

John H. Sailhamer

# The Pentateuch as Literature

## A Biblical–Theological Commentary

Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992

Chapter 1, Sections I.A–B, on the Creation stories of Genesis (pages 81–116)

## Chapter 1

### GENESIS

#### I. INTRODUCTION TO THE PATRIARCHS AND THE SINAI COVENANT (1:1-11:26)

Chapters 1–11 form an introduction to both the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch as a whole. One should read these chapters with this dual purpose in mind. They set the stage for the narratives of the patriarchs (Ge 12–50) as well as provide the appropriate background for understanding the central topic of the Pentateuch: the Sinai covenant (Exodus–Deuteronomy).

The author of the Pentateuch has carefully selected and arranged Genesis 1–11 to serve its function as an introduction. Behind the present shape of the narrative lies a clear theological program. Nearly every section of the work displays the author’s theological interest, which can be summarized in two points. First, he intends to draw a line connecting the God of the fathers and the God of the Sinai covenant with the God who created the world. Second, he intends to show that the call of the patriarchs and the Sinai covenant have as their ultimate goal the reestablishment of God’s original purpose in Creation. In a word, the biblical covenants are marked off as the way to a new Creation.

#### A. The Land and the Blessing (1:1-2:24)

A close look at the narrative style of the opening chapters of Genesis suggests that the first two chapters form a single unit. This unit has three primary sections. The first section is 1:1, which stands apart from the rest of chapter 1. The remaining two sections are 1:2–2:3 and 2:4b–25. The heading entitled “generations” in 2:4a serves to connect these last two sections.

Two primary themes dominate the Creation account: the land and the

blessing. In recounting the events of Creation, the author has selected and arranged his narrative to allow these themes full development. The preparation of the land and the divine blessing are important to the author of Genesis (and the Pentateuch) because these two themes form the basis of his treatment of the patriarchal narratives and the Sinai covenant. In translating the Hebrew word ארץ (“earth”) in 1:1–2, the English versions have blurred the connection of these early verses of Genesis to the central theme of the land in the Pentateuch. Although ארץ can be translated by either “earth” or “land,” the general term *land* in English more closely approximates its use in chapter 1. Thus from the start the author betrays his interest in the covenant by concentrating on the land in the account of creation. “Nothing is here by chance; everything must be considered carefully, deliberately, and precisely.”<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Beginning (1:1)

The account opens with a clear, concise statement<sup>2</sup> about the Creator and the Creation. Its simplicity belies the depth of its content. These seven words (in Hebrew) are the foundation of all that is to follow in the Bible. The purpose of the statement is threefold: to identify the Creator, to explain the origin of the world, and to tie the work of God in the past to the work of God in the future.

The Creator is identified in 1:1 as God, that is, Elohim. Although God is not further identified here (cf., e.g., Ge 15:7; Ex 20:2), the author appears confident that his readers will identify this God with the God of the fathers and the God of the covenant at Sinai. In other words, the proper context for understanding 1:1 is the whole of the book of Genesis and the Pentateuch. Already in Genesis 2:4b God (Elohim) is identified with the Lord (YHWH), the God who called Abraham (Ge 12:1) and delivered Israel from Egypt (Ex 3:15). The God of Genesis 1:1, then, is far from a faceless deity. From the perspective of the Pentateuch as a whole he is the God who has called the fathers into his good land, redeemed his people from Egypt, and led them again to the borders of the land, a land which he provided and now calls on them to enter and possess. He is the “Redeemer–Shepherd” of Jacob’s blessing in 48:15. The purpose of 1:1 is not to identify this God in a general way but to identify him as the Creator of the universe.

GENESIS 83

It is not difficult to detect a polemic against idolatry behind the words of this verse. By identifying God as the Creator, the author introduces a crucial distinction between the God of the fathers and the gods of the nations, gods that the biblical authors considered mere idols. God alone created the heavens and the earth. The sense of 1:1 is similar to the message in the book of Jeremiah that Israel was to carry to all the nations: “Tell them this,” Jeremiah said, “These gods, who did not make the heavens and the earth, will perish from the earth and from under the heavens” (Jer 10:11). Psalm 96:5 shows that later biblical writers appreciated the full impact of Genesis 1:1 as well: “For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD [YHWH] made the heavens.”

<sup>1</sup> Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 45.

<sup>2</sup> The first verse, a verbal clause, should be taken as an independent statement rather than a summary of the rest of chapter 1. Thus 1:1 describes God’s first work of creation *ex nihilo*, and the rest of the chapter describes God’s further activity. The author’s usual style in Genesis is to use nominal clauses as summary statements at the beginning of a narrative (e.g., 2:4a; 5:1; 6:9; 11:10), and verbal clauses as summaries at the end of the narrative (e.g., 2:1; 25:34b; 49:28b). Moreover, the conjunction at the beginning of 1:2 shows that 1:2–2:3 is coordinated with 1:1 rather than appositional. If the first verse were intended as a summary of the rest of the chapter, it would not be followed by a conjunction (e.g., 2:4a; 5:1). The conjunction in 2:5a further demonstrates the role of the conjunction in coordinating clauses, e.g., “When the Lord God made earth and heaven, *now* there was not yet any shrub of the field... The LORD God made man” (2:4b–7). Furthermore, the fact that 2:1 is already a well-formed summary of 1:2–31 suggests that 1:1 has another purpose.

The statement in Genesis 1:1 not only identifies the Creator but also explains the origin of the world. According to the sense of 1:1, God created all that exists in the universe. As it stands, the statement is an affirmation that God alone is eternal and that all else owes its origin and existence to him. The influence of this verse is reflected throughout the work of later biblical writers (e.g., Ps 33:6; Jn 1:3; Heb 11:3).

Equally important in 1:1 is the meaning of the phrase “in the beginning” within the framework of the Creation account and the book of Genesis.<sup>3</sup> The term *beginning* in biblical Hebrew marks a starting point of a specific duration, as in “the beginning of the year” (Dt 11:12). The end of a specific period is marked by its antonym, “the end,” as in “the end of the year” (Dt 11:12).<sup>4</sup> In opening the account of Creation with the phrase “in the beginning,” the author has marked Creation as the starting point of a period of time. “Hence will here be the beginning of the history which follows.... The history to be related from this point onwards was heaven and earth for its object, its scenes, its factors. At the head of this history stands the creation of the world as its commencement, or at all events its foundation.”<sup>5</sup> By commencing this history with a “beginning,” a word often paired with its antonym “end,” the author has not only commenced a history of God and his people but also prepared the way for the consummation of that history at “the end of time.”<sup>6</sup>

The growing focus within the biblical canon on the times of the “end” is an appropriate extension of the “end” already anticipated in the “beginning” of Genesis 1:1. The fundamental principle reflected in 1:1 and the prophetic vision of the end times in the rest of Scripture is that the “last things will be like the first things”:<sup>7</sup> “Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth” (Isa 65:17); “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev 21:1). The allusions to Genesis 1 and 2 in Revelation 22 illustrate the role that these

84 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

early chapters of Genesis played in shaping the form and content of the scriptural vision of the future.

The phrase “the heavens and the earth,” or more precisely, “sky and land,” is a figure of speech for the expression of totality. Its use in the Bible appears to be restricted to the totality of the present world order. It is equivalent to the “all things” in Isaiah 44:24 (cf. Ps 103:19; Jer 10:16). Of particular importance is that its use elsewhere in Scripture suggests that the phrase includes the sun and moon as well as the stars (e.g., Joel 3:15–16 [MT 4:15–16]). Since Genesis 1:1 describes God’s creating the universe, we should read the rest of the chapter from that perspective. For example, the “light” of verse 3 is the light of the sun created already “in the beginning.” It has long been apparent that the notion of God’s creating the universe in the beginning raises the question of what God did on the fourth day; it appears that on that day, rather than “in the beginning,” God created the “sun, moon, and stars.” We will attempt to answer that question in the discussion of the fourth day.

## 2. Preparation of the Land (1:2-2:3)

As a praise of God’s grace, the theme of the remainder of the Creation account (1:2–2:25) is God’s gift of the land. God first prepared the land for men and women by dividing the waters and furnishing its resources (1:2–27). Then he gave the land and its resources as a blessing to be safeguarded by obedience

---

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of the syntax of the first word, בראשית, “In the beginning,” see my “Genesis,” *EBC* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 2:21.

<sup>4</sup> H. P. Müller, *THAT*, 709.

<sup>5</sup> Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis*, trans. Sophia Taylor (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1888), 76.

<sup>6</sup> See Otto Procksch, *Die Genesis übersetzt und erklärt*, KAT, 1st ed. (Leipzig: Deichert, 1913), 425: “Already in Genesis 1:1 the concept of ‘the last days’ fills the mind of the reader.”

<sup>7</sup> Ernst Böklen, *Die Verwandtschaft der jüdisch-christlichen mit der Parsischen Eschatologie* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck K. Ruprecht, 1902), 136.

(2:16–17). Since a similar pattern is reflected in the psalm of Moses (Ex 15:1–18), where God leads his people to the promised land through the divided waters of the Red Sea, the creation account appears to be the narrative equivalent to such a hymn. The purpose is the same in both texts: “This is my God, I will praise him, my father’s God, I will exalt him” (Ex 15:2). At another point in the Pentateuch— the poem in Deuteronomy 32— the author draws a similar connection between God’s gracious work of Creation and his gracious covenant with Israel. There, in terminology clearly reminiscent of Genesis 1, Moses portrayed God’s loving care for Israel over against Israel’s chronic disobedience. In that poem the loss of the land, which was to come in the future exile, was portrayed as the height of folly over against God’s gracious and loving provision for his people. We will see throughout these early chapters that the viewpoint reflected in Moses’ final song plays a major role in the theological shaping of these narratives.

### **a. Day One (1:2-5)**

Verse 2 describes the condition of the land before God prepared it for human beings. The sense of the phrase “formless and empty”<sup>8</sup> must be

GENESIS 85

gained from the context alone. The immediate context (1:2a, 9) suggests that the land was described as “formless and empty” because “darkness” was upon the land and because the land was “covered with water.” The general context of chapter 1 suggests that the author means “formless and empty” to describe the condition of the land before God made it “good.” Before God began his work the land was “formless” (*tōhū*), and God then made it “good” (*tōb*). Thus the expression “formless and empty” refers ultimately to the condition of the land in its “not-yet” state— in its state before God made it “good.” In this sense the description of the land in 1:2 is similar to the description of the land in 2:5–6. Both texts describe the land as “not yet” what it shall be.<sup>9</sup>

In the light of the fact that the remainder of the chapter pictures God preparing the land as a place for human beings to dwell, we should understand verse 2 to focus our attention on the land as a place not yet humanly inhabitable.<sup>10</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> The English translation of *tōhū wābōhū* as “formless and empty” (NIV) or “without form and void” (RSV) often leads to an understanding of the description of the earth as a chaotic, amorphous mass, rather than calling to mind an uninhabitable stretch of wasteland, a wilderness not yet inhabitable by human beings, as is suggested in the first chapter. The translation often stirs up images of the earth and the universe in a primeval stage of existence, much like the view of the origin of the universe in the physical sciences: a mass of cooling gases, whirling aimlessly through space not yet in its present spherical shape (e.g., “an original formless matter in the first stage of the creation of the universe,” New Scofield Bible [New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967], 1). Though such a picture could find support in the English expression “without form and void,” it is not an image likely to arise out of the Hebrew.

The origin of the English translation is apparently the Greek version (LXX), which translates with “unseen” and “unformed.” Since both terms play an important role in the Hellenistic cosmologies at the time of the Greek translation, it is likely that the choice of these terms, and others within the LXX of Genesis, was motivated by an attempt to harmonize the biblical account with accepted views in the translators’ own day rather than a strict adherence to the sense of the Hebrew text (Armin Schmitt, “Interpretation der Genesis aus hellenistischen Geist,” ZAW 86 [1974]: 150–51). The later Greek versions, e.g., Aquila (“empty and nothing” and Symmachus (“fallow and undistinct”), decidedly moved away from the LXX. It is also important to note that the early Semitic versions have no trace of the concepts found in the LXX; e.g., Neophyti I appropriately paraphrases with “desolate without human beings or beast and void of an cultivation of plants and of trees.” The Vulgate (*inanis et vacua*) also shows little relationship to the Greek.

Within the English versions the influence of the LXX is at least as old as the Geneva Bible (“without form and void,” 1599), reflecting Calvin’s own translation, *informis et inanis* (p. 67). Calvin’s commentary on these words, however, shows that his understanding of the translation *informis et inanis* is quite different from the image suggested to the modern reader in the English equivalent “formless and void”: “Were we now to take away, I say, from the earth all that God added after the time here alluded to, then we should have this rude and unpolished, or rather shapeless chaos” (p. 73). In the days of the early English versions, the terms *formless* and *void* would not have suggested the same cosmological images as they do in a scientific age such as our own.

<sup>9</sup> Hans Westermann, *Genesis*, trans. John J. Scullion, 3 vols. (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984–1986), 1:94–95, 102.

<sup>10</sup> Ibn Ezra, *Torat Chaim Chumash* (Hebrew), ed. M. L. Gesinlinburg (Jerusalem: Mossad Harav Kook, 1986), 7.

Having described the land as uninhabitable, the author uses the remainder of the account to portray God's preparing the land as the place of human dwelling.<sup>11</sup> The description of the land as "formless and empty" in

verse 2a, then, plays a central role in the Creation account because it shows the condition of the land before God's gracious work has prepared it for humanity's well-being (*tôb*). Deuteronomy 32 draws on the same imagery

(v. 10) to depict Israel's time of waiting in the wilderness before their entry / into the good land. The prophets also drew from the same source to depict / God's judgment of exile. When Israel disobeyed God, the land became again \. "uninhabitable" (*tohu*) and the people were sent into exile: "I looked at the {land and it was formless and empty [*tohu waQohu*] and at the heavens and (. their light was gone.... The fruitful land was a desert" (fer 4:23–26). The

"\land after the Exile was depicted in the same state as the land before God's gracious preparation of it in Creation. The description of the land in Genesis 1:2, then, fits well into the prophet's vision of the future. The land lies empty, dark, and barren, awaiting God's call to light and life. Just as the light of the sun broke in upon the primeval darkness heralding the dawn of God's first blessing (1:3), so also the prophets and the apostles mark the beginning of the new age of salvation with the light that shatters the darkness (Isa 8:229:2 [MT 3]; Mt 4:13–17; Jn 1:5, 8–9).

Similar ideas are already at work in the composition of Genesis 1. Just as the future messianic salvation would be marked by a flowering of the desert (Isa 35:1–2), so also God's final acts of salvation are foreshadowed in Creation. The wilderness waits for its restoration. Henceforth the call to prepare for the coming day of salvation while yet waiting in the wilderness would become the hallmark of the prophets' vision of the future (Isa 40:3; Mk 1:4–5; Rev 12:6, 14–15).

The way in which later biblical writers reuse the terminology and themes of Genesis 1 suggests that the notion of "land" in this chapter is more circumspect than it is usually taken to be. The common understanding of the term *land* (אֶרֶץ) in Genesis 1:2 is "earth," or the "inhabited earth." Jeremiah 27:5, however, shows that later biblical writers read Genesis 1 as referring primarily to the "land" promised to the patriarchs and to Israel. This raises the question of whether the "Promised Land" is the land described here in Genesis 1:2 and hence whether the whole of Genesis 1:2–31 and 2:1–14 are primarily about God's preparation of the Promised Land as the "good land" for humanity's dwelling. So, then, 1:1 describes God's creation of the universe and 1:2–2:3 narrows the reader's focus to just one small but, from the perspective of the writer, all-important place, the land to be promised to Abraham and his descendants (15:18–19).<sup>12</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The meaning of the word *tôhû* (formless) here is identical to its meaning in Isa 45:18 "[God] did not create it [the land] to be empty [*tôhû*], but formed it to be inhabited." The term *empty* (*tôhû*) in the Isaiah passage stands in opposition to the phrase "to be inhabited." This is the same meaning of the word (*tôhû*) in Dt 32:10. There "formless" (*tôhû*) parallels "desert" (*miqbār*), an uninhabitable wasteland.

<sup>12</sup> The following points suggest reading "land" in Ge 1:2 as specifically referring to the land promised to the patriarchs in Ge 15:18–19. (1) The sense of the term *land* throughout Ge 1 is that of "the dry land" as opposed to a body of water (אֶרֶץ) of water (1:10). The notion of the "earth," as opposed to the other heavenly bodies, is not a feature of the term אֶרֶץ in Ge 1. (2) The compositional links between Ge 1 and 2 suggest that the location of the events of Ge 2 are the same as those of Ge 1. The boundaries of the location of Ge 2 are the Tigris, Euphrates, and the river that goes through Kush (Egypt). These are the same boundaries which are given for the Promised Land in Ge 15:18–19. (3) Though the text is clear that the flood was widespread over all the earth, the "land" (אֶרֶץ) that is the focus of the Flood account is the same as the "land" (אֶרֶץ) in the narrative' in Ge 11. The "land" in Ge 11 is clearly the Promised Land in that it is from this "land" that humankind travels "eastward" (12:2) and settles in the "land of Babylon."

The second part of verse 2 has received remarkably diverse interpretations. The central question is whether the last clause in verse 2 ("The Spirit of God was hovering over the waters") belongs with the first two clauses and hence further describes the state of the uninhabitable land, or whether it belongs to the following verse (3) and describes the work of God, or the Spirit of God, in the initial stages of Creation. In the first instance it would be translated "a mighty wind," while in the second instance it would be translated "the Spirit of God," as in most English versions.

Although many modern interpreters have read the clause as "a mighty wind," the traditional reading "Spirit of God" seems the only reading compatible with the verb "hovering," a verb not suited to describing the blowing of a wind. Moreover the image of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters is similar to the depiction of God in Deuteronomy 32:11 as an eagle "hovering" over the nest of its young, protecting and preparing their nest. The use of a similar image of God at both the beginning and end of the Pentateuch suggests that the picture of the Spirit of God is intended here.

Another observation in support of the meaning "Spirit of God" in verse 2 comes from the parallels between the Creation account (Ge 1) and the account of the construction of the tabernacle in Exodus. Although many lines of comparison can be drawn between the two accounts, showing that the writer intends a thematic identity between the two narratives, it will suffice here to note that in both accounts the work of God (Ge 2:2; Ex 31:5) is to be accomplished by the "Spirit of God." As God did his "work" of creation by means of the "Spirit of God," so Israel was to do their "work" by means of the "Spirit of God."

In verse 3, God said, "Let there be light." Not until verse 16, however, does the text speak of God making the sun. Consequently, verse 3 has often been taken to mean that God created light before he created the sun. It should be noted, however, that the sun, moon, and stars are all included in the usual meaning of the phrase "the heavens and the earth," and thus according to the present account these celestial bodies were all created in verse 1. Verse 3 then does not describe the creation of the sun but the sun's breaking through the morning darkness, much the way the sunrise is described in Genesis 44:3; Exodus 10:23; and Nehemiah 8:3. The narrative does not explain the cause of the darkness in verse 2, just as it does not explain the cause of the similar darkness in the land of Egypt in Exodus 10:22. The absence of an explanation in either case is, however, insufficient grounds for assuming that the sun had not yet been created. The expression "the heavens and the earth" does not easily permit that assumption. (See further on 1:14-16.) The division between "the day" and "the night" in verse 4 also leaves little room for an interpretation of the "light" in verse 3 as other than that of the light from the sun.

Given the frequent repetitions of the phrase "And God saw that it was good" (1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31), we may assume that the narrative intends to emphasize this element. In the light of such an emphasis at the beginning of the book, it is hardly accidental that throughout Genesis and the Pentateuch the activity of "seeing" is continually at the center of the author's conception of God. The first name given to God within the book is that of Hagar: "*El Roi*," the "God who sees" (16:13). Moreover, in 22:1-19, a central chapter dealing with the nature of God in Genesis, the narrative concludes

88 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

on the theme that God is the one who "sees." Thus the place where the Lord appeared to Abraham is called "The LORD will see" (22:14). Though the English versions often translate the verb *ra'a* ("see") in this passage as "provide," as it should be, the Hebrew word *ra'a* comes to mean "provide" only secondarily. The translation is dependent on the particular context, but the sense is the same in either case. This is similar to the expression "to see to it" in English, which is the same sense as "to provide."

The close connection between the notion of “seeing” and “providing,” which is brought out so clearly in chapter 22, likely plays an important role in the sense of the verb “see” in chapter 1. In a tragic reversal of his portrayal of God’s “seeing” the “good” in Creation, the author subsequently returns to the notion of God’s “seeing” at the opening of the account of the Flood. Here too the biblical God is the God who “sees,” but at that point in the narrative, after the Fall, God no longer “saw” the “good,” but rather he “saw that human evil was great upon the land” (6:5). The verbal parallels suggest that the author intends the two narratives to contrast the state of humanity before and after the Fall.

The “good” which the author has in view has a very specific range of meaning in chapter 1— the “good” is that which is beneficial for humankind. Note, for example, how in the description of the work of the second day (1:6–8) the narrative does not say that “God saw that it was good.” The reason is that on that day nothing was created or made that was, in fact, “good” or beneficial for humanity. The heavens were made and the waters divided, but the land, where human beings were to dwell, still remained hidden under the “deep.” The land was still “formless” (*tōhû*); it was not yet a place where a human being could dwell. Only on the third day, when the sea was parted and the dry land appeared, could the text say, “God saw that it was good.”

Throughout this opening chapter the author depicts God as the one who both knows what is “good” for humankind and is intent on providing the good for them. In this way the author has prepared the reader for the tragedy that awaits in chapter 3. It is in the light of an understanding of God as the one who know “good” from “evil” and who is intent on providing humanity with the good that the human beings’ rebellious attempt to gain the knowledge of “good and evil” for themselves can be seen clearly for the folly that it was. The author seems bent on portraying the fall of humanity not merely as a sin but also as the work of fools. When we read the portrayal of God in chapter 1 as the provider of all that is good and beneficial, we cannot help but see an anticipation of the author’s depiction of the hollowness of that first rebellious thought: “And the woman saw that the tree was good... and able to make one wise” (3:6). Here again the verbal parallels between God’s “seeing the good” in chapter 1 and the woman’s “seeing the good” in chapter 3 cannot be without purpose in the text. In drawing a parallel between the woman’s “seeing” and God’s “seeing,” the author has given a graphic picture of the limits of human wisdom and has highlighted the tragic irony of the Fall.

The fact that many English translations render 1:5b as “the first day” gives the impression that the author views this chapter as describing the first

GENESIS 89

day of creation. The Hebrew text, however, appears deliberately to avoid this impression by stating, “It was evening and morning; one day.”<sup>13</sup>

### **b. The Second Day (1:6-8)**

The sense of the account of the second day of Creation is largely determined by one’s understanding of the author’s perspective. The central question is how the author understands and uses the term *expanse*. Is it used from a cosmological perspective, that is, is it intended to describe a major component of the structured universe?<sup>14</sup> Or does the term describe something immediate in the everyday experience of the author (e.g., the “clouds” that hold the rain)? We must be careful to let neither our own view of the structure of the universe nor what we might think to have been the view of ancient people control our under-

---

<sup>13</sup> See my “Genesis,” *EBC*, 2:28, for a further discussion of the meaning of this expression.

<sup>14</sup> See, e.g., Delitzsch, *Genesis*, 86: “the higher ethereal region, the so-called atmosphere, the sky, is here meant; it is represented as the semi-spherical vault of heaven stretched over the earth and its water.”

standing of the biblical author's description of the "expanse."<sup>15</sup> We must seek clues from the text itself. One such clue is the purpose which the author assigns to the "expanse" in verse 6: "to separate water from water." The "expanse" holds water above the land; that much is certain. A second clue is the name given to the "expanse." In verse 8 it is called the "sky." Finally, we should look at the uses of the term *expanse* within chapter 1. The "expanse" refers not only to the place where God put the sun, moon, and stars (v.14) but also to that place where the birds fly (v. 20, "upon the surface of the expanse of the sky").

Is there a single word or idea that would accommodate such uses of the term *expanse*? Cosmological terms such as "ceiling," vault," or "global ocean," which are often used for "expanse" in this first chapter, do not suit the use of the term in v. 20. Such explanations, though drawn from analogies of ancient Near Eastern cosmologies, appear far too specific for the present context. Thus it would be unlikely that the narrative would have in view here a "solid partition or vault that separates the earth from the waters above."<sup>16</sup> It appears more likely that the narrative has in view something within the everyday experience of the natural world: In a general way, that place where the birds fly and where God placed the lights of heaven (cf. v. 14). In English the word *sky* appears to cover this sense well. The "waters above" the sky is likely a reference to the clouds. That is at least the view that appears to come from the reflections on this passage in later biblical texts. For example, in the account of the Flood in chapter 7, the author refers to the "windows of the sky" which, when opened, pour forth rain (7:11–12; cf. 2Ki 7:2; Pss 104:3; 147:8; 148:4). Furthermore, the writer of Proverbs 8:28 has clearly read the term *expanse* in Genesis 1 as a reference to the "clouds."<sup>\*</sup>

In recent years it has become customary to point to a subtle but significant tension between the accounts of verse 6 and verse 7. Whereas verse 6 recounts the creation of the "expanse" by God's "word" alone ("And

90 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

God said"), it is maintained that verse 7 presents an alternative account of the creation of the "expanse" by God's "act" ("So God made"). It is apparent that throughout chapter 1 there is a consistent alternation between accounts of God's speaking and acting, often giving the impression of duplication (compare v. 11 with v. 12; v. 14 with v. 16; v. 24 with v. 25). This impression is heightened by the presence of the recurring expression "and it was so," which suggests that what God had commanded had been accomplished. A close reading of chapter 1 could make it appear that the author at first recounts God's creative work as the result of God's speaking ("And God said... and it was so"), and then recounts God's work as an act or deed that he carried out to completion ("And God made"). If such observations are correct, we are left with the impression that the Creation account of chapter 1 has very little internal consistency and coherence. Though such a view cannot be ruled out, it is worth asking whether there might be another explanation for the apparent duplicity which runs throughout the whole chapter.

A possible explanation lies in a consideration of the nature of narrative texts like the present account of Creation. A twofold task lies before the authors of such narrative texts. Their responsibility is not only to recount and report events of the past, that is, to maintain a consistent and continuous flow of narrated events within the world of the narrative text. Often they must also supply the reader with more than the bare facts about those events; they must supply a measure of commentary on the events recorded, that is, monitor the reader's understanding and then manage his or her appreciation of those events. Such is the

---

<sup>15</sup> See Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis ubersetzt und erklärt*, 9th ed. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, repr. 1977), 107.

<sup>16</sup> Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:116.

\* [It's hard to see how this is actually so clear. Pr 8:28 reads, תהום עינות בעזו, ממעל באמצו שחקים, "When he established the clouds above, when he strengthened the fountains of the deep." —*ed.*]



case for the author of Genesis, for example, in 2:4. There he momentarily set aside the flow of narrative to address the reader directly with a word of advice and application: “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.” At that point in the narrative, the author is directly managing the reader’s response to the events of the narrative.

Although in the past, little attention was paid to such features of narrative texts, it has become increasingly apparent that narratives have such features to one degree or another.<sup>17</sup> It may be possible to explain some of the difficulties and irregularities in Genesis by looking for such reader-conscious techniques in the narrative. For example, in 1:24, the author recounts that God spoke and the animals came into being (“ And God said... and it was so”). But then he follows that description of God’s work by a reader-oriented comment: God made the animals according to their own kind, and he saw that it was good (v. 25). The purpose of such a comment was presumably to assure the reader that God— no one else— made the animals and, in addition, to underscore that God made the animals according to their kind, a key theme in this chapter that has its ultimate focal point in the one major exception, the creation of human beings according to the image of God.

In other words, behind the Creation account of Genesis 1 there appears to lie the same concern as in Psalm 104, especially verses 27–30: “These all look to you... when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of

*GENESIS 91*

the earth.” God is the Creator of all life, both animal and human. Such a reading of Genesis 1 not only accounts for the duplications within the whole of the chapter but more importantly, allows for a more explicit reckoning of the author’s overall intention. By monitoring his own text, the author reveals his chief interest in the events he is recounting and can be seen at each point along the way preparing the reader for a proper understanding of the narrative.

### **c. *The Third Day (1:9-13)***

There are two distinct acts of God on the third day: the preparation of the dry land and the seas, and the furnishing of the dry land with bushes and fruit trees. Unlike the work of the second day, both acts are called “good.” They are “good” because they are created for human benefit. Both acts relate to the preparation of the land, a central concern of the author (cf. Ge 12:7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:4). The separation of the waters and the preparation of the dry land is to be read in light of the subsequent accounts of the Flood (Ge 6–9) and the parting of the Red Sea (Ex 14–15). In all three accounts, the waters are an obstacle to humanity’s inhabiting the dry land. The water must be removed for human beings to enjoy God’s gift of the land.

But as we learn in the accounts of the Flood and the Red Sea, the waters are also God’s instrument of judgment on those who do not follow his way. The author of Genesis 1 is not merely recounting past events— he is building a case for the importance of obedience to the will of God. In the Creation account of chapter 1, the author begins with the simple picture of God’s awesome power at work harnessing the great sea. It is a picture of God’s work on behalf of humanity’s “good.” But in the Flood account, when the narrative returns to the picture of God’s power over the waters of the great sea, the water is a bitter reminder of the other side of God’s power. The sea has become an instrument of God’s judgment.

In his second act on the third day God furnished the land with bushes and fruit trees. In the present shape of the narrative it is likely that the author intends the reader to connect God’s furnishing the land with fruit trees in chapter 1 and his furnishing the “garden” with trees “good for food” in chapter 2. Whatever

---

<sup>17</sup> Robert de Beaugrade and Wolfgang Dressler, *Introduction to Text Linguistics* (London: Longman, 1981), 163ff.

our opinion may be about whether the two accounts of Creation in chapters 1 and 2 originally belonged together, there is little doubt that as they are put together in the narrative before us, they are meant to be read as one account.

The implications of reading the two chapters together are greater than has been acknowledged. For example, if the two accounts are about the same act of Creation, then the narrative has identified the “land” of chapter 1 with the “garden” of chapter 2. The focus of the Creation account in chapter 1, then, is on the part of God’s creation that ultimately becomes the location of the Garden of Eden. We will say more about the location of Eden in our discussion of chapter 2, but for now it is enough to point to the connection between “the land” and its “fruit trees” in chapter 1 and the trees of the Garden in chapter 2. One can see the selectivity of the Creation account in its focus on only the “seed bearing bushes” and “fruit trees.” Those are the plants which are food for human beings. No other forms of vegetation are mentioned. Even the origin of the food for the animals, mentioned at the close of this first chapter (1:30), is not recounted here.

92 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

#### **d. The Fourth Day (1:14-19)**

The narration of events on the fourth day raises several questions. Does the text state that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day? If so, how could the universe, “the heavens and the earth,” which would have surely included the sun, moon, and stars, have been created “in the beginning” (1:1)? Could the author speak of a “day and night” during the first three days of Creation if the sun had not yet been created? Were there plants and vegetation on the land (created on the third day) before the creation of the sun?

Keil represents a common evangelical viewpoint; he suggested that though “the heavens and the earth” were created “in the beginning” (1:1), it was not until the fourth day that they were “completed.”<sup>18</sup> Keil’s explanation can be seen already in Calvin, who stated that “the world was not perfected at its very commencement, in the manner in which it is now seen, but that it was created an empty chaos of heaven and earth.” According to Calvin, this “empty chaos” was then filled on the fourth day with the sun, moon, and stars. Calvin’s view is similar to that of Rashi: “[The sun, moon, and stars] were created on the first day, but on the fourth day [God] commanded that they be placed in the sky.”

The Scofield Bible represents another common line of interpretation (the “Restitution Theory” or “Gap Theory”), which can be found much earlier in the history of interpretation: “The sun and moon were created ‘in the beginning.’ The ‘light’ of course came from the sun, but the vapor diffused the light. Later the sun appeared in an unclouded sky.”<sup>19</sup> According to this view the sun, moon, and stars were all created in 1:1 but could not be seen from the earth until the fourth day.

Both of these approaches seek to avoid the seemingly obvious sense of the text, that is, that the sun, moon, and stars were created on the fourth day. Both views modify the sense of the verb “created” so that it harmonizes with the statement of the first verse: God created the universe in the beginning.

There is, however, another way to look at this text that provides a satisfactory and coherent reading of 1:1 and 1:14–18. First, we must decide on the meaning of the phrase “the heavens and the earth” in 1:1 (see comments above on 1:1). If the phrase means “universe” or “cosmos,” as is most probable,<sup>20</sup> then it must be taken with the same sense it has throughout its uses in the Bible (e.g., Joel 3:15–16 [4:15–16]); thus it

---

<sup>18</sup> Keil, *Pentateuch*, 1:59.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. O. Zöckler, “Schöpfung,” *RE*, 3d ed. (Gotha: Verlag von Rudolf Besser, 1866), 20:735–36.

<sup>20</sup> H. H. Schmid, *THAT*, 1:229.

would include the sun, moon, and stars. So the starting point of an understanding of Genesis 1:14–18 is the view that the whole of the universe, including the sun, moon, and stars, was created “in the beginning” (1:1) and thus not on the fourth day.

Second, we must consider the syntax of verse 14. When one compares it to that of the creation of the “expanse” in verse 6, one can see that the two verses have a quite different sense. The syntax of verse 6 suggests that when God said, “Let there be an expanse,” he was creating an expanse where

GENESIS 93

none existed previously (creation out of nothing). Thus there seems little doubt that the author intends to say that God created the expanse on the first day. In verse 14, however, the syntax is different, though the English translations do not always reflect this difference. We should be careful to note that in verse 14 God does not say, “Let there be lights... to separate...,” as if there were no lights before this command and afterward the lights were created. Rather, the Hebrew text reads, “God said, ‘Let the lights in the expanse be for separating....’” In other words, unlike the syntax of verse 6, the syntax in verse 14 assumes that the lights were already in the expanse, and in response to his command they were given a purpose, “to separate the day and night” and “to serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years.” If the difference between the syntax of verse 6 (the use of היה alone) and verse 14 (היה with an infinitive) is significant,<sup>21</sup> then it suggests that the author does not understand his account of the fourth day as an account of the creation of the lights but, on the contrary, he assumes that the heavenly lights have already been created “in the beginning.”

A third observation comes from the structure of verses 15 and 16. At the end of verse 15, the author states, “and it was so.” This expression marks the end of the author’s report and the beginning of his comment in verse 16 (see comments above on 1:6–7). Thus, verse 16 is not an account of the creation of the sun, moon, and stars on the fourth day, but rather a remark directed to the reader to draw out the significance of that which had previously been recounted: “So God [and not anyone else] made the lights and put them into the sky.” In other words, behind this narrative is the author’s concern to emphasize that God alone created the lights of the heavens and thus no one else is to be given the glory and honor due only to him. The passage also states that God created the light in the heavens for a purpose: to divide day and night and to mark the “seasons, days, and years.” Both of these concerns form the heart of the whole of chapter 1, namely, the lesson that God alone is the Creator of all things and worthy of the worship of his people.

#### **e. The Fifth Day (1:20-23)**

The creation of living creatures is divided into two days. On the fifth day, as the account reads, God created the creatures of the sea and the sky. On the sixth day (1:24–28) God created the land creatures, which included men and women. In verse 20 God spoke (“And God said”), and in verse 21 God acted (“So God created”). The word for “created” (Heb. *bara*) is used six times in the Creation account (1:1, 21, 27 [3 times]; 2:3). Elsewhere the verb *ʿāśā*, “make,” is used to describe God’s actions.

Why is “create” used with reference to the “great sea creatures”? Are the “great sea creatures” (1:21) singled out by the use of a special term? One suggestion is that the use of the word *bārā*’ (create) just at this point in the narrative is intended to mark the beginning of a new stage in the Creation, namely, the creation of the “living beings,” a group distinct from the vegetation and physical world of the previous six days. Each new stage in the account is marked by the use of the verb “create”: the universe (1:1), the living creatures (1:2), and human beings (1:26).

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. *GKC*, par. 114h.

The orderliness of the account is evident, as is its lack of specificity. The author's primary interest is to show the creation of all living creatures in three distinct groups: on the fifth day, sea creatures and sky creatures, and on the sixth day, land creatures.

For the first time in the Creation account, the notion of "blessing" appears (v. 22). The blessing of the creatures of the sea and sky is identical with the blessing of humanity, with the exception of the notion of "dominion," which is given only to human beings. As soon as "living beings" are created, the notion of "blessing" is appropriate because the blessing relates to the giving of life.<sup>22</sup>

#### **f. The Sixth Day (1:24-31)**

The account of the creation of the land creatures on the sixth day distinguishes two types: the "living creatures" that dwell upon the land and humankind. In turn, the "living creatures" of the land are divided into three groups: "livestock," "creatures that move along the ground," and "wild animals." Humankind is distinguished as "male" and "female."

Once again the author begins with the divine command ("And God said") in verse 24, and then follows with the comment to the reader in verse 25 ("So God made"). At first reading, the comment in verse 25 does not appear to add significantly to the command of verse 24. However, a comparison of these verses with similar verses (vv. 11-12) shows that verse 25 does add an important clarification to the report of verse 24. In verse 11 God said, "Let the land produce vegetation," and in verse 12 the author adds, "So the land produced the vegetation." The point of the comment is apparently that the land, not God, produced the vegetation. In verses 24 and 25, however, the emphasis shifts. Verse 24 reports a command similar to verse 11: "Let the land produce living creatures"; but the comment which follows in verse 25 stresses that God made the living creatures: "God made the wild animals." Apparently the author wants to show that though the command was the same for the creation of both the vegetation and the living creatures on land, the origin of the two forms of life was distinct. Vegetation was produced from the land, but the living creatures were made by God himself. Life stems from God and is to be distinguished from the rest of the physical world (cf. the creation of humankind and the animals in chap. 2).

The creation of humanity is set apart from the previous acts of creation by a series of subtle contrasts with the earlier accounts of God's acts. First, in verse 26, the beginning of the creation of humanity is marked by the usual "And God said." However, God's command which follows is not an impersonal (third person) "Let there be," but rather the more personal (first person) "Let us make." Second, whereas throughout the previous account the making of each creature is described as "according to its own kind," the account of humankind's creation specifies that the man and the woman were made according to the likeness of God ("in our [God's] image"), not merely "according to his own kind." The human likeness is not simply of himself and herself; they also share a likeness to their Creator. Third, the creation of humanity is specifically noted to be a creation of "male and female." The

GENESIS 95

author has not considered gender to be an important feature to stress in his account of the creation of the other forms of life, but for humankind it is of some importance. Thus the narrative stresses that God created humankind as "male and female." Fourth, only human beings have been given dominion in God's creation. This dominion is expressly stated to be over all other living creatures: sky, sea, and land creatures.

<sup>22</sup> See my "Genesis," *EBC*, 2:35, for a discussion of the use of the term בָּרָא in the Creation account.

If we ask why the author has singled out the creation of humanity in this way, one obvious answer is that he intends to portray human beings as special creatures, marked off from the rest of God's works. But the author's purpose seems to be not merely to mark human beings as different from the rest of the creatures but also to show that they are like God. It is important not to lose sight of the fact that behind the portrayal of the creation of humanity in this narrative lies the purpose of the author of Genesis and the Pentateuch. The author gives the reader certain facts to serve as the starting point for his larger purposes within the Pentateuch. Human beings are creatures, but they are special creatures, made in the image and likeness of God.

There have been many attempts to explain the plural forms: "Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness."<sup>23</sup> Westermann summarizes the explanations given to the plurals under four headings: (1) a reference to the Trinity; (2) a reference to God and his heavenly court of angels; (3) an attempt to avoid the idea of an immediate resemblance of human beings to God; (4) an expression of deliberation on God's part as he sets out to create humanity.<sup>24</sup> The singulars in verse 27 (cf. 5:1) rule out the second explanation (that the plural refers to a heavenly court of angels), since in the immediate context humanity's creation is said to be "in his image" with no mention of the image of the angels.<sup>25</sup> Both the third and fourth explanations are possible within the context, but neither is specifically supported by the context. Where we do find unequivocal deliberation, as in Genesis 18:17, it is not the plural that is used but the singular ("Shall I hide from Abraham what I am about to do?"). As Westermann has stated, the first explanation is "a dogmatic judgment," though we could add that it is not a judgment that runs counter to the passage itself. If we seek an answer from the immediate context, however, we should turn to the next verse for our clues.

Verse 27 stated twice that humankind was created in God's image and a third time that humankind was created "male and female." The same pattern is found in Genesis 5:1–2a: "When God created humankind... male and female he created them." The singular, "human being," is created as a plurality, "male and female." In a similar way, the one God created humanity through an expression of his plurality. Following this clue, one may see the divine plurality expressed in verse 26 as an anticipation of the

96 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

human plurality of the man and woman, thus casting the human relationship between man and woman in the role of reflecting God's own personal relationship with himself. "Could anything be more obvious than to conclude from this clear indication that the image and likeness of the being created by God signifies existence in confrontation, i.e., in this confrontation, in the juxtaposition and conjunction of man and man which is that of male and female, and then to go on to ask against this background in what the original and prototype of the divine existence of the Creator consists?"<sup>26</sup>

The importance of the blessing in verse 28 cannot be overlooked. Throughout Genesis and the Pentateuch the "blessing" remains a central theme.<sup>27</sup> The living creatures have already been blessed on the fifth day (1:22); thus the author's view of the blessing extends beyond humanity to all of God's living creatures. In verse 28 human beings are also included in God's blessing. The blessing itself in these verses is primarily one of posterity: "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the land." Thus already the fulfillment of the blessing is tied to human "seed" and the notion of "life" two themes that will later dominate the narratives of Genesis.

---

<sup>23</sup> See Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:144–45; Eduard König, *Die Genesis: Eingeleitet, übersetzt, und erklärt*, (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1919), 153.

<sup>24</sup> See Westermann, *Genesis*, 1:144–45.

<sup>25</sup> Ne 9:6 may also be an attempt to ensure that the plurals of Ge 1:26 are not read as referring to angels. In the liturgical rehearsal of the events of Ge 1, Ne 9:6 states, "You alone, O LORD, made the heavens," thus ruling out the participation of angels in Creation.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* (New York: Scribner, 1956), 3/1:195.

<sup>27</sup> See Claus Westermann, *Theologie des Alten Testaments in Grundzügen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978), 75.

Since the introductory statement identifies them as a “blessing,” the imperatives are not to be understood as commands in this verse. Moreover, the imperative, along with the jussive, is the common mood of the blessing (cf. 27:19).

**Command #212**, Ge 1:28, You must be fruitful and multiply: “Be fruitful and multiply.”<sup>28</sup>

### ***g. The Seventh Day (2:1-3)***

The author has set the seventh day apart from the first six not only by stating specifically that God “sanctified” it but also by changing the style of the account markedly. On this day God neither “spoke” nor “worked” as he had on the previous days. On this day he “blessed” and “sanctified” but he did not “work.” The reader is left with a somber and repetitive reminder of only one fact: God did not work on the seventh day. While the author recounts little else, he repeats three times that God did not work. The author surely intends to emphasize God’s “rest.”

It is also likely that the author intends the reader to understand the account the seventh day in the light of the “image of God” theme of the sixth day. If the purpose of pointing to the “likeness” between human beings and their Creator is to call on the reader to be more like God (cf., e.g., Lev 11:45), then it is significant that the account of the seventh day stresses that very thing which the writer elsewhere so ardently calls on the reader to do: “rest” on the seventh day (cf. Ex 20:8–11). If, as we have earlier suggested, the author’s intention is to point to the past as a picture of the future, then the

GENESIS 97

emphasis on God’s “rest” forms an important part of the author’s understanding of what lies in the future. At important points along the way, the author will return to the theme of God’s “rest” as a reminder of what lies ahead (2:15; 5:29; 8:4; 19:16; Ex 20:11; Dt 5:14; 12:10; 25:19). Later biblical writers continued to see a parallel between God’s “rest” in Creation and the future “rest” that awaits the faithful (Ps 95:11; Heb 3:11).

## **3. Gift of the Land (2:4-24)**

It is important to read chapter 2 as an integral part of the first chapter. (The chapter divisions are not original and are sometimes very arbitrary. They are referred to here only for the sake of convenience.) It seems apparent that the author intends the second chapter to be read closely with the first and that each chapter be identified as part of the same event. Thus the author explicitly returns to the place and time of chapter 1 at the point where he links it to chapter 2: “When the LORD God made the land and the sky” (2:4b). It is likely that the author’s central theological interests in chapter 1 would be continued in chapter 2 as well— the theme of humanity’s creation in the “image of God.” Thus we may expect to find in chapter 2 a continuation of the theme of the “likeness” between humankind and the Creator.

### ***a. Creation of Humanity (2:4-7)***

Chapter 2 begins with a description of the condition of the land before the creation of humanity. In this respect it resembles the description of the land in 1:2. The focus of the description is on those parts of the land that were to be directly affected by the Fall (3:8–24). The narrative points to the fact that before the man was created (in 2:7), the effects of human rebellion and of the Fall had not yet been felt on the land. In the subsequent narratives, each of the parts of the description of the land in verses 4b–6 is spe-

---

<sup>28</sup> According to ancient Jewish tradition, the command listed here is the first commandment found in the Pentateuch. These commandments were arranged and enumerated by the medieval Jewish scholar Maimonides. Throughout this commentary we will list each of the 613 commandments and prohibitions at the point in the text where they find their primary support. For more on this, see the last two paragraphs of the introduction as well as the Appendix.

cifically identified as a result of the Fall. The “shrub of the field” and “plant of the field” are not a reference to the “vegetation” of chapter 1, but rather anticipate the “thorns and thistles” and “plants of the field” which are to come (in 3:18) as a result of the curse.<sup>29</sup> In the same way, when the narrative states that the Lord God had not yet “caused it to rain upon the land,” we can sense the allusion to the Flood narratives at which time the Lord explicitly stated: “I will cause it to rain upon the earth.” The reference to “no man to work the ground” (2:4b–5) points us to the time when the man and the woman were to be cast from the garden “to work the ground” (3:23). Thus, as an introduction to the account of the man’s creation, we are told that a “good” land had been prepared for him: “streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground” (2:6). In the description of that land, however, we can already see the coming of the time when human beings would become aliens and strangers in a foreign land.

At first glance the description of the creation of the man in verse 7 is quite different from that of chapter 1. Man was made “from the dust of the ground” rather than “in the image of God.” However, we should not overlook the fact that the topic of the creation of humankind in chapter 2 is

98 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

not limited to verse 7. In fact, the topic of the creation of the man and the woman is the focus of the whole chapter. What the author had stated as a simple fact in chapter 1 (humankind, male and female, were created in God’s likeness) is explained and developed throughout the narrative of chapter 2. We cannot contrast the depiction of the creation of humanity in chapter 1 with only one verse in chapter 2; we must compare it to the whole chapter.

The first point that the author is intent on making is that the human being, though a special creature made in God’s image, was nevertheless a creature like the other creatures which God had made. The man did not begin as a “heavenly creature”; he was made of the “dust of the ground.” In the light of the special treatment given to humanity’s creation in chapter 1, the emphasis on human creatureliness in chapter 2 is not without importance. This narrative deliberately excludes the notion that humanity’s origin might somehow be connected with the divine. Man’s origin was from the dust of the ground. One can also see an anticipation of human destiny in the Fall, when human beings would again return to the “dust of the ground” (3:19)— in Creation a human being arose out of the dust, but as a result of the Fall human beings returned to the dust. This is a graphic picture of the author’s lesson on the contrast between the work of God and the work of humankind.

Still another contribution to the picture of humanity’s creation in God’s image can be seen in the author’s depiction of the land which was prepared for human dwelling. The description of the Garden of Eden appears to be deliberately cast to foreshadow the description of the tabernacle found later in the Pentateuch (see commentary on Ex 25:1–31:18). The Garden, like the tabernacle, was the place where human beings could enjoy the fellowship and presence of God.

### ***b. Preparation of the Garden (2:8-14)***

The inordinate amount of attention given in chapter 2 to the description of the “garden” signifies that we must pay attention to these details. *First*, we are told that the Lord God planted the garden and “put” the man there. Later in the same narrative this is repeated, though, as we shall see, with significant differences. We should also note that the garden was planted “in Eden to the east.” The word *Eden* appears to be a specific place, and since, in the Hebrew Bible, the word means “delight,” we may assume that the name was intended to evoke a picture of idyllic delight and rest.

---

<sup>29</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis, Part 1, From Adam to Noah*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1972), 102.

The fact that the garden was “to the east” in Eden is somewhat striking. Elsewhere in Genesis the notion of “eastward” is associated with judgment and separation from God (e.g., 3:24; 11:2; 13:11). Also, when the man and woman were expelled from the garden, the cherubim were placed “on the east” (3:24) of the Garden of Eden, giving the impression that the garden itself was not in the east. Such an apparent difficulty in the coherence of the passage may account for the fact that in 2:8 the garden is not actually called the “garden of Eden,” as it is elsewhere, but rather the “garden in Eden,” a designation found *only* in this verse. Thus, according to 2:8, the garden *was* planted in Eden, which was apparently to be taken as a location larger than the garden itself; and if “on the east” is taken with reference to Eden itself, the garden was on its eastern side.

It is still unclear how the reference to “east” in 2:8, which seems

GENESIS 99

positive, is to be associated with the references to “eastward” in the subsequent narratives, which are all to be taken negatively. One solution may be that of the early versions. For example, Targum Onkelos translated מִמֶּדֶם as “long ago” rather than as “eastward” (cf. the Vulgate’s *a principio*). Both meanings are possible for the Hebrew expression. In any event, if a geographical direction is meant here, the author is apparently establishing an important distinction between “east” and “west” which will be of great thematic importance throughout the remainder of the book (see below). For now we are given only a hint that the location of the garden may be important.

In the garden are beautiful, lush trees, including the elusive “Tree of Life” and “Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil,” as well as a river that divided into four “headstreams.” The author takes special care to locate the rivers and to describe the character of the lands through which they flowed. The lands were rich in gold and precious jewelry, and their location was closely aligned with the land later promised to Abraham and his descendants<sup>30</sup>—another example of the author’s continual interest in drawing comparisons between the events in primeval history and specific events and places in the life of Israel. Later biblical prophets also made an associative link between the Garden of Eden and the land promised to the fathers.<sup>31</sup>

The location of the Garden of/in Eden has long been debated. Two of the rivers mentioned in association with the garden can be identified with certainty, the Euphrates and the Tigris. It is difficult to identify the other two, the Pishon and the Gihon. Since the “land of Cush” is identified in the Bible as Ethiopia, the Gihon is most likely the river which passes through the land of Ethiopia. If so, the author apparently has in mind the “river of Egypt.” The land of “Havilah,” however, cannot be identified.

It should be noted that the amount of description given to each of the four rivers is in inverse proportion to the certainty of the identification of each of the rivers. The narrative gives most attention to the river Pishon, but there is least certainty regarding that river’s identification and location. By contrast, the narrative merely states that the well-known Euphrates is the fourth river. The author’s attention to detail with the two lesser-known rivers (e.g., the gold and jewels) can be tied to the parallels between the role of the Garden and that of the tabernacle later in the Pentateuch (see below). Moreover, the mention of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers can be linked to the identification of the Garden of Eden and the Promised Land.

---

<sup>30</sup> See Ibn Ezra and Rashi, in *Torat Chaim Chumash*, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Eze 36:35: “This land that was laid waste has become like the garden of Eden”; Joel 2:3: “Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste”; Isa 51:3: “The LORD will surely comfort Zion and will look with compassion on all her ruins; he will make her deserts like Eden, her wastelands like the garden of the LORD”; Zec 14:8: “On that day living water will flow out from Jerusalem”; Rev 22:1–2: “Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month.”



It can hardly be a coincidence that these rivers, along with the “River of Egypt,” again play a role in marking boundaries of the land promised to Abraham (Ge 15:18).

Another important detail in the description of the Garden of Eden in

100 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

chapter 2 is the close similarity between the appearance and role of the Garden and that of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–27.<sup>32</sup> We have already called attention to the similarities between the account of Creation in chapter 1 and the account of the building of the tabernacle in Exodus 25–27. Thus it is no surprise to find that the description of the “garden” erected by God in chapter 2 should also suggest similarities to the tabernacle. In describing the Garden the author’s primary interest is to stress the beauty of the gold and precious stones throughout the lands encompassed by the Garden. If we take the purpose of such descriptions in the later literature as a guide, the point of the description of the Garden is to show the glory of God’s presence through the beauty of the physical surroundings. The prophet Haggai later proclaimed the glory of God’s presence in the new temple with a description of the gold and precious metals of that temple: “‘I will fill this house with glory,’ says the LORD Almighty. ‘The silver is mine and the gold is mine,’ declares the LORD Almighty” (Hag 2:7–8); so also John’s description of the New Jerusalem stressed the gold and precious stones which pictured the glorious presence of God among his people: “The wall [of New Jerusalem] was made of jasper, and the city of pure gold, as pure as glass. The foundations of the city walls were decorated with every kind of precious stone” (Rev 21:18). In the light of such an attempt to depict the Garden as foreshadowing the tabernacle of God, it is especially interesting to find that the description of God’s placing the man in the Garden also bears a strong resemblance to the later establishment of the priesthood for the tabernacle and temple.

### **c. Man’s Place in the Garden (2:15-24)**

The author has already noted that God “put” the man into the Garden (2:8). In verse 15, however, he returns to this point by stating the purpose for God’s putting the man there. Two important points from verse 15 are in danger of being obscured by the traditional English translations. The first is the change in vocabulary for the Hebrew word for “put.” Unlike verse 8, where the author uses a common term for “put,” in verse 15 he uses a term that he elsewhere has reserved for two special uses: God’s “rest” or “safety” which he gives to human beings in the land (e.g., Ge 19:16; Dt 3:20; 12:10; 25:19), and the “dedication” of something before the presence of the Lord (Ex 16:33–34; Lev 16:23; Nu 17:4; Dt 26:4, 10). Both senses of the term appear to lie behind the author’s use of the word in verse 15. The man was “put” into the Garden where he could “rest” and be “safe,” and the man was “put” into the Garden “in God’s presence” where he could have fellowship with God (3:8).

A second observation from verse 15 concerns the specific purpose for God’s putting the man in the Garden. In most English translations of the verse the man is “put” in the Garden “to work it and take care of it.” Although this interpretation is found in translations as early as the LXX (2d century B.C.), there are serious objections to it. For one, the suffixed pronoun in the Hebrew text rendered “it” in English is feminine, whereas the noun

GENESIS 101

“garden,” which the pronoun refers to in English, is masculine. Only by changing the pronoun to a masculine singular, as the LXX has done, can it have the sense of the English translations, namely, “to work” and “to keep.” Moreover, later in this same narrative (3:23), “working the ground” is said to be a result of the

---

<sup>32</sup> This relationship has also been discussed by Gordon J. Wenham, “Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story,” *Proceedings of the World Congress of Jewish Studies* 9 (1986): 19–25.

Fall, and the narrative suggests that the author has intended such a punishment to be seen as an ironic reversal of humanity's original purpose (see comments below on 3:22–24). If such is the case, then “working” and “keeping” the Garden would not provide a contrast to “working the ground.” In view of these objections, which cannot easily be overlooked, a more suitable translation of the Hebrew text would be “to worship and obey.”<sup>33</sup> The man is put in the Garden to worship God and obey him. The man's life in the Garden was to be characterized by worship and obedience; he was to be a priest, not merely a worker and keeper of the Garden. Such a reading not only answers the objections raised against the traditional English translation but also suits the ideas of the narrative. Throughout chapter 2, the author has consistently and consciously developed the idea of the human “likeness” to God along the same lines as the major themes of the Pentateuch as a whole— worship and sabbath rest.

A further confirmation of our translation “to worship and obey” is that in the following verse we read for the first time that “God commanded” (2:16) the man whom he had created. As in the remainder of the Torah, here enjoyment of God's good land is made contingent on keeping God's commandments (cf. Dt 30:16). The similarity between this condition for enjoyment of God's blessing and that laid down for Israel at Sinai and in Deuteronomy is clear. Indeed, one can hardly fail to hear in these words of God to the first man the words of Moses to Israel: “See, I set before you today life and blessing [the good], death and calamity [the evil]. For I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, decrees, and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.... But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient... you will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess” (Dt 30:15–18).

The inference of God's commands in Genesis 2:16–17 is that God alone knows what is good for human beings and God alone knows what is not good for them. To enjoy the “good” we must trust God and obey him. If we disobey, we will have to decide for ourselves what is good and what is not good. While to modern men and women such a prospect may seem desirable, to the author of Genesis it is the worst fate that could have befallen humanity.

Having put this in general terms in verses 16–17, the author turns in the remainder of the chapter to give a specific example of God's knowledge of the “good”: the creation of the woman. Not only has the first chapter stressed that God knows the good (e.g., “and God saw that it was good”), but now in the present narrative the creation of the woman has become an archetypal example of God's knowledge of the good. When he sees the man alone, God says, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” At the close of chapter 2 the author puts the final touches on his account of what it means

*102 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE*

for humankind to be “in God's image and likeness.” In the first chapter, the author has intimated that humanity's creation in the “image of God” somehow entailed their creation as male and female: “In the image of God he created him; male and female he created them” (1:27). In the narrative of the creation of the woman in chapter 2, the author has returned to develop this theme by showing that humankind's creation “in God's image” also entails a “partnership” between the man and his wife. The “likeness” which the man and the woman share with God in chapter 1 finds an analogy in the “likeness” between the man and his wife in chapter 2. Here also, as in the first chapter, the human likeness to God is shown against the background of their distinction from the other creatures. That the author intends the account of the naming of the animals to be read as part of the story of the creation of the woman is made certain in verse 20, where at the conclusion of the man's naming the animals the author remarks: “but for Adam, he did not find a partner like himself.” The clear implication is that the author sees in the man's naming the animals also

---

<sup>33</sup> See further my “Genesis,” *EBC*, 2:45, 47–48.

his search for a suitable partner. In recounting that no suitable partner had been found, the author has assured the reader that the man was not like the other creatures. The author then records in graphic detail the words of the man when he discovered the woman who was one like himself: “This is now bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh” (2:23). Thus the man recognized his own likeness in the woman.

## **B. The Land and the Exile (2:25-4:26)**

If chapter 2 portrayed humanity’s earliest state as a prototype of God’s gift of the good land to Israel, then it should come as no surprise that the account of the Fall should also be recounted in terms that bring to mind Israel’s future exile from the land.

### **1. Disobedience (2:25-3:7)**

A more studied attempt to treat the problem of evil and temptation cannot be found in all the Scriptures. As a part of his deliberate strategy, the author of the Pentateuch has left the reader virtually alone with the events of the story. He does not reflect or comment on the events that transpired. We, the readers, are left to ourselves and our sense of the story for an answer to the questions it raises. We must seek our clues to the story’s meaning from the few signs of the author’s own shaping of the story.

#### **a. Transition (2:25)**

Verse 25 is clearly intended to link the account of the land and the blessing (1:1–2:24) with that of the Fall (2:25–3:24). The reference to the “two of them” looks back to the previous narrative, while their description as “naked and unashamed” anticipates the central problem of the narrative which is to follow. It is important to note that two different but related words are used to describe the “nakedness” of the man and his wife in this narrative. Apart from the obvious meaning of ערום (“naked”), its nuanced sense can be gained from the immediate context: “they were not ashamed.”

The choice of this term at the beginning of the narrative is likely motivated by two considerations. First, there is an alliteration between ערום (*`ārûm*, “nakedness”) and ערום (*`ārôm*, “crafty”). There is an obvious play on the two words. The effect of such a pun is both to draw the reader into the story by

*GENESIS 103*

providing an immediate connecting link with the previous narrative and to provide a presage to the events and outcome of the subsequent story. The link provides an immediate clue to the potential relationship between the serpent’s “cunning” and the innocence implied in the “nakedness” of the couple. The story unfolds the nature of that relationship.

Second, there is a difference in meaning between ערום (“naked”) in 2:25 and עירום (“naked”) in 3:7. Although both terms are infrequent in the Pentateuch, the latter is distinguished by its use in Deuteronomy 28:48, where it depicts the state of Israel’s exiles who have been punished for their failure to trust and obey God’s word: “Because you did not serve the LORD your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies that the LORD sends against you.” In distinguishing the first state of human nakedness from the second, the author has introduced a subtle yet perceptible due to the story’s meaning. The effect of the Fall was not simply that the man and the woman came to know that they were ערום (“naked”). Specifically, they came to know that they were עירום (“naked”) in the sense of being “under God’s judgment,” as in Deuteronomy 28:48 (cf. Eze 16:39; 23:29).

### ***b. The Tempter (3:1)***

The author has chosen to disclose a small but important clue to the story by revealing a detail about the snake: he was more “crafty” than any of the creatures. The word *crafty* is not primarily a negative term in the Bible but suggests wisdom and adroitness (besides its use here it occurs eight times in Proverbs and two times in Job). The description of the serpent as “crafty” is in keeping with several features of this story which suggest that the author wants to draw a relationship between the Fall and the human quest for wisdom. The disobedience of the man and the woman is depicted not so much as an act of great wickedness or a great transgression as an act of great folly. They had all the “good” they would have needed, but they wanted more— they wanted to be like God. The forbidden tree is the Tree of Knowledge of “Good and Evil.” When they take of the tree and eat, it is because the woman “saw that the tree was able to make one wise” (3:6). Thus, even the serpent is represented as a paragon of wisdom, an archetypal wiseman. However, the serpent and his wisdom lead ultimately to the curse (3:14). It should not be overlooked that the serpent is said to be one of the “beasts of the field” which the Lord God had made (cf. 1:25; 2:19). The purpose of this statement is to exclude the notion that the serpent was a supernatural being. “The serpent is none other than a serpent.”<sup>34</sup>

### ***c. Temptation (3:2-7)***

The story of the temptation is told with subtle simplicity. The snake speaks only twice, but that is enough to offset the balance of trust and obedience between the man and the woman and their Creator. The centerpiece of the story is the question of the knowledge of the “good.” The snake implied by his questions that God was keeping this knowledge *from* the man and the woman (3:5), while the sense of the narratives in the first

104 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

two chapters has been that God was keeping this knowledge *for* the man and the woman (e.g., 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31; 2:18). In other words, the snake’s statements were a direct challenge to the central theme of the narrative of chapters 1 and 2: God will provide the “good” for human beings if they will only trust him and obey him.

However, a narrative clue already points to the woman’s assuming God’s role of “knowing the good” even before she ate of the fruit— that is, the description of the woman’s thoughts in the last moment before the Fall. The narrative states that the woman “saw that the tree was good” (3:6). Up until now in the narrative, the expression “and he saw that it was good” has been used only of God. Now, instead of God, it is the woman who “saw that it was good.” Precisely at this point the author raises the issue of becoming “wise”: “And the woman saw that the tree was... also desirable for gaining wisdom” (3:6). Thus, the temptation is not presented as a general rebellion from God’s authority. Rather, it is portrayed as a quest for wisdom and “the good” apart from God’s provision.

Having thus shown the temptation to be a quest for “wisdom” apart from God, the story comes to an abrupt conclusion in the act of the transgression itself: “and she took some and ate it and also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it” (3:6b). How quickly the transgression comes once the decision has been made. The thrust of the story, with all its simplicity, lies in its tragic and ironic depiction of the search for wisdom. That which the snake promised did, in fact, come about: the man and the woman became “like God” as soon as they ate of the fruit. The irony lies in the fact that they were already “like God” because they had been created in his image (1:26). In the temptation the serpent promised that they would know “good and evil,” just as God knew “good and evil.” It is clear in the story that the man and the

---

<sup>34</sup> MBenno Jacob, *Das erste Buch der Tora, Genesis*, 102.

woman had believed that when they obtained the knowledge of “good and evil” they would, on their own, enjoy the “good.” Prior to their eating the fruit, the narrative did not raise the possibility that they would know only the “evil” and not the “good.” Yet when they ate of the fruit and their eyes were opened, it was not the “good” that they saw and enjoyed. Their new knowledge was that of their own nakedness. Their knowledge of “good and evil” which was to make them “like God” resulted in the knowledge that they were no longer even like each other— they were ashamed of their nakedness, and they sewed leaves together to hide their differences from each other. Like Qohelet (Ecclesiastes), they sought wisdom but found only vanity and toil. As the next segment of the narrative shows, not only did the man and his wife attempt to cover their shame from each other by making clothing from the trees of the garden, but they also tried to hide themselves from God at the first sound of his coming.

Why was the man held responsible for the actions of both he and his wife? There are some clues in the text and its context. For example, the author stresses in 3:13 that the woman was “deceived.” Since the text does not explicitly state that the man was also “deceived,” the author apparently means to suggest that the man was, in fact, not deceived and hence was to be held responsible for his own action. The woman, being deceived, was not responsible. There is a further indication within the text why the man was being held responsible for the woman’s actions. That is, in the larger context

*GENESIS 105*

of the Pentateuch (e.g., Nu 30:1–16), the Mosaic Law teaches that the husband is responsible for those vows which his wife has made (see comments below on Nu 30:1–6). The author of the Pentateuch allows the reader’s knowledge of the Mosaic Law to guide the reading of this passage. In Numbers 30, if the husband hears his wife make a vow and does not speak out, he is responsible for it. It may be important, then, that the author states specifically in Genesis 3 that the man was with his wife when she ate of the tree, and that he said nothing in reply to the serpent or the woman. His silence may be a clue as to why the man must bear the responsibility for the actions of his wife.

## **2. Judgment (3:8-20)**

### ***a. The Scene (3:8)***

The judgment scene opens with the “sound” of the Lord’s coming (3:8). Again the author’s depiction of the scene is ironic. The expression “the sound of the LORD God” is common in the Pentateuch, especially in Deuteronomy (5:25; 8:20; 13:19; 15:5; 18:16; 26:14; 27:10; 28:1, 2, 15, 45, 62; 30:8, 10), where along with the verb שמע (hear/obey) and the preposition ב, it is the common form of expression for the Lord’s call to obedience. It can hardly be without purpose that the author opens the scene of the curse with a subtle but painful reminder of the single requirement for obtaining God’s blessing: “to hear/obey the voice of the LORD God.”

The coming of the Lord at the mountain of Sinai is also foreshadowed in this scene of the Lord God’s coming: to the first disobedient couple. When the Lord came to Sinai (Dt 5:25; 18:16; cf. Ex 20:18–21), the people “heard the sound of the LORD God.” The response of Adam in the Garden was much the same as that of Israel at the foot of Sinai. When the people heard the sound of the Lord at Sinai they were afraid “and fled and stood at a great distance and said... ‘let not God speak with us lest we die’” (Ex 20:18–19). So also Adam and his wife fled at the first sound of the Lord in the Garden. Not only is the Fall a prototype of all sins, but also the failure of Israel at Sinai is cast as a replica of this first sin.

The time of the Lord’s visit is often translated as “the cool of the day” or “the time of the evening,” but the text reads only “at the wind of the day.” Indeed, nothing in the context suggests that this refers to a time of day. In the light of the general context of the picture of God’s coming in judgment and power, the

“wind” which the author envisions is more likely intended to resemble that “great and powerful wind” which blew on the “mountain of the LORD” in 1 Kings 19:11. Thus the viewpoint of the narrative would be much the same as that in Job 38:1, where the Lord answered Job “from the whirlwind.”<sup>35</sup> It is significant that the author calls attention to the hiding place: they fled to the trees. Throughout this chapter and the previous ones, the trees play a central role in depicting humanity’s changing relationship with God. First, in chapters 1 and 2, the fruit trees were the sign of God’s bountiful provision. Then, at the beginning of chapter 3, the trees became the ground for inciting the man and the woman to rebellion and the place where the rebellious man and woman sought to hide

106 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

from God. Finally, when the man and the woman are cast out of the Garden, their way is barred from the Tree of Life (3:24). The full sense of this focus on the trees should perhaps be understood in the light of the role of the tree as the place of the punishment of death (Dt 21:22–23) and also in the light of the later role of the tree as the place of the gift of life (Gal 3:13).

### **b. Trial (3:9-13)**

Before meting out the judgment, God’s only words to the rebellious man and woman come in the form of questions: “Where are you?” (3:9); “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?” (v. 11); “What is this you have done?” (v. 13). The picture of God’s questioning before his act of judgment suggests the proceedings of a court session much like that of 4:9–10: “Where is your brother Abel?... What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground”; and 18:21: “I will go down and see whether what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me.” Skillfully, by the repetition of the word *naked* (3:7, 10, 11), the author allows the man to be convicted with his own words: “I was afraid because I was naked.” Then, as though to show that alienation between the man and the woman went far beyond the shame that each now felt in the presence of the other, the author recounts the petty attempt on the man’s part to cast blame on the woman (“she gave to me”) and, obliquely, on God (“whom you gave to me”). The man’s words are an ironic reminder of God’s original intention: “It is not good that man should be alone. I will make a helper, fit for him” (2:18). As an index of the extent of humanity’s fall, the author shows that the man saw God’s good gift as the source of his trouble.

### **c. Verdict (3:14-20)**

Although much can be said about the curse on the snake, the woman, and the man, it is important to note that the text says very little. In this passage we can see most clearly the artful composition that produced the Pentateuch. There are no long discourses on the appearance of the snake before and after the curse. Did he have feet? Did he have wings? The thoughts of the snake, if there were such, or the thoughts of the man and woman are left completely out of view. The narrative gives nothing to help us understand their plight as individuals. The snake, the woman, and the man are not depicted as individuals involved in a personal crisis; rather, they are representatives. We are left with the impression that this is not their story so much as it is our story, the story of humankind. With great skill the author has presented these three participants as the heads of their race. The snake on the one hand and the man and the woman on the other are as two great nations embarking on a great struggle, a struggle that will find its conclusion only by an act of some distant and as yet unidentified “seed.”

Whereas once the snake was “crafty,” now he was “cursed.” His “curse” distinguished him “from all the livestock and wild animals,” that is, he must “walk upon his belly and eat dust all the days of his life.” This curse does not necessarily suggest that the snake had previously walked with feet and legs as the other

---

<sup>35</sup> So Rambam, *The Commentary of Rambam on the Torah* (Hebrew), ed. H. cf. Shual (Jerusalem; Mossad Harav Kook, 1984), 40.

land animals. The point is rather that now and for the rest of his life, as a result of the curse, when the snake walks on his belly, as snakes do, he will “eat the dust.” This expression elsewhere carries the meaning of “total defeat” (cf. Isa 65:25 and Mic 7:17). The curse of the snake,

*GENESIS 107*

then, as a result of his part in the Fall, is to be the perennial reminder of the ultimate defeat of the rebellious “seed.” So strongly was this imagery of the snake’s defeat felt by later biblical writers that in their description of the ultimate victory and reign of the righteous “seed,” when peace and harmony are restored to creation, the serpent remains under the curse: “dust will [still] be the serpent’s food” (Isa 65:25).

As representatives, the snake and the woman embody the fate of their seed, and the fate of their seed is their fate as well. The author has brought about this headship of the snake and the woman by means of a careful but consistent identification of the snake and his “seed.” At first in verse 15 the “enmity” is said to have been put between the snake and the woman and between the “seed” of the snake and the “seed” of the woman. But the second half of verse 15 states that the “seed” of the woman (“he”) will crush the head of the snake (“your head”). The woman’s “seed” is certainly intended to be understood as a group (or individual) which lies the same temporal distance from the woman as the “seed” of the snake does from the snake itself. Yet in this verse, it is the “seed” of the woman who crushes the head of the snake. Though the “enmity” may lie between the two “seeds,” the goal of the final crushing blow is not the “seed” of the snake but rather the snake itself— his head will be crushed. In other words, it appears that the author is intent on treating the snake and his “seed” together, as one. What happens to his “seed” in the distant future can be said to happen to the snake as well. This identification suggests that the author views the snake in terms that extend beyond this particular snake of the Garden. The snake, for the author, is representative of someone or something else, and is represented by his “seed.” When that “seed” is crushed, the head of the snake is crushed.

Consequently, more is at stake in this brief passage than the reader is at first aware. A program is set forth. A plot is established that will take the author far beyond this or that snake and his “seed.” It is what the snake and his “seed” represent that lies at the center of the author’s focus. With that “one” lies the “enmity” that must be crushed.

No attempt is made to answer the ancillary question of the snake’s role in the temptation over against the role of a higher being (e.g., Satan). This was, however, the drama which later biblical writers saw behind the deed of the snake (cf. Ro 16:20; Rev 12:9, “That ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray”). From what has been said, such a reading of this passage does not lie outside the narrative implications of the verse. We must mark the fact that in the last analysis the reader is left with only the words of the Lord to the snake. It is unlikely that at such a pivotal point in the narrative the author would intend no more than a mere reference to snakes and their offspring and the fear of them among humankind.

If one looks at the passage within the larger scope of the purpose of the Pentateuch and the pains taken by the author to construct a whole narrative out of just these small segments of discourse, much more appears to lie in these words (the Lord’s first spoken words after the Fall). In the light of the fact that such programmatic discourses are strategically important throughout the remainder of the book, it seems likely that the author intends these words to be read as programmatic and foundational for the establishment of

*108 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE*

the plot and characterization of the remainder of the book. In the narrative to follow, there is to be war (“enmity”). The two sides are represented by two seeds, the “seed” of the snake and the “seed” of the

woman. In the ensuing battle, the “seed” of the woman will crush the head of the snake. Though wounded in the struggle, the woman’s “seed” will be victorious.

There remains in this verse a puzzling yet important ambiguity: Who is the “seed” of the woman? It seems obvious that the purpose of verse 15 has not been to answer that question, but rather to raise it. The remainder of the book is, in fact, the author’s answer.

The judgment against the woman (3:16) relates first to her children and then to her husband. She would now bear children in increased pain or toil. Her “desire” will be for her husband and he will “rule over” her. The sense of this judgment within the larger context of the book lies in the role of the woman which is portrayed in chapters 1 and 2. The woman and her husband were to have enjoyed the blessing of children (1:28) and the harmonious partnership of marriage (2:18, 21–25). The judgment relates precisely to these two aspects of the blessing. What the woman once was to do as a blessing— that is, have children and be a marriage partner, had now become tainted by the curse. In those moments of life’s greatest blessing, children and marriage, the woman would now sense most clearly the painful consequences of her rebellion from God.

We should not overlook the relationship between the promise of verse 15 and these words to the woman. In that promise, the final victory was to be through the “seed” of the woman. In the beginning, when the man and the woman were created, childbirth was at the center of the blessing which their Creator had bestowed upon them (“Be fruitful, multiply, and fill the land,” 1:28). Now, after the Fall, childbirth is again to be the means through which the snake would be defeated and the blessing restored. The pain of the birth of every child was to be a reminder of the hope that lay in God’s promise. Birth pangs are not merely a reminder of the futility of the Fall; they are as well a sign of an impending joy: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as children, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved” (Ro 8:22–24); cf. Mt 24:8).

As the man’s judgment, the “good land” provided by the Creator in the narrative of chapters 1 and 2 was cursed (3:17–20). He could no longer “freely eat” of the produce of the land. Throughout chapters 2 and 3, the author has carefully monitored the man’s ongoing relationship with his Creator by means of the theme of eating. At first, God’s blessing and provision for the man are noted in the words: “from all the trees of the garden you may freely eat” (2:16), recalling the good gifts in chapter 1 and the pronouncement that all was then “very good” (1:31). Then, in chapter 3, it was precisely over the issue of “eating” that the tempter raised doubts about God’s ultimate goodness and care for the man and his wife (3:1–3). Finally, the man and the woman’s act of disobedience in chapter 3 is simply though thoughtfully described as “she ate it... and he ate it.” It is not surprising, then, that the author calls attention to precisely the aspect of eating in his description of the judgment on the man: “Cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you will eat all the days of your life” (3:17). Such a

*GENESIS 109*

focus on eating, which seems to dominate the author’s depiction of the Fall, is connected with the author’s interest elsewhere in the importance of eating and its association with humankind’s relationship to God, that is, in the Torah’s teaching regarding the clean and the unclean food (Lev 11; Dt 14) and the regulations for annual feasts to celebrate God’s gift of the good land in the covenant (Lev 23). To this material one could also add the larger context of the role of feasts and eating in the biblical eschaton (Rev 19:9).

The description of the “land” in verse 18 (“you shall eat of the shrub of the field”) is a reversal of the state of the land as it was described in chapter 2; “no shrub of the field had yet appeared on the land, and no plant of the field had yet sprung up” (2:5). In drawing a contrast between the condition of the land before



and after the Fall, the author shows that the present condition of the land was not the way it was intended to be. Rather, the state of the land was the result of human rebellion. In so doing, the author has paved the way for a central motif in the structure of biblical eschatology, the hope of a “new heaven and a new earth” (cf. Isa 65:17; Ro 8:22–24; Rev 21:1).

Just as verse 18 was intended to show the reversal of the state of the land before and after the Fall, so verse 19 intends to show the same for the condition of human beings themselves. Before the Fall, the man was taken from the ground and given the “breath of life” (2:7). As a result of the Fall, however, the man must return to the ground and to the dust from which he was taken (3:19). The author’s point in showing such a reversal is to stress that the verdict of death, of which the man was warned before the Fall (2:17), had now come upon him. As a perennial reminder of the effect of the Fall, the author draws a connection between the man’s name (אדם) and the ground (אדמה) from which he was taken. The man, Adam, curiously enough named his wife Eve (חוה), “because she was the mother of all living (חי) (3:20). This was the second time Adam had named his wife (cf. 2:23). The first name given to her pointed to her origin (“out of man”), whereas her second name pointed to her destiny (“the mother of all living”).

### **3. God’s Protection (3:21)**

In striking contrast to God’s rest from work in chapter 2, immediately after the statement of God’s judgment the author returns to the description of God at work: “And the LORD God made for the man and his wife a tunic of skin and he clothed them.” After, and because of, the Fall, there is more work to be done. The author characterizes that work as “covering the nakedness” of the man and the woman. The mention of the type of clothing which God made— a “skin [עור] tunic”— is perhaps intended to recall the state of the man and the woman before the Fall: “they were naked [ערום] and not ashamed” (2:25). The author may also be anticipating the notion of sacrifice in the slaying of the animals for the making of the skin tunics, though he has given no clues of this meaning in the narrative itself.

Later in the Pentateuch the Lord instructed the people to make tunics for the priests who were to enter into the presence of God at the tabernacle. The purpose of the tunics was to cover the priests’ nakedness (ערוה), lest they incur guilt and die (Ex 28:42). The author may be anticipating this “lasting ordinance” (Ex 28:43) in drawing our attention to God’s covering the nakedness of the man and the woman. In this way the role of the priests, developed later in the Pentateuch, is foreshadowed by God’s work in ages

*110 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE*

past— his work of restoring to humanity the blessing of his presence and fellowship.

In addition to the above points, there are other important links between this text and the later purity laws in the Pentateuch (see comments below on Lev 13:1–14:57 for a discussion).

### **4. The Exile (3:22–24)**

The verdict of death now brought against the man and the woman consisted of their being cast out of the Garden and barred from access to the Tree of Life. The penalty is identical to that established by the Mosaic Law: to be put to death (“he shall surely die”) is to be “cast off from the midst of one’s people” (Ex 31:14). In this sense, the transgression of Adam and Eve means that they must be cast off from the protective presence of the community in the Garden (cf. Ge 4:14).

The depiction of the man and woman being cast out of the Garden has an interesting parallel with the casting out of the one plagued with skin disease in Leviticus 13:46. This parallel is part of a larger strategy within the Pentateuch of depicting the Fall as a form of contamination that must be dealt with along lines similar to the cultic regulations described in Leviticus (see comments below on Lev 13:1–14:57).

The author uses irony to show the folly of humanity's fall. He shows that even though the human quest to "be like God" (3:5-7) was obtained, the goal itself proved to be undesirable. The man and the woman, who had been created "like God" in the beginning (1:26), found themselves, after the Fall, curiously "like God"— but no longer "with God" in the Garden. In this subtle verbal interchange the author has shown that human happiness does not consist in being "like God" but rather being "with God," enjoying the blessings of his presence: "You have made known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand" (Ps 16:11 [MT 12]).

In order to underscore the reversals which the man and the woman suffered in their rebellion, the author uses a wordplay on two key terms from his earlier depiction of humankind's blessing in the Garden. In 2:15 the man was put into the Garden for "worship" (עבד) and "obedience" (שמר), but here in 3:23, after the Fall, the man was cast out of the Garden "to work [עבד] the ground" and he is "kept [שמר] from the way of the Tree of Life."

In his depiction of the Garden and the Tree of Life after the Fall, the author has again anticipated God's plan to restore human blessing and life in the covenant at Sinai and the Torah. The Tree of Life stands guarded by the "cherubim" (3:24), just as in the Sinai covenant the Torah lies in the ark of the covenant guarded by the "cherubim" (Ex 25:10-22; Dt 31:24-26). Only through the covenant can human fellowship with God be restored: "There, above the cover between the two cherubim that are over the ark of the testimony, I will meet with you and give you all my commands for the Israelites" (Ex 25:22). In the covenant, human beings returned to the state they enjoyed in Genesis 2:15— serving God, obeying his will, and enjoying his blessing.

The author's mention of the direction "eastward" is not a mere geographical detail. Throughout Genesis, the author carefully apprises the reader of the direction of the characters' movement. In doing so, he plants a

GENESIS 111

narrative due to the meaning of the events he is recounting. At this point in the narrative, "eastward" has only the significance of "outside the garden." Later in the book, however, the author will carry this significance further by showing "eastward" to be the direction of the "city of Babylon" (11:2) and the "cities of Sodom and Gomorrah" (13:11). Moreover, he will show that to return from the east is to return to the Promised Land and to return to the "city of Salem" (14:17-20).

## 5. Life in Exile (4:1-26)

In chapter 4 the author has given a brief glimpse of life outside the Garden of Eden. The woman bore sons (cf. 3:16), and the sons became both workers of the ground (cf. 3:23) and tenders of sheep. Thus the narrative assumes the effects of the Fall recorded in chapter 3 ("by the sweat of your face you shall eat food"). The chapter is framed by the accounts of the births of Adam's sons at the beginning (4:1-2), in the center (4:17-22), and at the conclusion (4:25-26). The many diverse events included within the small space of the chapter give it an appearance of being a transition and staging narrative connecting the preceding events to those that are to follow. On the basis of Jude 11 ("Woe to them. They have taken the way of Cain") and Hebrews 11:4 ("By faith Abel offered God a better sacrifice than Cain"), Cain has often been taken as a type of a godless humanity and Abel as a type of the spiritual humanity.<sup>36</sup> Though there is no doubt truth in seeing both Cain and Abel as narrative examples of godlessness and godliness, there are

---

<sup>36</sup> Cf. the Scofield Bible, p. 8, nn. 3-4: "Cain is a type of the mere man of the earth... Abel is a type of the spiritual man"; and Augustine: "Cain then was the first-born... who belonged to the city of men; Abel... belonged to the city of God" (*The City of God Against the Pagans*, Loeb Classical Library, ed. Philip Levine [Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1966], 4:413).

hints in the text that the author also sees in Cain an example of repentance and forgiveness. The central question in the narrative is the meaning of Cain's words in 4:13 (see discussion below). If his words are to be understood as an expression of remorse and repentance, then Cain's City (4:17) and the line of Cain's descendants (4:17–24) are cast in a new light.

#### **a. The First Worship (4:1-8)**

Eve's first words after the Fall raise many questions. The translation "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth [or acquired] a man" [קניתי איש את-יהוה, 4.1] leaves the impression that her words are positive. Her acknowledging God's help makes it look as though she were hopeful that the promise of a "seed" to crush the head of the serpent (3:15) might find its fulfillment in this son. But her words can also be read in a less positive light: "I have created a man equally with the Lord." In this sense, Eve's words are a boast that just as the Lord had created a man, so now she also had created a man.<sup>37</sup>

The immediate context offers little help to decide between two such diverse readings of the passage. Two considerations, however, suggest that the latter interpretation is more likely. First, throughout the narratives of Genesis, a recurring theme is that of the attempt and failure of human effort in obtaining a blessing that only God can give. God continually promised a

112 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

person a blessing, and that person pushed it aside in favor of his or her own attempts at the blessing. The story of the building of Babylon (chap. 11) is the most familiar of such narratives. In particular, Eve's situation brings to mind that of Sarah's attempt to achieve the blessing through her handmaiden Hagar. Just as Sarah had tried to bring about the fulfillment of God's promised "seed" (16:1–4) on her own, so also Eve's words expressed her confidence in her own ability to fulfill the promise of 3:15.

The second consideration is Eve's later words about the birth of Seth ("God has granted me another seed in place of Abel," 4:25), which shed a great deal of light on her words in 4:1. The contrast between her words at the beginning of the narrative and those at the close is striking and revealing. At the beginning Eve said, "I have begotten a man," whereas at the close of the narrative she acknowledged, "God has given me another seed." Moreover, Eve did not say that Seth was given to replace Cain— he was to replace Abel. This suggests that within the story Eve had not placed her hope in Cain but in Abel. True to the plot of the remaining narratives in Genesis, Cain, the older son, did not stand to inherit the blessing; rather, the younger son was to inherit the blessing. Also true to the plot of the remaining narratives, God himself provided the other "seed" through yet another younger son.

In view of the parallels between the previous scene (3:21–24) and the worship of God in the Sinai covenant (see above), it is appropriate that the author has turned immediately to the question of God's acceptance of the offering and worship of Cain and his brother. The author's purpose is apparently to use the narrative of Cain and Abel to teach a lesson on the kind of worship that is pleasing to God. Worship that pleases God is that which springs from a pure heart. How does the narrative teach a lesson about a pure heart? It does so by allowing the reader to see, behind the scenes, the *response* of Cain to God's rejection. In that response, we see the heart that lay behind the unaccepted offering; Cain's worship was not acceptable, whereas Abel's worship was. The author does not explicitly draw out the difference between the two offerings. Contrary to the popular opinion that Cain's offering was not accepted because it was not a blood sacrifice, it seems clear from the narrative that both offerings, in themselves, were appropriate— both were described as "offerings" and not "sacrifices"; hence, Cain, a farmer, had no need to shed blood in his gift to God. The narrative suggests, as well, that they were both "firstfruits" offerings (4:4); thus, as a

---

<sup>37</sup> See Cassuto, *Genesis*, 1:201.

farmer, Cain's offering of "fruits of the soil" was as appropriate for his occupation as Abel's "firstborn of his flocks" was for his occupation as a shepherd. Rather than attempting to discover what was wrong with Cain's offering, we would be better advised simply to note that the author omitted any explanation. He is apparently less concerned about Cain's offering than he is about Cain's response to the Lord's rejection of his offering. At least, that is what the author focuses on. Whatever the cause of God's rejection of Cain's offering, the narrative itself focuses our attention on Cain's response. It is there that the narrative seeks to make its point.

Cain's response was twofold: (1) anger against God (4:4b), and (2) anger against his brother (4:8). By stating the problem in this way, the author surrounds his lesson on pleasing offerings with a subtle narrative warning: "by their fruits you shall know them" (Mt 7:20). In portraying the importance of a pure heart in worship, the author is close to the ideas

*GENESIS 113*

expressed by Jeremiah against the hypocritical worshipers in his day. Just as Jeremiah pleaded with his people "to do well [אם-היטיב תיטיב] and not shed innocent blood" lest they be exiled from their land (Jer 7:5-7), so God pleaded with Cain to "do well" (אם-תיטיב) or face the consequences of shedding innocent blood and exile from the land (Ge 4:7-12).

It is possible that the author intends the present narrative to be read in the light of the Deuteronomic legislation of the "cities of refuge." The terse description of Cain's offense against Abel is similar to the description of an intentional homicide in Deuteronomy 19:11. The similarity appears to play into the author's purpose. The purpose of the cities of refuge was to insure that "innocent blood not be shed in the land" (Dt 19:10). That, of course, is the central point of the Cain and Abel narrative: "The voice of your brother's blood is crying out to me from the ground" (4:10). In setting out the types of offenses for which the "cities of refuge" were to be used, Deuteronomy 19:11 specified that a guilty murderer was one who "lies in wait for his neighbor and rises up [וקם] against him and slays him." The narrative of Genesis 4 states that "while they were in the field, Cain rose up [ויקם] against Abel and slew him" (4:8). According to the law in Deuteronomy, Cain's offense was punishable by death, though, of course, he would still have had recourse to the cities of refuge. In any event, the fact that God showed mercy on Cain and the fact that later in the story God's mercy was connected with Cain's building a city suggest that a more than coincidental relationship exists between the story of Cain and the later Deuteronomic legislation dealing with the cities of refuge. The narrative may be suggesting not only that Cain's offense was punishable by death but also that the city which Cain built (4:17) was a prototype of the cities of refuge.

### ***b. Repentance (4:9-14)***

Again, as in chapter 3, when the Lord came in judgment, he first asked questions ("Where is Abel your brother?" "What have you done?"), then meted out the punishment ("Cursed are you from the ground.... When you work the ground it will no longer give its strength to you; you will wander to and fro over the land"). The picture of Cain's judgment is remarkably similar to the Exile that Israel was warned of in Deuteronomy:

"Cursed are you in the city and cursed are you in the field. Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks" (Dt 28:16-19).

The imagery of God's judgment against Cain appears to have become a metaphor to the prophets (Isa 26:21) in picturing the judgment of God against Israel in the Exile: "See, the LORD is coming out of his dwelling to punish the people of the land for their sins. The land will disclose the blood shed upon her;

she will conceal her slain no longer.” It should be noted that Isaiah 27:1–5 continues with images drawn from the early chapters of Genesis: of God’s final victory over the “snake” and God’s watchful care over his “fruitful vineyard” where no “briers and thorns” are allowed to grow.

The meaning of this passage turns on how we understand Cain’s reply in verse 13. Did Cain complain that his “punishment” was too great to bear? Or should we understand his reply to be that his “iniquity” was too great to

114 THE PENTATEUCH AS NARRATIVE

forgive? Although most English versions read “my punishment is too great to bear,” the sense of the Hebrew word עון and the Lord’s response to Cain’s words in verse 15 suggest that Cain’s words are not to be understood as a complaint about his punishment but rather an expression of remorse over the extent of his “iniquity.”<sup>38</sup> Cain acknowledged that God’s punishment (v. 12) would result in his own death, since he would not have the protection of an established community (v. 14). Like his parents, Adam and Eve, who were driven out (3:24) of their home, the penalty of death was to be carried out against Cain by banishment (4:14) from a protective community:

“Today you have driven me from the land, and I will be hidden from your presence; I will be a restless wanderer on the earth and whoever [or whatever] finds me will kill me.” By themselves Cain’s words do not necessarily suggest repentance, but the Lord’s response of mercy and protection (“Very well, anyone who kills Cain will be avenged seven times,” v. 15) implies that Cain’s words in verse 13 are indeed words of repentance.

### **c. Divine Protection (4:15-24)**

The major issues at stake in this narrative seem identical to those that lie behind the narrative of the cities of refuge (Nu 35:9–34). In both narratives God provides a protection against the “avenger of blood.” The question was not first whether one was actually guilty of the crime of murder— that could be settled by due process (Nu 35:12). The more basic question lying behind Cain’s statement and the provision of the cities of refuge was the protection of the accused against the threat of a blood avenger. In both narratives God’s provision was intended to put an end to the further bloodshed that even an unintentional killing engenders: “Bloodshed pollutes the land” (Nu 35:33).

The background of the cities of refuge may provide a clue to the sense of the “sign” given to Cain in this passage. It is clear that the purpose of the sign was to provide Cain with protection from vengeance. It is often said that the “sign” was put “on” Cain (cf. English versions), though the passage states that the sign was given “to” or “for” Cain (cf. Ge 21:13, 18; 27:37; 45:7, 9; 46:3 with 21:14; 44:21). I

What was the “sign” given to Cain for his protection? Though the narrative does not explicitly identify the sign,<sup>39</sup> we should note that after the mention of the sign, the narrative continues with an account of Cain’s departure to the land of Nod, “east of Eden,” where he built a city. In view of the parallels with those texts relating to the cities of refuge, it may be significant that in this text the “sign narrative” is followed by the “city narrative.” In the present shape of the text, Cain’s city may have been intended as the “sign” which gave divine protection to Cain. One element of the narrative that seems to be in favor of such a reading is that, within the narrative itself, the purpose of the “sign” was to provide protection for Cain from anyone who might attempt to avenge Abel’s death. Such was the express goal of the cities of refuge (“They will be places of refuge from the avenger, so that a person accused of murder may not die before he stands

---

<sup>38</sup> See Cassuto, *Genesis*, 1:22,7.

<sup>39</sup> Many attempts have been made to identify the sign, e.g., a dog, a bright colored coat, a horn on his forehead; see L. Diestel, *Geschichte des Alten Testaments in der christliche Kirche* (Jena: Mauke’s Verlag, 1869), 497.

trial before the assembly,” Nu 35:12). The subsequent narrative testifies to the association of Cain’s sign and the cities of refuge in that even in Lamech’s day (vv. 23–24) Cain’s city was a place of refuge for the “manslayer” (see comments below). Thus within the narrative as a whole, Cain’s city may be viewed as a city of refuge given him by God to protect him and his descendants from blood revenge (see Dt 19:11–13).

The importance which the author attaches to the city which Cain built can be seen in the fact that the remainder of the chapter is devoted to the culture which developed in the context of that city. In verses 20–24 the author names the originators of the primary components of city life: agriculture (Jabal, v. 20), arts (Jubal, v. 21), craftsmanship (Tubal–Cain, v. 22), and, it appears, law (Lamech, vv. 23–24).

Lamech’s words to his two wives have been interpreted many ways, frequently as an example of boasting arrogance and rebellion. When read in the context of the Mosaic Law and of the teaching regarding the cities of refuge, however, Lamech’s words appear to be an appeal to a system of legal justice.<sup>40</sup> The Mosaic Law provided for the safe refuge of any “manslayer” until a just trial could be held (Nu 35:12). By referring to the “avenging of Cain,” Lamech made it known that in his city he too had been “avenged.” To show that he had not shed innocent blood Lamech appealed to the fact that he killed a man “for wounding” him. He did not “hate his neighbor and lie in wait for him and rise up against him and kill him” (Dt 19:11) as Cain had done; rather, he based his appeal on a plea of self–defense.

Lamech’s appeal to the law of *lex talionis* bears striking resemblances to the Mosaic Law, which provided for a just penalty on the basis of *lex talionis*: “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” (Ex 21:23–25; Lev 24:18–20; Dt 19:21). The classic statement of this principle was given in Exodus 21:23–25, which concludes with the same words used by Lamech: “a wound for a wound and a bruise for a bruise.” The purpose of the principle was not to allow for revenge but to prevent it. The force of the principle was to ensure that a given crime was punished only by a just penalty. Like the laws establishing the cities of refuge, the principle of *lex talionis* was to prevent the escalation of an offense in blood revenge. Thus, Lamech killed a man for wounding him, that is, in self–defense, not because he “hated him” (Dt 19:6). If Cain, who killed his brother with malice, could be avenged, then Lamech would surely be avenged for a killing in self–defense. The point of the narrative is not to show that Lamech’s sense of justice was correct or even exemplary. Rather it is to show that Cain’s city and descendants had a system of law and justice representative of an ordered society. Not only did his city have agriculture, music, and crafts, it also had an ordered base from which human beings could run their affairs by law. The picture of Lamech is reminiscent of that of many ancient monarchs whose contribution to the peace and order of their realms was epitomized in their legal decisions (e.g., Hammurapi’s “Laws”).

#### ***d. God’s Blessing (4:25-26)***

The scene at the conclusion of the chapter returns to that of the beginning. A new son is born. Though Cain’s sons have prospered and have

become the founders of the new world after the Fall, the focus of the narrative turns from the line of Cain to that of the new son born “in the place of Abel.” The woman called him Seth (שֵׁט) because, she said, “God has given [שֵׁט] me another seed.” In such narratives as these the author clearly betrays his interest in the “seed” (Ge 3:15) of the woman. Chapter 5 shows just how seriously the author takes the promise in 3:15. The focus is on the “seed” and the one who will crush the head of the snake. A pattern is established

<sup>40</sup> See my “Genesis,” *EBC*, 2:Q8.

in chapter 4 that will remain the thematic center of the book. The one through whom the promised seed will come is not the heir apparent, that is, the eldest son, but the one whom God chooses. Abel, the younger of the two sons, received God's favor (4:4); Seth, still the younger son, replaced Abel. Cain takes his place in the narrative as one who was not to become part of the line of the "seed." With him throughout the remainder of the book of Genesis are Japheth (10:2-5), Ham (10:6-20), Nahor (11:29; 22:20-24), Ishmael (17:20), Lot (19:19-38), and Esau (chap. 36).

To underscore the importance of the line of Seth, the author notes that in his days humankind already practiced true worship of the God of the covenant ("At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD," 4:26). Such a note is a sign that, for the author, the worship of the Lord established at the time of Moses was not something new, but rather a restoration of the worship of the only and true God. In the light of such statements in the Pentateuch as Deuteronomy 31:27-29, which focus on the failure of the people to worship properly the God of the covenant, it is remarkable that the author not take a similar view of the patriarchs before the Flood. At least as far as the line of Seth was concerned, these men, like Abraham after them, are described as true worshipers of the covenant God.