From Paradise *to the* Promised Land

An Introduction to the Pentateuch

Fourth Edition

T. Desmond Alexander

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Fourth Edition

T. DESMOND ALEXANDER

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PREFACE

The idea of writing an introductory guide to the first five books of the Bible arose following a brief period of teaching Asian theological students in Singapore in 1990. My experience there confirmed what had been evident to me in Ireland: most students of theology and religious studies have at best a very limited understanding of the basic contents of the Pentateuch. While they are vaguely familiar with the better-known stories of Genesis and Exodus, few could claim to have a clear understanding of the Pentateuch as a whole. What was lacking was a good guide to the text, a book that was suited to the needs of such students. To this end, what now appears as part 1 of this edition was published in 1995 under the title *From Paradise to the Promised Land*.

This first edition focused deliberately on the contents of Genesis to Deuteronomy but provided no detailed discussion of contemporary academic approaches to the Pentateuch. To address this shortcoming, part 2 was added when the second edition was published in 2002. At that time, it was decided to place the discussion of Pentateuchal criticism at the start of the book, and this was retained in the third edition. In this fourth edition, however, I begin with the exploration of the Pentateuch's main themes. Feedback from users suggested that this would make the discussion more accessible to readers. The opportunity to produce a fourth edition has allowed me to refine my discussion of various topics, update the contents by taking into account more recent research, and add some additional material. Consequently, the present volume seeks to (1) focus on the main themes of the Pentateuch, viewed as a unified literary work, and (2) guide the reader through the maze of modern approaches to the study of the Pentateuch.

In every edition, I have sought to outline briefly the many ways in which the pentateuchal material is taken up and used in the New Testament. Two

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considerations have encouraged me to do this. First, many students of theology and religious studies approach the Pentateuch from a Christian perspective and are naturally interested in how this material relates to the beliefs and practices of the New Testament church. Second, and perhaps more important from a purely academic perspective, the New Testament documents reveal how the pentateuchal texts were understood in a period and culture much closer to that of the Pentateuch than our own. It is interesting, therefore, to compare the New Testament understanding of the Pentateuch with that of twenty-first-century readers. To what extent is there agreement on the meaning of the text?

Having stated the general aims of this study, some further comments may help clarify the overall approach adopted here. Although this volume seeks to explain the contents of the Pentateuch, it is not a verse-by-verse commentary on the text. An abundance of commentaries already exists, as noted in the recommended further reading section on pages 361–92. Yet while they are especially helpful in explaining shorter units of material—for example, individual verses or chapters—by their very nature commentaries tend to atomize the text into small units. Consequently, they sometimes fail to highlight themes that are spread across entire books, especially when such themes do not appear to be of particular importance in any single passage. Studying the biblical texts by means of commentaries can be compared to looking at the separate pieces of a jigsaw puzzle. Though we may find something of interest in each piece, it is only when all the pieces are put together that we get the complete picture. It is with this larger picture that we wish to engage in this study of the Pentateuch.

Not only may commentaries fail to give a complete picture, but they may also unintentionally give a distorted picture. By atomizing the text, there is ever present the danger of misinterpreting these shorter passages. This may be illustrated by considering the jigsaw puzzle again. Examined on its own, a single piece may appear to show one thing, yet when placed alongside its matching pieces, it may reveal something quite different. Obviously, knowledge of the wider context is vital for understanding the individual components of something larger. Unfortunately, scholars have not always adequately appreciated the dangers that exist in interpreting a biblical book unit by unit without sufficiently taking into account the broader context.

Alongside these shortcomings must be placed a further and much more fundamental problem. For the past two centuries the academic study of the Pentateuch has been dominated by methods that seek primarily to elucidate how the present text came into being; these methods are surveyed in part 2. Encouraged by the hope of uncovering the literary and oral prehistory of the

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received text, scholars have expended an inordinate amount of time and energy on developing the methodologies of *source* and *form* criticism. We observe several consequences of this practice. First, these methods have resulted in the text being dissected in a variety of ways. No longer is the Pentateuch generally considered to be a literary unity—which, regardless of how it was composed, it now is. Rather, it is commonly viewed as a collection of literary documents and/or oral accounts linked by editorial (or redactional) additions. Most scholarly research on the Pentateuch has sought to (1) discover the existence of these hypothetical sources, (2) explain the process by which they were combined to form the present text, and (3) relate the existence of these earlier sources to the history and religious development of the Israelites before the final composition of the Pentateuch in the exilic or postexilic period. While scholarly endeavors to address these issues have not been wanting, the past three decades have witnessed a substantial rejection of results that seemed assured for several immediately preceding generations of scholars. At the present time much uncertainty exists regarding how and when the Pentateuch was composed. Given our present knowledge, we could even ask if it is possible to determine with any confidence this process.

A second consequence of biblical scholarship's focusing its resources on the prehistory of the text has been a failure to elucidate the meaning of the Pentateuch in its received form. Many scholars assume that a detailed explanation of the prehistory of the Pentateuch reveals all that needs to be known about the text as received. However, as R. Polzin has rightly observed, "Traditional biblical scholarship has spent most of its efforts in disassembling the works of a complicated watch before our amazed eyes without apparently realizing that similar efforts by and large have not succeeded in putting the parts back together again in a significant or meaningful way."[1] We need to recognize that the Pentateuch, as we now have it, is much more than the sum of its component parts.

Scholars have tended to consider the study of the Pentateuch in its final form as less demanding and therefore of less academic value than the investigation of its hypothetical sources.[2] Such reasoning is fallacious, however. The value of the final form of the Pentateuch should not be judged on the basis of the ease or otherwise of studying it. Rather, such study should be undertaken

1. R. Polzin, "'The Ancestress of Israel in Danger' in Danger," *Semeia* 3 (1975): 82–83.

2. A similar observation was voiced by Gerhard von Rad in 1938: "On almost all sides the final form of the Hexateuch [Genesis–Joshua] has come to be regarded as a starting point barely worthy of discussion, from which the debate should move away as rapidly as possible in order to reach the real problems underlying it." See *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 1.

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because of the inherent importance of the text as a unified literary work. Various arguments strongly favor an approach that gives prominence to the final form of the Pentateuch.

First, this is the form in which the text has been received. Whatever the process by which it was composed, it is now a coherent literary work. Even if, as seems very likely, various sources were used in its composition, it must be recognized that the final editor, whoever he (or she?) may have been, appropriated all the source material as his own and used it to compose the present narrative, which begins in Genesis and continues to the end of Deuteronomy. It therefore is essential to view the entire Pentateuch as reflecting the outlook of the final editor, not merely the portions that are normally assigned to the last editorial stage.

Second, a detailed and comprehensive study of the Pentateuch in its final form must have priority in sequence over the approaches of source and form criticism. It is methodologically unsound to explore the prehistory of the text without having established a clear understanding of how the present text is constructed as a literary work. To do so is to set the cart before the horse. Similarly, on pedagogical grounds, it is surely improper to expect students to appreciate and apply critical methods before they have appreciated the content and literary structure of the received text. Students frequently are introduced to scholarly opinions regarding the process by which the text was composed, without understanding what the text itself is saying.

Third, literary approaches to the study of Hebrew narrative are providing fresh insights into the meaning of many pentateuchal passages. Frequently these insights offer new ways to approach problems that in the past were resolved by resorting to other solutions. Many scholars are now more confident about taking seriously the present integrity of the text.

Fourth, a clear understanding of the final form of the Pentateuch is important if we are to appreciate how it influenced later writers. The writers (and earliest readers) of the New Testament were all precritical in their understanding of the Pentateuch; they did not think in terms of different literary or oral sources underlying the text, each supposedly reflecting a different theology. For them the Pentateuch was a single entity; this was how they understood and interpreted it. All these reasons argue for an approach that treats with respect the received text of the Pentateuch.

In part 1, I aim to map out the terrain of the Pentateuch as it now stands by drawing attention to its main features. To enable the reader to assimilate the contents of the Pentateuch more easily, I usually approach the material book by book. Sometimes I focus on major themes running through entire books. Elsewhere I examine shorter blocks of material that deal with specific subjects.

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The intention is to allow the text to determine the approach that seems most appropriate. For example, on the one hand, the themes of offspring, blessing, and land run through the book of Genesis. On the other hand, the account of the building of the tabernacle dominates most of the final third of the book of Exodus. When we examine blocks of material, I have tried to follow the natural divisions of the text.

References to the rest of the Old Testament have been kept to a minimum. To have included all the relevant material would have added considerably to each chapter and shifted the focus of the book from the Pentateuch to the Old Testament as a whole.

Although I seek to include in part 1 the best insights of contemporary studies, to keep the presentation as straightforward as possible, I have deliberately avoided engaging in a detailed critique of scholarly discussions. The primary purpose of part 1 is to focus the reader's attention on the content of the Pentateuch itself rather than on the diverse opinions of contemporary scholars. To interact meaningfully with all that has been said would take this study far beyond an introductory guide.

A number of chapters have appeared in print elsewhere; to varying degrees I have modified and updated these to conform to the overall presenting pattern adopted in this volume. Chapter 6 was originally published as "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, edited by R. S. Hess, P. E. Satterthwaite, and G. J. Wenham.[3] Some of the material in chapters 7–10 was first published in 1994 in the *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, edited by D. A. Carson and others; I am grateful to the publisher, Inter-Varsity Press (UK), for permission to reproduce this in a modified form. Some material in chapters 21 and 23 first appeared in my book *Abraham in the Negev: A Source-Critical Investigation of Genesis 20:1–22:19*.[4] The discussion of the Passover in chapter 8 incorporates some material from my article "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, edited by R. T. Beckwith and M. Selman.[5] Chapters 3 and 23 first appeared respectively as "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional

3. T. D. Alexander, "Abraham Re-assessed Theologically: The Abraham Narrative and the New Testament Understanding of Justification by Faith," in *He Swore an Oath: Biblical Themes from Genesis 12–50*, ed. R. S. Hess, P. E. Satterthwaite, and G. J. Wenham (Cambridge: Tyndale, 1993), 7–28; 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 7–28.

4. T. D. Alexander, *Abraham in the Negev: A Source-Critical Investigation of Genesis 20:1–22:19* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1997).

5. T. D. Alexander, "The Passover Sacrifice," in *Sacrifice in the Bible*, ed. R. T. Beckwith and M. Selman (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 1–24.

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Unity of Genesis"[6] and "The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exodus xix 1–xxiv 11."[7] Some of the material in chapter 24 first appeared in my article "Authorship of the Pentateuch," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, edited by T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, and is used by permission of InterVarsity Press (USA). With this fourth edition, changes have been made to all of the materials just listed.

Except where otherwise indicated, biblical quotations are from the NIV, and all biblical references follow the English rather than the Hebrew scheme of numeration. All Hebrew words have been transliterated according to standard practice; however, where for the ordinary reader the transliteration does not reflect the actual pronunciation of a Hebrew word, I have added this in parentheses.

For providing me with helpful observations on sections of this study, I am grateful to John Brew, Claude-Bernard Costecalde, Ian Hart, James McKeown, Alan Millard, Albert Ong, David Palmer, and Paul Williamson. They can in no way be held responsible for the shortcomings that remain. I wish also to express my thanks to the staff of Baker Academic for their valuable assistance in the final stages of this book's production. For the loving support that I receive so consistently from my wife, Anne, I am deeply grateful. Her faithful love has contributed much to the writing of this fourth edition. I am especially privileged to enjoy the encouragement of our children, Jane and David, and their respective spouses, Ross and Alana, and our granddaughters, Martha and Maggie. They constantly remind me that there is more to life than books. To my mother, whose love for her sons cannot be measured, and in memory of my affectionately remembered father-in-law and mother-in-law, Robert and Janet Wallace, this book is dedicated with love.

SOLI DEO GLORIA.

6. T. D. Alexander, "Genealogies, Seed and the Compositional Unity of Genesis," *TynBul* 44 (1993): 255–70.

7. T. D. Alexander, "The Composition of the Sinai Narrative in Exodus xix 1–xxiv 11," *VT* 49 (1999): 2–20.

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PART 1

The Main Themes *of the* Pentateuch

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1

An Overview of the Pentateuch

Before embarking on a fuller study of the individual books that compose the Pentateuch, it may be helpful to provide a brief overview of the whole, in the process highlighting themes that will be examined in more detail in subsequent chapters.

As presently constituted, the Pentateuch consists of five books that have been composed in the light of one another to form a single unit. Various factors reveal the interdependence of the individual books. Primary among these is the plot, which begins in Genesis and flows logically to the end of Deuteronomy. Certain threads run through this plot, uniting the books. Genesis introduces the idea that the land of Canaan is divinely promised to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The fulfillment of this promise sets the agenda for the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy and beyond. Although the land is promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, it is anticipated that their descendants will take possession of it only after a long stay in Egypt (Gen. 15:13–16; cf. Exod. 12:40–41). Genesis 46 records how a small group of Israelites leave Canaan to settle temporarily in Egypt. Yet years later, as the opening chapters of Exodus reveal, they are enslaved by the Egyptians until through divine intervention the Israelites are enabled to flee the country. Their journey through the wilderness toward Canaan is narrated in Exodus, Leviticus, and Numbers. The account of this journey ends in Deuteronomy, with the people located on the plains of Moab, east of the river Jordan. Central to the account of the Israelites' divine rescue from Egypt is the figure of Moses,

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the opening chapters of Exodus describing his birth and the final chapter of Deuteronomy recording his death.[1]

Apart from thematic threads that run through a number of books, adjacent books are also linked through the presence of shared motifs. Genesis concludes with Joseph's making the sons of Jacob swear that they will carry his bones up from Egypt (Gen. 50:25); the fulfillment of this request is picked up in Exodus 13:19. Instructions for the consecration of priests are given in Exodus 29; the fulfillment of these instructions is narrated in Leviticus 9. Numbers 20:12 anticipates the death of Moses outside the promised land, but the account of this happening comes in Deuteronomy 34.

Even Genesis, often viewed as being quite different in character from the remaining books of the Pentateuch, is clearly integrated into the overall plot. The divine promises to the patriarchs set the agenda for developments in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy and beyond. The narrative associated with Joseph in Genesis 37–50 provides an essential link between the stories of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob living in Canaan and the account of their descendants being rescued from Egypt (Exod. 1–15). In the light of these general observations, it is important not to dismiss lightly the present unity of the Pentateuch. Although the books of Genesis to Deuteronomy are made up of very diverse components, which may superficially give the impression of lacking unity, someone has skillfully brought them together to form a narrative that exhibits considerable cohesion and harmony.

The basic plot of the Pentateuch may be outlined as follows. At the outset humans are created in order to enjoy a special relationship with God and to exercise authority on his behalf over the earth. Commissioned to fill the earth, they are to create a temple-city that will become God's earthly residence. However, the disobedience of Adam and Eve alienates them from God, and as a result they are expelled from Eden. By betraying God, they disqualify themselves from serving as his vicegerents. They are no longer able to fulfill their role as temple-city builders. Not only do humans pollute the earth through their subsequent evil actions, making it unfit for divine habitation, but they also use their God-given abilities to construct cities that are the antithesis of the temple-city that God desires for his residence. The city of Babel/Babylon[2] exemplifies human aspirations to live in community without God being present.

While the early chapters of Genesis concentrate mainly on the terrible consequences of humanity's alienation from God, the rest of Genesis, from

1. In the light of the importance of Moses, it is hardly surprising that an early and enduring title for the Pentateuch has been "The Books of Moses."

2. On Babel/Babylon, see chap. 2 below.

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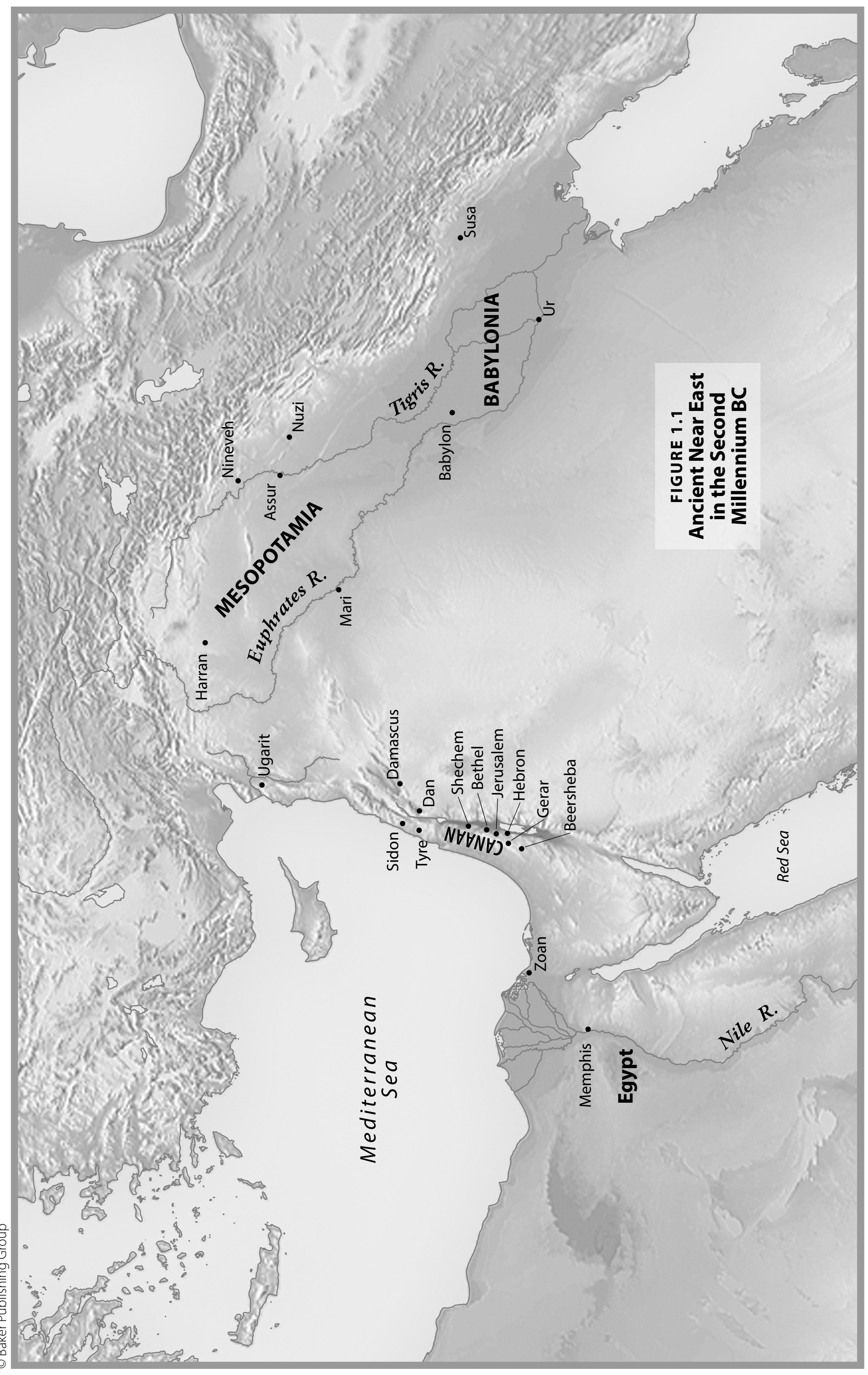

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chapter 12 onward, moves forward with the hope that people may yet be reconciled to God. Central to this reconciliation are divine promises made to Abraham. These set the agenda for all that follows in the rest of the Pentateuch and beyond. A careful study of the Abraham narrative reveals two major aspects of these promises. First, there is the promise that through an offspring of Abraham "all nations on earth will be blessed" (Gen. 22:18). Although of primary importance for reversing the consequences of what took place in the Garden of Eden, this promise remains unfulfilled by the conclusion of the Pentateuch. Within Genesis this promise is specifically linked to a future royal lineage that will be descended from Abraham. In the first instance, this line is traced through Abraham's great-grandson Joseph, and then via Joseph's younger son Ephraim to Joshua. However, Genesis anticipates that the future monarchy associated with Joseph-Ephraim will be replaced by one that will come from the family line of Judah, through his son Perez.

Other divine promises to Abraham center on the establishment of a great nation. These promises emphasize that Abraham's descendants will become numerous and take possession of the land of Canaan. Through a special covenant, God guarantees Abraham that his descendants will be given the land of Canaan some four centuries later (Gen. 15). However, this promise of nationhood, like the promise of blessing for the nations of the earth, remains unrealized by the end of Deuteronomy.

The promise of a royal descendant who will bless the nations and the promise of nationhood are closely linked. The blessing of the nations can occur only after the promise of nationhood has been fulfilled and a monarchy is created. This explains why the Pentateuch concentrates on the establishment of Abraham's descendants as a nation in the land of Canaan. Indeed, because so much attention is given to it, this latter promise tends to overshadow the promise of a royal descendant who will bless the nations. Yet, as we shall see, the divine covenant guaranteeing nationhood in Genesis 15 is subsumed under a more extensive covenant recorded in Genesis 17 that focuses on Abraham being the father of many nations. This latter covenant lays the foundation for the blessing of the nations through one of Abraham's descendants.

The setting apart of Israel as a nation distinct from all others dominates the narrative in Exodus to Deuteronomy. The primary purpose behind this is that Israel should initiate the process by which God's temple-city will one day dominate the earth. Although Exodus begins by emphasizing how the Israelites are fulfilling the creation mandate (Exod. 1:7; cf. Gen. 1:28), opposition comes from the king of Egypt. The Israelites soon find themselves enslaved and forced to become city builders for the Egyptian pharaohs. Against this background, they are eventually rescued and invited to enter into a unique

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relationship with God, with the potential to become a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Exod. 19:6). The Israelites will experience the unique presence of God as he takes up residence among them. As Exodus 15:17 indicates, the people rescued from slavery in Egypt anticipate dwelling with God on his holy mountain. In the light of this expectation, before they come to their destination in the land of Canaan, God brings them to another holy mountain, Mount Sinai. As we shall see in more detail later, the events at Mount Sinai, which dominate the central part of the Pentateuch, anticipate and prepare for the Israelites living with God on his holy mountain in the land of Canaan.

The Pentateuch foresees in part a return to the kind of divine-human relationship enjoyed by Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. There is an expectation that the Israelites will live in harmony with God on land blessed by him. Yet, although God comes to dwell in the midst of Israel, the people do not experience the same intimate communion that Adam and Eve originally enjoyed with him. The making of a friendship treaty at Mount Sinai and the construction of a portable sanctuary bring about an important advance in God's relationship with Abraham's descendants, but this does not give the Israelites immediate and unhindered access to the divine presence. Barriers still exist between God and the people. Only Moses enjoys what might be described as intimate contact with God, but even this is limited, for Moses is not permitted to see God's face. God's relationship with the Israelites anticipates something greater to come in conjunction with the blessing of the nations of the earth.

At the heart of the Pentateuch is a story about people being reconciled to God. This is especially evident in Exodus, as God comes to rescue the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. However the story is about much more than simply setting people free from the control of a despotic tyrant, important as this is. The story of exodus is about God coming to dwell in the midst of people whom he has redeemed from the power of evil, ransomed from death, purified from uncleanness, and finally made holy so that they can be his special people. Holiness, as illustrated in Leviticus, is one of the major themes of the Pentateuch.

Although the Pentateuch emphasizes that the Israelites are especially privileged by the fact that God reveals himself to them through signs and wonders in Egypt and then later through verbal communication at Sinai, it also highlights their waywardness in failing to trust and obey God completely. In spite of all that he graciously does for them, their shortcomings are a recurring feature of the narrative from Exodus to Deuteronomy. Even as they stand poised to possess the promised land, the Lord reminds them that, although

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they will initially enjoy his blessing, they will eventually be unfaithful and, as a result, be exiled from the land.

This latter observation highlights another important idea within the Pentateuch. The enjoyment of the benefits of the divine promises is linked to a trust in God's ability to fulfill them. Faith in God, marked by obedience, is highlighted in a variety of ways, both positively and negatively. The absence of faith was responsible for the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Faith was central to the life of Abraham, who, despite his failings, is presented as a model for others to follow. During the journey of the Israelites to the promised land, their lack of faith becomes an obstacle to their successful entry into the land of Canaan. Later, Deuteronomy shows how Moses encourages the people to trust and obey the Lord in order that they may take possession of the promised land. The benefits of the divine promises may be forfeited temporarily because of human failure, but the promises will ultimately be realized because they originate with God.

Although the Pentateuch gives a very distinctive history of the world from its creation to the arrival of the Israelites on the borders of Canaan, it is much more than a history of what has taken place. The divine promises of nationhood and of a future king who will bless the nations, which are so important to the development of the plot of the Pentateuch, remain unfulfilled by the end of Deuteronomy. As a result, the Pentateuch is oriented toward the future. What will become of these promises? To answer this we must look beyond the concluding chapters of Deuteronomy.[3] As it stands, the Pentateuch is an unfinished story.

3. In the light of this observation, it is important to note that the books of Joshua to 2 Kings provide a vital sequel to the Pentateuch. See T. D. Alexander, "Genesis to Kings," in *The New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2000), 115–20.

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2

God's Temple-City

Interpreted against their ancient Near Eastern background, the opening chapters of Genesis anticipate that God's plans for the earth center on the creation of an extraordinary temple-city where God will dwell in harmony with humanity. To this end, humans are given a royal and a priestly status, with the expectation that they will be God's vicegerents on the earth. However, tempted by the serpent, Adam and Eve betray their Creator, resulting in their expulsion from the Garden of Eden and the loss of their special status. The subsequent narrative comes to a significant climax with an account of humanity's attempt to construct an alternative city to the holy temple-city planned by God. These initial events set the scene for the call of Abraham and all that develops thereafter.

Introduction

The opening chapters of Genesis are exceptionally important for understanding the rest of the Pentateuch. Apart from setting the initial scene, Genesis 1–3 determines the trajectory for all that follows. For this reason, it is vitally important to comprehend the essence of these chapters within their present literary context. Unfortunately, discussions of Genesis 1–3 are too often hijacked by those who are almost exclusively preoccupied by the modern debate on the relationship between contemporary science and the biblical view of creation. Though this issue needs to be addressed, we should constantly

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remember that the author of these chapters penned them as an introduction to the narrative that unfolds in the books of Genesis to Kings. As we shall presently see, this narrative begins with the expectation that humans were created to build for God a temple-city on the earth. Unfortunately, God's plans are almost immediately thrown into chaos as Adam and Eve betray their Creator and subsequently their descendants pursue their own agendas by constructing God-less cities.

To understand how the opening chapters of Genesis introduce the larger narrative that extends to the end of the book of Kings, we must begin by observing that Genesis 1–3 provides two complementary descriptions of creation, a panoramic overview (1:1–2:3) followed by a close-up (2:4–3:24). The shift from the initial overview to the close-up is achieved by the special heading that comes in 2:4: "These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created" (NRSV). Similar headings recur throughout Genesis, often functioning like the zoom lens on a camera, enabling the narrator to focus in on a smaller part of a larger scene.[1] While Genesis 1:1–2:3 provides a panoramic description of creation, Genesis 2:4–3:24 concentrates on the creation of the first human couple, Adam and Eve, and their activity within the Garden of Eden.

This zooming-in effect explains why the literary style of Genesis changes significantly between 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24. Certain differences are very obvious. Genesis 1 is "repetitious, tabular, and formal."[2] By producing a highly structured account, the author reflects the order underlying the whole creation event. As M. A. Fishbane remarks, "The text thus provides a reflection of an orderly, harmonious creation. The alternation of the narrator's voice with divine speech, of description with prescription, serves to present 'the creation' as a dispassionate recitation recurrently punctuated with vital divine energy. The text shifts rhythmically between actions and results which utilize the same words ('separate' . . . 'call' . . . 'see' . . . 'make') and sequences. Its economy of vocabulary and technique produces a dictum of controlled energy and force."[3] In marked contrast, 2:4–3:24 has a quite different narrative style. No longer is the narrative shaped by a formal structure based on a seven-day scheme; gone is the repetition of chapter 1. "Here . . . we meet concise and vivid stories told in a masterful fashion."[4]

1. These headings—in Gen. 2:4; 5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10, 27; 25:12, 19; 36:1, 9; 37:2—all contain the Hebrew word *tôlədōt*, often translated "generations."

2. N. C. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1971), 19.

3. M. A. Fishbane, *Text and Texture: Close Readings of Selected Biblical Texts* (New York: Schocken Books, 1979), 8.

4. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, 21.

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This change in literary style is accompanied by differences in vocabulary, the most noteworthy of these being the names used for God. Throughout 1:1–2:3 the Creator is always referred to as Elohim, a Hebrew term meaning "God." From 2:4 to 3:24, the divine designation is Yahweh Elohim (usually translated "Lord God"), although there is a noteworthy departure from this pattern in 3:1b–5, where Elohim (God) alone occurs.

The variation in divine names coincides with another interesting feature of the text. When we analyze how God is described in Genesis 1–3, we discover that he is portrayed in two distinct ways.

> In Genesis 1 the majestic transcendence of a powerful cosmic organizer is primary. In line with this basic viewpoint Elohim creates and orders the universe by a series of decrees. He issues his command and the results are automatic. God appears as a being who stands outside of his cosmos and controls it with his mighty word. Hence the possible "anthropomorphic" expressions of Genesis 1 ("God said," "God saw," and "God rested") are reserved in character and tend to preserve the transcendence of God. They do not suggest the close proximity of a God who acts and looks like men.[5]

By way of contrast, the description of God in Genesis 2–4 is quite different.

> Here his immanence, personal nearness, and local involvement on the human scene are basic features. Yahweh is not a detached sovereign overlord but a God at hand as an intimate master. He is a God with whom man has ready contact and immediate responsibility. Accordingly the anthropomorphisms of Genesis 2–4 are so bold that they almost seem to depict Yahweh in terms of human limitations. He molds with his hands as a potter, he breathes into the mouth of a clay model, he plants a garden, he searches for a man, he has private conversations with man, woman, and beast, and he places a mark on yet another man.[6]

Given these differences between 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24, it is hardly surprising that many scholars conclude that two writers must have been responsible for producing such contrasting accounts.[7]

Undoubtedly, there is a clear difference between the style and theological outlook of 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24. With this there can be no disagreement. But,

5. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, 24; cf. Fishbane, *Text and Texture*, 8.

6. Habel, *Literary Criticism of the Old Testament*, 25.

7. It is usually maintained that 1:1–2:4 comes from the Priestly Writer (P) because of its interest in the Sabbath (2:1–3) and that 2:5–3:24 comes from the Yahwist (J) because it uses the divine name Yahweh.

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we must ask, why is this so? Why are two distinctive accounts of creation found at the beginning of Genesis?

By way of addressing this question, we need to recognize that the two descriptions of creation complement each other in a most remarkable way. This is especially so regarding their characterization of the Creator. In 1:1–2:3 God is revealed as separate and distant from his creation. In theological terms, he is transcendent. However, 2:4–3:24 pictures God as very close to humanity, walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the garden. In theological terms, God is immanent. By placing these accounts side by side, the opening sections of Genesis present a two-sided but complementary view of God. He is both transcendent and immanent.

This carefully balanced picture of God is also brought out by the narrator's choice of divine names. In 1:1–2:3 we find repeatedly the designation Elohim (God). However, in 2:4–3:24 the name Yahweh is introduced. Whereas Elohim is the general designation for a deity, Yahweh is a personal name. The use of Yahweh after 2:4 emphasizes the personal nature of God's relationship with humanity, something reflected in the contents of the narrative itself. For this same reason, in 3:1–5 the serpent always refers to God as Elohim and never as Yahweh; as God's archenemy, the serpent refuses to use God's personal name in the presence of Adam and Eve.

Although the two descriptions of creation in 1:1–2:3 and 2:4–3:24 are dissimilar, they should be viewed as complementary rather than contradictory. By having two accounts, Genesis enables us to see creation from two perspectives, enriching our understanding of what is going on. Remarkably, despite differing in content and literary style, the two accounts are united by the idea that the earth has been created to become God's dwelling place (see below).

The Earth as God's Temple-City

Most readers of Genesis 1 concentrate on the six days of creation. However, the opening section of Genesis comes to a climax with the seventh day. Unfortunately, this tends to be largely ignored because of the chapter division that separates day seven from days one to six. The present chapter divisions, however, were not there in the earliest form of Genesis.

The dominant motif in day seven involves God's resting (Gen. 2:1–3). This could imply that the Creator was tired from so much creating. But such an interpretation seems somewhat banal, especially when in Genesis 1 God merely speaks and things are brought into being. Why the emphasis on rest?

The most plausible explanation for this unusual interest in rest comes from J. H. Walton: "On the seventh day we finally discover that God has been

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working to achieve a rest. This seventh day is not a theological appendix to the creation account, just to bring closure now that the main event of creating people has been reported. Rather, it intimates the purpose of creation and of the cosmos. God does not set up the cosmos so that only people will have a place. He also sets up the cosmos to serve as his temple in which he will find rest in the order and equilibrium that he has established."[8] Walton arrives at this conclusion by reading Genesis in its ancient Near Eastern context. He observes that in extrabiblical accounts when gods become involved in creative activity, they do so in order to make a resting place for themselves. Normally this involves the creation of a temple that stands at the heart of a city. Divine rest is associated with temple building.[9]

Approaching the text of Genesis 1 independently of Walton, J. R. Middleton concludes that in this chapter God is portrayed as a cosmic builder:

> Suppose we press the question, *what sort of building* is God making in Genesis 1? Although not immediately obvious, the unequivocal answer given from the perspective of the rest of the Old Testament is this: God is building a *temple*. The notion of the cosmos as temple has its roots in the ancient Near Eastern worldview, in which temples were commonly understood as the royal palaces of the gods, in which they dwelled and from which they reigned. Furthermore, creation, followed by temple building and then divine rest, is a central theme in Mesopotamian, and perhaps Ugaritic, mythology (both Marduk and Baal have temples built for them after their conquest of the chaos monster).[10]

For both Walton and Middleton, the opening creation account in Genesis contains subtle allusions to temple building. As we shall see, the narrative in 2:4–3:24 reinforces this idea.

The Garden of Eden as Sanctuary

While 1:1–2:3 alludes to the creation of a temple, in 2:4–3:24 the Garden of Eden has every appearance of being a garden attached to a temple. Thus

8. J. H. Walton, "Creation," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, ed. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 161. Cf. J. H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 72–86.

9. The Hebrew term for temple, *hêkāl*, may also be translated as "palace." A temple was a divine palace. Consequently, temple and kingdom are intimately connected concepts.

10. J. R. Middleton, *The Liberating Image: The* Imago Dei *in Genesis 1* (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2005), 81; cf. R. P. Gordon, "The Week That Made the World: Reflections on the First Pages of the Bible," in *Reading the Law: Studies in Honour of Gordon J. Wenham*, ed. J. G. McConville and Karl Möller, LHBOTS 461 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2007), 234–37.

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G. J. Wenham comments, "The garden of Eden is not viewed by the author of Genesis simply as a piece of Mesopotamian farmland, but as an archetypal sanctuary, that is[,] a place where God dwells and where man should worship him. Many of the features of the garden may also be found in later sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle or Jerusalem temple. These parallels suggest that the garden itself is understood as a sort of sanctuary."[11] Interesting parallels exist between Eden and the later Israelite sanctuaries, particularly the tabernacle and Jerusalem temple.[12]

1. The Lord God walks in Eden as he later does in the tabernacle (Gen. 3:8; cf. Lev. 26:12; Deut. 23:15; 2 Sam. 7:6–7).
2. Eden and the later sanctuaries are entered from the east and guarded by cherubim (Gen. 3:24; Exod. 25:18–22; 26:31; 1 Kings 6:23–29).
3. The tabernacle menorah (lampstand) possibly symbolizes the tree of life (Gen. 2:9; 3:22; cf. Exod. 25:31–35).
4. The river flowing from Eden (Gen. 2:10) resembles Ezekiel 47:1–12, which envisages a river flowing from a future Jerusalem temple and bringing life to the Dead Sea.
5. Gold and onyx, mentioned in Genesis 2:11–12, are used extensively to decorate the later sanctuaries and priestly garments (e.g., Exod. 25:7, 11, 17, 31).[13] Gold in particular is associated with the divine presence.

Another fascinating pointer to the Garden of Eden as being part of a divine sanctuary may be seen in the duties that God gives the man in Genesis 2:15. The man's responsibilities in the garden are encapsulated in two verbs: *ʿābad* (*ʿāvad*), "to serve," "to work," "to till"; and *šāmar* (*shāmar*), "to keep," "to observe," "to guard."[14] When used independently, these verbs can refer to a wide range of activities. However, when used together, they tend to be linked to activities associated with the tabernacle or temple. The book of Numbers uses them in tandem to describe the duties of the Levites

11. G. J. Wenham, "Sanctuary Symbolism in the Garden of Eden Story," *PWCJS* 9 (1986): 19.

12. These parallels are set out by Wenham in "Sanctuary Symbolism," 19–25. Cf. R. M. Davidson, "Earth's First Sanctuary: Genesis 1–3 and Parallel Creation Accounts," *AUSS* 53 (2015): 65–89.

13. About one hundred references to gold and seven to onyx appear in the Exodus account of building the tabernacle. It should be noted, however, that in Gen. 2:11–12 the gold and onyx are located outside Eden in the region of Havilah.

14. The Hebrew verb *šāmar* is used in Deut. 5:12 concerning the Sabbath. The Israelites are to "observe, guard, keep" the Sabbath by preserving its sanctity. In all likelihood, Adam was commissioned to keep or guard the garden in order that it should remain holy as part of God's temple on earth.

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in the sanctuary (cf. Num. 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). This strongly suggests that the man's work is priestly in nature rather than agricultural. The man is appointed first and foremost as a guardian of sacred space; he is not created simply to be a gardener.

The overall picture in Genesis 1–2 suggests that the creation of the earth is closely associated with the construction of a palace/temple for God, although this is merely the start of the process, not its completion.[15] In this context humans are created not only to serve within this temple but also to extend its boundaries outward so that it fills the whole earth. To enable them to do this, God gives them royal authority alongside their priestly status.

Humanity's Royal Status

Genesis 1 stands in marked contrast to other ancient Near Eastern accounts when it describes the status of human beings. Whereas the main Babylonian story of creation, Enuma Elish, presents the destiny of humans in terms of providing food for the gods, Genesis ascribes to people a divinely given royal authority to rule over the earth. This is highlighted in two ways. First, they are directly instructed by God to exercise dominion over all other creatures.

> Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."
>
> So God created mankind in his own image,
> in the image of God he created them;
> male and female he created them.
>
> God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen. 1:26–28)

These verses emphasize that people are to govern all land animals, birds, and fish; the point is repeated twice within three verses. At the heart of the divine plan for humans is the idea that they should rule over the earth as God's vicegerents.

15. The evidence for God dwelling in Eden at this early stage is limited. For this reason, D. I. Block argues that Eden itself is not a sanctuary, while acknowledging that later sanctuaries resemble Eden. See "Eden: A Temple? A Reassessment of the Biblical Evidence," in *From Creation to New Creation: Biblical Theology and Exegesis*, ed. D. M. Gurtner and B. L. Gladd (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2013), 3–29.

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Second, the concept of royalty is associated with the expression "image of God." In ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, the phrase "image of God" is frequently linked to kings. The king was the living image of a god. The Egyptian king Ramesses II (1290–1224 BC) describes his divine image status in this way: "Utterance of the divine king, Lord of the Two Lands, lord of the form of Khepri, in whose limbs is Re, who came forth from Re, whom Ptah-Tatenen begat, King Ramses II, given life; to his father, from whom he came forth, Tatenen, father of the gods: 'I am thy son whom thou hast placed upon thy throne. Thou hast assigned to me thy kingdom, thou hast fashioned me in thy likeness and thy form, which thou hast assigned to me and hast created.'"[16] To be made in the "image of God" is to be given regal status. As Middleton remarks, "The writer of Genesis 1 portrays God as king presiding over 'heaven and earth,' an ordered and harmonious realm in which each creature manifests the will of the creator and is thus declared 'good.' Humanity is created *like* this God, with the special role of representing or imaging God's rule in the world."[17] Although the expression "image of God" has been the subject of much debate, it makes good sense to see it as denoting humanity's regal status.

Underlying the creation of the earth is God's desire to make a dwelling place for himself. In the light of this aspiration, the opening two chapters of Genesis reveal that humans are created with the intention that they should participate in transforming the earth into a divine dwelling. To this end, they are given a holy or priestly status that enables them to be in God's presence and serve in his sanctuary. God also delegates to people authority to rule on the earth as his vicegerents. In line with this, they are instructed to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth (1:28). Behind these commands lies the expectation that an ever-growing human population of royal priests will create a magnificent temple-city, which will eventually fill the earth.[18]

Such an expectation should not surprise us, especially when we view the book of Genesis in its original cultural context. In the ancient Near East, individual gods were often associated with particular cities. The inhabitants of the city worshiped the god whose temple stood at the heart of their community. The earliest readers of, or listeners to, Genesis would have automatically

16. J. H. Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: The Nineteenth Dynasty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1906), 3:181. The name Ramesses means "son of Ra."

17. Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 26.

18. W. J. Dumbrell develops the idea that Adam is a king-priest with the role of expanding Eden into a worldwide sanctuary. See "Genesis 2:1–17: A Foreshadowing of the New Creation," in *Biblical Theology: Retrospect and Prospect*, ed. S. J. Hafemann (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2002), 53–65.

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associated the creation of God's sanctuary on the earth with a city. They would have quickly realized that Eden was the elevated location designated by God to be at the center of his temple-city.[19]

The Great Betrayal

In the light of the divine plan for the earth, Genesis 3 recounts how the human couple tragically abandoned the special responsibility entrusted to them by God. The significance of Genesis 3 cannot be overestimated, though as a selective account of what took place it leaves many questions unanswered. In reading this chapter, we need to restrain our curiosity in order to hear clearly what the writer wishes to communicate.

Without unpacking the intriguing dialogue that takes place between the serpent[20] and the woman, let us observe how the human couple willfully abandon their principal duties as priestly vicegerents. First, Genesis 3 reveals that by letting in the serpent, they neglect to guard the sanctity of the garden. As G. K. Beale remarks, "When Adam failed to guard the temple by sinning and letting in a foul serpent to defile the sanctuary, he lost his priestly role, and the cherubim took over the responsibility of 'guarding' the Garden temple: God 'stationed the cherubim . . . *to guard* the way to the tree of life' (so Gen. 3:24; see also Ezek. 28:14, 16)."[21] As priests the human couple should have expelled the serpent from the garden.

Second, although God intended the human couple to rule over all the other creatures, on this occasion they obey one of the animals. By following the serpent's promptings, they fail to exercise authority over it. Their failure not only overturns the divinely instituted order of creation but also, significantly, is a blatant betrayal of God. By siding with the serpent, they reject God and

19. This comparison does not necessarily mean that the Israelites derived the concept of the temple-city from other nations. It is equally possible that polytheistic ideas about temple-cities have their origin in and are perversions of beliefs concerning the one and only true God.

20. The serpent is clearly no ordinary animal. Apart from being described as being "more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made" (3:1), it is portrayed by its actions as opposing God's sovereign rule over the earth. While later biblical texts identify the "ancient serpent" as "the devil, or Satan" (cf. Rev. 12:9; 20:2), Gen. 3 does not explicitly say this. For a fuller discussion, see P. R. Williamson, "Snakes and Dragons: A Neglected Theologial Trajectory of Genesis 3:15 in Scripture?," in *The Seed of Promise: The Sufferings and Glory of the Messiah; Essays in Honor of T. Desmond Alexander*, ed. P. R. Williamson and R. F. Cefalu, GlossaHouse Festschrift Series 3 (Wilmore, KY: GlossaHouse, 2020), 332–52.

21. G. K. Beale, *The Temple and the Church's Mission: A Biblical Theology of the Dwelling Place of God*, NSBT 17 (Leicester: Apollos, 2004), 70; cf. Middleton, *Liberating Image*, 59. The same verb *šāmar* (*shāmar*) is used in 2:15 and 3:24, which NIV translates "take care of" and "guard," respectively.

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his ordering of the world. Ironically, their treachery occurs in the context of the serpent's saying to them that they shall become "like God, knowing good and evil" (3:5). Unlike the serpent, the human couple have been made in the "image of God." However, by obeying the serpent instead of God, they forfeit their position as God's vicegerents. If they image anyone now, it is the serpent. Tragically, their authority to rule over the earth, delegated to them by God, now passes to the serpent.

By siding with the serpent, the human couple lose their royal and priestly status. This has major consequences. For now we shall mention only two of these. Almost immediately Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden and no longer enjoy an intimate relationship with God. As Walton observes, "In the aftermath of the fall, the greatest loss was not paradise; it was God's presence."[22] Responsibility for keeping/guarding the garden is given to cherubim who are stationed to guard the way to the tree of life (3:24).

Barred from access to the tree of life, Adam and Eve come under the power of death. Although they have been told by God that the punishment for eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is death (2:17), they have ignored this warning. Some scholars argue that this punishment was not enforced by God because the human couple did not die immediately after eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, "death" in this context need not necessarily imply the end of life; rather, it indicates spiritual separation from the one who is the source of all life.[23]

Since the opening chapters of Genesis anticipate the construction of a city that will be inhabited by both God and people, the disobedience of Adam and Eve throws God's creation project into chaos. In spite of being authorized and instructed to rule over all other creatures, they fail to exercise dominion over a cunning wild animal (3:1). Consequently, their authority to rule over the earth is transferred to the serpent, and they themselves become subject to it. Of necessity, God expels them from Eden and strips them of their royal and priestly status.

The tragic outcome of Adam and Eve's rebellion against God is reported in Genesis 4–11 through a series of specially chosen episodes. The last of these quite significantly involves the construction of a city.

22. J. H. Walton, "Eden, Garden of," in Alexander and Baker, *Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 205.

23. Cf. R. P. Gordon, "The Ethics of Eden: Truth-Telling in Genesis 2–3," in *Ethical and Unethical in the Old Testament: God and Humans in Dialogue*, ed. K. J. Dell, LHBOTS 528 (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 11–33.

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