

בראשית

Genesis

THE BOOK OF GENESIS received its English name from the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *toledot*, which is used thirteen times in Genesis, and is translated as “story” (Gen 2.4), “record” (Gen 5.1) or “line” (Gen 10.1). In Hebrew, it is known, like many books in the Tanakh, by its first word, “*bereishit*,” which means, “In the beginning.” Genesis is indeed a book about beginnings—the beginning of the natural world, the beginning of human culture, and the beginning of the people Israel, whose story occupies most of this book and will dominate the rest of the Torah. In the ancient Near Eastern world in which Israel emerged, beginnings were deemed to be crucial, for the origins of things were thought to disclose their character and purpose. In Genesis, the origins of Israel—the people known later as the “Jews”—lie in a mysterious promise of God to a Mesopotamian whose name is Abram (changed in chap. 17 to “Abraham”). The essence of the promise is that He will make of him a great nation, bless him abundantly, and grant him the land of Canaan. Ostensibly absurd when it first comes, the promise faces one obstacle after another throughout the course of Genesis—principally, the barrenness of Abraham’s primary wife (and of other matriarchs in the next two generations) and the murderous fraternal rivalry among his descendants. And yet, by the end of Genesis, all the obstacles notwithstanding, the twelve tribes that make up the people Israel have indeed come into existence, an Israelite effectively rules a superpower (Egypt), and the promise of the land, though far from fulfillment (which comes about only in the Book of Joshua), is anything but forgotten.

The Book of Genesis is thus, in more senses than one, a primary source for Jewish theology. It presents its ideas on the relationship of God to nature, to the human race in general, and to the people Israel in particular in ways that are, however, foreign to the expectations of most modern readers. It is therefore all too easy to miss the seriousness and profundity of its messages. For the vehicle through which Genesis conveys its worldview is neither the theological tract nor the rigorous philosophical proof, nor the confession of faith. That vehicle is, rather, narrative. The theology must be inferred from stories, and the lived relationship with God takes precedence over abstract theology. Those who think of stories (including mythology) as fit only for children not only misunderstand the thought-world

and the literary conventions of the ancient Near East; they also condemn themselves to miss the complexity and sophistication of the stories of Genesis. For these are narratives that have evoked interpretation upon interpretation from biblical times into our own day and occupied the attention of some of the keenest thinkers in human history.

One aspect of narrative in Genesis that requires special attention is its high tolerance for different versions of the same event, a well-known feature of ancient Near Eastern literature, from earliest times through rabbinic midrash. The book presents, for example, two accounts of Abram/Abraham's attempting to pass his wife off as his sister (12.10–20; 20.1–18; cf. 26.1–11), two accounts of God's making a covenant with him (chaps. 15 and 17), and two accounts of how Jacob's name was changed to Israel (32.23–33; 35.9–15). In these instances, most modern biblical scholars see different antecedent documents that editors (known as redactors) have combined to give us the text now in our hands. This could not have happened, however, if the existence of variation were seen as a serious defect or if rigid consistency were deemed essential to effective storytelling. Rather, the redactors have chosen a different approach, refusing to discard many variants as inauthentic or inaccurate, instead treating the different versions as sequential events in the same longer story. The result is a certain measure of repetition, to be sure, but the repetition is in the service of a sophisticated presentation of themes with variations in a book rich in narrative analogy, revealing echo, and suggestive contrast. For the rabbis of Talmudic times and their successors through the centuries, the exploration of those subtle literary features provided an indispensable insight not only into the first book of the Torah (the most sacred part of the Tanakh) but also into the mind of God Himself. The book is composed of four major sections: Genesis 1.1–11.26, the primeval story; 11.27–25.18, the story of Abraham; 25.19–36.43, the Jacob cycle; and 37.1–50.26, the story of Joseph. (There is little independent narrative about Isaac, the second patriarch.)

The first section, the primeval history, takes us from the creation of the world through the birth of Abram's father nineteen generations later. Its stories are short, loosely strung together, and connected only by genealogies that identify the generation in which the action takes place. There is, however, an overriding theme: the spread of human wickedness, the refusal of humankind to accept their creaturely status, as they seek to blur the all-important boundary between the human and the divine and, as a result, bring catastrophe upon themselves.

Largely because of its focus on creation, the primeval history exhibits a number of contacts with Mesopotamian mythology. The account of creation with which Genesis opens (1.1–2.3), for example, has affinities with *Enuma elish*, a Babylonian epic, which tells how the god Marduk attained supremacy over the others and created the world by splitting his aquatic enemy in half. The story of Adam and Eve's sin in the Garden of Eden (2.25–3.24) displays similarities with *Gilgamesh*, an epic poem that tells how its hero lost the opportunity for immortality and came to terms with his humanity. And the story of Noah (6.5–9.17) has close connections with *Atrahasis*, a Mesopotamian story in which the gods send a flood to wipe out the human race, with the exception of one man from whom humankind begins

afresh (the story was eventually incorporated into Gilgamesh as well). In each case, the biblical narrator has adapted the Mesopotamian forerunner to Israelite theology. The primeval history thus evidences both the deep continuities and the striking points of discontinuity of biblical Israel with its Mesopotamian antecedents and contemporaries.

In the story of Abraham (11.27–25.18), the narrative has become more continuous. Abraham dominates almost every episode. Seeing him in a wide variety of situations, we have a sense of his personality and of the human dimension of the events that God has mysteriously set into motion. Whereas God's relationship to human beings in the primeval history is marked mostly (but not exclusively) by judgment, expulsion, and exile, in the story of Abraham the dominant notes are the contrasting ones of blessing and promise, especially the promise of the Land. But the narrative does not spare us the knowledge that while the blessings and promises are as yet unrealized, Abraham's family have their moments of anguish and even ugliness. God, portrayed for the most part less anthropomorphically than in the primeval history, overcomes the obstacles to His promises and blessings, so that Abraham finally acquires both the son from whom the promised nation shall descend and a foothold in the Promised Land. The LORD accomplishes this partly through palpable miracles and partly through His silent guidance of the course of human events. As the story of Abraham unfolds, its human protagonist, despite some arguably serious lapses, gradually assumes the role of the ideal religious person—obedient to God's commands (even at the cost of the most painful sacrifice), faithful even when the promise seems impossible, gracious, generous, and hospitable, yet committed to justice and compassion even to the point of firmly (if deferentially) questioning God's counsel.

The stories in the Jacob cycle (25.19–36.43) are even more connected and less self-contained than those in the story of Abraham. Here, we are entitled to speak not simply of a general theme, like the theme of blessing and promise in the Abraham story (which continues in this section), but of a plot as well. In its broadest outlines, the plot has to do with how the second son acquires his older brother's superior status and the attendant rights to the Abrahamic promise, yet eventually reconciles with the brother he has wronged and emerges legitimately as the patriarch from whom the people Israel takes its name. Various types of trickery play a major role as this plot develops. The human dimension is more central here than in the Abraham narrative, and the resourcefulness of the protagonists, especially Jacob himself and his mother Rebekah, proportionately more important. Accordingly, God speaks less frequently and intervenes less dramatically. Indeed, His presence is less available and assumes an eerie cast ("Surely the LORD is present in this place, and I did not know it!" 28.16).

The closing section of the Book of Genesis, the story of Joseph (37.1–50.26), represents a narrative so coherent and so continuous that it has justly been termed a novella. Indeed, it offers the deepest psychological portraits and the most subtle and complex plot in Genesis and constitutes one of the gems of biblical prose narrative. Whereas in the first section of Genesis, the primeval history, God booms forth his pronouncements, in this last section He does not speak at all, with the exception of one apparition to Jacob while he is still in

Canaan (46.1–4). Rather, He communicates through dreams (in which, significantly, He does not appear) and, more importantly, through people, especially Joseph’s God-given wisdom to interpret dreams and to administer effectively. Here, even more than in the Jacob cycle, God works through the ambivalent and devious designs of flawed human beings, providentially bringing good out of human evil and arranging “the survival of many people” (50.20)—including the brothers who, seething with resentment, once plotted Joseph’s death and enslavement but now graciously accept subordination to the younger brother who has saved their lives.

How much history lies behind the story of Genesis? Because the action of the primeval story is not represented as taking place on the plane of ordinary human history and has so many affinities with ancient mythology, it is very far-fetched to speak of its narratives as historical at all. In the cases of the succeeding three large sections of the book, the matter is more complicated, for scholars continue to sift the evidence and to debate the question. Enormous amounts of data about ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt have been uncovered. Over the last two centuries, no evidence has turned up that establishes that Abraham, (his son) Isaac, Jacob, or Joseph existed.

1 When God began to create^a heaven and earth—²the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from^b God sweeping over the water—³God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, a first day.^c

a Others “In the beginning God created.”

b Others “the spirit of.” *c* Others “one day.”

1.1-2.3: Creation in Seven Days. The Book of Genesis—and thus the Bible itself—opens with an account of creation that is extraordinary for its austerity. Other ancient Near Eastern evocations of God’s (or the gods’) world-ordering activity, including many in the Bible itself (e.g., Psalms 104), provide high drama and graphic description of the events and their protagonists (even the LORD). Genesis 1.1–2.3, however, is utterly devoid of sensory detail. This eerie abstractness, combined with the highly schematic and formulaic structure of the narrative, conveys a sense of the awe-inspiring majesty and inviolable sovereignty of the God on whom the narrative is unswervingly focused. 1.1–2.3 is

structured by a pattern of seven days, six in which God accomplishes all His creative labors, and one in which He rests in regal repose, blessing and hallowing that climactic day. The correlations between things created on the various days exhibits a high degree of symmetry (diagram, p. 7). The first three days describe the creation of generalities or domains; the next three chronicle the creation of the specifics or the inhabitants of the domains in the same order. Creation comes to its culmination, however, only in the one day that has no counterpart, the Sabbath (“Shabbát” in modern Hebrew, or “Shábbes” in the Eastern European pronunciation), here observed by God above and not yet enjoined

upon His people Israel (who first hear of it in Exodus 16). The organization of time into seven-day units has become so familiar and so widespread that it is easy to forget that unlike the month (which in the Bible is lunar) and the year (which in the Bible never moves too far from its solar base), the biblical week corresponds to no astronomical event. The notion that seven signifies completeness and that things come to their fit conclusion on the seventh day did, however, have wide resonance in the ancient Near Eastern world in which Israel emerged and doubtless stands in the background of our passage. The role of the number seven in Genesis 1.1–2.3 extends, in fact, beyond the obvious division of the acts of creation into a seven-day sequence. For example, the expression, *And God saw that [something He made] was good or very good* occurs seven times, but not on every day of the primordial week. Missing on the second and seventh, it appears twice on the adjacent third and sixth days (1.10, 12, 25, 31). Similarly, the word “God” occurs exactly thirty-five times (i.e., five times seven) in our passage, and the section devoted to the seventh day

TORAH

GENESIS 1.6–1.10

⁶God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.”⁷ God made the expanse, and it separated the water which was below the expanse from the water which was above the expanse. And it was so. ⁸God called the expanse Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, a second day.

⁹God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of

(2.1–3) has exactly thirty-five words in the Hebrew. The organization of the process of creation into a sequence of seven days is familiar to most readers not only from the opening of the Tanakh but also from the Sabbath commandment of the Decalogue in Exodus 20.8–11. But we must not forget that this connection is far from universal in the Tanakh. In fact, most biblical descriptions of creation know nothing of a seven-day sequence (e.g., Psalms 104; Proverbs 8.22–31), and most texts about the Sabbath (including the version of the Decalogue in Deut 5.12–15) make no reference to creation. The suspicion arises that Genesis 1.1–2.3 derives from a distinct school of thought and one that dates to a relatively late period in the history of Israelite religion. On the basis of these considerations, and a multitude of others, critical scholars attribute the passage to the P (for “Priestly”) source. And God does function here in ways reminiscent of a “kohen” (priest), giving blessings, for example (Genesis 1.22, 28; 2.3; cf. Leviticus 9.22–23; Numbers 6.22–27), and consecrating the Sabbath (Genesis 2.3; cf. Ezekiel 44.24). The concern shown in this story for order and

clear boundaries typifies the Priestly corpus. More importantly, the creation of the world in Genesis 1.1–2.3 bears several striking resemblances to the construction of the Tabernacle mandated in Exodus 25–31 and executed in Exodus 35–40 (e.g., see Genesis 2.1–3 and Exodus 39.32, 42–43)—the prototype of the Jerusalem Temple and the focus of the priestly service of the LORD. Note that other ancient Near Eastern creation stories conclude with the construction of a temple for the creation god. In the Tanakh, the world is sometimes seen as the LORD’s temple, and the Temple as a microcosm (e.g., Isaiah 66.1–2). **1:** A tradition over two millennia old sees 1.1 as a complete sentence: *In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.* In the eleventh century, the great Jewish commentator Rashi made a case that the verse functions as a temporal clause. This is, in fact, how some ancient Near Eastern creation stories begin—including the one that starts at Genesis 2.4b. Hence the translation, *When God began to create heaven and earth. . . .* **2:** This clause describes things just before the process of creation began. To modern people, the opposite of the created order is “noth-

ing,” that is, a vacuum. To the ancients, the opposite of the created order was something much worse than “nothing.” It was an active, malevolent force we can best term “chaos.” In this verse, chaos is envisioned as a dark, undifferentiated mass of water. In 1.9, God creates the dry land (and the Seas, which can exist only when water is bounded by dry land). But in Genesis 1.1–2.3, water itself and darkness, too, are primordial (contrast Isaiah 45.7). In the midrash, Bar Kappara upholds the troubling notion that the Torah shows that God created the world out of pre-existent material. But other rabbis worry that acknowledging this would cause people to liken God to a king who had built his palace on a garbage dump, thus arrogantly impugning His majesty (*Ber. Rab.* 1.5). In the ancient Near East, however, to say that a deity had subdued chaos is to give him the highest praise. **3–5:** Since the sun is not created until the fourth day (1.14–19), the light of the first three days is of a different order from what we know. A midrash teaches that when God saw the corruption of the generations of the Flood and of the Tower of Babel, he hid that primordial light away for the benefit of the righteous in the world-to-come (*b. Hag.* 12a). Other ancient Near Eastern myths similarly assume the existence of light before the creation of the luminaries. **6–8:** The word translated *expanse* refers to a piece of metal that has been hammered flat. Here, the function of the sky is to separate the waters above (which fall as rain) from the subterranean waters (which rise as springs; see Genesis 7.11).

SABBATH DAY 7 (2.1–3)	
LAND AND PLANTS DAY 3 (1.9–13)	LAND ANIMALS AND HUMANS DAY 6 (1.24–31)
SKY (<i>separating waters above from waters below</i>) DAY 2 (1.6–8)	FISH/BIRDS DAY 5 (1.20–23)
LIGHT DAY 1 (1.1–5)	LIGHTS (<i>i.e., sun, moon, and stars</i>) DAY 4 (1.20–23)

waters He called Seas. And God saw that this was good. ¹¹And God said, “Let the earth sprout vegetation: seed-bearing plants, fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: seed-bearing plants of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that this was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, a third day.

¹⁴God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate day from night; they shall serve as signs for the set times—the days and the years; ¹⁵and they shall serve as lights in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶God made the two great lights, the greater light to dominate the day and the lesser light to dominate the night, and the stars. ¹⁷And God set them in the expanse of the sky to shine upon the earth, ¹⁸to dominate the day and the night, and to separate light from darkness. And God saw that this was good. ¹⁹And there was evening and there was morning, a fourth day.

²⁰God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and birds that fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky.” ²¹God created the great sea monsters, and all the living creatures of every kind that creep, which the waters brought forth in swarms, and all the winged birds of every kind. And God saw that this was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, “Be fertile and increase, fill the waters in the seas, and let the birds increase on the earth.” ²³And there was evening and there was morning, a fifth day.

²⁴God said, “Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: cattle, creeping things, and wild beasts of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵God made wild beasts of every kind and cattle of every kind, and all kinds of creeping things of the earth. And God saw that this was good. ²⁶And God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. They shall rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth.” ²⁷And God created man in His im-

16: The sun and moon are created only on the fourth day and are not named, but referred to only as *the greater light* and *the lesser light*. This may be an implicit polemic against the worship of astral bodies (see 2 Kings 23.5). **21:** A similar point can be made about the creation of *the great sea monsters* on the fifth day. In some ancient myths—and biblical texts as well (see Psalms

74.12–17; Job 26.5–14)—creation results from the slaying of a sea monster. Isaiah 27.1 uses the same word to describe the frightening sea monster that the LORD will kill at the end of time. **26:** The plural verb (*Let us . . .*) most likely reflects a setting in the divine council (cf. 1 Kings 22.19–22; Isaiah 6; Job 1–2): God the King announces the proposed course of action to His cabi-

net of subordinate deities, though He alone retains the power of decision. The midrash manifests considerable uneasiness with God’s proposal to create something so capable of evil as human beings are. Playing on Psalms 1.6, one midrash reports that God told his ministering angels only of *the way of the righteous* and hid from them *the way of the wicked* (*Ber. Rab.* 8.4). Another one reports that while the angels were debating the proposal among themselves, God took the matter in hand. “Why are you debating?” he asked them. “Man has already been created!” (*Ber. Rab.* 8.5). Whereas the earth and the waters (at God’s command) bring forth the plants, fish, birds, and other animals (Genesis 1.12, 20, 24), humankind has a different origin and a different character. In the ancient Near East, the king was often said to be the “image” of the god and thus to act with divine authority. So here, the creation of humanity in God’s *image* and *likeness* carries with it a commission to rule over the animal kingdom (Genesis 1.26b, 28b; cf. Psalms 8.4–9). Some have seen in that commission a license for ecological irresponsibility. The fact is, however, that the Tanakh presents humanity not as the owner of nature but as its steward, strictly accountable to its true Owner (see Leviticus 25.23–24). This theology is one source of the important institutions of the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (see Exodus 23.10–11; Leviticus 25). Whereas the next account of human origins (Genesis 2.4b–24) speaks of God’s creation of one male from whom one female subsequently emerges, Genesis 1 seems to speak of groups of men and women created simultaneously. The division of humankind into two sexes is closely associated with the divine mandate to *Be fertile and increase* (Genesis 1.28). In Jewish law, this is a positive commandment, although it is obligatory only on Jewish men, not women (*b. Yevam.* 65b). **29–30:** Humankind, animals, and birds all seem originally meant to be neither vegetarians nor carnivores,

age, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. ²⁸God blessed them and God said to them, “Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth.”

²⁹God said, “See, I give you every seed-bearing plant that is upon all the earth, and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit; they shall be yours for food. ³⁰And to all the animals on land, to all the birds of the sky, and to everything that creeps on earth, in which there is the breath of life, [I give] all the green plants for food.” And it was so. ³¹And God saw all that He had made, and found it very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array. ²On the seventh day God finished the work that He had been doing, and He ceased^a on the seventh day from all the work that He had done. ³And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation that He had done. ⁴Such is the story of heaven and earth when they were created.

When the LORD God made earth and heaven—⁵when no shrub of the field was yet on earth and no grasses of the field had yet sprouted, because the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil, ⁶but a flow would well up from the ground and water the whole surface of the earth—⁷the LORD God formed

a Or “rested.”

but frugivores, eating the seeds of plants and trees. **2.1–3:** In the Jewish liturgy, this passage serves as an introduction to the “kiddush,” the prayer over wine to sanctify the Sabbath that is recited just before the first meal of the holy day, on Friday night (see Exodus 20.8–11). It also appears in the traditional Friday evening service. The passage is characterized by the type of repetition that suggests it might have served as a liturgy already in antiquity.

2.4–25: The Creation of Adam and Eve. Whereas 1.1–2.3 presented a majestic God-centered scenario of creation, 2.4–25 presents a very different but equally

profound story of origins. This second account of creation is centered more on human beings and familiar human experiences, and even its Deity is conceived in more anthropomorphic terms. Source critics attribute the two accounts to different documents (P and J, respectively) later combined into the Torah we now have. The classical Jewish tradition tends to harmonize the discrepancies by intertwining the stories, using the details of one to fill in the details of the other. Even on the source-critical reading, however, the contrast and interaction of the two creation accounts offer a richer understanding of the relationship of God to humankind than we would have if

the accounts were read in isolation from each other. **4:** The Jewish textual tradition places a major break between 2.3 and 2.4, rather than in the middle of v. 4, where many modern interpreters put it, and for good reason. If the latter verse, or even its first half (2.4a), is read with 1.1–2.3, then several of the multiples of seven in 1.1–2.3, of which we gave a sample above (see the introduction to 1.1–2.3), disappear. Most likely, 2.4a is an editorial linkage between the two accounts of creation. **5–6:** For the first time, we see the Tetragrammaton, or the four-letter proper name of the God of Israel, the pronunciation of which rabbinic law forbids categorically. The name is conventionally rendered in English as “LORD” and in Hebrew as “Adonai” (in prayer and in liturgical reading of scripture) or “Ha-Shem” (in other contexts). The use of this name is one of several features that cause source critics to attribute this second creation account to the J source. Note that the expression “heaven and earth” (1.1; 2.4a) now appear in the reverse order (“earth and heaven”) as befits the more earth-centered character of this story. Whereas in the first account of creation the primordial problem was too much water, requiring God to split the waters and create dry land (1.6–7, 9–10), here the problem is too little water. The variation may reflect the difference between the situation in Babylonia, in which the saline waters of the sea threatened human life, and a setting in the Land of Israel, where a deficiency of water was (and is) a constant threat. **7:** Here, man has a lowlier origin than in the parallel in 1.26–28. He is created not in the image of God but from the dust of the earth. But he also has a closer and more intimate relationship with his Creator, who blows the breath of life into him, transforming that lowly, earth-bound creature into a living being. In this understanding, the human being is not an amalgam of perishable body and immortal soul, but a psychophysical unity who de-

man^a from the dust of the earth.^b He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

⁸The LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. ⁹And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and bad.

¹⁰A river issues from Eden to water the garden, and it then divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon, the one that winds through the whole land of Havilah, where the gold is. (¹²The gold of that land is good; bdellium is there, and lapis lazuli.^c) ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon, the one that winds through the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, the one that flows east of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat; ¹⁷but as for the tree of knowledge of good and bad, you must not eat of it; for as soon as you eat of it, you shall die.”

¹⁸The LORD God said, “It is not good for man to be alone; I will make a fitting helper for him.” ¹⁹And the LORD God formed out of the earth all the wild beasts and all the birds of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that would be its name. ²⁰And the man gave names to all the cattle and to the birds of the sky and to all the wild beasts; but for Adam no fitting helper was found. ²¹So the LORD God cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot. ²²And the LORD God fashioned the rib that He had taken from the man into a woman; and He brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

“This one at last
Is bone of my bones
And flesh of my flesh.
This one shall be called Woman,^d
For from man^e was she taken.”

²⁴Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh.

⁷The LORD appeared to Abram and said, “I will assign

a Heb. 'adam. *b* Heb. 'adamah.

c Others “onyx”; meaning of Heb. shoham uncertain.

d Heb. 'ishshah. *e* Heb. 'ish.

depends on God for life itself. **8–11:** The root of *Eden* denotes fertility. Where the wondrously fertile Garden was thought to have been located (if a realistic location was ever conceived) is unclear. The Tigris and Euphrates are the two great rivers of Mesopotamia (now found in modern Iraq). But the Pishon is unidentified, and the only Gihon in the Bible is a spring in Jerusalem (1 Kings 1.33, 38). Adam is conceived as a farmer, and work—albeit in an exceedingly easy form, given the miraculous fertility of Eden—is part of the divine plan. **16–17:** *Knowledge of good and bad* may be a merism, a figure of speech in which polar opposites denote a totality (like *heaven and earth* in 1.1). But *knowledge* can have an experiential, not only an intellectual, sense in biblical Hebrew, and “good and bad” can mean either “weal and woe” or “moral good and moral evil.” The forbidden tree offers an experience that is both pleasant and painful; it awakens those who partake of it to the higher knowledge and to the pain that both come with moral choice. **18–24:** Man’s fulfillment requires companionship. As a Talmudic rabbi observes about v. 18, “Even though a man has several sons, it is forbidden to him to be without a wife” (*b. Yevam. 61b*). The LORD’s creation of woman from man emphasizes the close connection between them and lays the groundwork for the understanding of marriage (and its association with procreation) in v. 24. The creation of the woman after the man and from a part of his body need not imply the subordination of women to men. According to Ramban (Nacmanides, a great thirteenth century Spanish rabbi), the point of v. 24 is that men are to be different from the males of the animal world, who mate and move on to the next partner: A man “wishes [his wife] to be with him always.” Promiscuity is thus a degradation of God’s intentions in creating human beings male and female. It is interesting that although polygamy is amply attested in the Tanakh, v. 24