

UnOrthodox Jewish Beliefs

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SESSION ONE: TWO CREATION STORIES AND WHAT THEY TEACH US ABOUT GOD, CREATION, AND HUMANITY

1. Chapter One: Religion and Science

- a. **How old is the world?** (Bible seems to say 5,780 years; science says billions of years)
- b. **Can we explain Six Days of Creation by counting billions of years for the first few days?** **No.** Day Three God creates plants; Day Four God creates the Sun. Photosynthesis requires the sun for plants to live. Moreover, Science says the Sun was the first thing created in our solar system; not the earth and seas (day three). Day Two separating Water Above from Water Below is “Old Science” – the Sky is made of a pool of water. By the way, what was the “Light” created on Day One? Some say: Big Bang. But there is another possibility (maybe more).
- c. **How does our Creation Story compare to other Creation Stories of the same time? Why is ours different?** (See Nahum Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, pp. 2-23)
- d. **What did the Biblical author believe about the Created World?** It was ordered, followed rules and principles ordained by God. God began with Chaos and created Order. Unlike other Creation stories in which the gods create a chaotic world in which they play games with each other – using human beings as chess pieces.
- e. **Can we reconcile the Bible with modern Science? How?** Not with science as we know it, but the nature of Creation as an Ordered System is necessary for science to exist.
- f. **Thought experiment:** If you were God, how would *you* have explained Creation to a human being 3,000 years ago?

2. Chapter Two: Religion and Morality.

- a. **Eating the fruit – who’s fault was it?** Multiple choice: a. Adam, b. Eve, c. Snake, d. God) (BTW, “fruit” not “apple”. Jewish traditions: grapes, figs or wheat. Latin: “apple” = “*Malus*” and “evil” = “*malum*”.) **Adam and Eve both “pass the buck”** – like children. (Guess what? They **were** children! Of course, even we adults sometimes pass the buck and don’t take responsibility for our own actions.) **Maybe God is responsible** – like a mother putting cookie jar in reach of little children and then leaving the room?
- b. **What is the role of the snake/serpent?**
 - i. Is “Evil” an *outside* force or an *internal* one? Who is in control – “Evil” or “Human Free Will”?

- ii. Where does the story begin? If start at Chapter 3 then the *Snake* is the central figure – it must be important, perhaps the “devil”. If start at end of Chapter 2, *Adam and Eve* are central figures. *The story is about Human Free Will.*
 - iii. “Shrewdest **creature God had made.**” (“Shrewdness” same Hebrew term as “naked” used to describe the humans.) Why does the snake talk? To tell us that this is NOT history but MORAL Tale – Fable. Like Aesop’s Fables, has moral message.
- c. **“Original Sin”?** (See “Judaism Rejects Original Sin”.)
- i. אֱלֹהֵי, נְשָׁמָה שָׁנַתָּת בִּי טְהוֹרָה הִיא. “My God, the soul that you have given me is pure.” (From *Birkot Hashahar* in prayer book.)
 - ii. Ezekiel 18:2-4 “What do you people mean by quoting this proverb about the land of Israel: ‘The fathers eat sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge’? As I live – declares the LORD God – this proverb shall no longer be current among you in Israel. ... The person who sins, only he shall die.” (cf. Jeremiah 31:29)
- d. What does this story teach us about Humanity’s role in Creation? (What makes Humans different from the other animals? What role does God give Adam and Eve in the Garden?)
- e. What does it teach us about our relationship to God?
- f. Why is this story so crucial to understanding the entire Bible? (Without “Free Will”, the rest of the Bible makes no sense.)
- g. A modern (?) interpretation of the Garden Eden story: *We are God’s hands and feet.*
3. **Bonus Question: Why was Eden not Destroyed?** Instead it is guarded by Cherubim and “Fiery sword”
- a. The Human Quest: Strive to return to Eden, return to Paradise.
 - b. The Ark of the covenant is also guarded by the Cherubim. Perhaps an indication that our Tradition is the pathway back to an idyllic world where people are loved and cared for, where disease is minimized, where there is no war or crime or bloodshed. This is also our Messianic Vision – the ideal world we strive to create.
4. **Final Thought Question: But, if there are two creation stories, what does that tell us about Who Wrote the Bible?**
- a. Stay tuned for third class session: Who Wrote the Bible?
 - b. But first, we must talk about God, and what humans can possibly know – or even attempt to understand – about God. That will be Session 2.



Judaism's Rejection of Original Sin

Saint Augustine (354-430) was the first theologian to teach that man is born into this world in a state of sin. The basis of his belief is from the [Bible \(Genesis 3:17-19\)](#) where [Adam](#) is described as having disobeyed [G-d](#) by eating the forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden. This, the first sin of man, became known as original sin.

Many [Christians](#) today, particularly members of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, and Presbyterian Churches, subscribe to this belief. They maintain that the sin of Adam was transferred to all future generations, tainting even the unborn. Substantiation for this view is found in the [New Testament \(Romans 5:12\)](#) where [Paul](#) says, "Wherefore as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned. By one man's disobedience many were made sinners."

Christianity believes that only through the acceptance of [Jesus](#) that the "grace" of G-d can return to man. A Christian need only believe in Jesus to be saved; nothing else is required of her.

The doctrine of original sin is totally unacceptable to Jews (as it is to Christian sects such as Baptists and Assemblies of G-d). Jews believe that man enters the world free of sin, with a soul that is pure and innocent and untainted. While there were some Jewish teachers in [Talmudic](#) times who believed that death was a punishment brought upon mankind on account of Adam's sin, the dominant view by far was that man sins because he is not a perfect being, and not, as Christianity teaches, because he is inherently sinful.

Source: Kolatch, Alfred J. [The Jewish Book of Why/The Second Jewish Book of Why](#). NY: Jonathan David Publishers, 1989.

Found at: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/judaism-s-rejection-of-original-sin>

relative obscurity as the city-god of Babylon to a supreme position in the Babylonian pantheon, "the king of all the gods." As a concomitant to this, it also reflected Babylonian imperialism and gave support to Babylon's claim to political pre-eminence in the ancient world.

Finally, and not least important, was the cultic-functional aspect of the *Enuma Elish*. The conflict between Tiamat and Marduk was expressive of the war between the forces of cosmic order and the forces of chaos. This struggle was believed to be repeated constantly in the annual life-cycle of the earth, particularly since the periodic and catastrophic upheavals of nature in Mesopotamia readily gave credence to such a belief. Hence, the mimetic New Year reenactment of the story was in reality ritual drama. At the critical time of the vernal equinox, when nature seemed to be suspended between inanimation and animation, between inertia and creativity, the ritual recitation served as an analogical repetition of the primordial victory of cosmic order. The participation of society in the struggle between the forces of death and those of revival portended and indeed, to the Babylonian mind actually effected, the renewal of communal life and its reinvigoration.¹³

The function of the Genesis narrative

If we have devoted so much space to a discussion of the role of *Enuma Elish* in Babylonian civilization, it is only because of the importance of the subject for the proper understanding of the biblical Genesis account and the perennial significance of its message.

It must be remembered that the Mesopotamian and Hebrew cosmogonies, each in its own way, express through their symbolism the world-views and values that animated the civilization each represents. The opening chapters of the Bible unveil the main pillars upon which the Israelite outlook rests. The characteristic trends of the religion of Israel assert themselves in Genesis as powerfully as does the rationale of Mesopotamian society and religion in *Enuma Elish*.

However, a vital and fundamental distinction must be made at once between Israel and Mesopotamia. The theme of creation, important as it is in the Bible, is nevertheless only introductory to what is its central motif, namely, the Exodus from Egypt. God's acts in history, rather than His role as Creator, are predominant in biblical thought.

The Bible opens with the account of Creation, not so much because

its primary purpose is to describe the process of cosmogony, nor because its chief concern is with the nature of the physical world or the origin and constitution of matter. Genesis is but a prologue to the historical drama that unfolds itself in the ensuing pages of the Bible. It proclaims, loudly and unambiguously, the absolute subordination of all creation to the supreme Creator who thus can make use of the forces of nature to fulfill His mighty deeds in history. It asserts unequivocally that the basic truth of all history is that the world is under the undivided and inescapable sovereignty of God. In brief, unlike *Enuma Elish* in Babylon, the Genesis Creation narrative is primarily the record of the event which inaugurated this historical process, and which ensures that there is a divine purpose behind creation that works itself out on the human scene.

The biblical Creation account is non-political and non-cultic

This playing of the cosmological theme in a relatively minor key in biblical literature points up other basic distinctions between Genesis and *Enuma Elish*. The former has no political role. It contains no allusion to the people of Israel, Jerusalem or the Temple. It does not seek to validate national ideals or institutions. Moreover, it fulfills no cultic function. The inextricable tie between myth and ritual, the mimetic enactment of the cosmogony in the form of ritual drama, which is an essential characteristic of the pagan religions, finds no counterpart in the Israelite cult. In this respect too, the Genesis story represents a complete break with Near Eastern tradition.

The Creation account is non-mythological¹⁴

The reason for this detachment of cosmogony from the ritual is not hard to find. The supreme characteristic of the Mesopotamian cosmogony is that it is embedded in a mythological matrix. On the other hand, the outstanding peculiarity of the biblical account is the complete absence of mythology in the classical pagan sense of the term. The religion of Israel is essentially non-mythological, there being no suggestion of any theo-biography. The Scriptures themselves do not openly betray a true

understanding of mythological paganism. In fact, as a result of their thorough-going monotheism the picture they paint of the religion of the contemporaries of Israel is really a distortion. The Bible shows no consciousness of any connection between the pagan gods and mythological motifs, no realization of the close relationship that existed between mythology and the cult. There is not a single biblical reference to the natural or mythological qualities of the pagan gods. There is not even a biblical term for "goddess." Actually, in its overt polemic with paganism Scripture never combats mythology. It frequently exposes the folly of idolatry, but never gives a hint of the true nature of the cult associated with it. A case in point is the not uncommon reference to the goddess Ishtar under the guise of "Ashtoret."¹⁵ We may search the Bible in vain for any clear statement of her character. Who would know that in the Assyro-Babylonian literature she is the great goddess of love, fertility and productivity, but also the cruel patroness of war? Who could guess from the scriptural sources that into this divine figure has been blended a rich and complex mythology, varied strains of thought and diverse religious concepts? Pagan representation of the gods by pictures and images, and its use of icons in worship, are conceived by the biblical writers to be nothing more than fetishism. In short, so remote are the biblical writers from the religious atmosphere of the pagan world that they are unable to present a true picture of it.

Nowhere is this non-mythological outlook better illustrated than in the Genesis narrative. The Hebrew account is matchless in its solemn and majestic simplicity. It has no notion of the birth of God and no biography of God. It does not even begin with a statement about the existence of God. Such speculation would have been unthinkable at this time.¹⁶ To the Bible, God's existence is as self-evident as is life itself. The Hebrew concept of God is implicit in the narrative, not formulated abstractly and explicitly. The whole of biblical literature is really the attestation of the experiences of individuals and of a nation with the Divine. Genesis, therefore, begins immediately with an account of the creative activity of the pre-existent God.

Far different is the Mesopotamian account. Theogony is inextricably tied up with cosmogony. The gods themselves had to be created. Even Marduk, the head of the pantheon, is not pre-existent. The first supernal beings are demons and monsters, while the god of creation is only born at a fairly late stage in the theogonic process. Moreover, his creative activity is introduced almost casually and incidentally.

Mythology, magic and God's freedom

This absence or presence of the theogonic motif had profound consequences for the development of the religions of Israel and her Near Eastern neighbors. The birth of the gods implies the existence of some primordial, self-contained, realm from which the gods themselves derive. The cosmos, too, is fashioned from this same element, personified in *Enuma Elish* as the carcass of Tiamat. That is to say, both the divine and the cosmic are animated by a common source. Moreover, the concept of the immanence of the gods in nature was one of the basic convictions of the religions of the pagan world. It meant the existence of divine powers, operative in nature, upon whom the well-being of man and society depended. The periodic changes in nature were conceived as episodes in the lives of the gods. Nature and man belonged to the same realm. Hence, the goal of man on earth was to integrate himself harmoniously into the cosmic rhythm.¹⁷

This all-pervasive dependence upon the material explains the prominence in polytheistic religion of the tales of the personal lives of the gods, their subjection to birth, growth, sex, hunger, disease, impotence, senescence and even death.¹⁸ Now, if there are many gods and these gods are dependent upon physical existence, then they can have neither freedom nor omnipotence. Their immanence in nature limits their scope. Their sovereign powers are circumscribed by the superior forces inherent in the primordial substance of existence. Since, according to pagan concepts, man's destiny is controlled by two separate forces, the gods and the powers beyond the gods, it was inevitable that magic became an integral part of pagan religion. Man had to be able to devise the means of activating those forces superior even to the gods. Religion, as a consequence, became increasingly concerned with the elaboration of ritual designed to propitiate the numerous unpredictable powers that be.

Anyone who reads the Hebrew Bible, especially the Book of Psalms, is aware that the ancient Israelite was as struck by the majesty of natural phenomena as was any of his pagan neighbors. But unlike them, he did not profess to see God within those phenomena. The clear line of demarcation between God and His creation was never violated. Nowhere is this brought out more forcefully than in the Hebrew Genesis account. Here we find no physical link between the world of humanity and the world of the divine. There is no natural connection between the Creator and his handiwork. Hence, there is no room for magic in the religion of

the Bible. The God of Creation is eternally existent, removed from all corporeality, and independent of time and space. Creation comes about through the simple divine fiat: Let there be!

"Let there be!"

It has been maintained that this notion of the creative power of the word is known to us from elsewhere in the ancient Near East.¹⁹ But the similarity is wholly superficial, for wherever it is found it has a magical content. The pronouncement of the right word, like the performance of the right magical actions, is able to, or rather, inevitably must, actualize the potentialities which are inherent in the inert matter. In other words, it implies a mystic bond uniting matter to its manipulator.

Worlds apart is the Genesis concept of creation by divine fiat. Notice how the Bible passes over in absolute silence the nature of the matter—if any—upon which the divine word acted creatively. Its presence or absence is of no importance, for there is no tie between it and God. "Let there be!" or, as the Psalmist echoed it, "He spoke and it was so,"²⁰ refers not to the utterance of the magic word, but to the expression of the omnipotent, sovereign, unchallengeable will of the absolute, transcendent God to whom all nature is completely subservient. Such a concept of God and of the process of creation added a new dimension to human thought and marked a new stage in the history of religion. It emancipated the mind from the limitations of mythopoeic thinking, and it liberated religion from the baneful influence of magic.

"Male and female He created them"

This notion of creation by the divine will presents us with yet another radical departure from paganism. In polytheistic mythologies creation is always expressed in terms of procreation. Apparently, paganism was unable to conceive of any primal creative force other than in terms of sex. It will be remembered that in *Enuma Elish*, Apsu and Tiamat represent respectively the male and female powers which, through the "comingling of their waters" gave birth to the first generation of gods. The sex element existed before the cosmos came into being and all the gods were themselves creatures of sex.²¹ On the other hand, the Creator in

Genesis is uniquely without any female counterpart and the very association of sex with God is utterly alien to the religion of the Bible. When, in fact, Genesis (1:27; 5:2) informs us that "male and female He created them," that God Himself created sexual differentiation, it is more than likely that we are dealing with an intended protest against such pagan notions.

The same may be said in regard to the place of the element of water in the Hebrew cosmogony. The latter shares with *Enuma Elish* the idea of the priority of water in time.²² Just as Apsu and Tiamat, the two oceans, exist before all things, so in Genesis the existence of water is taken for granted. The darkness is over the surface of the deep; the wind,²³ or the breath of God, sweeps over the waters and the primordial waters are divided into two. Now this concept of the priority of water is fairly widespread among many unrelated mythologies. It most likely arose from the fact that, being amorphous, water seems clearly to represent the state of affairs before chaos was reduced to order and things achieved fixed form. However, since in lower Mesopotamia the earth actually came into being through the sinking of the water level and deposits of silt, it is more than probable that we have in our Genesis account, which gives priority in time to water and envisages the dry land as emerging from it, Babylonian coloration. This is particularly so in view of the contrast between the rich alluvial plains of the Euphrates-Tigris valley and the hilly, rocky soil of Palestine, dependent for its fertility upon seasonal rainfall.²⁴

However, the similarity ends here. For in pagan mythologies water is the primal generative force—a notion utterly foreign to the Book of Genesis. Here God wills and the waters obey. At His command they divide.

God said, "Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water." . . . And it was so.

(1 : 6-7)

In conformity with His will the waters gather into one area so that the dry land may appear. If they spawn forth swarms of living creatures, it is not due to any inherent, independent, generative powers they may possess, but is solely in response to the divine command. For the first time in history, therefore, we have a totally new conception of cosmogony and one, strangely enough, that in its literary form has not hesitated to make use of some of the symbols of its ideologically incompatible predecessor. This is a characteristic of the Genesis narrative that we shall encounter again and again.

Man the pinnacle of creation

Perhaps nowhere is the contrast between the mythological and the Israelite conceptions more striking and more illuminating than in their respective descriptions of the creation of man. Yet at first glance this statement may seem to be quite paradoxical, for the Hebrew story bears close resemblance to a Near Eastern mythic pattern.

In the opening chapter of Genesis we are told simply that God created man "in His image," (1:27) nothing being stated of the matter used in the act of creation. But in the subsequent narrative it is related how God "formed man from dust of the earth."²⁵ Now if we note that the word here translated "dust" is used quite often in biblical Hebrew as a synonym for clay,²⁶ we may recognize at once a theme frequently encountered in Scripture.²⁷ Here, again, we are confronted with a familiar motif, the shaping of man out of clay.²⁸ In *Enuma Elish* man is created from the blood of the rebellious Kingu.²⁹ But in the *Epic of Gilgamesh* of which we shall learn more in the next chapter, the goddess Aruru "washed her hands, nipped off clay" and fashioned it into Enkidu.³⁰ An Old Babylonian myth, paralleled in an Assyrian version, explicitly describes the creation of the first men from clay.³¹ That this motif is of very great antiquity may be shown by its presence in a Sumerian composition of the third millennium B.C.E.³² Conforming to the same conceptual pattern are the Egyptian paintings which depict the god Khnum sitting upon his throne before a potter's wheel busily fashioning men.³³

Yet this very similarity between the Bible and Near Eastern mythology affords us an excellent example of the superficiality of parallels if a single feature is wrenched from its cultural moorings and treated independently.

The very fact that the creation of man in the Genesis description is an exception to the rule of creation by divine fiat, and that solely in the case of man is the material from which he is made explicitly mentioned, implies emphasis upon a unique position for man among created things and a special relationship to God. This, indeed, is reinforced in many and varied subtle ways. It is as though for the climactic performance the usual act of will was reinforced by an act of divine effort. Man, alone, has the breath of life blown into his nostrils by God Himself. Only by virtue of this direct animation did man become a living being, drawing directly from God his life source. The creation of nothing else in the cosmogonic process is preceded by a divine declaration of intention and purpose, "Let us make man" (Gen. 1:26). Man, in fact, is the pinnacle of creation and the entire story has a human-centered orientation.

This situation contrasts strongly with the story of the creation of man in *Enuma Elish*. There he is almost incidental, fashioned as a kind of afterthought as a menial of the gods to provide them with nourishment and generally to satisfy their physical needs. The Book of Genesis seems to be emphasizing the antithesis of this, for the very first communication of God to man—

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 . . .
(1 : 29f.)

Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat.

(2 : 16)

—is an expression of divine concern for man's physical needs and well being.

So much does the Torah wish to signify the special status accorded man in the cosmos and to stress that the relationship between man and God is *sui generis*, that it employs certain unusual literary devices in the story. Three times in the course of a single verse it repeats the verb *bara'*, used in Hebrew exclusively to denote divine creativity. Furthermore, it reiterates the theme of man being actually created in the "image of God" (1:26-27; cf. 5:1; 9:6):

And God created man in His image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. (1 : 27)

The phrase "in the image of God" is a difficult one and its origin and exact import have not been satisfactorily explained.³⁴ But it must be connected with the immediately following divine blessing:

"Be fertile and increase, fill the earth and master it; and rule the fish of the sea, and birds of the sky, and all the living things that creep on earth."
(1 : 28)

This exclusive distinction endows man with power over the animal and vegetable worlds and confers upon him the right, nay the duty, to exploit the resources of nature for his own benefits. In this setting, the idea of man "in the image of God" must inevitably include within the scope of its meaning all those faculties and gifts of character that distinguish man from the beast and that are needed for the fulfillment of his task on earth,

namely, intellect, free will, self-awareness, consciousness of the existence of others, conscience, responsibility and self-control. Moreover, being created "in the image of God" implies that human life is infinitely precious. Such, indeed, is the meaning given to the phrase in Genesis 9:6:

Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God was man created.

The Bible's concept of the divine image in man thus constitutes another revolutionary break with its contemporary world. The pagan bond between man and nature has been severed once and for all. No longer is man a creature of blind forces, helplessly at the mercy of the inexorable rhythms and cycles of nature. On the contrary, he is now a being possessed of dignity, purpose, freedom and tremendous power.

Yet the pre-eminence of man over beast is not the same as total independence. This is where the vivid picture of the clayey origin of man comes into play once again. The figure is suggestive of the activity of a potter molding the malleable raw material into the desired shape. The very verb used in the second account of the creation of man by God—*yasar* (2:7, 8)—is the same from which the Hebrew word for "potter" is drawn. Most significantly, the terms for "creator" and "potter" may be expressed in Hebrew by one and the same word (*yasar*). This figure is a well-known biblical symbol evocative of the notion of God's absolute mastery over man,³⁵ so that through the ingenious employment of a common mythological motif, the Hebrew writer has subtly and effectively succeeded, not just in combatting mythological notions, but also in conveying, all at once, both a sense of man's glory and freedom and the feeling of his inescapable dependence upon God. Human sovereignty can never quite be absolute. It must always be subject to the demands of a higher law, the divinely ordained moral order of the universe.

The nature of God

This emphasis upon the uniqueness of man follows, of course, from the moral nature of God as conceived in the Bible. That God is moral is not accidental, for it is the fundamental difference between polytheism and monotheism. We are not dealing here simply with a matter of arithmetic; the cleavage between the two systems goes much deeper.

We shall soon take fuller note of the phenomenon of conflict inherent

in the polytheistic system. Here we are concerned with the fact that the idea of many gods inevitably engendered a multiplicity of ethical values and moral standards. It is perfectly true that there were gods in the polytheistic pantheon who were guardians of justice and who demanded righteous conduct from man. However, their ethical quality was but one of many diverse and contradictory attributes and was neither inherent in the idea of the godhead nor absolute. Anyone who reads the *Enuma Elish* is struck by the moral indifference of the gods, and much the same is true of the Homeric epics. The pagan worshiper had no reason to believe that the decrees of his god must necessarily be just, any more than he could be convinced that society rested upon a universal order of justice. According to the pagan world-view the fate of man was not determined by human behavior. The gods were innately capricious, so that any absolute authority was impossible.³⁶

This capriciousness of the gods is diametrically opposed to the biblical view. The God of Creation is not at all morally indifferent. On the contrary, morality and ethics constitute the very essence of His nature.³⁷ The Bible presumes that God operates by an order which man can comprehend, and that a universal moral law had been decreed for society. Thus, the idea embedded in Genesis of one universal Creator has profound ethical implications. It means that the same universal sovereign will that brought the world into existence continues to exert itself thereafter making absolute, not relative, demands upon man, expressed in categorical imperatives—"thou shalt," "thou shalt not."

It is not to be wondered at that Mesopotamian society suffered from a malaise which scholars have characterized as "overtones of anxiety." The nature of the gods could give no feeling of certainty and security in the cosmos. To make matters worse there were also environmental factors that had to be taken into account. Man always found himself confronted by the tremendous forces of nature, and nature, especially in Mesopotamia, showed itself to be cruel, indiscriminate, unpredictable. Since the gods were immanent in nature, they too shared these same harsh attributes. To aggravate the situation still further, there was always that inscrutable, primordial power beyond the realm of the gods to which man and gods were both subject. Evil, then, was a permanent necessity and there was nothing essentially good in the pagan universe. In such circumstances there could be no correlation between right conduct and individual or national well-being. The universe was purposeless and the deities could offer their votaries no guarantee that life had meaning and direction, no assurance that the end of human strivings was anything but

vanity. History and time were but a repeating cycle of events in which man played a passive role, carried along relentlessly by the stream of existence to his ineluctable fate.³⁸

Far different is the outlook of Genesis. One of its seemingly naive features is God's pleasure at His own artistry, the repeated declaration, after each completed act of creation, that God saw how good His work was (1:4 etc.). Following the creation of living things, we meet with the climactic observation that God saw all that He had made and found it to be "very good" (1:31). But this naïveté of idiom cloaks a profundity of thought that marks off the mood of Hebrew civilization from that of Mesopotamia in a most revolutionary manner. The concept of a single directing Mind behind the cosmic machine, with all its ethico-moral implications, emancipated Israel from thralldom to the vicious cycle of time. In place of a fortuitous concatenation of events, history has become purposeful and society has achieved direction. A strong streak of optimism has displaced the acute awareness of insecurity. The all-pervasive pagan consciousness of human impotence has given way to a profound sense of the significance of man and the powers he can employ. Contemplating the awesome majesty of cosmic phenomena, the Psalmist can yet extol the glory and dignity with which God has adorned man and the authority He has placed in his hands.³⁹

This basic belief in the essential goodness of the universe was, of course, destined to exert a powerful influence upon the direction of the religion of Israel and to affect the outlook on life of the people. It found its expression in the concept of the covenant relationship between God and His people and ultimately achieved its most glorious manifestation in the notion of Messianism—two uniquely Israelite contributions to religion. The God of Israel, being a deity whose will is absolute and incontestable and whose word is eternal, was able to give assurances that human strivings were decidedly not in vain. Israelite society did not suffer from "overtones of anxiety."

The sabbath

This unshakable conviction in the essentially benign nature of divine activity, is reflected, too, in the description of the cessation from creativity. We are told God

ceased on the seventh day from all the work which He had done. And God blessed the seventh day and declared it holy, because on it God ceased from all the work of creation which He had done. (2 : 2f.)

The institution of the sabbath will be discussed at greater length in a subsequent volume. Here, we can only address ourselves to the questions raised by this passage.

It will doubtless have been noted at once that the statement about God here cited contains no mention of the sabbath as a fixed, weekly institution. It refers only to the seventh day of Creation, to the divine cessation from creation, and to the blessing and sanctification of that day. But the name "sabbath" is not to be found, only the cognate verbal form *shabat*, meaning, "to desist from labor." Yet the connection between the weekly sabbath day and Creation is explicitly made both in the first version of the Ten Commandments:

For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth and sea, and all that is in them and He rested on the seventh day; therefore the Lord blessed the sabbath day and hallowed it. . . .

(EXOD. 20 : 11)

as well as in another passage emphasizing the sabbath as an external sign of the covenant between God and Israel.⁴⁰ In other words, while Genesis ignores the weekly sabbath-day, these texts understood this same passage as being the source of the institution.⁴¹

As a matter of fact, there are no biblical sources recounting the founding of the weekly sabbath-day. The antiquity of its existence is presupposed in all the legislation and even in the narratives. Just one month after the departure from Egypt, and before the Sinaitic revelation, the sabbath is assumed to be already established.⁴² Moreover, the very formulations of both versions of the Decalogue—"Remember/observe the Sabbath day"—take for granted an existing institution.⁴³ There can not be any doubt that the sabbath belongs to the most ancient of Israel's sacred days.⁴⁴

The questions now assert themselves. What is the origin of the sabbath, and why does our Genesis text speak only of the seventh day of Creation, hinting at, without specifically mentioning, the sabbath institution? The answers to these questions involve us, once again, in the world of ancient Near Eastern belief and practice.

Six Days of Creation Chart

DAY 1

Light/Day and Dark/Night



DAY 4

Sun – Moon and Stars



DAY 2

Water Above

“Expanse” = *Shamayim* = “Sky”

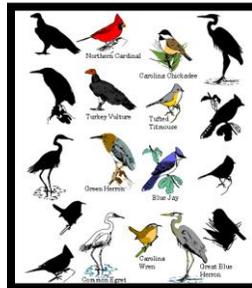
Water Below



DAY 5

Birds to Fly in the Sky

Swarming Creatures in Sea



DAY 3

Dry land = Earth

Gathered water = Sea

Vegetation: plants, trees

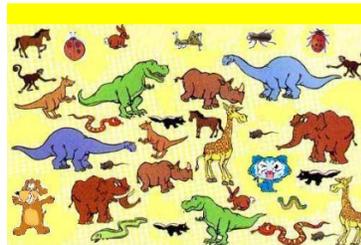


DAY 6

Earth creatures:

cattle, creeping animals, wild beasts

Human



DAY 7 THE SABBATH

BERE'SHIT

בראשית

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

⁶God said, “Let there be an expanse in the midst of the water, that it may separate water from water.” ⁷God 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.

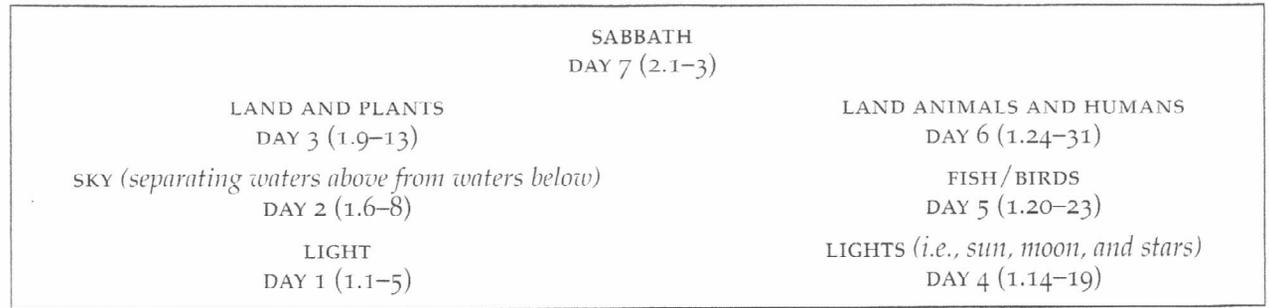
⁹God said, “Let the water below the sky be gathered into one area, that the dry land may appear.” And it was

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., Ps. 104), provide high drama and graphic description of the events and their protagonists (even the LORD). Gen. 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. This narrative 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 exhibit a high degree of symmetry (diagram, below). 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 Heb, 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 that idea doubtless stands in the background of our passage. The role of the number seven in 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 (2.1–3) has exactly thirty-five words in the Heb. 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 Exod. 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



so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the gathering of 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 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

(e.g., Ps. 104; Prov. 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 1.1–2.3 derives from a distinct school of thought, 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 (1.22, 28; 2.3; cf. Lev. 9.22–23; Num. 6.22–27), and consecrating the Sabbath (2.3; cf. Ezek. 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 1.1–2.3 bears several striking resemblances to the construction of the Tabernacle mandated in Exod. chs 25–31 and executed in Exod. chs 35–40 (e.g.,

see Gen. 2.1–3; Exod. 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., Isa. 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 11th 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 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 "nothing," 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 1.1–2.3, water itself and darkness, too, are primordial (contrast Isa. 45.7). In the midrash, Bar Kappara upholds the troubling notion that the Torah shows that God created the world out of preexistent 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 (*Gen. 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 7.11). **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 Ps. 74.12–17; Job 26.5–14)—creation results from the slaying of a sea

GENESIS 1.22-2.3

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 image, 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.

^a Or "rested."

monster. Isa. 27.1 uses the same word to describe the frightening sea monster that the LORD will kill at the end of time. **26-28:** The plural construction (*Let us . . .*) most likely reflects a setting in the divine council (cf. 1 Kings 22.19-22; Isa. ch 6; Job chs 1-2): God the King announces the proposed course of action to His cabinet of subordinate deities, though He alone retains the power of deci-

sion. The midrash manifests considerable uneasiness with God's proposal to create something so capable of evil as human beings are. Playing on Ps. 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" (*Gen. 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!" (*Gen. Rab.* 8.5).

Whereas the earth and the waters (at God's command) bring forth the plants, fish, birds, and other animals (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 (1.26b, 28b; cf. Ps. 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 Lev. 25.23-24). This theology is one source of the important institutions of the sabbatical and jubilee years (see Exod. 23.10-11; Lev. ch 25). Whereas the next account of human origins (Gen. 2.4b-24) speaks of God's creation of one male from whom one female subsequently emerges, Gen. ch 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*. In Jewish law, this is a positive commandment, although it is obligatory only on Jewish men, not women (*b. Yebam.* 65b). **29-30:** Humankind, animals, and birds all seem originally meant to be neither vegetarians nor carnivores, 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 Exod. 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.

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 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.

a Heb. 'adam.

b Heb. 'adamah.

c Others "onyx"; meaning of Heb. shoham uncertain.

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 con-

trast 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 intro. 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 (YHWH) 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 Heb 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 appears 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 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.

GENESIS 2.15-3.3

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,^a
For from man^b was she taken."

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

²⁵The two of them were naked,^c the man and his wife, yet they felt no shame. ¹Now the serpent was the shrewdest of all the wild beasts that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say: You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?" ²The woman replied to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the other trees of the garden. ³It is only about fruit of the tree in the

^a Heb. 'ishshah.

^b Heb. 'ish.

^c Heb. 'arummim, play on 'arum "shrewd" in 3.1.

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 Heb, and "good and bad" can mean either "weal and woe" or "moral good and moral evil." The forbid-

den 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. Yebam. 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 (Nahmanides, a great 13th-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 indicates that the ideal, Edenic condition is monogamy (see also Mal. 2.14-16; Prov. 5.15-23).

2.25-3.24: Disobedience, knowledge, exile. 2.25-3.1a: That the primal couple were nude (Heb "arummim") but not ashamed attests to their innocence but also to their ignorance. It contrasts with the shrewd ("arum") nature of the snake who will tempt them into losing both. Unlike some later Jewish and Christian literature, Genesis does not identify the talking snake with Satan or any other demonic being. **3.1b-3:** His question is tricky and does not admit of a yes-or-no answer. The woman, who has never heard the commandment directly (2.16-17), paraphrases it closely. Why she adds the prohibition on touching the fruit is unclear. A talmudic rabbi sees here an illustration of the dictum that "he who adds [to God's words] subtracts [from them]" (*b. Sanh. 29a*). Another rabbinic source presents a more complicated explanation. In relaying the prohibition to his wife, Adam has obeyed the rabbinic principle that one should "make a [protective] hedge for the Torah" (*m. 'Avot 1.1*). Tragically, this praiseworthy act gave the snake his opening. He

middle of the garden that God said: 'You shall not eat of it or touch it, lest you die.' " ⁴And the serpent said to the woman, "You are not going to die, ⁵but God knows that as soon as you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like ^adivine beings who know ^a good and bad." ⁶When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave some to her husband, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they perceived that they were naked; and they sewed together fig leaves and made themselves loincloths.

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of day; and the man and his wife hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹The LORD God called out to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" ¹⁰He replied, "I heard the sound of You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, so I hid." ¹¹Then He asked, "Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat of the tree from which I had forbidden you to eat?" ¹²The man said, "The woman You put at my side—she gave me of the tree, and I ate." ¹³And the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done!" The woman replied, "The serpent duped me, and I ate." ¹⁴Then the LORD God said to the serpent,

"Because you did this,
More cursed shall you be
Than all cattle
And all the wild beasts:
On your belly shall you crawl
And dirt shall you eat
All the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your offspring and hers;
They shall strike at your head,
And you shall strike at their heel."

¹⁶ And to the woman He said,
"I will make most severe
Your pangs in childbearing;
In pain shall you bear children.
Yet your urge shall be for your husband,
And he shall rule over you."

¹⁷To Adam He said, "Because you did as your wife said and ate of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,'

"touched the tree with his hands and his feet, and shook it until its fruits dropped to the ground," thus undermining the credibility of God's entire commandment in the woman's mind (*Avot. R. Nat. A,1*). **4-5:** The serpent impugns God's motives, attributing the command to jealousy. Whereas in the first creation account human beings are God-like creatures exercising dominion (1.26-28), here their ambition to be like God or like divine beings is the root of their expulsion from Eden. **6:** The fatal progression in the woman's mind begins with the physical (*eating*), moves to the aesthetic (*a delight to the eyes*), and culminates in the intellectual (*a source of wisdom*). The progression may reflect the process of rationalization to which she succumbed just before she engaged in humanity's first act of disobedience. **7:** As the serpent had predicted (v. 5), their eyes are opened, and they have enhanced knowledge (v. 7). **8-17:** But with the new knowledge comes the shame of nudity that they had lacked in their childlike innocence (vv. 10-11; cf. 2.25), a symbol of a much more encompassing sense of guilt and an ominous estrangement between God and the primal couple. The man lamely attempts to pass the buck to his wife, and thus, also to the God who put her at his side (v. 12). She, with more credibility, blames the serpent (v. 13). **14-19:** The LORD God then reverses the order and punishes the malefactors in the order of their misdeeds. The serpent is to lose his legs, slither in the dirt, and suffer from the hostility of human beings (vv. 14-15). The woman will suffer pain in childbirth, experience sexual desire for her husband, yet be subordinate to him (v. 16). The man, for having obeyed her rather than God, will toil over unproductive soil all the days of his life, until the ground from which he was taken reabsorbs him (vv. 17-19; cf. 2.7). The primal couple have left the magical garden of their childhood and their innocence and entered into the harsh world of adulthood and

Cursed be the ground because of you;
 By toil shall you eat of it
 All the days of your life:
 18 Thorns and thistles shall it sprout for you.
 But your food shall be the grasses of the field;
 19 By the sweat of your brow
 Shall you get bread to eat,
 Until you return to the ground—
 For from it you were taken.
 For dust you are,
 And to dust you shall return.”

²⁰The man named his wife Eve,^a because she was the mother of all the living.^b ²¹And the LORD God made garments of skins for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

²²And the LORD God said, “Now that the man has become like one of us, knowing good and bad, what if he should stretch out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever!” ²³So the LORD God banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the soil from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove the man out, and stationed east of the garden of Eden the cherubim and the fiery ever-turning sword, to guard the way to the tree of life.

4 Now the man knew^c his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gained^d a male child with the help of the LORD.” ²She then bore his brother Abel. Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. ³In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the LORD from the fruit of the soil; ⁴and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The LORD paid heed to Abel and his offering, ⁵but to Cain

a Heb. ḥawwah. *b* Heb. ḥay.

c Heb. yada', often in a sexual sense. *d* Heb. qanithi, connected with “Cain.”

its painful realities. **20-21:** God’s clothing the naked indicates that His anger was not the last word in the divine-human relationship. The Jewish ethical tradition finds in this unmerited kindness a paradigm for human behavior, as well. “Great are acts of kindness,” a talmudic rabbi remarks, “for the Torah begins with an act of kindness and ends with an act of kindness”—it begins with God’s clothing the naked and ends with His burying the dead (Moses) (Deut.

34.6) (*b. Sof.* 14a). **22-24:** Neither the first nor the second account of creation portrays humankind as created immortal. Nor does the punishment of v. 19, which speaks of Adam’s returning to the ground from which he was taken, mean that he would have lived forever, had it not been for his disobedience. In this passage, the LORD, alarmed at the very real, God-like status that the man has suddenly attained, resolves to deny him the opportunity to make himself im-

mortal and banishes him from the garden in which the tree of life was found. The cherubim are supernatural beings who sometimes act as protectors of sacred items or places (e.g., Exod. 25.17-22; 1 Kings 8.6-7). The stance of jealousy about His status and anxiety about human beings’ acquiring immortality is not the only one taken by the God of Israel. Prov. 3.18 asserts that the tree of life, in the form of Wisdom (therein personified as a woman), remains available to “those who grasp her.” The Rabbis identified wisdom with Torah and could therefore cite Prov. 3.18 in support of their characteristic affirmation that Torah “gives life to those who practice it, in this world and in the world-to-come” (*m. ’Avot* 6.7). In Judaism, the estrangement caused by the innate human appetite for evil does not require an act of messianic redemption to be healed. Rather, the practice and study of Torah renew intimacy with the God of Israel and lead to eternal life. “The Holy One (blessed be He) created the Evil Inclination; He created Torah as its antidote” (*b. B. Bat.* 16a).

4.1-16: The first murder. This story of the LORD’s preference for the younger brother and the older brother’s resentment and exile looks both back to the episode in the garden of Eden and forward to other stories of mysterious divine preference, sibling rivalry, and exile later in the book of Genesis (chs 21, 27, 37). **1:** The verb translated *knew* may have the sense of “had known” in this context. Rashi thinks the conception of Cain occurred in the garden of Eden before his parents had sinned. **3-5:** The Torah does not say why the LORD accepted Abel’s offering, but not Cain’s. Perhaps we are to infer that Abel offered his with greater devotion (*the choicest of the firstlings as opposed to the fruit of the soil*). Alternately, the episode may evidence the high regard for shepherds and the pastoral life manifest, for example, in the early life of national heroes such as Jo-