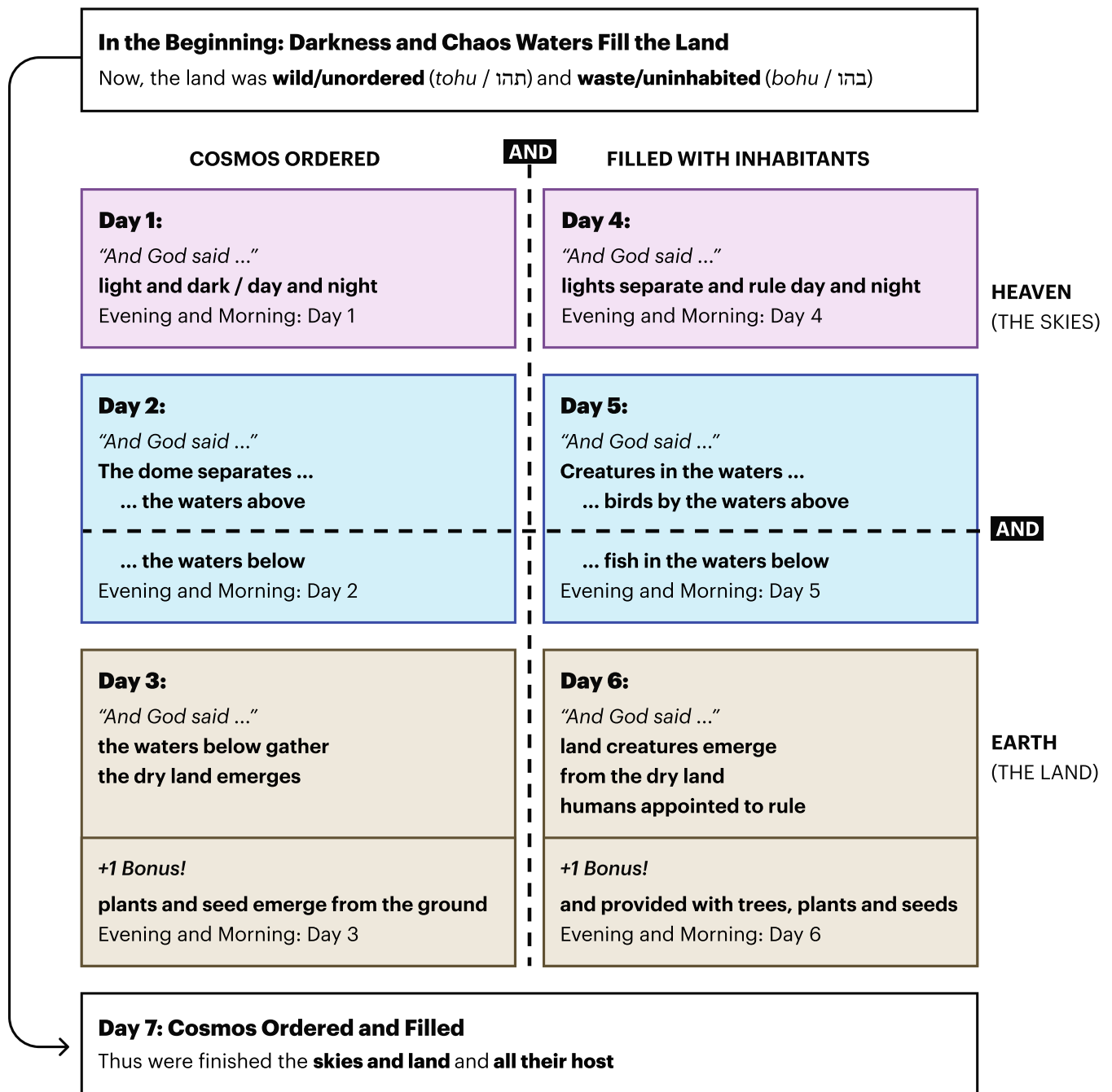
- Genesis 2:5: No human (אדם) to work the ground (אדמה)
- Genesis 2:6: A spring (אד) would go up from the land (מן הארץ) to water the ground (אדמה)
- Genesis 2:7: Yahweh formed (וייצר) human (אדם) as dust from the ground (מן האדמה)
- Genesis 2:9: And Yahweh sprouted (ויצמח) from the ground (מן האדמה) every tree

Humans, Waters, and Trees

The water is a gift of divine life that makes two types of derivative life possible, and both bear fruit in the land. Humans bear fruit through what they do, and trees bear fruit through what they grow. They are like each other. In the biblical imagination, people are like trees, and both have their life source rooted in water.

Comparison of Days Three and Six in Genesis 1

Days one through three of creation are parallel to days four through six in Genesis 1. Notice the comparison between day three and six. On day three, the trees produce fruit. On day six, the humans produce fruit.



Origami of Genesis 1. Adapted from David Andrew Teeter by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

What are the three things that come up from the dirt in Genesis 2:4-17?

Session 11: Humans Formed From Dust

Key Takeaways

- Humans are formed from dust and this signifies that they are from the realm of frail mortality.
- The Genesis 1 waters and the Genesis 2 waters create a combined statement of Yahweh as the master of the chaos waters—the one who can turn them into a source of life.

Genesis 2:7: Humanity Formed From Clay

There are two biblical motifs about human nature whose beginnings are rooted in the language and imagery of Genesis 2:7: “And Yahweh formed (וַיַּצַּר) the human of dust (עָפָר) from the ground.”

Is this line describing a literal creation of the first human by focusing on the material substance from which he was made? Or is this an archetypal description that focuses on the nature and mortality of the human species as a whole?

To answer these interpretive questions, let’s focus on the key words “formed” (*yatsar*) and “dust” (*aphar*) and ask two questions.

1. Does the verb form commonly focus on material substance?
2. Is “formed of dust” used to describe only the human of Genesis 2, or does it include other humans as well?

Word Study: Formed — *Yatsar*

Does the verb *yatsar* focus exclusively on the material substance of what is created? The verb appears 45 times in biblical Hebrew. And it takes a variety of direct objects, not all of which are material.

2 Kings 19:25 ESV*

Have you not heard that I made it long ago? I **formed it** from days of old what now I bring to pass, that you should turn fortified cities into heaps of ruins ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Here, the word refers to a series of events providentially arranged by God ([Isa. 22:11](#); [46:11](#)).

Isaiah 27:11 NIV*

For this is a people without understanding; so their maker has no compassion on them, and **the one who formed them** shows them no favor.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 43:1 NIV

But now, this is what the LORD says—
he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you Israel:

“Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine.”

The entire nation of Israel was formed and made by Yahweh ([Isa. 29:16](#); [43:7](#), [10](#), [21](#); [44:21](#), [24](#); [Ps. 95:5](#)).

Isaiah 45:6-7 NIV*

I am Yahweh, and there is no other.

I form the light and create darkness,

I bring good and create bad;

I, the LORD, do all these things.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Here, the word is used for metaphorical descriptions of historical events of abundance and peace or war and defeat ([Jer. 18:1-10](#)).

Isaiah 45:18 NIV*

For this is what the LORD says—he who created the heavens, he is God; **he who formed the land**, and made it; he founded it; he did not create it to be empty, but formed it to be inhabited—he says: “I am the LORD, and there is no other.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The entire cosmos is formed by Yahweh ([Jer. 18:1-10](#); [33:2](#)).

Amos 4:13 NIV

He who **forms the mountains**, who creates the wind, and who reveals his thoughts to mankind, who turns dawn to darkness, and treads on the heights of the earth—the LORD God Almighty is his name.

The mountains and the wind are elements within the cosmos.

Amos 7:1 NIV*

This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: **He was forming swarms of locusts** after the king's share had been harvested and just as the late crops were coming up.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Here, the word is used to describe Yahweh's actions on swarms of locusts.

Zechariah 12:1 NASB*

Thus declares the Lord who stretches out the heavens, lays the foundation of the earth, and **forms the breath of a human within him ...**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The breath of life that animates humans was also formed by Yahweh.

Psalm 74:16-17 NIV*

The day is yours, and yours also the night; you established the sun and moon. It was you who set all the boundaries of the earth; **you formed both summer and winter.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Summer, winter, and seasonal orders of time are formed by Yahweh.

Psalm 139:16 NIV*

Your eyes saw my unformed body; all **the days you formed for me** were written in your book before one of them came to be.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

A person's "days," that is, the course of their lives, are formed by God.

It's not about literal versus non-literal. The Hebrew word for "formed" can refer to the creation of a material object, but it seems to have a broader meaning of God ordering the cosmos and providentially bringing things to be at the right place and the right time for his purposes. That's the pattern.

Word Study: Dust and Clay

Does dust describe the unique material substance of the first human, or is this an archetypal description of the nature and mortality of the human creature? The words "dust" and "clay" are regularly used to describe humanity as a whole and every human, not just the human in Genesis 2.

Genesis 3:19 NASB

By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; **for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.**

Psalm 103:14 NASB

For he himself knows our form;
he is mindful that **we are but dust.**

Job 33:4-6 NASB*

The **Spirit/Breath** (רוח) of God has made me, and the **breath** (נשמה) of the Almighty gives me life. Refute me if you can; array yourselves before me, take your stand. Behold, I belong to God like you; **I too have been pinched out of the clay.**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalm 119:73 NASB*

Your hands made me and fashioned me;
give me understanding, that I may learn your commandments.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Job 4:19 NASB

How much more those who dwell in **houses of clay** (חמר), whose **foundation is in the dust** (עפר), who are crushed before the moth!

Job 10:8-9 NASB*

Your hands fashioned and made me altogether, and would you destroy me? Remember now, that **you have made me as clay**; and would you **turn me into dust** again?

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 64:8 NASB*

Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are **the clay, you are the former/potter**; we are all the work of your hand.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Notice that in all these texts, the language of the Eden narrative is used to describe the nature of all humanity.

Adam, Archetype, and Being Formed From Dust

“Being formed from dust is a statement about [human] essence and identity, not our substance. In this, Adam is an archetype ... If we are all formed from dust, yet at the same time we are born of a mother through a normal birth process, we can see that being formed from dust, while true of each of us, is not a statement about each of our material origins. One can be born of a woman yet still be formed from dust; all of us are. ... “Formed from dust” is not a statement of material origins for any of us, and there is no reason to think that it is a statement of Adam’s material origins. For Adam, as for all of us, that we are formed from dust makes a statement about our identity as mortals. Since it pertains to all of us, it is archetypal.”

Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

Defining “Archetype”

“Archetype” is a compound word from two Greek words.

1. *Arche*: first, beginning
2. *Tupos*: pattern

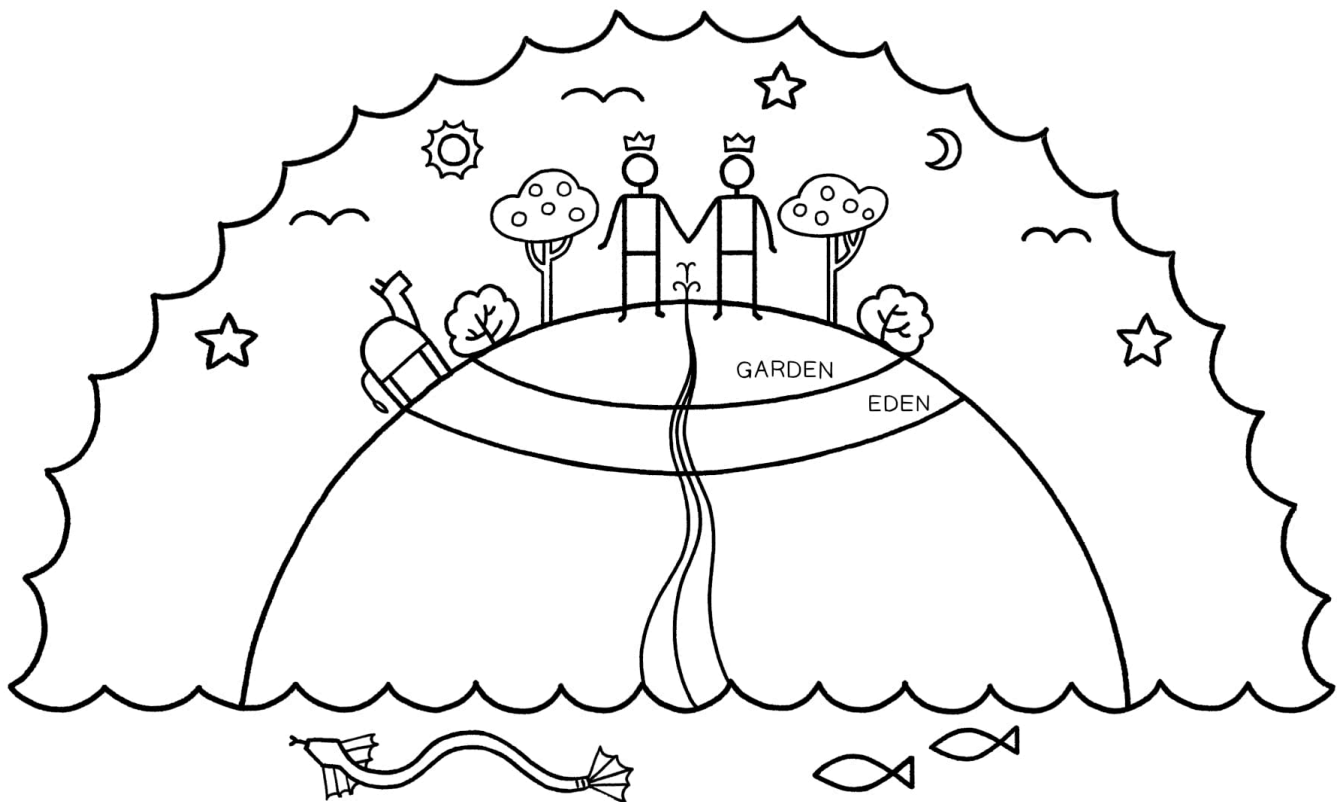
An archetype is an event, person, place, or thing that will begin a series of patterns. The function of the archetype is that what happens in the initial instance will be in common with all later iterations of the pattern.

The literal meaning of the statement that humans are formed of the dust is that humans are from the realm of death and mortality—of non-eternal life. To have eternal life, something else needs to happen.

The Waters of Potential

Both land and water could be seen as chaotic and disorganized mortality or sources of death, but they can also be seen as sources of life and enablers of prosperity. In this passage, we see Yahweh as the agent through which disorganized chaos becomes organized goodness.

The Genesis 1 waters and the Genesis 2 waters form a combined statement of Yahweh as the master of the chaos waters who can turn them into a source of life. When any story happens at a well or a spring, it's an Eden picture that all starts with that stream in Genesis 2.

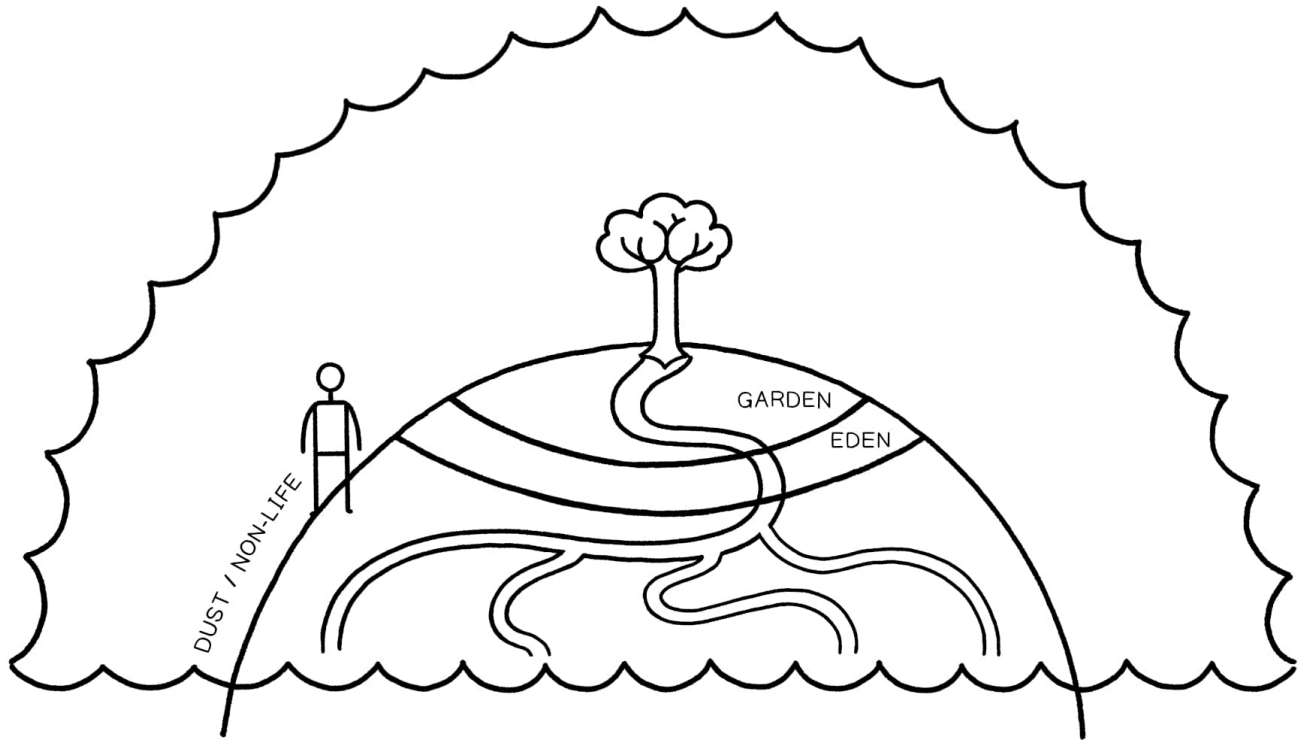


Waters of Potential in Genesis. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Eden and the Three-Part Geography of the Land in Genesis 2:4-17

We've already established the existence of the waters above and below and the dry land in Genesis 1. Now we see a more detailed geography unfold in [Genesis 2:8-9](#).

1. Region of Eden
2. Garden in the region of Eden
3. Trees in the middle of the garden



Three-Part Geography of Eden. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Although the humans were formed in the realm of dust/non-life, they were placed in the garden with access to the tree of life. The humans are given the chance to have eternal life, but they forfeit it. The garden of Eden story is about an ideal never realized, not perfection lost.

The biblical story is not: The universe used to be perfect, but then two humans did something wrong that introduced death and everything unpleasant.

The biblical story is: God created a space for his humans to partner with the divine project to spread life and order out of the realm of chaos and non-order.

The Rivers of Genesis 2:10-14

The description of the primordial river in [Genesis 2:10-14](#) has an intentional literary design. Each river is described with decreasing length, imitating a spring running out over the land. Each of the names is associated with various regions of the ancient biblical map.

River	Region	People Groups and Empires
Pishon	Havilah = South and East of Canaan, the NW edge of the Arabian desert	Cainites, Ishmaelites, Edomites, Arabs
Gihon	Cush = Southern Egypt, the upper Nile, Ethiopia	Egyptians and Ethiopians
Hiddeqel	Assyria = The Tigris River	Assyria
Euphrates	Babylonian flood plains	Babylon
<i>Rivers Associated with Ancient Regions. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).</i>		

This Eden-sourced river prepares the reader to view each of these regions (Egypt, Jerusalem and surroundings, and Mesopotamia) as extensions of Eden’s life-giving waters and places that are graced with the life of Eden. This makes perfect sense of the Eden analogies applied to Canaan (Gen. 13:10), Mesopotamia (Gen. 11:1-4), and Egypt (Gen. 13:10; 45:18, 20).

River 1: The Pishon (2:11-12)

The Pishon is given the longest description, which prepares the reader for understanding the significance of future stories.

- “Goes around the land of Havilah”: This is where Ishmael’s descendants will settle (Gen. 25:18) and where Hagar will wander in her flight from Sarah (Gen. 16:7).
- “Good gold” + “aromatic resin” + “onyx stone”: These are all associated with the symbolic Eden gifts given to Israel in their wilderness wanderings. Gold is provided for the tabernacle. Aromatic resin (בדלח) is mentioned in the appearance of the manna (Exod. 16:33; Num. 11:7). Onyx stones (אבן שהם) are in the high priest’s ephod (Exod. 25:7; 28:9).

Treasure Outside the Garden?

Is there significance in the fact that these treasures are not located in the garden, but just outside it? Does this communicate that the garden creates value in the world but is not to be mistaken with those actual treasures? Are we to view these treasures as signals that one is near to the garden, but that these should not be identified with the real treasure of the garden, namely that one can be with God there? [suggestion from Jacob Stromberg]

River 2: The Gihon (2:13)

The Gihon is associated with the land of Cush, which has multiple referents in the Hebrew Bible.

- Southern Egypt (modern Ethiopia): 2 Kgs. 19:9; Esther 1:1; 8:9; Ps. 68:31; Isa. 18:1; 20:3-5; 45:14; Ezek. 29:10; 30:4-5, 9; Nah. 3:9.

- The son of Ham, whose descendants are people of southern Egypt (Gen. 10:6-7). But this very Cush is the father of Nimrod, who goes east to Mesopotamia to build the empires of Assyria and Babylon.
- The name of Gihon spring/river is only elsewhere associated with the spring that supplies water to Jerusalem and the temple (1 Chron. 32:30; 33:14), which is where Solomon was crowned king of Israel (1 Kgs. 1:33, 38, 45).

Rivers 3 and 4: The Hideqel and Euphrates (2:14)

The Hideqel and Euphrates are associated with two Mesopotamian empires. The Tigris flows “to the east of Assyria.” And the Euphrates is left to the reader’s imagination, which is of course supposed to bring Babylon to mind.

“The description of the rivers has been outlined in ‘decrecendo’ form, as each successive description becomes shorter and shorter ... The same pattern is evident in Hebrew word counts, as the four river descriptions are given in 20, 10, 8, and 4, Hebrew words successively. The second river’s description (10 words) is exactly half the length of the first (20 words), and the fourth (4 words) is half the length of the third (8 words). The impression of this most striking feature of Gen. 2:10-14 is precisely that of a spring welling up and dissipating as it flows out all over the land—that is, verses 11-14 demonstrate literarily what is stated explicitly in verse 10.”

Morales, L.M. (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers.

Eden as a Cosmic Mountain

The depiction of Eden as a high place, from which flows a river of divine life that provides life for all of the nations, is foundational for the biblical storyline. Eden is “Heaven on Earth” in the form of a cosmic high place, where the life of Heaven is one with Earth.

Genesis 2:10 Instructor’s Translation

Now, **a river went out** from Eden **to water** the garden; and from there it separated and became four heads ...

Eden is a high enough place for a river to flow out to water various distant regions of the land.

Ezekiel 28:13-14 NASB

You were in **Eden**, the **garden of God** ... you were on the **holy mountain of God**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Eden is referred to by later biblical authors as a mountain.

Exodus 24:16-18 NASB

¹⁶ The glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day he called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. ¹⁷ And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance

of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the mountain top.¹⁸ Moses entered the midst of the cloud as **he went up to the mountain**; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.

Exodus 25:8-9 NASB

Let them construct a sanctuary for me, that I may dwell among them. **According to all that I am going to show you, as the pattern of the tabernacle and the pattern of all its furniture**, just so you shall construct it.

The plans for the tabernacle, which was designed as a micro-Eden, were revealed to Moses on top of Mount Sinai, where he encountered Yahweh in the burning tree.

Joel 2:1-3 NIV*

Blow the trumpet in **Zion**, sound the alarm on **my holy mountain** ... before them [the army] the land is like the **garden of Eden**; behind them, a desert wasteland.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 51:3 NIV

The LORD will surely comfort **Zion** and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts **like Eden**, her wastelands **like the garden of the LORD**. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

Ezekiel 36:34-35 NASB

The desolate land will be cultivated instead of being a desolation in the sight of everyone who passes by. They will say, "This desolate land has become **like the garden of Eden**; and the waste, desolate and ruined cities are fortified and inhabited."

The Jerusalem temple, which was designed to be Heaven/Eden on earth, was built on Mount Zion, a high hill which is constantly likened to Eden.

Psalms 46:4 NIV

There is **a river** whose streams make glad **the city of God**,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.

Psalms 48:1-2 NIV

Great is the LORD, and most worthy of praise, in **the city of our God, his holy mountain**. Beautiful in its loftiness, the joy of the whole earth, like **the heights of Zaphon is Mount Zion, the city of the great king**.

Ezekiel 47:1-12 NIV

¹ The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw **water coming out from under the threshold of the temple** toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar ... ⁵ He measured off another thousand, but **now it was a river that I could not cross**, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. ⁶ He asked me, "Son of man, do you see this?"

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. ⁸ He said to me, "This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹ **Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows ...** ¹² Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing."

Joel 3:18 NASB

And in that day, the **mountains will drip with sweet wine**,
and the hills will flow with milk,
and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;
and **a spring will go out from the house of the LORD**
to water the valley of Shittim.

Revelation 21:10 NASB

And he carried me away in the Spirit to **a mountain great and high**, and he showed me **the holy city**, Jerusalem coming down **out of heaven from God**.

Revelation 22:1 NASB

Then he showed me **a river of the water of life**, clear as crystal **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb**.

The heavenly Jerusalem, that is, renewed Eden on Earth, is described as a high mountain garden-city that flows with the river of life.

"In Genesis 2-3, Eden is not explicitly described as a mountain, but this can be best understood by a careful reading of many biblical texts that symbolically identify Eden with Zion. Through the temple ritual on Mount Zion, the cosmic images of Eden became an earthly reality. Genesis 2:10-14 mentions the four great rivers that proceed from Eden and water all the earth. One of these cosmic streams is the Gihon, which appears only elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible in reference to the main source of Jerusalem's water ... This connection between the Gihon of Eden and of Jerusalem is not the result of fuzzy or illogical mode of thought on the part of the biblical authors. This symbolic matching reflects Zion's cosmic and spiritual importance ... The image of Jerusalem's cosmic stream is no more inappropriate than similar imagery applied to Jerusalem in Psalm 48:1-3 ("Beautiful in elevation, the joy of the entire earth, Mount Zion in the far north") or Isaiah 2:1-4 ("Mount Zion will be raised up as the highest of all mountains on earth"). In the symbolic world of Israel's temple liturgies, ordinary space became sacred space, the meager water spring of the city became a cosmic river, and the little knoll of Jerusalem became Mount Zion, the highest mountain on the earth, and Jerusalem a peripheral city in the ancient world, became the center of the earth (Ezek. 38:12)."

Anderson, Gary (1988). "The Cosmic Mountain: Eden and Its Early Interpreters in Syriac Christianity," *Genesis 1-3 in the History of Exegesis: Intrigue in the Garden*. 192-93.

The Cosmic Mountain and the Primeval River in the Ancient Near East

"In the ancient Near East, the union of heaven and earth was conceived as a mountain whose base was the bottom of the earth and whose peak was the top of heaven, making it the axis mundi ... the center of the world ... The cosmic mountain was the meeting place of the gods, the source of water and fertility ... the meeting place of heaven and earth. The cosmic mountain motif appears in the literature and religious rituals of Mesopotamia, Egypt, the Hittites, Canaan, and ancient Israel."

Morales, L.M. (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers.

"[Ancient Near Eastern temples] were the architectural embodiment of the cosmic mountain ... [The] pyramids and ziggurats were architectonic representations of the archetype of the cosmic mountain, often decorated with portrayals of the cosmic waters and fertile trees. The connection between temples and cosmic mountains is related to their function as links between heaven and earth, as attested by the names of the Babylonian sanctuaries ("Mountain of the house," "House of the Mountain of all Lands"), so that the ziggurat was literally and symbolically a cosmic mountain."

Morales, L.M. (2012). [*The Tabernacle Pre-Figured: Cosmic Mountain Ideology in Genesis and Exodus*](#). Peeters Publishers.



Keel, Othmar; Hallett, Timothy J. (translator) (1997). *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

This image is from a carving on a fountain from an Assyrian temple (8th-7th cent. B.C.). It depicts a deity whose body is a tall forest mountain, and four primal rivers go out into the world as a gift of his own divine life.



Keel, Othmar; Hallett, Timothy J. (translator) (1997). *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

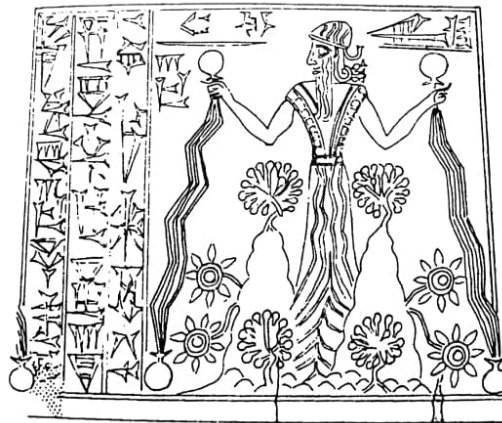
“A highly interesting wall painting from Mari (191) shows a rectangular space surrounded by a wall ... flanked by date palms and trees ... four cherubim, and two bulls. One foot of each bull is planted on a mountaintop. The two mountains probably indicate that the center of the court is located on a mountain. The two fountain deities in the lower of the two smaller rectangles correspond to the two mountains. A stream with four branches (as in Gen. 2:10) rises from the vessels held by the deities. A stylized plant grows out of the stream. This is the place from which all life issues. In the center of this region, in the upper rectangle, stands Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, love, and war ... Her right foot is set on a lion. The king stands in greeting before her. She appears to be presenting him with ring and staff. In any case, the picture depicts all parts of an entire temple complex. The temple building is a broad room with a wide antechamber (cf. 172-73, 207). The anteroom and the forecourt incorporate all those features which characterize the temple as a sphere of life. We find these features repeated—almost without exception—in the Solomonic temple and in the description of paradise: the mountain (Ezek 28:13-16), the rivers, the trees, the cherubim. Even the bulls are present. In the Jerusalem temple they carried the bronze sea (1 Kgs 7:25). Belief in the presence of the living God supplied the temple forecourts with all the symbols which had already played a role in the Ishtar temple of Mari.”

Keel, Othmar; Hallett, Timothy J. (translator) (1997). [*The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*](#). Eisenbrauns.



Keel, Othmar; Hallett, Timothy J. (translator) (1997). *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

Image of Assyrian relief found in a fountain in the Temple of Asshur (patron god of Assyria, 1800-1500 B.C.). A combination of two river deities (four streams total), who issue from the mountain god and supply all plant life (notice the tree of life goat motif). This image depicts Asshur as the chief of the cosmic mountain, supplying vegetation and water to the cosmos.



Keel, Othmar; Hallett, Timothy J. (translator) (1997). *The Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

Kassite cylinder seal (14th cent. B.C.). Between forested mountain tops, the mountain god rises and provides rivers of life and vegetation for his realm. The rain waters come from his hands, and the primeval river flows from his skirt.

The Design Pattern of the Primeval River

Because the garden of Eden represents the union of Heaven and Earth, its river is portrayed as the source of all the world's fertility and abundance. When later biblical authors portray the arrival of God's deliverance and restoration of Jerusalem and all creation, it is no surprise that they draw upon this river imagery.

And in that day the mountains will drip with sweet wine,
and the hills will flow with milk,
and all the brooks of Judah will flow with water;
and **a spring will go out from the house of the LORD** to water the valley of Shittim.

Isaiah 30:23-26 NIV

²³ **He will also send you rain** for the seed you sow in the ground, and the food that comes from the land will be rich and plentiful. In that day your cattle will graze in broad meadows ... when the towers fall, **streams of water will flow on every high mountain and every lofty hill.** ²⁶ The moon will shine like the sun, and the sunlight will be seven times brighter, like the light of seven full days, when the LORD binds up the bruises of his people and heals the wounds he inflicted.

Zechariah 14:6-9 NIV

⁶ On that day there will be neither sunlight nor cold, frosty darkness. ⁷ It will be a unique day—a day known only to the Lord—with no distinction between day and night. When evening comes, there will be light. ⁸ On that day **living water will flow out from Jerusalem**, half of it east to the Dead Sea and half of it west to the Mediterranean Sea, in summer and in winter. ⁹ The LORD will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one LORD, and his name the only name.

Psalms 36:7-9 NIV

⁷ How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.

⁸ They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.

⁹ For **with you is the fountain of life;**
in your light we see light.

Ezekiel 47:1-12 NIV

¹ The man brought me back to the entrance to the temple, and I saw **water coming out from under the threshold of the temple** toward the east (for the temple faced east). The water was coming down from under the south side of the temple, south of the altar ... ⁵ He measured off another thousand, but **now it was a river that I could not cross**, because the water had risen and was deep enough to swim in—a river that no one could cross. ⁶ He asked me, “Son of Man, do you see this?”

Then he led me back to the bank of the river. ⁷ When I arrived there, I saw a great number of trees on each side of the river. ⁸ He said to me, “This water flows toward the eastern region and goes down into the Arabah, where it enters the Dead Sea. When it empties into the sea, the salty water there becomes fresh. ⁹ **Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows ...** ¹² Fruit trees of all kinds will grow on both banks of the river. Their leaves will not wither, nor will their fruit fail. Every month they will bear fruit, because the water from the sanctuary flows to them. Their fruit will serve for food and their leaves for healing.”

Reflection Question

What idea is being emphasized in Genesis 2 when God forms the human from the dust?

Session 12: Garden Imagery in the Ancient Near East

Key Takeaways

- Garden imagery is how the biblical authors talk about the space where Heaven and Earth overlap.
- Garden imagery is also used in other ancient Near Eastern iconography to represent divine space, similar to but also different from the biblical concept.

Word Study: Delight/Eden — *Eden* (עֵדֶן)

The word “eden” (עֵדֶן) is used in two overlapping ways in the Hebrew Bible.

Eden as Luxuriance or Delight

2 Samuel 1:24 NKJV*

O daughters of Israel, weep over Saul, Who clothed you in scarlet with **luxuries (lit. “edens”)** who put ornaments of gold on your apparel.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 36:7-8 NIV

How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of **delights (lit. “edens”)**.

Jeremiah 51:34 NIV

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon has devoured us, he has thrown us into confusion, he has made us an empty jar. Like a serpent he has swallowed us and filled his stomach with our **delicacies (lit. “edens”)**, and then has spewed us out.

Eden as the Cosmic Meeting of Heaven and Earth

The cosmic land called “Delight/Eden” is consistently referred back to in the Hebrew Bible as a meeting place of Heaven and Earth, which is the source of all life and abundance outside of Eden.

Isaiah 51:3 NIV

The LORD will surely comfort **Zion** and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts **like Eden** her wastelands like the garden of the LORD. Joy and gladness will be found in her, thanksgiving and the sound of singing.

Ezekiel 31:3-4, 9 NIV

³ Consider **Assyria** once a cedar in Lebanon, with beautiful branches overshadowing the forest; it towered on high, its top above the thick foliage. ⁴ The waters nourished it, deep springs made it grow tall; their streams flowed all around its base and sent their channels to all the trees of the field ... ⁹ I made it beautiful with abundant branches, the envy of all **the trees of Eden** in **the garden of God**.

Ezekiel 36:35 NIV

They will say, “**This land** that was laid waste has become **like the garden of Eden**; the cities that were lying in ruins, desolate and destroyed, are now fortified and inhabited.”

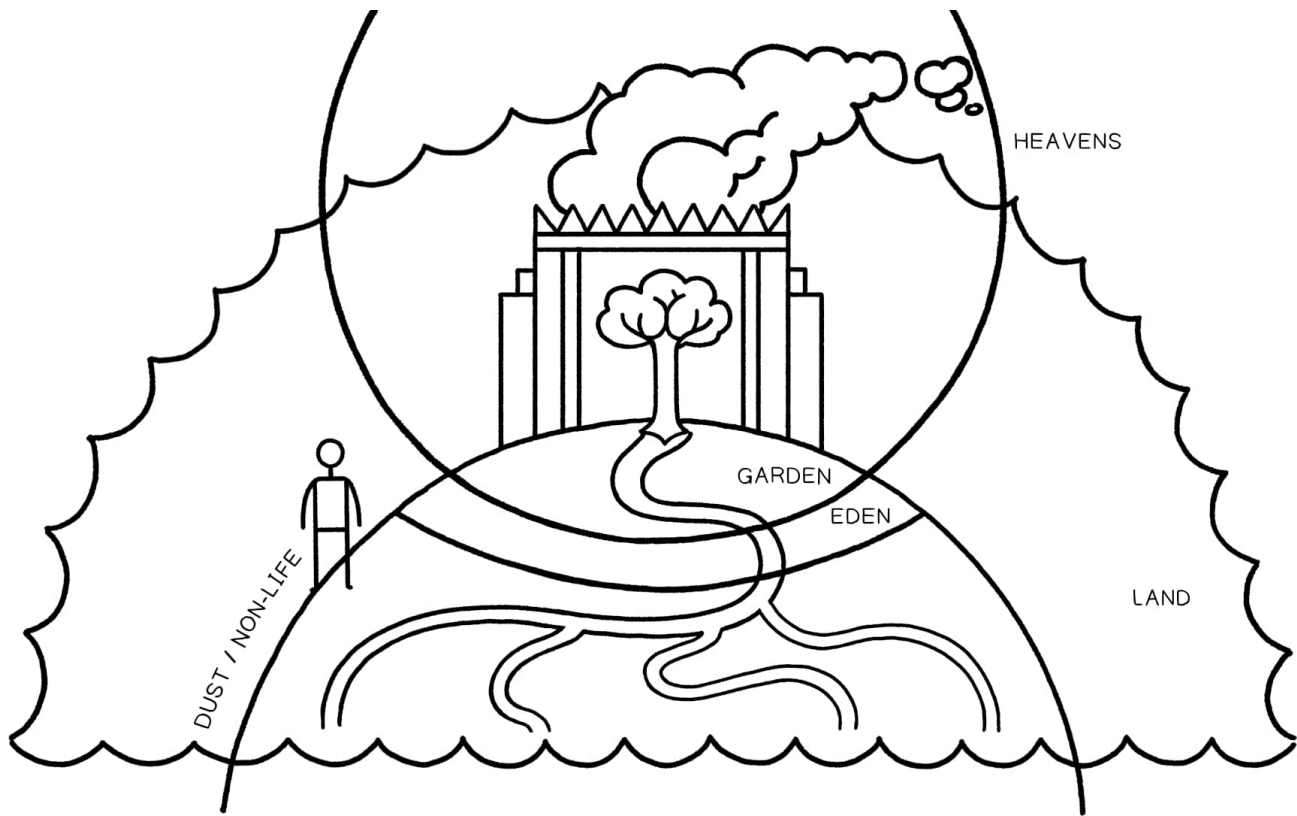
Ezekiel 28:13-14 NASB

You were in **Eden, the garden of God** ... You were on **the holy mountain of God**; you walked in the midst of the stones of fire.

Psalms 46:1-7 NASB

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change
and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea;
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains quake at its swelling pride.
Selah.
⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy dwelling places of the Most High.
⁵ God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved;
God will help her when morning dawns.
⁶ The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered;
he raised his voice, the earth melted.
⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our stronghold.
Selah.

Images of Heaven on Earth



Garden of Eden Pattern. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

God, the high place that sources the river, and the city up on high all become mapped onto each other as images pointing to a greater reality.

Garden as Paradise

200 years before Jesus, Hebrew scholars translated their Hebrew Bible into Greek. This version, called the Septuagint, translated the word “gan” to “paradeisos,” which is where the English word “paradise” comes from.

Luke 23:42-44 NASB

⁴² And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingdom!” ⁴³ And he said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with me in **Paradise**.” ⁴⁴ It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness fell over the whole land until the ninth hour.”

Revelation 21:1-4 NASB

¹ Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the **holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God**, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and he will dwell among them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be among them, ⁴ and he will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”

Revelation 22:1-2 NASB

¹ Then he showed me a **river of the water of life**, clear as crystal, **coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb**, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

Word Study: Planted in the East/of Old — Qedem (קדם)

The word *qedem* can be used geographically (to mean “east”) or temporally (to mean “before”). The use is picked up and elaborated in Genesis 3:24 and 4:16.

Genesis 3:24 NASB

So he drove the man out; and **at the east** (מקדם) of the garden of Eden, he stationed the cherubim and the flaming sword which turned every direction to guard the way to the tree of life.

Genesis 4:16 NASB

Then Cain went out from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, **east** (קדמת) of Eden.

This geographical use of Eden is clear, but the question is whether the word “*miqeddem*” has a double meaning in [Genesis 2:8](#), because the temporal use of this word is very common.

Isaiah 45:21 NIV

Declare what is to be, present it—let them take counsel together. Who foretold this long ago, who declared it from the **distant past** (מקדם)? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no God apart from me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none but me.

Micah 5:2 NIV

But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are **from of old** (מקדם), from ancient times.

Habakkuk 1:12 NIV*

LORD, are you not from **antiquity** (מקדם)? My God, my Holy One, you will never die. You, LORD, have appointed them to execute judgment; you, my Rock, have ordained them to punish.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 77:11-12 NIV*

¹¹ I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your miracles **of long ago** (מקדם). ¹² I will consider all your works and meditate on all your mighty deeds.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

In the earliest history of interpretation, the word was understood both ways.

1. Geographical: Old Greek (κατα ἀνατολας, “from eastward”)

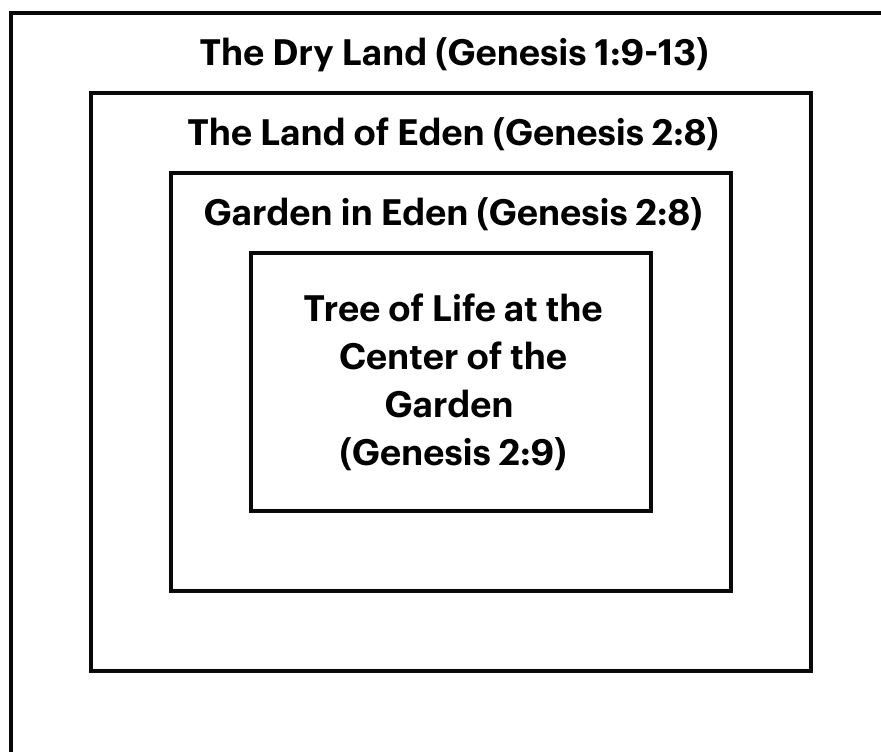
2. Temporal: Latin Vulgate (*a principio*, “from the beginning”), and early Septuagint revisers (Aquila *ἀπο ἀρχῆθεν*, Symmachus *ἐκ πρωτης*, Theodotian *ἐν πρωτοις*), and all of the Aramaic Targums (Neofiti, Pseudo-Jonathan)

“‘Before the creation of the world a garden had been planted by the Memra of the Lord God from Eden for the righteous’—The view expressed here by Pseudo-Jonathan that the garden of Eden was created before the creation of the world is debated in Genesis Rabbah 15, 3. The garden of Eden is included among the ten things that were created on the eve of the first Sabbath. According to Jubilees 2, 7 and 2 Enoch 30, 1, the garden of Eden was created on the third day.”

Maher, Michael (1992). *Targum Pseudo-Jonathan: Genesis (The Aramaic Bible) (Volume 1)*. Michael Glazier.

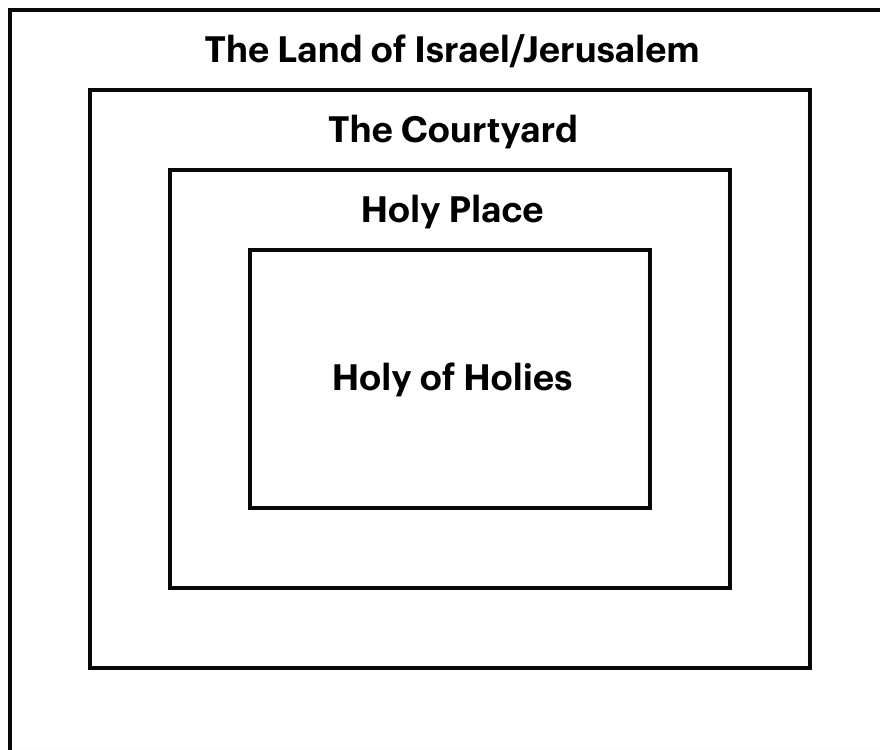
The Three-Part Geography of Eden and Tabernacle

The geography of Eden within the dry land of Genesis 1-3 depicts a three-part topography.



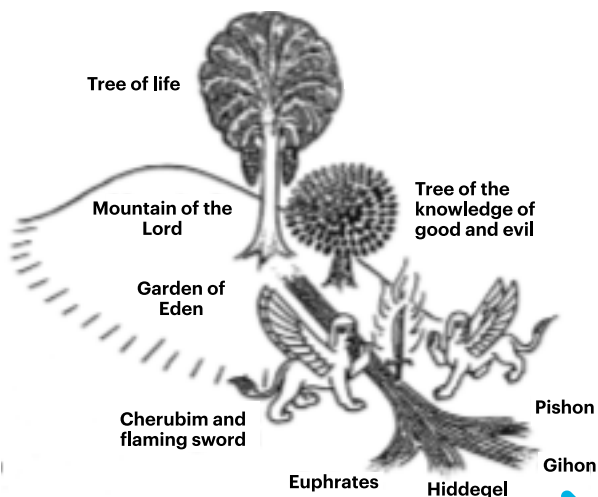
Three-Part Eden Geography Diagram. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

This conception of the garden of Eden on the dry land provides a symbolic template for Israel’s tabernacle temple, especially as described in Ezekiel’s ideal/restored temple (Ezek. 40-48).

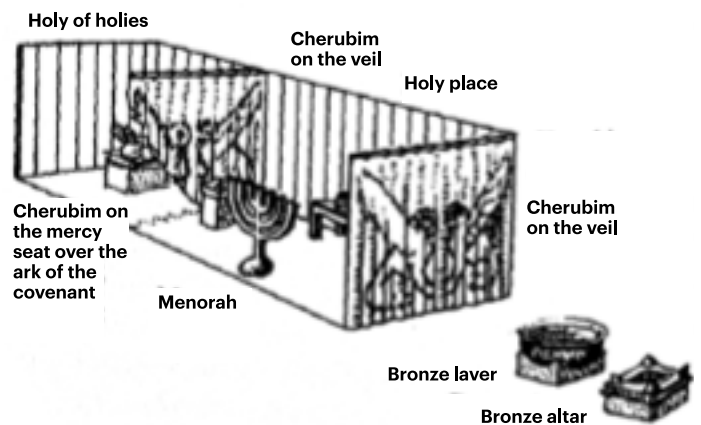


Three-Part Tabernacle Layout. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

In his book *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?*, Michel Morales depicts the similarities between the garden and the tabernacle.



Exile
Eastward



Exodus
Westward



Image adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic.

Adapted from Morales, Michael L. (2015). *Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord?: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*. IVP Academic. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

The Tree of Life

The tree of life is the tree in the center of the garden that imparts eternal life.

Genesis 2:9 Instructor's Translation

And Yahweh God caused to sprout every tree from the ground that is pleasing to the sight and good for food; **and the tree of life was in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowing of good and bad.**

Genesis 3:22 NASB

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, **he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever.**"

"[The tree of life] represents life that is beyond the original life that God breathed into human. The first human by nature is susceptible to death ... Nevertheless, continued eating from the tree could renew life and prevent death. Apart from disobedience to God's command, mortals had access to this tree ... The tree of life allows humanity to transcend its mortality, the state in which it was created on the sixth day, so it can move to a higher dimension ... to eternal life and immortality. As one partakes of this ... fruit by faith, one participates in this eternal life. This highest potency of life was available in the garden and becomes once again available to us as we reenter the temple-garden through the second Adam ... and look forward to the resurrection of our bodies."

Waltke, Bruce; Yu, Charles (2007). [*An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach*](#). Zondervan.

The Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Perspective

The tree of life was an iconic image in the ancient world. It's helpful to compare and contrast this tree's significance in Mesopotamian, Canaanite, and Egyptian culture with the biblical portrait.

"As any astute tourist quickly observes, the landscape of much the Near East is predominantly stark and barren. The land is comprised of innumerable shades of brown, with only brief interjections of green and blue. The higher in elevation one goes, the greener the picture becomes. Consequently, mountains and rivers, along with the forests that adorn them, seem to be natural focal points anyone who lives or travels in these lands. The ancient peoples, from the remote western world of Egypt to the eastern river marshes of Babylonia, lived in the land, not simply on it. They were all agrarian cultures, whose livelihood was found and maintained among the shade, fruit, shelter, and beauty of their trees. As a result, there can be little doubt that this lifestyle had a significant effect on these ancient cultures and the way they perceived the world. Trees were some of the most sacred elements in ancient near Eastern civilizations."

Osborne, William (2018). [*Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*](#). Eisenbrauns.

Sacred Trees in Ancient Egypt

Nut, the sky goddess, who is often associated with the sky-dome and the gift of rain, is also often portrayed as a tree that supplies fruit, water, and life for the land.

“These images and strong associations between the tree and the goddess do not indicate that the ancients necessarily believed the tree was equal to the deity, but that the god was like the tree, or at least that the tree was an embodiment of the deity ...”

Osborne, William (2018). [*Trees and Kings: A Comparative Analysis of Tree Imagery in Israel's Prophetic Tradition and the Ancient Near East*](#). Eisenbrauns.

Egyptian Kings as Trees

The productivity of ancient Egypt was completely dependent upon the Nile, which annually flooded and irrigated the shores and deltas. Osiris was the deity associated with the Nile, and the one who provided fertility for the land through the waters. In Egyptian mythology, Osiris was believed to have a son named Horus, who was incarnate as the Pharaoh. The king stood as the sole mediator between the gods and the people, responsible for fertility and order.



[Wikipedia](#).

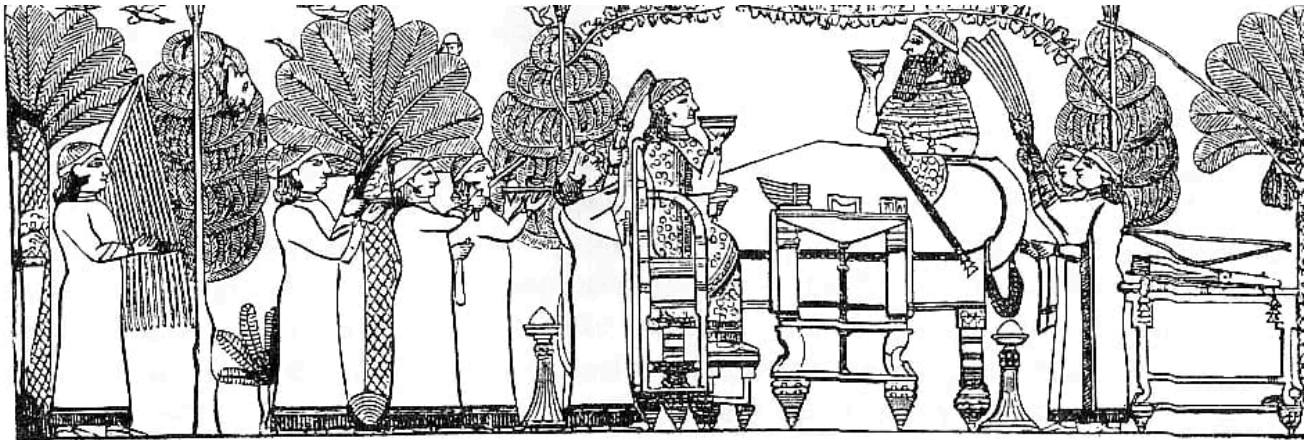
Temple of Karnak: King Sety I (early 1200s B.C.) is sitting in the middle of a tree, being crowned and given a scepter by Thoth who is writing his name on the leaves of the tree. It's an image for the king's role as a god giving life to the land through the sacred tree.



King, Hugo (2011). [Flickr](#).

Trees in Mesopotamian Culture (Assyria and Babylon)

Trees and gardens were associated with the royal gardens of imperial kings. The image below depicts a wall relief of Assyrian king Asshurbanipal's garden parties (7th century B.C.).

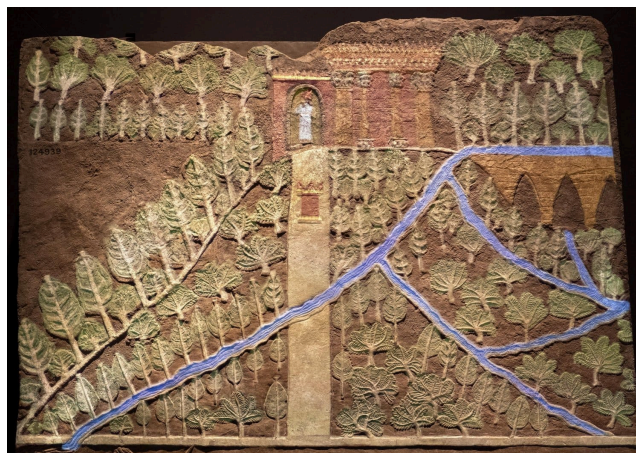


[Wikimedia Commons.](#)

Asshurbanipal's Royal Garden in Nimrud Designed a Microcosm of His Empire

"By the will of the gods, vines, fruit trees of all kinds, olive trees, aromatic trees, flourished greatly in my gardens. Cypress trees ... grew tall and sent out shoots. I created a marsh for the flow of water for the gardens ... Birds of the heavens, herons ... boars and deer ... gave birth in abundance."

Royal Inscriptions of Sennacharib, Text #8

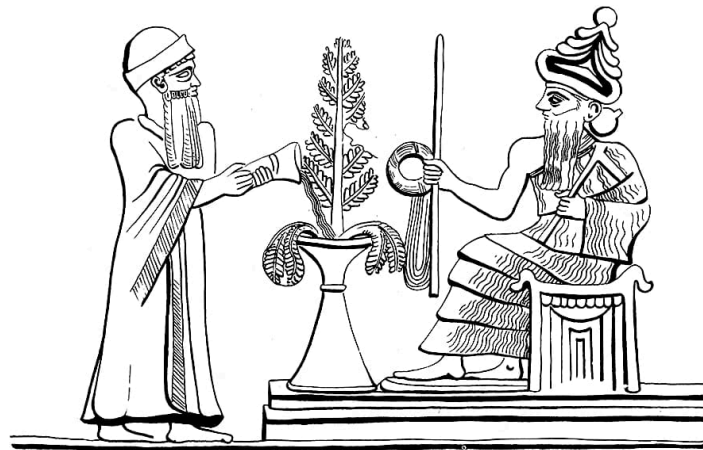


SPL. [National Geographic.](#)

Trees and the Gods

Ur-Nammu of Ur (2060-1955 B.C.) offering a libation to a tree, which apparently represents the moon god Nanna, who sits enthroned behind it (cf. 239). The beneficent power of the god is present in the tree (cf. 253-

55). The king, in strengthening the tree by a drink offering, enhances that power. In return, the tree dispenses life-giving water.



Keel, Othmar (2015), page 135. Creation: *Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*. Eisenbrauns.

The Motif of a Divine Tree Protected by the Gods Comes from Mesopotamia

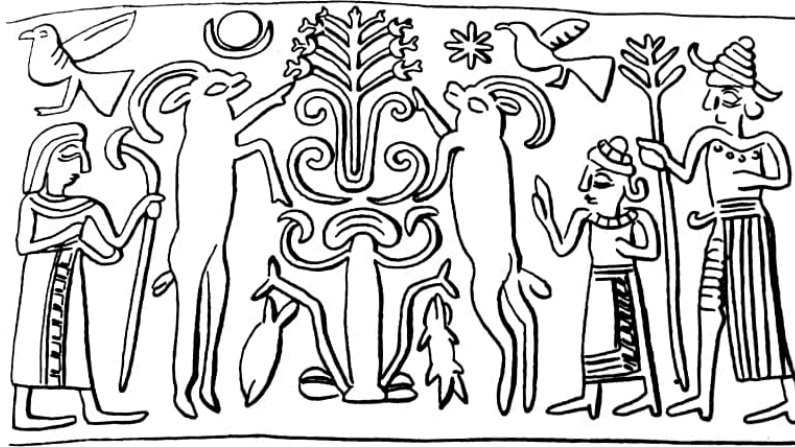
A carving from Nimrud shows goats around a tree of life, symbolizing its vitality, and then cherubim, showing that it's also the domain of the gods (also below, a plaque stitched to the chest of a deceased person in a tomb).



Keel, Othmar (2015), page 135. Creation: *Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*. Eisenbrauns.

Trees of Life in Syria-Canaanite Tradition

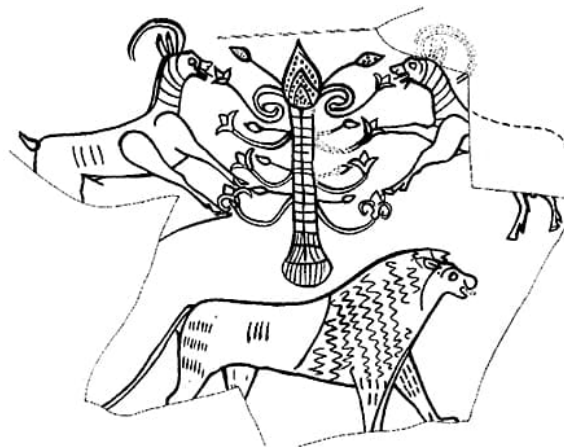
Syrian seal (1750-1550 B.C.): Two goats flank and eat from the cosmic world tree, symbolizing food given to all creatures of the land (birds, goats, fish) by the gods who stand nearby. To the right, the giant is the storm god with his plant-scepter.



Keel, Othmar (2015). "Image #21," *Creation: Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*. Eisenbrauns.

Kuntillet 'Ajrud (Sinai Peninsula), 9th-8th Century B.C.

This image was found in a fortress in the Sinai peninsula, with an inscription that mentions Yahweh and Asherah. The image was certainly drawn by an Israelite, who here shows familiarity with the ancient Near Eastern motif of the tree of life.



[Wikipedia](#).

Summary of Ancient Tree Imagery

Osborne concludes that tree imagery in the ancient Near East is interwoven in three ways.

1. Abundance and prosperity from the gods are depicted as abundant gardens and tree-filled forests.
2. Deities and their powers to give fertility are regularly associated with tree symbols.
3. Kings who mediate the power of the gods are either the caretakers of trees or symbolized as trees themselves.

Comparisons and Contrasts with Genesis 1-2

The biblical images take on a life of their own and a unique meaning within the Bible. But they are also rooted in the ancient cultures of Israel's neighbors.

Seeing the garden/tree imagery as a design pattern of Heaven on Earth in its ancient context is helpful in understanding why garden imagery is so pervasive throughout the Bible. It was the language of Heaven and Earth in the time of the biblical authors.

In Genesis 1-2, all humanity is given the royal task of stewarding the garden and its trees. This fits with the pattern of the image of God, where all humanity assumes the role of the king.

The tree is not divine but a symbol of divine life and abundance that can be internalized (eaten). The tree is not magic; rather it is an image of proximity to the source of divine life.

Jesus and Garden Imagery

The New Testament authors build upon this imagery to communicate what was accomplished through the life and death of Jesus. Take for example the opening of John's Gospel.

John 1:14 NASB

And the Word became flesh, and **dwelt** among us, and we saw his **glory**, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

When you look at Jesus, you are seeing the divine glory that used to only be accessible by one priest, one time a year in the temple. But now, what was contained "in the middle" is now unleashed in Jesus. Throughout the rest of the Gospel, John continues to use this Eden/temple imagery, like when Jesus is called the water of life, the vine of God's life, the new temple, and when he is crucified and lifted up on the high place.

Reflection Question

The garden of Eden is more than just a safe and fertile piece of land—it's a symbol of a bigger reality. What does the garden of Eden represent?

Session 13: The Human's Priestly Role and the Divine Command

Key Takeaways

- The description of the role of humanity in the garden, to “work and to keep” it, is priestly language, and it introduces the theme of the one who stands in the place of the many.
- God’s command concerning the two trees at the center of the garden begins with a generous invitation to enjoy the bounty of the garden.

“To Work and To Keep”: Genesis 2:15

These two verbs found in Genesis 2:15 are packed with significance, as they portray the ideal vocation of humanity. Let’s look into their meaning.

Word Study: To Work, To Serve, To Worship — *Abad* (עבד)

Exodus 20:8-10 NIV*

⁸ Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your **‘abad**, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any **‘abad**, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

‘Abad = to work

Genesis 27:29 NASB*

May peoples **‘abad** you, and nations bow down to you; be master of your brothers, and may your mother’s sons bow down to you. Cursed be those who curse you, and blessed be those who bless you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

‘Abad = to serve

Exodus 3:12 NIV*

And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will **‘abad** God on this mountain.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

'Abad = to worship

Numbers 18:7 NASB*

But you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to do your **'abodah**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Chronicles 24:3 NIV*

With the help of Zadok a descendant of Eleazar and Ahimelek a descendant of Ithamar, David separated them into divisions for their appointed order of **'abodah**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

'Abodah = priestly service

Word Study: To Keep — *Shamar* (שמר)

The phrase “to serve and keep” (*shamar* / שמר) refers to a priestly service of worship. These verbs are used together as a phrase elsewhere only in descriptions of the priests and Levites working in and around the temple.

Numbers 3:5-9 NASB*

⁵ Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ⁶ “Bring the tribe of Levi near and set them before Aaron the priest, that they may serve him. ⁷ They shall **shamar** the **mishmeret** for him and the **mishmeret** of the whole congregation before the tent of meeting, to **'abad** the **'abodah** of the tabernacle. ⁸ They shall also **shamar** all the furnishings of the tent of meeting, along with the duties of the sons of Israel, to **'abad** the **'abodah** of the tabernacle. ⁹ You shall thus give the Levites to Aaron and to his sons; they are wholly given to him from among the sons of Israel.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 8:26 NASB*

They may, however, assist their brothers in the tent of meeting, to **shamar** the **mishmeret**, but they themselves shall **'abad** no **'abodah**. Thus you shall deal with the Levites concerning their obligations.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 18:7 NASB*

But you and your sons with you shall **shamar** to your priesthood for everything concerning the altar and inside the veil, and you are to **'abad** the **'abodah**. I am giving you the priesthood as a bestowed service ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

“עבד, to serve till’ is a very common verb and is often used of cultivating the soil (2:5; 3:23; 4:2, 12, etc.). The word is commonly used in a religious sense of serving God (e.g., Deut. 4:19), and in priestly texts,

especially of the tabernacle duties of the Levites (Num. 3:7-8; 4:23-24, 26, etc.). Similarly, מִרְשׁ 'to guard, to keep' has the simple profane sense of 'guard' (4:9; 30:31), but it is even more commonly used in legal texts of observing religious commands and duties (17:9; Lev. 18:5) and particularly of the Levitical responsibility for guarding the tabernacle from intruders (Num. 1:53; 3:7-8). It is striking that here and in the priestly law these two terms are juxtaposed (Num. 3:7-8; 8:26; 18:5-6), another pointer to the interplay of tabernacle and Eden symbolism already noted."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*World Biblical Commentary: Vol. 1, Genesis 1-15*](#). Thomas Nelson Inc.

"[T]he tasks given to Adam are of a priestly nature: caring for sacred space. In ancient thinking, caring for sacred space was a way of upholding creation. By preserving order, non-order was held at bay ... If the priestly vocabulary in Genesis 2:15 indicates the same kind of thinking, the point of caring for sacred space should be seen as much more than landscaping or even priestly duties. Maintaining order made one a participant with God in the ongoing task of sustaining the equilibrium God had established in the cosmos. Egyptian thinking attached this not only to the role of priests as they maintained the sacred space in the temples but also to the king, whose task was 'to complete what was unfinished, and to preserve the existent, not as a status quo but in a continuing, dynamic, even revolutionary process of remodeling and improvement.' This combines the subduing and ruling of Genesis 1 with the 'bd and šmr of this chapter."

Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

Genesis 2:16-17: The Divine Command Given About the Tree

Notice that the first command has to do with eating from all of the trees, not the prohibition of the one ([Gen. 2:16](#)). The divine command is not arbitrary and is directly linked to humanity's continued enjoyment of life in the garden of Eden.

The prohibition's purpose is to safeguard the divine intent for humanity to enjoy God's own life in the garden.

Symmetrical Pairing of the Divine Command

Genesis 2:16-17 Instructor's Translation

- a - from every tree of the garden
 - b **you will surely** eat (אכל תאכל)
- a' - and from the tree of knowing good and bad
 - b' you will not eat (לא תאכל)
- a'' - for in the day of your eating (אכלך)
 - b'' **you will surely** die (מות תמות)

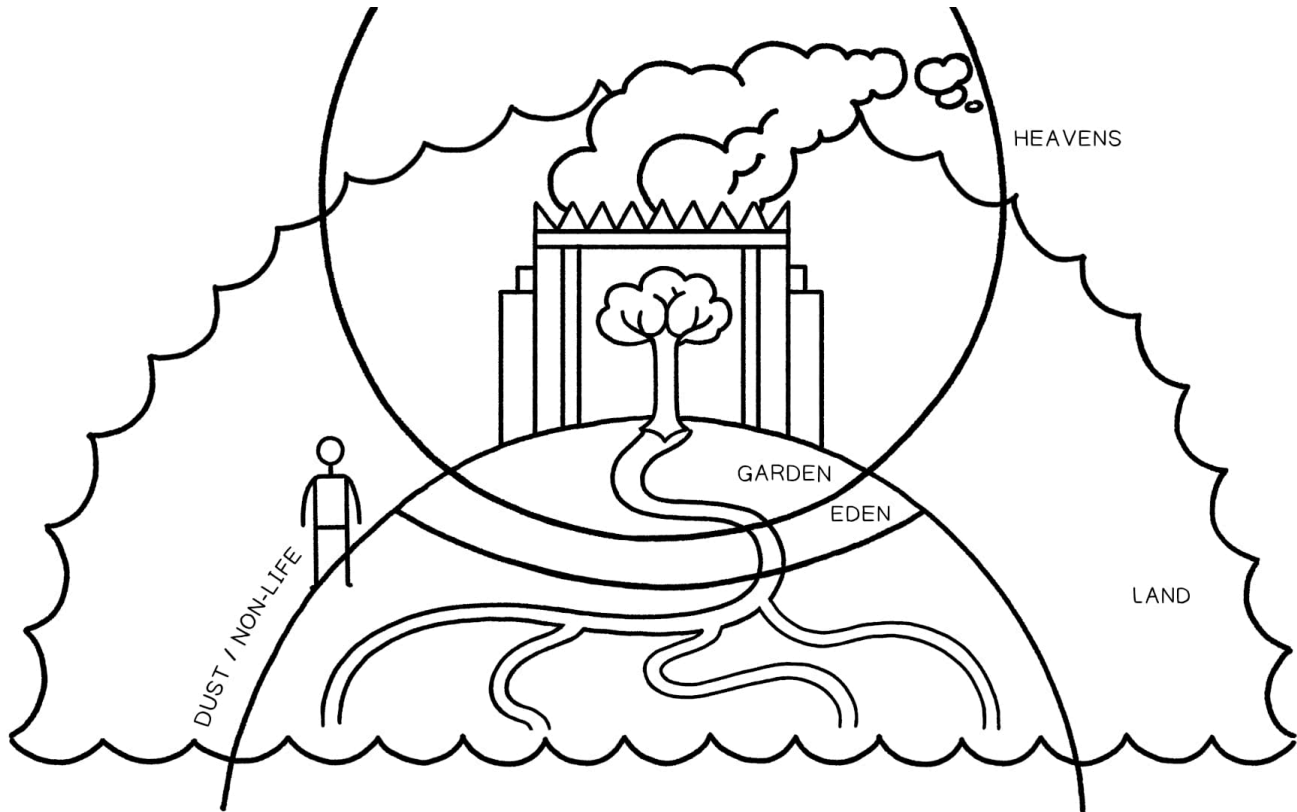
Magical Fruit?

The divine command does not assume that the fruit has magical powers to give knowledge. Rather, the choice to eat is itself the act of "knowing good and bad."

“No fruit per se is magically conveying life or death; it is the eating from one or the other tree that brings about life or death, that is, the choice to strike a path independent of divine wisdom.”

LaCocque, Andre (2012). [*The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist*](#). Wipf and Stock.

When the humans eat the fruit, they cut themselves off from the source of life—exile is death in this scenario. It is not immediately clear in chapter 2 what it means to die after eating the forbidden fruit. However, it becomes clear at the end of chapter 3 as the humans are banished from the garden.



Exile As Death Outside of Eden. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

What is the very first command God gives to humanity in the garden?

Session 14: The Tree of Knowing Good and Bad

Key Takeaways

- The knowledge of good and bad is not an immoral thing that God wants to keep from humans. When the phrase is used elsewhere in the Bible, it indicates moral maturity.
- This tree doesn't represent knowledge; it represents the choice to trust God or not. Will humans let God be their source of wisdom and knowledge, or will they reach out and take what seems good in their own eyes?
- The two trees in the garden are an archetype of the test all humans will eventually face.

The Tree of Knowing Good and Bad

The trees are introduced in [Genesis 2:9](#) and appear again in [Genesis 2:16-17](#).

“[The tree of life] represents life that is beyond the original life that God breathed into human. The first human by nature is susceptible to death ... Nevertheless, continued eating from the tree could renew life and prevent death. Apart from disobedience to God's command, mortals had access to this tree ... The tree of life allows humanity to transcend its mortality, the state in which it was created on the sixth day, so it can move to a higher dimension ... to eternal life and immortality. As one partakes of this ... fruit by faith, one participates in this eternal life. This highest potency of life was available in the garden and becomes once again available to us as we reenter the temple-garden through the second Adam ... and look forward to the resurrection of our bodies.”

Waltke, Bruce and Chales Yu (2007). [An Old Testament Theology: An Exegetical, Canonical, and Thematic Approach](#). Zondervan.

This Edenic state is fragile and conditional upon trusting and living by God's command. In Genesis 1, God alone is the provider and knower of what is good and not good. That is, he has the wisdom to know what is necessary for humanity to fulfill their role as God's partners in the “gardenizing” all of creation. This dignified role for the humans, however, comes with a great responsibility and choice. Will they learn wisdom from God, or will they take it for themselves?

In the “good” garden, there are trees loaded with fruit for eating and cultivating, and in the center of the garden (from which flows the river) is the tree of life. It's an image of God's ultimate gift to creation—the opportunity to share in and receive God's own goodness and life into oneself.

But ongoing access to the tree of life is conditional upon not taking from the tree of knowing *toṽ* and *ra*. The meaning of this phrase is important for the logic of the narrative, so we must take a deep dive into the meaning of these key words.

Good (Heb. *Tov*) and Bad/Evil (Heb. *Ra*)

Let's look at the words *tov* and *ra* in the Hebrew Bible to develop a portrait for our definition of these terms.

Good/Bad in Condition or Quality

Jeremiah 24:1-2 NIV*

... the LORD showed me two baskets of figs placed in front of the temple of the LORD. 2 One basket had very **tov** figs, like those that ripen early; the other basket had very **ra** figs, so **ra** they could not be eaten.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Proverbs 25:19 NASB*

Like a **ra** tooth and an unsteady foot, is confidence in a faithless man in time of trouble.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Good/Bad as Pleasant/Unpleasant, Beneficial/Harmful

1 Kings 5:4 NIV*

But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no enemy or **ra**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Judges 16:25 NASB*

It so happened when they were **tov** of heart, that they said, "Call for Samson, that he may amuse us." So they called for Samson from the prison, and he entertained them. And they made him stand between the pillars.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ecclesiastes 2:16-17 NIV*

¹⁶ For the wise, like the fool, will not be long remembered; the days have already come when both have been forgotten. Like the fool, the wise too must die! ¹⁷ So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was **ra** to me.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Good/Bad as Morally Good/Evil

Psalms 140:1-2 NASB*

Rescue me, O LORD, from **ra** humans;
preserve me from violent men
who devise **ra** in their hearts;
they continually stir up wars.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Esther 7:5-6 NASB*

⁵ Then King Ahasuerus asked Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who would presume to do thus?” ⁶ Esther said, “A foe and an enemy is this **ra** Haman!”.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Good/bad = morally good/evil

Good/Bad Applied to God’s People

Deuteronomy 1:35 NIV*

No one from this **ra** generation shall see the **tov** land I swore to give your ancestors ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Jeremiah 18:7-10 NASB*

⁷ At one moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to uproot, to pull down, or to destroy it; ⁸ if that nation against which I have spoken turns from its **ra**, I will relent concerning the **ra** I planned to bring on it. ⁹ Or at another moment I might speak concerning a nation or concerning a kingdom to build up or to plant it; ¹⁰ if it does **ra** in my sight by not obeying my voice, then I will think better of the **ra** with which I had promised to [verb] **tov** it.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Definition of *Tov* and *Ra*

“Good” (Heb. *tov*): (1) what is morally/ethically good, (2) what is beneficial, pleasant or in good condition

“Bad/Evil” (Heb. *ra*): (1) what is morally/ethically bad, (2) what is harmful, unpleasant, or in poor condition

The Rare Phrase: “Knowing *Tov* and *Ra*”

The words *tov* and *ra* pick up more nuanced meaning when you look at the phrase “knowing *tov* and *ra*.” This rare phrase occurs elsewhere to describe children. Therefore, “knowing *tov* and *ra*” is a sign of maturity.

Deuteronomy 1:39 Instructor's Translation

Your **little ones** ... and your **sons**, who today **do not know good or evil**, shall enter there, and I will give it to them and they shall possess it.

1 Kings 3:7-9 NASB

⁷ Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David, yet **I am but a little child**; I do not know how to go out or come in ... ⁹ So give your servant a heart that listens, to judge your people, **to discern between good and evil**. For who is able to judge this great people of yours?

Isaiah 7:15-16 NASB*

¹⁵ [Immanuel] will eat curds and honey at the time he knows to refuse evil and choose good. ¹⁶ **For before the boy will know to refuse evil and choose good**, the land whose two kings you dread will be forsaken.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

As we can see from these examples, not knowing *tov* and *ra* is a quality of infants or children. The knowing of *tov* and *ra* is about moral discernment and maturity. The question is: Who will you allow to teach you the knowledge of *tov* and *ra*?

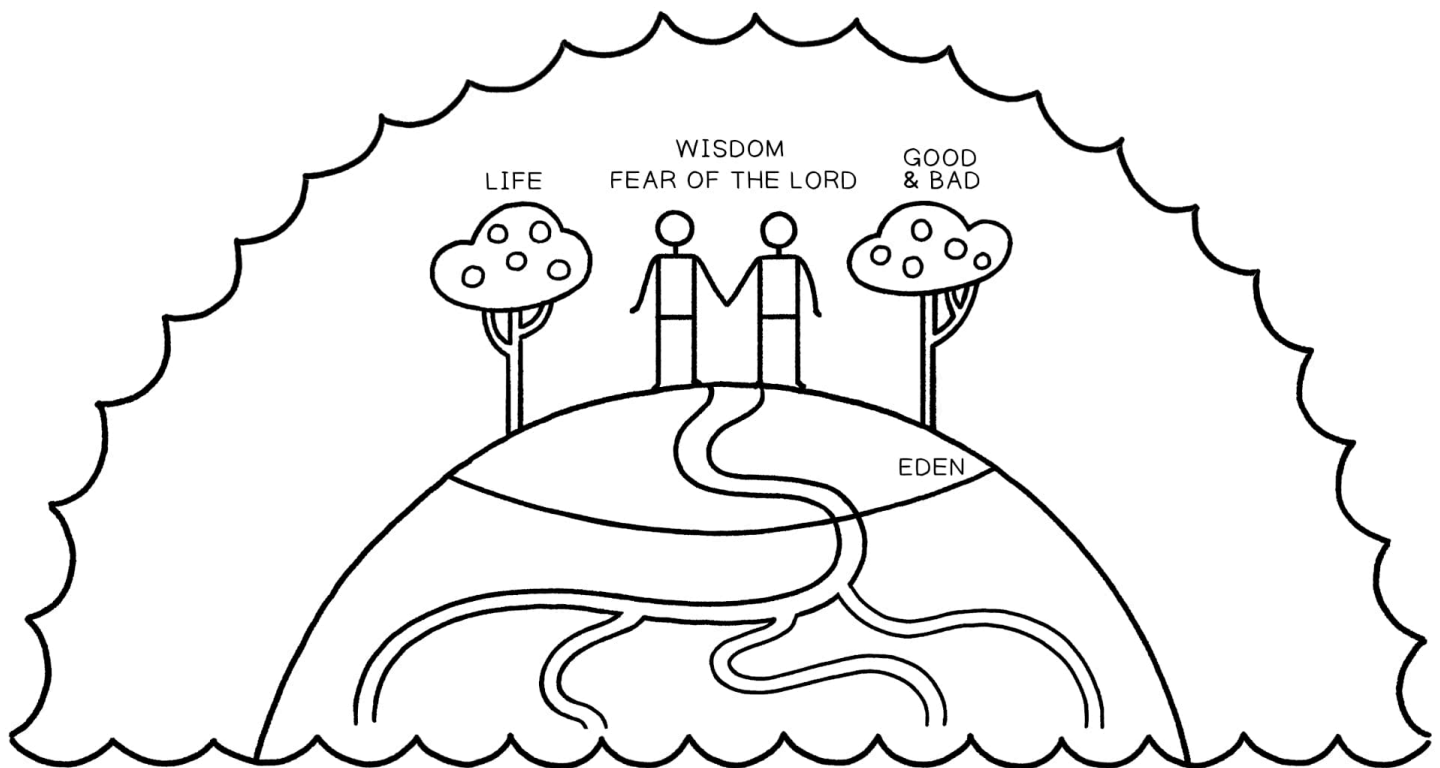
Genesis 2:17 NASB*

... but from the tree of the **knowledge of good and bad** you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

It is clear from Genesis 2:17 that there is a way of knowing *tov* and *ra* that leads to death. However, it also suggests that discerning *tov* and *ra* is actually a good thing that Adam and Eve will need to learn to carry out their purpose.

The Choice Before Adam and Eve



The Choice of Wisdom. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

The narrative in Genesis 1-2 shows that God knows what is “pleasant/beneficial” and that he will provide *tov* when something is not *tov* (the woman), that is, *ra*. So the tree represents a choice for the humans.

Will they live with God, allowing him to know/define *tov* and *ra*? Presumably they need this knowledge as they mature, but who will teach it to them? Will they learn from watching God’s knowledge at work?

Adam and Eve are portrayed as children. The tree of knowing *tov* and *ra* represents two modes for how to know and experience *tov* and *ra*. Will they take this knowledge for themselves so that they “become like *Elohim*,” knowing what is *tov* and *ra*? Or will they allow God to teach them wisdom?

Proverbs 3:13-18 NASB

¹³ How blessed is the man who finds **wisdom** and the man who gains understanding.

¹⁴ For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold.

¹⁵ She is more precious than jewels; and nothing you desire compares with her.

¹⁶ Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor.

¹⁷ Her ways are pleasant ways and all her paths are peace.

¹⁸ She is a **tree of life** to those who **take** hold of her, and happy are all who hold her fast.

It’s not a question of whether this knowledge is a good or bad thing. It’s about whose wisdom we trust to attain it.

The Choice Before Israel

The two trees at the center of the garden will later be set in analogy to the role of the Torah in Israel’s covenant with God.

Trees in Genesis	Torah in Deuteronomy
Genesis 2:9: “And God caused to sprout ... the tree of life in the center of the garden , and the tree of knowing good and evil .” Genesis 2:15: “And Yahweh commanded the human saying, ‘From the fruit of every tree you may surely eat. But from the fruit of knowing good and evil you may not eat from it, for in the day of your eating, you will surely die .”	Deuteronomy 10:4-5: “Yahweh wrote on the tablets ... the ten words which the LORD had spoken to you on the mountain from the midst of the fire ... Then I turned and came down from the mountain and put the tablets inside the ark which I had made; and there they are, as the LORD commanded me .” Deuteronomy 31:26: “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the

Trees and Torah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Trees in Genesis

Torah in Deuteronomy

LORD your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.

Deuteronomy 30:15, 19: "Behold, today I have set before you **life** and **good**, **death** and **evil** ... **life and death**, blessing and cursing, therefore choose **life** that both you and your seed may **live**."

Trees and Torah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

"Within the garden Yahweh had set both a tree of life and a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Taken together, with their fruits connected to life and death respectively, the trees may be seen to function like the Torah, imploring Adam to choose life, just as Moses implored Israel in Deuteronomy 30. Resisting the second tree, the fruit of which offered wisdom independent from God, was Adam's wisdom, allowing him to perfect the fear of Yahweh through submission of his will to God's ... Just as for Solomon and his foreign wives (1 Kings 11), so too for Adam: the choice between the two trees is cast as a choice between allegiance to Yahweh and his wife, with whom he is 'one flesh.' This, through the cunning orchestration of the serpent, is the test for Adam."

Morales, Michael (2015). [*Who Shall Ascend the Mountain of the Lord: A Biblical Theology of the Book of Leviticus*](#). IVP Academic.

Humans as Trees of Testing in the Hebrew Bible

The tree in Genesis poses a test. It is desirable of sight and good to eat, and the humans take the fruit. As we keep reading the Bible, we see this pattern continue in future fail narratives.

- Sarah is good to look at, so Abraham goes down to Egypt so that Pharaoh will do good to him ([Genesis 12](#)).
- Joseph is beautiful of sight and good to look at, so Potiphar's wife takes his garment ([Genesis 39](#)).
- Daniel is said to be wise and good to look at, so King Nebuchadnezzar takes him to Babylon. The narrative is all about Daniel's refusal to eat forbidden food ([Dan. 1](#)).

These are just a few examples of a flexible image used to connect stories to a greater pattern.

Book Recommendations

- [The Art of Biblical Narrative by Robert Alter](#)
- [The Art of Biblical Poetry by Robert Alter](#)
- [The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary by Robert Alter](#)

Reflection Question

Was the knowledge of good and bad something that God wanted to keep from humanity? Why did God command the humans not to take from this tree?



Module 3: Man and Woman Created and Unified

SESSIONS 15-17

Journey deeper into the Eden story and learn how Yahweh responds when something is not good in his creation.

Session 15: The Problem of the Human Alone

Key Takeaways

- The first thing God declares as “not good” is the solitary human. The human in isolation is not God’s ideal expressed in Genesis 1.
- When the diversity of humanity unites in Christ, we more fully reflect the image of God in this world.

Lone Human is Now Two: Translation and Literary Design: Genesis 2:18-25

Problem: A Lone Human and No Help-Counterpart

18a and Yahweh God said,

"It is not good for **the human** to be **alone (לבדו)**

18b I will make a **help-counterpart for him**

Yahweh Acts

A

19a **and Yahweh** **formed** from the ground

every living creature of the field

and every bird of the skies

Animals Brought But No Counterpart

B

19b **and he brought them to the human** to see what he would **call it** ,
and everything which the human would **call it** a living being,
that was its name."

Human Names

A'

20a and the human **called** the names

of every **beast**

and bird of the skies

and every living creature of the field

Problem Not Solved: No Help-Counterpart

20b **but for the human there was not found a help-counterpart**

Yahweh Acts

A 21 and Yahweh caused to fall a deep sleep on the human and he slept
and he took one from his sides
and he closed the **flesh** of its place

Woman Brought And Counterpart!

B 22 and Yahweh **built** the side which he took from the human into **woman** ,
and he brought her to the human

Human Names

A' 23 and the human said
This time, bone from my bones, and **flesh** from my **flesh** .
This one will be **called** (יקרא) **woman** for from **man** this one was taken

Problem Solved: Lone Human is Now Two

24 For this reason,
a **man** will leave his father and his mother,
and he will cling to his **woman** ,
and they will become **one flesh** .
25a and the **two** **of them** were naked,
25b **the human** and his **woman** ,
and they were not ashamed."

Genesis 2:18-25. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Macro Design Observations: From Alone to One Flesh

This two-step divine provision of the “help” (עזר) is crucial. It mimics Genesis 1 (days 1-3 are step one, days 4-6 are step two), and it creates a model or expectation.

God is the first one to notice “no good” in his creation (Gen. 2:18). The lone human is unable to fulfill his vocation without an other.

The narrative design of Genesis 2:18-25 goes from problem to solution. A solitary human cannot accomplish the calling placed upon “the image-statue of Elohim” in Genesis 1:26-28 to rule creation as God’s partners, to image God through gender difference, and to be fruitful and multiply.

To fulfill this task, the human family must simultaneously become “many” and “one/unified,” and they must do all of this as an image of God.

Genesis 2:24 NASB*

For this reason a man shall leave his father and his mother, and cling to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 2:24 addresses a foundational question about human relationships: Why would a person leave their closest biological relationship (a child to their parent) and join themselves to one who is not in their family? The claim of Genesis 2:24 is that marriage overcomes this biological divide and recovers an original, unified state of humanity. The woman is not a “helper” or simply a mating partner in Genesis 2. She is half of him and he is half of her; only together can they become the unified humanity that God has called us to be.

The “one flesh” of Genesis 2:24 transcends the union of the sexual act (though it is one way the “one flesh” unity may be experienced). It is a prime example of how two humans who are genuine others to one another may experience unity and oneness.

Notice the highly surprising roles of man and woman in Genesis 2:24. It is the man who leaves his family to join a biological stranger, his wife, to create a new family. This formulation is the opposite of every marriage in the Hebrew Bible, where the woman leaves her family to join the man (e.g. Rebekah, Rachel and Leah, etc.).

The words “abandon” (*‘azab* / עָזַב) and “cling” (*dabaq* / דָּבַק) are covenantal terms that speak to the forsaking of previous bonds and “clinging” to one’s covenant partner (Deut. 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 22:16).

The Fractured Ideal in Genesis 1-11

Genesis 1-11 will go on to explore the fracturing of this ideal unity on all levels of the human family, setting up the reader’s expectation that God will again solve this “no good” situation of a humanity unable to do what God has called them to do.

- Genesis 2-3: Fracturing the unity between a man and a woman (marriage)
- Genesis 4:1-15: Fracturing the unity between two siblings (family)
- Genesis 4:16-25: Fracturing the unity of a city (community)
- Genesis 6:1-4: Distorting the unity of Heaven and Earth (cosmos)
- Genesis 9:18-27: Fracturing the unity of the extended family (tribes)
- Genesis 11: Distorting the unity of the human family (nations)

To repair these layered distortions of the ideal unified humanity, future narratives will explore how the fractured human family becomes one again through covenant commitment.

Why the Two-Step Solution—Animals First Then the Matching Human?

This scene first allows the human to come to their own awareness of the solitude. When God “brings” the animals to the human, we can infer that he observes that they come in pairs. The next repetition of this motif, when God brings the animals to Noah and the ark, emphasizes that animals come “two by two” (Gen. 6:19-20; 7:2-3).

“Despite God’s identification of man’s need, there is a delay in his provision: contrast the instantaneous fulfillment of the divine word in chapter 1. This hold-up creates suspense. It allows us to feel man’s loneliness. All the animals are brought before him, and we see him looking at each one in the hope it would make a suitable companion for man. Ber. Rab. 17:5 pictures the animals passing by in pairs and man commenting, ‘Everything has its partner but I have no partner.’ The pathos is heightened in the narrative’s emphasis on the fact that the animals, like man (v 7), are shaped from the land (v 19), and, like him, are ‘living creatures.’ Furthermore, the word for ‘animal’ and ‘living,’ *ḥayyāh*, anticipates ‘Eve,’ *ḥawwāh*. Though in Hebrew these creatures’ names sound so similar to Eve’s, they are not what man is looking for. Despite man’s superiority to the other creatures, demonstrated by his naming of them (to give a name to something is to assert authority over it; cf. 1:26, 28), no suitable helper is found. Once again the narrative is laying the ground for chap. 3, establishing man’s place in the world, a little lower than the angels and a little higher than the animals.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*World Biblical Commentary, Vol. 1: Genesis 1-15*](#). Thomas Nelson.

“[Some] commentators consider that this scene implies that the Lord God made, as it were, a number of unsuccessful attempts, by creating various kinds of creatures and by passing them in review before Adam, to see if the man would find in one of them a helper corresponding to him; but it was all in vain, for not one of them satisfied him. This interpretation is unacceptable for the following reasons: 1) It would be strange to declare that God did not understand, so to speak, what man understood, that among the animals there was none ... corresponding to him ... it is [also] inconceivable that the experiment was carried out with all the beasts of the field and all the flying creatures of the air without exception, that is, even with creatures that were most unlike man. 2) It is explicitly written in v. 20 that the purpose of the Lord God in bringing the creatures before man, was only to see what he would call each one. It would seem that the text intends to tell us only that the Lord God wished to engender in the heart of man a desire for a helper who should correspond to him exactly. When the man would inspect all the species of animals in turn, and would find that some of them were indeed suited to serve him and help him to some extent, but yet there was not one among them that was his like *keneghdō*, he would become conscious of his loneliness and would yearn for one who could be his true companion ... in the full sense of the words, and, in consequence, he would be ready to appreciate and cherish the gift that the Lord God was to give him.”

Cassuto, Umberto (1961). [*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, From Adam to Noah*](#). Hebrew University Magnes Press.

The Naming of the Animals in Genesis 2:19-20

In Genesis 1:1-2:3, God’s creative activity involves naming entities, that is, separating them out and conferring upon them a distinct identity and purpose. Here, God invites the human to imitate the divine creative act by naming the animals.

The portrait of God in this scene is of a creator who wants to share responsibility with his creation so that it can become what it is made to be.

“This portrayal of God, the creator of heaven and earth, leading all the animals one by one, and then the woman, to a face-to-face meeting with the ‘*adam*, is truly remarkable ... God the Creator places the divine self at the service of the ‘good’ of the human being ... God’s role is to place the various possibilities before the human, but it is the creature that is given freedom to decide. God so values human freedom that God

will take into account the free human response from within the creative process in shaping the future ... The human being's naming of each creature is meant to be parallel to the divine naming in Gen. 1:5-10. This act is not perfunctory, like labeling the cages of a zoo. Naming is a part of the creative process itself ... human decisions are shown to be important to the ongoing development of the created order."

Fretheim, Terence E. (2005). [*God and the World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*](#). Abingdon Press.

Reflection Question

Summarize how the two becoming one flesh in Genesis 2:24 is a picture of God's ultimate plan for humanity.

Session 16: The One Becomes Two

Key Takeaways

- The woman is created not as an inferior assistant but as the agent of God's deliverance.
- The picture of God taking one of the human's sides shows that the woman is the equal, corresponding other without whom the ideal of Genesis 1 cannot be fully realized.

Key Words from Genesis 2:18-25

Genesis 2:18-25 introduces some key vocabulary regarding gender that has created a range of interpretations throughout history. It's important to explore the meaning of several of these Hebrew words in their original context.

Word Study: Helper — 'Ezer (עֵזֶר)

The phrase *'ezer kenegdo* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ עֵזֶר) has been translated differently in the history of the English versions: "help meet" (KJV), "helper suitable" (NIV, NAS), "helper fit" (NRSV), "a helper to bear him company" (Tyndale).

Translation Comparisons of Genesis 2:18

Genesis 2:18 NIV

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Genesis 2:18 ESV

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper fit for him."

Genesis 2:18 NASB

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

Genesis 2:18 NRSV

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper as his partner."

Genesis 2:18 NLT

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper who is just right for him."

Genesis 2:18 KJV

And the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.”

Variety in Early Interpretations

The earliest translations show a variety of interpretations.

- Old Greek: “a help according to him” (βοηθὸν κατ’ αὐτόν)
- Targum Neofiti: “a partner who comes as one with him” = “a partner similar to him” (זוג בד נפק ביה)
- Targum Pseudo-Jonathan and Onkelos: “a support according to him” (סמך בקבליה)
- Latin Vulgate: “a helper similar to him” (adiutorium similem sui)

The word help (עֵזֶר) does not mean “assistant” or “helper.” Rather, it describes someone who plays the role of the indispensable other without whom the desired good cannot happen. The noun is masculine in grammatical gender, which means the word is a kind of title or role descriptor, not an adjective (e.g., female assistant).

Concordance Search of the Word “Help-Counterpart”

The noun “help” occurs 21 times in the Hebrew Bible. Outside of Genesis 2, it is only used to describe Yahweh as a deliverer of his people, or of useless humans who provide “no help” compared to Yahweh.

Exodus 18:4 NIV*

And the other was named Eli‘ezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my ‘ezer; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 33:7 NIV*

And this he said about Judah: “Hear, LORD, the cry of Judah; bring him to his people. With his own hands he defends his cause. Oh, be his ‘ezer against his foes!”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 33:26-27 NIV*

²⁶ There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens as your ‘ezer and on the clouds in his majesty. ²⁷ The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemies before you, saying, “Destroy them!”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 33:29 NIV*

Blessed are you, Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and ‘ezer and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will tread on their heights.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Hosea 13:9 NIV*

You are destroyed, Israel, because you are against me, against your ‘ezer.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 20:1-2 NIV*

¹ May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. ² May he send you **'ezer** from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 33:18-20 NIV*

¹⁸ But the eyes of the LORD are on those who fear him,
on those whose hope is in his unfailing love,

¹⁹ to deliver them from death
and keep them alive in famine.

²⁰ We wait in hope for the LORD;
he is our **'ezer** and our shield.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 121:1-2 NIV*

¹ I lift up my eyes to the mountains—where does my **'ezer** come from? ² My **'ezer** comes from the LORD, the maker of Heaven and Earth.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 146:5-6 NIV*

⁵ Blessed are those whose **'ezer** is the God of Jacob,
whose hope is in the LORD their God.

⁶ He is the maker of Heaven and Earth, the sea, and everything in them—
he remains faithful forever.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 30:3-5 NIV*

³ But Pharaoh's protection will be to your shame,
Egypt's shade will bring you disgrace.

⁴ Though they have officials in Zoan
and their envoys have arrived in Hanes,

⁵ everyone will be put to shame because of a people useless to them,
who bring neither **'ezer** nor advantage, but only shame and disgrace.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel 12:13-14 NIV*

¹³ ... I will bring [Zedekiah] to Babylonia, the land of the Chaldeans, but he will not see it, and there he will die. ¹⁴ I will scatter to the winds all those around him—his staff and all his **'ezer**—and I will pursue them with drawn sword.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The word *‘ezer* is often used to describe military backup, though in context, it always portrays such military power as powerless compared to Yahweh’s *‘ezer*.

Defining “Help”

The word help (עֵזֶר) does not mean “assistant” or “helper.” Rather, it describes someone who plays the role of the indispensable other without whom the desired good cannot happen.

Word Study: Corresponding to Him — *Kenegdo* (כְּנֶגְדּוֹ)

Let’s look at the other half of the phrase in Genesis 2:18: “helper corresponding to him.” This is a compound word “*ke*” (כִּי) “like, as, according to” + “*neged*” (כְּנֶגֶד) “in front of, opposite.” The word “*neged*” means, basically, “in front of, before.”

Exodus 19:2 NIV*

... and Israel camped there in the desert **in front of** (*neged*) the mountain.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 34:10 NIV*

Before (*neged*) all your people, I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Genesis 2:18 and 20 are the only occurrences of this preposition with *neged*, though the preposition’s meaning of “like, as” indicates similarity. Given the spatial imagery of “in front of,” the meaning seems to be “similar to what would face him.” We might use a metaphor of mirroring to get the core idea.

“The last part of v. 18 reads literally, ‘I will make him for him a helper as in front of him (or according to what is in front of him).’ This last phrase, ‘as in front of him (or according to what is in front of him)’ (*keneḡdô*), occurs only here and in v. 20. It suggests that what God creates for Adam will correspond to him. Thus the new creation will be neither a superior nor an inferior, but an equal. The creation of this helper will form one-half of a polarity, and will be to man as the south pole is to the north pole.”

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [*The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*](#). Eerdmans.

Defining “Helper Corresponding to Him”

If we combine our study of these two words, *‘ezer* and *neged*, we produce the following paraphrase of Genesis 2:18.

“It is not good for the human to be solitary. I will make one who can deliver him from his inability to fulfill the divine commission alone, one who mirrors him.”

"This new creation which man needs is called a helper ('ezer), which is masculine in gender, though here it is a term for woman. Any suggestion that this particular word denotes one who has only an associate or subordinate status to a senior member is refuted by the fact that most frequently this same word describes Yahweh's relationship to Israel. He is Israel's help(er) because he is the stronger one (see, e.g., Exod. 18:4; Deut. 33:7, 26, 29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5; etc.) ... The word is used less frequently for human helpers, and even here, the helper is one appealed to because of superior military strength (Isa. 30:5) or superior size (Ps. 121:1). The verb behind 'ezer is 'azar, which means ... 'save from danger,' 'deliver from death.' The woman in Gen. 2 delivers or saves man from his solitude."

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [*The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*](#). Eerdmans.

Word Study: Deep Sleep — *Tardemah* (תרדמה)

There is another Hebrew word we'll need to explore in order to understand the full meaning of this story: "*tardemah*" or "deep sleep." This uncommon word appears only a handful of times in the Bible, and it is not the normal word for "sleep" (*yashan* / ישן). Take a look at where it occurs in the Genesis 2 narrative.

Genesis 2:21-22 Instructor's Translation

²¹ and Yahweh caused to fall a **deep sleep** on the human and he slept
and he took one from his sides
and he closed the flesh of its place

²² and Yahweh built the side which he took from the human into woman

Connections with Genesis 15

Note the commonalities between Genesis 2:18-25 and God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15.

Genesis 15:2-21 NASB*

² Abram said, "O Lord God, what will you give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is **Eliezer** of Damascus?" ³ And Abram said, "Since you have given no **offspring** to me, one born in my house is my heir. ⁴ Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth **from your own body**, he shall be your heir." ⁵ And he took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And he said to him, "So shall your descendants be." ⁶ Then he believed in the LORD; and he reckoned it to him as righteousness. ⁷ And he said to him, "I am the LORD who brought you out of Ur of the Chaldeans, to give you this land to possess it." ⁸ He said, "O Lord God, how may I know that I will possess it?" ⁹ So he said to him, "Bring me a three year old heifer, and a three year old female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon." ¹⁰ Then he brought all these to him and cut them in two, and laid each half opposite the other; but he did not cut the birds. ¹¹ The birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away. ¹² Now when the sun was going down, a **deep sleep** fell upon Abram; and behold, terror and great darkness fell upon him. ¹³ God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. ¹⁴ But I will also judge the nation

whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.¹⁵ As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.¹⁶ Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”¹⁷ It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared **a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces**.¹⁸ On that day the LORD made a **covenant** with Abram, saying, “To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: ¹⁹ the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite²⁰ and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim²¹ and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

HELP = EZER = עֶזֶר
 SEED = ZERA' = זֶרַע

Help and Seed Wordplay. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Tardemah Throughout the Bible

This uncommon word appears only a handful of times in the Bible, and it is not the normal word for “sleep” (*yashan* / יָשַׁן). There is both a noun, “deep sleep,” and a verb, “to fall into a deep sleep” (*radam*). Both refer to a comatose state of helplessness and vulnerability that is attributed to God’s power. Adam’s tardemah begins an important design pattern in the Hebrew Bible connected to this word. God causes tardemah to fall upon either his partners to demonstrate their inability to help themselves and bring about God’s plan and blessing, or his enemies so that they are reduced to helplessness.

God Causes a Deep Sleep to Fall on His Partners

- Adam in Genesis 2:21: God prevents Adam from providing his own “help.”
- Abraham in Genesis 15:12: God prevents Abram from walking down the aisle of animal pieces.
- Daniel in Daniel 8:18 and 10:9: Daniel goes into a deep sleep as he experiences his visions of the coming of God’s Kingdom.

God Causes a Deep Sleep to Fall on His Enemies

- Sisera in Judges 4:21: He is in a deep sleep in Jael’s tent when she kills him.
- Saul and his soldiers in 1 Samuel 26:12: Saul is prevented from waking and capturing David.
- Judah’s leaders in Isaiah 29:10: God cuts off all communication through prophets to Judah’s leaders.
- Jonah in Jonah 1:5-6: Jonah runs from God and tries to escape to his self-made Eden.
- Psalms 76:6: God rebukes enemy warriors and reduces them to deep sleep.

Word Study: Rib — *Tsela'* (צלע)

There is one last word to explore in this session: “*tsela'*,” or “rib” as we see it translated in Genesis 2:21. Does it really mean “rib”?

Genesis 2:21 NIV

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man’s **ribs** and then closed up the place with flesh.

Genesis 2:21 ESV

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his **ribs** and closed up its place with flesh.

Genesis 2:21 NASB

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his **ribs** and closed up the flesh at that place.

Genesis 2:21 NRSV

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his **ribs** and closed up its place with flesh.

Genesis 2:21 NLT

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his **ribs** and closed up its place with flesh.

Concordance Search of *Tsela'* (צלע)

There are 40 occurrences of the word *tsela'* (צלע) in the Hebrew Bible. The only time it is translated into anatomical terms is in Genesis 2:21. The rest of the occurrences are in architectural terms.

Exodus 25:12 NASB

You shall cast four gold rings for it and fasten them on its four feet, and two rings shall be on one **side** of it and two rings on the **other side** of it.

Exodus 25:14 NASB

You shall put the poles into the rings on the **sides** of the ark, to carry the ark with them.

Exodus 26:20 NASB

... and for the second **side** of the tabernacle, on the north side, twenty boards ...

Exodus 26:26 NASB

Also make crossbars of acacia wood, five for the frames on one **side** of the tabernacle ...

Exodus 26:35 NASB

You shall set the table outside the veil, and the lampstand opposite the table on the **side** of the tabernacle toward the south; and you shall put the table on the north **side**.

2 Samuel 16:13 NASB

So David and his men went on the way; and Shimei went along on the **hillside** parallel with him and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him.

1 Kings 6:5 NASB

Against the wall of the house he built stories encompassing the walls of the house around both the nave and the inner sanctuary; thus he made **side** chambers all around.

The word *tsela'* does not mean "rib;" it means "side." This term is used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe the construction of the tabernacle or temple, which is the sacred space God provides to meet with his people and deliver them.

"The word [*tsela'*] is used about forty times in the Hebrew Bible but is not an anatomical term in any other passage. Outside of Genesis 2, with the exception of 2 Samuel 16:13 (referring to the other side of the hill), the word is only used architecturally in the tabernacle/temple passages (Exod. 25-38; 1 Kgs. 6-7; Ezek. 41). It can refer to planks or beams in these passages, but more often it refers to one side or the other, typically when there are two sides (rings along two sides of the ark; rooms on two sides of the temple, the north or south side; etc.). On the basis of Adam's statement, combined with these data on usage, we would have to conclude that God took one of Adam's sides—likely meaning he cut Adam in half and from one side built the woman."

Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

"[T]he text says that God took one of the *šēlā'* of man. Almost without exception this word has been translated as 'rib' (hence even today the many puns on 'Adam's rib' and 'women's lib'). A better translation of *šēlā'* is side. The word designates a side or the shell of the ark of the covenant (Exod. 25:12, 14; 37:3, 5), the side of a building (Exod. 26:20; 36:25) or even a whole room ('side chamber, arcade, cell,' Ezek. 41:5-8), or a ridge or terrace on a hill (2 Sam. 16:13). Gen. 2:21 is the only place in the OT where the modern versions

render this word as 'rib' ... The passage states that woman was created from an undesignated part of man's body rather than from one of his organs or from a portion of bony tissue."

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [*The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*](#). Eerdmans.

God "Builds" the "Side" Into a Woman

Interpreters have long noticed the architectural vocabulary of Genesis 2:21-22.

Genesis 2:21-22 NASB*

²¹ And [God] took one from [the human's] **side**, and he **closed** flesh in its place, ²² and he **built** the **side** ... into a woman.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

All of these terms are used elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe the construction of a building—and not just any building! This same vocabulary occurs in the narratives where God provides a sacred space where he will meet with his people and deliver them.

- The ark of Noah (see [Gen. 6:14-22](#); [7:15-16](#))
- The tabernacle and the ark of the covenant (see [Exod. 25:10-22](#))
- The temple (see [1 Kgs. 6:1-38](#))
- The new temple and the new Jerusalem, aka "Lady Zion" ([Isa. 54](#) and [60](#))

The building of the woman deliverer begins a design pattern that is fundamental to the biblical narrative: God's provision of a blessing, deliverance, or sacred gift that is meant to bring the protagonist into closer union with God. But tragically, God's provision ends up being abused or distorted in some way and thus causes a downfall. As a result, the future deliverance becomes bound up with the hope of a future seed, who will be born from the "woman/building" (the ark, the tabernacle, temple, house of David, etc.).

"[*Tardemah*] sleep blocks all perception in the human realm. In each of these passages there is either danger in the human realm of which the sleeper is unaware, or there is insight in the visionary realm to be gained. Pertaining to the latter possibility, it is of interest that the Septuagint translators chose to use the Greek word *ekstasis* in Genesis 2:21. This word is the same as the one they used in Genesis 15:12, suggesting an understanding related to visions, trances and ecstasy ... From these data it is easy to conclude that ... the description of the man being cut in half and the woman being built from the other half (Gen. 2:21-22) would refer not to something he physically experienced but to something that he saw in a vision. It would therefore not describe a material event but would give him an understanding of an important reality, which he expresses eloquently in Genesis 2:23. Consequently, we would then be able to conclude that the text does not describe the material origin of Eve. The vision would concern her identity as ontologically related to the man. The text would therefore have no claim to make about the material origin of woman."

Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.

Reflection Question

Did any of these word studies unlock a new way to read Genesis 2:18-25 for you? Do you still have any pressing questions about the meaning of any of these words?

Session 17: How Paul References Genesis 2

Key Takeaways

- In 1 Timothy 2, Paul is making a precise comparison between Adam and Eve's situation in Genesis 2 and 3 and male teachers poorly informing some women in Ephesus.
- Eve is God's 'ezer, and her role of bearing God's deliverance in her body foreshadows themes of God's provision.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

Tim points out that in 1 Timothy 2:13-14, the apostle Paul is making a contrast between the order of creation and the order of deception. This contrast highlights that Adam, being first, was the one to receive proper instruction from God, so Eve must have gotten bad or inadequate teaching from Adam. In what way was Eve's situation similar to that of the Ephesian women Paul is talking about?



Module 4: The Snake and the Humans

SESSIONS 18-24

Unpack the central scenes of the Eden story from the talking snake to exile from the garden.

Session 18: The Shrewd Talking Snake

Key Takeaways

- The snake is described using the Hebrew word *arum*, which means “prudent, cunning, or sensible.” The description isn’t a negative one, and the word does not necessarily indicate trickery or falsehood.
- Given the ambiguous, even positive, introduction of the snake, many have interpreted Genesis 3 as showing the snake’s initial rebellion in conjunction with the humans’ failure.

The Snake and the Woman: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 2:25-3:7

Naked and Unashamed

2:25 And the **two** of them were **naked (ערום)**, the human and his **woman**, and they were not **ashamed**.

3:1a Now the snake was more **shrewd (ערום)** than any beast of the field which Yahweh God had made.

The Dialogue

The Snake

- a 3:1b **And it [the snake] said to the woman** ,
b "Indeed, **has God said** ,
c 'You **shall not eat** from any **tree of the garden** '?"

The Woman

- a 2 **and the woman said to the snake** ,
b " **From the fruit** of the **trees of the garden** **we may eat** ;
3 but **from the fruit** of **the tree** which is in the middle **of the garden** ,
God has said ,
c 'You **shall not eat** from it or touch it, or **you will die** .'"

The Snake

- a 4 **and the snake said to the woman** ,
" **You surely will not die** !
b 5 For **God knows**
c that in the day **you eat** from it **your eyes will be opened** ,

and you will be like **elohim**, **knowers of good and bad**."

The Act

- a 6 and the woman saw that **the tree** **was good** **for eating** ,
- b and that it was desirable to **the eyes** ,
and that the tree was desirable **to make one wise** ,
- c and **she took** from its fruit and **she ate** ;
- c' and **she gave** also to her husband with her, and **he ate** .
- b' 7a **and the eyes of both of them were opened** ,

Naked and Ashamed

- 7b and **they knew** that they were **naked** (ערום);
- a' and they sewed **leaves of a fig tree** together and made themselves loin coverings.

Genesis 2:25-3:7. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

Naked and Unashamed and Shrewd

This potent narrative detail is offered to describe the new ideal state of the human creature, who is now a unified plurality. Nakedness in the biblical world refers to a state of ultimate vulnerability. To be naked outside of the garden ideal is to be exposed to the leering eyes of untrustworthy people and is associated with humiliation and shame (see [Isa. 20:2-4](#); [Hos. 2:5](#); [Amos 2:16](#)). To be naked and unashamed is an image of pure trust, openness, vulnerability, and safety.

"Naked and unashamed" is a kind of commentary on "the two become one flesh." When one is truly unified with another, there is no need for self-protection or projection of a false self.

Notice the wordplay between human nakedness (Heb. *arom*) and the snake's "shrewdness" (Heb. *arum*). It is precisely this characteristic of the snake that will transform the humans' nakedness from vulnerability into shame.

A Shrewd, Talking Snake

The character of the snake is a rich and dense narrative image with many layers of meaning. In [Genesis 3:1](#), the snake is described as "shrewd" or "crafty." This Hebrew word, *arum* (ערום), is morally neutral, as it can describe the righteous and wise, like in the book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 22:3 NASB

The *arum* sees the evil and hides himself, but the naive go on, and are punished for it.

Proverbs 12:16 NIV

Fools show their annoyance at once, but the *arum* overlook an insult.

Proverbs 14:15 NASB

The naive believes everything, but the *arum* considers his steps.

Proverbs 8:5 NIV

You who are simple, gain *ormah*; you who are foolish, set your hearts on it.

When the word is used of people with questionable character, the nuance of “crafty” is evident.

Psalms 83:2-3 NIV

² See how your enemies growl,
how your foes rear their heads.

³ With *ormah* they conspire against your people;
they plot against those you cherish.

Job 5:12-13 NIV

¹² He thwarts the plans of the *arum*,
so that their hands achieve no success.

¹³ He catches the wise in their *ormah*,
and the schemes of the wily are swept away.

“[The ‘*arum*’] conceal what they feel and what they know (Prov. 12:16, 23). They esteem knowledge and plan how to use it in achieving their objectives (Prov. 13:16; 14:8, 18); they do not believe everything that they hear (Prov. 14:15); and they know how to avoid trouble and punishment (Prov. 22:3; 27:12). In sum, they are shrewd and calculating, willing to bend and torture the limits of acceptable behavior but not to cross the line into illegalities. They may be unpleasant and purposely misleading in speech but are not out-and-out liars (Josh. 9:4; 1 Sam. 23:22). They know how to read people and situations and how to turn their readings to advantage. A keen wit and a rapier tongue are their tools.”

Zevit, Ziony (2013). *What Really Happened in the Garden of Eden?*. Yale University Press.

Notice also the wordplay between the snake’s introduction and its final destiny in 3:14.

Genesis 3:1 NIV

And the snake was shrewd (ערום) more than every animal of the field (מכל חית השדה) ...

Genesis 3:14 NIV

You are cursed (ארור) more than every beast and every animal of the field (מכל חית השדה) ...

The shrewdness of the snake is a portrait of a creature endowed with the blessing of wisdom who abuses that power for selfish ends.

“Although it is assumed by all the English translations that ערום has a negative sense (‘crafty’) in Genesis 3:1, a closer examination suggests otherwise. The description of the serpent commences with its being ‘more prudent (*arum*) than all the creatures of the field’ (Genesis 3:1), and after having tempted Eve, concludes with its being ‘more cursed (*arur*) than all the creatures of the field (3:14). The two lines are nearly identical in

Hebrew, suggesting an intentional contrast between them: the cursed serpent is a negative contrast to an initially positive shrewd serpent. Not only does 'prudent' make more sense of the narrative flow of events, it also distances God from any responsibility with respect to the origin of evil. God did not make a 'crafty' creature; he made a wise creature. The serpent's 'prudence' may even be a sign of God's special favor toward the serpent above the other animals. The serpent's decision to use its prudence for evil intentions, however, resulted in a fall from divine favor to eternal humiliation, and this offers a solution to the age-old question of the serpent's (and Satan's) fall. When did the serpent rebel and fall? It 'fell' in Genesis 3. Thus, Genesis 3 depicts the fall of Adam, and Eve, and the serpent."

Postell, Seth (2011). [*Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh*](#). Pickwick Publications.

Reflection Question

Genesis 3:1 tells us that "the snake is more shrewd than any beast of the field." Does this shrewdness imply that the snake is evil?

Session 19: Humanity Fails the Test

Key Takeaways

- Humans fail by trying to make themselves gods instead of trusting God.
- The humans' failure in the garden is folly because they tried to seize from God what he had already freely offered them.

The Dialogue Between the Snake and the Woman

In [Genesis 3:1](#), notice how the snake first twists the divine command in [Genesis 2:16-17](#) so that God's generosity ("eat from all the trees of the garden") is portrayed as protective scarcity. His first tactic is to undermine God's character by creating an easy opportunity for correction.

"The serpent's obvious inaccuracy in his rendition of God's prohibition sounds like cunning or lack of subtlety. In fact, it is a well-known trick of the con man to appear stupid to put others in a position of sham superiority. Any hustler knows that she better start by losing some games and give the impression to other that they will be easy winners."

Lacoque, Andre (2006). *The Trial of Innocence: Adam, Eve, and the Yahwist*. Cascade Books.

In [Genesis 3:2-3](#), the woman responds by correcting the snake, and she clarifies that God invited them to eat from all of the trees except one. The snake has directed the conversation so that the single prohibition now becomes the focus. She first provides God's rationale for avoiding the tree—choosing to eat from it will constitute an act of rebellious autonomy, taking into one's own hands the wisdom and authority to discern between good and bad.

In [Genesis 3:4-5](#), the snake's response is to offer an alternative interpretation of both God's words and his intentions. God is actually withholding an ultimate good from his creatures, preventing them from becoming "like *Elohim*."

"In Genesis 2-3, Adam and Eve's sin is a departure from a relationship of love and trust of their creator. The serpent offers them a fake deification; a tragic imitation of a divine nature that they already have. They are already God's divine image (both in Gen. 1:26–28 and also in Gen. 2.), carrying the divine breath (2:7), with divine privileges (such as the ability to name parts of creation as God himself did on Days 1-3) and wisdom (see esp. 2:25 where they are עֲרוּמִים: 'naked' or 'shrewd'). God has already showed them the difference between good and evil and would continue to guide them in that discernment. They are the image-idols of the creator Yahweh God, the serpent offers them a shot at becoming only like 'gods' (*elohim*, so, correctly, the LXX). In apparent ignorance or forgetfulness of—or in rebellion against—their true identity they fall prey to the serpent's insinuations that their creator had deceived them (Gen. 3:1-5). The tree that should have proved their discernment between wrongdoing and faithfulness to God, becomes instead a tree that leads

to their experience of both evil and, lingering, good. In the same way that idolaters become like what they worship (Ps. 115:4-8; 135:15-18), so the humans become like the (leaf-clad) tree (3:7). They give up the splendor of their creator, inclining to the voice of the creature, and are left bereft of the glory that was theirs by rights. Their action strikes at the heart of their identity. In succumbing to the lie that they need something they already have, they annihilate themselves, and, so, 'after sin there is nothing for it but death.'

Fletcher-Louis, Crispin (2012). "2 Enoch and the New Perspective on Apocalyptic". In *New Perspectives on 2 Enoch: No Longer Slavonic Only*. Brill.

The Inverted Symmetry of Genesis 3:6-7

The Act

- a 6 and the woman saw that **the tree** **was good** **for eating** ,
b and that it was desirable to **the eyes** ,
and that the tree was desirable **to make one wise** ,
c and **she took** from its fruit and **she ate** ;
c' and **she gave** also to her husband with her, and **he ate** .
b' 7a **and the eyes of both of them were opened** ,

Naked and Ashamed

- 7b and **they knew** that they were **naked** (ערום);
a' and they sewed **leaves of a fig tree** together and made themselves loin coverings.

Genesis 2:25-3:7. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

What the woman sees is filled out in three steps.

1. "And she saw that [it] ... was good": This is in deliberate contrast to God's "seeing that it is good" seven times over in Genesis 1:1-2:3.
2. "Desirable (תאוה) to the eyes": What the woman sees generates desire. She now "wants" the thing that will kill her because she has embraced the snake's alternate narrative. Instead of realizing her true desire will only be fulfilled by trusting God and eating from the tree of life (see [Prov. 13:12](#)), she mistakes the tree's beauty for the creator it points to.
3. "Desirable (נחמד 'to covet') for becoming wise (שכל)": By embracing the snake's interpretation of the tree, she sees the knowing of good and bad as desirable and a path to true wisdom. In reality, it is the path of folly that will lead to death.

"Precisely at this point the author raises the issue of becoming 'wise': 'And the woman saw that the tree was also desirable for gaining wisdom' (3:6). Thus, the temptation is not presented as a general rebellion from God's authority. Rather, it is portrayed as a quest for wisdom and 'the good' apart from God's provision."

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [*The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary*](#). Zondervan Academic.

Notice that the snake was not lying about “the eyes being opened” but about what kind of enlightenment would result. The humans become aware of their own nakedness and vulnerability with each other and hide their bodies from one another.

Their folly and rebellion was caused by their idolatrous desire for a forbidden tree, so now the humans become like trees, covering their bodies with leaves.

Reflection Question

The snake casts doubt on God’s goodness and generosity by implying that God is depriving humanity of good things. Compare the snake’s words in Genesis 3:4-5 to God’s command in Genesis 2:16-17. What does God say in his original command that shows the snake is wrong about God’s generosity?

Session 20: The Snake in Genesis and Beyond

Key Takeaways

- The snake comes first but is made subject to the human. This sets up the repeated theme of the latecomer being favored, leading to jealousy and strife.
- Textual details and themes in Genesis and the rest of the Hebrew Bible indicate that the snake is a spiritual being.
- The failure of the snake and humanity in the garden sets up a theme of human and spiritual rebellion that continues throughout Scripture.

The Pattern of Sibling Rivalry in Genesis

SIBLING RIVALRY

	<u>FIRST BORN</u>	<u>LATE COMER</u>
	CAIN	ABEL
	SARAH	HAGAR
	ISHMAEL	ISAAC
	ESAU	JACOB & MOM
	ALL BROTHERS	JOSEPH
GEN. 1	LAND CREATURES	HUMANS

Sibling Rivalry. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

The Identity of the Snake in the Hebrew Bible

Genesis 3:1 Instructor's Translation

Now the snake (Heb. *nakhash* /נחש) was more shrewd than any living creature of the field which the LORD God had made.

The image of the snake as a “living creature of the field” is a dense narrative image that invites the reader to ponder it from many angles. Here are some of the layers of meaning that seem intended by the author’s choice of the snake as the tempter.

1. The Snake Among the Animals of Genesis 1

On day six of Genesis 1, God populates the dry land with creatures—first the animals and then humanity.

Genesis 1:24-26 NASB*

²⁴ And God said, “Let the land bring forth **living creatures** after their kind: cattle and **creeping things** and beasts of the land after their kind”; and it was so. ²⁵ God made the **living creatures** of the land after their kind, and the cattle after their kind, and everything that **creeps on the ground** after its kind; and God saw that it was good. ²⁶ And God said, “Let us make **human** in our image, according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over **every creeping thing** that creeps on the earth.”

*Kew Words Adapted by Teacher

Notice the animals are called “the living creatures” (Heb. *khayyot* /חיות) and specified by rough categories: domesticated animals, creepers (the wild ones that run and hide), and the wild beasts.

Humans are the last thing to be created in Genesis 1, yet they are the ones elevated to rule over all creation: the sea, the sky, and the land creatures. This establishes a major design pattern in the biblical story: God’s elevation of the latecomer to a role of honor above the ones who came before.

In the book of Genesis, the theme of the latecomer’s elevation often focuses on the jealousy and anger of the elder. Think of Cain and Abel, or Jacob and Esau (“the older will serve the younger,” (Gen. 25:23), or of Joseph’s older brothers who hate him because he had a dream where he ruled over them (Gen. 37:1-11). Or think of David’s jealous older brothers who were not chosen to be king (1 Sam. 16-17), and so on.

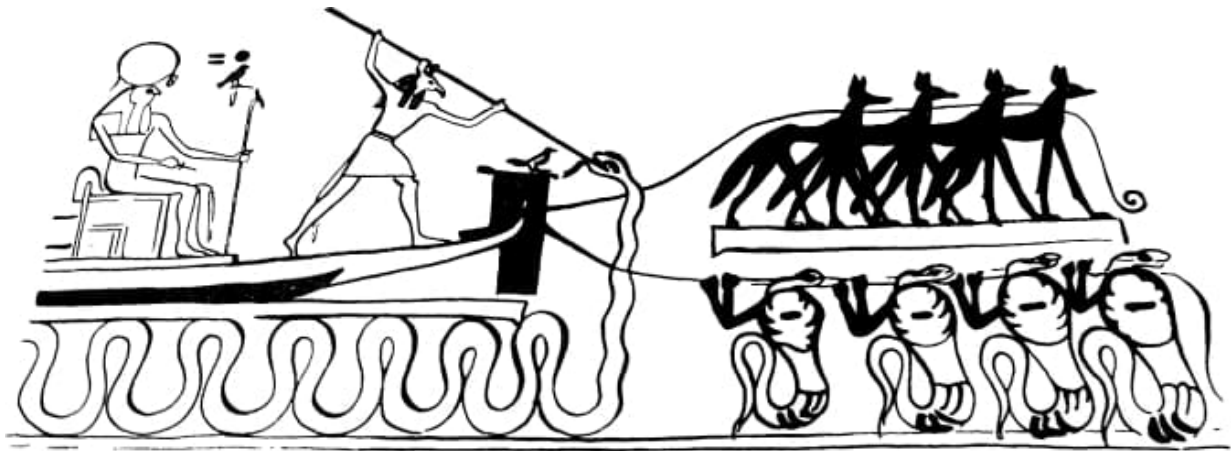
When you come to Genesis 3 after considering this pattern throughout the Hebrew Bible, you’re prompted to notice the beasts of day six, who are created first yet summoned to come under the rule of humans who came second. Will any of them be like Cain or Esau or Joseph’s brothers and resent being ruled by a creature who has only come to the dry land after them?

2. The Snake as a Symbol of Disorder and Sorcery

In the ancient Near East, snakes were powerful symbols of chaos creatures, creatures that don’t properly belong to the divinely ordered world. The snake is both a water and land creature, yet it has no legs, making it out of place on the dry land. But it also doesn’t have fins, making it also out of place in the water.

This “out of order” nature of the snake is why it is included among the ritually impure animals in Israel’s Kosher food laws (Lev. 11:42). Animals that do not properly fit in their category are liminal and belong to the non-ordered realm.

Snakes were potent symbols of immortality (rebirth through shedding of skin), death (poisonous bite), and the underworld realm of the dead (they crawl on the ground and descend into holes). To have mastery of snakes was to be a master of death. This explains the pervasive snake imagery in Egyptian royal art.



Keel, Othmar (1997). "Figure 55" (p. 55). *Symbolism of the Biblical World: Ancient Near Eastern Iconography and the Book of Psalms*. Eisenbrauns.

Image Description: The sun god Re is pulled through the underworld sea at night. The god Seth spears and defeats the death god Apophis (a snake), while the boat is pulled by subjugated night demons (jackals and snakes).



Jensen, Tom. *Gilgamesh Cylinder Seal Impression Tablet 11 Photo*. The Schoyen Collection. [Medium](#)

"This plant ... is the 'Plant of Heartbeat,' with it a man can regain his vigour ... 'Its name shall be "Old Man Grown Young," I will eat it myself, and be again as I was in my youth!' ... Gilgamesh found a pool whose water was cool, down he went into it, to bathe in the water. Of the plant's fragrance a snake caught scent, came up [in silence], and carried off the plant. As it turned away it shed its skin. Then Gilgamesh sat down and wept, down his cheeks the tears were coursing."

Dalley, Stephanie (2006). [Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, the Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others](#). Oxford University Press.

“Throughout the ancient world, [the serpent] was endowed with divine or semidivine qualities; it was venerated as an emblem of health, fertility, immortality, occult wisdom, and chaotic evil; and it was often worshipped. The serpent played a significant role in the mythology, the religious symbolism, and the cults of the ancient Near East.”

Sarna, Nahum (2001). [*The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis*](#). Jewish Publication Society.

The word *nakhash* (נָחַשׁ) also contains a double meaning because it is also the word for sorcery or divination.

Deuteronomy 18:9-11 NIV

⁹ When you enter the land the LORD your God is giving you, do not learn to imitate the detestable ways of the nations there. ¹⁰ Let no one be found among you who sacrifices their son or daughter in the fire, who practices divination (*nakhash*) or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, ¹¹ or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead.

2 Kings 21:5-6 NIV*

⁵ In the two courts of the temple of the LORD, [Manasseh] built altars to all the starry hosts. ⁶ He sacrificed his own son in the fire, practiced divination (*nakhash*), sought omens, and consulted mediums and spiritists. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

2 Kings 17:16-17 NIV*

¹⁶ They forsook all the commands of the LORD their God and made for themselves two idols cast in the shape of calves, and an Asherah pole. They bowed down to all the starry hosts, and they worshiped Baal. ¹⁷ They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire. They practiced divination (*nakhash*) and sought omens and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, arousing his anger.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

3. The Snake as a Figure in the Heavenly Throne Room

The garden of Eden is a high mountain garden-temple where Heaven and its creatures overlap with the Earth and its creatures. Here are several observations that lead us to this conclusion.

- The garden is the source of a single river that leaves the garden and divides into four rivers that water the main regions of the biblical world (see [Gen. 2:8-14](#)). This has a fairly obvious implication; the garden of Eden is portrayed as the highest place on the dry land.
- Eden is described as the host land of the ultimate garden-temple. It's a land of gold, fruit trees, precious gems, and abundance ([Gen. 2:9-14](#)). These are precisely the images and materials used in the construction of the tabernacle ([Exod. 25:1-31:18](#)) and the temple in Jerusalem ([1 Kgs. 6:1-7:51](#)).
- The Heaven and Earth Eden temple is the same place Israel's prophets saw in their visions ([Isa. 6:1-13](#); [1 Kgs. 22:1-53](#); [Ezek. 1:1-28](#)), a place where God's heavenly presence overlaps with Earth. We're told that there are cherubim in this garden ([Gen. 3:22-24](#))([Gen. 3:22-24](#)), just like the ones that populate God's throne room ([Ezek. 10:1-15](#)).

All of this leads the reader to expect Adam and Eve to live together in the garden with spiritual beings of the hybrid animal variety. So when a talking snake appears in Genesis 3, we have a category for this kind of creature. Let's look at the statement where the snake is introduced.

Genesis 3:1 NASB*

Now the snake (Heb. *nakhash* / נחש) was more shrewd than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, "Indeed, has God said, 'You shall not eat from any tree of the garden'?"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

This comment suggests there is more to this snake than just an animal. For starters, it can talk! The phrase "more shrewd than any beast of the field" could mean that the snake belongs to the beasts of the field and is more sly than the rest. Or it could also mean that it isn't technically a beast of the field; rather, it's a different kind of creature that is simply more shrewd than any kind of beast. With either interpretation, we can conclude that this is not an average snake!

The snake also appears to have knowledge of God's decisions and purposes ("God knows that in the day you eat [the fruit] you will be like divine beings, knowing good and bad." Gen. 3:5).

If we fast forward to the end of the Eden narrative, when God curses the snake in Genesis 3:14, we'll find another interesting statement about the nature of the snake.

Genesis 3:14 NASB

Because you have done this,
cursed are you more than all cattle,
and more than every beast of the field;
on your belly you will go,
and dust you will eat
all the days of your life.

If it was a normal snake, wouldn't it already crawl in the dust on its belly? Why does God say the snake's future state will be to go in the dust if it already crawls on the ground? This statement could mean that the snake that approached the humans wasn't on the ground.

This puzzling image of a snake that doesn't crawl on the ground finds its confirmation much later in the biblical story. When the prophet Isaiah has a vision of God's heavenly throne room, he sees heavenly creatures surrounding God's throne. In Ezekiel's visions of the same space, these beings are called "cherubim" and "living creatures," but Isaiah calls them "seraphim" (Heb. שרפים).

Isaiah 6:1-3 NASB

¹ In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of his robe filling the temple. ² **Seraphim** stood above him, **each having six wings**: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. ³ And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory!"

This is the only place in the entire Bible where the heavenly throne room creatures are called *seraphim*. All modern English translations leave this word untranslated, which is strange, because it is a normal Hebrew

word for venomous snake.

Numbers 21:6 NASB*

Yahweh sent snakes (Heb. *nakhashim*, plural noun), **venomous snakes** (Heb. *seraphim*, plural noun) among the people, and they bit the people.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Deuteronomy 8:15 NASB*

Yahweh led you in the great and terrifying wilderness, of the snake, the **venomous snake** (Heb. *seraph*, singular noun).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Later in the book of Isaiah, the prophet describes the ruler of Babylon as a “snake” (Heb. *nakhash*) and a “flying snake” (Heb. *saraph me’opheph*). This appears in the same section as Isaiah’s accusation against the ruler of Babylon, which refers both to the human king of Babylon and a spiritual power that lurks behind Babylon.

Flying snakes were a common religious icon in the ancient Near East, and images of them have even been found in ancient Israelite art. For examples, see the images below.



Left image: Keel, Othmar (1977). *Jahwe-Visionen und Siegelkunst: Eine neue Deutung der Majestätsschilderungen in Jes 6, Ez 1 und 10 und Sach 4* (Stuttgarter Bibelstudien) (German Edition). Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk. Middle and right image: Deutsch, Robert (2012). “Six Hebrew Fiscal Bullae from the Time of Hezekiah.” Soc. of Biblical Literature.

Another important instance is in the scroll of Ezekiel. The prophet Ezekiel looks out at Tyre (a powerful seaside kingdom of his day) and accuses its leader of acting like an ancient spiritual rebel. Ezekiel first accuses Tyre’s king of claiming to be a deity.

Ezekiel 28:6-9 NASB*

⁶ Therefore thus says the Lord God,
“Because you have made your heart like the heart of God,
⁷ therefore, behold, I will bring strangers upon you,

the most ruthless of the nations.

And they will draw their swords against the **beauty of your wisdom** and defile **your splendor**.

⁸ They will bring you **down to the pit**,
and you will die the death of those who are slain in the heart of the seas.

⁹ Will you still say, **'I am an elohim,'**
in the presence of your slayer, though **you are a human and not elohim**,
in the hands of those who wound you?"

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Ezekiel then likens the king of Tyre to an ancient spiritual rebel who inhabited Eden.

Ezekiel 28:12-17 NIV

¹² Son of man, take up a lament concerning the king of Tyre and say to him:
"This is what the Sovereign LORD says:

**'You were the seal of perfection,
full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.**

¹³ **You were in Eden,
the garden of God;**

every precious stone adorned you:
carnelian, chrysolite and emerald, topaz, onyx and jasper,
lapis lazuli, turquoise and beryl.

Your settings and mountings were made of gold;
on the day you were created they were prepared.

¹⁴ **You were anointed as a covering cherub**, for so I ordained you.

You were on the holy mount of God;
you walked among the fiery stones.

¹⁵ You were blameless in your ways
from the day you were created
till wickedness was found in you.

¹⁶ Through your widespread trade
you were filled with violence, and you sinned.

**So I drove you in disgrace from the mount of God,
and I expelled you, guardian cherub,**
from among the fiery stones.

¹⁷ Your heart became proud
on account of your beauty,
and you corrupted your wisdom because of your splendor."

Ezekiel provides us with the earliest interpretation of the Genesis 3 snake in the Bible. The snake is understood to be a spiritual being, one of the winged throne guardians, a "living creature" (*cherubim*) in the garden temple. But as we learned from the "last will be first" design pattern in Genesis, it seems that we're meant to infer that this snake resented coming under the authority of the human creatures whose origins were of dirt. And so this glorious creature misused its honored place of God-given authority and rebelled by seducing the

humans into misusing their authority in the same way. In this way, the snake represents a spiritual rebellion that coincides with the earthly rebellion of the humans. Genesis 3 portrays the fall of humanity and the fall of the spiritual rebel.

“How are we supposed to understand the serpent’s function in the story? On the one hand the author wants to convey the idea of an actual snake, one of the animals Yahweh had made. But it is precisely this referential comment that raises a clear tension: What about this snake’s ability to speak? And how is it that the snake is more shrewd and knowledgeable than humans? If the text intentionally raises such questions and then leaves them unanswered, it’s clear that this is a purposeful and deliberate means of creating a mystery. More than that, the narrative wants to present the temptation’s power and effectiveness as resting on this mysterious nature. Therefore, we may not expect the text to satisfy our curiosity. It seeks to not only communicate the scene from Eve’s point of view, but also seeks to evoke curiosity in the reader as a literary device to draw them into the narrative. The author wants the readers to experience the power and elusiveness of the snake ‘first hand,’ as it were.”

Emmrich, Martin (2001). “The Temptation Narrative in Genesis as a Prelude to the Pentateuch and History of Israel”. *The Evangelical Quarterly*.

Recommended Resource

For more discussion of Genesis 3 as the fall narrative of humanity and the snake, check out Seth Postell’s book, [Adam as Israel: Genesis 1-3 as the Introduction to the Torah and Tanakh, chapter 6](#).

Reflection Question

Who was created last in Genesis 1, humans or animals? What about in Genesis 2? Was it the animals or the woman?

Session 21: God's Response to Human Failure

Key Takeaways

- God's response to human failure is an invitation to come out of hiding and dialogue with him.
- The story of humanity's failure in the garden of Eden is less about a paradise that was lost and more about an opportunity for a paradise that was not achieved.

Reflection on Paradigm Ungained

"Wisdom is good, and we can safely assume that God did not intend to withhold it from humanity. But true wisdom must be acquired through a process, generally from instruction by those who are wise. The fall is defined by the fact that Adam and Eve acquired wisdom illegitimately (Gen. 3:22), thus trying to take God's role for themselves rather than eventually joining God in his role as they were taught wisdom and became the fully functional vice-regents of God involved in the process of bringing order. If humans are to work alongside of God in extending order ('subdue' and 'rule' [Gen. 1:28], they need to attain wisdom, but as endowment from God, not by seizing it for autonomous use. If ... from the start people were mortal, and pain and suffering were already a part of a not yet fully ordered cosmos, we cannot think of death and suffering as having been foisted on us by Adam and Eve's malfeasance ... Instead, we can have a much more charitable attitude toward Adam and Eve when we realize that it is not that they initiated a situation that was not already there; it is that they failed to achieve a solution ... that was in their reach. Their choices resulted in their failure to acquire relief on our behalf. Their failure meant that we are doomed to death and a disordered world full of sin. These are profoundly significant consequences for what was a serious offense. In contrast, Christ was able to achieve the desired result where Adam and Eve failed. We are all doomed to die because when they sinned we lost access to the tree of life. We are therefore subject to death because of sin. Christ succeeded and actually provided the remedy to sin and death. Some would follow this same line of reasoning to suggest that what we call original sin is the result of our ancestors 'pulling out of the program' prematurely. James Gaffney identifies these approaches as involving a view that our human condition is underdeveloped, failing to achieve the intended goal because we wanted to do it our way—not paradise lost, but, as it were, paradise ungained."

Walton, John (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic.

Trial in the Garden: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 3:8-13

⁸ and they **heard the sound** of **Yahweh God** walking **in the garden** in the wind of the day

Human Response

and **the human and his woman** **hid themselves**
from before the face of Yahweh God among the trees of the garden.

Yahweh's First Question

⁹ and **Yahweh God** called to the human, and said to him,
"Where are you?"

Human Response

¹⁰ and he **[the human]** said,
"I **heard the sound of you in the garden**,
and I was afraid because I was **naked (ערום)**
and **I hid myself**."

Yahweh's Second Question

¹¹ and he **[Yahweh God]** called to the human, and said to him,
"Who told you that you were naked (ערום)
Have **you eaten** from the tree of which I commanded you not **to eat**?"

Human Response

¹² and **the human** said,
"The woman whom you gave to be with me,
she gave me from the tree, and **I ate**."

Yahweh's Third Question

¹³ and **Yahweh God** said to the woman,
"What is this you have done?"

Human Response

and **the woman** said,
"The snake deceived me, and **I ate**."

Notice how the scene unfolds in an alternating fashion, juxtaposing Yahweh's actions with multiple evasive human responses.

Key Words in Genesis 3:8-13

The vocabulary of Genesis 3:8 was chosen in order to paint the portrait of Yahweh's first personal appearance, or theophany. Later theophany stories will draw upon and develop the imagery of this scene.

Word Study: The Sound/Voice of Yahweh — *Qol* (קול)

The phrase “the sound/voice of Yahweh” (Heb. *qol* / קול) refers to the sound of Yahweh's voice when he appears to address his people. It is usually loud, intimidating, and indistinguishable from thunder. The voice of Yahweh is sometimes depicted as a character in its own right.

Exodus 19:16-17 NASB*

¹⁶ So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were **sounds** (קול) and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. ¹⁷ And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

*Kew Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 20:18-19 NASB*

¹⁸ All the people saw the ****sounds**** (קול) and the lightning flashes and the sound (קול) of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. ¹⁹ Then they said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die.”

*Kew Words Adapted by Teacher

Numbers 7:89 NASB*

Now when Moses went into the tent of meeting to speak with him, he heard the **voice/sound** (קול) speaking to him from above the mercy seat that was on the ark of the testimony, from between the two cherubim; so he spoke to him.

*Kew Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 29:3-4 NASB

³ The voice of the LORD is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD is over many waters.

⁴ The **voice** of the LORD is powerful,
the **voice** of the LORD is majestic.

Word Study: Walking — Hithalek (התהלך)

This picture of Yahweh walking about or strolling in the garden, waiting for the humans to join him, is a powerful image of divine and human intimacy idealized in the garden. The righteous of later generations who live outside of Eden are those who “walk/stroll with Yahweh,” that is, they relate to God in the Eden ideal.

Genesis 5:23-24 NASB

²³ So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. ²⁴ Enoch **walked with God**; and he was not, for God took him.

Genesis 6:8-9 NASB

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD. ⁹ These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah **walked with God**.

Genesis 17:1 NASB

Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the LORD appeared to Abram and said to him, “I am God Almighty; **walk before me and be blameless.**”

Leviticus 26:9-12 NASB

⁹ ... I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will confirm my covenant with you ...
¹¹ Moreover, I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul will not reject you. ¹² **I will walk among** you and be your God, and you shall be my people.

Word Study: The Wind of the Day — Ruakh Hayom (רוח היום)

Some interpreters take “the wind of the day” (Heb. *ruakh hayom* / רוח היום) to mean the breezy time of day, that is, in the morning or evening, in contrast to “the heat of the day” (see [Genesis 3:8](#)). Others take it to mean a storm because the words “wind” and “sound” are sometimes associated with thunderstorm theophanies ([Jer. 10:13](#); [Jer. 51:16](#)). The words “wind” and “day” are also associated with storms ([Isa. 27:8](#); [Zeph. 2:2](#)). Throughout Scripture, we see Yahweh’s personal appearances associated with storms and thunder, so the fact that the “sound” of Yahweh appears with wind is key to the storm imagery later in the Hebrew Bible.

“The time of the Lord’s visit is often translated as ‘the cool of the day’ or ‘the time of the evening,’ but the text reads only ‘at the wind of the day.’ Indeed, nothing in the context suggests that this refers to a time of day. In the light of the general context of the picture of God’s coming in judgment and power, the ‘wind’ which the author envisions is more likely intended to resemble that ‘great and powerful wind’ which blew on the ‘mountain of the LORD’ in 1 Kings 19:11. Thus the viewpoint of the narrative would be much the same as that in Job 38:1, where the Lord answered Job ‘from the whirlwind.’”

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary](#). Zondervan Academic.

Yahweh’s Seven Speeches and Many Questions

Just as God spoke 10 times over the course of seven days to establish the cosmic order as a sacred space, so here in Genesis 3, God speaks seven times to address the problem of disorder that has been introduced by the snake and the humans.

1. 3:9: And Yahweh Elohim called to the human and **he said** to him, “Where are you?”
2. 3:11: And **he said**, “Who told you that you are naked?”
3. 3:13: And **Yahweh Elohim said** to the woman, “What is this you have done?”
4. 3:14: And **Yahweh Elohim said** to the snake ...
5. 3:16: And to the woman, **he said** ...
6. 3:17: And to the man, **he said** ...
7. 3:22: And **Yahweh Elohim said**, “Look, the human has become like one of us ...”

Yahweh’s three questions display a patient desire that gives the humans an opportunity to own their failure: “Where?” “Who?” “What?” At each turn, Yahweh invites the humans to acknowledge their violation of the divine command, but the humans evade his questions every step of the way.

“[T]he question, ‘Where are you?’ is essentially rhetorical. “Where?” (אֵיךָ) is often used in this way in poetry (e.g., Isa. 33:18; 36:19; Ps. 42:3, 10), and a very close parallel is found in Genesis 4:9, where ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ is followed by ‘Listen, your brother’s blood is crying to me from the land,’ showing that God knows perfectly well what has happened to Abel. ... Just as a parent who sees where his children are hiding may shout out, ‘Where are you?’ in effect inciting them to come out, so does God. [W]e presume that this is what happened here: the couple emerge shamefaced from the trees. Their reply to God’s inquiry shows that they understood the question as an invitation to come out and explain their behavior.”

Wenham, Gordan J. (1987). [*Genesis 1-15*](#). Thomas Nelson Inc.

The humans blameshift at each step of the conversation: “the woman!” “the snake!” No one is able to take responsibility for their own choices. Notice how the man blames the one whom God provided as his ‘ezer, and the woman then blames the snake for her own misdirected desire.

Reflection Question

God responds to the first humans’ failure by seeking them out and pursuing relationship with them. What does this say about God’s character?

Session 22: God's Lament

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 14-19 continues the pattern of narrative sections culminating in densely packed poems. God's curse is upon the snake and the ground, not on humanity.
- Conflict will exist between the seed of the woman and the seed of the snake, but the ultimate victory is over the snake—our enemy is never another human.

God's Lament: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 3:14-19

The Snake Is Cursed

14 and Yahweh God said to the snake ,
" Because you have done this thing ,
you are cursed more than every beast and more than every living creature of the field
on your belly you will go,
and dust you will eat .
all the days of your life.

Consequences For The Woman

15 And I will set hostility
a between you and the woman ,
a' and between your seed and her seed ,
b he will strike your head
b' and you will strike his heel."

16 and to the woman he said ,
a "I will greatly multiply your grief and your conception ,
a' in grief you will birth children ,
b and your desire will be for your husband,
b' and he will rule over you."

Consequences For The Man

17 and to human he said ,
" Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,

and **you ate** from the tree about which I commanded you, saying,
' **You will** not **eat** from it.'
cursed is the **ground** on account of you;
in grief **you will eat** from it
all the days of your life.

- a 18 thorns and thistles it shall sprout for you;
b and **you will eat** the plants of the field;
a' 19 by the sweat of your face
b' **you will eat** bread,
-

- a until you return to the **ground**
b for from **it** you were taken;
b' for you are **dust**
a' and to **dust** you will return.

Genesis 3:14-19. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

"Although much can be said about the curse on the snake, the woman, and the man, it is important to note that the text says very little. In this passage we can see most clearly the artful composition that produced the Pentateuch. ... The narrative gives nothing to help us understand their plight as individuals. The snake, the woman, and the man are not depicted as individuals involved in a personal crisis; rather, they are representatives. We are left with the impression that this is not their story so much as it is our story, the story of humankind. With great skill the author has presented these three participants as the heads of their race. The snake on the one hand and the man and the woman on the other are as two great nations embarking on a great struggle, a struggle that will find its conclusion only by an act of some distant and as yet unidentified 'seed.'"

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [*The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary*](#). Zondervan Academic.

Poems as Summary Literary Markers

The poetic speech of God makes clear a pattern that has already been at work in Genesis 1-3. This pattern will continue for the rest of the book of Genesis and on through the large narrative work of the Torah and Former Prophets (Genesis-2 Kings).

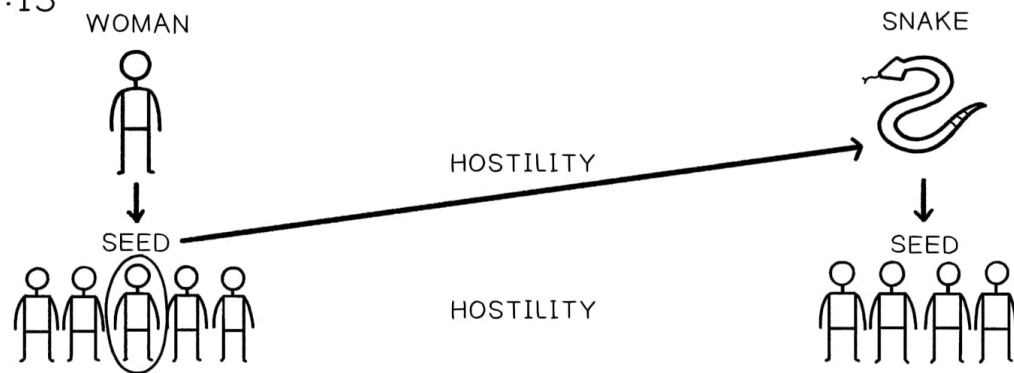
Strategic narratives in the Torah often begin or conclude with poems that condense the core themes and images of the surrounding stories while carrying the plot forward. These poems occur on the micro level within individual stories, but they also occur at the macro level that determines the larger plot and themes of the entire story of the Torah and Prophets.

Reference	Embedded Poem	
Genesis 1:1-2:3	Image of God poem	1:27
Genesis 2:4-24	Song of Adam about Eve	2:23
Genesis 3:14-19	Curses add consequences	3:14-19
Genesis 4:1-26	Lemek's murderous boast	4:23-24
Genesis 5:1-9:28	Noah's farewell speech	9:25-27
Genesis 10:1-11:32	God's promise to Abram	12:1-3
Genesis 24:1-67	Farewell blessing for Rebekah	24:60
Genesis 25:19-34	Rebekah's birth oracle	25:23
Genesis 27:1-28:7	Isaac's blessing for Jacob	27:27-29
Genesis 37:1-50:26	Jacob's farewell speech	49:1-28
Exodus 1:1-15:21	Song of the Sea	15:1-22
Numbers 22:1-24:25	Balaam's oracles of blessing	23:7-10 23:18-24 24:2-9 24:15-24
Deuteronomy 1-34	Moses' final warning speech	32:1-43
	Moses' farewell blessing for Israel	33:1-29
<i>Poems as Summary Literary Markers.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020). Adapted from John H. Sailhamer, <i>The Pentateuch as Narrative</i> (1992).		

Each of these riddle-like poems summarizes the themes of the narrative up to that point, and each poem also directs the reader's attention to the main themes in the following story.

Illustrated Reflection on Genesis 3:15

GENESIS 3:15



Reflection on Genesis 3:15. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Yahweh's Curse on the Snake

Notice the snake is the only one cursed in Genesis 3:14-15: "On your belly you will go, you will eat dust." This is imagery of humiliation and defeat ([Mic. 7:17](#)) that is drawn upon by later biblical authors when they depicted the messianic age ([Isa. 65:25](#)). John Sailhamer's reflections on [Genesis 3:15](#) are full of insight on this topic.

"As representatives, the snake and the woman embody the fate of their seed, and the fate of their seed is their fate as well ... At first in verse 15 the 'enmity' is said to have been put between the snake and the woman and between the 'seed' of the snake and the 'seed' of the woman. But the second half of verse 15 states that the 'seed' of the woman ('he') will crush the head of the snake ('your head'). ... Though the 'enmity' may lie between the two 'seeds,' the goal of the final crushing blow is not the 'seed' of the snake but rather the snake itself—his head will be crushed. In other words, it appears that the author is intent on treating the snake and his 'seed' together, as one. What happens to his 'seed' in the distant future can be said to happen to the snake as well. This identification suggests that the author views the snake in terms that extend beyond this particular snake of the Garden. The snake, for the author, is representative of someone or something else, and is represented by his 'seed.' When that 'seed' is crushed, the head of the snake is crushed. Consequently, more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his 'seed.' It is what the snake and his 'seed' represent that lies at the center of the author's focus. With that 'one' lies the 'enmity' that must be crushed ... If one looks at the passage within the larger scope of the purpose of the Pentateuch ... much more appears to lie in these words ... It seems likely that the author

intends these words to be read as programmatic and foundational for the establishment of the plot and characterization of the remainder of the book. In the narrative to follow, there is to be war ('enmity'). The two sides are represented by two seeds, the 'seed' of the snake and the 'seed' of the woman. In the ensuing battle, the 'seed' of the woman will crush the head of the snake. Though wounded in the struggle, the woman's 'seed' will be victorious. There remains in this verse a puzzling yet important ambiguity: Who is the 'seed' of the woman? It seems obvious that the purpose of verse 15 has not been to answer that question, but rather to raise it. The remainder of the book is, in fact, the author's answer."

Sailhamer, John H. (1995). [*The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-theological Commentary*](#). Zondervan Academic.

Reflection Question

Who or what is cursed in Genesis 3:14-19? Who or what is not cursed?

Session 23: Consequences of the Fail

Key Takeaways

- The word *'itsabon* means “emotional grief and anguish,” and it is used to characterize the consequences for the man and the woman in Genesis 3:16-19. It does not describe physical pain during childbirth as a punishment for the woman’s failure.
- In response to human failure, God sorrowfully hands people over to the consequences of their choices, but he does not delight in heaping suffering on them.

The Juxtaposition of Genesis 3:15 and 3:16

Genesis 3:15 tells us that there will be struggle between personal forces of rebellion that carry on the legacy of the snake and the seed of the woman. We also learn that this struggle will result in a conflict that wounds both the snake and the seed. However this happens, it’s clear that childbirth is at the heart of this conflict and also the strange vehicle of God’s rescue.

The next verse, Genesis 3:16, focuses on the fraught reality of childbirth, which is the unique and privileged role of the woman. It will take place in the middle of struggle and grief, but at the same time, the birth of the promised seed is the hope of future restoration.

The pain surrounding the entry of every child into the world is a paradoxical reminder of the future hope of creation’s rescue. It makes perfect sense, then, why the pain of childbirth becomes a powerful biblical image of suffering leading to redemption (Rom. 8:22-24; Matt. 24:8).

Consequences for the Woman: Genesis 3:16

Let’s look at a couple different translations of the first half of Genesis 3:16. To the common reader, these translations seem to associate pain with giving labor. But is that what is going on here?

Genesis 3:16a NIV

I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children.

Genesis 3:16a ESV

I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.

Pain in Childbirth?

Interestingly, the word grief or pain (Heb. *'itsabon*) is not the Hebrew word for labor pains. The same word, *'itsabon*, is used in the next verse, [Genesis 3:17](#), to refer to the frustrating toil the man will experience in the field (see also [Gen. 5:29](#); [Isa. 14:3](#)). Additionally, the word grief/pain is applied to the noun “conception” (Heb. *herayon*) which is explicitly *not* labor pain.

The root of *'itsabon* is widely used in biblical Hebrew and is best understood as “grief” or “hurtful” (*'atsab* / עֲצַב). Take a look at the word used as a verb describing the emotional experience of grief or sadness.

Genesis 6:6 NIV*

The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was **'atsab**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Isaiah 54:6 NIV*

“The LORD will call you back as if you were a wife deserted and **'atsab** in spirit—a wife who married young, only to be rejected” says your God.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The root word also appears as a noun: *'Otseb* or *'etseb* (עֲצַב). This word can be used to refer to a combined physical or emotional pain that results from difficult work circumstances.

2 Samuel 19:1-2 NIV*

¹ Joab was told, “The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” ² And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, “The king is **'atsab** for his son.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Proverbs 15:1 NASB*

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a word of **'otseb** stirs up anger.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Proverbs 10:22 NIV*

The blessing of the Lord brings wealth, without **'etseb** for it.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Psalms 147:2-3 NIV*

² The Lord builds up Jerusalem;
he gathers the exiles of Israel.

³ He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their **'otseb**

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Proverbs 14:23 NIV*

All **'etseb** brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.

"[The word 'etseb] is used of emotional pain and the pain involved in work. It can also be used of a more generalized kind of pain. Is is never used elsewhere in the Old Testament, however, to refer to labor pains, or 'birthpangs.' Conversely, there is a well-established vocabulary which is routinely used to labor pain: tsarar (צָרַר, *khebel* חָבַל, and *khul* חוּל ... If we take our lead from the meaning of 'etseb עֵצֵב elsewhere in the Old Testament, Genesis 3:16 refers to the agony, hardship, worry, and anxiety of the circumstances in which children are conceived, born and raised, and in which they die. ... This is the same word's clear meaning when describing the man's work in the field in the very next verse (Gen. 3:17)."

Provan, Iain (2012). "Pain in Childbirth?" In *Let Us Go Up to Zion*. Brill.

"The 'pain' of 3:16 ought not be understood as the physical pain of childbirth, but of the unrelenting labor required even of pregnant mothers in a pre-industrial, agrarian subsistence economy, and the concomitant psychological stresses of motherhood in such a milieu."

Heard, Christopher (2003). "An Intertextual Reading of Jabez' Prayer in 1 Chronicles 4:9-10." *Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*.

After study and reflection, we think the following translation of Genesis 3:16a is a better reflection of how these words are used in the Hebrew Bible.

Genesis 3:16a Instructor's Translation

I will greatly multiply your grief and your conception, in grief you will birth children.

He Will Rule Over You?

This interpretation of Genesis 3:16a makes even more sense in the light of Genesis 3:16b.

Genesis 3:16b NASB

Your desire will be for your husband, but he will rule over you.

The key interpretive question is whether this is a comparison or a contrast, and whether the key words, "desire" and "rule," are to be taken as positive or negative. This results in four different interpretations of this sentence.

Interpretation 1: Contrast

Genesis 3:16b NASB*

Your **desire [negative]** will be for your husband,
but he will **rule [positive]** over you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The woman's "desire" is a negative one used to control and manipulate her husband, in line with her deceptive behavior in giving him the fruit that she took. In contrast, and as a punishment of sorts, God appoints that

man rules woman as her authority. The ESV translation provides an interpretive translation that points in this direction: “Your desire will be contrary to your husband, but he will rule over you.”

Problems with Interpretation 1

- Genesis 3:6-7 does not portray the woman as acting against the will of her husband. On the contrary, he is right next to her! And God holds both of them accountable for the act, not just the woman. She is not portrayed as more culpable than the man, so these words are a punishment.
- The man “ruling” the woman is a direct inversion of God’s ideal will for humanity in Genesis 1:26-28 that male and female rule together.

Interpretation 2: Contrast

Genesis 3:16b NASB*

Your **desire [positive]** will be for your husband,
but he will **rule [negative]** over you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The woman’s desire is viewed as a natural or instinctual kind of submissive desire while, unfortunately, the man’s desire is for aggressive control of the woman. This interpretation sees Genesis 3:16b as a kind of reflection on the “nature” of gender relations.

Problems with Interpretation 2

- This very narrow and biased view of gender relations makes faulty, sweeping assumptions (as if all men have power complexes in relation to women and all women have positive feelings about men!).
- It is hard to see how this interpretation contributes to the context of Genesis 3:16a or the broader context of the story, where the man and woman are clearly at odds with each other in Genesis 3:8-13.

Interpretation 3: Comparison

Genesis 3:16b NASB*

Your **desire [positive]** will be for your husband,
but he will **rule [positive]** over you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The woman’s positive desire will be a submissive one for her husband’s love, and in return, he rules her with divinely granted authority. This view describes the ideal relation between genders from a Christian hierarchical point of view.

Problems with Interpretation 3

- Biblical scholars agree that Genesis 3:16b is not making a positive, ideal statement. This interpretation is a logical possibility, but not likely given the context that God is giving bad news in Genesis 3:14-19.

Interpretation 4: Comparison

Genesis 3:16b NASB*

Your **desire [negative]** will be for your husband,
but he will **rule [negative]** over you.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The woman's desires will be in contrast to her husband's desires, generating conflict between them, and in response, the man will make a powerplay over the woman to control and subdue her.

This is God's sad and realistic warning of the new normal for the man and woman outside of Eden. Now that each person "does what is good in their own eyes," the ideal of [Genesis 1:26-28](#) for male and female to rule together is tragically distorted. Women desire to subvert their husbands, and men return the favor.

Strengths of Interpretation 4

This interpretation fits into the larger context perfectly, as it represents a sad inversion of both ideals in Genesis 1:26-28 (ruling together) and Genesis 2:18-25 (naked intimacy and desirable union).

- The rare word "desire" (*teshuqah* / תְּשׁוּקָה) is used only two times elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, both hyperlinked to Genesis 3:16b.
- Genesis 4:7 is a clever hyperlink: "[sin's] desire is for you, and you can rule it." Here the desire of "sin" for Cain is a negative desire to control his actions and consume him like an animal.
- Song of Songs 7:10: "I belong to my beloved, and his desire is for me." This is also a clever hyperlink back to Genesis 3:16, where the idealized male and female lovers (in the garden of the song) reverse the tragic reality of Eden back into its ideal. Song of Songs 7:10 represents the undoing of the fracture between man and woman in Genesis 3:16! Here the "desire" is positive, precisely in contrast to Genesis 3:16.
- The man "ruling" the woman is the precise opposite picture of God's ideal in Genesis 1-2, where male and female rule together (Gen. 1:26-28), and where the woman is set apart from the animals not as the man's inferior but as his equal (from his "side").
- The rest of the book of Genesis is a series of narrative embodiments of this interpretation of Genesis 3:16. Every generation will experience moments where a woman desires power and control over her husband, which is met by a response of manipulation and powerplay in return: Abraham and Sarai ([Gen. 12:10-20](#); [Gen. 16:1-16](#)), Isaac and Rebekah ([Gen. 27:1-46](#)), Jacob and Rachel and Leah ([Gen. 29:1-30:43](#)), Judah and Tamar ([Gen. 38:1-30](#)), etc.

"The man's fate [in Gen. 3:17] ... matches the woman's. He will know grievous toil ('etseb) as she does. Here it certainly refers to challenging economic circumstances, as the man is locked in a struggle with the land, hoping through 'painful toil' to grow sufficient green plants in the midst of 'thorns and thistles' to survive. The work done in the field corresponds to the work done at home (notice that the woman's 'etseb is said to increase, not to begin) ... The man is not only in a struggle with the land, but Gen. 3:16 tells us that he's also locked in a struggle with his spouse. ... Men and women are created to work and rule in partnership ... but now the man relates to the woman as if she were a part of the creation, rather than a co-ruler over creation with the man. And she, for her part, is not portrayed as blameless in this increased dysfunctionality in male-female relations. ... Intended for partnership, they will in fact find themselves embroiled in a struggle for dominance. ... This is why family life will be more 'painful' for the woman ... dysfunction now marks not only

the human relationship with God and with the land, but also with each other. The remainder of the book of Genesis powerfully illustrated this dysfunction and the sorrow that it brings.”
Provan, Iain (2012). *“Pain in Childbirth?” In Let Us Go Up to Zion*. Brill.

Consequences for the Man: Genesis 3:17-19

Genesis 3:17a Instructor’s Translation

“Because you listened (*shama’* / קוֹל) to the voice (*qol* / קוֹל) of your wife”

This phrase refers back to his “taking and eating” in Genesis 3:6, which also provides a contrast to his fearful response when God entered the garden in Genesis 3:10: “I listened (*shama’* / שמע) to your sound/voice (*qol* / קוֹל) in the garden.”

Instead of “listening to the voice of God” about the tree, he ate from it after “listening to the voice” of his wife. This introduction of the key phrase prepares the reader for many later narratives where “listening to the voice” becomes a synonym for someone’s moral failure on analogy with Genesis 3:1-24 (Gen. 16:2; Gen. 27:8), or their moral victory that reverses Genesis 3:1-24 (Gen. 22:18).

Genesis 3:17b Instructor’s Translation

“Cursed is the land on account of you ...”

Instead of experiencing God’s uninhibited blessing of abundance in the land, humanity will have to struggle with a land outside of Eden that easily produces inedible plants (“thorns and thistles”) and grows edible food only with “grievous toil.”

Genesis 3:18 Instructor’s Translation

“You will eat the vegetation of the field (*‘eseb hassadeh* / עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה)”

Outside of Eden, humanity is reduced to the food that was explicitly assigned to the animals in Genesis 1:30: “to every living creature of the land, every bird ... and creeper on the land ... the green vegetation (*‘eseb* / עֵשֶׂב) will be for food.”

Instead of eating from the easily cultivated fruit trees of Eden that produce food by themselves, humanity will be forced to coax the ground to produce vegetation (3:18) that can be made into “bread” (3:19).

Genesis 3:19 Instructor’s Translation

“By the sweat of your brow ... until you return to the ground, for from it you were taken”

Subsistence agriculture is backbreaking work that reduces humans to servants of the ground and grinds them back into the dust. This is in contrast to the easily enjoyed food of the cultivated garden. These

words also link forward to Genesis 3:22, which tells us humanity would have achieved immortality only if they had access to God's presence through the tree of life.

Genesis 3:17-19 has profound implications. The Eden narrative presents the dirt-humans as mortal by nature. Immortality was not inherent to human nature but a gift that was forfeited and never attained. Instead of falling from perfection into death, Genesis 2-3 is a story about a failure to receive God's gift of eternal life. Perhaps we should begin calling Genesis 3 "the fail" instead of "the fall."

"[The punishment is] that work will now involve more pain than before. The work will be experienced in a different way—as a struggle with an earth that is more reluctant to give up good things, and that insists on producing 'thorns and thistles for you' (Gen. 3:8). The wording of this verse is strange, and underlines that it is not the world that has changed but people's experience of this world ... The land will still provide food, but only at a greater cost."

Provan, Iain (2014). [*Seriously Dangerous Religion: What the Old Testament Really Says and Why It Matters*](#). Baylor University Press.

Reflection Question

In Genesis 3:16-17, God says to the woman that she will experience pain related to bearing children. What kind of pain does it seem like God is talking about?

Session 24: Key Takeaways From the Eden Story

Key Takeaways

- The Hebrew words for help and skin look very similar. It’s as if the animal skin that God provides to cover the humans is a diminished form of God’s ‘ezer (help) in the broken reality after the failure of the humans.
- God responds to human failure with mercy. God continues to work with humanity even in the midst of brokenness.

Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 3:20-21

Eve’s Name and a Divine Mercy

²⁰ and the human **called** the name of his woman "Hawwah",
"for she is the mother of all **living** (חַיִּים)"

²¹ and God made for human and his wife, garments of skin,
and he clothed them.

Genesis 3:20-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

These two verses seem randomly placed here, but they are actually strategically located in order to create a frame around the entire fail narrative of Genesis 3:1-19 by matching and inverting multiple elements in Genesis 2:18-25.

Genesis 2:18-25	Genesis 3:1-19	Genesis 3:20-21
1. Adam names the woman “woman”	The snake, the woman, and the man	1. Adam names the woman “Hawwah”
2. God provides woman as an ‘ezer (עֵזֶר)		2. The deception of the ‘ezer (עֵזֶר) creates the need for “skin” (עוֹר)
Comparing Genesis 2:18-25 to Genesis 3:20-21. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).		

Genesis 2:18-25			Genesis 3:1-19			Genesis 3:20-21		
3. They are naked and not ashamed						3. Human nakedness is covered by God		
4. Humanity at peace with the animals						4. An animal is killed to “clothe” humans		
<i>Comparing Genesis 2:18-25 to Genesis 3:20-21. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).</i>								

After the failure of the man and woman, the story concludes with these two short details. The naming of the woman in 2:23 is now furthered by a dual wordplay.

1. She is named “Eve” (Heb. *hawwah* / חוה for she is the mother of all “life” (Heb. *hay* / חי).
2. The semitic root *hawwah* also means “snake” in Jewish Aramaic (חוויה) and Syriac (see Kohler-Baumgartner, *Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 296).

God provides “garments of skin (עור)” to replace the “leaf garments” the humans made to hide their nakedness from each other. This last word (“garments of skin”) is a wordplay on God’s provision of the woman as a deliverance of help for the man (עזר).

The provision of garments for the humans happens before their expulsion from Eden and is portrayed as an act of divine generosity in the midst of judgment. Now that the humans have made the irreversible decision, God accommodates their non-ideal situation and provides them with a gift. And this “garment” (Heb. *ketonet* / כתנת) is not just a tunic but a robe (Joseph’s technicolor dream coat in Gen. 37:3 is a *ketonet* as well).

This scene also plants the seed of a key motif in the book of Genesis: deception and garments. In the Eden story, the snake’s deception of the naked woman results in her need for a garment. Let’s look at this motif in later biblical stories.

- Rebekah and Jacob trick Isaac with deceptive garments and food ([Gen. 27:15-17](#)).
- Joseph’s brothers deceive Jacob with a bloodied garment ([Gen. 37:31-33](#)).
- Tamar deceives Judah by “covering” herself with deceptive garments ([Gen. 38:14](#)).
- Joseph is elevated from prison and gets new garments ([Gen. 41:42](#)) that disguise him from his brothers so that he can deceptively get them to tell the truth ([Gen. 42:8](#); [43:1-44:34](#)).

This provision of garments for the one God exiles from Eden is also reversed in Israel’s priesthood. They are also assigned “divine garments (Heb. *ketonet*)” by God which will cover their nakedness when they work at the altar or enter the tabernacle ([Exod. 21:26](#); [28:39-43](#)).

Conclusion of the Eden Narrative: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 3:22-24

Exile From Eden

22 And Yahweh God said,
"Look, the human has become like one of us, **knowing good and bad**,
and now so that he won't send out his hand and take also from **the tree of life** (חיים),
and eat and **live** (חי) forever ..."

23 and Yahweh God **sent him out** from the garden
to work the ground from which he was taken

24a and he **banished** the human

24b and he made to dwell at the **east of the garden of Eden**
cherubim and the flame of the whirling sword to guard way to **the tree of life** (חיים).

Genesis 3:20-24. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

This concluding unit represents the inversion of the Eden story's introduction.

- God created the human and placed him in the garden. > The human is banished from the garden.
- God causes the tree of life and knowing good and bad to grow. > Humans are cut off from them.
- Before the garden there was no human to work the ground. > The human works the ground outside Eden.
- Humanity was made mortal so that by obeying God they could remain in the garden and receive the gift of eternal life. > Now they are cut off and sent into the land of mortality.
- Humanity was directed to guard/keep the garden. > Humanity is now guarded/kept from the garden.

The story's final line about the cherubim and "flame of the whirling sword" is a condensed hint that sends the reader forward to the design of the tabernacle and temple and into the prophetic visions of the divine throne room. Cherubim flank the ark of the covenant on the holy of holies ([Exod. 25:17-22](#)). In the temple, cherubim are designed on the walls of the holy place and on the front doors into the temple ([1 Kgs. 6:29-32](#)). The "sword" will appear in the hand of the angel of Yahweh again when David goes to the hilltop in Jerusalem, which at the time was the threshing floor of Ornan ([1 Chron. 21:16](#)).

Key Takeaways From the Eden Story in Genesis 2:4-3:24

God's ideal for creation is for his transcendent and eternal life-giving presence (Heaven) to be united with our material creation (Earth) so that it is transformed into eternal life.

Eden is the key biblical image of the place where Heaven and Earth are one. It is both Heaven and Earth simultaneously, as are the tabernacle and the Jerusalem temple. This is why garden and temple imagery pervades Heaven imagery throughout the Bible.

Outside of Eden, the reality of Heaven on Earth is hidden from us most of the time. However, we experience its gifts of blessing in every baby's birth, in every abundant harvest, in every good meal, in every experience of beauty and laughter, and in every feeling of intimacy and communion with family or someone we love.

These gifts of Eden are small tastes of ultimate goodness that pervade our world and point humanity to their creator if they have eyes to see.

The story of Genesis 3 is more about “the fail” than “the fall.” It is about a misguided attempt to seize divine wisdom.

“Wisdom is good, and we can safely assume that God did not intend to withhold it from humanity. But true wisdom must be acquired through a process, generally from instruction by those who are wise. The fall is defined by the fact that Adam and Eve acquired wisdom illegitimately (Gen. 3:22), thus trying to take God’s role for themselves rather than eventually joining God in his role as they were taught wisdom and became the fully functional vice-regents of God involved in the process of bringing order. If humans are to work alongside of God in extending order (‘subdue’ and ‘rule’ [Gen. 1:28]), they need to attain wisdom, but as endowment from God, not by seizing it for autonomous use. If ... from the start people were mortal, and pain and suffering were already a part of a not yet fully ordered cosmos, we cannot think of death and suffering as having been foisted on us by Adam and Eve’s malfeasance. ... Instead, we can have a much more charitable attitude toward Adam and Eve when we realize that it is not that they initiated a situation that was not already there; it is that they failed to achieve a solution ... that was in their reach. Their choices resulted in their failure to acquire relief on our behalf. Their failure meant that we are doomed to death and a disordered world full of sin. These are profoundly significant consequences for what was a serious offense. In contrast, Christ was able to achieve the desired result where Adam and Eve failed. We are all doomed to die because when they sinned we lost access to the tree of life. We are therefore subject to death because of sin. Christ succeeded and actually provided the remedy to sin and death. Some would follow this same line of reasoning to suggest that what we call original sin is the result of our ancestors “pulling out of the program” prematurely. James Gaffney identifies these approaches as involving a view that our human condition is underdeveloped, failing to achieve the intended goal because we wanted to do it our way—not paradise lost, but, as it were, paradise ungained.”

Walton, John (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2-3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic.

Evil is a semi-personal presence that causes doubt about the creator’s goodness and intentions, and it compels humans to declare themselves to be the author of both their own identity and of good and evil. This results in a tragic irony where humans give their divine dignity over to creation with its animal-like appetite for survival and control.

The story sets up the main plot conflict that drives the rest of the biblical story: God wanted to rule creation through his human images, but now they are in rebellion and causing chaos and disorder in God’s good world. So what’s the solution? We need a new kind of human who can do two things we cannot do for ourselves: Deal with the problem humanity has generated, and restore humanity back to its ideal role.

Reflection Question

God doesn’t stop working in and with humanity after he banishes them from the garden. What does this show us about God’s heart? What should we expect from God as we continue reading Genesis and the rest of the Bible?



Module 5: Life Outside the Garden

SESSIONS 25-29

Follow humanity's story out of the garden of Eden. Trace the narrative themes to see what life looks like in the land of thorns and thistles.

Session 25: Literary Design of Genesis 4

Key Takeaways

- Genesis 4 develops themes introduced in previous chapters: knowing, conception, birth, grief, the ground, and testing.
- Genesis 4 also introduces new themes: the voice of the blood of the innocent, the city of blood, farmers and shepherds, and sibling rivalry.

Macro Design of Genesis 4:1-26

Genesis 4 is broken into two large narrative panels, punctuated by three birth scenes.

Scenes		Overview
A: 4:1-2: Birth Scene 1		"and the human knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and she gave birth..." Two sons born: • Cain + wordplay on son's name • Abel (=“vapor”)
B: 4:3-16: Narrative Panel 1		Cain murders his brother Abel • v. 3-7: The sacrifices and Cain's test • v. 8-11: Cain murders his brother and dialogue with Yahweh • v. 12-16: God's punishment and his mercy on Cain God's mercy: 7x blood vengeance declared for Cain
A: 4:17-18: Birth Scene 2		"And Cain knew his wife and she conceived and gave birth to Enoch..." • Builds a city named after his son
B: 4:19-24: Narrative Panel 2		Lemek murders a young man • v. 19: Lemek's two wives • v. 20-22: Lemek's three sons • v. 23-24: Lemek's murderous poem Lemek declares 77x blood vengeance on himself
Cain and Abel: A Tale of Two Seeds. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

Scenes	Overview
A: 4:25-26: Birth Scene 3	“And the human knew again his wife and she gave birth to a son...” Two sons born: • Seth + wordplay on son’s name • Enosh (= “humanity”)
<i>Cain and Abel: A Tale of Two Seeds.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

“Throughout the Pentateuch, the sevenfold use of divine speech formula is commonplace, and within this chapter the number seven is clearly significant (cf. vv 15, 24). Unusually full details about Lamek, the seventh generation from Adam (vv 18-24), may illustrate another convention associated with biblical genealogies, a tendency to draw attention to the seventh generation. Indeed various keywords in the narrative appear a multiple of seven times. Within 4:1-17, ‘Abel’ and ‘brother’ occur seven times, and ‘Cain’ fourteen times. Within the whole of 2:4-4:26, אֶרֶץ ‘earth,’ not ‘land of,’ is mentioned seven times, אֲדָמָה ‘land’ fourteen times, and ‘God,’ ‘the Lord,’ or ‘The Lord God’ some thirty-four times, exactly matching the thirty-five occurrences of ‘God’ in 1:1-2:3. The last verse of chap. 4, ‘At that time people began to call on the name of the Lord,’ thus contains the seventieth mention of the deity in Genesis and the fourteenth use of the key word ‘call’... In all these respects chapter 4 is entirely typical of the editorial techniques used throughout Genesis, and its present form must owe much to the final editor.”

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [Genesis 1-15 \(Word Biblical Commentary\)](#). Thomas Nelson Inc.

Eve’s Many Sons: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 4:1-2 and 4:25-26

Birth Scene #1: Eve “Creates” a Son

- a ¹ Now, **the human knew his wife Eve**,
- b **and she conceived and she gave birth** to **Cain (קַיִן)**
- c and she said, "I have **created (קָנִיתִי)** a man (in comparison) with Yahweh."
- b ^{2a} and again she gave birth to his brother **Abel**,

Birth Scene #3: God “Appoints” a Son

²⁵ **and Adam knew his wife again**
and she gave birth to a son,
and she named him " Seth (שֵׁת)," because,
“God has appointed (שָׁת) me another seed in place of Abel, for Cain killed him.”

²⁶ and to Seth, to him also a son was born;
and he called his name Enosh.
then it was begun, to call on the name of Yahweh.

The Cain and Abel Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

Observations About the Two Birth Scenes

The opening and closing birth scenes (4:1-2; 4:25-26) provide a matching frame of Eve's pregnancy, birth, and naming of sons. The similarities also highlight some important contrasts.

"I have created a man ..."

Eve's words in 4:1 could be taken as a celebration of divine assistance ("with Yahweh" = "with Yahweh's assistance"). More likely, they are a statement of her budding arrogance: "I have created a man, alongside/in comparison with Yahweh." The likelihood of this interpretation is supported by many observations of the following narrative.

Eve's words "I have created a man ..." contain the Hebrew root קנ"ה, which appears elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible to describe God as creator of the world (Gen. 14:19, 22), of Israel (Deut. 32:6), of people (Ps. 139:13), and of wisdom (Prov. 8:22). Since divine procreation is often connected with this verse, and it is never used of "acquiring" children, it's more likely that Eve is attributing the creation of Cain to her own power and ability (cf. the warning against attributing God's power to oneself in , and of wisdom Deut. 8:11-18).

"With Yahweh ..."

Many translations interpret the "with" (אִתּוֹ) as Yahweh's agency, meaning that Eve is attributing her pregnancy to Yahweh (Septuagint διὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ; "with the help of the LORD" NASB; ESV; NIV). But the word is more likely implying a comparison: "beside, in comparison with Yahweh." This is a common use of "with." Exodus 20:23 says, "Do not make any gods alongside/in comparison with me (אִתִּי)," and Genesis 39:6 says, "And Potiphar left everything in the hand of Joseph and didn't know anything alongside/in comparison with him (אִתּוֹ)."

With this interpretation, the narrative is portraying Eve (once again) as a human who uses their God-given abilities to create their own blessing by their own wisdom and power. Eve would then be the first of many mothers in Genesis to try to achieve or attribute the divine blessing of children to their own plan or power. Compare Sarai in [Genesis 16:1-16](#), Rebekah in [Genesis 27:1-46](#), and Leah and Rachel in [Genesis 30:1-43](#). This would also explain why God accepts the younger son's offering, in order to subvert human wisdom and power, as he does in each of the generations.

"The first woman, in her joy at giving birth to her first son, boasts of her generative power, which approximates in her estimation to the Divine creative power. The Lord formed the first man (2:7), and I have formed the second man. Literally, 'I have created a man with the Lord' = I stand together [i.e. equally] with him in the rank of creators."

Cassuto, U. (1961). [A Commentary on the Book of Genesis \(Part I\): from Adam to Noah](#). Magnes Press.

The Contrast of Eve's Words in 4:1 and 4:25

Eve's words about her sons open and close the chapter (4:1 and 4:25), and they contrast each other. In Genesis 4:1 she says, "I have created a man alongside Yahweh," and in 4:25 she says, "God has given me a seed, another one in the place of Abel, for Cain murdered him." Her opening words of hubris are subverted while her closing words accept Seth as a generous gift after the tragic loss of Abel that ironically overturned her presumptive words. Additionally, 4:25 provides a kind of reversal of Abel's death.

"Although Seth is not Abel, he is said to stand 'in the place of' the dead son in a more profound sense ... Seth is Abel *redivivus* [= 'revived'], the slain son restored to his parents. His birth is proof that the loss of the son favored by God's inscrutable grace is not final. The death of the beloved son, even when it is not averted, can still be reversed."

Levenson, Jon D. (1995). "Favor and Fratricide." [*The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*](#). Yale University Press.

Reflection Question

Genesis 4 begins and ends with Eve giving birth to a son. Compare what Eve says in Genesis 4:1 to her words in Genesis 4:25. What do you notice? How would you describe the differences between the two statements?

Session 26: Offerings at the Door of the Garden

Key Takeaways

- Cain and Abel introduce the biblical pattern of shepherds representing reliance on God and farmers representing self-reliance.
- Yahweh's favor can be a cause of jealousy and danger.
- Textual clues indicate that the brothers were offering sacrifices at the door to the garden in Eden.

Cain and Abel's Offering: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 4:2-7

Cain and Abel's Offering

- a 2b and **Abel** was a shepherd of flocks,
b but **Cain** was a tiller of the ground,
c 3 and it came from the end of days
b' and **Cain**
brought from the fruit of the ground
an offering to Yahweh.
a' 4 and **Abel**
also he brought from the firstborn of his flock
and from their fat portions,

- a and Yahweh gazed
b upon **Abel** and for his offering;
b' 5 but upon **Cain** and upon his offering
a' he did not gaze.

- a and there was **heat-anger** to Cain,
b and his **face fell**,
6 and Yahweh said to Cain,
a' **Why is there heat-anger to you?**
b' and why has your **face fallen** ?
a 7 If you **do good**,
b **won't there be lifting up**,
a' and if you **do not do good**,
b' **at the door, sin is a croucher**,

~ c' and its desire is for you,
c' but you can **rule** it."

The Cain and Abel Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

Farmers vs. Shepherds, the City vs. the Wilderness

Cain and Abel are first introduced by their economic and cultural domains. Cain is a farmer who works the ground, and Abel is a shepherd who works among migrating flocks. These two vocations have important associations throughout the biblical narrative.

Farming and Cities

Organized agriculture in the ancient Near East was associated with the world's first empires (Babylon and Egypt), where slave labor and infrastructure provided the groundwork for mass farming. It's no accident that Cain will become associated with the first cities in the Bible (Gen. 4:17) and the advent of technology and civilization (Gen. 4:20-22).

Shepherding and the Desert

Shepherds who migrated with their grazing animals were nomads that lived on the borders of urban society. They tended to be viewed as lower class (though they could produce great wealth) and outside the value systems of the great cities and empires (shepherds were viewed as despicable by urban Egyptians (Gen. 43:32; 46:34)).

Generally, Yahweh identifies himself with the shepherd underdog throughout the Bible and consistently reveals himself to people in the desert, to shepherds outside the imperial systems of organized human power and prestige.

- Abraham the shepherd is called out of the cities of Babylon ("Ur of the Chaldeans") and Haran in Syria (Gen. 11:31-12:4).
- Isaac and Jacob and his many sons are all shepherds living on the edge of urban centers in the land of Canaan.
- Moses meets Yahweh in the desert of Sinai while shepherding his flock (Exod. 3).
- Yahweh forms the people of Israel by leading them out of Egypt (where they farm and build cities) and establishing them as his covenant people in the Sinai desert.
- Israel's first true king, David, was a shepherd (1 Sam. 16:11), while the illegitimate king, Saul, was a farmer of the field (1 Sam. 11:5).
- Yahweh himself is portrayed as Israel's shepherd (Ps. 23:1-6), and he dwells in a tent (2 Sam. 7:6).

This contrast continues throughout the rest of the Hebrew Bible, and it is introduced in the Cain and Abel story in order to prepare us for what happens next. It should not surprise us that God favors the shepherd and that the "city boy" (or "farmer boy") is the negative character.

Yahweh's Favor for Abel but Not for Cain

The narrative is very spare, but it's precise in directing the reader's attention that what we're supposed to notice in the Cain and Abel narrative.

The Nature of the Offerings

Cain brings "the fruit of the ground." Cain is, like Adam his father, a tiller of the ground, which has been cursed. Cain's offering, while legitimate, is an undifferentiated vegetable and grain bundle.

Abel's offering is "from the firstborn of the flock, and from the fat portions." Notice the extra detail devoted to the description of Abel's offering, which highlights two layers of value: (1) the firstborn of the flock (the greatest symbolic value), and (2) the fat portions (the tastiest and most nutritious portions). The narrative implies a direct contrast here between Cain's bundled veggies and Abel's carefully selected and valuable animal offering.

"By giving the first-born and the best of the animal (i.e. the fat), Abel would be understood as having given everything to God."

Hess, Richard (1992). "Abel." [*The Anchor Yale Bible Dictionary, A-C, Vol. 1*](#). Yale University Press.

While both offerings are legitimate (grain and animal offerings are both described in the sacrificial rules of Leviticus 1-7), the lavish value ascribed to Abel's offering makes Cain's gift pale in comparison. But the fault isn't simply in the ingredients of the offering but what they indicated about the character of the one offering.

God Does Not "Reject" Cain

God's favor on Abel does not constitute a rejection of Cain, though he seems to experience it as such. God immediately reaches out to Cain, continues a long dialogue with him, and tells him that this moment is not permanent.

God tells Cain the way to favor: "do what is good." The implication is that God can discern, somehow, in Cain's offering that all is not well in his heart, mind, and character. So he works with Cain and invites him to do the right thing to experience divine favor.

"The issue in Genesis 4 is one of ethics, not of sacrificial ingredient ... Nonetheless, there exists a possibility that a comparative ethical value is reflected in the quality of the sacrifices offered ... With the same ingredients, the human roles could have been reversed ... Cain would have selected the best of what the earth can offer, and Abel would killed an animal picked gingerly from the heard ... The emphasis is not on the ingredient of the sacrifices but on the disposition of the one offering."

LaCocque, Andre (2008). [*Onslaught Against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist*](#). Cascade Books.

The Firstborn Rivalry and Yahweh

Cain's birth story draws attention to him as the firstborn. His mother boasts of her ability to "create" a man, and this man goes on to take the place of Adam as a "worker of the ground."

Cain is also the first to bring an offering, as the patriarch or firstborn male always does as their prerogative. The firstborn was to be acknowledged as the one who received the greater share of the inheritance (Deut. 21:17) as the father's representative (Gen. 49:3). In Genesis, the male head of the family offers sacrifices (Noah in 8:20; Abraham in 12:4-10) and passes on the blessing and right of the first-born (Gen. 27).

In Genesis 4:3, we're told first that Cain brought his offering. Then, all of a sudden, we're told, "And Abel, he also brought from the firstborn of his flocks ..."

If Abel's offering is not an effort at usurpation of his elder brother (and it may well be), the narrator is at least showing us that the first-born is being shown up by his younger brother. And to top it all off, Yahweh favors Abel!

This begins a major theme in the book of Genesis: that God carries forward his promises in ways that subvert and challenge traditional wisdom in human societies, and he loves to elevate the underdog and the disadvantaged.

Sacrifices at the Door of the Garden

Cain and Abel are introduced in a narrative about worship as they make their offerings before Yahweh. But where is this story taking place?

- Genesis 3:22-24 tells us that the humans were sent out from the garden of Eden "to the east" and that on that eastern border of Eden, Yahweh stationed cherubim and a sword.
- When Cain is exiled after murdering his brother in Genesis 4:16, we're told he went "east of Eden." This means that Genesis 4:1-16 is taking place within Eden, near the eastern edge of the garden.
- There are numerous clues in this narrative and in later design patterns about the tabernacle and temple that point to envisioning this offering as taking place at the "door" of the garden of Eden, which is mentioned in Genesis 4:7.

The "door" of Genesis 4:7 is often taken to metaphorically refer to the door of Cain's heart or mind, where the sinful urge is waiting for him. But this is not what the Hebrew text says. Genesis 4:7 consists of three words in Hebrew: "at the door" (לפתח), sin (חטאת) is a croucher (רביץ). The metaphorical "door of the heart" is used nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible, whereas the narrative context provides us with a perfectly plausible explanation.

Cain and Abel are depicted as offering their sacrifices at the door of the garden of Eden, in front of the cherubim and the entrance into the holy place of God's heavenly presence on Earth. The sinful, animal-like temptation to rebel against God has exited the garden with them and is now "at the door" alongside them.

With this reading, the later tabernacle and temple mirror this precise scene, as the altar was placed directly east in front of the "door" (פתח) to the sacred space, where offerings were made before the priests could enter into sacred space.

Resource Recommendation

For more on topic of sacrifices at the door of Eden, see Azevedo, J (1999). "At the Door of Paradise: A Contextual Interpretation of Genesis 4:7." *Biblische Notizen*, vol. 100.

Reflection Question

Is there something wrong with Cain's offering? Was Cain rejected by God?

Session 27: Cain Fails His Test

Key Takeaways

- The blood of the innocent crying out to God from the ground is a key motif in the biblical narrative that moves God to action.
- The actions of Cain align him with the “seed of the snake” not the “seed of the woman.”

Yahweh’s Dialogue With Cain: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 4:8-16

Yahweh’s Dialogue With Cain

a 8 and **Cain** spoke to **Abel** his brother
b and it came about when they were in the field,
a' and **Cain** rose up to **Abel** his brother
b' and he **killed** him.
a 9 and **Yahweh said to Cain,**
b **"Where is Abel your brother?"**
a' and he said,
b' "I do not know. Am I the keeper of **my brother?**"

10 **and he said**
"What have you done?"
a **The voice of the shed-blood of your brother**
b is crying out to me **from the ground** .
b' 11 and now, you are cursed **from the ground** .
a' which **has opened its mouth**
a' to receive **the shed-blood of your brother** from your hand.

12 When you work **the ground** ,
it will no longer yield its strength to you;
you will be a vagrant and a wanderer in the land."

13 and **Cain** said to the Lord,
a "My punishment is too great to lift up,
b 14 Behold, You have banished me this day

c from the face of the ground ;
c' and from your face I will be hidden,
b' and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer in the land ,
a' and whoever finds me will kill me ."

15 and Yahweh said to him, "
"Therefore whoever, kill Cain
seven times he will be avenged,"
and Yahweh established a sign for Cain ,

so that anyone who finds him would not strike him .
16 and Cain went out from the face of Yahweh ,
and he dwelt in the land of Wandering/Nod , east of Eden.

The Cain and Abel Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

Yahweh's words to Cain turn his anger into a moment of testing that is modeled closely on the story of his parents' testing and failure.

The Blood Cries Out

In Genesis 4:10-4:11, God tells Cain that the voice of his brother's blood is crying out from the ground. Notice that the ground has become an active character (it "cries" and "opens its mouth" and "receives") that witnesses Abel's murder, is defiled by it, and testifies as a witness.

Humanity was made from clay made by water and dust ([Gen. 2:7](#)), but now a human returns to the dirt in the form of blood, which results not in the ground being cursed but Cain being cursed from the ground.

This begins an important design pattern throughout the Hebrew Bible, related to the "city of bloodshed." When human societies build themselves upon the blood of the innocent, God hears their cry and responds.

Genesis 6:13 NASB

Then God said to Noah, "The end of all flesh **has come before me**; for the earth is filled with **violence** because of them; and behold, I am about to destroy them with the earth.

The Land

Genesis 18:20-21 NASB

²⁰ And the Lord said, "The **outcry of Sodom and Gomorrah** is indeed great, and their sin is exceedingly grave. ²¹ I will go down now, and see if they have done entirely according to **its outcry, which has come to me**; and if not, I will know."

Sodom

Exodus 2:23 NASB

Now it came about in the course of those many days that the king of Egypt died. And the sons of Israel sighed because of the bondage, and they cried out; and **their cry for help because of their bondage rose up to God.**

Egypt

God Shows Mercy and Gives a Sign

In Genesis 4:13-4:14, Cain complains of the severity of the consequences and then blames God for his exile. Cain also raises the important factor that he has blood on his hands and that an “avenger of blood” may “find” him and exact justice. His language hints forward to the kinsman redeemer, whose family responsibility it was to avenge the murder of a relative (Num. 35:12-25).

God “sets a sign for Cain” (not “on” him). The history of interpretation for this verse is littered with imaginative speculations that are not grounded in the text. The earliest collection of interpretations is found in an early Jewish commentary on Genesis (4th-6th century A.D.) called *Genesis Rabbah* (Ginzberg, Louis, [The Legends of the Jews](#), p. 107).

Seven Interpretive Opinions on the Sign of Cain

1. God caused the sun to rise (as a sign that Cain was not to be slain by animals)
2. He marked him by inflicting leprosy on him
3. He gave him a dog to protect him against animals
4. He marked him with a horn on his forehead (as a degradation of his human form)
5. He punished Cain as a sign (warning) to future murderers
6. He partly pardoned his sin as a sign (example) for future sinners who repent
7. He allowed him to live until the flood

The Sign Motif

The “sign for Cain” begins a design pattern motif in the Hebrew Bible. When God confronts humanity’s evil, he usually brings justice while also showing mercy. And he marks this distinction by means of a sign (’ot / אות), a symbol that itself communicates the meaning of the event on a deep level.

Genesis 9:11-15 NASB*

¹¹ “I set up my covenant with you; and all flesh shall never again be cut off by the water of the flood, neither shall there again be a flood to ruin the earth.” ¹² And Elohim said, “This is the sign of the covenant, which I am giving between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all successive generations; ¹³ I give my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a **sign** of a covenant between me and the earth. ¹⁴ It shall come about, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow will be seen in the cloud, ¹⁵ and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh and never again shall the water become a flood to ruin all flesh.”

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The rainbow is a sign of God's judgment and rescue.

Genesis 17:10-14 NASB

¹⁰ "This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your seed after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. ¹¹ And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the **sign** of the covenant between me and you. ¹² And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your seed ... thus shall my covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant."

Circumcision is a sign of God's judgment and his eternal promise to raise up a seed for Abraham.

Exodus 8:21-24 NASB

²¹ "For if you do not let my people go, behold, I will send swarms of flies on you and on your servants and on your people and into your houses ... ²² But on that day I will set apart the land of Goshen, where my people are living, so that no swarms of flies will be there, in order that you may know that I, the Lord, am in the midst of the land. ²³ I will set a division between my people and your people. Tomorrow this **sign** will occur." ²⁴ Then the Lord did so. And there came great swarms of flies into the house of Pharaoh and the houses of his servants and the land was ruined because of the swarms of flies in all the land of Egypt.

Exodus 10:1-2 NASB

¹ Then Yahweh said to Moses, "Go to Pharaoh, for I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants, that I may set my **signs** among them, ² and that you may tell in the hearing of your son, and of your grandson, how I made a mockery of the Egyptians and how I set my signs among them, that you may know that I am the Lord."

The plagues that God sends on Egypt are signs of God's judgment and his commitment to save the Israelites (see also [Ps. 78:43](#); [105:27](#)). God also gives a sign of the distinction between Egypt and Israel.

Exodus 12:12-13 NASB

¹² For I will go through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both human and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments. I am Yahweh. ¹³ The blood shall be a **sign** for you on the houses where you live; and when I see the blood I will pass over you, and there will be on you no plague to ruin you when I strike the land of Egypt.

The blood of the passover lamb on the doorposts is a sign of God's judgment and mercy.

Joshua 2:12-13 NIV

¹² Now then, please swear to me by the Lord that you will show kindness to my family, because I have shown kindness to you. Give me a **sign**, a reliable one ¹³ that you will preserve the lives of my father and

mother, my brothers and sisters, and all who belong to them—and that you will deliver us from death.

Joshua 2:17-19 NIV

¹⁷ Now the men had said to her, “This oath you made us swear will not be binding on us ¹⁸ unless, when we enter the land, you have tied this **cord of scarlet** thread in the window through which you let us down, and unless you have brought your father and mother, your brothers and all your family into your house (הביתה).

¹⁹ If any of them go outside your house into the street, their blood will be on their own heads; we will not be responsible. As for those who are in the house with you, their blood will be on our head if a hand is laid on them.”

Rahab's scarlet cords in Jericho are a sign for God to spare her family when he brings his judgment on the city.

Cain's sign is the archetype of all these “signs of sparing.” In each instance, Yahweh could strike and bring ruin indiscriminately, but instead, he makes his mercy available to a remnant, showing his mercy with a visual sign.

The story that sets up this design pattern does not tell us what the sign is but only what it means: that Cain stands under God's judgment for his murder, and no one else has the legal or moral right to exact vengeance on him. But Cain also stands under God's mercy, which is marked by “a sign for Cain.”

This is a good example of how design patterns work in the Hebrew Bible. In this case, the first appearance of a motif is the most ambiguous, and it is only through repetition that the motif gains clarity. Notice that all of the signs are visual phenomena (bow in the sky, cutting of flesh, blood on door frame, cord of scarlet thread on window).

It's also possible that in [Genesis 4:15](#), we are given the content of the sign in the form of Yahweh's declaration of protection for Cain.

“[T]he meaning is not: whoever slays Cain will be punished seven times as much as one who kills any other person; such a penalty would not be in accord with justice. Seven [שבע, *šebha*] is the number of completeness (see Genesis 1); and שבעתִּים *šibhāthayim*—that is, seven times—connotes in complete measure, with the full stringency of the law. Compare Psalm 12:6 ‘gold that is purified seven times;’ or Psalm 79:12 ‘return sevenfold into the bosom of our neighbors.’ The one who slays Cain will deserve to be punished with the utmost severity, because he will be guilty of a dual offense: the crime of shedding blood, and the sin of contemning the Lord's judgement by augmenting the divine punishment.”

Cassuto, U. (1961). [A Commentary on the Book of Genesis \(Part I\): from Adam to Noah](#). Magnes Press.

It is Yahweh's verdict that the first human murderer, who should experience just consequences, is instead spared. This, Yahweh says, is “a sign for Cain.” If Yahweh, who has full rights to eliminate Cain, does not do so, there is no right for anyone else to kill him. This is a potent sign: Yahweh does not want to take away life.

This interpretation has the advantage of taking on board the meaning of all the future signs of mercy that repeat the design pattern. But it has the disadvantage of not being a visual cue, which all the later signs are.

“The precise nature of the sign remains uncertain, but its function is clear. As the clothing given to Adam and Eve after the fall (Gen. 3:21) served to remind them of their sin and God's mercy, so does

the mark placed on Cain. As a protective device against potential enemies it may stay death; in that sense, the anticipated punishment is softened. But at the same time it serves as a constant reminder of Cain's banishment, his isolation from other people."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*Genesis 1-15 \(Word Biblical Commentary\)*](#). Thomas Nelson Inc.

God's Mercy, Cain's Wife, and Cain's City

Immediately after God provides a protective sign for Cain, he "went out from before the face of Yahweh, and he settled in the land of "wandering (*nod* /נוֹד), east of Eden" ([Gen. 4:16](#)). That is, he leaves the scene of 4:1-16, outside the "door" of the garden, and he leaves Eden and his family.

Outside of Eden, Cain does two things that surprise the reader that may have assumed Adam and Eve were the only or first human beings. He impregnates his wife (where did she come from?), and he builds a city (for whom?!). What's going on here?

Cain's Wife

While no other siblings of Cain or Abel are mentioned in the story, we do learn in [Genesis 5:4](#) that Adam and Eve did have other sons and daughters after Cain and Abel. But it is not likely that we are meant to think that Cain married one of his sisters. His exile from Eden is also an exile from his family. This seems to be the whole point of his punishment—isolation ("a vagrant and wanderer you will be," Gen. 4:12). Instead of assuming that Cain is going into a world empty of humans, this detail is one of the main indicators that Genesis 2:4-3:24 is an archetypal account of the first human priests, not of the first humans on Earth. In that case, Cain is returning to the humanity from which his parents were selected.

Cain's City

Genesis 4:17 Instructor's Translation

And he built a city, and he called the name of the city, according to the name of his son, "dedicated" (Heb. *khanok* /חֲנוֹךְ).

There are multiple clues that this city is a negative, or at least highly ambiguous, development. After God's declaration of protection over Cain, Cain leaves Eden and provides his own form of protection by means of a city (a walled collection of homes). The building of the first city, then, is a display of Cain's lack of trust in Yahweh's ability to "be his keeper."

This city protects the murderer Cain, much like the later cities of refuge ([Num. 35:6-15](#)). And after multiple generations, Khanok will become the kind of place that protects an even more heinous murderer, Lemek.

In the literary design of Genesis 1-11, Cain's city corresponds to the building of the city of Babylon, which is also a negative development. Perhaps Cain's act is one of defiance. He has had enough of nomadic life. He refuses to abide under God's terms any longer. The only other reference to building a city in Genesis 1-11 is the incident at Babel.

"Come, let us build ourselves a city ...' (11:4). Here the whole city-building, tower-erecting project is one that God condemns ... Cain's act of city building is an attempt to provide security for himself, a security he

is not sure that God’s mark guarantees. In the words of J. Ellul, Cain ‘wants to find alone the remedy for a situation he created, but which he cannot himself repair because it is a situation dependent on God’s grace.’”

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [*The Book of Genesis \(New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series\) 1-17*](#). Eerdmans.

Genesis 3 and 4 As Mirror Stories

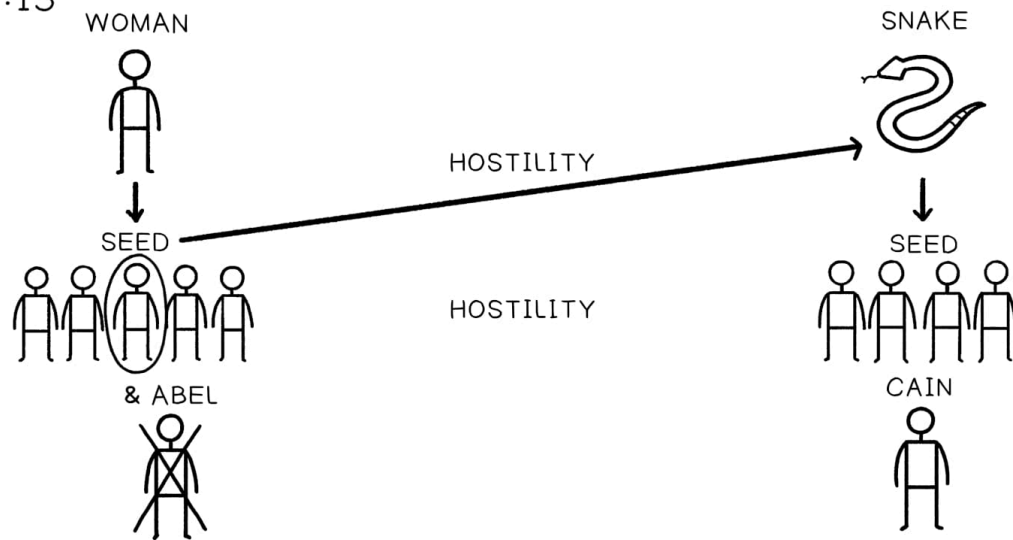
The story of Cain’s murder has been designed as a mirror that develops and intensifies the story of his parents’ failure inside of Eden.

Theme	Genesis 2-3: Adam & Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human given a significant choice about “good”	2:14: “from any tree of the garden you may eat, but from the tree of knowing good and evil you should not eat, because the day you eat from it you will surely die.	4:5-6: But Yahweh did not regard Cain’s offering, and Cain was very angry... Yahweh said “Why are you angry, and why has your face fallen? Isn’t it the case that if you do good, you will be lifted up?”
Human tempted by an “animal”	3:1: “Now the snake was more crafty than any creature of the field...and he said to the woman, ‘Did God really say not to eat from any tree in the garden?’”	4:6: “But if you don’t do good, sin is crouching at the door, and its desire is for you.”
Human gives into temptation with destructive consequences	3:6: “When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and desirable to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom... she took...”	4:5: “And Cain was very angry...” [4:8] And Cain spoke to Abel his brother and while they were in the field Cain rose up against Abel his brother and murdered him”
God shows up to ask a leading question	3:9: “And God called out to the human, and said “Where are you (מה איכה)?”	4:9: “And God said to Cain, “where is your (אי) brother Abel?”
	3:12: “And God said to the woman, ‘What have you done?’ (מה עשית)	4:10: “And God said, “What have you done?” (מה עשית)
Genesis 3 and 4 as Mirror Stories. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).		

Theme	Genesis 2-3: Adam & Eve	Genesis 4: Cain and Abel
Human dodges the question	3:12: "The human said 'The woman who you set with me, she gave to me and I ate.'"	4:9: "I don't know! Am I my brother's keeper?"
The perpetrator is cursed	3:14: "God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, you are cursed from every beast and from every creature of the field'"	4:11: "And now you are cursed from the ground..."
Inverted Desire	3:16: "Your desire will be toward your husband, and he will rule you."	4:7: "Sin...its desire is toward you, and you will rule it."
Working the ground will now be more difficult	3:17b: "in pain you will eat from the ground"	4:12: "For you will work the ground, and it will no longer give its strength to you."
	3:23: "And God sent him from the garden of Eden to work the ground"	
The human is banished from the divine presence	3:24: "And [God] banished the human and he camped east of the garden of Eden..."	4:14: "Behold, you have banished me from the face of the ground and from your presence." ... [4:16] "And Cain settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden."
Genesis 3 and 4 as Mirror Stories. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).		

Illustration: Cain Becomes the Seed of the Snake

GENESIS 3:15



Tale of Two Seeds. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

Biologically, Cain is “the seed of the woman,” but he becomes “the seed of the snake” by his choices. Based on this, does bloodline determine faithfulness? What can we expect from chosen families or chosen individuals in the rest of the Hebrew Bible?

Session 28: A Tale of Two Seeds

Key Takeaways

- Lemek's actions intensify and spread the destruction and bloodshed that began with Cain and the snake.
- Genesis 4 makes it clear that the theme of the two seeds from Genesis 3 will be an ongoing conflict.

From Cain to Seth: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 4:17-26

Birth Scene #2: Cain's City

17 **and Cain knew his wife**
and she conceived, and gave birth to Enoch;
and he built a city,
and called the name of the city "Enoch (חנוך • *khanok*)," according to the name of his son.
18 and to Enoch was born Irad,
and Irad birthed Mehuyael,
and Mehuyael birthed Methushael,
and Methushael birthed Lamech.

The Murderous Lamech

- a 19 and Lamech took for himself two wives:
b the name of the one was **Adah** ,
b' and the name of the other **Zillah** .
-
- a 20 and **Adah** gave birth to **Yabal** ;
b **he was the father** of those who **dwelt in tents and have livestock** .
a' 21 and his brother's name was **Yubal** ;
b' **he was the father** of all those who **play the lyre and pipe** .
a 22 and **Zillah** , she also gave birth to **Tubal-Cain** ,
b **the forger** of all implements **of bronze and iron** ;
c and the sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

23 and Lamech said to his wives,

- a " **Adah** of and **Zillah** , **listen to my voice**
- b wives of Lamech, **hear my speech**,
- a for I have killed a **man** **for wounding me** ;
- a' and a **boy** **for striking me** ;
- b 24 if Cain is avenged **seven times**,
- b' then Lamech **seventy-seven times**."

Birth Scene #3: God "Appoints" a Son

25 **and Adam knew his wife again**
and she gave birth to a son,
 and she named him " Seth (שֵׁת)," because,
 "God has appointed (שָׂת) me another seed in place of Abel, for Cain killed him."

26 and to Seth, to him also a son was born;
 and he called his name Enosh.
 then it was begun, to call on the name of Yahweh.

The Cain and Abel Story. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

The Murderous Lemek: 4:19-24

Lemek is the seventh generation from Adam through Cain, and his life culminates and distorts two God-given realities in the narrative.

1. God provides the woman for the human in Genesis 2, but Lemek takes two wives for himself.
2. God provides Cain with mercy and a mark of protection, but Lemek declares his own mark of protection.

Lemek has three sons from his two wives, and each is associated with the development of human civilization in important ways. All three sons' names are wordplays from two Semitic roots "water canal" (*yabal*) or "tribute offering" (*yobil/yubal*). Each of the three sons is titled the "father" of a cultural institution. The narrative is highlighting the origins of human civilization and its diverse institutions.

Son 1: *Yabal* (יָבָל)

Meaning of Name: "Stream, river" (see [Isa. 30:25](#); [44:4](#)) or "tribute, offering" (see [Zephaniah 3:10](#)). Description: "Father of those dwelling in tents and among herds" Cultural Institution: Animal husbandry on a mass scale

Son 2: *Yubal* (יֹובָל)

Meaning of Name: "Water course, canal" (see [Jer. 17:8](#)) or "tribute, offering" (see [Isa. 18:7](#)). Description: "Father of those using the harp and the flute" Cultural Institution: Musical art

Son 3: *Tubal-Cain* (תּוֹבֵל קַיִן)

Meaning of Name: “Tribute offering of Cain” Description: “Hammerer of those fashioning with iron and bronze” Cultural Institution: Metallurgy

This account would have stood in contrast to Israel’s surrounding neighbors and their accounts for the origins of animal husbandry, music, and metallurgy. These are all viewed as divine wisdom received from the gods.

“[T]he development of the arts of civilization in the ancient Near East was typically attributed to the gods. [In Mesopotamian mythology] they were introduced to the human race by the seven divine sages (called the apkallu). In the Myth of Inanna and Enki, the patron goddess of Uruk, attempts to procure the arts of civilization from Enki, the lord of Eridu. Among the ninety-four ‘arts’ mentioned in the text are offices such as kingship and priesthood; objects such as sword and quiver; actions such as running, kissing, and lovemaking; qualities such as heroism or dishonesty; and abstractions such as understanding and knowledge. But pertinent to this passage, the list also includes the craft of the coppersmith (along with other crafts), the resounding lute and the art of singing, and the sheepfold.”

Walton, John H. (2001). [*Genesis: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Vol. 1*](#). Zondervan Academic.

“In the end, city building was a divine enterprise. Within this tradition, city building was related to, and a part of, creation, because creation involved the establishment of the world as the Mesopotamians knew it—not only in terms of the physical cosmos, but also including the civilized aspect of the social and economic world. In contrast, Genesis sees city building in purely human terms.”

Walton, John H. (2001). [*Genesis: Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary Vol. 1*](#). Zondervan Academic.

“[T]he Mesopotamians believed that humankind was initially barbaric and primitive. Civilization, consisting of cities, kingship, arts, sciences and technology, among other things, was a gift from the gods, given to humans by the gods. Once humans received these civilizing elements from the gods, they moved beyond their initial state of primitivism and became civilized. For many of these cultural rudiments, the creator god and god of wisdom Enki is said to have passed them to humans, and the apkallu were often the instruments of this transmission. The Mesopotamians spoke of these cultural components as the M’E , a term used to quantify in concrete terms their conception of the various aspects of civilization.”

Lowry, Daniel D. (2013). [*Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1-11*](#). Eisenbrauns.

Lemek’s third son’s name, Tubal-Cain, is a reference to Cain the murderer. Additionally, Tubal-Cain is associated with metallurgy—information we are given right before his father’s murderous song infers an ominous and dark tone to Tubal-Cain’s “metal work.” This brings to mind a sword, which is precisely the interpretation offered in ancient Jewish tradition (see *Genesis Rabbah* 22:2-3).

The literary design of Genesis 4 leads the reader to view the advent of the city and metallurgy as highly ambiguous, or even negative, developments because of their association with the murderous violence of Cain and Lemek.

- 4:1-16: Cain’s murder of his brother is avenged seven times
 - 4:17: Cain’s son/city Enoch is a civilization that multiplies murder
 - 4:21-22: Lemek’s son Tubal-Cain creates a civilization that invents weapons

- 4:22-23: Lemek's murder of a young man is avenged seventy-seven times

Sinai Legislation Mirrors Genesis 4:23

Genesis 4:23 NIV*

I have killed a man for **wounding** (פצע) me;
and a young man for **bruising** me (חבורה).

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Exodus 21:23-25 Instructor's Translation

²³ But if there is any injury, then you shall assign: life for life, ²⁴ eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, ²⁵ burn for burn, **wound** for **wound** (פצע), **bruise** for **bruise** (חבורה).

Lemek has both exceeded the divinely ordained limit of retaliation and redefined the divine law by his own authority. It is interesting that both Cain and Lemek's murders and the consequences are defined in the language of the later Sinai covenant laws.

Birth of Cain and Abel 4:1-2	Cain Murders Abel 4:3-16	Cain's Family Line 4:17-18	Lemek Murders Another 4:19-24	Birth of Seth to Replace Abel 4:25-26
"And the human knew Eve his wife and she conceived and gave birth..."		And Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and gave birth..."		And human again knew his wife and she gave birth..."
Eve boasts in her "divine" power (4:1) to create a "man" (איש)			Lemek boasts in his "divine" authority (4:24) to kill a "man" (איש)	Eve humbly receives the gift of another son (4:25)
	Narrative of murder and remorse		Narrative of murder and celebration	
	Cain's response is described in terms of Sinai covenant law about cities of refuge: Deut		Lemek's response is described in terms of Sinai covenant law about retaliation: Exodus 21:25	

Cain's and Lemek's Response. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Birth of Cain and Abel 4:1-2	Cain Murders Abel 4:3-16	Cain's Family Line 4:17-18	Lemek Murders Another 4:19-24	Birth of Seth to Replace Abel 4:25-26
	19:10-12 Seven times		Seventy-seven times	
Child is named in relation to Yahweh (4:1)		City is named in relation to humans ("the name of his son" 4:17)		Child named in relation to God (4:26), resulting in true worship.
<i>Cain's and Lemek's Response.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).				

"Seventy-sevenfold [literally, 'seventy-seven'] /—that is, seventy-seven times as much. The number, needless to say, is not to be taken literally. Sevenfold means in perfect measure (see above, on v. 15); seventy-sevenfold signifies in overflowing measure, more than is due, many for one."

Cassuto, U. (1961). [*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis \(Part I\): from Adam to Noah*](#). Magnes Press.

"While Cain, Lamech's ancestor, would be avenged seven times over by God, Lamech takes it into his own hands to satisfy his desire for vengeance through a seventy-sevenfold retaliation. At this point, the principle of retributive justice is pushed to the point of becoming the caricature of itself. Moreover, there is a profound irony in Lamech's effrontery to refer to the divine protection of his ancestor Cain. As Lamech's 'immunity,' by contrast, is at the cost of unlimited violence, he has turned the divine grace to Cain into its ugly counterfeit ... Any trivial inconvenience is occasion for Lamech to yield to violence. What he demands is not an eye for an eye, but a life for a wound. Lamech's song is the last spasm, so to speak, of Cain's murder story ... bringing the horror of fratricide to its apex ... The clouds are gathering that will soon bring about the flood."

LaCocque, Andre (2008). [*Onslaught Against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist*](#). Cascade Books.

"Unlike his ancestor several generations earlier who felt the desperate need of divine protection, Lamech feels he is his own security. He can handle any difficulty or any mistreatment quite adequately by himself. If Cain is avenged only sevenfold, he will be avenged seventy-sevenfold. He has no scruples about taking the law into his own hands. Lamech's chief characteristics, in line with his irregular marriages, are not commendable. He is not only replete with a spirit of vindictiveness, but he is also a proud man who backs away from nobody and does not hesitate to kill anybody. Cain's mind-set now surfaces in his great-great-grandson."

Hamilton, Victor P. (1990). [*The Book of Genesis \(New International Commentary on the Old Testament Series\) 1-17*](#). Eerdmans.

"If Adah and Zillah watched with pride as their sons developed husbandry, music, and metalworking, they listened with horror to their husband's violent blood lust. Lamek's seventy-sevenfold vengeance stands in contrast with the law of talion which limits retaliation to exact equivalence (Exod. 21:25 "bruise for bruise," "hit for hit" echoes the terminology of Gen. 4:23 exactly). By placing this comment at the end of the story of Cain, the editor suggests that all his descendants are under judgment and hints at the disaster to come."

Wenham, Gordon J. (1987). [*Genesis 1-15 \(Word Biblical Commentary\)*](#). Thomas Nelson Inc.

Hope Reborn: The Arrival of Seth in Genesis 4:25-26

Genesis 4:25-26 Instructor's Translation

²⁵ And Adam knew his wife again, and she gave birth to a son, and she named him "Seth (שֵׁת)," because, "God has appointed (שָׂת) me another seed in place of Abel, for Cain killed him." ²⁶ And to Seth, to him also a son was born; and he called his name Enosh. Then it was begun, to call on the name of Yahweh.

In contrast to Cain's birth, which Eve attributed to her own creative powers ([Gen. 4:1-2](#)), and in contrast to Cain, who uses his son's name to memorialize his own city ([Gen. 4:17](#)), this chapter ends with a chastened Eve, who now highlights God's generosity in giving her another son to replace the murdered Abel (and, less directly, the exiled Cain).

This portrait of Seth as the substitute for Abel is crucial. It begins a design pattern motif that echoes from Genesis through 2 Kings.

- Seth is "in place of" (תחת) Abel
- The ram is offering "in place of" (תחת) Isaac
- Judah offers himself "in place of" (תחת) Benjamin

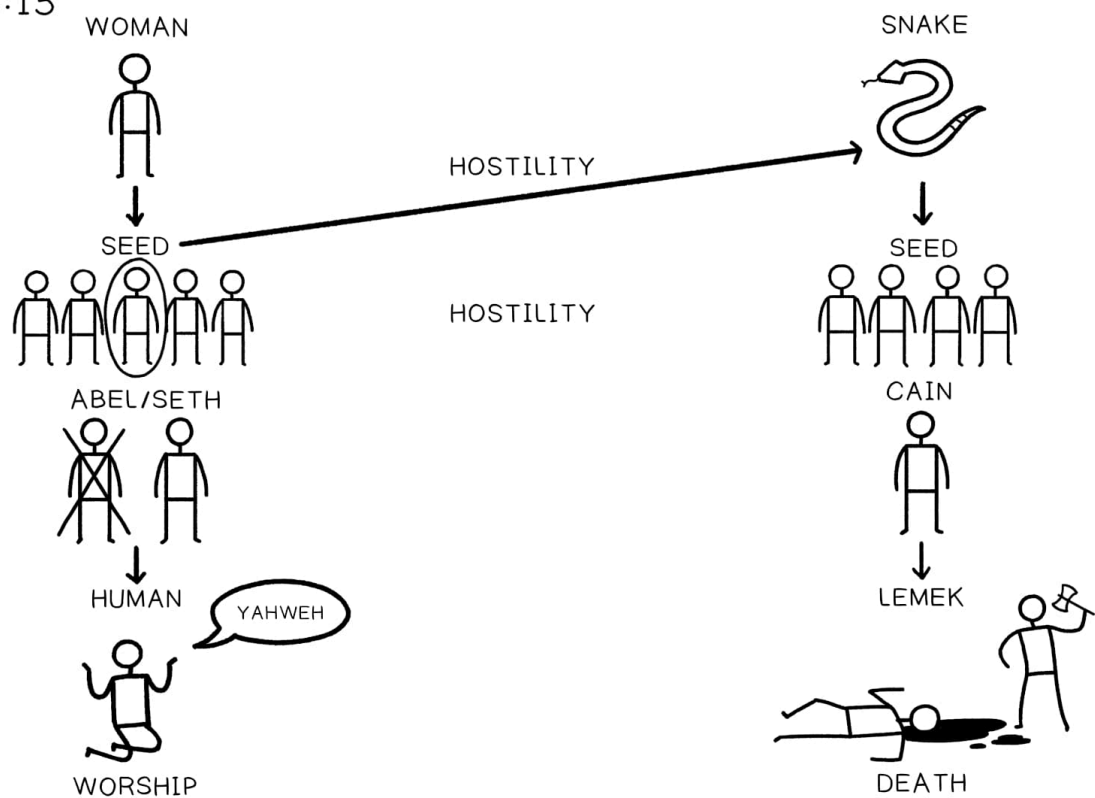
In contrast to Cain's son Enoch, Seth now has a son, Enosh (אֱנוֹשׁ), which means, "human." It's as if humanity gets a fresh start with Seth, which helps us understand the bright note on which this dark chapter concludes: the worship of Yahweh.

"The statement [is] saying that the worship of Yahweh began in the primeval time. With the birth of Seth, the child of promise, people started to invoke him. Beforehand, to be sure, Yahweh has intervened in the course of history ... But, properly speaking, no one had called on the name of God, that is, until the end of Genesis 4 there is no prayer ... Until Seth, it is here intimated, the humans had taken intercourse with the deity for granted ... With the advent of Seth, however, something has changed in the relationship ... the name of God can now be called upon for help and to honor ... What is of primordial import here is that ... the invocation of Yahweh preceded the advent of the people of Israel. It is a theological statement: Yahweh is the God of the whole of humanity ... Abram did not inaugurate the calling upon of Yahweh's name ... rather, Abram's conversion led him to join a chorus that began with Seth."

LaCocque, Andre (2008). [*Onslaught Against Innocence: Cain, Abel, and the Yahwist*](#). Cascade Books.

Illustration: Continuing the Tale of Two Seeds

GENESIS 3:15



Tale of Two Seeds Continued. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Comparing Cain’s Line and Seth’s Line

The two lines of Cain (Gen. 4:17-24) and Seth (Gen. 4:25-26, 5:1-32) are juxtaposed so that the reader notices all sorts of comparisons and contrasts.

Cain’s Line 4:17-24	Seth’s Line 4:25-26, 5:1-32
1. Adam (אדם)	0. God (+ repeat of 1:26-27) 1. Adam (אדם)
2. Cain (קין)	2. Seth (שֵׁת)
3. Enoch (חֵנוֹךְ)	3. Enosh (אֱנוֹשׁ = “humanity”)
4. Irad (עִירָד)	4. Kenan (קֵינָן)

Cain’s Line and Seth’s Line. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Cain's Line 4:17-24	Seth's Line 4:25-26, 5:1-32
5. Mehuya'el (מחויאל)	5. Mehalelel (מהללאל)
6. Methusha'el (מתושאל)	6. Yered (ירד)
7. Lemek I (למך) [70 x 7]	7. Enoch (חנוך = "dedicated")
8. Yabal	8. Methuselah (מתושלח)
9. Yubal	9. Lemek II (למך) [700 + 70 + 7yrs]
10. Tubal-Cain [= "Produce of Cain"] Three sons	10. Noah (נח) Three sons - Shem, Ham, Japheth
Lemek's perversion (4:23-24) Adam had 1 wife // Lemek has 2 wives Cain: divine blessing of 7x vengeance // Lemek: human curse of 7x + 70x vengeance	Lemek's promise (5:29) Noah (נח) will bring comfort (נחם) to our "painful toil" (עצבון) and the cursed ground (אדמה/אררה) → 3:17 Lemek lives 7 + 70 + 700 years.
Blessing becomes Curse	Curse becomes Blessing
Cain's Line and Seth's Line. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

"The effect of the whole of Genesis 5, is to replace Cain with Seth as the second father of humanity. The human race continued only through the lineage of Adam's third son, Seth, the descendants of his first son Cain presumably having perished in the flood ... Here we see a programmatic principle laid out ... as the people of Israel and its royal and priestly dynasties are not derived from their families first-born, but from late-born sons. The people are descended not from Ishmael and Esau, but from Isaac and Jacob. The royal line is derived from Jacob's fourth son, Judah, and from David and Solomon, none of whom are the first-born. The priesthood is derived from Levi, Jacob's third son, and the priest's third and fourth sons Ithamar and Eleazar, not Nadab and Abihu the first and second born. In Cain and Seth, we can see that the same principle pertains not only within the chosen family, but with universal humanity as a whole: humankind is descended not from Cain but from Seth, not from Adam and Eve's first son, but from their third ... In that case, Abel's death in the field is not final or irreversible, for upon it follows his assumption of the exalted status of ancestor of all who live. God's favor at the altar leads to more than fratricide. It leads also to the survival of the human family through the younger brother."

Levenson, Jon D. (1995). [*The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*](#). Yale University Press.

"The genealogy in Genesis 4:17-24 leading from Cain to Lamech, from one murderer to another, is by contrast an anti-genealogy, which expresses through the list the whole sequence of human decisions undertaken outside of the order established by God at creation. The use of the genealogy to link two murderers is highly ironic. Their actions in bringing life to an end contradict the whole logic of the genealogies, which normally record the orderly continuation of life from one generation to the next. The irony, in turn, highlights a fundamental theme in Genesis, that human sin stands in profound contradiction to the created order of God. Cain's and Lamech's murders subvert the very nature of genealogical succession, which rests on the command to be fruitful and multiply in Genesis 1:28. Significantly, the genealogy of Seth, which reasserts the created order, appears after the subversion of the genealogical order in chapter 4 so that the created order has the last word."

Robinson, Robert B. (1986). "The Literary Function of Genealogies in Genesis". *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* Vol. 48 (4). Catholic Biblical Association.

"[C]omparing the two genealogies in Gen 4 and Gen 5... confirms our suspicions regarding the negative light cast on the first in contrast to the positive of the second. [T]he final editor juxtaposes these two genealogies for communicative effect... a "genealogical doublet": Whatever the origins of the two lines . . . the texts of Genesis 4 and 5, and particularly the recurrent similarity in names, invite an examination of their relationship. The text attaches Cain's Enoch to a city but Seth's Enoch moves beyond human culture to the world of the divine. . . . Both Lamechs play pivotal roles in their lines and both have statements recorded in the text. But Cain's Lamech utters a cry of vengeance and with that terminates his line; while Seth's Lamech expresses the hope for a better life for his descendants, and with that introduces the offspring who will continue his line and play a role in trying to fulfill his wish."

Lowry, Daniel D. (2013). [*Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1-11*](#). Eisenbrauns.

Reflection Question

Compare and contrast Cain with Lamech. How are their actions similar? Describe the trajectory the story takes while following Cain's descendants.

Session 29: 10 Generations From Adam to Noah

Key Takeaways

- The genealogy of Genesis 5 shares some similarities with other ancient Near Eastern genealogies, but the way that this one differs makes a profound theological statement.
- Enoch is a hero in the biblical value system—not a great king or civilization builder but one who walks with God. The naming of Noah in Genesis 5 brings many of the preceding themes together as the story moves forward.

Ten Generations From Adam to Noah

After the humans are exiled from Eden, and after the drama that splits Adam and Eve’s family into two lines, the narrative reboots and begins again. This time, the genealogy follows the line of Seth, with Cain’s line having been concluded with Lemek and his sons. This genealogy has a highly schematic form, which makes the three narrative inserts stick out.

Generation	Verse	Person	Age
1	5:1-2, 3a	Narrative Insert	930yrs
	5:3-5	Adam	
2	5:6-8	Seth	912yrs
3	5:9-11	Enosh	905yrs
4	5:12-14	Cainan	910yrs
5	5:15-17	Mahalalel	895yrs
6	5:18-20	Yared	962yrs
7	5:21-24	Enoch	365yrs
Ten Generations from Adam to Noah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Generation	Verse	Person	Age
	5:22, 24	Narrative Insert	
8	5:25-27	Methuselah	969yrs
9	5:28-31	Lemek	777yrs
	5:29	Narrative Insert	
10	5:32	Noah	TBD...
Ten Generations from Adam to Noah. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).			

Ten Generations From Adam to Noah: Translation and Literary Design of Genesis 5:1-32

This genealogy lists 10 generations from Adam to Noah, each one given in an identical literary form:

*and __ **lived** __ years, and he caused the birth of [son's name]. and __ **lived** __ years after he caused the birth of [son's name], and he caused the birth of sons and daughters, and all the days of __ **were** __ years, and he died.*

There are three figures whose genealogical entry deviates from this form, and at precisely these three points, we find narrative inserts that highlight significant themes in Genesis. Pay special attention to Adam, Enoch, and Lemech/Noah.

Prologue

¹ This is the scroll of the generations of **Adam** ;
 In the day when Elohim created **humanity** ,
 he made him as the likeness of Elohim,
 male and female he created them,
 and he blessed them
 and he named them **'human'**
 in the day when they were created.

10 Generations

Adam

³ And Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years,

and he caused the birth of one

in his own likeness,
according to his image,
and named him Seth.

⁴ And the days of Adam after he caused the birth of Seth were eight hundred years,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

⁵ And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years,
and he died.

Seth

⁶ And Seth lived one hundred and five years,
and he caused the birth of Enosh.

⁷ And Seth lived eight hundred and seven years after he caused the birth of Enosh,
and he he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

⁸ and all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years,
and he died.

Enosh

⁹ And Enosh lived ninety years,
and he caused the birth of Cainan.

¹⁰ And Enosh lived eight hundred and fifteen years after he caused the birth of Cainan,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹¹ And all the days of Enosh were nine hundred and five years,
and he died.

Cainan

¹² And Cainan lived seventy years,
and he caused the birth of Mahalalel.

¹³ And Cainan lived eight hundred and forty years after he he caused the birth of Mahalalel,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹⁴ And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years,
and he died.

Mahalalel

¹⁵ And Mahalalel lived sixty-five years,
and he caused the birth of Jared.

¹⁶ And Mahalalel lived eight hundred and thirty years after he became the father of Jared,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

¹⁷ And all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred and ninety-five years,
and he died.

Yared

¹⁸ And Yared lived one hundred and sixty-two years,
and he caused the birth of Enoch.

¹⁹ And Yared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

²⁰ And all the days of Yared were nine hundred and sixty-two years,
and he died.

Enoch

²¹ And Enoch lived sixty-five years,
and he caused the birth of Methuselah,

²² and Enoch **walked with God three hundred years**

after he became the father of Methuselah,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

²³ and all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years,

²⁴ **and Enoch walked with God ;**

and he was not, for God took him .

Methuselah

²⁵ And Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years,
and he became the father of Lemek,

²⁶ and Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lemek,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters.

²⁷ And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years,
and he died.

Lemek

²⁸ And Lemek lived one hundred and eighty-two years,
and he caused the birth of a son,

²⁹ **and he called his name "Noah," saying,**

"This one will give us rest from our work

and from the toil of our hands from the ground

which the Lord has cursed."

²⁰ And Lemek lived five hundred and ninety-five years after he became the father of Noah,
and he caused the birth of sons and daughters,

³¹ and all the days of Lemek were seven hundred and seventy-seven years,
and he died.

Noah

³² And Noah was five hundred years old,
and Noah he caused the birth of Shem, Ham, and Japheth ...

Genesis 5:1-32. Translation and Literary Design by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

The Genealogy of Genesis 5 From an Ancient Near Eastern Perspective

It seems very probable that the author of Genesis has drawn upon ancient Mesopotamian traditions of the generations of humanity before the flood and strategically adapted them for his own theological and communication purposes.

There was a widespread belief in ancient Assyria and Babylon that the most ancient roots of civilization and kingship came from the gods from before the time of the flood. These traditions are expressed in a series of ancient texts called *The Sumerian King Lists*, which are found in multiple versions (see Jacobsen, Thorkild, *The Sumerian King Lists*, and VanderKam, James, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*).

The Sumerian King List Compared with Genesis 5

The Sumerian King Lists	Genesis 5
There are 10 kings from the creation of kingship to the flood and right after the flood.	There are 10 generations from Adam to the flood of Noah, who lives after the flood.
The first king, Alulim, is appointed by the oldest gods.	Adam and Eve (= ‘adam, “humanity”) is appointed as the royal image of God to rule all creation.
The final king is chosen to survive the flood.	Noah, the tenth, is chosen to survive the flood.
The 10 kings rule for hyperbolically long periods of time (two versions are based on WB 62 and WB 444; see Jacobsen, <i>The Sumerian King Lists</i>, 70-77). Alulim - 67,200 or 28,800 Alalgar - 72,000 or 36,000 Kidunnu - 72,000 or 43,200 Alimma - 21,600 or 28,800 Dumuzi - 21,600 or 36,000 Enmenluanna - 21,600 or 28,800 Enmeduranki - 36,000 or 21,000 Enmeduranna - 72,000 or 18,000 Ubartutu - 28,000 or [NA] Ziusudra - 36,000 or [NA]	The 10 patriarchs live for long periods of time Adam - 930 years Seth - 912 years Enosh - 905 years Qenan - 910 years Mahalalel - 895 years Yared - 962 years Enoch - 365 years Methushelah - 969 years Lemek - 777 years Noah - 950 years
<i>Similarities Between the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).	

The Sumerian King Lists	Genesis 5
The seventh king, Enmeduranki, is brought up into the divine assembly and has a unique role among the gods.	The seventh patriarch, Enoch, does not die but is translated to God’s realm because of his special relationship with God.
<i>Similarities Between the Sumerian King List and Genesis 5. Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).</i>	

This last connection between Enoch and Enmeduranki is important and has been the focus of much scholarship (see VanderKam, James, *Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition*).

Enmeduranki is the seventh king who ruled in the ancient city of Sippar, and whose patron deity was Shamash, the sun deity. Enoch is the seventh generation listed in Genesis 5, and his curiously shorter life corresponds exactly to the days of the solar year: 365.

Enmeduranki passed on traditions of divination and techniques for discerning the will of the gods. He received this ability because of a special experience he is said to have had.

“Shamash [the sun-god] in Ebabbarra [appointed] Enmeduranki [king of Sippar], the beloved of Anu, Enlil, [and Ea]. Shamash and Adad [the storm-god] brought him into their assembly, they honored him, and they set him on a large throne of gold ... they gave him the tablet of the gods ... a secret of heaven and the underworld ... He is the learned sage, who guards the secrets of the great gods ...”

Lambert, W. G. (1967). *"Enmeduranki and Related Matters"*. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 21. The University of Chicago Press.

This text from the 12th century B.C. goes on to state that Enmeduranki was the founder of the guild of Mesopotamian diviners, who were able discern the will of the gods. He was elevated to the divine realm and given secret knowledge of the gods, which was inscribed in texts that he then passes onto his descendants in Nippur, Sippar, and Babylon.

In the same period of the 12th century, Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, makes a public claim that he is the descendant of Enmeduranki.

“[I am] distant heir of kingship, of seed preserved from before the flood, offspring of Enmeduranki, king of Sippar ... who sat in the presence of Shamash and Adad, the divine judges ...”

Lambert, W. G. (1967). *"Enmeduranki and Related Matters"*. *Journal of Cuneiform Studies*, Vol. 21. The University of Chicago Press.

These traditions have a clear similarity to the traditions of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, who has a close association with God and is “taken” into the divine realm of eternal life. However, the role of Enoch in the story of Genesis has been strategically adapted to the theological message of the author, who is making a very different set of claims, ones that outshine the claim of Nebuchadnezzar!

While these traditions are hinted at in [Genesis 5:21-24](#), it is clear that there was also a larger set of ancient traditions about Enoch as the master sage elevated to the divine realm, where he learned divine mysteries and revealed them to his son Methuselah. These traditions are found in the texts compiled together in 1 Enoch and 2 Enoch.

“Every indicator points to the conclusion that the author of [1 Enoch chs. 72-82] has fixed in writing a very old state ... of Enochic lore ... By presenting the seventh biblical patriarch as the person to whom God chose to reveal astronomical information, the writer ranks Enoch alongside other culture heroes from the various peoples of the ancient world. There was a widespread belief in the ancient Near East, and in the classical world, that knowledge about the sun, moon, and stars had been divulged to special individuals at the dawn of history. And here Enoch is set among their ranks.”

VanderKam, James C. (1984). [Enoch and the Growth of an Apocalyptic Tradition](#). Catholic Biblical Association.

Conclusions About Genesis 5 and *The Sumerian King List*

It appears that the author of Genesis 5 is adapting a common Mesopotamian tradition about the 10 generations from the origins of kingship to the flood. At each step, the story launches an implicit critique of Babylon's claim to divine origins and offers an alternative story instead.

The gods of Babylon did not originate humanity or kingship. Rather, Yahweh, the God of Israel, created “humanity” (*adam*) as male and female in God's image. All humanity was made to rule. The fantastically long reigns of the Sumerian kings were literary images of their divine nature and rule. In contrast, the long lives of the patriarchs in Genesis 5 are all ended by death. This is part of a strategy showing that the loss of Eden and the increasing distance and alienation from the creator results in the diminishment of life. The seventh king, Enmeduranki, was elevated to the realm of the gods, where he became the source of secret divine knowledge given to the elite Babylonian diviners. In contrast, the seventh patriarch of Genesis 5, Enoch, is unique for his piety and communion with God, which results in his evasion of death and the gift of eternal life in Eden.

Genesis 5 is an Israelite version of the concepts being expressed in *The Sumerian King List* that claimed divine authority for Babylon's kings. The biblical author subverts those claims and offers a revisionist version, which places Israel's origins within these royal-priestly patriarchs, whose stories foreshadow the unique role that Israel will play among the nations later on in the story.

- The king and high priest will become “new Adams,” and they will restore Eden through their royal and priestly ministries.
- The priests will embody a “new Enoch,” and they will “walk with God” in the temple on behalf of Israel and open the way to eternal life in the holy of holies.
- Moses, the priests, and David will embody “new Noahs,” and they will call out to God in the midst of divine judgment and be delivered so that they can offer intercession on behalf of others.

Adam, Seth, and the Image of God

In Genesis 5:1-3, we are shown that the promised line of the seed will be carried on through Seth, Adam and Eve's third son.

Genesis 5:1-3 ESV*

¹ This is the scroll of the generations of ‘adam: In the day when God created ‘adam, **in the likeness of God** he made him, ² male and female he created them, and he blessed them, and he named them ‘adam in the day when they were created. ³ And Adam had lived one hundred and thirty years, and he became the father of a son **in his own likeness, according to his image**, and named him Seth.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Notice that ‘adam’s relationship to God is described as “image and likeness,” and this recalls all of the meaning and significance of [Genesis 1:26-28](#). Now, here in Genesis 5:1-3, Seth is described as his father’s image and likeness, on analogy to Adam’s relationship to God. The analogy illuminates two significant points for the rest of the biblical story.

Son of God = Image of God

If Seth is the “son of Adam” and can be called the image of Adam, then ‘adam too can be thought of as the “son of God,” which becomes a synonym for “image of God.”

Flash Forward: Notice that Luke’s genealogy of Jesus is constructed on this very conviction, tracing Jesus as the “son of God” all the way back to Adam as a “son of God” ([Luke 3:23-38](#)).

This set of ideas in Genesis 1-5 formed the template for later narratives in the Hebrew Bible that depict certain human rulers as “new Adams,” who are given a chance to be the “image of God” and rule the world on God’s behalf, overcoming the forces of animal-like chaos in the world.

The Unique Role of Enoch in Genesis 5

Enoch lives the shortest time span of all 10 patriarchs in Genesis 5—in fact, he is placed between the two longest-living figures in the genealogy, Jared and Methuselah.

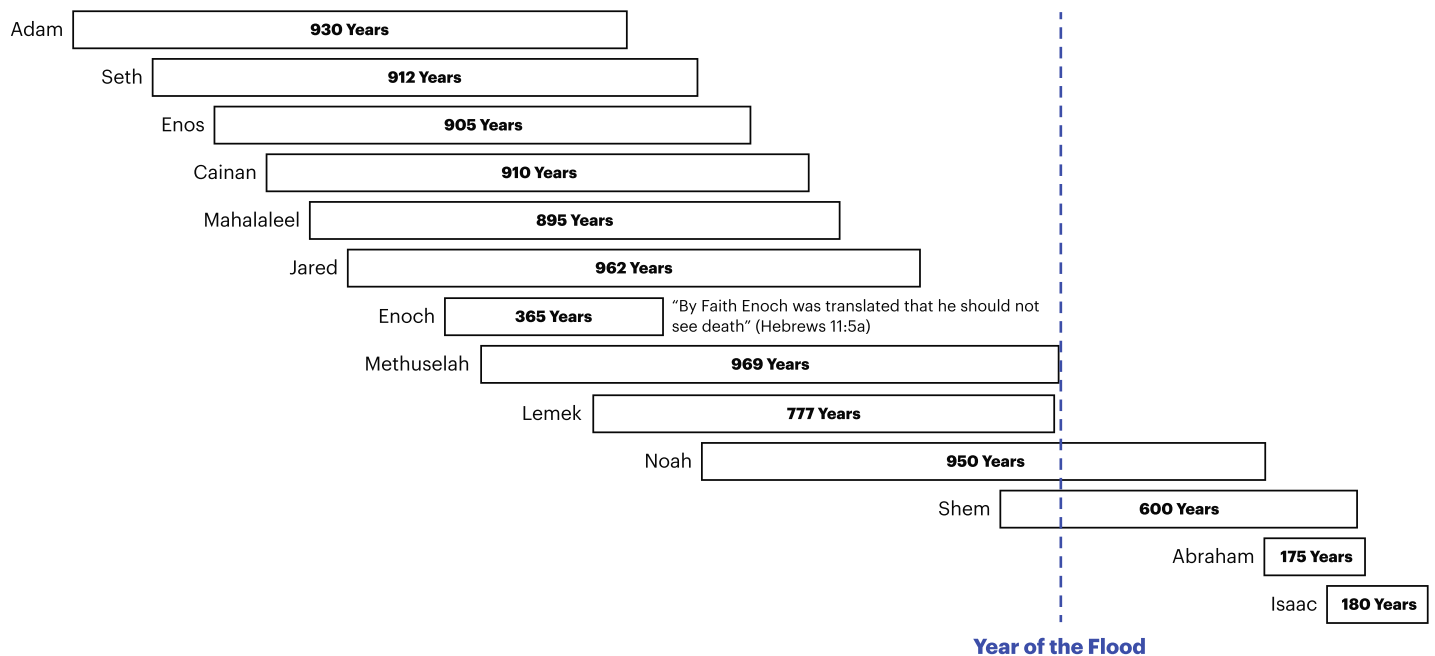
Verse	Person	Time
Gen 5:3	Adam	130 + 800 = 930
Gen 5:6	Seth	105 + 807 = 912
Gen 5:9	Enosh	90 + 815 = 905
Gen 5:12	Kenan	70 + 840 = 910

The Unique Role of Enoch in Genesis 5. Adapted from Hughes, Jeremy (2009). *Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology*. Sheffield Academic Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Verse	Person	Time
Gen 5:15	Mahalalel	$65 + 830 = 895$
Gen 5:18	Jared	$162 + 800 = 962$
Gen 5:21	Enoch	$65 + 300 = 365$
Gen 5:25	Methuselah	$187 + 782 = 969$
Gen 5:28	Lamech	$182 + 595 = 777$
Gen 5:32	Noah	500
Gen 7:6; 9:28	Age of Flood	$600 + 350 = 950$
<i>The Unique Role of Enoch in Genesis 5.</i> Adapted from Hughes, Jeremy (2009). <i>Secrets of the Times: Myth and History in Biblical Chronology</i> . Sheffield Academic Press. By BibleProject for Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

If we follow the numbers of the years for each of the patriarchs and notice when he had children, a fascinating fact becomes clear.

All of the patriarchs who came before Enoch were still alive when he was born, and Enoch was born 622 years after Adam and Eve's creation according to the Masoretic Hebrew chronology in Genesis 5. This means that among all of the patriarchs, including Adam, Enoch is singled out as the one who "walked with God" in a unique way. There is something superior about Enoch and his relationship to God that is, apparently, not true of his ancestors.



Overlap of the Lifespans of the Patriarchs. Created by Tim Mackie adapted from viz.bible for BibleProject Classroom Adam to Noah (2020).

In Genesis 5:18-27, Enoch's story is modeled after all the others but differs at two strategic points.

Jared	Enoch	Methuselah
Gen 5:18 and Jared lived one hundred and sixty-two years,	Gen 5:21 and Enoch lived sixty-five years,	Gen 5:25 and Methuselah lived one hundred and eighty-seven years,
and became the father of Enoch.	and became the father of Methuselah.	and became the father of Lamech.
Gen 5:19 and Jared lived eight hundred years after he became the father of Enoch,	Gen 5:22 and Enoch walked with God three hundred years after he became the father of Methuselah,	Gen 5:26 Then Methuselah lived seven hundred and eighty-two years after he became the father of Lamech,
and he had sons and daughters.	and he had sons and daughters.	and he had sons and daughters.
Gen 5:20 and all the days of Jared were nine hundred and sixty-two years,	Gen 5:23 and all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years.	Gen 5:27 So all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred and sixty-nine years,
<i>How Enoch Breaks the Pattern.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

Jared	Enoch	Methuselah
and he died .	Gen 5:24 and Enoch walked with God ; and he was no more , for God took him.	and he died .
<i>How Enoch Breaks the Pattern.</i> Created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).		

- Notice how Jared and Methuselah’s “living” is in parallel with Enoch’s “walking with God.” This sets up an analogy between life and union with God—walking with God is true life.
- Notice also that Jared and Methuselah’s “death” is contrasted with Enoch’s “was not, for God took him.” If one’s life is defined by a close union with the author of life, then Enoch’s “being taken” is not death but transformation into a new mode of existence.
- Notice also the double repetition of the phrase “Enoch walked with God.” The first statement in 5:22 makes clear that this was his pattern of life for all 300 years, while the second statement in 5:24 implies that it was this special relationship with God that was connected to his “departure.”

Why Enoch, the Seventh from Adam?

- In Hebrew, “*enoch*” (חֲנוּךְ) means “dedicated” (used as a verb in [Deuteronomy 20:5](#) and [1 Kings 8:63](#), both about “dedicating” a house or temple).
- Enoch’s total age surely has symbolic significance: 365 years is the same as a solar calendar year.
- Enoch’s piety is linked to that of Adam and Eve’s in the garden of Eden and sets a pattern for later characters to attain.

Genesis 3:6, 8 Instructor's Translation

And [Eve] **took** (לָקַח) from its fruit and she ate ... And [Adam and Eve] heard the voice of Yahweh **walking** (מִתְהַלֵּךְ) in the garden.

Genesis 5:22, 25 Instructor's Translation

And Enoch **walked** (וַיִּתְחַלֵּךְ) with the-*elohim* ... And Enoch **walked** (וַיִּתְהַלֵּךְ) with the-*elohim*, and he was not, because *Elohim* **took** (לָקַח) him.”

Enoch’s way of life embodies the communion with God that Adam and Eve experienced and forfeited in the garden. Notice also the inversion of “taking.” Adam and Eve’s “taking” results in the loss of walking with God, while Enoch’s walking with God results in his being “taken.”

What Does It Mean to “Walk with God”?

This phrase is used of Noah in Genesis 6:8-9. And in 1 Samuel 25:15-16, the phrase is used to refer to friendly and close contact between people.

Genesis 6:8-9 NIV

⁸ But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. ⁹ These are the records of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his time; Noah **walked with God**.

1 Samuel 25:14-16 NASB

¹⁴ But one of the young men told Abigail, Nabal's wife, saying, "Behold, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, and he scorned them. ¹⁵ Yet the men were very good to us, and we were not insulted, nor did we miss anything as long as we **walked with them**, while we were in the fields. ¹⁶ They were a wall to us both by night and by day, all the time we were with them tending the sheep."

"[T]he meaning of the phrase ... is obvious from 1 Samuel 25:15-16, where it describes friendly everyday conduct with regard to one's neighbors. The [author of Genesis 5] understood the words in the sense that Enoch stood in a direct and immediate relationship to God ... and so was entrusted with God's plans and intentions. This is the starting point for the significance that the figure of Enoch had in a tradition that began early and reached its fullness only in the Apocalyptic literature."

Westermann, Claus (1990). [*Genesis 1-11: Continental Commentaries*](#). Fortress Press.

"With Elohim"

Although it is not reflected in English, the word *elohim* in 5:22 and 5:24 has the definite article "the" in front of it (האלהים). The phrase "the *elohim*" can be used to refer to the single deity Yahweh, but it can also be a way of referring to spiritual beings, members of the divine council, or angels (Ps. 8:6; 82:1; 97:7; 138:1).

Notice also that in the phrase "for God took him," the word *elohim* does not have the definite article (כי לקח אתו אלהים). In other words, Enoch walks with the *elohim*, and so *Elohim* takes him.

This distinction seems like a meaningful one: Enoch's life was marked by friendly and intimate relations with the beings of the spiritual realm (the *elohim*), and so the chief *Elohim* (named Yahweh later in the story) takes him.

This was how the story was universally understood in ancient Judaism (see 1 Enoch, or 2 Enoch).

"And he walked with the *elohim*, and he was not, because God took him."

In the middle of a genealogy that focuses on death as the sad curtain-closer on God's blessing for life, Enoch's evasion of death in the seventh generation sticks out. He is marked as the seventh (i.e. complete) human whose allegiance and union with God results in eternal life.

The word "took" (לקח) is a reference back to Genesis 2:15, where God "took" the human he had created and "rested" (wordplay on Noah's name: וינחהו) him in the garden. Enoch is set in analogy to the human of Genesis 2, that is, Enoch is transferred to the garden of Eden, the realm of eternal life. This is how the earliest interpretation of the Enoch story goes, preserved in 1 Enoch chapters 24-32, in which Enoch is taken up in the Spirit and tours the cosmos until he arrives in Eden, the mountain of God.

Notice that the phrase is repeated in 5:22 and also in 5:24, which speaks of his "removal." This indicates that Enoch had close relationships with the *elohim* during his 365 years and presumably after his relocation to another realm.

In a later story modeled after Enoch's divine disappearance, Elijah's departure happens in a similar way and with similar vocabulary.

2 Kings 2:9-11 NASB

⁹ When they had crossed over, Elijah said to Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for you before **I am taken** from you." And Elisha said, "Please, let a double portion of your spirit be upon me." ¹⁰ He said, "You have asked a hard thing. Nevertheless, if you see me when **I am taken** from you, it shall be so for you; but if not, it shall not be so." ¹¹ As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire, which separated the two of them. And **Elijah went up in a storm to the heavens**.

The rainbow is a sign of God's judgment and rescue.

Psalms 49:15 KJV*

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for **he will take me**.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

The parallels between Adam and Enoch's being "taken" to Eden where they "walk with God" and the later design pattern of Elijah's departure suggest that Enoch is "taken" to Eden, the cosmic mountain in the skies. This is the primary image of "the heavens," where God's space and human space are one. This is how Enoch is portrayed in Jewish literature outside the Hebrew Bible (see 1 Enoch 14, 71; 2 Enoch).

"The passage, to be sure, gives the impression of being only a brief reference to a much more extensive tradition; it is an open question, therefore, whether much of the apocalyptic Enoch tradition is not really very old and precedes in time (not follows) the Priestly narrative."

von Rad, Gerhard; Trans: Marks, John H (1973). [*Genesis: A Commentary, Revised Edition*](#). John Knox Press.

Noah As the Promised "Comforter" of Humanity in Genesis 5

Lemek's anticipation of a future descendant in Genesis 5:29 who will bring an end to the curse picks up the macro theme of humanity's exile from Eden and the curse of death and the promise of a coming "seed" who will overcome the snake and its work.

Every line of Lemek's words has significant hyperlinks back to various texts in Genesis 1-3:

Genesis 5:29 NASB*

And he called his name "**Noah** (נח)," saying, "This one will give us **comfort** (נחם) from our work (מעשה) and from the **painful toil** (עצבון) of our hands, from the **ground** (האדמה) which the Lord has **cursed** (אררה)."

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

Noah's name is given significant theological meaning by means of wordplay.

"Noah" (נח) // "rest" (נוח) // "comfort" (נחם)

Noah's name is spelled like the word "rest," and it rhymes with the first two letters of the word "comfort."

Genesis 2:15 Instructor's Translation

And Yahweh *Elohim* took the human and he **rested him** (וינחהו) in the garden of Eden, to work it (עבד) and to keep it.

Genesis 3:17, 19 Instructor's Translation

Cursed is the **ground** (ארורה האדמה) because of you, with **painful toil** (עצבון) you will from it ...until you return to the **ground** (האדמה), for from it you were taken ...

Genesis 3:23 Instructor's Translation

And Yahweh *Elohim* sent him out from the garden of Eden to work (עבד) the **ground** (האדמה) from which he was taken ...

By means of this association, Noah's role in the story is previewed and given a theological interpretation. His obedient actions and his role as the surviving remnant in the generation of the flood are the ways that God is bringing rest and comfort to his world.

- **Rest (נוח)** is a major theological theme in the TaNaK, as it is often used to describe the restoration of Eden conditions on Earth as in Heaven. When God brings rest, it involves restoring a realm of order and sacred space where God can dwell with his people (Deut. 3:20; 12:10; Josh. 1:13; 21:44; 2 Sam. 7:1-11; 1 Kings 5:18).
- **Comfort (נחם)** is a major theme in the Prophets, especially Isaiah, and it describes the era of restoration when the failure of God's people is forgiven, their exile is over, and God renews the covenant with them in a restored Eden.

All of this points forward to Noah's crucial act of worship and obedience as he emerges from the ark in Genesis 8:20-22. In the narrative arc of Genesis 2-9, Noah is placed before the reader as an image of the promised seed of Genesis 3:15.

He is the righteous seed who passes the test through obedience to God's will and survives as a remnant through the waters of death to offer a precious sacrifice. This qualifies him to become the new humanity at the helm of a renewed creation that lives in a new covenant relationship with its creator. This narrative forms the thematic template for every single story to follow in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.

The Abraham Story

- Called out of Ur of the Chaldeans
- Given the promise of blessing and for all nations
- Fails many of his tests
- Passes the ultimate test by offering a sacrifice
- His sacrifice releases God's covenant blessing to all nations

The Moses Story

- Rescued in an "ark" through the waters of death

- Leads Israel to offer the Passover lamb
- God leads all the people through the waters to dry land
- Mediates a covenant with Israel to be priests for the nations
- Israel fails its test, but Moses offers himself as a sacrifice
- God comes to take up residence with his people in a micro-Eden

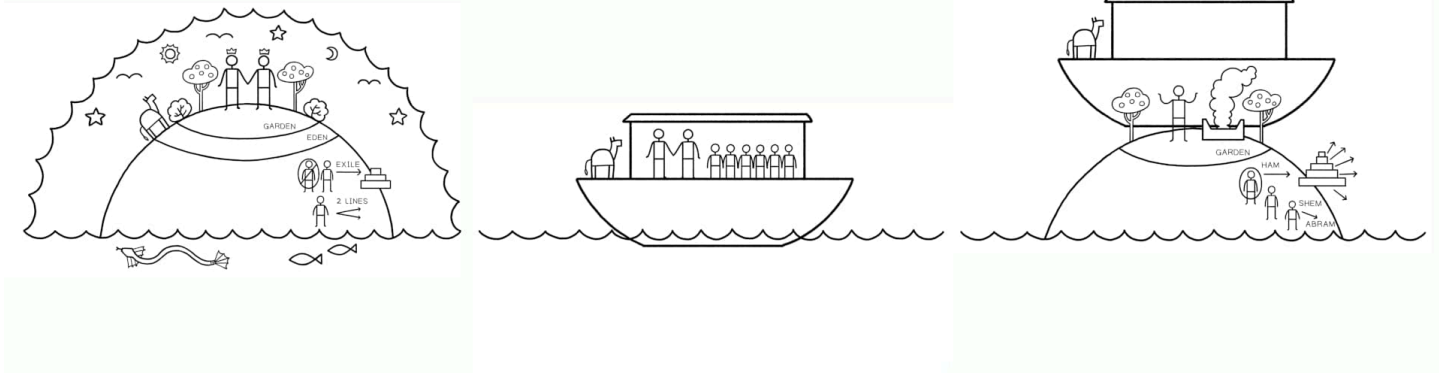
The Story of Judah and Exile

- Joshua leads the people to subdue the land of rest
- The people are given rest in the land
- The Israelites fail their many tests in the land and are exiled
- An obedient remnant survives exile and receives a message of comfort and restoration
- Restoration comes through the obedient self-sacrifice of the servant
- The servant's obedience unto death released blessing and new covenant to the nations

The Story of Jesus

- A new Joshua who will lead Israel into the new creation
- Jesus warns of a great flood of divine justice that is coming to Israel
- Jesus offers himself as a sacrifice, suffering the flood of exile and death
- Jesus' obedience unto death leads to resurrection life and releases blessing and a new covenant for all nations

Illustration: Preview of the Biblical Story Through Adam to Noah



Preview of the Biblical Story Through Adam to Noah. Illustration created by Tim Mackie for BibleProject Classroom: Adam to Noah (2020).

Reflection Question

What is the difference between Enmeduranki, a hero of the Sumarian King List, and Enoch, the corresponding character in the Genesis 5 genealogy?



Module 6: Engaging with Genesis 2-5 Today

SESSIONS 30-32

Evaluate a few of the common questions modern readers have when they come to these stories and learn helpful perspectives that guide these inquiries.

Session 30: How Biblical Authors Tell the Truth

Key Takeaways

- The biblical authors thought “imagistically” and used imagery, symbolism, and imagination to talk about the reality of the world.
- Imagistic narrative is not mythological.

The Eden Story As Imagistic Narrative (Not Mythology)

“[The debate about the literary style of Genesis 1-11] goes beyond the labeling of a genre of literature; it concerns the process by which literature of any genre is conceived and composed. The ancients think differently; they perceive the world in different ways, with different categories and priorities than we do.

In our culture, we think ‘scientifically.’ We are primarily concerned with causation, composition, and systematization. In the ancient world, they are more likely to think of the world in terms of symbols and to express their understanding by means of imagery. We are primarily interested in events and material realia whereas they are more interested in ideas and their representation.

[To describe this way of representing history] the word group image/imagery/imagination/imaginative would work well (though imaginary would be incorrect). A rhetoric using mythical imagery is easily discernible in biblical poetry (e.g., “from the heavens the stars fought” or “crushed the heads of Leviathan” [Ps. 74:14]), and it becomes formalized in the genre of apocalyptic. Nevertheless, it is not absent from prose. To describe this sort of thinking, I would like to adapt the term ‘imagistic.’

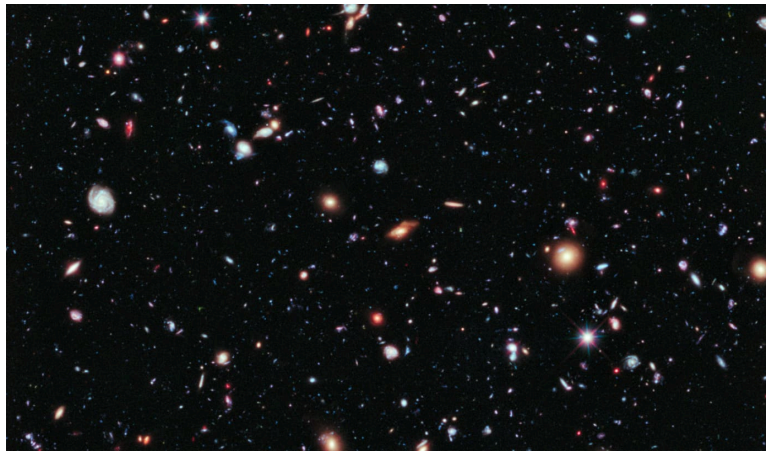
Rather than attempting to define it, in accordance with true imagistic thinking, I will instead describe it by illustrations. Imagistic thinking and representation would stand in contrast to scientific or analytical thinking. We can see the difference if we compare two visual representations of the night sky—one taken by the Hubble telescope, the other presented by Vincent van Gogh’s *The Starry Night*. People would never consider doing astronomy from the van Gogh and could not do so even if they wanted to; the image contains nothing of the composition or position of stars. At the same time, we would not say that it is a false depiction of the night sky. Visual artists depict the world imagistically, and we recognize that this depiction is independent of science, but not independent of truth. The ancients apply this same imagistic conception to all genres of literature, including those that we cannot conceive of as anything other than scientific. Imagistic history, like that preserved in Genesis, is to history as *The Starry Night* is to a Hubble photograph.

Imagistic thinking presents difficulties [for modern people]. Israelites found no problems thinking about Ezekiel’s vision of Egypt as a cosmic tree (Ezek. 31). This does not warrant labeling the literature mythology, nor does it concern questions of reality or truth. Some might consider the trees, the garden and the snake to be examples of imagistic thinking without thereby denying reality and truth to the account. The author

understands trees in a way that does not simply indicate a botanical species of flora with remarkable chemical properties. When we put these elements in their ancient Near Eastern context and recognize the Israelite capacity, and even propensity, to think in imagistic terms, we may find that we gain a deeper understanding of important theological realities.

Some scholars today believe that Israel was in the habit of borrowing other people's myths and transforming them into a mythology of their own. I do not share that perspective. What is sometimes perceived as a shared mythology is more often a shared propensity to think imagistically about the same issues using a shared symbolic vocabulary."

Walton, John H. (2015). *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*. IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.



Hubble Telescope (2009). *Hubble Deep Field Image*. [Wikimedia Commons](#).



van Gogh, Vincent (1889). *The Starry Night*. [Wikimedia Commons](#).

Reflection Question

Summarize what John Walton means when he says Hebrew Bible narrative is “imagistic.” Does Walton’s description help you understand Genesis better?

Session 31: Discussing Different Ways of Representing Reality

Key Takeaways

- We use various, equally valid forms of communication to tell the truth, even when talking about the same thing.

In this session, we discuss the John Walton quote in session 30 and its implications for interpreting the early chapters of Genesis.



This session has no notes

Reflection Question

What are your biggest challenges or questions when reading Genesis? Has this discussion helped you resolve some of those challenges or at least hold them in tension with the message of the biblical authors?

Session 32: Views on the Historical Adam

Key Takeaways

- View of Historicity #1 Literary Symbolic: Adam and Eve are purely literary figures in a divinely-inspired story.
- View of Historicity #2 First Ancestor: Adam and Eve are two actual people, specially created by God in precisely the way the text describes, and they are the first ancestors of all humans.
- View of Historicity #3 Archetypal, First Ancestor of All Humanity: Adam and Eve are both the archetypal representatives and the first biological ancestors of all human beings, but the narratives are told in the style and imagery of ancient Hebrew culture.
- View of Historicity #4 Archetypal Representative of All Humanity: Adam and Eve are real archetypal representatives of humanity, but not necessarily the first biological ancestors. The narrative refers to a “real” history through the image-expressive medium of Hebrew literature.

The Historical Adam and Eve Debate

The debates about the historicity of Genesis 1-3 are not simply about how to interpret an ancient text. They are animated by concern to protect and promote the good news about Jesus that presents itself as a solution to the problems introduced in Genesis 1-3. The two most common underlying issues are:

1. Concern for the historical truthfulness of the Bible’s narratives.
2. Concern for the integrity of the good news about Jesus that his life, death, and resurrection brought about a divine rescue from a terrible fate that traps all humanity.

The Historical Truthfulness of the Bible’s Narratives

The modern debates often equate historical truthfulness with a common sense, literal reading of Genesis 1-3 in English. In other words, they don’t always honor the ancient historical and cultural context of the narratives and what the authors mean to communicate in Hebrew.

We should care more about the literary meaning, defined as the meaning intended by the ancient author within their own context. When we do this, we find that a spectrum of views are currently put forward by scholars who all embrace orthodox Christian beliefs and hold the conviction that the Scriptures are the result of divine inspiration.

Four Interpretive Views on the Historical Adam and Eve

View 1: The Literary Symbolic View

In this view, Adam and Eve are purely literary figures in a divinely inspired story meant to prefigure the identity and failure of all the following failure narratives in the Bible. Therefore, the Eden story is intended as a parable prologue to the rest of the biblical story, and Adam and Eve are symbols of the patriarchs and matriarchs of Genesis, and of the Israelites in the promised land.

Representatives of the Literary Symbolic View

- Harlow, Daniel (2010). "After Adam: Reading Genesis in an Age of Evolutionary Science." *Perspectives on Science and Christian Faith*, vol. 62 (p. 179-195).
- Enns, Peter (2021). [*The Evolution of Adam: What the Bible Does and Doesn't Say about Human Origins*](#). Brazos Press.
- Lamoureux, Denis (2008). [*Evolutionary Creation: A Christian Approach to Evolution*](#). Lutterworth Press.
- McKnight, Scot; Venema, Dennis R. (2017). [*Adam and the Genome: Reading Scripture after Genetic Science*](#). Brazos Press.
- Collins, Francis S. (2007). [*The Language of God: A Scientist Presents Evidence for Belief*](#). Free Press.

View 2: The First Ancestor View

In this view, Adam and Eve are two actual people, specially created ("de novo") by God in precisely the way the text describes, and apart from any previous hominid ancestors. They are also the actual first ancestors of all following human beings. Therefore, the Eden narratives do not contain metaphorical imagery or symbolism but are offering a description of what actually happened at the origins of the human race on planet earth.

Representatives of the First Ancestor View

- Barrick, William D. (2013). "The Historical Adam: A Young-Earth Creation View." [*Four Views on the Historical Adam*](#). Zondervan Academic.
- DeYoung, Kevin (2012). [*Ten Reasons To Believe in a Historical Adam*](#). The Gospel Coalition.

View 3: The Archetypal, First Ancestor of All Humanity

In this view, Adam and Eve are both the archetypal representatives and the first biological ancestors of all human beings, but the narratives are told in the style and imagery of ancient Hebrew culture. We should not assume a simple reference between textual imagery and what we might consider historical reality.

Representatives of the Archetypal, First Ancestor of All Humanity View

- Collins, C. John (2011). [*Did Adam and Eve Really Exist?: Who They Were and Why You Should Care*](#). Crossway.
- Stone, William (2014). "Adam and Modern Science." [*Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin: Theological, Biblical, and Scientific Perspectives*](#). Baker Academic.
- Rana, Fazale; Ross, Hugh (2005). [*Who Was Adam? A Creation Model Approach to the Origin of Man*](#). NavPress Publishing Group.

View 4: The Archetypal Representative of All Humanity

In this view, Adam and Eve are real archetypal representatives of humanity, but not necessarily the first biological ancestors. The narratives are told in the ancient Hebrew style that uses imagery and metaphor to communicate truths about history. The narrative refers to a “real” history through an image-expressive medium.

Representatives of the Archetypal Representative of All Humanity View

- Walton, John H. (2015). [*The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate*](#). IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press.
- Kidner, Derek (2008). [*Genesis \(Tyndale Old Testament Commentary\)*](#). IVP Academic.
- McNall, Joshua (2019). “Where Are You, Adam? Recapitulation and the Human Origins Debate.” [*The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work*](#). Zondervan Academic.

How Do These Views Impact Our Understanding of Jesus?

Does the integrity of the good news about Jesus depend on a first ancestor Adam and Eve or on a representative Adam and Eve? This is a concern for some, so let’s unpack it.

In the New Testament, Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection is portrayed as a divine resolution to the problems of death and sin that began in the Adam and Eve story. Luke presents the baptism and mission of Jesus ([Luke 3:1-22](#); [4:1-44](#)) with a genealogy that traces his lineage back to Adam and God ([Luke 3:23-38](#)). In Romans 5:12-21, Paul presents Jesus as a second Adam.

Romans 5:12-21 NASB*

¹² Therefore, just as **through one human sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all humans, because all sinned ...** ¹³ For until the law, sin was in the world, but sin is not imputed when there is no law. ¹⁴ Nevertheless, **death reigned from Adam** until Moses, even over those who had not sinned in the likeness of **the offense of Adam, who is a pattern of him who was to come.** ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the transgression. For if by **the transgression of the one** the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gift by **the grace of the one human, Jesus Christ**, abound to the many. ¹⁶ The gift is not like that which came through **the one who sinned**; for on the one hand, the judgment arose from one transgression resulting in condemnation, but on the other hand, the free gift arose from many transgressions resulting in justification. ¹⁷ For if by the transgression of the one, **death reigned through the one**, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness **reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.** ¹⁸ So then, just as **through one transgression** there resulted condemnation to all humans, even so **through one act of righteousness** there resulted justification of life to all humans. ¹⁹ For just as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the one the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ The law came in so that the transgression would increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, **just as sin reigned** in death, even so **grace would reign** through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

1 Corinthians 15:21-22 NASB*

²¹ For since **by a human** came death, **by a human** also came the resurrection of the dead. ²² For as **in Adam** all die, so also **in Christ** all will be made alive.

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

It is clear that in Paul's thinking, Jesus provides a solution to a problem that all humanity has—it began with Adam and was intensified by the gift of the Torah to Israel.

In Romans 5:12, Paul's statement that through the sin of one human, death spread to all is capable of multiple interpretations.

- Eden represents an idyllic state of creation pre-fall, where there was no death, disease, or pain of any kind. The first humans spoiled this ideal, perfect state by introducing sin and death.
- Death was a reality outside the garden in the wilderness, but Adam and Eve were chosen out of the realm of non-order and placed in proximity to eternal life. The introduction of "death" in Romans 5:12, then, has to do with humanity's loss of the gift of eternal life that was offered to the first image of God, royal priests. It does not infer that biological death was not present outside the garden before the narrative of Genesis 2:4 and following.

Adam, Original Sin, and Original Guilt

In the early Latin translation of the New Testament, called the *Latin Vulgate* (produced throughout the 4th century A.D.), Romans 5:12 was translated incorrectly.

Romans 5:12 NASB*

... Through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin, death; and in this way, death spread to all humans, **because** (Grk. *eph ho /ἐφ' ᾧ*) everyone sinned ...

*Key Words Adapted by Teacher

In the *Latin Vulgate*, the word because was incorrectly translated, resulting in the following translation:

Romans 5:12 DRC

... By one man sin entered into this world and by sin death: and so death passed upon all men, **in whom** all have sinned.

This translation was in the Bible of Augustine of Hippo, a north African Bishop in the 4th century. In his influential book [City of God](#), he formulated the doctrine of original sin. More important was his conclusion that Romans 5:12 implies that all humans who descend from Adam are held accountable for his sin and so inherit biologically from him both original sin (the inclination toward sin) and original guilt (the consequences for his act).

This is the logic behind his theological view that the vast majority of humanity is non-elect, including unbaptized infants who are destined for eternal death (see Augustine of Hippo, [On the Soul and Its Origin](#), ch. 10).

Issues with Augustine's Conclusion

This formulation of original sin and original guilt has questionable biblical foundations. For more details, see Stanley Porter's ["The Pauline Concept of Original Sin"](#) in *Tyndale Bulletin*, vol. 41 (1990) and Oliver Crisp's ["On Original Sin"](#) in *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 17.2 (2015).

- Paul does not say that all humanity sinned "in Adam." Rather, he says Adam's first sin began a domino effect that led to "everyone sinning" and so bringing the consequences of their own choices upon themselves.
- When Paul says that Adam's sin lead to "condemnation for all" ([Rom. 5:18](#)), this does not necessarily mean that every person is now "condemned" for their distant ancestor's sin. Rather, it seems that Paul is offering a straightforward explanation of the narrative design of Genesis, in which every following generation replays the sin of Adam and Eve in their own way, and so experience divine judgment and grace as a result.

Adam and Eve can still be archetypal representatives for all humanity without being the first biological pair of humans.

- Adam and Eve are portrayed as priests. In the Torah, the priest's representative role does not depend on their biological priority over those whom they represent. Rather, it is their shared humanity that qualifies them (as in the argument of [Hebrews 1:1-8:13](#)).
- Jesus is clearly portrayed as humanity's high priest, even over those who do not descend from him (he didn't marry!). If Jesus' right standing before God can be attributed to us apart from biological descent, then our covenant relationship with God stands independent of ancestry. Why should Adam's act have relevance only for his biological descendants if, in fact, he was appointed as a representative priest?
- Priests are selected from a larger group to represent the many. If this is the model on which the Adam and Eve story is formed, then it explains the sudden presence of other humans outside of Eden (Cain's wife, the inhabitants of his city), and perhaps before Eden (the humanity of Genesis 1).

"If other homonins lived before Adam, then one must account for what makes Adam distinct. The divine image is an excellent candidate ... This creature is patterned after the one who is the true image of the invisible God ... [Resulting in] a relationship that never before existed ... a vocation of authentic moral responsibility that allowed Adam to transcend animal instinct in order to mirror (or fail to mirror) the image of [God] ... If these image bearers were indeed selected from the mass of (nonhuman) homonins, then the parallels between Adam and Israel are deepened ... Just as God chose Israel from the rest of mankind for a strange, special, demanding vocation, so perhaps what Genesis is telling us is that God chose one pair from the rest of early hominids for a similar vocation. In this way, the election of Adam bears a relation to the vocation of Israel, just as the bestowal of the image upon Adam's 'collaterals' bears a resemblance to the New Testament inclusion within God's great family."

McNall, Joshua (2019). *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work*. Zondervan Academic.

Reflection Question

Tim outlined four different ways to answer the historicity question: literary symbolic, first ancestor, archetypal first ancestor, and archetypal non-first ancestor. Briefly summarize each view.