

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS



Author, Date, and Recipients

Traditionally, Moses is considered to have been the author of Genesis and the rest of the Pentateuch (see Num. 33:2; Deut. 31:24; John 5:46). Of course, Moses lived much later than the events of Genesis. Presumably, stories were passed down about those earlier events, and Moses brought them all together.

The first audience would have been the Israelites Moses led through the wilderness. For readers today, Genesis is an essential introduction to the rest of the Bible. It is rightly called the book of beginnings.

Theme

The theme of Genesis is creation, sin, and re-creation. God made the world very good, but first cursed it and then destroyed it in the flood because of man's disobedience. The new world after the flood was also spoiled by human sin (ch. 11). God chose Abraham for a special purpose. Through his family, all nations would be blessed (12:1–3). God's purpose will eventually be fulfilled through Abraham's descendants (ch. 49).

Key Themes

1. The Lord God commissions human beings to be his representatives on earth. They are to take care of the earth and govern the other creatures (1:1–2:25).
2. Instead of acting as God's representatives on earth, the first man and woman—Adam and Eve—listen to the serpent and follow his advice. Their disobedience has devastating results for all mankind and for the entire created world (3:1–24; 6:5–6).
3. God graciously announces that Eve's offspring will free humanity from the serpent's control (3:15). Genesis then begins tracing the history of one family that will become the people of Israel. This family has a special relationship with God and will become a source of blessing to fallen humanity (12:1–3).
4. As a result of Adam's disobedience, his unique relationship with the ground degenerates, resulting in hard work and later in flood and famine. But the special family descending from Adam also brings relief from the difficulties (3:17–19; 5:29; 50:19–21).
5. While Eve's punishment centers on pain in bearing children (3:16), women play an essential role in continuing the unique family line. With God's help, even barrenness is overcome (11:30; 21:1–7; 25:21; 38:1–30).
6. The corruption of human nature causes families to be torn apart (4:1–16; 13:5–8; 25:22–23; 27:41–45; 37:2–35). Although Genesis shows the reality of family conflicts, individual members of the chosen family can also help resolve those conflicts (13:8–11; 33:1–11; 45:1–28; 50:15–21).
7. The wicked are exiled from Eden and scattered throughout the earth (3:22–24; 4:12–16; 11:9), but God is kind to his chosen people and promises them a land of their own (12:1–2, 7; 15:7–21; 28:13–14; 50:24).

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8. God is prepared to destroy almost the entire human race because of its corruption (6:7, 11–12; 18:17–33), but he still wants his world to be populated by righteous people (1:28; 9:1; 15:1–5; 35:11).

Outline

- I. Primeval History (1:1–11:26)
 - A. God's creation and ordering of heaven and earth (1:1–2:3)
 - B. Earth's first people (2:4–4:26)
 - C. Adam's descendants (5:1–6:8)
 - D. Noah's descendants (6:9–9:29)
 - E. The descendants of Noah's sons (10:1–11:9)
 - F. Shem's descendants (11:10–26)
- II. Patriarchal History (11:27–50:26)
 - A. Terah's descendants (11:27–25:18)
 - B. Isaac's descendants (25:19–37:1)
 - C. Jacob's descendants (37:2–50:26)

The Near East at the Time of Genesis



c. 2000 B.C.

The book of Genesis describes events in the ancient Near East from the beginnings of civilization to the relocation of Jacob's (Israel's) family in Egypt. The stories of Genesis are set among some of the oldest nations in the world, including Egypt, Assyria, Babylonia, and Elam.

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The Beginning of the Redemptive Story

The book of Genesis begins the story of God's relationship with mankind, tells the sad story of how that relationship went very wrong, and outlines God's promised solution to that crisis—a solution that would reach its glorious conclusion in Jesus Christ.

Genesis 1 introduces the central person of the biblical story line: God is the Creator-Father-King. God created the human race in his own image, as his royal sons and daughters to establish his kingdom on earth (Gen. 1:26–28). As humanity multiplied upon the earth, they were to establish it as God's kingdom, in which the will of God was done on earth as it was in heaven. The intended outcome was that the Creator-King would dwell among a flourishing human community in a kind of paradise-kingdom. Heaven and earth would intersect, and God would be all in all.

Despite the disastrous rebellion of the human race, this original intention for creation remains the goal of God's cosmic restoration accomplished in Jesus Christ. The rest of redemptive history after the rebellion narrates and explains the unfolding of this cosmic restoration.

Mankind's Rebellion

Genesis 3 recounts the crisis of redemptive history, consisting in mankind's rebellion against God. Discontent with the role of ruling under God, Adam and Eve—enticed by Satan in the form of a serpent—grasp for equality with God. The outcome is disastrous. For their act of high treason, Adam and Eve are exiled from perfect fellowship with God in the garden of Eden and are barred from the tree of life. Sin and death enter the world. All of creation becomes enslaved to futility and corruption. Satan has successfully usurped mankind's throne as ruler of the world (see Luke 4:5–6; John 12:31; 2 Cor. 4:4; Eph. 2:2).

God's Judgment

Genesis 6 reports how mankind, created to fill the earth with the rule of God, fills it instead with violence (Gen. 6:11, 13). Originally created as "very good," the earth now lies ruined because of sin (1:31; 6:12). God's patience runs out and, in grief, he determines to destroy humanity together with the ruined earth (6:13). God reverses the creation process of Genesis 1 by opening creation's floodgates above and below—to deluge the earth and return it to its pre-creation state of dark chaos (1:2).

All life is extinguished, with the exception of a single family. Because of Noah's righteousness, God preserves him and his family and a remnant of the animal world in a large boat. Then, the floods subside and Noah disembarks into a washed and clean new world. This is a new beginning. Although Noah subsequently fails, as Adam did before him, the redemptive pattern is set. God intends to fulfill his original creation intentions through a humanity led by a righteous head. Unlike Adam and Noah, however, the ultimate Adam, Jesus Christ, does in fact deliver a remnant by his righteousness, so that he and they together might rule over a holy, restored world (see Rom. 5:12–21, 8:18–30; 1 Cor. 15:20–28, 42–57).

The Promise

Genesis 12:1–3 is God's answer to the problem of mankind's rebellion narrated in the book's first eleven chapters. God promises Abraham a land, countless descendants, and that all the families of the earth will be blessed in him. Through Abraham's descendants—Israel, and ultimately Israel's royal king, Jesus—the Creator-King will reclaim his world. Blessing and life will overcome and swallow up the curse of Genesis 3. God is determined, by his grace, to restore humanity and the entire cosmos to the paradise it was in Eden.

Universal Themes in Genesis

The image of God. Genesis teaches that everyone on earth is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26–27; 9:6). This means that we are created like God in certain ways—for example, in our

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ability to love, speak, create, and reason, as well as in our ability to form relationships with our fellow humans. The image of God is also seen in the way humans are to rule the earth, under God, who rules over all. Because every person is made in God's image, every person is inherently valuable to God and is to be treated with dignity regardless of ethnicity, age, class status, or gender.

Sin and the problem of the human heart. Genesis shows clearly that the fallen human heart is filled with sin. The reason God determined to destroy mankind in the flood was that "every intention of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Despite experiencing God's judgment in the flood, however, mankind fell again into sin (8:21). The flood, then, did not solve the problem of humanity's sin and rebellion. Noah and his family passed the infection of sin on to their offspring and thus to all the nations of the earth. The world's many expressions of rebellion against their Creator stem from the deeper, more fundamental problem of the fallen heart with its wayward desires. To fulfill his original intention for creation, God must find a way to forgive sin and to transform hard hearts with new desires. This divine mission would ultimately be fulfilled in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The Global Message of Genesis for Today

Marriage and sexuality. The original intention for marriage was, and still is, a permanent marriage relationship between a man and a woman, with the gift of sexuality being expressed within the freedom of this exclusive relationship. This divine ideal, set forth in Genesis 2:18–24, still stands, despite the sordid stories that Genesis records of how far short humans fall from God's plan. We read of Lamech's bigamy (4:19–24), Sodom's homosexual brutality (19:1–29), Jacob's polygamy (chs. 29–30), Shechem's rape (34:2), Reuben's incest (35:22; 49:4), Judah's prostitution (38:15–18), and the adulterous desires of Potiphar's wife (39:6–12). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the Genesis 2 ideal in his teaching, providing instruction concerning divorce in the process (Mark 10:2–12).

Ethnicity and genocide. The "table of nations" in Genesis 10 traces all of the ethnic groups and peoples of the world to their common ancestors preserved on the ark (Noah and his family). It tells of the original genealogy of the entire world. The narrator's use of a genealogy to describe humanity's diverse ethnic, linguistic, and geographical complexity reveals that the human race is one massive extended family. Therefore ethnic arrogance, tribal wars, racism, and the atrocity of genocide—the murder of one group by another because of ethnic difference—are incomprehensible evils, since every person is related as family to every other person upon the earth. Because of humanity's evil heart, however, only in Christ can such ethnic strife and racial injustice find their ultimate solution.

Environment. God commissioned humanity to manage the world as his stewards and not as selfish tyrants. Humanity must represent God and his character and his will, because God ultimately rules over the created order. The Creator-King is wise, loving, holy, compassionate, good, and just, and we must reflect his character in our attitude to environmental issues. We may harness and use the resources of the earth, but must not waste, abuse, or exploit them. Creation exists for God's glory, and its beautiful interlocking ecosystems must be protected to fulfill this purpose. Moreover, humanity is utterly dependent upon the earth and its resources for life. For all these reasons, the preservation and stewardship of creation should be an urgent and significant priority for twenty-first century global Christians.

GENESIS

The Creation of the World

1 In the ^abeginning, God created the heavens and the earth. ²The earth was ^bwithout form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

³And God said, ^c“Let there be light,” and there was light. ⁴And God 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, the first day.

⁶And God said, ^d“Let there be an expanse^f in

¹Or a canopy; also verses 7, 8, 14, 15, 17, 20 ²Or fashioned; also verse 16 ³Or Sky; also verses 9, 14, 15, 17, 20, 26, 28, 30; 2:1 ⁴Or Land; also verses 11, 12, 22, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30; 2:1

Chapter 1 ¹Job 38:4-7; Ps. 33:6; 136:5; Isa. 42:5; 45:18; John 1:1-3; Acts 14:15; 17:24; Col. 1:16, 17; Heb. 1:10; 11:3; Rev. 4:11 ²Jer. 4:23 ³2 Cor. 4:6 ⁴Job 37:18; Ps. 136:5; Jer. 10:12; 51:15 ⁵Prov. 8:27-29 ⁶Ps. 148:4 ⁷Job 38:8-11; Ps. 33:7; 136:6; Jer. 5:22; 2 Pet. 3:5

1:1–11:26 Primeval History. Genesis 1–11 surveys the history of the world before Abraham, while chs. 12–50 focus on one main family. There are no real parallels to chs. 12–50 in the literature of other ancient civilizations. However, other ancient stories do exist about both creation and the flood. These stories stand in sharp contrast to the biblical account. Generally they depict creation as a great struggle, often involving conflict between the gods. For example, they claim that the flood was sent because the gods could not stand the noise made by human beings but were unable to control it in any other way. Genesis disproves such stories by its teachings. There is only one God, whose word is almighty. He spoke the world into being. The sun and moon are not gods in their own right but are created by the one God. It is human sin that prompts the flood. These principles in Genesis 1–11 run through the rest of Scripture.

1:1–2:3 God’s Creation and Ordering of Heaven and Earth. The book of Genesis opens with a majestic description of how God created the heavens and earth and then put everything in order so that it might become his dwelling place. God assigns humanity to govern the other creatures on his behalf, so that the whole earth should become the temple of God, the place of his presence, displaying his glory.

1:1 In the beginning. The opening verse of the Genesis creation account can be taken as either (1) a summary of the entire process of creation or (2) a description of the *first event* in creation. This event would have occurred sometime before the first day (vv. 3–5), and would have included the creation of matter, space, and time. This second view emphasizes the fact that God created the universe from nothing (compare Heb. 11:3). **God created.** The Hebrew word for God, *’Elohim*, is plural, possibly to express God’s majesty, but the verb “created” is singular, indicating that God is one being. In contrast to other ancient Near Eastern accounts of creation, Genesis always emphasizes that there is only one God. Whenever the Hebrew verb for “create” occurs in the OT, God is the subject. **Heavens and the earth** here means “everything.” Thus, “in the beginning” refers to the beginning of everything. The text indicates that God created everything in the universe, which means that he created it out of nothing.

1:2 Before the first actual day of creation (vv. 3–5), the **earth was without form and void** (compare Jer. 4:23), implying that it lacked order and content. The reference to **darkness . . . over the face of the deep**

the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷And God made² the expanse and ^eseparated the waters that were under the expanse from the waters that were ^fabove the expanse. And it was so. ⁸And God called the expanse Heaven. ³And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, ^g“Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth,⁴ and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

FACT

In the Hebrew Bible, the title of Genesis is **In the Beginning**, the book’s first words. The English title is related to the Greek word *genesis*, which means “beginning.”

points to the absence of light. **The Spirit of God was hovering** suggests that something was about to happen. There is no reason to think that a long time elapsed between Gen. 1:1 and 1:2.

1:3–5 And God said. God’s absolute power is seen in that he merely speaks and things are created. Each new section of ch. 1 is introduced by God’s speaking. Everything that God speaks into being is **good** (vv. 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). These verses show how God has arranged time in a weekly cycle (**Day . . . Night**). God is pictured as working for six days and resting on the seventh, which is a model for human activity. Day 4 will develop this idea further: the lights are placed in the heavens for signs and seasons, for marking days and years and the times of the festivals, such as Passover. This sense of time having a structure is further emphasized as each stage of God’s creative work is separated into specific days. **there was evening and there was morning, the first day.** After each workday there is an evening and then a morning, implying that there is a nighttime (the worker’s daily time of rest) in between. Similar phrases divide ch. 1 into six distinctive workdays, with 2:1–3 being a seventh day, God’s Sabbath. On the first three days God creates the environment that the creatures of days 4–6 will inhabit. For example, the sea and sky (day 2) are occupied by the fish and birds (day 5). These days can be understood as days in the life of God, but how his days relate to human days is more difficult to determine (see 2 Pet. 3:8).

1:6–8 As light was separated from darkness, so the **waters** are separated to form an **expanse**, which God calls **Heaven**. It is difficult to find a single English word that accurately translates the precise meaning of this Hebrew term (see *esv* footnote). In this context, it refers to what humans see above them, that is, the region that contains both heavenly lights (vv. 14–17) and birds (v. 20).

1:9–13 God organizes two further regions: the **dry land**, forming **Earth**; and the **waters**, forming **Seas** (vv. 9–10). God then instructs the earth to bring forth **vegetation** (vv. 11–12). The creation of distinctive locations in days 1–3, along with vegetation, prepares for the filling of these locations in days 4–6.

¹¹ And God said, ^h“Let the earth sprout vegetation, plants ¹ yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, on the earth.” And it was so. ¹² The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ¹³ And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

¹⁴ And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night. And let them be for ¹signs and for ¹seasons, ² and for days and years, ¹⁵ and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. ¹⁶ And God ⁶made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. ¹⁷ And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, ¹⁸ to ¹rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. ¹⁹ And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

²⁰ And God said, “Let the waters swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds ³ fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.” ²¹ So ^mGod created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters

¹ Or *small plants*; also verses 12, 29 ² Or *appointed times* ³ Or *flying things*; see Leviticus 11:19–20 ⁴ The Hebrew word for *man (adam)* is the generic term for mankind and becomes the proper name *Adam*

¹¹ ^{Ps.} 104:14 ¹⁴ ^{Jer.} 10:2; Ezek. 32:7, 8; Joel 2:30, 31; 3:15; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25 ¹⁵ ^{Ps.} 104:19 ¹⁶ ^{Deut.} 4:19; Ps. 136:7–9 ¹⁸ ^{Jer.} 31:35 ²¹ ^{Ps.} 104:25, 26 ²² ^{Ch.} 8:17; 9:1 ²⁶ ^{Ch.} 3:22; 11:7; Isa. 6:8 ² ^{Ch.} 5:1; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Eph. 4:24; Col. 3:10; James 3:9 ³ ^{Ch.} 9:2; Ps. 8:6–8; James 3:7 ²⁷ ^{Ch.} 2:18, 21–23; 5:2; Mal. 2:15; Matt. 19:4; Mark 10:6 ²⁸ ^{Ch.} 9:1, 7

swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. ²² And God blessed them, saying, ^m“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” ²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds—livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.” And it was so. ²⁵ And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, ^o“Let us make man ⁴ in our image, ^p after our likeness. And ^qlet them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”

²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; ^r male and female he created them.

²⁸ And God blessed them. And God said to them, ^s“Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the

FACT

Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God said, “Let us make man” (1:26). This phrase could be the Bible’s earliest indication that God exists as three persons in one: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Christians around the world refer to this as the doctrine of the Trinity.

1:14–19 These verses, describing the fourth day, correspond with the separating of light and darkness on the first day (vv. 3–5). Here is the creation of **lights** that will govern time, as well as provide **light upon the earth** (v. 15). By referring to them as the **greater light** and **lesser light** (v. 16), the author of Genesis avoids using terms that were also proper names for pagan gods linked to the sun and the moon. The term **made** may simply mean that God “fashioned” or “worked on” these greater and lesser lights. It does not necessarily mean that they did not exist in any form before this. On this day God made it possible that the sun and moon would define the passing of time. The references to **seasons** (v. 14) or “appointed times” (sv footnote) and to **days and years** probably refer to appointed times for religious observances in the Hebrew calendar (see Ex. 13:10).

1:16 and the stars. The immense universe that God created (see note on Isa. 40:25–26) is mentioned here only briefly, almost as an afterthought. The focus of Genesis 1 is on the earth.

1:20–23 This section, on day 5, describes how the **waters** and the **expanse of the heavens** are filled with various kinds of creatures.

1:21 The Hebrew term for **great sea creatures** can mean large serpents, dragons, or crocodiles, as well as whales or sharks. Some have suggested that this could also refer to extinct creatures such as dinosaurs.

1:24–25 livestock and creeping things and beasts of the earth. These terms group the land-dwelling animals into three broad categories, probably reflecting the way nomadic shepherds would experience them.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive, and it is hard to know in which category to put some animals.

1:26 Let us make man in our image. Some have suggested that God may be addressing the members of his heavenly court, whom the OT elsewhere calls “sons of God” (e.g., Job 1:6) and the NT calls “angels.” But man is not made in the image of angels (see Gen. 1:27), and the Bible never teaches that angels participated in the creation of human beings. Since God alone creates man (v. 27), many Christians believe that “let us” means God is speaking to himself. If so, this would be the first biblical mention of the “Trinity” (see note on John 1:1).

1:27 The term image of God can be seen as describing the ways in which man is different from all other created beings. It describes how humans resemble God in their ability to think, to communicate, to understand right and wrong, to be creative, and to experience relationships with God and with one another. This allows men and women to represent God as they exercise authority over the rest of creation (see v. 26; and note on v. 28). The Hebrew word for **man** (*adam*), is often a generic term for both male and female, though sometimes it refers to man in distinction from woman (e.g., 2:22, 23; 3:8). It can also be the proper name “Adam” (2:20; 3:17; 4:1; 5:1).

1:28–30 Although the word “covenant” does not occur in the Bible until 6:18, many consider 1:28–30 along with 2:16–17 to be God’s covenant with Adam. See Hos. 6:7 and note. Adam receives this covenant on behalf of the rest of mankind. Thus, in the NT, Paul views Adam as a representative head of the human race (1 Cor. 15:22).

1:28 Be fruitful and multiply. From the time of creation, God’s plan has been that the whole earth should be populated by those who know him and who serve wisely as his representatives. To **subdue** the earth and to **have dominion** over it probably means that humans are permitted to make the earth beneficial for themselves. They are to investigate and develop its resources. This command provides a basis for wise scientific and technological development. It does not mean that humans may exploit the earth and its creatures simply to satisfy their own greed.

sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”²⁹ And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit.³⁰ You shall have them for food.³⁰ And ^uto every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.³¹ And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

The Seventh Day, God Rests

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and ^wall the host of them.² And ^xon the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.³ So God blessed the seventh day

¹Or open country ²Or earth; also verse 6 ³Or spring

²⁹ch. 9:3; Ps. 104:14, 15; 145:15, 16 ³⁰Ps. 147:9 ³¹1 Tim. 4:4 **Chapter 2** ¹Deut. 4:19; Ps. 33:6 ²Ex. 20:8-11; 31:17; Deut. 5:12-14; Heb. 4:4 ³ch. 1:1 ⁵[ch. 1:11, 12] ⁶ch. 3:23 ⁷ch. 3:19, 23; 18:27; Ps. 103:14; Eccles. 12:7; 1 Cor. 15:47 ⁸ch. 7:22; Job 33:4; Isa. 2:22 ⁹Job 27:3 ¹⁰Cited 1 Cor. 15:45 ¹¹ver. 15; ch. 13:10; Isa. 51:3; Ezek. 28:13; 31:8; Joel 2:3

1:31 One final occurrence of **behold, it was very good** invites the reader to imagine seeing creation through God’s eyes. Despite the invasion of sin (ch. 3), the material creation retains its basic goodness (see 1 Tim. 4:4).

2:1–3 God has now completed the process of putting his creation in order (see note on 1:1–2:3). That God **rested** does not imply he was weary from labor. Rather, God’s resting hints at the purpose of creation. God’s purpose for the earth is that it should become his dwelling place, not simply a place for his creatures. **God blessed the seventh day and made it holy** (2:3). These words provide the basis for God’s instructing the Israelites to rest from their normal labor on the Sabbath day (see Ex. 20:8–11).



The Garden of Eden

Genesis describes the location of Eden in relation to the convergence of four rivers. While two of the rivers are unknown (the Pishon and the Gihon), the nearly universal identification of the other two rivers as the Tigris and the Euphrates suggests a possible location for Eden at either their northern or southern extremes.

and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.

The Creation of Man and Woman

4 ^yThese are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

⁵When no ^zbush of the field¹ was yet in the land² and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man^a to work the ground,⁶ and a mist³ was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground—⁷ then the LORD God formed the man of ^bdust from the ground and ^cbreathed into his ^dnostrils the breath of life, and ^ethe man became a living creature.⁸ And the LORD God planted a ^ggarden in

PROFILE

Adam, whose name means “man,” was the first human being. Created out of dust, he was made in the image of God. Adam was given dominion over the rest of creation and was placed in the garden of Eden to care for it. God created Eve as a helper for Adam, and together they enjoyed perfect fellowship with their Creator. But Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, which brought sin and death into the world. Because of their sin, all humans are now born sinners and will someday die. The Bible tells the story of how God redeems his creation from the curse of Adam’s sin. “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22). (**Genesis 2:7**)

2:4–4:26 *Earth’s First People.* Centered initially on the garden of Eden, the episodes in this part of Genesis recount how God’s ordered creation is thrown into chaos by the human couple’s disobedience. The subsequent story of Cain and Abel and then Lamech (ch. 4) shows human society spiraling downward into violence. These events are essential for understanding not only the rest of Genesis but the rest of the Bible as well.

2:4 *These are the generations of.* This is the first of 11 such headings in Genesis (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10; 11:27; 25:12; 25:19; 36:1; 36:9; 37:2). **LORD God.** Throughout 1:1–2:3 the generic word “God” was used for the Creator. The reader is now introduced to God’s personal name, “Yahweh,” which is rendered in most English Bible translations as “LORD,” using small capital letters. This practice comes from the ancient Jewish tradition of substituting for “Yahweh” the Hebrew term for “LORD” when reading the biblical text. The Septuagint (an ancient Greek translation of the OT) used the Greek word for “LORD” (*Kyrios*) to refer to God. That translation was then quoted many times by the NT authors, who also used *Kyrios* rather than Yahweh for God’s name. See notes on Ex. 3:14; 3:15.

2:7 *then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground.* The verb “formed” describes a potter fashioning clay into a particular shape. The close relationship between the man and the ground is reflected in the Hebrew words *’adam* for man and *’adamah* for the ground. **living creature.** The same Hebrew term is used in 1:20, 24 for sea and land creatures. (See Paul’s quotation of this passage in 1 Cor. 15:45.)

2:8–9 God provides a suitable environment for the man by planting a

Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.⁹ And out of the ground the LORD God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.⁸ The tree of life was in the midst of the garden,^h and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of ^hHavilah, where there is gold.¹² And the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there.¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush.¹⁴ And the name of the third river is the ^jTigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man ^k and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden,¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good

and evil ^l you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat ^l of it you ^m shall surely die.”

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; ⁿ I will make him a helper fit for ^r him.”¹⁹ Now out of the ground the LORD God had formed³ every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and ^p brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name.²⁰ The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam⁴ there was not found a helper fit for him.²¹ So the LORD God caused a ^q deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.²² And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made⁵ into a woman and brought her to the man.²³ Then the man said,

“This at last is ^r bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was ^s taken out of Man.”⁶

¹ Or when you eat ² Or corresponding to; also verse 20 ³ Or And out of the ground the LORD God formed ⁴ Or the man ⁵ Hebrew built ⁶ The Hebrew words for woman (*ishshah*) and man (*ish*) sound alike

⁹ ch. 3:22; Rev. 2:7; 22:2, 14 ¹⁰ ver. 17 ¹¹ ch. 10:7, 29; 25:18; 1 Sam. 15:7 ¹⁴ Dan. 10:4 ¹⁵ ver. 8 ¹⁷ ch. 3:1-3, 11, 17 ¹⁹ Rom. 6:23; James 1:15 ¹⁸ 1 Cor. 11:9; 1 Tim. 2:13 ¹⁹ ch. 1:20, 24 ²⁰ Ps. 8:6 ²¹ ch. 15:12; 1 Sam. 26:12 ²³ ch. 29:14; Judg. 9:2; 2 Sam. 5:1; 19:13; [Eph. 5:28-30] ¹ Cor. 11:8

FACT

The Euphrates (2:14) is the longest and most important river in southwest Asia. Early settlers depended on the river for commerce and agriculture. The Euphrates and Tigris rivers form what is today the Shatt-al-Arab, a waterway that flows into the Persian Gulf.

garden in Eden, in the east. The name “Eden” suggests luxury and pleasure. It probably refers to a region much greater than the garden itself. God formed the man in the “land” (see vv. 5–7), and then put him in the garden (compare v. 15). The earliest translation into Greek (the Septuagint) used the word *paradeisos*, from which comes the English term “paradise” (compare Luke 23:43), to translate the Hebrew term for “garden.” The abundance of the garden is suggested by the fact that it contained **every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food** (Gen. 2:9). This very abundance will later become a source of temptation (3:6). On the **tree of life**, see note on 3:22–24. On the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, see note on 2:17.

2:10–14 The description of the river that flowed out of Eden dividing into **four rivers** implies that Eden occupied a central location in the ancient world. In spite of the very specific details provided, however, Eden’s location remains a mystery. While the names **Tigris** and **Euphrates** are associated with the two rivers that surround Mesopotamia, the rivers **Pishon** and **Gihon**, as well as the regions of **Havilah** and **Cush**, have not been satisfactorily identified. The reference to **gold** and **onyx** points to the land’s rich resources.

2:15–16 The overall picture of Eden suggests that the park-like garden is part of a divine sanctuary. **The man is put** in the garden to **work it and keep it**. Since God commanded Adam to work before Adam had committed any sin, work did not come as a result of sin. Productive work is part of God’s good purpose for humans. The fact that God **commanded the man** implies that God gave the man a leadership role, including the responsibility to guard and care for all of creation (v. 15). This leadership role is related to Adam’s relationship with Eve as his wife, who was given as “a helper fit for him” (v. 18). (On the NT understanding of the relationship between husband and wife, see Eph. 5:22–33.)

2:17 The fruit of the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** has been variously understood as giving (1) sexual awareness, (2) moral discrimination, (3) moral responsibility, and (4) moral experience. Of these possibilities, the last is the most likely. If Adam disobeys God and eats the fruit of this tree, he will come to know evil by experience. **God shall surely die**. What kind of death does this threaten: physical, spiritual, or some combination of the two? The Hebrew word can be used for any of these ideas, and the only way to discover what “surely die” means in this case is to see what happens as the story unfolds (see note on 3:4–5). **In the day that you eat of it** does not mean that death will come on that very day. It means that once the forbidden fruit is eaten, death will become a certainty.

2:18 **Not good** is a jarring contrast to 1:31. **Helper** is one who supplies strength in an area that is lacking in the one who is helped. **Fit for him** or “matching him” (see vsv footnote) is not the same as “like him.” A wife is not to be just like her husband but is to complement him. **I will make him** can also be translated “I will make for him,” which explains Paul’s statement in 1 Cor. 11:9.

2:20 **The man gave names.** By naming the animals, the man demonstrates his authority over all the other creatures. **Adam.** See note on 5:1–2.

2:23–24 **This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.** Compare 29:14. Marriage creates the closest of all human relationships. Heterosexual monogamy is the divine pattern for marriage that God established at creation. **Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife.** Marriage creates obligations that are more important than one’s duty to one’s parents. In ancient Israel, sons did not move away from home when they married; they lived near their parents and inherited their father’s land. But they “left” their parents in the sense of putting their wife’s welfare before that of their parents. The term “hold fast” is used elsewhere for practicing covenant faithfulness (e.g., Deut. 10:20). Thus, other Bible texts call marriage a “covenant” (e.g., Prov. 2:17; Mal. 2:14). Paul’s teaching on marriage in Eph. 5:25–32 is founded on this text. When a man leaves his parents and takes a wife, **they shall become one flesh**. That is, they become one unit, a union of man and woman. This oneness is consummated in sexual intercourse. Jesus appeals to this verse and to Gen. 1:27 when teaching about marriage (Matt. 19:4–5).

2:25 **naked and . . . not ashamed.** The man and woman are living in a state of innocent delight.

²⁴Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.

The Fall

3 Now ^uthe serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You¹ shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ²And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴“But the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’ ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So 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, ² she took of its fruit ^xand ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, ^yand he ate. ⁷^zThen the eyes of both were opened, ^aand they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

¹In Hebrew you is plural in verses 1–5 ²Or to give insight ³Hebrew wind ⁴In Hebrew you is singular in verses 9 and 11 ⁵Hebrew seed; so throughout Genesis

²⁴Cited Matt. 19:5; Mark 10:7; 1 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 5:31; [Ps. 45:10; 1 Cor. 7:10, 11] **Chapter 3** ¹Matt. 10:16; 2 Cor. 11:3; Rev. 12:9; 20:2–3^{ch.}; 2:17 ⁴Ver. 13; John 8:44; [2 Cor. 11:3] ⁶1 Tim. 2:14 ⁷Ver. 12, 17; Hos. 6:7 ⁷Ver. 5 ⁹ch. 2:25 ⁸[Ps. 139:1–12; Jer. 23:23, 24] ¹⁰Ver. 7; ch. 2:25 ¹²ch. 2:18; Job 31:33 ¹³Ver. 4; 2 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:14 ¹⁴Isa. 65:25; Mic. 7:17 ¹⁵[Isa. 7:14; Mic. 5:3; Matt. 1:23, 25; Luke 1:34, 35; Gal. 4:4; 1 Tim. 2:15]

3:1–24 The sudden arrival of a speaking **serpent** presents a challenge to the human couple. Their choice to disregard God’s instructions is an act of willful rebellion that has terrible consequences for all of creation. Nothing is said about where the serpent came from. The text does not indicate when or how the serpent became evil. It is clear, however, that evil entered the created world at some time after God’s “very good” work of creation was completed (1:31). Unlike the teachings of some other religions, the Bible never teaches that evil has always existed. See notes on Isa. 14:12–15; Ezek. 28:11–19.

3:2–3 The woman’s response echoes the divine instruction given in 2:16–17 (see note on 2:17), although she fails to identify the tree clearly, and she adds, “**neither shall you touch it.**”

3:4–5 The serpent directly contradicts what God has said. He presents the fruit of the tree as something worth having. By eating it, he says, Adam and Eve will be **like God, knowing good and evil**. The irony of the serpent’s remarks is that Adam and Eve, unlike the serpent, were already made in the image of God (1:26–27). They are already “like God.” This means they are expected to exercise authority over all the beasts of the field—including the serpent! By obeying the serpent, however, they betray the trust that God has placed in them. **You will not surely die**. It is sometimes claimed that the serpent is correct when he says this, for they do not immediately “die.” Further, their eyes are in fact opened (3:7), and God acknowledges that “the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil” (v. 22). Yet the serpent speaks only half-truths. What Adam and Eve will experience outside of Eden is not life as God intended. It is spiritual death.

3:6 when the woman saw that the tree was good. Somehow the serpent has made the woman discontented with the permitted trees (2:16), and she desires instead the forbidden one. Apparently she is attracted to the tree’s ability to **make one wise** (see note on 2:17): **she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.** As Adam ate what God had forbidden, he was deliberately rebelling against God. The fact that he was “with” Eve at the time meant that he had failed to carry

⁸And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool³ of the day, and the man and his wife ^bhid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?”⁴ ¹⁰And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, ^cbecause I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, ^d“The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, ^e“The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you above all livestock
and above all beasts of the field;
on your belly you shall go,
and ^fdust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring⁵ and ^gher offspring;

PROFILE

God created **Eve**, whose name means “life,” as a helper for Adam. Fashioned from one of Adam’s ribs, Eve became the mother (that is, the female ancestor) of all human beings. Though enjoying perfect fellowship with God, Eve was deceived by the serpent and disobeyed God by eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Because of their sin, Adam and Eve were driven from the paradise of Eden and began to experience great hardship. For Eve, that included pain in childbearing. Yet, as promised in Genesis 3:15, one of her offspring would defeat the serpent and bring salvation and eternal life to all who put their trust in him. (**Genesis 2:23**)

out his God-given responsibility to guard and “keep” both the garden and his wife (see 2:15). The disastrous consequences of Adam’s sin include the fall of mankind, the beginning of every kind of sin, suffering, and pain, along with spiritual and physical death for the entire human race.

3:9 the LORD God called to the man . . . , “Where are you?” Both “man” and “you” are singular in Hebrew. God thus confronts Adam first, holding him primarily responsible for the sin committed by both Adam and Eve. Adam is thus treated as the representative or “head” of the husband-and-wife relationship, established before the fall (see note on Eph. 5:23–24).

3:14–15 The serpent is punished for tempting the woman. It will live in ongoing hostility with the woman, which will be carried on by their respective **offspring**.

3:15 This verse is usually understood as pointing forward to the defeat of the serpent by the **offspring** (that is, a descendant) of the woman. For

^hhe shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said,

“I will surely multiply your pain in child-bearing;

ⁱin pain you shall bring forth children.

^jYour desire shall be contrary to ^kyour husband,
but he shall ^krule over you.”

¹⁷And to Adam he said,

“Because you have listened to the voice of
your wife

and have eaten of the tree

^lof which I commanded you,

‘You shall not eat of it,’

^mcursed is the ground because of you;

ⁿin pain you shall eat of it all the days of
your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for
you;

and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face

you shall eat bread,

till you return to the ground,

for out of it you were taken;

^ofor you are dust,

and ^pto dust you shall return.”

²⁰The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.²¹ And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.

²²Then the LORD God said, ^q“Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand ^rand take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—”

²³therefore the LORD God sent him out from the garden of Eden ^sto work the ground from which

¹Or shall be toward (see 4:7) ²Eve sounds like the Hebrew for life-giver and resembles the word for living

¹⁵Rom. 16:20; Heb. 2:14; Rev. 20:1-3, 10 ¹⁶(John 16:21) ⁱch. 4:7; Song 7:10 ^k1 Cor. 11:3; 14:34; Eph. 5:22-24; Col. 3:18; 1 Tim. 2:11, 12; Titus 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1, 5, 6 ¹⁷ch. 2:17 ^mch. 5:29; (Rom. 8:20-22) ⁿEccles. 2:22, 23 ¹⁹ch. 2:7; Ps. 103:14 ^pJob 34:15; Ps. 104:29; Eccles. 3:20; 12:7; Rom. 5:12 ²²ver. 5 ^{ch} 2:9 ²³ch. 2:5

FACT

Cherubim (3:24) are angels who guard holy places. They appear in various places in the Bible. “Cherubim” is the Hebrew plural form of “cherub.”

this reason, it has been labeled the “Protoevangelium,” that is, the first announcement of the gospel. While Genesis does not explicitly identify the serpent with Satan, that is clearly what the apostle John understood (see Rev. 12:9; 20:2). The idea of the woman’s “offspring” is seen again in Gen. 4:25 in the birth of Seth. The rest of Genesis traces a single line of Seth’s descendants (see diagram, this page), which will eventually produce a king through whom all the nations of the earth will be blessed. **he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.** The use of the singular “he” and “his” suggests that one particular person (“offspring”) is in view. The promise of this person comes to fulfillment in Jesus Christ, who is clearly presented in the NT as overcoming Satan (Heb. 2:14; 1 John 3:8; compare John 12:31). At the same time, he is “bruised” by Satan at the cross.

3:16 Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you. God originally intended that there would be a complementary relationship between husband and wife, with the husband in a leadership role (see note on 2:15–16). But that plan has now been distorted and damaged by sin. This takes the form of “desire” on the part of the wife and heavy-handed “rule” on the part of the husband. The Hebrew term here for “desire” appears again in 4:7, where the Lord says to Cain that sin’s “desire is contrary to you.” Eve will have the sinful “desire” to oppose Adam and to assert leadership over him. But Adam will also abandon his God-given role of leading, guarding, and caring for Eve. Instead, he will have a sinful, distorted desire to “rule” over her. Thus one of the most tragic results of Adam and Eve’s rebellion against God is ongoing conflict between husbands and wives, as they both rebel against their God-given roles and responsibilities in marriage. (See notes on Eph. 5:21–32 for the NT ideal for marriage.)

3:17–19 Because he has eaten what was prohibited (v. 6), Adam will have to struggle to eat in the future. He will no longer enjoy the garden’s abundance but will have to work the ground from which he was taken (v. 23; see note on 2:8–9). The punishment is not the work itself (see note on 2:15–16) but rather the hardship and frustration that it will involve. To say that the **ground is cursed** and will produce **thorns and thistles** means that it will no longer be as productive as it was in Eden.

3:19 Because of his sin, the man’s body will **return to the ground**, that is, he will die. Death was not a part of the original creation (see Rom.

5:12). The Bible looks forward to a time when nature will be set free from death and the other consequences of human sin (Rom. 8:19–22).

3:20–21 God’s words of judgment are immediately followed by two actions that offer hope. First, the man names his wife **Eve**, which means “life-giver” (see esv footnote). Second, God makes clothing for

The Genealogies of Genesis

