# Genesis: John Goldingay

# Foreword

I wrote this commentary in the following way.

1. I first made a translation, utilizing an earlier version of the translation in *The First Testament: A New Translation*[[1]](#footnote-1) but then reworking it as I wrote the commentary (all biblical translations are my own unless otherwise stated).
2. I wrote what I could by way of commentary on the basis of what I had in my head and my imagination, with the aid of lexica, concordances, grammars, and Biblica hebraica quinta (Tal, *Genesis*), without referring to other secondary works except when I was stuck.
3. I read a selection of works on Genesis including examples of
4. Early Jewish interpretation such as the LXX, Aq, Sym (if its author was Jewish), the *Genesis Apocryphon*, *Jubilees*, Philo, the New Testament, and the Targums.
5. Early Christian interpretation such as Th, Vg, and African, Asian, and European writers such as Ephrem, Chrysostom, Didymus, Jerome, Origen, and Augustine.
6. Medieval Jewish interpretation such as *Genesis Rabbah*, Ibn Ezra, Rashi, and Qimchi.
7. Reformation interpretation such as Calvin, Luther, and Willet.
8. Nineteenth-century interpretation such as Keil and Delitzsch, Dillmann, Skinner, Driver, and Gunkel (to stretch a point: Gunkel’s commentary was published in 1901).
9. Twentieth-century interpretation such as Barth, Zimmerli, Speiser, von Rad, Westermann, Wenham, Seebass, Sarna, Fretheim, Hamilton, and Brueggemann.
10. Twenty-first century interpretation—post-critical, critical, pre-critical; African, Asian, American, and European.

On the basis of this reading I modified and expanded my initial draft and asked my wife Kathleen Scott Goldingay to read it; comments derived from her observations are acknowledged as “KSG.” I have not made a point of indicating whether I share my understanding with most scholars or with recent scholars, partly because being the majority or being recent is not necessarily an indication of being right. I have indicated some points at which my view is idiosyncratic, though being idiosyncratic is not necessarily an indication of being wrong.

Two general idiosyncrasies you will notice are the following. The Jewish name for the collection of Jewish writings that begin with Genesis is the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings. The New Testament name for them is the Scriptures. Two or three centuries after Jesus’s day, Christians started calling them the Old Testament. I think it’s rather a misleading name; it suggests they are antiquated and out of date. So usually refer to them as the First Testament.

The other general idiosyncrasy arises from the fact that many familiar versions of First Testament names (e.g., Eve, Cain, Abel, Egypt) are some distance from the Hebrew form or totally different from it (Ḥavvāh, Qayin, Hebel, Miṣrayim). These changes result from transliteration over the centuries into Greek, then Latin, then English, and from replacing Israelite names by modern ones. In my translation I have used a more literal transliteration of the consonants in names, though I have ignored aleph and ayin when they come at the beginning or end of names (e.g., Adam) and I have not tried to preserve the subtleties of Hebrew vowels (hence e.g., Adam not ’ādām). In the commentary itself I have used the familiar form of familiar names.

John Goldingay

There is nothing more beautiful in Holy Scripture than Genesis as a whole.

Luther, *Genesis 31—37*, 313.

Certain interpreters weary themselves in the fabrication of subtleties; but it is our business… to cultivate sobriety…. There are also some things, concerning which… I shall not be ashamed to acknowledge my ignorance, because I do not choose to wander in uncertain speculations.

Calvin, *Genesis* 2:412-13.

One of the false gods of theologians, philosophers, and other academics is called method…. The tyranny of methodolatry hinders new discoveries. … The god Method is in fact a subordinate deity, serving Higher Powers… social and cultural institutions… patriarchy.

Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father* (reprinted Boston: Beacon, 1985), 11.

If anyone wishes to hear and understand these words literally he ought to gather with the Jews rather than with the Christians.

Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 121

The reason God granted those generations [in Genesis 5] such long lives may have been to enable them to study… over a long period of time…. A lifetime of 70 years as we know it today is simply not long enough to accumulate this type of knowledge.

Qimchi, *Genesis*, on Gen 5:4.

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbor, does not yet understand them as he ought. If, on the other hand, a man draws a meaning from them that may be used for for building up of love, even though he does not happen upon the precise meaning which the author whom he reads intended to express in that place, his error is not pernicious, and he is wholly clear from foe charge of deception.

Augustine, *Christian Doctrine* I, 40

To read with intelligent charity.

Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 1

Love is productive of knowledge.

Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 46, summarizing Nussbaum

The initial trait of charitable hermeneutics is *attentiveness*

Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 52, summarizing Bakhtin

It is this commitment to faithfulness that we must bring to our lives as readers if we would govern our reading by the law of love.

Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 64.

Genuine love of others is *kenotic*…. [It] requires an emptying out of one’s own self and a consequent refilling of the emptied consciousness with attention to the Other.

Jacobs, *A Theology of Reading*, 104.

The Lord God will grant me retirement in His own time.

Luther, *Genesis 38—44*, 54.

# Abbreviations

*AJPS Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies*

*ANET* Pritchard, J. B. (ed.). [*Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*](http://fulleripac.fuller.edu/ipac20/ipac.jsp?session=13124149T366V.14350&profile=main&uri=search=ATL%7E%21The%20Ancient%20Near%20Eastern%20texts%20:%20relating%20to%20the%20Old%20Testament%20/&term=The%20Ancient%20Near%20Eastern%20texts%20:%20relating%20to%20the%20Old%20Testament%20/%20edited%20by%20James%20B.%20Pritchard.&aspect=basic_search&menu=search&source=%7E%21horizon). 3rd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969

Aq Aquila’s Greek translation, as documented in Field, *Origenis Hexaplorum quae supersunt*

b. Babylonian Talmud

ASV American Standard Version

*AUSS Andrews University Seminary Studies*

*BAR Biblical Archaeology Review*

BDB Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs (eds.). *Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament.* Corrected ed., Oxford: Clarendon, 1962

BH Biblical Hebrew

*BibInt Biblical Interpretation*

*BN Biblische Notizen*

*BSac Bibliotheca Sacra*

*CTJ Calvin Theological Journal*

*DCH* D. J. A. Clines (ed.). *The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew.* Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press (vols. 1-5) and Sheffield Phoenix Press (vols. 6-8), 1993-2011

DG Gibson, J. C. L. *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar – Syntax*. Edinburgh: Clark, 1994.

*DSS* García Martínez, F., and E. J. C. Tigchelaar (eds.). *The Dead Sea Scrolls*. Reprinted Leiden: Brill, 2000.

*DTT* Jastrow, M. *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi, and the Midrashic Literature.* New York: Choreb, 1926

*GenAp* 1QGenesis Apocryphon, as printed in DSS 1:28-49.

*GenR* Genesis Rabbah, as translated by Neusner, *Genesis Rabbah*.

*GK* Gesenius, W., et al. *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*. 2nd ed. Reprinted Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966

*HALOT* Koehler, L., et al. *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Translated by M. E. J. Richardson. Leiden: Brill, 2001

Hapax Hapax legomenenon, a word occurring in the First Testament only once.

*HBT Horizons in Biblical Theology*

*IBHS* Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O’Connor. *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990

*JAB Journal of the Aramaic Bible*

*JATS Journal of the Adventist Theological Society*

*JBL Journal of Biblical Literature*

*JBQ Jewish Bible Quarterly*

*JESOT Journal for the Evangelical Study of the Old Testament*

*JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*

*JJS Journal of Jewish Studies*

JMJoüon, P. *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*. Translated and revised by T. Muraoka. Rome: PBI, 1991

JPSV Jewish Publication Society Version, 2nd ed., Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999

*JPT Journal of Pentecostal Theology*

*JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament*

*JTI Journal of Theological Interpretation*

*Jub* *Jubilees*, as translated by O. S. Wintermute in Charlesworth (ed.), *OT Pseudepigrapha* 2:35-142.

K The Kethib or “written” consonantal Masoretic Text

KJV King James Version

*LTQ Lexington Theological Quarterly*

LXX Septuagint , as printed in A. Rahlfs (ed.), *Septuaginta*. 9th ed. Reprinted Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1971

MT Masoretic Text, as printed in Tal, *Genesis*; MT (C), MT (A), and MT (L) refer to the Cairo, Aleppo, and Leningrad codices

*NETS* A. Pietersma and B. G. Wright (eds.). *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

NIV New International Version (2011 version)

NPNF A Select Library of the Nice and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church. Reprinted Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988

NRSV New Revised Standard Version

*OTE Old Testament Essays*

PG Patrologia Graeca

PL Patrologia Latina

Q Qumran manuscripts: e.g., 4QGenh denotes Genesis manuscript “h” from Cave 4 at Qumran

*RB Revue Biblique*

*RevExp Review and Expositor*

*RSR Revue des sciences religieuses*

*SJOT Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*

SP Samaritan Pentateuch, as noted in Tal, *Genesis*.

Sym Symmachus’s Greek translation (see under Aq)

*TDOT* Botterweck, G. J. et al. (eds.). *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament.* Translated by J. T. Willis et al.Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-2006

Tg TgNeoph, TgOnq, and TgPsJ

TgNeoph Targum Neophyti

TgOnq Targum Onqelos

TgPsJ Targum Pseud-Jonathan

Theod Theodotion’s Greek translation (see under Aq)

*TTH* Driver, S. R. *A Treatise on the Use of the Tenses in Hebrew and Some Other Syntactical Questions*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1892

*TynB* *Tyndale Bulletin*

Vg Vulgate, as printed in R. Weber (ed.), *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgatam versionem*. 3rd ed. Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelanstalt, 1983

*VT Vetus Testamentum*

*ZAW Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

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# Introduction

The sacred laws having been written in five books, the first is called and inscribed Genesis, deriving its title from the origin [*genesis*] of the world, which it contains at the beginning; although there are ten thousand other matters also introduced which refer to peace and to war, or to fertility and barrenness, or to hunger and plenty, or to the terrible destructions which have taken place on earth by the agency of fire and water; or, on the contrary, to the birth and rapid propagation of animals and plants in accordance with the admirable arrangement of the atmosphere, and the seasons of the year, and of men, some of whom lived in accordance with virtue, while others were associated with wickedness.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Genesis tells many stories about God’s relationship with individuals and about their relationships with one another—about husbands and wives, parents and children, and birth and death, about leaders, political relationships, conflict, and negotiation, about migration and famine, about work and worship and prayer. These stories appear in Genesis as a whole in the context of a larger-scale story about the origin of the world as the audience knows it and about the audience’s ancestors. In turn, the framework of Genesis as a whole and its context in the Scriptures depict Genesis as an account of the opening stages in God’s working out his purpose in the world. In the Christian Scriptures, it then pairs with Revelation; these two scrolls form a frame around the biblical story as a whole, telling of how the world began and how it will end, with the Scriptures in between relating what happens in between.

Within the First Testament, Genesis is the first in a sequence of scrolls extending through to the end of 2 Kings. The sequence tells the story of Yahweh and Israel from its beginning to Yahweh’s destruction of the Ephraimite state in 722 BC and of the Judahite state in 587 BC. Genesis introduces the sequence by relating two aspects of Israel’s prehistory. Its immediate prehistory is Yahweh’s summons of Israel’s ancestors from Mesopotamia and his dealings with them until they find themselves in the Egypt where the real history of “Israel” begins. Its further and ultimate prehistory is Yahweh’s summoning into being the creation as a whole and his dealings with the world as a whole. Making Genesis the introduction to Israel’s story suggests that one can understand Israel only against this double background and that one can understand creation and those ancestors only in light of where their stories lead.

Thus Genesis both is and is not a self-contained scroll; it is both complete and incomplete. It resembles the first series in a long-running television drama. It ends in Gen 50 with some resolution of a number of the issues that the drama has raised, and in particular with some resolution of the family strife that dominates the last third of the book.[[3]](#footnote-3) It is thus a distinct scroll; Exodus is then another. Genesis tells a story that has some coherence as it relates the normative way Israel came to understand the sequence of events before it escaped from Egypt to travel to Canaan. But Genesis thus also leads into Exodus. It ends with a recognition that its story needs to continue if Yahweh’s aim in calling the world into being and summoning Abraham and Sarah is to find fulfilment. It is incomplete in the sense that it focuses on God’s intention to bless the world and to bless Abraham, and to fulfil the former intention through the latter, and this aim has not been fulfilled by the end of Genesis. A key aspect of God’s blessing of Abraham’s family and a means whereby God is to bless the nations is the family’s coming into possession of the country of Canaan, and at the end of Genesis they are living as a migrant community in Egypt. In itself this incompleteness would not make the scroll in complete. But in fact, the Genesis story continues in the next scroll within the First Testament. And so does the story in the next scroll, as continues to happen with each scroll that follows (Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers…), on to 2 Kings. Even then, God’s intention has not been fulfilled, but there is no doubt that 2 Kings marks the end of the sequence that began in Genesis, because over the page in the Torah and the Prophets is Isaiah, and over the page in the First Testament in its Greek and English order is… Adam again.

## The Narrative and the Genealogies

For the most part, Genesis is a narrative, a report of a series of connected events; it is not poetry, nor is it a record of someone telling other people what they should think or do, nor is it prayer or praise. It is dominated by past tense verbs (someone did this or that) not by future tense verbs (this is what is going to happen) or imperatives (this is what you should do) or appeals (please do this). It tells a story.

The narrative as a whole works largely by offering a chain of individual stories averaging maybe 400-500 words in Hebrew (rather more in English), most of which can stand alone to a fair degree, and most of which count as a chapter in a printed Bible. The stories also belong to sequences (e.g., stories about Abraham and Sarah), some tighter, some looser, so that something of their significance emerges from their place in their sequence as well as their place in Genesis as a whole. In this respect they again resemble the episodes in a television series.

A key role in the organizing and signposting of these sequences is played by accounts of people’s “lines of descent” or genealogies, lists of ancestors and descendants—the Hebrew word is *tôlᵉdôt*,from the verb meaning “father” or “give birth.” Such lines of descent in the Scriptures fulfill a number of functions. They may offer insight on characters by relating their background; they may provide validation for the status of characters; they may establish relationships between Israel and other peoples; they may suggest continuity within a people over the centuries; they may indicate links between peoples or periods that are otherwise widely separate; they may help establish chronology.[[4]](#footnote-4) We should not overemphasize the distinction in significance between stories and genealogies. “The genealogical form operates as a mode of storytelling.”[[5]](#footnote-5)

Genesis describe these lists as “lines of descent” frequently within 1:1—11:26 (see 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1, 32; 11:10). The description usually leads into what follows but it may summarize what precedes (see 2:4a; 10:32). The expression features more sparingly in 11:27—50:36 (see 11:27; 25:12, 13, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2). The ists play a key role in giving structure to the scroll, in providing a framework for the sequences of stories, and in marking key transitions in the scroll and thus in its narrative.[[6]](#footnote-6) “Genesis is a book whose plot is genealogy.”[[7]](#footnote-7) The lines of descent signal the stages in the story of the world and of the three generations of Israel’s ancestors.[[8]](#footnote-8) Utilizing the clues they offer, I treat Genesis as dividing into four parts:

Part One The lines of descent of the heavens and the earth, through Noah[[9]](#footnote-9) 1:1—11:26

Part Two The lines of descent of Terah, through Abraham and Sarah 11:27—25:11

Part Three The lines of descent of Isaac and Rebekah, through Jacob 25:12—35:29

Part Four The lines of descent of Jacob, through Joseph 36:1—50:26

The four parts give expression to four key truths about God. In Part One, God is especially disciplinary, though also merciful. He chastens Adam and Eve, and Cain, and in due course the world as a whole; and then he chastens the nations as a whole after the making of the Babel tower. In Part Two, he is especially promissory, though also demanding. He makes promises to Abraham and Sarah that seem more than unlikely of fulfillment, but he starts fulfilling them. In Part Three, he is accommodating, though also persistent. In being involved with Isaac and Rebekah, he continues to work via their faith and their stupidity and those of their son. In Part Four, he is proactive though also interactive. He implements a plan to ensure the future of Jacob’s family by harnessing tensions within the family and inspiring solutions to a crisis that threatens the life of Egypt.

## Story and History

Genesis tells a story. But there are many kinds of story. One way of categorizing them is to divide them into fact and fiction, into historical narrative and works of the imagination. Factual stories tell of things that happened; fictional stories tell of things that did not happen. Both categories are of some help in understanding Genesis but are misleading if assumed to tell the whole truth. On one hand, Genesis tells about things that God historically did—create the world, do so in a purposeful way, make it a good place, put humanity in charge of it, set about putting it right when it went wrong, make promises to Israel’s ancestors and set about seeing that they got fulfilled, and so on. On the other hand, Genesis tells its story in a way that uses the techniques that characterize works of the imagination—it talks about a tree that conveys knowledge and about sphinxes and a sword-like flame guarding a garden, it uses numbers symbolically, it tells the audience what people in the story are thinking, and it organizes its individual stories into arrangements such as palistrophes.

A major preoccupation in recent Western study of Genesis has been the relationship of its narrative to historical events in the world and in the Middle East. How can we understand that relationship? In a Western context, believers and secular people may assume that Genesis deserves taking seriously only if tells a factual story. Believers may then focus on defending its factuality; secular people may dismiss it in the conviction that it is not factual. Both sides are misled by modern Western assumptions. Two analogies may help an understanding of the nature of Genesis.[[10]](#footnote-10)

From the Middle East itself, we do not have examples of long prose works that compare with Genesis. But from First Testament times we do have examples from elsewhere in the Mediterranean world, notably the Greek Histories of Herodotus (who was born in Turkey) and Thucydides (who was born in Greece). Both lived in the same century as Ezra and Nehemiah. Both are concerned with events of their own people’s recent history, but want to help people understand these events by seeing them against their historical background. So both include copious factual material. But they also include stories that they value because they are traditional stories and not because they are factual. They include speeches by participants in the events that are the product of their own imagination. And they include evaluative judgments on the right and wrong, the good sense and bad sense, in what happened. They thus have a broad view of what telling their people’s story means. It means passing on their people’s traditions, using their imagination, and making their comments, as well as passing on facts.

The modern Western world suggests another parallel. I have drawn an analogy between Genesis to Kings and a TV series. Most such TV series are fiction, though they may take place in factual places and be based on factual situations. Other series and many movies tell the story of factual events but use imagination in doing so. There is a multi-year TV series about the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, called *The Crown*. It follows the history of events in Britain through the period in question, which are matters of public record—events such as the Suez crisis in 1957. It also incorporates reflection by different characters on the British constitution and accounts of conversations between the queen and other people. It thus combines factual data with the fruits of the exercise of imagination and reflection by the author.

One of the trickiest tasks in interpretation is determining whether an author was seeking to write history or fiction. Whereas some readers of Genesis have seen it as simply history, others as pure fiction, it looks more like something in between, like the Greek histories or like movies “based on fact” that use imagination in order to bring out the significance of events. In Genesis, the Holy Spirit inspired an author or authors to use their imagination to tell their factually-based story. And while interpreters have worked hard to seek to establish how far it is factual and how far traditional and how far imaginative, their work has not resulted in agreed results. In this commentary I have therefore not given much attention to this question, on the basis of the knowledge that it is the text of Genesis that the Holy Spirit and the human author wanted us to study.

Interpreters have used a number of terms to describe what kind of story-based-on -fact Genesis might be or might include. There is a number of such terms used to describe traditional stories:

* A saga, a long story about a community and/or its heroes which has been handed down orally over the centuries. Behind Gen 12—35 one can see saga material.
* A legend, a story about an impressive and important individual that again may have been handed down over time. Gen 22:1-19 is an example.
* An explanation, a story that explains the origin of something to answer the questions of people living later. Gen 23 is an example.

The word “myth” has also been applied to Genesis, and it can be used in a positive way, but it is inclined to suggest a story about a “fantasy world”; Gen 6:1-4 has been seen as an example.[[11]](#footnote-11)

## Understanding Stories

While one can see saga and legend behind Genesis, the stories are more than transcripts of such traditional stories. Genesis has made use of folk material, but it is not folk literature. While folk literature is designed to engage, to entertain, and to amuse, underneath much humor lies a serious meaning,[[12]](#footnote-12) and in Genesis, folk material passed down in the life of the Israelite clans has been turned into more reflective, literary, and sophisticated stories.

There are then other terms to describe such stories:

* A short story, composed by an author who sets up a question and tells of a sequence of events that may initially complicate the question but eventually resolve it. Gen 24 is an example.
* A novelette, a longer story composed by an author, possibly with a more complex plot, and focusing on an individual. The Joseph story is the example in Genesis.
* A report or chronicle, a narrative that gives a sequential account of events without providing a plot to the sequence or a tension that needs to be resolved. Gen 29:31—30:24 is an example.

Given that many of the stories in Genesis suggest they were composed in a reflective and sophisticated way, approaches to interpretation that focus on plot and theme aid their understanding (compared with modern short stories, character is less important than plot and theme in Genesis). An interpreter may therefore ask:

* What is the question or problem or issue that the story starts from?
* What is its answer to the question or solution of the problem or resolution of the issue?
* How does it get from question/problem/issue to answer/solution/resolution?
* Are there obstacles that have to be overcome on the way?
* Does the telling of the story incidentally allow other insights to emerge?
* Does the story leave issues unresolved?
* Does it incorporate surprising features that hold readers’ attention to the end?
* What is the author’s viewpoint?
* Who are the story’s implied audience, the people it looks designed to speak to?
* Who is the main character in the story?
* Who are the other characters and what role do they have?
* How do the events in the story affect them or change them?

One can ask these questions about Genesis as a whole: its question then is, what is the backstory to Yahweh’s bringing the Israelites out of Egypt and taking them to the country of Canaan? And its answer is, Yahweh had made promises to Israel’s ancestors that he needed to keep. In turn, that answer prompts the question, why did Yahweh make those promises? To which the answer is, they related to the project he set in motion in creating the world in the first place.

Such formulations provide some of the background to the fact that human characters are not as central to the stories in Genesis as they are to modern stories. The main character in Genesis is God, as is the case elsewhere in the First Testament. There are other features of the Genesis stories that that it shares with other books in the First Testament.

* It sometimes organizes stories as palistrophes (or chiasms), units in which the second half mirrors the first half. The Jacob story in Gen is the great example in Genesis.
* It often incorporates two related or parallel stories. There are two creation stories, two accounts of God making a covenant with Abraham, and in the Joseph story dreams come in pairs.
* It makes much use of irony, which (for instance) suggests the way things work out differently from the way people expect.
* It often reports events in a way that first gives a general account then goes back to relate more detail. It thus commonly prefers a dramatic order to a chronological order.
* It makes use of paronomasia, the way words may point to reality; it thus presupposes the revelatory potential of words, especially of names (e.g., Eve, Cain).

## The Origin of Genesis

Genesis gives no indication of its authorship and no direct indication of when it was written. Jewish and Christian tradition came to describe it as “The First Book of Moses” and thus as the introduction to Exodus through Deuteronomy, but that description parallels the description of the Psalms as David’s and of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs as Solomon’s. They are not statements about authorship. As one of the five Moses scrolls, Genesis has particular authority for the Jewish and Christian communities, but the authority came first and the description as Mosaic expresses its having authority, rather than vice versa.

The relationship between Genesis and Exodus through 2 Kings suggests that it came into being in the form that we have it after Judah’s fall to the Babylonians in 587, and occasional notes in the scroll fit with an origin in this period. For instance, not only does 12:6 postdate the time when the Canaanites were in Canaan (and therefore well postdate Moses’s day); 11:31 has Abraham and Sarah setting out from “Ur of the “Chaldeans,” and the Chaldeans became the rulers of Babylonia only with the arrival of Nabopolassar in 626. Yet such notes are few, and it seems implausible to think of Genesis being created from scratch in the Babylonian period; it will have issued from the compilation and reworking of materials that had accumulated over centuries. The story of Ezra bringing the Torah scroll from Babylon to Jerusalem in 458 (see Ezra 7) may mark the point when the Torah as we know it had come into being, during the Persian period.[[13]](#footnote-13) The first explicit reference to the Torah (with the Prophets) as

Since the late nineteenth century it has been common for commentaries on Genesis to give considerable attention to tracing the origin of the material before it reached its final form, and on the basis of such study to tracing the history of the events to which Genesis refers and the history of the development of Israelite religious beliefs. Such study of the origin of the material is potentially significant for an understanding of the text. For much of the twentieth century there was a broad scholarly consensus about this process of development, accumulation, compilation, and reworking, but it was a consensus that existed as much because scholars needed to have some working hypothesis as because it was based on evidence. A number of scholars in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries declared that the consensus view resembled the emperor who had no clothes and suggested that the Persian period played a much more creative role in the development of the Pentateuch. Indeed, “Abraham’s wanderings in Palestine and Egypt are nothing in comparison to the virtual travels he has experienced at the hands of the scholarly community.” It has been so exegetically; even more obviously, “chronologically, the dating of the patriarchs along a timeline from 2000 BCE to the post-exilic period went into free fall, occurring within a short period of forty years.”[[14]](#footnote-14) Yet even if “it is widely agreed that the Persianperiod is the most likely historical setting for the final editing of Genesis,” such a conclusion may not aid the interpretation of the scroll in that “the implications of this consensus are disputed”: for instance, it can be read as ethnocentric or as resisting ethnocentricity.[[15]](#footnote-15) And even if there is currently a scholarly consensus on the origin of Genesis, there no reason to think that the latest scholarly views on the question will have said the last word. Tracing the origin of the Pentateuch is an instance of “problems in biblical studies which are so complex that they seem never to find an agreed resolution, yet which are so fascinating that scholars never give up the quest.”[[16]](#footnote-16)

I have not usually referred to the latest critical views on the origin of different passages in Genesis, not least because they will not be the latest critical conclusions by the time you read this commentary. One cannot base an understanding of Genesis on the basis of knowing the date of its stories or of seeing it as the expression of the ideology of a particular group or period in the history of Israel. I seek to understand it as it stands against the broad context of the life of Israel, as a repository of Israel’s collective memory or a reflective reworking of that memory that so commended itself to the community that the community held onto it when it let other memories fall away. As we know virtually nothing about how Genesis came into existence, we know virtually nothing about the process whereby it came to be part of the Scriptures. We do know that the Torah and the Prophets were part of the Scriptures by the time of Ben Sira.

The First Testament, the New Testament, and modern critical study do suggest a number of contexts against which to read Genesis, and as exercises in imagination I have sometimes noted how a story might impact an audience in particularly periods. These exercises presuppose that most people got to know the stories by listening to them being read from the scroll or retold on the basis of the scroll. It is so in the Western world: people’s knowledge comes from hearing Genesis read in church if they are lucky, or from what preachers or Sunday School teachers tell them. It was also in the ancient world; hardly any Israelites would have possessed a copy of the scroll and read it in the way intellectuals read books.

## The Text and Language of Genesis

The traditional starting point for identifying the Hebrew Text of Genesis, as of other parts of the First Testament, is the “Masoretic Text” (MT), the version codified by Jewish scholars about AD 1000, and the translation in this commentary follows the version of that text printed in the standard scholarly version, Biblica Hebraica Quinta, edited by Abraham Tal. We have fragmentary copies of manuscripts of Genesis from Qumran which are a thousand years older than MT and many manuscripts belonging to the Masoretic tradition from later in the medieval period. Also from later in the medieval period we have copies of the Samaritan Pentateuch, with the text in Samaritan script as preserved among the Samaritans, and thus in a separate tradition from the Masoretic. From between the Qumran scrolls and the Masoretic Text we have manuscripts of the Pentateuch translated into Greek (the Septuagint) into Latin (the Vulgate), and into Syriac (the Peshiṭta). From these translations one can attempt to infer the Hebrew text they were based on and thus gain access to another tradition of the Hebrew text.

There are countless small differences between these versions of the text and it is likely that one or other of these different versions are sometimes closer to the text of Genesis as it might have been known (say) in Jerusalem in 300 BC than MT is. In addition, biblical scholars have made countless suggestions for changing MT to what they believe is an earlier version of the text. It is easy to see in some cases how the other traditions and these suggestions are tidying the form of the text in MT, which was originally a bit untidy. And generally I am inclined to think that any attempt of mine to establish a more authentic text would be likely to be mistaken as often as it was right, so that the end result would be on average no more authentic than MT. So I have nearly always worked with MT.

Hebrew syntax is simple and sentences commonly unfold in a simple way: “The upper ocean came onto the earth for forty days, and the water increased, and it lifted the chest, and it rose up from on the earth, and the water grew strong, and it increased greatly on the earth, and the chest moved on the face of the water” (6:17-18: to illustrate the point, I have made the translation slightly more literal). Further, Hebrew sentences usually follow an order different from regular English order, in that the verb comes first. So word-for-word, “Came the upper ocean onto the earth for forty days, and increased the water, and it lifted the chest, and it rose up from on the earth, and grew strong the water and increased greatly on the earth, and moved the chest on the face of the water” (following the word order in English introduces some ambiguity into the sentences, but it does not usually do so in Hebrew). Yet further, Hebrew is an inflected language, which means that “it lifted” is one word, as is “it rose up” and “it increased.”

Working within the framework of those basic conventions, Genesis can introduce subtlety into the way it communicates. For instance,

* If the “and” between clauses is missing, it indicates that the sentences do not relate in the regular way—possibly that the first clause leads into the second.
* If the subject or the object or some other expression comes before the verb, it has emphasis,[[17]](#footnote-17) (but in a noun clause context has to determine which is subject and which is predicate[[18]](#footnote-18) and emphasis is thus harder to spot).
* If a pronoun (“it” I the above examples) is expressed, which is unnecessary to the sense because it is contained within the verb, it has emphasis.

In the translation, while I have often omitted the “ands” to make things flow, I have sought to bring out these points. Two other frequent conventions in Genesis (commented on in the footnotes) are:

* Hebrew make less use of adverbs than English; it uses repetition instead. So instead of saying “you will definitely die” it says “dying you will die” (“dying” is a gerund not a participle).
* To signify a statement which is also an act (a “performative act”) such as “I hereby give,” Hebrew uses a qatal (perfect) verb, which would usually mean “I have given.” I translate such verbs in the present: “I am giving.”

# Genesis Part One: The Lines of Descent of the Heavens and the Earth (1:1—11:26)

Within Genesis as a whole as the back story to Yahweh’s involvement with Israel, the immediate back story to that narrative is the promises Yahweh made to Israel’s ancestors, which include the idea that all earth’s families were to seek the blessing that came to these ancestors (e.g., 12:3), and the further back story to Gen 11:27—50:26 is God’s dealing with the world as a whole. These dealings are the subject of Gen 1:1—11:26. It relates how this purpose of God’s to bless the world goes back to is very beginning, before which there can hardly be a back story. The question it considers is, why did God settle on one particular family as a means of blessing the entire world? The answer is that God had tried blessing the entire world and it hadn’t worked. Indeed, God had tried it twice, and neither time did it work.

In Gen 1:1—11:26 the story from creation to Abraham is a story in two acts in which Adam and his sons and then Noah and his sons play key roles. The account of the people’s lines of descent (notably 5:1-32 and 11:10-26) contributes to the shaping of the story. Interwoven with the lines of descent, the stories bring a focus on key moments, especially in the time of Adam and Noah. But lines of descent and stories interweave in a complicated way, not a straightforward one. While there are the regular “lines of descent,” this expression is also used to introduce the Noah story at 6:9, to introduce 10:1-32 which also includes the Nimrod story, and most surprisingly at 2:4a to close off 1:1—2:3. Further, 4:17-18 is surely a line of descent, but it is not labeled as such. In substance, then, the chapters outline as follows.

Lines of descent Story

1:1—2:4a 2:4b-4:16

4:17-18 4:19-26

5:1-32 6:1—9:29

10:1-7 10:8-12

10:13-32 11:1-9

11:10-26

The non-straightforward nature of this sequencing makes it not surprising that there are various ways of understanding the structure of 1:1—11:26.[[19]](#footnote-19)

Given that Gen 1:1—11:26 is the back story to Gen 11:27—50:26 and that Genesis as whole is the back story to the great narrative extending from Exodus through 2 Kings, it seems logically necessary that Genesis in some sense relates events that happened. God did create the world as a good place, humanity chose to do as God said, and the situation became one that could not be rectified. At the same time, the opening chapters of Genesis portray the world in a way that recurs in the closing chapters of Revelation and one that does not correspond to our experience (e.g., with sacramental trees and a snake that talks). I infer that Genesis often tells its historical story in symbolic terms. Further, Genesis shows an acquaintance with other Middle Eastern stories about the world’s origins and about a great deluge, though it sets the message of its story over against them rather than simply following them. I infer that the authors of Genesis took up traditional materials that it knew from its cultural context and truths that it knew about God from God’s dealings with Israel, and used these imaginatively to compose a historical parable that told the real truth about the way God had dealt with the world from the Beginning.

# Genesis 1:1—2:4a—How God Created the World

## Overview

God created the heavens and the earth. But the initial question set up by the opening verses of Gen 1 concerns how God will get to the creation of the heavens and the earth from a situation in which the earth is an empty void and darkness is over the face of the Deep (1:1-2). The answer is, by means of an eight-stage process in which four stages set the scene and four fill in the scene. God makes this process the agenda for a week’s work—so he fits two stages into days three and six (1:3-31). Some of the holding power of a story comes from its dealing with problems or obstacles or diversions that threaten or delay the move from question to resolution (as happens in stories such as 2:4b-25 or 11:27—13:4). Here, the account of the first three days (which only put in place the framework for creation) sets up the suspense, and the account of the second three days resolves it. The way the story unfolds also makes it possible to repeat and thus emphasize some themes, such as God’s systematic way of working, God’s authority and power, and the goodness of what God brings into being. God is effectively the one character in the story, and by the end we have learned a lot about him. A question it might seem implicitly to raise is how the story fits with what the audience knows about the world and about humanity that does not seem to be “good.” It implicitly then answers that question by saying, “there was nothing bad about it when God made it.”

A surprise feature to keep people watching through the credits is God’s stopping work for day seven and makes the seventh day of the week sacred. That closing note opens up the possibility that there was another question to which the story was the answer. Why does Israel observe the Sabbath? The answer is that Israel is thereby following the pattern of God’s work in creation. The viewpoint of the storyteller is that of a teacher who wants to encourage people to keep Sabbath and who through the use of sanctified imagination “knows” all about the process of creation and about God’s thinking and speaking on those days when no human beings were present, and could thus teach authoritatively about it.

## Translation

1At the beginning of God’s creating[[20]](#footnote-20)

the heavens and the earth,

2When the earth[[21]](#footnote-21) was[[22]](#footnote-22) an empty void,

with darkness over the face of the deep,

And God’s wind[[23]](#footnote-23) quivering[[24]](#footnote-24)

over the face of the water,

3God said,[[25]](#footnote-25) “Light!”[[26]](#footnote-26)

and light came into being.

4God saw that the light was good;[[27]](#footnote-27)

and God made a distinction between the light and the darkness.

5God called the light “day”;

the darkness he called “night.”

There was evening and there was morning,

day one.

6God said,

“A dome[[28]](#footnote-28) in the middle of the water,

so it will be making water distinct from water!”

7God made the dome and made a distinction

between the water that was under the dome

and the water that was above the dome.

So it came to be;

8God called the dome “heavens.”

There was evening and there was morning,

a second day.

9God said:

“The water under the heavens is to gather

into one place,[[29]](#footnote-29)

So the dry land may appear!”—

so it came to be.

10God called the dry land “earth,”

and the gathering of water he called “seas,”

and God saw that it was good.

11God said:

“The earth is to grow vegetation,

plant generating seed,

Fruit tree[[30]](#footnote-30) producing fruit by its species,

with its seed in it, on the earth!”—

so it came to be.

12The earth put out vegetation,

plant generating seed by its species,

And tree producing fruit with its seed in it by its species,

and God saw that it was good.

13There was evening and there was morning,

a third day.

14God said,

“Lights[[31]](#footnote-31) in the dome of the heavens

to make a distinction between day and night!

They will be as signs for[[32]](#footnote-32) set times[[33]](#footnote-33)

and days and years.

15They will be as lights in the heavens’ dome,

to give light on the earth”;

so it came to be.

16God made

the two big lights,

The bigger light to rule the day,

the smaller light to rule the night,

and the stars.

17God put them in the heavens’ dome,

to give light on the earth,

18To rule over the day and over the night,

to make a distinction between light and darkness;

and God saw that it was good.

19There was evening and there was morning,

a fourth day.

20God said,

“The water is to teem

with living creatures.

Birds are to fly over the earth,

over the face of the heavens’ dome!”

21God created the big sea monsters

and every living creature that moves,

with which the water teems, by their species,

And every winged bird by its species;

and God saw that it was good.

22God blessed them:

“Be fruitful, be numerous.

Fill the water in the seas;

birds are to be numerous on the earth.”

23There was evening and there was morning,

a fifth day.

24God said,

“The earth is to put out

the living creature by its species –

Animal, moving thing,

and the living thing of the earth, by its species!”—

so it came to be.

25God made

the living thing of the earth by its species,

animal by its species,

And everything that moves on the ground by its species;

and God saw that it was good.

26God said,

“Let us make humanity in our image, as our likeness,

so they can hold sway over the fish in the sea,

Over the birds in the heavens,

over the animals,

Over all the earth,

and over all the things that move on the earth.”

27So God created humanity in his image;

he created it in the image of God;

he created them male and female.

28God blessed them,

and said to them,

“Be fruitful, be numerous,

fill the earth and subjugate it.

Hold sway over the fish in the sea,

over the birds in the heavens,

and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

29God said,

“Here, I am giving you[[34]](#footnote-34)

all the plants that generate seed,

Which are on the face of all the earth,

and every tree with fruit that generates seed.[[35]](#footnote-35)

These will be food for you,

30for every living thing of the earth,

For all the birds in the heavens,

and for all the things that move on the earth,

Which have living breath in them,

all the green plants as food”;

so it came to be.

31God saw all that he had made:

and there – it was very good.

And there was evening and there was morning,

the sixth day.

2:1So the heavens were finished,

and the earth, and all their army.[[36]](#footnote-36)

2On the seventh[[37]](#footnote-37) day God finished[[38]](#footnote-38)

his work that he had been doing,

so on the seventh day he stopped[[39]](#footnote-39)

from all his work that he had been doing.

3God blessed the seventh day

and made it sacred,

because on it God stopped

from his entire work of creation that he had been doing.[[40]](#footnote-40)

4aThese[[41]](#footnote-41) are the lines of descent of the heavens and the earth when they were created.[[42]](#footnote-42)

## Interpretation

The medieval chapter divisions in printed Hebrew and English Bibles separate the six days of creation from the day when God “stopped,” which thus becomes 2:1-3. In MT,[[43]](#footnote-43) the seventh day belongs with the first six: the text actually has a chapter or unit marker (a *petuḥah*) after the account of each of the seven days of the week whose story is told in Gen 1:1—2:3, so that Genesis begins with seven short “chapters” (MT’s next unit stretches from 2:4 to 3:21). One might even argue that “the key to understanding the intrinsic nature of the Genesis cosmology is in an element that is often neglected, the seventh day.”[[44]](#footnote-44)I thus treat the account of all seven days as the first section of Genesis (and I will refer to it loosely as “Gen 1”). But I will treat the section as 1:1—2:4a, for reasons explained in the comment on 2:4a.

In form or genre, there is nothing to compare Gen 1 with.[[45]](#footnote-45) It is written in what one might call poetic prose or as prosaic poetry. Its Hebrew has some classic marks of prose style, such as *waw*-consecutives, relative particles, and object markers. It also has some classic marks of verse: it makes little use of the definite article; much of it can be laid out in lines of about six words in which the second half complements the first half; it manifests much restatement within these lines--repetition involving variation rather than exact replication (“parallelism”); and it describes things in a figurative way, using images and figures of speech.[[46]](#footnote-46) It is “poetic historiography.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Corresponding to these two indicators of the kind of passage it is, listeners might bring to it expectations pointing in more than one direction. Gen 1 is the beginning of the long narrative extending from Genesis to 2 Kings, which might make them ask how far it resembles the prose ending of that narrative, in 2 Kings 25. They might also ask how far it resembles poetic descriptions of creation such as Yahweh’s own account in Job 38—39 and/or Jeremiah’s account in Jer 10:12-13 and/or Ms Wisdom’s account in Prov 8:22-31.[[48]](#footnote-48)

As the beginning of that long narrative extending from Genesis to 2 Kings, in its prosaic aspect Gen 1 speaks of something that happened in history. But in its poetic aspect it speaks in the manner of those other accounts: it communicates dramatically and it communicates in symbols and images. While the authors of the story might well have worked out that the sun was the source of light in the world,[[49]](#footnote-49) this awareness need not have held them back from painting a theologically-suggestive picture in which God the source of all light first creates light, then creates the sun. The audience might notice artificial aspects to the six-day sequence (there seems to be not much to do on day one and rather a lot to do on days three and six) and/or might intuitively realize that the chapter was not portraying God doing a literal week’s work and then having a day off. As is the case in Jeremiah, Job, or Proverbs, God inspires a picture of creation that involves imagery and metaphor in order to communicate the truth about creation, rather than inspiring a literal account that nobody would have understood (at least, I don’t understand *A Brief History of Time*,[[50]](#footnote-50) and nor—I have heard it said—do most of the nine million people who brought the book). Thus a theologian such as Chrysostom classically emphasizes the considerateness (*synkatabasis*) of the way God speaks in the Scriptures in starting where people are in order to communicate his truth.[[51]](#footnote-51) The ease with which Western readers assume that Gen 1 is simply a prosaic narrative like 2 Kings 25 makes it advantageous to lay it out as verse to draw attention to its poetic aspect. Realistically, it describes creation as an event which happened but is not accessible to us. We cannot investigate it by historical method. It is not unhistorical or timeless. But it is “‘non-historical’ history.”[[52]](#footnote-52)

Like those other accounts of creation, then, Gen 1 speaks of God’s making the world in a way designed to communicate, and in a way designed to bring a message home to people in the context in which they live. One way it does so is by taking up motifs from creation stories with which people could have been familiar and tweaking them so that they give a more reliable portrait of the significance of the real God’s act of creation. It is common to refer to Gen 1 as a myth, and even more common to refer to those other creation stories as myths, but the word *myth* is used in so many different ways that it deserves to appear on the list of proscribed terms along with eschatology and apocalyptic. Gen 1 and other peoples’ creation stories are imaginative poetic accounts of how the world came to be. From none of them can we derive information on what the video camera would have caught if it had been there. From all of them we may derive some true information about the nature and purpose of the world and the nature of God. But another reason for hesitating to describe Gen 1 as myth is that it stands at the beginning of a narrative that as whole tells a story that is in some sense historical, as is not the case with other Middle Eastern accounts of creation.[[53]](#footnote-53)

The narrator of the story in 2 Kings 25 may have witnessed the events described there, or may (like Luke, according to the introduction to his Gospel) have talked to people who witnessed the events or may have listened to the story that had been passed on for a generation or so. The author of Gen 1 did not witness the events that are described, nor has he talked to people who witnessed them or listened to a story passed down by people who did (with the possible exception of 1:27-30). He is either more like the author of Job or Proverbs, who imagines what creation would have been like, or like Jeremiah, whom God told about the manner of his creation.[[54]](#footnote-54) It makes no difference whether one thinks in terms of divinely-inspired human imagination or humanly-mediated divine revelation, because in either way Gen 1 offers a trustworthy figurative account of God’s historical act of creation.

The narrator introduces God’s words and reports on God’s action, and provides the account’s “narrative thread,” and it thereby calms or tempers what would otherwise be the “overpowering” nature of God’s own relentless commanding words with their “controlled energy and force.”[[55]](#footnote-55) The six “chapters” in Gen 1 contain similar elements and have a similar structure, but each one is individualized; the First Testament commonly thus employs repetition with variation rather than engaging in exact repetition.[[56]](#footnote-56) The elements are:

1. God speaks a word of command
2. The command is obeyed and/or God does what the command speaks of
3. Thus “so it came to be”
4. God looks at what has come into being and declares that it is good
5. God names the thing he has brought into being
6. The day comes to an end.

The variants are:

Day one has no “so it came to be”

Day two has no “and God saw that it was good”[[57]](#footnote-57)

Day three has two words of command and two fulfilments

Day four has no naming

Day five has no “and so it came to be” and no naming

Day six has three words from God and the declaration “very good,” but no naming

Day seven has no naming or declaration about goodness or about “evening and morning.”

Only days one through three incorporate the setting up of a distinction or naming; only days four through six include creating or blessing. The seven days’ work is structured as follows:

Day One Light Day Four Lights in the sky

Day Two Waters separated Day Five Waters filled

Day Three Land appears Day Six Land produces creatures

Land produces growth Humanity to rule over them

Day Seven All is finished.

Thus the first three days lay the foundations for the second three days, which fill them out, with days three and six each requiring two sets of actions. Perhaps the author of Genesis knew a story that told of eight acts of creation, but fits them into six days so that they can form part of one week’s work.[[58]](#footnote-58)

Gen 1 covers matters that Gen 2—3 will also cover, and one could see it as in effect offering an anticipatory interpretation or anticipatory midrash on Gen2—3. One aspect of the nature of midrash is to take up questions raised by the scriptural text and puzzling aspects of it, and to offer some clarification of them. Since the end of the nineteenth century, the usual scholarly view of Gen 1—3 is that the more folktale-like Gen 2—3 story is older than Gen 1, which has seemed more sophisticated, and understanding Gen 1 as a midrash on Gen 2—3 does illumine Gen 1. Paradoxically, indeed, seeing it as offering an explanation of Gen 2—3 helps clarify otherwise puzzling features of Gen 1 itself. But the order of the chapters in Genesis invites us to work the logic the other way around: that is, Gen 2—3 will clarify puzzling questions raised by Gen 1. Indeed, given that the basis for dating different parts of Genesis is shaky, one might see Gen 2—3 as a supplement to Gen 1. The opening chapter left the origin of evil unexplained and would leave people with a puzzling account of the world. Gen 2—3 answers the question it raises and/or raises questions about the earlier story.[[59]](#footnote-59)

Whether or not Gen 1 is the Bible’s first creation story, it is certainly not the world’s first creation story. We have in fragmentary form a number of older creation stories, of which the fullest are *When on High* (*Enuma elish*) and *Atrahasis* (“Exceedingly-wise,” the name of its hero). *When on High[[60]](#footnote-60)* tells the story of the origin of the gods themselves, who were made from some earlier, already existent entities. Conflict among these beings eventually issues in the triumph of one of the younger gods, Marduk, through whose initiative humanity is then created. More importantly in the dynamic of the story, Marduk establishes Babylon as his sacred city, with its temple as the proper place to offer sacrifice. The First Testament story ultimately wants to affirm that actually *the* God is Yahweh, and *the* sacred city is Jerusalem. Indeed, the story of the creation of the world has been seen to picture it as a kind of sanctuary,[[61]](#footnote-61) though if such themes are present in Gen 1, they are under the surface; there is not even a city in Gen 1. Israel does not appear in the creation story, the First Testament has Israel “arriving late to its own story.”[[62]](#footnote-62) Atrahasis[[63]](#footnote-63) tells of the creation of humanity to relieve the gods from their labor on the farm and elsewhere, but the problem that ensues is that the growing human population disturbs the gods, so they first attempt population control, but eventually decide to bring a devastating flood. A rogue god informs Atrahasis, who constructs a boat for himself and some animals in which they survive. Atrahasis then offers sacrifice, around which the hungry gods swarm like flies. The overlaps in Gen 1 with other Middle Eastern creation accounts opens up the possibility that the people whom the storyteller hoped would listen to the story are acquainted with these other accounts and for a variety of reasons might be tempted to take them seriously. Gen 1 seeks to get them to commit themselves to the truth of this version. Gen 1 is formulating the *real* story which pictures deity, creation, and humanity in a markedly different way.[[64]](#footnote-64)

**1:1-3. “**With no introduction and little fanfare, the text announces with utmost simplicity that it was God – and God *alone* – who created the cosmos.”[[65]](#footnote-65) The way in which “*God*, the personal Lord, stands here at the beginning,” make for a contrast with all other accounts of creation.[[66]](#footnote-66) And “God comes on stage with a complete absence of preliminaries. Who is God? What is God? Where does he hail from? How does he differ from other deities?”[[67]](#footnote-67) It is the contents of the chapter itself that will answer those questions.

As is commonly the case with First Testament books,the opening expression in Genesis, “In the beginning” (*bᵉrē’šît*), provides the Genesis scroll with its title in Hebrew. More literally, Gen 1 begins “in the beginning of [when] God created the heavens and the earth”; Gen 2:4b will likewise begin “in the day of God’s making the heavens and the earth.” *When on High* similarlybegins, “When the heavens above did not exist, and earth beneath had not come into being.”[[68]](#footnote-68) Unlike *When on High*,however, Genesis would not have imagined (or rather, would not at all agree) that God came into being from some already-existing matter. But like *When on High*, Gen 1 is a story about the creation of the world; the creation of humanity is subordinate to the broader story (in Gen 2—3 the creation of humanity is more central; it thus compares more with Atrahasis).

The complexity of the opening sentence which occupies vv. 1-3 also anticipates the complexity of the corresponding opening sentence comprising 2:4b-7. In Gen 1, too, it will become clear that “the heavens and the earth” do not denote the entire cosmos—the world’s upper reservoir lies above the heavens and its lower water lies below the earth. The heavens and the earth denote the world within whose boundaries humanity lives. Nor do “the heavens” suggest heaven in the sense of God’s dwelling. It is thus advantageous to translation *šāmayim* literally as “heavens” rather than as “heaven.”[[69]](#footnote-69)

In a context such as Gen 1, the English word “create” may seem to refer by definition to God’s bringing everything into existence way back at the beginning. But we also speak of “continuous creation,” of God’s continuing to bring things into existence; creation is not just a once-for-all past event (cf. Ps 104:30). And we speak of God (and us) being creative in envisaging and shaping new possibilities where there might have seemed to be none (cf. Ps 51:10 [12]). We also speak of creativity in more trivial connections, so that creation talk is subjected to “inflation.”[[70]](#footnote-70) In an analogous way, the Hebrew word translated “create” (*bārā’*) has broader meanings. It can suggest any action that can only be predicated of God and action that is novel, extraordinary, and effortless.[[71]](#footnote-71) The Prophets use the verb most often, especially in referring to something that God is going to do in restoring his people’s fortunes (e.g., Isa 41:20; 45:7-8; 48:7; 65:17-18). Creation denotes a sovereign act whereby God transforms disorder, jumble, and disarray into form, harmony, and peace; thus the First Testament uses this verb only with God as subject.

At the original creation God so acted on a vast scale, in bringing into being “the heavens and the earth.” He created the world in which people live and also the vast panoply of the sky in which they can see sun and moon and planets. He turned a miscellany of raw materials into a magnificent cosmos. One aspect of the good news in Gen 1 is that God’s acting at the Beginning implies that he could do it again. This aspect of the significance of creation links with the text’s speaking of God and not of Yahweh (as Gen 2 will). Writer and audience know that “God” means Yahweh (as TgOnq makes explicit), but the word “God” points to his being the deity with all power and all authority to act as creator once again.

The beginning with which Genesis opens is not the absolute beginning of everything in the material cosmos. Genesis is not starting from the moment when nothing apart from God existed. Further, it says nothing about the origin of other supernatural beings. One way this creation story differs from those of other ancient peoples is “its lack of interest in the realm of heaven.” It deals “solely with what lies beneath the celestial realm.”[[72]](#footnote-72) It starts from the existence of the earth, but from a situation in which the earth is only an empty void. Its words continue to anticipate 2:4b, which will follow its opening clause about the making of the earth and the heavens with the elaboration, “when no bush of the open country was in the earth yet, and no plant of the open country was growing yet.” Both beginnings picture a situation with potential, but a situation that requires action if it is to become actual. Genesis would also not have imagined (or rather, would not at all agree) that the world was created from some already existing matter that God had not brought into being (as *When on High* says) or that the world was created out of God (as the Memphite Theology says). But it does not concern itself with the ultimate origin of the raw material of creation.

“Empty void” (v. 2) is *tōhû* *wābōhû*, a hendiadys and an onomatopoeic expression which doesn’t exactly mean anything but rather conveys an impression of wha-wha-wha. BDB comments that the primary meaning of *tōhû* is “difficulty to seize.” Tg appropriately has “desolate and empty.” The expression suggests the presence and the reality of something that in English (as in LXX and Vg) is most easily characterized by negatives: it is shapeless and formless, like a trackless waste, or like outer space (cf. Job 12:24; 26:7). Translations sometimes use the word *chaos* in rendering *tōhû* *wābōhû*, which is both suggestive and misleading. It is misleading in that *When on High* tells of conflict among the gods which issued in the violence and chaos out of which humanity was created;[[73]](#footnote-73) there is no such back story in Genesis and no chaos before creation, just unformed raw material.[[74]](#footnote-74) This aspect of Gen 1 makes the chapter rather calm and undramatic compared with *When on High* with its account of the conflict between Marduk and Tiamat. “The ancient Babylonian myth (or foundational story) that strongly resembles Genesis 1 has one great dissimilarity from it: in that myth, creation begins with a murder.”[[75]](#footnote-75)

The word “chaos” is nevertheless suggestive in that the only other two occurrences of *tōhû* *wābōhû* (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23) describe the results of an act of destruction by God, in response to the wrongdoing of Edom and of Israel. If one reads those passages in light of Gen 1, in the order in which they come in the Scriptures, they make the frightening point that those acts of destruction reverse God’s work of creation, and “chaos” is not an inappropriate word in connection with these prophetic threats.[[76]](#footnote-76) Conversely, however, when people read Gen 1 after experiencing an act of destruction (Jeremiah is referring to the coming destruction of Jerusalem), this creation story becomes massively encouraging. It declares that things began with God acting to give substance, shape, and order to *tōhû* *wābōhû*, which suggests that *tōhû* *wābōhû* need not be the end of the nations’ story or of Israel’s story.[[77]](#footnote-77) “According to this phrase the situation in which the earth finds itself is the very opposite of promising. It is quite hopeless.”[[78]](#footnote-78) But the decades after the destruction of Jerusalem are the time when the verb “create” comes into its own in Isa 40—55.

Similar resonances attach to the parallel picture of darkness over the face of the deep. Darkness is another image to describe the results of Yahweh’s act of destruction (e.g., Isa 9:2 [1]; 47:5; Amos 5:18, 20). And “the deep” suggests the powerful, dynamic, energetic forces embodied in the might of the ocean or in the subterranean waters that burst out in waterfalls and springs. They needn’t be threatening (cf. Deut 8:7; 33:13), but they can be threatening if you are in the wrong place at the wrong time (cf. Gen 7:11; 8:2). “This is a frightening image: desolation below and desolation above.”[[79]](#footnote-79)

Then there is God’s wind quivering over the face of those waters. If v. 2b as a whole were parallel to v. 2a, then “God’s wind” might need to be a negative image, but “quivering” (*rāḥap*) does not point to a threatening action. “God’s wind” rather suggests another ironic and provocative comparison to *When on High*, because there Marduk let loose a wind at Tiamat which she swallowed so that it blew her up and made her easy to kill. While there is no direct link between Tiamat’s name and the word for deep, *tᵉhôm*, some people listening to the Genesis story might spot the similarity between the word and the name. Here, God’s breath or wind is hovering in a positive fashion over the surface of the water, perhaps in such a way as to calm any negative energy (contrast Dan 7:2. It is “a merciful wind” (TgPsJ, TgNeoph). “Creation means the irruption and revelation of the divine compassion.”[[80]](#footnote-80) The description of the wind thus quivering over the face of the water also anticipates a question that might be raised by 2:5-6. If (a) God had not sent rain, but (b) there was a stream coming up from the earth, who or what made the stream come up? Here is the answer.

Against that background we get the description of God’s first creative act (v. 3). Light is the opposite of darkness, metaphorically as well as literally (again, cf. Isa 9:2 [1]; 45:7). Genesis does not say that God “created” light; perhaps rather he willed it to emanate from himself.[[81]](#footnote-81) His generating light means his setting a limit to darkness: “darkness is no longer boundless but is given its place in the rhythm of time.”[[82]](#footnote-82) As a body does not come alive until God breathes in his life, so the raw material of creation does not come alight until God bids light come into it.

In this first act God goes about creation by issuing a directive (cf. Ps 33:6; John 1:1-5). He is like a king or general who speaks, and things happen.[[83]](#footnote-83) Yet his words are not exactly a command; they are not addressed to anyone. They work more like magic. God speaks, and something happens in a way that need not involve anyone doing anything. Simply by speaking, “God calls into being things that did not exist” (Rom 4:17).[[84]](#footnote-84) The same motif appears in an Egyptian account of creation which seems to have been composed sometime between the period of Moses and that of Isaiah, the Memphite Theology.[[85]](#footnote-85) Whereas God could have simply willed light into being, he speaks it into being as a performative act, and thereby brings language itself into being.[[86]](#footnote-86)

People in the ancient world were quite aware that talk of light and of day and night really presupposes the existence of sun and moon and stars. They knew that the sun was the source of light in the world.[[87]](#footnote-87) But there can be light on earth on a cloudy day when the sun is not shining, and this fact can act as a reminder that the sun is not the ultimate source of light. God wraps himself in light as if it is his clothing (Ps 104:2). “The light born from God is the very Wisdom of God, but the light made by God is something mutable.”[[88]](#footnote-88) In God’s light we see light (Ps 36:9 [10]).[[89]](#footnote-89) And there can be evening and morning on the first day even before sun and moon have been created because these are God’s days, not earthly days.[[90]](#footnote-90)

**1:4-5.** In the First Testament the word for “good” (*ṭôb*) has a similar range of meanings to the English word. It can suggest something that feels good or that looks good or that is morally good; we should not try to tighten the word’s meaning.[[91]](#footnote-91) TgNeoph often uses the words “beautiful and proper.” Anticipating the questions that will arise in Gen 2—3 over whether the creation actually is good, or when it becomes good, or whether it includes bad things (2:9, 18; cf. 6:5), and thus over where the badness in creation comes from, Gen 1 declares that it does not come from creation itself. God checked it out and made sure. Henceforth in Gen 1 “this repeated refrain” that God says that it was good “punctuates Gen. 1 like an exclamation point.”[[92]](#footnote-92)

One might have expected that light would simply replace darkness, but it does not. Here, at least, Genesis is speaking not of metaphorical light and darkness, which signify blessing and trouble (darkness being the negative backcloth to light, as it was in v. 2). It is speaking of material light and darkness, which are part of the rhythm of daily life for the human world and the animal world (Ps 104:19-23). So light is good, but darkness is not simply bad—It makes sleep natural (TgPsJ has night being made for creatures to rest). In this connection Genesis introduces the key verb “make a distinction” or “separate” (*bādal* hiphil) which comes five times in this chapter and six times in Lev 10—11 and 20. In Leviticus it refers to Israel’s making a distinction between the sacred and the ordinary and between the taboo and the clean, which includes a separation between things that can be eaten and things that cannot; that separation is related to the distinction between Israel and other peoples. Gen 1 establishes that the making of distinctions is not just an Israelite peculiarity. It fits the pattern of creation. “The concept of separation is one of the most important aspects of the account of creation.”[[93]](#footnote-93)

God names the light and the darkness, a sign of his lordship over them. Whereas it might be obvious that the day belongs to God, the night does, too (Ps 74:16).[[94]](#footnote-94) And then the first day of creation is over.[[95]](#footnote-95) It might seem a short day’s work, but it was foundational. The working day comes to an end with the evening, which then looks forward to the next day. We may infer that “no darkness has the power to prevent the light from being called and actually being day again—true day…. Day was constituted by an act of God. But now we can say further that it was constituted by an act of God which when it is performed is resumed and continued by God.”[[96]](#footnote-96) Speaking of “evening and morning” might imply the assumption that the day starts in the evening, but it doesn’t require it, and the evidence elsewhere is ambiguous.[[97]](#footnote-97)

**1:6-8**. The background to God’s second act is the presence of water—on earth’s surface, underneath it and springing up, and in the sky from which it falls from time to time. The second day’s mode of creation corresponds to the first’s. God speaks out what needs to happen, it happens, Genesis refers to the significance of God’s action in connection with the making of a distinction, God names what he has made, then the day comes to an end. The “dome” is the sky, which has the appearance of a solid vault when one looks up from earth. It will hold back the upper water except when God allows it to come through (cf. 7:11-12; 2 Kings 7:2; Ps 104:13). It will thus make a distinction between the two bodies of water. Here God “makes” the dome rather than simply summoning it into existence. Whereas Josephus sees God as here making rain and dew possible,[[98]](#footnote-98) Genesis sees God as stopping water being overwhelming. “The creation of the firmament, with its comprehensive opposition of form to formlessness, of the possibility of life to the necessity of death, aims at a peaceful and meaningful existence of the creature before and with its Creator.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

Once again, we should not be wooden in interpreting the Genesis poetry as it portrays the dome.[[100]](#footnote-100) The Israelites had noticed that rain came from clouds (Job 36:27-28; Jer 10:13). And once again, Genesis’s account of the dome contrasts with the account in *When on High*, where Marduk makes the dome by splitting Tiamat like a shellfish, using the top half as the dome, and setting guards to make sure that Tiamat’s water does not escape.

**1:9-13.** The presupposition of vv. 6-8 is that water still covers the earth. God needs to undertake another act of separation (though the word does not come), between the water and the dry land which is allowed to emerge from the water. Once again God creates by speaking the distinction into being, names and thus asserts authority, and sees that it (the earth or the general result?) is good.

On this day that declaration is not the end of the story. There is a further act to follow, or rather a further self-fulfilling command to utter—again things happen just because God speaks. The command mandates that the things that grow have within themselves the capacity to reproduce. God will not have to be involved in continuous creation. Growing things will have the power to bear a seed-bearing crop. And they will reproduce their own like. One can know that figs will produce figs and grapes will produce grapes. It need not have been so. The word for “species” (*mîn*) restates that point, but also draws attention to the wondrous variety and comprehensiveness of what God creates.[[101]](#footnote-101) Further, God has here provided for humanity’s needs before even creating the first human beings.[[102]](#footnote-102)

**1:14-19.** Having put in place the framework for the cosmos’s life over the first three days of the week, God goes back to the beginning to add the contents to the framework. “The Genesis account of God's seven days… has an architectural quality…. Day builds on day. The picture of God's creative work shows something like the construction of a seven-story dwelling in which each level adds to and depends on the ones that came before it.”[[103]](#footnote-103)

Once again God speaks a third-person command (vv. 14-15). It refers to sources of light in the sky, like the electric lights set into a ceiling. The point of the lamps is not merely to give light on the earth; v. 3 has taken care of that need. The lamps relate again to the making of distinctions. They are “signs.” Whereas the introduction of light made a distinction between light and darkness, putting the lamps in the sky will make a distinction between day and night in the sense that they will make it possible to determine when day ends and night begins, and when night ends and day begins. It will therefore be clear when the evening offering and morning offering are to be made. The two lamps will contribute to the structuring of people’s relationship with God. They will do so in a broader calendrical way by providing information on the beginning and ending of the Sabbath, on the beginning of each new month with its special offerings, and on the time for Pesaḥ, Flat Bread, Shavuot, New Year, Atonement Day, Sukkot, and in due course Hanukkah and Purim. Further, outside Gen 1 the word for these lights (*mā’ôr*) mainly occurs to designate the sanctuary lamps (e.g., Exod 35:8, 14, 28), which hints at the idea that the structure of the created world anticipates the structure of the sanctuary and/or that the sanctuary mirrors the created world. The creation story invites Judahites living after the destruction of the Jerusalem sanctuary to see themselves as still living in a sanctuary.

Once again (vv. 16-19) the declaration that something is to happen is accompanied by a declaration that God made it happen, as happened in vv. 7-8. While God thus makes the sun and the moon, they are not named, unlike day, night, heavens, earth, and seas. Alongside this odd fact is the offhand determination of a further object of God’s making, “and the stars.” Even for people who do not know what a vast panoply the stars comprise, this comment might seem to understate their impressiveness. Therein may lie the point. For many people in Israel’s context, sun, moon, and stars signified deities standing behind these entities, which were the means of the gods’ determining events on earth. Genesis puts them in their place as mere lampposts in the sky.[[104]](#footnote-104) They rule, but they rule on behalf of the real God, and rule in that way that helps people structure their relationship with God.[[105]](#footnote-105)

**1:20-23.** God returns to consideration of the dome and the water, the subject in vv. 6-8. First are the creatures of the sea. If God created them, there is no doubt that he rules over the deep of which v. 2 spoke. The term for the living beings (*nepeš ḥayyāh*) in the water will be applied to the first human being (2:7), but here it specifically applies to the “big sea monsters.” For the first time since v. 1 Genesis speaks of God’s “creating”; *bārā’* again asserts the sovereignty and power of God’s act, in relation to such impressive and frightening creatures as well as the other creatures of the water. And Genesis again implies an acerbic comment on other Middle Eastern creation stories. While a sea monster (*tannîn*)might be just a crocodile, it can also be the embodiment of dynamic power asserted against order in the world and against God (Isa 27:1; 51:9). It is another designation for Leviathan or for Sea itself. Genesis makes no direct reference to such beings, and here reduces them to mere impressive water creatures whom God in his dynamic sovereignty brought into being (cf. Ps 104:26). There is nothing to be frightened of here.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Beneath the dome there are to be the birds, distinguished by their species. That word again draws attention to the variety of the creation that God brings into being, but it has a further implication. Species (*mîn*)is another term that links with Leviticus. It comes seven times in this chapter in connection with the animate creation, and seven more times in a similar connection in 6:20; 7:14. It comes nine times in Lev 11, and five more times in a similar connection in Deut 14:13-18; Ezek 47:10. “The creation narrative sets the stage for… the dietary law of Leviticus 11.”[[107]](#footnote-107) It supports and undergirds Israel’s commitment to the instructions about food in the Torah. Creating the differences in species makes it possible for people to work out which creatures may be eaten and which may not.

“Move” (*rāmaš*)is another unusual word common to Gen 1—9 (ten times) and Leviticus (three times) (four times in the rest of the First Testament). In close association, “teem” (*šāraṣ*) recurs in Gen 1—9 (five times) and Lev 11 (five times); the related noun *šereṣ* also recurs in both contexts. All these entities that God created are good, notwithstanding the fact that some will be forbidden to Israel to eat and that some can seem to stand for those assertive powers.

God not only created the water creatures and the birds; God blessed them (*bārak*) (vv. 22-23). The implication of blessing is spelled out in the parallelism of the line and in the verbs that follow. God blesses by telling creatures that they can be fruitful. The Scriptures speak of blessing more-or-less exclusively in connection with animate creatures, upon whom it conveys the capacity to be fruitful. The imperatives and the jussive that follow the act of blessing are the kind of commands that really constitute promises.[[108]](#footnote-108) God’s personal relationship with the animate world expresses itself in the fact that he speaks to it, as he will later speak to humanity; the reality of that relationship is reflected in the First Testament’s assumption that nature is capable of responding to God in worship.

**1:24-25**. Day six in turn pairs with day three, though precise nature of the pairing will not be explicit until vv. 29-30. As the earth brought out or sent out vegetation, so it is to bring out or send out animals. As the water was to teem with living creatures, so is the land. “Animal” (*bᵉhēmāh*) commonly denotes cattle; “moving thing” suggests things that crawl as opposed to creatures with legs (this verb described water creatures in v. 21); “living things” perhaps then denotes animals of the wild. If one wonders how the earth was to fulfil the commission to bring out these creatures, then Genesis sidesteps the question by declaring that God made them. There is no blessing or commission to increase; perhaps Gen 1 is hastening on to what follows.

**1:26-28**. The chapter now abandons something of its “terse rigidity” and becomes more poetic.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Now all things were already arrived at their own end: “the heaven and the earth,” as Moses says, “were finished, and all things that lie between them, and the particular things were adorned with their appropriate beauty; the heaven with the rays of the stars, the sea and air with the living creatures that swim and fly, and the earth with all varieties of plants and animals, to all which, empowered by the Divine will, it gave birth together; the earth was full, too, of her produce, bringing forth fruits at the same time with flowers; the meadows were full of all that grows therein, and all the mountain ridges, and summits, and every hill-side, and slope, and hollow, were crowned with young grass, and with the varied produce of the trees, just risen from the ground, yet shot up at once into their perfect beauty; and all the beasts that had come into life at God's command were rejoicing, we may suppose, and skipping about, running to and fro in the thickets in herds according to their kind, while every sheltered and shady spot was ringing with the chants of the song-birds. And at sea, we may suppose, the sight to be seen was of the like kind, as it had just settled to quiet and calm in the gathering together of its depths, where havens and harbours spontaneously hollowed out on the coasts made the sea reconciled with the land; and the gentle motion of the waves vied in beauty with the meadows, rippling delicately with light and harmless breezes that skimmed the surface; and all the wealth of creation by land and sea was ready, and none was there to share it.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Against this background, there is a second declaration that “God said,” introducing another commission, as happened on day three. But whereas the seven preceding occurrences of “God said” introduced commissions in the jussive, this eighth occurrence introduces a cohortative. God speaks not about what other entities must do, but about what he must do. He could easily have said “earth is to bring out human beings”; the move to a cohortative suggests a more direct involvement on God’s part with this act of creation.

Strikingly, the act is not initially described as “creation” but simply as “making.” But the novelty of this act of making is further underlined by God’s saying not “I am going to make” but “we are going to make.” While the God who speaks is the trinitarian God, engaged in this act of making as Father, Son, and Spirit, and he might have had a smile on his face in inspiring Genesis to use this plural form, the author of Genesis and the people listening to the creation story did not know this fact about God’s creating humanity, so this insight was not the one God wanted to convey to them in inspiring the report of his words in this form.[[111]](#footnote-111) God might be associating himself with other supernatural beings (see e.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 38b); but neither here nor in other passages where the plural recurs (e.g., 3:22; 11:7; Isa 6:8) is there reference to such beings in the context (the seraphs in Isa 6 are not beings who would have this kind of role), and one wonders about the idea of humanity being made in the image of other supernatural beings. The form of words might reflect the plural of majesty whereby a king or queen says “we have decided,” meaning “I have decided.” The plural then underlines the authority of the one who speaks; it draws attention to the difference and the boundary between God and humanity even while making a point about humanity being made like God.[[112]](#footnote-112) Or the plural might suggest self-deliberation,[[113]](#footnote-113) which was appropriate (*GenR* 8:1-4 suggests) in light of the way things are going to go wrong with humanity.

Human beings are to be made in God’s image (*bᵉṣelem*) and as God’s likeness (*kᵉdᵉmût*). Outside Genesis, the first noun generally refers to a statue, usually one that represents a deity (e.g., Num 33:52; Ezek 7:20), though in a notable exception it denotes the statue of a king in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Dan 2; and cf. Dan 3). Some Mesopotamian texts refer to the king as made in the god’s image and thus as ruling with his authority; Gen 1 says that humanity does so.[[114]](#footnote-114) Whereas “image” usually has negative connotations, “likeness” refers more neutrally to something that simply resembles something else (Ezek 1 and 10 have most of the occurrences). The first word, then suggests that human beings will physically represent God, in a living and lively way that contrasts with a “regular” divine image.[[115]](#footnote-115) The second word suggests that they will be godlike in the way they do so. Along with the extra nuance attaching to the extra noun is the extra nuance attaching to the second preposition. The two prepositions recur in 5:3 with their nouns switched, so we should not make too much of the distinction between them. But the *k* does underline that humanity will be the very likeness of God. Humanity’s nature “blurs… the otherwise sharp distinction between creator and creation.”[[116]](#footnote-116) We know from Gen 1 already that God’s characteristics include the capacity to create, speak authoritatively, see, think, make distinctions, name, make, put in place, bless, and command. The idol images used by other peoples in their worship have mouths, eyes, ears, noses, hands, and feet, but they cannot speak, see, hear, smell, act, or walk, and their devotees end up like them (Pss 115:4-8; 135:15-18). The real God can do those things, and human beings have the body parts which enable them to be the physical representations and representatives of that God. “Valid manifestation of divine presence is not found in consecrated wood, stone, or metal. Rather, humankind is the *locus* of divine presence.”[[117]](#footnote-117)

Gen 2 will describe human beings and animals as similar to each other in their origin—made by the same process from the same stuff and both ending up as “living beings.” Gen 1 anticipates questions about whether or how they are different. The deliberation involved in making human beings marks a difference in the process of making them and in the result: they are declared to be more like God than like the other animate beings. Further, in Gen 3 the snake suggests that God doesn’t want humanity to be like God, and God in due course notes that through their disobedience they have become like God in a negative sense, in their recognition of good and bad that issues from their assertion of their own authority. Gen 1 makes clear that there is a sense in which God intends them to be like him.[[118]](#footnote-118)

The rest of v. 26 spells out the implications of being God-like or provides the rationale for it, and also indicates the sense in which human being have authority in the world. They are made to hold sway over or control the animate creation on God’s behalf. As in *When on High* and in Gen 2, humanity is created to work on God’s behalf. “Hold sway” (*rādāh*) suggests a rule that is enforced: it’s like Israel’s enemies’ rule over Israel (Lev 26:17) and like Israel’s eventual reversal of that rule (Isa 14:2). This control need not be harsh (cf. Lev 25:43, 46, 53) but it is one imposed on subjects that may not welcome it. In the immediate term humanity will express this authority by naming the animals (Gen 2:19-20), for which action God’s present words provide the rationale. In contrast, Gen 3 will trace the beginning of the human tragedy to Adam and Eve’s yielding to a suggestion from one of the creatures that God made. Gen 1 anticipates the possibility of such resistance to God’s will from the animate world, and presupposes that humanity is to exercise authority over it. God begins with the fish, as he began with the sea creatures in vv. 20-23, though their being explicitly the object of humanity’s sway anticipates a question that might arise in 2:19-20 where the human being names (and thus implicitly has authority) only over land animals and birds.

So God “created” humanity (v. 27). While translations normally lay out Gen 1 as prose, they may treat v. 27 as a poetic line (so e.g., NRSV). It is then an exceptional one. Whereas poetic lines in Hebrew generally comprise two cola, here there are three, with “created” coming in each one, which further adds to the significance of what happens on this day. In the unexpected third colon Genesis adds that God created them “male and female.” In Gen 2 the creation of Eve from a part of Adam might raise the question whether there was femaleness in Adam that could be recycled in this way. It could seem that God had made *’ādām* male and female—which is what 1:28 suggests.[[119]](#footnote-119) Another question that may be raised by Gen 3 is whether the man or the woman was responsible for humanity’s disobedience. And what of the declaration in Gen 3 that henceforth a man will rule over his woman? The New Testament can talk both in terms of Adam’s responsibility for that first act of disobedience (Rom 5:12, 14), and in terms of Eve’s responsibility (1 Tim 2:14). Gen 1 invites people listening to the story to see male and female both together as made in God’s image and as both together designed to rule over the world, not to rule one over the other. Does it also invite people to infer that God is both male and female?[[120]](#footnote-120)

The blessing of fruitfulness follows (v. 28), suggesting another aspect of the significance of humanity’s being made male and female. Only as male and female can they be fruitful.[[121]](#footnote-121) Again Gen 1 links with what will follow in Gen 2, where Eve is created in order to make it possible for humanity to look after God’s orchard; her being female and able to bear children is at least an aspect of the way she fulfills that role. The commission to be numerous and to fill the earth corresponds to the commission to the rest of the animate world, while the distinctive charge to hold sway over that world also follows. But God now speaks of subjugating it (*kābaš*), an even more forceful word, used of Israel’s conquest of Canaan and of the enforced servitude of people within Israel (e.g., Num 32:22, 29; Jer 34:11, 16). The commission again anticipates the failure of Gen 3, where the man and the woman do not subjugate the snake. And the absence of a declaration that God saw that humanity was good might anticipate the events of Gen 3,[[122]](#footnote-122) though the “very good” of v. 31 will follow in a moment.

**1:29-30.** Yet one more “God said” adds yet further to the emphasis on the work of the sixth day. God’s words are the most remarkable ones in the chapter in what they don’t say. God gives what grows to the animate world as its food, but does not invite members of the animate world to eat one another. This note in Gen 1 again anticipatorily spells out the implications of Gen 2, where Adam is sent into God’s orchard to serve it and look after it, and is invited to eat from all the trees, but only to name the animals. The fact that Gen 1 does not think about the “problem” that some animals are apparently built to be carnivorous may point to another insight about the chapter as a whole, that the account of the creation focuses on portraying a world that is structured and ordered. Everything has its place and its proper lifestyle. Perhaps it was okay for lions to be carnivorous.

**1:31**. At the end of the last working day of the week, the day that has occupied so much space in the chapter, God stands back once more, as he has at the end of each day, and now looks with satisfaction at the week’s work. The creation of the world is complete. It looks really good. God is like a craftsman who knows what he is making and is not surprised at what emerges from his work, but who nevertheless stands back when he has finished and is pleased with what he sees; the individual parts of something may be impressive, but the whole will be even more so.[[123]](#footnote-123) While the following chapters will arouse questions about the goodness of creation, Gen 1 anticipates them and declares that it is very good.

**2:1-3.** So God has completed the work of creating the cosmos and its army. The latter term applies directly to the “heavenly host,” the sun, the moon, and the stars. They are the forces that Yahweh controls and makes use of in governing the earth and whom Israel will be tempted to bow down to as if they were gods (Deut 4:19; 17:3). The creation story has anticipatorily reminded Israel that these entities are part of created reality.

Genesis speaks loosely of God finishing his work on the seventh day (v. 2)—strictly he had finished it on the sixth, though *GenR* 10:9 suggests that on the seventh day God created tranquility, pleasure, well-being, and peace. But he now stops (*šābat*). Whereas *When on High* emphasizes that creating humanity makes it possible for the gods to rest, Genesis does not refer to God’s resting. The seventh day is simply God’s stopping day. If the reference to *tōhû* *wābōhû* and to the deep were the indications of a problem that Gen 1 needed to solve, then stopping because the work is done announces that the problem was indeed resolved. “God finished his work” near the beginning of Genesis also anticipates the note that “Moses finished the work” on the sanctuary, near the end of Exodus (Exod 40:33).

If blessing (v. 3) suggests making fruitful,[[124]](#footnote-124) blessing the seventh day has suggestive implications, hinting that God “ordained that happy consequences attach to its celebration.”[[125]](#footnote-125) *GenR* 12 comments that God blessed it with special lights, special food, special offerings, and Torah study. How unbiblical is any legalistic understanding of the Sabbath, which for the Jewish people is a joy![[126]](#footnote-126) But given that the First Testament normally speaks of blessing only animate things, Genesis might be expecting its hearers to compare the theme of blessing God.[[127]](#footnote-127) The verb will then suggest praising. This understanding could link with the declaration that God made this day sacred. While the first six days of the week are ordinary, and humanity can use them as it wishes, the seventh day is special. God claims it. People are not to trespass on it. It belongs to God. When “the distinguished word *qadosh* [holy] is used for the first time,… it is applied to time,” to a day.[[128]](#footnote-128) Whereas *When on High* ends with the making of a temple, Gen 1 ends with the sanctifying of a day. Genesis makes no statement about the Sabbath being made for humanity. “It is an ordinance of the kosmos like any other part of the creative operations.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

“The seven-day pattern of Gen 1:1–2:3 transforms something as simple as the weekly calendar… into a constant reminder of God’s creative sovereignty. *Every week* of human history becomes a mnemonic stroll through creation itself.”[[130]](#footnote-130) The “time-consciousness” of the First Testament begins here, as does the in-time activity of God. But for human beings time begins with a day of rest not a day of work (so that it was a happy innovation when the church made the first day of the week a holiday).[[131]](#footnote-131) The organization of time by seven-day weeks is another distinctive aspect of Israelite life, and Gen 1 buttresses it by tracing it back to creation. But it does not use the noun *šabbāt* or have God telling anyone about its sacredness or speak of any human obligation regarding it.[[132]](#footnote-132) Such revelation will come only in Exod 16, in the First Testament’s only clear reference to Gen 1, in Exod 20:11,[[133]](#footnote-133) and in Exod 23:12. Exodus will then also speak of God resting on the seventh day and of animals having the chance to do so. And there it will emerge that this divine rest is one in which human beings and animals share rather than one that human work makes possible.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Sabbath stopping becomes one of the ways in which Israel as God’s special people mirrors God and models what it means to be truly human.[[135]](#footnote-135) As an exordium to the Torah, Gen 1 presupposes that “the law corresponds to the world and the world to the law,” so that a person who lives in accordance with the law thus lives as a “citizen of the world,” living in harmony with it.[[136]](#footnote-136) And the point about human beings stopping for one day in seven may be implicit in Genesis. Given that Gen 2 will record Yahweh’s shaping of a man to serve and keep the earth, Gen 2:3 anticipatorily implies that people are to work only for six days.[[137]](#footnote-137) Writings from the Babylonian and Persian periods imply that Judah’s failure to observe the Sabbath was one reason for Yahweh’s bringing about the fall of Jerusalem and the exile (see e.g., Jer 17; Ezek 20), and for people reading this creation story in these periods, omitting mention of the human obligation regarding the Sabbath might be an encouragement. The Sabbath is not just something to make people feel guilty.

There is no “evening and morning” at the end of the seventh day. Perhaps “the Sabbath of God has no evening,”[[138]](#footnote-138) and the seventh day continues although God continues to be at work; God and we live during the seventh day (cf. John 5:17). . But other features of the first six days also fail to appear here, such as the naming and the comment on its being good. God’s stopping on the seventh day does not rule out God’s starting again on the eighth day (which John 5:17 would also fit).

Heb 4:4 creatively relates the talk of God’s stopping in Gen 2:2 to the First Testament’s talk of Israel’s stopping in connection with Israel’s arrival in Canaan in Ps 95 (cf. e.g., Deut 12:9; Josh 21:44 [42]) and to the stopping associated with the salvation that is opened up to us through Jesus. While MT talks about “rest” (*mᵉnûḥāh*) in connection with Israel’s arrival in Canaan, LXX assimilates its language to that of Gen 2 and thus talks about Israel “stopping” (*katapauō*) not about rest, and Heb 3:7—4:11 follows. But Psalm 95 indicates that being in the promised land doesn’t mean people have yet entered God’s stopping. “There remains a sabbathing for the people of God.” Coming to trust in Jesus opens up the possibility of entering into God’s seventh-day stopping in the new Jerusalem. Paradoxically, entering into that stopping involves a lot of effort (Heb 4:11).[[139]](#footnote-139)

**2:4a.** MT takes 2:4a as the beginning of a new unit; similar formulations in passages such as 5:1; 6:9 introduce what follows. But this understanding does not work for 2:4a, since what follows is not an account of the origins of the heavens and the earth.[[140]](#footnote-140) Gen 2:4a is a footnote to 1:1—2:3;[[141]](#footnote-141) as the expression in 10:32 is a footnotes to what precedes. In its reference to creation and to the heavens and the earth it corresponds to and pairs with 1:1. The distinctiveness of its location matches the distinctiveness of the meaning of the term “lines of descent” (*tôlᵉdôt*) on this first occurrence. The traditional translation “generations” reflects the expression’s etymology (it comes from *yālad*, “to father/give birth to) and its usage elsewhere. But Gen 1 is not a “genealogy”; the expression refers metaphorically to the process whereby the cosmos came into being. Given the innovative nature of this metaphorical use of the expression, it would have made a puzzling opening for the first verse of Genesis, but in light of Gen 1 as a whole it can be understood and it can anticipatorily make a link between the process whereby the world came into being and the process whereby humanity comes into being from Adam to Noah and from Noah to Abraham.

## Creation

The world had a beginning. It has not always existed.[[142]](#footnote-142) And the world came into being because God acted; it did not just happen. “There are those who look at nature and do not consider God, as if all things do not happen in God. But these are greatly in error.”[[143]](#footnote-143) The world came into being because God created, God said, God saw, God made a distinction, God called, God made, God put, God blessed, God finished, God made sacred, God stopped. In Gen 1, God is

the mighty Creator who takes on the role of the great actor in time and narrative. On this register, the cosmic revelatory drama of God speaking, acting, and proclaiming is to be considered as *sculpting in time*…. While there is a revealed dimension of transhistoricity to God’s being Creator, God’s profound kinship with time, displayed in narrative, life, and the cosmos, provokes a hermeneutical trajectory that subverts any exclusively atemporal or salvific agenda in Genesis.[[144]](#footnote-144)

God’s speaking and acting were an expression of his thoughtfulness and insight. The expression “At the beginning” makes *GenR* 1:1 think of Ms Wisdom’s being “the beginning” in Prov 8:22 and then of the fact that Ms Wisdom was (on one understanding of the puzzling word *’āmôn*) a craftworker. Further, Wisdom can be identified with Torah, which suggests the inference that Yahweh created the world on the basis of consultation with the Torah—which (Prov 8:22 also indicates) God had created before going on to create the world. To put it more historically, “Genesis 1 sets forth both implicitly and explicitly the rationale on which the Torah’s religion will be founded, or by which the Torah’s religion will make sense.”[[145]](#footnote-145)

God’s bringing the world into being was careful and organized. It resembled the work of someone who knows he has a week’s work to do, thinks through what he needs to do, makes a plan, and implements it. Then “God views his work and is satisfied with it; this means that God loves his work and therefore wills to preserve it.”[[146]](#footnote-146) Genesis makes the first of the Scriptures’ characteristic comments about God’s real-time engagement with the world. While God knew that he was commissioning something good, there is a difference between knowing ahead of time and looking at it in such a way as to see it is good. It is an aspect of God’s intrinsic temporality. Genesis is not worried about implying that God was not perfect before he has the experience of seeing something that he had not seen before because it did not exist before.

God had several ways of bringing things into being. He spoke in third-person commands that worked as if by magic or that worked like the speech of a king or a commander-in-chief, so that things happened by the authority of his word,. He made things like a builder. He created things like an emperor who causes things happen by his sovereign power. He blessed things and thereby give them the power to increase. He commissioned them to do so.[[147]](#footnote-147) In bringing the world into being, God speaks in the third person (“such-and-such is to happen”) in a way that distances him from the world, in the second person (“be fruitful”) in a way that implies a personal relationship with the world, and in the first person (“let us make”) in a way that implies personal involvement in what happens. Transcendence and immanence are thus both aspects of God’s relationship with the world.[[148]](#footnote-148)

It came into being through the action of the one God. The process was deliberate, thoughtful, and smooth. It involved “the complete and effortless control of God over his creation,”[[149]](#footnote-149) without struggle, conflict, or effort. Thus the significance of Gen 1 is "to render God, as it were, visible to us in all his works…. The Lord, that he may invite us to the knowledge of himself, places the fabric of heaven and earth before our eyes, rendering himself, in a certain manner, manifest in them.”[[150]](#footnote-150) Its portrayal of God is in its way just as anthropomorphic as that of Gen 2—3.[[151]](#footnote-151) Further, to say that “God saw; God evaluated; God named; God separated,” and so on, is to indicate that “the creating God is not only the acting God, but also the reacting God, the God who responds to that which has been created.”[[152]](#footnote-152)

Gen 1 does not say why God created the world. He just decided to. It was simply his will. You cannot get behind that fact.[[153]](#footnote-153) And whereas other peoples told stories about what God or the gods were doing before creation, Genesis does not. “Was He in a state of rest or not? Augustine relates in his *Confessions* that someone had answered to this effect: ‘God was making hell ready for those who pried into meddlesome questions.’” [[154]](#footnote-154) It also tells us nothing about the creation of angels or about their fall.[[155]](#footnote-155) It tells us nothing anything about the empirical process whereby the world came into being. Its poetic nature (even if it is poetic prose rather than actual verse) means we cannot make inferences of this kind from it. Its account rules out non-theistic evolution; it does not support creationism or theistic evolution but it would allow them; it most obviously supports intelligent design.[[156]](#footnote-156) But the intent of the Torah is not to inform about the natural sciences but to keep human beings straight on the way of making right decisions and to establish in their mind a trust in his oneness and providence.[[157]](#footnote-157)

The world came into bring through God’s setting to work on a situation that was desolate and empty and transforming it into something that had form and beauty, order and structure, life and fruitfulness. Gen 1 is not talking about *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing; theology’s use of that Latin expression puts us on the track of its context in ideas that became important much later.[[158]](#footnote-158) Genesis does not say that God created the raw material for creation, though other passages in the First Testament make clear enough that it would assume that God did so, Genesis’s interest lies elsewhere. One result is that we learn in Gen 1 of God’s craftsmanship.[[159]](#footnote-159) We do not lose theologically by declining to read *creatio ex nihilo* into Genesis (because that doctrine is true anyway); we gain.[[160]](#footnote-160)

“The God of the Christian confession… is Elohim, the God of Israel.” And “the Lord of this sphere [of Israel’s history] is God the Creator; and it is only as such that He is the Lord of the sphere of the world.” For him to be the creator means him doing something—namely, creating; and his creative action happened not out of time and history but in time and history.[[161]](#footnote-161) Thus, while “the Church of Christ bears witness to the end of all things” and “lives from the end,” Gen 1 shows that the Scriptures have things to say about creation and about the beginning; it is not the case that only from Christ can we know what the beginning is or that “the Scriptures need to be read and proclaimed wholly from the viewpoint of the end.”[[162]](#footnote-162) The order of the Scriptures indicates that they have nothing to say about Christ outside the context of what we know from the beginning. Only by starting from the beginning can we know who Christ is. Thus John 1:1-5 is in part an exposition of Gen 1, using the account of creation to illumine who Jesus is,[[163]](#footnote-163) and Col 1:15; 4:4 describe Jesus as the image of God (cf. also Phil 2:6). Such passages parallel the later finding of the Trinity in Gen 1 in that they do not help us understand Gen 1 itself, though by a feedback process they have implications for our broader understanding of creation and of humanity. Jews and Christians naturally read Gen 1 in light of their own faith, so that in Judaism Torah became the agent of creation and in Christian faith Jesus became the agent of creation.[[164]](#footnote-164) But we lose out if we do not consider what Gen 1 in its own right has to say about creator and creation. And while God is the God of the covenant, “creation occurs ‘in the beginning,’ whereas covenant belongs in the middle.”[[165]](#footnote-165)

## The Image of God

Gen 1:26-27 “are perhaps the verses of the Old Testament most commented on by the Fathers” and the doctrine of humanity’s creation in God’s image is “the foundation of patristic anthropology.”[[166]](#footnote-166) In modern times, too, “scarcely any verse in the whole of the Old Testament has retained such interest,” though “this interest has been confined almost exclusively to the area of church doctrine.”[[167]](#footnote-167) God’s image has then been located (for instance) in humanity’s intellect, spiritual nature, ethical nature, freedom, memory, will, self-consciousness, relational nature, and capacity to rule. As is the case with *creatio ex nihilo*,it is telling that theology commonly uses the Latin expression *imago Dei* in connection with this discussion. The terms and the content of the discussion come from Western thinking rather than from Gen 1. The First Testament as a whole does attribute all the above characteristics to humanity, but Gen 1:26-27 provide no basis for associating “the image of God” with them except perhaps the last.[[168]](#footnote-168) The monumental doctrinal edifice is not unscriptural, but when represented as based on these verses, it falls over.[[169]](#footnote-169) Or perhaps we should turn this argument on its head and acknowledge that “language of ‘the image of God’ is a relatively under-determined place-holder for something that can only be more clearly defined by seeing how the canonical narrative develops, beyond Genesis, and indeed beyond the OT.”[[170]](#footnote-170)

Bings in the image of God means that humanity rules over the earth. Why and in what sense does humanity need to do so? Gen 2—3 provides some immediate answers. Looking beyond Gen 2—3 may suggest that humanity will need to constrain the animals in order to have living space for itself.[[171]](#footnote-171) Israelites might fear that the human world could be overwhelmed by the animal world; this commission in Genesis promises it will not be.[[172]](#footnote-172) It perhaps also presupposes an awareness of conflict characterizing the animate world (cf. Isa 11:6-9)[[173]](#footnote-173) and envisions humanity driving it into harmony. “A central function of government in the Hebrew conception is to check oppression” so “the authority of the human governors exists, among other things, to repress violence among the animals”—perhaps peacefully taming them.[[174]](#footnote-174) The goodness of creation evidently does not exclude its requiring control, but the godlike nature of humanity’s rule will express itself in being liberating rather than harsh.

Humanity’s exercise of authority over the animal world does not indicate that it is superior to it.[[175]](#footnote-175) My boss exercises authority over me but he seems not to see himself as superior to me. Indeed, authority combines with subordination; humanity serves the garden (Gen 2:15), but serving the soil requires the exercise of violent force upon it. One aspect of the significance of the commission may lie not in the intention that humanity will *hold sway* (as opposed to caring for or living in harmony with or being threatened by) but in the intention that *humanity* (as opposed to kings) will hold sway.[[176]](#footnote-176) And holding sway is the work of a shepherd-king.[[177]](#footnote-177) The commission to rule does not encourage exploitation; humanity is not given the right to eat animals.[[178]](#footnote-178) The vision of harmony in Gen 1:26-30 links with this apparent expectation that the diet of human beings and animals will be vegetarian.[[179]](#footnote-179) Perhaps the audience was expected to be no more literalist in its understanding of this aspect of the Genesis parable than it was of other aspects. But killing for food involves violence, so not eating each other coheres with a vision for harmony. The harmony linked to the Beginning in Gen 1 becomes a promise for the End in Isa 11,[[180]](#footnote-180) though even at the Beginning it was a commission rather than an actuality. While Genesis portrays creation as over and does not think in terms of continuous creation or of human beings as co-creators with God or of creation as unfinished project, yet the outworking of God’s creation project involves humanity as creatures made in God’s image.

Man and woman together are made in God’s image. One implication of v. 27 (in association with 2:24) is that God’s creation intention was that one man and one woman should marry and should then be together for life, but God does not simply leave people to their own devices when they do not live up to the creation vision: see Deut 24:1-4; Mark 10:6; Matt 19:4.[[181]](#footnote-181) Jesus’s collocating of Gen 1—2 and Deut 24 in connection with a question about divorce suggests an approach to the ethical and theological issues raised by polygamy, same-sex marriage, and transgender issues. Of course Jesus is seeking to expound the significance of Genesis in connection with a question raised in his context, and his comments should not be thought of as holding readers back from studying Genesis in its own right.[[182]](#footnote-182)

Paul’s declaration that man as opposed to woman is God’s image and glory (1 Cor 11:7) also depends on the collocation of Gen 1:26-27 with Gen 2, where the woman is created second. On the other hand, his accepting in 1 Cor 11 the assumption that women as well as men prophecy and pray in worship fits the declaration in Gen 1 that all humanity, male and female, embodies God’s image and is commissioned to rule the earth. In Gen 1—2 there are hierarchies of authority within humanity.[[183]](#footnote-183) Paul’s declaration in Gal 3:28, which uses the expression “male and female” as it comes in Gen 1:27 LXX, further suggests that through Jesus God reasserts a correspondence between male and female in terms of relationship to God, a correspondence going back to creation. And his inclusion in Gal 3:28 of Jew and Gentile and of slave and free suggests further implications of the declaration that all humanity is made in God’s image.[[184]](#footnote-184)

Being in God’s image and being male and female leads into a commission to be fruitful. One implication of Gen 1:27-28 is that “the spiritual significance of sexual union in scripture does not simply encourage romanticized images of intimacy, nor does it draw upon Dionysian images of orgiastic ecstasy.” Its significance lies in its capacity to generate new life. It “gives birth to a future.”[[185]](#footnote-185) Further, James 3:9 derives an ethical principle from humanity’s being in God’s image. “Man has been depicted by the Lord God, his artist. He is fortunate in having a craftsman and a painter of distinction. He should not erase that painting”[[186]](#footnote-186)—in himself or in someone else. An implication is that human disobedience did not destroy God’s image in humanity, though it did tarnish it. The image of God cleaned up through Jesus then has two principal parts: wisdom and holiness (cf. Col 3:10; Eph 4:24).[[187]](#footnote-187) “Let us always, therefore, contemplate that image of God that we can be transformed to his likeness.”[[188]](#footnote-188)

Humanity’s spoiling of the world in modern times has been blamed on the alleged anthropocentrism of Gen 1. One consideration that makes this charge implausible is that it apparently took two or three millennia for the creation story to have this effect, which suggests that other ideological factors were at work in the spoiling.[[189]](#footnote-189) Indeed, one might reverse the accusation: “the order of the cosmos portrayed in Genesis has been unprecedentedly disrupted by modern humanity’s scientific-technological project of unlimited domination of the whole world.”[[190]](#footnote-190)

Genesis makes clear that humanity is not the center of creation. The world was not created for humanity; if anything, humanity was created for the world. This insight is one of the pointers to the significance of Gen 1 for ecological concerns.[[191]](#footnote-191) Conversely, some of humanity’s achievements in modern times such as the conquest of diseases and the decrease in infant mortality might be seen as ways in which humanity is subduing the earth. But again, the fact that millennia have passed suggests that other ideological factors are at work. “It happens through divine power that the waters do not pass over us…. For what is our entire life on earth but a passage through the Red Sea, where on both sides the sea stood like high walls? Because it is very certain that the sea is far higher than the earth, God, up to the present time, commands the waters to remain in suspense and restrains them by His Word lest they burst upon us as they burst forth in the deluge.”[[192]](#footnote-192) But if it is human action that has issued in the melting of the polar icecaps, we might be unwise to assume that God’s original constraining the water of the oceans so as to let the land emerge means he will always protect the land mass.

# Genesis 2:4b-25—How God Made the Garden and Its Servants

## Overview

MT has no unit break at the end of Gen 2; the text runs on into chapter 3. It is thus for convenience that I separate 2:4b-25 from 3:1-24; they form the two acts of one drama.[[193]](#footnote-193) The first act does have its own arc of completeness arising from its focus on Yahweh’s creation of a garden. The initial question it raises is similar to the one raised by the beginning if Gen 1—the phraseology is similar. There’s nothing growing on the earth, partly because there’s no one to till the soil in which things could grow. So how will God succeed in making earth and heavens (v. 4b) when there is nothing growing (v. 5-6)? The initial answer is, by planting a garden or orchard and shaping a human being to look after it (vv. 7-9), providing good water supply for the earth as a whole (vv. 10-14), and giving the human being permissions and instructions (vv. 15-17). But that’s where problems arise on the way: the human being can’t fulfill the commission on his own (v. 18), and animals won’t do (vv. 19-20). So God shapes another human being to share the task with the first one (vv. 21-25). The opening act of the drama could then look complete on its own, and two lines of verse mark its climax at 2:23. But the chapter leaves unexplained the two trees that it mentions, so we wonder about them. Further, the implied audience for the story is people who are involved in farming and marriage and who don’t live in this garden, and the story doesn’t make clear how it fits in with some things they know about the world and about life as it really is. So perhaps they are waiting for the other shoe to drop, and it will drop in Gen 3.

## Translation

4bAt the time of[[194]](#footnote-194) Yahweh God’s making earth and heavens,[[195]](#footnote-195) 5and when no bush of the open country was in the earth yet,[[196]](#footnote-196) and no plant of the open country was growing yet (because Yahweh God had not made it rain on the earth), and there was no human being to serve[[197]](#footnote-197) the ground, 6though a stream[[198]](#footnote-198) was going up from the earth and watering the entire face of the ground, 7Yahweh God shaped the human being with dirt[[199]](#footnote-199) from the ground and blew into its nostrils living breath, and the human being became a living person. 8Yahweh God planted[[200]](#footnote-200) a garden[[201]](#footnote-201) in Lush,[[202]](#footnote-202) on the east,[[203]](#footnote-203) and put there the human being that he had shaped. 9Yahweh God made to grow up from the ground every tree that is desirable to look at and good for food, with the life-tree in the middle of the garden, and the good-and-bad-knowledge tree.

10There was a river going out of Lush to water the garden, and from there it would divide and become four headwaters. 11The name of the first was Pišon; it was the one going around the entire Ḥavilah region, where the gold is. 12(The gold of that region is good; ruby[[204]](#footnote-204) and emerald[[205]](#footnote-205) stone are there.) 13The name of the second river was Giḥon; it was the one going around the entire Kush region. 14The name of the third river was Ḥiddeqel; it was the one going east of Aššur.[[206]](#footnote-206) The fourth river was the Perat.

15So Yahweh God got the human being and set him down in Lush Garden to serve it and keep it. 16Yahweh God ordered the human being: “From every tree in the garden you may definitely eat,[[207]](#footnote-207) 17but from the good-and-bad-knowledge tree you will not[[208]](#footnote-208) eat, because at the time[[209]](#footnote-209) you eat from it, you will definitely die.” 18But Yahweh God said, “It’s not good for the human being to be on his own. I’ll make him help equivalent to him.”[[210]](#footnote-210)

19Yahweh God shaped from the ground every creature of the open country and every bird of the heavens, and brought them to the human being to see what he would call it. Whatever the human being called a living being, it became its name. 20So the human being gave names to all the animals, to the birds of the heavens, and to all the creatures of the open country. But for a human being[[211]](#footnote-211) he didn’t find[[212]](#footnote-212) help equivalent to him.

21So Yahweh God made a coma fall on the human being so he slept, got one of his ribs,[[213]](#footnote-213) and closed up its place with flesh. 22Yahweh God built[[214]](#footnote-214) the rib that he’d got from the human being into a woman, and brought her to the human being. 23The human being said:

This one, finally,[[215]](#footnote-215) is bone from my bones

flesh from my flesh!

This one will be called woman*,*

because from a man[[216]](#footnote-216) this one was got.

24That’s why a man abandons his father and his mother and attaches himself to his woman and they become one flesh.

25The two of them were naked, the man and his woman,[[217]](#footnote-217) but they felt no shame.[[218]](#footnote-218)

## Interpretation

Gen 2—3 mostly tells its story in more straightforward prose than Gen 1,[[219]](#footnote-219) and it speaks of many familiar human realities—the land’s need of watering and working, the lovely appearance and taste of the fruit from many trees, the rivers that can play a key role in irrigation, the richness of gold and precious gems, the corporate nature of the work of farming, the mutual recognition of a man and a woman, and their abandonment of parental obligations for this new commitment. The story tells of the origin of such familiar realities, but paradoxically does so by making more sustained use of figures of speech— God shaping a human body like a potter shaping clay, God breathing into the body, God planting a garden, the four rivers, the good-and-bad-knowledge tree, the life-tree, the naming of the animals, God putting the man into a coma, God building a woman from a part of the man.

The portrayal of events and of the dynamics of life thus does not correspond to the portrayal of God’s acts in the rest of the Scriptures beyond Gen 2—3, or in regular human experience. It does compare in some ways with the portrayal in Revelation. Does the story indicate that God simply acted in different ways at the beginning of the world’s story and that he will again act in different ways at the end? Rather I take its non-realistic form to suggest that (like Gen 1) it is not a historiographic story. On one hand, its integral relationship with the succeeding chapters in the unfolding First Testament story (and with Revelation) suggests that it does refer to things that happened at some time; it is not simply a parable of how things always are for human beings. But on the other, neither is it simply a straightforward account of what the video camera might have caught. It is a parabolic account of something that happened, like Nathan’s parable in 2 Sam 12:1-4. Second Samuel 11—12 offers a literal account of David’s actions followed by that parabolic account. Both relate events; the first does so literally, the second figuratively.[[220]](#footnote-220) The non-realistic nature of the portrayal in Gen 2—3 suggests that it provides a figurative rather than a literal account of how God made the garden and its servants and how they went wrong. It is still a historical account in that it describes not how God always creates and how human beings always go wrong, but how God created at the beginning and how human beings went wrong at the beginning in a way that had fateful consequences for all humanity.

The story works as follows.

Vv. 4b-7 How God shaped a man

Vv. 8-9 How God planted a garden

Vv. 10-14 A sidebar on the rivers watering the garden

Vv. 15-18 How God provided for the man, but acknowledged a further need

Vv. 19-20 A sidebar on how God brought the animals for the man to name

Vv. 21-25 How God created the woman and brought her to the man

Like Gen 1, the chapter incorporates a number of motifs paralleling motifs in other Middle Eastern creation stories that speak of human beings made from clay, of humanity being created to work, of gardens, of life-giving plants, and of forbidden fruit: see e.g., the Sumerian “Eridu Genesis,”[[221]](#footnote-221) the Akkadian Atrahasis story[[222]](#footnote-222) (both speak both of creation and of a flood), the Akkadian Gilgamesh story,[[223]](#footnote-223) and the story of Adapa,[[224]](#footnote-224) as well as *When on High*. Some of these parallels suggest acquaintance with such stories and/or reflect the culture shared by Israel and other Middle Eastern peoples. But Gen 2—3 gives less indication than Gen 1 of being designed to challenge the perspective of other Middle Eastern stories; it focuses on narrating its own story, which in its own right tells the true tale of God bringing humanity into being.[[225]](#footnote-225) Comparing the stories within the framework of the kind of intertextuality that does not presuppose a direct relationship between stories may nevertheless help us perceive aspects of Gen 2 in its own right. In Genesis, then, the first human being is created from dirt and from the breath of a living God not from clay and the flesh and blood of a dead God. The garden is one whose fruit humanity is encouraged to enjoy. Humanity will work there; in this sense it is not a paradise. But there is no suggestion that humanity’s work will inevitably be toilsome or that it was designed the relieve God from work or that it relates to worshiping God or feeding God. Woman and man are made separately to work together. Gen 3 will relate how humanity ignores God’s instructions rather than heeding them and pays a terrible ongoing price for doing so, but Genesis focuses less on the quest for immortality or the loss of immortality than some other Middle Eastern stories, and focuses more on God’s forming man and woman, as partners in the work of his garden.[[226]](#footnote-226)

The verses about the four rivers (vv. 10-14) can be removed without disturbing the flow of the chapter—indeed they make it more even; and there is some unevenness about the references to the life-tree and the good-and-bad-knowledge tree. But there is no scholarly consensus on the way the chapters may have developed, and investigation into possibly earlier versions of the stories does not seem to make a significant contribution to understanding the chapters as we have them.

**2:4b-9.** The story begins in a way paralleling Gen 1, with a background general reference to the process that will follow (v. 4b; cf. 1:1), then a more specific description of the unformed state of things before God acts (vv. 5-6; cf. 1:2), then God’s first concrete act (v. 7; cf. 1:3). Whereas Gen 1 was concerned with “the cosmic plan of creation,” however, Gen 2 is interested in the human being “as a cultivator of his environment and as a moral agent,” and whereas Gen 1 had a vertical perspective and had God as the constant subject of verbs denoting action and speech, in Gen 2 the world and humanity are the subject of many of the verbs. In Gen 1 God doesn’t play dice with the universe; in Gen 2 he does.[[227]](#footnote-227)

Thus Gen 2 moves (v. 4b) from talking about the beginning and about the heavens and the earth and about creating (1:1; 2:4a) to talking about the day or time and about earth and heavens and about making.[[228]](#footnote-228) In this creation story “we are dealing in some sense with a history of creation from inside,” as is suggested by the reversing of the order of the words to “the earth and the heavens.”[[229]](#footnote-229) Genesis now speaks of “Yahweh God.” MT and Tg camouflage the name Yahweh by providing it with the vowels of the word for “the Lord,” to encourage readers to use that term instead, and other translations of Genesis replace it by the word for Lord in their languages, which obscures the point Genesis makes. The double title comes nineteen times in Gen 2—3, almost half the occurrences in the entire First Testament; most of the others are in Chronicles. It combines the regular Hebrew term for God which appeared throughout the preceding chapter, *’ĕlōhîm*, with the name of God, Yahweh, which will appear eleven times in the chapter that follows, Gen 4. If Gen 2—3 itself had simply used the same Yahweh, one can imagine that people listening to the story might have wondered whether he was a different deity from the “God” of Gen 1—especially if they knew that other peoples had creation stories that involved a number of gods. The double expression thus fulfils a midrashic function like that which features at many points within Gen 1 by anticipating and answering that possible question about whether Yahweh is the God who created the whole heavens and earth of whom we have just read, or a different deity. It might also be no coincidence that Chronicles and Gen 2—3 have this double expression in common. During the Second Temple period, Jews became less inclined to use the name Yahweh and more inclined to use the word “God” (as the book of Daniel, among others, shows) perhaps partly because the name might obscure the fact that the God of Israel was the God of the heavens and the earth, and in Chronicles the double expression safeguards the fact that Yahweh is the God of the heavens and the earth and the fact that the God of the heavens and the earth is Yahweh. In Gen 2—3, too, the double expression can both confirm that the creator who acts in Gen 2—3 is the God of the heavens and the earth and confirm that the God of the heavens and the earth is Yahweh the God of Israel. The God of creation is the God of Israel; the God of Israel is the God of creation. The God who has a purpose for the whole cosmos is the God who entered into a relationship with Israel; the God who entered into a relationship with Israel is the God who has a purpose for the whole cosmos. “As *Elohim* is a name of power and justice, given unto God in the creation: so now *Iehovah* a name of mercy, is attributed unto God, the whole worke being finished, because therein his mercy appeared: or rather now after God had made his worke full and complete, he is also set forth in his full and complete titles.”[[230]](#footnote-230)

The garden story begins (vv. 5-6) by taking us back to the situation presupposed by 1:2, though it expresses things in a different way. Whereas Gen 1 stood back and portrayed the big picture of the heavens and the earth, Gen 2 stands close up and speaks not of the face of the deep (1:2) but of the face of the ground.[[231]](#footnote-231) It imagines what it would have been like to position oneself on the earth, in open country (that is, land that has not been cultivated—which is all the land there is), when God has not yet furnished it with plants, people, and animals. “Bushes” (*śîaḥ*) are wilderness or desert shrubs (21:15) that are not human food unless someone is desperate (Job 30:4, 7) but would be a reasonable resource for goats and some other animals of the wild; the term might cover pasturage in general. “Plants” (*‘ēśeb*) could denote pasturage but also grains, the staple for human beings in the Middle East (see esp. Ps 104:14);[[232]](#footnote-232) in 1:29-30 the word covered both animal and human food. Gen 2 describes the kind of land that could support animals and human beings.But there is nothing growing at the moment, because it hasn’t rained yet, and anyway there are no farmers to channel the water or to manage the growth of anything that does sprout and to look after it; in the absence of such tending the land will simply continue as open country. There is the potential for such growth, because a stream comes up from the earth’s underground water resources, and it would be possible for a gardener to harness this resource and irrigate plants. What is needed is an *’ādām* to serve the ’*ădāmāh*. The first significance in the word *’ādām* lies here. The earth needs an earthling to exercise responsibility for it, to identify with it in a way appropriate to the similarity in their designations. The “divine mandate of the first account (‘fill the earth and subdue it’ 1:28) is unpacked in the purpose clause of the second (‘to till it and keep it,’ 2:15).”[[233]](#footnote-233) Humanity’s relationship to the ground is one of service—service of God and service of the ground, for whose sake humanity was created. “The purpose of human beings… is grounded (pardon the pun) in Earth.”[[234]](#footnote-234) Need drives Gen 2 as it does not drive Gen 1.[[235]](#footnote-235) Thus “a graphic sense of ‘earthiness’” pervades Gen 2—3; these chapters were written “by someone for whom creation was not an abstraction.”[[236]](#footnote-236)

So Yahweh God “forms” a laborer (v. 7). The verb (*yāṣar*) is different from “make” and “create.” It suggests the shaping of something by a potter or another craftsman (e.g., Isa 29:16; 30:14; 41:25; 44:9, 10, 12; 45:9). To judge from other references in the First Testament, “dirt” suggests frailty, fragility, and flimsiness (e.g., Job 10:9; 34:15).[[237]](#footnote-237) It also suggests that the body was dark not white![[238]](#footnote-238)As well as being made for the sake of the *ădāmāh*,the *’ādām* is made from the *ădāmāh*. In serving it, he serves not something alien but something to which he is materially related. Yahweh God then turns the body into a living person by breathing life into it. The expression *nišmat ḥayyāh*,“living breath” or “breath of life” or “life-giving breath,” comes only here, though 7:22 has “the breath of the spirit of life,” and that passage indicates that this breath is possessed by the rest of the animate creation as well as by humanity. Likewise the term for a living person, *nepeš ḥayyāh*, isthe one used to describe the sea creatures, animals, and birds in 1:20; 2:19. Breath, obviously enough, is the difference between an inanimate body and a live person; Gen 2 uses this fact in picturing how the first person came into being. He will not need to breathe into each person who comes into existence (he doesn’t even need to breathe into the first woman). One might think in terms of God’s giving procreative power to humanity that conveys the capacity to generate a living person not just a lifeless body (cf. Isa 42:5), though Elihu notes that God can take back his breath or his spirit (*rûaḥ*; Job 34:14; cf. 32:8; 33:4; Ps 104:29). And Yahweh does breathe into lifeless bodies again in Ezek 37, “the most powerful commentary on Gen. 27.”[[239]](#footnote-239) Genesis does not mention blood in connection with the making of the live human being, notwithstanding the Israelite awareness that blood is life (cf. Gen 9:4-6), perhaps because the involvement of divine blood in creation is integral to other Middle Eastern creation stories;[[240]](#footnote-240) conversely, the Middle Eastern stories do not speak in terms of something like *nišmat ḥayyāh* being breathed into humanity,[[241]](#footnote-241) Nor does Genesis think of a human person as body plus soul, or body plus soul plus spirit.[[242]](#footnote-242)

**2:8-9.** Meanwhile the potter himself becomes a gardener.[[243]](#footnote-243) Yahweh God’s planting a garden or orchard is again the small-scale, local equivalent of the large-scale, cosmic action in Gen 1:3-13, though making the orchard follows on shaping the human being, in the reverse of the order in Gen 1. Both orders make the same point: there is an intrinsic relationship between the creation of humanity and the creation of the fruitful world, with humanity being created to look after the fruitful world. The orchard is located in Lush: I follow Vg in translating the name *‘ēden* rather than transliterating the word on the assumption that Eden is simply a name (so LXX). Even if one transliterates, the word’s associations are significant, as is the case with the names Adam and Eve. Eden-things are things that are delightful, even luxurious (2 Sam 1:24; Ps 36:8 [9]; Jer 51:34; related words appear in Gen 49:20; Neh 9:25; Isa 47:8; Lam 4:5). Here the implication is that God’s orchard is in a fertile, fruitful region. Perhaps it is fertile through being well-watered in the way v. 6 described, though v. 6 has implied that at the moment it is by no means lush, so the name may be anticipatory. In terms of literal geography, the land’s location to the east of author and audience would suggest Mesopotamia, where two great rivers irrigate the land.[[244]](#footnote-244) But the east, where the sun rises, is a symbolic place, the in-between space on the borders of earth and heaven, the place where Gilgamesh needs to go in his quest for immortality.[[245]](#footnote-245) There is something to be said for facing east in prayer: we are seeking our ancient home.[[246]](#footnote-246)

In this verdant or potentially verdant region, Yahweh God makes fruit trees grow (v. 9): the garden is indeed an orchard.[[247]](#footnote-247) The trees are attractive to look at as well as their fruit being good to eat. The garden recalls parks like that of the Assyrian king Sargon II with its almond, quince, and plum trees.[[248]](#footnote-248) Yahweh God puts there two further trees. The phrase tree of life/life-tree/living tree/life-giving tree parallels the phrase breath of life/life-breath/living breath/life-giving breath. But whereas the phrase “breath of life” comes only here, “tree of life” recurs as a metaphor in Prov 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4: paying attention to insight, living faithfully, experiencing the fulfillment of your hopes, and having someone speak words of comfort when they are needed, are all life-giving realities. Proverbs’ metaphor becomes a theological symbol in Genesis. The tree of life has a broader background in Middle Eastern symbolism,[[249]](#footnote-249) which is one factor in its being a “most salient, and problematic, motif.”[[250]](#footnote-250) Apparently the fact that God has infused the human being with his breath does not mean he will simply live forever. Humanity was not created immortal.[[251]](#footnote-251) The human being will need to eat the fruit of this sacramental tree in order to live on (cf. 3:22). The story again presupposes the empirical realities of human life. People do live for quite a while, but eventually they stop breathing and die. God’s idea had been that they would eat of the life-tree and thus be able to evade this dynamic. But at this point Genesis does not tell us anything more about the life-tree than that it is there in the middle of the garden. The information about the life-tree is a note addressed to the audience of the story. Genesis will not refer to it again until 3:22-24; the note here is a bit of background for the audience to keep in mind and to recall when we come to that point in the narrative.

Proverbs also refers to knowledge much more often than any other book in the First Testament (e.g., 1:4, 7, 22, 29), with the frequent implication that *da‘at* covers acknowledgment or recognition in the way one lives, in living in light of the facts, as well as denoting intellectual understanding. And good and bad is a recurring antithesis in Proverbs (e.g., 11:27; 13:21; 14:22; 15:15; 17:20; 31:12).[[252]](#footnote-252) A more telling reference to good and bad is the “remarkable inversion” of Genesis in 1 Kings 3:9: as king, Solomon needs to be able to discern between good and bad (see also Deut 1:39).[[253]](#footnote-253) While good and bad can be a moral antithesis, in Proverbs as in 1 Kings it commonly suggests an antithesis between what is wise and brings a good result and what it stupid and brings trouble.[[254]](#footnote-254) The good-and-bad-knowledge tree, then, is a sacramental aid to making good decisions and avoid bad decisions, a means of acquiring insight for life (cf. 3:6). It is food that enables people to grow up morally and pragmatically.

**2:10-14.** The paragraph about the river spells out the implications of v. 6, though it speaks in different terms.

Somewhere in Lush (v. 10) a river emerged from the ground in the manner of the Jordan in northern Israel, where it bursts out fully formed from the foothills of Hermon. It first irrigated the garden, and then split into four rivers flowing into the rest of the world.

Pishon (vv. 11-12) appears only here. Havilah appears in contexts that suggest Egypt and Arabia (10:7, 29; 25:18; 1 Sam 15:7), which might imply that Pishon refers to the Persian Gulf and/or the Red Sea, an area traditionally associated with gold and precious stones.

Gihon (v. 13) is the stream arising on the east side of Jerusalem and providing the city with its water, but Kush denotes Sudan, which suggests that Gihon would have to denote the Nile. Possibly the use of the apparent names Pishon and Gihon trades on their etymologies as “Springer” and “Burster” (there would not be much difference between the two).

Ḥiddeqel and Perat (v. 14) are the Tigris and the Euphrates, the two great Mesopotamian rivers. One way or another, then, the four rivers cover the world around Israel. “Suddenly we find ourselves in our historical and geographical world…. This strangely profound section strives without doubt to sketch the real geographical world.”[[255]](#footnote-255) It is a real place, even if we cannot locate it.[[256]](#footnote-256)

**2:15-18.** Genesis returns to the main sequence of event after the excursus in vv. 10-14, to relate the fulfillment of the project initiated in vv. 4b-9: Yahweh God’s aim is to have someone to serve the ground (v. 5) and he is setting him in a place with plentiful provision (v. 9).

Yahweh God now makes explicit (v. 15) that the human being will serve the garden by looking after it. The garden is not merely a place to enjoy, but a place to work. Supplementing the idea of “serving” (*‘ābad*)with the reference to “keeping” (*šāmar*)is slightly puzzling: will the garden need protection? The verb’s appearing will turn out to be ironic in light of 3:24 and 4:9. In the broader context of the Torah, serving and keeping the sanctuary will be the responsibility of priests (e.g., Num 3:7-8), and this commission to the man is one of a number of hints that might invite readers of Genesis to see the sanctuary as a kind of re-establishment of Lush Garden and to see the human beings as having a priestly role in the garden as itself a kind of sanctuary.[[257]](#footnote-257) To go into the sanctuary, then, is to reenter Lush Garden, an especially welcome notion when life outside the sanctuary was discouraging. But in the immediate context serving and keeping may suggest the awareness that there are two aspects to life on the farm—cultivating plants and caring for animals (cf. *šāmar* in 30:31).[[258]](#footnote-258) The “work” will surely be a joy. We may have seen men “cultivating the land with such pleasure that it is a severe punishment for them to be called away from it to something else,” even now when enjoyment of this work has been marred by humanity’s disobedience. The audience is invited to think of it as it was designed, “when the gifts of God’s creation came forth in a joyful and abundant harvest with the help of man’s effort…. What more impressive and wonderful spectacle than this?”[[259]](#footnote-259)

The human being may eat the fruit from any of the orchard’s trees (v. 16). It is the other side of his relationship with the garden; the provision parallels the gift of food in 1:29-30. Perhaps the life-tree is included, but nothing is said about it; perhaps the assumption that the human being will not need to eat from it until death threatens.

The note about the good-and-bad-knowledge tree (v. 17) is also background to Gen 3, but Yahweh God does explain something of its importance. This tree looks good but it is lethally poisonous.[[260]](#footnote-260) Over against the life-tree, “the tree of knowledge is the tree of death.”[[261]](#footnote-261) Yahweh God’s words in v. 16 about the trees in general involved his “commanding,” though they were more permissive or promissory than compulsory, like the imperatives in 1:22. The verb “command” might suggest that the emphasis in vv. 16-17 lies on the prohibition in v. 17. The prohibition is strange in light of the recognition in the First Testament elsewhere that knowing good and bad, and being able to determine the difference between them is a key skill for life. It resembles God’s later strange command that Abraham should sacrifice Isaac, even if it seems less scandalous. That command will explicitly be a test; this command is implicitly a test. It gives humanity the opportunity of obedience.[[262]](#footnote-262) Perhaps passing the test would open up the possibility of eating from this tree.[[263]](#footnote-263) One way or another, “the question of the prohibition is haunting.”[[264]](#footnote-264) The goodness of creation (Gen 1) is not compromised by the presence of test or danger or threat or constraint. “One might wish for a garden without such dangerous trees. But that is not given to us.”[[265]](#footnote-265)

“At the time you eat of it” is more literally “on the day you eat of it” (cf. LXX), though the human being will not actually die on the day he eats of it. Vg has “whenever” (whereas Vg was notably precise when the same time expression came in v. 4), perhaps inferring that we should not be too literal in understanding Yahweh God’s words. Actually they will not die “on the day” or “at the time” or “whenever.” Adam will live for over eight hundred more years (5:3-5). *Jub* 4:29-30 neatly appeals to the fact that a thousand years are in God’s sight just like a day (Ps 90:4).[[266]](#footnote-266) Sym has “you will become mortal” and TgPsJ similarly has “you will become liable to die” (i.e., liable to the death penalty). Given that humanity was not created immortal (otherwise the tree of life would have been unnecessary), the threat is not of mortality but of losing the possibility of enjoying and serving the garden on an ongoing basis rather than only for one’s threescore years and ten; implicitly, it might thus be a threat of expulsion from the garden, where the life-tree was.[[267]](#footnote-267) But perhaps Yahweh God does mean that the man will die “on the day” or “at the time,” but will turn out to be more lenient than he threatens.[[268]](#footnote-268) He is, after all, sovereign in relation to his own word: he can even change his curse into a blessing.[[269]](#footnote-269) Arguably, there will be nothing surprising about the human disobedience (at least, for people who knows ancient Near Eastern stories or knows the story of Israel or knows themselves). The surprise lies in the fact that death does not follow.[[270]](#footnote-270) Yet there is also something surprising about a holy book that begins with a command that is immediately disobeyed and a God who fails to carry out a threat.[[271]](#footnote-271)

The goodness of creation is compromised (v. 18) by the fact that the human being whom God has created is “on his own” (*lᵉbaddô*). Other passages where this expression occurs (e.g., 30:40; Exod 12:16; Deut 8:3) make clear that Yahweh God is not referring to the man’s being lonely but to his being single-handed. By himself he cannot fulfill the task of serving the ground and looking after the garden. One would have thought that “the human is formed to be autonomous and functional. The completed being, however, reveals a deficit.”[[272]](#footnote-272) Only after creating one human being does Yahweh God articulate the awareness that making only one and putting him in the garden on his own will not work; Yahweh God’s relationship with his world is interactive. The human being will need the appropriate help (*’ēzer*). Now a king has a staff who are his help (Ezek 12:14), who are thus subordinate to him. But usually “help” denote someone strong and powerful who can help by getting one out of a mess; the term nearly always refers to Yahweh (e.g., Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; and ten times in Psalms). Here, “equivalent to him” suggests a counterpart, something in between a subordinate and a superior. Wherein lies the help? Another human being would help the man serve and care for the garden.[[273]](#footnote-273) If the first man just needed physical help on the farm, however, then another man would do fine. The First Testament does hint at the idea that a man works out in the fields, while a woman works at home cooking, making clothes, and so on. Both roles are vital; neither is more important or superior to the other.[[274]](#footnote-274) But one man and one woman won’t be enough in the long term, there is another kind of help that the man will need.[[275]](#footnote-275)

**2:19-20.** Whereas Gen 1 implies that God plans his actions and systematically implements his plans, Gen 2 portrays him acting more serendipitously and in a way that interacts with what human beings do. At first it might seem as if Yahweh God wonders if one of the animals would serve as a help to the man, as if his creative work involves experimenting,[[276]](#footnote-276) or as if he is playing the jokester or trickster.[[277]](#footnote-277) But Genesis rather describes his action as designed to establish what the man will call the animals. Thus vv. 19-20 form another sidebar which raises suspense as we wonder what God will do about the issue raised in v. 18.[[278]](#footnote-278) As is the case with its unexplained reference to the life-tree, Genesis leaves us for a moment with the recognition that the man needs help and goes off in a different direction.

Yahweh God shapes the animals from the ground (v. 19), as he had so shaped the human being. Again there is a superficial clash between the order of events in Gen 2 from that in Gen 1, where the animals were created first, but the story’s point is the same. By inviting the human being to name the creatures, Yahweh God puts them under his authority; Gen 2 once again reexpresses the point in Gen 1. Genesis perhaps implies something similar about humanity’s relationship with the animal world to its point about the garden. While naming the animals implies some authority in relation to them, naming may also imply a recognition of their individual nature and a degree of intimacy with them; they are not total strangers to humanity. Animals are vital helps in working the land, and their shared origin in being shaped from the ground, and being “living beings” like the human being who has been inbreathed by God might also have given plausibility to the idea that animals might suffice as help to the man. The verse thus continues to raise suspense, though perhaps it is significant that it refers to the animals of the wild and the birds, not to cattle.

Cattle likely do then feature as the object of the actual naming (v. 20): “animals” (*bᵉhēmāh*) often denotes livestock (e.g., 34:23; 36:6; 47:18). But the result of Yahweh God’s involving the man in naming the animals is that the man himself recognizes that none of them will do as a help in the sense of a help equivalent to him.[[279]](#footnote-279)

**2:21-24.** Yahweh God does not now do the obvious thing, which is to create another human being. His alternative procedure certifies the fact of oneness in the nature of man and woman (and of all who will be born from them)[[280]](#footnote-280) and also explains the sense of oneness that human beings may have with one another over against animals and the particular sense that a man and a woman may have in relation to each other, as if they have found their other half. It undergirds that sense.

God acts (vv. 21-23) first as an anesthetist and surgeon and then as a builder or reconstructive surgeon. Then “God himself, like the father of the bride, leads the woman to the man.”[[281]](#footnote-281) And the man recognizes the woman as his own flesh and blood, as English puts it (cf. the similar phrases in 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12-13 [13-14]). He does not name the woman in the way he names the animals (he will actually name her in 3:20). His declaration that she will be called woman is more a declaration of recognition and of her actual equivalence than an exercise of authority. It is neatly symbolized by the similarity of the words for man and wo-man, *’iššāh* and *’îš*.

The story of the woman’s origin explains another odd fact about human life (v. 24). Genesis is not here laying down rules for marriage as an institution, though it presupposes marriage as an institution.[[282]](#footnote-282) It is describing what happens rather than what should happen, though the latter follows.[[283]](#footnote-283) Now marriage means a woman leaving her father and mother to join her husband. Occasionally it may mean moving a long way (see Gen 24) but more often it simply means moving across the street within the village. Both man and woman might go out from their parents to a little house of their own or to share with another couple within the extended family. Yet a man does not leave his parents in the sense that his wife leaves hers; the new couple form a subset within the broader family to which he belongs. Nevertheless the man does abandon his family (*‘āzab*). It is a strong verb (see e.g., Ruth 1:16; 2:11; 1 Kings 19:20; Jer 14:5; 49:11; and frequently in connection with Israel abandoning Yahweh). Abandoning means giving up one obligation and taking on another. Likewise a man attaches himself to his wife in a way that replaces his attachment to his parents. “Attach oneself” (*dābaq*: see e.g., Ruth 1:14; 2 Sam 20:2) also often refers to relationships with Yahweh, like “abandon.”[[284]](#footnote-284) It does not refer to the physical sexual union. And while the expression “one flesh” comes only here in the First Testament, other references to flesh (*bāśār*: e.g., Gen 37:27; Neh 5:5)do not suggest a reference to sex but to forming one family unit that replaces the one from which one was born. It is a strange phenomenon. After all, the man was born from his parents and he has formed one community with them through his life so far. But the origin of woman in being constructed out of man explains why this transfer of loyalty is natural. Whereas the man and the woman had been one flesh with their respective parents, now they become one flesh with each other. They become one new family unit, as if they had been born that way. Because in a sense they had, the man declares when he calls her “bones from my bones” and “flesh from my flesh” (cf. Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:12-13 [13-14]).

**2:25.** Possibly the assumption that v. 24 refers to sex (which is explicit in Tg) has been encouraged by the reference to nakedness and shame in v. 25. But that reference also has other connotations.[[285]](#footnote-285) Only occasionally does nakedness or shame have sexual associations. Being naked (*‘ārûm*) usually implies being poor and resourceless and therefore humiliated (e.g., Job 1:21; 22:6; 24:7, 10; Amos 2:16; Mic 1:8). And shame may indicate that you thought you had resources but your resources turned out not be trustworthy (Job 6:20). A particular reason for shame then is that you should have been trusting in God (e.g., Pss 22:5 [6]; 25:2, 3, 20) but you failed to do so and put your trust elsewhere (e.g., Ezra 8:22; Jer 2:36), and your stupidity is now exposed. Or just in general, wrongdoing makes you ashamed (Ezra 9:6; Jer 31:19). Such references to shame bring out the second of the two main connotations of shame itself. It is a term from relationships with other people, specifically the group to which one belongs and whose acceptance one needs. It is also a term for one’s relationship with oneself; one needs a sense of self-acceptance. The first couple have nothing, but they don’t feel shamed by the fact. They can trust in God. Humanity is designed to live in trust and dependence on God and not to feel there is anything wrong with that dependence and any reason to be ashamed of it. In contrast, “the essence of shame” lies in “discomfort at the complete exposure of one's creatureliness.”[[286]](#footnote-286)

## Body and Soul, Man and Woman, Obligation and Freedom

In Western thinking it has been common to see humanity as comprising a body and a soul which is semi-independent of the body. In Genesis God formed a human being from the same stuff as the rest of the material world and breathed breath into him. It is the combination of person and breath that makes what the KJV calls “a living soul.” This analysis applies to animals as well as human beings. The distinctiveness of humanity lies in the nature of the person rather than in its breath. So at the Beginning, the first human being did not comprise a body and a soul that was separate from the body. God did not shape a body out of matter and shape a soul out of something else. God shaped a person that combined what we might call a body and what we might call a personality or soul, but these two are aspects of the one person. There is no body without a personality/soul and no personality/soul without a body. Before God breathed in breath, the whole person (body and personality/soul) was not yet alive; when the person stops breathing, the whole person (body and personality/soul) ceases to be alive. Once God has breathed in his breath, God relates to the living person as a whole (body and personality/soul)—there is no relating to a person’s personality/soul except as expressed in a body, and no relating to a body except as expressive of a personality/soul. And this whole person (body and personality/soul) was destined to experience eternal life; it is not conceivable how the body could experience eternal life separate from the personality/soul or how the personality/soul could experience eternal life without the body.

In its account of the origin of woman, Genesis confronts some common assumptions. The woman’s creation as a help to the man does not imply that she is secondary in importance; both of them together are secondary in importance to God’s garden. It does not imply that she is subordinate to him; he does not have authority over her. She is not created to be a companion or soul-friend but a co-worker. Man and woman are not so different that there is no possibility of mutual understanding between them; they have a common origin. Their origin explains the way that a man and a woman set up a new home semi-independent of their parents with a mutual commitment that rules out their parents continuing to have authority over them. Their becoming one flesh does not merely denote their sexual union but their becoming a new proto-family, an insight which coheres with Paul’s scandalized comment that sex with a prostitute means a man becomes one flesh with her (1 Cor 6:16); it is not merely a physical union. It also coheres with his analogy between a man abandoning his parents to become one with his wife and believers in Jesus becoming part of his body, part of a new community in the church (Eph 5:31). Paul is also inspired to draw some inferences from the order of the creation of the man and the woman (1 Cor 11:2-16; 1 Tim 2:8-15) which do not emerge from Genesis itself but were appropriate in the context that they address; Gen 6:1-4 will show why it would be wise for the women not to tempt the angels.[[287]](#footnote-287)

“The creature does not exist casually. It does not merely exist, but exists meaningfully. In its existence it realises a purpose and plan and order.”[[288]](#footnote-288) Humanity was created to serve and look after the garden. “The meaning of human life is to be found in tilling the acres, and not so much in dwelling in a luxury garden.”[[289]](#footnote-289) If readers might be tempted to think that the verb *‘ābad* had lost the connotation of “serve” and simply meant “work” or “till,” which would suggest an activity designed simply for the benefit of the workers, to enable them to profit from the soil, the pairing of the verb *‘ābad* with the verb *šāmar* (“keep/look after/care for/protect”) would safeguard against that temptation. The work of the gardener was designed to enable the ground to find its own fulfillment in being productive—even though this productivity would also benefit the servants. So the relationship of human beings and garden involved a mutual symbiosis. Humanity was given no freedom to rape the earth.

Human beings are created with massive freewill regarding how they live, but Genesis thinks about freewill within a different framework from the one which has preoccupied modernity (and often antiquity, actually).[[290]](#footnote-290)

Who could adequately admire the generosity of the common Lord of all? With what great kindness he regales the creature who has not yet anything to show for himself? I mean, he did not confine to half the garden the enjoyment he permitted, nor bid him abstain from most things and retain the enjoyment of the remainder. Instead, he wanted him to partake of everything in the garden and ordered him to abstain from the one tree only, showing through these things he had no other purpose in his actions than that he should be able to recognize the one responsible for such acts of kindness.[[291]](#footnote-291)

Humanity is free in most connections but limited in one connection. Yet the constraint on that freedom is not one that humanity is forced to accept. Within the framework of modernity’s understanding of freewill, “human beings have been given freedom enough to destroy themselves.”[[292]](#footnote-292) The good-and-bad-knowledge tree was the freewill tree. To put it another way, God is in the permission business. Even the command to hold back from the one tree is a kind of permission, to hold back from something bad and hold to God’s own will. It is the permission or freedom to be faithful to God that is restored through Jesus’s dying for us and through the gift of the Holy Spirit. But the man and the woman prefer to give themselves another kind of permission and freedom, a permission to renounce the grace of God. His use of his free will tricks him into servitude.[[293]](#footnote-293)

# Genesis 3:1-24—How Things Went Wrong

## Overview

In the second act of the story told in Gen 2:4b—3:24, the main question or problem is, how did the man and the woman end up outside the garden which they were created to serve? The answer is that one of God’s creatures asserts itself and they yield to it instead of asserting authority over it.[[294]](#footnote-294) They eat from the forbidden tree and lose the right to eat from the other tree. And God declares consequences that will naturally follow and consequences that he will make follow. The end of the story makes explicit for the listeners where it was going from the beginning. In this chapter there are no logistical problems to be solved on the way, as there were in Gen 2, which reflects the fact that Gen 3 is not a complete story but simply the second half of Genesis 2:4b—3:24 in which everything goes downhill. MT takes the edge off the story’s toughness by locating the end of the unit after v. 21 (with only a paragraph break, a setumah, at 3:24). The story thus ends with grace and mercy. But the motifs of vv. 22-24 (good-and-bad-knowledge, life tree, garden) are motifs from 2:4b—3:21 and themes that need closing off, and 2:4b—3:24 has to be allowed its solemn ending. It will be 4:25-26 that eventually closes the story of beginnings on a more hopeful note.

## Translation

1Now the snake was shrewder than any creature of the open country that Yahweh God had made. It said to the woman, “God really said,[[295]](#footnote-295) ‘You will not eat from any tree in the garden?!’” 2The woman said to the snake, “We may eat from the fruit of the trees in the garden, 3but from the fruit of the tree that’s in the middle of the garden God said, ‘You will not eat from it and you will not touch it, so that you don’t die.’” 4The snake said to the woman, “You will not ‘definitely die.’”[[296]](#footnote-296) 5Rather, he knows,[[297]](#footnote-297) God does, that at the time you eat from it, your eyes will open,[[298]](#footnote-298) and you’ll become like God,[[299]](#footnote-299) knowing good and bad.”

6The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and that it was an object of longing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for conveying wisdom.[[300]](#footnote-300) So she got some of its fruit and ate, and also gave some to her man with her,[[301]](#footnote-301) and he ate. 7The eyes of the two of them opened and they knew that they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

8They heard the sound of Yahweh God walking about[[302]](#footnote-302) in the garden towards[[303]](#footnote-303) the breezy time of the day,[[304]](#footnote-304) so the man and his woman hid from the face of Yahweh God among the trees in the garden. 9Yahweh God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”[[305]](#footnote-305) 10He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid.” 11He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I ordered you not to eat from?” 12The man said, “The woman you put with me – she gave to me[[306]](#footnote-306) from the tree, and I ate.” 13Yahweh God said to the woman, “What is this that you’ve done?” The woman said, “The snake – it deceived me,[[307]](#footnote-307) and I ate.”

14Yahweh God said to the snake, “Because you’ve done this:

You’re cursed, more than[[308]](#footnote-308) every animal,

and more than every creature of the open country.

On your stomach you’ll go and dirt you’ll eat,

all the days of your life.

15Enmity I will set in place

between you and the woman,

And between your offspring

and her offspring.

He’ll strike[[309]](#footnote-309) you on the head,

you’ll strike him on the heel.”

16To the woman he said,

“I will make very great[[310]](#footnote-310) your pain in connection with pregnancy;[[311]](#footnote-311)

in painfulness you will give birth to children.[[312]](#footnote-312)

Towards your man will be your desire,

but he – he will rule over you.”

17To Adam he said, “Because you listened to the voice of your woman and ate from the tree that I ordered you, ‘You will not eat from it’:

The ground is cursed because of you;[[313]](#footnote-313)

in pain you will eat from it

all the days of your life.

18Thorn and thistle it will grow for you,

but you will eat the plants of the open country.

19By the sweat of your face

you will eat bread,

Until you go back to the ground,

because you were got from it.

Because you were dirt,

and you will go back to dirt.”

20The man named his woman Ḥavvah, because she became the mother of every living person.[[314]](#footnote-314) 21And Yahweh God made for Adam and his woman leather[[315]](#footnote-315) coats, and clothed them.

22But Yahweh God said, “Here, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and bad.[[316]](#footnote-316) So now, so that he can’t put out his hand and also get from the life-tree and eat, and live through the ages….”[[317]](#footnote-317) 23So Yahweh God sent him off from Lush Garden to serve the ground from which he was got. 24Yahweh God drove the man out and made the sphinxes dwell[[318]](#footnote-318) on the east of Lush Garden, with a sword-like flame whirling, to keep the way to the life-tree.

## Interpretation

Although Gen 2 may have seemed complete enough in some ways, listeners will have known that it left many ends untied. Why don’t we now live in that lush garden? How did tending the ground turn out to be so hard? Whatever happened about the good-and-bad-knowledge tree? What was the life-tree about and how did humanity apparently lose access to it? What happened to human authority over the animal creation? Why did the relationship between a man and a woman become fraught, even though the one was created from the other? Why did relationships between married couples and their parents become fraught? How did we come to be ashamed of our naked dependence on God and to hide from God? This complex story offers insight on those questions, without exactly answering them all.

The chapter thus continues to describe familiar human realities—temptation that issues from the created world, the ease of yielding to it, the ease of mistrusting God’s goodwill,[[319]](#footnote-319) the shame of wrongdoing, the inclination to hide from God, the inclination to blame, the enmity between snake and human being, the pain of parenthood, the tension built into marriage, the toughness of agriculture, the impossibility of evading death. And for the most part it describes them in regular prose, like most of Gen 2, but its horrifying denouement in Yahweh God’s words in vv. 14-19 manifest rhythm and some parallelism. In coming to a climax with some verse, it again parallels Gen 2, though it does so in a grievous way, not least because it reverses the man’s earlier joyful poetic exclamation (contrast 3:16 with 2:23).

Gen 3 also continues to portray events in a way that does not correspond to the portrayal of God’s acts in the rest of the Scriptures or in regular human experience, as it speaks of a talking snake, of a tree that opened eyes, of God out for an evening walk in his garden, of God asking questions as if he doesn’t know the answers, of a banishing from God’s garden, and of sphinxes and a flaming sword. Genesis continues to narrate a historical parable. It tells of a once-for-all occasion at the beginning of human history when humanity chose to disobey God and thereby ruined things for all humanity, but it tells this historical story in a figurative way (see further the introductory comments on 2:4b-25 above).

Gen 3 has a further feature. Whereas it responds to most of the questions raised in Gen 2, it also raises questions that it does not answer—it declines to tie up its own loose ends. Indeed, in this chapter “a sea of questions arises.”[[320]](#footnote-320) For how long were the couple happy and untempted in the garden? Why does the snake want to use its shrewdness in the way it does? Why did Yahweh God let it operate the way it does? Why does it approach the woman rather than the man? How does the woman know the answer to its question, given that she was not there when Yahweh God issued his prohibition? Why does she add “touch” to Yahweh God’s injunction—did it come from the man or is it her idea? Is she properly playing safe, or improperly adding to Yahweh God’s word? Is she confused about which tree they are not to eat from, given that it was the life-tree that was directly described as “in the middle of the garden” (though the phrase may also have applied to the good-and-bad-knowledge tree)? What is the man doing while the snake is having its conversation with the woman? Why is the man silent? Does the snake tell the truth when it contradicts God about their not dying and when it says they will become like God/gods through eating of the forbidden tree? Is the woman correct when she says that the snake deceived her? Why does Yahweh God call to the man rather than the woman? When Yahweh God asks his questions, does he know the answer to them? What is the significance of Yahweh God’s imposing pain on the man and the woman and not implementing the threat that when they eat from the tree they will die? It is possible to suggest plausible answers to some of these questions, but their overall effect is to leave as much mystery as the mystery about human experience from which Gen 2—3 begins.

The story unfolds as follows.

Vv. 1-7 A conversation between the snake and the woman, and the consequences

Vv. 8-13 A conversation between Yahweh God and the couple

Vv. 14-19 Yahweh God’s declarations issuing from the conversation

Vv. 20-24 A series of actions that follow (naming, clothing, banishing, guarding)

**3:1-7.** It’s easy enough to seethat snakes are shrewd (*‘ārûm*); they don’t look spectacularly threatening like lions, but they can lie in wait and get people, with fatal results. In itself, shrewdness is not a negative quality (e.g., Prov 14:8, 15, 18); it denotes the capacity to make sensible decisions that will work out well, and to get people to do what you want them to do. It is not incompatible with honesty and submission to Yahweh (cf. the context of comments on shrewdness in Prov 1:4; 8:5, 12). But it is a more ambiguous word than *ḥākām*, the word usually translated “wise,” and in this context it has the advantage that it makes for a paronomasia with the word for naked in the previous verse (*‘ārûmîm*, in the plural).[[321]](#footnote-321) The snake is a bare(faced) liar,[[322]](#footnote-322) a trickster.[[323]](#footnote-323) Its being *‘ārûm* will bring to an end the couple’s feeling comfortable about being *‘ărûmîm*. Other creatures that Yahweh God made are more obviously dangerous. But it is clever and devious in a way that the other creatures are not—though that may not be saying much.[[324]](#footnote-324) Its shrewdness finds expression in attributing negative motivations to Yahweh God. Does it also lie in approaching the woman? She was not there when Yahweh God gave the man the instructions about the trees, which the snake is going to twist in more than one way.

Yet if you were seeking a symbol for shrewdness, would it be the snake that first came to mind? In Prov 30:24-28, it is the ant, the hyrax, the locust, and the lizard that epitomize wisdom or cleverness. Conversely, if you were thinking about the snake and what it might symbolize, would it be shrewdness that first came to mind? Elsewhere it is the snake’s frightening capacity to bite and poison and kill (e.g., Exod 4:3; Num 21:6-9; Pss 58:4 [5]; 140:3 [4]; Isa 14:29). But the First Testament also hints that Israel recognized a link between a snake and the traditional religion of the land (see 2 Kings 18:1-4); a number of snake figurines have shown up in archeological sites in Israel.[[325]](#footnote-325) The snake can be a symbol of fertility and a symbol of healing. One or two passages suggest a link between a snake and a supernatural power of evil that is resistant to God (Job 26:13; Isa 27:1; cf. Rev 12:9; 20:2); even if there was no conflict with such forces at the background of creation, creation did issue in conflict.[[326]](#footnote-326) Another paronomasia links the snake (*nāḥāš*) with divination (*naḥaš*).[[327]](#footnote-327)Outside the Scriptures, in the Gilgamesh story (Tablet XI)[[328]](#footnote-328) a snake steals the plant which could have restored Gilgamesh’s youth, and in modern economic thinking the snake might suggest the “potential, predatory capabilities of humans” as these are “captured by the abstraction ‘economic man.’”[[329]](#footnote-329) These different possibilities are bewildering. Perhaps the extensive symbolic and mythic background to the snake outside Gen 3 draws attention to the “demythologizing” that takes place here, where the snake is simply one of the creatures that Yahweh God made.[[330]](#footnote-330)

The story evidently doesn’t expect the woman to be fazed by a snake that talks (vv. 2-3), any more than Balaam was fazed by a donkey that talked (Num 22:21-35).[[331]](#footnote-331) And evidently the snake can assume that the woman knows about Yahweh God issuing a prohibition in connection with the trees and knows it applies to her as well as to the man. But we have noted that the question of how she was supposed to know (had the man told her, or had Yahweh God?) is only one of the questions raised by her conversation with the snake, along with whether she is confused about which tree is which, and whence comes the additional requirement that they are not to touch the tree in question.[[332]](#footnote-332) Leaving much unclear points up the story’s tragic as well as willful aspects and invites restraint in our passing judgment on the woman and the man. Everything was so clear; except that it wasn’t.

Further (vv. 4-5), is it significant that the woman doesn’t quote Yahweh God’s actual words, “You will definitely die,” whereas the snake does quote those words, in order to deny them, and also takes up Yahweh God’s reference to “the time you eat of it.” Genesis doesn’t say that the snake “tempts” the woman. Indeed, if “tempt” means “try to get someone to do the wrong thing,” Hebrew does not have a word meaning “tempt”: while *nāsāh* and the related noun *massāh* can be translated “tempt,” they then refer to humanity testing God or God testing humanity. The snake does not “tempt” the woman in the sense of suggesting something she might do (contrast Satan’s “tempting” of Jesus). Nor does it tell a lie when it declares that eating from the good-and-bad-knowledge tree will give them a Godlike capacity and cause their eyes to open; the opening of eyes refers here to the capacity to see things that are otherwise invisible (cf. Num 22:31; 2 Kings 6:17). But the snake does deceive the woman, by implicitly questioning God’s motives for his prohibition and by contradicting what he had said about the further consequences of eating from the tree (thus 1 Tim 2:14 rightly refers to Eve’s being “deceived”). But the snake leaves the woman to work out what to do in light of its contradiction and its slur. And therein lies its shrewdness. The serpent’s speech is an invitation into absurdity, it is the original piece of “bad theology,” and it is also “the establishment of ethics.”[[333]](#footnote-333) Its beguiling involves questioning the meaning of a command that was quite clear. It is typical that our resistance to God’s command works in this way.[[334]](#footnote-334) Hermeneutics is a wonderful art. One might thus think that the temptation should have been rather easy to resist; it might seem a temptation that had been reduced in force in the way that Yahweh later placed constraints around the testing of Job (and cf. 1 Cor 10:13).[[335]](#footnote-335) But the serpent turns out to be more powerful than God.[[336]](#footnote-336)

In a sense, the woman’s logic (v. 6) can hardly be faulted. There is nothing wrong with things being good to eat and good to look at or good for conveying wisdom; that last description of the tree fits the idea that good-and-bad-knowledge signifies the capacity to decide between what is good and bad morally and in its effects. The verb “convey wisdom” (*śākal*) occurs almost exclusively in the hiphil, both with the hiphil’s more common causative meaning (“make wise”) and with the rarer declarative meaning (“show wisdom”); the latter meaning spills over into the idea of being successful through the exercise of wisdom (see e.g., Prov 1:3; 16:20, 22; 21:11, 12, 16). It is a fine way of paraphrasing the idea of good-and-bad-knowledge. The trouble is that the snake “has already made a deadly attack on the artlessness of obedience,”[[337]](#footnote-337) for “very dangerous is the temptation, when it is suggested to us, that God is not to be obeyed, except so far as the reason of his command is apparent.”[[338]](#footnote-338) The next puzzle is aroused by the fact that apparently the man has been there “with her” through her conversation with the snake. It was already implied when the snake addressed the woman but used the plural when it said “you.” “It’s not good for the woman to be alone” any more than for the man to be alone, but effectively she is alone; she needed help, too, and she didn’t get it.[[339]](#footnote-339) How does the man come simply to accede to the woman’s suggestion? “He simply fell into line.”[[340]](#footnote-340) She doesn’t need to tempt or deceive or beguile him.[[341]](#footnote-341) “Great was the man's indifference, too.”[[342]](#footnote-342) So the man and the woman continue to stand together “as one flesh.”[[343]](#footnote-343) Both of them eat, and both of them have the experience that follows. Genesis does not fault either more than the other.

Through the eating, their eyes open (v. 7a), though what they see falls short of the snake’s promise. They see something visible that they have missed or whose significance they have missed, rather than something that is invisible and life-transforming in a positive way. They become self-conscious and thus self-centered.[[344]](#footnote-344) Yahweh God will later comment that they now do know good-and-bad, though the idea that knowing that they are naked constitutes this knowledge seems not to fit. More likely it was the act of eating the fruit that constituted and thus conveyed the knowledge. In effect, God had told them what counted as good and bad, but in eating from the tree they have made up their own minds about the question and thus asserted their knowledge. They had been challenged to trust God for that knowledge and they declined to do so.

They now stand exposed before Yahweh God (v. 7b) so try to do something about it. There would be some poetic appropriateness if the fig tree had been the good-and-bad-knowledge tree from which they ate, so that it is from this same tree that they now devise their makeshift covering (cf. *b. Sanhedrin* 70b).[[345]](#footnote-345) The fig tree does produce the largest leaves of the common fruit trees in Israel,[[346]](#footnote-346) though grape vine leaves are almost as big. But maybe more plausible is the inference that making clothes from fig leaves was a pathetic project for people who were hoping to become wise.[[347]](#footnote-347)

**3:8-13. “**After this transgression, the reader is prepared for swift and terrible annihilationof the human couple.” Instead, they hear the sound of Yahweh God walking about in the garden, and subsequently they hear his voice calling to them.[[348]](#footnote-348) “The anthropomorphism of the scene is again enormous.”[[349]](#footnote-349) Given that Genesis gives no hint about how much time elapsed between Yahweh God’s bringing the woman to the man and the events just described, we do not know whether the couple had a time of bliss with each other and with God.[[350]](#footnote-350) And we do not know whether Yahweh God was in the habit of taking a walk in the garden as the cool of late afternoon arrived and whether he was looking to meet with the man and the woman, though the verb “walk about” implies that he wasn’t simply out looking for them. All we know is that he went for a walk on this occasion and they knew they had to hide. Far from gaining wisdom, they have gained stupidity, in thinking they could hide from God.[[351]](#footnote-351) Perhaps Genesis implies that it was the sound of the breeze that suggested the presence of Yahweh God—in which case their fear of it anticipates Lev 26:36.[[352]](#footnote-352) But the sound (*qôl*)of someone walking suggests the sound of footsteps (cf. 1 Kings 14:6). Yahweh God’s making his footsteps audible could be a gesture of grace, an invitation to come and talk.[[353]](#footnote-353)

Perhaps God’s calling out to the man (v. 9), like a father or mother looking for one of their children, implies that the man is in some way responsible for the couple. If so, the man’s remarkable incompetence during the event described in vv. 1-7 gives him further reason for hiding. And Yahweh God might call out “Where are you” because he doesn’t know or because he wants to give the man the chance to emerge voluntarily. “The words ‘Where are you?’ are words of the Law,” though they are also spoken “affectionately.”[[354]](#footnote-354) Yahweh God wants to “engage in conversation with him so that he not be too bewildered to repent.”[[355]](#footnote-355) Declarations about the all-knowing God (e.g., 1 Sam 2:3; 1 John 3:2) are like commentaries on the “dark and menacing text” of Gen 3:8-9, where the man and the woman think they can hide from God but find that they cannot. There is a strange comfort in the fact that God does not let us fall out of his knowledge and his thoughts even when we are wayward.[[356]](#footnote-356)

Nor do we know whether the man had spotted the illogic (v. 10) in still describing himself as naked even though they had covered themselves up a bit. At least he perceives something: he perceives that he has reason to be afraid of Yahweh God. The reason for his fear is not really that he is naked. If anything it is because he is not naked, and his covering himself has issued from his ignoring the one limitation Yahweh God had placed on him.

Again, we do not know whether Yahweh God’s further request for information (v. 11) indicates that he didn’t know the answer to his question or was again trying to draw the man out, but it’s beginning to look more like the former, which fits with other passages in the Scriptures that portray Yahweh as not knowing things (Gen 22 is a significant example). Presumably God could choose to know the answer to his questions, but holding back from knowing could make for a more genuine relationship with human beings. The alternative “does he not know or is he trying to bring us out” then becomes false.

Before answering the question, the man makes his excuses (v. 12), which involve a denial of the responsibility that Yahweh God has implied and a preemptive attempt to transfer blame to the woman and to Yahweh God himself. It is quite a lot to achieve in nine words. Only in the last single word of his reply, “and I ate,” does the man answer the question. It anticipates David’s two-word response to Nathan, “I have done wrong in relation to Yahweh” (2 Sam 12:13). Both responses constitute admissions of wrongdoing but not admissions that constitute repentance, to judge from the way the man is more focused on his excuses[[357]](#footnote-357) and the way David will continue as an unchanged man, and from the way we are not told that either of the wrongdoers finds forgiveness, though they do find mercy.[[358]](#footnote-358)

So Yahweh God turns to the woman (v. 13) and addresses to her a question that looks more clearly rhetorical, yet which meets with a similar response: first deny responsibility, then push the blame somewhere else (though she does hold back from pointing out that it was Yahweh God who made the snake so clever), then end up the same as the man did.

**3:14-19**. Yahweh reverses the order of his responses in light of the answers he has received: first the snake, then the woman, then the man. A transition to poetry marks the gravity of Yahweh God’s words; “the curses… are the narrator’s main concern.”[[359]](#footnote-359) At each point Yahweh God declares that life is now going to be the way the people listening to the story experience it, in relation to the animate world, in relation to being a woman, and in relation to being a man. The negative aspects to life that Yahweh God will describe are not the way things were meant to be, but they are the way they now will be. Yahweh speaks both of how things will be, without indicating how they will come about (vv. 14, 16b, 17-19) and of how he himself will take action to make things happen (vv. 15, 16a). There is a natural process involved by which the creatures’ actions produce their fruit, and also a divine intention involved by which Yahweh’s personal will is put into effect.

The snake (v. 14) is given no opportunity to make his excuses (“Well you created me this way, and wasn’t it a good idea for me to test their commitment, as you will agree to the testing of Job’s?”). The snake alone “is summarily sentenced without interrogation—a token of God’s withering disdain”; the snake is impotent and insignificant.[[360]](#footnote-360) First Yahweh God introduces the word curse, the terrible antithesis to the word blessing (1:22, 28; 2:3) which will rival it through Gen 1—12 and beyond. It is not exactly the opposite of blessing. It does not merely mean “make fruitless” as “bless” means “make fruitful.” Its negative implications are broader. The snake will just crawl and eat dirt. The one who was *‘ārûm* (shrewd)becomes the one who is *’ārûr* (cursed).[[361]](#footnote-361) In effect, indeed, “more shrewd than any creature of the open country” gives way to “more cursed than any creature of the open country” (cf. *GenR* 19:2). There need be no implication that the rest of the animal world is cursed; the snake is cursed in a way that other animals are not. And there need be no implication that Genesis assumes that until this moment snakes had legs and did not seem to eat dirt, nor that it thinks they literally eat dirt. The comment resembles some of the “therefores” relating to names, which imply “so it’s appropriate that it’s called…” (e.g., 19:22; 25:30; 31:48; 33:17). To put it another way, originally there was nothing wrong with the snake’s manner of movement, but now its slither is “ignominious” and the sign of being cursed.[[362]](#footnote-362)

Further, the snake will appropriately live in ongoing enmity with humanity (v. 15). Yahweh God starts with the woman herself, then moves to her offspring—in other words, to all humanity. The enmity will express itself in a logical way. On one hand, the woman’s offspring will strike at the head of the snake, and on the other, the snake will strike at the heel of the offspring. And “neither wishes to wound, but to kill.”[[363]](#footnote-363) Irenaeus saw Yahweh God’s reference to the woman’s offspring’s hitting the snake on the head as fulfilled in Jesus’s victory over Satan,[[364]](#footnote-364) and later v. 15 came to be described as the Protevangelium, the first gospel preaching.[[365]](#footnote-365) But there is no indication in Genesis that Yahweh God’s words are a promise of victory; they are rather a warning of an ongoing conflict. TgNeoph and TgPsJ rather gloss the warning with a promise and a threat: on one hand, people who keep the Torah will win the victory over the snake; on the other, people who do not do so will be struck down by it. While v. 15 speaks literally about humanity’s relationship with snakes, it is also suggestive metaphorically. The woman has opened the doors to a dark power and now the doors will always be open, and humanity is daily to be exposed to attack by that power.[[366]](#footnote-366)

Yahweh God goes on to address the woman (v. 16a). In his words to her and to the man, the word “pain” as a consequence of human wrongdoing enters the reality of humanity’s story.[[367]](#footnote-367) One reason for the woman’s creation as a help to the man was that she would be able to have children. But her experience of motherhood will be affected by her action. As Yahweh God had spoken of causing enmity between the snake and the woman and her offspring, so he is going to take deliberate action in this other connection: “I will make….” It is hardly conceivable that giving birth could ever have been painless,[[368]](#footnote-368) and it wouldn’t be difficult for an Israelite to realize this it. Perhaps the stress in Yahweh God’s words lies on how great the pain is going to be, or perhaps the reference to this pain parallels the reference to the snake crawling: the pain will now have the meaning Yahweh here attaches to it. But Yahweh actually refers to the pain of conception or pregnancy, not the pain of giving birth (though the parallel colon does refer to giving birth).[[369]](#footnote-369) Perhaps the pain of pregnancy will be the pain of motherhood in a broader sense, “the pain of rearing children,”[[370]](#footnote-370) pain such as that involved in having one son kill another son (Gen 4).[[371]](#footnote-371) Either way, the pain becoming great (*rābāh* hiphil) contrasts grievously with the intention that the offspring of the man and woman should be great in numbers (*rābāh* qal, 1:28).[[372]](#footnote-372)

The woman’s relationship with her husband will also be spoiled (v. 16b)—or more spoiled than it is already. What is the desire to which Yahweh refers? After enduring the pain of childbirth, *GenR* comments, a woman might say she will never have sex again, but actually, she will want to.[[373]](#footnote-373) Like the English word *desire*, Hebrew *tᵉšûqāh* can refer to something improper or something proper: see 4:7 and Cant 7:11, the only two other occurrences. Her husband’s ruling could then point to the other side of the sexual consequences of a spoiled situation, the husband imposing himself on his wife. Or it could point to a patriarchal attitude that will run through life as a whole, which will mean the man and the woman losing the equality in the relationship which issued from their being created in God’s image and from her being a help to him. “‘To love and to cherish’ becomes ‘To desire and to dominate.’”[[374]](#footnote-374) But other rabbinic comments suggest that we should not think only of sexual desire when Yahweh refers to the woman’s desire or longing or inclination to (re)turn to her man from whom she came (*tᵉšûqāh* is not far from *tᵉšûbāh*).[[375]](#footnote-375)

Finally (vv. 17-19), and at greatest length, Yahweh God addresses the man, who is now named for the first time (in MT: in LXX and Vg he has been “Adam” since 2:19). Once again there is a curse, now a curse on the ground. Yahweh God “determined that his anger should, like a deluge, overflow all parts of the earth,” even though it will still be true that the earth is full of God’s mercy or commitment (*ḥesed*; Ps 33:5).[[376]](#footnote-376) Once again the curse will not mean making fruitless but that farming will no longer be the unalloyed joy that it might have been. It will be unpleasantly and painfully hard work. As the woman’s helping will become painful, so will the man’s. He was created to be a gardener, but he will become just a peasant. Fortunately the First Testament does not elsewhere express such a gloomy view of the farmer’s lot,[[377]](#footnote-377) as it does not express such a gloomy view of motherhood. God’s bark is worse than his bite.

The curse will work itself out (v. 18) in the man’s having to cope with opposition as he works in order to eat from the land. He will not be enjoying the fruit trees in the orchard. He will be outside the garden in the open country where he started life back in 2:4b-7 before Yahweh God planted the garden and put him there to look after it. He will eat the plants that he grows there, fighting against the natural instinct of the land to produce thorn and thistle.

Working in the garden would surely have involved some sweat (v. 19), as motherhood would surely have involved some pain, so the point in this further set of couplets likely lies especially in the second and third of them. The need to sweat in order to eat will continue all through a man’s life until his life comes to its pointless end. There will be a certain relief about that end, and a certain appropriateness about it. The statement about being dirt and going back to dirt looks like an independent saying of which variants (especially of the second colon) appear elsewhere (Job 10:9; Ps 90:3; Eccl 3:20)—as it is also used in the “ashing” at an Ash Wednesday service, “From dust you came, and to dust you will return.”

**3:20-21**. What about “at the time you eat from it, you will definitely die,” and what about the life-tree? Before we get something like an answer to those questions, there is a delay which raises the tension,[[378]](#footnote-378) though its two footnotes also take the edge off the grievousness of what has been said and of what will follow. The first footnote involves the man exercising authority in naming his wife. Neither men nor women were perhaps as troubled by that assumption of authority as many men and women are in the modern West, and anyway the stress lies on the name the man gives the woman. It is a name that speaks of life, notwithstanding her having been the one who opened the way to death. Eve is not the mother of anything yet; this first footnote is the narrator’s comment made in light of later events.

The second footnote (v. 21) relates the act of graciousness by which Yahweh God provides Adam and his woman with better clothes than the ones they had devised. So the Torah almost begins with God personally providing clothes for Adam and Eve, and ends with Yahweh personally burying Moses.[[379]](#footnote-379) Perhaps this provision, too, presupposes life outside the garden. And/or perhaps it indicates that (like good-and-bad-knowledge) the desire for clothing was not so inappropriate; clothing is a mark of honor. The point is that they had to let God provide it.[[380]](#footnote-380)

**3:22-24.** But then there is the further, final punishment, which rounds off the story by taking us back to the creation of the garden and the life-tree and the good-and-bad-knowledge.

Yahweh God’s words (v. 22) presuppose something implied by chapter 2, that the man and the woman were not created inherently immortal but would need to eat of the life-tree in order to live on. It is in some way something like a means of resurrection, though without the necessity to die. Yahweh God here implies that they have not yet eaten from the life-tree, and Gen 2 may not imply they even knew about it (they wouldn’t need it yet).

Further (vv. 23-24), with some irony, whereas the man was to serve and keep the garden (2:15), now serving and keeping are separated. Expulsion from the garden does not mean ceasing to serve the ground, but the man will now be serving the land outside the garden instead of serving the garden. And instead of being involved in keeping or guarding it, the way to the garden needs to be kept or guarded from him. Sphinxes (*kᵉrubîm*) are beings that combine features of animals and of birds and perhaps of human beings. They are not “cherubic”; they are “terrible fighters.”[[381]](#footnote-381) They appear in various connections in the First Testament. Most commonly, crafted sphinxes stand over the covenant chest in the wilderness sanctuary and in the temple. They perhaps implicitly guard it, though they more explicitly function as support for Yahweh’s throne (cf. Ezek 10). Equivalent figures (*kuribu*) stood outside Mesopotamian temples.[[382]](#footnote-382) In turn, the sword may suggest the flashing blades of a scythed chariot wheel.[[383]](#footnote-383) Sphinxes and flaming sword bring the grievous story to a close. Since the garden is to the east from the perspective of the listeners (2:8), the implication of v. 24 is that the first couple settle somewhere even further east and further away from Canaan.

## Fall, Original Sin?

The study of Gen 3 provides us with examples of at least three forms of theological interpretation of the Scriptures. The first is the articulation of the theological statements that are on the surface of the text. The second is the articulation of theological statements that one might say are implicit in the text. The third is the use of the text to make theological statements which are extrinsic to the text but are true to the Scriptures more generally. In suggesting such interpretations to the story’s author, one might expect him or her to say “Yes, the first one is something I meant, the second one isn’t something I meant but I can see it brings out implications in what I said, in the third one you are using my words to say something different from anything I meant.” The third is sometimes termed the fuller sense, but it seems more appropriate to keep that description for the second; the third is more like allegory. The interpretation of v. 15 as the Protevangelium is an example of the third (see the “Comment”).

The key overt theological statement in Gen 3 is that God has banished humanity from his garden and barred the way to it, and also thereby barred the way to the tree of life. It is in keeping with that action that the rest of the First Testament does not concern itself with eternal life; it accepts the fact that we die and go to be with our family. Within the Scriptures as a whole, the circle is completed only in their last pages, where the life-tree reappears in the new Jerusalem and access to it is promised to people who have washed their robes (Rev 22:2, 14, 19; cf. also 2:7). It is Jesus’s execution that makes this cleansing possible. People who identify with Jesus have some experience of the life of the new Jerusalem even now, but they await the true fulfillment of God’s creation purpose which will come when they have been physically raised to new life and are thus in a position to walk the streets of the city. But Genesis has no such vision of an ultimate fulfillment of God’s purpose (it has no “eschatology”).[[384]](#footnote-384) God has put his creation project on hold. Meanwhile, it is half-true that “the meaning of life is that it stops” (anon.).

The beguiling that led to this terrible result came from a creature that God had made and that was present in the garden. It did not come from a supernatural being. Paul, too, notes that it came from a snake (2 Cor 11:3). Rev 12:9; 20:2 do describe Satan as “the snake,” which invites us to see Satan as a deceiver with the characteristics of this snake in Genesis. It may also invite the inference that Satan was behind the snake. And this inference fits the way Isa 27:1 uses the word *snake* to denote the First Testament’s equivalent to Satan, Leviathan (cf. Job 26:13).[[385]](#footnote-385) But the theological insight expressed in Genesis itself remains significant: the beguiling came from within creation. “No *diabolia ex machina* are set in motion” to explain humanity’s perverted use of its freedom.[[386]](#footnote-386) Perhaps God commissioned the snake to find out whether humanity would do as he said, as God commissioned Satan to find out whether Jesus would do so (Matt 4:1).

Second Esdras 7:118 describes what happened in the garden as the “fall” of the first human beings, and this metaphor found its way into Christian theology, but it compromises the theological significance of Gen 3. First, to speak of the first human beings falling pictures them as having an exalted position before they fell. Gen 3 does not give that impression. They were not created morally good or evil, or spiritually mature. They were like children who needed to grow to maturity by coping with the challenges and experiences that came to them. In the second century AD Irenaeus emphasized this insight, and his understanding has been seen as antithetical to that of Augustine and as pointing towards the idea that the fall was a fall upwards, a move towards maturity as humanity takes responsibility for its own moral judgments.[[387]](#footnote-387) But Irenaeus’s own treatment of Gen 3 does not make the move from “the first man and woman were not yet mature” to “therefore making their own decision about the good-and-bad-knowledge tree was a step towards maturity”; he follows Genesis itself in seeing Adam as being “disobedient to God” through yielding to the blandishments of the serpent, so that “when they were put out of Paradise, Adam and his wife Eve fell into many troubles of anxious grief, going about with sorrow and toil and lamentation in this world.”[[388]](#footnote-388) A second disadvantage of the “fall” image is its implication that they were the victims of what happened. Gen 3 implies that they jumped, not that they fell. The occasion was a rebellion, not a fall, though Gen 3 has no specific word to describe the couple’s act of disobedience.

Given the disadvantages of the word “fall,” it is fortuitous that the neither the Torah, the Prophets, and the Writings, nor the New Testament, use the word, though in the absence of another convenient term it has proved useful to summarize Paul’s point about the origin of human wrongdoing in Rom 5:12-21. Here Paul brings out theological implications of Gen 3 that lie beneath the surface there. Sin came into the world through one human being, and death came in as a consequence (cf. 1 Cor 15:21-22, 45-49). While Gen 3 does not portray humanity as created immortal, it does imply that humanity could have made the move from limited life to lasting life by eating from the life-tree and that by its disobedience it forfeited that possibility, so that this disobedience did mean that death came in. And the influence of the first human beings on their descendants meant that death came to all humanity, as Rom 5:12 says.

At Rom 5:12, Vg has all humanity sinning “in Adam,” and this translation encouraged the development of the doctrine of original sin, which (in the formulation of the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion) “standeth not in the following of Adam… but it is the fault and corruption of the Nature of every man, that naturally is engendered of the offspring of Adam; whereby man is very far gone from original righteousness, and is of his own nature inclined to evil, so that the flesh lusteth always contrary to the Spirit; and therefore in every person born into this world, it deserveth God's wrath and damnation.” While Genesis does not suggest that all subsequent humanity is implicated in Adam’s own sin and therefore shares in his guilt, its account of the human story as it unfolds after Gen 3 does suggest a certain inevitability about human sinfulness, which Christian theological reflection makes more explicit: “It took the work of the last Adam to bring home to us our full downfall in the first Adam.”[[389]](#footnote-389) We might put it in sociological rather than psychological terms: Adam and Eve’s rebellion did not change individual human makeup, but it did fatally change the environment in which all human beings would now be born.[[390]](#footnote-390)

There is little subsequent reference to Gen 3 in the First Testament, especially compared with the importance of the chapter in Paul and in subsequent Christian theology.[[391]](#footnote-391) The book with which it most resonates is Ecclesiastes. Like Ecclesiastes, Gen 3 honors the ambiguity of humanity’s position in the world. As created by God and living in God’s world, human beings are both responsible for the things that they do and are also victims of the things that happen to them. If the readers of Gen 3 are like the man and the woman in the story who long for “reason without pathos,”[[392]](#footnote-392) for understanding without vulnerability, for an escape from anxiety that does not involve trust, they will be disappointed. Like Ecclesiastes (and like Job 38—41), Gen 3 sees humanity as challenged to live by trust in God where we cannot understand and to be satisfied with partial insights into our lives and to give up aspirations to finding our own way to wisdom.

Gen 3 offers various possible ways of conceptualizing the nature of the original sin. It may be the wish to make up one’s own mind, to exercise freewill, to exercise choice. It may be pride. It may be ambition, the longing to be like God or to be God. It may be desire (but Gen 3 is not very interested in sex and does not suggest a link between sin and sex). None of these characteristics are wrong in themselves, but they are all capable of going wrong. Gen 3 itself does not explain human wrongdoing; it remains a mystery. It redirects the question about sin’s origin in order to focus rather on its nature, as “the conscious disobedience of man to the will of God.”[[393]](#footnote-393) The speech of the serpent, “like all bad theology—of which this speech is the original—is itself only an interpretation of human existence which does not explicitly express but only implies a call to disobedience.”[[394]](#footnote-394) We may trace the process whereby the man and the woman came to do what they did, yet such tracing does not explain the action; “a chasm opens” and “it becomes really inconceivable how the evil could have been committed.”[[395]](#footnote-395)

Nor does Gen 3 explain the origin of evil in the broader sense. It does presuppose that God created a good world (the point that Gen 1 makes explicit) but it also presupposes that God’s good created world had puzzling features, pressures, and temptations. In connection with evil in the world, its message indeed compares with that of Job 38—41, which challenges Job to accept the fact that he will not understand everything (not least, what has happened to him), to come to terms with the fact that the world does not revolve around him, and to live with the evidence and thus the conviction that God is not doing too bad a job of running the world. The narrator of Gen 3 does not imply access to much of God’s will and intentions and so does not imply that people listening to the story should grasp them.[[396]](#footnote-396) “Many readers assume that the biblical author had fairly complete resolution on theological matters.” But Gen 3 does not give this impression regarding the question of how to resolve the conflict between the presence of evil in the world and God's reign over it. It does not resolve the “conundrum”; it “merely expresses it.”[[397]](#footnote-397)

Whereas Paul can see Adam as the one responsible for the coming of sin and death into the world (Rom 5:14; 1 Cor 15:22), in the context of a series of warnings about womanhood, Sirach 25:24 reminds its readers that the beginning of sin came from a woman, and because of her we all die. Likewise Paul elsewhere bases a requirement that women should learn in submission on the fact that the man was formed first, not the woman, and that it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner, not the man (1 Tim 2:14: it is a common critical view that Paul himself didn’t write 1 Timothy, but this possibility doesn’t affect the question of the theological interrelationship of the passages). Romans, 1 Corinthians, and 1 Timothy are all using Gen 3 through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to illumine and support their points, though in none of the passages do the points issue from Gen 3 itself. It is evenhanded in its attribution of blame to the man and the woman: the woman sins by her words, the man sins by his silence.[[398]](#footnote-398) Paul’s further comment that women need to stay in submission to their husbands, not least if they are to be preserved though childbirth (1 Tim 2:15), may reflect Gen 3:16 LXX which speaks of the woman having “recourse” to her man.[[399]](#footnote-399) First John 2:16 issues a warning to the faithful that sees an ongoing significance in Gen 3:6, a warning about the desires of our physical nature (“good to eat”), about desires that arise from what we see (“an object of longing to the eyes”), and about pretentiousness (“desirable for conveying wisdom”); compare also the three temptations in Matt 4:1-11; Luke 4:1-13.[[400]](#footnote-400) The implication is that Gen 3 describes the ongoing dynamics of human decision-making as well as describing something that happened once for all.

# Genesis 4:1-26—How Things Got Worse

## Overview

The question or the problem that would make the audience listen attentively when the storyteller had reached the end of Gen 3 is, what will happen to the first human couple and their destiny to fill the earth? The answer is: (a) they have a son who worships God; (b) they have another son who also worships God, and God likes his worship more, so his brother kills him, and starts a line that continues accordingly; (c) they have a third son so that things can start again. One might treat Gen 2:4b—4:26 as actually a three-act drama; Gen 3 came to such a discouraging end, and for a while Gen 4 portrays things as getting worse, but it closes with a note of hope. Yet Gen 4 has its own coherence as a story. The account of the birth of the two sons, their work, and their worship (vv. 1-4a) raises the audience’s anticipation: maybe things outside the garden will not be so hopeless. If the audience simply entertains that hope, it has missed hints that catastrophe may again be on the way, and this possibility now looms (vv. 4b-7). The audience waits to see how Cain will react, but disaster indeed ensues (v. 8). So what will happen now? The dynamics of the answer (vv. 9-16) overlap with those in 3:8-24. The dynamics of what follows (vv. 17-18) in turn reprise the beginning of 4:1-4a, while the dynamics of the next scene (vv. 19-24) reprise those of 4:4b-8. We therefore expect another confrontation like the confrontation with Adam and Eve and with Cain, but instead the sequence breaks off and vv. 25-26 closes the story with grace and mercy and thanksgiving and worship. The Hollywood ending enables the audience to go home and sleep and dream.

## Translation

1Now[[401]](#footnote-401) the man slept with his woman, Ḥavvah, she got pregnant, and she gave birth to Qayin and said, “I’ve generated[[402]](#footnote-402) someone with Yahweh”![[403]](#footnote-403) 2She went on to give birth to his brother, Hebel.[[404]](#footnote-404) Hebel became one who pastured sheep, while[[405]](#footnote-405) Qayin became one who served the ground.

3After some time, Qayin brought some of the fruit of the ground as an offering for Yahweh, 4while Hebel, too, brought some of the firstborn of his flock, some[[406]](#footnote-406) of the fat parts. Yahweh recognized Hebel and his offering, 5but Qayin and his offering Yahweh did not recognize. It really enraged Qayin and his face glowered.[[407]](#footnote-407) 6Yahweh said to Qayin,

Why has it enraged you,

why has your face glowered?

7If you do what’s good, there’ll be a lifting up,[[408]](#footnote-408) won’t there,

but if you don’t do what’s good,

At the entrance wrongdoing[[409]](#footnote-409) is something lying,[[410]](#footnote-410)

and towards you is its desire,[[411]](#footnote-411)

but you – you’re to rule over it.”[[412]](#footnote-412)

8Qayin told Hebel his brother.[[413]](#footnote-413) And while they were in the open country, Qayin set upon Hebel his brother and killed him.

9Yahweh said to Qayin, “Where’s Hebel, your brother?” He said, “I don’t know – am I the one who keeps guard over my brother?” 10He said, “What have you done? The sound of[[414]](#footnote-414) your brother’s spilt blood[[415]](#footnote-415) is crying out to me from the ground. 11There, you are cursed, more than[[416]](#footnote-416) the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s spilt blood from your hand.12When you serve the ground, it is no more to give its energy to you. A drifter, a vagrant, you will be on the earth.”

13Qayin said to Yahweh, “My waywardness[[417]](#footnote-417) is too big to carry.[[418]](#footnote-418) 14Here, you’ve driven me away today from the face of the ground, and from your face I’m to conceal myself, and I’m to be a drifter, a vagrant on the earth – and anyone who finds me may kill me.” 15But Yahweh said to him, “Therefore,[[419]](#footnote-419) anyone who kills Qayin, sevenfold[[420]](#footnote-420) it’s to be redressed.” So Yahweh set a mark for Qayin in order that no one who found him would strike him down. 16Then Qayin went out from being before Yahweh’s face and lived in in the country of Drifting, east of Lush.

17Qayin slept with his woman, she got pregnant, and she gave birth to Ḥanok. He was building a town, and he named the town after his son Ḥanok. 18To Ḥanok was born Irad. Irad fathered[[421]](#footnote-421) Mehuya’el, Mehiya’el[[422]](#footnote-422) fathered Metusa’el, and Metusa’el fathered Lemek.[[423]](#footnote-423) 19Lemek got himself two women; the name of one was Adah, the name of the second Ṣillah. 20Adah gave birth to Yabal; he was the ancestor of everyone who lives with a tent and livestock.[[424]](#footnote-424) 21His brother’s name was Yubal; he was the ancestor of everyone who plays guitar or pipe. 22Ṣillah, she too gave birth, to Tubal Qayin,[[425]](#footnote-425) forger, every craftsman in copper and iron.[[426]](#footnote-426) Tubal-qayin’s sister was Na’amah.

23Lemek said to his women,

Adah and Ṣillah, listen to my voice;

as Lemek’s women, give ear to my word.

Because I’ve killed someone for wounding me,

a young man for injuring me.

24If for Qayin it’s redressed sevenfold,

for Lemek seventy-sevenfold.

25Once more Adam slept with his woman and she gave birth to a son. She named him Šet, because “God has set in place for me another offspring in place of Hebel, because Qayin killed him.” 26To Šet, too, a son was born, and he named him Enoš.

At that time a beginning was made[[427]](#footnote-427) to calling out with the name Yahweh.[[428]](#footnote-428)

## Interpretation

“At last we have passed over that expanse of text on which all expositors have toiled exceedingly…. The chapters that follow are less subject to debate.”[[429]](#footnote-429) Luther makes this comment before starting his exposition of Gen 4, on which he then goes on to spend as much time as he spent on Gen 3 and more time than he spent on Gen 1 or Gen 2.[[430]](#footnote-430) Christian tradition sets Gen 1—3 sharply off from Gen 4 and succeeding chapters, but Genesis itself does not do so. The story of Adam and Eve’s children and what goes wrong with them follows straight on from the story of the parents and what went wrong with them. Once again the story raises familiar human issues: sex, pregnancy, the birth of children, the roles of different children, sibling rivalry, the making of offerings, God blessing one person and not another, the multiplying of sexual relationships, conflict and violence in the community.[[431]](#footnote-431) But Adam and Eve’s children stand at the center of the chapter. There is one son, and then another son, and the question is, how they will relate? The answer is discouraging, indeed “frightening,”[[432]](#footnote-432) and there is not too much improvement in the story of their grandchildren and great grandchildren and so on. But at least the chapter closes on a note of hope, as if all is not lost, as it goes back to its starting point and introduces another son.

In this way and in its overall dynamic, Gen 4 parallels Gen 3, but it sees things playing out within the family and outside the garden. Once again someone gives in to a bad idea, Yahweh asks more than one (possibly rhetorical) question,[[433]](#footnote-433) a guilty party is evasive or self-defensive, there is talk of a tension between desiring and ruling over, there is a curse, there is some expression of mercy by Yahweh, but once again there is a driving out to land east of Lush. Accompanying its concern with a sibling relationship rather than a marriage relationship is its portrayal of the development of human life—the growth of the family, the first offerings to Yahweh, the building of a town, the beginnings of culture and technology, and the first calling out with Yahweh’s name. Gen 4 portrays people’s lives in a more true-to-life way than Gen 3; there is no talking snake or Yahweh going for an afternoon walk or whirling flaming sword. There is a remarkably conversational relationship between Yahweh and Cain. But whereas Adam and Eve simply have to leave the garden and Yahweh stays involved with them, Cain has to leave the face or presence of Yahweh. There will be no more conversations between God and human beings until the Abraham story (Gen 15).[[434]](#footnote-434) On the other hand, the story ends with the birth of another child and with him having a child and thus with the promise on an alternative to Cain’s line, and with people beginning to call out with Yahweh’s name.

If “the most prominent anthropological theme in the Old Testament is that of violence”[[435]](#footnote-435) then it is appropriate that the story of Cain killing Abel features early in the account of life outside the garden. The first scene relates the background and the deed itself, “the beginning of a murder.”[[436]](#footnote-436) The second relates Yahweh’s response. The third tells of the subsequent life of Cain and his family.[[437]](#footnote-437) The fourth speaks of how Adam and Eve start again.

Vv. 1-8 Cain kills Abel

Vv. 1-2a Eve gives birth to Cain and Abel

V. 2b They have different occupations

Vv. 3-5a They bring different offerings, and Yahweh reacts differently

V. 5b Cain gets angry

V.v. 6-7 Yahweh issues a challenge

V. 8 Cain kills Abel

Vv. 9-16 Yahweh banishes Cain

V. 9 Yahweh confronts Cain

Vv. 10-12 Yahweh issues a sentence

Vv. 13-14 Cain protests

Vv. 15-16 Yahweh alleviates the sentence

Vv. 17-24 Cain starts a family

Vv. 17-18 Cain initiates a family line and builds a town

Vv. 19 Lamech starts two families

Vv. 20-22 They have different occupations

Vv. 23-24 Lamech speaks of vengeance

Vv. 25-26 Adam and Eve start again

Vv. 25-26a Eve gives birth to Seth

V. 26b People begin to call on Yahweh

**4:1-2**. “Slept with” is literally “knew,” both being euphemisms for “had sex with.” Hebrew uses the verb “know” even in connection with casual sex, so there is no suggestion that sex is a deep way of “knowing.” On the other hand, using this verb (which recurs in v. 9) conveys some irony in light of the significance of the theme of knowing in Gen 2—3.[[438]](#footnote-438) It is not explicit that Adam and Eve had never had sex in Eden, though it may be implied. But the importance lies in where the sex led. Eve starts to live up to her name and starts being a help to Adam by giving birth to Cain. The name (more precisely Qayin) comes from the root *qyn*, whichmeans to forge; the Kenites/Qenites/Qinites (e.g., 15:19) are perhaps so called because they were metalworkers.[[439]](#footnote-439) The name is thus etymologically unrelated to *qānāh* meaning “acquire,” or in this context “have” (in the sense of “have a baby”), or “generate,” but the name points to suggestive link.[[440]](#footnote-440) Eve had Cain with Adam, but what strikes her is that she had him with Yahweh. Having a baby does involve a man, a woman, and God, but modern Western talk of a couple being pregnant needs not to imperil the significance of the fact that actually it is the woman who is pregnant, and modern ways of making pregnancy and safe birth possible do not to imperil the fact that a woman has a baby with God. The birth is a hopeful event and Eve’s comment is a hopeful statement. The couple’s (initiated by Eve) has not broken their relationship with Yahweh. Yahweh is involved in Eve’s life, outside the garden, and Eve is not hiding from Yahweh any more. Whether or not giving birth is more painful than it might have been (3:16), it is dangerous, and Eve’s successfully giving birth is another indication that she has done so “with Yahweh.” In a moment, her sons will also give expression to their relationship with Yahweh. V. 1 perhaps implies that it was Eve who named Cain, as she will name Seth (v. 25); either mother or father can be the name-giver in the First Testament (in v. 26 Seth names Enosh). More explicitly, in her exclamation about the meaning of Cain’s name she speaks as the archetypal “joyful mother of children” (Ps 113:9).[[441]](#footnote-441)

Neither Eve nor the narrator comment on her second son’s name (v. 2a). Maybe it’s insignificant; not every name has implications. But the names of Eve and Cain were explicitly significant, as will be the name of the third son (v. 25). Adam’s name was implicitly significant, too, given the recurrence of the word *’ādām* with the meaning “man” and of the word for the “ground,” *’ădāmāh*, from which and for which he was made. And Abel (more precisely *hebel*) means “breath,” not breath in the sense of the means of life but breath in the sense of something insubstantial and evanescent, like an idol, or (in Ecclesiastes) like all human endeavor in its ultimate emptiness and fruitlessness. Does the name that contrasts with Cain’s indicate that he doesn’t mean as much to Eve as Cain did? The firstborn is commonly the son who counts most.[[442]](#footnote-442) It will transpire that Eve’s second son is easily blown away. Presumably it was not what they had in mind in naming the boy, and as a name *hebel* could have another meaning (herdsman is the most attractive of the possibilities),[[443]](#footnote-443) or it could simply be a name. The explicit point that Gen 4 keeps repeating about Abel is not the meaning of his name but the relationship he has with Cain: he is Cain’s brother, the brother of his murderer (vv. 2, 8a, 8b, 9a, 9b, 10, 11); compare the way the book of Ruth keeps identifying Ruth as “a/the Moabite.” Maybe they were even twins—there’s no second reference to sex and pregnancy before the report of his birth and naming.

Keeping flocks and working the soil (v. 2b) are two key human occupations, and for the average Israelite family there are two key tasks outside the home, looking after the animals and tending the ground. The two brothers take one task each. It would be nice then to picture them as being a help to each other, as a man and his wife were designed to be, but actually in Genesis “brothers are naturally rivals.”[[444]](#footnote-444) Only the second of the occupations was directly mentioned in Gen 1—3 as the task for which humanity was created, which perhaps suggests it was the more important. Even girls can look after sheep (see e.g., Exod 2:16), so it might naturally be the task that falls to the younger brother.[[445]](#footnote-445) Admittedly, keeping the sheep would be a key aspect of people who were made in God’s image holding sway over the animals (1:26-28), and “keeping” has been in other ways an important motif in Genesis already (2:15, 3:24). But the elder brother gets the task that Yahweh explicitly commissioned, while his little brother gets the secondary task. In v. 2b Abel comes first and Cain second; perhaps Genesis is just letting the order fluctuate for the sake of variety: Cain-Abel, then Abel-Cain, then Cain-Abel again in v. 3.

**4:3-5.** Genesis introduces the making of offerings (as it introduced God in chapter 1) in a way that presupposes that the listeners know enough about them to make sense of what it says—as of course they do. Genesis assumes that worship needs no explanation. As a lead in to his comment about God having made us for himself so that our hearts are restless until they find their rest in him, Augustine declares that God stirs human beings to take pleasure in praising him.[[446]](#footnote-446) And any people except Westerners and other urbanized people know that it is a natural human thing to bring presents to God, as natural as bringing a present to a human being, though such offerings to a human being can be indications of some insecurity in the relationship (the other “offerings” in Genesis are Jacob’s offering to Esau and his sons’ offering to Joseph in Gen 32—33 and 43). Gifts from the fruit of the ground will be an integral part of the offerings for which Yahweh in due course issues regulations, in Deut 26:1-11 (see also Lev 2, though those regulations relate to grain offering in particular). Cain and Abel’s making offerings on their own initiative suggests that in subsequently issuing instructions for these offerings, Yahweh is adopting that human instinct and harnessing it to the relationship between Israel and himself, as he does with the institution of kingship, the building of the temple, and (one might infer) the institution of priesthood. The reference to the fruit of the ground is neat, given the significance of fruit in Gen 1:11-12, 29 (positively) and 3:1-6 (more equivocally), and given the significance of those later instructions in Deut 26:1-11 about bringing the first of the *fruits* of the ground to the place Yahweh chooses, in an acknowledgment that Yahweh has fulfilled his promises and given his people the land.

It would also be natural for Abel to bring an offering from what issues from his work (v. 4), but here the problems start. Abel’s offering also corresponds to regulations which will feature later in the Torah (see Lev 1, but especially Deut 12).While there is no doubt that Cain’s offering was a proper one, Deut 26:1-11 will talk about the *first fruits* of the ground, and Cain’s offering does not correspond to that expectation.[[447]](#footnote-447) In contrast, Abel brings some of the firstborn of his flock, as Deut 12 will say. He brings specifically some of the fat parts, on which Lev 3 will lay great emphasis: the offerer and Yahweh share the sacrificial meal, but Yahweh gets the juiciest parts of the animal. And here, Yahweh “recognizes” Abel and his offering. The verb (*šā‘āh*) is unusual. It is used only here of a positive regard by God; it occasionally applies to human recognition of or regard for God (e.g., Isa 17:7-8, 31:1). Presumably it indicates that Yahweh accepted the offering, perhaps that he liked its smell (cf. Gen 8:21), though Genesis notes first that Yahweh accepted the person.[[448]](#footnote-448) Perhaps he gave some sign of this acceptance like the one in Lev 9:24 or Judg 6:20-21. But we are reduced to guesswork on that question. “As a reader, one has more questions to the text than the narrator is interested in.”[[449]](#footnote-449)

Whatever was the sign of recognition, Yahweh did not give it to Cain (v. 5). We might have wondered if we should blame the victim by asking whether Abel had been trying to do better than his brother: “you bring some ordinary offerings from your work, I’ll bring some extraordinary ones from mine, and we all know that meat is better than vegetables.” Or we might have suspected that there was some other difference in their attitude, one that worked in Abel’s favor rather than against him (cf. Heb 11:4). Or we might have seen the difference as the first instance of a pattern that will recur whereby Yahweh favors the second son rather than the first, against the social norm. Or we might have wondered whether sacrifices that involve shedding of blood are more pleasing to Yahweh.[[450]](#footnote-450) Or we might have seen the difference in Yahweh’s response as pointing to another mystery like the mysteries in Gen 2—3 and the mystery for Job about the way Yahweh treats him; we cannot always know why God acts the way he does; the subsequent stories about God’s “mysterious choice to elevate one brother to prominence” suggest that God’s attentiveness to Abel’s sacrifice and not Cain’s is not driven by what they do.”[[451]](#footnote-451) But actually Genesis has drawn attention to the differences between the quality of the brothers’ offerings, “some of the firstborn of his flock, someof the fat parts” over against “some of the fruit of the ground.” This difference that makes it not surprising that there is the difference in Yahweh’s response. “It is not the distinction between the two professions that leads to deadly conflict… but the offering to God which two brothers make of their produce.”[[452]](#footnote-452) So Cain gets angry and goes into a huff. Anger is an understandable reaction to rejection.

**4:6-7. “**Although Cain’s sacrifice is ignored by God, his anger is not.”[[453]](#footnote-453) Thereis enough rhythm, parallelism, and figurative speech to imply that Yahweh’s words of confrontation take poetic form, like the words in 3:14-19.

First (v. 6), Yahweh asks a double rhetorical question. Its implication is that instead of getting into a huff Cain ought to have thought about what has just happened and about why Yahweh might have appreciated Abel’s gift in a way he did not appreciate Cain’s.

In making the point (v. 7a), Yahweh implies that Cain has thus not done something “good.” That root recurs again, as the verb whose related adjective came fifteen times in chapters 1—3. Cain’s giving has not corresponded to the goodness of what God made and has not suggested that Cain has inherited the ability to recognize the difference between good and bad. His doing something that didn’t really count as good doesn’t imply that he had done something wrong. It did mean he didn’t get an enthusiastic response from Yahweh. It is through having this experience that he is in danger of wrongdoing. The kind of testing experience that came to his mother (and will come to Abraham and to Job) is now coming to him.[[454]](#footnote-454) “Wrongdoing” is *ḥaṭṭā’āt*, conventionally translated “sin”; it suggests failing to meet God’s standards, more because one doesn’t try than because one tries and falls short. With some irony, the word does not occur in Gen 2—3, which is regularly and plausibly seen as the story of how sin entered the world.[[455]](#footnote-455) In Yahweh’s own way of speaking, the moment when someone has not offered the best to him and then has found that Yahweh’s response is negative is the moment when sin threatens. Wrongdoing lies there relaxed, like a sheep or lion having a nice rest (the best-known occurrence of the verb is Ps 23:2). The entrance it is keeping an eye on is presumably that of Cain’s tent (cf. 18:1), or metaphorically that of Cain’s life. There’s no suggestion that it’s crouching waiting to pounce. It’s quite comfortable and laid-back. It knows it won’t need to do anything very shrewd to catch this victim.

It does have its eye on Cain (v. 7b). “Desire” is the word Yahweh used to describe the woman’s feelings towards her man (3:16).[[456]](#footnote-456) Whatever the moral significance of that desire, there is no doubt that this desire is threatening. It will aim to issue in a consuming of its object. As in that earlier verse, “ruling” is set over against “desire.” Like Eve in relation to Adam is the animal’s desire in relation to Cain. So what kind of creature lies at the entrance to the tent and might pounce? The link with Gen 2—3 makes one wonder whether it is again a snake.[[457]](#footnote-457) Cain’s parents had been told to exercise authority over the animal creation but they had given in to its blandishments instead. Cain is told that he needs to rule over the wrongdoing that lies at the door waiting to catch him in the same way. TgPsJ and TgNeoph underline the freedom Yahweh gives Cain to master wrongdoing, and Erasmus refers to these verses in his defense of the notion of freewill.[[458]](#footnote-458) Luther responds that the exhortation that Cain should master wrongdoing does not mean that he can.[[459]](#footnote-459) While Erasmus has the better of the exegetical argument, Luther has the better of the theological one. But the two theologians are operating with different notions of freewill, and both are seeking to push the implications of the text in a more logical way than is possible. Much of this verse is allusive and ambiguous, and we have to leave it that way. As is the case with Gen 3, this story works by raising more questions than it answers.[[460]](#footnote-460)

**4:8**. Cain has nothing to say back to Yahweh. Perhaps he was not listening. He believes that actions speak louder than words. He turns his plowshare into a sword.[[461]](#footnote-461) “Unable to kill God, Cain kills God’s favorite.”[[462]](#footnote-462) The account of the horrific slaying is terse, short and to the point.

O Cain, what are you doing? Don't you know to whom you're talking? Don't you understand that this conversation is taking place with your brother? Don't you realize that he was born of the same mother as you?[[463]](#footnote-463)

For Cain, such considerations are overwhelmed by the need to bury his burden of shame and of the necessity to face every day the brother whom Yahweh prefers.[[464]](#footnote-464) The open country is where you do something that no one can see (Deut 22:25-27). Thus “the first man who was really naturally born into this real world is a murderer.”[[465]](#footnote-465) There is something Gothic about Cain.[[466]](#footnote-466)

**4:9.** Yahweh responds with a question like the one he addressed to Adam (3:9), which might again imply that he is holding back from knowing the answer, or simply giving Cain the chance to own up to what he has done—the effect is the same. Cain’s response begins with a lie. Then he asks his own rhetorical question, which implies he assumes that Yahweh doesn’t know the answer, and he incorporates another occurrence of the verb “keep” (cf. 2:15; 3:24). Does Cain mean that Yahweh is the person who ought to know the answer to his own question?—after all, Yahweh is supposed to be the keeper of his people (e.g., Ps 121:3, 4, 5; 145:20).[[467]](#footnote-467) Indeed Cain thereby raises a troubling question, for Yahweh has not been keeping Abel, or (for that matter) keeping Cain by keeping him from falling to temptation. And/or is Cain also making a snide observation about his own occupation and about his brother’s occupation, which Yahweh might seem to be enthusiastic about? Abel was someone who pastured sheep, about which Yahweh had said nothing. Cain was someone who kept the ground, a project about which Yahweh was enthusiastic. Is Cain supposed to keep his brother as well?

**4:10-12.** Yet another rhetorical question follows. Yahweh does know what has happened, but not merely through his general omniscience.“Cry out”is almost a technical word for the cry of the needy or the oppressed, addressed to human beings with power, or to God (e.g., Ps 34:17 [18]; 77:1 [2]). It transpires that the scream of people who are treated wrongly is not silenced when they are killed. While they themselves may cry out before it happens, their blood continues to scream afterwards. It does so because it falls onto the ground and lies there as a stain that cannot be missed. A slaying cannot simply be ignored as if it did not matter. It puts the world out of kilter. Shed blood cries out for redress. It does not cry out without there being someone listening. “Abel was dead to Cain, but not to God.”[[468]](#footnote-468)

A curse therefore follows (v. 11). In his parents’ story, the snake had been cursed and the ground had been cursed, but now the wrongdoer himself is cursed, with a combination of or a cross between those two curses. As God spoke performatively in bringing the world into being, so he continues to speak performatively.[[469]](#footnote-469) Cain receives a curse like the snake, a “more than” curse. This “more than” compares Cain to the ground which was the object of the curse uttered to his father. This curse appropriately and necessarily banishes him from the ground because of the scream that arises from it. There is no way Cain can now be tending the ground and expecting it to produce its fruit. He has served the ground and brought the fruit of the ground, but now he has alienated the ground.[[470]](#footnote-470) At the same time, in a strange fashion the curse respects Cain in a way that simply ignoring his action or easily forgiving it would not. Rather than simply sending him off in shame with no means of making good for what he has done, it treats him as a responsible human being and even invites him to repentance. Nor does Yahweh give him the escape of death. Perhaps Yahweh will rather have him go on with life and be the means of creating the town and carving out a new future for humanity and even thus making some redress for his wrongdoing and working off his shame.[[471]](#footnote-471)

The result (v. 12) is that whereas he had been the one who took up Yahweh’s commission to his parents to serve the ground, and had brought his not-good-enough offering from it to Yahweh, and had shed his brother’s blood, he will find that the ground will no longer yield its fruitfulness to him. Energy (*kōaḥ*) is not something that only personal beings possess. The world of nature has life and a voice and a will. It is personal and alive.[[472]](#footnote-472) The ground has a mouth and Abel’s blood has a voice. The world of nature can praise, and protest, and cooperate with humanity or resist it. The notion of the ground having energy thus continues the personification involved in the talk of Abel’s blood crying out. The created world is alive and can behave with the determination of a human being. So Cain’s life as a farmer is finished. He can only be a vagabond and a wanderer. They are two similar participles (*nā‘* and *nād*) to make essentially the same point. The words are not ones suggesting some honor or having positive connotations, like words such as nomad or Bedouin. They rather indicate that Cain is to be a homeless hobo. Cain becomes “without God… without home… without food.”[[473]](#footnote-473)

**4:13-14.** “Under the weight of this curse Cain goes to pieces.”[[474]](#footnote-474)The conversation continues as Cain issues his own protest. As was the case with his parents, there is no expression of penitence but only regret at the consequences of his action for him.

He introduces another of the First Testament’s key expressions for sin (v. 13), “waywardness” (*‘āwōn*). Yahweh had warned him that he was in danger of “wrongdoing”; he himself recognizes that he has already acted in a deviant fashion. Yahweh has made clear that he has to carry responsibility for his deviant behavior. But the burden is too heavy. “In truth there is not misery greater than to be deserted and despised by God; for the anarchy of fools is cruel and very intolerable; but to be despised by the great King, and to fall down as an abject person cast down from the government of the Supreme Power is an indescribable affliction.” [[475]](#footnote-475) But Cain has not recognized that fact. Nor is he referring to the psychological burden of his waywardness, as is often the connotation of the English expression “the burden of sin.” It might be better if he did mean that he felt this burden. He is referring to the objective consequences of his waywardness which Yahweh has just pronounced. It is perhaps a surprising complaint. Abel’s shed blood was surely crying out for the shedding of Cain’s blood, and one might have expected that murder would carry the death penalty. It does not, but Cain is not recognizing his luck or the divine mercy.

Rather, he goes on (v. 14) to expand on the negative implications of Yahweh’s pronouncement. He protests about God, about himself, and about other people, as one does in a psalm.[[476]](#footnote-476) Yahweh had driven his father out of Lush to serve the ground outside (3:23-24); Yahweh is driving him out from the face of that ground. Cain speaks as if it has already happened, in accordance with the way Hebrew can speak of a future event as if it has already taken place, especially when Yahweh has decided it and it’s therefore certain to happen (it is the way prophecies sometimes speak). There are two faces that humanity was designed to serve and to live in fellowship with—the face of the ground and the face of Yahweh. Cain will no longer be able to look either in the face. Both will be hostile. The ground will refuse to yield its energy. And whereas his parents had understandably but futilely hidden from Yahweh’s face after eating from the tree, Cain had not tried to hide after killing Abel, but now he knows he will have to conceal himself from Yahweh’s face. The hostility of that face is not merely a matter of an attitude or a look. The expression on a person’s face can issue either in blessing or in trouble (e.g., 16:6, 8; 31:2, 5; and famously, Num 6:25). Cain knows how the look on the face will be and whose look it will be. His position anticipates that of the manager in Jesus’s parable who is to be thrown out of his job and worries about not being strong enough to dig and being ashamed to beg (Luke 16:3). But further, a homeless hobo who belongs to no place and no community has no security. Indeed, some obligation rests on the community to take redress on a murderer. Another reason why Cain will have to leave the tilled land is that as a murderer he is an outcast. “In some ways it is a fate worse than death.”[[477]](#footnote-477)

(So far we would have assumed that the only human beings who exist are Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, but the story is evidently at ease with the implication that there are many more people around. Perhaps Cain’s potential executioners are yet-unmentioned siblings (cf. 5:4)—after all, Eve is the mother of all. But the chapters are historical parables, and in a parable one does not press the details.)

**4:15-16**. As happened with Adam and Eve, Yahweh mercifully tempers his retribution; “the curse is not the final and only word of God about the brother-murderer.”[[478]](#footnote-478) Whereas Yahweh might have said, “Tough, that’s what you’ll deserve in return for murdering Abel,” instead he declares that redress will be exacted on Cain’s own murderer. “God does not let go of the unreconciled one.”[[479]](#footnote-479) Evidently it is impossible to second-guess what Yahweh will do. It’s also difficult to see what sevenfold redress would constitute. Presumably it doesn’t mean seven of the potential murderer’s family being killed. More likely it is a figure of speech, like “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” This possibility is supported by v. 24: it means frighteningly full redress. What the mark on Cain constituted, we also do not know.[[480]](#footnote-480) TgPsJ takes the “mark” to be one of the letters from God’s name, which would mean that attacking Cain would be attacking God (cf. James 3:9). “The riddle of his future existence” is that “because of his murder he is cursed by separation from God” and yet he is also “incomprehensibly guarded and supported by God’s protection” [[481]](#footnote-481) (according to *Jub* 4:31-32, it doesn’t save him from being killed through his house collapsing on him eventually).

The place where he makes his home (v. 16) is appropriately called Drifting (*nôd*;“The Land of Nod” came to suggest sleep in British English). East of Lush is where the sphinxes and flaming sword were (3:24); the reference to the location draws attention to the garden’s inaccessibility to him.[[482]](#footnote-482)

**4:17-18**. As Genesis does not concern itself with the identity of Cain’s potential executioners, so it does not ask where his wife came from; at v. 1, TgPsJ has Eve giving birth to a twin sister as well as Cain, and *Jub* 4:1-9 identifies his wife as his sister Avan. Genesis is interested rather in the fact that Cain and his wife repeat his parents’ story (see v. 1). Their son’s name would imply “Dedication” (compare the name of the Hanukkah festival, the occasion of the temple’s rededication after the defilement by Antiochus Epiphanes). Presumably Cain was seeking to deal with the implications of being banished from the ground when he set about building a town, presumably the world’s first. The listeners will be familiar with the way the town becomes a refuge for people who have no land.[[483]](#footnote-483) Town life thus has at best an ambiguous beginning.

The story hastens through four more generations (v. 18) in order to reach the next figure on which it will focus. Genesis will manifest a pattern whereby it covers briefly the son whose line is not the one in whom Yahweh is especially at work before coming to a more expansive treatment of the son on whose line the future depends (Japhet and Ham before Shem, Ishmael before Isaac, Esau before Jacob: Gen 10; 25; 36). This pattern finds its first iteration in 4:17-26. Yet Cain’s line gets more extensive treatment than this pattern would make one expect; it has some significance in its own right. This fact is noteworthy set over against Cain’s being a murderer, whereas figures such as Ishmael and Esau were not such wrongdoers.

**4:19-22**. Lamech causes the story to pause for a moment, as he is the initiator of another familiar reality, polygamous marriage. In the First Testament and elsewhere, there are two main reasons for having more than one wife—status and a first wife’s inability to have children. For Lamech the second consideration seems irrelevant (vv. 20-22), but the first may apply (cf. vv. 23-24). Genesis makes no negative judgment on Lamech’s polygamy, though his being the man who goes in for the stance of which he boasts in vv. 23-24 may point in that direction.

The story continues to provide the listeners with the background to realities they know (v. 20). While any family would need to look after its animals (cf. v. 2), one might divide lifestyles more broadly between the settled farmer and the more nomadic shepherd or cattleman. While Cain was condemned to the life of a wanderer, the positive spin to put on that designation is to call it the lifestyle of a shepherd or cowboy. A shepherd has to keep on the move in the marginal land between cultivable country and desert, looking for provision for sheep and cattle and living in a tent rather than a house in a village. Such is the life of Lamech’s first son.

Another category of people that one finds in a town (v. 21) is those who are involved in arts and crafts, and such is Yabal’s brother Yubal. It is appropriately for him to bear a name derived from those three consonants, since a *yôbēl* is a horn (the word lies behind the term *Jubilee*, a festival heralded by the blowing of a horn). The instruments mentioned, however, are guitar (*kinnôr*), standing for stringed instruments in general, and pipe, standing for all instruments that one blows.

Yabel and Yubal’s half-brother (v. 22) is the ancestor of another group of craftworkers from the town. Tubal is another name that suggests the same root as Yabal and Yubal. The mention of his sister perhaps makes for balance in the mention of the two offspring of Adah and Sillah. Copper (with the alloy bronze, which *nᵉḥōšet* also covers) and iron were the two most significant metals worked in the ancient world. The second half of Tubal’s name may be nothing to do with the Cain earlier in the chapter, given that related languages have words resembling *qayin* that mean metalworker (see BDB)—or rather, it may designate Tubal in light of the etymological meaning of that name.

**4:23-24.** Lamech’s chief claim to fame, or infamy, issues from composing the first human verse; previous verse in Genesis has been God’s. Lamech’s verse is neater. It comprises three lines with parallelism, 4-4, 4-2, and 3-3. As “Lamech’s women” are the same people as “Adah and Sillah,” so “a young man” can be the same person as “a man,” but the second word heightens and gives precision to the first, and “seventy-sevenfold” heightens “sevenfold.” Tellingly, each of the first four cola closes with the first-person sufformative or suffix, my… my… me… me, though “its disciplined form only accentuates the barbarity of the message.”[[484]](#footnote-484) One boasts to one’s womenfolk, and Lamech does so. What might be the background to the poem? Who had wounded Lamech, and who had he killed? Or is this poem simply a boast about the kind of man he claims to be? –“No one had better mess with me!”[[485]](#footnote-485) In that case, we need not assume that the young man is the same as the man.[[486]](#footnote-486) Either way, the point is that things are getting worse and worse in Genesis. In Gen 3 there is disobedience. In 4:1-16 there is murder. In 4:17-24 there is the threat of murder upon murder. The human inclination to take disproportionate redress underlies the need for the limitation to equivalence which will be required by the Torah later (see Exod 21:23-25, where the words for wound and injury recur). Recording the poem brings to a climax the story’s hints at the ambiguity involved in the development of human culture. If we may assume that Lamech used a weapon to strike down his victim and that he would have sung or chanted his poem, then the story has spoken of the origin of music, technology, and poetry, but illustrated them from the life of Lamech as their first horrifying exploiter. There is even an ambiguity in the significance of his speaking thus to his women, given that his words could be read as a confession—but the words are addressed to them rather than to God.[[487]](#footnote-487)

**4:25-26**. The poem’s “negative pole” thus perhaps “outweighs the positive signs of culture’s progress.”[[488]](#footnote-488) “Even though humanity advances culturally and technologically, things are not at all the way they should be between humans and their Creator.”[[489]](#footnote-489) Fortunately the unit will not end (in MT or in printed Bibles) until a more unequivocally positive note has been sounded.[[490]](#footnote-490)

We have forgotten about Adam and Eve (v. 25) and obviously the story has moved on way beyond their day, but now it moves back to the aftermath of Cain’s killing of Abel. Seth’s name (more precisely, Šet) recalls the verb *šît*, which we can fortuitously render “set in place.” But Eve’s words about setting offspring in place also recall 3:15, with hopeful irony, while her renewed mention of Abel and Cain recalls Yahweh’s words about the pain of motherhood in 3:16. In the very act of naming she is “erecting a monument, as it were, to her other son.”[[491]](#footnote-491) The patterns whereby Genesis deals briefly with the line on whom the future does not depend before dealing at greater length with the line on whom it does depend and whereby it sometimes tells its story in a dramatic rather than a chronological order would mean that we need not have assumed that Seth was born after Abel’s murder rather than while the two older boys were young. But actually he was born later.

Whereas Eve named Seth, Seth names Enosh (v. 26), an ordinary word for “man,” like *’ādām*. In effect Eve has herself expressed the conviction that God has initiated an alternative line to that of Cain and one that will take the place of Abel’s. Her statement of faith is even more spectacular than the one with which the chapter began (given what has happened in between). The evidence for the truth of her conviction is that at this time (that is, way back in the time of Adam, Eve, Seth, and Enosh, the very first human generations) people start calling out with Yahweh’s name, as will Abraham (12:8; 13:4; 21:33) and Isaac (26:25). Like the making of offerings, such calling out most often suggests praise and thus proclamation (e.g., Pss 80:19 [18]; 105:1; 116, 13, 17). When people worship, it is in words as well as by means of offerings. The addition of the expression “with Yahweh’s name” underlines how this praise is out-loud and not merely in the heart, which is what makes it by its nature also proclamation; the very nature of worship is also to be witness. Calling out with Yahweh’s name in prayer (e.g., Ps 116:4; Isa 64:7 [6]) can accompany offerings, it also is out-loud, and it also links with proclamation. People are appealing to the real God as he will reveal himself to Israel. They are not calling on some other deity who can’t really do anything, as they make offerings to such a deity (cf. 1 Kings 18:24-26). Praise, proclamation, and prayer make an appeal to the real God whom humanity knew of from creation. Humanity did not have to evolve through various other (“primitive”?) forms of religion and worship; God had made himself known to them from the beginning. The reference to calling out with *Yahweh’s* name is especially bold and significant. Exod 3 and 6 will relate how Yahweh first reveals his name to Moses. Here in the time before Moses, people would not have been literally calling with Yahweh’s name. But the author of Gen 4 knows that it was Yahweh that people acknowledged in this earlier time, even if they did not literally call him by that name. After all, it was Yahweh who created the world and Yahweh who made promises to Abraham. So the stress in v. 26b lies on the fact that people are starting to praise, proclaim, and make requests of the real God.[[492]](#footnote-492) Gen 4 thus finally juxtaposes “radical sin…, high culture…, and confessional religion… in an uneasy combination.”[[493]](#footnote-493)

## Though Dead, They Still Speak

Gen 4 has stimulated a particularly extensive history of interpretation.[[494]](#footnote-494) Heb 11:4-5 sees Abel as a model of relating to God on the basis of trust, which is a plausible inference from Gen 4, though not a point it makes. The point that Genesis makes is that trust is not just a matter of an attitude of heart. It involves bringing the produce of one’s work as an offering to God, and offering him the best. One is then to expect that God will respond to one’s offering—perhaps with recognition, perhaps not. Gen 4 itself ensures that the point Heb 11 goes on to make is true, that “even death does not mute Abel’s voice.”[[495]](#footnote-495) Even if “innocent blood has no voice… discernible by human ears,… it has one that reaches God, as the cry of a wicked deed demanding vengeance."[[496]](#footnote-496) Thus “Abel’s death meant, in many ways, a new life for him.”[[497]](#footnote-497) But innocent blood can speak in two ways. The cry of the martyr’s blood cries out for redress, and God promises it (cf. Rev 6:10-11). At the same time, Heb 12:24 also notes, the blood of Jesus makes a different appeal, and God responds to that appeal, too.[[498]](#footnote-498)

Cain, too, still speaks. In contrast to Abel, Cain gives an example of which believers are to be wary (Jude 11). While Adam was expelled from God’s garden for his disobedience, Cain was put under a curse and expelled from God’s presence for his fratricide, though the exegetical tradition has been harder on Cain than God himself was.[[499]](#footnote-499) The “fall” in this story is much worse than the “fall” in Gen 3. “What is so shocking about the whole event is that a man like him, who does his work and presents his offering to God, is capable of this”; it is what God’s unequal treatment of two brothers can lead to (see Luke 15:11-32).[[500]](#footnote-500) Yet to Cain, God is pastor, judge, and protector.[[501]](#footnote-501) And even if it is possible to see a basis in Abel’s action for God’s responding to him, we can see nothing in Cain that provides a basis for God’s responding to him. It is just an act of grace.[[502]](#footnote-502) “Cain murders—and walks.”[[503]](#footnote-503) His murderous act is but the beginning of a horrific and grievous history of members of the people of God shedding each other’s blood (Matt 23:35). Only one step back from that shedding of blood is the hatred that members of the people of God have harbored towards one another (1 John 3:11-15).[[504]](#footnote-504) Luke 15 also recognizes that the elder brother may find it hard to live with his younger sibling; he is a Cain-like figure.[[505]](#footnote-505) But Ps 133 promises that brothers can live together.

Lamech, too, still speaks. The development of civilization, music, technology, and poetry is part of the earliest history of humanity, in all the ambiguity of that history, reflected in the varying exegeses of 4:17-24.[[506]](#footnote-506) One must do justice to both sides of the ambiguity. On the other hand, priesthood is not part of that earliest history. Nor is kingship, as it is in (for instance) the “Sumerian king list,” a list of kings on a stone tablet from Sumer in Iraq of which various versions date from the third, second, and first millennia BC. According to the king list, “kingship was lowered from heaven.”[[507]](#footnote-507) Yet the development of kingship in Israel will relate to facing the implications of the negative side to the development of civilization and technology.

And Seth still speaks. Gen 1 does not imply that being made in God’s image signifies that humanity has a spiritual nature that enables it to relate to God. But the Gen 2—4 stories do indicate that humanity has that capacity, and the end of Gen 4 makes the point most explicit. Alongside the making of offerings which are the best of the fruit of one’s work, another key aspect of relating to God in worship is a verbal out-loud calling with God’s name in praise, proclamation, and prayer, made in light of God’s revelation of who he is. There are people who focus on what they can achieve by science, technology, culture, self-analysis, development of gifts, and action to put things right according to their light, and others who focus on calling upon God.[[508]](#footnote-508)

# Genesis 5:1—6:8—From Adam to Noah

## Overview

The resumptive opening of Gen 5 takes us back to the beginning of the Genesis story in the manner of the resumptive opening to an episode in a television series; the narrative arc of Gen 1—4 (creation, waywardness, disaster, encouragement) will recur over Gen 5—8. The narrative arc of this introduction to the deluge story leads the listeners along before kicking them in the teeth. The record of Adam’s line of descent in Gen 5 builds on the hopefulness of the end of Gen 4, but it has to be realistic about the fact that each of the people who are mentioned died (except the mysterious Enoch); they did not have access to the life tree. So the listeners might again be waiting for the other shoe to drop. Even if are, the beginning of Gen 6 has devastating impact. A question lying behind Gen 5:1—6:8 is, why did the deluge have to happen? The answer is perplexing. Like Gen 3, the section raises questions as well as resolving them. Gen 5 is ambiguous in its implications, the story in 6:1-2 mystifies, the declaration of intent in 6:3 is a puzzle, and the footnote in 6:4 is enigmatic. In some respects the conclusion in 6:5-8 is only too clear, but not so clear is how it follows from what precedes, and it raises questions of its own. Yahweh regrets? Yahweh will wipe out? And why will he favor Noah? The author of Gen 5:1—6:8 has some supernatural knowledge (for instance, about some things that God is thinking) but does not know everything. As was the case in Gen 3, the effect is to recognize the tragic and mysterious aspect to human experience as well as the willful and intelligible aspect, and by facing it to help us to live with it.

## Translation

5:1This is the document with Adam’s[[509]](#footnote-509) lines of descent.

At the time of[[510]](#footnote-510) God’s creating humanity, it was in the likeness of God that he made it. 2Male and female he created them, and he blessed them, and named them “humanity,” at the time of their being created.

* 3Adam lived 130 years, fathered someone[[511]](#footnote-511) in his likeness, as his image, and named him Šet. 4Adam’s time[[512]](#footnote-512) after fathering Šet came to 800 years, and he fathered sons and daughters. 5So the entire time that Adam lived came to 930 years. Then he died.[[513]](#footnote-513)
* 6Šet lived 105 years, and fathered Enoš. 7Šet lived 807 years after fathering Enoš, and fathered sons and daughters. 8So Šet’s entire time came to 912 years. Then he died.
* 9Enoš lived 90 years, and fathered Qenan. 10Enoš lived 815 years after fathering Qenan, and fathered sons and daughters. 11So Enoš’s entire time came to 905 years. Then he died.
* 12Qenan lived 70 years, and fathered Mahalal’el. 13Qenan lived 840 years after fathering Mahalal’el, and fathered sons and daughters. 14So Qenan’s entire time came to 910 years. Then he died.
* 15Mahalal’el lived 65 years, and fathered Yered. 16Mahalal’el lived 830 years after fathering Yered, and fathered sons and daughters. 17So Mahalal’el entire time came to 895 years. Then he died.
* 18Yered lived 162 years, and fathered Ḥanok.[[514]](#footnote-514) 19Yered lived 800 years after fathering Ḥanok, and fathered sons and daughters. 20So Yered’s entire time came to 962 years. Then he died.
* 21Ḥanok lived 65 years, and fathered Metušelaḥ. 22Ḥanok walked about with God[[515]](#footnote-515) 300 years after fathering Metušelaḥ, and fathered sons and daughters. 23So Ḥanok’s entire time came to[[516]](#footnote-516) 365 years. 24Ḥanok walked about with God, and then he was no more, because God got him.
* 25Metušelaḥ lived 187 years, and fathered Lemek. 26Metušelaḥ lived 782 years after fathering Lemek, and fathered sons and daughters. 27So Metušelaḥ’s entire time came to 969 years. Then he died.
* 28Lemek lived 182 years, fathered a son, 29and named him Noaḥ, saying: “This man: he’ll relieve us[[517]](#footnote-517) from our work,[[518]](#footnote-518) from the pain of our hands, from the ground that Yahweh cursed.” 30Lemek lived 595 years after fathering Noaḥ, and fathered sons and daughters. 31So Lemek’s entire time came to 777 years. Then he died.
* 32Noaḥ lived 500 years, and Noaḥ fathered Šem, Ḥam, and Yepet.[[519]](#footnote-519)

6:1But when humanity started to be numerous on the face of the ground and daughters were born to them, 2the divine beings[[520]](#footnote-520) saw that the human daughters were good[[521]](#footnote-521) and got women for themselves, any one that they chose. 3Yahweh said, “My spirit will not govern[[522]](#footnote-522) over humanity through the ages, in that indeed[[523]](#footnote-523) it is flesh. Its time will be 120 years.”[[524]](#footnote-524) 4Now the Fallen[[525]](#footnote-525) were on the earth at that time and also afterwards, when the divine beings were sleeping with[[526]](#footnote-526) the human daughters and they were giving birth for them. Those were the strong men that were of old, famous men.

5Yahweh saw that humanity’s bad state on the earth was great. The entire shaping of its heart’s[[527]](#footnote-527) intentions was simply bad, all day. 6Yahweh regretted[[528]](#footnote-528) that he had made humanity on the earth. It pained his heart. 7Yahweh said, “I will wipe out the humanity that I created from the face of the ground, from humanity to animals to moving things to birds in the heavens, because I regret that I made them.” 8But Noaḥ—he found favor in Yahweh’s eyes.[[529]](#footnote-529)

## Interpretation

If a “document” about Adam’s line of descent begins here (5:1), where does it end? The medieval chapter division makes a break after the birth of Noah’s sons (5:32). But while MT has a number of paragraph and unit breaks through Gen 5, it has no break after 5:32; it has a unit break after 6:4, another after 6:8, another after 9:17, and another after 9:29. This last has a good claim to be designated the end of the “document,” because 9:28-29 completes the formulaic description of Noah which begins in 5:32; a new heading then follows in 10:1, “The lines of descent of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japhet.” Those data suggest taking 5:1—9:29 as a section of the book. Admittedly, the original “document” might have gone straight from 5:32 to 9:28-29, the intervening material having been inserted into it in the process whereby Genesis itself came into being. Further, 6:9 already provides a resumptive heading to introduce what follows as “Noah’s lines of descent,” which rather invites readers to see these words as the opening of a section; it is the beginning of the second synagogue parashah (lection) in Genesis, following on 1:1—6:8 and running on to 11:32. We will accept this invitation and treat 5:1—6:8 as a section.

Gen 5 is the first example of the Scriptures summarizing a lengthy period of time and history by means of a genealogical list. The lists take various forms. Gen 10 will comprise simply names without ages, as will the lists in 1 Chron 1—9; Matt 1:1-17; Luke 3:23-38. But Gen 10 and 1 Chron 1—9 do incorporate some anecdotes or other expansions, as does Gen 5 in its accounts of Enoch and Lamech. The lists in 1 Chron 1:1-4 and Luke 3:36-38 correspond closely to Gen 5. Genealogies are a brisk and efficient way of communicating the passage of time and the development of a story, a little like the speeded-up summaries of “the story so far” that sometimes open episodes of a television series. But whatever their precise form, they carry messages, as does a separate genealogical list such as the one that closes the story of Ruth or the lists incorporated in Ezra-Nehemiah.

“Genealogies evoke the forward thrust of time. They are emblems of the future.” The new genesis in Gen 5 “evokes the possibility of a new future” notwithstanding what has preceded.[[530]](#footnote-530) It offers “a construction of reality alternative to the one presented in Genesis 4.”[[531]](#footnote-531) It shows how God’s creation purpose is being fulfilled. Humanity is experiencing God’s blessing and is filling the earth. The ages that people live show that humanity is flourishing. But the list also shows that “death reigned from Adam until Moses” (Rom 5:14), and thus incidentally until Noah. There is a more specific point about the figures relating how long people lived. Almost everyone lives for more than nine hundred years (in one case for almost nine hundred years) but for less than a thousand years. The exceptions are Enoch, who disappears after 365 years, and Lamech, who lives 777 years. Those two specific figures look significant. One is the number of days in a solar year. The other recalls the wide-ranging significance of seven as the number of days in the week (see 2:2-3) and as a feature of the earlier Lamech story (see 4:23-24). The other figures have in common that each falls a little short of a millennium: it could have seemed that each ancestor might live for a thousand years, might live forever, but not one does. Instead, each of their stories ends with the solemn footnote, “then he died… then he died… then he died….”

The list in Matthew is schematized so as to comprise three fourteen-generation sections; comparison with the First Testament lists which it uses reveals how it constructs the fourteen-generation scheme by being selective in who it includes and omits. Gen 5 similarly uses traditional material to generate a list that makes points about the passing of time from Adam to Noah. When Matthew says “Thus all the generations from Abraham to David were fourteen, and from David to the transportation to Babylon fourteen, and from the transportation to Babylon to the Anointed fourteen,” it is not making a literal statement about history, and neither is Gen 5 when it says that (e.g.) someone fathered children at the age of 130 and subsequently lived on for a further 800 years. While author and listeners may have accepted the figures at their face value (as readers of Matt 1 may take its fourteens literally), and our judgment that the figures are not making a literal statement issues from a Western framework, author and listeners might have noticed some questions that the numbers raise: for instance, Noah apparently outlived Nahor, and Shem outlived Abraham. Indeed, the Hebrew text raises fewer difficulties than the Septuagint, according to whose figures Methusalaḥ did not die until after the flood.[[532]](#footnote-532)

Perhaps only a scholar studying the written Genesis scroll would be aware of the questions raised by various of the numbers. Hearing the scroll read would more likely invoke awe, the mystery of life and death, and the connectivity of the actions of the generations one to another. It also allows a stretching of the imagination to lengths of time such as hint at the lengthy time frame of the universe, which we convey by speaking of in terms of light years. Further, as modern readers we are inclined to think that our individual actions are all-important, but Gen 5 reminds us of the importance of the long-term world story, and draws attention to the birthing of children as a most important factor in this story because it is the means through which life continues.[[533]](#footnote-533)

In addition, the material on the long-living ancestors again compares and contrasts with the Sumerian king list.[[534]](#footnote-534) The classic version of the king list says that between the lowering of kingship from heaven and the flood, eight Sumerian kings reigned for 241,200 years. The Sumerian kings after the flood then reigned for periods more like the lifetimes in Gen 5 (twenty-three kings ruled for 24,510 years). Gen 5 implies an awareness of such traditions (not necessarily this particular one) which spoke of the long lives of people in early times. There are eight figures between Adam and Noah as there are eight early Sumerian kings. But Gen 5 tells of ordinary people not kings, these ordinary people descend from one another as the kings of the different towns are not, it is their lifetimes and their families not their reigns that are in focus, and the lifetimes associated with them are modest compared with those of the kings. Gen 5 might thus have a parallel effect on its readers to the effect of Gen 1 in light of a comparison and contrast with *When on High*; it might provoke the thought, “You know those silly Sumerian statistics? Well, here are some less outlandish ones.”

Gen 5 also has points of comparison with Gen 1, of which traditional source criticism sees it as the original continuation.[[535]](#footnote-535) Even less than Gen 1 is it a story with a plot or a question that it resolves, though it becomes part of a story with a plot and a question through its association with 6:1-8. In itself it is an account of a sequence of people, with no development. Its names overlap with the ones in Gen 4: Seth and Enosh reappear at the beginning of the list, Enoch in the middle, and Lamech at the end. Qenan, Mahalal’el, Yered, and Methuselah are new names, though all are similar to names in Gen 4: Qenan to Qayin, Mahalal’el to Mehuya’el, Yered to Irad, Methuselah to Metusa’el. The overlaps and similarities suggest that the two lists derive from different versions of the same list or set of stories. Genesis has used one version of the list to provide a picture of Cain’s line and another version of the list to provide a picture of Seth’s line. Elements in Gen 5 that manifest characteristics associated with the Yahwist strand in Genesis (see the comments on vv. 1 and 29) indicate that the interweaving of sources in Genesis has been accompanied by some redaction.

Its points of connection with Gen 4 further clarify the nature of Gen 5 as a bridge between the Adam story and the Noah story. Whereas things happen in Gen 4, nothing really happens in Gen 5; the Genesis narrative marks time. In Gen 5, in contrast with Gen 4, there is neither positive nor negative development. The two accounts of events from Adam to Lamech complement each other as the two accounts of creation in Gen 1 and Gen 2—3 complement each other, though they appear in a ABB’A’ order. Gen 2—3 and 4 give a dynamic account of creation and of events from the creation to the eve of the flood; there is development both positive and negative. Gen 1 and 5 give a steady state version. In human history, one generation follows another without there being progress or development, or for that matter deterioration.[[536]](#footnote-536) There is birth and growing up and procreating and living on—and dying. It is possible for individuals to stand out within this line. They may have a relationship with God which evokes wonder; though what happens to them may be a mystery. They may have hopes for their children that get fulfilled. They may be responsible for discoveries that make the tough side to human life more bearable. And Jesus eventually appears at the end of this line that begins with Adam (Luke 3:23-38), but nothing about this line as Gen 5 documents it would make one expect Jesus to come at the end. Yet he does, and one needs to understand this line in order to understand Jesus.

With the exceptions of Enoch and Lamech, the ancestors’ ages are 912, 905, 895, 962, and 969 years, averaging 929 years. In SP the numbers for Yered, Methuselah, and Lamech are shorter, while in LXX most of the fathers have their first son later but the total ages are mostly the same as MT.[[537]](#footnote-537) We do not know what lies behind the numbers. Some differences in the LXX and SP recensions may be designed to avoid the impression that some of the figures lived on through the deluge.[[538]](#footnote-538) And/or they may play a role in the devising of a timeline from creation to the exodus, the building of the temple, the fall of Jerusalem in 587, and the fall of Jerusalem in AD 70, in which case the period from creation to the exodus is 2666 years or two-thirds of four millennia.[[539]](#footnote-539) For readers unacquainted with this chronological framework, they simply underline the impression of concrete reality that belongs to the list.

While 6:1-8 carries straight on from 5:32 in MT without a paragraph or unit break, in form as well as in message it makes for a contrast. Indeed, it makes for a double contrast, because MT’s unit break after 6:4 marks a sharp shift in form and message between vv. 1-4 and 5-8. Whereas Gen 4 tells a story that is discouraging but ends with a glimmer of light, Gen 5:1—6:8 tells a story that is more encouraging but ends with darkness.

Gen 6:1-8 continues to describe a world that is both like and unlike the world the audience would know. It is like that world in that it begins from the reality of sexual disorder and the levying of sexual expectations by powerful males on females for whom resistance may be impossible. The general issue was raised in 3:16, will recur in Genesis, and will be presupposed by rules in the Torah that seek to constrain it and to protect women’s rights. This world is unlike the audience’s world in that the powerful figures are an alien class or classes, beings one does not meet nowadays. Yahweh’s own assessment of the state of the world is that things are uniformly bad. That assessment puts into question the entire validity or success of the creation project. While comparison would again be possible with the bad state that might characterize the audience’s world, the bad state of things in its day was surely nothing compared with the state things had reached according to 6:5-7.

The account in vv. 1-4 works in a jerky fashion that has no parallel earlier or later in Genesis, which enhances the disturbing effect of what it describes. Grammatically, vv. 1-2 are coherent enough, and v. 3 follows smoothly with a *waw*-consecutive, but in content v. 3 involves a jump. V. 4 begins as a circumstantial clause whose relationship to v. 3 in content, with its reference to the “Fallen,” is unstated, though it is semi-clarified by the amplification in the middle of the verse. V. 4 closes with another circumstantial clause whose relationship in content with what precedes is unstated: are the strong and famous men the offspring or the sons of the divine beings or the Fallen—or what? It is impossible to resolve all these questions with certainty; the passage expresses itself with an allusiveness, ambiguity, and murkiness that is intrinsic to its message about the dark strangeness of the events or situations that it describes. The author may be adapting an older traditional story with a background outside mainstream First Testament thinking,[[540]](#footnote-540) but the mere fact that the passage is jerky, unique, and parallel to works outside the First Testament does not constitute strong evidence of this point. Many later Jewish and non-Jewish works have the same features.

Some further lurch is then involved in the move from vv. 1-4 to vv. 5-8, though a lurch of a different kind from the internal jerkiness within vv. 1-4. In contrast to what has preceded in 5:1—6:4,in vv. 5-8 there comes a coherent theological judgment on the state of the world in the time to which it refers, expressed in connected and coherent regular prose sentences. In its talk of “humanity” and “creation” and “pain” and “the face of the ground” it picks up familiar motifs, and in that context its talk of things being “bad” resonates with the earlier importance of the word “good,” especially in Gen 1. At the same time, it introduces a range of new motifs: its talk of the mind’s intentions, of Yahweh’s regret, and of favor or grace. Here the narrator speaks freely and innovatively in reflecting on the implications of the story, in something like a statement from systematic theology.[[541]](#footnote-541) Yet its summary description of the bad state of things is surprising, following on chapters 1—5 and even on 6:1-4; we have had little hint that things are as bad as it says. But its closing reference to Noah makes a link with chapter 5, while 6:9 suggests the opening of a new section.

**5:1-2.** Gen 5 begins, however, in a way overlapping with 2:4a. The expression “lines of descent” (*tôlᵉdôt*) appeared there in the retrospective footnote to 1:1—2:3, and one might see v. 1a here as a retrospective footnote to Gen 4 4. But the formulation of v. 1a as a whole with its reference to a “document” (unique in Genesis) differs from that in 2:4a. And what follows in Gen 5 looks more like Adam’s line of descent than Gen 4 does. This reference is forward-looking and introductory, “as though making a fresh start and wanting to sooth Adam and Eve's grief which the murderer had presumed to inflict upon them with the death of his brother by raising his hand against Abel.”[[542]](#footnote-542)

“At the time of God’s creating human beings” (v. 1b) then parallels “at the time of Yahweh God’s making earth and heavens,” the opening words in 2:4b—3:24, though “creating” is more a Gen 1 word, and every subsequent expression in vv. 1b-2 (humanity, likeness, make, male and female, create, bless, name) picks up from Gen 1. So vv. 1b-2 as a whole forms a resumptive introduction to Gen 5. Among the nuanced formulations are the defining of *’ādām* as both male and female[[543]](#footnote-543) and God’s own naming of humanity, which perhaps reasserts his authority at the beginning of the account of humanity itself going about procreation.[[544]](#footnote-544)

**5:3-5.** The description of Adam’s fathering with its talk of image and likeness further recalls Gen 1, while also taking its language further and providing a midrashic answer to one or two other questions that might be raised by Gen 2—4 . In Eve, Adam could recognize someone who was like him, because she was made from a part of him. Subsequent human beings do not come into being in that way. How far is Seth like Adam? Adam fathers Seth as someone who is indeed “in his likeness, as his image.” The prepositions and the nouns are the same as those in 1:26, but they were there paired in the opposite way, and the suffixes referred to God. The variation in the order of the nouns puts the emphasis on Seth’s likeness to his father in character and follows it up with an assertion that he also shares the physical nature of his father. The account of these lines of descent follows on the stories of Cain and of Lamech, who did not behave in a particularly Godlike fashion, or even a particularly Adam-like fashion. Against this background, TgPsJ notes, Gen 5 affirms that Seth was indeed his father’s son, and resembled him. God passes on his image by creating; Adam passes on his image by procreating. Understanding the latter may then contribute to an understanding of the former.[[545]](#footnote-545)

Does Seth share in God’s image and likeness? Is he totally like God, as Adam was when created? Or is he nothing like God, because Adam has lost God’s image and likeness?[[546]](#footnote-546) The broader context of the Scriptures suggests that human beings are still made in God’s image, but that this image is somewhat tainted, so that the answer would lie in between these two alternatives. Seth is in both images, “which gives him an unfortunate bipolarity” shared by subsequent humanity.[[547]](#footnote-547) Such an inference fits the formulation in its distinctiveness, and also fits its context.[[548]](#footnote-548) Gen 2—4 has made clear that humanity has failed to fulfil the role for which it was created as embodying God’s image. If one considers Gen 1 and 5 (as the P narrative) separately from Gen 2—4, reading Gen 5 in light of Gen 1 makes more striking and significant the contrast between “in our image, as our likeness” and “in his likeness, as his image.” Humanity is one: made in God’s image and likeness, and made in the image and likeness of one generation after another.

In other respects, the account of Adam lays down the formula which will run through the chapter. Humanity’s creation as male and female (notwithstanding the formula’s referring only to fathering) and its blessing is indeed beginning to work itself out. The description of Adam and his descendants fathering sons and daughters illustrates that process and also opens up the possibility of a midrashic answer to the question “Who would be the people who were a threat to Cain, and from whom Cain found a wife?” But Adam’s story ends with “the first obituary in human history,” a moment anticipated since 2:17.[[549]](#footnote-549)

**5:6-20.** The accounts of Seth, Enosh, Qenan, Mahalal’el, and Yared unfold in a consistent way without variation in the formula. When x had lived y years, he fathered z; x lived for aaa years after fathering z and fathered sons and daughters, so the entire time of x came to bbb years, then he died. A human life is one characterized by life, procreating the next generation, living on, and dying.

**5:21-24.** Only Enoch and Noah (6:9) walked about with God. Whereas walking about in front of God (17:1) suggests transparency and implies conformity to expectations, “walking about with God” suggests ongoing companionship of life; it can refer to keeping ordinary human company (1 Sam 25:15). It suggests close friendship. Whereas Yahweh had walked about in the garden and Adam and Eve had wanted to avoid him, Enoch wanted to walk about with God, and enjoyed doing so for three hundred years after fathering his first son. He lived a complete life of 365 years, then disappeared. The story hints at a link between his walking about with God and God’s getting him, though it does not explain the link. The account of his disappearance is a cross between the accounts of Moses’s dying (Deut 34) and of Elijah’s being taken by Yahweh into the heavens (2 Kings 2). Like Moses, Enoch disappears, though Deut 34 speaks explicitly of Moses’s dying. Like Elijah, Enoch is taken by God, but there is no account of the way it happened. As the manner of Moses’s and Elijah’s departure made it possible for them to appear with Jesus, the manner of Enoch’s disappearance made it possible to infer that he had been taken to be with God (the references to God’s “getting” in Pss 49:15 [16]; 73:24 have been understood to refer to such a taking, but the contexts suggest they refer to rescue from death and restoration to honor).[[550]](#footnote-550) Such a destiny would qualify Enoch to reveal things about affairs in the heavens. He thus becomes the inspiration of the vast Enoch literature from Second Temple times, to which Jude 14-15 refers. Admittedly, “he was no more” could simply be a euphemism for dying (e.g., Gen 42:13, 32; Job 7:8, 21; Ps 37:10, 36; 39:13 [14]; 104:35; Jer 31:15), and “getting” him could likewise denote bringing about his death (cf. Ezek 24:16; *GenR* 25:1). TgOnq asserts that indeed Yahweh “got” Enoch in that he “caused him to die,” to safeguard against people attending to the Enoch material with its speculative-looking pseudo-visions.[[551]](#footnote-551) In contrast, TgPsJ makes explicit that he ascended into the firmament and was given the name Metatron, the name of an archangel and heavenly scribe.

Heb 11:5-6 follows the LXX in its translation of Gen 5:24, and thus makes explicit that Enoch did not die and that God “transferred” him to a different place. It makes a different point from Gen 5:24 in commenting that Enoch pleased God rather than that he lived in fellowship with God; he “channeled all his love and desire into fulfilling the will of God.”[[552]](#footnote-552) The context of Heb 11 as a whole, however, makes the point that even people such as Enoch “did not receive what was promised” because they will only reach the fullness of God’s purpose for them when they do so in “our” company on resurrection day and in the new Jerusalem. Enoch still awaits the resurrection: “Christs flesh therefore must make a way into heaven before any man’s flesh beside can enter.”[[553]](#footnote-553) If Enoch was taken into the heavens, it is not a hint at the resurrection that will come to all God’s people. It is simply something extraordinary that God did for this friend of his.

**5:25-32.** The accounts of Methuselah and Lamech follow the formula, but the paragraph on Lamech has two further features. He lived for 777 years, and he fathered Noah. He makes a link between his son’s name and the significance he will have, though as often happens, the link is indirect, and in this case seems also whimsical. Lamech could easily have connected Noah’s name with the verb *nûaḥ* which means “rest,” which would have fitted what Lamech goes on to say; one could think of Noah making rest available to humanity. Instead, Lamech speaks of Noah bringing relief or comfort, using the piel (transitive) verb *niḥam*.[[554]](#footnote-554) The usage introduces further whimsy, since this verb will shortly recur in the niphal (reflexive) in 6:6-7 with a rather different meaning, and since forms of *nûaḥ* actually will appear in 8:4, 9, 21.[[555]](#footnote-555) Lamech himself says that Noah will bring humanity relief from the consequences of Yahweh’s curse on the ground, which turned farming into painful work. How will he do so? With yet further whimsy, Jerome thinks in terms of people resting in death because of the flood.[[556]](#footnote-556) Ephrem thinks of his making an offering,[[557]](#footnote-557) which will bring God rest (*nîḥōaḥ*, from that root which underlies Noah’s name; 8:21—cf. *GenR* 25:2). More down-to-earth is the suggestion that Noah will bring humanity relief through discovering how to make wine (9:20): at the end of a back-breaking day’s work, a man can relax with a glass of wine and God’s curse on the ground is thereby alleviated, perhaps even lifted.[[558]](#footnote-558) Jer 16:7 makes the link between sorrow (*naḥămô*) on one hand and wine on the other as a means of relief or comfort (*tanḥûmîm*); cf. also Prov 31:6-7 for this idea, though the word relief or comfort does not appear there.

Gen 5 finally begins the formulaic account of Noah and his sons (v. 32). The story of the flood will now interrupt it, pending its completion in 9:28-29, as a vast further instance of the way particularities can do so (cf. vv. 21-24, 28-31). The other variation from the formula at this point is the mention of three sons, which trailers their subsequent importance in 9:18—10:32.

**6:1-2**. Humanity is starting to fulfill its commission to be plentiful (1:28), as Gen 5 has suggested. It has not been driven away from the face of the ground, as Cain feared would happen to him (4:14). Gen 4 focused on sons, but Gen 5 kept referring to daughters, and these verses pick up that reference. But the chapter begins with a *waw-*consecutive, and the sentences that follow suggest that the *waw* implies “but,” not merely “and.”

“The divine beings” (v. 2) are more literally “the sons of divine beings,” *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm*. The phrase comes otherwise only in Job 1:6 and 2:1; *bᵉnê-’ĕlōhîm* without the article appear again in Job 38:7. *Bᵉnê ’ēlîm* appear in Pss 29:1; 89:6 [7] and *bᵉnê ‘elyôn* in Ps 82:6. Qumran documents include similar references;[[559]](#footnote-559) particularly significant is the 4QDeutj reading at Deut 32:8 *bny ’lhym* and the 4QDeutq reading at Deut 32:43 *kl ’lhym* (see translations such as NRSV, and NIV margin).[[560]](#footnote-560) The equivalent singular expression in Aramaic, *bar-’ĕlāhîn*, comes in Dan 3:25. In all these passages these figures are supernatural beings who are subordinate to Yahweh and thus not divine in the same sense that Yahweh is. They are elsewhere referred to simply as *’ĕlōhîm*, “gods” (e.g., Ps 8:5 [6]). Indeed, the compound expression compares with expressions such as “sons of the prophets” (e.g., 2 Kings 2:3), which denotes members of a prophetic community. So the Genesis phrase might be translated “beings who belong to the class ‘gods’”[[561]](#footnote-561) and “sons of the gods” need not carry implications regarding their parentage; hence the translation “divine beings.”

English can distinguish between God with upper case G, a term that applies only to one being and is in effect a name, and gods with lower case g, which can apply to other supernatural beings. This distinction corresponds to one the First Testament makes, though Hebrew does not have a typographical way of making it. While such “divine beings” beings are not deities in the same sense as Yahweh, the one real deity, they are supernatural beings, and they are not very different from the figures referred to elsewhere as the heavenly army (e.g., 1 Kings 22:19; 2 Kings 17:16) or as Yahweh’s aides (*mal’ākîm*; e.g. Gen 28:12) or as the leaders of the nations (*śārîm*; Dan 10) or in Greek as messengers (*angeloi*). Such is the assumption about the figures in Gen 6 in early Jewish works such as *1 Enoch* 6—11, and it is likely thus presupposed by 1 Peter 3:19-20; 2 Peter 2:4-6, and Jude 6.[[562]](#footnote-562)

The *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm*, then, are supernatural beings who take a look at the daughters of humanity, presumably the women referred to in v. 1, and like what they see. “The sense of [vv. 1-2] is perfectly clear.”[[563]](#footnote-563) Only after New Testament times did alternative understandings of *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm* arise. The king can be called the son of God (e.g., Ps 2); hence the idea that the sons of God might be kings. Israel can be called the son of God (e.g., Exod 4:22) and Israel can be called the children of God (*bᵉnê ’ēl-ḥay;* Hos 1:10 [2:1]); hence the idea that the sons of God might be the line of the elect which began with Seth. Judges can perhaps be called *’ĕlōhîm* (e.g., Exod 21:6), hence the idea that the *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm* might be judges. Such alternative understandings which avoid the scandalous connotations of the interpretation assumed in New Testament times gained traction in Christian and Jewish circles; *GenR* 26:5 reports a curse on anyone who says they are actually sons of God.[[564]](#footnote-564)

The divine beings saw that the human daughters were good (*ṭôb*); with grievous irony, it is the expression used of God’s seeing in 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. While looking good hardly excludes being physically attractive, it is hardly the main point, any more than in Gen 1. If Genesis had wanted to focus on the women’s physical attractiveness, it could have used a word such as *yāpeh* which Abraham uses of Sarahin this connection (e.g., 12:11, 14). And the following verses will suggest that the point about their attractiveness lies elsewhere. It made the divine beings “get some of the women for themselves. “Get” a woman is the regular expression for marrying a wife. The verb (*lāqaḥ*)need not have forceful connotations; it can mean “receive” or “accept.” Nor need it exclude a woman’s having a say in the matter, as is clear from stories such as those of Isaac and Rebekah (Gen 24). Families are also involved in the making of marriages (Gen 28—29; 34). But the expression in v. 2 does indicate where the initiative lies. The point is underlined by the further expression, “any one that they chose.”[[565]](#footnote-565)

**6:3-4**. The further *waw*-consecutive indicates that v. 3 follows straight on from vv. 1-2, but the jerkiness of these verses means that any interpretation involves connecting dots. The next time someone will get a woman it will be Pharaoh (12:15, 19), and it causes a reaction; so it will be when David does so (2 Sam 11-12).[[566]](#footnote-566) Here the reaction comes from Yahweh, as it does in David’s case. What follows thus implies that the divine beings’ activity raises some questions.

Many Middle Eastern stories tell of gods and goddesses engaging in sex, having sex with human beings, and having children with them, and tell about the birth of giants.[[567]](#footnote-567) The questions the story raises would thus not be merely logistical. But Jesus’s comment about angels not marrying (Mark 12:25) coheres with a comment in *b. Hagigah* 16a: demons propagate like human beings, as they eat and drink and die like human beings, whereas none of these things apply to angels.[[568]](#footnote-568) Once again Genesis parallels other Middle Eastern stories but differs from them. An indication within Genesis of why Yahweh might object to supernatural beings marrying human beings could be hinted by the declaration in Gen 1 that different creatures were to reproduce by their species. The story’s location as a lead in to the account of the flood coheres with the idea that the supernatural beings were ignoring constraints put upon them. Their action also worryingly recalls the way the first woman “saw” that the fruit was “good” and therefore “got” some (3:6).[[569]](#footnote-569)

The question of whether humanity should continue permanently (*lᵉōlām*) recalls 3:22. The rest of Genesis does not suggest that 120 years is a cap to be placed on a human lifetime, nor does the 120-year figure feature elsewhere in the First Testament as such a limit, though Deut 34:7 might allude to it.[[570]](#footnote-570) More likely it is a cap to be placed on how long Yahweh intends to allow human life on earth to continue. LXX makes the point explicit by translating “abide among *these* people”[[571]](#footnote-571) (cf. TgPsJ, TgNeoph; 1 Peter 3:20 carries the same implication). Human life will continue for just three more generations,[[572]](#footnote-572) in keeping with the principle to be articulated in passages such as Exod 20:5. Beyond that time, Yahweh will not carry on exercising his beneficent authority and constraint over humanity in the way he has been doing. The significance of the references to Yahweh’s spirit (*rûaḥ*)and to flesh (*bāśār*)will be clarified by 6:17; 7:15, 21-22. Speaking of Yahweh’s spirit is the same as speaking of Yahweh’s breath (*nᵉšāmāh*, 2:7); Gen 7:22 will speak of “the breath of the spirit of life.” Both terms can apply both to human beings and to animals (for *rûaḥ* in this latter connection, cf. Ps 104:29-30). Yahweh is declaring that he does not intend to continue ruling over or within humanity by means of his breath in the way humanity needs—and without that breath, humanity is merely flesh, the same as animals; it has no life.

What is unexplained is that the activity by the supernatural beings issues in action against humanity; the question will be extended in v. 7, when Yahweh declares the intention to wipe out the rest of the animate creation because of the state of humanity. Perhaps it is simply that the created world as a whole (of which the divine beings are part) are bound up in the bundle of life together; they stand or fall together. But Genesis does not make the point explicit.

Jerkiness now comes to dominate (v. 4). A circumstantial clause followed by appended temporal phrases (“now the Fallen were on the earth at that time and also afterwards” leads into a double relative clause in the yiqtol/wᵉqatal with past imperfect/frequentative reference (“when the divine beings were having sex with the daughters of human beings and they were giving birth for them”). Finally there is a noun clause (“those were the strong men that were of old, famous men”). The interrelationship of the three clauses is tricky to determine, as is the question of how many groups of people the verse denotes when it refers to the Fallen, the divine beings, and the strong men/famous men. The verse seems to be going out of its way to avoid saying that either the Fallen or the strong/famous men are the offspring of the unions. The immediate antecedent of “those” is the divine beings, though one might more naturally assume that the strong/famous men are the Fallen.

The Fallen (*nᵉpilîm*) appear only here and in Num 13:33, in the report of Israelite spies who have gone to reconnoiter Canaan. Failing to convince the assembly that the task ahead of Israel is too demanding, the spies amplify their report by testifying to the threatening size of the Canaanites, among whom the Fallen number; they do not actually say that the Fallen themselves are exceptionally big, and anyway the story implies that their report cannot necessarily be trusted. In that passage, however, LXX assumes it can be and translates *nᵉpilîm* by the word *gigantes*, “giants,” while Vg translates it *monstra*, “monsters”; here in Gen 6:4 both translations use the word *gigantes*. Understanding the Fallen to be people of huge size invites the inference that they were the monstrous offspring of the unions reported in vv. 1-2, though this is the inference Genesis seems to forestall. “Fallen” rather points towards seeing them as the kind of supernatural beings that will later be termed “fallen angels.” That understanding could invite the inference that “the Fallen” is another designation of the divine beings themselves whose activity vv. 1-2 reported, and it might just be possible to construe v. 4a that way (“Now the Fallen were on the earth at that time and also afterwards, the divine beings who were having sex…”). But then there is the further reference to some renowned “strong men” (*gibbôrîm*), a term soon to be applied to Noah’s great-grandson Nimrod (10:8-9), but here more naturally applied to the Fallen. So the most plausible way of construing the verse is to infer that the three terms refer to two groups, the Fallen who are also the renowned strong men, and the supernatural beings. And we do not know anything about the Fallen/renowned strong men except what those terms convey.

The parenthesis “and also afterwards” could refer to the awareness that the Fallen (and the renowned/strong men) were not confined to those pre-Flood days (though people listening to this story might have noticed that these Fallen must have fallen in the deluge, unless one of them rode on the roof of the ark).[[573]](#footnote-573) But the context suggests that the “afterwards” is rather a reference to the 120 years between Yahweh’s making his decision and implementing it. In turn that possibility links with the one extra note in this verse whose reference is clear: after Yahweh made his declaration not only did the sons of the divine beings continue to have sex with the daughters of human beings (declining to observe that boundary between themselves and the woman God had created); the latter were giving birth to their offspring.

People listening to this story have to accept that the verse, which has the nature of a postscript,[[574]](#footnote-574) declines to make the links we would like to have between the supernatural figures, the Fallen, the renowned/strong men, and the unions between the supernatural figures and the human girls, and between all these and Yahweh’s decision reported in v. 3. No matter how long we ponder the verses, the dots remain missing. The verses invite people to see that they are looking back on strange days, days like the ones when a tree could enable you to transcend death and when Yahweh would go for a walk and when a snake talked and when Yahweh put a mark on a murderer, days whose characteristics somehow explained how Yahweh came to a decision to flood the earth. Further, as with the talking snake, the audience is expected to imagine the stories it hears, but perhaps not necessarily to infer that things simply happened the way the stories describe.

Elsewhere, not least in *1 Enoch*, the activity of supernatural figures is the origin of sin in the world. Genesis does not make that link. Gen 3 attributed the origin of sin to human disobedience and 6:5-6 will go on to do the same.[[575]](#footnote-575)

**6:5-6**. Once again there is a leap from one verse to the next, but the leap is accompanied by verbal links. Humanity had started to become *great* in numbers and the supernatural figures had seen that the human women were *good*, but Yahweh sees that the *bad* state of humanity is *great*. The occurrence of *rōb* leads into the sadly contrasting occurrence of *rabbāh*, and the occurrence of *ṭōbōt* leads into the occurrence of *rā‘āh*; the latter again also sadly recalls the recurrent “he saw that it was good” of Gen 1. Humanity is in a grievous and tragic state. The next sentence also makes clear that the moral connotations of *ra‘* (morally bad as well as experientially bad) also apply. The point could hardly be made more forcefully than it is made in v. 5b. The word “shaping” (*yēṣer*) also carries some sadness, because it is related to the term for Yahweh’s shaping (*yāṣar*)the first human being (2:7-8). How mis-shapen things have become. Likewise the “intentions” of the mind need not have been by definition bad; the next occurrences of the word will relate to plans for building the wilderness sanctuary (Exod 31:4; 35:32-35). But actually they are bad, bad, bad. In retrospect, it transpires that the divine beings’ judgment on the human daughters was mistaken.[[576]](#footnote-576) Gen 6:5-8 is not a statement about how things always are with humanity but a statement about how things were in Noah’s time (see further 8:21). It does make a horrifying statement about how they were at that point. Perhaps the audience has to ask itself whether things are similar in its time, or in its nation, or in its community. The story’s description of things as bad invites it to hold together the idea of things being ugly and things being wicked. They are in a state that is the opposite of the way they were created as “good.”

So Yahweh regrets his entire project (v. 6). The story of creation has been a disappointment. The verb (*niḥam* niphal) makes for an ironic and sad link with 5:29, or underlines the need that Lamech’s hope should find fulfillment. The verb plays a key role in the Scriptures’ description of Yahweh’s relationship with the world, in connection with the past (“regret” is then the idea) or in connection with the future (“relent” is then the idea). While it is sometimes used of human beings (e.g., Judg 21:6, 15), Yahweh is the subject of the vast majority of its occurrences, not least at key points in the stories of Noah, Moses, and David.[[577]](#footnote-577) It forcefully expresses the flexibility of God’s relationship with events in the world. “Gen. 6:6 then is testimony to the personal relationship between God and man.”[[578]](#footnote-578) His experiencing regret shows that Yahweh lives in time and tries things out to see if they will work, and when they do not work, he takes action to try something different or to remedy the situation. While Yahweh is time-transcendent and exists yesterday, today, and forever, his eternal existence does not preclude his being involved with the world and with humanity in a time sequence. While Genesis may presuppose that Yahweh has the capacity to be all-knowing and may presuppose that he has used that capacity and has foreseen how humanity’s action in the world would turn out, the point it makes is that nevertheless Yahweh responds to these events emotionally and conatively within time, in the flow of events. *GenR* 27:6 notes that regretting need not imply he was surprised. You can know something is going to happen but still be saddened by it when it does. Thus God experiences frustration and disappointment. He is now sorry he made humanity. The pain that the woman would feel (*‘eṣeb*; 3:16) and the pain that the man would feel (*‘iṣṣābôn*; 3:16-17; cf. 5:29) are the pain that Yahweh now feels (*‘āṣab* hitpael).

While we have assumed that Yahweh’s declarations in 3:14-19 implied anger, this pain is the first emotion that has been explicitly ascribed to Yahweh in Genesis, and in the deluge story God expresses sorrow and regret, but not anger. “The response of the divine heart” in its pain is set alongside “the basic character of the human heart” in its bad intentions.[[579]](#footnote-579) Yahweh’s pain at this moment is the opposite of his joy at his works elsewhere (Ps 104:31).[[580]](#footnote-580) The Scriptures do not provide a basis for taking Yahweh’s pain or regret as any more of an anthropomorphism than other statements about Yahweh such as that he loves or is compassionate. As humanity’s nature and experience include operating in time and knowing a before and an after, so it is an aspect of the nature of the God in whose image humanity is made. “The image of God in the flood story is perhaps best described as a grieving and pained parent, distressed over what has happened to the human race.” Further, in the aftermath of the deluge God will go on to place constraints around his options for the future. In Gen 6—9 as in Gen 1—2 we have set before us in the opening pages of the Scriptures an understanding of God that is presumably meant to guide our understanding of the Scriptures that follow and that clashes with assumptions about God that Christians commonly take for granted.[[581]](#footnote-581) God walks with humanity through history and experiences its joys and it vicissitudes, its achievements and its frustrations. His being God provides the reassurance that no frustration or miscarriage confounds him, as the deluge story shows, and as the Jesus story will show. His being God means he will always find a way through. He will never be defeated.

God’s disappointment with creation anticipates the disappointment he will have with his people. He never says he regrets choosing them (rather surprisingly, given the strength of some of his statements about them), but on the other occasions in the First Testament when he is said to be caused pain, the cause will be his people (Ps 78:40; Isa 63:10). God will have such high hopes for Israel, but Israel will decline to live up to them.

I myself had said,

“How gladly I’ll put you among my children

And give you a desirable country,

the most splendid domain of the nations.”

I said you’d call me “Father,”

and not turn back from following me.

Actually, as a woman breaks faith with her lover,

so you broke faith with me,

Israel’s household. (Jer 3:19-20)

It has already been like that with creation. “The essential fracture between creator and creation is the premise and agenda of the flood narrative” which will follow.[[582]](#footnote-582) But the fact that God looks in the face the disappointing nature of creation but responds with a commitment to persevering with it is then an encouragement with regard to his maintaining commitment to his people.

**6:7-8**. So Yahweh resolves to wipe out everything on earth. His regret is with humanity not with creation in its entirety. God had created humanity to look after the earth, and it has been a spectacular failure. Yet he has decided to wipe out the rest of the animate creation along with humanity. In some way it is implicated in the bad state of humanity. Yahweh does not explain why it follows that he will wipe out the animate creation along with humanity. Perhaps the assumption is that the animal world needs humanity to look after it and exercise authority over it. Or perhaps the extent of the divine action underlines the horrific nature of the human wickedness.[[583]](#footnote-583) Or perhaps it illustrates how there is a kind of overflow of the results of human wrongdoing, as when David’s census brings trouble on the whole land.[[584]](#footnote-584) For good or ill, the destiny and fate of creation is tied up with that of humanity (cf. Rom 8:21).[[585]](#footnote-585)

But Noah “found favor in Yahweh’s eyes” (v. 8). The term “favor” or “grace” (*ḥēn*) occurs in Genesis only in this compound expression “found favor in the eyes of,” usually of human relationships. It commonly indicates a favor that is not earned; it just happens (e.g. 18:3; 19:19; 30:27; 39:21; 47:25, 29; 50:4), though it can refer to favor that one seeks to earn (32:5 [6]; 33:8, 10, 15; 34:11; 39:4). The lack of any attempt on Noah’s part to find favor with Yahweh suggests that here Yahweh himself is the source of it. Noah did not “win favor” with God: he found it. Maybe he wasn’t even looking.[[586]](#footnote-586) He found favor “not because he was righteous, but so that he *might be* righteous.”[[587]](#footnote-587) The basis for his being exempt from drowning, along with his family and the representatives of the rest of creation, is not his deserving it but God’s purpose. He is just lucky. But he has to respond.

## On Ignoring the Great Divide

Gen 6:1-4 issues the reminder that “the great cleavage is not between heaven and earth. It is, rather, between God on the one hand and the powers of both heaven and earth on the other. All of both ‘heaven and earth’ stand over against God and are responsive to him”[[588]](#footnote-588)—or at least responsible to him. Although the form of the stories in Gen 1—11 does not invite us to hypothesize a one-to-one relationship between story and history, it does invite us to assume the presence of some factual reference in the historical parable (the word “myth” has been used to describe vv. 1-4, but it is a word of vague meaning that is worth avoiding).[[589]](#footnote-589) Here its implication would be that while humanity is responsible in key ways for wrongdoing in the world, we are also the (cooperative) victims of rebellion on the part of supernatural forces. It is as well that Jesus came to defeat them.

Gen 6:1-4 leaves its listeners to work out the implications of its extraordinary story rather than telling them what those implications are. The audience might see humanity as implicated in the event that is related, and might do so in several ways. People might put themselves into the position of the fathers and families of the women who were taken in marriage. How did they come to allow this to happen? Are they repeating the unthinking submission of the first man to the suggestion of the snake? They might put themselves in the position of the women themselves. How did they come to accept these marriages? Are they repeating the unthinking submission of the first woman? They might identify with the supernatural figures themselves. Are they seeking to transgress the limits that God set for humanity, raising themselves above their station like the king of Babel in Isa 14?[[590]](#footnote-590) In its effect this approach is then not so different from the implications of seeing the *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm* as human leaders. In raising these questions, Gen 6:1-4 compares with Deuteronomy in its assumptions about the link between disobedience to Yahweh and trouble that follows. But the audience might face these questions in an awed and sympathetic fashion (especially in considering the experience of the women), not a judgmental one.

The other way an audience might work out the story’s implications relates to the other aspect of Gen 2—3. While the garden story offers a partial explanation of the way things are for humanity in the world, its explanation is only partial, and it leaves questions unanswered. Here the story raises questions such as, why did the supernatural figures intervene in the way they did? Why did God respond to the action of these beings by setting a limit to *human* life? Why does God destroy all life on earth because of the bad dealings and situation of humanity? How do vv. 5-7 follow from vv. 1-4 and from 1:1—6:4 as a whole? How did Noah find favor with God? Like Gen 2—3, the opening of Gen 6 owns the mystery and the unanswered questions about our position in the world and about God’s actions. It thus compares with Ecclesiastes and Job.

The references in 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 to the events related in Gen 6:1-4 suggest overlapping considerations, though the two epistles base themselves on the elaborated versions of the story in 1 Enoch. The 2 Peter reference starts as if to warn its readers to learn from the fate of the angels who get sent to Hell, but before coming to its warning it reminds its readers that God is able to rescue the godly from trial. Jude reminds its readers of the mercy of Jesus which is able to bring them to eternal life, urges them to be merciful to people who doubt and to save others by snatching them from the fire, and closes by recalling that God is able to keep them from stumbling and present them before his glorious presence. (In 1 Enoch 12—13 itself, the Lookouts urge Enoch to go and preach to the disobedient angels, and they ask him to pray for them.)

# Genesis 6:9—8:22—The Deluge from Above and Below

## Overview

The question for this next section emerges from what precedes. If God is going to wipe out life on the earth, is that the end of the creation project? The audience knows that it wasn’t, otherwise it wouldn’t be there listening. But how is God going to reboot the creation project? Evidently Noah is part of the answer to that question, but how? And what will be the status of this rebooted creation? When things go wrong again, will God wipe out its inhabitants again? How secure is humanity in the world?

Although it would have been easy enough for God to destroy everything and start again, God does not do so. The new creation will be a relaunching of the old creation, as Eve was constructed from Adam rather than made from scratch. Noah is the means of continuity between the old and the new, and also the means whereby to save representatives of the entire creation who are the means of its continuity. And at the end of the story God says, “Never again.” Maintaining the continuity tells the audience that it is one with the original creation and with God’s purpose for it. Saying “never again” makes enables it to feel secure in the world.

## Translation

6:9These are Noaḥ’s lines of descent.

Now Noaḥ, a faithful man, was a person of integrity among his generations—Noaḥ walked about with God.[[591]](#footnote-591) 10Noaḥ fathered three sons, Šem, Ḥam, and Yepet. 11But the earth had become devastated before God; the earth was full of violence.

12God saw the earth: and there, it had become devastated, because all flesh had devastated its way on the earth. 13So God said to Noaḥ, “The end[[592]](#footnote-592) of all flesh has come before me, because the earth is full of violence through them. Here, I’m going to devastate[[593]](#footnote-593) them, with the earth.

14Make for yourself a chest[[594]](#footnote-594) of sealed wood.[[595]](#footnote-595) With compartments[[596]](#footnote-596) you’re to make[[597]](#footnote-597) the chest, and cover it inside and outside with pitch. 15This is how you’re to make it: the length of the chest three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. 16You’re to make a gable[[598]](#footnote-598) for the chest, to finish it to a cubit upwards,[[599]](#footnote-599) and to put the entrance of the chest in its side. You’re to make it with bottom, second, and third levels. 17And I: here, I’m going to bring the upper ocean as water onto the earth, to devastate all flesh in which there is living breath from under the heavens. Everything on the earth will breathe its last. 18But I will implement[[600]](#footnote-600) my pact with you.

You’re to come into the chest, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. 19And of every living thing, of all flesh, you’re to bring two of each into the chest to keep alive with you. They are to be a male and a female. 20Of bird by its species, of animal by its species, and of everything that moves on the ground by its species, two of each are to come to you, to keep them alive. 21And you: get yourself some of all food that’s eaten and gather it for yourself. It will be food for you and for them.”

22Noaḥ acted in accordance with all that God ordered him. So he did.

7:1So Yahweh said to Noaḥ, “Go into the chest, you and your entire household, because I’ve seen that you’re a person who is faithful before me in this generation. 2Of every pure animal get yourself seven of each, a male and its mate, and of an animal that’s not pure, two, a male and its mate, 3also of the bird in the heavens seven of each, a male and a female, to keep offspring alive on the face of the entire earth. 4Because in seven more days I’m going to make it rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights and wipe out everything that had been established that I made, from on the face of the ground.”

5Noaḥ acted in accordance with all that God ordered him.

6Now Noaḥ was a man of six hundred years when the upper ocean came as water onto the earth. 7Noaḥ came into the chest, he, his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives with him, in the face of the water of the upper ocean. 8Of the pure animal, of the animal that’s not pure, of the bird, and everything that moves on the ground, 9two of each came to Noaḥ into the chest, a male and a female, as God ordered Noaḥ.

10After the seven days, the water of the upper ocean came onto the earth. 11In the six-hundredth year[[601]](#footnote-601) of Noaḥ’s life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on this day all the springs in the great deep broke out and the apertures in the heavens opened. 12The downpour[[602]](#footnote-602) came on the earth forty days and forty nights. 13On this very day Noaḥ came into the chest, he, Šem, Ḥam, and Yepet, Noaḥ’s sons, and Noaḥ’s wife, and his sons’ three wives, 14they and every living thing by its species, every animal by its species, everything that moves on the earth by its species, and everything that flies by its species, every bird, every winged thing. 15They came to Noaḥ into the chest, two each of all flesh in which was living breath. 16So the ones who came, a male and a female from all flesh, came as God ordered him. And Yahweh shut him in.

17The upper ocean came onto the earth for forty days, and the water increased and lifted the chest, and it rose up from on the earth. 18The water grew strong and increased greatly on the earth, and the chest moved on the face of the water. 19When the water grew very, very strong on the earth, all the lofty mountains under the entire heavens were covered. 20As the water grew strong fifteen cubits higher, the mountains were covered. 21All flesh moving on the earth breathed its last, by way of bird, of animal, of living thing, of everything that teems on the earth, and all humanity. 22Everything that had living spirit, breath,[[603]](#footnote-603) in its nostrils, of everything that was on the dry land, died. 23It wiped out everything that had been established on the face of the ground, from human being to animal to moving thing to bird in the heavens. They were wiped out from the earth. Only Noaḥ and those with him in the chest remained. 24The water grew strong on the earth for one hundred and fifty days.

8:1But God was mindful of Noaḥ and every living thing and every animal that was with him in the chest.

So God made a wind pass over the earth and the water abated. 2The springs in the deep and the apertures in the heavens were blocked up, the downpour from the heavens held back, 3and the water gradually withdrew from on the earth. The water decreased at the end of one hundred and fifty days, 4and the chest came to rest in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on the Ararat[[604]](#footnote-604) mountains. 5As the water gradually decreased[[605]](#footnote-605) until the tenth month, in the tenth on the first of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

6At the end of forty days, Noaḥ opened a window in the chest that he had made 7and sent out a raven.[[606]](#footnote-606) It continued to go out and come back[[607]](#footnote-607) until the water dried up from on the earth. 8He sent out a pigeon from being with him to see if the water had diminished from on the face of the ground, 9but the pigeon didn’t find a place to alight for the sole of its foot and it came back to him to the chest, because there was water on the face of the entire earth. So he put out his hand, got it, and brought it to him into the chest. 10He waited again seven more days and once more sent out the pigeon from the chest. 11The pigeon came to him at evening time, and there, in its mouth a plucked-off olive leaf. So Noaḥ knew that the water had diminished from on the earth. 12He waited again seven more days and sent out the pigeon, and it didn’t come back to him again.

13So in the six hundred and first year, in the first on the first of the month, the water dried from on the earth. Noaḥ removed the chest’s cover and saw: there, the face of the ground was dry. 14In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dried out.

15God spoke to Noaḥ: 16“Get out of the chest, you, your wife, your sons, and your sons’ wives with you. 17Every living thing that’s with you from all flesh, by way of bird, of animal, and of everything that moves on the earth: get them out[[608]](#footnote-608) with you, so they may teem on the earth and be fruitful and be numerous on the earth.”

18So Noaḥ got out, he, his sons, his wife, and his sons’ wives with him. 19Every living thing, everything that moves, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth got out of the chest by their families.

20Noaḥ built an altar for Yahweh, got some of every pure animal and of every pure bird, and offered up burnt offerings on the altar, 21and Yahweh smelled the restful smell. Yahweh said in his heart,[[609]](#footnote-609) “I won’t yet again diminish the ground on account of humanity because[[610]](#footnote-610) the shaping of the human heart is bad from its youth. I won’t yet again strike down every living thing, as I did.

22All earth’s days yet,[[611]](#footnote-611)

seedtime and harvest, cold and heat,

Summer and winter, day and night—

they will not stop.”

## Interpretation

The heading at 6:9 marks a new beginning following on 5:1, and a new synagogue lection begins here. But the backdrop to the plot and drama of the story that will now unfold is the summary statement in 6:5-8. That statement made clear that Yahweh has to take some action, but it also set up a tension between Yahweh’s intentions and his attitude to Noah—or it did not indicate the relationship between the intention and the attitude. Against that backdrop, the section unfolds as follows.

1. 6:9-13 restates that background, in reverse order: Noah’s standing before God, the devastating and devastated situation of the earth, and God’s consequent intention. It constitutes the “exposition,” the statement of background information, for what follows.[[612]](#footnote-612) In the Overview to this section we noted questions it answers from an a posteriori perspective. The exposition points to questions that need answering on the basis of what has preceded. How can God show proper disapproval of earth’s violence, recognize Noah’s distinctive faithfulness, and lay the foundations for relaunching the creation plan? The entirety of the rest of the section comprises the answer to these questions.
2. 6:14-21 begins to provide the answers by relating God’s commission to Noah to build a huge chest in which Noah’s family and representatives of all earth’s species can be kept safe.
3. 6:22 ends this first stage in the story by reassuring us that Noah did as God told him.
4. 7:1-4 describes Yahweh’s commission to Noah to get the survival party into the chest.
5. 7:5 ends the second stage by again reassuring us that Noah did as God told him.
6. 7:6-16a relates how they all got into the chest, with some raising of suspense as we continue to await the coming of the deluge announced back in 6:13.
7. 7:16b ends the third stage with Yahweh making sure that the survival party is secure.
8. 7:17-24 describes the deluge with its catastrophic consequences from which only Noah and his party are exempt.
9. 8:1a ends the fourth stage by in affirming that God was mindful of Noah, and also forms a bridge to the fifth stage in the story; it constitutes the turning point in the story, ending the first act and heralding the second act.
10. 8:1b-5 relates how God took action to make the flood diminish.
11. 8:6-14 describes how Noah established that the flood had gone.
12. 8:15-17 relates how God told Noah to get his family out of the chest so that the creation project can be resumed.
13. 8:18-19 brings to an end the long fifth stage by describing how Noah did as he was told in bringing his family out of the chest, with the animate creation following.
14. 8:20-22 corresponds to the opening subsection 6:9-13 (and thus also recalls 6:5-8). Noah expresses his faithfulness by making an offering, and Yahweh declares that he will never again strike down or destroy the earth because of its bad dealings. Thus Yahweh has shown proper disapproval of earth’s violence, recognized Noah’s distinctive faithfulness, and laid the foundations for relaunching the creation plan.

Genesis combines chronological patterning with relating the story in that linear fashion.

7:4, 6 7 days’ notice from God of a 40-day deluge; it’s year 600 in Noah’s life

7:10-11 after 7 days the deluge starts, on the 17th day of the 2nd month of year 600 in Noah’s life

7:12, 17 for 40 days and nights the deluge continues

7:24 for 150 days the water grows deeper

8:3-5 after 150 days the water decreases, until the 10th of the 10th month; on the 17th of the 7th the chest stops

8:6-9 after 40 days Noah sends out a raven then a pigeon

8:10-11 after 7 days he sends out the pigeon again

8:12-14 after 7 days he sends out the pigeon again; it’s the 1st day in the 1st month and then the 27th day of the 2nd month of year 601 in Noah’s life

The pattern is thus palistrophic in its references to the years of Noah’s life and to periods of 7, 40, and 150 days. 8:1 is again shown to be the center point of the palistrophe.[[613]](#footnote-613) The math apparently presupposes that the first 40 days are part of the 150 days that the deluge continues, and that 150 days is a way of saying 5 lunar months.[[614]](#footnote-614) The pattern combines an interest in broad chronology (the flood lasts a year) with neatness of arrangement (the 7-7-40-150-150-40-7-7 scheme) in a way that compares with Gen 5 and again with Matt 1:1-17. As Matthew will omit some figures from his genealogy so that his 14-14-14 pattern works, Genesis implicitly wraps its first period of 40 days into its first period of 150 days so as to combine its palistrophic scheme with its picture of the flood lasting a year. Further, by distinguishing two stages in the earth’s drying out it pictures the flood lasting both a lunar year and a solar year.[[615]](#footnote-615)

The form of a palistrophe can point towards something simply going somewhere and back again and thus getting nowhere, but a palistrophe may work more like parallelism in the sense that the second or return half may not merely repeat the first but may take matters forward. This instance does combine the form of a palistrophe with the form of a story that sets up a question or problem and then sets about resolving it.

Further, combined with the linear plot and the palistrophic structure is a pattern whereby God acts, God gives Noah orders, and Noah obeyss:

6:12 God looks

6:13-21 God tells Noah to build a giant chest

6:22 Noah does as God says

7:1-4 God tells Noah to get everyone into the chest

7:5-16a Noah does as God says and the deluge happens

7:16b-24 God shuts Noah in and the deluge continues

8:1-14 God is mindful and the waters abate

8:15-17 God tells Noah to get everyone out of the chest

8:18-20 Noah does as God says and offers him a sacrifice

8:21-22 God smells and speaks to himself

The interweaving of the statements is significant, and so is the impossibility of interrelating them as neatly as cause and effect. It is not because Noah is obedient that God is mindful; God just is. It is not because God told Noah to build an altar and offer a sacrifice that Noah does so; Noah just does. The relationship between God and Noah or Noah and God is not programmed and predictable but independent and free.

Within these frameworks, Genesis says little about the logistics of the monumental task of building the chest, collecting the animals, controlling them, and feeding them, not to say coping with their defecation. It is not that people in the ancient world didn’t notice these matters,[[616]](#footnote-616) as Western readers do. It’s just that Genesis’s interest lies elsewhere. Its own further emphases include:

1. God’s act in bringing devastation on the earth corresponds to the way humanity has brought devastation on the earth.
2. The act of devastation involves an undoing of the act of creation. Whereas the sky dome had held back the upper water from the earth, this upper ocean is now let loose on the earth again, and the water under the earth are also allowed to contribute to the flooding.
3. The animals and birds are important in the story, which is not simply about the survival of Noah and his family but about the relaunching of God’s creation project. The birds play a role in establishing that the flood has ceased.

Whereas 6:9-13 restate 6:5-8, they speak of “God” whereas 6:5-8 spoke of “Yahweh.” In traditional source-critical terms, then, vv. 5-8 are J’s introduction to the story of the deluge, while vv. 9-13 are P’s introduction. Whereas broadly Genesis has so far combined P and J in large chunks (roughly, Gen 1 and 5 are P, Gen 2—4 are J), here it interweaves them more delicately. Possibly the intricate nature of both versions of the story requires this treatment; simply setting them one after the other would be harder. Or possibly we should infer that P is adapting and supplementing the J story rather than there being two separate complete stories which a later author interwove. Either way, we can broadly infer how some sequences of verses came from J and others from P, following clues such as their terms for God and their way of numbering the animals (P just talks of pairs of each species, J talks in terms of one pair of impure animals and seven pairs of pure animals). But two versions of the stories cannot be separated into separate continuous versions with no remainder; if there were two complete versions, Genesis has done some abbreviating and smoothing in the course of combining of them. Thus (for instance) Genesis contains no J account of Yahweh’s commission to Noah to build the chest and of Noah doing so; as incorporated in Genesis, the J account goes straight from God’s decision (6:5-8) to his commission to Noah to go into the chest (7:1-5).[[617]](#footnote-617) Possibly the inclusion in Genesis of P’s creation story as it stood facilitated the retaining of its poetic character whereas the interweaving and reworking of the two versions of the flood story sacrificed it.

**6:9-10**. Against the background of what has preceded, the idea that Noah will have lines of descent is quite a statement of hope. Yet whereas the heading at 5:1 covered the whole of Adam’s line from Adam to Noah, the heading at 6:9 really covers only Noah’s story; his sons will acquire a new heading at 10:1. Noah is characterized in three ways. First, he is faithful (*ṣaddîq*). It is the first occurrence of a key First Testament word, and Noah is the only person in the First Testament who is ever so described.[[618]](#footnote-618) It is commonly translated “righteous,” but this term does not convey the important relational implications of the word. To be *ṣaddîq* is to live in the right way with God and with one’s family and community. Second, he is a person of integrity (*tāmîm*). The common translation of this further key First Testament word is “blameless,” which is again misleading. The word does not denote the absence of something (so that it might imply being sinless) but the presence of something. Applied to a sacrificial animal, it denotes one that is whole; applied to a person, it denotes someone who is wholly committed in relationship with God and with other people. Thus there is not very much difference between faithfulness and integrity, as Ps 15 suggests in expounding the way both qualities find expression in a person’s life. Putting the two words alongside each other is not to say two separate things but to underline the qualities indicated by both. Given what we have read in vv. 5-7, we can see that in his faithfulness and integrity Noah would indeed be a man whose life contrasted with the lives of his contemporaries—indeed with those of any generation.[[619]](#footnote-619)

The third expression, “he walked about with God,” is the phrase used to describe Enoch. While the word order in vv. 5-9 suggests that Noah was the man he was because he found favor with Yahweh rather than that his faithfulness and integrity were what won him Yahweh’s favor, the order of the expressions within v. 9 (to complement this point) suggests that it was because Noah was faithful and a man of integrity that he was able to walk about with God in the way that friends do.[[620]](#footnote-620) Given that vv. 5-8 are J’s introduction to the deluge story, J stresses God’s favor; given that vv. 9-10 are P’s introduction, P emphasizes Noah’s commitment and responsibility; and in combination Genesis affirms both. Noah’s being a man of faithfulness and integrity followed from finding favor with God and from being able to walk about in God’s company. There would have been no faithfulness and integrity without God, but there would have been no faithfulness and integrity without Noah. That God can say “I’ve seen that you’re a person who is faithful before me in this generation” is “a wonderful testimony and worthy of trust: what could be better than when the Creator himself, he who brings everything into being, delivers such a verdict on the just man?”[[621]](#footnote-621) He is indeed a man who “by his trust condemned the world” and became an heir of the destiny that belongs to God’s people through that trust (Heb 11:7). But if you are condemned by Noah, he cannot save you; you would have to identify with him (Ezek 14:12-20).

**6:11-13**. Two key terms describing the earth complement the three terms describing Noah. The earth has become devastated (*šāḥat* niphal; vv. 11, 12), devastated “before God”: the significance of the second expression in this context emerges when one compares and contrasts with the reappearance of the phrase in v. 13 and in 7:1. The point is made vividly as the narrator’s “there” invites us to imagine God looking at the scene. While Noah’s faithfulness is there before God’s eyes (7:1), that statement contrasts with the devastation of the earth which is before his eyes (perhaps with the implication that it is flagrant),[[622]](#footnote-622) and with the “end” which is before the eyes of his imagination according to v. 13. Perhaps there is an implication that both the devastation and the end are before him in court; the phrase recurs in Exod 22:9; Lam 1:22; Esth 9:11. The devastation results from the fact that humanity has devastated its way (*šāḥat* hiphil; 6:12). In response, God is going to devastate humanity (*šāḥat* piel and hiphil; 6:13, 17; 9:11, 13). While v. 19 will use the word “flesh” in a way that includes the rest of the animate world, it will there make that reference explicit; v. 12 includes no pointer to this broader reference. Humanity is the “flesh” that has devastated the earth, and God’s devastating will put the seal on its devastating. “Destruction is thereby intrinsically related to corruption, violence leads in to violence.”[[623]](#footnote-623)

Because the means whereby humanity has devastated the earth is by filling it with violence or violation (*ḥāmās*;6:11, 13). It is the first use of the verb “fill” since 1:22-23, 28.[[624]](#footnote-624) God had commissioned human beings to fill the earth, and they had filled it all right, but not as commissioned. Fortuitously (or perhaps it is more than chance) English has the two similar words “violence” and “violation” to match the Hebrew noun *ḥāmās,* with the related verb *ḥāmas*, which have both meanings. The verb refers to violating God’s teaching (e.g., Zeph 3:4) or violating people (e.g., Jer 22:3). The double use of the Hebrew word suggests that it points to the kind of violation that involves violence to people and the kind of violence that involves violation of the law. *Ḥāmās* refers to violation of God’s rules and violation to people as an expression of such lawlessness. The violence to which it refers always constitutes violation, which is what makes it wrong; the focus of the word does not lie on the violation of the person. The First Testament does assume that the violation of a person is wrong, but this assumption is not the one that underlies its use of the word *ḥāmās*. This word rather draws attention to the fact that unwarranted violation of a person is a violation of principles that God has laid down. It is, indeed, an act of violation against God, insofar as humanity is made in God’s image (James 3:9).

God’s response (v. 13) is to speak to Noah. He apparently speaks directly with Noah about his intentions, which puts Noah into the same category as Adam, Abraham and Moses.[[625]](#footnote-625) God sums up the point about violence and devastation and underlines it by repeating the words (devastated, full of violence, devastated, devastated, full of violence, devastate) and by his now taking them on his own lips. He also takes up and reverses phrases from Gen 1, where he “said” things about creation and then “saw” that creation was good. Here he “sees” and then “says” things about devastation.[[626]](#footnote-626) And he adds the further key term, “the end” (*qēṣ*). Like its English equivalent, the Hebrew term is just an ordinary unthreatening word (e.g., 8:6; 41:1), but in some circumstances it can become a terrifying one. Amos once declared that the end was coming upon Ephraim (Amos 8:2), and his words made an impression on Ezekiel (Ezek 7:1-6). Here in Genesis “the end” is a shorthand alternative for the talk of devastation that runs through vv. 11-13. TgNeoph suggestively paraphrases, “The outcry of all flesh has come up before me.” Humanity has brought the life of the earth to an end, this fact has come to God’s notice, and God intends to validate that action. Perhaps the logic of v. 13 also follows and nuances that of v. 7. Human beings were supposed to hold sway over the earth and subjugate it (1:26, 28), but instead they have joined it in its violence.[[627]](#footnote-627) The talk of *ḥāmās* in vv. 11 and 13 recalls the violent action of Cain and Lamech and possibly that of the supernatural beings; in addition, the first man and woman, and again the divine beings, were involved in violating God’s instructions and violating the boundaries God had laid down. Indeed, “Genesis 3—6 catalogues a crescendo of undifferentiated violence propagating uncontrollably.”[[628]](#footnote-628) And therefore humanity will be devastated “with the earth.” God has imagined what it would be like to commit the final act of devastation and bring earth’s life to an end, looked the possibility in the eye, and determined to do it. Genesis moves from creation to apocalypse.[[629]](#footnote-629) In English we might then speak of God himself undertaking a final act of violence. Hebrew would not speak in terms of God doing *ḥāmās*, because *ḥāmās* is by definition wrong; it is “virtually a technical term for the oppression of the weak by the strong.”[[630]](#footnote-630) But the Scriptures are quite willing to describe God acting violently in the sense in which we use the word in English, where violence (e.g., on the part of law enforcement) can be a proper response to wrongdoing.

A further comparison and contrast with Amos is that Yahweh’s first announcements to Amos of devastation for Ephraim (Amos 7:1-6) meets with protests from the prophet, which Yahweh heeds, though Yahweh’s subsequent announcements (Amos 7:7-9; 8:1-3) meet with no such protests. Neither does this announcement to Noah. On the other hand, rhetorically one aspect of the significance of Amos 7—8 is that people who hear Amos describing his visions, perhaps during a festival at Bethel, or who hear his scroll read out, would be wise to respond by turning from their waywardness so that Yahweh might relent (even if he has not said he would do so) and/or by recognizing that Yahweh has acted properly in letting them experience catastrophe, so that this experience was not without meaning. The same would be true of the deluge story. It was designed to be heard where necessary by people who might need to turn from their waywardness and thus avert such a catastrophe coming to them, or who might need to turn from their waywardness because it has fallen upon them. From the declaration that devastation is coming “emerges the loving kindness and goodness of God in foretelling what was to come, his purpose being to suppress the evil through fear of what was expected,” as happened in the case of the Ninevites.[[631]](#footnote-631)

**6:14-18a.** What now follows manifests a charming illogic but also a jaw-dropping horror; the reading of the story deserves a long pause to give God’s words chance to sink in.[[632]](#footnote-632) God’s devastating indictment about devastation could have seemed to allow for no exceptions, but actually God has not given up on his creation project. In this connection Noah is to construct a gigantic container (a cubit is about half a yard), though it will be rather smaller than Utnapishtim’s—rectangular rather than cuboid, and having three rather than seven levels. Its purpose is dramatically held back until the specification is complete, though its shape might remind readers of the Jerusalem sanctuary, as Utnapishtim’s container might remind people of temple structures that they knew.[[633]](#footnote-633) It will need to have rooms and it will need to be sealed with pitch, because it is to be a floating refuge from Yahweh’s coming act of devastation whereby earth is to be overwhelmed by the “upper ocean” (*mabbûl*).The term is another that comes only in these chapters, and in Ps 29:10. This last occurrence puts us on the track of its meaning. It denotes the ocean that sits above the sky, the reservoir of water held back by God’s original act of creation. It will engulf the earth and kill everything.

Except that God will set up a pact (*bᵉrît*)with Noah (v. 18a). It is the first occurrence of another key First Testament word, whose implications will be spelled out in chapter 9.[[634]](#footnote-634) God’s speaking of what he *will* do suggests he is referring not to the undertaking to preserve Noah and his family from the act of devastation, but to that undertaking which will follow afterwards. Genesis is here summarizing where the story is going and what is the ultimate nature of God’s intention. The declaration that he intends to set up this pact will make it a little easier to cope with his intention in the shorter term to destabilize everything (see further 7:4, 23) and a little easier for Noah to illustrate how “we derive alacrity from hope.”[[635]](#footnote-635) The declaration also means that the chest can be “the matrix of a new creation”;[[636]](#footnote-636) one might then take it as a symbol of the city of God on its pilgrimage in history,[[637]](#footnote-637) with baptism as the door to this chest (1 Peter 3:21), though one might be wise to be wary of generating a detailed allegory out of such an approach. Such allegories, “if not actually scholarly, are nevertheless harmless, inasmuch as they contain no error; and one may use them—except in debates—for the sake of embellishment,”[[638]](#footnote-638) even though there may be in them “scarcely anything solid.”[[639]](#footnote-639)

**6:18b-22.** Noah’s family will then get into the chest. A family includes the women whom the parents’ sons have married as well as the parents and the sons themselves, but Mr. and Ms. Noah’s daughters now belong to other families. To Western readers, at least, their abandonment will seem harsh; that feeling reflects a different way of looking at family, but it also presupposes a different focus in God’s action. The point about the chest is not to save specific individuals; it relates to God’s purpose for his world. The same applies to the saving of examples of each of the species. The listing of the categories of creatures “by their species” takes up the account of creation (1:21-25). Whereas God could have simply started again by creating new human beings and new animals, he chooses not to. At this point in the story, the instruction about taking food likely implies things that grow, in keeping with Gen 1, but 7:1-5 may supplement that idea.

Noah does as he is told (v. 22). MT’s paragraph break and the medieval chapter division neatly draw attention to this note.

**7:1-5**. The reference to Yahweh signals that Genesis moves to following the J version of the story when it tells of the command to get into the chest, and also to nuance the instruction about the animals. In using the name Yahweh, J safeguards the point that it was of course Yahweh who was involved with Noah even though Noah did not himself know the name. Genesis again notes that Yahweh is involved with him because Noah is faithful. The declaration explains both the reason why Yahweh preserves Noah and his family, and the reason why Noah and his family make a reliable basis for Yahweh’s rebooting his creation project.[[640]](#footnote-640)

J nuances Yahweh’s instructions about the animate creation (vv. 2-3) in distinguishing between pure and impure creatures—ones that can be offered to Yahweh in sacrifice and ones that cannot. The Sinai revelation will be the explicit locus of detailed instructions regarding this area of life, as it will be regarding other areas, and P’s omission of reference to this distinction between pure and impure fits the way it will be Leviticus that provides these instructions. P does not back-project them, as it does not back-project the use of Yahweh’s name. But in principle there will be nothing very novel about the distinction that will eventually be expounded in Leviticus; most societies make such a distinction in some way. J can naturally portray a faithful person like Noah as encouraged to work with it, and portray Yahweh as presupposing the distinction. While part of the point about having the animals in the chest is to keep them alive, J may also assumes that part of the point is for Noah and his family to have something to eat. So Yahweh instructs Noah to take on board plenty of the animals that can be eaten, but just token examples of the ones that cannot, to keep those species alive. Among the latter, what about ones that die through natural causes before they have chance to procreate? We must not be literalist in understanding the story.

The declaration that everything set in place by Yahweh is going to be wiped out (v. 4) would be even more frightening if Yahweh had not said that he intended to set in place a more secure base for the future (6:18; both times forms from *qûm*).

Once again, Noah does as he is told (v. 5).

**7:6-16.** The story spells out Noah’s obedience and relates how things worked out God said. Even the animals do as God said, without apparently being told; they submit to the authority that God gave humanity at the Beginning.[[641]](#footnote-641) The story form of the account of the deluge enables Genesis to make subtle theological points in a way that will be taken further when Exodus speaks of God declaring the intention to stiffen Pharaoh’s resolve, then of Pharaoh’s resolve being stiff and of Pharaoh stiffening his resolve, and only subsequently of God actually stiffening Pharaoh’s resolve. In this case the theological subtlety concerns the sovereignty of God, of nature, and of Noah. Genesis speaks of God’s decisions, but mostly of nature’s actions. It is God who declares the intention to destroy, but nature wreaks the destruction. God’s activity is confined to shutting the door in the chest and then being mindful and sending a wind over the earth, though once again nature effects its own withdrawal. And Genesis speaks of God’s decisions and nature’s actions, but also of Noah’s cooperation, without which the story would collapse—or rather, God would have to rework his plan.

The account of the deluge (vv. 11-12) describes the engulfing of the earth in terms that recall Gen 1; God is indeed reversing his work of creation. He then established the dome to hold back the water in the heavens, while evidently allowing for some apertures through which rain could fall; now he lets the apertures be wide open. What falls is more than rain (*māṭār*; cf. v. 4); it is an overwhelming downpour (*gešem*; v. 12). Further, in Gen 1 the background of God’s activity was the presence of darkness over the face of the subterranean deep, and God also made sure that the land was secure from encroaching water; now he also lets the subterranean deep bubble up uncontrollably. The deluge is “a catastrophe involving the entire cosmos. When the heavenly ocean breaks forth upon the earth below, and the primeval sea beneath the earth, which is restrained by God, now freed from its bonds, gushes up through yawning chasms onto the earth, then there is a destruction of the entire cosmic system.” [[642]](#footnote-642) Giving the date of the deluge indicates “the absolute concreteness and reality of God’s activity.”[[643]](#footnote-643)

“This very day” (vv. 13-16a) is a day when God does something particularly significant in fulfillment of his word, or when human beings do something particularly significant in response to his word (17:23, 26; Exod 12:17, 41, 51). “A fullness of detail and a studied solemnity” then characterizes the account of “the entrance of the obedient, pious man into the place of salvation or preservation,” while “the participation of every species of animal in this solemn procession reflects the same attitude that we have seen in Gen 1: all living beings belong together and the blessing holds for all.”[[644]](#footnote-644) The verse-by-verse repetitions in the children’s song that relate how “the animals went in two by two” in their procession pick up the repetitions in the account: they “came… came… came… came,” with the coup de grace following at the end of the repetitions: “as God ordered him.” listing of the categories of each creature “by its species” takes up the account of creation again (Gen 1:21-25).

And Yahweh shut Noah in (v. 16b). No doubt literally Noah shut the door, as Utnapishtim does in the Mesopotamian Gilgamesh story which tells of a great flood (Tablet XI), but metaphorically Yahweh did, ensuring that the water would not be able to gain access to the chest. Perhaps God also wanted to keep other people out.[[645]](#footnote-645)

**7:17-24.** There follows the detailed account of the process of the deluge and its effects. Initially Genesis simply describes the awe-inspiring nature of the flood. Even an audience that knows only about the mountains in its region and not about the Himalayas could be stunned at the picture the account paints. Perhaps it would momentarily forget what the deluge was designed to accomplish. And the repeated verb “increased” might remind it of the occurrences of the same verb in the imperative in the creation story, in a quite different connection (1:22, 28, there translated “be numerous”). But the breathtaking effect of the picture then gives way to horror (vv. 21-23). Everything “breathed its last,” expired (*gûa‘*), in keeping with God’s word (6:17). To put it in stark everyday words, everything “died.” It no longer had in its nostrils the breath of life, the breath that makes the difference between life and death; again the process of creation is reversed (2:7). The event “wiped out” everything, obliterated it (*māḥāh*), in keeping with God’s word (6:7; 7:4). Using the transitive form of this verb without an explicit subject and then using the passive verb draws indirect attention to the unnamed agent of the elimination. Its horror is both underlined and qualified by the subsequent verb “remained” (*šā’ar*). With its related nouns, the verb recurs in Israel’s later story in portrayals of the cataclysmic nature of the disasters Yahweh threatens and brings to Israel, which allow only leftovers or remains or a remnant to survive—but at least they allow something to survive, which can be the nucleus of a new future.

**8:1-5.** But God was mindful of Noah (*zākar*). The medieval chapter division neatly draws attention to this turning point in the story. Yet another key verb appears. It is conventionally translated “remember,” but the Hebrew word has connotations beyond those of that English verb. It can apply to the future not just the past, it can signify a deliberate act not just an accidental one, and it can point not just to a mental event but to an action by which one does something on the basis on what one applies one’s mind to. The chest could be the matrix of a new creation only because God was mindful or remembered. That statement “must not be weakened as though it were a figure of speech meaning that God acted as if He had forgotten.”[[646]](#footnote-646) The statement takes its place along with the declarations that God regretted and felt pain as markers of God’s living in linear time with the world, not only in eternity. God has memory; but distinctive to God is the capacity to control his memory. And further, whereas human beings may do nothing on the basis of what they remember, for God forgetting and remembering are actions. God has been putting Noah out of mind as far as action is concerned, and now sets his mind on him and thus initiates action. Genesis thus now abandons the reticence it showed when it did not refer to God’s action in describing the bringing of the deluge in 7:10-24: God makes a wind pass over the , so that the water abates. If the deluge meant the undoing of creation, God is now beginning a new act of creation. Floods of water have not quenched love (Song 8:7).[[647]](#footnote-647) Once again a wind passes over the earth (TgPsJ and TgNeoph once again call it “a merciful wind”) and once again the water comes under control (cf. 1:2), and it is God who makes it do so. The springs below the earth close, as do the apertures in the dome above. The rain therefore stops and gradually the water returns to the place that God allocated to it at the beginning (1:6-10), in a way that corresponds to the gradual way in which it had grown to overwhelm the earth.

Thus the chest comes to rest (*nûaḥ*, the verb from which Noah’s name comes; vv. 4-5). Ararat, an area rather than a single mountain, also appears in 2 Kings 19:37; Isa 37:38; Jer 51:27, without any great indication of its location, though somewhere in Assyria would make sense, and thus somewhere in eastern Turkey, Armenia, or northern Iran. The name compares with that of the kingdom of Urartu in Armenia. The mountains’ appearing further suggests that creation is returning (cf. 1:9).[[648]](#footnote-648)

**8:6-12.** The account of the birds (one of the detailed points of contact with the Utnapishtim story) extends the suspense of the story. With the landing of the chest, we might have thought that Noah was home and dry; but it is a while before he is. The vignette about the birds “subtly lets us witness the waiting and hoping of those enclosed in the ark.”[[649]](#footnote-649) It’s said that sailors used to rely on birds to tell them whether they were near land. [[650]](#footnote-650) The experiments with the birds establish whether it’s safe to think of disembarking. The vignette underlines the way the destinies of humanity and of the rest of the animate creation are interwoven. Noah has made it possible for the animate creation to survive; the animate creation makes it possible for him to know he really has survived. Noah sends out a raven and a pigeon, as happens in Utnapishtim’s story, though there the pigeon goes first and the raven last, with a swallow in between. *GenR* 33:5 nicely hints that the reason for sending a raven would be that it is good at finding food for a servant of God (1 Kings 17:6), though the raven is also a scavenger and an impure bird (Lev 11:15); it would thus find acceptable food before a pigeon did.[[651]](#footnote-651) Pigeons are pure birds that commonly feature in connection with sacrifice (e.g., Lev 1:14; Luke 2:24). The olive branch was already a symbol of peace in the ancient world,[[652]](#footnote-652) but the pigeon might have brought the olive branch so that it could start building a nest,[[653]](#footnote-653) though in this context the point may be that the olive is one of the most basic requirements of life in Israel. Josephus[[654]](#footnote-654) nicely has the pigeon covered in mud as well as carrying the olive branch. As the narrative’s “there” had invited the audience to look at the world’s moral devastation through God’s eyes (6:12), now its “there” invites it to watch through Noah’s eyes as the pigeon returns with good news (there will be another “there” in v. 13).

**8:13-19.** The deluge has lasted a year, whether one works by a lunar or by a solar calendar. The command that God then issues is the kind that gives permission and an invitation. “The loving Lord's goodness” expresses itself in the way “he brought the good man out of the ark, freeing him from life there and releasing him from that strange and distressing prison, and bestowed on him the reward for his endurance in the words, ‘Increase and multiply.’”[[655]](#footnote-655) But it is also a command to play that part. Noah, his family, and the animate beings can leave the chest to begin to take their part in the renewal of the creation project (cf. 1:20-28). “The whole of creation recovers its proper order, both the soil reawakening to productivity as well as everything else that had been created.”[[656]](#footnote-656)

**8:20-22.** The first thing Noah does is worship God. He’s like someone released from prison who therefore wants to give public testimony to what God has done for him (so *GenR* 34:1).

Thus (v. 20) **“**Noah, having left the ark, does not proceed to build a tower or a house, or to plow the fields, but to build an altar.”[[657]](#footnote-657) Cain and Abel made offerings to God, and we might assume that their offerings involved an altar, but Here Genesis explicitly mentions Noah’s building an altar. Conversely, accounts of subsequent altar-building (12:7-8; 13:18; 22:9; 26:25; 33:20; 35:1-7—the last the only occasion when God commissions the construction) do not always refer to the offering of sacrifices—the building of the altar is significant in its own right. It means proclaiming Yahweh’s name over an area; it signifies that this area belongs to Yahweh. And it means recognizing this place as a place where Yahweh has acted. Both significances could apply in Gen 8. But here, Genesis talks about both altar and sacrifice. It notes the practical reason why one builds an altar. It is hardly the moment for an expiatory sacrifice;[[658]](#footnote-658) Christian readers have to keep recalling that expiation or propitiation is not the most common significance of sacrifice. A thank offering would have seemed quite appropriate, the kind of sacrifice that involves a fellowship meal between Yahweh and the offerers. Noah actually offers a whole offering, the kind of sacrifice that involves giving the entire animal to Yahweh, the kind of sacrifice that Gen 22 will require, a sign of total personal commitment. Such a sacrifice might well accompany a prayer, that God will never flood the earth again.[[659]](#footnote-659)

God likes the smell of Noah’s offerings (v. 21a). As God regrets and remembers, so the God of the Scriptures, like the gods of other Middle Eastern peoples, is not only not a timeless being; nor is he a spiritual being whose nature is quite other than that of the beings he created. He created beings in his image and he is like them. As well as having the full range of emotions such as love, hate, joy, pleasure, and anger, God has the full range of capacities such as seeing, hearing, feeling--and smelling. Indeed *b. Berakot* asks, “Whence do we learn that a blessing should be said over sweet odours?” And answers, “Because it says, Let every soul[*nᵉšāmāh*, ‘breath’] praise the Lord [Ps 150:6]. What is that which gives enjoyment to the soul and not to the body? — You must say that this is fragrant smell.” Smell is spiritual.[[660]](#footnote-660) The difference between Yahweh and other so-called gods is that his eyes, ears, and nose work, as theirs do not (see the comment on 1:26-28). It would be a shame to view it as merely a dead metaphor. The idea of sacrifice having a smell that Yahweh likes (or does not like) occurs later as well as earlier in First Testament times and in the New Testament (e.g., Exod 29:18; Lev 1:9; Isa 1:13; Ezek 6:13; Eph 5:2). For Genesis and its audience, what might be significant is the relatively *non*-anthropomorphic nature of the expression, if people were familiar with the Mesopotamian picture of the gods clustering like flies in their hunger.[[661]](#footnote-661) And Yahweh finds the smell of the sacrifice restful (*nîḥōaḥ*), another word derived from the same root as Noah’s name (cf. v. 4). It would be a nice counter to the “stench of ungodliness”[[662]](#footnote-662) and the stench of death all over the earth.

In what sense do the offering and the smell generate the decision never again to bring such catastrophe on the earth? The backcloth to the story of the deluge was a cataclysmically gloomy assessment of humanity’s moral state. But Noah has proved to be an exception to that assessment, and the offering he has brought has confirmed that all is not totally lost. It is possible to start over. Yahweh had tried cursing the snake and the ground and one of the human beings, and it had got no one anywhere. He will not devastate the ground again. “Diminish” (*qālal* piel) has similar implications “curse” (*’ārar*) in Gen 3 and 4, but “curse” refers to the process whereby something terrible happens through someone whose words have power speaking words that are bound to find fulfillment, whereas “diminish” refers to the results of that process. It suggests turning an object or a person into something slight and of no account, making it shrink to nothing, or counting it as nothing (cf. 1 Sam 18:23; Job 40:4; Isa 49:6). It is the opposite of blessing, which implies making something fruitful and enabling growth. Here, “diminish” rather than “curse” picks up from 8:8, 11: the water has diminished and abated from the land; Yahweh will not again let the ground diminish by letting the water overwhelm it. He will not again strike down (*nākāh* hiphil) everything living. Whereas Yahweh does not get involved in willful violence or *ḥāmās*, he does get involved in proper violence, for which *nākāh* hiphil is the nearest that Hebrew has to a technical term. But whereas proper violence may work as punishment or chastisement, Yahweh also recognizes that in itself it does not take him towards the achievement of his creation purpose. Yahweh is not referring to an abrogation of the curse in 3:17-19 (which the audience’s experience would have told them had not been abrogated) but to a promise never again to bring a disaster like the deluge. Thus “the real significance of the Flood as God’s judgement” lies in “God’s pledge that such a judgment will not happen again.”[[663]](#footnote-663)

The reason (v. 21b) relates to the human waywardness described in devastating fashion in 6:5-6; the mention of the divine heart and the human heart takes up the reference there. “The same condition, which in the prologue is the basis for God’s judgment, in the epilogue reveals God’s grace and providence. The contrast between God’s punishing anger and his supporting grace, which pervades the whole Bible, is here presented quite untheologically, even almost inappropriately. It seems almost like indulgence, an adjustment by God towards man’s sinfulness.”[[664]](#footnote-664) While humanity’s youth may be the youth of each individual, in the context it is more likely the youth of humanity which Genesis 1—6 has related. But what is the nature of the “because” relating to its waywardness? The obvious understanding is that Yahweh is acknowledges that cursing the ground gets no one anywhere because of the extent and depth of human waywardness. Instead of cursing the ground because of that waywardness, he will have to live with it and/or do something else about it. The sinfulness of the human heart is first be the reason for divine judgment and then the reason for holding back from judgment.[[665]](#footnote-665) This understanding implies a profound insight, but it is rather subtle. More likely the because-clause explicates the phrase “on account of humanity.” The bad state of the human heart will not make Yahweh diminish the ground again. The implication of the two possible understandings is not very different. Humanity will continue in being on account of God’s mercy not on account of its deserving. Noah’s sacrifice has encouraged Yahweh to make that commitment. Genesis “has a dim view of the human heart”; it raises a question about whether human beings can transcend the calculated self-interest which inevitably leads to death.[[666]](#footnote-666) The judgment that “the shaping of the human heart is bad from its youth” is less severe than the judgment that “the entire shaping of its heart’s intentions was simply bad, all day” (6:5).[[667]](#footnote-667) Yet this more general but more moderate judgment gives no basis for optimism about human moral progress, and the world has seen no progress since Noah’s day. Humanity continues to be inclined to devastate the earth and to be inclined to violation and violence. “There will be wars and rumors of wars” (Matt 24:6). In setting the world going again, God has looked in the face the fact that the human heart is in a bad shape and has promised that he will put up with it rather than destroy the world. These verses “belong indisputably to the weightiest in the whole Bible.”[[668]](#footnote-668)

Yahweh spells out his commitment in a series of poetic cola (v. 22). Because English puts subjects before verbs, the sentence looks ordinary, but in Hebrew it is unusual because verbs usually come first. It opens with a noun phrase picking up from v. 21 with its “yet,” and closes with a verbal expression for which we thus have to wait for an unaccustomed time. The phrases in between pair aba’b’: seedtime/harvest is re-expressed as summer/winter and cold/heat is re-expressed as day/night. Internally, the phrases work abb’a’ (seedtime/harvest then summer/winter and cold/heat then day/night. (Only at the end does the nature of the pairing become clear to a reader in the northern hemisphere where “cold/heat” sounds as if it should pair with “seedtime/harvest” and “summer/winter,” which makes it sound as if all the first three phrases refer to the seasons with the result that the fourth phrase stands on its own; whereas in the Middle East the temperature difference between day and night is often more noticeable.) So the audience is invited to think about the ordering of time on the large scale (the seasons of the year) and on the small scale (within each twenty-four hours) and is eventually reassured that this ordering will not break down. The crucial sequence of sowing as the rainy season comes and harvest in the summer will continue. Day/night takes us back to Gen 1, as does the promise that they will not “stop” just because Yahweh has “stopped” creating (2:1-3). At the beginning, God established the rhythm of day and night with some implication of permanency, but human rebellion meant the forgoing of such certainty. Now God makes that rhythm the object of a promise.[[669]](#footnote-669) Back in Gen 1 God had given the animate creation and the things that grow from the ground the power to procreate. Now he extends the promise to an assurance that the broader creation will not act in such a way as to frustrate their capacity. The First Testament knows that Yahweh acts linearly and acts in history. It also knows that Yahweh also acts cyclically and acts in the round of nature.[[670]](#footnote-670)

For Isa 54:9 this promise becomes a model for the commitment that God will make to Zion. Set alongside God’s disappointment with his people that parallels his disappointment with created humanity[[671]](#footnote-671) will be a divine oath not to act in wrath against his people that will parallel the divine renunciation of the idea of cursing the earth again. The experienced security of God’s earth is a guarantee of the security of God’s people. Admittedly thereby “God’s unfailing promises make room for more violence.”[[672]](#footnote-672)

## Flood Stories

There are many Middle Eastern deluge stories, in origin dating from before Moses’s day. As is the case with the creation stories, Genesis shares aspects of its theology and message with them and it has concrete motifs in common with them, while other aspects of its theology and message are different, as is its detailed story. Once again, Genesis may be consciously telling a story that contrasts with Middle Eastern equivalents.[[673]](#footnote-673) At one level the reason for the existence of many such stories is that there were a number of floods in the Tigris-Euphrates plain, and even storytellers who have not personally experienced a flood would be able to imagine one. But the phenomenon also needs to be compared with the existence of flood stories in other parts of the world and with the many Western stories of inter-galactic battle and alien invasion. Such stories become the screen on which perennial human issues can be projected. Western movies project questions into the future and ask whether there will be a future. Middle Eastern stories project them into the past and ask about the security of the created world. They speak “of the threat to human existence and at the same time of its permanence.”[[674]](#footnote-674)

The most famous Middle Eastern deluge story is the one told by Utnapishtim to Gilgamesh, the king of Uruk. Like the Genesis story it forms part of a much larger work, in this case a poem telling of Gilgamesh’s quest for eternal life after the death of his friend Enkidu. Utnapishtim relates how the gods decide to flood the town of Shuruppak on the Euphrates; a flood there which has left archeological indications may have been part of the background to the story’s development.[[675]](#footnote-675) One of the gods speaks in a way that Utnapishtim can overhear about the need to construct a boat and take examples of all species on it. Utnapishtim gives an account of the making of the boat and its launching, then of the frightening nature of the storm that comes. The boat survives the storm, the water abates, and Utnapishtim sends out a pigeon, a swallow, and a raven to see if they find a place to land. In due course he offers a sacrifice, though this action provokes argument among the gods about who enabled Utnapishtim to escape the flood. He is rewarded with the gift of eternal life, though this does no good to Gilgamesh.

The other deluge narrative that is most comparable with Genesis is the older story of Atrahasis, which lies behind the flood story element in the Gilgamesh narrative. It also has a broader plot, which more closely parallels that of Genesis: the gods create the world, then determine to destroy it because of the behavior of human beings who disturb the gods by their noisy rebelliousness. In both Gilgamesh and Atrahasis, the flood is the action of last resort after the gods have tried other chastisements.

As is the case with the creation story and its relationship with stories such as *When on High*, the deluge story thus manifests point of detail that are hardly coincidental, along with a different total perspective.[[676]](#footnote-676) In Genesis question of human immortality is not a theme; there is only one God to be involved, so he combines the roles taken by different Mesopotamian gods; he brings about the deluge because of human wrongdoing not just because human beings are a nuisance.[[677]](#footnote-677) The Genesis story is rather prosaic and down-to-earth compared with the Mesopotamian epics.[[678]](#footnote-678) On the other hand, while Gen 6—8 cannot be laid out as poetry in the manner of Gen 1, it closes with some poetic lines and it may include one or two others (JPSV finds a poetic couplet in 7:11b). Its inclusion of a number of rare expressions such as the words for chest, sealed, pitch, compartments, gable, ocean, and what had been established (6:14, 16, 17; 7:4, 23), and the difficult phrases “finish it to a cubit upwards” and “breath of the spirit of life” (6:16; 7:22) may reflect a poetic background. The same possibility applies to some of the repetitions of words, which parallels that in Gen 1.[[679]](#footnote-679)

Whereas many Western readers might have preferred this story not to be in the Scriptures, one reason why it is there may be that “a story of a flood is in some way a given in the world of ancient Israel,” so that the question becomes what is characteristic and distinctive of this particular flood story.[[680]](#footnote-680) The perspective of Genesis again contrasts with that of Middle Eastern equivalents. In Gilgamesh Tablet XI the god Enlil determines to destroy humanity because of the noise they make, but Ea, the god who created humanity commissions Atrahasis to build a boat so that humanity can survive the flood. In Genesis the reason for devastating the world is that humanity has already devastated it by its violence, but the fact that Yahweh alone is God means that he is both the one who devastates and the one who enables humanity to survive. The person through whom God makes it possible is not an impressive human hero like Utnapishtim but just a good man who does what God says.[[681]](#footnote-681) The broader Genesis story of the deluge is concerned not with the destiny of an individual such as Gilgamesh but with the destiny of the world as a whole, and ensuring the survival of one man and his family is integral to the divine intention in bringing about the catastrophe, rather than something that might or might not have come about, depending on differences among the gods.

# Genesis 9:1-29—The Blessing, the Pact, and the Fall

## Overview

Gen 9 comprises two codas to the Noah story, though speaking in terms of two codas might imply an underestimate of the chapter’s importance. If anything, the account of the aftermath of the deluge brings the Noah story to a double climax rather than amounting to an anticlimax. As usual, in regard to both parts of the chapter we can ask what problem or question they raise, perhaps a problem or question for the audience of Genesis.

The first coda (vv. 1-17) is an extended midrash on 8:20-22. The question those verses might raise is, “Really? How do those words relate to all the things we have heard in 6:9-8:19?” Genesis is not merely speaking of “distant primeval things” but answering a question about the present, because it is speaking about “our world age.”[[682]](#footnote-682) The opening part of the response to that question makes explicit that God really is setting creation going again. He is doing so in full recognition of the truth about the violation that issued in the deluge, and he is incorporating some commands that issue from that truth. To which one might again respond, “Really?” Thus the latter part of the response to that question turns the promise from 8:20-22 into a pact with a sign, which God will therefore not be able to get out of keeping. The first coda, then, constitutes a rounding off of the deluge story as God lays down the “new world-order”[[683]](#footnote-683) for the new world.

In retrospect, the second coda (vv. 18-29) illustrates why humanity needs such a commitment on God’s part. This second coda is a little story with a question and an answer, though it parallels other Genesis stories in raising as many questions as it answers. Its own question is, why do the Canaanites end up as servants to the Israelites? And the answer is, they pay a price for something their father did, as is often the case in human experience.

## Translation

1God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful, be numerous, fill the earth. 2Awe towards you and dread towards you[[684]](#footnote-684) will be upon every living thing on the earth, upon every bird in the sky, with everything that moves on the ground, and with all the fish in the sea; they’re given into your hand. 3Everything that moves, that’s living, will be yours as food. Like the green plants, I am giving[[685]](#footnote-685) you everything. 4However, flesh with its life, its blood, you will not eat.

5And, however,

Your blood, belonging to your lives, I will require;

from the hand of every living thing I will require it.

From the hand of a human being,[[686]](#footnote-686)

from the hand of an individual for his brother,

I will require the life of a human being.

6One who pours out the blood of a human being,

through a human being[[687]](#footnote-687) his blood will pour out.

Because it was in God’s image

that he made a human being.[[688]](#footnote-688)

7But you: be fruitful, be numerous,

teem on the earth, be numerous[[689]](#footnote-689) on it.”

8Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him: 9“And I: here, I’m going to implement my pact with you, with your offspring after you, 10and with every living being that’s with you: bird, animal, and every living thing on the earth with you, of all that got out of the chest, for every living thing on the earth. 11I will implement my pact with you, and all flesh will not be cut off again by the water of the upper ocean. The upper ocean will not again become something to devastate the earth.”

12And God said, “This is the sign of the pact that I’m going to set between me and you and every living creature that’s with you, to age-long generations. 13My bow I am setting[[690]](#footnote-690) in the mist. It will be a sign of the pact between me and the earth. 14When I spread mist on the earth and the bow appears in the mist, 15I will be mindful of my pact that’s between me and you and every living creature among all flesh, and the water will not again become an upper ocean outburst to devastate all flesh. 16The bow will be in the mist and I will see it, being mindful of the age-long pact between God and every living creature among all flesh that’s on the earth.” 17So God said to Noah, “This will be the sign of the pact that I am implementing between me and all flesh that’s on the earth.”

18Noah’s sons who got out of the chest were Šem, Ḥam, and Yepet, while Ḥam was the father of Kena‘an. 19These three were Noah’s sons, and from them the entire earth dispersed.[[691]](#footnote-691)

20Noah was the first, as the man of the ground, who planted a vineyard.[[692]](#footnote-692) 21He drank some of the wine and got drunk, and exposed himself inside his tent. 22Ḥam, Kena‘an’s father, saw his father’s naked body and told his two brothers outside. 23Šem and Yepet got a cover, put it on both their shoulders, walked backwards, and covered up their father’s naked body, with their faces turned backwards, so they didn’t see their father’s naked body.

24Noah woke up from his wine and came to know what his youngest son had done to him. 25He said,

Cursed be Kena’an:

he is to be the lowest servant[[693]](#footnote-693) to his brothers.

26And he said,

Blessed be Yahweh, the God of Šem:

may Kena’an be a servant to them.[[694]](#footnote-694)

27May God open up[[695]](#footnote-695) Yepet ,

may he[[696]](#footnote-696) dwell in the tents of Šem,[[697]](#footnote-697)

and may Kena’an be a servant to them.

28Noah lived after the upper ocean outburst for 350 years. 29So Noah’s entire time came to 950 years. Then he died.

## Interpretation

Given that Gen 9 comprises a further address by God elaborating on 8:21-22 and a further story about Noah, separating it off from what precedes is slightly arbitrary and done for convenience, though the chapter division does mark the move from J material to P material that came: that is, 9:1-17 is P’s vast equivalent to or midrash on 8:22-23. MT has a unit break after 9:17 and another after 9:29; the summary statement in 9:28-29 is actually the completion of the summary statement about Noah begun in 5:32.[[698]](#footnote-698) So 9:1-29, which is marked as a unit by the medieval chapter division, ay reasonably be treated as a third unit within 5:1—9:29. Gen 10:1 then has a heading for the new line of descent, the line of Noah’s sons.

The chapter works as follows:

9:1-7: God renews the creation blessing and commission,[[699]](#footnote-699) but adds a new feature and also a new requirement. Vv. 1 and 7 form a frame around the subsection, which MT closes with a paragraph marker.

9:8-17: God speaks of implementing a pact with Noah and his sons, a bow in the clouds being a sign of its permanent nature. Vv. 8 and 17 form a frame around the subsection, which MT closes with a unit marker.

9:18-19: A summary footnote to vv. 1-17.

9:20-27: A story about Noah and his sons and grandson.

9:20-29: The final completion of Noah’s story, which MT closes with a unit marker.

The story in vv. 18-27 is laconic and puzzling. Like Gen 2—3 and 4, it raises many questions that it does not answer. Was Noah the first-ever vine-dresser? Was he the first-ever person to discover the effects of letting grapes ferment? Was he at fault for getting drunk? Was he at fault for exposing himself? In what sense was it his tent? Where was Ms. Noah? How did Ham happen to see him unclothed? Is “saw his father’s naked body” a literal statement or a euphemism? If it is a literal statement, what was so wrong with Ham’s reaction? Why is Ham called Noah’s youngest son? Why does Noah declare a curse on Canaan rather than on Ham? Was Noah’s reaction appropriate? Why does Noah bless the God of Shem rather than Shem himself? What is the meaning of the prayer that God may open up Japhet? Who does Noah envisage dwelling in the tents of Shem?

The story itself clarifies only some of these questions and we have to accept its opacity over others. As is again the case with the stories in Gen 2—4, this opacity is part of its nature. In telling a story that raises more questions than it answers, it again invites us to live with the fact that not all questions have answers that we can see (cf. Job). At the same time we can look for clues that enable us to fill in the gaps in the story with some conviction.

The clue to one key aspect of its focus lies in the unexpected reference to Canaan in the opening verse, which leads into four more references to Canaan in the story, more than to Noah, Shem, Ham, or Japhet. Now Canaan is not part of the bigger narrative yet. His birth will feature only in passing in 10:6, while 10:15-19 will list his descendants. Gen 11—13 will then refer to the Canaanites’ presence in the country that bears their name, a presence that complicates Yahweh’s promise of the country to Abraham and Sarah, and the rest of Genesis will often refer to Canaan; one of its implicit questions will continue to be how Canaan can become the domain of Abraham and Sarah’s descendants.

But many people listening to this story know about Canaan not only as part of the broader story of what God has been doing with them. They are part of their own lives as Shem, Ham, and Japhet are not. Outside the genealogies in Chronicles, the names of Noah’s sons appear only in the occasional description of Egypt as the country of Ham (cf. Pss 78:51; 105:23, 27; 106:22), though another link is that Canaan was long an underling of Egypt. While some First Testament passages can speak as if the Israelites under Joshua eliminated the Canaanites, other passages make clear that actually “the Israelites lived among the Canaanites” and intermarried with them (Judg 3:5; see further Ps 106:34-39). David’s ill-fated census had to include the towns of the Hivvites and Canaanites (2 Sam 24:7) and at least until Solomon’s day Canaanites still lived in the big town of Gezer not far from Jerusalem (1 Kings 9:16). The question of how to think of the Canaanites could be a live one in the listeners’ day, and this story provides them with some allusive hints.

The tale it tells means that the second climax to Noah’s story all-but undoes the new world-order proclaimed by the first climax. Realism confronts what could be utopianism.[[700]](#footnote-700) Thus the chapter as a whole parallels Gen 1—4, with P again leading the way and J then subverting it. Or perhaps one may put the matter the other way around: the unconditional promise of a new world order implies that the world can live with the mess to which the unsavory subsequent story testifies, and that God’s blessing (v. 1) will not be frustrated by Noah’s curse (v. 25). And as the close of Gen1—4 tells of people calling out with the name Yahweh, the close of Gen 9 tells of Noah blessing Yahweh.

**9:1-4.** Whereas the good news in 8:21-22 concerned the way God spoke to himself (though the existence of the report implies that he shared his thinking), the good news in P’s account concerns the way he speaks to Noah and his sons.

The further initial excitement in God’s words (v. 1) is that they report his renewing the blessing on humanity and the commission that P reported in Gen 1. God exactly repeats his opening words in 1:28 except for the change in the object, as “Noah and his sons” replace “them.” Blessing is again spelled out in terms of numerical fruitfulness; God wants the earth filled. God is committed to humanity’s having a new beginning. Amusingly, in 1:28 “them” referred to male and female humanity; here the women are left out, which would make it hard to fulfill the commission. The reason for the difference is that 1:28 looked forward to 2:18-25 (on which it incorporated an anticipatory midrash) whereas 9:1 looks forward to 9:18-27. This commission to fill the earth contrasts with the aftermath of the flood in Atrahasis, where the gods are concerned to limit human fecundity in the conviction that it caused the problems that made the flood necessary.[[701]](#footnote-701) It also reasserts the desirability of this filling which contrasts with the other filling of 6:8.

God goes on (v. 2), as he did in 1:28, to speak of humanity’s position in relation to the rest of the animate world. He speaks of the creatures in slightly different terms, but the differences do not seem significant, and initially the nature of their relationship to humanity might not seem very different. Earlier he spoke of humanity subjugating and holding sway; humanity’s turning proper subjugation into improper violence might lie behind God’s omitting subjugation from this commission.[[702]](#footnote-702) Here he speaks of the creatures showing awe and dread. There is nothing wrong with awe and dread (*môrā’*, *ḥat*); they are attitudes that God’s people are supposed to take to him. The two related verbs come together in Mal 2:5. But while the first word very often has these positive connotations, the connotations of the second are much more usually negative, which hints that God’s point here may be more sinister. That possibility finds support in the way related words come together in (e.g.) Deut 11:25. God’s declaration that the animate world is given into humanity’s hand or power is also not encouraging for it (see e.g., 14:20; 16:6). Yet another negative hint is the way God does not repeat the original creation blessing on the animate world.

God’s point is indeed more sinister (v. 3). “Although Noah is in some sense a new Adam…, the world is no new Eden.”[[703]](#footnote-703) The two most general expressions from v. 2 (things that move, that are living), which were also the last summary expressions in 1:28, recur with what one might see as good news for Noah and his sons but bad news for the animate world. Notwithstanding the promise in v. 2, lions and tigers are not obviously scared of human beings, though one ought not to worry too much about that fact, especially in light of the point about God’s promise which now follows.[[704]](#footnote-704) At the beginning God said “I am giving you… the green plants as food” (1:29-30), and *GenAp* 11 has God only repeating the permission to eat things that grow from the ground.[[705]](#footnote-705) But in v. 3 God now takes up the same expression to apply it to everything in the animate world that is alive. He does not say that the dietary extension also applies to the animate beings themselves. Nor does he explain the dietary extension, though perhaps it links with the commission to humanity to maintain control of the animate world, on one hand, and with the actual growth in violence in the world, on the other.

There is a qualification on the permission (v. 4). The pattern of generous provision and a single prohibition recurs from 2:16-17.[[706]](#footnote-706) Human beings may not eat flesh with its life, its *nepeš*.An animate being may be described as beinga *nepeš*, a life or living creature or soul (1:24; 2:7), or as having a *nepeš*, a life or soul (1:20, 21). The word’s connotations are unlike those of the English word “soul” if we think of a human being as combined of two elements, body and soul, of which the second is semi-independent of the first and is the locus of the real person.[[707]](#footnote-707) The connotations of *nepeš* are more like those of the word “soul” if one thinks in terms of soul music or of a person who is soulful. But because *nepeš* often suggests “life,” it links closely with blood. When a human being or another creature loses a lot of blood, it loses its life, which indicates that there is a sense in which the life is in the blood (Lev 17:11). Human beings may not eat the life, and therefore may not eat the blood. The ban God pronounces is a straight prohibition with no qualification or sanction, like the prohibitions in the Decalogue, and it uses the strong negative *lō’* as they do, rather than the more regular *’al*. Like them, again, it does not make specific exactly what it applies to. Does it cover not eating an animal that is still half-alive, as predatory animals themselves may, and/or not tearing a limb off a living animal, and/or not draining the blood from an animal you have killed, and/or not eating an animal that has died of natural causes from which you could not drain the blood (this consideration might underlie the specific permission in v. 3 to eat creatures that are alive)[[708]](#footnote-708)? Once more, Genesis does not give reasons for this limitation; perhaps they seemed obvious. Perhaps there is a link with the description of the first human being as becoming a living being through God breathing into him. The life and thus the blood issues from God, so that eating the blood would be consuming something that belongs to God and must be allowed to return to him. People are indeed therefore to let the blood drain from an animal before eating it. As Gen 1 did not say anything about the “problem” that some animals are built to be carnivorous, here God says nothing about giving permission to such animals to become themselves (as we might think of it). His concern is with the regulating and ordering of human life and with how the regulating and ordering of life looks from the angle of humanity. It is humanity that he addresses here. As he Implies in speaking to Job (Job 38—39), how he relates to the animals is between him and them.

**9:5-7.** There remains something more serious about the blood of a human being. Whereas people may shed an animal’s blood and drain it in order to eat the animal’s flesh, neither human beings nor animals may shed human blood at all. The seriousness of the matter is expressed by the rhythmic nature of the declarations, with their repetitions and parallelism. In the first bicolon, both cola end with the same verb. In v. 5 as a whole, three cola begin “from the hand of.” Then its final colon includes a third occurrence of the verb, so that the verse as a whole incorporates three occurrences of the verb and three of the prepositional phrase. In turn, v. 6 is a perfect abcc’b’a’ bicolon.

“Require” (*dāraš*) (v. 5) is a serious and threatening word. More generally the verb means “go to see” or “search for,” with “the element of movement as a presupposition for the process.”[[709]](#footnote-709) The verb’s everyday usage includes the idea of investigation into wrongdoing (Ezra 10:16), but where God becomes the subject, it acquires more menacing connotations. The correlative verb to such “seeking” is “finding.” God is not merely investigating; he knows what has happened (cf. 42:22?). He is taking action, on the basis of what he knows (cf. Ps 10). Thus one of the verb’s nuances (as here) is “taking redress.” The objects of this action are not merely human beings but also animals, as the pact will apply to animals as well as human beings (v. 10); rules in the Torah such as Exod 21:28-32 presuppose this principle. Perhaps the implication is that the unevenness or disorder caused by one taking of life is leveled or rectified by the taking of another life. With the taking of life by a human being, there is the further consideration that as human beings, killer and victim were brothers; the declaration also carries an irony after Gen 4. Perhaps its point includes a warning not to take Yahweh’s sparing of Cain as a precedent.

“Pour” (*šāpak*) (v. 6) underlines the violence of the action that brings death; pouring is what someone does to water—or anger (Ps 22:14 [15]; 79:6). Once again God speaks in a categorical manner, though not in the negative second-person form which characterizes the Decalogue but in the positive third-person form of 4:15. In a further contrast with the Decalogue, where murder is but one of the wrongs that Yahweh proscribes, “here in Gen 9 murder is something utterly on its own; nothing can be compared with it.”[[710]](#footnote-710) “Through” a human being (*bᵉ*) is an unusual expression. It might imply that a human being is the agent of the redress of which v. 5 spoke, and the logic of v. 6b would then be that the executioner’s being made in God’s image means sharing in responsibility for getting and keeping the world under control (1:26-28),[[711]](#footnote-711) sharing in God’s openness to exercising violence.[[712]](#footnote-712) This expectation would further nuance the reference to brothers in the previous verse; it is the family’s task to see that the leveling happens. But the use of the preposition parallels its appearance in the expression “a life *for* a life” (Deut 19:21; cf. 2 Sam 3:27; 14:7),[[713]](#footnote-713) and more likely the line rather declares that one death will lead to another, without clarifying the question who is responsible for ensuring the leveling which v. 5 pointed to. It may thus be simply a warning or prediction of how violence will beget violence.[[714]](#footnote-714) Beginning with 17:14, many pronouncements and rules in the Torah and elsewhere declare that a person will be “cut off,” and these declarations are warnings that God will take the required action. Here, the reminder that the victim of murder was someone made in God’s image suggests that it is God who will be taking action in response to the attack on himself.

At last (v. 7), God turns back from all the solemn talk about killing and returns to the commission or promise with which vv. 1-7 began, closing the bracket opened in v. 1. First he repeats the identical two words with which he began in v. 1, then as a variant on “fill the earth” he adds “teem on the earth”—which was earlier used just of sea creatures (1:20) and then of the non-human creation as a whole (7:21; 8:17). And as a final underscoring, he repeats “be numerous” again.

**9:8-11**. “Chances were that the good man was still beside himself and his mind still prey to fear; and it was likely that if some light shower should happen to fall, he would be bound to become distraught and quite upset at the thought of such a deluge overwhelming the world once again.”[[715]](#footnote-715) Perhaps God might indeed have to allow that Noah and his sons could wonder how secure is the fulfillment of the promises that are implied by the commissions in v. 1; they didn’t work out very well the first time.[[716]](#footnote-716) God has said that he will not devastate the world again (8:21-22). How conditional is that promise?

God undergirds it with a “pact” (*bᵉrît*) (v. 9), the pact to which he referred in 6:18. He introduces it with the special introductory phrase “And I: here, I am going to…,” leading into a participle, which he had used leading into a more sinister participle in 6:17 (and cf. 6:13; 7:4); as there, the participle refers to something God is about to do. Further, this “and I” corresponds to the “and you” in v. 7, and implies a relationship between the commission in vv. 1-7 and the promises that now follow. English translations conventionally speak of a “covenant,” but that English word has a significance of its own. The Hebrew word is both broader and narrower. It covers the ground suggested by the English words treaty, contract, and pact, as well as covenant. But it need not suggest mutuality, in the way that “covenant” does,[[717]](#footnote-717) and thus it also overlaps with the English word “pledge.” Here God is indeed making a pact *with* Noah and his sons and *with* their offspring, but it is a one-sided pact, a pledge or self-obligation or solemn promise. As much is implied by his declaration that *he* will implement it; a mutual pact would require a shared act of implementation. The one-sided nature of the pact will be more explicit in vv. 12-17, where also the essential nature of a pact as opposed to a bare promise will be reflected in the provision of a supportive sign relating to it. The beneficiaries of the pact are not only Noah and his sons but also their offspring (*zera‘*). It is the first occurrence (with this connotation) of another word that will be of ongoing importance in Genesis (e.g., 12:7; 13:15-16; 15:18; 17:7-10). God’s commitment looks way beyond the present generation, points to his long-term involvement with people, and signals the way he will work through families. Again it is whimsical that God mentions only the men, not the women who will need to have a role in this connection. The collocation of pact and offspring will recur in Gen 17, though one should not assimilate the two pacts. “Something happens between God and Abraham in Gen 17. Abraham responds in word and action. But nothing happens between God and Noah” in the course of the making of this pact. “There is an address by God to Noah, and no reaction at all on Noah’s part.”[[718]](#footnote-718)

The one-sided nature of the pact is further reflected (v. 10) in the fact that humanity is not its only beneficiary. God is also making it *with* the rest of the animate world, which is “with”Noah and his sons. At creation humanity was brought into being for the sake of the animate world, to keep it under control. During the deluge, God’s mindfulness applied not only to Noah but to every living thing.[[719]](#footnote-719) As creation is rebooted, the animate world gains its security from God’s commitment to humanity. God reverts to the familiar talk of every living being, spelled out as bird, animal, and every living thing, and then as all that got out of the chest, every living thing on the earth. God is firmly and inescapably tying his hands. There is no wiggle room here.

To make the commitment even more inescapable (v. 11) God repeats the promise about the pact. Specifically, there will be no more pouring out of the upper ocean to cut off all flesh or devastate the earth. God again seals off his escape routes as he takes up expressions from 6:9—8:22: “all flesh” (seven times), “water of the upper ocean” (twice, and three other occurrences of “upper ocean”), “devastate” (twice with this meaning, and three other occurrences). The link between human devastation and divine devastation is broken.[[720]](#footnote-720)

**9:12-17.** Talk in terms of a pact as opposed to a mere promise makes one expect the provision of a sign; it is this provision that constitutes the difference. But before specifying the sign, God ties his hands yet further. The pact applies not only to the present generation and to its offspring and to every living creature, as vv. 9-10 said, but to “age-long generations,” to “the generations of *’ôlām*.”A word such as “eternal” might be misleading, but the term is the furthest-reaching expression that Hebrew has. Whereas the situation in the world that God created remains affected by the waywardness of humanity, this word of God to humanity after the deluge makes for something better than God said at creation or in his words that renewed the creation commission in vv. 1-11.[[721]](#footnote-721) Further, more literalistically God speaks of putting the sign “between me and between you and between every living creature,” repeating the word “between” before “you” and before “every” in accordance with the way Hebrew works. Like the repeated “with,” the repeated “between” underlines the paradoxically reciprocal nature of this one-sided pact.[[722]](#footnote-722) At the same time, the unusual expression “setting” the pact, which prepares the way for the coming reference to “setting” the bow in the mist, involves the use of the verb *nātan* whose regular meaning is “give,” so that it hints at an underscoring of the gracious nature of the pact.

A sign (v. 13) need not have an intrinsic relationship to what it connotes; examples are Hezekiah’s sign (2 Kings 20:8-11) and the convention that green signifies “go” and red “stop,” or that a dot on a line of type signifies the end of a sentence. But the Scriptures’ signs that relate to pacts (and some other signs) commonly have an intrinsic relationship to what they signify, as is the case with circumcision (see Gen 17)[[723]](#footnote-723) and with baptism (which connotes both death and cleansing). So it is with this sign. The word “bow” occurs over seventy times in the First Testament, and everywhere but here and in Ezek 1:28 it denotes the bow as a literal weapon of war. As a sign, it has the same significance. Once more, Genesis reworks a motif from other Middle Eastern stories. In *When on High* 6:82-91, for instance, Marduk takes the bow with which he had defeated Tiamat and sets it up in the sky as a constellation of stars.[[724]](#footnote-724) Here God gives a more immediately encouraging significance to the weapon. He is laying aside the weapon with which he might attack the earth.[[725]](#footnote-725) God’s covenant extends not only beyond Noah to the animate world, but beyond the animate to the earth itself—the earth that had become devastated and was then due for devastation (6:12-13). Genesis might or might not assume that the rainbow itself was already familiar;[[726]](#footnote-726) on the former assumption, the pronouncement about the rainbow takes a known reality and gives it a new meaning, as the later rule about circumcision will take a known practice and give it a new meaning. But Genesis would be more interested in making that contrast with *When on High* than on the history of meteorology.

From now on (vv. 14-15), when Yahweh makes mist or cloud cover the earth, and when a rainbow also appears, it will have a message for him and for humanity. The word for mist or cloud (*‘ānān*)is not a regular word for a raincloud but one that usually denotes the mist or cloud that both draws attention to and shields people from the awe-inspiring presence of God (e.g., Exod 13:21-22; 24:15-16). Counterintuitively, the appearance of the (rain)bow will act not as an encouragement to God to make war against the world, maybe by shooting fiery lightning arrows as God can (Ps 78:48), but as a discouragement to him because it will remind him of his pact. He is like the king of a superpower who has made a pact with an underling within his empire, and has foregone the freedom to use his firepower against this underling. Such a pact presupposes a mutual commitment, and such a king is not bound by the pact if the underling rebels. But God’s pact is one-sided and he has surrendered that freedom even while looking in the face the fact that the underling will rebel. When he sees the bow, it will make him “mindful” of that pact, as he had been “mindful” of Noah (8:1).[[727]](#footnote-727) “The gospel of this God is that he remembers.” And “his remembering… asserts that God is not preoccupied with himself but with his covenant partner, creation.” [[728]](#footnote-728)

In case they are still not convinced (vv. 16-17), God says it again, and then again. He speaks in a way that offers the most encouraging security to humanity. “The Holy Spirit is prolix, but not without purpose.”[[729]](#footnote-729)

God’s promise that he will not devastate the world again (except in connection with the creation of a new heavens and a new earth)[[730]](#footnote-730) might or might not indicate that God will stop humanity doing so. But anyway, the interim security of the world is not a guarantee of its ultimate security. Further, Isa 24 may be plausibly be taken to imply that he reserves the right to devastate the world again for disregarding the “age-long pact.” The mistakenness of people who scoff at this idea will thus be exposed (2 Peter 3:6-7). In this sense “the days of ‘The Man’” will resemble “the days of Noah” (Luke 17:26-27). As the spiritual puts it,

God gave Noah the rainbow sign,

No more water but fire next time,

Better get a home in that rock.[[731]](#footnote-731)

God’s spelling out his promises here follows on his spelling out his commission in vv. 1-7, with the implication that there is a link between them.[[732]](#footnote-732) The categories of conditional and unconditional do not help an understanding of the dynamic and personal nature of the covenantal relationship between God and people, any more than they help in understanding covenantal relationships such as marriage. But equally, entering into such relationships does not carry with it the assumption that one can do as one likes, as Paul notes in Rom 6. Relationships are two sided.

**9:18-19.** The note about Noah’s sons closes off the deluge story, introduces the last Noah story which will immediately follow by means of its reference to Canaan, and trailers the account of the dispersion of humanity which will come later (see 10:18; 11:1-9). It is important to the security of the world as a whole that this dispersion issues from Noah’s sons to whose offspring God made the promises associated with the pact.

**9:20-23.** Like the story of the original creation, the story of the rebooting of creation begins with a human being tending the ground. Noah is fulfilling the original creation purpose.[[733]](#footnote-733) But the story then adds a new note. Maybe the idea of cultivating a vineyard is new, in which case Noah repeats the dynamic of Gen 4 with its account of the development of technology. Yet the audience might assume that both the garden and the ground outside the garden grew grapes along with olives (cf. 8:11), figs (3:7), and other produce with which everyone was familiar, that there were vineyards before the deluge, and maybe that there was wine, so that Noah is simply the first person after the deluge to farm and to cultivate vines. The subsequent reference to Noah in his tent suggests a Bedouin lifestyle, which can combine with a little agriculture and viniculture. Either way, the vineyard would be an image with much resonance for the audience.[[734]](#footnote-734) It was itself Yahweh’s vineyard (e.g., Isa 5:1-7; Jer 12:10). Vineyards, like olive orchards, were an important aspect of its economy. Wine was an important element in its worship (e.g., Lev 23:13; 1 Chron 9:29) and an important joy of everyday life (Ps 104:15; Eccles 9:7).

But maybe (v. 21) no one had discovered what happens when you leave grapes to ferment,[[735]](#footnote-735) and the First Testament does pay much attention to the trouble wine can get you into. Whether or not Noah’s viniculture is a new achievement, creation is followed by disaster, a kind of fall, as happened in Gen 1—4. Once more the trouble issues from within creation, though the story does not explicitly attribute any responsibility to the element within creation through which the trouble comes, nor to the human being to whom and through whom it comes. Maybe it’s just one of those things. The overlap of motifs with Gen 1—4 continues in the account of Noah’s exposing himself, which would not have been a problem back at the beginning (2:25). Maybe it wouldn’t have been a problem now if Ms. Noah had been around.[[736]](#footnote-736)

Indeed, maybe it wouldn’t have been a problem now were it not for Ham’s action (v. 22). After all, Noah was in his tent; he wasn’t exposing himself in public. An Ugaritic story relates how a dutiful son “takes [his father] by the hand when he’s drunk, carries him when he’s sated with wine”;[[737]](#footnote-737) Ham is not a dutiful son. Genesis reminds us that Ham is Canaan’s father, and thus that this story links with events in the listeners’ day. It is not just something quirky and shameful that happened back then in the story of humanity’s ancestors. While the word for “naked body” (*‘erwāh*) comes from a verb meaning “be bare” in quite a neutral sense, and the noun has a morally neutral sense in its other occurrence in Genesis (42:9, 12), in the vast majority of occurrences in the First Testament it refers to someone’s genitals (“private parts” is a near English equivalent) and it appears elsewhere in combination with the verbs “expose” (cf. v. 21) or “see” (cf. especially Lev 18; 20; Ezek 16). And references to such seeing or exposing are linked with a view of the Canaanites (Lev 18:3) and of the customs of the people God intends to drive out of the land so that Israel may possess it (Lev 20:22-24), and with the slur that Jerusalem’s origin and birth were from the country of the Canaanites (Ezek 16:1-3). Further, in such passages “exposing the naked body” of someone or “seeing” it is a kind of metonymy or synecdoche and euphemism for having sex with them. The implication would thus be that Ham sexually assaulted his father—or his mother.[[738]](#footnote-738) And in passages such as Lev 18 and 20, “the prohibitions of sexual violation and indignity embody a rejection of Canaanite ways of life and values.” [[739]](#footnote-739)

The response of the other two brothers (v. 23) raises questions about that implication, in that the description of their action seems designed to suggest that seeing their father’s naked body simply meant seeing their father’s naked body, which many cultures would regard as imperilling proper regard between children and parents and proper family order. So the story is ambiguous over the nature of Ham’s act. Indeed, the slow and careful way in which Genesis describes the brothers’ slow and careful action seems designed to draw attention away from Ham’s act. It draws a veil of ambiguity over it (appositely) and rather draws attention to the brothers’ act of propriety.[[740]](#footnote-740) But either way, something has happened that involve a compromising of the relationship between father and son that parallels the fracturing of the relationship between brothers in Gen 4. And it is something that anticipates or embodies the compromising of proper sexual relationships within the family which the audience would associate with Canaan. Perhaps, then, the ambiguity over what Ham did functions to associate the mere looking (which Ham did) with the improper actions (which are what Lev 18 and 20 refer to).[[741]](#footnote-741)

**9:24-27.** The accountof the outrage and the act of piety leads into the account of the curse (v. 24-25) and the blessing (vv. 26-27).[[742]](#footnote-742)

We come to Noah’s first words in the Scriptures (v. 24): “he built a ship, gathereda crew, weathered a storm, offered a sacrifice, and lived righteously, but the text never mentions any words that he spoke. A more taciturn man would be difficult to find. Now he finally speaks, though some will doubt whether this is the most auspicious way to enter the world conversationally.”[[743]](#footnote-743) It is a converse of the possible implication that Noah’s silence (which contrasts with the volubility of the heroes in the other flood narratives) makes the point that it is God’s activity not that of human beings that counts; all Noah has to do is act as God said.[[744]](#footnote-744) If it is Ham who is described as Noah’s youngest son, the regular order Shem, Ham, and Japhet is not in order of age. But more likely “youngest son” somehow refers to Canaan. The account of Noah’s reaction once more reworks the balance over understanding what specifically either Ham or Canaan had done to Noah. Did he know what had happened because he heard people talking about his exposing himself?[[745]](#footnote-745)

His response (v. 25a) suggests something worse than seeing, but again that may simply mean that Noah is pictured as cursing the practices Leviticus proscribes. Blessing and cursing involve a declaration that something good or bad should and will happen to someone, a declaration made by someone whose words have power to bring about what they announce by a dynamic that cannot further be analysed but simply reflects the power that resides in that person. While God especially has such power (cf. 1:22, 28; 3:14, 17; 4:11), some human beings can also have it (e.g., 49:7; Josh 6:26; 9:23). So a blessing or a curse is more powerful than a prayer, though there is likely an assumption that neither a blessing nor a curse can “work” unless God complies with it (cf. the sequence in Ruth 1:19-20, and other occurrences of the expression “blessed to/for/regarding/by [*le*] Yahweh” such as Gen 14:19; 24:31; Judg 17:2). It is Ham’s son rather than Ham himself whom Noah curses. Yahweh himself will often declare that he attends to the waywardness of parents in connection with their children (e.g., Exod 20:5), and Noah presupposes that reality about the way things work out in human lives. On this occasion, the action of Noah’s son will be matched by the fate of Ham’s son. Cursing a person’s son is a most powerful way of cursing the person. It means cursing the future of his line. And *Jub* 7:13 has Ham as displeased as modern readers at the treatment of Canaan.But for people listening to the story, the object of the curse is the ancestor of the people of Canaan whom they know, who are the epitome of abhorrent sexual practices. “For the Hebrews, Canaan is the most natural historical embodiment of Ham.”[[746]](#footnote-746)

Further(v. 25b), one of the few objects of a human curse in the First Testament is the people of Gibeon, who are Hivvites and are thus “sons” of Canaan (10:17; Josh 9); they are a subset of Canaanites. They deceive Joshua into exempting them from the slaughter of other Canaanites, but Joshua feels free to turn them into permanent servants, with responsibility for the arduous tasks of getting wood and water for the community and specifically for the sanctuary. For the audience of Genesis, the story in Joshua and this story explain why the Gibeonites have that position. While Genesis leaves people to work out whether Noah’s curse is an appropriate response to his son’s act, that broader context suggests no questioning of it. It is not unusual in many cultures to assume that there should be ranking among brothers for the sake of order in the family when the father is gone, and to assume that the oldest brother in a family should have authority in the family—hence the incongruity of the idea that the older should serve the younger (25:23; cf. 27:29, 40). While the point here might thus be that Canaan will be put into a particularly lowly servitude, in the context of Gen 1—11 more likely Noah’s curse links with the awareness that human wrongdoing disrupts not only harmony between humanity and the animate world and between men and women (Gen 3) and between brothers (Gen 4); it disrupts relationship between fathers and sons and brings an end to the ideal egalitarian relationship between brothers, and it does so in a way that brings abject or permanent servitude. “Sinne maketh the brother borne of the same parent a servant.”[[747]](#footnote-747) It’s surprising that Genesis doesn’t note a link between the name *Kᵉna‘an* and the verb *kāna‘* which means “bow down.”Noah’s own point is a broader or more concrete one. Canaan is to be a servant to Ham’s brothers, who are the ancestors of two much wider groups than merely the Israelites (see 10:1-31). But there is no historical context with which we can connect this idea. And there is no basis for linking Canaan’s being a servant to the enslavement of black people in the Americas.[[748]](#footnote-748) The theory of race is “constructed on” rather than “constructed from” Genesis.[[749]](#footnote-749)

The descendants of Shem (v. 26) will be listed in 10:21-31. Yahweh is understood to be the God of all of them (cf. 4:26). The prayer that Yahweh be blessed implies an ellipse; it presupposes that Yahweh will bless Shem and that Yahweh will therefore be blessed in the sense of praised.[[750]](#footnote-750) Noah recognizes the work of God’s grace in his son as the source of his decency and offers praise to God rather than congratulating his son or himself.[[751]](#footnote-751) The prayer thus also adds to the unpredictable nature of Noah’s words (is he still under the influence?): as well as cursing not Ham but his son, he blesses not Shem but his God.[[752]](#footnote-752) There is nothing straightforward about this story. But this unexpected blessing does mean that the miserable story comes near its end with praise of Yahweh, like Gen 4. The experience of humanity in the everyday world is one in which people of integrity who have been the recipients of God’s grace can make mistakes for which it is hard to see whether they should be held responsible. They can be betrayed by their children or grandchildren who then in turn pay a terrible price for their waywardness. Family and specifically sexual relationships can be the context in which this waywardness is expressed. The challenge to further people of integrity is to seek to restore seemliness, and as they do so, they may find God dwelling in their midst and opening them up in a way that generates the praise of God.

The prayer that God should open up Japhet (v. 27) might refer to giving land to his descendants, who will be listed in 10:2-5, but the context may rather suggest opening him up so that he responds to Yahweh.[[753]](#footnote-753) Either way, the prayer offers a contrast when it speaks of God dwelling in Shem’s tents and reaffirms the idea that Canaan will be a servant to the two brothers.Gen 10:6-20 will suggest that there is no such curse on Canaan for quite a while: “Ham’s offspring took possession of the most beautiful places and luxuries in the whole world.”[[754]](#footnote-754) Perhaps we are to infer that the waywardness of the Amorites was not yet full (15:16). Looking back from the circumstances of the audience of Genesis, people can see that Noah’s curse did eventually work. But looking forward from the circumstances in which it is uttered, the future is open.

**9:28-29.** At last we come to the end of the formulaic description of Noah’s life in accordance with the pattern of Gen 5, the description which began in 5:32 and has been interrupted by 6:1—9:27. We thus come to the end of a unit both in MT and according to the medieval division. “Then he died.” No immortality for him, like that of Utnapishtim.

## Blood

Humanity does not live in the age of Adam and Eve or in Lush Garden, but we do live in the age of the renewed creation commission. And if the animate world feels awe and dread towards humanity, “it is surely obvious that the possession of such power confers upon man a very definite responsibility towards non-human life.”[[755]](#footnote-755) Thus “this blessing which gives this authority over the beasts to man must not be taken lightly.” And that gift and the revelation of how to cultivate wine “are reliable and excellent proofs that God no longer hates man but is kindly disposed toward him.” God has been able to turn from his “strange work” of acting in wrath to his more natural compassion.[[756]](#footnote-756)

Perhaps God’s allowing for animate creatures to eat one another is a concession to creation’s self-centeredness, in keeping with the principle Jesus enunciates in Matt 19:3-9. It would then not be surprising if many people who want to embody God’s delivering them from self-centeredness give up eating other creatures, in keeping with the possibility Jesus points to in Matt 19:10-12. To put Jesus’s approach in different terms, here as elsewhere in Genesis “overt ideologies of human dominance, male dominance or primogeniture are allowed to stand, but alternative perspectives are juxtaposed in such a way as to undermine the dominant ideology.”[[757]](#footnote-757)

If all the rules in the Torah express love for God or love for neighbor (Matt 22:40), then refraining from eating blood most obviously belongs in the first category. It is a way of showing respect for God, to whom life belongs. But in addition, “the killing of animals carries within it the danger of blood-lust (Num 23:24; Deut 32:42; Jer 46:10), of killing for the sake of killing, of blood-thirstiness.” Killing animals can easily be brutal and barbaric. This consideration links with what follows. ”One’s conduct toward other people is not to be separated from one’s conduct toward animals.”[[758]](#footnote-758) Or perhaps, if the life of animals becomes cheap, so does all life.[[759]](#footnote-759) The ban on eating the blood of an animal was unique to Israel; it was one of those observances that marked Israel out.[[760]](#footnote-760) But it was then carried over into Christian faith (Acts 15:29) and into Islam.

God’s requiring the blood of an animate being that sheds human blood overlaps with but does not exactly correspond to regulations for capital punishment. First, it applies to all animate beings, not just human beings. But second, it does see the killing of one human person by another as particularly reprobate, because human beings are, after all members of the same family. It does not clearly indicate that members of the family have responsibility for the redress.[[761]](#footnote-761) It does make clear the more fundamental point that God ensures this redress one way or another. The Torah’s provision for due inquiry and for asylum towns presupposes that the family has responsibility for taking God’s redress, but seeks to make sure that no one is executed when they are innocent of murderous intent, and much of the proper concern about execution in the United States has this background. But further, even if God does here require human beings to take action to ensure redress for murder, “one cannot simply transfer verse 6 to the statute book unless one is prepared to include verses 4 and 5a with it.”[[762]](#footnote-762)

The prohibition on eating an animal’s blood and on killing another human being are two of the “Noahide commands”; other Noahide commands ban idolatry/denial of God, blasphemy, incest/adultery, and robbery, and require the setting up of courts of law.[[763]](#footnote-763) The term “Noahide commands” does not imply the belief that they came from the revelation to Noah but that Gentiles who keep these commands which are binding on all humanity are true sons and daughters of Noah and are acceptable to God. The decisions of the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:29) reflect the way of thinking expressed in the idea of Noahide commands.

# Genesis 10:1—11:26—The Nations and the Narrowing

## Overview

Gen 1:1—11:26 finally turns to the question of the relationship between its narrative about God’s relationship with the created world and with humanity as a whole, and the focus on Terah’s family which will now follow. Typically, it answers that question by means of an interweaving of lines of descent and stories. The first line of descent and the first story (10:1-32) relates the way the descendants of Noah spread through the world, but the order in which it records these descendants puts Noah’s sons in reverse order (Japhet, then Ham, then Shem), because it is from Shem that Terah’s line will be born. The second story (11:1-9) confirms Yahweh’s involvement in ensuring that people spread over the world rather than sticking in one place, but the second line of descent (11:10-26) confirms the focus on Shem’s line. So God is interested in the whole world but the line that leads to Terah is especially significant.

To put it another way, the question underling 10:1—11:26 is, “How did the story of Noah become the story of humanity, and the story of humanity become the story of Abraham’s family?” And the answer is:

* By a natural process whereby Noah’s descendants grew to fill the world as we know it.
* By the achievements of a hero like Nimrod at the heart of the civilized world.
* By God’s compelling the world’s peoples to spread over the world.
* By a natural process whereby Shem’s descendants propagated until Abram’s family came into being

The section leaves unresolved the relationship between these two themes of God’s involvement with the whole world and God’s particular involvement with some of Shem’s descendants. The unresolved question means the audience has to listen to what will follow in the section that begins with 11:27.

## Translation

1So these are the lines of descent of Noah’s sons, Šem, Ḥam, and Yepet. Sons were born to them after the upper ocean event.

* 2The sons of Yepet: Gomer, Magog, Maday, Yavan, Tubal, Mešek, and Tiras.
* 3The sons of Gomer: Aškenaz, Ripat, and Togarmah.
* 4The sons of Yavan: Elišah, Taršiš, Kittites, and Dodanites.[[764]](#footnote-764)

5From these, the nations on far shores[[765]](#footnote-765) parted into their countries, each with its language, by their kin-groups, in their nations.

* 6The sons of Ḥam: Kuš, Miṣrayim, Puṭ, and Kena‘an.
* 7The sons of Kuš: Seba, Ḥavilah, Sabtah, Ra’mah, and Sabteka.
* The sons of Ra’mah: Šeba and Dedan.

8Kuš fathered[[766]](#footnote-766) Nimrod, who was the first to become[[767]](#footnote-767) a strong man on the earth. 9He became a strong man as a hunter[[768]](#footnote-768) before Yahweh; that’s why it’s said,

Like Nimrod, a strong man as a hunter

before Yahweh.

10The beginning[[769]](#footnote-769) of his realm was Babel, Erek, Akkad, and Kalneh, in the country of Šin’ar. 11From that country he went out to Aššur[[770]](#footnote-770) and built Nineveh and the town squares,[[771]](#footnote-771) Kalah, 12and Resen between Nineveh and Kalah: that’s the big town.

* 13Miṣrayim fathered Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naptuḥites, 14Patrusites, Kasluḥites (from whom the Pelištites went out), and Kaptorites.
* 15Kena‘an fathered Ṣidon his firstborn, Ḥet, 16the Yebusites, the Amorites, the Girgašites, 17the Hivvites, the Arqites, the Sinites, 18the Arvadites, the Ṣemarites, and the Ḥamatites.

Later, the Kena‘anite kin-groups dispersed 19and the Kena‘anite border reached from Ṣidon until you come to Gerar, near Azzah, until you come to Sedom, Amorah, Admah, and Ṣeboyim, near Laša.

20These are the descendants of Ḥam by their kin-groups, by their languages, in their countries, in their nations.

* 21There[[772]](#footnote-772) were also born to Šem, the ancestor of all the descendants of Eber, the brother of Yepet (the oldest)[[773]](#footnote-773)— 22the descendants of Šem: Elam, Aššur, Arpakšad, Lud, and Aram.
* 23The descendants of Aram: Uṣ, Ḥul, Geter, and Maš.
* 24Arpakšad fathered Šelaḥ, Šelaḥ fathered Eber.
* 25Two sons were born to Eber: the name of the first was Peleg, because in his time the earth divided, and the name of the second was Yoqṭan.
* 26Yoqṭan fathered Almodad, Šelep, Ḥaṣarmavet, Yeraḥ, 27Hadoram, Uzal, Diqlah, 28Obal, Abima’el, Šeba, 29Opir, Havilah, and Yobab. All these were descendants of Yoqṭan.

30The places where they lived went from Meša until you come to Separ, the eastern highland.

31These are the descendants of Šem by their kin-groups, by their languages, in their countries, by their nations.

32These are the kin-groups of Noah’s sons by their lines of descent according to their nations. From these the nations parted in the earth after the upper ocean outburst.

11:1Now the entire earth was of one language and common[[774]](#footnote-774) words. 2As people moved on in[[775]](#footnote-775) the east they found a valley in the region of Šin’ar and lived there. 3They said, one to his neighbor, “Come on, let’s make bricks and bake them thoroughly”; so they had brick in place of stone, and tar in place of cement. 4They said, “Come on, let’s build ourselves a town and a tower with its top in the heavens, and make a name for ourselves, so we don’t disperse over the face of the entire earth.”

5Yahweh went down to see the town and the tower that the human beings had made. 6Yahweh said, “Here, one people with one language for all of them, and this is the first thing they do. So now, nothing that they may scheme to do is closed off from them. 7Come on, let’s go down and make a babble[[776]](#footnote-776) of their language there, so one person won’t be able to hear his neighbor’s language.”

8So Yahweh dispersed them from there over the face of the entire earth and they left off from building the town. 9That’s why people named[[777]](#footnote-777) it Babel, because there Yahweh made a babble of the language of the entire earth, and from there Yahweh dispersed them over the face of the entire earth.

10These are Šem’s lines of descent.

* Šem was a man of 100 years and fathered Arpakšad, two years after the upper ocean outburst.[[778]](#footnote-778) 11After fathering Arpakšad, Šem lived 500 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 12When Arpakšad had lived thirty-five years, he fathered Šelaḥ. 13After fathering Šelaḥ, Arpakšad lived 403 years and fathered sons and daughters.[[779]](#footnote-779)
* 14When Šelaḥ had lived thirty years, he fathered Eber. 15After fathering Eber, Šelaḥ lived 403 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 16Eber lived thirty-four years and fathered Peleg. 17After fathering Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 18Peleg lived thirty years and fathered Re‘u. 19After fathering Re‘u, Peleg lived 209 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 20Re‘u lived thirty-two years and fathered Śerug. 21After fathering Śerug, Re‘u lived 207 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 22Śerug lived thirty years and fathered Naḥor. 23After fathering Naḥor, Śerug lived 200 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 24Naḥor lived twenty-nine years and fathered Teraḥ. 25After fathering Teraḥ, Naḥor lived 119 years and fathered sons and daughters.
* 26Teraḥ lived seventy years and fathered Abram, Naḥor, and Haran.

## Interpretation

In MT 10:1-32 is one unit, 11:1-9 is another, and 11:10—12:9 is the next; paragraph breaks come after 10:14; 10:20; and 11:32, as well as after each of the entries in 11:10-26, while the synagogue lection that began at 6:9 ends at 11:32. But at 10:1 and at 11:27 there are headings referring to “lines of descent,” and such headings indicated significance transitions in the story at 2:4a; 5:1; and 6:9. They will do so again at 25:12 and 19, marking the transition to the story of Ishmael and Isaac. Luther thus sees Genesis’s “third book” beginning at 11:27.[[780]](#footnote-780) I treat 10:1—11:26 as one unit bridging the Noah story and the Abraham story by tracing lines of descent and telling stories, in a way analogous to 5:1—6:8. It gives four parallel accounts of this process.

* 10:1-7, 13-32 is a genealogy explaining how the nations around Israel came to “part in the earth” (10:32).
* V. 1 The introduction to the account of Noah’s sons
* V. 2-5 Japhet’s descendants

Vv.2-4 Peoples descended from Japhet

V. 5 A concluding note about these nations spreading

* Vv. 6-20 Ham’s descendants

Vv. 6-7 Peoples descended from Ham

[Vv. 8-12 A story about Nimrod, one of Ham’s descendants]

Vv. 13-18a Peoples that Ham’s sons fathered

Vv. 18b-19 A note about the spread of the Kena‘anite kin-groups

V. 20 A conclusion to the list of the peoples descended from Ham

* Vv. 21-31 Shem’s descendants

Vv. 21-23 Peoples descended from Shem

Vv. 24-29 Peoples that Shem’s sons fathered

V. 30 A note about the where Yoqṭan’s descendants settled

V. 31 A conclusion to the list of the peoples descended from Shem

* V. 32 The conclusion to the account of Noah’s sons
* 10:8-12 is a story incorporated into that genealogy, explaining how Mesopotamia in particular came to grow:
* Vv. 8-9 The man Nimrod was
* Vv. 10-12 The things he did
* 11:1-9 is a second story, explaining how the nations came to “be dispersed over the face of the entire earth” (11:9):
* V. 1 What people were
* Vv. 2-4 What people did
* Vv. 5-8 What Yahweh did
* V. 9 What Yahweh thereby effected.
* 11:10-26 is a second genealogy, providing the background to the way the focus of Genesis will now narrow down. It resumes Shem’s genealogy, expanding on 10:21-31 but focusing on the line of Shem’s third son. The transition from the first genealogy to a second parallels that between Gen 4 and Gen 5 and the form of this genealogy corresponds to the form of Gen 5; both come from P.

**10:1, 32.** Verses 1 and 32 form an introduction and conclusion to Gen 10. As happened in chapter 5, “time is restarted.”[[781]](#footnote-781) The first lines of descent are thus those of Noah’s three sons, who themselves fathered peoples all over the world, portrayed from the perspective of Israelites surveying the world around them. Formally the list speaks of them having individual children, but the children are the names of peoples. Shem, Ham, and Japhet are the only individuals in the main list (Nimrod is the one other individual who appears in Gen 10). Indeed, the list closes by speaking of the people in the list as descendants, nations, and kin groups. The account presupposes thinking that parallels the description of George Washington as father of the United States or of Gandhi as the father of India. The list “gives a first impression of system and lack of system wonderfully interwoven.”[[782]](#footnote-782) It combines materials from P and J. The background may sometimes suggest the Judahite monarchy, sometimes the neo-Babylonian period (notably, the parallels with Ezekiel). Whereas Gen 5 and Gen 11 are simple, “linear,” genealogies, Gen 10 is a more complex “segmented” genealogy; it deals with all three of Noah’s sons and their descendants in such a way as to undergird an understanding of the interrelationships of the descendants—in this case the peoples descended from them. It comprises:

The genealogy of Shem, Ham, and Japhet includes seventy-one names. By omitting from the count Nimrod or the Philistines (who appear in a periphrasis), the number can be reduced to seventy, and seventy is a number that signals comprehensiveness (e.g., 46:27); later, at least, it suggests the number of nations in the world.[[783]](#footnote-783) The genealogy offers a comprehensive picture of the world as it developed from Noah’s day onwards, a verbal “map” of the known world organized around Noah’s three sons. It thus pictures how the world has a fundamental unity.[[784]](#footnote-784) At the same time, its portrayal can be related to the ancient world’s great spheres of imperial power.[[785]](#footnote-785) The chapter combines a comprehensive framework with detailed vignettes, snapshots, and data of the kind that were available from stories people told and from knowledge that people had through Judah’s trading relations.[[786]](#footnote-786) It says nothing of God being directly involved in the growth that it relates; the development comes about by the natural power that God has bestowed upon or infused into humanity. Yet the chapter presupposes that this development thus issues from God’s blessing, and it gives concrete expression to the history of that blessing. It is not a mere generalization but an account “tracing the lines from the sons of Noah across the whole map of the world” as known within its purview.[[787]](#footnote-787)

Each of the three groups of Noah’s descendants is characterized in terms of countries, languages, kin-groups, and nations. A country is an entity that has a land, has a common language, is ethnically-related, and has a political form. The chapter thus understands the nations’ interrelationships geographically, linguistically, familially and thus ethnically (though not racially in the sense of based on skin color), and politically (Canaan belongs with Ham in this connection). In an understated way it also understands the world of nations salvation-historically (Shem comes last). “If we consider the dramatic excitement of history during the centuries when the table of nations was formed, we must be astonished at the political dispassionateness of this document,” compared with the prophecies about the nations in Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel from approximately the same period. [[788]](#footnote-788) Although the lists presuppose an Israelite audience, Israel is not even mentioned.

**10:2-5.** Noah’s sons come in reverse order, in accordance with the recurrent practice in Genesis of moving from the less relevant to the more relevant. Japhet’s descendants cover a band of territory north of Israel, from Armenia through Turkey to Ionia.[[789]](#footnote-789) Gomer (cf. Ezek 38:6) may be the Cimmerians, a people associated with Assyria and eastern Turkey. Magog (cf. Ezek 38:2; 39:6) is otherwise unknown, but the context of the other names suggests somewhere in Turkey. Maday is Media. Yavan (Ionia) is on the western coast of Turkey. Tubal and Meshek (e.g., Ezek 38:2-3) are in eastern Turkey. Tiras may be the Tursha mentioned in an Egyptian text as an invading people from across the Mediterranean. As a group, then, one may plausibly locate all these peoples in Turkey and the area of Asia to its east. The same applies to the “sons” of Gomer: Ashkenaz (cf. Jer 51:27) may be the Scythians; Ripat is otherwise unknown; Togarmah (cf. Ezek 27:14; 38:6) may be Tegarama in eastern Turkey.

Elishah (Ezek 27:7) (v. 4) is a Mediterranean island, perhaps Cyprus or Crete. Josephus[[790]](#footnote-790) identifies Tarshish as Tarsus, but Tarshish is a place name that recurs in the First Testament and generally suggests somewhere further away. It is traditionally identified with Tartessus in Spain;[[791]](#footnote-791) the LXX transliterates here but at other passages (e.g., Isa 23:1) thinks of Carthage. The Kittites (e.g., Ezek 27:6) are the people of Kition, a town on Cyprus. Dodona is in northwestern Greece, but it is a significant location as the oldest Greek oracle sanctuary. Perhaps, then, v. 4 interweaves two nearby places and two far off ones. And perhaps this Greek reference links with parallels between the list in Gen 10 and Greek genealogical lists.[[792]](#footnote-792)

These places (v. 5) are thus a cross-section of locations in Turkey and the country to the west and east from which people spread out into the rest of that area. Many would be locations known through Jerusalem’s trading relations. The description of them as nations on far shores suggests reference in particular to the island and coastal peoples of v. 4.

**10:6-7**. Ham’sdescendants, listed in vv. 7-20, cover a wide tract of territory south of Judah, from the Arabian Gulf across north Africa, but also including Canaan itself. Kush is the southern part of Egypt and the northern part of Sudan (*sudan* is an Arabic word for black people). Miṣrayim is Egypt itself (“Egypt” comes from the name of an Egyptian ruler or a sanctuary; “Miṣrayim” is closer to the modern Arabic name). Puṭ is Libya (*libuē* is its Greek name, though LXX and Vg simply transliterate here). Canaan denotes the area from Egypt to Lebanon; it appears with Egypt in the list perhaps on the basis of its having been commonly under Egyptian control. So this list works roughly from south to north.

It fits that the “sons” and “grandsons” of Kush (v. 7) are places in north Africa and Arabia. They are mixed up, but for Judah they would have in common their being Judah’s trading partners to its south. For Ḥavilah, cf. 2:11; 25:18; for Sheba, see e.g., 1 Kings 10; Ezek 27:22. Possibly Sheba is in Arabia and Seba in north Africa.[[793]](#footnote-793)

**10:8-12** formally makes for an interlude in the genealogical list, of the kind that appears in such lists in 1 Chronicles (e.g., 4:8-10). Suddenly we are reading about an individual instead of the embodiment of a people. It’s a reminder that the role played by individuals of energy and drive is decisive to the development of peoples and nations and empires. It’s surprising to see a descendant of Kuš finding his way to Mesopotamia and making his mark there, and Nimrod did not feature in the list of Kuš’s descendants in v. 7. His story is appended to it, raising the question of whether it relates to someone or somewhere else of the same name. And there are such, the Kuššu or Kassites, who ruled Babylonia between the sixteenth and twelfth centuries,[[794]](#footnote-794) and the earlier important Sumerian town of Kish near Babylon.[[795]](#footnote-795) But outside Gen 10 and the description of Assyria as “Nimrod’s country” in Micah 5:6 [5], we have no references to anyone of this name or to anyone with the list of achievements that are here credited to Nimrod. He is a figure like Cain or Noah, whose story can embody concretely and engagingly the impressive development of human achievement—in his case, the progress of the great states of the Middle East. Thus his story strikes a different note from the rest of the chapter, which describes a process of the natural growth of peoples. His story relates the complementary role played in the development of nations and empires by a man of drive and initiative.

As someone who gained a reputation as a strong man (v. 8) Nimrod belongs to the same category as Gideon (ironically?), Jephtah, David, and Alexander (Judg 6:12; 11:1; 1 Sam 9:1; Dan 11:1), among many others. Perhaps he was simply “the first” in the story of history after the deluge (as Noah was the first farmer), or perhaps he was an entirely new kind of political and military strong man. If he came from the Kush mentioned in v. 6, then the world’s first strong man was a black man.[[796]](#footnote-796)

Specifically, he was a strong man as a hunter (v. 9); perhaps he was thus fulfilling the post-deluge commission to let the animate world be in dreadful awe of humanity. That promise thus applies not only to domestic animals but to the wild animals that human beings eat—e.g., deer, gazelle, and antelope. It would also apply to wild animals that were a threat to human communities, for whose security a king bears responsibility; kings are sometimes described as hunters.[[797]](#footnote-797) While Nimrod thus gained a reputation as a formidable and heroic fighter, what is most remarkable about him is that he was a strong man “before Yahweh.” The earth was “devastated before God”; Noah was “faithful before me” (6:11; 7:1). When God looked at the earth, he saw devastation; when he looked at Noah, he saw faithfulness.[[798]](#footnote-798) When he looked at Nimrod, he saw a strong man and a hunter. The precise phrase “before Yahweh” comes five more times in Genesis (18:22; 19:13, 27; 24:52; 27:7), each time referring to prayer. The pattern continues in succeeding books. It is a metaphor deriving from the way people physically appear before the image of their deity. Prayer and worship involve standing “before Yahweh” (literalistically, “to the face of Yahweh”) in a true though more figurative sense, given that Yahweh properly has no image. Worshipers are really in Yahweh’s presence and Yahweh’s face really turns towards them. Apparently Nimrod became a byword for his three characteristics as a strong man, a hunter, and someone who stood before Yahweh. So the astonishing picture of his achievements parallels not so much the picture of Cain as the picture of Noah. Nimrod was a strong man “before Yahweh” as Noah was someone who walked about with God (6:9). The description also anticipates the commission to Abraham to walk about “before me,” with transparency and integrity. It lacks even the qualifications on Noah’s achievements that issue from the close of his story. Nimrod is God’s hero and a hero for God, “created by him, receiving from him God’s blessing.”[[799]](#footnote-799) We should not infer anything from the fact that his name recalls the verb *mārad* (“rebel”); “do not attempt to ascertain the meaning of any names encountered in the Bible if Scripture itself does not explain them.”[[800]](#footnote-800)

Yet more remarkable in the description of Nimrod as king (v. 10) is the description of the beginning of his kingdom or realm as Babel, Erek, Akkad, and Kalneh, in southern Mesopotamia. Babel, after all, was one of the oldest and most important cities there; Erek or Uruk was one of the earliest Sumerian cities; Akkad was the seat of Sargon I and his dynasty; Shinar is a familiar First Testament term for Babylonia in general. Kalneh is otherwise unknown, but it was presumably also in Babylonia.[[801]](#footnote-801)

The astonishing portrait of Nimrod continues (vv. 11-12) in the account of his venturing out from Shinar to northern Mesopotamia into the area of the kingdom of Assyria. Asshur itself, Nineveh, and Kalah were key and impressive cities on the River Tigris; they were all capitals of Assyria at different times and their names would be familiar to many readers of Genesis. The literal historical reality is that the original Babylonian empire indeed predated the Assyrian empire and did influence it.[[802]](#footnote-802) Nineveh’s town squares were apparently undeveloped areas of the city. Resen is apparently the abbreviated form of a name equivalent to Hebrew *rō’š ‘ayin*, “source of a spring”;[[803]](#footnote-803) while the name occurs in Assyrian texts, we do not know of a Resen between Nineveh and Kalah.[[804]](#footnote-804) The closing reference to the big town would apply less appropriately to Resen than to Nineveh or to Kalah, which was earlier more important than Nineveh (the modern name of Kalah is Nimrud).

**10:13-20.** After the Nimrod story, Genesis reverts to the record of Ham’s descendants. It moves on from Kush to Egypt and thus back to Africa. The Ludites, Anamites, Lehabites, Naptuhites, and Patrusites are apparently all Egyptian or North African peoples,[[805]](#footnote-805) though we have hard evidence only for the last as the people of Pathros, between Lower Egypt and Kush. More intriguing are the Kasluhites and Kaphtorites because of the mention of the Pelishtites, the Philistines, who are elsewhere linked with Kaphtor (Jer 47:7; Amos 9:7). The Kaphtorites are the Cretans; we do not know who the Kasluhites were.

Ham’s next son is Canaan (vv. 15-19), of whom we heard much in 9:18-27. Many of the peoples and places that follow are ones that will become familiar in the First Testament story. Sidon (which can cover Tyre, subsequently more important) marks Canaan’s far northern border, in the area that continued to be Canaanite or Phoenician when one would no longer use the term Canaan for the area further south that was thoroughly Israelite. Het is the eponymous ancestor of the Hittites (see e.g., Gen 23), probably to be distinguished from the Ḫatti who once ruled a great empire centered on Turkey.

The Jebusites (v. 16) are the people who lived in Jerusalem. The Amorites lived in the Mamre area (cf. 14:13), likewise to be distinguished from the broader Amurru of Mesopotamia, though the term is also used (like Canaanites) to denote the pre-Israelite inhabitants of Syria-Palestine in general. The Girgashites are unknown except for references in the lists of pre-Israelite peoples, though their name is intriguingly similar to that of the Gergesenes/Gerasenes/Gadarenes of Matt 8:28; Mark 5:1; Luke 8:26, 37.[[806]](#footnote-806)

The Hivvites (vv. 17-18a) are also unknown outside the lists of pre-Israelite peoples, but they are sometimes associated with northern Canaan (e.g., Josh 11:3) and the following peoples belong to the north, to the Phoenician towns of Arqa, Siannu in Phoenicia, Arvad, and Ṣumur,[[807]](#footnote-807) and to the inland northern town of Hamat which sometimes marks Israel’s northern border (e.g., Num 34:8).

The subsequent dispersal or spread of the Canaanites (vv. 18b-19) might presuppose that they originally belonged in the highland and in the north but spread southwest into the coastal areas. But the reason for the author and the audience to be interested in these links, and the means by which they might have known about them, would again be trading relations between Jerusalem and the Canaanite/Phoenician towns. Gerar (Gen 20:1; 26:1) was evidently near Azzah (Gaza), while Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, and Seboyim were at the south end of the Dead Sea—as apparently was Lasha, which Jerome identifies as Callirhoe on the eastern side.[[808]](#footnote-808)

The summary note about the Hamites (v. 20) confirms that Genesis is not simply talking about a family genealogy but is surveying the development of kin-groups and language-groups in different countries and nations.

**10:21-31.** The descendants of Shem come last, even though he is “Japhet’s older brother,” because it is Shem’s line that leads into what follows in 11:10-26, where Eber will also feature, and thus leads into the Abraham story which comes next. The descendants of Shem cover the territory east and southeast of Israel.

Elam (vv. 22-24) was a great power even further east than Babylonia, the other side of the Persian Gulf. While Asshur was to the north of Babylonia. Arpakshad seems in some way to stand for Babylonia itself. Lud is presumably to be distinguished from the home of the earlier Ludites in v. 13; the context suggests a people among those east and north of Canaan, which makes the Lydians in Western Turkey rather a long way away. Aram as a state is approximately equivalent to modern Syria (that modern name is derived from “Assyria”), but the Arameans also spread into Mesopotamia, and the descendants of Aram presumably live in that broad area. We will come across Shelaḥ (whose location is unknown) along with Eber in 11:10-26.

Before we get there (vv. 25-30), Genesis speaks of Eber’s descendants. The earth’s dividing (*pālag*) might be the rift between peoples that 11:1-9 will relate; *pālag* appears in such a connection in Ps 55:9 [10] (cf. the equivalent Aramaic word in Dan 2:41). And we will hear more of Peleg in 11:10-26. Meanwhile, Genesis provides the information about Yoqṭan’s line—once again, it thus deals first with the line that matters less in terms of the story it will go on to tell. Some of the names have definite links with South Arabia, the southernmost part of the Arabian peninsula centered on modern Yemen. For instance, Shelep is the name of a district or tribe in Yemen, and Ḥaṣarmavet is Hadramaut, an area of Yemen. It seems a fair guess that the rest of the names also relate to places in this area. The only one that is well-known in the First Testament is Ophir, a source of good gold (e.g., Job 28:16). As with the list of Phoenician/Canaanite towns in vv. 18-19, the reason for the author and the audience to be interested in these links, and the means by which they might have known about them, would be Judah’s trading relations with them.

The account of Shem’s descendants and of Noah’s descendants is now complete (vv. 31-32). It is an account of how the nations have parted (*pārad*; cf. v. 4, and later 13:9, 11, 14; 25:23) or “divided” (v. 25). This motif announced an important theme in the story that follows.

**11:1-9.** This narrative from J complements the lines of descent in a way parallel to 10:8-12. The lines of descent make a theological statement in one way; the story makes it in another. The question with which it concerns itself is, how and why did peoples who all had a common origin end up speaking different languages and unable to communicate? Indeed, it suggests approaches to several questions. Not untypically within Gen 1—11, it provides “multiple aetiologies: not only for human beingshaving many different languages, but also for the dispersalof humanity throughout the earth, and for the origin of the place name Babel.”[[809]](#footnote-809) There are two aspects to its answer to the questions: these results came about because of some action that people took, and because of some responsive action that Yahweh took. Whereas Gen 10 described the spreading of the nations through the earth positively and as a natural process, no reference to God being needed, 11:1-9 sees it as involving human waywardness on one hand and divine intervention on the other.[[810]](#footnote-810) Gen 10 saw plurality of locations and languages as an outworking of God’s blessings. Gen 11 sees it (in effect) a result of God’s curse, yet paradoxically this curse implies a kind of blessing. As is the case with 2:18-25, a story that can stand on its own, and answers a question raised within it and articulated at the end of it, has come to be part of a bigger story in 10:1—11:26 (which is itself part of a yet bigger story in 1:1—11:26, which is itself part of Genesis, which is part of Genesis to Kings). The story as a whole does not have equivalents elsewhere in the Middle East, like the creation and flood narratives, though there are parallels there and in other parts of the world to its individual motifs of the dispersion of peoples, the building of a tower, and the division into different languages.[[811]](#footnote-811) Maybe the story is “a deliberate expression of ideas that are in antipodal opposition to some cherished notions of ancient Mesopotamia.”[[812]](#footnote-812)

So the story goes back (v. 1) behind the account of the lines of descent, to a time when it can picture the entire earth as having one language (contrast 10:5, 20, 31). It is a little speculative to infer that everyone’s original language was Hebrew.[[813]](#footnote-813) But it is God’s promise that towns in Egypt will come to speak the language of Canaan (Isa 19:18).[[814]](#footnote-814)

The talk of people moving on or traveling in the east (v. 2) reminds one of 2:8, though more immediately this story is about things moving on after the deluge, and “east” may rather be the audience’s position; what is happening takes place east of Canaan. Specifically, the people are in Shinar, Babylonia (see 10:10). The valley (*beqa‘*) is thus something more like a plain than a canyon (cf. Deut 34:3; Ezek 37:1-2; and the Beqa*‘* in Lebanon), even if it ultimately has mountainous sides.The talk of “finding” (*māṣā’*)a valley rather implies that they were looking for one; they did not just “chance upon” this place (*qārāh*). Apparently they have had enough of dispersing through the earth. Perhaps we should picture them wagon-training through mountains and at last discovering a vale where settlement was more practical. A location that would later be as notable as that of Shinar and Babel would surely be an impressive place to settle. So they have settled there, which doesn’t seem unreasonable. (An incidental advantage of locating the story in Babylonia will emerge in v. 9.)

The proposal that follows (v. 3) is a more evidently different matter. They all speak the same language, so they can discuss a plan. The account of the plan recalls some lines in *When on High* that describe gods making bricks for a lofty temple where Marduk’s image was to be put. It is a sacral act.[[815]](#footnote-815) In Genesis, the making of the bricks is a human act and it is, well, just the making of bricks. Further, the account hints at an irony. In Judah, nature provides stone for building; these builders make mud brick to build with. The character of the bonding material is not so clear, but the word for “tar” (*ḥōmer*) is the word for the coating Moses’s mother will give to the casket in which she puts him (Exod 2:3), and it contrasts with the cement that the Israelites will use in connection with Pharaoh’s building projects (Exod 1:14). So maybe Genesis is noting another human technological innovation, but maybe it is scoffing at the makeshift nature of the work it describes. Indeed, the story as a whole can be read as a satire on a Mesopotamian account of a building project.[[816]](#footnote-816)

The further description of the project also suggests scoffing (v. 4). The people are building a town and a tower that reaches to the sky. Mudbrick is all very well for ordinary people’s houses (an Israelite might think), but surely not for a town, even less for a tower (cf. Isa 9:10 [9])—still less one of these dimensions, even if the people speak hyperbolically, as when we speak of sky-scrapers (cf. Deut 1:28).[[817]](#footnote-817) The story may presuppose the existence of the ziggurats in Mesopotamian cities, towers that reached into the sky to symbolize and facilitate contact between humanity and God, like the towers and spires of churches and cathedrals.[[818]](#footnote-818) Genesis is more specific about two further significances of the building project. The builders want to make a name for themselves. The idea of making a name could suggest gaining power.[[819]](#footnote-819) But there’s no suggestion of imperial pretension or tyrannical coercion; it’s a community formulating a plan that people agree on.[[820]](#footnote-820) And in the context the further implication is that they feel threatened by other peoples. As was the case in Gen 4, one would not have guessed that there were other peoples around who might be a threat, but in this story there are. A tower (*migdāl*) is a defensive structure; it is somewhere to hide (e.g., Judg 9:46-53).[[821]](#footnote-821) So a practical usefulness attaches to a tower. But in addition, the building of town and tower may impress these other peoples with the achievements of the builders and dissuade them from discounting the builders more generally. Yet further, building a town (and one with security) means they can settle down more definitively in this welcoming valley. Again the logic parallels the logic in Gen 4; Cain, the man who was sentenced to being a wanderer, set about building a town. Whereas dispersing over the whole earth seemed fine in 9:19, here it is something to be resisted. But a focus on building high may be counter-productive (Isa 2:10-18). The aim is not the same as the one described in Isa 14, or at least it is more complex; the expression does not suggest an assault on heaven, as becomes explicit in *Jub* 10:18-19.[[822]](#footnote-822) The people’s motivation is not so much ambition as lethargy mixed with fatigue mixed with fear.

Yahweh comes down to look (v. 5). God can be actively involved in the world, but his actual home is in the heavens (Ps 115:3; Isa 66:1). From that perspective, what looks humanly-impressive may look pathetic. One expects a deity to show up for the dedication of a building and for its blessing; Yahweh shows up for a different reason and with different results.[[823]](#footnote-823) There is no description of the actual building; Genesis leaps on to the action by Yahweh that presupposes at least their beginning to carry out the plan, though v. 8 will make clear that not all the work is done. The effect of moving straight from their plan to Yahweh’s descent is to set their aim and Yahweh’s action in tension and in contrast. They want to reach to the heavens (though it does not say to God). God comes down from his abode (though it does not say from the heavens). Far from invading God’s abode, they got nowhere near it. Indeed, Yahweh has to make quite a journey even to see it. “The one who sits in the heavens laughs” (Ps 2:4).[[824]](#footnote-824) But as is often the case, Yahweh does not rely on what he can know from a distance by divine omniscience or on what his aides report. His interest in the world makes him check things out (cf. 18:21). He is like a parent sitting downstairs and letting the children in their rooms upstairs get on with things until he or she thinks things sound too quiet or too noisy and determines to investigate. One could say that Yahweh’s coming to investigate is an act of grace.[[825]](#footnote-825) But there is no “where are you” or “where is your brother” or “what are you doing.” Indeed, it is “ominous” that Yahweh and the human beings do not stand in dialogue in this story.[[826]](#footnote-826)

One question behind this story (v. 6) is why humanity speaks so many languages, and the answer now begins to appear. Yahweh is not very bothered about the tower, which actually reaches nowhere very important. The question is rather, who knows where these peoples’ action will lead? Genesis does not give examples of where it might lead (was the building of the tower an ancient equivalent to globalization?)[[827]](#footnote-827) But the question suggests some overlap with the idea of humanity’s eating from the good-and-bad-knowledge tree and where it might lead (3:22). The challenge that comes to Job is to recognize that Yahweh is the one for whom no scheme is closed off (42:2; the verb *bāṣar* in the niphal comes only in these two passages).[[828]](#footnote-828) If there is no scheme closed off to them, they have become like God. The fall in relationships with God (Gen 3) and with one’s brother (Gen 4) and with one’s parents (Gen 9) becomes the fall of nations.

Yahweh apparently returns home to deliberate (v. 7). He does not behave instinctively; he does not go in for gut reactions. There is often a delay between saying he will punish and his doing so. But whereas the “let us” of 1:26 had issued in the making of humanity, this “let us” issues in its unmaking. Their “come on” (v. 3) meets its counterpart in his “come on.” First, he goes down to look; then he goes down to act by causing trouble (as in Exod 3:8, though there the Israelites will be beneficiaries). The proposed action is very mild. Yahweh does not determine simply to demolish the tower and destroy the town. Anyway, the people might then simply decide to build another.

Yahweh does take action (vv. 8-9). While Genesis may presuppose that returning to the heavens means returning to the heavenly court for some deliberation on what to do, his “let us” does not seem to imply that a heavenly crowd was going to take action. It is he who acts. TgPsJ does neatly have him consulting with “the seventy angels that stand before him,” who will be the beings who are in charge of each of the nations and who then go and implement the judgment—appositely, as each has the language of his people and the characters of its writing in his hand. Iven that Yahweh doesn’t seem very worried about town and tower in themselves, the aim and result of his action is to make it practically impossible for the people to live together. Perhaps there is an implication that their wanting to settle down in one place implied resistance to God’s desire that they should fill the earth. More explicitly, Yahweh doesn’t want them to be able to work together, because it’s likely to issue in devising means of security that don’t depend on him. The advantage of locating the story in Babel is that the town’s name recalls the Hebrew word *bālal* which means “mix.” It would do no harm if people were also aware of the possibility that the etymological meaning of Babel is actually “God’s Gate,” or that this phrase expresses another popular etymology,[[829]](#footnote-829) and/or that the Akkadian verb *abālu* means something like “disperse.”[[830]](#footnote-830)

**11:10-26.** As the genealogy in Gen 5 led into the account of Lamech’s hopes for Noah, this genealogy leads into a more detailed account of Teraḥ’s family line. It is an “in-between text.”[[831]](#footnote-831) Whereas any development towards the story of Israel’s ancestors was understated in Gen 10, here it becomes more overt. And as was the case in Gen 10, this unit describes the developments from Shem’s time to Abram’s time as a natural process (indeed, the same will be true of the family’s departure from Ur). There was nothing divinely-orchestrated about the emergence of Shem’s line (the other theological side to the account will come in 12:1). But in it God’s blessing is being worked out, on the way to the line of Abraham.[[832]](#footnote-832) If Abraham’s ancestors served other gods (Josh 24:2), it was from the effectiveness of God’s blessing that they lived and grew, even though they didn’t realize.[[833]](#footnote-833)

The accounts of Shem, Arpakshad, Shelaḥ, Eber, Peleg, Re‘u, Serug, and Nahor unfold in a consistent way without any variation in the formula. When x had lived y years, he fathered z; x lived for aaa years after fathering z and he fathered sons and daughters. The elements in the formula thus correspond to those in 5:6-20, but the formula does not go on to total the years of the person’s lifetime nor to add the note about him dying. Maybe this difference links with the fact that the ages of the figures in this list are much nearer the ages the audience would be familiar with from its own experience. Whereas the people from Adam and Eve to Noah lived in a different world or a different age, the people from Noah to Abraham lived in something closer to the regular world. The move from monumentally long lives to just slightly impossible lives parallels the move in the Sumerian king list to reigns before the flood of lengths such as 28,800 years and 36,000 years to reigns after the flood in the hundreds of years, when third-millennium kings become people mentioned in inscriptions.[[834]](#footnote-834)

The names of Shem, Arpakshad, Shelaḥ, Eber, and Peleg recur from 10:21-25. That earlier list had implied that Arpakshad was not Shem’s firstborn; this list ignores his older brothers because it focuses on the line that will lead to Abram. The earlier list had then included the descendants of Yoqṭan, Peleg’s brother, but had set aside Peleg’s descendants Re‘u, Serug, and Nahor, who therefore feature here. The account of Nahor’s son Teraḥ then deviates from the formula by providing the names of three sons, because of their significance in the detail that will follow. And the account of Teraḥ then stops with the formula unfinished, as happened in 5:32, and for a parallel reason; it will be completed in a distinctive fashion in 11:32. Perhaps it is significant that both accounts end with three sons.

From Adam to Noah ten generations passed, the last entry being incomplete. From Shem to Teraḥ nine generations pass, the last entry again being incomplete. Someone who counts the numbers will be looking for another entry, which LXX provides by incorporating another Qenan (cf. 5:12) between Arpakšad and Šelaḥ (cf. *Jub* 8:1-4), and which MT will eventually provide in the person of Abram.

## Peoples, Nations, and Languages

Only after the deluge and after God’s giving of his covenant does Genesis talk about peoples and nations. They had no place in Gen 1—9. Is the implication that they were not part of God’s creation design? It is in the context of this covenanted but flawed new creation that they emerge.[[835]](#footnote-835) Is God chiefly interested in his people or in those other peoples? Gen 10—11 is part of the story that leads to a focus on Israel’s ancestors in Gen 12—50. Yet God’s blessing is being worked out among other peoples. Even Canaan grows and spreads like other descendants of Noah.[[836]](#footnote-836) Gen 10—11 manifests a wide-ranging interest in the world as a whole that is strictly unnecessary to a focus on Israel. It presupposes that Israel appropriately asks about the significance of other peoples, and it implies God’s missional concern for the nations.[[837]](#footnote-837) “There is a tension between the universal sovereignty (and *providence*) of God, who cares for and presides over all nations (10:1-32) and the *election* of God, who focuses on this distinctive people (11:10-29).” Thus “(a) creation can and must be understood historically, and (b) Israel can and must be understood cosmically.”[[838]](#footnote-838) And Jesus can and must be understood both as the descendant of Teraḥ’s line (Matt 1:1-17) and as the descendant of the line that goes behind Teraḥ to the figures whose names appear earlier in Gen 11 (Luke 3:23-38).

In a useful formulation, Gen 10:5, 20, and 31 speaks of Noah’s descendants as identifiable by countries, languages, kin-groups, and nations. A people is an entity that has a country, a land. It has a common language. It is ethically-related. And it has a political form. All four contribute to its identity and to its sense of identity.

A people’s land is a source for the provision of its need for food, and through having borders a source of its security. If talk of nations was a latecomer in Gen 1—11, so was talk of lands. But it will become central though in a paradoxical way from the end of Gen 11 onwards.[[839]](#footnote-839)

A people’s common language makes communication possible. At the end of the history of the world’s origins the Bible opens up the problem of language.[[840]](#footnote-840) Further, while the Babel story refers only to linguistic diversity, language is an aspect of culture,[[841]](#footnote-841) and the story’s ambivalence about language points to an ambivalence about culture that parallels Gen 4’s ambivalences. Although at a superficial level humanity had one language, arguably earlier chapters in Genesis have been all about non-communication. The imposition of diversity in language is a positive step towards the fulfilment of Yahweh’s purpose for the world, which embraces diversity. In this sense “the Babel story is not a narrative about the end of communication, but about its beginning.”[[842]](#footnote-842) And this story evokes a “great homesickness.[[843]](#footnote-843) Judahites under the domination of Assyria, Babylon, or Persia would be aware that the exercise of imperial power over them would require linguistic communication. For peoples subordinate to the imperial power, Yahweh’s facilitating the development of multiple languages is thus a blessing not a curse. “Gen 11:1-9 problematizes the unity of language, from the point of view of human hubris or excess, as an instrument of oppression,”[[844]](#footnote-844) though the story’s affirmation of diversity could also be harnessed to a system such as apartheid.[[845]](#footnote-845) The background imposing disunity is God’s desire for people to spread through the world and not be too united. Or rather, God wants there to be a unity that facilitates scattering not a unity that resists scattering, the kind of unity that Pentecost issued in (sometimes) and that the new Jerusalem will finally embody.[[846]](#footnote-846) Where there is resistance to his purpose in Gen 11, “God does not make use of battering rams to break down walls”; he merely confuses people’s languages. “This is truly an astonishing method of conquering cities and of demolishing walls, but it is the surest and easiest of all.” Whereas the mixing up of people’s languages might seem a slight punishment, in reality it was “a terrible one,” issuing in disunity and hatred.” It is for this reason that Pentecost was “a great blessing and an outstanding miracle”: God “tears down the wall” between us (Eph 2:14).[[847]](#footnote-847)

A people’s ethnic or familial nature or self-understanding undergirds its mutual commitment by encouraging people to see it as the family writ-large. In tension with that reality, Gen 10 reminds Israel that the peoples among whom God’s blessing is worked out are one in their relationship to Noah. God “made from one all the ethnic groups among human beings to dwell on the face of all the earth, establishing the bounds of the set times and the boundaries of where they dwelt” (Acts 17:26). Their shared relationship to Noah means they are one family. Ignoring the genealogies in Genesis has the effect of “blunting the ethical impact of its depiction of all humanity as members of a single family.”[[848]](#footnote-848) The family embraces mighty empires, Assyria, Babylon, Media, and Greece, that will be Israel’s overlords and oppressors and also its deliverers and benefactors. It embraces peoples with whom Israel will have trading relationships as equals and peoples on whom Israel itself will make war.

A people’s political structure facilitates its having the means whereby a group that is in reality much larger than a family can make decisions. But alongside the portrait of nations developing through God’s blessing, and individuals such as Nimrod encouraging the development of infrastructure, is the portrait of nations feeling the need to build towers for protection, which are expressions of their fear and of their assumption that they have to take responsibility for their survival. But “if Yahweh doesn’t build a house, in vain the builders have labored on it” (Ps 127:1).[[849]](#footnote-849) And finding that you have made a name for yourself as an incidental result of doing something significant (e.g., 2 Sam 8:13; Isa 63:12) is one thing; trying to make a name for yourself by doing something significant is another,[[850]](#footnote-850) like professors writing books because otherwise we won’t get tenure.

With Yahweh’s action against Adam and Eve, and against Cain, and against humanity in the deluge, Yahweh’s action against Babel was tempered by an insistence on continuing to persevere with his purpose through humanity, to protect, and to be merciful. Is it still so?[[851]](#footnote-851) While the Abraham and Sarah story will provide a more explicit positive answer, the fact that dispersal has previously been a positive not a negative idea (9:19; 10:18) hints that the negative act has a positive aim.

## A black and white map along these lines in the context of the treatment of 10:1—11:26?



1. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2018; cf. *The Bible for Everyone* (London: SPCK, 2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Philo, *On Abraham* 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Thus D. L. Petersen calls it “a book in its own right” (“The Genesis of Genesis,” in Lemaire [ed.], *Congress Volume: Ljubljana 2007*,27-40 [28]). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See Y. Levin, “Understanding Biblical Genealogies,” *Currents in Research: Biblical Studies* 9 (2001): 11-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Mbuvi, *Belongings in Genesis*, 43. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See T. Hieke, *Die Genealogien der Genesis* (Freiburg: Herder, 2003); M. A. Thomas, *These Are the Generations* (New York: Clark, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. N. A. Steinberg, “The Genealogical Framework of the Family Stories in Genesis,” *Semeia* 46 (1989): 41–50 (41). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. See further D. Carr, “*Biblos Geneseōs* Revisited,” *ZAW* 110 (1998): 159-72, 327-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Luther describes Adam to Noah as the church’s first age, Noah to Abraham as the second age, and Abraham as beginning the third age (*Genesis 6—14*, 236, 245). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. On the issues raised here, see further J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology Volume One: Israel’s Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 859-83. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Coats, *Genesis*, 318-19. See further the introductory comments on Gen 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. W. R. Bascom, “Four Functions of Folklore,” in Dundas (ed.), *The Study of Folklore*, 279-98 (290). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. For a reformulated version of this critical position, see R. Hendel, “Historical Context,” in Evans et al. (eds.), *Book of* *Genesis*, 49-81. A useful introduction to the traditional JEDP theory focusing on Genesis is R. S. Kawashima, “Sources and Redaction,” in Hengel (ed.), *Reading Genesis*, 47-70. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. E. Noort, “Abraham and the Nations,” in van Ruiten et al. (eds.), *Abraham, the Nations, and the Hagarites*, 3-31 (4). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. M. G. Brett, “Abraham’s ‘Heretical’ Imperative,” in Cosgrove (ed.), *The Meanings We Choose*, 166-78 (168). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. E. W. Nicholson, *The Pentateuch in the Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), v. Cf. M. Vervenne, “Genesis 1,1—2,4,” in Wénin (ed.), *Genesis*, 35-79 (36). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. See Bandstra, “Word Order and Emphasis.” [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. See Redford, *Study of the Biblical Story of Joseph*, 34-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. See M. Richelle, “La structure littéraire de l’Histoire Primitive,” *BN* 151 (2011): 3-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. LXX and Vg have the more sonorous, impressive, and theologically suggestive “In the beginning God created” (cf. Brayford, *Genesis*, 205-7)while TgOnq has “in former times God created”; cf. Qimchi, *Genesis*,on the verse; Reno, *Genesis*, 29-39; J. T. K. Lim, “Explication of an Exegetical Enigma in Genesis 1:1-3,” *Asia Journal of Theology* 16 (2002): 301-14. While *bᵉrē’šît* might possibly be understood as absolute, “in the beginning,” one would expect *bārē’šît*. The form *rē’šît* is usually construct and refers to the beginning of something, here suggesting“at the beginning of [when] God created” (for the construction cf. Isa 29:1; Hos 1:2; JM 129p; DG 13; cf. Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 22; R. Holmstedt, “The Restrictive Syntax of Genesis i 1,” *VT* 68 [2008]: 56-67). W. Oswald **(**“Das Erstlingswerk Gottes”, *ZAW* 120 [2008], 417-421) argues for “As the beginning”; cf. J. L’Hour, “*Ré’shît* et *beré’shît* encore et toujours,” *Biblica* 92 [2010], 50-65; and for a survey of possible interpretations of the phrase, see J. Moskala, “Interpretation of Bereʼšît in the Context of Genesis 1:1-3,” *AUSS* 49 (2011): 33-44.. On the LXX interpretation one wonders “the beginning of what?” (as Augustine reports the Manichees asking: see “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” 49). On either translation God was creating against the background of the empty void that already exists or that he makes exist, with no implication imply that somebody else must have brought the empty void into being before God transformed it. For the argument that actually *bārā’* means “separate,” see E. van Wolde, “Why the Verb *br’* Does Not Mean 'to Create’in Genesis 1.1—2.4a,” *JSOT* 34 (2009): 3-23; T. R. Wardlaw, “The Meaning of *br’* in Genesis 1:1—2:3,” *VT* 64 (2014): 502-13. E. van Wolde, “Separation and Creation in Genesis 1 and Psalm 104,” *VT* 67 (2017): 611-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The noun precedes the verb, suggesting that this is a circumstantial clause (a similar circumstantial clause begins Gen 3), which works against the idea that v. 2 is the main clause following on v. 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. C. J. Scofield’s *The Scofield Reference* *Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1909), 3, sees v. 1 as referring to the original creation, which underwent cataclysmic change because of an act of divine judgment likely related to the fall of angels (v. 2); v. 3 then begins an account of God’s renewing creation. For earlier expositions of this view (and for a recent advocacy of the view that one can calculate the date of creation from Genesis, namely c. 4200 BC), see J. P. Tanner, “Old Testament Chronology and Its Implications for the Creation and Flood Accounts,” *BSac* 172 (2015): 24-44. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Vg has *spiritus* (spirit, breath, or breeze) while LXX has *pneuma* (spirit, breath, or wind). The link with the watersuggests wind or breeze (cf. TgOnq), and 8:1 supports this inference. The same link suggests that it is “God’s wind” rather than “a godlike/supernatural/mighty wind” (and see next note). For the translation “spirit of God” see e.g., T. Freedman, “*rwḥ ’lhym*,” *JBQ* 24 (1996): 9-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. The verb *rāḥap* comes elsewhere only in Deut 32:11 (a bird flapping or fluttering) and Jer 23:9 (bones trembling). “Brooding” (Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 30; see further Hayward’s notes, 102-4) seems to depend on Syriac usage (see Basil, “On the Hexaemeron,” 31; also BDB).Whatever the verb’s precise meaning, it also works against the translation “a mighty wind”: it suggests something calmer or calming. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The *waw-*apodosis follows on from the extraposed expression occupying vv. 1-2: cf. Isa 48:4 where also a prepositional phrase is continued by circumstantial clauses (cf. GK 111h, 143d). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Literally “There is to be light.” The standard English translation “let there be light,” necessitated by the lack of a third-person imperative in English, is misleading because it makes God seem to be addressing someone and urging them to give permission or to stop hindering something. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Literally, “saw the light, that it was good”: on the word order, see JM 158d. *DCH* translates “how good,” but the idea that *kî* can be an adverb seems questionable. At 18:20 *HALOT* takes *kî* as an emphatic particle, attractively inviting here the translation “indeed good,” but the expression *rā’āh kî* “saw that” is too common to infer this usage on one or two occasions. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Again, literally: “There is to be a dome.” [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For *māqôm* 4QGenhl has *mqwh* “gathering place” (cf. LXX), perhaps assimilating to v. 10 (Tal, *Genesis*,5, 78\*). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. SP, LXX, Vg, TgPsJ, have “and fruit trees,” as in v. 12, which strictly implies that both plant and fruit tree are subsets of *deše’*, vegetation, the word for grass or hay. MT’s asyndetic reading (with TgOnq and TgNeoph) probably implies three objects for the verb (grass, plant, fruit tree), which is more apposite as “fruit tree” is not really appropriate as a subset of *deše’*. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Again literally, “There are to be lights….” [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Literally, “signs and.” [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. The traditional English translation “seasons” is misleading; *mô‘ēd* refers not to an agricultural season or to seasons such as summer and winter but to a specific time which is fixed by God—that is, the time for a festival (see e.g., D. J. Rudolph, “Festivals in Genesis 1:14,” *TynB* 54 [2003]: 23-40). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The declarative/performative qatal suggests a speech ac, “I hereby give.” [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. God omits the *deše’*, which makes sense if it refers to grass or hay which human beings do not eat. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. For *ṣābā’*, the regular word for an army, LXX has *kosmos*, which lacks the Hebrew’s martial implications and rather suggests “the finely tuned magnificence of the created universe” (Brayford, *Genesis*, 225); Vg has *ornatus*, a standard translation of *kosmos*, but which can also mean (military) equipment. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. SP, LXX deal with the oddity of God finishing the work on the seventh day by changing seventh to sixth. T. Krüger (“Schöpfung und Sabbat in Genesis 2,1-3,” in C. Karrer-Grube et al. [eds.], *Sprache—Bilder—Klänge* [R. Bartelmus Festschrift; Munster: Ugarit, 2009], 155-69) argues that LXX and SP have the original reading. Contrast E. Tov, “Searching for the ‘Original’ Bible,” *BAR* 40/4 (2014): 48-53, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. NIV “by the seventh day God had finished” makes good sense as an alternative solution to the problem recognized by LXX and SP (see previous note), but both the preposition and the verb tense are the same in v. 2b. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cf. LXX; and Driver, *Genesis*, 18. “Rested” (Vg) overinterprets *šābat*. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Literally, “from his entire work which he had created, in making. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. “‘These” are the things mentioned above” (Rashi, *Br’šyt*, 19). [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. MT treats the whole of v. 4 as one sentence (so also LXX) and as an introduction to 2:5—3:24. More often the formula in v. 4a is a complete sentence, and it make sense to treat just v. 4b as the introduction to what follows (see the comment on 2:4a). [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. More specifically, in MT (L); the other MT mss lack the division markers in Gen 1—2 (Tal, *Genesis*,11\*). [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. J. H. Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1-2:3 and the Ancient Near East,” *CTJ* 43 (2008): 48-63 (58). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Cf. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:62. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. See further S. G.-J. de la Lama, “Reiteraciones,” *Scripta Theologica* 32 (2000): 719-55; G. G. Polak, “Poetic Style and Parallelism in the Creation Account,” in Reventlow/Hoffman (eds.), *Creation*, 2-31; R. B. Robinson, “The Poetry of Creation,” in J. J. Ahn and S. L. Cook (eds.), *Thus Says the Lord* (R. R. Wilson Festschrift; New York: Clark, 2009), 114-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. G. R. Diepstra and G. J. Laughery, “Interpreting Science and Scripture,” *European Journal of Theology* 18 (2009): 5-16 (10-11); they attribute this phrase to P. Ricoeur, but do not give a reference. But D. M. Fouts, “Selected Lexical and Grammatical Studies in Genesis 1,” *AUSS* 42 (2004): 79-90 (88-89), questions the idea that Gen 1 is poetry at all. For recent discussions about how literally historical Gen 1 is, and how figurative, see J. D. Charles (ed.), *Reading Genesis 1—2* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Though G. M. Landes (“Creation Tradition in Proverbs 8: 22-31 and Genesis 1,” in H. Bream et al. [eds.], A Light unto My Path [J. B. Myers Festschrift; Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974], 279-93) stresses the poetic features in Prov 8 over against the prosaic nature of Gen 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. See the comment on 1:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. S. Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. See e.g., *Homilies on Genesis* *1-17*, 42-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:79. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Cf. M. S. Smith, “Is Genesis 1 a Creation Myth?” in D. E. Callender Jr. (ed.), *Myth and Scripture* (Atlanta: SBL, 2014), 71-102. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Cf. Keil/Delitzsch, *Pentateuch,* 44-45. P. J. Wiseman interpreted the six days of Gen 1 as the period during which God gave such a revelation to Moses (*Creation Revealed in Six Days* [London: Marshall, 1948]). [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 7, 8. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. LXX makes the repetition more consistent: see E. Tov, “The Harmonizing Character of the Septuagint of Genesis 1—11,” in W. Kraus et al. (eds.), *Die Septuaginta—Text, Wirkung, Rezeption* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2014): 315-32—unless LXX is following a more consistent Hebrew original (see e.g., Hendel, *Text of Genesis 1—11*, 16-39; J. Cook, “”The Septuagint of Genesis,” in Wénin [ed.], *Genesis*, 315-29; W. P. Brown, *Structure, Role, and Ideology in the Hebrew and Greek Texts of Genesis 1:1—2:3* [Atlanta: Scholars, 1993]). P. C. Bouteneff sets the LXX and NRSV texts alongside each other in *Beginnings* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2008), 185-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Thus one hardly needs a special explanation for the omission of this phrase in vv. 6-8 (see H. Ramantswana, “Day Two of Creation,” *Journal for Semitics* 22 (2013): 101-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. See e.g., T. Krüger, “Genesis 1:1—2:3 and the Development of the Pentateuch,” in Dozemann et al. (eds.), *Pentateuch*, 125-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. So E. Otto, “Die **Paradieserzählung** Genesis 2-3,” in A. A. Diesel (ed.), ***“Jedes Ding hat seine Zeit,”* (D. Michel Festschrift; Berlin: de Gruyter, 1996), 167-92; “Die Urmenschen im Paradies,” in R. Achenbach et al. (eds.), *Tora in der Hebräischen Bibel* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2007), 122-33; cf. E. J. Waschke, “**Zum Verhältnis von Ruhe und Arbeit in den biblischen Schöpfungsgeschichten Gen 1-3,” in R. Achenbach and M. Arneth (eds.), “*Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben* (E. Otto Festschrift; Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 69-80; P. R. Davies, “Making It,” in M. D. Carroll R. et al. (eds.), *The Bible in Human Society* (J. Rogerson Festschrift; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 249-56; more narrowly regarding the image of God, N. MacDonald, “A Text in Search of Context,” in Baer/Gordon (eds.), *Leshon Limmudim*, 3-16. T. O. Phillips then argues that Acts 1—7 mediates between the P and the J understanding (“Creation, Sin and Its Curse, and the People of God,” *HBT* 25 [2003]: 146-60). See also J. Goldingay, “Postmodernizing Eve and Adam,” in Davies/Clines (eds.), *World of Genesis*, 50-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. See e.g., Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 41-59; *ANET*, 60-72; V. Hurowitz, “The Genesis of Genesis,” *Bible Review* 21/1 (2005): 36-48, 52-54; O. Keel and S. Schroer, *Creation Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See e.g., J. H. Walton, “Creation in Genesis 1:1—2:3 and the Ancient Near East,” *CTJ* 43 (2008): 48-63; *The Lost World of Genesis One* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009); *Genesis 1 as Ancient Cosmology* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Mbuvi, *Belonging in Genesis*, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. See Lambert/Millard, *Atra-ḫasīs*; Matthews/Benjamin, *OT Parallels*, 16-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. See e.g., M. Fieger, “Die Erschaffung der Schöpfung,” in M. Fieger and J. Lanckau, *Erschaffung und Zerstörung der Schöpfung* (Bern: Lang, 2011), 65-88; K. L. Sparks, “*Enūma Elish* and Priestly Mimesis,” *JBL* 126 (2007): 625-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Arnold, *Genesis*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative*, 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Although *šāmayim* and *mayim* look dual, they are plural (see GK 88d; JM 91f). [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Cf. Skinner, *Genesis*, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Sarna, *Genesis*, 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. See e.g., Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 41-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. See R. Ouro, “The Earth of Genesis 1:2,” *AUSS* 35 (1998): 259-76; 37 (1999): 39-53; 38 (2000): 59-67; D. T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 9-35 (and further 36-76). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. R. Adler, in Eskenazi/Weiss (eds.). *The Torah: A Women’s Commentary*, 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. See e.g., J. T. A. G. M. van Ruiten, “Back to Chaos,” in G. H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 21-30. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Cf. P. Peery, “Genesis 1:1—2:3,” *Interpretation* 65(2011): 392-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:104. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Luzzatto, *Genesis*, on Gen 1:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:111. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Cf. M. S. Smith, “Light in Genesis 1:3,” in Cohen et al. (eds.), *Birkat Shalom*, 125-34. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. E. Noort, “The Creation of Light in Genesis 1:1-5,” in G. H. van Kooten (ed.), *The Creation of Heaven and Earth* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 3-20 (20). [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. See Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:110-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cf. Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 66. See further J. E. Atwell, “An Egyptian Source for Genesis 1,” *JTS* 51 (2000): 441-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. J. Yovel, “The Creation of Language and Language without Time,” *BibInt* 20 (2012): 205-25 (214-16). [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. The Manichees certainly knew: see Augustine, “Two Books on Genesis,” 68-69. See further the quotations in Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 6-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Augustine, *On the Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, 158. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Reno, *Genesis*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Cf. J. W. Skillen, “The Seven Days of Creation,” *CTJ* 46 (2011): 111-39 (120). [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Cf. J. Gericke, “A Philosophical Clarification of the Axiological Assumptions behind the Concept of Goodness in **Genesis** 1,” *Journal for Semitics* 22 (2013): 201-225. See also M. A. Klopfenstein, “‘Und siehe, es war sehr gut!’” in H.-P. Mathys (ed.), *Ebenbild Gottes—Herrscher über die Welt* (Nuekirchen: Neukirchener, 1998), 56-74. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Reno, *Genesis*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Harland, *The Value of Human Life*, 100. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:129. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. On the history of the question whether these are 24-hour days (as I assume), see W. Hilbrands, “Die Länge der Schöpfungstage,” *BN* 149 (2011): 3-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:133. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. See H. R. Stroes, “Does the Day Begin in the Evening or Morning,” *VT* 16 (1966): 460-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. *Anitiquities* 1:1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:135. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Indeed, R. W. Younker and R. M. Davidson (“The Myth of the Solid Heavenly Dome,” *AUSS* 49 [2011]: 125-47) argue against the idea that the *rāqîa‘* is described as something solid and metal-like. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. See R. Neville, “Differentiation in Genesis 1,” *JBL* 130 (2011): 209-226. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:152. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Skillen, “The Seven Days of Creation,” 123-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Cf. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 61-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. But J. C. Gertz, “Antibabylonische Polemik im priesterlichen Schöpfungsbericht?” *ZTK* 106 (2009): 137-55, critiques the idea that Genesis engages in anti-Babylonian polemic here. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Cf. W. Vogels, “‘And God Created the Great *Tanninim*,*’*” *Science et Esprit* 63 (2011): 349-365. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. E. Firmage, “Genesis 1 and the Priestly Agenda,” *JSOT* 82 (1999): 97-114 (114). [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. See GK 110c; *IBHS* 34.4c. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Skinner, *Genesis*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Gregory of Nyssa, “On the Making of Man” 1:5, in *Select Writings and Letters* (NPNF Second Series 5; reprinted Edinburgh: Clark, 1988), 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Cf. Calvin against Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 57-59, though “darkly,” Luther notes, so that only after Jesus came can the point be clear; and cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:191-92. Cf. also Augustine, *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1: 95 (Augustine also finds Father, Word, and Spirit in Gen 1:1-3: *Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1:23-26). Chrysostom (*Homilies on Genesis 1—17*, 109) thinks only of the Father and the Son. J. Johnson (“Genesis 1:26-28,” *Interpretation* 59 [2005]: 176-78) reflects on the fruitfulness of thinking about the image of God and God as Trinity. T. A. Keiser (“The Divine Plural,” *JSOT* 34 [2009]: 131-46) argues for a reference to some form of plurality in the Godhead. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. See L. Eslinger, “The Enigmatic Plurals Like ‘One of Us,’” *VT* 56 (2006): 171-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. So GK 124g. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. See e.g., J. M. Miller, “In the ‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ of God,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 289-304 (294-95); A. Schellenberg, “Humankind as the ‘Image of God,’” *TZ* 65 (2009): 97-115; but especially J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. See C. L. McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. S. D. McBride, “Divine Protocol,” in Brown and McBride (eds.), *God Who Creates*, 3-41 (16-17). [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. S. I. Herring, “A ‘Transubstantiated’ Humanity,” *VT* 58 (2008): 480-94 (494). [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. See further J. F. A. Sawyer, “The Image of God, the Wisdom of Serpents and the Knowledge of Good and Evil,” in Morris/Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden*, 64-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Cf. Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 94-95; and see J. C. de Moor, “The Duality in God and Man,” in de Moor (ed.), *Intertextuality in Ugarit and Israel* (OTS 20; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 112-25; contrast E. Noort, “The Creation of Man and Woman in Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Traditions, in Luttikhuizen (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman*, 1-18 (4-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. So T. Gudbergsen, “God Consists of Both the Male and the Female Genders,” *VT* 62 (2012): 450-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Cf. P. Niskanen, “The Poetics of Adam,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 417-36. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Cf. Augustine,*The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 1:101; more recently H. Ramantswana, “Humanity Not Pronounced Good,” *OTE* 26 (2013): 425-44, 804-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Cf. Augustine, “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” 59-60, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See the comment on 1:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Dillmann, *Genesis* 1:91. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 105. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:107. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. A. Heschel, *The Sabbath* (reprinted New York: Farrar, 1984), 9; cf. Skillen, “The Seven Days of Creation,” 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Skinner, *Genesis*, 35, [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Arnold, *Genesis*, 49-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 2:457, 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. *Jub* 2:17-33 makes up extensively for this omission. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See Y. Hoffman, “The First Creation Story,” in Reventlow/Hoffman (eds.), *Creation*, 32-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. Cf. H. N. Wallace, “Rest for the Earth?” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 49-59 (53-54). [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. But contrast the argument of H. R. Cole, “The Sabbath and Genesis 2:1-3,” *AUSS* 41 (2003): 5-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Philo, *On the Creation of the World*, 1:3. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Cf. B. Arnold, “Genesis as Holiness Preamble,” in Provain/Boda (eds.), *Let Us Go Up to Zion*, 331-43 (334-36). I. Hart (“Genesis 1:1-2:3 as a Prologue to the Book of Genesis,” *TynB* 46 [1995]: 315-36 (316) notes that “work” in Gen 2:1-3 is *mᵉlā’kāh*, the ordinary word for human work. [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Keil/Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 69; cf. Augustine, *Confessions*, 35 [50-51]—though they have reservations about the idea. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Skillen (“The Seven Days of Creation,” 112) takes Heb 4 as a “signpost” for reading the significance of Gen 1 within the context of the Scriptures as a whole. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. See e.g., Seebass, *Genesis* 1:62. “Heavens and earth” can hardly be a subjective genitive (Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 151); they do not generate the garden and its human beings. T. Stordalen argues for the forward-looking understanding here (“Genesis 2,4,” *ZAW* 104 [1992]: 163-77), and J. S. Derouchie has more recently argued that all these headings are introductions rather than conclusions (“The Blessing-Commission, the Promised Offspring, and the *Toledot* Structure Of Genesis,” *JETS* 56 [2013]: 219-47). J. C. Gertz (“The Formation of the Primeval Histpry,” in Evans et al. (eds.), *Book of Genesis*, 107-35 [114-18]) calls it a “redactional bridge” between 1:--2:3 and 2:4b—3:24. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* *1—17*, 157-59. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Cf. Ambrose of Milan. *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 7-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Oecolampadius, *Genesis*, 74-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. G. R. Diepstra and G. J. Laughery, “Sculpting in Time,” EvQ 83 (2011): 291–307 (300); their title phrase comes from A. Tarkovsky, *Sculpting in Time* (Austin: University of Texas, 1986). [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. E. L. Greenstein, “Presenting Genesis 1, Constructively and Deconstructively,” *Prooftexts* 21 (2001): 1-22 (4); Greenstein goes on to be deconstructive later in the paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall; Temptation*, 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Cf. F. Watson, *Text, Church and World* (Edinburgh: Clark, 1994), 140-45, though Watson prefers to speak in terms of three models which facilitates the making of a link with trinitarian thinking (313); while T. E. Fretheim, *God and the World* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005), 34-48, has nine modes of creation from Gen 1—2, and seven images of God the creator. [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. See e.g., K. Möller, “Images of God and Creation in Genesis 1—2,” in J. A. Grant et al. (eds.), *A God of Faithfulness* (J. G. McConville Festschrift; New York: Clark, 2011), 3-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Chiilds, *Myth and Reality in the OT*, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:58-59 (cf. Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 8-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. See A. K. Knanfl, *Forming God* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 53-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. M. Welker, “What Is Creation? *Theology Today* 48 (1991): 56-71 (61). [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Cf. Augustine, “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” 51-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 10 (referring to Augustine, *Confessions* 11.12). [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 22-23. *Jub* 2:2 makes up for the first omission, apparently taking off from the assumption that *’ĕlōhîm* in 1:2 refers to such beings (van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Reinterpreted*, 25). Augustine thinks they must be included in the “light” of Day One (*City of God* 12:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. On these issues see (e.g.) K. B. Miller, *Perspectives on an Evolving Creation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003); S. C. Barton and D. Wilkinson (eds.), *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); M. Rose, *The Evolution-Creation Struggle* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Luzzatto, *Genesis*, on Gen 1:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. See e.g., M. Konkel, “‘Und siehe, es war sehr gut,’” *Theologie und Glaube* 99 (2009): 588-604 (596-97), who sees the idea as coming first in Vg (it is not even in 2 Macc 7:28; Rom 4:17; or Heb 11:3). Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 2:152-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1—17*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Against Reno, *Genesis*, 39-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:12, 14, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Against Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall; Temptation*, 9, 10, with which compare J. Moltmann, *God in Creation* (London: SCM, 1985), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. See e.g., M. J. J. Menken, “Genesis in John’s Gospel and 1 John, in Moyise/Menken, *Genesis in the NT*, 83-98 (88-90). [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. See P. S. Alexander, “In the Beginning,” in Grypeou/Spurling (eds.), *Exegetical Encounter*, 1-29. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Cf. F. Watson, *Text and Truth* (Edinburhg: Clark, 1997), 230, 232. Watson goes on (237-39) to read the Jesus story in light of the seven days of creation (rather than simply vice versa. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 148; cf. J. S. Sexton’s (positive) comments on the work of Stanley Grenz, “The *Imago Dei* Once Again,” *JTI* 4 (2010): 187-206. On the diverse interpretations of the image of God, see e.g., G. A. Jónsson, *The Image of God* (Lund: Almqvist, 1988); W. S. Towner, “Clones of God,” *Interpretation* 59(2005): 341-56; D. Simango, “The Imago Dei,” *Studia historiae ecclesiasticae* 42/1 (2016). [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Cf. Middleton, *The Liberating Image*. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. So R. S. Briggs, “Humans in the Image of God and Other Things Genesis Does Not Make Clear,” *JTI* 4 (2010): 111-26. N. MacDonald reviews Barth’s use of the expression in a sympathetic way in “The *Imago Dei* and Election,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10 (2008): 303-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Cf. J. Wohrle, “Dominium terrae,” *ZAW* 121 (2009): 171-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Cf. U. Rüterswörden, *Dominum Terrae* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993), 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Cf. R. Mincato, “A Questão Do ‘Subjugai a Terra’ em *Gn* 1,28,” *Teocomunicação* 39 (2009): 366-377 (376). [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. W. J. Houston, “Sex or Violence,” in MacDonald et al. (eds.), *Genesis and Christian Theology*, 140-51 (144). Cf. R. Bauckham, “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1—3,” in the same volume, 175-89 (179-83). [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Cf. E. O. Nwaoru, “Genesis 1,28,” *Biblische Notizen* 153 (2012): 3-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. See e.g., Brett, *Genesis*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Cf. E. Pentiuc, ““Holding Sway in Companionship,” *Greek Orthodox Theological Review* 56 (2011): 221-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Keel/Schroer, *Creation Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Cf. R. P. McLaughlin, “A Meatless Dominion,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 47 (2017): 144-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. See e.g., S. P. Ahearne-Kroll, “Genesis in Mark’s Gospel,” in Moyise/Menken, *Genesis in the NT*, 27-41 (30-34); J. K. Browne, “Genesis in Matthew’s Gospel,” in Moyise/Menken, *Genesis in the NT*, 42-59 (44-46); and their references. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)
182. Cf. A. Wénin“‘Une chair unique’ ou ‘une seule chair’?” *Recherches de science religieuse* 102 (2014): 277-280. [↑](#footnote-ref-182)
183. Cf. J. R. Middleton, “The Liberating Image,” *Christian Scholars Review* 24 (1994): 8-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-183)
184. But Gen 17 may also be in the background of Gal 3:28: see the discussion of “Circumcision” at the end of the comments on Gen 17 below. [↑](#footnote-ref-184)
185. Reno, *Genesis*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-185)
186. Ambrose, *Hexameron*, *Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-186)
187. W. Perkins, “An Exposition of the Creed,” in Perkins, *Works* (London: Legatt, 1631) 1:151 (cf. Thompson, *Genesis 1—11,* 43). [↑](#footnote-ref-187)
188. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-188)
189. See further Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003) 1:114-15; for a nuanced studyP. Harrison, “Subduing the Earth,” *Journal of Religion* 76 (1999): 86-109; and for the history of the text’s interpretation, J. Cohen, *“Be Fertile and Increase, Fill the Earth and Master It”* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1989). [↑](#footnote-ref-189)
190. R. Bauckham, “Humans, Animals, and the Environment in Genesis 1—3,” in MacDonald et al. (eds.), *Genesis and Christian Theology*, 175-89 (185). [↑](#footnote-ref-190)
191. See e.g., K. Okyere*, “*Bible, Ecology and Sustainable Development,” *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies* 1/2 (2011): 81-96; and more generally for Gen 1—11, E. Van Wolde, “Facing the Earth,” in Davies/Clines (eds.), *World of Genesis*, 22-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-191)
192. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-192)
193. Cf. Gibson, *Genesis* 1:98-99. M. Bauks argues that they were originally separate units for which 2:25 was shaped as a bridge (“Text- and Reception-Historical Reflections on Transmissional and Hermeneutical Techniques in Genesis 2—3,” in Dozemann et al. (eds.), *Pentateuch*, 139-68). P. F. Scotchmer (“Lessons from Paradise,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 28 [2004]: 80-85) understands Gen 2—3 as a palistrophe. [↑](#footnote-ref-193)
194. Literally, “on the day of”; but the expression can be used in a looser way. [↑](#footnote-ref-194)
195. MT treats v. 4 as one sentence, but more often the formula in v. 4a is itself a complete sentence, and v. 4b makes sense as the introduction to what follows (see the footnote to 2:4a). [↑](#footnote-ref-195)
196. The finite verb clauses in v. 5 continue the infinitival clause in v. 4b, instancing the yiqtol’s capacity to signify past continuous tense, in clauses that are marked as circumstantial by the noun preceding the verb. [↑](#footnote-ref-196)
197. LXX, Vg have “work,” but *‘ābad* is the regular word for “serve.” [↑](#footnote-ref-197)
198. *’Ēd* comes otherwise only in Job 36:27, where the context suggests cloud or mist; cf. Tg and Ibn Ezra (*Genesis*, 52)here (and M. Rogland, “Interpreting *’d* in Genesis 2.5-6,” *JSOT* 34 [2010]: 379-93). But LXX, Vg, Aq assume reference to a spring or stream, which better fits the present context where the *’ēd* is going up. See D. T. Tsumura, *Creation and Destruction* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 85-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-198)
199. *‘āpār* suggests dry earth rather than dust; Vg has *limus* which means dirt or mud(Augustine presupposes “mud” in *Two Books on Genesis Against the Manichees*, 102-4). [↑](#footnote-ref-199)
200. Vg has “however the Lord God had planted,” NIV “now the LORD God had planted”: but the regular word order (verb preceding subject) does not suggest a circumstantial clause, and the *waw*-consecutive does not suggest a pluperfect translation; the same objection applies in connection with v. 18. [↑](#footnote-ref-200)
201. A *paradeisos* in LXX, cf. Vg, which is ultimately a Persian word meaning “garden.” It comes to have the connotation of paradise, though that development may issue from LXX’s use of the word (cf. Brayford, *Genesis*, 228)rather than because LXX over-translates. Westermann (*Genesis 1—11*, 208-10) notes the various ways of describing the place called *‘ēden* in the First Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-201)
202. Following vv. 4b-6, it would make sense if *‘ēden* denoted the “steppe” in the midst of which Yahweh God plants a fertile garden, but the idea that *‘ēden* could mean “steppe” seems fallacious (cf. B. Kedar-Kopfstein on *‘ēden*, *TDOT* 10:487). [↑](#footnote-ref-202)
203. *Qedem* means “before” and thus “east” because it is “before” you for people who orientate facing the sun; Rashi (*Br’šyt*, 23) takes the expression to denote East of Eden. *Qedem* can also mean before you in time; which opens up the possibility of understanding *miqqedem* to refer to God’s having created the garden “long ago” (as in e.g., Mic 5:2 [1]), as would be implied on the assumption that Gen 1 and 2 tell chronologically sequential rather than parallel stories (see Tg, Aq, Sym, Th). [↑](#footnote-ref-203)
204. *Bᵉdōlaḥ* comes only here and in Num 11:7. Vg renders *bdellium*, a resin used in making perfume, but this translation looks like a guess based on the similarity of the words. The context suggests a word for a gem; LXX has a word for charcoal, which might suggest a dark red stone such as ruby. [↑](#footnote-ref-204)
205. *Śōḥam* recurs elsewhere in lists of gems (e.g., Ezek 28:13). LXX has a “green” stone, which suggests emerald. TgOnq, TgPsJ have beryl, of which emerald is a subset. TgNeoph has pearl. Vg has onyx. [↑](#footnote-ref-205)
206. The town rather than the country, to judge from the description of the river as east of Aššur. [↑](#footnote-ref-206)
207. Here and in v. 17 God uses the idiom which combines an infinitive and its cognate finite verb to indicate emphasis. [↑](#footnote-ref-207)
208. The negative is *lō’* not *’al*, as in the Decalogue. [↑](#footnote-ref-208)
209. Strictly “on the day”; but see the footnote on v. 4b where the same expression came. [↑](#footnote-ref-209)
210. The expression *kᵉnegdô* comes only here, though *k* is a common preposition and *neged* a fairly common word meaning “in front of.” So the expression means literally “according to what is in front of him,” in other words “corresponding to him” (cf. BDB), as his counterpart; cf. Vg *simile*. But one needs to be careful of someone who is one’s equal in this way and is over against one: “should he not be worthy then she is opposite him to fight” (Rashi, *Br’šyt*, 27). [↑](#footnote-ref-210)
211. Previously *’ādām* has had the article (except in v. 5, where the context indicates indefinite meaning). Here it lacks the article, and it could be translated Adam. Indeed, Tg has Adam from v. 7, LXX from v. 16, and Vg from v. 19, even where *’ādām* has the article; they thus treat *hā’ādām* as if it were a noun that has become a proper noun, as is sometimes said to be so with *habba’ al* and *haśśātān* (see *IBHS* 13.6a). But the only clear example of this usage is *hā’ĕlōhîm*, which is a special case. More likely *hā’ādām* means “the human being/man,” and here *’ādām* is indefinite. [↑](#footnote-ref-211)
212. LXX, Vg, TgOnq, TgPsJ take as impersonal active, and translate “there was not found”—perhaps to safeguard against the idea that Yahweh God now discovered something. TgNeoph rather implies that the human being did the (not) finding, which works grammatically (since *hā’ādām* is the antecedent) and makes good sense. [↑](#footnote-ref-212)
213. Only here does *ṣela‘* apparentlymean “rib”; usually it denotes the “side” of something. Thus God might have taken the man’s whole “side.” LXX, Vg could have either meaning; TgPsJ specifies that the word refers to the thirteenth rib on the right side. [↑](#footnote-ref-213)
214. The metaphor is apposite in that *ṣēla‘* is most commonly an architectural term for the side of a building (Sarna, *Genesis*, 22). [↑](#footnote-ref-214)
215. *Happa‘am* (literally “the stroke/beat”) suggests something that happens at last, after delay or disappointment (cf. 9:34, 35; 30:20; 46:30; Judg 15:3; 16:18) [↑](#footnote-ref-215)
216. *Iiššāh* was taken from *’îš*; the audience would be aware that adding an -*āh* ending is a way one forms a feminine noun, though in this case the nouns are probably not etymologically related (cf. Speiser, *Genesis*, 18; and cf. BDB). Whereas *’ādām* denotes a human being as opposed to an animal, *’îš* denotes an individual person as opposed to a group. While TgPsJ, TgNeoph, Sym, Th have “from a man,” like MT, LXX and SP have “from her man,” which introduces a more explicit reference to marriage, while TgOnq *b‘lh* “her master” makes the point even clearer (see E. G. Dafni, “*’šh ky m’iš*—*gunē oti ek tou andros autēs*,” in Wénin [ed.], *Genesis*, 569-84). [↑](#footnote-ref-216)
217. Or “his wife”; *’îš* and *’iššāh* are also the usual Hebrew words for husband and wife (Hebrew has the more technical words *ba‘al* and *bᵉ‘ûlāh*, which mean “master/owner” and “owned,” but the First Testament rarely uses them with this meaning). [↑](#footnote-ref-217)
218. V. 25 would make good sense as the introduction to Gen 3 (so JPSV), but its *waw*-consecutive form (followed by a circumstantial clause opening up a different subject, in 3:1) makes it look more like a continuation from what precedes. Seebass (*Genesis* 1:115) sees it as “linking” 2:18-24 and 3:1-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-218)
219. But N. Wyatt (“A Royal Garden,” *SJOT* 28 [2014]: 1-35) lays it out as verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-219)
220. I owe this analogy to Kidner, *Genesis*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-220)
221. See Jacobsen, T. *The Harps That Once*. [↑](#footnote-ref-221)
222. See Lambert/Millard, *Atrahasis*. [↑](#footnote-ref-222)
223. See *ANET,* 72-99 (esp. Tablets I-II) with Speiser’s comments, *Genesis*, 26-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-223)
224. See *ANET*, 101-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-224)
225. See e.g., Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 52-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-225)
226. Cf. Keel/Schroer, *Creation Biblical Theologies in the Context of the Ancient Near East*, 117-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-226)
227. Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 141, 142, 144 (referring to a saying of A. Einstein for which see e.g.,

     W. Hermanns, *Einstein and the Poet* [Brookline Village, MA: Branden, 1983], 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-227)
228. Cf. M. S. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 210), 131-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-228)
229. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:233, 235. [↑](#footnote-ref-229)
230. Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-230)
231. Cf. Smith, *The Priestly Vision of Genesis 1*,133. [↑](#footnote-ref-231)
232. Cf. A. Cairus, “Grain and Rain in Genesis 2:5, 6,” *Journal of Asia Adventist Seminary* 13 (2010): 93-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-232)
233. Arnold, *Genesis*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-233)
234. K. M. Swenson, “Earth Tells the Lessons of Cain,” in Habel/Trudinger (eds.), *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 32-39 (33). [↑](#footnote-ref-234)
235. Reno, *Genesis*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-235)
236. C. A. Newsom, “Common Ground,” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 60-72 (63) [↑](#footnote-ref-236)
237. Cf. J. M. Soden, “From the Dust,” *BSac* 172 (1915): 45-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-237)
238. Cf. De La Torre, *Genesis*, 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-238)
239. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:249. [↑](#footnote-ref-239)
240. So S. Anthonioz, “Le sang est la vie,” *RB* 116 (2009): 5-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-240)
241. See E. Noort, “‘Was ist der Mensch,’” in S. Beyerle et al. (eds.), *Viele Wege zu dem Einen* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2012), 1-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-241)
242. So Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 1:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-242)
243. Cf. Hartley, *Genesis 1—17*, 161. [↑](#footnote-ref-243)
244. M. Görg (“Beobachtungen zu den biblischen Bildern vom ‘Garten (in) Eden,’” Münchener Theologische Zeitschrift 63 [2012]: 98-108) suggests the recently discovered flourishing kingdom of Qatna in Syria. [↑](#footnote-ref-244)
245. See C. Woods, “At the Edge of the World,” *Journal of Near Eastern Religions* 9 (2009): 183-238; P. J. van Dyk, “In Search of Eden,” *OTE* 27 (2014): 651-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-245)
246. Basil the Great, “De Spiritu Sancto,”in *Letters and Selected Works* (NPNF Second Series 8; reprinted Edinburgh: Clark, 1989), 42; cf. Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-246)
247. On the implications of the term *gan* (garden or orchard), see C. Meyers, “Food and the First Family,” in Evans et al. (eds), *Book of Genesis*, 137-57 [146-51]). [↑](#footnote-ref-247)
248. A. van fer Kooij, “The Story of Paradise in the Light of Mesopotamian Culture and Literature,” in Dell et al. (eds.), *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms*, 3-22 (9-10). [↑](#footnote-ref-248)
249. Cf. M. Bauks, “Sacred Trees in the Garden of Eden and Their Ancient Near Eastern Precursors*,” Journal of Ancient Judaism* 3 (2012): 267–301. [↑](#footnote-ref-249)
250. P. T. Lanfer, *Remembering Eden* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 33. Lanfer goes on to survey the extensive reference to the tree of life beyond the Hebrew Bible itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-250)
251. On this question see recently K. Schmid, “Loss of Immortality?” in Riedweg/Schmid (eds.), *Beyond Eden*, 58-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-251)
252. See T. Forti, “The Polarity of Wisdom and Fear of God in the Eden Narrative and in the Book of Proverbs,” *BN* 149 (2011): 45-57; P. Guillaume, “The Demise of Lady Wisdom and of *Homo Sapiens*,” *Theological Review* 25/2 (2004): 20-38. [↑](#footnote-ref-252)
253. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* II, 1:433. [↑](#footnote-ref-253)
254. Even if “good and bad” may occasionally mean “everything” (2 Sam 14:17 compared with 20), that understanding hardly fits this context (see 3:22) (Kidner, *Genesis*, 63). [↑](#footnote-ref-254)
255. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 77. On the possible identities of the places, see further Jericke, *Die Ortsangaben im Buch Genesis*, 25-37. [↑](#footnote-ref-255)
256. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1: 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-256)
257. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 67; T. Stordalen, “Heaven on Earth—Or Not?” in Riedweg/Schmid (eds.), *Beyond Eden*, 28 -57; D. M. Hudson, “From Chaos to Cosmos,” *ZAW*  108 (1996): 87-97; L. E. Stager, “Jerusalem as Eden,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20/3 (2000), 37-47, 66; R. Hendel, “Other Edens,” in J. D. Schloen (ed.), *Exploring the Long Durée* (L. E. Stager Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 185-89; L. Schachter, “The Garden of Eden as God’s First Sanctuary,” *JBQ* 41 (2013): 73-77; J. H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2015); *Jub* 3 assumes that the garden was a sanctuary (see van Ruiten, *Primaeval History Reinterpreted*, 85-89). In critique, see e.g., R. P. Gordon, “Evensong in Eden,” in Baer/Gordon (eds.), *Leshon Limmudim*, 17-30 (18-21). [↑](#footnote-ref-257)
258. C. Meyers suggests rather that keeping is what people will need to do to the fruit trees, which do not need working: cf. Neh 2:8 (“Food and the First Family,” in Evans et al. (eds.), *Book of Genesis*, 137-57 [148-49]). [↑](#footnote-ref-258)
259. Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2:44-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-259)
260. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-260)
261. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall; Temptation*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-261)
262. Cf. S. K. Tonstad, “The Message of the Trees in the Midst of the Garden,” *JATS* 19 (2008): 82-97; A. Wénin, “Le précepte d’Adonaï Dieu en Genèse 2,16-17,” *RSR* 82 (2008): 303-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-262)
263. Cf. T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Eden Narrative* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-263)
264. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-264)
265. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-265)
266. Cf. Z. Ron, “The Book of Jubilees and the Midrash on the Early Chapters of Genesis,” *JBQ* 41 (2013): 143-55 (148-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-266)
267. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 21. [↑](#footnote-ref-267)
268. See e.g., the discussions in R. P. Gordon, “The Ethics of Eden,” in K. J. Dell (ed.), *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament* (New York: Clark, 2010), 11-33, and in J. Lim, “Did the Scholar(s) Get It Right?” in R. Boer et al. (eds.), *The One Who Reads May Run* (E. W. Conrad Festschrift; New York: Clark, 2012), 69-79, with references to the earlier argument between J. Barr, “Is God a Liar?” *JTS* 57 (2006): 1-22, and R. W. L. Moberly, “Did the Interpreters Get it Right?” *JTS* 59 (2008): 22-40. Yahweh’s not imposing death on the first human couple is one of the ways in which Gen 2—3 prefigures the story of Israel’s disobedience at Sinai in Exod 32 (J. Joosten, “Que s’est-il passé au jardin d’Eden?” *RSR* 86 [2012]: 493-501). [↑](#footnote-ref-268)
269. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-269)
270. Cf. F. M. Yamada, “What Does Manzanar Have to Do with Eden?” in R. C. Bailey et al. (eds.), *They Were All Together in One Place?* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 97-117 (111). [↑](#footnote-ref-270)
271. Dershowitz, *The Genesis of Justice,* 30-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-271)
272. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-272)
273. Cf. Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 104. N. L. deClaissé-Walford (“Genesis 2,” *RevExo* 103 [2006]: 324-58) suggests a much broader understanding. [↑](#footnote-ref-273)
274. See C. Meyers, “Gender Roles and Genesis 3:16 Revisited,” in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 118-41; *Discovering Eve* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). [↑](#footnote-ref-274)
275. So e.g., Augustine, *The Literal Meaning of Genesis* 2:73-75; Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 115-19. But contrast H. Efthimiadis-Keith, “Genesis 2:18-25 from a Jungian and Feminist-Deconstructionist Point of View,” *OTE* 23 (2010): 44-65. [↑](#footnote-ref-275)
276. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 138; cf. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:117. [↑](#footnote-ref-276)
277. Cf. S. Wurst, “‘Beloved, Come Back to Me’” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis* 87-104 (91). [↑](#footnote-ref-277)
278. Cf. Coats, *Genesis*, 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-278)
279. R. Whitekettle argues that it is human-like intelligence that even the domestic animals lack, but that the woman will have (“Oxen Can Plow, But Women Can Ruminate,” *SJOT* 23 [2009]: 243-56). [↑](#footnote-ref-279)
280. Cf. Ambrose, *Hexameron, Paradise, and Cain and Abel*, 327. [↑](#footnote-ref-280)
281. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 82; cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-281)
282. See the nuanced discussion in B. F. Batto, “The Institution of Marriage in Genesis 2 and in *Atrahasis*,” *CBQ* 62 (2000): 621-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-282)
283. On variants on this alternative, see T. Krueger, “Eteology or Obligation,” in H. M. Niemann and M. Augustin (eds.), *Thinking Towards New Horizons* (Frankfurt: Lang, 2008), 35-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-283)
284. M. Warner suggests that 2:24 explains the instinct to marry someone of another ethnic group (“‘Therefore a Man Leaves His Father and His Mother and Clings to His Wife,’” *JBL* 136 [2017]: 269-88). [↑](#footnote-ref-284)
285. See J. Magonet, “The Themes of Genesis 2—3,” in Morris/Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden*, 39-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-285)
286. M. E. Biddle, “Genesis 3,” *RevExp* 103 (2006): 359-70 (362); cf. also M. A. Snoeberger,“Nakedness and Coverings In Genesis 3,” *Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary Journal* 22 (2017): 21–33. [↑](#footnote-ref-286)
287. See e.g., L. J. L. Peerbolte, “Man, Woman, and the Angels in 1 Cor 11:2-16,” in Luttikhuizen (ed.), *The Creation of Man and Woman*, 76-92. [↑](#footnote-ref-287)
288. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 1:231. [↑](#footnote-ref-288)
289. B. Becking, Signs from the Garden,” in G. Eidevall and B. Scheuer (eds.), *Enigmas and Images* (T. N. D. Mettinger Festschrift [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011]), 22-36 (26). [↑](#footnote-ref-289)
290. See V. L. Visotzky, “Will and Grace,” in Grypeou/Spurling (eds.), *Exegetical Encounter*, 43-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-290)
291. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1—17*,187-88; cf. Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 26. [↑](#footnote-ref-291)
292. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 356. [↑](#footnote-ref-292)
293. Barth, *Dogmatics* II, 2:593-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-293)
294. Cf. Keil/Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-294)
295. LXX, Vg take the double conjunction *’ap kî* to mean “why,” while EVV generally have something like “Did God really say?” But there is no philological basis for understanding the expression interrogatively; 4QGenk prefixes it with the interrogative *h* to produce this understanding. Speiser (*Genesis*, 21, 23)renders “even though,” comparing the use of *gam kî*, but this leaves a harsh ellipse at the end of the verse. I follow Tyndale, who has “Ah syr [surely] that God hath said,” which one could indeed then see as implicitly interrogative. [↑](#footnote-ref-295)
296. The snake picks up Yahweh God’s use of the idiom which involves combining an infinitive and cognate finite verb (see the footnote to 2:16). When this idiom is negatived, the word order would usually be “definitely you will not die.” Here the serpent puts the negative first. But the translation “you will not definitely die” would sound more equivocal than the serpent surely intends. More likely he puts the negative first “to concentrate the emphasis on the neg[ative] part[icle] rather than on the verbal idea” (Skinner, *Genesis*, 74-75)and thus to negative the words as Yahweh God uttered them. [↑](#footnote-ref-296)
297. The participle coming first indicates some emphasis (*TTH* 135.4). [↑](#footnote-ref-297)
298. The *waw*-consecutive follows on the infinitival expression, “at the time of your eating from it.” LXX, Vg translate the verb as passive “will be opened,” but the form is niphal not pual. Niphal commonly functions as an intransitive equivalent to qal. [↑](#footnote-ref-298)
299. Tg assume that the snake means “like gods”—i.e., lower supernatural beings. Cf. J. A. Soggin, “‘And You Will Be like God and Know What Is Good and What Is Bad,’” in C. Cohen et al. (eds.), *Sefer Moshe* (M. Weinfeld Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 191-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-299)
300. “Desirable to look at” (LXX, cf. Vg) seems an under-translation of *śākal* hiphil in the context. [↑](#footnote-ref-300)
301. Vg omits “with her,” which encourages readers to excuse the man of any responsibility for what is happening (see J. F. Parker, “Blaming Eve Alone,” *JBL* 132 (2013): 729-47. [↑](#footnote-ref-301)
302. The hitpael of *hālak* suggests he was not merely walking (see *IBHS* 26.1.2). [↑](#footnote-ref-302)
303. For this use of *l*, see BDB, 516-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-303)
304. Literally “the wind of the day”: for alternative understandings, see J. J. Niehaus, “In the Wind of the Storm,” *VT* 44 (1994): 263-67; C. L. K. Grundke, “A Tempest in a Teapot?” *VT* 51 (2001): 549-51; D. K. Stuart, “‘The Cool of the Day,’” *BSac* 171 (2014): 259-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-304)
305. TgNeoph and TgPsJ have substantial additions to exclude the idea that Yahweh God does not know where the man and the woman are. [↑](#footnote-ref-305)
306. “Gave” and “put” are both forms of *nātan*; “the repeated verb” conveys the way the man ”passes the buck” both to the woman and to God (Alter, *Genesis*, 13). [↑](#footnote-ref-306)
307. Aq “led me on/induced me” is a more accurate description than the verb the woman uses. [↑](#footnote-ref-307)
308. LXX has “away from,” a more usual meaning for *min*, but “cursed away from” is harsh in Hebrew as in English, and the sequence of references to a curse (3:14, 17; 4:11) makes better sense on the assumption that *min* means “above” (cf.Vg’s “among”). [↑](#footnote-ref-308)
309. The verb *šûp* comes only in this verse and in Job 9:17; Ps 139:11. In postbiblical Hebrew it means smooth/polish/rub, which doesn’t fit (though cf. Aq). But BH also has a verb *šā’ap*, of which *šûp* looks like a byform; or rather, BH has two verbs *šā’ap*, one meaning crush, the other pant after (cf. LXX). Possibly the first occurrence here is the first verb, and the latter one the second (cf. Vg, which has “crush” and “lie in wait”). Vg “she will crush” encouraged the application of the colon to Mary, but the pronoun is the masculine *hû’* (cf. LXX): thus Vermigli (*In Primum Librum Mosis*, on the verse) notes that the Latin should read *ipsum* not *ipsa*. [↑](#footnote-ref-309)
310. While the verb *rābāh* (hiphil) could signify “make greater/increase,” an intensifying of something that already exists (cf. e.g., NRSV), in the context it more likely denotes “make great” starting from scratch (cf. NIV). [↑](#footnote-ref-310)
311. Literally, “your pain and your pregnancy.” T. Novick (“Pain and Production in Eden,” *VT* 58 [2008]: 235-44) derives *‘iṣṣābôn* from *‘āṣab* II and renders “I will greatly lengthen your forming/gestation.” [↑](#footnote-ref-311)
312. “Apposition… enhances the similarity between two clauses” (DG 147a). [↑](#footnote-ref-312)
313. LXX, Vg, have “in your work,” implying *b‘bwdk* for *b‘bwrk*. [↑](#footnote-ref-313)
314. *Ḥay.* Whereas some words with which the text links names are similar in spelling but are etymologically unrelated, in this case the name and the word, while spelled differently, are etymologically related (see BDB). [↑](#footnote-ref-314)
315. A homonym of the root of the word for leather, *‘wr*, also generates words referring to blindness, which is apposite for people who have just gained a sad form of sight (cf. S. Schneider and M. Seelenfreund, “*Kotnot Or*,” *JBQ* 40 [2012]: 116-24). [↑](#footnote-ref-315)
316. TgOnq has “become unique, from it [the tree] knowing good and bad” (see A. Luc, “Like One of Us?” *JAB* 1 [1999]: 219-23); TgPsJ and TgNeoph are similar. [↑](#footnote-ref-316)
317. Literally, “to the age.” [↑](#footnote-ref-317)
318. For *wayyaškēn* TgNeoph and TgPsJ may imply the interesting reading *wayyiškōn* suggesting that Yahweh now settled east of the garden: see R. Eichler, “When God Abandoned the Garden of Eden,” *VT* 65 (2015): 20-32. [↑](#footnote-ref-318)
319. T. Krüger, “Sündenfall?” in Riedweg/Schmid (eds.), *Beyond Eden*, 95-109 (95) sees a failure of trust as the original sin in Gen 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-319)
320. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 144. [↑](#footnote-ref-320)
321. Cf. Z. Ron, “Wordplay in Genesis 2:25—3:1,” *JBQ* 42 (2014): 1-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-321)
322. J. T. Dennison, “The Eschatological Reversal of the Protological Reversal,” *Kerux* 23/2 (2008): 3-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-322)
323. B. C. Ollenburger, “Creation and Peace,” in J. Isaak (eds.), *The Old Testament in the Life of God’s People* (E. Martens Festschrift; Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 143-58 (152). [↑](#footnote-ref-323)
324. Cf. Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 107. [↑](#footnote-ref-324)
325. See e.g., S. Wurst, “‘Beloved, Come Back to Me,’” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis* 87-104 (95-96). [↑](#footnote-ref-325)
326. Cf. H. Ramantswana, “Conflicts at Creation,” *OTE* 27 (2014): 553-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-326)
327. D. E. Smith, “The Divining Snake,” *JBL* 134 (2015): 31-49. [↑](#footnote-ref-327)
328. See *ANET*, 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-328)
329. So S. Wagner-Tsukamoto, “The Paradise Story,” *JSOT* 34 (2009): 147-70 (163). [↑](#footnote-ref-329)
330. Sarna, *Genesis*, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-330)
331. C. B. R. Howard compares these two stories in “Animal Speech as Revelation in Genesis 3

     and Numbers 22” (Habel/Trudinger [eds.], *Exploring Ecological Hermeneutics*, 21-29). [↑](#footnote-ref-331)
332. *GenR* 19:3 notes that the woman’s addition goes against Prov 30:6 (cf. Rashi, *Br’šyt,* 31). Further, as she adds on, the snake takes away; between them they contravene both warnings in Deut 4:2 (G. de Villiers, “Sin, Suffering, Sagacity,” in B. Becking and D. Human (eds.), *Exile and Suffering* (Leiden: Brill, 2009): 3-17 (8). [↑](#footnote-ref-332)
333. Barth, *Dogmatics* IV, 1:411, 420, 449. [↑](#footnote-ref-333)
334. Barth, *Dogmatics* II, 2:670. [↑](#footnote-ref-334)
335. So Vermigli, *In Primum Librum Mosis*, on 4:1 (cf. Thompson [ed.], *Genesis 1—11*, 116). [↑](#footnote-ref-335)
336. Jacobs, *Gender, Power, and Persuasion*, 57-58. [↑](#footnote-ref-336)
337. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-337)
338. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:147-48. [↑](#footnote-ref-338)
339. D. Olson, “Untying the Knot?” in L. Day and C. Pressler (eds.), *Engaging the Bible in a Gendered World* (K. D. Sakenfeld Festschrift; Louisville: WJK, 2006), 72-86 (78). [↑](#footnote-ref-339)
340. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 250. *GenR* 19:3, 5, speculates that the man and the woman had made love and he was now sleeping it off; and that the woman shared the fruit with the man because she knew she was going to die and she didn’t want him to live on and marry someone else. [↑](#footnote-ref-340)
341. Cf. Oecolampadius, *Genesis*, 166-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-341)
342. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 1--17*, 215. [↑](#footnote-ref-342)
343. Cf. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 361. [↑](#footnote-ref-343)
344. Cf. Newsom, “Common Ground,” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 60-72 (69). [↑](#footnote-ref-344)
345. The idea that it was an apple may derive from the fact that the Latin for apple is *malum*, which in Vg also the word for a bad thing in 2:9, 17; 3:5, 22. I have argued elsewhere that it was the apricot: see Goldingay, *After Eating the Apricot* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1996), 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-345)
346. Cf. Qimchi, *Genesis*, on the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-346)
347. Cf. S. N, Lambden, “From Fig Leaves to Fingernails,” in Morris/Sawyer, *A Walk in the Garden*, 74-90 (76). [↑](#footnote-ref-347)
348. Arnold, *Genesis*, 66. [↑](#footnote-ref-348)
349. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:122. [↑](#footnote-ref-349)
350. *Jub* 3:17 provides the answer: seven years. See further the discussion in Calvin, *Genesis*, 1:156-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-350)
351. Cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-351)
352. So Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 169-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-352)
353. Cf. Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-353)
354. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 173, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-354)
355. Rashi, *Br’šyt,* 34, comparing Gen 4:7; Num 22:9. [↑](#footnote-ref-355)
356. Barth, II, 1: 554. [↑](#footnote-ref-356)
357. Cf. Ephrem’s comments on the couple’s declining to repent (“Commentary on Genesis,” 114-15). [↑](#footnote-ref-357)
358. Some translations have Yahweh “forgiving” David, but the word is neither of the usual words for “forgive”; it means something like the enigmatic “Yahweh has made your wrongdoing pass on.” [↑](#footnote-ref-358)
359. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-359)
360. Sarna, *Genesis*, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-360)
361. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 363. [↑](#footnote-ref-361)
362. Willett, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-362)
363. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-363)
364. See *Against Heresies* V, 21:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-364)
365. The Oxford English Dictionary attributes this description to the seventeenth-century English writer Peter Heylin. [↑](#footnote-ref-365)
366. Frey, *Buch der Anfänge*, 50 (cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 90). [↑](#footnote-ref-366)
367. Cf. R. Bergey, “Pathologie et guérison spirituelle: la “douleur” et le remède en Genèse 3,” *Revue réformée* 62 (2011): 7-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-367)
368. Cf. Augustine’s comments, “Two Books on Genesis against the Manichees,” 123-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-368)
369. See J. van Ruiten “Eve’s Pain in Childbearing?” in Luttikhuizen (ed.), *Eve’s Children*, 3-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-369)
370. Rashi’s comment (*Br’šyt*, 37) on the first of the references to pain. [↑](#footnote-ref-370)
371. C. L. Meyers rather refers it to the hard work of life on the farm which will involve her as much as her husband (See *Discovering Eve* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1991], 95-121; *Rediscovering Eve* [New York: Oxford University Press, 2013], 88-102). [↑](#footnote-ref-371)
372. Cf. R. Ouro, “Linguistic and Thematic Parallels Between Genesis 1 and 3,” *JATS* 13 (2002): 44-54 (50-51). [↑](#footnote-ref-372)
373. In classic midrashic fashion, the comment in *GenR* 20:7 clarifies the relationship between the statement in the first half of the verse and the statement in the second. [↑](#footnote-ref-373)
374. Kidner, *Genesis*, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-374)
375. See J. N. Lohr, “Sexual Desire?” *JBL* 130 (2011):227-46. [↑](#footnote-ref-375)
376. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:173. [↑](#footnote-ref-376)
377. Cf. Skinner, *Genesis*, 83, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-377)
378. Cf. Coats, *Genesis*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-378)
379. Cf. Qimchi, *Genesis*, on the verse; he attributes the comment to Simlai, the third century sage. [↑](#footnote-ref-379)
380. Cf. W. N. Wilder, “Illumination and Investiture,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 68 (2006): 51-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-380)
381. Ellul, *Meaning of the City*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-381)
382. Sarna, *Genesis*, 375. [↑](#footnote-ref-382)
383. So M. Lichtenstein, “The Fearsome Sword of Genesis 3:24,” *JBL* 134 (21015): 53-57. A Winitzer (“Etana in Eden,” *JAOS* 133 [2013]: 441-65) notes a similar motif in the Etana story from Babylon (*ANET*, 114-18 [116a]). [↑](#footnote-ref-383)
384. Cf. A Schüle, “‘Und siehe, es war sehr gut ... und siehe, die Erde war verdorben’ (Gen 1,31; 6,12),” *Jahrbuch Iür Biblische Theologie* 26 (2011): 3-28 (21). [↑](#footnote-ref-384)
385. See further Reno, *Genesis*, 77-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-385)
386. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall; Temptation*, 70-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-386)
387. See e.g., J. Hick, *Evil and the God of Love* (London: Macmillan, 1966); more recently, L. M. Bechtel, “Rethinking the Interpretation of Genesis 2:4b—3:24,” in Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Genesis*, 77-117; P. Ladoceur, “Evolution and Genesis 2—3,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 57 (2013): 135-76; B. Lang, “Three Philosophers in Paradise,” *SJOT* 28 (2014): 298-314. [↑](#footnote-ref-387)
388. *The Proof of the Apostolic Preaching* 16-17 (cf. e.g., *Heresies* V, 23); and see Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 211. [↑](#footnote-ref-388)
389. Kidner, *Genesis*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-389)
390. There is a set of discussions of these issues in W. T. Cavanaugh and J. K. A Smith (eds.), *Evolution and the Fall* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017) and another set from a slightly more conservative perspective than mine in H. Madueme and M. Reeves (eds,), *Adam, the Fall, and Original Sin* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-390)
391. And on the equivalent contrast between the Fathers and the rabbis, see H. Reuling, “The Christian and the Rabbinic Adam,” in Grypeou/Spurling (eds.), *Exegetical Encounter*, 63-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-391)
392. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 31, but in Brueggemann’s translation of “Vernunft ohne Pathos," *Genesis*, 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-392)
393. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the OT*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-393)
394. Barth, *Dogmatics* IV, 1:421. [↑](#footnote-ref-394)
395. Bonhoeffer, *Creation and Fall; Temptation*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-395)
396. Cf. T. Stordalen, “The God of the Eden Narrative,” in G. Eidevall and B. Scheuer (eds.), *Enigmas and Images* (T. N. D. Mettinger Festschrift [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011]), 3-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-396)
397. G. R. Diepstra and G. J. Laughery, “Exploring the Possible Worlds of Genesis 2—3,” *EvQ* 85 (2013): 309-27 (316). [↑](#footnote-ref-397)
398. See e.g., D. M. Sharon, “The Doom of Paradise,” in Brenner (ed.), *Genesis*, 53-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-398)
399. Cf. W. Loader, “Genesis 3:16-19 LXX in Reception,” in W. Kraus et al. (eds.), *Die Septuaginta—Text, Wirkung, Rezeption* (Tübingen: Mohr, 2014): 381-91; and more broadly, J. W. Aageson, “Genesis in the Deutero-Pauline Epistles,” in Moyise/Menken, *Genesis in the NT*, 117-29 (118-22). [↑](#footnote-ref-399)
400. Reno, *Genesis*, 90. [↑](#footnote-ref-400)
401. The clause opens with the subject, signaling a new stage in the narrative (cf. Bandstra, “Word Order and Emphasis,” 120). [↑](#footnote-ref-401)
402. LXX, Vg have “acquired,” the much more common meaning of *qānāh*, but “generated” better fits the present context (following on Gen 2—3), fits the use of the preposition *’et*, and fits the description of her offspring as *’îš* (see E. Lipiński on *qānāh*, *TDOT* 13:58-63). D. E. Bokovoy, “Did Eve Acquire, Create, or Procreate with Yahweh?” (*VT* 63 [2013]: 19-35) translates “procreated.” [↑](#footnote-ref-402)
403. The expression is strange in Hebrew as in English—more so, because “someone,” *’îš*, the word for an individual, usually denotes a grown man; though she will eventually have “generated” him, when he is grown up. [↑](#footnote-ref-403)
404. The name first appears here in a position where it has the pausal form *hābel*, which thus becomes Abel in LXX and Vg. [↑](#footnote-ref-404)
405. The clause opens with the subject, signaling the contrast with the preceding clause; so also in v. 4. Placing the object first in v. 5a has a similar effect. [↑](#footnote-ref-405)
406. Taking the *waw* as explanatory, with GK 154a. [↑](#footnote-ref-406)
407. Literally, “fell”; but the English expression “his face fell” came to mean “he was sad,” whereas the context here indicates that the expression means to scowl or sulk (cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 261). In the qal the Hebrew expression comes only here, but the hiphil in Jer 3:12 has this meaning (Job 29:24 is more obscure) (the English phrase comes in Mark 10:22 in some translations, but it is not a literal translation of the verb *stugnazō* there). See R. Marsden, “Cain’s Face, and Other Problems,” *Reformation* I (1996): 29-51. [↑](#footnote-ref-407)
408. LXX takes the rare noun *śᵉ’ēt* from *nāśā’* (in form it might alternatively be infinitive construct) to denote the raising of the sacrifice, but this would be an unparalleled usage. Tg, Sym take it to denote forgiving, which is a plausible meaning for a word derived from *nāśā* with its common implication of carrying wrongdoing, but the context has not indicated that Qayin’s offering involved wrongdoing that required forgiveness, and while his anger might now require forgiveness, making this link entails some connecting of dots; further, there are no other instances of the noun meaning forgiveness. Vg has “receiving,” to which the same applies. Following on the previous line, Yahweh might be referring to Qayin’s lifting his face instead of lowering it in a scowl (cf. Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 82). In Gen 49:3; Job 13:11; 31:23; Ps 62:4 [5]; Hab 1:7 the noun means exaltation or honoring (cf. S. Sipilä and R. van der Spuy, “‘To Lift Up,’ but By Whom and What?” *Bible Translator* 63 [2012]: 192-96). [↑](#footnote-ref-408)
409. L. M. Morales (“Crouching Demon, Hidden Lamb,” *Bible Translator* 63 [2012] 185-91) suggests “sin offering” for *ḥaṭṭā’t*, but would Yahweh suggest that a sin offering avails for deliberate wrongdoing? [↑](#footnote-ref-409)
410. Whereas “wrongdoing,” the subject of the clause, is feminine, this participle is masculine, and masculine continues in the next two cola; apparently the participle takes the place of a noun for “animal” (GK 132 note 2). It “is frequently and plausibly identified with Akk[adian] *rābiṣu*, denoting various officials and also demons, especially those that guard entrances to buildings” (Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 106). Indeed, A.-F. Loiseau notes that *ḥaṭṭā’t* is suspiciously similar to an Akkadian word for a watcher which can apply to a demon (“Gen 4,7,” *ZAW* 125 [2013]: 479-82). Perhaps *rōbēṣ* should read *tirbōṣ* (haplography), “wrongdoing lies in wait” (e.g., Hendel, *Text of Genesis 1—11*, 46). C. L. Crouch (“*ḥṭ’t* as Interpretive Gloss,” *ZAW* 123 [2011]: 250-58) takes *ḥaṭṭā’t* as an addition clarifying the negative implications of *rōbēṣ* . [↑](#footnote-ref-410)
411. LXX implies “his [Hebel’s] desire” and in the next colon “rule over him,” which suggests a closer parallel with the comment about the brothers’ parents in 3:17, but this understanding depends on LXX’s lack of the masculine antecedent “something lying” to which MT’s suffixes refer back. [↑](#footnote-ref-411)
412. Whereas the yiqtol *timšōl* has its expected simple future meaning in 37:8 (cf. 3:16), a yiqtol can denote “you must/may/can” (Exod 20:9 is a good example) and this understanding fits the context (cf. *TTH* 39a). The move from “thou shalt” in the KJV to “do thou” in the ASV gives John Steinbeck cause for reflection in *East of Eden* (reprinted Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979 [219]); cf. K. Schöpflin, “Genesis 4,7 – ausgelegt von John Steinbeck,” *BN* 154 (2012): 3-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-412)
413. Literally, “said to Hebel his brother.” The absolute use of *’āmar* is almost unique, but cf. Exod 19:25; 2 Chron 32:24 (Skinner, *Genesis*, 107); 2 Sam 21:2; 2 Chron 1:2 (P. T. Reis, “What Cain Said,” *JSOT* 27 [2002]: 107-13 [109]; she translates “spoke against”).LXX adds “Let’s go out into the open country” (cf. Vg; see Brayford, *Genesis*, 252), which makes for a smoother reading; the Hebrew equivalent to the extra words could have been lost through a scribe’s eye jumping from one occurrence of “the open country” to the next. See further M. W. Scarlata, *Outside of Eden* (London: Clark, 2012), 111-30. J. N. Lohr sees the addition of these words as one of the indications that LXX deliberately paints a negative portrait of Cain and thereby “explains” Yahweh’s acceptance of Abel and not of Cain (“Righteous Abel, Wicked Cain,” *CBQ* 71 [2009]: 485-96 [490]). [↑](#footnote-ref-413)
414. GK 146b understands *qôl* as an exclamation, “Hark!” but MT’s conjunctive accent suggests taking it as construct (cf. LXX, Vg, Tg). [↑](#footnote-ref-414)
415. The plural of the word for “blood” denotes shed blood. [↑](#footnote-ref-415)
416. See the footnote to 3:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-416)
417. I assume (with *HALOT* rather than BDB and *DCH*) that there is one root verb *‘āwāh* from which the noun *‘āwōn* ultimately derives, though Hebrew speakers might not be aware of that link. The conventional English translation of *‘āwōn* is the rather colorless “iniquity.” It follows Vg’s less colorless *iniquitas* whose etymological meaning is “unevenness,” which is not far from the possible resonances of *‘āwōn* with its link to *‘āwāh*. Etymologically, then, *‘āwōn* implies bending or twisting, and it could suggest those connotations. LXX here as often elsewhere has “my punishment” in the sense of the penalty for my waywardness, but this seems an unnecessary complication. Contrast Tg. [↑](#footnote-ref-417)
418. LXX, Vg, TgOnq have “forgive.” [↑](#footnote-ref-418)
419. For *lākēn*, LXX, Vg imply *lō’ kēn*, “Not so!” Aq has “therefore.” [↑](#footnote-ref-419)
420. Tg take the word to denote seven generations (cf. vv. 17-24). [↑](#footnote-ref-420)
421. The subject commonly precedes the verb in such lists, which fits the fact that the subject provides the new information and in this sense has emphasis (see the footnote to 22:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-421)
422. MT has preserved two forms of this name next to one another. [↑](#footnote-ref-422)
423. The quasi-circumstantial word order in v. 18 has the effect of hurrying the reader on to Lemek’s action in v. 19 and to what follows. On its first occurrence Lemek’s name is pointed Lāmek because it is in pause, and via LXX and Vg this pointing generates the misspelling of the name in English—as happened with Hebel. [↑](#footnote-ref-423)
424. Adverbial accusative (Seebass, *Genesis* 1:166). [↑](#footnote-ref-424)
425. A possible explanation of the double name is that both words mean “smith” and that the second explains the first and/or distinguishes this Tubal from the Tubal in (e.g.) 10:2, where it is implicitly also the name of a people (cf. *HALOT*). LXX omits Qayin, perhaps suspicious of the repetition. [↑](#footnote-ref-425)
426. The description of Tubal-qayin is difficult to construe, and neither LXX, Vg, or Tg nor scholarly suggestions offer a clear lead towards emending the text. [↑](#footnote-ref-426)
427. LXX, Vg, Tg have an active verb, of which Enoš would then be the subject; on MT’s more allusive expression, see R. P. Gordon, “Who ‘Began To Call On The Name Of The Lord’ In Genesis 4:26b?” in Provain/Boda (eds.), *Let Us Go Up to Zion*, 57-68. [↑](#footnote-ref-427)
428. The construct is epexegetical not possessive (“the name of Yahweh”; cf. GK 128k). [↑](#footnote-ref-428)
429. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 237. [↑](#footnote-ref-429)
430. In *Genesis 1—11*,Westermann spends 104 pages on Gen 1:1—2:4a, 101 pages on Gen 2:4b—3:24, and 66 pages on Gen 4. The chapter does raise a number of tricky questions: cf. Y. Chung, “Conflicting Readings in the Narrative of Cain and Abel,” *AJPS* 14 (2011): 241-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-430)
431. Cf. J. P. Angélico, “Agonia, Cristianismo e Saudade,” *Humanística e Teologia* 33 (2012): 407-419. [↑](#footnote-ref-431)
432. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:164*.* [↑](#footnote-ref-432)
433. Questions play a key role in Gen 4: see K. M. Craig, “Questions Outside Eden,” *JSOT* 86 (1999): 107-28. [↑](#footnote-ref-433)
434. T. L. Thompson traces further the way Gen 4 takes on themes from Gen 3 (“Genesis 4 and the Pentateuch’s Reiterative Discourse,” in J. Zsengeller (ed.), *Samaria, Samarians, Samaritans* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 9-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-434)
435. E. Peels, “The World’s First Murder,” in J. Fitzgerald et al. (eds.), *Animosity, the Bible, and Us* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 19-40 (19); cf. R. Schwager, *Must There Be Scapegoats?* (2nd ed., New York: Crossroad, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-435)
436. J. Angelats, “Elements per a una lectura de Gn 4,1-16” (a psychoanalytic reading of the story), *Scripta biblica* 9 (2009): 11-32 (15). [↑](#footnote-ref-436)
437. On the Mesopotamian background to Genesis’s account of the development of civilization, see D. D. Lowery, *Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1—11* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 122-227. [↑](#footnote-ref-437)
438. Cf. D. Rudman, “A Little Knowledge Is a Dangerous Thing,” in Wénin (ed.), *Genesis*, 461-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-438)
439. The story has been thought to reflect Israel’s awareness of them; but if it does at all, it is not interested in this question; it is the two brothers that interest Genesis (cf. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 229-30). [↑](#footnote-ref-439)
440. Josephus implies that Cain lives up to his name be being continuing interested in acquiring things (*Antiquities* 1, 2:1-2). [↑](#footnote-ref-440)
441. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-441)
442. Cf. De La Torre, *Genesis*, 93-94. [↑](#footnote-ref-442)
443. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 32; for other possibilities *s*ee BDB and K. Seybold in *TDOT* 3:313. [↑](#footnote-ref-443)
444. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-444)
445. Cf. C. Meyers, “Food and the First Family,” in Evans et al. (eds.), *Book of Genesis*, 137-57 (151-52). [↑](#footnote-ref-445)
446. *Confessions* 1:1; cf. Reno, *Genesis*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-446)
447. Though TgPsJ makes it do so (cf. D. Shepherd, “Translating and Supplementing,” *JAB* 1 [1999]: 125-46 [126]). [↑](#footnote-ref-447)
448. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:194. [↑](#footnote-ref-448)
449. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:152. [↑](#footnote-ref-449)
450. On early discussion of this question between Jews and Christians, see R. Yayward, “What Did Cain Do Wrong?” in Grypeou/Spurling (eds.), *Exegetical Encounter*, 101-23. [↑](#footnote-ref-450)
451. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob*, 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-451)
452. G. Wittenberg, “Alienation and ‘Emancipation’ from the Earth,” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 105-16 (107). Contrast J. J. Allen, “The Mixed Economies of Cain and Abel,” *Conversations with the Biblical World* 31 (2011): 33-52. [↑](#footnote-ref-452)
453. M. R. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-453)
454. Cf. E. Pfoh, “Genesis 4 Revisited,” *SJOT* 23 (2009): 38-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-454)
455. Cf. J. Abraham, “Feminist Hermeneutics and Pentecostal Spirituality,” *AJPS* 6 (2003): 3-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-455)
456. R. Hendel lists many such links of words within Gen 1—11 in *“Leitwort* Style and Literary Structure in the J Primeval Narrative,” in S. Dolansky (ed.), *Sacred History, Sacred Literature* (R. E. Friedman Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2008), 93-109. [↑](#footnote-ref-456)
457. Cf. Scarlata, *Outside of Eden*, 80-81; R. P. Gordon, “‘Couch’ or ‘crouch,’” in J. K. Aitken et al. (eds.), *On Stone and Scroll* (G. I. Davies Festschrift; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2011), 195-209. [↑](#footnote-ref-457)
458. “A Discussion of Freewill” in *Collected Works of Ersasmus* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1999) 76:33. [↑](#footnote-ref-458)
459. *Genesis 1—5*, 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-459)
460. Cf. J. C. Gertz, “Variations autour du récit de Caïn et Abel,” *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 94 (2014): 27-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-460)
461. Cf. B. Kahl, “Fratricide and Ecocide,” in D. Hessel and L. Rasmussen (eds.), *Earth Habitat* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2001), 53-68 (63). [↑](#footnote-ref-461)
462. Schlimm, *From Fratricide to Forgiveness*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-462)
463. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 22. [↑](#footnote-ref-463)
464. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-464)
465. E. Noort, “Gen 4:1-16,” in Luttikhuizen (ed.), *Eve’s Children*, 93-106 (105); cf. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 230. [↑](#footnote-ref-465)
466. See A. H. S. Ng, “Death and the Double,” in R. S. Sabbath (ed.), *Sacred Tropes* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 107-13. [↑](#footnote-ref-466)
467. See W. Vogels, “‘The Guardian of My Brother, Me?’” in Ausloos/Lemmelijn (eds.), *A Pillar of Cloud*, 297-313. [↑](#footnote-ref-467)
468. Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 200, paraphrasing Erasmus’s comment on Heb 11:4 (*Collected Works of Ersasmus* [Toronto: University of Toronto, 2016] 44:245. [↑](#footnote-ref-468)
469. See K. Vermeulen, “Verbal Creation,” *SJOT* 31 (2017): 294-313 (305-6). [↑](#footnote-ref-469)
470. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-470)
471. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-471)
472. Cf. Wittenberg, “Alienation and ‘Emancipation’ from the Earth,” 108-10; cf. M. Jørstad, “The Ground That Opened Its Mouth,” *JBL* 135 (2016): 705-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-472)
473. Frey, *Buch der Anfänge*, 78-79; cf. E. Peels, “The World’s First Murder,” in H. F. van Rooy et al. (eds.), *Animosity, the Bible, and Us* (Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 19-39 (28). [↑](#footnote-ref-473)
474. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-474)
475. Philo, *Questions and Answers on Genesis* 1:73. [↑](#footnote-ref-475)
476. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 309. [↑](#footnote-ref-476)
477. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 232. [↑](#footnote-ref-477)
478. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 233. [↑](#footnote-ref-478)
479. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-479)
480. R. W. L. Moberly (“The Mark of Cain,” *Harvard Theological Review* 100 [2007]: 11-28) argues that it is the threat in v. 15a itself. [↑](#footnote-ref-480)
481. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-481)
482. Cf. Ellul, *Meaning of the City*, 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-482)
483. D. Luciani, “Gn 4,17 (la première ville) et ses commentaires,” *Nouvelle revue theologique* 137 (2015): 21-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-483)
484. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-484)
485. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:219-21. [↑](#footnote-ref-485)
486. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 241. [↑](#footnote-ref-486)
487. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-487)
488. Coats, *Genesis*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-488)
489. Lowery, *Toward a Poetics of Genesis 1—11*, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-489)
490. Though not in Tg, which gives a negative slant to the calling in v. 26: it suggest lax or illicit worship (cf. e.g., Qimchi, *Genesis*, on the verse); nor in Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 243, which treats the sections as 4:1-24 and 4:25—5:32. [↑](#footnote-ref-490)
491. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 45. [↑](#footnote-ref-491)
492. See S. Bakon, “And He Called by the Name of the Lord,” *JBQ* 42 (2014): 8-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-492)
493. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-493)
494. See especially J. Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-494)
495. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-495)
496. Keil/Delitzsch, *Pentateuch*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-496)
497. Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-497)
498. See T. Hilhorst, “Abel’s Speaking in Hebrews 11:4 and 12:24,” in Luttikhuizen (ed.), *Eve’e Children*, 119-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-498)
499. Byron, *Cain and Abel in Text and Tradition*, e.g., 93, 207-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-499)
500. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 302. [↑](#footnote-ref-500)
501. See H. G. L. Peels, “In het teken van Kaïn,” *Verbum et ecclesia* 29 (2008): 172-93 (187). [↑](#footnote-ref-501)
502. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* II, 2:341, 355. [↑](#footnote-ref-502)
503. Dershowitz, *The Genesis of Justice,*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-503)
504. See e.g., M. J. J. Menken, “Genesis in John’s Gospel and 1 John,” in Moyise/Menken, *Genesis in the NT*, 83-98 (95-97). [↑](#footnote-ref-504)
505. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 61-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-505)
506. On which see M. J. Paul, “Genesis 4:17-24,” *TynB* 47 (1996): 143-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-506)
507. *ANET*, 265. See further T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1939). [↑](#footnote-ref-507)
508. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-508)
509. Through vv. 1-3 *’ādām* is thus anarthrous and could refer either to Adam or to humanity: LXX has humanity here but Adam in vv. 1b-2. But following on 4:25, here *’ādām* likely denotes Adam, while vv. 1b-2 in resuming 1:27-28 must be referring to humanity. [↑](#footnote-ref-509)
510. More literally, “on the day of,” and again in v. 2; see the footnote to 2:4b. [↑](#footnote-ref-510)
511. MT has no word for “someone”—in other words the verb has no object. J. Hutzli (“The Procreation of Seth by Adam,” *Semitica 54* [2012]: 147-62) suggests the inference that Seth is portrayed as asexual to safeguard the asexuality of the God in whose image he was procreated. [↑](#footnote-ref-511)
512. More literally, “days”—contrast the singular in vv. 1-2 to denote a punctiliar time. [↑](#footnote-ref-512)
513. TgNeoph takes the edge off this tough-minded conclusion to each paragraph by paraphrasing, “he was gathered from the midst of the world”—compare the formula in passage such as 25:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-513)
514. The form “Enoch” follows the LXX transliteration. [↑](#footnote-ref-514)
515. As in 3:8, the hitpael of *hālak* suggests he was not merely walking (see *IBHS* 26.1.2). LXX has him “pleasing” God (cf. Heb 11:5), which is more appropriately its translation of the different expression “walk about before me” in 17:1. Tg similarly has Hanok “walking in awe” of Yahweh or “serving in truth” before Yahweh “Walked about with God” rather suggests friendship. [↑](#footnote-ref-515)
516. The verb is oddly singular—on the other occurrences in vv. 5, 8, 11, 14, 17, 20, 27, 31 it is plural, and LXX, Vg assimilate this occurrence to that usage. [↑](#footnote-ref-516)
517. For *yᵉnaḥămēnû*,LXX has “give us respite,” implying a form of the verb *nûaḥ*; see the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-517)
518. *Ma*‘*ăśēnû* spelled thus looks like the singular form of the noun (cf. LXX); contrast the plural spelling at Isa 26:12. But Vg takes this as defective spelling of the plural. See the discussion in Tal, *Genesis*, 91\*. [↑](#footnote-ref-518)
519. In MT’s *yāpet* (cf. LXX’s *Iaphet*, also Vg, and thus English Japhet), the *ā* vowel comes from the name’s pausal vocalization (cf. 4:2 and the note). [↑](#footnote-ref-519)
520. Different editions of LXX, the other Greek translations, and Tg translate *bᵉnê-hā’ĕlōhîm* in varying ways, reflecting how controversial the phrase came to be: see Tal, *Genesis*, 91-92\*; Brayford, *Genesis*, 260; Aberbach/Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 50-51; P. S. Alexander, “The Targumim and Early Exegesis of ‘Sons of God’ in Genesis 6,” *JJS* 23 (1972): 60-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-520)
521. LXX renders *kalos* rather than *agathos*, which might imply that they looked good; though it used the same adjective in Gen 1. Vg used *bonus* in Gen 1 but here uses *pulcher*, which makes more explicit that they looked good. TgPsJ expands on the point with reference to their makeup and their exposure of themselves. [↑](#footnote-ref-521)
522. *Yādôn* looks like a form from an otherwise unknown verb *dûn* (BDB) or *dānan* (R. Hendel, “The Nephilim Were on the Earth,” in C. Auffarth and L. Stuckenbruck [eds.], *The Fall of the Angels* [Leiden: Brill, 2004], 11-34 [15]; cf. *HALOT*). I take it as an irregular yiqtol from *dîn* (BDB) which would mean “rule, exercise authority” (Zech 3:7) or possibly “contend” (Eccles 10); cf. Sym’s *krinei*; also more paraphrastically TgPsJ, TgNeoph. LXX, Vg, TgOnq have “abide, dwell,” which might imply *yādôr* (cf. 4Q 252, part of 4QCommentary on Genesis; also Ps 84:11, something of an Aramaism), but is “perhaps nothing more than a plausible guess” (Skinner, *Genesis*, 143). Rashi comments, “There are many aggadic comments on *lō’ yādôn*” (*Br’šyt*, 61). [↑](#footnote-ref-522)
523. *Bᵉšaggam*: the preposition *bᵉ* followed by the particle *š* followed by the adverb *gam*; cf. LXX, Vg. Some mss have *bᵉšaggām* which would mean “because of their going astray” (see BDB under *šāgag*). [↑](#footnote-ref-523)
524. Tg make explicit that the 120 years are time for humanity to turn back. [↑](#footnote-ref-524)
525. Rashi notes that *hannᵉpilîm* were so called because they “fell” and caused the world’s “downfall” (*Br’šyt*, 61). While TgOnq here replaces *hannᵉpilîm* by “the strong men” as in v. 4, which might imply a desire to safeguard against speculative interpretations of the idea of fallen angels, in v. 4 it makes explicit reference to angels that fell (Aberbach/Grossfeld. *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 53). LXX, Vg have “giants” (cf. the context of Num13:33). [↑](#footnote-ref-525)
526. Literally, “coming (in)to.” [↑](#footnote-ref-526)
527. One would usually render *lēb* “mind” in such a context, but it suggests “heart” in v. 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-527)
528. Vg *paenituit* issues in the English translation “repented,” which now gives a misleading impression, whereas like the Hebrew verb, the Latin verb means “be sorry, regret.” [↑](#footnote-ref-528)
529. GK 142b takes the word order with the subject first to indicate that the clause provides background information and that the verb should be rendered in the pluperfect. But it is simpler to take the word order as indicating that the clause offers a contrast with what precedes (DG 142c). [↑](#footnote-ref-529)
530. Reno, *Genesis*, 111. [↑](#footnote-ref-530)
531. Brett, *Genesis*, 39. [↑](#footnote-ref-531)
532. See Jerome, *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 35-36 (with Hayward’s notes, 128). Josephus (*Antiquities* 1, 3:9) suggests that people lived longer in those days because they ate more sensibly. [↑](#footnote-ref-532)
533. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-533)
534. See the comments on “Though Dead, They Still Speak” at the end of the commentary on Gen 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-534)
535. See e.g. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 102-38; von Rad, *Genesis*, 43-71. [↑](#footnote-ref-535)
536. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 347. [↑](#footnote-ref-536)
537. For the details, see Skinner, *Genesis*, 134; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-537)
538. Cf. E. Tov, “The Genealogical Lists in Genesis 5 and 11,” in C. Werman (ed.), *From Author to Copyist* (Z. Talshir Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2015), 37-52; Hendel, *Text of Genesis 1—11*, 61-80. [↑](#footnote-ref-538)
539. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 67. For critique of such theories, see R. Hendel, “A Hasmonean Edition of MT Genesis?” *Hebrew Bible and Ancient Israel* 1 (2012): 448-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-539)
540. For possibilities, see Day, *Creation to Babel*, 93-97. [↑](#footnote-ref-540)
541. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-541)
542. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*,53. [↑](#footnote-ref-542)
543. Cf. Didymus, *Genesis*, 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-543)
544. So Sarna, *Genesis*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-544)
545. Cf. G. Ortlund, “Image of Adam, Son of God,” *JETS* 57 (2014): 673-88. [↑](#footnote-ref-545)
546. Cf. Luther, *Genesis 1—5*, 339-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-546)
547. Arnold, *Genesis*, 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-547)
548. Cf. D. Simango, “The Meaning of the *Imago Dei* (Gen 1:26-27) in Genesis 1—11,” *OTE* 25 (2012): 638-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-548)
549. Arnold, *Genesis*, 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-549)
550. See Goldingay, *Psalms Volume 2* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007), on the passages. [↑](#footnote-ref-550)
551. See Aberbach/Grossfeld. *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 48-49; cf. Rashi, *Br’šyt*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-551)
552. Qimchi, *Genesis*, on the verse. [↑](#footnote-ref-552)
553. Willett, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-553)
554. Cf. the agonizing in *GenR* 25:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-554)
555. Retrospectively *GenR* 33:3 sees these passages as the real reason for Noah’s being called by that name. [↑](#footnote-ref-555)
556. *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-556)
557. *Genesis*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-557)
558. Cf. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-558)
559. See *DCH* 2:206-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-559)
560. See E. Ulrich et al., *Qumran Cave 4: IX* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995), 90, 141; and the discussion in e.g., J. H. Tigay, *Deuteronomy* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1996), 513-18. [↑](#footnote-ref-560)
561. So GK 128v; DG 35; JM 129j. [↑](#footnote-ref-561)
562. Cf. Kidner, *Genesis*, 84. [↑](#footnote-ref-562)
563. Skinner, *Genesis*, 141. But S. Fockner (“Reopening the Discussion,” *JSOT* 32 [2008]: 435-56) questions this consensus. [↑](#footnote-ref-563)
564. See further (e.g.) R. C. Newman, “The Ancient Exegesis of Genesis 6:2, 4,” *Grace Theological Journal* 5 (1984): 18-36; G. Oberhänsli-Widmer, *Bilder vom Bösen im Judentum* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 2013), 93-124. [↑](#footnote-ref-564)
565. In this “crossing of divinely ordained boundaries” it seems hard to suggest that “human beings may be viewed as prime movers” (so R. Routledge, “‘My Spirit’ in Genesis 6.1-4,” *JPT* 20 (2011): 232-51 (246). [↑](#footnote-ref-565)
566. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 366-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-566)
567. See e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 379-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-567)
568. This comment coheres with an observation by Barth that the beings cannot be fallen angels because the notion of fallen angels is an incoherent one (*Dogmatics* III, 3:531-32). [↑](#footnote-ref-568)
569. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-569)
570. See K. Schmid, “Genesis in the Pentateuch,” in Evans et al. (eds.),, *Book of Genesis*, 27-50 (38-40); W. Bührer “Göttersöhne und Menschentöchter,” *ZAW* 123 [2011]: 495-515) sees the allusion in the reverse direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-570)
571. Cf. J. van Ruiten, “Nomadic Angels,” in Ausloos/Lemmelijn (eds.), *A Pillar of Cloud*, 247-76 (263). [↑](#footnote-ref-571)
572. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 46. [↑](#footnote-ref-572)
573. Cf. R. W. L. Moberly, “”How Should One Read the early Chapters of Genesis?” in S. C. Barton and D. Wilkinson (eds.), *Reading Genesis after Darwin* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 5-21 (12). TgPsJ (on 14:13) says one did so. [↑](#footnote-ref-573)
574. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:190. [↑](#footnote-ref-574)
575. Cf. P. R. Davies, “And Enoch Was Not, for Genesis Took Him,” in C. Hempel and J. M. Lieu (eds.), *Biblical Traditions in Transmission* (M. A. Knibb Festschrift; Leiden: Brill, 2006), 97-107. [↑](#footnote-ref-575)
576. Cf. C. M. Kaminski, “Beautiful Women or 'False Judgment’?” *JSOT* 32 (2008): 457-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-576)
577. Cf. J.-P. Sonnet, “God’s Repentance and “False Starts” in Biblical History,” in Lemaire (ed.), *Congress Volume Ljubljana 2007*, 469-494. [↑](#footnote-ref-577)
578. Harland, *Value of Human Life*, 83. [↑](#footnote-ref-578)
579. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 389. [↑](#footnote-ref-579)
580. Cf. Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-580)
581. T. E. Fretheim, “The Self-Limiting God of the Old Testament,” in K. L. Noll and B. Schramm (eds.), *Raising Up a Faithful Exegete* (R. D. Nelson Festschrift; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 179-91 (quotation from 186). [↑](#footnote-ref-581)
582. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-582)
583. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:250. [↑](#footnote-ref-583)
584. Cf. Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-584)
585. Cf. Chysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18—45*, 80-81. [↑](#footnote-ref-585)
586. The New English Bible has he “won favour,” as does Didymus (*Genesis*, 151), who declares that he both sought and found. [↑](#footnote-ref-586)
587. Konrad Pellikan, *Commentaria Bibliorum* (Zürich: Froschov, 1532) 1: 10r, as quoted in Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-587)
588. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-588)
589. See the Introduction to this commentary ad in the introduction to 1:1—2:4a above. [↑](#footnote-ref-589)
590. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 382. [↑](#footnote-ref-590)
591. On the expression “walk about with,” see the footnote to 5:22. Here the clause is asyndetically related to the previous one and “with God” precedes the verb, suggesting that it is subordinate to the preceding clause. [↑](#footnote-ref-591)
592. LXX has *kairos*, perhaps “the critical moment” (cf. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis*, 72), which would also be true. [↑](#footnote-ref-592)
593. Three times (cf. 6:17; 7:4) Yahweh uses a participle as we do in English if we say “I’m coming” when we have not yet begun to move (JM 121e; *IBHS* 37.6f; GK 116p); he is about to act and you had better believe it. [↑](#footnote-ref-593)
594. *Tēbāh*, an Egyptian word, borrowed simply to designate this extraordinary construction, and otherwise used to refer only to the coffer in which Moses’s mother floats him on the Nile. [↑](#footnote-ref-594)
595. EVV take *gōper* to denote an otherwise unknown kind of wood, “gopher,” but in postbiblical Hebrew *gāpar* refers to making something watertight by the use of bitumen (*DTT*, 263); cf. the BH word for bitumen, *goprît* *and* the word *kōper* which comes later in the verse. Thus Jerome translates *bituminata* (PL 23: 949; cf. *Hebrew Questions on Genesis* 37); and cf. Aq. [↑](#footnote-ref-595)
596. Literally, “nests”; repointing *qinnîm* to *qānîm* produces the meaning “reeds” (see Day, *Creation to Babel*, 113-22). [↑](#footnote-ref-596)
597. Yahweh speaks in the imperative at the beginning and near the end of his words to Noah in vv. 14-21 but speaks in the yiqtol in between, which perhaps makes his words a stronger declaration of what Noah *will* definitely do. [↑](#footnote-ref-597)
598. The word *ṣōhar* comes only here; Vg has “window” (perhaps linking with *ṣohŏrayim* “midday”), but the context suggests a word denoting a roof. [↑](#footnote-ref-598)
599. Possibly this difficult phrase indicates that the chest is to have a pitched roof with the center a cubit higher than the walls (cf. *GenR* 31:11). [↑](#footnote-ref-599)
600. Not “confirm” (Wenham *Genesis 1—15*, 149, 175); *qûm* hiphil denotes establishing something, not reinforcing it, and there has been no mention of an existent pact to be confirmed. In a looser sense one could say that God had been living in a covenantal relationship with humanity and/or with Noaḥ, but Genesis has not spoken in these terms. [↑](#footnote-ref-600)
601. Literally, “in the year of six-hundred, the year”: with compound numbers “year” can be repeated (cf. GX134o). [↑](#footnote-ref-601)
602. *Gešem* is sometimes translated “shower,” which gives the wrong impression: see 1 Kings 18:41; Ps 68:9 [10]; Ezek 13:11, 13; 38:22. [↑](#footnote-ref-602)
603. Literally, “the breath of the spirit of life,” a combination of “breath of life/living breath” (cf. 2:7) and “spirit of life/living spirit” (cf. 7:15). [↑](#footnote-ref-603)
604. Sym, Aq, Th have “Armenian.” [↑](#footnote-ref-604)
605. On this unique verbal usage (*hāyāh* followed by two infinitive absolutes) see H. Gzella, “Zum periphrastischen Infinitiv in **Genesis** viii 5,” *VT* 58 (2008): 469-79. [↑](#footnote-ref-605)
606. Literally, “the raven”: see GK 126r. [↑](#footnote-ref-606)
607. The idiomatic expression begins with a finite verb followed by its infinitive absolute, “it went out in going out,” i.e., “it went out repeatedly,” then adds a second infinitive absolute from a different root so that in effect there is an ellipse of the related second finite verb. See *IBHS* 135.3c; JM 123m; GK 113s; DG 101c. [↑](#footnote-ref-607)
608. Q *hayṣē’* is an “irregular” form (GK 69v), almost as if the verb were an initial *y* verb (see GK 70). [↑](#footnote-ref-608)
609. Literally, “to his heart.” [↑](#footnote-ref-609)
610. NIV has “even though,” but the regular meaning of *kî* when linking statements is “because”; it is doubtful whether it ever means “although.” See Harland, *The Value of Human Life*, 119-21, andthe “Comment” below, though W. Moberly concludes that “the exegetical issue eludes clear resolution” (“On Interpreting the Mind of God,” in J. R. Wagner et al. [eds.], *The Word Leaps the Gap* [R. B. Hays Festschrift; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008], 44-66 [57]). [↑](#footnote-ref-610)
611. The “yet” picks up from the repeated use in v. 21, though MT here spells *‘ōd* rather than *‘ôd*. [↑](#footnote-ref-611)
612. Cf. Coats, *Genesis*, 73. [↑](#footnote-ref-612)
613. B. W. Anderson, “From Analysis to Synthesis,” *JBL* 97 (1978): 23-39 (38); cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 156. For critique, see J. D. Pleins, *When the Great Abyss Opened* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 24-25. [↑](#footnote-ref-613)
614. On the flood chronology, see further (e.g.) Kidner, *Genesis*, 98-99; Sarna, *Genesis*, 376; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 179-81; and their references. [↑](#footnote-ref-614)
615. Cf. e.g., Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-615)
616. See e.g., Augustine’s comments, *City of God*, 15:17; cf. Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 133. [↑](#footnote-ref-616)
617. For varying understandings of the process whereby Genesis came to interweave J and P, and for observations on how the sources might have been read in their own right, see e.g., Skinner, *Genesis*, 147-69; Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 384-458; Coats, *Genesis*, 73-82; Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 167-69. Hays (*Hidden Riches*, 82-85) lays out the text distinguishing between the two versions and also editorial additions. G. A. Rendsburg (“The Biblical Flood Story in Light of the Gilgameš Flood Account,” in J. Azize and N. Weeks ]eds.], *Gilgameš and the World of Assyria* [Leuven: Peeters, 2007], 115-27) sees the biblical story as more broadly following Gilgamesh and using Israelite material to modify it. [↑](#footnote-ref-617)
618. Cf. Harland, *The Value of Human Life*, 45. “God loved this man for his righteousness [*dikaiosunē*]” (Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 3:2). [↑](#footnote-ref-618)
619. See the discussion in J. M. Cohen, “*Be-doratav*,” *JBQ* 21 (2013): 187-90. [↑](#footnote-ref-619)
620. Cf. Didymus, *Genesis*, 153 (though he is working with the LXX, which has “pleasing to God” for “walked about with God”). [↑](#footnote-ref-620)
621. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-621)
622. So Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-622)
623. T. E. Fretheim, “The God of the Flood Story and Natural Disasters,” *CTJ* 48 (2008): 21-34 (30). [↑](#footnote-ref-623)
624. Cf. Alter, *Genesis*, 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-624)
625. Cf. R. T. Stanton, “Asking Questions of the Divine Announcement in the Flood Stories from Ancient Mesopotamia and Israel,” in Azize/Weeks ]eds.], *Gilgameš and the World of Assyria*, 147-72. [↑](#footnote-ref-625)
626. Cf. Gardner, “Ecojustice,” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 117-30 (118); R. Hendel, “The Poetics of Myth in Genesis,” in S. D. Breslauer (ed.), *The Seductiveness of Jewish Myth* (Alnay, NY: SUNY, 1997), 157-70 (162-63). [↑](#footnote-ref-626)
627. Cf. A. Gardner, “Ecojustice,” 128). [↑](#footnote-ref-627)
628. G. B. Walker, “Noah and the Season of Violence,” *RevExp* 103 (2006): 371-90 (379). Walker is reading the Noah story in light of R. Girard’s work on violence: see e.g., J. G. Williams (ed.), *The Girard Reader* (New York: Crossroad, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-628)
629. Cf. C. A. Kirk-Duggan, “Characterizations, Comedy, and Catastrophe,” in Brenner et al. (eds.), *Genesis*, 221-46 (231. [↑](#footnote-ref-629)
630. Walker, “Noah and the Season of Violence,” 380. [↑](#footnote-ref-630)
631. Didymus, *Genesis*, 159. TgPsJ sees this significance in the seven-day wait of 7:4; Chrysostom sees it in the difference between the first forty days and the time that follows (*Homilies on Genesis 18—45*, 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-631)
632. KSG. [↑](#footnote-ref-632)
633. Cf. Lanckau, “Gottliche Reue und menschlicher Trost,” 126; S. W. Holloway, “What Ship Goes There,” *ZAW* 103 (1991):328-55. [↑](#footnote-ref-633)
634. See the comment there. [↑](#footnote-ref-634)
635. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:269. [↑](#footnote-ref-635)
636. Sarna, *Genesis*, 50. [↑](#footnote-ref-636)
637. Augustine, *City of God* 15:26; cf. Louth (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 131. [↑](#footnote-ref-637)
638. Luther, *Lectures on Genesis 6—14*, 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-638)
639. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:257. [↑](#footnote-ref-639)
640. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 426-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-640)
641. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1: 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-641)
642. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-642)
643. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-643)
644. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 436. [↑](#footnote-ref-644)
645. So Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-645)
646. Luther, *Genesis 6-14,* 104. [↑](#footnote-ref-646)
647. Didymus, *Genesis*, 176. [↑](#footnote-ref-647)
648. Cf. Alter, *Genesis*, 34. [↑](#footnote-ref-648)
649. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-649)
650. Cf. Skinner, *Genesis*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-650)
651. R. W. L. Moberly (“Why Did Noah Send out a Raven?” *VT* 50 [2000]: 345-56) suggests that Noah is “symbolically replicating” God’s action (8:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-651)
652. Cf. Skinner, *Genesis*, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-652)
653. Cf. S. T. Keiter, “Noah and the Dove,” *JBQ 40 (*2012*):*261-64. [↑](#footnote-ref-653)
654. *Antiquities* 1, 3:5. [↑](#footnote-ref-654)
655. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 18-45, 162. [↑](#footnote-ref-655)
656. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis* 18-45, 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-656)
657. J. Brenz, *Opera 1: Commentarii in Genesis…* (Tübingen: Gruppenbach, 1576), 105, as quoted in Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-657)
658. Against e.g., Gunkel*, Genesis*, 66: cf. *Genesis Apocryphon* 10.13; and *Jub* 6:1-2, with van Ruiten’s comments, *Primaeval History Reinterpreted*, 224-26. [↑](#footnote-ref-658)
659. So Josephus, *Antiquities* 1, 3:7. [↑](#footnote-ref-659)
660. Cf. D. J. Marwil, “A Soothing Savor,” *JBQ* 42 (2014): 169-72 (170). [↑](#footnote-ref-660)
661. Cf. Kidner, *Genesis*, 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-661)
662. Luther, *Genesis 6-14*, 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-662)
663. R. Bauckham, *The Bible in Politics* (London: SPCK, 1989), 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-663)
664. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 119; the first sentence is in italics. [↑](#footnote-ref-664)
665. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* II, 1:103. [↑](#footnote-ref-665)
666. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-666)
667. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 59. [↑](#footnote-ref-667)
668. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:220. [↑](#footnote-ref-668)
669. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* 1, 2:48. [↑](#footnote-ref-669)
670. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 458. [↑](#footnote-ref-670)
671. See the comment on 6:5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-671)
672. T. E. Fretheim, “Violence and the God of the Old Testament,” in M. Zehnder and H Hagelia (eds.), *Encountering Violence in the Bible* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix, 2013), 108-27 (124). [↑](#footnote-ref-672)
673. See e.g., Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 159-66; Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 75-95; E. Noort, “The Stories of the Great Flood,” in F. G. Martínez and G. P. Luttikhuizen (eds.), *Interpretations of the Flood* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp. 1-38; J. Pfost, “A Literary Analysis of the Flood Story as a Semitic Type-Scene,” *Studia Antiqua* 13/1 (2014): 1-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-673)
674. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 395. [↑](#footnote-ref-674)
675. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-675)
676. But K. Grünwaldt (“Wenn Gott nur einer ist,” *Kerygma und Dogma* 60 [2014]: 95-110) suggests we have something to learn from the way Genesis learns from other understandings of the deluge in its context. [↑](#footnote-ref-676)
677. Cf. J. Lanckau, “Gottliche Reue und menschlicher Trost,” in M. Fieger and J. Lanckau, *Erschaffung und Zerstörung der Schöpfung* (Bern: Lang, 2011), 89-130.  [↑](#footnote-ref-677)
678. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 72-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-678)
679. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-679)
680. Moberly, “On Interpreting the Mind of God,” 63. [↑](#footnote-ref-680)
681. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 165-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-681)
682. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 127. [↑](#footnote-ref-682)
683. Skinner, *Genesis*, 169. [↑](#footnote-ref-683)
684. A hendiadys: cf. Speiser’s “dread fear” (*Genesis*, 58). [↑](#footnote-ref-684)
685. The declarative/performative qatal suggests a speech act, “I hereby give”; another comes in v. 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-685)
686. *Hā’ādam* with the article through vv. 5-6. [↑](#footnote-ref-686)
687. Vg omits *bā’ādām*. TgNeoph take it to mean “by a human being” and TgOnq, TgPsJ expands it to denote by a human court, to safeguard against private vengeance (cf. Aberbach/Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos*, 65). But LXX has “for his blood,” which suggests translating MT “for a human being” (cf. Brayford, *Genesis*, 272-73); andsee the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-687)
688. LXX and Vg tidy up the text to eliminate the move to third person reference to God in v. 6b, but such moves are common in the First Testament (cf. v. 16), partly reflecting the fact that a human being is here speaking for God, so that either “I” or “he” is appropriate. [↑](#footnote-ref-688)
689. For MT’s repeated *rᵉbû* LXX implies *rᵉdû* “hold sway,” conforming to 1:28. [↑](#footnote-ref-689)
690. The declarative/performative qatal again suggests a speech act, “I hereby set”; cf. v. 17. [↑](#footnote-ref-690)
691. *Nāpᵉṣāh* from *nāpaṣ*, a byform of *pûṣ*. [↑](#footnote-ref-691)
692. Literally, “was the first… and he planted.” Hardly “was the first tiller of the soil, and he planted,” nor need LXX imply this understanding (against *NETS*); see the discussion in Brayford, *Genesis*, 275-76. But understood this way, the words would presumably be designating Noah as the first person to take up farming after the deluge. For the absolute use of *ḥālal* hiphil followed by *waw*-consecutive, cf. Ezra 3:8; the more regular construction comes in Gen 10:8. [↑](#footnote-ref-692)
693. Literally, “the servant of servants,” For the translation “servant” for ‘*ebed*, cf. Common English Bible. “Slave” (NRSV, NIV) is misleading; *‘ebed* does not usually denote someone who is the property of another, and the people of Gibeon (see the comment) became servants not slaves. LXX *pais oiketēs*; Vg *servus*, could mean either slave or servant. Midrash Tanḥuma B takes the phrase to denote a permanent servant as opposed to one who would be freed after a period of years (see Lev 25:46) (Aberbach/Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos to Genesis*, 68-69; also TgNeoph). [↑](#footnote-ref-693)
694. LXX, Vg take *lāmô* as meaning “to him” (Vg translates similarly in v. 27); on this possibility, see GK 103f, note 3). But the usual plural understanding fits, following up the collective singular *šēm* (and *yepet*). [↑](#footnote-ref-694)
695. *Yapt* makes for paronomasia with *yepet*. *HALOT*, *DCH* assume there are two verbs *pātāh*, BDB that there is a verb *yapat* of which is the only clear instance, but with some derived words suggesting simple or open-minded, and a denominative verb derived from the latter, *DTT* that there is one verb with both sorts of meaning.. [↑](#footnote-ref-695)
696. That is, God; cf. TgOnq; *GenR* 36:8; Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 146. “May he [Yepet]” is less likely; it is not obvious what Yepet’s living in Šem’s tents would mean, and it is natural to take the subject of this colon to be the same as the subject of the previous colon. [↑](#footnote-ref-696)
697. “Tents of Šem” (*’āhŏlê šēm*) makes for another paronomasia, with “God of Šem” (*’ĕlŏhê šēm*). [↑](#footnote-ref-697)
698. See the introduction to 5:1—6:8 above. [↑](#footnote-ref-698)
699. See K. D. Mulzac, “Genesis 9:1-7,” *JATS* 12 (2001): 65-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-699)
700. J. C. Gertz, “Hams Sündenfall und Kanaans Erbfluch,” in R. Achenbach and M. Arneth (eds.), “***Gerechtigkeit und Recht zu üben* (E. Otto Festschrift;** Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 81-95 (95). [↑](#footnote-ref-700)
701. See T. Römer, “La création des hommes et leur multiplication, *Semitica* 55 (2013): 147-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-701)
702. Cf. Gardner, “Ecojustice,” 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-702)
703. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 398. [↑](#footnote-ref-703)
704. Cf. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:290-91. [↑](#footnote-ref-704)
705. See *DSS* 1:34-35; cf. D. K. Falk, “Divergence from Genesis in the *Genesis Apocryphon*,” in D. W. Parry et al., *Qumran Cave 1 Revisited* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 193-203 (200-2); and more broadly Y. Shemesh, “Vegetarian Ideology in Talmudic Literature and Traditional Biblical Exegesis,” in Brenner et al. (eds.), *Genesis*, 107-27. [↑](#footnote-ref-705)
706. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-706)
707. See the section on “Body and Soul at the end of the commentary on Gen 2. [↑](#footnote-ref-707)
708. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-708)
709. S. Wagner on *dāraš*, *TDOT* 3:294. [↑](#footnote-ref-709)
710. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 468. [↑](#footnote-ref-710)
711. Cf. Ephrem, “Commentary on Genesis,” 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-711)
712. Cf. S. M. Wilson, “Blood Vengeance and the *Imago Dei* in the Flood Narrative,” *Interpretation* 71 (2017): 263-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-712)
713. Cf. Sarna, Genesis, 357. [↑](#footnote-ref-713)
714. Cf. Coats, *Genesis*, 78. [↑](#footnote-ref-714)
715. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-715)
716. Cf. Rashi, *Br’šyt,* 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-716)
717. See S. Van Den Eynde, “The Missing Link,” in Wénin (ed.), *Genesis*, 467-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-717)
718. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 471. [↑](#footnote-ref-718)
719. Cf. A. Chalmers, “The Importance of the Noahic Covenant to Biblical Theology,” *TynB* 60 (2009): 207-16 (213). [↑](#footnote-ref-719)
720. Cf. J. Olley, “Mixed Blessings for Animals,” in Habel/Wurst (eds.), *Earth Story in Genesis*, 130-39 (138). [↑](#footnote-ref-720)
721. Zimmerli, *1. Mose 1—11*, 351. [↑](#footnote-ref-721)
722. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 473. [↑](#footnote-ref-722)
723. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-723)
724. Cf. Sarna, *Genesis*, 63; for the text, Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-724)
725. E. van der Wolde, “One Bow or Another?” *VT* 63 (2013): 124-49; see also P. J. Kissling, “The Rainbow in Genesis 9:12-17,” *Stone-Campbell Journal* 4 (2001) 249-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-725)
726. The latter is Luther’s view (*Genesis 6—14*, 149); Calvin (*Genesis* 2:299) calls it “frivolous.” [↑](#footnote-ref-726)
727. See the comment. [↑](#footnote-ref-727)
728. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-728)
729. Luther, *Genesis 6—14*, 143. [↑](#footnote-ref-729)
730. Indeed, G. R. Kreider questions whether he will do so then (“The Flood Is as Bad as It Gets,” *BSac* 171 [2014]: 418-39). [↑](#footnote-ref-730)
731. Cf. W. S. Towner, “Genesis 9:8-17,” *Interpretation* 63 (2009): 168-71 (168). [↑](#footnote-ref-731)
732. Cf. S. D. Mason, “Another Flood?” *JSOT* 32 (2007}: 177-98 (though he does talk in terms of conditional and unconditional). [↑](#footnote-ref-732)
733. Cf. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 89. [↑](#footnote-ref-733)
734. Cf. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 403. [↑](#footnote-ref-734)
735. So e.g., Qimchi, *Genesis*, on v. 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-735)
736. Cf. Musculus, *In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii*, 249; cf. Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-736)
737. From Aqht A, *ANET*, 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-737)
738. See e.g., J. S. Bergsma and S. W. Hahn, “Noah's Nakedness and the Curse on Canaan,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 25-40. [↑](#footnote-ref-738)
739. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-739)
740. Cf. Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-740)
741. See further B. Embry, “The 'Naked Narrative’from Noah to Leviticus,” *JSOT* 35 (2011): 417-33. [↑](#footnote-ref-741)
742. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 483. [↑](#footnote-ref-742)
743. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-743)
744. So Pfost, “A Literary Analysis of the Flood Story,” 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-744)
745. TgPsJ explains that he discovered through a dream. [↑](#footnote-ref-745)
746. Dillmann, *Genesis* 1:307. [↑](#footnote-ref-746)
747. Willett, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 91, following Chysostom. [↑](#footnote-ref-747)
748. See e.g., D. H. Aaron, “Early Rabbinic Exegesis on Noah's Son Ham and the So-Called 'Hamitic Myth,'” *JAAR* 63 (1994-95): 721-59; O. P. Robertson, “Current Critical Questions Concerning the ‘Curse of Ham,’" *JETS* 41 (1998): 177-188; and especially S. R. Haynes, *Noah’s Curse* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); and more broadly J. Knust, “Who’s Afraid of Canaan’s Curse? *BibInt* 22 (2014): 388-413. [↑](#footnote-ref-748)
749. Mbuvi, *Belonging in Genesis*, 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-749)
750. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-750)
751. Musculus, *In Mosis Genesim plenissimi commentarii*, 255; cf. Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-751)
752. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-752)
753. Cf. Luther, *Genesis 6—14*, 182-84. [↑](#footnote-ref-753)
754. N. Selnecker, *In Genesin* (Leipzig: Johannes Rhamba, 1569), 355; cf. Thompson (ed.), *Genesis 1—11*, 324. [↑](#footnote-ref-754)
755. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 4:251. [↑](#footnote-ref-755)
756. Luther, *Genesis 6—14*, 133, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-756)
757. Brett, *Genesis*, 44 (the clauses are italicized). [↑](#footnote-ref-757)
758. Westermann, *Genesis* *1—11*, 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-758)
759. Cf. Willett, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 87, following Chrysostom. [↑](#footnote-ref-759)
760. Cf. J. R. M. I Tourner, “La sang i la vida humana en Gn 9,1-7,” *Scripta biblica* 9 (2009): 33-65 (41-49). [↑](#footnote-ref-760)
761. For discussion see e.g., P. Verster, “Respek vir die lewe en die doodstraf,” *Acta Theologica* 24 (2004): 168-77. [↑](#footnote-ref-761)
762. Kidner, *Genesis*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-762)
763. See e.g., *b. Sanhedrin* 56a. [↑](#footnote-ref-763)
764. For *dōdānîm*, LXX implies *rōdānîm* (cf. 1 Chron 1:7). Reference to Rhodes would fit the context and in Hebrew r and d look similar. [↑](#footnote-ref-764)
765. LXX, Vg have “island nations,” but “islands” is too narrow for *’iyyîm*, which denotes places one reaches by sea. [↑](#footnote-ref-765)
766. In vv. 8-26 the subject precedes the verb *yālad*, which fits the fact that the subject provides the new information in a genealogy and in this sense has emphasis (see the footnote to 22:1). [↑](#footnote-ref-766)
767. The verb *ḥālal* recurs from 9:20, here followed by an infinitive, the more regular construction. [↑](#footnote-ref-767)
768. Literally, “a strong man of hunting.” [↑](#footnote-ref-768)
769. In isolation *rē’šît* might refer to the “core” of his kingdom, but vv. 11-12 describe its expansion, so “beginning” is more likely. [↑](#footnote-ref-769)
770. The Hebrew has no preposition “to,” so one could translate “Aššur went out” (cf. TgOnq, TgNeoph), but the introduction of Aššur is then abrupt, and he will be introduced in v. 22 as a descendant of Šem. The preposition is omitted after *yāṣā’* in 27:3 and after other verbs of “going” in 24:27; 26:23 (see GK118f; and cf. TgPsJ). Mic 5:6 [5] suggests the assumption that Nimrod went to Aššur. [↑](#footnote-ref-770)
771. Cf. Vg for this understanding of *rᵉḥōbōt ‘îr*, with Hamilton’s comments (*Genesis 1—17*. 340); LXX takes it as the name of an otherwise-unknown city. [↑](#footnote-ref-771)
772. There is no word for “sons”; the construction breaks down. [↑](#footnote-ref-772)
773. LXX assumes that “the oldest” describes Yepet, but the order of the brothers when they are listed is always Šem, Ḥam, Yepet (9:24 raises special problems: see the comment). More likely, “the eldest” describes Šem. Perhaps LXX was misled by the order of the genealogies in this chapter, but on any theory these genealogies do not come in order of age. [↑](#footnote-ref-773)
774. Literally “one." [↑](#footnote-ref-774)
775. LXX, Vg have “from,” the natural understanding of *min*, but this meaning does not always apply in such expressions (cf. 2:8; 3:24; 12:8; 13:11), and it makes poor sense here. TgOnq has *b* in place of *min*. [↑](#footnote-ref-775)
776. *Nābᵉlāh*, suggestively similar to the word for moral stupidity, *nābēlāh* (Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 235). [↑](#footnote-ref-776)
777. Literally, “one named” (GK 144d). [↑](#footnote-ref-777)
778. Gen 5:32 combined with 7:6 suggest that Šem would be 102 when Arpakšad was born; perhaps we should take the 500 and 100 in these texts as approximate. [↑](#footnote-ref-778)
779. In vv. 7-26, the numbers vary between MT, SP, and LXX; Vg corresponds to MT except in v. 13. MT’s numbers mean that (e.g.) Šem is still alive in the time of Jacob; perhaps SP and LXX reflect recensions that had therefore modified the numbers (cf. the comment on the numbers in Gen 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-779)
780. *Genesis 6—14*, 236. Calvin calls the division at 12:1 “absurd,” though he locates the new beginning of a section at 11:31 (*Genesis* 1:338, 341). [↑](#footnote-ref-780)
781. Reno, *Genesis*, 130. [↑](#footnote-ref-781)
782. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 498. [↑](#footnote-ref-782)
783. See the comment on 11:8-9; also Luke 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-783)
784. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 91. [↑](#footnote-ref-784)
785. So T. Hieke, “Die Völkertafel von Genesis 10,” in A.-B. Renger and I. Toral-Niehoff (eds.), *Genealogie und Migrationsmythen* (Berlin: Topoi, 2014), 23-40 (32). [↑](#footnote-ref-785)
786. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 502-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-786)
787. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 529. [↑](#footnote-ref-787)
788. Von Rad, *Genesis*, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-788)
789. Concerning the peoples in vv. 2-4, see further e.g., *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-789)
790. *Antiquities* 1, 6.1; cf. TgPsJ. [↑](#footnote-ref-790)
791. See recently J. Day, “Where Was Tarshish,” in Provain/Boda (eds.), *Let Us Go Up to Zion*, 359-69. [↑](#footnote-ref-791)
792. On which see G. Darshan, “The Biblical Account of the Post-Diluvian Generation (Gen. 9:20-10:32) in the Light of Greek Genealogical Literature,” *VT* 63 (2013): 515-35. [↑](#footnote-ref-792)
793. On the other names, see e.g., *HALOT*. See further Montgomery, *Arabia and the Bible*, 37-53. [↑](#footnote-ref-793)
794. See Driver, *Genesis*, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-794)
795. See Y. Levin, “Nimrod the Mighty, King of Kish, King of Sumer and Akkad,” *VT* 52 (2002): 350-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-795)
796. Cf. M. Oduyọye, *The Sons of God and the Daughters of Men* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-796)
797. See e.g., Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*,516; B. A. Strawn, “Comparative Approaches,” in J. M. LeMon and K. H. Richards (eds,), *Method Matters* (D. L. Petersen Festschrift; Atlanta: SBL, 2009), 117-42 (132-34). [↑](#footnote-ref-797)
798. Cf. Driver, *Genesis*, 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-798)
799. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*,218. I. Knohl notes the similarity of the Genesis phrase to an equivalent Mesopotamian expression (“Nimrod, Son of Cush,” in Cohen et al. [eds.], *Birkat Shalom*, 45-52 [50]). [↑](#footnote-ref-799)
800. Ibn Ezra, *Genesis*, 132; he recognizes that “before Yahweh” implies worship. Contrast e.g., TgPsJ; TgNeoph (which calls Nimrod “a strong man in sin”); and recently M. K. Y. H. Hom, “. . . A Mighty Hunter before YHWH,” *VT* 60 (2010): 63-68; D. Petrovich, “Identifying Nimrod,” *JETS* 56 (2013): 273-305. [↑](#footnote-ref-800)
801. On the location of these places, see Jericke, *Die Ortsangaben im Buch Genesis*, 42-54. [↑](#footnote-ref-801)
802. R. Hendel sees Genesis as appropriating a piece of Mesopotamian history and claiming its hero as “before Yahweh” (“Genesis 1—11 and Its Mesopotamian Problem,” in E. S. Gruen {ed.], *Cultural Borrowings*

     *and Ethnic Appropriations in Antiquity* [Stuttgart: Steiner, 2005], 23-36 [30]). [↑](#footnote-ref-802)
803. See *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-803)
804. Unless you go a rather indirect way, as V. A. Hurowitz suggests in arguing for the identification of Resen with Dur-sharrukin (“In Search of Resen,” in Cohen et al. [eds.], *Birkat Shalom*, 511-24). See also A. van fer Kooij, “The City of Babel and Assyrian Imperialism,” in A. Lemaire (ed.), *Congress Volume Leiden 2004* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 1-17; T. Fenton, “Nimrod’s Cities,” in Dell et al. (eds.), *Genesis, Isaiah, and Psalms*, 23-31. [↑](#footnote-ref-804)
805. See e.g., *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-805)
806. Hamilton, *Genesis 1—17*, 341. [↑](#footnote-ref-806)
807. See e.g., *HALOT*. [↑](#footnote-ref-807)
808. *Hebrew Questions on Genesis*, 42; cf. *GenR* 37.6; TgPsJ; TgNeoph. [↑](#footnote-ref-808)
809. Day, *Creation to Babel*, 181. [↑](#footnote-ref-809)
810. Cf. R. Tadiello, “La dispersione occasione positiva di crescita,” *Bibbia e Oriente* 129-48 (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-810)
811. See the comment on 11:3; and see e.g., Wenham, *Genesis 1—15*, 236-37. He also notes the prominence of assonance in the story, and suggests a detailed palistrophic understanding of it on the basis of parallels between the two halves (*Genesis 1—15*, 235; cf. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis*, 11-45), though v. 6 does not fit into the outline (cf. P. J. Harland, “Vertical or Horizontal: the Sin of Babel,” *VT* 48 [1998]: 515-33 [519-20]; J. S. Baden, “The Tower of Babel,” *JBL* 128 [2009]: 209-24, discusses more broadly the interrelationship of such literary approaches and of historical criticism). [↑](#footnote-ref-811)
812. Sarna, *Genesis*, 81. C. Uehlinger (*Weltraich und “eine Rede,”* [Göttingen: Vandenhoeck: 1990) sees it as originally a polemic against a world power of the day which has as its background an unfinished building project of Sargon II. S. Reimer (“The Tower of Babel,” *Direction* 25 [1996]: 64-72) rather finds its background in the fall of the Uruk empire. P. T. Penley (“A Historical Reading of Genesis 11:1-9,” *JETS* 50 [2007]: 693-714) sees it in the collapse of the Sumerian civilization. P. M. Sherman surveys the history of the story’s interpretation in *Babel’s Tower Translated* (Leiden: Brill, 2013). [↑](#footnote-ref-812)
813. See e.g., Rashi, *Br’šyt*, 105; TgPsJ; and I. E. Mozeson, “Could Pre-Hebrew Be the *Safa Ahat* ofGenesis 11:1?” *JBQ* 38 (2010): 55-61. [↑](#footnote-ref-813)
814. Calvin, *Genesis* 1:331. [↑](#footnote-ref-814)
815. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 545-46; cf. *ANET*, 68-69; Hays, *Hidden Riches*, 55-56. [↑](#footnote-ref-815)
816. See A. Giorgetti, “The ‘Mock Building Account’ of Genesis 11:1-9,” *VT* 64 (2014): 1-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-816)
817. Cf. Willet, *Hexapla in Genesin & Exodum*, 107, 108. [↑](#footnote-ref-817)
818. See further S. Anthonioz, *Babel la tête dans le ciel* (Paris: Gabalda, 2015); she relates the story to the destruction of the Jerusalem temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-818)
819. Cf. A. Bornapé, “El motive de un ‘nombre’ en la historia de la Torre de Babel,” *DavarLogos* 9 (2010): 127-133. [↑](#footnote-ref-819)
820. Cf. Sherman, *Babel’s Tower Translated*, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-820)
821. Which argues against a link with the ziggurat (Uehlinger, *Weltraich und “eine Rede,”* 231-36; cf. W. C. Marlowe, “The Sin of Shinar,” *European Journal of Theology* 20 (2011): 29-39 (he stresses the aggressive as well as the defensive nature of the builders’ project). [↑](#footnote-ref-821)
822. Cf. Z. Ron, “The Book of Jubilees and the Midrash Part 3,” *JBQ* 42 (2014): 165-68. On this traditional understanding, see further T. Hiebert, “Babel: Babble or Blueprint?” in W. M. Alston and M. Welker (eds.), *Reformed Theology: Identity and Ecumenicity II* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 127-45. [↑](#footnote-ref-822)
823. Giorgetti, “The ‘Mock Building Account’ of Genesis 11:1-9,” 13-19. [↑](#footnote-ref-823)
824. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 147. [↑](#footnote-ref-824)
825. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 4:316. [↑](#footnote-ref-825)
826. Fretheim, “Genesis,” 411. [↑](#footnote-ref-826)
827. Cf. J. O. Ojo, “Is Globalization a Re-Enactment of One World Language in Genesis 11:1-9? *Practical Theology* 6 (2013): 101-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-827)
828. Cf. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 551. [↑](#footnote-ref-828)
829. Cf. Gunkel, *Genesis*, 97. [↑](#footnote-ref-829)
830. See J. Grossman, “The Double Etymology of Babel in Genesis 11,” *ZAW* 129 (2017): 362-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-830)
831. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:288. [↑](#footnote-ref-831)
832. See C. Kaminski, *From Noah to Israel* (London: Clark, 2004). [↑](#footnote-ref-832)
833. Westermann, *Genesis 1—11*, 566. [↑](#footnote-ref-833)
834. *ANET*, 265. See further T. Jacobsen, *The Sumerian King List* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1939). Josephus (*Antiquities* 1, 3:4) describes the figures in Gen 5 as rulers. [↑](#footnote-ref-834)
835. Cf. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 4:310-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-835)
836. See N. Habel, “Canaan, Land of Promise,” in F. R. Ames and C. W. Miller (eds.), *Foster Biblical Scholarship* (K. H. Richards Festschrift; Atlanta: SBL, 2010), 269-78. [↑](#footnote-ref-836)
837. See I. Ballenger, "Missiological Thoughts Prompted by Genesis 10,” *RevExp* 103 (2006): 391-401. [↑](#footnote-ref-837)
838. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 94, 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-838)
839. See the comments on 12:7a. [↑](#footnote-ref-839)
840. Seebass, *Genesis* 1:286. [↑](#footnote-ref-840)
841. Cf. T. Hiebert, “The Tower of babel and the Origin of the World’s Cultures,” *JBL* 126 [2007]: 29-58; cf. J. T. Strong, “Shattering the Image of God,” *JBL* 127 [2008]: 625-34). [↑](#footnote-ref-841)
842. M. Moyaert, “A ‘Babelish’ World,” *Horizons* 36 (2009): 215-34 (217). She is particularly concerned to undermine the gloomy implications of the cultural-linguistic theory of religion. [↑](#footnote-ref-842)
843. Barth, *Dogmatics* III, 4:318. [↑](#footnote-ref-843)
844. J. S. Croatto, “A Reading of the Story of the Tower of Babel,” in F. F. Segovia and M. A. Tolbert (eds.), *Teaching the Bible* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2004), 203-23 (222). Cf. (also from Latin American perspective) J. Miguez-Bonino, “Genesis 11:1-9,” in J. J. Levison and P. Pope-Levison (eds.), *Return to Babel* (Louisville: WJK, 1999): 13-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-844)
845. See General Synod of the Dutch Reformed Church, *Human Relations and the South African Scene in the Light of Scripture* (Cape Town: Dutch Reformed Church, 1976), 13-21. See further M. Rathbone, “Unity and Scattering,” in Brenner et al. (eds.), *Genesis*,99-106. [↑](#footnote-ref-845)
846. Cf. A. Hock, “From Babel to the New Jerusalem,” *Biblical 89 (2008): 109-18.* [↑](#footnote-ref-846)
847. Luther, *Genesis 6—14*, 225, 214-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-847)
848. Mbuvi, *Belonging in Genesis*, 106. [↑](#footnote-ref-848)
849. Cf. Chrysostom, *Homilies on Genesis 18-45*, 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-849)
850. Cf. A. Lacocque, “Whatever Happened in the valley of Shinar,” *JBL* 128 (2009): 29-41 (33-34). [↑](#footnote-ref-850)
851. Cf. von Rad, *Genesis*, 149. [↑](#footnote-ref-851)