

INTRODUCTION TO GENESIS



The book of Genesis narrates two God-willed beginnings for what constitutes the heart of biblical faith. Genesis is an act of *ongoing, daring, faithful imagination*: It is *imagination* because it gathers disparate materials together and shapes them into an utterly new articulation. It is *faithful* because for all of its disparate material it amounts to a witness to YHWH, the God of Israel who is creator of heaven and Earth. It is *daring* because it links the God-given wonder of the world to the God-given chosenness of Israel in a way in which creation and history were never before connected. It is *ongoing* because the book is a continuing dynamic process in which many generations of traditionalists were able to have a participating voice.

The first narration of God-willed beginning is the succinct “history of the world” that is presented in Genesis 1–11. The narrative intends to be neither scientifically nor historically plausible. It is rather an act of artistic construal whereby the origin, nature, and ongoing life of the world is linked to the creator. In order to generate this narrative, the traditionalists of ancient Israel utilized many already extant materials from cultures older than Israel. Israel, however, in its borrowing of such materials shaped, interpreted, and organized them in ways that made them into a peculiarly Israelite narrative that attested the God of Israel.

At the outset, two accounts of creation bear witness to different dimensions of the truth of created reality (1:1–2:4a; 2:4b–25). The presentation of two such narratives that are not reconciled to each other indicates from the outset that Israel’s imaginative material is no single absolute statement; it is rather a playful, elusive, teasing articulation that has given interpreters (Jewish and Christian) ample room for exploration. As the story of the world unfolds in these chapters it is the claim of the text that the life of the world is profoundly alienated from the creator God: alienated by disobedience (3:1–19), murder (4:1–8), violence (6:11–13), and arrogance (11:1–9). While many theological interpretations have flowed from these old stories, the text itself does not voice or vouch for such interpretations, but provides material for the continual probe of the wonder of creation and the human predicament.

The second God-willed beginning is the ancient memory of Israel concerning the divine initiative with Israel’s ancestors, four generations of patriarchs and matriarchs. The materials that constitute Genesis 12–50 are made up of many old tribal memories that have been gathered, interpreted, and organized in a deliberate way over a long period of time. In addition the tradition has created set pieces of theological

affirmation at pivotal points so that the material can serve the faith requirements of Israel. The sum of this material is an account of this chosen people that is destined for a chosen land.

In each successive generation the defining question is whether the present generation will have an heir to continue the family line and to carry the promise of God into the next phase of the life of Israel. That promise from God, first given to Abraham, on the one hand concerns the prosperity and well-being of Israel. On the other hand the promise is that Israel will be a blessing to the other peoples of the world, the ones we have witnessed in Genesis 1–11. The overriding question is whether God is faithful, whether God can keep promises in spite of overwhelming circumstances to the contrary. In each generation the text gives an affirmative answer: Yes, God is faithful to God's promises! An heir is given by the power of God!

In the fourth generation, that of Joseph, the role of God is hidden and not at all as direct as in the preceding generations. This great-grandson becomes an accomplice in the predatory policies of Pharaoh, who subsequently becomes the great nemesis of Israel. Indeed, we may take the narrative of Pharaoh's predation (47:13-26) as the precondition for the book of Exodus and the status of the Hebrews as slaves of Pharaoh.

The book of Genesis is bracketed by God's goodness. In Genesis 1:31 God saw that creation was "very good." In 50:20 Joseph attests that "God intended it for good." The goodness of God persists and prevails in the face of immense impediments. The story is taken by both Jews and Christians as a witness to the truth of God in the life of the world and with God's people.

GENESIS

Six Days of Creation and the Sabbath

1 In the beginning when God created^a the heavens and the earth, ²the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God^b swept over the face of the waters. ³Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. ⁴And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. ⁵God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

⁶And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” ⁷So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so. ⁸God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

⁹And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. ¹⁰God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good. ¹¹Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. ¹²The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and

trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. ¹³And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

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

²⁰And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” ²¹So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. ²²God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.”

a Or when God began to create or In the beginning God created *b* Or while the spirit of God or while a mighty wind

1:1–2:4a. The forming and filling of creation. **1:1-2** The opening verse may be translated as an independent introductory clause (e.g., “In the beginning God created”) or as a dependent temporal statement (e.g., “When God began to create . . .”). *Created* (v. 1, Heb *bereshit*) is used only of God’s creating. *Formless void* (*tohu wa bohu*) and *deep* (*tehom*) in v. 2 suggest we are not dealing with creatio ex nihilo but rather creation out of a preexistent watery chaos. *Tehom* may be related to Tiamat, the Babylonian goddess associated with primeval chaos waters and defeated by the hero Marduk in the mythic *Enuma Elish*, which likely inspired this first creation story. The theme of God creating through combat with watery chaos is evident in Ps 74. **3-13** The first three days of creation establish the spaces for creation (day/night, sky, land/sea), which the subsequent three days (vv. 14-31) fill with actors (lights, sea creatures/birds, animals/humanity). This symmetry and parallelism, coupled with the repetition of *evening and . . . morning* as marking a new day, are hallmarks of the first creation account. *Dome* (vv. 6-8) separates the preexistent waters of chaos into oceans on earth and in the heavens. The recurring threat of this watery chaos returning is evident in the Noah story (see Gen 7:11). **14-25** Days 4–6 of creation parallel days 1–3. While it is God who creates the *two great lights* (v. 16), he invites that which has already been created to join in the creative process on days 5 and 6: *let the waters bring forth* (v. 20) and *let the earth bring forth* (v. 24).

²³ And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

²⁴ And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. ²⁵ God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

²⁶ Then God said, “Let us make humankind^a in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth,^b and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”

²⁷ So God created humankind^a in his image, in the image of God he created them;^c male and female he created them.

²⁸ God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

²⁹ God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰ And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so. ³¹ God

saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. ² And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. ³ So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation.

⁴ These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

Another Account of the Creation

In the day that the LORD^d God made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— ⁷ then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground,^e and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being. ⁸ And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had

a Heb *adam* *b* Syr: Heb *and over all the earth* *c* Heb *him* *d* Heb *YHWH*, as in other places where “LORD” is spelled with capital letters (see also Ex 3.14–15 with notes). *e* Or *formed a man* (Heb *adam*) *of dust from the ground* (Heb *adamah*)

26-31 The creation of humanity. The plural *Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness* (v. 26) likely references God speaking in the presence of other divine beings in the heavenly court (see 1 Kgs 22:19; Job 1:6; also Gen 3:22). *Image and likeness* (v. 26) probably hearken to ancient Near Eastern tradition in which the king represents the embodiment of god on earth, thus legitimating the king’s rule. God here democratizes this idea, allowing for all humanity to stand as a manifestation of God’s rule over creation. **2:1-4a** Day 7 and divine rest complete the work of creation. *Rested* (v. 3, Heb *shabbat*) consecrates this day and establishes a seven-day structure to the created order. Verse 4a functions as a hinge connecting two creation stories, completing Gen 1 and introducing Gen 2:4b. *These are the generations* (Heb *elleh toledot*) is the first of a ten-part structure of the entire Genesis narrative that uses this Hebrew formula to frame the text in genealogical clusters focused on a particular figure (or, in this case, the heavens and Earth) and their extended family. There are five such division markers in the primeval history (2:4a, heaven and Earth; 5:1, Adam; 6:9, Noah; 10:1, Noah’s three sons; 11:10, Shem) and five in the ancestral narratives (11:27, Terah; 25:12, Ishmael; 25:19, Isaac; 36:1, Esau/Edom; 37:2, Jacob).

2:4b-3:24. The creation and fall of humanity. 2:4b-25. Creation in the garden. This is a non-Priestly story of creation, traditionally ascribed to the J/Yahwistic tradition, differing significantly from 1:1-2:4a in ordering and literary style. 7 A Hebrew wordplay between *adam* (“man”) and *adamah* (“ground”) highlights the earthy nature of this creation story. Whereas in Gen 1:1-2:4a God created by commanding order out of chaos, here God forms the first human and brings it to life with the divine breath. 9 *The tree of the knowledge of good and evil* is

formed. ⁹Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁰A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. ¹¹The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; ¹²and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone are there. ¹³The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. ¹⁴The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

¹⁵The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶And the LORD God commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

¹⁸Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.” ¹⁹So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal 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. ²⁰The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man^a there was not found a helper as his partner. ²¹So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. ²²And the

rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. ²³Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;

this one shall be called Woman,^b

for out of Man^c this one was taken.”

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

The First Sin and Its Punishment

3 Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’” ²The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God,^d knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

a Or for Adam b Heb ishshah c Heb ish d Or gods

a merism highlighting the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge. **18-20** *It is not good that the man should be alone* contrasts with Gen 1:1-2:4a and the repeated refrain of creation's goodness. Also note that here animals are created after, not before, the first humans (cf. 1:24-25). Here the man participates in creation by naming each animal in the quest to find a suitable helper. **23-25** Another Hebrew wordplay (cf. 2:7) highlights the relatedness of *Man* (Heb *ish*) and *Woman* (Heb *ishah*). **3:1-25. Humanity's rise and fall.** Christianity traditionally regards this story as the advent of original sin (see Rom 5:12-21), despite the absence of the word “sin.” While eating the forbidden fruit certainly has disastrous consequences, it also results in the maturation of humanity from an uncivilized to a civilized state. **1-2** *The serpent* is not presented as inherently evil or threatening but simply as a part of God's creation. *More crafty* denotes simply the serpent's association with wisdom (see Matt 10:16). It is not until the Second Temple period when the serpent here comes to be associated with the devil (see Wis 2:24). **4-7** The serpent calls into question the actual consequences of eating the fruit and is, perhaps expectedly, proven right. What the serpent says will happen happens, and the death of which God warned does not come to pass (see 3:22-24).

GENESIS 4

⁸They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” ¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” ¹³Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.” ¹⁴The LORD God said to the serpent,

“Because you have done this,
cursed are you among all animals
and among all wild creatures;
upon your belly you shall go,
and dust you shall eat
all the days of your life.

¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring and hers;
he will strike your head,
and you will strike his heel.”

¹⁶To the woman he said,
“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing;
in pain you shall bring forth children,
yet your desire shall be for your husband,
and he shall rule over you.”

¹⁷And to the man^a he said,
“Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
and have eaten of the tree

about which I commanded you,
‘You shall not eat of it,’
cursed is the ground because of you;
in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;

¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
and you shall eat the plants of the field.

¹⁹ By the sweat of your face
you shall eat bread
until you return to the ground,
for out of it you were taken;
you are dust,
and to dust you shall return.”

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

²²Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— ²³therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

Cain Murders Abel

4 Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced^d a man with the help of the LORD.” ²Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel

a Or to Adam *b* In Heb *Eve* resembles the word for living *c* Or for Adam *d* The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Cain*

8-19 Equipped with their newfound knowledge, the first humans now experience fear, vulnerability, and a breakdown in relationships. It is common in the history of tradition to blame the woman (e.g., Sir 25:24; 1 Tim 2:14), though note that punishment befalls both animal and human realms. The punishments here are likely etiologies explaining why serpents slither on their stomachs, women endure pain in childbirth, and men toil in working the ground. **20-21** *Eve* means “life” in Hebrew, so the first couple, Adam and Eve, represent “humanity” and “life.” God, noting their vulnerability, clothes them. **22-24** *Like one of us* (v. 22) references God speaking in the heavenly court (see 1:26). Here God confirms implicitly that the words spoken by the serpent in 3:4-5 were indeed true.

4:1-26. Abel, Cain, and Cain’s descendants. 1-16 The first sin occurs as brother kills brother over the inscrutability of God’s choice. **1-2** *Cain* comes from the Hebrew word “create” (*qanah*), while *Abel* is the same word translated as “vanity” in Ecclesiastes (*hevel*). As is common in Genesis, the brothers are very different from one another, representing two innovations in a post-Eden society: farming and shepherding.

was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.³ In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground,⁴ and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering,⁵ but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.⁶ The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen?⁷ If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

⁸ Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.”^a And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.⁹ Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?”¹⁰ And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground!¹¹ And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand.¹² When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”¹³ Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear!¹⁴ Today you have driven me away from the soil, and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.”¹⁵ Then the LORD said to him, “Not so!^b Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.¹⁶ Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod,^c east of Eden.

Beginnings of Civilization

¹⁷ Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.¹⁸ To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech.¹⁹ Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.²⁰ Adah bore Jabal; he was the ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock.²¹ His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe.²² Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

²³ Lamech said to his wives:

“Adah and Zillah, hear my voice;
you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say:
I have killed a man for wounding me,
a young man for striking me.

²⁴ If Cain is avenged sevenfold,
truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

²⁵ Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, “God has appointed^d for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.”²⁶ To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD.

Adam’s Descendants to Noah and His Sons

5 This is the list of the descendants of Adam. When God created humankind,^e he made them^f in the likeness of God.² Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and

a Sam Gk Syr Compare Vg: MT lacks *Let us go out to the field* *b* Gk Syr Vg: Heb *Therefore* *c* That is *Wandering* *d* The verb in Heb resembles the word for *Seth* *e* Heb *adam* *f* Heb *him*

3-5 The text does not make clear why God favors Abel’s offering and not Cain’s. Scholars have suggested it may be because of God’s preference for a pastoral lifestyle (David was a shepherd), or the first peek at what will become a recurring theme in Genesis: divine preference for the younger sibling. 6-7 This is the first occurrence of the word *sin* in the Bible (v. 7). God attempts to counsel a jealous Cain, suggesting sin is something one can master. 10-16 Cain receives a word of judgment in relation to the ground, as did his father, Adam (cf. 3:17b-19). Both are also exiled. Cain, fearing for his life as a fugitive, receives a protective *mark* (v. 15), perhaps a tattoo. 17-26 Cain’s genealogy and the continued innovation in culture are evident in the careers of Lamech’s sons: shepherd, musician, and smith. 25-26 The advent of referring to God with the divine name, YHWH, is attributed to the period of Seth’s son, Enosh, whereas Exod 6:2-6 suggests God first reveals the name to Moses.

5:1-32. The generations from Adam to Noah. This list of the descendants of Adam actualizes the divine blessing in 1:28 to be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. The extraordinary ages of the individuals in this

named them “Humankind”^a when they were created.

³ When Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he became the father of a son in his likeness, according to his image, and named him Seth. ⁴ The days of Adam after he became the father of Seth were eight hundred years; and he had other sons and daughters. ⁵ Thus all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred thirty years; and he died.

⁶ When Seth had lived one hundred five years, he became the father of Enosh. ⁷ Seth lived after the birth of Enosh eight hundred seven years, and had other sons and daughters. ⁸ Thus all the days of Seth were nine hundred twelve years; and he died.

⁹ When Enosh had lived ninety years, he became the father of Kenan. ¹⁰ Enosh lived after the birth of Kenan eight hundred fifteen years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹¹ Thus all the days of Enosh were nine hundred five years; and he died.

¹² When Kenan had lived seventy years, he became the father of Mahalalel. ¹³ Kenan lived after the birth of Mahalalel eight hundred and forty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁴ Thus all the days of Kenan were nine hundred and ten years; and he died.

¹⁵ When Mahalalel had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Jared. ¹⁶ Mahalalel lived after the birth of Jared eight hundred thirty years, and had other sons and daughters. ¹⁷ Thus all the days of Mahalalel were eight hundred ninety-five years; and he died.

¹⁸ When Jared had lived one hundred sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch. ¹⁹ Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁰ Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.

²¹ When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. ²² Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. ²³ Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. ²⁴ Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

²⁵ When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech. ²⁶ Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. ²⁷ Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty-nine years; and he died.

²⁸ When Lamech had lived one hundred eighty-two years, he became the father of a son; ²⁹ he named him Noah, saying, “Out of the ground that the LORD has cursed this one shall bring us relief from our work and from the toil of our hands.” ³⁰ Lamech lived after the birth of Noah five hundred ninety-five years, and had other sons and daughters. ³¹ Thus all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy-seven years; and he died.

³² After Noah was five hundred years old, Noah became the father of Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The Wickedness of Humankind

6 When people began to multiply on the face of the ground, and daughters were born to them, ² the sons of God saw that they were fair; and they took wives for themselves of all that they chose. ³ Then the LORD said, “My spirit shall not abide^b in mortals forever, for they are flesh; their days shall be one hundred twenty years.” ⁴ The Nephilim were on

a Heb *adam* *b* Meaning of Heb uncertain

genealogy are not meant to be taken literally but rather parallel other ancient lists (for example, the Sumerian King List) with incredibly long pre-flood life spans. Verse 1 begins the second *toledot* structure in Genesis focused on Adam and his descendants (see comment on 2:4a).

6:1-4. The sons of God and the daughters of humans. The divine/human boundary God sought to preserve in 3:22 is now broken when the *sons of God* commingle with the beautiful *daughters of humans*. A much more expansive tradition resides behind this brief text. Its strategic placement between the Adam genealogy and the flood narrative frames it as the reason for the flood. **2** *Sons of God* are angels in the LXX and elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible. **4** It is unclear whether the *Nephilim* are the *sons of God*, the result of their union with the *daughters of humans*, or (most likely) a physically imposing pre-Israelite people in Palestine (cf. Num 13:33; Deut 2:10-11). *Nephilim* literally means “fallen ones” in Hebrew.

the earth in those days—and also afterward—when the sons of God went in to the daughters of humans, who bore children to them. These were the heroes that were of old, warriors of renown.

⁵The LORD saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually. ⁶And the LORD was sorry that he had made humankind on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. ⁷So the LORD said, “I will blot out from the earth the human beings I have created—people together with animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor in the sight of the LORD.

Noah Pleases God

⁹These are the descendants of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation; Noah walked with God. ¹⁰And Noah had three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

¹¹Now the earth was corrupt in God’s sight, and the earth was filled with violence. ¹²And God saw that the earth was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted its ways upon the earth. ¹³And God said to Noah, “I have determined to make an end of all flesh, for the earth is filled with violence because of them; now I am going to destroy them along with the earth. ¹⁴Make yourself an ark of cypress^a wood; make rooms in the ark, and cover it inside and out with pitch. ¹⁵This is how you are to make it: the length of the ark three hundred cubits, its width fifty cubits, and its height thirty cubits. ¹⁶Make a roof^b for the ark, and finish it to a cubit above; and put the door of the ark in its side; make it with

lower, second, and third decks. ¹⁷For my part, I am going to bring a flood of waters on the earth, to destroy from under heaven all flesh in which is the breath of life; everything that is on the earth shall die. ¹⁸But I will establish my covenant with you; and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. ¹⁹And of every living thing, of all flesh, you shall bring two of every kind into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. ²⁰Of the birds according to their kinds, and of the animals according to their kinds, of every creeping thing of the ground according to its kind, two of every kind shall come in to you, to keep them alive. ²¹Also take with you every kind of food that is eaten, and store it up; and it shall serve as food for you and for them.” ²²Noah did this; he did all that God commanded him.

The Great Flood

7 Then the LORD said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and all your household, for I have seen that you alone are righteous before me in this generation. ²Take with you seven pairs of all clean animals, the male and its mate; and a pair of the animals that are not clean, the male and its mate; ³and seven pairs of the birds of the air also, male and female, to keep their kind alive on the face of all the earth. ⁴For in seven days I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights; and every living thing that I have made I will blot out from the face of the ground.” ⁵And Noah did all that the LORD had commanded him.

⁶Noah was six hundred years old when the

a Meaning of Heb uncertain *b* Or window

6:5–8:22. The great flood. Creation imagery abounds in this narrative, which describes God’s un-creation and re-creation of the world. The text itself is composite, a combination of two separate flood accounts (a mixture often attributed to Priestly traditions tied to Gen 1:1–2:4a and 5:1–32, and Yahwistic traditions in 2:4b–4:26), woven together to comprise a single narrative. **6:5–8** Unlike other ancient Near Eastern flood accounts, which place blame for the deluge on the disruption caused by a noisy and overpopulated world, the Genesis account focuses on the human proclivity toward wickedness. This wickedness is not matched, however, by divine anger but by divine sorrow (v. 7), betraying that God experiences a range of emotions. **9** *These are the descendants* marks the third occurrence of the *toledot* organizing formula in Genesis (see comment on 2:4a). Jacob and Job are the only other individuals in the Bible described as *blameless* (Heb *tam*). See Gen 25:27 and Job 1:1, 8; 2:3. **7:1–10** The interweaving of two flood stories is evident here in the command to take seven pairs of clean animals and one pair of unclean (v. 2) in the Priestly tradition and two pairs, male and female, of each animal in the Yahwistic tradition (vv. 8–9).

flood of waters came on the earth. ⁷ And Noah with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives went into the ark to escape the waters of the flood. ⁸ Of clean animals, and of animals that are not clean, and of birds, and of everything that creeps on the ground, ⁹ two and two, male and female, went into the ark with Noah, as God had commanded Noah. ¹⁰ And after seven days the waters of the flood came on the earth.

¹¹ In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. ¹² The rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. ¹³ On the very same day Noah with his sons, Shem and Ham and Japheth, and Noah's wife and the three wives of his sons entered the ark, ¹⁴ they and every wild animal of every kind, and all domestic animals of every kind, and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth, and every bird of every kind—every bird, every winged creature. ¹⁵ They went into the ark with Noah, two and two of all flesh in which there was the breath of life. ¹⁶ And those that entered, male and female of all flesh, went in as God had commanded him; and the LORD shut him in.

¹⁷ The flood continued forty days on the earth; and the waters increased, and bore up the ark, and it rose high above the earth. ¹⁸ The waters swelled and increased greatly on the earth; and the ark floated on the face of the waters. ¹⁹ The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; ²⁰ the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. ²¹ And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings; ²² everything on dry land in whose nostrils was the breath of life died. ²³ He blotted out every living thing that was on the face of the ground,

human beings and animals and creeping things and birds of the air; they were blotted out from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those that were with him in the ark. ²⁴ And the waters swelled on the earth for one hundred fifty days.

The Flood Subsides

8 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and all the domestic animals that were with him in the ark. And God made a wind blow over the earth, and the waters subsided; ² the fountains of the deep and the windows of the heavens were closed, the rain from the heavens was restrained, ³ and the waters gradually receded from the earth. At the end of one hundred fifty days the waters had abated; ⁴ and in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, the ark came to rest on the mountains of Ararat. ⁵ The waters continued to abate until the tenth month; in the tenth month, on the first day of the month, the tops of the mountains appeared.

⁶ At the end of forty days Noah opened the window of the ark that he had made ⁷ and sent out the raven; and it went to and fro until the waters were dried up from the earth. ⁸ Then he sent out the dove from him, to see if the waters had subsided from the face of the ground; ⁹ but the dove found no place to set its foot, and it returned to him to the ark, for the waters were still on the face of the whole earth. So he put out his hand and took it and brought it into the ark with him. ¹⁰ He waited another seven days, and again he sent out the dove from the ark; ¹¹ and the dove came back to him in the evening, and there in its beak was a freshly plucked olive leaf; so Noah knew that the waters had subsided from the earth. ¹² Then he waited another seven days, and sent out the dove; and it did not return to him any more.

¹³ In the six hundred first year, in the first month, on the first day of the month, the waters

11 *The fountains of the great deep and windows of the heavens* hearken to the separation of the waters in 1:6-8. The deluge is portrayed as an act of un-creation, returning the world to its original primordial chaos. **17-24** Again evidencing the composite nature of the flood narrative, the flood is said to have lasted *forty days* (v. 17) and *one hundred fifty days* (v. 24). **8:1-3** The wind blowing over the waters and the closing of the fountains of the deep and windows of heaven begin the work of re-creation by recalling the second day of creation (1:6-8). **4-12** There are a number of similarities to the flood account from the Gilgamesh Epic. In both Gilgamesh and the biblical account, the ark comes to rest on a mountain as the flood waters abate, and in both texts various birds are sent out to confirm dry land.

were dried up from the earth; and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and saw that the face of the ground was drying.¹⁴ In the second month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, the earth was dry.¹⁵ Then God said to Noah,¹⁶ “Go out of the ark, you and your wife, and your sons and your sons’ wives with you.¹⁷ Bring out with you every living thing that is with you of all flesh—birds and animals and every creeping thing that creeps on the earth—so that they may abound on the earth, and be fruitful and multiply on the earth.”¹⁸ So Noah went out with his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives.¹⁹ And every animal, every creeping thing, and every bird, everything that moves on the earth, went out of the ark by families.

God’s Promise to Noah

²⁰Then Noah built an altar to the LORD, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.²¹ And when the LORD smelled the pleasing odor, the LORD said in his heart, “I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.²² As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night, shall not cease.”

The Covenant with Noah

9 God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth.² The fear and dread of you shall rest on every animal of the earth, and on every bird of the air, on everything that creeps on

the ground, and on all the fish of the sea; into your hand they are delivered.³ Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; and just as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.⁴ Only, you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.⁵ For your own lifeblood I will surely require a reckoning: from every animal I will require it and from human beings, each one for the blood of another, I will require a reckoning for human life.

⁶ Whoever sheds the blood of a human, by a human shall that person’s blood be shed; for in his own image God made humankind.

⁷ And you, be fruitful and multiply, abound on the earth and multiply in it.”

⁸ Then God said to Noah and to his sons with him,⁹ “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you and your descendants after you,¹⁰ and with every living creature that is with you, the birds, the domestic animals, and every animal of the earth with you, as many as came out of the ark.^a ¹¹ I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.”

¹² God said, “This is the sign of the covenant that I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations:¹³ I have set my bow in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.¹⁴ When I bring clouds over the earth and the bow is seen in the clouds,¹⁵ I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all

a Gk: Heb adds every animal of the earth

¹⁷ Continuing the theme of re-creation and resonances with Gen 1, the first postdeluge command God offers is *be fruitful and multiply on the earth*, recalling the original command to the first couple (1:28; see also 9:1).

9:1-19. God’s covenant with all creation. 1-7 There are a number of resonances with the Priestly creation account from Gen 1:1-2:4a: the blessing to be fruitful and multiply (9:1, 7; cf. 1:28); a revision of the original intention toward vegetarianism (9:3; cf. 1:29-30); human dominion and stewardship over creation (9:2; cf. 1:28); and reaffirmation of creation in the image of God (9:6; cf. 1:26-27). This overlap continues the theme of re-creation after the flood. **8-17 A covenant** (v. 9) is an agreement between two parties, typically with one party holding superior status to the other, in which obligations exist on both sides. This covenant is the first explicit covenant in the Bible and is made not only with Noah and his family but with all creation, including all living creatures (vv. 9-12) and the earth (v. 13). The *bow* (v. 13) is often understood to be a rainbow, but Ps 7:12-13 and Hab 3:9-11 describe the bow as one of God’s weapons. God is thus hanging up his weapon as a symbol and reminder that he will never again flood the earth.

flesh; and the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh. ¹⁶When the bow is in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth.” ¹⁷God said to Noah, “This is the sign of the covenant that I have established between me and all flesh that is on the earth.”

Noah and His Sons

¹⁸The sons of Noah who went out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. Ham was the father of Canaan. ¹⁹These three were the sons of Noah; and from these the whole earth was peopled.

²⁰Noah, a man of the soil, was the first to plant a vineyard. ²¹He drank some of the wine and became drunk, and he lay uncovered in his tent. ²²And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brothers outside. ²³Then Shem and Japheth took a garment, laid it on both their shoulders, and walked backward and covered the nakedness of their father; their faces were turned away, and they did not see their father’s nakedness. ²⁴When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, ²⁵he said,

“Cursed be Canaan;
lowest of slaves shall he be to his
brothers.”

²⁶He also said,

“Blessed by the LORD my God be Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.

²⁷May God make space for^a Japheth,
and let him live in the tents of Shem;
and let Canaan be his slave.”

²⁸After the flood Noah lived three hundred fifty years. ²⁹All the days of Noah were nine hundred fifty years; and he died.

Nations Descended from Noah

10 These are the descendants of Noah’s sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth; children were born to them after the flood.

²The descendants of Japheth: Gomer, Magog, Madai, Javan, Tubal, Meshech, and Tiras. ³The descendants of Gomer: Ashkenaz, Riphath, and Togarmah. ⁴The descendants of Javan: Elishah, Tarshish, Kittim, and Rodanim.^b ⁵From these the coastland peoples spread. These are the descendants of Japheth^c in their lands, with their own language, by their families, in their nations.

⁶The descendants of Ham: Cush, Egypt, Put, and Canaan. ⁷The descendants of Cush: Seba, Havilah, Sabtah, Raamah, and Sabteca. The descendants of Raamah: Sheba and Dedan. ⁸Cush became the father of Nimrod; he was the first on earth to become a mighty warrior. ⁹He was a mighty hunter before the LORD; therefore it is said, “Like Nimrod a mighty hunter before the LORD.” ¹⁰The beginning of his kingdom was Babel, Erech, and Accad, all of them in the land of Shinar. ¹¹From that land he went into Assyria, and built Nineveh, Rehobothir, Calah, and ¹²Resen between Nineveh and Calah; that is the great city. ¹³Egypt became the father of Ludim, Anamim, Lehabim, Naphtuhim, ¹⁴Pathrusim, Casluhim, and Caphtorim, from which the Philistines come.^d

¹⁵Canaan became the father of Sidon his first-born, and Heth, ¹⁶and the Jebusites, the Amorites, the Girgashites, ¹⁷the Hivites, the Arkites, the Sinites, ¹⁸the Arvadites, the Zemarites, and

a Heb *yaphth*, a play on *Japheth* *b* Heb Mss Sam Gk See 1 Chr 1:7: MT *Dodanim* *c* Compare verses 20, 31. Heb lacks *These are the descendants of Japheth* *d* Cn: Heb *Casluhim, from which the Philistines come, and Caphtorim*

9:22-27. The cursing of Ham. **22-23** Some commentators suggest Ham had intercourse with his drunk, naked father, but it appears more likely, given that his brothers walk backward and seek to cover their father’s nakedness, that the offense was not turning away. The offense, then, is a violation of a son’s duty to protect his father’s honor both by looking upon his nakedness and sharing this with his two brothers. **24-27** It is unclear why Canaan, and not Ham, is the object of Noah’s curse, though it is plausible that an original curse on Ham has been emended to support the eventual Israelite conquest of Canaan. Noah’s curse has also been used to legitimate the enslavement of black bodies in more recent centuries, given the interpretation of Ham and his descendants’ apparent dark complexion as the motivation for his receiving the curse.

10:1-32. The table of the nations. These verses identify the fulfillment of the *be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth* command (9:1, 7) given after the flood. The entire world is populated by Noah’s three sons, giving rise to a diversity of peoples and geographical locales. *These are the descendants* (v. 1) is the fourth *toledot* formula in Genesis, introducing brief stories from the time of Noah’s three sons (see comment on 2:4a).