



How Women
in the Bible
Advance the Story
of Salvation

REDEEMING EDEN

Ingrid Faro
with Joyce Koo Dalrymple

Forward by Skye Jethani

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Three birds are depicted in flight against a white background. One bird is in the upper right, another is in the center, and a third is in the lower right. They are all facing towards the left.

Ingrid Faro

with Joyce Koo Dalrymple

 ZONDERVAN
REFLECTIVE

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Foreword

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Introduction

BOLD WOMEN IN GOD'S BIG PICTURE

Rarely is a woman the main topic of a sermon or teaching outside of women's Bible study groups. This oversight has caused a dearth of insight into how important women are to God and his mission. This book traces a thread through Scripture that forms a cohesive narrative demonstrating that women initiate and advance key movements in redemptive history. These contributions go largely unnoticed in scholarship, teaching, and preaching. God values women. Therefore, God strategically used overlooked and underestimated women and girls who responded bravely in difficult circumstances to change the history of the world.

Most of us have overlooked the role of women in advancing the storyline of the Bible and history. Hebrew Bible scholar Jacob Wright observes that in the historical and theological account of the Israelite people recorded in Scripture, "women introduce the major epochs and their central themes. . . . Indeed, women figure prominently across the entire biblical corpus: from the matriarchs who create the nation to Esther who saves it."¹ I too missed Scripture's significant portrayal of women until I began teaching a graduate class on women in the Old Testament. The first year I taught this class, it was the toughest course in my fifteen years

of teaching because I didn't realize how many triggers it would set off among both the women and the men in the class. Since then, it's become my favorite class. I've learned to prepare for the traumas and triggers and to incorporate discussions about the misinformation and, frankly, wretched ways biblical women are often spoken about or ignored in the church. It was during this time, as I studied and prepared for my classes, that I began to see the pivotal placement of women in the Bible's storyline.

Each chapter in this book builds on the others, pointing toward a comprehensive theme that recognizes God's attention to women who were not looking for success or title. Often these biblical women were considered despised, foreigners, or of questionable value within Israelite society. These women weren't trying to be heroes. They simply took action to do what was right or just. And their unpretentious tenacity transformed history.

Most of these would be considered ordinary women. Some of the women may be unfamiliar to you. A few had positions of significance in their time. Though these women are rarely the main topic of conversations or preaching, they are honored in the pages of Scripture. Some of their reputations have been wrongfully sullied or vilified. We will acknowledge these women and, when needed, set their stories right.

I have no agenda to push and no axe to grind. My goal is to recount women whom God has deemed noteworthy through their strategic placement in the Bible, using clean exegesis, incorporating ancient Near Eastern cultural evidence and archaeological material, and reading within the canonical context. All of this background contributes to our understanding and interpretation. As such, this book is intended to be accessible to those with a general interest in women of the Bible and to those studying the subject academically, historically, or curiously.

Since beginning my biblical and theological studies in 2000, I've approached the role of women in Scripture prayerfully and

curiously. Thirteen years of theological graduate study, including biblical Hebrew, Koine Greek, cognate (related) languages of Ugaritic, Aramaic, and Northwest Semitic inscriptions, have been complemented with learning from scholars who work extensively in Akkadian, Sumerian, Egyptian (hieroglyphics and hieratic), and archaeology. Having taught the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament now for sixteen years at five institutions, including biblical Hebrew through advanced exegesis for eleven years, and working alongside amazing colleagues, I have expanded the tools available in my research. All of this is undergirded with prayer and the commitment to be “approved to God” as one “accurately handling the word of truth” (2 Tim 2:15 NASB).

My tools for this exploration, therefore, are biblical Hebrew (the primary original language of the Old Testament), occasionally the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible around 200 BC), the Greek of the New Testament, archaeological and material culture, ancient law codes, and other scholarly research that sheds light on our understanding of the history and interpretation of the passages. We will dig into what the words and stories may have meant to the first hearers and readers of the biblical texts. We’ll also trace the connections and recurring themes to uncover the roles and significance of these women within the broader biblical narrative.

Along the way, you’ll discover the importance of women from God’s perspective. Hopefully, you’ll find refreshing insights that inspire men and women alike to be people of valor in the face of wrongs and bold in the presence of powers that would silence those who stand up for the dignity of others and themselves. In his work on the plot structure of Genesis, Todd Patterson observes, “Female characters in Genesis often take initiative that determines the next development in the narrative (e.g. Eve, Sarah, Tamar). This important theme has not received adequate attention even from feminist scholars and yet the plot-structure

provides fertile ground for new explorations.”² This theme (women initiating narrative movements) continues throughout the plot structure of the Pentateuch and the Historical Books of the Old Testament (the Torah and Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible).

Our exploration begins in Genesis 1 through 4, examining the Hebrew words and structure of the biblical text to better understand who woman is as an image bearer of God with man. We investigate who women are designed to be from creation as a coregent with God and as partners with men in carrying out God’s mission from Eden to the rest of the earth.³ We also look at what happened to the liaison between woman and man in the movement from Genesis 2 to 3. From Genesis 3 to the end of Revelation, God is at work redeeming what was lost in Eden, and the Bible shows us that women have a strategic role in advancing salvation history. Thus, throughout Scripture, women play an ongoing and pivotal role in redeeming Eden.

From this foundational discussion, we progress and identify the stories of some key individual women who initiate important narrative movements in Scripture. There are many, many more who aren’t covered in this book. The following paragraphs summarize the stories of a few of the women we will explore.

In Genesis 12 through 21, both Abraham and Sarah at times act in faith and at times act in doubt. Ultimately, both need to respond in faith when God promises them an heir, as Abraham is one hundred years old and Sarah’s womb is “dead” (Gen 18:11–14; Rom 4:19; Heb 11:11–12). Their faith provides an early understanding of life coming from death.

Exodus begins with the sons of Jacob and the “fruitfulness” of the Israelite women who are slaves in Egypt. The narrative quickly turns its attention to two midwives who defy the orders of the mightiest leader of the ancient Near East, the pharaoh. They refuse to kill the baby slave boys. Then the story turns to

a mother, daughter, and princess who also defy the pharaoh's orders and work together to save one particular slave baby boy, who is initially nameless. After all, he's just the baby of slaves, of no consequence to the world. Although the pharaoh is afraid of the Israelite men revolting against him, he misses that the actions of brave women initiate his demise. Five women of different ages and backgrounds save the slave baby boy, who would be named Moses and become God's appointed deliverer of the slaves who form the nation of Israel.

In Exodus and Numbers, Miriam is recognized, along with Moses and Aaron, as one of the leaders who followed God and brought Israel out of Egypt. Miriam, like her brothers, had a significant moment of failure: Aaron in Exodus 32:1–35; Miriam in Numbers 12:1–15; and Moses in Numbers 20:8–13. Yet, also along with her brothers, she is honored for her role and acknowledged as a prophet: Aaron in Exodus 7:1; Miriam in Exodus 15:20; and Moses in Deuteronomy 18:18. The leadership of all three is spoken of in Micah 6:4..

The book of Joshua opens with the admonition to be strong and courageous and to be careful to do all that the Lord commands. Joshua 2 hints at questionable behavior of the two spies sent ahead of the troops into Jericho. But thanks to the bold, faith-filled words and actions of Rahab, a Canaanite woman of questionable occupation, the spies are delivered and Jericho is defeated. Rahab and her family become integrated into the people of Israel, with her becoming the wife of the Israelite Salmon and mother of Boaz, in the line of David and the Messiah (Ruth 4:21–22; Matt 1:5).

The book of Judges starts with the death of Joshua (Judg 2:6–10). After his death, Israel does evil in the sight of the Lord and serves the gods of Canaan. When the Israelites call out to the Lord, he sends judges to deliver them from their attackers and oppressors. In the Old Testament, only three figures are identified

as both a judge and a prophet: Moses (Exod 18:13–27; Deut 18:18); Deborah (Judg 4:4); and Samuel, the last judge of Israel (1 Sam 7:6, 15–17; 3:20). Deborah, in cooperation with general Barak, delivers the Israelites from Jabin, king of Canaan, and his general Sisera, bringing Israel forty years of peace.

During the time of the judges, we also have the story of Ruth. She is routinely called a Moabite in the book bearing her name. Her bold confession and actions of faith in following Naomi, her Israelite mother-in-law, and the God of Israel bring her into the line of David and the Messiah (Ruth 4:16–22; Matt 1:5).

First Samuel opens with the story of Hannah, one of two wives of Elkanah, also during the time of the judges. The main priest at this time, Eli, sees her lips moving but making no sound, so he assumes Hannah is drunk as she silently implores the Lord for a child. Hannah's prayer is answered. Her firstborn, Samuel, restores national worship. He is the last judge and prophet in the Old Testament, initiating the monarchy by anointing first Saul and then David as king. Much later, the prayer of Mary, mother of Jesus, significantly mirrors Hannah's prayer.

First Kings continues the thread of redemptive history. While David is in his final days, he has ignored the kingdom's succession. The prophet Nathan and Bathsheba, mother of Solomon, step in. We finally hear Bathsheba's voice as she advocates for the fulfillment of God's promises regarding Solomon's kingship. Nathan's council and Bathsheba's courage secure the continuation of the messianic line through Solomon.

In the following chapters, we will delve into the details of the lives and times of these women. Some of them are famous; most are not. All of them inspire us to live better, be bolder, and trust God more deeply. They encourage us to work in cooperation with other women and men to save lives, deliver the oppressed, provide for the needy, and expand goodness in our world, whether or not anyone is watching.

The end of each chapter has questions to prompt you to reflect on the content, consider how the chapter applies to your life, and take potential action steps. These questions are intended to help you process what you've read individually or with others and prayerfully consider how God might want you to respond. Finally, each chapter concludes with a breath prayer to help you slow down and connect with God. This practice involves slowly breathing in and out while repeating a simple prayer several times following the rhythm of your breath.

Reflect on the Chapter

- ✦ What is the role of women in the storyline of the Bible and in redemptive history? Is this surprising to you? Why or why not?
- ✦ From this chapter, name a few specific ways women initiate and advance God's redemptive plan.

Reflect on Your Life

- ✦ God placed women in key junctures of redemptive history, which reveals how much God values women. In what ways have women been valued at your church, work, or community? In what ways have you seen women being undervalued?
- ✦ Who have been some women in your life who have inspired you to live better, be bolder, and trust God more deeply?
- ✦ What do you hope to learn or take away from this book?

Take Your Bold Step

- ✦ Write a thank you note to a woman who has inspired you.

- * Share one thing you learned about how God values women with someone in your life.
- * If you are a ministry leader, plan a lesson, Bible study, or sermon about one of the bold women in Scripture.

Breath Prayer

(Inhale) Lord, open my eyes to see
(Exhale) how you delight in women.



CHAPTER 1

Man and Woman as God's Image

GENESIS 1

The way a story begins is important. The beginning is how the author sets the scene and lays the foundation for how we read the rest of the book. Genesis 1 opens with “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In the beginning, God had a plan. He wanted to manifest the spiritual realm within a physical universe and to express his being in the earth through us as his image bearers. We humans probably best understand this as imagining an idea, a concept, or an invention and, through a creative process, bringing our inner image into tangible reality.

Recently, I rewatched the movie *Hidden Figures*, about the first black women at NASA and their pivotal roles in sending the first man into space. The human ability to create what is not yet is expressed by Katherine Goble Johnson in the movie: “In my mind I’m already there.”¹ An embellishment of Michelangelo’s words about his creative process convey a similar idea: “I saw the angel in the marble and carved until I set it free.”¹ Certainly some

1. The source of these words is unknown, but perhaps a creative expansion from Michelangelo’s letter to Benedetto Varchi, “*Io intendo scultura quella che si fa per forza di levare: quella che si fa per via di porre è simile alla pittura*” which is roughly translated, “I mean sculpture, that which is done by force of taking away: that which is

human inventions and works of art happen by chance. More commonly, however, the creative process involves envisioning something that inspires actions to create something new. These creations are often an expression of our being or our character. With this in mind, we turn to the biblical story.

The Bible is a beautiful literary piece of art. It is also the most read book in the world. I believe it is divinely inspired to tell us about God, the world, and ourselves. If you question or don't accept the Bible as authoritative or inspired, then I invite you to join this exploration as a narrative project. The opening two chapters of the Bible describe God's creative process and give insight into his thoughts and character. As Catherine McDowell points out, "No biblical text has received more attention than the opening chapters of Genesis. In particular, the creation of humans in the image (*ṣelem*) and likeness (*dēmût*) of God, as it is described in Genesis 1:26–27."² Indeed, how we read this passage is the foundation on which we must build our understanding of the rest of Scripture.

The stories we believe about who we are and where we come from shape our worldview and the way we see ourselves and value others. In Genesis 1 the character and inner life of God are expressed through his words and actions. Let's note these and compare them with other ancient Near Eastern stories of the making of the cosmos (cosmogony) and the making of humans (anthropogeny).

God Creates in Community for Community

In reading through Genesis 1, we find layers of interconnected relationships, with no mention of any forces in conflict or in

made by means of placing is similar to painting." See https://it.wikisource.org/wiki/Lettera_a_messer_Benedetto_Varchi.

competition with the one God. God's work of creation was done in community and for the sake of creating more community. The divine, the spiritual, the human, and the earthly communities are all designed to function together in harmony.

This one God, however, is multifaceted. The Creator acts through the community within himself, moving through his Spirit and speaking through his Word. God then reveals himself and his character through what he makes and in the way he makes them.

Although the Hebrew word for God, *Elohim*, is a plural noun, the verb "created" in Genesis 1:1 is singular. God is one and yet a complex, manifold God. Chief rabbi Jonathan Sacks says, "Elohim in the plural means, 'the One who is the totality of powers, forces and causes in the universe.' It refers to God as we experience Him in creation and its natural laws, as well as in justice and its moral laws."³ A Hebrew word used elsewhere in the Bible for the universe, *ôlâm*, "is connected to the verb meaning 'to hide' (see Lev 4:13; Deut 22:1). The physical world is a place in which the presence of God is real, yet hidden."⁴

This complex God is further described in the creation narrative as having a Spirit. The Spirit (or breath or wind) of God moved across the expansive deep (Gen 1:2). In Hebrew, the word "Spirit" (*rûah*) is a singular, feminine noun. The actions of the Spirit, or breath force of God, in Genesis 1:2 can also be translated as the Spirit of God "fluttering" over the face of the waters "like a bird, that moves its wings back and forth."⁵ The verb "to flutter" occurs also in Deuteronomy 32:11, describing an eagle that hovers, or flutters, over the baby birds in its nest. The God who conceives the idea of heavens and earth and imbues movement and breath through his Spirit also speaks, and his thoughts become reality. This complex God cooperates and communes in perfect unison between the power of his thoughts, movement of his Spirit, and

force of his words. Birthing language pertaining to the creation of the world is echoed in Job 38:8–9 (NRSVue), when God asks Job,

“Who shut in the sea with doors
when it burst out from the womb,
when I made the clouds its garment
and thick darkness its swaddling band?”

The God of creation has community within himself.

We’re not told how God created the heavenly realms before the universe was set in motion, but the Bible speaks of spiritual beings present at the birth of creation in Job 38:7 (NRSVue). God tells Job that when he created the universe, “the morning stars sang together and all the heavenly beings [lit. ‘sons of Elohim’] shouted for joy.” The Hebrew terms for “morning stars” and “sons of Elohim” are common expressions for nonhuman, spiritual beings who were created before the physical, earthly realm.⁶ Our multifaceted God, Elohim, created the world in conversation with spiritual beings that he had created in his likeness. This is expressed in Genesis 1:26 (NRSVue): “Then God said, ‘Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness . . .’” W. Randall Garr demonstrates convincingly in his extensive work on this passage that when God “reveals his intention to make the human race,” he is situated “in his divine community” of heavenly beings who are fully in unity and in “support of their leader.”⁷

The process of creation unfolds over several days, each having a marked time. The seventh day, however, is unique. After God completes his creation and appoints humanity to represent him in the physical world, God ceases from his work of creation.⁸ The interconnected layers of community are complete. The number six “represents the material, physical, secular.”⁹ The number seven has special significance in Hebrew understanding, indicating holiness, fullness, or perfection. The “seven-day” framework

serves a double purpose. First, it speaks to the common ancient Near Eastern practice of using a “seven-day” framework as a literary device for marking sacred time when describing building a temple for their god(s). The creation story in Genesis 1 is a “temple-inauguration” text. In other words, the universe is God’s cosmic sanctuary, and the earth represents the physical place of his dwelling.¹⁰ Second, the seven days of Genesis 1 provide a template for human society’s work week.¹¹ Seven is also the number of times that God assesses his work: “God saw that it was good.” With the seventh time, after creating humanity, he emphasizes that “it was very good.”

The creation narrative can be described as “exalted prose.”¹² Let’s look in more detail at the final act, which many describe as the crown of creation: the making of humanity in Genesis 1:26–28.¹³

Then God said, Let us make humanity as our image,¹⁴ according to our likeness, so that they may have dominion in the realm of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, all the animals, and all the earth, and every moving thing that moves upon the earth.

And God created humankind as his image, as the image of God he created it (humanity);¹⁵ male and female he created them (humanity).¹⁶

Then God blessed them, and God said to them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion in the realm of the fish of the sea, and the birds in the sky, and every animal that moves upon the earth. (my translation)

The culmination of God’s act of creating humanity proceeded in community, for community. As Carmen Joy Imes puts it, God made humanity in “teamwork,” in consultation with “us”:

the “morning stars” and “sons of Elohim” in God’s divine council.¹⁷ The Hebrew word *’ādām* (hereafter, just written as *adam*) in Genesis 1 and in most of the Hebrew Bible means humanity, not gendered “man.” This is clear from verse 27, where God’s creation of humanity (*adam*) is first identified with a singular pronoun and in the next clause within the same sentence is identified as “male and female” with a plural pronoun. Verse 28 continues with the double plural pronoun: “God blessed *them*, and God said to *them* . . .” (emphasis mine), using all plural verbs as well. The emphasis is on the unity of God’s creation of one diverse humanity, in which every human individually and all humans corporately are God’s image bearers. The interplay between humanity as singular (a unified whole) and as plural (individuals interdependent on one another) continues in Genesis 2.

What Does It Mean to Be God’s Image?

The scholarship behind our understanding of the “image of God” has existed for decades, but only recently has it begun to reach the wider public.

When asked what my favorite book is, I often respond that it’s the published version of a Harvard dissertation written by Catherine McDowell, *The Image of God in the Garden of Eden*.¹⁸ Learning about the image of God was transformative in my life. As a biblical interpreter, I seek to understand what the original authors of the biblical text were saying. McDowell, along with many other scholars such as Carmen Imes, demonstrates that ancient Egypt, Mesopotamia, and Israel had common understandings for the meaning of image and likeness, which sheds light on this concept for us today.

The societies surrounding Israel all made idols, or statues, of their gods out of stone, clay, bronze, or precious metals. After the

idol was formed, it was often taken to a garden or by a stream to complete a vivification process to bring life into the idol.

One common set of rituals performed on idols in Mesopotamia and Egypt was called the Washing of the Mouth and the Opening of the Mouth ceremony, giving the god the ability to speak. A final procedure was the Opening of the Eyes ceremony. When the mouth and the eyes of the statue were opened, it would be inhabited by a spiritual entity, making it a god. We recognize the use of this language in Genesis 3. The serpent says, “When you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [or gods], knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). This leads us to understand that the actual desire of the man and the woman was *to become a god* on their own. The temptation they quickly yielded to was to no longer be reliant on God but to be the arbitrators of good and bad for themselves, independent of God.

Outside of Israel, they also made statues of kings or governors of their lands, who were generally considered gods themselves, or at least the representative of one of the gods of their land. These statues were physical images of the leader’s essence and also stood for their government. Therefore, the statues made in their image and likeness were to be treated with the same level of respect as the leader himself, or herself. For example, some of the best known are the statues of Ramesses II. Many of the statues of the pharaohs still stand at the entryways, temples, and walled cities of Egypt. Statues of other kings were similarly placed, like the statue of the ruler Hadad-yith’i at Tell Fekheriye in northern Syria. The inscription on his statue uses the same ancient words, describing the statue as the “image and likeness” of the governor, as in Genesis 1:26, where humanity is the image and likeness of God.¹⁹

The inscriptions often found at the base of these statues first give a dedication to the king’s or governor’s ruling god. After this tribute are statements along the line of “This is the image of king

(or governor) such and such. This image represents the king himself and his government. The way you treat this image is just like the way you treat the king himself. Therefore, if you treat this image well and respect it, you are giving respect to the king.” A list of blessings follows. “But if you do any damage to this statue, if you mar the statue or treat it badly, it’s like you are doing that to the king himself.” After the list of blessings is a list of curses that will come upon anyone who dares mistreat the statue.

In the Old Testament, the word “image” or “statue” (*selem*) generally refers to an illicit idol that God prohibits. Therefore, McDowell notes that “an explicitly positive or favorable meaning of *selem* occurs only when it describes the creation of mankind.”²⁰ Daniel Fleming helpfully points out, “Read in light of the Bible’s abhorrence of images, Gen 1:26 proposes that humanity itself, male and female, represent the only acceptable statues of God. The only legitimate representation of the Creator has been made by himself.”²¹

The big contrast between the creation of humans in the Bible and the creation of humans in the rest of the ancient Near East is that outside of the Bible, only kings and rulers were divine image bearers (or some were considered gods themselves). The rest of the masses were created by the gods to serve the gods and their appointed rulers: to bring them food, build them temples, fight their wars, etc. Humans were considered noisy and annoying. In contrast, in Genesis and throughout the rest of the Bible, every human being is God’s image bearer. Every human bears the dignity and value of God himself. God takes personally the way we treat every other human being, including ourselves.

Image language from Genesis 1 onward is kinship, family language. It is also royalty language. For we are made in God’s image *so that* we may rule. The intended purpose for every human is to be royal children of God. We are created to be God’s

representatives, carrying out his blessings, bringing his goodness, and fighting against the evil and injustice in the world.

In Genesis, the fall did not cause humans to lose their status as divine image bearers. For in Genesis 5:1–3, image-of-God language returns and continues through the human genealogy: “This is the record of the generations of Adam. When God created Adam, he made him in the likeness of God. Male and female he created them. And he blessed them. And he called their name ‘Humankind’ when they were created. And when Adam had lived one hundred thirty years, he fathered of a child in his likeness, according to his image. And he called his name Seth” (LEB).

Just as humans did not lose their status as image bearers after the fall, neither did humans lose their status as divine image bearers after the flood. For in Genesis 9:5–7, God requires every human to give account for the way they treat every other human being *because* “in his own image God made humankind.” And God repeats the creation blessing he first spoke in Genesis 1:28. God never stops taking personally the way every human treats any another human, *especially* the way people in positions of power or influence treat others. We hear this throughout the words of the psalmists and the prophets. And we hear this in the words of Jesus, who points out that God’s rulership is in stark contrast to human rulership, saying, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant,” (Matt 20:25–26 NIV). Furthermore, Jesus tells us that he takes personally the way we treat every other human being: “‘The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’ . . . whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.” (Matt 25:40, 45 NIV).

God elevates every human being no matter how marred or

broken and expects us to do the same. God's plan from the beginning has never changed. Who we are and who God expects us to be in this physical universe sets the foundation for how we view and treat every person, man and woman. Any reading of Scripture that twists this truth corrupts the mission of God, which he declared from the beginning as "very good."

Reflect on the Chapter

- ✦ What does the creation account in Genesis reveal about who God is?
- ✦ What does the creation account reveal about the value of humanity to God?
- ✦ How does the creation account in Genesis differ from other Near Eastern stories of the creation of the world and humans?

Reflect on Your Life

- ✦ Identify some specific ways in which God made you in his image.
- ✦ How does knowing that every human bears the dignity and value of God himself affect how you see yourself and value others?

Take Your Bold Step

- ✦ God elevates every human being no matter how marred or broken and expects us to do the same. Take a moment to think of someone who is being mistreated, and ask God to reveal what you can do to help restore their dignity, such as speaking up for them in a meeting, promoting policy

changes at your school or workplace, or partnering with an advocacy or humanitarian aid group.

- ✱ Pray for someone who does not know their value to God. Share with them that they are made in God's image and have infinite worth to him.

Breath Prayer

(Inhale) Our Creator God,
(Exhale) thank you for making me in your image.

Sneak Peek!
Not for Distribution



CHAPTER 2

Man and Woman as Sacred Space

GENESIS 2

Humanity is intended to represent God as his royal priestly family on the physical earth. Genesis 2 gives us pictures in story form to help us know how to live together as his divine representatives and carriers of his presence.

Our identity and purpose as God's image bearers in Genesis 1 continue to take shape in Genesis 2. Here we see God's personal touch as he forms the earthling (the *adam*) with dust from the earth (the *ādāmāh*, Gen 2:7). With the closeness of a kiss, the Lord God breathes divine life into his nostrils, and the person becomes a living being. The fusion of soil and Spirit points to our inherent contradictions. We are dust and divinity. Little wonder we feel pulled in two directions—earthbound and heavenward.

The narrative expands in intricate imagery to help us imagine life in the garden and to show what life is like when people are rightly aligned with God and one another. Genesis 2:4–25 instructs us about our essence, identity, and mission. This passage reveals powerful insights, building on the dignity of all people as God's coregents. But some poor translations obscure God's beautiful picture, minimizing or degrading the importance of humanity in general and women in particular. Wrong concepts

from these faulty translations are then taught as authoritative truth. I won't speak to the motives of the translators or preachers but rather point to the uplifting and biblically solid correctives.

Four Key Attributes of Our Identity in Genesis 2

Four key attributes serve as a blueprint for our identity and our purpose as humanity.

HUMAN IDENTITY

God made one humanity with diversity. As Genesis 1:27 (NRSVA) states, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them [singular in the Hebrew]; male and female he created them [plural in the Hebrew]." In the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible), humankind is *ton anthrōpon*, from the Greek root word *anthrōpos*. This word is not distinctly male, but rather, is the word for "humanity" or "human being," which includes males and females.

Likewise, in Genesis 2:7, the Septuagint rightly translates the Hebrew word *adam* as *ton anthrōpon*, "the human being." For there is one humanity—not separate creations of man and woman. We are of one substance together. Since *adam* (humanity) was taken from the *adamah* (the earth), what humanity does impacts the earth itself. The emphasis is on the unity of humanity with God, with the earth, and with one another.

Humanity (*adam*) in Genesis 1:27 and 2:7 refers to man and woman, together. These passages about male and female in Genesis aren't intended as biology lessons, but lessons in anthropology, teaching us what *kind* of being God created us to be. They don't explain *how* God made one humanity in two parts, but rather that humanity will rightly represent God in the world only as one humankind comprised of males and females. The unity in diversity functioning together as God's representatives is key.

It also obliterates any separation by racial or ethnic divides. All such human power-driven distinctions deface the image of God.

The diversification of the *adam* as male and female is important to human identity.¹ The first basic kinship set for human identity is male and female. The man voices this realization when he is introduced to the woman as the other half of his wholeness, expressed in poetic form: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). The composite term “flesh and bone” in both the Old Testament and the New Testament consistently refers to a kinship relationship, to family.² Perhaps God placed a pause between the need for companionship and the provision because he wanted the man to feel the lack of his other half so he would appreciate the wholeness the woman brings him. We cannot truly know ourselves as individuals without knowing ourselves in relationship with others, especially those who are different from us.³

MORAL IDENTITY

God’s prescription to eat from *every tree* of the garden, with the prohibition against eating from *one tree*, gives humanity the opportunity to learn about moral character (Gen 2:16–17). This is unique to humans as earthly creatures. Jacqueline Lapsley points out that before humans are given the right to choose between all the trees in the garden or the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, “the *adam* is without a moral identity, in the sense that without any prohibitions of any kind, no moral decision making is expected or required of the human being.”⁴

It’s important to note that the first “command”⁵ God gives in the Bible is a positive one: “The LORD God commanded the human, saying ‘From every tree of the Garden, Eat freely!’” (Gen 2:16, my translation). Or, as I like to elaborate from the context of Genesis 2:9, “Look at all the beautiful and delicious trees I made for you! Enjoy them all!”

The second command establishes a moral-ethical boundary: “There is something off-limits for you, even though you’re in my image and therefore it is available to you. You have the ability, the right, to choose independence from me and to decide for yourselves what is good or bad, right or wrong, in the world I have given you authority over as stewards. But if you decide to go against my wisdom, the consequences will bring chaos and death instead of harmony and life” (my expanded living translation of Gen 2:17).

At this point in the narrative, choice has become “a meaningful category.”⁶ Baird Callicott explains further that moral choice entails “the power to *judge*, to *decide*, to *determine* what is right and what is wrong *in relation to self*.”⁷ Once aware of the power of choice, “human beings became conscious of their capacity for good as well as evil.”⁸ The decision that the man and the woman make in the next chapter is not based on God’s perspective of what is good, but rather on what they themselves perceive as beneficial for the *self* rather than for the good of the *other*.

The man and the woman are allowed to make mistakes and receive the consequences for their decisions.

PRIESTLY IDENTITY

Eden is not only a lavish garden but also a sanctuary, a replica of the heavenly temple. A temple is where God makes his presence known on the earth.⁹ The tabernacle and the temple built by Solomon were patterned after the garden and the heavenly temple. God dwelled in the garden, close to the first man and woman.¹⁰ In light of Genesis 1:26–28, God’s image bearers were to represent and reflect God’s goodness in such a way that his glorious presence, initially limited to the garden temple of Eden, was to be extended throughout the whole earth.¹¹ What an amazing vision! God never gives up on this vision. Jesus renews this vision

as the goal of the church—God’s people rightly representing him as we follow Jesus.

While on earth, Jesus described himself incarnate as the temple (John 2:21); he was the place where the presence of God dwelled on earth. After Jesus ascended to heaven, he sent the Holy Spirit to dwell in us. Our bodies are now temples of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 3:16; 6:19). And in Christ, God’s people are collectively his temple: “In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God” (Eph 2:21–22 NRSVue).

Finally, when Jesus returns, the whole earth will be redeemed and in effect be a sanctuary where God will dwell among the people and sit upon the throne (Revelation 21–22).¹²

This is God’s plan in the beginning, where both the garden and the people are God’s beautiful and holy temple. God installs the humans into this sacred space and instills them with purpose.¹³ The passage reads, “And the LORD God took the *adam* and installed him in the garden of Eden to serve it and to protect it” (Gen 2:15, my translation). Two of the verbs used in Genesis 2:15, “serve and protect” are only paired together in the Hebrew Bible when referring to “‘serving and guarding / obeying’ God’s word,” or “to priests who ‘serve’ God in the temple and ‘guard’ the sanctity and the purity of the temple (Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14).”¹⁴

The humans (man and woman together) are to serve and protect the garden as sacred space, a place where God could abide with humans. This divine assignment, however, foreshadows the possibility of a threat to the garden and speaks to humanity’s responsibility to protect the sanctity of the place. The *adam* is told to be alert because malevolent spiritual forces had already rebelled against God.

Therefore, after installing the human in the garden temple, giving purpose and boundaries, the Lord God says that it’s not

good for the *adam* to be alone. However, in the next sentences in Genesis 2:18–23, a few key Hebrew words poorly translated into English have harmed our understanding of women as co-image bearers of God.

IDENTITY AS FEMALE AND MALE: MAN AND WOMAN AS SACRED SPACE

In the beautiful garden sanctuary, one thing is not good. It isn't evil, but it is *not good*. It is not good for the man to be alone. Life in the garden isn't only to relax and enjoy the good food. As a priest, the human is also supposed to be on guard duty, protecting the sacred space. For this, the human needs a strong ally.

Genesis 2:18–23 is intended to help us understand how we are to relate to one another as male and female. Tragically, the insufficient translations along with poor teaching have led to marred relationships and a confused image of God. Here's the passage with a few troubled translations in bold that have led to confusion and bad behavior:

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a **helper** [*ezer*] as his partner." So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a **helper** [*ezer*] as his partner.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his **ribs** [*sela*] and closed up its place with flesh. And the **rib** [*sela*] that the LORD God had taken from the man **he made** [*bnh*, built] into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said,

“This at last is bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
this one shall be called Woman,
for out of Man this one was taken.” (NRSVue)

We’ll look at the words in bold to get a better understanding of God’s intentions for humans as male and female.

‘Ezer: A Strong Ally

Quite a lot has been written about this Hebrew word *‘ezer* in scholarship and for the broader public.¹⁵ The word *‘ezer* occurs in Genesis 2:18 and 20. Most of the major English translations render *‘ezer* as “helper, help,” except a few that render it “companion” (MSG, TLB, NET). When I teach these verses, I ask the students what words or images they associate with “helper” in Genesis 2. Inevitably, I’m told, “assistant,” “housekeeper,” “secretary,” etc.; characters from the movie *The Help*; or some other person of lesser position or authority giving aid to someone of greater position.

However, *‘ezer* occurs twenty-one times in the Hebrew Bible, twice here in Genesis and nineteen times elsewhere—predominantly in military contexts.¹⁶ In sixteen of the twenty-one occurrences, *‘ezer* refers to the Lord God as our help! We can be sure that God is not anyone’s assistant, doing our dishes or cleaning up after us.

Here are a few examples of the Lord as *‘ezer*:¹⁷

1. Exodus 18:4: Moses named his son Eliezer, for he said, “My father’s God was my helper; he saved me from the sword of Pharaoh.”
2. Psalm 20:2 (NRSVue): “May he [the Lord] send you help from the sanctuary and give you support from Zion.”

3. Psalm 115:9: “All you Israelites, trust in the LORD—he is their help and shield.”
4. Psalm 124:8 (NRSVue): “Our help is in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.”

Although the translations also use “help” or “helper” for God, *‘ezer* has developed a very different connotation in Genesis 2 when referring to women. From the Hebrew use of the word *‘ezer*, woman should be understood as a divine help, a strong ally serving and protecting with the man as priests in the garden. Yet so few English translations have changed their rendering of the Hebrew *‘ezer* in Genesis 2:18 and 20. This has led to ineffectiveness in our mutual work in the church and in the world.

Unfortunately, in the garden, neither the man nor woman resist the serpent’s temptation to be their own god. But God’s divine assignment remains. As the continuing story of Scripture shows, many women do step boldly into their role as *‘ezer*! This significant God-given identity is lived out by the women in the following chapters, demonstrating what has too often been missed.

Ṣēlā’: Holding Up Our Side of Sacred Space

Genesis 2 gives us a second image to further help us understand man and woman’s role in the world as God’s image bearer. The Lord God gives us another perhaps even more vibrant image of his plan for how man and woman are to represent him in the world through the Hebrew word *ṣēlā*, which is almost always mistranslated into English as “rib” in Genesis 2:21–22. As some prominent but ignored scholars have pointed out, it should be translated “side.”¹⁸

The Hebrew word *ṣēlā* occurs forty times in the Hebrew Bible. The only place it is translated “rib” is in Genesis 2:21–22. Every major English Bible since the 1530 Tyndale version translates *ṣēlā* as “rib,” except the NET Bible and the Amplified Bible (“part he

had taken out of the man,” “part”). The passage reads, “And the Lord God built from the side which he took from the *adam* into a woman, and he brought her to the *adam*” (my translation).

Centuries of mistranslation and misconceptions need to be corrected because Genesis 1–3 is “the very base of Western perception of femininity.”¹⁹ Comments about women as Adam’s rib have generally been negative and sometimes deplorable with slurs regarding the inferior or backbiting character of women.²⁰ As Anne Lerner observes, “The creation of the first woman has been viewed as secondary to the man’s; her substance, derivative; her eating the fruit of the forbidden tree, culpable; her status relative to her man, subordinate. Her story, framed by her creation from a rib and by her banishment from the Garden of Eden, has been exploited to validate the dependent, circumscribed position of women.”²¹

Wilda Gafney notes, “The *tzela’* [or *ṣēlā*] that God removes is a ‘side’ and not a ‘rib’ as commonly mistranslated. Throughout Exodus the *tzela’* of the ark of the covenant on which its poles are alternately set are its sides. There is no other place in Scripture in which *tzela’* is translated as a rib.”²² Let’s look more closely at the word *ṣēlā* and why I and other scholars call “rib” a mistranslation.

Outside of Genesis 2:21–22, *ṣēlā* is never translated “rib.” It is almost always translated “side.” And it’s not just any word for side. It has a unique and special use. Other than the two translations as “rib” in Genesis 2:21–22, all but two uses of *ṣēlā* are special architectural terms for the sides of sacred places where God makes his presence known:

- Side walls / chambers of the temple, which are structurally necessary for the temple to stand²³ — fifteen times, 1 Kgs 6:5, 8, 15 (2x), Ezek 41:5, 6 (4x), 7, 8, 9 (2x), 11, 26

- Sides to the entrance (nave / side doors) of the temple — one time, 1 Kgs 6:34
- Side walls of the holy of holies — one time, 1 Kgs 6:16
- Sides of the tabernacle — seven times; Exod 26:20, 26, 27 (2x); 36:25, 31, 32
- Sides of the ark of the covenant—holding up the mercy seat — eight times, Exod 25:12 (2x), 14; 26:35 (2x); 37:3 (2x), 5
- Sides of the altar of incense — two times, Exod 30:4; 37:27
- Sides of the altar of burnt offering — two times, Exod 27:7; 38:7
- Side beams of Solomon’s house — one time; *not* sacred space: 1 Kgs 7
- Side of the hill where Shimei threw stones at David as he left Jerusalem when Absalom took his throne — one time, *not* sacred space, 2 Sam 16:13

All but the last two are holy places. The sides of each of these structures must be present, of equivalent size and shape, and capable of bearing the weight of the lid or the roof.¹ If one of the sides were missing, deficient, or wobbly, the temple would collapse, the tabernacle would not stand, the mercy seat would not rest upon the ark of the covenant, and the incense that represents

1. There are at least eight other words for “side” in the Hebrew Bible. Each of these other words have many different uses but are not substituted for *šēlā*. For example, one common Hebrew word, *šad*, is used to refer to one side of Noah’s ark for the door (Gen 6:16); people as thorns in the Israelite’s side (Num 33:55; Jos 23:13); Ezekiel lying on one side (Ezek 4:4). Another Hebrew word, *‘ever*, generally refers to “side” as a territorial edge, such as the sides of a hill (1 Sam 26:13); one side of a city (1 Kings 4:12); or the sides of a river (Deut 30:13). In contrast, *šēlā* is not used anywhere in the Hebrew Bible to refer to a human body part. Much later, *šēlā* began to be used figuratively for ribs. A similar Aramaic word occurs in Daniel 3:5, and possibly in Hebrew in the apocryphal book of Jubilees 3:5; both of these texts are from around the 2nd century BC. However, “The idea that Eve was made out of one of Adam’s ribs has its origin in rabbinical lore,” which ranges from the second to the seventh century AD, many more centuries after the Hebrew Bible was complete.

the prayers of God's people and the sacrifices to God upon the altar could not be offered.

The understanding we gain from this imagery is that both man and woman are necessary to take their stand as holy sides for God's presence and power to be manifested in the earthly realm. Woman and man are essential as the sides of the frame, opposite to the other, upholding the image of God together as one unit. If woman is beat down or excluded, or if man tries to take both sides in God's spiritual architecture, sacred space is left in shambles. God's work and presence will not be manifested.

Therefore, the *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, a prominent Hebrew lexicon (dictionary), concludes, "Given the fact that *tsela*^c [*ṣēlā*] is seen as meaning 'rib' only in the context of the creation of woman, it is unlikely that it is a correct reading."²⁴ Other prominent scholars agree with that conclusion.²⁵ Additional textual support for the allusion to the sanctuary is "its association in Genesis 2 with the verb *banah*; 'build, architecturally design.' . . . Thus the 'rib / side' used by the Lord as the basis for the 'building' of Eve is another of the numerous hints or echoes of the tabernacle/Temple."²⁶ Man and woman are "creative co-participants, spiritual intimates, yes, priests, in the sacred worship service of the Eden sanctuary."²⁷

Conclusion

Genesis 2 expands our sacred imaginations to see God's vision for humanity united in our diversity as divine image bearers with moral and priestly identities as male and female. Without a proper understanding of how God made woman as '*ezer* and *ṣēlā*, neither men nor women can fulfill their God-given purpose. If, however, women and men partner together and support one another in our human, moral, and priestly identities, we will

manifest God's presence and glory to a broken world in need of healing and redemption.

Reflect on the Chapter

- ✱ What did you learn about human, moral, priestly, or female identity in Genesis 2?
- ✱ How does knowing that the word *'ezer* in Scripture typically refers to God's help or God as our helper shape your view of how God created woman to be an *'ezer* (Gen 2:18)?
- ✱ Outside of Genesis 2, what does the word *ṣēlā* refer to in Scripture? How does that impact your understanding of God's plan for the relationship between man and woman and their sacred joint purpose?

Reflect on Your Life

- ✱ Dr. Faro writes, "If woman is beat down or excluded, or if man tries to take both sides in God's spiritual architecture, sacred space is left in shambles." If you have experienced or observed this, describe how that affected your life, church, or community.
- ✱ Conversely, in what ways have you seen men and women partnering together in unity that make God's presence and power known (not just in a marriage relationship)?

Take Your Bold Step

- ✱ Consider a few concrete ways you want to grow in being an *'ezer* (not limited to the context of marriage), such as providing leadership when challenges arise, mentoring and empowering others, using your voice to speak out against injustice, and building strong relationships of support.

- ✱ How can you encourage, champion, or equip women in your sphere so that they can live out God's plan for them as *'ezers* in their lives? Some examples include mentoring them so they can develop their unique gifts, connecting them to new people, and giving them opportunities to lead.

Breath Prayer

(Inhale) Thank you, God,
(Exhale) for your presence dwelling in us.

Sneak Peek!
Not for Distribution

Sneak Peek!
Not for Distribution



CHAPTER 3

Redemption Hope Through the Woman

GENESIS 3—4

God's beautiful vision of his intentions for life on this earth is presented to us in Genesis 2. Life is as it should be: abundant, harmonious, beautiful, very good. The "not good" of human isolation finds fulfillment in community. Man rejoices when woman enters the scene. The first recorded human words in the Bible are Adam's poetic exuberance toward his strong ally who is "At last!" with him: "The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man" (Gen 2:23 NTL, NIV). "The self, the 'I,' discovers itself in greeting another."¹

Woman is one substance with man. Yet they are not the same. But in their separateness, they are one (Gen 2:23–24). Their union is grounded in trust, expressed by the words, "Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame" (Gen 2:25). They are fully disclosed before each other with no hidden motives. Life is whole.

Eve in Hebrew means "the mother of all living." Although the woman was drawn from the *adam*, every human being thereafter is drawn from a woman. Man and woman are inexorably intertwined in their being and becoming.

Alienation from God and Each Other

Genesis 3 and 4 reveal how the harmony of the garden falls apart. But God does not leave us without hope. The degradation of human relationships begins with believing a lie. The serpent twists God's words, implying that God has lied and is withholding goodness from them (Gen 3:1–4). In falling prey to this falsehood, Adam and Eve *take* what now appears desirable: independence from God (Gen 3:5–6). This independence separates them from each other and their interconnectedness with creation.

In their new state of self-deification, they recognize their vulnerability, feel a new sensation—*fear*—and scramble to hide (Gen 3:7, 10). Along with fear comes shame, which produces blame: the man refuses to take responsibility for his actions, casting his shadow on God and the woman. The vilification of women has persisted ever since Adam tried to throw the blame for his mutiny off himself.

However, Adam is present during the whole dark conversation with the serpent. Although the serpent is addressing the woman, he speaks to both of them using the plural *you* verbs: “Did God really say, ‘You [plural] must not eat from any tree in the garden?’” as in “the both of you,” which is evident in the Hebrew (Gen 3:1, 4, 5). Furthermore, the biblical text says that the man was right there. He was “with her,” and she was “with me” (Gen 3:6, 12). Both were complicit in the decision to eat from the forbidden tree.

They both fail their priestly assignment to *serve* and *protect* the garden, their sacred home (Gen 2:15). They both believe the serpent's lies more than what God has spoken and act on their desire to be gods, to their mutual demise.

The Lord God speaks first to the man because God had first directly spoken to him when he gave instructions regarding the Tree. The problem was *not* that the man listened to the woman but that he failed to obey God's clear command. God does not let

the man off the hook but asks him, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?” (Gen 3:11).² God holds the man accountable for his actions, just as he holds the woman responsible for hers.

The last words of Adam recorded in Scripture are, “The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it” (Gen 3:12). He expresses no remorse. Instead, he blames God: “The woman you put here with me”! His words expose his treason against the heavenly realm, blaming God foremost and secondly blaming the woman for his actions.

Many male commentators on this passage throughout history have continued the secondary sin of Adam, shifting the blame to Eve in particular and extend Eve’s sin to label all women as seducers of men, shifting the culpability for their own wrongful actions onto women. If these analysts and preachers were truthful, they would realize they are blaming God, who made women along with men in his image and deemed his creation “very good” (Gen 1:26–28, 31).

God then turns to the woman and asks, “What is this you have done?” (Gen 3:13). The woman is not accountable for the man’s sin. And as Carmen Joy Imes observes, “God does not hold Adam accountable for Eve’s sin; she possesses her own dignity as a moral agent. God’s question gives her an opportunity to confess: ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate’ (Gen. 3:13).”³ Although both the man and the woman transgressed God’s command, the woman’s statement is accurate (Gen 2:16–17; 1 Tim 2:14).

As Katharine Bushnell notes, “Eve’s answer to God was better than Adam’s. Adam casts aspersions on God for giving him Eve, referring to her as ‘the woman you put here with me’ (v.12). It’s easy for us also to point the finger at Eve, blaming her for the human predicament, the path of sin we all have chosen. Eve instead correctly identifies the serpent as the tempter and herself as the one who made the choice.”⁴

The Lord then addresses the serpent. God curses the serpent with a low earthly existence (3:14). Please notice a common misconception: The snake is cursed, but the woman and the man are not! The woman and the man experience consequences for their choices, but God does not say they are cursed (v. 16–19). The ground also is cursed because of humans separating themselves from God and separating themselves from his assignment to them as stewards of his creation.

God then pronounces the consequences for the serpent's actions: the ensuing conflict between the serpent and the woman, with the promise of redemption from the serpent's bite through the woman and her offspring, literally "her seed."

And I will put enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring [seed] and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike [crush] his heel. (Gen 3:15)

We'll return to this hope shortly. But first, God pronounces the cost of the woman's and the man's betrayal.

Broken Relationships, Grief, and Hardship

Tim Mackie of the BibleProject calls these pronouncements on the woman and the man "God's lament": "Yahweh naming the new normal in light of the decisions that they have made."⁵ The consequences for what each has done are closely related and share some common language.⁶ Genesis 3:16 states,

To the woman he said,

“I will greatly multiply your hardship [*ʿiṣābôn*] and
conception.

In grief [*eṣev*] you will bring forth children.”

(my translation)

Our English translations wrongly say that women will experience increased pain during childbirth or labor. The three Hebrew words used throughout the Old Testament for labor pains or childbirth are not used here.¹ Rather, as Iain Provan points out, “Gen 3:16 refers to the ‘agony, hardship, worry, and anxiety’ of the circumstances in which children are conceived, born, and raised, and in which they die.”⁷

In Genesis 3:17, the Lord God tells the man the consequences of his action:

“Cursed is the ground because of you;
through painful toil [*ʿiṣābôn*] you will eat food
from it
all the days of your life.”

Notice that the word *ʿiṣābôn*, meaning grief and “mental anguish,” is the same in verses 16 and 17.⁸ Both man and woman suffer grief in their pursuits of love and fruitfulness. In the home, the woman “suffers pain (*ʿiṣābôn*) . . . not only because she is in conflict with the man, but also because the man is in conflict with the earth, and the entire community suffers as a result.”⁹

Not only do man and woman suffer grief due to their actions, God also experiences grief in his heart due to the corruption and

1. The three Hebrew words that refer specifically to labor pain are ררצ (*srr* in the *hiph*, Jer 48:41; 49:22), לבח (*hbl* in the *piel*, Ps 7:15; Song 8:5), and לוח (*hwl*); see in particular Provan, “Pain in Childbirth?,” 287–94, who demonstrates through extensive exegesis of this passage that the Hebrew word used here (*herôn*, from the verb *hārā*) refers specifically to being/becoming pregnant and nowhere to labor pains or giving birth.

evil that humanity inflicts on his good creation. The verb (*aṣab*) that describes God's grief in Genesis 6:6, leading up to the flood, comes from the same word that speaks of the pain and anguish suffered by the woman and man in Genesis 3:16–17 (*iṣābôn*). All uses of this root word (*aṣab* and *iṣābôn*) speak of the pain and sorrows experienced due to humanity to life conditions after the garden.¹⁰

The family stories in Genesis continues this trajectory. Children are conceived amid angst, jealousy, and broken relationships. Sarah and Hagar, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, and Rachel and Leah all provide vivid stories of dysfunctional life in exile from Eden. Each family undergoes the test of believing God or not. Sarah, Rebecca, and Rachel struggle with infertility, which parallels Abraham's and Isaac's struggles with famine, when they're willing to give away their wives for their own personal safety and profit.¹¹

The consequences of our determination to live independently from God are demonstrated in our innate longing to experience fruitfulness and multiplication in our various domains of life. But our efforts are fraught with grief, hardship, striving, and loss when man and woman each seeks to control their environment while refusing to yield control to God Almighty.

Eve Speaks the First Words of Hope After the Exile

Eve experiences the consequences of her disobedience, including grief and dysfunction, but she does not let that paralyze her. She actively anticipates One who will be born through her, a seed who will crush the head of the serpent. The hope of promise is first echoed in her strange words.¹² Genesis 4 begins, "Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said, 'I have acquired [*qnh*] a man [*iśh*] with Yahweh.'

Then she gave birth again to his brother Abel” (Gen 4:1–2a, my translation).

The language of this birthing narrative is highly unusual. There is no other parallel in Scripture.¹³ A leading dictionary of biblical Hebrew rightly uses “uncertain” to describe the meaning of this verse.¹⁴ Adam is not given credit for the child. Eve’s covenant God, Yahweh, is. Let’s look closely at her words.

She names her son Cain, which comes from the word often translated “acquired” (*qanah* or *qnh*, in Hebrew). Scholars disagree on the translation for this verb that Eve uses. It can mean “to buy, acquire, or produce,” but a similar form of this word can mean “create.”¹⁵ The Septuagint (ancient Greek) translation maintains the ambiguity of her words, that she “acquired a man through [via] God.”¹⁶

Furthermore, she doesn’t call her newborn a baby or a boy but a man, an *’ish*. Her language echoes Adam’s exuberant words when he first saw her and called her *ishshah* in Genesis 2:23. “Eve now says, in effect: ‘I, a woman (*’ish(sh)ah*), was produced from man (*’ish*); now I, woman, have in turn produced a man.’”¹⁷

She declares that this man she bore was acquired not with Adam but with Yahweh, which can imply “together with” the Lord. There is ambiguity concerning the meaning of the little word *’et* that connects man (*’ish*) *with* the Lord (Yahweh). This word *’et* can either mean “with” as in, “I have gained a man with the Lord,” or it can be a direct object marker, as in, “I have gained a man, the Lord.”¹⁸ Some, such as Martin Luther, understand her statement as a declaration of faith in the messianic promise from Genesis 3:15.

Regardless of how her curious words are understood, Scripture notes that the sacred covenant name of Yahweh was first uttered by the woman, Eve.¹⁹ And she is the first to give God glory after their exile from the garden.

Eve's Final Words and the Hope of Redemption

Yet for all Eve's expectations, her hope for Cain is dashed when he murders her son Abel. Despite what must have been overwhelming grief to lose a son at the hands of another son, Eve still has faith that God will fulfill his promise. She speaks yet once more toward the close of this chapter in Genesis, initiating language that becomes synonymous with salvation: "Then Adam knew his wife again, and she gave birth to a son. And she called his name Seth [šēt], for [she said], 'God has appointed [šāt] to me another seed [zera'] in place of Abel, because Cain killed him.' And as for Seth, he also fathered a son, and he called his name Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of Yahweh" (Gen 4:25–26, my translation). The name Seth comes from the verb *šāt* that was used in Genesis 3:15 and designates him as the hopefully promised seed who will crush the head of the serpent.

Through the sorrow of events and the passage of time, Eve credits God for the birth of her son Seth, the appointed seed. Here is where these two key words in Hebrew previously occurred together only in Genesis 3:15:

And I will put [šāt] enmity
between you and the woman,
and between your offspring [zera'] and hers;
he will crush your head,
and you will strike his heel.

Eve demonstrates her continued faith in Yahweh's promise by directly connecting his promise in Genesis 3:15 with the name she gives her son Seth. Furthermore, the narrative points to the fruit of her faith in the verse that follows: "Seth also had a son, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26).

Seth's son, whom he names Enosh, means "mortal." *Enosh* becomes a word for "human" (with an emphasis on our mortality), just as *adam* means human in the rest of the Hebrew Bible.²⁰ In a genuine sense, Enosh becomes the second Adam, but one aware of our mortality and dependency on Yahweh.²¹ Through the line of Seth and Enosh, the Messiah is birthed.

As Abraham Kuyper wrote in 1933, "In her there lay concealed as in a kernel a woman's grace and independence, her susceptibility to Satan, but her susceptibility to the faith as well."²² Kuyper continues,

Into the profound soul of this woman God sowed the seeds of a glorious faith, and by means of it again permitted heaven to arise before her. The seed of this tempted woman was once to bruise the head of the Tempter. Eve fixed her whole soul to that promise. In fact, when Cain was born to her she supposed that this child was already the promised seed and she exclaimed, "I have gotten a man from the Lord." . . . The disillusionment which followed upon that hope was bitter when, after some years, the earth imbibed the blood of Abel. Yet, after many epochs the Angels of God acknowledged the seed of this woman in the Child of Mary. The Son of Mary was also Eve's child.²³

The Rest of the Story

Eve's words regarding Seth as another "seed" are followed by this explosive statement: "At that time people began to call on the name of the LORD" (Gen 4:26). This expression "refers to worshiping the LORD through prayer and sacrifice."²⁴ And even more, the "name of the LORD" represents not only his name, but all that God has revealed about himself. "To 'call on the name of the LORD' is to worship him according to the whole revealed truth of God."²⁵

In addition to worship, calling on the name of the Lord becomes associated with salvation. The prophet Joel prophesies deliverance in the last days, proclaiming, “And everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved” (Joel 2:32). Peter quotes Joel’s prophecy in his first sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:21). And Paul in Romans 10:13 repeats the famous verse again: “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.”

These all flow from the conclusion of Genesis 4, which introduces the theme of worship, the promise of the messianic lineage, and the message of salvation. Genesis 5 starts with a genealogy, beginning with God’s creation of humanity in his image, Adam, Seth, and Enosh, and proceeds through Noah, whose son Shem would continue the messianic line of hope.²⁶

The Legacy of Eve

Interpreters and teachers have often vilified Eve, leading to a distorted image of God and a corrupt treatment of humanity. This loss harms all of us. While Eve did fall for the words of the serpent and eat the forbidden fruit, she also demonstrated her faith by returning to God’s words of hope. As Abraham Kuyper wrote, “She fixed her whole soul on that promise,” first believing that Cain and then Seth might be the promised “seed” of salvation.

Eve, like many of us, was familiar with the grief and pain of life and of family. She mourns the death of her son Abel and the exile of her firstborn. Yet despite these tremendous losses, she still chooses to put her hope in God’s promise.

Although Eve does not live to see God’s plan fulfilled in the birth of Jesus, she rejoices in the birth of her grandson Enosh and lives to see people begin worshiping the Lord. Eve, the first person in Scripture to utter the name Yahweh, likely played an important role in teaching the next generation how to call upon the Lord and believe once again in his word.

Reflect on the Chapter

- ✱ How did you view Eve before reading this chapter? Has your view of Eve changed after reading this chapter, and if so, how?
- ✱ After Adam and Eve sinned, God issued consequences to the man and the woman in Genesis 3:16–19. What is similar about the consequences he gave to each of them?
- ✱ In what ways did Eve maintain hope in God’s promise despite her grief?

Reflect on Your Life

- ✱ In addition to the tremendous grief she felt after Cain killed Abel, Eve may also have felt guilt or shame that she should have done something differently as a mother to prevent the tragedy. What in your life has led to disappointment, grief, guilt, or shame that has threatened to paralyze you?
- ✱ Romans 8:1–2 says, “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death.” How does Eve’s example help you move forward in freedom and hope?

Take Your Bold Step

- ✱ Eve was hoping that Cain and then Seth might be the “seed” that God promised. Perhaps you also are waiting for God to fulfill a promise to you. Or maybe you have hopes for your children, your vocation, or your partner that are yet unfulfilled. Take some time to pray over these longings and entrust them to the Lord.
- ✱ Eve was the first in Scripture to utter the name Yahweh

and was the first to give God glory after their exile from the garden. Dr. Faro writes that calling on the name of the Lord means to “worship him according to the whole revealed truth of God.” Look up some names of God from Scripture and praise God using those specific names. For example, “We praise you for being Immanuel, God with us. Thank you for being with me right now.”

Breath Prayer

(Inhale)	God, my Deliverer,
(Exhale)	I put my hope in you.

Sneak Peek!
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