



UNIT II

DISCOVERING THE PENTATEUCH

This unit introduces the reader to:

- Israel's understanding of the universe and humanity
- Israel's ancestors and their stories
- Israel's bondage and deliverance from Egypt
- Israel's journey toward the Promised Land
- The laws and instructions that Moses gave to Israel

- Israel's View of the World: Genesis 1—11
- God's Covenant with Abraham:
Genesis 12—25
- The Covenant Family: Genesis 26—50
- The Birth of a Nation: Exodus 1—18
- The Covenant Community: Exodus 19—40
- Israel in the Wilderness: Leviticus and
Numbers
- Instructions for Life in the Land:
Deuteronomy





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Israel's View of the World: Genesis 1—11

Objectives:

Your study of the chapter should help you to:

- Explain the title, authorship, and main content of the Book of Genesis.
- Evaluate the key theological truths found in the creation stories.
- Identify the main stories found in Genesis 3—11.
- Evaluate the theological lessons of the main stories found in Genesis 3—11.
- Make assessment of the present condition of humanity.
- Develop a theological framework for personal faith and life in the world today.

Questions to consider as you read:

1. Give a list of your perceptions and beliefs about God. From this list, choose the most basic and most essential belief about God. Explain why.
2. Why is it important to have faith in God as the Creator of the universe?
3. Why do we resist authority?
4. What are the various areas of human relationship where resistance to authority is found?

Key Words to Understand

Torah
 Pentateuch
 Genesis
 Septuagint
 Primeval narratives/traditions
 Patriarchal narratives/traditions
 Theocentric
 Anthropocentric
Enuma Elish
 Creatio ex nihilo
 Sabbath
 Image of God
 Garden of Eden
 Tree of life
 Tree of the knowledge of good and evil
 Heart
 Covenant with Noah
 Gilgamesh epic
 Ziggurats
 Babel

The opening statement of the Bible establishes God as the supreme Creator. This confession of faith is the beginning point of Israel's story. The Christian confession through the Apostles' Creed, "I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth," also sums up this foundational belief about God. The people of Israel also understood their own particular history in the context of God's creation of the universe and humanity. In this chapter, we will deal with the Genesis narratives on God, creation, and humanity that serve as a preamble to the story of Israel's origins.

Title and Authorship

The Book of Genesis is the first book of the Bible. It is also the first book of the **Torah** (or **Pentateuch**). The title **Genesis** (meaning "beginning" or "origin") comes from the Greek translation of the Bible (the **Septuagint**). Who wrote this book and the other four books of the Pentateuch? We do not know. The composition of the entire Pentateuch in its final form continues to be a subject of debate among biblical scholars.

We think that a substantial part of the traditions, stories, and laws in the Pentateuch originated during the period of Moses (13th century B.C.). It is difficult to say how much of these materials existed in written form during Moses' time. Perhaps most remained as oral traditions for a long period. We also think that at a much later period, Israel's scribes collected the literary sources and oral traditions of the previous generations and fixed them into writing. This process must have gone through different stages and different generations of scribal activity. It is difficult to assign a specific time for

the final form of the Pentateuch. Modern critical scholars think that at least four major literary and theological sources make up the Pentateuch. They label these sources as a Yahwistic (J), Elohist (E), Priestly (P), and Deuteronomistic (D). They also regard the Yahwistic source as the oldest (9th century B.C.) and the Priestly source as the latest (5th century B.C.) and assign 400 B.C. for the final shaping of the Pentateuch.

Content

The story of the Book of Genesis is told in 50 chapters. The book can be divided into two parts:

1. Primeval traditions (1:1—11:32)
2. Patriarchal traditions (12:1—50:26)

The first 11 chapters contain stories about creation and the earliest history of humanity. These stories focus on events that took place long before humanity began to document its history and civilization. Therefore we designate the content of these chapters as **primeval narratives/traditions**. These chapters contain narratives about the world out of which Israel's ancestor Abraham came to follow God's call. In that respect, these chapters look back at the universal setting of the birth of the nation Israel. Chapters 12—50 deal with the stories of Israel's great ancestors—the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Scholars label these chapters as Israel's **patriarchal narratives/traditions**. Taken as a whole, the Book of Genesis contains several family stories that connect one generation with the next. Where there are gaps in these family stories, we find extended genealo-

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Narratives—Principles of Interpretation

The following are some general principles that we need to keep in mind when we attempt to interpret narratives in the Old Testament.

- Narratives in Genesis 1—11 presuppose historical realities. However, they do not offer to us sufficient data to establish the specific date of any event in these chapters. Some Christians view these stories as literary accounts of religious themes. Others find in these chapters literal accounts of actual historical events. A more balanced view is that these chapters contain both oral and literary traditions that convey Israel's religious beliefs about the earliest history of humanity.
- Narratives convey the reality of divine revelation. Often, we may find details lacking in the narratives. Also, historical gaps are very much a part of the biblical narratives. We must avoid the temptation to fill the gaps with fictional or imaginary events.
- Revelation presupposes supernatural events. Some may be easily explained; others we may not be able to explain.
- Attempt to identify the particular focus of the narrative and its intention or purpose by the storyteller (a family story, an explanation of the origin of a custom, the naming of a place, a heroic story, a report of family conflict, a report of divine revelation, etc.).
- Attempt to place the narratives in their historical, cultural, social, and religious setting. Placing a story in its actual setting would allow us to see its relationship to the larger Old Testament story and its impact on subsequent events.
- Attempt to identify particular theological concepts or religious ideas underlying the narrative (such as election, covenant, divine promises and fulfillment).
- Attempt to evaluate biographical narratives in light of the entire biography of the main character. A single story may serve only as a link in a chain of events. The reader should focus on the total assessment of the character by the biblical writers.
- In all the narratives, attempt to discover the role played by God. Even when some narratives may lack any reference to God, the story may imply the mysterious activity of God.

gies or family trees that trace groups of people or individuals to particular ancestors (see chaps. 5; 10; 11:10-32; 25:12-18; and 36).

These genealogies seem to show the interrelationships and familial connections of various social and ethnic groups that existed in the ancient world.

■ Israel's Primeval Traditions (1:1—11:32)

Two Creation Accounts

Genesis 1 and 2 contain the most precise and systematic treatment of God as the Creator of the universe. These chapters contain

two separate creation accounts or traditions. The first account (1:1—2:4a) is a summary description of the creation of the world and everything in it. This account may be called a **theocentric** account (in Greek, *theos* means “God”) because God and His majestic work of creation is its primary focus. The second account (2:4b-25) is a more specific treatment of the making of the man, the animals, the woman, and the divine assignment of work to the man in the garden. It is an **anthropocentric** account (in Greek, *anthropos* means “man”) in which emphasis is on humanity's nature, destiny,

and vocation. The rest of the story of humanity, including the story of Israel in the Old Testament, is a continuation of the second creation account.

We will now study these creation accounts to gain an overall understanding of what the Bible says about God and His work of creation.

The First Creation Story (1:1—2:4a)

Careful reading of Genesis 1:1—2:4a shows that the focus of

the text is on the Creator and what He made. The subject of the action (God) is prominent (see the repeated phrase “And God said . . .”). The result of the action, namely, what God made, is also clear.

Genesis 1:1 is a summary statement that affirms faith in God as the sovereign Creator. The Creator “created” the universe (“the heavens and the earth”). The Hebrew verb (*bara'*, meaning “created”) used here to describe God’s activity denotes God’s power to bring into existence things that do not exist. In the Old Testament *bara'* is never used as a verb to describe human activities. This faith statement alone makes the biblical account distinctive and unlike any pagan myth of creation such as the Mesopotamian account of creation known as the ***Enuma Elish***. The universe was a “formless void” (NRSV) covered with darkness when it was brought into existence by God (v. 2). However, even this original condition of chaos was under the control and power of the Spirit of God (v. 3).

The rest of the first account focuses on six days of God’s creative activities that brought light, life, and beauty that we see in the world today.² The recurring

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The *Enuma Elish*

The *Enuma Elish*, the Mesopotamian story of creation, begins with the account of two deities, Apsu (a male god) and Tiamat (Apsu’s female counterpart). Subsequent generations of gods were born, which resulted in a struggle for order and authority between the older generations and the younger generations of gods. Apsu was killed in this struggle, and Tiamat gathered up her forces to retaliate. Other frightened gods chose Marduk—a younger, energetic god—to confront the forces of Tiamat. Marduk fought and killed Tiamat. Using her corpse, Marduk laid out the cosmos. The pantheon of gods proclaimed Marduk as their king. Marduk created humanity with the blood of a slain god, and he built Babylon for him to reside. The story ends with a praise of Marduk.¹

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Creation Out of Nothing

Genesis 1:1 maintains the truth that the world was created out of nothing (***creatio ex nihilo***). The world in which we live is God’s world, conceived by the wisdom of God, fashioned, designed, and brought into being by the powerful speech of God. The Bible affirms the faith that God’s creative power has been at work since the beginning of history. God continues to speak His powerful and authoritative word to His creation and causes things to come into existence. The apostle Paul speaks of this power at work in the life of Abraham, who believed in the God “who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist” (Romans 4:17, NRSV). It is this faith that enables us today to hope in God “against hope” as Abraham did, “being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised” (vv. 18, 21).

phrase, “And God said,” describes creation by the power of God’s word or command. There is no satisfactory explanation of the “day” in the first account of creation. The Hebrew word for a day (*yom*) is used in the Old Testament in different ways, including measured time as well as an indefinite duration of time. The recurring phrase in this narrative, “And there was evening, and there was morning” (1:5, 8, 13, 19, 23, 31), shows that Israel’s faith placed the creation narrative within the framework of the Jewish understanding of the day. This narrative structure further anticipates the culmination of God’s creative work and His rest on the “seventh” day (the **Sabbath**).

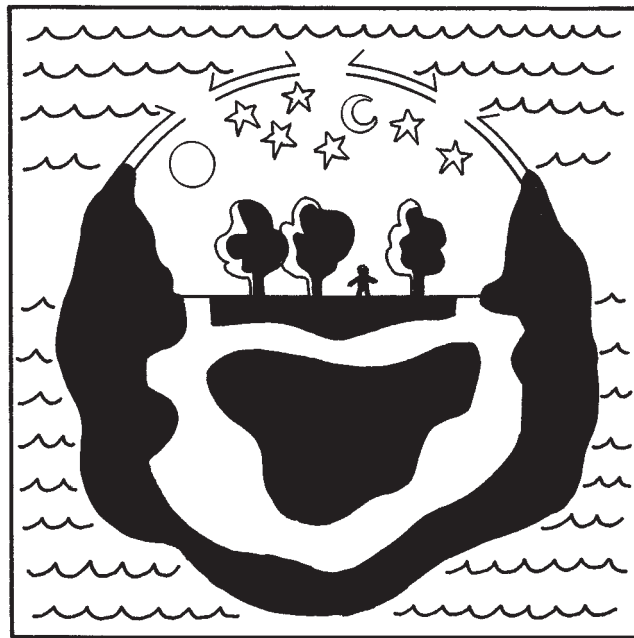
During the first three days of creation God focused on the activity of separation or setting boundaries to what He created. On the first day of creation, God created the light and separated it from the darkness that existed over the universe (vv. 3-5). He made the sky and separated the waters above the sky from the waters below on the second day (vv. 6-8). He separated the waters below into seas that led to the formation of the land (vv. 9-10). This natural order and boundary that God established at the time of creation gave Israel confidence in the dependability and authority of God as the Creator (see Psalms 46:1-3; 75:3; Isaiah 40:21-26).

After the land was formed on the third day, God gave command to the earth to produce various plants and fruit-bearing trees (1:11-13). The creation of the sun, the moon, and the stars took place on the fourth day (vv. 14-19). This activity parallels the creation of light on the first day. God

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Israel's Understanding of the Universe

The first account of creation reflects Israel’s understanding of the structure of the universe (cosmology). Israel viewed the earth as flat and circular. Above the earth is a dome-shaped sky or the firmament that rests on the mountains around the edge of the earth. Water above the sky is the source of rain. The earth rests on pillars that float in the waters below the earth (Psalm 46:2). These waters supply the springs, streams, and rivers (Job 38:16).



filled the sky with birds and the sea with various kinds of living creatures on the fifth day (vv. 20-23). This activity parallels the establishment of the firmament (the sky) on the second day. On the sixth day He made the land animals and humanity as male and female (vv. 24-26). Again, the sixth day’s creative work parallels God’s activity of forming the land on the third day.

Diagram showing the Hebrew understanding of the universe.

God's final activity on the sixth day was the creation of humanity. He created both male and female in His image and commanded them to subdue the earth and have dominion over every living thing that He created (vv. 27-28). For humanity and animals, God established a vegetarian way of life (vv. 29-30). After completing His work of creation in six days, God "rested" (in Hebrew, *shabat*, meaning "to cease") from all His work on the seventh day. He blessed and made the seventh day "holy" or set it apart from the six days of creation (2:2-3).

Sexuality and the gender distinction of humanity are part of

God's creation plan. The phrase "he created him; male and female he created them" (1:27) expresses the divine plan for the solidarity of human beings, their gender distinction, and community existence. The biblical view that both male and female are created in the image of God also highlights the equality of both genders. Exploitation, devaluation, and manipulation of the opposite gender deny that individual the rightful place in human society.

The Second Creation Story (2:4b-25)

This text also deals with the work of God as the Creator.

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Humanity in the Image of God

The image of God is a significant biblical idea. The words *image* and *likeness* mean the same. In the context of the Genesis account of creation, these words refer to humanity's function, place, and responsibility in the created world (1:26). God created humanity to be the **image of God**, to rule over His creation as His earthly representatives. Humanness in a biblical sense is our God-given capacity to love and care for God and His creation. Human individuals and the community reflect God's image when they love God with their whole being—heart, soul, and strength (Deuteronomy 6:4), and love each other with unselfish love (Leviticus 19:18; Mark. 12:29-31). The New Testament portrays Jesus as the "image" of the invisible God (Colossians 1:15), who for the sake of the salvation of the world, took the "very nature of a servant" and "became obedient to death, even death on a cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). Loving God with unreserved obedience and loving others in an unselfish manner are thus essential marks of being the "image of God."³

The Sabbath

The Sabbath teaches the following lessons: First, God's rest (in Hebrew, *shabat*) on the seventh day means that the creation is a completed act. All that He intended to create, He brought into existence during the six days of creation. The world that He created for humanity is therefore a finished work—a dependable world fashioned and created by a dependable Creator God. We do not need to be anxious about the stability of the world in which we live. Second, God "rested" from the work He did in six days. The rhythm of work and rest in the first creation story models for us a divine pattern for an orderly and wholesome life in God's world. Both work and rest are part of God's plan for His creation. The Sabbath offers us freedom from the bondage of excessive work, self-sufficiency, and materialism. Third, the Sabbath is a time for retrospection and reflective living. Retrospection and reflection would lead us to gratitude and dependence on God's gracious provisions for our daily existence. Finally, Jesus models for us the lesson that the Sabbath is for all humanity—a time to bring healing and rest to all who are weary and tired (Mark 2:23—3:6; Matthew 11:28).

However, in this second account, the emphasis is on the nature of the human individual and the divinely set agenda for human existence. Who are we as human beings? What is the nature and makeup of human beings? What is the divinely intended purpose for human existence? What is the nature and the proper basis of our relationship with God? What is the essential foundation for harmony in family and societal life? These are the questions the text seeks to answer.

The second creation story begins with an observation about the uncultivated condition of the earth (v. 5). This serves as the reason for God's decision to make the man. In most instances, the reference to the man in Genesis 1–4 (in Hebrew, *'adam*) has the definite article, which conveys the idea of the man in a generic sense (humanity). God "formed" the man (*'adam*) from the ground (in Hebrew, *'adamah*) and the man became a living being (in Hebrew, *nephesh*) when God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

God made a garden, a place for the dwelling of humanity (vv. 8–10; 15). The **tree of life** and the **tree of the knowledge of good and evil** were located in the middle of the garden. A river that branched out into four rivers watered the garden.

Scholars think that the word *Eden* means "luxury," "abundance," "delight." The common reference of Eden as paradise comes from the meaning implied in the Septuagint translation. In Genesis 2 and 3, Eden is a large geographical region in which God made a garden for the existence of humanity. The phrase "in the east" (2:8) has led some schol-



Jewish mother
and child
pronounce
blessing over the
Sabbath candles.

ars to think that Eden was located in the Mesopotamian region.

God placed Adam in the garden to work and to take care of it. Along with the vocation, God also granted to the man permission to eat from "any tree in the garden" except "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (2:16–17). The prohibition included the warning that death would be the consequence of the violation of the divine command. The tree of the knowledge of good and evil appears again in chapter 3 as the focus of temptation. Scholarly opinions regarding the meaning and significance of the tree of the

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Permission and Prohibition

The issue of human freedom and divine prohibition in the second creation story clearly conveys the truth that obedience is the key to a meaningful and harmonious relationship with God. On the one hand, God granted to the man freedom or permission to enjoy the garden. Yet, on the other hand, this permission also came with a prohibition and a warning (2:16-17). The text makes it clear that the freedom God granted to the man was not absolute freedom. Human beings are not autonomous creatures. There are divinely established limits to our freedom, and we must keep the boundary of our freedom. Freedom calls for expressions of our gratitude to God's graciousness. Prohibition calls for acts of obedience. Obedience to God's command is the most appropriate way to acknowledge God's sovereignty as our Creator.

knowledge of good and evil include humanity's moral values and judgment, omniscient knowledge, and sexual awakening. In Genesis 2 this tree is a symbol of the limit of human freedom in the **Garden of Eden**.

The tree of life that was also located in the middle of the garden receives mention elsewhere in the Bible and seems to represent the possibility of human immortality (Genesis 3:22). In other biblical texts, the tree of life is associated with wisdom, righteousness, hope, healing of relationships, and eternal reward for one's faithfulness (see Proverbs 3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4; Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19).

The second account of creation concludes with a report about the actions that God undertook to make for the man "a helper as his partner" (2:18). God made first the beasts of the field and birds of the air. The man gave the animals

and the birds their names and thus assigned them their particular task under his authority. However, the suitable helper for the man was a woman whom God made from the "ribs" of the man. The Hebrew word for helper (*ezer*) does not mean a subservient, servant role, but rather a strong, upholding, strengthening, and sustaining function of the woman in the life of the man. The man recognized the woman as a part of his own being, of his own kind, the one with whom he was destined to become "one flesh" (vv. 23-24). Here we find a divinely established pattern for marriage and the establishment of family (vv. 18-24). Mutual strengthening and helping is the biblical pattern for a healthy and wholesome relationship between a husband and a wife. Paul illustrates this biblical concept by drawing analogy to the relationship between Christ and His Church and the sacrificial love Christ demonstrated through His death (Ephesians 5:21-33). The narrative ends with the final statement that the man and the woman were "naked," but they were not ashamed. This reflects the state of innocence, truthfulness, and integrity of relationship that characterized the existence of the first human couple.

The next chapter in the Book of Genesis tells us that the first man and the first woman failed to be God's image in the garden. We shall now turn to this story.

Humanity's Sin (3:1-24)

The story of Genesis 3 is a continuation of the story that begins in 2:4b. The narrative begins with a conversation between the woman and the serpent, a crea-

ture “the LORD God had made” (3:1). The text does not give any further significance to the creature except that it was cunning (“crafty”) and untamable (“wild.”).

The serpent began the conversation with the question, “Did God say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” (v. 1). The conversation was between the serpent and the woman; however, the man was also on the scene as a silent partner (see v. 6). The serpent’s question was a deliberate attempt to divert the focus from freedom to the prohibition. The woman’s response also focused on the prohibition and the warning of death (vv. 2-3). The serpent forcefully claimed that death would not happen. On the contrary, he asserted that they will become “like God, knowing good and evil” (v. 5).

Humanity trusted the word of the serpent and ate the fruit of the tree prohibited by God (3:6-7). The result was the opening of the eyes of the man and the woman and the recognition that they were “naked.” Guilt and shame of their act prompted them to make a covering to hide their nakedness. Moreover, they attempted to hide from the presence of God. God, nonetheless, encountered them (v. 9). In the trial that followed, the man accused the woman, the woman accused the serpent, and both claimed innocence (vv. 9-13). The power of sin broke up not only the divine-human relationships but also interpersonal relationships (vv. 10-13). The man and the woman were no longer “one flesh” bound together by a harmonious, faithful, and loving relationship. Each one saw the other as responsible for their predicament. Before God they

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Definition of Sin

Though the word *sin* is not found in Genesis 3:1-7, various aspects of this narrative help us describe and define sin. The narrative makes it clear that sin cannot be explained with a simple definition. However, the narrative reveals various facets of sin. The man and the woman trusted the serpent’s word against the word of God. Sin in this narrative is thus lack of trust in God and His word. The narrative shows that lack of trust in God has damaging consequences. Their mistrust of God led them to the act of disobedience (v. 6).

Moreover, the eating of the fruit from the tree of prohibition was a voluntary and deliberate act on the part of the man and the woman, who were under the divine command to live in faithful obedience to God in the garden (see 2:15-17). Rather than trusting God and recognizing God’s authority as the Creator, the first couple became victims of the seductive power of the tempter. Doubt and lack of trust led them to the false claim that they have the potential to become “like God” (3:5). In the final analysis, the eating of the fruit from the forbidden tree was a display of lack of trust, self-sovereignty, pride, and rebellion against God’s sovereign authority over them.

stood, not in corporate solidarity and accountability, but by blaming each other, and by trying to justify their individual actions.

God’s judgment came upon the serpent, the woman, and the man (vv. 14-19). He destined the serpent to be humanity’s enemy. He made childbearing a painful experience for the woman. The consequence of her sin would be her domination by her husband (v. 16). God’s punishment of the man was no less severe (vv. 17-19). He made the ground a difficult place for the man to cultivate. Humanity will exist in toil and hardship. God pronounced death as punishment for humanity’s sin.

The narrative concludes with the naming of the woman by the man. The man called the woman Eve (the Hebrew word is similar to the word for “living”). The name anticipates that life would continue to come forth through her, though they were under the curse of death (v. 20). God also clothed the sinful and guilty couple with garments of skin (v. 21). The final outcome of sin was the expulsion of the sinners from the garden. God placed cherubim to guard the entrance of the garden, so that the sinful humanity may not forcefully reenter the home from where they were driven out.

The instruction we find in this narrative is that we must live in the experience of freedom that God graciously offers to us, but with the discernment and recognition that our freedom has limits. God calls us to trust Him and His words when we are faced with the anxieties of life. When we are tempted, our model is Jesus, who

resisted the power of the tempter and his attempts to exploit the human anxieties and desires of life (see Matthew 4:1-11).

Cain and Abel: Humanity Outside the Garden (4:1-16)

The world outside of the garden is the context of the story that follows in Genesis 4. The story moves from the report about the birth of Cain and Abel, to a brief reference to their respective vocations. Both brothers came to worship God with their offerings. This is the first act of worship reported in the Bible. God accepted Abel and his offering. We do not know why God did not accept Cain and his offering (vv. 4-5). One thing we do know; God rejected Cain but also offered him an alternative way to seek His approval. However, Cain remained angry and rejected God’s instruction as well as warning about the power of sin. What follows in the narrative is actually the story of Cain (vv. 8-16). Cain murdered his brother, and this bloodshed of an innocent human being further alienated humanity from God. Following the trial, God pronounced His judgment that Cain would be a fugitive and wanderer on the earth. Cain was horrified at the prospect of living life as a homeless fugitive. When love is not expressed and practiced as the axiom of relationships, the outcome is alienation and fear. However, in the midst of his death-filled existence, he heard the gracious word of God’s protection of his life (v. 15). God placed a mark of protection on Cain. Cain went on from the presence of God to live his life in the land of Nod (which means “wandering”), east of Eden.

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Sin and Grace

Throughout this story, we also find God acting toward the sinful human beings with compassion and grace. Even His visitation of the man and the woman after their disobedience was an act of grace. Most evangelical scholars see Genesis 3:15 as a word about God’s final victory over the power of sin through the Messiah (protevangelium). Though death was the punishment for disobedience, God granted continued existence for human life through childbirth. God dealt with the issue of humanity’s shame and guilt by providing for them garments that He made out of skin (3:21). The narrative thus powerfully illustrates the life-giving grace of God at work in the midst of sin and death. The God of this narrative is a God who insists on offering life to those who are dead through their sin (Ephesians 2:1-7).

The Grieving God (4:17—9:29)

The next segment in the primeval stories shows that the power of sin continued to exploit and dominate the human society. Violence became a way of life for the descendants of Cain (4:17-24). Adam and Eve became parents of a third son by the name of Seth, who was born in the “likeness” and “image” of Adam (vv. 25-26; 5:3). Chapter 5 is a genealogy that traces the ancestry of Noah to Seth. In this genealogical record, we find long life spans for humanity. Two names in this genealogy deserve special mention—Enoch, who did not suffer death because he walked with God (vv. 21-24), and Methuselah with the longest recorded life of 969 years. Genesis 6:1-8 shows that sin continued to dominate humanity. The story of the marriage between the “sons of God” and “daughters of men” (vv. 1-4) perhaps reflects the view of Israel that in the primeval period sin affected even the divine realm. Divine beings broke the boundaries of their conduct and entered into unholy alliance with the sinful humanity. This story also sets the stage for the story of the universal flood.

The biblical story of the Flood (Genesis 6—9) begins with the report that the widespread and malignant growth of sin brought grief and pain to God. Human beings became corrupt to the point that every thought of their hearts was evil.

God decided to bring an end to human history that was filled with evil. In the midst of sin and judgment, Noah a righteous and blameless person, “found favor in the eyes of the LORD” (v. 8). God’s

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Heart

Heart (in Hebrew, *leb*) is the seat of human emotions, understanding, and will. The human heart represents the whole human being. A corrupt heart is a heart that has lost all sensitivity to pure thoughts and motives, because it is evil through and through. Ezekiel describes such a heart as a “heart of stone” (Ezekiel 36:26). This heart cannot grieve, because it is stubborn and rebellious. In contrast to this human heart, the Genesis account describes the heart of God as a grieving heart (Genesis 6:6). Sin, though it may bring joy to a sinner, breaks the heart of God.

decision was to destroy the earth with a flood. At the command of God, Noah built an ark to save himself and his family. He also took into the ark male and female specimens of all types of animals. The rain and the flood that lasted for a period of 150 days destroyed all living creatures. When the floodwaters receded, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. The narrative ends with an account of God making a **covenant with Noah** (8:21—9:17). This is the first covenant mentioned in the Bible. The covenant contained the promise that God would never again destroy the earth with a flood. God promised a predictable and dependable world with seasons and cycles of nature. He blessed Noah and his family and gave them permission to eat meat without blood in it. God also established the value and sacredness of human life on the basis of the fact that He made humanity in His image. The narrative concludes with the report that God set the rainbow as a sign of His covenant with His creation.

Other ancient cultures also

maintained their own traditions of a universal flood that destroyed the earth in the ancient past. The most notable one is the Mesopotamian account preserved in the **Gilgamesh epic**.

Even though the Mesopotamian flood story has some external parallels to the Old Testament account, there are significant differences between the two in content and theology. Perhaps the most important difference is the lack of any moral or ethical reason for the acts of the deities in the Mesopotamian accounts.

The concluding statement of the Flood narrative establishes the three sons of Noah (Shem, Ham, and Japheth) as the ancestors of all the people who inhabited the world (9:18-19). The genealogical record in chapter 10 gives the list of nations that descended from Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Of the three sons, Ham (the ancestor of Canaan) received a curse from his father because of his disrespectful attitude and con-

duct toward his father (vv. 20-27). His sin was that when he saw the nakedness of his drunken father, he did not do anything to cover it and thereby prevent his father from becoming an object of public ridicule and disgrace. His brothers received the blessing from Noah for their respectful action to preserve the honor of their father. The blessing statements show the preeminence Noah gave to Shem, who was the ancestor of the Semitic people.

God made provision for a new beginning for humanity. In the midst of grief and judgment, God remained gracious. From grief, God moved on to grace and offered the world a new beginning. The covenant God made with Noah was the basis for a new relationship between God and the world. God promised to sustain the world in spite of human wickedness and rebellion. This covenant is eternal in nature. It is a solemn promise by the sovereign Creator who understands the frailties and sinfulness of humanity and treats us with patience, love, and compassion. Keeping of this covenant is God's responsibility. The Flood account thus ends with a note of hope for the post-Flood humanity. This graciousness of God toward us, in the final analysis, is our hope and salvation.

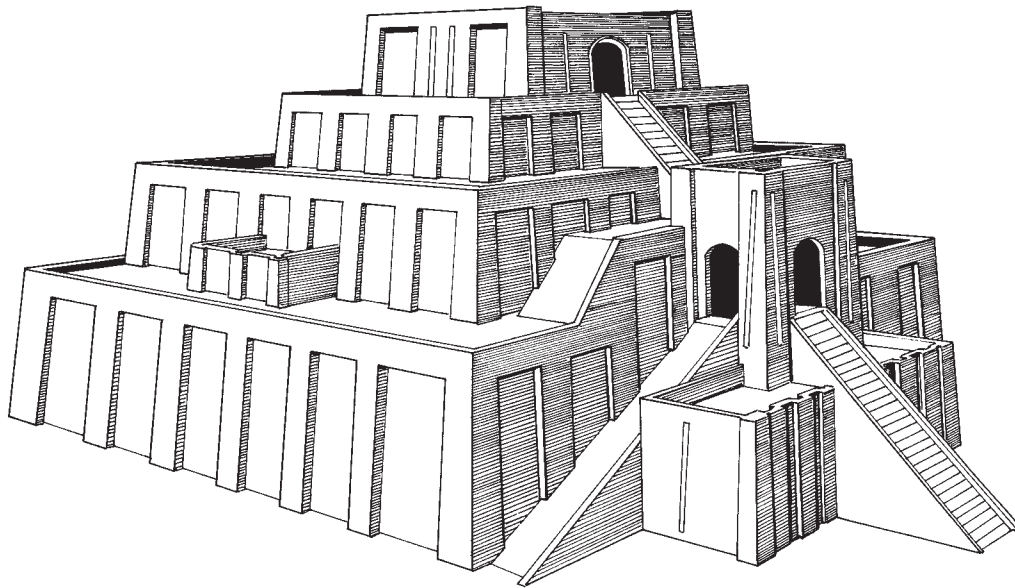
A Scattered and Confused Humanity (11:1-9)

There was a new beginning for humanity (vv. 1-2). This new humanity had one language. A common language is the key to unity, understanding, cooperation, and harmony. Humanity moved eastward and settled down at Shinar (Babylon). It is possible that the

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The Gilgamesh Epic

The Epic of Gilgamesh contains the Mesopotamian version of the flood account. This epic is the story of Gilgamesh, king of Erech, two-thirds god and one-third man, and his search for immortality. The fear of death drove the hero Gilgamesh to go on a journey to meet Utnapishtim, who long ago survived a great flood and attained immortality. When the great gods planned to destroy humanity with a flood for no apparent reason, the god Ea warned Utnapishtim and instructed him to build a boat to escape the catastrophe. The story also includes reference to the sending of birds to see if the water was subsiding. In another version of the flood story, the Atrahasis epic, the hero is called Atrahasis, who also received warning about the flood and built a boat to escape the flood.⁴



story traces the origin of human civilization and sedentary life to the southern part of ancient Mesopotamia. Some scholars also see in this story Israel's indictment of the city of Babylon, and its temple-towers known as **ziggurats**.

The first goal of this new humanity was to build a city with bricks and tar so that they may make a name for themselves (vv. 3-4). The goal of the project was a tower that reached the heavens. The post-Flood humanity's fear of being "scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (v. 4, NRSV) was another factor that brought unity to their decision to build a city. When humanity resisted God's mandate (see Genesis 1:28; 9:1), He came down and disrupted the human plans (11:5-9). God confused (in Hebrew, *balal*) their language, which was the source of their pride, strength, and false security (the city's name, **Babel**, which literally means "gate of god," sounds like the word *balal* in Hebrew). The result was the scat-

tering of humanity abroad over the face of the earth.

In this narrative the city and its citizens stand as the earliest examples of human pride and arrogance. The world continues to witness prideful attempts by human beings to immortalize their name. Some do it with bricks, concrete, steel, and marble. Some do it by their restless effort to move upward in our upwardly mobile society. We often forget the truth that "unless the LORD builds the house, its builders labor in vain (Ps.alm 127:1).

Where there is pride and rebellion, God steps in as the heavenly Judge. God's decision to confuse humanity's language and scatter them was His judgment upon their rebellion. However, we also find here, God fulfilling His will for His creation that they multiply and fill the earth (Genesis 1:28; 9:1). The divine act of scattering separated humanity into distinctive ethnic and language groups (see the Table of Nations in Genesis 10, NIV).

Ziggurat; the altar was located on the top of this tower-like structure.

The rest of the biblical story informs us that the God who divides and scatters in judgment is also the God who gathers humanity to salvation. The next chapter in the Book of Genesis (12) focuses on the beginning of the gather-

ing activity of God. God encountered and called Abraham, a member of this scattered humanity, to obedience so that through him God may unite and bless all the families of the earth (vv. 1-3). We shall now turn to this story.

Summary Statements

- The first creation story focuses on the universe and its creation by the sovereign Creator God.
- The second creation story focuses on humanity's purpose for existence.
- God created humanity in His image.
- Obedience is essential to our relationship with God.
- Humanity yielded to the temptation to mistrust God's word and His authority.
- In the midst of judgment, God showed grace to humanity.
- Noah lived a blameless life in the midst of a sinful world.
- Though God judged the world with the Flood, He also provided for it a new beginning.
- God scattered the descendants of Noah, who were united in their plan to resist God's will for them.

Questions for Reflection

1. What hope do you find in the truth that God has the power to bring into existence things that do not exist?
2. What are the practical implications of our understanding of God as the God who sets boundaries to His creation?
3. What should be the proper Christian response to gender inequality and sex discrimination, based on the biblical concept of both male and female in the image of God?
4. How do we express self-sovereignty (cite examples)?
5. What are some of the negative outcomes of blaming others for our actions?
6. What are the things we do that cause grief to God's heart?
7. What are the things we do to make a name for ourselves?

Resources for Further Study

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