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Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity, Volume II

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Chapter One

IN THE BEGINNING: MALE AND FEMALE (GEN 1-3)

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Perhaps no section of Scripture has generated more attention and discussion than Gen 1-3. Its importance in the Judeo-Christian tradition can hardly be overestimated. Historically at the center of discussions regarding the relation of science and the Bible, theological reflection concerning the "Fall" (and the larger anthropological concerns of what it means to be human) and debate comparing the relation of ancient Israelite thought and literature with that of the ancient Near East, its message continues to attract us.

In recent years Gen 1-3 has played a central role in the socio-theological discussion regarding the relationship and roles of male and female. Of considerable interest has been the question of whether Gen 1-3 provides a definitive statement concerning the nature and roles of man and woman in the divine order of creation, and if so, what that message is. This essay focuses principally upon those aspects of Gen 1-3 which are most pertinent for understanding the theological and anthropological message of the material regarding the divine-human relationship and the male-female relationship.

1. *The Larger Literary Context of Gen 1-3*

A. *Gen 1-3 in Relation to Gen 1-50*

Genesis divides rather unevenly into two major sections: 1-11 (primeval history) and 12-50 (patriarchal history). Gen 12:1-3 serves as the centerpiece to the book, as God's call and promise to Abraham occupy center stage throughout the remainder of the book of Genesis as well as

much of the Pentateuch. Consequently, the place and function of Gen 1-11 as a prelude to this pivotal theme of God's election and blessing of Abraham is of no small significance.[1] Gen 1 serves as a fitting preamble to Gen 12-50. Gen 1:26-28 commissions humanity to procreate and possess responsibly the land. Gen 12-50 is the dramatic account of the working out of that commission in the life of Abraham and his heirs. Gen 1:26 tells us that humans are created in the image of God. Throughout the remainder of Genesis (and the Pentateuch), Israel is called to be God's image to the nations.[2] So, Gen 1 presents the divine intent for creation; the remainder of Genesis recounts the multi-valent responses of creation, especially the human element of creation, to that divine intent.

B. *Gen 1-3 in Relation to Gen 1-11*

In general, Gen 1-11 divides clearly into five major narrative units. Chap. 1 sets the stage for chaps. 1-11 as a panoramic overview of the creation of the world. This creative masterpiece serves as backdrop for four dramatic episodes, each replete with intrigue, tragedy, and an open future to be resolved: 1) Adam and Eve; 2) Cain and Abel; 3) Noah and the flood; 4) the Tower of Babel. Not insignificantly, extensive genealogies immediately precede and follow the flood, marking its central importance to humanity.[3] Although numerous themes and issues are

[1]The ties between Gen 1-11 and 12-50 are apparent, the former closing with a people striving unsuccessfully for fame (name) and security, through the building of a tower. The Patriarchal history opens with the call of Abraham, through whom God brings blessing and purpose to life, while making for him a "name."

[2]For a fuller discussion, see Richard Clifford, "The Hebrew Scriptures and the Theology of Creation," *ThStud* 46 (1985): 507-23. For an introductory overview of the theological structure of Genesis, see Rick Marrs, "Thinking Theologically on Genesis: How to get at the Theological Message of the Book," *Where Genesis Meets Life* (Searcy, AR: Harding Univ. Press, 1991): 165-75.

[3]The positioning of genealogies immediately preceding and following the flood reassures the reader that despite the propensity of

treated in this opening section, pivotal is the dramatic interplay between the reality of life in God's world (Gen 3-11) versus God's intent for life in his world (Gen 1-2). Repeatedly we see the failure of humanity to respond appropriately to God's promise and purpose. Such failure results in a world filled with strife, violence, deceit, and an unending struggle for power and preeminence.

Of considerable significance is the carefully crafted linkage between the account of creation and the account of the flood.[4] In many ways, the flood appears as creation revisited.[5] Because of the overwhelming level of social violence and chaos, Yahweh regretfully returns this creation which is "out of control" to its prior watery status. However, disorder and chaos was never the divine intent, and so out of this watery chaos God once again re-creates his world, centering it this time in Noah, one who understands and models the appropriate human response to the divine creator (Gen 6:9; 8:1).

2. *The Relationship of Gen 1 to Gen 2-3*

Since the Enlightenment, heated debate has raged regarding the literary relationship between chaps. 1 and 2-

humanity toward disobedience and *hubris*, God's grace and providence insures order and continuity to the creation.

[4]For various thematic analyses of Gen 1-11, highlighting the close relationship of creation and the flood, see Bernard Anderson, "From Analysis to Synthesis: The Interpretation of Genesis 1-11," *JBL* 97 (1978) 23-39; Gary Rendsburg, *The Redaction of Genesis* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1986): 8-12; George Coats, "Strife and Reconciliation: Themes of a Biblical Theology in the Book of Genesis," *HBT* 2 (1980): 15-37; Susan Niditch, *From Chaos to Cosmos: Studies in Biblical Patterns of Creation* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985).

[5]At one level, the literary structure of the flood account returns us to the watery mass world of days 2-3. Out of this watery mass, God once again surfaces dry land and its vegetation. Noah is commissioned (Gen 9:1-7) in a manner strikingly reminiscent of Adam (Gen 1:26-30). Though finite and fickle, humans retain the image of God and are called to live in a manner reflecting that image.

3.[6] Clearly the focus of attention differs in the presentation of creation in Gen 1 from that in Gen 2-3. Gen 1 paints the universe in broad strokes; each creative act of God marches inexorably toward the pinnacle of creation—the creation of humanity on day six. This depiction is thoroughly theocentric—God the Creator unfolds in regal fashion his creative design across the expanse of the universe. Remarkably, this all-powerful and transcendent cosmic Creator chooses to stamp his own image upon creation in the form of humanity. Gen 2-3 must be read against this panoramic backdrop. If Gen 1 presents humankind as the pinnacle of creation, Gen 2-3 presents humankind as its center. The thoroughly theocentric view of Gen 1 is somewhat moderated by anthropocentric concerns in Gen 2-3. If Gen 1 depicts creation in telescopic majesty, Gen 2-3 addresses the nature of humankind and its relation to the Creator in microscopic detail. In Gen 2-3 we learn that the Cosmic Creator of Gen 1 is also a caring covenant God (יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים) who attends to the needs and complexities of human life.

3. *Analysis and Exegesis of Genesis 1*

A. *Structure and Literary Character*

In Gen 1, creation spans six days, the watery mass (1:1-2) being transformed into an ordered universe. On the first three days, the Creator progressively induces separation in this watery mass—light from dark, water from sky, dry land from water. Over the next three days, God fills and enumerates these various arenas. Having created light on day one, God creates specific lights on day four (sun, moon, stars). Having separated air and water on day two, God places birds and aquatic creatures in those two realms on day five. Having made dry land with its vegetation on day three, God creates land animals and humans to inhabit that area on day six. With day seven, order is present throughout creation and the Creator rests (2:1-3).

[6]As our interest is in determining the meaning and message of chaps. 1-3 in its final form, the subtle linguistic nuances and various images depicted throughout the narrative are of vital importance.

Formulaic repetition typifies Gen 1. Each day is recounted in strikingly similar fashion. We are struck with the orderliness of creation and the ease with which God creates. He simply speaks (commands) and creation is executed. Creation is good; the Lord of the universe deems it so.[7] Throughout we never lose sight that there is purpose and direction in the plan of the Creator. This God who began with a formless void concludes creation with every element in its proper place. Having blessed and commissioned his latter creative acts, he affirms the goodness of his creation and rests over it.

B. *Specific Exegetical Issues Pertinent to an Understanding of Humankind*

1. *Creation of Humankind.* Prior to the creation of humankind, we have become familiar with the standard formula: "God said . . . and it was so." However, we now hear: "Let us make . . . and God created."[8] God's creative

[7]Although in general there is an apparent sameness to the presentation of each day, on closer reading we note minor variations in the account, variations which add to the beauty of the reading. Key terms repeatedly surface: "made" (days 2, 4, 5, 6); "created" (day 6), "rule" (days 4, 6); "bless" (days 5, 6, 7). God calls (names) only on days 1-3. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984): 87, considers God's "naming" (קָרָא) significant. God names only what he separates. God creates in such a way that after the creation of the earth through separation and naming, life can come forth, but only because the creative word of God is at its origin.

[8]The divine plural (let us . . .) has been variously interpreted: 1) as a reference to the Trinity; 2) as a plural reflecting the morphological plurality of the term אֱלֹהִים (god); 3) as a plural of majesty; 4) as God speaking to his royal (divine) court; 5) as a plural of deliberation. Although long a favorite in Christian circles, the irrelevancy of the Trinity to the original hearers of Gen 1 leads us to search elsewhere for a more suitable interpretation. However, Gerhard Hasel, "The Meaning of 'Let us' in Gn 1:26," *AUSS* 13 (1975): 65, while avoiding specific Trinitarian terminology, has a rather nuanced interpretation which he designates the "plural of fullness," i.e., here we have presented in germinal form the acknowledgment of the fullness of personality and person within the deity. Although it is true that the term אֱלֹהִים is a

actions on day six, particularly the creation of humankind, provide the pinnacle of creative activity in chapter one. This is evidenced not only by the inordinate detail with which this action is recounted, but also through the introduction of direct discourse. Humankind stands as the only creature God addresses directly. Here creation moves between direct discourse (vv. 26, 28-30) and narrated discourse (v. 27). Humans clearly share aspects with the rest of the created order; their essence as creature is never forgotten. However, their uniqueness from the rest of creation captures our attention. This uniqueness is expressed through receiving their commission directly from God,[9] and through their creation in the image of God.

2. *Image of God.* The issue of the nature and essence of humankind being in the image of God has occupied scholarship for generations. Numerous and creative theories

masculine plural noun, it regularly occurs with singular verbs elsewhere in Gen 1, rendering the second interpretation questionable. The third interpretation (plural of majesty) envisions God speaking in the manner of a king (the "royal *we*"). This interpretation argues that kings regularly issued royal decrees in first person plural. Although the plural of majesty *may* occur with nouns in the OT, there is no evidence for its use with verbs or pronouns in the OT. Assuming a similar backdrop, the fourth interpretation envisions God encircled by his divine court and announcing his intention to them. God's heavenly court is mentioned elsewhere in the OT (1 Kgs 22:19-22; Job 1:6-7; 2:1-2; 38:7; Isa 6:8; Ps 82:1); its presence in Gen 1 continues to be disputed. For the use of the plural ("of deliberation") as a literary device to underscore the importance or solemnity of the event, see Isa 6:8; 2 Sam 24:14; Gen 11:7. God speaks to himself about his most important creation; with its execution he returns to the singular (v. 27). Given the royal imagery of Gen 1, the latter two interpretations are most compelling.

[9]As Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982): 31, notes, the human is the "speech creature" par excellence. He continues, "This is the one to whom God has made a peculiarly intense commitment (by speaking) and to whom marvelous freedom has been granted (in responding)."

have been propounded regarding its meaning.[10] Part of the difficulty in determining the meaning results from the text being more concerned to articulate the *result* of being in God's image (viz., dominion) than the *essence*. However, two issues are clear: 1) whatever the image entails, it was not lost with expulsion from the garden (Gen 9:6); 2) both male and female are created in the image of God.

"Image" (צֶלֶם) in the OT refers to any sculpture or plastic work, whether made of wood or stone. It is often used of idols (e.g., 1 Sam 6:5; Num 33:52; 2 Kgs 11:18; Ezek 23:14). Throughout the OT it signifies a concrete representation.[11] "Likeness" (דְּמוּת) is an abstract noun derived from the root דָּמָה (to be like).[12] This term connotes similarity and analogy rather than dissimilarity. Thus, צֶלֶם and דמות jointly describe a single idea.[13]

Thus, humankind in some way images God in the world. As Westermann[14] notes, the uniqueness of humans consists in their being God's counterparts. The text describes an action, not the nature of human beings. God's image is not something added to humanity; rather, humans are created in such a way that their very existence is intended to be their relationship with God. The divine-human correspondence is not static, but dynamic—evidenced in God's call to humanity to procreate and have dominion. To be

[10]For a detailing of several such theories, see David Clines, The Image of God in Man," *TynBul* 19 (1968): 53-103; John Willis, *Genesis* (Austin: Sweet, 1979): 88; Westermann, *Genesis*, 147-55; Hans Wildberger, "Das Abbild Gottes," *TZ* 21 (1965): 245-59, 481-509; Werner H. Schmidt, *Die Schopfungsgeschichte der Priesterschrift* (WMANT 17; Neukirchen: Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1967).

[11]This renders suspect attempts to import Western notions of the image of God involving our moral or spiritual nature.

[12]For examples, note Ezek 1:5, 10, 26, 28; 2 Kgs 16:10.

[13]No distinction seems intended in the variation of prepositions used in 1:26 (in our image, בְּצַלְמֵנוּ; according to our likeness, כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ). In Gen 5:3, Adam becomes "the father of a son, *in his image* (בִּדְמוּתוֹ) *according to his image* (כְּצַלְמוֹ).

[14]Westermann, *Genesis*, 157-158.

created in the image of God means that we are gifted by the Creator to be in personal relationship with Him. Remarkably, we are the only creatures with whom he has chosen to communicate directly.[15]

Finally, of utmost interest is the parallelistic statement of 1:27: "God created humankind (אָדָם) in his image, in the image of God he created him (אֹתוֹ); male (זָכָר) and female (נְקֵבָה) he created them (אֹתָם)." The shift from singular (אֹתוֹ) to plural (אֹתָם) shows clearly that אָדָם is not one single creature who is both male and female, but two creatures.[16] Further, no indication is given that these two creatures are created in opposition rather than in harmony. In Gen 1, male and female appear simultaneously, with no mention of superiority or subordination.[17]

3. *The Commissioning and Blessing of Humanity.* Just as the sun, moon, and stars were commissioned to rule the sky, separating night from day and delimiting time and season, so humans are now commissioned (1:28-30) to have dominion over the earth. Although the verbs "subdue" (כָּבַשׁ) and "have dominion" (רָדָה) often denote royal power and

[15]Gen 1:26-28 may also implicitly reflect ancient Israel's constant aversion to idols and graven images. Israel stood unique among her neighbors as an aniconic society. Her God could not be captured through the construction of any idol, for such images partook of creation itself. The Creator of the universe stands free from Israel and his world. However, inexplicably, this same Creator freely chooses to image himself in none other than his creation of humans! I.e., God cannot be imaged by any human construction, for he has already imaged himself in his own creation of humans (note especially Deut 4:12-18, where imaging is directly linked to creation).

[16]This disallows any androgynous interpretation.

[17]Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978): 17-19, argues forcefully that what is left *unsaid* allows freedom in interpreting the contours of the male and female creatures. In this first appearance of male and female, no attention is given to delineating sexual relationships, roles, characteristics, attitudes, or emotions. Rather, the text identifies two human responsibilities: procreation and dominion (with both male and female being assigned these tasks).

domination, one should not conclude that coercion and wanton exploitation of the created order is justified. Sarna argues that such a conclusion is unwarranted for several reasons: 1) humankind is not inherently sovereign, but enjoys dominion solely by the grace of God; 2) the model of kingship in ancient Israel denied unrestrained power and authority to a sole monarch, who stood under carefully defined divine law; 3) humans have been given sovereignty in a "very good" world in which God intends harmony and acts that are beneficial to his creation (see Isa 11:1-9).[18]

Blessing occurs three times in this opening account of creation (1:22, 28; 2:3). In its first two occurrences, blessing evokes fertility and multiplication. The capacity for sexual reproduction is a divine blessing bestowed by the Creator upon his creatures. The third blessing bestows a sacredness upon the Sabbath.[19]

C. *Place of Gen 1 within the Larger Context of the Ancient Near East*

The metaphor that best captures the essence of God as Creator in Gen 1 is that of a royal monarch who simply

[18]Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis* (New York: Jewish Theological Sem. of America, 1966): 13. Similarly, Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 32-33, links the nature of dominion and authority presented here with the NT concept of dominion, where the one who rules is the one who serves (Mk 10:43-44). Lordship means servanthood. Gen 1:26-28, he says, ". . . is revolutionary. It presents an inverted view of God, not as the one who reigns by fiat and remoteness, but as the one who governs by gracious self-giving. It also presents an inverted view of humanness. This man and woman are not the chattel and servants of God, but the agents of God to whom much is given and from whom much is expected."

[19]Sarna, *Genesis,* 10-11, 15: "Through his weekly suspension of normal activity, man imitates the divine pattern and reactualizes the original sacred time of God, thereby recovering the sacred dimension of existence. Paradoxically, he also thereby rediscovers his own very human dimension, his earthliness, for the Sabbath delimits man's autonomy, suspends for a while his creative freedom, and declares that on that one day each week nature is inviolable."

issues commands (and God said) which are then executed (and it was so). As noted above, the crowning achievement of his creative activity is the creation of humankind in his image. In ancient Mesopotamia,[20] when a monarch subdued another territory, he frequently erected a statue (image) of himself in that conquered country before returning to his homeland. That image was a constant reminder to the subjugated people of their Mesopotamian overlord, his "image" in effect reflecting his "presence."[21] Given this backdrop, we suggest that Gen 1 reflects just such imagery, but with a dramatic twist. God, the royal sovereign of the universe, has placed his own "images" *within* his created order. Man and woman are essentially accorded "royal status." It is no wonder that Ps 8:3-9 exclaims:

> When I look at your heavens, the work of your
> fingers,
> the moon and the stars that you established;
> What are humans that you are mindful of them,
> mortals that you care for them?
> Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
> and crowned them with glory and honor.

[20]For an intriguing and provocative reading of Gen 1-11 against the backdrop of the Mesopotamian world, see Bernard Batto, *Slaying the Dragon* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 1992).

[21]In Mesopotamia and Egypt the king is considered the image/likeness of his god. In Egypt, Tutankhamen is called "the living image of (the god) Amun"; Thutmose IV is designated "the likeness of Re." On Assyrian royal steles, the gods are often depicted by their symbols (e.g., Ashur by a winged disk; Shamash by the sun disk); these depictions were called "the image (*salam*) of the great gods." Not uncommon are statements such as: "The father of my lord the king is the very image of Bel (*salam bel*) and the king, my lord is the very image of Bel"; "the king, lord of the lands is the image of Shamash"; "O king of the inhabited world, you are the image of Marduk." At Tell-Fekheriyeh (Syria), a 9th-century bilingual (Assyrian-Aramaic) inscription contains the word pair צֶלֶם / דְּמוּת (image/likeness) in parallelism on a statue. For a fuller discussion of this phenomenon, see Sarna, *Genesis,* 12; Alan Millard and Pierre Brodrueil, "A Statue from Syria with Assyrian and Aramaic Inscriptions," *BA* 45 (1982): 135-41.

> You have given them dominion over the work of
> your hands;
> you have put all things under their feet,
> all sheep and oxen,
> and also the beasts fo the field,
> the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea,
> whatever passes along the paths of the seas.
> O Lord, our Sovereign,
> how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Although much could be said in this context, three observations will suffice: 1) in Mesopotamia a frequent image of humanity is that of a slave (lackey) functioning primarily to serve the gods, whereas in Gen 1 humans are exalted creatures given responsibility for the rest of creation;[22] 2) in Mesopotamia only the king bears the image of God, whereas in Gen 1 this view is democratized (*all humankind* reflect God's image);[23] 3) (to my knowledge) no Mesopotamian material recounts the creation of woman and her relationship to the divine world and the rest of creation.

D. *Theological Significance of Gen 1*

Scripture opens with a powerful affirmation of what it means to be human in a God-centered and God-ordered world. Humankind, consisting of male and female, reflect the very image of God. The sovereign Lord of the universe has entrusted to his sovereign subjects direct responsibility for the rest of creation. Humankind as male and female stands neither in opposition (antonymous) to each other nor as indistinguishable (synonymous). Rather, they stand in community with a common commission and function.[24]

[22]In *Enuma elish,* Marduk creates humankind to take the place of the lesser gods who are tired of the demeaning service they must perform for the greater gods.

[23]For all humanity to be stamped in the image of God reflects the infinite worth of humanity and affirms the inviolability of humankind (Gen 9:6).

[24]Bernard Anderson, "'Subdue the Earth': What Does it Mean?" *BibRev* 8 (1992): 4, states: "Crowned as kings and queens, they are

Human sexuality partakes of the very blessing of God. God's creation is "good," a designation not simply denoting its aesthetic quality, but more importantly its functional nature. God has created each element suitable to its purpose. Divine creation is neither an afterthought nor without focus and direction. Rather, the world God has created has meaning and purpose; he has ordered it in such a manner that it can fulfill its purpose. Crucial to this realization is the place and role of humanity. Created in the image of God, these human creatures have the awesome task of providing maintenance and direction in such a way that creation fulfills its divine goal. Although transcendent, there is a closeness between the Creator and his creatures, reflected in his daily attentiveness to his creation. Inexplicably, it is humanity which benefits most dramatically from this awesome creative power and blessing. Humankind as male and female finds its meaning, direction, and purpose only in relation to its benevolent and gracious Creator.

4. *Analysis and Exegesis of Genesis 2-3*

In OT scholarship, the attention accorded the opening chapter of Genesis pales only in comparison to the attention given the creation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from the garden (Gen 2-3). This latter narrative has been the breeding ground for countless discussions regarding the nature of man and woman and their relationship.[25] Having

commissioned to exercise their God-given role wisely and benevolently so that God's dominion over the earth may be manifested in their actions. When viewed in the light of Ps 8, the creation story of Gen 1 is a call to responsibility." For further discussion of this passage within the specific context of human sexuality, see Phyllis Bird, "'Male and Female He Created Them': Gen 1:27b in the Context of the Priestly Account of Creation," *HTR* 74 (1981): 129-60; *idem*, "Sexual Differentiation and Divine Image in the Genesis Creation Texts," *Image of God and Gender Models* (ed. K. Borresen; Solum Forlag, 1991): 10-31.

[25]A not infrequent reading of this text assumes that in its presentation of Adam and Eve, it proclaims male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. Woman is portrayed as a "temptress" and troublemaker who is dependent upon and must be dominated by her

seen the lofty position the Sovereign God has accorded humankind (Gen 1), we now turn our attention to the human response to this exalted status. Gen 2-3 allows us to focus more closely upon the creation of the first couple and their response to the place accorded them in the created order by the Creator of the universe.[26]

A. *Structure and Literary Character*

Gen 2-3 is a carefully-crafted narrative. Readers for generations have been struck by the dramatic unfolding of the plot, the suspense, and the ensuing tragedy. The thrust of the material clearly revolves about the creation of the first

husband. This misogynous reading is often agreed upon both by those who applaud or deplore this narrative. Trible, *Sexuality*, 73, notes several reasons that are cited to justify this rendering: 1) a male God creates first man and last woman; first means superior and last means inferior/subordinate; 2) woman is created for the sake of man: a help-mate to cure his loneliness; 3) contrary to nature, woman comes out of man: she is denied even her natural function of birthing (that function being given to man); 4) woman is the rib of man, dependent upon him for life; 5) taken out of man, woman has a derivative, rather than autonomous, existence; 6) man names woman and thus has power over her; 7) man leaves his father's family in order to set up through his wife another patriarchal unit; 8) woman (being untrustworthy, gullible, and simpleminded), tempted man to disobey and thus is responsible for the entrance of sin into the world; 9) woman is cursed by pain in childbirth (pain in childbirth is a more severe punishment than man's struggle with the soil, signifying that woman's sin is greater than man's); 10) woman's desire for man is God's way of keeping her faithful and submissive to her husband; 11) God gives man the right to rule over the woman. She suggests that none of these premises are *altogether* accurate; most are simply not present in the story and violate the real purpose and thrust of the story! For her, the true focus of the story concerns life and death.

[26]From the cosmic sweep of Gen 1 we direct our attention to the creation and placement of humans—the glory and central problem of creation. As Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 51, notes, Gen 2-3 principally addresses how to live with creation in God's world on God's terms. This narrative probes the extent to which one may order one's life autonomously, without reference to any limit or prohibition (a problem which endures throughout the OT).

man and woman and their relationship to their Creator. However, brief interludes balance and enhance the overall movement of the story. In broad strokes, Gen 2-3 recounts a garden that is given to (2:8-17) and then lost by (3:1-24) the first human couple. More precisely, it narrates the coming to full life of this first couple (2:7-25) and the disintegration of that life (3:8-24) through disobedience (3:1-7). Repetition of key phrases at the beginning (2:4-9, 15) and end (3:22-24) provide *inclusio*, compelling the reader to read chapters 2-3 as a unified whole.[27]

The narrative of Gen 2-3, though rather straightforward with its three major scenes (2:7-25; 3:1-7, 8-24) and four major characters (God, Adam, Eve, the serpent), continues to intrigue us with unanswered questions, language with multiple meaning, and apparent ambiguity. Yahweh, the principal determiner of the nature of human existence in scenes one and three, is noticeably absent from scene two (the temptation). That middle scene is fraught with drama, for there the serpent, man, and woman turn God-the-subject into God-the-object.[28] It is often easy to overlook what the text does tell us in our search for answers to questions left unaddressed by this narrative.

[27]Gen 3 must be read against the backdrop of chap. 2. Throughout terminology and themes resurface which can only be properly understood against the whole of the narrative. Alan Hauser, "Genesis 2-3: the theme of intimacy and alienation," *Art and Meaning* (ed. D. Clines, *et al.*; Sheffield: JSOT, 1982): 20-33, utilizes the themes of intimacy and alienation to depict the thematic relation of chaps. 2-3. The world of harmony and intimacy (chap. 2) is shattered in chap. 3 and replaced by a world of disruption and alienation. For Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 51, the contrast concerns the faithful work of God (chap. 2) and the resultant human distrust (chap. 3). In God's garden, as God intends it, there is mutuality and equity (chap. 2); in God's garden, now permeated by distrust (chap. 3), there is struggle for control and distortion.

[28]So Trible, *Sexuality*, 75.

B. *Specific Exegetical Issues Pertinent to an Understanding of Humankind*

1. *Creation of Humankind.* Out of the earth (אֲדָמָה) created by God, an "earthling" (אָדָם) is fashioned.[29] We immediately are confronted with the strikingly complex nature of this creature[30]—formed from dust, yet infused with the very breath of God. The importance of these twin relationships (i.e., with the earth, with God) cannot be overemphasized. At one and the same time we encounter אָדָם in his frailty as mere dust and yet empowered for life through the gracious gift of God's breath.[31] The creation of אָדָם is set against the backdrop of the initial barrenness of the land. Two reasons are given for this barrenness: 1) God has not yet watered his earth (i.e., sent rain); 2) there is as yet no creature to care for (i.e., till) the earth. This initial tension is quickly erased.

a) *Relation of Man to the Earth.* Following quickly upon the heels of the creation of אָדָם (earthling), God's grace manifests itself in the planting of a beautiful garden for

[29]The verb יָצַר (formed) is often, though not exclusively, used of a potter / sculptor. Significantly, two-thirds of its occurrences have God as subject. The imagery of man originating from dust and being molded by God occurs elsewhere in the OT (Gen 3:19; Job 10:9; Pss 18:27; 90:3; 104:29; 119:73; 146:4; *et al.*). The image is shared with other ancient Near Eastern cultures. For a fuller discussion, see Sarna, *Genesis*, 17; Westermann, *Genesis*, 203-4.

[30]Contra Trible, *Sexuality*, 80, it seems to me that we are expected to understand אָדָם as a "man" from the beginning. However, she is surely correct in noting that his maleness is of no significance at the outset. Rather, it is his relationship to the earth אֲדָמָה that is of central importance. See Richard Davidson, "The Theology of Sexuality in the Beginning," *AUSS* 26 (1988): 121-31.

[31]As Sarna, *Genesis*, 17, notes, here we see humanity simultaneously in its glory and its utter insignificance. Adam enjoys exalted status through the nature of being God's creation in which the divine breath of life is present; at the same time he is mere dust taken from the earth.

the creature's dwelling.[32] Already two clear anthropological themes are sounded: 1) אָדָם shares an intimate connection with the earth (אֲדָמָה); 2) אָדָם is created with meaning and purpose—to care for the earth.[33]

Placed within this wondrous garden, the man's life finds meaning and purpose—he is to "till and keep" the garden (2:15). אָדָם and the garden stand in somewhat of a reciprocal relationship. As he serves and tends the garden, so it feeds and sustains him. However, this gracious provision of God is not without limitations, for in the midst of the garden stands the tree of knowledge of good and evil, from which the man must not eat. Although the tendency among readers is to concentrate almost exclusively upon the prohibition (2:17), in actuality the text makes a powerful threefold statement regarding the man's status: 1) he is given a vocation (v. 15);[34] 2) he is given permission (v. 16); 3) he is given a prohibition (v. 17). Human life before God is characterized by vocation, permission, and prohibition. If any is missing, human life is perverted.[35]

[32]So that we not miss the beauty and magnitude of this gift, the contours of this garden are depicted in some detail (2:8-14). Even the name of the garden conveys this message; Eden means "delight, enjoyment."

[33]What Gen 1 expresses through the motif of the image of God, Gen 2 conveys through the medium of the very name of man (אָדָם/אֲדָמָה).

[34]Trible, *Sexuality*, 85, rightly concludes that since the garden is a work of delight, caring for it should foster pleasure. The terms used for the human task are significant. עָבַד (serve [till]) connotes respect; indeed, in numerous OT texts it is used of reverence and worship of the Lord. שָׁמַר (keep) denotes protection rather than possession. Both terms intend care and attention rather than plunder and exploitation. Not insignificantly, work appears indigenous to creation; however, it may be of some significance that initially the man's commission envisions only care for the garden, whereas in chap. 3 he will receive the virtually impossible task of "tilling the earth" (3:23). Not unexpectedly, there the joy of work gives way to frustration and despair (3:17-19).

[35]As Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46, rightly notes, although the gift of the garden is an act of utter graciousness on God's part, the tree(s) in the midst of the garden disclose the character of God's graciousness. There is no cheap grace here.

b) *Relation of Man to the Animals.* Having been graciously placed in the garden and entrusted with a task, Yahweh's concern and care for Adam does not suddenly disappear. Rather, just as Gen 1 shows us that God intends humanity as community, so here he addresses the aloneness of אָדָם (earthling).[36] Like man, animals are formed from the earth (2:7, 19); unlike man, they are not inbreathed with the breath of God. Although similar to אָדָם, it is their difference which receives attention.[37] Having created the animals, Yahweh entrusts to אָדָם yet another task—that of naming the animals.

Although a rather common perception is that naming implies domination by a superior and subordination of an inferior, such a view is less than compelling in the present context. Although the naming of persons and places often occurs in contexts which also reflect hierarchical concerns, it more typically denotes the activity of providing identity, specifically identity with respect to the one naming. Naming allows one to determine the identity and placement of various elements.[38] In our present context, such an interpretation is cogent. In Gen 2, the animals appear initially to address the issue of man's loneliness. However, we quickly realize that, although they will have a place in אָדָם's (earthling)

[36]In Gen 1 the creation of male and female results in God's assessment of creation as "very good"; in Gen 2 God assesses the man's solitariness as "not good."

[37]The ambiguous drama of this scene has been noted often. Are we to understand that Yahweh initially falters in his attempt to alleviate the man's aloneness? Are we to view Yahweh's creative activity as less than stellar? We would suggest that the present ambiguity is intentional and foreshadows the introduction and presentation of woman. Rather than intending to detract from the creation of animals, we are already made aware that the man's solitariness can only be resolved through a dramatic and direct intervention on God's part. Nothing less than an equal portion of God's attentive care will suffice to resolve the man's dilemma.

[38]So Westermann, *Genesis,* 228.

world, they are insufficient to meet his deepest need—human companionship.

c) *Relation of Man to Woman.* Strikingly, the creation of woman is presented in greater detail than that of man. Further, she is the only creature that does not derive directly from the earth (הָאֲדָמָה). Rather, אָדָם (earthling) functions as the אֲדָמָה did earlier.[39] Because of their importance in detailing the first interaction between man and woman, vv. 21-24 demand careful reading.

Although virtually impossible to read this material without importing concepts and materials from elsewhere, it is crucial that we initially struggle to hear what the immediate text says concerning this original man and woman. Several things are worthy of note: 1) while the creation of man is covered in one verse (2:7), the creation of woman is detailed in five verses; 2) unlike the animals, woman realizes fully God's provision for the man of a "helper fit for him" (עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ); 3) whereas the man simply names the animals when they are presented to him, with the introduction of the woman the naming is enveloped in exclamation; 4) just as man was given a vocation that should bring joy, so now he is given a companion that brings joy; 5) man's initial observation (and assessment?) regarding woman focuses entirely upon their commonality and mutuality (v. 23); 6) the solitary אָדָם (earthling) finds true "oneness" in union with the woman (they "become one flesh" [v. 24]).

Repeatedly, Gen 2:21-25 has been used to justify a hierarchical relationship of female subordination toward the male.[40] Arguments for a hierarchical interpretation include:

[39]Trible, *Sexuality,* 96.

[40]See, among others, Stephen B. Clark, *Man and Woman in Christ: An Examination of the Roles of Men and Women in the Light of Scripture and the Social Sciences* (Ann Arbor: Servant Books, 1980): 23-28; Susan Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Pub. Co., 1979): 61-62; Michael Stitzinger, "Genesis 1-3 and the Male / Female Role Relationship," *GTJ* 2 (1981): 23-44.

1) man was created first and woman last; first connotes superiority while last denotes subordination (inferiority); 2) woman was created for the sake of man—to be his helpmate (assistant) to cure his loneliness; 3) woman comes out of man, implying a derivative or subordinate status; 4) woman was created from man's rib, indicating a dependence upon him for life; 5) man names woman, indicating his power/authority over her. Each of these arguments is problematic. Literarily, Gen 2 reflects a "ring composition." That is, the order of creation (man first, woman last) intends not a move from superiority to inferiority, but through *inclusio* (man/woman) a move from incompleteness to completeness. Literarily, one can more compellingly argue that woman is presented as the climax and culmination of the story—she is the crowning work of creation![41] Regarding the place of woman in creation, we should not too quickly assume that the designation "helper" necessarily connotes subordinate status and position (a point to which we will return). The suggestion that derivation implies subordination would force us to conclude that man is subordinate to the earth, from which he was derived![42] Finally, as noted above, naming does not necessarily imply dominion. In the immediate context, the man's naming of woman actually occurs within his joyous exclamation at God's marvelous creative act. Man is not so much "determining" woman as delighting in what God has done.[43] Thus, a hierarchical interpretation of

[41]If superiority derives from order of appearance, then animals take preeminence over humans in Gen 1! Willis, *Genesis,* 111-12, argues that although the creation of woman was in God's mind from the beginning, he withholds her appearance until man can appreciate her value in the fullest sense.

[42]The woman is *not* Adam's rib; rather, it is simply the raw material from which she is made, just as dust is the raw material from which man is formed. Woman is not molded from clay (dust), but "architecturally constructed" (*banah*). Conversely, one might argue that woman is superior, being created from animate (superior) matter rather than inanimate matter. More likely, the rib implies equality rather than inferiority—woman is created to stand side by side.

[43]For this discussion I have relied principally on the work of R. Davidson, *AUSS* 13.

Gen 2:21-25 is less than compelling. However, three aspects of this text merit further consideration: 1) the designation of woman as man's "helper"; 2) the naming of woman by man; 3) the designation of man and woman together as "one flesh."

The creation of woman occurs within the context of God's intent to provide man with a "helper fit for him" (עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ). The noun עֵזֶר occurs several times in the OT, primarily as a relational term describing an anticipated beneficial relationship. It can be used of humans, nations,[44] or God.[45] The latter is telling; throughout the OT God is designated and called upon as the helper of humankind. However, to suggest that in these contexts God functions as subordinate to humans is ludicrous. Rather, it is the relationship that is paramount; the hierarchical dynamics of that relationship are left unspecified by עֵזֶר.[46] For this reason the prepositional phrase כְּנֶגְדּוֹ is of paramount significance.[47] If עֵזֶר designates the relationship, כְּנֶגְדּוֹ designates the nature of the relationship. Woman is created as a companion (neither subordinate nor superior) who alleviates man's isolation through identity.[48]

[44]Isa 30:5; Hos 13:9.

[45]Exod 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26; Pss 20:3; 33:20; 70:5; 115:9-11; 121:1; 146:5.

[46]Just as importing a nuance of inferiority into the term עֵזֶר lacks cogency, so does the attempt of R. Freedman, "Woman, a Power Equal to Man: Translation of Woman as a 'fit helpmate' for Man in Question," *BibRev* 9 (1983): 56-68, to see here a nuance of superiority. Freedman argues that etymologically עֵזֶר is a combination of עָזַר(to save, rescue) and עֹז (to be strong). Determining the precise nuance of terminology must derive principally from context rather than solely from etymological constructs.

[47]כְּנֶגְדּוֹ literally means: "like (כ) his counterpart (נֶגֶד + object suffix)," i.e., "corresponding to him."

[48]In general, we would suggest that Gen 2-3 recounts three relationships in which אָדָם finds himself: that with God (superior/subordinate); that with woman (equal); that with the rest of the created order (superior/subordinate).

This interpretation finds support in the naming of woman by man: 1) whereas man is asked to name the animals, with the arrival of woman this occurs spontaneously; 2) although the customary expression for naming consists of the verb קָרָא (to call) plus the noun שֵׁם (name), the noun is noticeably absent here;[49] 3) the designation "woman" (אִשָּׁה) is not in actuality a personal name, but simply a generic term; 4) in naming his counterpart "woman," אִשָּׁה, the man simultaneously names himself אִישׁ.[50] Thus, upon awakening, the man exultantly acknowledges God's marvelous accomplishment in creating a "partner suitable for him."

The realization of woman as man's "suitable partner" and his attendant response of jubilation culminates in the remarkable designation of their union as "one flesh." The language of 2:23-24 is most striking. Introducing another human into the creation scene to relieve the solitary situation of the man results not in a statement of differentiation regarding the man and woman, but in an affirmation of their solidarity and mutuality. Although the affirmation of "bone and flesh" may speak to the sexual union created between a husband and wife, we would suggest another focus. The terms "bone" (עֶצֶם) and "flesh" (בָּשָׂר) are a common word

[49]Trible, *Sexuality,* 100, concludes: "Hence, in calling the woman, man is not establishing power over her but rejoicing in their mutuality." Perhaps noteworthy also is that the verb קָרָא in v. 23 occurs in the passive (to / for this one it shall be called woman). For a detailed study of naming in the OT, see George Ramsey, "Is Name-Giving an Act of Domination in Genesis 2:23 and Elsewhere?" *CBQ* 50 (1988): 24-35. Ramsey argues that naming for the Hebrews was determined primarily by circumstances, rather than the naming determining the essence of an entity. Specifically regarding Gen 2, he argues that when Adam names the animals he is simply discerning their essence (already established by God). Adam's exclamation at 2:23 is a cry of discovery, or recognition, rather than a prescription of what woman shall be (i.e., an act of discernment rather than of domination).

[50]אִישׁ (man) occurs here for the first time. Sarna, *Genesis,* 23, suggests that אָדָם (earthling) discovers his own manhood and fulfillment only when he faces the woman.

pair used in the OT to express a close relationship between two parties.[51] However, it is worthy of note that this designation often occurs in decidedly covenantal contexts. That is, the language may underscore more covenantal loyalty than blood ties.[52] Thus, Gen 2:23-24, the first statement regarding the conjugal relationship between man and woman, makes a most powerful statement about the covenantal nature of marriage. Gen 2:24 affirms the divine intent of a man abandoning his familial identity to enter into a lasting covenantal relationship with a woman, a relationship typified by mutual concern, fidelity, and commitment.[53]

2. *The Temptation.* The temptation scene (3:1-7) both fascinates us and leaves us desiring more information. Several features of the narrative merit close attention: 1) the dialogue between the serpent and the woman; 2) the nature of the serpent and its relationship to the woman; 3) the nature

[51]Gen 29:14; Judg 9:2-3; 2 Sam 5:1; 19:13 (see also Job 2:5; Ps 102:5). Walter Brueggemann, "Of the Same Flesh and Bone, Gn 2, 23a," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 533, understands flesh and bone as merismus (i.e., flesh = weakness and absence of power; bone = strength and might).

[52]The verb "cleave" (דָּבַק) also occurs in covenantal contexts (Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Josh 22:5; 23:8; 2 Sam 20:3; 2 Kgs 18:6).

[53]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 233. Trible, *Sexuality,* 104, captures well the radical message of the text: From one comes two; from wholeness comes differentiation. Now, at the conclusion of the episode, this differentiation returns to wholeness; from two come the one flesh of communion between female and male. Robert Lawton, "Genesis 2:24: Trite or Tragic?" *JBL* 105 (1986): 97-98, argues that the verb "leaves" (עָזַב) should not be read as a frequentive imperfect (i.e., as descriptive of that which typically occurs), but as a potential imperfect (i.e., as that which should occur). He translates v. 24: "a man *should* leave his father and mother . . . ." Since social custom reflected the reverse of this practice (i.e., the woman typically left her family for that of her husband), he interprets this verse as a statement of divine intent rather than a habitually observed reality. Reading v. 24 in this way places it within a series of reversals which occur between chaps. 2 and 3. Just as 2:25 is reversed by 3:7, so 2:24 is dramatically reversed in 3:12, 16 when the man fails to take responsibility for his own actions, blaming instead his wife.

of the woman and her response to the serpent; 4) the presence/absence of the man.

The surprising absence of God from the scene is heightened by the sudden presence and dominance of the serpent. The serpent initiates and concludes the dialogue, implicitly demonstrating that the woman has been "surrounded and captured."[54] The serpent's opening question is a "masterpiece of psychological shading."[55] Through subtle distortion, the question defies a simple "yes or no" response. In responding, the woman corrects the serpent's distortion, but in the process shades the command herself. Having been captured by the serpent's apparent knowledge and insight, she succumbs to the temptation. Remarkably, we are told that having eaten of the fruit, the "eyes of the woman and her husband were opened"; knowledge of some sort has in fact been gained. The scene concludes with a vignette of the man and woman acting somewhat self-sufficiently—unsatisfied with their nakedness, they make clothing for themselves.

The linguistic and thematic links between Gen 2 and 3 must not be missed. The introduction of the serpent, the most crafty (עָרוּם) of the animals, follows the note that the man and woman were both naked (עֲרוּמִּים) and unashamed. "Made" (עָשָׂה) by God (3:1), this most cunning representative of the animal kingdom threatens the harmony of the created order and challenges the intent of the Creator.[56] Incredibly, the serpent contends that the divine statement

[54]Trible, *Sexuality,* 108. God is consistently designated יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים in Gen 2-3, except by the serpent who simply calls him אֱלֹהִים.

[55]Gerhard Von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. J. Marks; rev. ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972): 88.

[56]A discussion of the nature and full identity of the serpent is beyond the scope of this essay. In the immediate context, the serpent is clearly identified as a wild animal. For extensive discussions regarding the use of this passage in other biblical contexts, and the motif of the serpent in the larger ancient Near Eastern world, see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 237-38; Willis, *Genesis,* 120; Karen Joines, "The Serpent in Genesis 3," *ZAW* 87 (1975): 1-11.

concerning death is inaccurate and that the divine intent is rooted in jealousy rather than care and concern.[57]

In her initial response, the woman faithfully defends God, even to the point of utilizing his sentence structure. However, her response allows the serpent to assert his presumed superior insight and force the woman away from her position of believing obedience to a position of neutrality from which she might judge God and his command.[58] Herein lies the essence of the temptation—to become like God, living not under command to be responsible, but under the power to decide what responsible is.[59] However, it is important that we acknowledge the presentation of the woman in this temptation scene. As Trible notes, her response reveals her as intelligent, informed, and perceptive. She assumes responsibility for obedience (to a command delivered originally to the man), a responsibility the man will quickly abdicate (3:12).[60] To portray the woman as weak,

[57]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 240. As Trible, *Sexuality,* 111, notes, the motivation of the serpent is unstated. We are not told whether his "quarrel" is with God or the human couple; neither are we told whether his primary desire is to expose God's deceptive jealousy or his own superior slyness (which can overcome even humans). Although the motives of the serpent may be obscure, the enormity of its claims are clear—knowledge of divine action and intent.

[58]Von Rad, *Genesis,* 88, noting that the serpent gives the woman opportunity first to be right and defend herself for God's sake, states, "In the form of a question, however, the serpent has already made a deadly attack on the artlessness of obedience."

[59]George Coats, *Genesis* (FOTL I; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983): 54; see also *idem,* "God of Death: Power and Obedience in the Primeval History," *Int* 29 (1975) 227-39. Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 249, states: "The narrator wants to point to the inscrutable riddle which is always part of human existence wherever and as long as it is lived, namely, that people have the urge to transcend themselves by overstepping the limits set for them."

[60]Trible, *Sexuality,* 110, somewhat overstating the situation, calls her a theologian, ethicist, hermeneut, and rabbi! The woman, in adding the prohibition against touching the tree, "builds a fence around the Torah." Her "addition" to the command should insure obedience!

feeble-minded, and an easy target for the serpent finds no warrant in the text.[61]

The serpent's challenge of the divine command brings tragic results. The word of the serpent supplants the word of God. The movement of the woman is dramatically drawn out: "So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate (3:6)."[62]

To this point the man has received no mention. We are now told that the woman took some of the fruit and gave it to her husband, who also ate. Again, although it has long been popular to presume the man's absence from this scene, and thus to develop elaborate theories for the serpent's selection of the woman and her succumbing to the temptation, the text challenges such explanations. Though left explicitly unstated, several features of the text would suggest that the man is present throughout: 1) from the moment that God presents the woman to the man, no mention is made of their separation; 2) the serpent consistently uses a plural address; the woman answers in first person plural (we); 3) in 3:6b, we are told that she gives fruit also to her husband "with her" (עִמָּהּ).[63] Whether the man is absent or present from the

[61]The question of the serpent's selection of the woman rather than the man has fascinated readers for centuries. Since the text gives no reason, speculation abounds. Quite popular of course is that her "inferiority" makes her more vulnerable to temptation than the man. Conversely, Richard Hess, "The Roles of the Woman and the Man in Genesis 3," *Themelios* 18 (1993): 16, theorizes that since the woman was not present during the naming of the animals, she would be unaware of the serpent's shrewdness and thus more susceptible to its persuasive powers!

[62]Ironically, the woman's assessment of the "goodness" of the tree results in tragedy; through disobedience to the divine command the "goodness" of God's creation (chap. 1) brings harm rather than benefit. Sarna, *Genesis,* 25, notes the reason for the contrast: no longer is the goodness rooted in God's verdict; now it is rooted in the appeal to the senses and utilitarian value.

[63]This prepositional phrase is best taken as a nominal attribute

beginning, clearly absent is any nuance of the woman as a "temptress" of the man. Unlike the serpent, she makes no overtures toward him or in any way verbally entices him to partake; she simply hands him the fruit.[64]

The results are tragicomic. Knowledge does ensue; the couple become painfully aware of their nakedness. The "one flesh" find themselves exposed. Ironically, with their eyes opened, they realize the opposite of what the serpent promised: "They know their helplessness, insecurity, and defenselessness. What characterized their life in creation now threatens it in disobedience."[65]

This newly-acquired knowledge has failed to make them like God and completely autonomous. Although numerous interpretations have been given for the meaning of "knowledge of good and evil," in the present context it seems best understood as that knowledge which allows humankind to determine for itself what is beneficial or

(i.e., "to her husband [who was] with her" [so NRSV], rather than as an adverbial (i.e., "she took and ate, and also [besides feeding herself alone] gave it to her man along with herself"). For a full discussion arguing in favor of the man's presence throughout, see Jean M. Higgins, "Myth of Eve: the Temptress," *JAAR* 44 (1976): 645-46, who notes that 3:6b in some versions ends: "she gave to her husband and *they* ate" (perhaps presuming his presence from the outset).

[64]Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 250, sees here two temptations. The temptation of woman reflects the desire to rise above oneself; the temptation of man demonstrates the desire toward conformity.

[65]Trible, *Sexuality,* 114, further states: "The defenselessness that belongs to creation produces neither shame (2:25) nor fear (cf. 3:10). But the knowledge of defenselessness that is acquired through disobedience yields simultaneous affirmations and denials of itself: "and they sewed leaves together and made for themselves clothes" (3:7cd). What they conceal, they reveal. Having exceeded the limits set for Eros, this couple has destroyed its harmony. Instead of fulfillment, joy, and gift, they now experience life as problem that *they* must solve; as threat that *they* must eliminate; and as shame that *they* must cover up. God-given helplessness has become danger; existence has become burden."

detrimental.[66] The serpent has essentially challenged the necessity of humans living in relationship with God and under his command. With the acquisition of this knowledge, divine beneficence and protection will be irrelevant and unnecessary, since humans will have the capacity within themselves to address such matters.[67] It is to this situation that Yahweh responds.

3. *The Divine Response.* Strikingly, when Yahweh comes, he begins not with condemnation but with questions.[68] This final scene is somewhat cyclic, consisting of a trial (3:8-13), ensuing judgment (3:14-19), and its

[66]For a thorough presentation of the various interpretations of this phrase, see Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 242-245; Howard Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (HSM 32; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985): 115-128; H. Stern, "Knowledge of Good and Evil," *VT* 8 (1958): 405-18; W. Malcolm Clark, "Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'good and evil'," *JBL* 88 (1969): 266-78.

[67]Von Rad, *Genesis,* 89, states, "So the serpent holds out less the prospect of an extension of the capacity for knowledge than the independence that enables a man to decide for himself what will help or hinder him. This is something completely new in that as a result man leaves the protection of divine providence. God had provided what was good for man (2:18!), and had given him complete security. But now man will go beyond this, to decide for himself. The question in mind is probably whether the coveted autonomy might not be the greatest burden of man's life. But who thinks of that now? The step to be taken is such a small one! . . . What the serpent's insinuation means is the possibility of an extension of human existence beyond the limits set for it by God at creation, an increase of life not only in the sense of pure intellectual enrichment but also familiarity with, and power over, mysteries that lie beyond man. That the narrative see man's fall, his actual separation from God, occurring again and again in *this* area (and not, for example, as a plunge into moral evil, into the subhuman!), i.e., in what we call Titanism, man's *hubris*—this is truly one of its most significant affirmations."

[68]In the OT, divine questions often allow the listener to realize the full implications of prior actions and affirmations (see Gen 4:6, 10; Job 38:2; 1 Kgs 19:9). In Gen 1, God "calls" (קָרָא) creation into orderly existence (1:5, 8, 10); in 3:9 he "calls" (קָרָא) אָדָם (earthling) into question.

aftermath (3:20-24).[69] To this point, the presence of God has consistently meant the presence of grace and beneficence. However, God's appearance creates fear and the disappearance ("hiding") of the humans. Through God's questioning, confession results. However, it is confession tinged with deniability. The man refuses complete responsibility for his actions, as does the woman. At one level the serpent is right, the human couple do not experience immediate death; at a deeper level they suffer a fate worse than death—they no longer stand together as one flesh.[70] The man, strangely silent throughout the temptation, becomes verbose, while the woman's response is brief.[71] Paradoxically, the man cites his nakedness as cause for his fear and hiding, even though he has only recently clothed himself!

The trial concluded and verdict self-evident, judgment swiftly follows (3:14-19). The divine pronouncements upon the serpent, woman, and man, hauntingly echo the language of Gen 2. The serpent, unaddressed in vv. 8-13, is deemed guilty (without a trial). The "craftiest" (עָרוּם) of animals is cursed (אָרוּר).[72] Having challenged humankind to forsake

[69]Gen 3:8-24 is clearly set in contrast to 2:7-24. Harmony and intimacy disintegrate into disharmony and alienation.

[70]Coats, *Genesis,* 55.

[71]Trible, *Sexuality,*118-20, insightfully compares the responses of the man and the woman. The man, heaping up words in response, testifies to the damage of disobedience. Explanation, rationalization, and justification have entered life. "Defenselessness has become defensiveness; self-centeredness prevails . . . . Ironically, his opposition to her [the woman] speaks of his solidarity with her in transgression. Though he betrays her, he does not say that she tempted him . . . Neither God nor the woman has tempted the man, and yet he implicates them both in his guilt." Regarding the woman's response, Trible states: "By betraying the woman to God, the man opposed himself to her; by ignoring him in her reply to God, the woman separates herself from the man."

[72]Trible, *Sexuality,* 123, captures it well: "The very animal who tempted the human creatures of dust to eat the forbidden fruit and assured them that death would not result (3:1, 4) eats dust himself all the days of his life."

believing trust for knowledge, this creature now will experience constant enmity with the human realm. The harmony of the created order has been shattered. Having presumptuously pitted his knowledge and skill against that of the divine order, he now suffers repeated defeat in his conflict with the human realm (3:15).[73]

The punishment pronounced upon the woman (3:16) bristles with difficulties and ambiguity which defy resolution. The difficulty of this verse is matched only by the important weight it has borne in studies treating the male/female relationship. Several aspects merit attention: 1) What is the precise syntax of v. 16? What is the relationship of 16a to 16b? 2) How should v. 16b be translated? 3) What is the intended nuance and meaning of "desire" (תְּשׁוּקָה)? 4) How is this statement related to Gen 2? 5) What is the hermeneutical significance of this statement?

It is worthy of note that the pronouncement upon the woman is the only pronouncement which contains no curse. Surrounded by curse (the serpent [v. 14], the ground [v. 17]), she remains uncursed.[74] Also, in contrast to the serpent and the man, no "reason" (because . . .) is given for the pronouncement.[75] However, it is unclear whether her punishment is singular (pain in childbearing) or dual (pain in childbearing; desire for husband)? A decisive answer to this question eludes us.[76]

[73]For an excellent treatment of this passage and its interpretation throughout history, see Jack P. Lewis, "The Woman's Seed (Gen 3:15)," *JETS* 34 (1991): 299-319; Westermann, *Genesis 1-11,* 259-61.

[74]As noted by Trible, *Sexuality*, 126, this should give us pause in claiming she is judged more severely than any other party.

[75]No reason is necessary; her earlier statement (3:13) acknowledges her guilt.

[76]The number of punishments in each of the addresses in vv. 14-19 continues to be disputed. Presently, the majority of scholars envision one punishment per party, with the remainder of the pronouncement explanation of the conditions under which the punishment will take place. For a detailed discussion of this aspect of the text, see Irvin A. Busenitz, "Woman's Desire for Man: Genesis 3:16 Reconsidered," *GTJ*

A valid translation of v. 16b must take into account two factors: 1) the meaning and precise nuance of תְּשׁוּקָה (desire); 2) the syntactical force of the preposition אֶל (to, for). The noun תְּשׁוּקָה occurs only twice elsewhere in biblical Hebrew: Gen 4:7 (its desire is for you, but you must master it [a most enigmatic passage]); Cant 7:10 (I am my beloved's, and his desire is for me). Three readings of v. 16b prevail: 1) the woman's desire, whatever it may be, will be subjected to that of her husband;[77] 2) the woman's desire specifically entails her drive to dominate her husband and the relationship;[78] 3) the woman's desire involves primarily her

7 (1986): 203-12. This lack of clarity is most unfortunate, since a comprehensive understanding of v. 16 necessitates an understanding of the relationship of v. 16a to 16b.

[77]So Edward Young, *Genesis 3* (London: Banner of Truth, 1966): 127, states: "Her desire, whatever it may be, will not be her own. She cannot do what she wishes, for her husband rules over her like a despot and whatever she wishes is subject to his will." Similarly, but less harshly, Willis, *Genesis,* 131, endorsing the rendering of the KJV and ASV ("thy desire shall be *to* [אֶל] thy husband"), states: "The previous context described what happened when the woman was left to follow freely her own desire. Her inability to cope with the situation made it necessary for God to impose a control upon her, which would be superior to her innermost wishes (viz., the decision of her husband). In matters of great importance and ultimate concern, it is his decision that must prevail, no matter how strong the woman's desire for a different route of action may be." Perhaps in support of this position, the LXX and Peshitta apparently emended or (mis)read תְּשׁוּקָה (desire) as תְּשׁוּבָה (your return), possibly implying that since the woman failed to act responsibly, she must return to the role originally intended for her (and her husband will make sure she discharges that role).

[78]This interpretation is most forcefully articulated by Susan Foh, "What is the Woman's Desire?" *WTJ* 37 (1975): 382; *idem*, *Women and the Word of God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980): 69. Her argumentation is elaborate. She first argues that any notion of sexual desire is eliminated by an etymological tracking of the noun תְּשׁוּקָה. She derives תְּשׁוּקָה from Arabic *saqa* (to urge, drive on, impel), not *shaqa* (to desire, excite). For Foh, male headship was God-ordained from the beginning (see below); it is not a result of or punishment for sin. Utilizing the enigmatic line in Gen 4:7, she states that the woman's desire for her husband is of the same type as that of Cain—the desire to possess and control. Thus, what 3:16b affirms is that woman will

sexual desire[79] for her husband. Although difficult, the last interpretation seems least problematic. The first two interpretations necessitate a hierarchical reading of Gen 2 (which we have seen to be quite problematic) and a reading of the temptation scene for which there is no solid textual evidence.[80] A straightforward reading of Gen 2 seriously undermines attempts to read that chapter hierarchically. First, Eve's derivation from Adam does not presume subordination, else Adam, derived from the earth, would find himself inferior to it. Second, reading "helpmate" as implying subordination defies the lexical evidence for the term. Third, the grammatical evidence for Adam's naming of Eve reflects more the world of recognition and discovery than the world of dominion and subordination. In naming the woman, Adam is not determining her identity, but rejoicing in what God has done.[81] Finally, the language of 2:24 (leaves . . . cleaves) reverberates with covenantal significance.[82] In Gen 2, woman was created for meaningful and fulfilling companionship—companionship best reflected in a covenantal relationship of both partners giving fully of themselves to the other. Eve and Adam have shattered that wonderful covenantal relationship through their desire to become their own gods.[83] As noted earlier, there is no indication in Gen 3:1-7 that the woman's

constantly strive to control and master her husband; the husband will be forced to fight for his headship. The primary change from Gen 2 to 3 is that sin has corrupted the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband. The rule of love founded in Paradise is replaced by struggle, tyranny, and domination. Hess, *Themelios* (1993): 17, partly follows Foh, but in the final phrase Hess reads, "he *will* rule over you" (*not* "he *should* rule over you"). The difference is vital.

[79]Alternately, her desire for intimacy.

[80]Specifically, if the woman's sin involved usurping of the man's authority, we would expect some mention of his failure to control his wife enumerated in his punishment (3:17-19), but none occurs.

[81]In actuality, in naming the woman (אִשָּׁה) the man (אִישׁ) simultaneously names himself (so Sarna, *Genesis*, 23).

[82]See Deut 10:20; 11:22; 13:4; Josh 22:5; 23:8.

[83]"To love and to cherish" has given way to "desire and dominate."

succumbing to temptation was in any way related to her separation from her husband. In actuality, the woman's sin in 3:1-7 has nothing to do with usurping the man's authority; rather, it involves exalting herself above the Creator to determine for herself right and wrong.[84] If v. 16b has any relation to v. 16a, we would expect the woman's desire to have some connection to the pain that now accompanies her giving birth. It seems plausible that given the extreme pain that will now attend childbirth, the woman's desire for intimacy would be diminished.[85] V. 16b counters such an assumption. However, her desire will be met with rule.[86]

Davidson[87] notes the possibilities of the hermeneutical significance of this passage: 1) the subordination of woman was a creation ordinance (i.e., God's ideal from the beginning), but through sin this original form of hierarchy

[84]Busenitz, *GTJ* 7 (1986): 203-12, correctly notes that the immediate context speaks not of the woman's desire to rule, but of the continuation of life in the face of death. He states: "Woman may desire to dominate or rule over man, but it is not a part of the punishment pronounced upon woman; it is just the essence, character and result of all sin against God. Self-exaltation and pride always result in the desire to dominate and rule." However, he vacillates by concluding that "the contention that 'sin has corrupted both the willing submission of the wife and the loving headship of the husband' (Foh, *Women,* 69) is unquestionably true. But it is a natural consequence of sin and not the result of God's judgment upon woman in Genesis 3:16." Within the larger context, Gen 3:8-24 serves as a contrast to 2:7-24. The harmony and intimacy of covenantal togetherness has given way to disharmony and alienation.

[85]We should remember that in the ancient world technology to alleviate the pain of childbirth and greatly reduce the potentially fatal consequences of labor and delivery was not advanced. As the possibility of a mother's loss of life during pregnancy and especially delivery was staggering, it is remarkable that women would continued to put themselves in such life-threatening circumstances.

[86]Trible, *Sexuality,* 128, states: "The man will not reciprocate the woman's desire; instead, he will rule over her. Thus she lives in unresolved tension. Where once there was mutuality, now there is a hierarchy of division."

[87]Davidson, *AUSS* 26 (1988): 121-31.

was distorted and corrupted and must be restored by the gospel; 2) subordination was a creation ordinance; however, Gen 3:16 reflects not a distortion of subordination but a reaffirmation of subordination as a blessing and comfort to woman in her difficulties as mother;[88] 3) the subordination of 3:16b is a blessing rather than a curse; however, subordination was not a creation ordinance; 4) subordination did not exist prior to the sin; further, the statement of subordination of 3:16 intends only a *description* of the evil consequences of sin (to be removed by the gospel), not a *prescription* of God's will for subsequent husband-wife relationships; 5) subordination did not exist prior to the sin; however, 3:16 is *prescriptive*, not merely *descriptive*. Ultimately, our decision will be rooted in our larger understanding of the husband-wife relationship found throughout Scripture. Not unexpectedly, how this passage is utilized in subsequent portions of Scripture impacts greatly our reading of it in its original setting. Although not without difficulties, in its *original* setting, the fourth reading seems to reflect most closely the original intent of the passage.[89] Having desired to rule her own life, the woman finds herself in a situation in which subsequent life comes only through

[88]I.e., the woman in her labor will be eager for her husband and he will rule, not through domination and oppression, but through care and help.

[89]Establishing a sound exegetical method is crucial for understanding the larger hermeneutical ramifications of this passage. Sound exegetical procedure involves reading a passage first within its immediate context. Taking seriously the internal dynamics and nature of the text within its immediate context entails a close reading of the text *on its own terms* (i.e., initially without regard to its use elsewhere in Scripture), followed by close attention to the scriptural placement of the text (i.e., noting what immediately precedes and follows the text under discussion). To be specific, one must determine first the exegetical meaning and theological thrust of Gen 2-3—only then can one determine profitably Paul's use of this material in 1 Tim. To reverse the process seriously undermines the validity of the exegetical process. For example, were one to begin with Rom 5:12-21, one might come to Gen 2-3 assuming that Eve's actions were of no significance whatsoever, since she is not mentioned in Rom 5! The only sin of any consequence, then, would be that of Adam!

excruciating pain and in a relationship where mutuality and equality have been replaced by desire and control.

With the punishment of the man, curse returns (upon the earth, however, not the man), with the reason for the punishment.[90] The man's punishment is relatively clear. He receives the longest address, perhaps in response to his earlier lengthy assertions (3:10, 12) or as an indication of the extent of his culpability.[91] Just as his intimate relationship of mutuality with the woman has been shattered, so now his joyful working of the garden is replaced with burdensome and never-ending toil.

With the trial complete and judgment having been pronounced, expulsion from the garden remains. The final scene (3:20-24) is freighted with language that hauntingly echoes earlier sections. Irony dominates the scene. The man now names his wife, giving the reason.[92] This woman, who initially receives no mention of family (2:25), is now designated the "mother of all living" (3:20). However, we cannot help but remind ourselves that life will come through extreme pain and toil (3:16). Their inadequate attempt to address their vulnerability and exposure through the making

[90]In 3:17, the man "listened to the voice (לְקוֹל שָׁמַעְתָּ) of his wife." Although one might assume that this statement affirms the nature of the woman as "temptress," it seems preferable simply to understand here an acknowledgment of the man's decision to follow his wife's direction rather than God's command. The expression לְקוֹל שָׁמַעְתָּ regularly occurs in Hebrew with the nuance "to obey." Here, the man chose to "obey" his wife rather than God. Again, it is important to note that the man is faulted for failing to be a responsible creature, not for failing to control the woman.

[91]Sarna, *Genesis,* 28, regards the man as most culpable, since he received the prohibition directly from God.

[92]Whereas God articulates no reason for her punishment (3:16), the man provides reason through wordplay: "Eve" (חַוָּה)/"life" (חַי). Numerous scholars have suggested that, unlike the earlier acknowledgment of the woman (2:23), this act of naming implicitly carries a notion of control and authority.

of garments (3:7) is corrected by Yahweh through the gracious gift of leather garments (3:21).[93]

However, a most significant issue remains to be addressed. Through partaking of the knowledge of good and evil, the man and woman have dramatically altered the relationship between themselves and their Creator. Contrary to the serpent's arrogant assertions, their eating has not resulted in eliminating their need for relationship with God, but rather in bringing them to full awareness of their helplessness and vulnerability in the created order. The quest for power and self-sufficiency has ironically resulted in the eruption of conflict, tension, and struggle in God's harmonious creation. The resulting human creatures in no way are worthy candidates for participation in the tree of life.[94] Expulsion is necessary. Poignantly, as the man and woman are driven from the garden to "till the ground from which he was taken," cherubs are positioned "to guard" (לִשְׁמֹר) against their possible re-entry.[95]

[93]It may be appropriate to contrast the ambiguous stance between the man and the woman with the constant stance of God in grace toward his creatures. God the creator becomes God the sustainer. God, having "made" (עָשָׂה) the world and its inhabitants, now "makes" (עָשָׂה) clothing for his human creatures. These creatures, who began "naked and unashamed," are now given the clothing necessary to endure the shame and fear they have created, and the harsh conditions of life now theirs.

[94]Trible, *Sexuality,* 136, notes: "Perhaps irony, a device that has appeared often in scene three, best interprets this closing speech by God. Helpless creatures, their lives shattered by strife, discord, and enmity, are hardly candidates for divinity." Thus, Yahweh may be mocking the serpent's assertion. Sarna, *Genesis,* 30, suggests that through the desire to exceed the limits of creaturehood, the human has radically altered the perspective of human existence. The next temptation quite likely would entail the attempt to restore the previous condition through artificial means (viz., the quest for eternal life) rather than through restoring the ruptured relationship with the Creator.

[95]Originally, the man was entrusted with the task of "tilling and keeping (guard)" (שָׁמַר/עָבַד) the garden. Now, he is sent forth to "till" (עָבַד) the earth, a task which will tax him severely, while the cherubs "guard" (שָׁמַר) the garden. The man struggles to eke out sustenance from the very dust from which he was created (2:7; 3:19).

Conclusion

Gen 2-3 provides a powerful account of the nature of God, the relationship of God to his human creatures, and the relation of human creatures to one another. Whereas God is presented primarily through the metaphor of a sovereign monarch in Gen 1, in Gen 2-3 several images arise. As God creates, he is a potter sculpting the dust of the earth into a man. As gardener, he plants a luxurious garden to address the physical needs of this creature. As surgeon and architect, he crafts a woman from man. With the completion of creation in Gen 2, humankind have vocation (caring for the garden), permission (eating of the garden) and prohibition (refraining from that which will harm them). Perhaps most significantly, they have community (2:23-25).

However, in Gen 3 Yahweh's intent for creation is ruptured. In challenging the divine design for creation, the human couple tragically alter their vital relationships: 1) their relationship with their Creator; 2) their relationship with each other; 3) their relationship with the rest of the created order. Where once there was harmony, productivity, and meaning, there is now pain, struggle, and potential meaninglessness to life. The contrast could not be more poignantly drawn. In their desire to circumvent the need for a sovereign Lord, they achieve not fulfillment but become keenly aware of the weakness and vulnerability of their creatureliness. In their relationship to each other, equality, mutual concern, and care are replaced by struggle, conflict, and obsession with hierarchical order. Finally, the rest of creation, given to them for enjoyment and sustenance, now deals them endless toil and backbreaking labor. The joy and freedom of life under the protective wing of the Creator has given way to a constant awareness of struggle and the omnipresence of mortality and finitude. However, the story continues—for the God of Gen 1-3 is a God of infinite grace and mercy, a God who repeatedly calls his creation to realign with his purposes and intent. Most dramatically, he ultimately exhibits that posture himself in the gift of his own Son.

Chapter Two

SARAH—HER LIFE AND LEGACY

Jack W. Vancil

First mentioned in the early Genesis narratives, Sarah is relatively obscured by the male figures in the text and later by a religious interest centered on her husband, Abraham. Nevertheless the stories about both characters are so important that all later biblical history is understood to begin here. There are many questions concerning Sarah and diverse opinions are found among the students of Genesis. These pertain to uncertainties about her role in the narratives, her family background, her status in the ancient society, her relationship to Abraham, her beauty, her involvement in Pharaoh's harem, her power over Hagar, her being taken by Abimelech and, finally, an entire chapter devoted to her death.

The scarcity of direct information on Sarah should not, however, detract from her unique and crucial place in the total biblical story and as the principal matriarch in the history of faith. Beyond Genesis, she receives only brief mention in the rest of the Bible, but there developed an early and extensive interest in Sarah, as is indicated in extrabiblical Jewish sources and in the Koran and its exegetical commentators.

1. *Sarah's Name And Pagan Background*

The patriarchs and matriarchs bore names common to the West Semitic region of the ancient Near East.[1] Sarah appears first as the Hebrew שָׂרַי (*sarai*, Gen 11:29) and later,

[1]See Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36* (trans. J. Scullion; Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985): 84-86, 137-139.