

2. Primeval History

Genesis 2–11

1. Pre-Flood History (2:4–6:8)

1.1 The Garden (Gen 2:4–3:24)

A literary unit.

Not a second, perhaps contradictory, creation account. Instead, the opening scene of Biblical history.

Switch of names from God (Elohim 1:1–2:3) to LORD God (Yhwh Elohim 2:4–3:24).

1.1.1 God's Design (2:4-25)

Initial state (5-6)

Begins with four negative statements! Two types of vegetation are not yet, each with a reason.

- Not yet scrub of the field (שִׁיחַ הַשָּׂדֶה) because Yhwh God had not sent rain. Scrub that grows after rain, which sheep and goats can eat.
- Not yet grasses of the field (עֵשֶׂב הַשָּׂדֶה) because no human (*adam*) to work (*abad*) the ground (*adamah*). Grain that is cultivated by humans.

The field is open countryside surrounding human habitation, where flocks can eat the scrub and grain can be grown. Neolithic Revolution (c. 10,000 BP): domestication of plants (grain) and animals (flocks).

Does Yhwh intend to reverse these lacks?

Instead: subterranean water was coming up and watering the ground (*adamah*).

God's Action: a Human and a Home (2:7-9)

1. Human: Yhwh God formed (*yatsar*) a human (*adam*) from the dust of the ground (*adamah*), as a potter (*yotser*) forms clay into a pot. Breathes into it breath of life so it becomes a living creature.
2. Garden: Planted a garden in Eden in the east, into which he placed the human. Caused trees to sprout, producing fruit for food. Two particular trees: of life, of the knowledge of good and evil.

Interlude: River of life flows from the garden to water the earth (2:10-14).

The garden is God's sanctuary, his footprint on earth. An intrusion of heaven onto earth.

God Commissions the Human (2:15-17)

Settled/deposited the human in the garden. Origin: dust of the ground; destiny: God's sanctuary.

Purpose: to *abad* (עבד) and *shamar* (שמר 2:15).

- Conventional understanding (most EVV): to work it and to guard/keep it (the garden). But God has done the work, planting the garden, fruiting the trees.
- Cf. Israel's story: to serve (Yhwh) and keep (his commandment). These two verbs will be commission given to Israel in the Land, and to Levites and priests in the sanctuary. Priestly service.

The first commandment (2:16-17):

From every tree freely eat (emph). From the tree of the knowledge of good and evil do not eat (strong prohibition); if you do you will surely die (emph.)

The human is to enjoy the bounty of God's abundant provision, heeding his commandment. In such service lies his perfect freedom (cf. C. S. Lewis, *Perelandra*).

Ways of understanding the commandment:

- Covenant of works: "God promised them blessedness contingent upon their obedience to his

command” (Sproul). But there is no mention of covenant.

- God’s moral law: an eternal moral code intrinsic to the fabric of the cosmos and humanity.
- Loyalty & allegiance: faithful obedience to Yhwh God as creator; serve/worship Yhwh.

A Suitable Helper (2:18-25)

Another lack: not good for the human to be alone. Yhwh will make a helper corresponding to him.

- helper (*ezer*): most frequently used of God.
- corresponding to (*kenegdo*): lit. “as face-to-face to him,” i.e. a match.

Naming animals: God named on days 1-3; assigns to the human days 5-6a (living creatures). No helper.

Drops a deep sleep (*tardemah*) on the human: supernaturally induced. Took one of his (two) sides (*tsela*), i.e. cuts the human in half.

- one half: closed the gaping hole with flesh (cf. closing door across doorway).
- other half: built into a woman.

The (half-)human immediately recognizes the match: bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh.

Not a usual naming formula: “Concerning this one it will be called *Woman (ishah)* for from *Man (ish)* was taken this one.”

Pattern: *leave* parents and *cleave* to wife, put back together as one flesh, producing next generation. Leave and cleave will be important covenantal terms in Israel’s story. Fills world with people, resolving aloneness.

1.1.2 The Design Dashed (3:1-24)

Test/Temptation (3:1-7)

The serpent, an agent of disorder, tests/tempts the woman by questioning then contradicting God’s word (“Yhwh God” absent from 1-7). The woman listened to another voice then followed her eye not her ear: she *saw* that it was *good* and she *took*. God had not laid on humanity the ability to evaluate good apart from his word.

Consequences: eyes opened and they knew (serpent was right). But shame, so hid from one another and from Yhwh God (double name resumes in 3:8).

Judgment (3:14-19)

- **On serpent** (14-15): God blames the serpent.
 - cursed, the opposite of blessed. To bless is to endow with abundant and effective life. To curse is to rob of that, i.e. to frustrate. Bless = forward moving arrow; curse = dead-end.
 - enmity: the serpent persuaded the woman it was her friend, God the enemy. God will not leave it so, but interpose enmity.
 - two seeds: rest of Genesis and OT can be read as the story of the generation of these two seeds.
 - battle: knowing he will be mortally wounded in battle with the woman’s seed, the serpent and its seed will try to eliminate the woman’s seed.
 - 3:15 = protoevangelium (beginning of the gospel).
- **On woman** (3:16):
 - pain in childbirth. Would expect God to facilitate bearing of children.
 - marital conflict: woman’s desire towards husband, but he will rule over her.
- **On man** (3:17-19):
 - ground cursed, subject to futility. The ground will “naturally” yield thorns and thistles (uncultivated scrub of the field 2:5) suitable for goats but not humans. With painful toil the man can cultivate (*abad*) the ground (*adamah*) to produce grain (grass of the field = wheat,

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- barley) for food. The negatives of 2:5 have been reversed, but this was not God's design.
- Death: *adam*, taken from dust of *adamah*, will return to dust of *adamah*.

Expulsion from garden "to work the ground from which he was taken." East of Eden.
Garden sanctuary protected by cherubim (God's symbolic throne attendants).

1.2 Rise of Civilization (Gen 4)

1.2.1 Cain and Abel (4:1-16)

Eve bears a son, Cain: "I have gained a man." Self-focused. Then Abel his brother.

- Occupations: Abel a pastoralist (keeper of flocks), Cain a farmer (worker of the ground). The earliest occupations of domesticated life, tending domesticated animals and grains (Neolithic Revolution). Essential fore-runners of civilization. But in the Biblical story this happens east of Eden, after expulsion from Yhwh's garden sanctuary.
- Offerings: At the end of the season each brought a tribute offering (*minḥah*) to Yhwh. Abel brought the best he had (firstborn; fat portions), Cain did not. Offerings indicated their heart: Abel offered himself along with his offering.
- Yhwh's response: looked on both offerers and their offerings.
- Cain's response: very angry, fallen countenance.

Yhwh and Cain (6-15)

Warning: Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is towards you, but you must/can/will rule over it.

Cain killed Abel. Raises three problems:

- Abel's innocent death (first martyr)
- Cain's fratricide: God curses Cain; he will be wanderer. But provides protective mark.
- sin has entered the door: how to get it out?

Cain self-imposed exile: settled in the land of Nod (wandering).

1.2.2 Civilization outside God's presence (4:17-24)

Gifts of civilization arise in exile from God:

- Cain city-builder (urbanism c. 5500BC)
- Lamech's children: pastoral nomads; metal-workers (Chalcolithic 5500BC, Bronze Age 3500BC, Iron Age 1100BC), music-makers.

1.2.3 Second Line (4:25-26)

Eve birthed Seth, "God has set me another seed in place of Abel." God-focused.

Seth's descendants began to call on the name of Yhwh.

1.3 Family account (toledot) of Adam (5:1-6:8)

1.3.1 First genealogy (5:1-31)

Ten generations, highlighting 7th and 10th, ending with three sons.

- Enoch (#7): breaks pattern. (contrast Lamech #7 through Cain).
 - others "lived" but he "walked with God" ×2 cf. Noah (6:9), Abram (17:1).
 - others "died" but he "was not, for God took him."
- Noah (#10): Lamech named him *Noah* (rest) "This one will comfort (*naḥam*) us from our labor and

from the painful toil of our hands because of the ground which Yhwh cursed” (29).

1.3.2 Noah and the Nephilim (6:1-8)

Earthly perspective (1-4)

- Humanity (*ha-adam*) multiplying on the land (*ha-adamah*). Sons of God *saw* that the daughters of men were *good* and they *took* for themselves wives.
- Result: Nephilim (Gk *gigantes* giants), the semi-divine heroes of old; the world’s heroes.

Heavenly perspective (5-8)

- Yhwh saw that human wickedness and thoughts only evil continually.
- Yhwh was sorry (*naḥam*, regretted, changed his mind) he had made humanity on earth, pained in his heart. Decided to blot out humanity, even all living creatures.
- But Noah found favor in Lord’s eyes, his hero.

Two contrasts:

- what humanity sees as good, Yhwh sees as evil.
- Nephilim are humanity’s heroes, Noah is Yhwh’s hero.

2. The Flood (6:9–9:29)

2.1 The Flood (6:9–8:22)

2.1.1 Noah and the Earth (6:9-12)

- Noah: righteous man, blameless in his generation, it was with God Noah walked. Noah’s obedience (6:22; 7:5,9,16) is the outworking of this character.
- The Earth: ruined (3× in 6:11-12) in God’s sight. Humanity has filled it with violence (13).

2.1.2 God to Noah (6:13-21)

I am about to destroy (cause ruin) earth and humanity > so, make an ark.

I am about to bring a Flood > so, enter the ark and bring in animals.

- The Ark (*tebah*): cf. Moses’s basket. Both are vessels for saving through waters of destruction.
- The Flood (*Mabbul* of only this event, Gk *kataklysmos* “washing down,” Vg *diluvium* “washing away”). A unique event; meaning “waters upon the earth” (6:17; 7:6).

Focus on entrance (7× in 7:1-16) into ark. Only when all those entering have entered does Yhwh shut door.

The fountains of the great deep burst forth, the windows of the heavens were opened (7:11), the waters above and the waters below (1:7) invaded the living space. Undoing creation. Blotting out, wiping clean. Turning point: God remembered Noah (8:1a). Sent his Spirit-wind over the earth (cf. 1:2). Disembarkation (8:15-19): Noah a new Adam on a wiped-clean earth. A new beginning.

Noah’s offering (8:20-22)

Yhwh smelled the pleasing aroma, putting him at rest.

Self-resolve:

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never again: curse the ground (*ha-adamah*) because of humanity (*ha-adam*).

because (not although) the intention of humanity's heart is evil from its youth.

never again: smite all life.

The Flood did not solve the problem of human wickedness; the evil intent (*yetser ha-ra* 6:5; 8:21). This evil intent is grounds for both judgment (6:5) and grace (8:21), cf. Exod 32:9-10; 34:9.

Nevertheless Yhwh commits himself to the earth.

2.2 Noah & Sons (9:1-29)

God blesses Noah and sons (9:1).

Covenant with Noah and creation (9:8-17)

Initiated by God. To Noah and all creation.

Covenant promise: never again!

- never again will all flesh (humans+animals) be cut off.
- never again a Flood (*Mabbul*) to ruin the earth.

Covenant sign: rainbow, for God to see and remember.

Noah's curse and blessing (9:18-27)

New beginning: from Shem, Ham and Japheth humanity spreads across earth. Canaan 5× in 18-27.

Noah's curse and blessing (9:25-27)

- curse: Canaan (not Ham).
- blessing: Yhwh identifies himself with Shem; Japheth will find his blessing in tents of Shem.

3. Post-Flood History (10:1–11:26)

The account of Noah's sons (10:1–11:9).

3.1 The Table of Nations (Gen 10)

Descendants of Shem, Ham, Japheth spread across the earth in their lands, languages, clans, nation.

70 nations. Israel not one of them, but 70 described with non-existent Israel at center.

- Japheth: on far horizon, beyond Israel's interaction.
- Ham: near-neighbors with whom Israel interacted, often with enmity.
- Shem: Israel's "cousins."

Later identification: Japheth = Europe, Ham = Africa, Shem = Asia.

Several insertions:

- sons of Ham: Nimrod (8-12), Philistines (14), Canaanite territory (19)
- sons of Shem: two lines of humanity diverge from Eber: those who seek to make a name for themselves by building Babel (11:4, line of Joktan), and those for whom Yhwh will make a name in calling Abram (12:2, line of Peleg).

3.2 The Tower of Babel (11:1-9)

Humanity's sin

- Settlement: wandering east of Eden, away from God. The people settle in Shinar (Mesopotamia), against God's command to fill the earth (9:1).

- Build a city and a tower. The tower is a ziggurat, thought to give access to heaven. Babylon was called *bab-ilu*, “gate of god” because of its ziggurat. “The House of the Link between Heaven and Earth.” The narrator has to explain Mesopotamian building techniques for his Israelite audience. Babylon is the human city, the city of humanity gathered together in autonomy from God. The antithesis of later Jerusalem, the city of God and his people.

God’s response

Yhwh has to come down to see this tower that supposedly reaches heaven.

Human sin has crossed a new threshold: “this is only the beginning of what they will do” (6). God frustrates further spread of evil:

- scatters
- confusion of languages: Babel is not the gate to heaven, but the place where human language was confused (*balal*).

Second genealogy (11:10-26)

Ten generations from Shem through Peleg to Terah and his 3 sons.