

CREATED AS MALE AND FEMALE: 'ADAM, GENDER, AND THE LEGACY OF DISOBEDIENCE

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Given its significance in later biblical and theological reflection, it may come as a surprise that no direct quotations or references to Genesis 2-3 appear within the Old Testament itself. Similarly, despite the common description of this passage as the “fall” and the beginning of “original sin” within the Christian tradition, none of the many words for “sin” or “iniquity” appear either.¹ Nonetheless, early Judaism and along with it the New Testament already shows great interest in this passage, and its significance has continued over time.

Indeed, Christian theology often describes the “grand narrative” of the Bible as creation, fall, redemption, and consummation. In this theological shorthand, Genesis 1-3 figures more prominently than any other part of the Old Testament; taken to the extreme, such a perspective leaps from the account of creation and the Garden of Eden past the rest of the Old Testament to the coming of the Messiah in the Gospels. In terms of understanding humanity and its role—biblical anthropology—the “fall” in Genesis identifies the problem which messianic redemption resolves. “Original sin” often proves central in this depiction, and leads some to an extremely negative view of humans as utterly depraved. Further, the “order of creation” has provided a significant basis for depicting men’s authority over women as divinely ordained. However, while the Genesis account of creation can be

¹ Similarly, despite a later equation of the two, nowhere does the passage itself explicitly identify the serpent as Satan or the devil.

intriguing, complex, and ambiguous, it may in fact challenge both of these common claims.

To consider what the beginning of Genesis contributes to our understanding of biblical anthropology we will concentrate on four key moments: first, the creation of *'adam* as male and female (Gen. 1); second, the portrayal of *'adam* and his wife (Gen. 2); third, the consequences of disobedience for male and female (Gen. 3); and fourth, the depiction of humanity after Eden (Gen. 5:1-3). Finally, we will briefly consider several broader implications of this study for our understanding of the Bible, interpretation, and the role of the believing community.

As we shall see, humanity continues to be formed “in the image of God” after Eden, but challenges remain in dealing with the consequences of disobedience. Rather than seeing men “ruling over women” as divinely ordained or sanctioned, *'adam* as both male and female continues to occupy a unique and exalted status in creation. Thus, a close reading of Genesis 1-5 suggests this tendency to dominate is one that Christians should seek to limit and even overcome.

Creation of *'adam* as Male and Female (Genesis 1)

The Bible begins with the creative act of God: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In patterned, orderly, poetic language, Genesis 1 describes how God calls the world into being. Time after time, the passage states: “And God said, ‘Let there be . . .’” and there was: light and darkness; sea and sky; land and vegetation. Once prepared, each arena is then populated, with the sun and moon in the sky, fish in the sea, birds in the air, and beasts in the field.² And all of this is recounted in wonderful rhythm: “and God saw, and it was good. And there was evening and there was morning . . .”

The description builds until, at the end of the sixth day, God says:

Let us make *'adam* in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the

² George W. Coats, *Genesis: With an Introduction to Narrative*, *The Forms of the Old Testament Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1983), 1:43–45.

birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” (Gen. 1:26-28)³

The last element of creation, this new humanity, is both similar to and distinct from other creatures. Like the others, humanity is also created as a living being (*nephesh hayah*) and commanded to “be fruitful and multiply.”⁴ Unlike its predecessors, the *'adam* is granted both a unique role and attribute: no other creature is given “dominion” over other living things and, most importantly, nothing else is described as being created “in the image and likeness” of God.

For our purposes, verse 27 proves to be of particular interest:

So God created *'adam* in his image, in the image of God he created it (him); *male and female he created them*. (Gen. 1:27, emphasis mine)

The term “create” appears three times in this key verse, and in each case relates to *'adam*. While the first two lines reflect a virtual mirror image of one another, the third expands the singular “it” to the plural “them.” In other words, the *'adam* that God creates is none other than the male and female “them.”⁵

There are two observations to be made at this point. First, although traditionally translated as “God created man . . .” (KJV), *'adam* here appears in a generic sense that includes both male and female.⁶ Second,

³ Unless stated otherwise, biblical quotations will be from the NRSV.

⁴ Although complicated because of its frequent translation as “soul” in other contexts, within the Old Testament, *nephesh* does not reflect a body/soul dualism.

⁵ Although usually rendered with “his/him,” it is worth noting that there are no gender-neutral verb forms or pronouns in biblical Hebrew. Since these pronouns refer to *'adam* which is then clarified as male and female, it may be better to think of this singular pronoun as the neuter “it.”

⁶ Translations differ at this point, with the traditional “man” (KJV, NKJV, JPS, NIV) being changed to “human beings” (TNIV) and “humankind” (NRSV) in more recent versions. To underscore the generic usage here I have left the term *'adam* untranslated. How this should be understood has been debated within the tradition, from some early proponents who saw *'adam* as an

humanity forms the climax of creation, as both were created in the divine image and given dominion over the other creatures. In addition, in Genesis 1 there is no internal hierarchy between the sexes since, as part of *'adam*, *both* male and female are created in God's image and *both* are given dominion. Even so, the distinction between creator and creatures remains and is linguistically underscored; while people can form, shape, or make in the Old Testament, only God "creates."⁷

Although beyond the scope of this paper, we increasingly recognize the complicity and negative consequences of an unfettered "domination" view of creation. As Wendell Berry states: "The certified Christian seems just as likely as anyone else to join the military-industrial conspiracy to murder Creation."⁸ Thus, in addition to continued discernment regarding the nature of humans as created male and female in God's image, it is imperative to search for alternative ways of interpreting humanity's role both as part of and as uniquely capable of exercising "dominion" over—and in doing so even destroying—creation.

In any case, we have seen that humanity—male and female—is both part of creation and given "dominion" over other creatures. Although similar in the latter respect, we will see that the view of *'adam* shifts as we move into the Garden of Eden.

***'adam* and his Wife (Genesis 2)**

In Genesis 2 the scene shifts to the "genealogy of the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 2:4). Rather than speaking things into being, here the

androgynous being that was both male and female to Karl Barth's insistence that the divine image necessarily requires male and female together. The latter view has been particularly significant, since Barth argues from this basis against same-gender organizations; see Karl Barth, "The Doctrine of Creation," in *Church Dogmatics III*. 4, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 2010), 163–66.

⁷ The Qal verb form of the term "create" (*bara'*), used throughout Gen. 1, only appears with God as its subject in the Old Testament. Other forms of the term meaning to "cut," "shape," or even "separate" can be used for people as well.

⁸ Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," in *Sex, Economy, Freedom & Community: Eight Essays* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 94.

LORD God forms, shapes, plants, and waters.⁹ In contrast to the creation of *'adam* as male and female through the spoken word, here *'adam* is undoubtedly male and formed first among the creatures, while the woman appears at the end of the creation account. As Phyllis Tribble states, traditionally interpreters have said this account “proclaims male superiority and female inferiority as the will of God. It portrays woman as ‘temptress’ and troublemaker who is dependent upon and dominated by her husband.”¹⁰ With this issue in the background, we will concentrate on two pertinent aspects of this chapter: the process of naming and the search for a “helper.” In doing so we will discover that the narrative proves more ambiguous on this issue than is often recognized, and actually raises serious questions about and even moves against a reading of male priority.

In Genesis 2 the LORD God forms *'adam* from the dust of the ground (*'adamah*) (v. 7), but it is only once God breathes into this “earth creature”¹¹ that he becomes a “living being.” Not only the name but also the plight and purpose of the earthling is linked to the ground: “The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it” (v. 15).¹² Since the term translated as “till” (*'abod*) also means to “work” or “serve” (even “worship”), one could say that the *'adam*’s purpose is to serve rather than to dominate the land.

God then plants Eden, places the man in it, and commands him not to eat from the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Immediately afterwards, the LORD God says: “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner” (v. 19). Using exactly the same language as with the man, God then “forms” animals and birds

⁹ Although the divine is referred to as LORD God throughout Genesis 2-3 I will use God and LORD God interchangeably for stylistic reasons.

¹⁰ Tribble has provided a classic critique that challenges this view through a close reading of Gen. 2-3. See Phyllis Tribble, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” in *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 72–143. This quotation appears in Tribble, “A Love Story Gone Awry,” 72–73.

¹¹ A phrase used by Phyllis Tribble in “A Love Story Gone Awry.”

¹² This verse reconfirms the purpose stated for the man even before he was formed: “there was no one (no *'adam*) to till the ground” (v. 5).

“from the ground” and brings them before the *'adam*. Where God breathed into him, here the divine allows the man to name the rest of the creatures, an element that is explicitly underscored twice (v. 19, 20). Where each of these creatures are also recognized as a “living being,” the role of *'adam* in naming stands in sharp contrast to the depiction of his own creation. While naming also represents a form of authority over other creatures, in contrast to Genesis 1 this role is given to an unambiguously male *'adam* in chapter 2. Nonetheless, “there was not found a helper as his partner” (v. 20).

It is at this point that God “constructs” the woman from the *'adam*'s side and, like the creatures before, brings her to the man.¹³ The man's response bears repeating:

This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; *this* shall be called woman (*'ishah*), for from man (*'ish*) this was taken. (Gen. 2:23, emphasis mine)¹⁴

Although not readily apparent in translation, the term “this” appears three times without a single use of “she” (or it). The grammar effectively underscores the novelty of this new creature by giving the impression that the man does not know what to make of her. Despite a clear parallel with how the other creatures are brought before the man, here the *'adam* does not “name” the woman (the Hebrew term for “name,” *shem*, does not appear) but rather states what she “will be

¹³ The term here is quite different from that used for the man or the other creatures, and is the only occurrence in the creation account in Genesis; whereas “form” is the verb used for a potter, “build” is that employed to construct houses. The term “side” or “rib,” when used with reference to construction, can also be translated as “beam” or “plank.” Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 23.

¹⁴ I have provided a literalistic translation of this verse to emphasize the threefold occurrence of “this.” Though awkward to maintain in translation, the term appears as the first and last word of the statement, as well as in the precise middle, at the beginning of the second line.

called.” Where “naming” suggests authority over, explicit identification of this element is conspicuously absent here.¹⁵

In some interpretations, the depiction of the woman as the man’s “helper” has been used to support male authority over women. However, while the term “helper” in English suggests a subordinate or secondary role, the term *‘ezer* in the Old Testament does not.¹⁶ For instance, this term can refer to kings and military allies:

The Egyptians are human, and not God (or gods); their horses are flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD stretches out his hand, the *helper* will stumble, and the one *helped* will fall, and they will all perish together” (Is. 31:3).

In this case it is clear that the “helper” is actually the stronger party (Egypt), to whom the weaker party (Israel) goes for support. Likewise, the term is used frequently to refer to God:

Hear, O LORD, and be gracious to me! O LORD, be my *helper*!
(Ps. 30:10).

Thus, the term *‘ezer* does not imply a subordinate or secondary role but rather quite the opposite. Though sometimes used to support a view of male authority (or even superiority), the term itself does not fit such a portrayal.¹⁷

As we have seen, the account of creation in Genesis proves more ambiguous regarding the relationship between the sexes than is sometimes assumed. In Genesis 1 God creates humanity together on the

¹⁵ Contra Wenham, who sees this as “a typical example of Hebrew naming.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Word Biblical Commentary, vol. 1 (Milton Keynes, UK: Word Publishing, 1991), 70. However, the term “name,” explicitly underscored twice with respect to the animals, does not appear here.

¹⁶ Bill T. Arnold, *Genesis*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 60.

¹⁷ “This term cannot be demeaning because Hebrew *‘ezer*, employed here to describe the intended role of the woman, is often used of God in His relation to man (sic).” Sarna, *Genesis*, 22.

sixth day and gives dominion over the rest of creation to 'adam as both male *and* female. In contrast, in Genesis 2 the LORD God forms the man out of the ground at the outset of creation and gives him (!) the power to name and thus authority over the beasts of the field and birds of the air. While the woman's appearance as the man's "helper" at the end of the account has led some to claim a subordinate role for females based on this "order of creation," the term "helper" does not imply a subordinate in the Old Testament and the man does not name the woman as he does the other creatures.

Finally, the concluding statement of the chapter shows little sign of a hierarchical or uneven partnership: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. And the two of them were naked, the 'adam and his wife, and they were not ashamed" (vv. 24-25).¹⁸

Disobedience and its Consequences (Genesis 3)

Few passages have been as influential for Christian theological anthropology (particularly in the West) as Genesis 3, where the account of Adam and Eve eating from the forbidden tree has come to be known as "the fall" and the beginning of "original sin."¹⁹ Along with the order of

¹⁸ I have left the term 'adam untranslated in order to illustrate how it is employed differently here than in Genesis 1. Also, although frequently used in contemporary wedding ceremonies and often taken for granted as an expression of the "nuclear family," the first sentence here is puzzling when considered in ancient Israel. Elsewhere in Genesis (and still today in some cultures) the man does *not* physically leave his parents, but brings his wife into his "father's house" (*beth 'ab*). For the crucial role of women as those with experience in and connections between different households, see Carole R. Fontaine, "The Sage in Family and Tribe," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. John G. Gammie and Leo G. Perdue (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 155–64.

¹⁹ While dominant within the Western Christian theological tradition, this view of the "fall" is not universal. As Brueggemann, a prominent Protestant Old Testament scholar, writes: "The text [Gen. 2:4b-3:24] is commonly treated as the account of 'the fall.' Nothing could be more remote from the narrative itself." Or again, "The text is not interested in theoretical or abstract questions of sin/death/evil/fall. The usual abstract questions of the world (e.g., origin of

creation in chapter 2, the depiction of Eve and the divine punishment for disobedience in Genesis 3 has also long been an important factor in promoting male authority over women within the Christian tradition. Indeed, while Augustine cemented the significance of this passage centuries later, the beginning of Genesis was already linked to debates over the relationship between the genders within the New Testament itself.²⁰

Among other things, Eve's response to the serpent has received much attention and contributed to a negative portrayal of Eve within the Christian tradition. Where God previously told the man not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17),²¹ Eve renders these instructions as: "you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree . . . nor shall you touch it, or you shall die" (Gen. 3:3, emphasis mine). Some have suggested that this additional phrase represents the real beginning of human disobedience, since humans should not add to the command of the LORD.²² While there has been much debate over the

death and sin, meaning of the "fall") are likely to be false, escapist questions. Such questions are no part of biblical testimony and are of no interest to genuine faith." Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 41, 43.

²⁰ The New Testament already reflects a diversity of interpretation regarding the implications of this Genesis passage for male/female relations. For instance, I Timothy refers to the "order of creation" as a basis for male authority: ". . . For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor" (1 Tim. 2:11-14). In contrast, 1 Corinthians employs the same passage to emphasize the interdependence and mutuality of men and women: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ . . . Man was not made from woman, but woman from man . . . Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God" (1 Cor. 11:1, 7-12).

²¹ One of the intriguing gaps within the narrative is that God initially warns the man, not the woman, about eating from this tree. Although she clearly hears about this prohibition, the passage does not inform us how this came to be, which has spawned numerous interpretations.

²² These words have prompted a remarkably different evaluation within some parts of Jewish interpretation, where Eve's response has even provided the basis for her depiction as the first rabbi. Like a good teacher, Eve constructs a "fence around the Torah" by making the requirements more strict than God's

precise nature of this disobedience and the significance of the tree, our primary goal here will be to explore what the beginning of Genesis tells us regarding humans and the appropriate relationship among them in our context *outside* of Eden. To this end we will concentrate on what are sometimes described as the “curses” that the LORD God imposes.

While God curses the serpent (v. 14) and the ground (v. 17) neither the man nor the woman are cursed directly; nonetheless, both continue to bear the effects of what has happened. The woman is told that she will experience great pain in childbirth, and further that: “your desire shall be for your husband (man), and he shall rule over you.” The man, on the other hand, now faces the constant struggle to raise food from the cursed ground: “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” (v. 19). Though these tasks have become more difficult, in both cases they also relate directly to pre-“fall” purposes: by giving birth the woman fulfills the divine word to “be fruitful and multiply,” while through his “toil” the man continues the task of working the ground.²³ However, as these verses make clear, something significant has changed.

The basic difficulty with interpreting God’s speech to the woman and man in Genesis 3:16-19 lies in whether these statements should be seen as prescriptive or descriptive. In other words, do they describe or explain the way things are or tend to be, or does this represent the divine will or command going forward? It is at this point, I would suggest, that interpretation has often been inconsistent.

For instance, at its most basic level, should Christians develop and employ means to lessen the amount of effort (“sweat of the brow”) required to produce food from the earth? Although often not stated in this way, many Christians would be open to technological advancement if it allows for better food production. Some may even go so far as to

initial command and thus safeguarding God’s word from being violated. The logic works, since if Eve would have heeded her own statement and not touched the fruit, she would not have eaten it either.

²³ This appears to be a word-play with the previous purpose of the man. Initially, he was meant to till/work/serve (*‘abod*) where now he will “toil” (*‘abur*).

suggest it is our duty to do so; in a world of hunger we should produce as much food as possible. When applied to Genesis 3, this view sees the curse of the ground as a consequence of the “fall” which we should counteract or struggle against as much as possible.

However, the passage regarding the woman in Genesis 3 has often been seen in precisely the opposite direction:

To the woman [the LORD God] 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.*”
(v. 16)

For some, the pain of childbirth represents a divinely ordained punishment that needs to be endured and should not be lessened. Indeed, on the basis of this passage women have been prohibited from taking painkillers during childbirth in some settings. Likewise, some have taken this verse as a divine command confirming the order of creation, so that a man’s ordained role is to “rule over” his woman/wife. In this view, God’s words provide a prescriptive description of how the relationship between the sexes *should* (“shall”) function. However, to be consistent this position would also imply that the man’s plight is also God-ordained. If women can’t take painkillers, men can’t use tractors either.

Although less often noted, a direct parallel in the next chapter helps to shed light on this verse. After Cain murders his brother Abel, God says to him: “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? 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*” (Gen. 4:16-17, emphasis mine). Intriguingly, God’s words to the woman and to Cain reflect a parallel structure and identical terminology:²⁴

²⁴ Arnold also notes this connection and sees in it a confirmation of a descriptive rather than prescriptive reading of this material. He also notes that the term “desire” (*teshuqah*) is extremely rare, appearing only three times in the Old Testament, which further underscores the connection between these

<p>“ . . . In pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire (<i>teshuqah</i>) (shall be) for your husband, he shall rule over (<i>mashal b-</i>) you. (Gen. 3:16) (<i>we’el-’ishek teshurqathek wehu’ yimshol bak</i>)</p>	<p>“ . . . sin is lurking at the door; its desire (<i>teshuqah</i>) (is) for you, but you must master (<i>mashal b-</i>) it.” (Gen. 4:16-17)²⁵ (<i>we’eleka teshuqatho w’attah timshol-bo</i>)</p>
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Although the NRSV renders the main verb as “rule over” in one chapter and “master” in the next, the Hebrew wording is identical; the only difference lies in the shift from third person (“*he shall*”) to second (“*you must*”), and the change of the final pronoun from “you” to “it” required by the context. Despite virtual unanimity in translating the phrase spoken to the woman as “he shall rule over you,” significantly more variety appears in rendering the second: “and thou *shalt rule* over him” (KJV); “but you *should rule* over it” (NKJV); “but you *must rule* over it” (ESV); “but you *must master* it” (NAS, NIV, RSV, NRSV); “you *can still master* him” (NJB); “but thou *mayest rule* over it” (JPS); and “Yet you *can be its master*” (TNK). It must be said that all of these are legitimate translations; one is not more “literal” than another.

The difficulty here lies in the imperfect aspect of the verb, which allows for many possibilities. For instance, an imperfect verb can denote a command (“thou shalt”), a persuasive statement (“you must”) or a simple future (“you will”); it can be used as a modal (“you could/should/would”), to express ability (“you can”), or a wish or desire (“may you”); it can even be used to describe continuous or habitual

two passages. Its only other occurrence appears in Song of Songs 7:10. Arnold, *Genesis*, 70.

²⁵ To visually illustrate the similarity between these two verses I have placed the terms that reflect direct correspondence between these two passages in bold type. I have also placed the varying forms of the verb “to be” in parentheses, since these are contextually implied but not explicitly present in either passage.

action (“you constantly,” “you tend to”); and more.²⁶ Given all of these possibilities, and particularly in light of the variety of translations of the imperfect of the identical verb form in Genesis 4, it is striking that God’s statement to the woman is repeatedly translated as “he *shall rule over you*.” Indeed, out of the ten versions surveyed here, only the NIV and NJB offer an alternative translation, with “he will rule over you” and “he will dominate you” respectively.

Taken on its own it is possible, as some do, to read this passage in a prescriptive sense where God’s words to the woman mandate how things *should* be: “he shall rule over you.” However, I find it problematic to do so and then treat the statement to the man as merely descriptive, so that the toil involved in producing food is a difficulty that one should attempt to limit. If, on the other hand, the difficulty of working the ground is understood as a difficulty we should attempt to overcome, then the same should be said of the depiction of gender imbalance. Thus, one could just as accurately read the phrase: “(unfortunately) he will tend to rule over you.”²⁷ In other words, this statement neither reflects the original plan of God nor a divinely mandated “Plan B” after the “fall,” but reflects a tendency arising from human disobedience that all too often plays itself out.²⁸ Thus, a

²⁶ Verbs in Biblical or Classical Hebrew do not have “tenses” but rather are conjugated (or “built,” to use the Hebrew idiom) based on aspect. As a result the division between past, present, and future commonly assumed in other languages proves more complex and ambiguous. Thus, while an imperfect commonly refers to a future or potential action, it can also be used to describe ongoing action in the present or even habitual action in the past. For instance, “I will go to the store,” “I go to the store every week,” and “Last year I went to the store every week” all reflect an imperfect aspect, even though they reflect future, present, and past tenses respectively.

²⁷ Arnold discusses the issue of descriptive vs. prescriptive readings and concludes: “Whatever the nuanced meanings of the archaic poetry and terminology, now partly lost to us, the rulership of the man is no more prescriptive than pain in childbirth.” Suggesting that the phrase may reflect an “attempt or endeavor rather than fact” he proposes the translation: “he will attempt to rule over you.” Arnold, *Genesis*, 70, 71.

²⁸ Many scholars take this view. The following quotations come from a Jewish and Catholic Christian scholar respectively: “It is quite clear from the description of woman in 2:18, 23 that the ideal situation, which hitherto

descriptive view seems to make better sense of the surrounding narrative context than one that sees this phrase as prescriptive in nature.

Finally, it is noteworthy that the man only explicitly “names” the woman Eve *after* the “fall” and the description of its consequences (Gen. 3:20). If one sees God’s statement to the woman as a normative command then this confirms the man’s authority over the woman. If, however, one sees masculine dominance as an unfortunate consequence of the fall, the man’s action may immediately illustrate this tendency. In any case, *’adam* gives the woman a proper name here, which is different than “naming” a species of creature as he does with the animals. It is also striking that the passage explains the name “Eve” as the mother of “*all living*” (not just humanity), which puts her on fairly even footing with the *’adam*. Might this suggest a joint priority over creation in this chapter similar to the “dominion” granted to *’adam* (both male and female) in Genesis 1?

As we have seen, although Genesis 2-3 has often been read as confirming men’s priority over women as instituted by God and reflected in the “order of creation,” this view does not account well for all of the material within this narrative. Despite its connotations in English, the term “helper” does not reflect a secondary or subordinate role in the Old Testament, but is often used of the stronger, more authoritative or even dominant party. While the overwhelming tendency to translate God’s speech to the woman as “he *shall* rule over you” suggests that this is a prescriptive statement or even command, the

existed, was the absolute equality of the sexes. The new state of male dominance is regarded as an aspect of the deterioration in the human condition that resulted from defiance of divine will.” Sarna, *Genesis*, 28. As with many others, David W. Cotter sees vv. 14-21 as “etiological” and describes these verses as follows: “It should be noted that these, especially male dominance, are the undesired realities of a sinfully disordered world. Our author is attempting to explain the mysterious realities of the world in which he (or she) lived.” David W. Cotter, *Genesis*, Berit Olam (Collegeville, MI: Liturgical Press, 2003), 35. In contrast, Wenham argues that the man has authority over the woman, since she is formed from man and “twice named by man (2:23; 3:20).” As a result, “It is therefore usually argued that ‘rule’ here represents harsh exploitive subjugation.” Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 81.

breadth of possible translations is less often recognized. Further, when considered in light of the consequences for the man and a parallel verse in the next chapter, this statement seems to be descriptive rather than prescriptive. In other words, the tendency for men to “rule over” women appears as yet another unfortunate consequence of the “fall,” which humans should struggle to overcome.

Still “In the Image” (Gen. 5:1-3)

Though the beginning of Adam’s genealogy attracts much less attention than the preceding chapters, Gen. 5:1-3 proves significant for our topic:

This is the list of the descendants of Adam (*'adam*). When God created humankind (*'adam*), he made them (it) in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them, and he blessed them and named them "Humankind" (*'adam*) when they were created. When Adam (*'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 . . . (Gen. 5:1-3)

This passage brings together the perspectives of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2-3 in a very striking way. While we would expect *'adam* to appear as a proper name at the beginning of a genealogy (and the term clearly continues as such in verse 3),²⁹ this list of descendants is immediately interrupted by a rehearsal of Genesis 1:26-27. Precisely where the human genealogy begins we are taken back to the initial creation of *'adam*, where the term appears not as male over against female or as a proper name, but as male *and* female. Although hidden in translation, these verses combine two very different uses of the term *'adam*; the contrast could not be more stark or the difference more

²⁹ Though its significance lies beyond the scope of this paper, the phrase “the generations of . . .” appears over ten times within Genesis and functions as an organizational or structural element within the book. Except for Genesis 2:4 (“these are the generations of the heavens and the earth”), each genealogy begins with the name of a character in the account: Adam (5:1); Noah (6:9); the sons of Noah (10:1); Shem (11:10); Terah (11: 27); Ishmael (25:12); Isaac (25:19); Esau (36:1, 9); and Jacob (37:2).

jarring.³⁰ For our purposes, I would like to mention three implications of this brief passage.

First, this passage appears *after the expulsion from Eden*. Despite their disobedience in the Garden and its negative consequences, humanity—both male and female— still reflects the “likeness of God.” Although some Christian groups and theologians have insisted on “human depravity,” the “fall” does not alter humanity’s status or erase the divine likeness instilled in them as *'adam* at creation. At the same time, the statement that “he (Adam) died” (Gen. 5:5) serves as an important reminder that humanity is *not* divine, but a creature.

Second, although the “likeness of God” continues to be passed on, the means by which this occurs has fundamentally changed to that of procreation. Where *'adam* as male and female was created directly by God, Adam in turn fathers Seth “in his likeness, according to his image.” Further, since Seth is in the likeness of Adam who is in the likeness of God, this passage also suggests that the divine “image and likeness” resides in each and every human being.

Third, while the divine image is passed on, the child appears in the likeness of Adam and not immediately of God.³¹ While a link to Eden

³⁰ One of the intriguing and puzzling characteristics of biblical material lies in its frequently unharmonized nature. Biblical scholars have long argued, on the basis of such shifts, that Genesis reflects different traditions or written “sources” that were collected and put together at some point. In doing so, some treat the beginning of Genesis as containing two different creation accounts that have little to do with one another; for a classic example of this approach see: E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, introduction translation, in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964), 3–28. While there may have been previous “versions” of such material, the passage in Genesis 5:1-3 reflects the intentional intermingling of perspectives or even “sources” to create a new whole. Whatever its prehistory, the canonical text(s) of the Bible provide the basis for ongoing Christian interpretation.

³¹ As Brueggemann states: “The text may realistically recognize that Seth and his heirs are a strange, unresolved mixture of the *regal* image of God and the *threatened* image of Adam. Such a double statement recognizes the ambivalence of humankind, even as Paul later experienced it (cf. Rom. 7:15-23).” Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Interpretation (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 68.

remains, this also points to a new stage in which the difficulties and problems begun in the Garden continue to have ongoing effects.

Although it often does not receive much attention, Genesis 5:1-3 provides an important corrective or even a textual antidote for an overly bleak view of humanity espoused in some western Christian theology. Instead of, or at least alongside, a thoroughgoing “original sin” endemic to all humanity, this brief passage confirms that people, men and women, continue to bear the “likeness of God” even after their expulsion from Eden. Thus, it refuses to allow a negative view of biblical anthropology to effectively erase the divine image and likeness granted at creation.

Where some cite the “order of creation” to uphold views regarding the priority or authority of men over women, the “order of *Scripture*” suggests otherwise. Having narrated the “fall,” Genesis returns to reaffirm the creation of *'adam* as both male and female, and thus implicitly the dominion of *both* over creation as described in Genesis 1. In doing so, it bounds the account of Adam and Eve in the Garden before and after with an affirmation that questions an imbalance in authority or status between men and women, and so cautions us against such a conclusion. Indeed, given the patriarchal culture and perspective from which biblical material emerges, I am actually amazed at how much fodder the account provides to critique and challenge such a perspective.

Implications

In this paper we have looked at the beginning of Genesis to consider its implications for biblical anthropology. In doing so we have also encountered broader issues worth highlighting regarding the nature of the Bible, the significance of interpretation, and the role of the community of faith.

First, we have seen that, as is often the case with the Bible more generally, these chapters are remarkably unharmonized. Genesis 5:1-3 provides a microcosm of this issue by using *'adam* in two very different ways within the same sentence: first as a proper name, then as a generic term that includes male and female, and finally as a proper name again. Far from being hidden, the passage highlights these shifts in such a way as to make them unmistakable. While we may be tempted to either

smooth over such differences or to heighten them to the point where we see no connection between two different “creation accounts,” these verses provide an example where divergent views have been incorporated into a meaningful whole. Rather than a problem to be solved, recognizing such differences can prove fruitful for interpreting the document we have before us.

Second, we have seen both the significance and inevitability of interpretation. The ambiguity of the language and gaps within the story inevitably draw readers into the process of interpretation. As our discussion of the term “helper” and the phrase “he shall rule over you” demonstrate, translation adds yet another level of complexity to the interpretive enterprise. The latter case also illustrates that it is impossible to avoid interpretation and “just read” a biblical document even when working in the original language; differences in translation often make explicit the ambiguity that lies implicit within the original grammar itself. Similarly, the traditional view that Genesis 3 describes “the fall” and the beginning of “original sin” necessarily goes beyond the words on the page.³² This does not mean that such a perspective should be necessarily deemed mistaken or inaccurate, but simply that it needs to be recognized as an interpretation within the ongoing tradition.

Third, given the unharmonized nature, gaps, and ambiguities reflected in biblical material, the role of the community as both the site and embodiment of interpretation proves essential. The relationship between genders provides an excellent example where life affects interpretation and interpretation informs life. This example also illustrates how proposing a different interpretation opens the possibility and challenge of embodying an alternate understanding of the tradition; and it is the community of faith where such interpretations take place and are tested in practice. After all, the ultimate goal of Christian biblical interpretation, whether of the Old Testament or the New, is to reveal and embody the gospel of Jesus Christ under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.³³

³² Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 41-44.

³³ This is not simply a linear process or one in which a New Testament view necessarily trumps the Old. It may well be, for instance, that a rereading of the

In light of the three elements just described, it is also important to state that our interpretation is always provisional. Conclusions are not settled for all time but represent our best contextual attempt to understand and embody the gospel in our time and place, building on and being faithful to the tradition that has been passed down to us. And once again, it is hard to overemphasize the role of the community in this process. Although a Scripture may theoretically exist on its own, it cannot *function* as such without a community committed to engage it and live in accordance with it. At the same time, Christian Scripture does not contain or monopolize God. Within the Christian tradition the Bible is not the revelation in and of itself, but rather functions as a pointer witnessing to the divine that lies beyond it. Since the Gospel lies before us as well as behind us, our preceding tradition—as essential as it is—does not hold a monopoly on appropriate interpretation but prompts us to return again and again to rediscover, recommit to, and continue to embody the gospel it reveals.

Conclusion

In this paper we have reconsidered some of the most influential biblical material for understanding the role and nature of humanity within the Western Christian tradition. Indeed, it would be difficult to overstate the influence the “order of creation,” the “fall,” and “original sin” have had within this tradition.

Nonetheless, we have also seen that interpretations linked to these concepts do not account for all of the material present in the first chapters of Genesis. Perhaps most significantly I have argued that Eve’s role as Adam’s “helper” as well as God’s speech to the woman should not be understood to support male dominance as divinely mandated. Rather, the common tendency for men to “rule over” women reflects a consequence of the “fall” that we are called to limit and overcome as much as possible. In a similar vein, if one jumps from the “fall” to “redemption” in the Gospels it becomes possible to miss or downplay the insistence in Genesis 5 that humanity continues to be formed in the divine likeness, even on this side of Eden. Thus, I have argued against a

beginning of Genesis and other New Testament material may well lead us to re-evaluate Timothy in light of the gospel as much as the inverse.

view of humanity as thoroughly “depraved,” although the ongoing repercussions of human disobedience were—and remain—all too real.

Finally, while it has attracted much attention, in my view one of the most striking aspects of the account of the Garden in Genesis lies in its brevity. Humanity quickly emerges out of an earthly paradise, so that the vast majority of the Bible proves concerned with life on this side of Eden rather than an extended pining for how things “used to be.” However, since creation remains good but things are not right in their current arrangement, it is the task of the church to embody and thus be a witness to how things should be rather than accepting them as they are. I believe the human tendency to “rule over” or dominate, whether men over women, one people over another, or humanity over the rest of creation, remains a major issue that the church is called to address. Doing so is not primarily a philosophical problem, but rather a challenge of imagining and incarnating a different reality.

