

## Commentary on The Book of Genesis (2)

### Man's Establishment and Fall (Genesis 2.4 to 3.24) TABLET II

Chapters 2 and 3 of Genesis form a unit distinguished by the fact that God is called Yahweh Elohim (Lord God), repeated and constantly all the way through, a phrase which occurs elsewhere in the Pentateuch only once, in Exodus 9.30 where it is connected with the thought that the earth is Yahweh's, and thus with creation. This distinctive use sets the account off from the rest of Genesis as standing by itself.

The use may be in order to stress the closeness of man's relationship with the Creator at that stage, or it may be in order to link Elohim the Creator of chapter 1 with Yahweh the covenant God of chapter 4 onwards. (In general we must beware of laying too great a stress on the use of particular divine names in the Pentateuch as other Hebrew texts and the versions such as the Septuagint and the Syriac often differ with the Massoretic Text in the use of such names. However there can be no doubt that in the Massoretic Text this passage has a distinctive use of Yahweh Elohim, although the versions sometimes have simply the equivalent of Elohim).

The use of a dual name for a god was not unusual in the Ancient Near East. We can compare in Egypt 'Iir-Sedjmy', 'Amen-Re', 'Mentu-Re', 'Sobek-Re' and at Ugarit 'Aleyan Baal'. Baal was also known for example as 'Baal Melkart'. It is true that Baal meant 'Lord' and that in one sense this is saying 'Lord Melkart', but Baal, like Melkart, is a god in his own right and would be acknowledged as such by the Phoenicians. Indeed Yahweh Elohim - where El is the name of a god but was also used to depict 'God' - is a very similar combination. C H Gordon cites a number of further examples of the use of compound names for gods in Ugaritic and other literature.

The focus of the account is found in the words of God in 3.14-19. These words are based on a theophany (manifestation of God in some way) in which God declares His covenants with the man, the woman and the snake, the background to which is given in these chapters. This passage is therefore in 'covenant form' and once probably stood on its own as originally an oral 'record' of the above covenants, before being incorporated into the wider framework, initially possibly the framework of Genesis 1-11. While general history was not always put in writing in smaller tribes, covenants were put in written form from the start, and once writing was known covenants like this would be recorded because of the importance they had with regard to their relationship with God.

It is even possible that it was first incorporated into a larger record from 2.4 to 5.1, along with the two smaller covenants with Cain and Lamech, this whole record bearing the colophon 'this is the history of Adam' (5.1), before that was incorporated into Genesis 1-11.

The continually recurring phrase in Genesis 'this is the history (toledoth) of --' demonstrates that much of the material, if not all, is taken from tablets, as 'this is the history of' is typical of the colophon (heading or footnote) found on tablets to identify them. Mention should also be made of certain repetitive phrases typical of links between such tablets.

It is extremely probable that at some stage these early 'covenant' tablets were incorporated into a series of tablets making up Genesis 1 - 11, which almost certainly once formed a unit, paralleling a similar 'history' of Atrahasis from creation through the flood and beyond found elsewhere. Although the similarity is only in structure and basic form, the parallel does serve to demonstrate the existence of such epics around the time of Abraham. Thus it may have been at this latter stage that this initial group of covenants was brought together to form a 'history of Adam', possibly attaching the colophon at the end from one of the tablets from which they

were taken.

The account is remarkable both for its simplicity and the absence from it of mythical material. The seeming naivete of it is deceptive. It is a work of brilliant insight and understanding, and while the story appears straightforward enough to the casual reader, the writer deliberately introduces undercurrents which the discerning reader cannot ignore.

### The Tree-covered Plain in Eden (Genesis 2.4 to 2.24)

2.4-6 'In the day that the Lord God made earth and heavens, when no plant (siach) of the field was yet in the earth, and no herb ('eseb) of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no man to serve the ground, there used to come up a mist from the earth which watered the whole face of the ground, and the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.'

Note carefully that this is not another account of creation, rather it proceeds on the basis that creation has already taken place. What is now lacking is cultivated plants, (because there is no one to cultivate them), and rain. These are missing together with the creation of the one who is to be the cultivator and general controller of His creation. So God now acts to create a cultivator, Man, and set him over all His creation.

The word 'yom' translated 'day' can also mean an appointed time or a period of time. This activity is not therefore restricted to a day. The plants and herbs 'of the field' refer to 'cultivated plants' (see 3.18 where fallen man will eat 'the herb ('eseb) of the field' grown amidst thorns and thistles, thus defining in context the meaning of the phrase), and the point is that at this stage there were no such cultivated plants, 'cultivated' here meaning simply that man's labour contributed something towards their growth.

'Earth and heavens.' Note the order here, which contrasts with 1.1 and 2.4a, and connects with what immediately follows - 'no plant -- in the earth' and 'not caused it to rain' (from the heavens).

There is probably intended to be little difference between the two descriptions 'plant' and 'herb', which are really mainly interchangeable, and the meaning here may well be 'cultivated plants of different types'.

Others, however, see it as referring to 'weeds and cultivated plants', both of which are largely dependent on rain (the word siach is rare occurring elsewhere in Genesis 21.15; Job 30.4,7 where it means desert scrub). In that case we have a situation where there were neither weeds nor cultivated plants. This then has in mind the fact that the account will end with both present as a result of man's fall. This introductory statement is then preparing for all that is to follow.

The twofold description of plant and herb is intended to parallel the twofold answer of rain and man for rhythmic reasons. The reasons that there are no cultivated plants are stated to be, firstly because there was no rain, and secondly because there was no man to 'work' or 'cultivate' the ground. This may be a glance forward to after the fall, for the main meaning of the verb is to 'serve', and it is only when man has fallen that he has to 'serve' the ground. The idea here may alternatively be that man serves the ground by irrigating it.

It should be noted that this is not a creation story. There is no mention of the creation of the heavens, of the heavenly bodies, of fish or of general vegetation. It is concerned rather with God's specific provision for the first man. Man is central to the account.

The first sentence refers back to Genesis 1.1 - 2.4a and may be a connecting link at the top of the tablet, but in the narrative as a whole it is an integral part of the phrase 'these are the histories of the heavens and the earth in the day that Yahweh Elohim created the earth and the heavens' (compare the similarity with 5.1) making the two accounts one whole.

The passage goes on to point out that there is a lack of cultivated plants (not a lack of vegetation), having very much in mind what is to happen. This agrees with the former passage where all vegetation was previously self producing. The lack of cultivated plants is mentioned here because the writer is introducing a situation which is looking ahead to the later covenant, which is the main reason for the account in the first place. Then man will have to work the ground and produce 'the herb of the field', plants he has to labour over, because he has been sentenced by God. The writer is at this stage very much aware of the consequences of the fall.

This lack of rain would then naturally raise the question as to how, if there was no rain, any vegetation at all was able to grow. His reply is that it was because a 'mist' or 'ground water' or 'rising river' or some other water source arises constantly from the earth and waters the ground. The meaning of the word 'ed' is uncertain and LXX translates 'fountain', for it is clearly some water source. The Akkadian *edu* means a flood or the overflow of a river. Sumerian 'id' means a subterranean, fresh-water river. It occurs in Job 36.27 where it probably means cloud, vapour or mist ('He draws up the drops of water which distil in rain from his ed').

Thus, contrary to some, the earth was not a dry and barren waste at this stage. The coming of rain would, in fact, be a mixed blessing. Man would then be dependent on the vagaries of the weather rather than on a constant supply. Note that the idea of rain watering the ground looks beyond Eden. In Eden there is plentiful water from the great River.

The writer now immediately moves on to the focus of his whole account, which is the creation of man, and God's provision for him. Thus he will go on to depict God's provision for him of fruitful trees in a chosen place, of abounding water, of animals to provide companionship of a kind, and, finally, of the one who was to be his suitable companion, and the precursor of the fall. Each is introduced as it becomes necessary for his story, but the ideas are not chronological. See as evidence of this verses 8 and 9 where God 'plants a garden', 'puts man in it', then 'causes to grow' the abundant trees, then verse 15 where it is again stated that He puts man in it (v.15). This kind of repetition is found continually in Genesis. It was intended to reinforce the basic ideas to the listener. Clearly the 'causing to grow' parallels 'planted', and the writer hardly conceives of the man as having to wait for the trees to grow. The trees were 'caused to grow' before the man was placed there.

Note that there is no mention of God producing general vegetation, or indeed as producing plants of the field. The concern is not with the creation of the world, but with the place and provision provided for the man.

**2.7 'And the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.'**

The word for 'formed' is, among other uses, used of the potter shaping his material, and the writer, who by a quick reading of the rest of the narrative is shown to be a master of presenting his content in folksy fashion, is using it anthropomorphically to depict God's creative work as skilful and creative. But he carefully avoids making the thought too literal. There is no detailed description of how God did it. His language is illustrative not literal. His aim is rather to show the twofold side to man's creation, the aspect which ties him firmly to earth and the aspect which brings him in touch with heaven. In one sense man is of the earth, earthy. He is of the dust of the ground, made up of the same constituents as the animals. In the

**other his life is inbreathed by the breath of God. He has life from God.**

**Man (adam) is made ‘of the dust of the ground (adamah)’. He is outwardly made of earthly materials. His name Adam will ever remind us of his earthly (adamah) source. He is made of common materials, like the rest of the world, of the ‘adamah’. But where he is unique is in receiving the breath of God in the way that he does. How this ‘forming’ took place then is not described or limited. It merely tells us that there was man and his final origin was the dust of the ground. It is the end product that concerns the writer, not the process.**

**The fact that this is breathed ‘into his nostrils’ warns us against seeing this as an imparting of the divine spark, but the fact that God breathes into him at all, something that He does not do with the animals, demonstrates that this new life is intended to be seen as something unique, a ‘something other’, that makes him distinctive from the rest of creation. He is not just an animal, he possesses something extra, something that comes directly from God. This confirms what Genesis 1.26 means by ‘the image of God’. He has received ‘spirit’ (neshamah - breath, spirit). Compare Isaiah 42.5 where both neshamah and ruach (spirit) are used in parallel when connected with man; and see also Job 27.3. He is uniquely a ‘living being’ in a sense that no other is.**

**Later the animals are said to be made ‘out of the ground (adamah)’, thus the writer possibly introduces the term ‘the dust’ here to keep some form of distinction between man and animals and to warn against too close a connection between ‘adam’ and ‘adamah’. It is a reminder that while man is a receiver from the ground he is also a receiver of the divine breath. He is not quite so closely identified with ‘the ground’ as the rest of creation. Or it may simply be in preparation for the fact that dust he is and to dust he will return (3.19).**

**While it is true that in Genesis 7.22 neshamah is used of animal life and they also are described as ‘living beings’ (nephesh chayyah - Genesis 1.24), here the use contrasts with the forming of the animals in v.19 and is thus distinctive, and nowhere is it said that God directly breathed into the animals (the use of ‘breath’ in Ecclesiastes 3.19 is totally different. The emphasis there is on earthly life). In one sense the relationship between man and animals is close, in another it is distinctive.**

**‘The Lord God’ (Yahweh Elohim). This use of the dual name is rare outside chapter 2 and 3, and is only found elsewhere in the Pentateuch in Exodus 9.30 where it is connected with Yahweh as creator. The combining of divine names for a god is not unusual in ancient literature (see above). The writer wishes to stress that the Elohim of creation is Yahweh (‘the one who is’, or ‘the one who causes to be’ - see Exodus 3.14). No other is involved. It has also been suggested that here we have the combination of the God of creation (Elohim) with the God of history (Yahweh) as creation moves into ‘history’. See for this Psalm 100.3 where Yahweh is Elohim, Who has made us (creation) and is our shepherd (history)).**

**2.8 ‘And the Lord God planted a tree-covered area (gan - possibly a ‘place shaded over’ i.e. by trees) in Eden, eastward, and there he put the man whom he had formed.’**

**The word ‘planted’ is a vivid anthropomorphism. God caused it to grow.**

**The word ‘gan’ signifies a protected place of fruitfulness. The use of ‘garden’ is fine as long as we do not over-press the word, and rather recognise that it was not a cultivated, enwalled garden, but a fruitful, tree-covered area of land set apart by God for man’s use. Ezekiel 31.8-9 brings out something of the nature of the trees in the ‘gan’ in its exaggerated praise of Pharaoh.**

**Note that it is a tree-covered plain ‘in Eden’. Eden is the country in which it is found, not the**

name of the 'gan'. The name may be taken from the Sumerian 'edin' meaning plain. Later, because it is in Eden or in 'the plain', it will be called 'the gan of Eden' v.15. 'Eastward' may signify that it was in the east of Eden, or that it was eastward from where the writer was.

Again we remember that Hebrew verbs are not exact as to tense. They indicate rather completed or incompleted action without indicating when the activity took place. Thus it is not necessary for us to assume that man was made before the 'garden'. The writer is not describing the order in which things were made, but is bringing them in as they apply, and stressing that God had made them too. He is saying 'God did this' and 'God did that' without meaning they happened in sequence. We who are more chronologically oriented could translate, 'now God had planted a tree-covered plain in Eden and there he put the man whom he had formed'.

So God has made good provision for man. Unlike later, man does not have to search out his food or work for it. The place where he first becomes man is fruitful and plenteous, self-producing, and provides plenty of shade. (LXX will describe it as 'Paradise').

**2.9 'And out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, also the tree of life in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowing good and evil.'**

Here we have 'made to grow' instead of 'planted', confirming what we have said above. He not only put them there but made them grow. God is sovereign over every part of His creation. No labour was required from man, they grew of their own accord under God's hand. Indeed we need not doubt that the Garden was 'made to grow' before man was formed so that his home was already ready for him.

The verse brings out God's concern for man. The trees not only provide sustenance, but they are also pleasant to look at. God is concerned not only for man's palate but for his aesthetic enjoyment. This is one question atheistic evolution has never explained. Why is the world on the whole so beautiful? The writer gives us the answer. It is for man's good pleasure. (The principle still applies even if the beauty is in the eye of the beholder). Again we note that the concern is not with the creation of vegetation, but specifically with God's provision for man. The trees are specially chosen for their usefulness to man.

Note that it is not speaking of all trees but of those suitable for man's dwelling place. This is not general creation, but specific to man's own needs.

The trees of 'life' and of 'knowing good and evil' are mentioned at this point to stress that they are two among the trees of the garden. In themselves, apart from their function, they are nothing special. The tree of life is mentioned in many stories elsewhere, but always as inaccessible to man. It is only the Lord God Who wants man to have everlasting life. In those accounts it regularly provides life by its fruit being continually eaten. The fact that man has to be excluded from the tree to prevent him living for ever suggests it had a similar continuing function. Thus it would appear that its fruit is seen as containing some element which prolongs life to a great extent. This is not scientifically impossible, although we may regret that it is no longer obtainable. In other stories it conveys immortality once and for all.

This tree is stated to be 'central to the garden' because to God and the writer it is the all-important one, although the phraseology includes the tree of knowing good and evil as also being in the midst of the garden. Later the tree of knowing good and evil will be seen by the woman to be the central one because it is the one that possesses her mind.

Note how 'and the tree of knowing good and evil' is almost tacked on to the sentence. It is

added like this as a means of stressing it. This is done deliberately to bring out the sombre note lying behind the reference, for the writer knows what is to come. One can almost hear his voice changing as he pauses and then adds **AND THE TREE OF KNOWING GOOD AND EVIL**'.

Later it is confirmed that this tree is also 'in the midst of the garden', but the writer here wants the bare statement to be pregnant with meaning. This tree does not offer men special knowledge. It offers knowledge of a unique kind, indeed of a kind that man does not want, the knowledge by experience of what is good and what is evil. Such knowledge can only be found by committing evil. Then and then alone can the distinction be fully clear. The eating of the fruit would be a specific, open and deliberate act of defiance.

While 'knowing good and evil' can in some contexts be a way of saying 'having wide knowledge' (2 Samuel 14.17), it is clear that it means more than that in this passage because of the context which is all about learning about evil. Compare Deuteronomy 1.39; 30.15 - the latter being especially appropriate as linking good with life and evil with death. (Indeed the wider meaning may suggest the knowledge of this story misinterpreted). As we shall see later the tree was not put there as a temptation. It was there as a reminder to man of God's supremacy. Both trees were intended as a blessing.

Thus in the 'centre' of the garden is the tree which is the source of everlasting life and the tree which is a reminder of God's sovereignty, a kind of sacred grove where man can commune with God and be reminded of His goodness.

The plain of Eden is now put in a more specific historical setting, to bring out both its fruitfulness and its riches.

2.10 'And a river flowed out of Eden to water the plain, and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon, it is the one which flows round the whole land of Havilah where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good, and aromatic resin and onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon, it is the one which flows around (or meanders through) the whole land of Cush, the name of the third river is Hiddekel (Hiddekel is the Tigris), which flows out of Assyria, and the fourth river is the Euphrates.'

The descriptions show that the author intended the place to be approximately identifiable, if not certain, and his description of Havilah suggests that he had a good knowledge of it. Gold was plentiful in the mountains of Armenia, and in Babylon. Bdellium (bedolach - aromatic resin?) and onyx stone (?) are not clearly identifiable. In Numbers 11.7 manna is said to look like bdellium and this has made some suggest it means pearls.

Havilah is elsewhere mentioned in connection with Arabia (Genesis 25.18; 1 Samuel 15.7), which is associated with aromatic resins, but this may well be a different Havilah. In Genesis 10 Havilah is related to both Ham, through Cush (v.7) and Shem, through Yoktan (v.29). The name may thus be connected with two differing tribes.

The river that waters the plain splits into four after it leaves the plain. The last two rivers are well known. They were the lifeblood of Mesopotamia. Thus all will know that the river that flows through the plain is a fruitful river. The other two rivers are unidentifiable to us. Rivers change their courses, and many cataclysms and floods have taken place which have changed the courses of rivers.

The attempts to make them rivers that encompass the world owe more to speculation than to exegesis. We have no reason to think that at this stage the rarely used number four (unlike three, seven and ten) meant anything other than that. The Cush mentioned in connection with the Gihon is not necessarily the Sudan or Ethiopia. It may refer to Kassite territory (Akkadian

kassu), East of the Tigris, or indeed to a Cush unknown to us at all. In Genesis 10 Cush is the 'father' of Nimrod, who was connected with Babel, Erech and Archad in the land of Shinar (the Babylon area), and who built Nineveh (vv.8-12). Havilah also is the name of a son of Cush, but we know nothing further about him, and it may be a coincidence and not significant. The place was, however, clearly significant to the writer. What is probable is that the descriptions indicate to us that Eden was in the Mesopotamian region, possibly in the Armenian mountains, which are the source of the great rivers.

The reference to gold and precious things demonstrated that man had every good thing available to him (he is not restricted to the garden). The mythical Eden mentioned by Ezekiel (Ezekiel 28.13) had jewels in the trees, but here they are firmly rooted in nature and real. This is a real place.

v.15 'And the Lord God took the man and put him in the Tree-covered Plain of Eden to serve and to guard.'

Notice that the man has already been 'put' in the Plain in verse 8. This stresses again that the writer is not thinking chronologically. One event does not necessarily follow another. While he is telling us what happened it is not in sequence. In verse 8 his being placed there is mentioned so as to show how God has provided for him. Here it is mentioned to stress God's purpose in putting him there. We would translate, 'the Lord God had taken the man ---'. This is a clear example of how Hebrew tenses express either completed or incomplete action and are not showing chronological sequence. It is also a clear example of the delight in repetition of early Hebrew narratives. When men had to remember narratives with no library to hand such repetition was invaluable.

The man is placed there 'to serve and to guard'. Trees do not need to be tilled, and it is doubtful if there is here any thought of pruning. The purpose in putting man here was to act as priest and king. 'Serving' God is later the task of priests, and the 'guarding' connects with his having dominion over the wild beasts in 1.28. It is the latter who may cause depredations in the Plain. So the man is there to maintain worship of, and obedience to, God and to protect God's handiwork on His behalf.

It is true that the word for 'serve' is the same as that in verse 5, but there it refers to 'working' the ground whereas here that idea cannot be in mind. Here we are dealing with trees, not cultivated plants. It is of course possible that we are to see 'to serve and to guard' as almost synonymous, service to God seen as indicating guarding the Plain, but leaders of family tribes were regularly priest and king, and it is probable that this verse is looking forward to his establishing his family tribe.

2.16-17 'And the Lord God commanded the man saying, "You may freely eat of every tree in the Plain, but concerning the tree of knowing good and evil you shall not eat of it, for in the day that you eat of it you will surely die".'

God's provision is wide and generous. The man may eat of anything grown in the Plain, including the Tree of Life. One tree only is forbidden to him, the tree of knowing good and evil. This tree is a symbol to him of God's over-lordship. It is like a sacrament. Every time he sees the tree it will remind him that there is One Whom he must obey, One Who is his Lord. Though man is lord of the earth, he will recognise that he is subject to the Lord of Heaven.

Indeed he can come to the tree and ponder on the goodness of his Creator. From this point of view it was a gift of grace. By continuing in obedience man would gradually grow in an understanding of goodness, which would be a great blessing. But to eat of it would be an act of rebellion, and the man would then experience evil, and thus become experimentally aware of

good and evil in a catastrophic way. The verb 'to know' never for the Israelite means to know intellectually. It means to know by experience. The man would know evil in contrast with good because he would experience it.

We need not see it as meaning that there was anything magical in its fruit. It was simply that it was the test of man's willingness to obey God. The consequence of disobedience would be death, for it would signify that he had rebelled against God, and in such a state he could not be allowed to live for ever.

2.18-20. 'And the Lord God said, "It is not good that man should be alone. I will make him a helper who is suitable for him (literally 'as in front of him')". And out of the ground the Lord God formed (or had formed) every beast of the field, and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for the man was not found a helper who was suitable for him.'

The context now brings out that all God's intentions towards the man are good. First we note God's concern that the man should not be alone, and not only so, but that he should be fully provided for with someone suitable for him and worthy of him i.e. on a level with him. Then we are informed that God, Who had formed the living creatures out of the ground, now brought them to the man so the man could name them. Notice that the domestic animals, the cattle, are not said to have been brought. They are already there. This confirms that we are to see 'formed' as pluperfect, and only mentioned as secondary in connection with the bringing (as otherwise the 'forming' of the domestic animals would have been mentioned as well).

But we notice here immediately what is not said. It is *not* said that the animals are brought to find out if they are suitable. Indeed it is impossible to conceive that the writer suggests that God keeps trying to achieve a suitable companion and failing. He has far too high a view of God. The idea is rather that the animals are 'brought' to be named and that, in the course of that, their unsuitability is incidentally emphasised. (Note the indirect form of 'there was not found a suitable helper').

By naming the living creatures the man is shown to have rule over them. At the same time he is entering into some kind of relationship with them so that they would provide him with some kind of companionship. But, of course, none was suitable to be his life companion, as everyone had known would be the case from the start. It was not expected that a suitable helpmeet would be found, for this is just the writer's way of emphasising the fact that the animals with which the man came in contact were not in fact suitable as complete companions. We note that the creeping things are not included. They would not be subject to man's dominion.

We are not necessarily to see in this that the man stood there while God literally brought the animals to him. This could have occurred through the course of many days in the pursuit of his activities, with God causing him to come in contact with the animals one by one. The writer's style is simple and homely which would appeal to his readers. The verbs in this verse are all in the 'imperfect' signifying incomplete action and suggesting this occurred over time.

Note that while the verbs in this verse are 'imperfect' following a waw consecutive, which some scholars have tried to suggest can only be rendered in the pluperfect when connected with a pluperfect, there are other examples where this construction is clearly used in a pluperfect sense. The waw consecutive can refer backwards as well as forwards when this is clear from the context. Thus in the light of the context of Genesis 1 we must see 'formed' as referring backwards to when they were made before man. The verse does not say here when the animals were formed, only that they were at some stage formed preparatory to bringing them to man. The emphasis here is on the bringing, the making is just background to stress that they were

also made by God. Hebrew verbs are not necessarily chronological. (Note again that no mention is made of the 'forming' of the domestic animals, it is the bringing and naming that is primary).

'Was not found.' - 'matsa'. Note that there is no subject. It is therefore indefinite - 'there was not found'. It is not God who was looking for the suitable companion.

2.21-22 'So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept, and he took one of his sides and closed up its place with flesh. And the side that he had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.'

The deep sleep, when God will do something exceptional and a mystery is about to be revealed, is paralleled elsewhere (compare Genesis 15.12) although the parallel is not exact as Abraham was conscious. The stress is on the fact that the creation of the woman is a mystery.

Note that the word translated 'rib' in most versions, is almost without exception translated 'side' in the Old Testament. It was later tradition that inaccurately turned it into a rib. The description, which avoids detail, is of some remarkable process by which the woman devolved out of the man. The process and the method are not revealed.

The writer is always careful to avoid the excesses of mythology. This is ancient philosophy. What he is trying to demonstrate is not the method of her production but that the woman is seen to be man's equal, for she is one half of him, his 'other half'. So the woman is both his helper and his equal. In New Testament terms the man is the head of the woman as Christ is the head of the church, and we cannot avoid here in Genesis the idea that the man has some kind of extra status, for he is the one made by God to act on God's behalf on earth, and she is the helper. But the woman is his close helper, and equal in all except that status.

2.23 'Then the man said, "This one at this time now is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, this one shall be called Woman (isha) because this one was taken out of Man (ish)".'

The woman is not just produced from one of his ribs, but is made up of his flesh and bones. The man names the woman, thus once more establishing his position over her, but this time the 'woman' is given a name similar to his own. The naming is an act cementing a close relationship as well as revealing his special status. While she too is subject to him, she is also his close companion. (Ish and isha do not have the same etymology. Their connection is in sound. The original word play would be in another language than Hebrew). Note the threefold repetition of 'this one' (zoth) signifying completeness.

'At this time now' - RSV translates 'at last'. Here was one at last who could stand on a par with man as his helpmeet.

2.24 'Therefore will a man leave his father and mother and cleave to his wife, and they will become one flesh.'

It is because of this close relationship between a man and his mate that that relationship supersedes that of his parents. When they enter into sexual union they become one, bound in a relationship closer than any other. Family loyalties still hold, but the loyalty between a man and his wife is primary. Notice that sexual relations are treated as normal and good (in spite of the euphemism 'cleaves'). There is no suggestion anywhere in this account that sex is to be seen as somehow sinful.

The fact that the man is said to leave his father and mother indicates that here a new unit is forming. There will, of course, still be family ties and responsibilities, but essentially by

marriage the man is stepping out to form a new unit with his wife which is unbreakable, and complete in itself. The impression given is that a man will have one wife.

**2.25 ‘And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed.’**

This does not primarily mean naked before each other, but naked before God. Their state of total innocence meant that they were unashamed of who and what they were. They had nothing to hide from, and no need to fear God’s scrutiny. They were totally open to God and to each other in body and soul. It was an indication that all was well with them.

Later being ‘naked’ before God would be seen as a terrible situation, for it meant that all their sins were revealed, but there was no fear of this here. See Isaiah 47.3; Lamentations 1.8; Ezekiel 16.36; 23.18; 2 Corinthians 5.3; Hebrews 4.13.

**3.1a ‘Now the snake was wiser than any creature that the Lord God had made.’**

The word for snake always refers to ordinary snakes in the Old Testament, with the exception of Isaiah 27.1 and possibly Amos 9.3. However these exceptions do show that the Israelites were familiar with the myths of surrounding peoples relating to ‘snakes’ and ‘serpents’, which were often looked on as semi-divine creatures involved in evil, although also often in good. It is the behaviour of this snake that reveals its innate evil. The fact that the writer also calls him ‘wiser’, (a word usually translated ‘more prudent’), ‘than any creature that the Lord God had made’ demonstrates that he is indicating that this snake is unusual. Given the fact that the root of the word used for snake (nachash) is also used for ‘enchantment’, it is difficult to avoid the thought that the writer intends it to be seen as somehow endowed with some sinister power. But he does not dwell on the question because he does not want to be seen to take away the responsibility for failure from the man and woman.

The word for ‘wiser’ comes from the same root as the word for ‘naked’ in the previous verse. This is written in a way that shows that there is an intentional connection. There is an ironic contrast between their nakedness, a proof of their innocence and what they are revealed to be, and his ‘wisdom’ which is the proof of his devilishness and what he is revealed to be, which will later result in their ‘nakedness’ being revealed.

**3.1b ‘ And he said to the woman, “Yes. Has God said that you shall not eat of any tree of the garden?” ’**

This immediately raises the question as to how the snake was able to speak. Does the author really see it as chatting with the woman, or are we to see the conversation as going on in her mind? Or was there a Satanic voice which spoke through it? The sinuous beauty of the snake, curled round a branch of the tree, (possibly the very tree itself, with its fruit clearly visible), and gazing at her with an hypnotic stare, might certainly have an hypnotic effect, on a hot day, on a languid and slightly resentful woman. Possibly what happened was the result of the woman’s reverie combined with a growing sense of unhappiness and discontent which had arisen within her, influenced by suggestions placed in her mind by the one behind ‘the snake’. The writer may well have imagined such a scene.

In other words did the snake in fact ‘speak’ through his silent gaze? Did the woman look at the fruit and think of that fruit which was forbidden, and then sense words which she felt came from the hypnotic influence of the snake? The Bible is full of places where we are told that ‘God said’ when that word was probably expressed in other ways, for example through use of the Urim and Thummim. Indeed the usage is common today when we say, ‘God told me to ---’ or ‘the Devil persuaded me ---’. Such anthropomorphic language has been common in all ages. Thus we might be justified in seeing here a conversation going on in her mind, induced by

some evil power, for which the snake takes the blame!

If we ask, why then would God blame the snake, we must recognise that it is not really the snake that God is blaming, but the shadowy figure behind the snake. Just as Jesus would curse a fig tree to teach a lesson about a nation (Mark 11.14,21), so God ‘curses’ a snake to teach a lesson about this shadowy figure from the spiritual realm.

Otherwise we are left with a choice between a talking snake and a demon possessed one. Or rather not a choice, for while we may see the latter, the woman sees the former. She sees only a creature who comes below her in the order of things, one who is not to be feared, unaware of dangerous undercurrents. The reader, on the other hand, is aware of a power at work that is both subtle and dangerous. To her a talking snake is an interesting phenomenon. To the reader it is indicative of sinister undertones. Suddenly into this idealistic world something ‘foreign’ has introduced itself. Elsewhere God will speak through an ass (Numbers 22.28). Here some evil presence could well literally speak through the snake.

Whatever way it was the idea sown by the snake was effective. The question was ambiguous, suggesting a God Who somehow was a little unreasonable without actually saying so. The implication was, was God really being behaving as He should?

3.2-3 ‘And the woman said to the snake, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But God has said ‘you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, nor shall you touch it, lest you die’.”.’

The woman’s conscience is struggling to be fair to God. But she cannot help but think of THAT tree, and she slightly ameliorates God’s warning and slightly exaggerates His demands. God had not said ‘lest you die’, He had said ‘you shall surely die’. Dangerously she has in mind the possibility that it might not be true. It is always unwise to ‘improve’ the word of God. Nor had He said, ‘you shall not touch it’. But in the latter she was interpreting God perfectly correctly. To touch it was to be half way to eating it. Possibly she is also trying to build up her protection against the temptation she is now experiencing.

Some have tried to see in the reference to this tree as ‘the tree which is in the midst of the garden’ (which was how the tree of life was previously described by the writer) an indication that the story originally only contained one tree, the tree of life. Others have suggested that the woman only knew of one tree, because the tree of life had not yet been revealed to man. But neither is necessary. To the woman in her condition there *was* only ONE tree, that which was forbidden to her. Her concentration on that tree is intended by the writer to demonstrate the seeds of doubt in her mind. Whereas the most important tree to the writer and to God was the tree of life, which offered continuing life and was therefore central, to the woman the most important tree was the one which was she was unable to partake of, and in her thinking *that* was central.

3.4-5. ‘And the snake said to the woman, “You shall not surely die, for God knows that in the day you eat of it then your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God knowing good and evil”.’

The snake knows he has won. He now drops his mask. He no longer prevaricates but blatantly and with stress reveals his true nature. No ordinary snake could be seen as speaking like this, for he is forcefully claiming to know better than God. The reader has his suspicions confirmed that something dreadfully sinister lies behind the snake. (Supernatural beings are ever in the background in these passages without being mentioned e.g. Genesis 1.26; 3.22; 3.24. They are the background to all that happens).

**‘But the snake said to the woman, “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it you will be like God, knowing good and evil”. How subtle the snake is. He is suggesting that knowing good and evil is a good thing for the woman, and that God is only pretending when He makes His threats so as to prevent them getting on equality with Himself. Indeed he makes God look mean-spirited and he makes a curse look like a blessing. Why, do they not realise that they can be ‘like God’ (or ‘like the elohim’, like spiritual beings)? Of course, the truth is that had they continued in obedience they would have known the difference between good and evil through persevering in goodness, and would then indeed have been more Godlike. On the other hand the snake’s way was a much quicker route, learning by experience rather than by obedience, but it was a way that led to disaster.**

**Note that the snake uses simply the term God. This, along with the woman’s reply (v.3), is the only place where the term ‘the Lord God’ (Yahweh Elohim) is not used in chapters 2.5 to 3.25. It is probably intended to be seen as the snake ‘watering down’ the authority and closeness of God in the woman’s mind, and an indication of the woman responding.**

**3.6 ‘So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was a delight to the eyes and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate.’**

**The woman clearly did not give way immediately. She contemplated the tree and the fruit carefully, and no doubt she wrestled with her conscience. How wonderful the fruit looked, so much to be desired, and how beautiful the tree was, surely something so beautiful could not cause her any harm? Had not God made them? And to be made wise in knowing good and evil like God. How wonderful that must be. She was not aware of Paul’s words to Timothy, ‘flee youthful desires’. For that is what she should have done. Victory over desires like this is only found through flight, not by trying to fight them. Had she fled all would have been well. But she lingered on, and in the end she inevitably gave way. She took of its fruit and ate.**

**Of course the man and the woman had a conscience and knew the difference between right and wrong in a semi-theoretical way (having never experienced evil) but she saw the snake as offering something more, a God-like knowledge of good and evil.**

**But she did worse. She went to her mate and took him with her, for she gave the fruit to him, and he ate as well. Seemingly he ate because the woman asked him to. There was no thought for him that it would make him wise like God. He allowed the woman to be more important to him than God. That is why Paul can say, the woman was deceived ( 1 Timothy 2.14), but the man was not deceived. He was flagrantly disobedient because of his wife. How often when we fall we drag others down with us.**

**So the one who was ‘a helper suitable for him’ has proved man’s downfall. Perhaps because she was only a helper she did not consider her privilege and responsibility as God’s representative on earth. (How easy it is for us to think that we are unimportant and therefore that what we do ‘doesn’t really matter’). Thus instead of seeing the tree as a proof of her exalted position she saw it only as a way of getting satisfaction and status.**

**We are constantly brought into positions where we too, as God’s representatives on earth, have to make choices. When something alluring comes before us we need to ‘flee’. That is the only way to fight such things. Otherwise we too will fail, and drag others down with us. On the other hand, if someone important to us begins to suggest we disregard the Lordship of God, we need to be stern with them, and if necessary even be willing to turn away from them. For otherwise we too will fall.**

**Notice how the temptation is a basis for the words of John in 1 John 2.16. She saw that it was**

good for food (the lust of the flesh), a delight to the eyes (the lust of the eyes), and to be desired to make one wise (the pride of life). Herein lies the root of most sin.

**3.7 'Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they knew that they were naked, and they joined fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.'**

What a dreadful moment. They suddenly became aware of their puniness, and their inadequacy, and that they could no longer face God because they were defiled. 'They knew that they were naked'. It was true that they had indeed received a form of knowledge, but it was a knowledge of what they had lost, a knowledge that they could no longer be His representatives, a knowledge that they no longer enjoyed the approval of God, a knowledge that they lay bare before Him, a knowledge that they could no longer face Him. They had become aware that they had forfeited their position totally, aware that all that awaited them was death.

Their response to their nakedness is not said to have had anything to do with sexual awareness, and the fig leaves were not said to be placed delicately over their private parts. Rather what they wanted to do was to hide themselves, to cover themselves totally, for they were afraid of God. 'They joined fig leaves together'. They had never had clothes and now they had to make a pathetic attempt to find something which would cover them. They could not, of course, sew. All they could do was take the feeble fig leaves and try somehow to join them together into coverings, something for which the fig leaves were really not suitable.

What a pass this couple have now come to. From proudly walking with God and having dominion over their world, they have come to scrabbling around trying pathetically to tie fig leaves together to make some kind of covering. Truly they have received knowledge, the knowledge of what good was, and what evil is, the knowledge of the consequences of sin and disobedience.

The idea of nakedness here is that of inadequacy before God, of being seen for what they are. 'All things are naked and open before the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do' (Hebrews 4.13). We can compare with this how Paul does not want to be found 'naked' before God when he goes to meet Him (2 Corinthians 5.3). Nakedness was now a thing of shame (compare Isaiah 20.2-4; Ezekiel 16.7; Revelation 3.17). There is no reason at this stage to equate it with sexual awareness. That will come later.

**3.8a 'And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze (ruach - literally 'in the wind of the day').'**

It may well be that they had communed with God each evening, and that the sound in the trees had indicated to them His presence, but now the overtones are different. Now it is to them the approach of a vengeful God which is made known to them by the sound of the wind in the trees. Compare 2 Samuel 5.24 where God is known by 'the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees'. (See also 2 Samuel 22.11, 'he was seen upon the wings of the wind'; Job 38.1, 'the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind'; Psalm 18.10, 'he came swiftly on the wings of the wind'; also Psalm 104.3; Ezekiel 1.4; John 3.8; Acts 2.2). This is no stroll. To their guilty consciences it is the sound of the approach of God to tackle them over what they have done.

**3.8b 'And the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.'**

Like the scrabbling together of coverings from fig leaves, this was another desperate and foolish attempt to hide from the all-seeing eyes of God. They sought out the darkest place they could find among the trees of the garden, the trees which God had provided as a blessing and

which had now become their only hope of hiding from Him. Possibly they hoped that if they could not be seen God would pass them by. How foolish we are when we think that we can hide anything from God or avoid facing up to Him.

**3.9 ‘And the Lord God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ’**

God speaks directly to the man. This is no vague call but a word spoken directly to the heart. God, of course, knew where he was, but He was making him face up to his present situation. He was giving him a chance to express his deep sorrow and repentance.

**3.10 ‘And he said, “I heard the sound of your presence in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked, and I hid myself .” ’**

How quickly the man gives himself away. The futile coverings that they had made had proved useless, as do all man’s attempts to make himself acceptable to God. (‘Our righteousnesses are as filthy rags’ declares the prophet in Isaiah 64.6) Now he has to recognise the folly of his ways. ‘I was afraid because I was naked’. The knowledge of God’s presence had intensified his sense of shame. Now he knew himself for what he now was, and it caused him to give himself away completely. ‘And I hid myself’. The frank admission that alone could give him hope. He does not try to brazen it out before God. He admits his unworthiness, his shame, that he is not fit to meet God.

**3.11 ‘And he (God) said, “Who has made you aware that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?” ’**

The man, of course, had always known that he was physically naked, but that had been unimportant. This question goes deeper. There is something in the man that has filled him with conscious shame, that has made him afraid to be looked at by God. The man is ashamed of his inner nakedness, which reveals him as one who has failed God, as one who has rebelled against God, as one who has weakly given way to the one for whom he was held responsible.

God is aware of what the man means, He knows that there is only one thing that could have filled him with this sense of shame and He determines to pin him down and to make him admit the whole truth. ‘Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?’ If there is to be a remedy the lesson must first be brought fully home.

**3.12 ‘And the man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ’**

What an accurate picture of a man suffused in guilt. He seeks to place the blame anywhere but on himself. ‘The woman --’. She is the one who is to blame. She gave it to me. ‘Whom you gave to be with me.’ It was really your fault, God, it was you who gave her to me. ‘She gave me fruit from the tree.’ What else could I do? It would not have been nice to refuse. ‘And I ate.’ In the end he has to admit a tiny bit of blame for himself.

So it is clear that the real culprits are the woman, and to some extent God. The fact, of course, was that the man himself was largely to blame. He was not deceived. He had been appointed by God and told that the fruit of the tree was banned. The tree was holy to the Lord. Had he stood firm, how the course of history would have changed. But he was deliberately disobedient. Possibly his only real excuse was that the woman was very beautiful and persuasive. But like the woman, he should have run away with his fingers in his ears.

**3.13a ‘Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” ’**

**Only God really knew the answer to that question as He looked down the suffering of the ages, and saw finally the suffering of His own Son. He knew what she had done. But, although the woman may have been aware of some of the consequences for herself, she could have no idea what she had done. Sin is like that. It reaches further than we can ever know.**

**3.13b ‘And the woman said, “The snake beguiled me, and I ate”.’**

**She did not blame God. It was the snake’s fault. She admitted she had been deceived, but it was only because he was so beguiling. She could not accept that she was really to blame. But earlier she had told the snake quite clearly what the position was. She too was without excuse. And in the end she admits ‘I ate’.**

**“The snake beguiled me.” How feeble her excuse is. Here is this subordinate creature and yet she puts the blame on him. She is not yet aware of the power behind the snake.**

**It is now noteworthy that God does not question the snake. This is not an omission. The writer wants us to know that God is well aware that the snake is not really to blame. There is another, who is yet nameless, who must bear the blame, and it is to him that the sentence on the snake is really addressed.**

**3.14-15 ‘And the Lord God said to the snake, “Because you have done this, cursed are you beyond all cattle, and beyond all wild animals. On your belly you will go, and dust will you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.” ’**

**Did the author really think that the snake had once had legs, which were now removed? Of course not. He is now turning the snake into a symbol of what would happen to the one who had used the snake as a tool. We notice here that of all the culprits it is only the snake which is cursed. If it had only been a misguided creature, lower than man, this would be inconceivable. It can only be that, at this stage, for reasons we cannot fathom, the master is seen for the present as out of reach, so the curse is pronounced on the tool. (Just as it will be the ground from which man was taken that will be cursed and not the man).**

**‘Beyond all cattle.’ ‘Micol - ‘from all’, therefore as distinctive from, compare verse 1 where he was wise beyond all. Because he was wise beyond all he is now cursed beyond all. The wisdom and the curse belong to another.**

**The majestic movements of the snake are now depicted in terms which demonstrate his master’s fate. ‘On your belly you will go, and dust will you eat’. How different things can look from a different perspective. It is not the snake’s movements that have changed, it is the interpretation of them. The author knows that the snake does not actually eat dust. The ‘eating of dust’ is a symbol of defeat and humiliation (Psalm 72.9; Micah 7.17; Isaiah 47.1; 49.23) and crawling on the belly was widely known as something expected by kings of their humbled foes (see also Psalm 44.25 where it symbolises affliction and oppression).**

**So from now on the snake will be humbled and defeated. Once he was seen as moving gracefully along the ground, but now he is seen as ‘crawling on his belly’, and man will attack the snake wherever he sees it, and the snake will equally retaliate. But it is the man who, though grievously hurt, will finally come out on top. And from now on the ‘unseen enemy’ will also attack man, and with the help of God will be fought against, humiliated and defeated, and be made to crawl and bite the dust.**

**The symbolism is significant. Every time man sees a snake he will be reminded of the subtlety of sin, and how it creeps up and strikes suddenly. He must take as much care in watching out**

for sin as he does in watching out for snakes.

**‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will snap at your head, and you will bruise his heel.’**

Man’s future constant battle with snakes, which is a totally new departure in that almost perfect world, is also seen as a picture of man’s constant battle with evil, the evil that will meet him at every turn and constantly snap at his heels. But it is significant that that battle is seen in terms of final, though hard won, victory for man, for that is surely what the bruising of the head must signify. The head is the major part, the heel the tail end. It will be a hard and difficult time but in the end it is man who will gain the victory. But only God knew Who the Man would be, and what He would have to go through, to achieve that final victory. Note that the battle is between snake and man, and the unseen enemy and man. God is sovereign above it all, until He steps down and becomes man.

The words for ‘snap at’ and ‘bruise’ are only slightly different. The first comes from a root shuph as a variant of sha’aph, ‘to snap at, snatch’. The other from shuph (Akkadian sapu) ‘to trample on, bruise’. Thus there is a deliberate play on words.

Are we to see here a reference to the coming of One Who will defeat the Serpent? The answer is ‘yes’ and ‘no’. What is declared is that man will finally triumph, and the implication is of triumph over the unseen evil behind the snake. It is only later that it will become apparent that this must be by some Special Man. But it is implicit for otherwise why will it take so long? A special, unique man, the seed of Adam, must be in mind to achieve the final victory. The Serpent will be defeated by the ultimate Man.

**3.16 ‘To the woman he said, “I will greatly multiply your pain, especially in childbearing, in pain you will produce children, and your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you.”’**

In Genesis 1 the producing of children is a duty, a privilege and a blessing, but now that duty, privilege and blessing will be accompanied by intense pain. It is in the mercy of God that, in spite of what she has done, she will still be allowed the blessing of producing children. It is the punishment of God that this will be achieved through much pain.

But she will not be able to avoid it even if she wants to. ‘Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you’. She will not be able to avoid her punishment, for her craving for her husband will ensure that she seeks him out and his authority over her will guarantee her part in procreation. There is here a clear loss of status. The man’s authority is now seen as more emphatic and overbearing.

‘Your pain, especially in childbearing’ is literally ‘your pain and your childbearing’. The word for ‘pain’ (atsab) is not the usual one for pain in childbearing and is used in the next verse for man’s punishment in toil. Thus it refers to the more general misery of life. It may, however, be deliberately used because two of its consonants connect to ‘ets’ (tree), thus pain and suffering arising from the tree.

**3.17-19 ‘And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to your wife’s voice, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you ‘you shall not eat of it’, cursed is the ground because of you; in toil (pain) you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it will produce for you, and you will eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you will eat food until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you will return”.’**

**It is noteworthy that God does not curse the man, as He cursed the snake. Unlike the snake, the man is 'on his own', a weak earth creature. There is no one behind him deserving to be cursed. But from now on it is his daily provision that is cursed, something that will constantly remind him of his position and what he has done. Thus as with the snake the curse is one step removed from the guilty party. The snake is cursed as representing the evil power behind it, the ground is cursed as representing the man.**

**From now on man will have to toil in pain for his food against ever increasing difficulties. He will have to contend with thorns and thistles, which will be ever ready to prevent the growth of what he will eat. It is the vegetation that tears at his hands and prevents him having food that will grow on its own, as once, in contrast, the trees of the garden had grown on their own to provide him with food. Seeking his food will be a constant struggle. The place to which he will be sent will not have sufficient trees to provide his food. It must now be sought amidst thorns and thistles, which will tear not only his hands, but his heart.**

**'Cursed is the ground because of you.' Compare the description of the land that is blessed in Deuteronomy 33.13-15, it is well-watered and fruitful, full of precious things. The thought here is of land unwatered and unfruitful except as a result of hard labour.**

**'In the sweat of your face you will eat food'. The water of the river in the garden is replaced by the sweat of his brow. Now he will be dependent on the vagaries of rain and weather, and life will be a constant and almost unendurable struggle.**

**Then, in the end, the ground that has been cursed will receive him, and he will become once more part of the ground. He will return to the dust. Thus the curse will fully attach to him in the end. But the cursing of the ground and not the man is God's indication that in mercy He is delaying punishment. The man will die, but not yet.**

**It will be noted that the warning 'in the day that you eat of it you will surely die' has not been carried into literal fruition. Neither the man nor the power behind the snake will receive their deserts as yet. The writer indeed wants us to see that a new phase is beginning in God's purposes. He is acknowledging that the man has not fallen because he independently chose to rebel against God, but because another more sinister power dragged him down. Thus God will show mercy to him so that he in his turn, along with his descendants, can reverse the situation and bring down that evil power. He will yet bruise the head of 'the snake'. Yet the sentence is only delayed, for, as God has already declared, one day the ground that has been cursed will receive him. He is but dust, and dust he will become.**

**3.20 'And the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.'**

**The man recognises that God has shown mercy to him and that, in spite of all, life will therefore go on. And by revealing his willingness to carry out God's command to 'be fruitful and multiply' (1.28), he is making a statement of faith. 'The man called his wife's name 'Chawwa' ('life' - ch as in loch) because she is to be the mother of all who will live' ('chay'). Suddenly tragedy has been tempered by hope. All is not yet lost. Although they have lost everlasting life, they will live on in their children.**

**But the change of name also reflects the change in situation. She has previously been 'woman' in relation to 'man', the suggestion of an idyllic relationship, now she becomes the 'life' bearer who through pain and anguish will produce children. The renaming further stresses the woman's new relationship to the man, 'your desire will be to your husband and he will rule over you'. By renaming her the man is exerting his new authority. She is now not just subordinate, but in subjection.**

**3.21 'And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife clothing made from skins and covered them.'**

God now makes clear their new position. They can no longer walk naked before him, for they have made themselves feel vulnerable, inadequate and ashamed. Thus they must be covered to give them a feeling of security and acceptance. The clothes will ever be a reminder of the wonderful relationship with God that they have lost.

Yet with some surprise we learn that the clothes were 'of skins'. Here we have the first hint of actual deaths. No reader could fail to relate the provision of skins with the deaths of animals. And in this story it stands out dramatically, for death has been totally absent. Man receives his first lesson that his disobedience has brought death. Already a substitute is required. Others die that he might be able to face God. Here we have the primitive beginnings of the idea of sacrifice, which will lead on to the final sacrifice.

**5.22 'Then the Lord God said, "Look, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil, and now, to prevent him from reaching out and taking also of the tree of life so that he might eat and live for ever ----" therefore the Lord God expelled him from the plain of Eden, to serve the ground from which he was taken.'**

Once again, as in 1.26, we have the introduction of 'us' - 'like one of us'. God again reveals Himself as surrounded by His heavenly court. But they remain in the background. The hint is there and nothing else. They have no place in creation and the working out of man's destiny. Yet they are a reminder that 'behind the scenes' there are other beings who have not directly entered into the account. There is too the further hint that among 'us' both good and evil have been experienced - 'like us knowing good and evil'. Again we are made aware of the sinister power behind the snake, an evil heavenly being.

The sentence for man, although reduced, is again emphasised. Death will now become his destiny because the means of 'life unto the ages' will be removed. He will no longer be able to eat of the tree of life, the tree whose fruit has the special quality that it can renew life and prevent old age. By this man is sentenced to a lingering death. The idea of a food of life which can give immortality was widespread in the ancient world, taking many forms, but it demonstrates that the idea was writ large in man's ancient memory.

**3.23 'Therefore the Lord God expelled him from the plain of Eden to serve the ground from which he was taken.'**

Man not only loses the tree of life, but all the trees in the plain of Eden. He is sent out into a place where he must eat 'herbs of the field', scrabbling among the weeds to obtain his food, and scratching at the surface of the ground in hope that it will increase its production. He had been raised above it by God, but now he returns to it, a reminder of his new situation.

**3.24 'So he drove out the man, and at the east of the plain of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.'**

The verb is forceful - 'He drove out'. This suggests some powerful catastrophe that made it impossible for man to stay where he was. The mention of the cherubim takes us by surprise, and indeed this is the first time that heavenly beings are suggested as playing any part in God's activity. The fact that they do so is a further indication of the barriers that have grown between man and God. What tragedy. The guardians of God are set to keep out the one who had been set to guard. reaching out' --- and 'he *drove* him out'.

In Psalm 18.10 the idea of the cherub is paralleled with the 'wings of the wind', and in Ezekiel

1.4-5 with a stormy wind, and it may thus be that originally the cherubim were seen as directly connected with powerful, stormy winds. The cherubim and their parallels are regularly seen as the guardians of sacred places, and even, as an escort, of God Himself.

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The Facts behind the Story.

In dealing with the above account we have deliberately stuck to the plan and pattern of the writer. We have thus avoided reading in what later teaching would reveal. His account was written so as to lay the emphasis where it belonged, on the man, his failure and his destiny. But we, of course, are aware of the background which would push the man into the background, the activities of ‘that old snake, the Devil and Satan’ (Revelation 12.9), the coming of Jesus Christ, the Messiah, to defeat him, the final victory of God. But this was the beginning, the low point, and we must not lose its impact. The remainder of the story will be revealed later.

The Mythological ‘Background’

Much has been made of the myths that are said to lie behind the stories of Creation, the Garden of Eden and the Fall and for the sake of completeness we attach details of some of these myths and our view of them. But Genesis 1 to 3 are remarkably free of mythical elements, and, although briefly mentioning such myths as we went on, we were loath to clutter up the narrative with detailed discussion. Those, however, who may be interested should go to [Mythology](#)

[Return to Home Page](#)

[Go to Home Page for further interesting articles](#)

[Back to Genesis 1](#)

[Forward to Genesis 4](#)

[EXODUS](#)

[LEVITICUS 1.1-7.38 --- 8.1-11.47 --- 12.1-16.34](#)

[NUMBERS 1-10--- 11-19--- 20-36](#)

[DEUTERONOMY 1.1-4.44 --- 4.45-11.32 --- 12.1-29.1--- THE BOOK OF JOSHUA](#)

[THE BOOK OF JUDGES](#)

[EZEKIEL](#)

[DANIEL 1-7](#)

[DANIEL 8-12](#)

[NAHUM](#)

[HABAKKUK](#)

[ZEPHANIAH](#)

[ZECHARIAH](#)

[THE GOSPEL OF MARK](#)

[THE GOSPEL OF JOHN](#)

[GALATIANS](#)

[EPHESIANS](#)

[COLOSSIANS](#)

[1 THESSALONIANS](#)

[2 THESSALONIANS](#)

[HEBREWS 1-6 --- 7-10 --- 11-13](#)

**REVELATION** e was holy to the Lord. Had he stood firm, how the course of history would have changed. But he was deliberately disobedient. Possibly his only real excuse was that the woman was very beautiful and persuasive. But like the woman, he should have run away with his fingers in his ears.

**3.13a** ‘Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” ’

Only God really knew the answer to that question as He looked down the suffering of the ages, and saw finally the suffering of His own Son. He knew what she had done. But, although the woman may have been aware of some of the consequences for herself, she could have no idea what she had done. Sin is like that. It reaches further than we can ever know.

**3.13b** ‘And the woman said, “The snake beguiled me, and I ate”.’

She did not blame God. It was the snake’s fault. She admitted she had been deceived, but it was only because he was so beguiling. She could not accept that she was really to blame. But earlier she had told the snake quite clearly what the position was. She too was without excuse. And in the end she admits ‘I ate’.

“The snake beguiled me.” How feeble her excuse is. Here is this subordinate creature and yet she puts the blame on him. She is not yet aware of the power behind the snake.

It is now noteworthy that God does not question the snake. This is not an omission. The writer wants us to know that God is well aware that the snake is not really to blame. There is another, who is yet nameless, who must bear the blame, and it is to him that the sentence on the snake is

really addressed.

**3.14-15 ‘And the Lord God said to the snake, “Because you have done this, cursed are you beyond all cattle, and beyond all wild animals. On your belly you will go, and dust will you eat all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel.”’**

Did the author really think that the snake had once had legs, which were now removed? Of course not. He is now turning the snake into a symbol of what would happen to the one who had used the snake as a tool. We notice here that of all the culprits it is only the snake which is cursed. If it had only been a misguided creature, lower than man, this would be inconceivable. It can only be that, at this stage, for reasons we cannot fathom, the master is seen for the present as out of reach, so the curse is pronounced on the tool. (Just as it will be the ground from which man was taken that will be cursed and not the man).

‘Beyond all cattle.’ ‘Micol - ‘from all’, therefore as distinctive from, compare verse 1 where he was wise beyond all. Because he was wise beyond all he is now cursed beyond all. The wisdom and the curse belong to another.

The majestic movements of the snake are now depicted in terms which demonstrate his master’s fate. ‘On your belly you will go, and dust will you eat’. How different things can look from a different perspective. It is not the snake’s movements that have changed, it is the interpretation of them. The author knows that the snake does not actually eat dust. The ‘eating of dust’ is a symbol of defeat and humiliation (Psalm 72.9; Micah 7.17; Isaiah 47.1; 49.23) and crawling on the belly was widely known as something expected by kings of their humbled foes (see also Psalm 44.25 where it symbolises affliction and oppression).

So from now on the snake will be humbled and defeated. Once he was seen as moving gracefully along the ground, but now he is seen as ‘crawling on his belly’, and man will attack the snake wherever he sees it, and the snake will equally retaliate. But it is the man who, though grievously hurt, will finally come out on top. And from now on the ‘unseen enemy’ will also attack man, and with the help of God will be fought against, humiliated and defeated, and be made to crawl and bite the dust.

The symbolism is significant. Every time man sees a snake he will be reminded of the subtlety of sin, and how it creeps up and strikes suddenly. He must take as much care in watching out for sin as he does in watching out for snakes.

**‘I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed. He will snap at your head, and you will bruise his heel.’**

Man’s future constant battle with snakes, which is a totally new departure in that almost perfect world, is also seen as a picture of man’s constant battle with evil, the evil that will meet him at every turn and constantly snap at his heels. But it is significant that that battle is seen in terms of final, though hard won, victory for man, for that is surely what the bruising of the head must signify. The head is the major part, the heel the tail end. It will be a hard and difficult time but in the end it is man who will gain the victory. But only God knew Who the Man would be, and what He would have to go through, to achieve that final victory. Note that the battle is between snake and man, and the unseen enemy and man. God is sovereign above it all, until He steps down and becomes man.

The words for ‘snap at’ and ‘bruise’ are only slightly different. The first comes from a root shuph as a variant of sha’aph, ‘to snap at, snatch’. The other from shuph (Akkadian sapu) ‘to trample on, bruise’. Thus there is a deliberate play on words.

Are we to see here a reference to the coming of One Who will defeat the Serpent? The answer is 'yes' and 'no'. What is declared is that man will finally triumph, and the implication is of triumph over the unseen evil behind the snake. It is only later that it will become apparent that this must be some Special Man. But it is implicit for otherwise why will it take so long? A special, unique man, the seed of Adam, must be in mind to achieve the final victory. The Serpent will be defeated by the ultimate man.

**3.16** 'To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain, especially in childbearing, in pain you will produce children, and your desire shall be for your husband, and he will rule over you."'

In Genesis 1 the producing of children is a duty, a privilege and a blessing, but now that duty, privilege and blessing will be accompanied by intense pain. It is in the mercy of God that, in spite of what she has done, she will still be allowed the blessing of producing children. It is the punishment of God that this will be achieved through much pain.

But she will not be able to avoid it even if she wants to. 'Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you'. She will not be able to avoid her punishment, for her craving for her husband will ensure that she seeks him out and his authority over her will guarantee her part in procreation. There is here a clear loss of status. The man's authority is now seen as more emphatic and overbearing.

'Your pain, especially in childbearing' is literally 'your pain and your childbearing'. The word for 'pain' (atsab) is not the usual one for pain in childbearing and is used in the next verse for man's punishment in toil. Thus it refers to the more general misery of life. It may, however, be deliberately used because two of its consonants connect to 'ets' (tree), thus pain and suffering arising from the tree.

**3.17-19** 'And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to your wife's voice, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you 'you shall not eat of it', cursed is the ground because of you; in toil (pain) you shall eat of it all the days of your life, thorns and thistles it will produce for you, and you will eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you will eat food until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust and to dust you will return".'

It is noteworthy that God does not curse the man, as He cursed the snake. Unlike the snake, the man is 'on his own', a weak earth creature. There is no one behind him deserving to be cursed. But from now on it is his daily provision that is cursed, something that will constantly remind him of his position and what he has done. Thus as with the snake the curse is one step removed from the guilty party. The snake is cursed as representing the evil power behind it, the ground is cursed as representing the man.

From now on man will have to toil in pain for his food against ever increasing difficulties. He will have to contend with thorns and thistles, which will be ever ready to prevent the growth of what he will eat. It is the vegetation that tears at his hands and prevents him having food that will grow on its own, as once, in contrast, the trees of the garden had grown on their own to provide him with food. Seeking his food will be a constant struggle. The place to which he will be sent will not have sufficient trees to provide his food. It must now be sought amidst thorns and thistles, which will tear not only his hands, but his heart.

'Cursed is the ground because of you.' Compare the description of the land that is blessed in Deuteronomy 33.13-15, it is well-watered and fruitful, full of precious things. The thought here is of land unwatered and unfruitful except as a result of hard labour.

**‘In the sweat of your face you will eat food’. The water of the river in the garden is replaced by the sweat of his brow. Now he will be dependent on the vagaries of rain and weather, and life will be a constant and almost unendurable struggle.**

**Then, in the end, the ground that has been cursed will receive him, and he will become once more part of the ground. He will return to the dust. Thus the curse will fully attach to him in the end. But the cursing of the ground and not the man is God’s indication that in mercy He is delaying punishment. The man will die, but not yet.**

**It will be noted that the warning ‘in the day that you eat of it you will surely die’ has not been carried into literal fruition. Neither the man nor the power behind the snake will receive their deserts as yet. The writer indeed wants us to see that a new phase is beginning in God’s purposes. He is acknowledging that the man has not fallen because he independently chose to rebel against God, but because another more sinister power dragged him down. Thus God will show mercy to him so that he in his turn, along with his descendants, can reverse the situation and bring down that evil power. He will yet bruise the head of ‘the snake’. Yet the sentence is only delayed, for, as God has already declared, one day the ground that has been cursed will receive him. He is but dust, and dust he will become.**

**3.20 ‘And the man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.’**

**The man recognises that God has shown mercy to him and that, in spite of all, life will therefore go on. And by revealing his willingness to carry out God’s command to ‘be fruitful and multiply’ (1.28), he is making a statement of faith. ‘The man called his wife’s name ‘Chawwa’ (‘life’ - ch as in loch) because she is to be the mother of all who will live’ (‘chay’). Suddenly tragedy has been tempered by hope. All is not yet lost. Although they have lost everlasting life, they will live on in their children.**

**But the change of name also reflects the change in situation. She has previously been ‘woman’ in relation to ‘man’, the suggestion of an idyllic relationship, now she becomes the ‘life’ bearer who through pain and anguish will produce children. The renaming further stresses the woman’s new relationship to the man, ‘your desire will be to your husband and he will rule over you’. By renaming her the man is exerting his new authority. She is now not just subordinate, but in subjection.**

**3.21 ‘And the Lord God made for Adam and his wife clothing made from skins and covered them.’**

**God now makes clear their new position. They can no longer walk naked before him, for they have made themselves feel vulnerable, inadequate and ashamed. Thus they must be covered to give them a feeling of security and acceptance. The clothes will ever be a reminder of the wonderful relationship with God that they have lost.**

**Yet with some surprise we learn that the clothes were ‘of skins’. Here we have the first hint of actual deaths. No reader could fail to relate the provision of skins with the deaths of animals. And in this story it stands out dramatically, for death has been totally absent. Man receives his first lesson that his disobedience has brought death. Already a substitute is required. Others die that he might be able to face God. Here we have the primitive beginnings of the idea of sacrifice, which will lead on to the final sacrifice.**

**5.22 ‘Then the Lord God said, “Look, the man has become like one of us knowing good and evil, and now, to prevent him from reaching out and taking also of the tree of life so that he might eat and live for ever ----” therefore the Lord God expelled him from the plain of Eden, to serve the ground from which he was taken.’**

Once again, as in 1.26, we have the introduction of 'us' - 'like one of us'. God again reveals Himself as surrounded by His heavenly court. But they remain in the background. The hint is there and nothing else. They have no place in creation and the working out of man's destiny. Yet they are a reminder that 'behind the scenes' there are other beings who have not directly entered into the account. There is too the further hint that among 'us' both good and evil have been experienced - 'like us knowing good and evil'. Again we are made aware of the sinister power behind the snake, an evil heavenly being.

The sentence for man, although reduced, is again emphasised. Death will now become his destiny because the means of 'life unto the ages' will be removed. He will no longer be able to eat of the tree of life, the tree whose fruit has the special quality that it can renew life and prevent old age. By this man is sentenced to a lingering death. The idea of a food of life which can give immortality was widespread in the ancient world, taking many forms, but it demonstrates that the idea was writ large in man's ancient memory.

3.23 'Therefore the Lord God expelled him from the plain of Eden to serve the ground from which he was taken.'

Man not only loses the tree of life, but all the trees in the plain of Eden. He is sent out into a place where he must eat 'herbs of the field', scrabbling among the weeds to obtain his food, and scratching at the surface of the ground in hope that it will increase its production. He had been raised above it by God, but now he returns to it, a reminder of his new situation.

3.24 'So he drove out the man, and at the east of the plain of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.'

The verb is forceful - 'He drove out'. This suggests some powerful catastrophe that made it impossible for man to stay where he was. The mention of the cherubim takes us by surprise, and indeed this is the first time that heavenly beings are suggested as playing any part in God's activity. The fact that they do so is a further indication of the barriers that have grown between man and God. What tragedy. The guardians of God are set to keep out the one who had been set to guard. reaching out' --- and 'he *drove* him out'.

In Psalm 18.10 the idea of the cherub is paralleled with the 'wings of the wind', and in Ezekiel 1.4-5 with a stormy wind, and it may thus be that originally the cherubim were seen as directly connected with powerful, stormy winds. The cherubim and their parallels are regularly seen as the guardians of sacred places, and even, as an escort, of God Himself.

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