Our exposition of these difficult verses—what they originally meant and what they mean to different religious communities—should not be used for continuing the late antique and medieval polemic. There is room enough in Jewish and Christian discussion today to be open enough to state, "I may not agree with you, but I understand how you came to your conclusion." Possibilities, not polemics.

We hope that our readers will look beyond these fraught verses and read the first creation story as a whole—a marvelously structured story that makes a strong claim for an ordered, good world, in which people can play a central and constructive role.

CHAPTER 4

Adam and Eve

Death, Domination, and Divorce

The story of Adam and Eve is essential to the New Testament. For Paul, Jesus is the antithesis of Adam; what Adam broke, Jesus fixed. As Adam introduces sin into the world, so Jesus introduces being in a right relationship with God. Paul proclaims, "For just as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19). As Adam brings death into the world, so Jesus offers the opportunity for new life: "For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being; for as all die in Adam, so all will be made alive in Christ" (1 Cor 15:21–22; cf. 15:45).

Romans 5:12, "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned," then becomes the prompt for seeing all humanity as participating in Adam's sin. The Greek expression *eph'ō*, which the NRSV translates as "because," indicates simply that all people sin. The Old Latin and Vulgate translations read "*in quo omnes peccaverunt*"—"in whom all have sinned."[1] This translation led Augustine to conclude that all people, as descendants of Adam, are born with the taint of this "original sin" and so are guilty and deserving of damnation—an idea found in neither the Hebrew nor the Greek versions of Genesis. Christian tradition reads the Adam and Eve story as

indicating the "fall of man." As we shall see, Jewish interpreters had other readings.[2]

Regarding gender roles, Eden informs the New Testament as well. For Paul, the order of creation in Genesis 2—first the man and then the woman—establishes a hierarchy, with woman in the subordinate role; this hierarchy based on the order of creation is absent in Genesis 2 itself. Combining Genesis 2 with Plato's concern for ideal types and then derivatives, Paul sees that woman, created from the body of the man, is a step removed from the original, better creation:

> For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God; but woman is the reflection of man. Indeed, man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for the sake of woman, but woman for the sake of man. For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man or man independent of woman. For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God. (1 Cor 11:7–12)

Reinforcing hierarchy rather than the mutuality with which the Corinthian quotation ends, 1 Timothy, a New Testament letter ascribed to Paul, depicts Eve as the original transgressor, whose sin has ongoing implications for all women: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty" (1 Tim 2:11–15). The NRSV's "through childbearing" is a possible but generous translation. The text does not mean that women will not die in childbirth; the Greek suggests rather that women *must bear children* in order to gain salvation. In the late first and early second centuries, as many followers of Jesus came to the realization that he was not necessarily returning during their lifetimes, they determined to follow Paul's suggestion from 1 Corinthians 7:7–9: "I wish that all were as I myself am," says Paul, referring to celibacy. But as he states, celibacy is a spiritual gift: "Each has a particular gift from God." Therefore, he concludes, "To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion." They may also have known Jesus's commendation of celibacy in Matthew 19:12, or apocryphal Acts, such as the Acts of Paul and Thecla, which promote celibacy. For the later communities, in which wives accepted not only Paul's message about the Christ but also about the flesh, 1 Timothy's exhortation to produce children, and so to give husbands their conjugal rights, becomes explicable.[3]

The Gospels do not mention Eve, and Adam appears only in Luke's genealogy, which begins with Jesus and ends with "son of Enos, son of Seth, son of Adam, son of God" (Luke 3:38). For Luke, all people, descended from Adam, are also children of God. But in the Gospel tradition, Jesus does cite the garden of Eden story together with the first creation story in Genesis 1. His focus is not on sin, or death, or resurrection; it is on rejecting the practice of divorce: "But from the beginning of creation, 'God made them male and female.' 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two, but one flesh" (Mark 10:6–8; cf. Matt 19:4–5). These and other New Testament interpretations of the garden of Eden story are fundamental to Christianity: they contribute to teachings concerning original sin, the "fall of man," the subordination of women, and the restriction of divorce. None of these ideas is explicit in the text

of Genesis 2–3; while each is a possible reading, none is a necessary one. Returning to Eden, we can discern what the second creation story might have meant in its original context, and then see not only why Jesus and his followers emphasized certain interpretations but also how the Jewish tradition came to regard this same text.

The Garden of Eden

The garden of Eden story is part of the Torah's larger J source (from the German Jahwe, equivalent to English YHWH), or Yahwistic source, another one of the recognized sources of the Torah, which most scholars think antedates both the Priestly source and the Babylonian exile of 586 BCE.[4] This story of the creation of man and woman—their original innocence, the encounter with the snake, their eating the forbidden fruit, and their expulsion from the garden of Eden—is a "myth," by which we mean a metaphorical tale designed to explain why life is the way it is. A myth does not, however, explain how life *should* be. Genesis 2:4b–3:24 follows a cross-cultural mythic pattern, which describes a descent from the ideal to the actual. Similarly, the Greek writer Hesiod, in his eighth-century BCE *Works and Days*, speaks of a "golden age" from which humanity continued to decline. When we think of the "good old days," we are often appealing to a myth that romanticizes the past and ignores its problems.

Such mythic understandings of the past are more than traces of nostalgia; they help us deal with the present. We sometimes find ourselves projecting an image of the perfect past into the future so that, if we can find the right key, we can return to the garden of Eden, or the golden age. But if we confuse "myth" with "history" in the sense of what actually happened, we miscue the genre.

Genesis 2:4b reads, "In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens." Creation here is a one-day effort, not the six-day effort described in Genesis 1:1–2:4a. This second creation story begins with a reference to plants and herbs and the lack of anyone to till the ground (Gen 2:4b–5). We should not pass over this notice too quickly. A major theme of the end of the story, and of life in ancient Israel, is agricultural hardship. Eden is a place where gardening is, in all senses of the term, fruitful; outside, in the real world, humanity faces drought and locusts and fire. Whereas Genesis 1, from the Priestly source, presents the ordering of plants and animals and then gives them to humanity for appropriate use, Genesis 2–3, from the Yahwistic (J) source, reveals how humanity and the natural world, which are initially in harmony, became alienated.[5]

Genesis 1 describes the creation first of plants and animals and then, on the sixth day, of humanity, male and female as equals. In Genesis 2, the creation of the first human, called *ha'adam* (Gen 2:7), precedes the time when there were any plants or animals. More, we do not have here the simultaneous creation of male and female.

The Hebrew prefix *ha-* of *ha'adam* is the definite article "the." In Hebrew, "the" cannot precede personal names; Hebrew has no formula for speaking of "the Deborah" or "the David." Therefore, Genesis 1–3 does not describe the creation of a fellow named "Adam."[6] "Adam," in the sense of a proper name, does not appear until Genesis 4:25, after the expulsion from Eden and the murder of Abel by Cain.

This human of Genesis 2 has two parts. The first, a physical part, is formed from earth or clay, *ha'adamah*. The wordplay highlights the close connection between humanity (*ha'adam*) and earth (*ha'adamah*). The translation "earthling" is appropriate—or perhaps "clod," given the man's passive behavior later in the story.[7] The verb "to form" (Hebrew *y-tz-r*) describes what potters do (see especially Jer 18:4), and thus the "LORD God," the name for the deity in the

J account, is envisioned as a master potter. The J source makes no mention, however, of this human being in the divine image.

The second part, "the breath of life" (Hebrew *nefesh chayah*), connotes the life force; it is what allows this earth creature to breathe. The *nefesh chayah* is not "the soul" in the sense of the part of us that survives physical death. The Septuagint translates *nefesh* as *psychē*, which in this text as well as in the New Testament means the "self" or the "inner life" or even "very being" rather than an "immortal soul." When we start thinking of this "soul" as something immortal, we have added to the original myth. The garden story has much to say about immortality, but surviving death through the immortality of the soul is not initially part of its teaching.

The LORD God then places *ha'adam* in "a garden in Eden" (Gen 2:8). The name "Eden" most likely derives from the Hebrew root *'-d-n*, "bliss, delight," as found, for example, in Psalm 36:8: "They feast on the abundance of your house, / and you give them drink from the river of your delights (*'adanecha*)." A cognate is the noun *'ednah*, meaning "pleasure," including sexual pleasure. When Abraham's wife Sarah hears that she, well past menopause, will conceive a child, she laughs and exclaims, "After I have grown old, and my husband is old, shall I have pleasure [*'ednah*]?" (Gen 18:12).

The Septuagint translates the Hebrew term *gan*, "garden," in Genesis 2–3 as *paradeisos*, which means "garden" but can have the connotation of "paradise." Thus, later texts will collapse, linguistically, the "paradise" of Eden with the "paradise" of heaven. Conflating Eden and heaven, and so projecting the myth of the past into the future, Revelation 2:7b announces, "To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God." Similarly, the (probably) first-century Jewish author known as Pseudo-Philo suggests that the garden has been preserved and will be inhabited by the resurrected righteous.[8] Other New Tes-

tament references to "paradise" may also suggest the garden of Eden. For example, in Luke 23:43 Jesus tells the repentant thief hanging on a cross, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Paul's "third heaven" comment speaks of his being caught up into "Paradise" (2 Cor 12:2, 4).

Eden is, for Genesis, not in heaven but "in the east"—that is, in Mesopotamia, northeast of Israel, at the confluence of four rivers (Gen 2:10–14). The first river, Pishon in the land of Havilah, is in southwest Arabia; the second, Gihon, is in Cush, another name for Ethiopia. Yet Pishon is not otherwise attested, and Gihon is elsewhere in the Bible a spring in the land of Israel. The other two rivers are the well-known Tigris and Euphrates, both in Mesopotamia. The four rivers do not meet, and no geological data indicate that they ever did. Consequently, the setting is everywhere and nowhere.

In this locale, "in the midst of the garden," are two trees: "the tree of life . . . and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (Gen 2:9), but until chapter 3, their import for the plot remains unknown.

The role of *ha'adam* in the garden is "to till it and keep it" (Gen 2:15). Eden is not a place of perpetual rest; instead, it is a place where the work is both easy and fulfilling: we might compare the joy of weekend gardening to the backbreaking work of picking crops by hand.

The LORD God then sets up dietary regulations. *Ha'adam* may eat any of the garden's fruits. In this garden setting, humanity is vegetarian. Permission to consume animal flesh will not be given until Noah and his family exit the ark (Gen 9:3–4), and even then, blood is forbidden. One additional restriction prevails for Eden: "of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17). The Hebrew of the last phrase, *mot tamut*, using the same verb *m-w-t* ("to die") twice, can mean "you shall surely die" or "you will drop dead"; it can also mean, "you will become mortal," as in Psalm 82:7, where God tells the heavenly

court (Hebrew *benei 'elyon*, literally "children of the Most High"), "You shall die [*temutun*] like mortals."

Whether God intended for humanity to be immortal is never explicitly stated. It seems likely to us that God intended *ha'adam* to live forever, and thus the warning concerning eating from the tree meant "you shall surely die." At this point, no prohibition is made regarding eating fruit from the tree of life, which conferred immortality—most likely because the text is imagining this first human as immortal. The mention of the tree of life is anticipatory.

The LORD God, who cares about this creature, then realizes, "It is not good that the man [*ha'adam*] should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner" (Hebrew *'ezer kenegdo*) (Gen 2:18). The first word, *'ezer*, "helper," does not imply subordination; it may be used of an equal or even someone superior. It appears in popular personal names such as Ezra (helper) and Azariah (or its variant, Azaryahu), meaning "the Lord (Yah[u]) is [my] helper"; it also describes God in Psalm 121:2: "My help ['*ezer*] comes from the LORD, / who made heaven and earth." The second word, *neged*, means "in front of," "corresponding to," and even "opposite." Thus, this helper should be understood as a partner for *ha'adam*.

Neither is the role of the helper to provide *ha'adam* offspring. "Be fruitful and multiply" is the P version of the story, not the J version. Nor would procreation be advisable for immortal beings; the garden would quickly become overpopulated. The concern for overpopulation might seem anachronistic, but the Mesopotamian epic *Atrahasis*, written centuries earlier than the garden story, mentions the great noise caused by overpopulation and presents mortality as a remedy.[9]

The role of the helper, created as *ha'adam*'s equal, is to alleviate *ha'adam*'s solitary state in Eden. However, as we shall see, this original meaning did not discourage either the Jewish or the Christian

tradition from considering this "helper," this woman, as created subordinate to *ha'adam*, the man.

Genesis 2:19 describes the LORD God's initially unsuccessful attempt to create the partner from "every animal of the field and every bird of the air": "but for the man [*ha'adam*] there was not found a helper as his partner" (Gen 2:20). The LORD God tries again. Putting *ha'adam* into a deep sleep, he takes from him a *tzela'* and from it constructs a woman (2:21–22). Although traditionally rendered "rib" (a meaning this noun has in Akkadian and Arabic), in Biblical Hebrew *tzela'* typically means "side"—a meaning it also has in those languages—as in the construction of the tabernacle: "two rings on the one side [*tzela'*] of it" (Exod 25:12). Ziony Zevit, a biblical scholar, and Scott Gilbert, an evolutionary biologist, argue that this *tzela'* meant, for the J source, the baculum, or penis bone, that all male mammals with the exception of humans possess.[10] (Others take this thesis to be a "phallacy.")

The woman being created second, after the man and the animals, does not imply her—or any woman's—secondary status.[11] For the Bible, what is done last, not first, can be more important. This observation on the order of creation is already noted in *The Women's Bible*, edited by Elizabeth Cady Stanton (1815–1902). Lillie Devereux Blake writes there: "In the detailed description of creation we find a gradually ascending series. Creeping things, 'great sea monsters' . . . 'Every bird of wing,' cattle and living things of the earth . . . then man, and last and crowning glory of the whole, woman."[12]

Ha'adam, waking up and delighted upon seeing this new creation, speaks for the first time, and in poetry:

> 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. (Gen 2:23)

The word for "man" is *'ish*, and the word for "woman" is *'ishah*. The two words, which sound similar, express the idea that the two created beings are, at this point, closely and harmoniously related: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his woman, and they become one flesh" (Gen 2:24, authors' translation). This "one flesh" reunites *ha'adam* with his missing piece, and so the two, together, are whole and become a new family. The comment anticipates procreation—when people *have* fathers and mothers—after the expulsion from Eden. The text does not state or even suggest that the man and woman were married, for such an institution did not exist in Eden. The Hebrew term *'ishah*, which we translate "woman," can also indicate "wife"; the same translation holds for the Greek term *gynē* (whence "gynecology"), but the translation "wife" for Genesis 2 would be an overread.

To this point, we have a happy, naked couple in the garden, where their task is to till it and keep it. The problem of human solitude is resolved. But the two trees indicate that problems lie ahead.

Eating Forbidden Fruit

The last verse of Genesis 2 reads, "And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed" (v. 25). The chapter division is off, however. The verse actually introduces the next scene, in which the woman has her conversation with the snake. That the verse belongs with what follows is seen in the wordplay between *'arumim*, "naked," used to describe the man and woman in 2:25, and the introduction of the snake as *'arum*, "crafty," in 3:1. This description shows that the common stereotype of the woman as easily enticed is incorrect—craft was needed to persuade her to eat the forbidden fruit. Only in Genesis 3 is *'arum*, craftiness, a negative trait; elsewhere it reflects positive cleverness or prudence, as in Proverbs 13:16: "The clever [*'arum*] do all things intelligently, / but the fool displays folly."

The snake (Hebrew *nachash*) is exactly that: sometimes a snake is just a snake. The same Hebrew term describes snakes elsewhere, such as Exodus 4 where Moses's and Aaron's staffs miraculously turn into snakes. Nothing in Genesis suggests that this creature is the devil, but we can see the connection in later texts. Paul may be thinking of Satan when he tells the Corinthian assembly, "But I am afraid that as the serpent deceived Eve by its cunning, your thoughts will be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ" (2 Cor 11:3), and the book of Revelation mentions "the dragon, that ancient

serpent, who is the Devil and Satan" (Rev 20:2). The idea that the devil participated in causing Adam's sin is first made explicit by the second-century Christian writer Justin Martyr.[13]

Multiple reasons can be suggested for why the J author chose a snake to entice Eve. Perhaps there is an implied polemic against the worship of snakes or the view that snakes, because they shed their skin, are immortal. Perhaps the author picked up the connection between snakes and immortality, already noted in the Gilgamesh story, an ancient Mediterranean epic about the hero's (failed) search for immortality. Or perhaps the motivation was a pun, since the word for "snake" in several Semitic languages is *chivya*, close to the name of Eve, *chavah*. Perhaps the phallic shape of the snake, or the fact that snakes can be poisonous, made it the ideal character to entice her.[14]

In Genesis 3:1–5, this snake approaches the woman, still unnamed, and inquires about the forbidden tree: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (v. 1). We do not know what the snake's motive is: To gain the fruit for itself? To alienate the human couple from God? To see whether the woman would in fact die?

The woman explains that she and *ha'adam* should neither eat the tree's fruit nor touch it, lest they die. The narrator does not tell us who gave the woman these instructions, or where the comment about touching originated. One midrash fills in the story by suggesting that at this point, the snake pushed the woman into the tree. When she did not die, she determined that since the touch would not kill her, neither would the taste.[15] The snake counters: "You will not die," but "your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God [or "gods"; Hebrew *'elohim*], knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:4–5). Although the NRSV has the singular "God," the designation *'elohim* here is a plural, since the verb "knowing," describing these gods in the heavenly court, is in the plural.

The woman makes a careful decision: "So when the woman

saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband [Hebrew *'ish*, "man"], who was with her, and he ate" (Gen 3:6). We could read this woman as a "theologian, ethicist, hermeneut, rabbi, [who] speaks with clarity and authority"[16] and who eats because she "finds the tree physically appealing, aesthetically pleasing, and above all, sapientially transforming. . . . Moreover, she does not discuss the matter with her man. She acts independently . . . she is not secretive, deceptive or withdrawn."[17] Or, we could see her as deliberately transgressing the one commandment she and her man received, as failing to engage in consultation, and as overstepping her role by seeking to become like the gods. The text could be read either way. As seen above, the author of 1 Timothy blames the woman by stating that the "man was not deceived." For 1 Timothy, the man was not "deceived" because *he realized what he was doing.* As soon as the woman took a bite from the forbidden fruit, she was, the man knew, doomed. By eating, he sacrificed his immortality for her sake.

The couple do not die. After eating the fruit, "the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves" (Gen 3:7). No longer like animals, who lack shame in nudity, they realize that their naked bodies should not be on public display. The man and the woman move from the world of nature to what might be called the world of civilization.

They have also become "like gods, knowing good and evil" (Gen 3:5, authors' translation; *ke'lohim*—again, the NRSV mistranslates as "like God"). As the context suggests, "knowing" here has a sexual sense—it is knowing in the biblical sense, and indeed as soon as they are expelled from the garden, "the man knew his wife Eve" (4:1). The

type of knowledge the tree of knowledge of good and evil provides is ultimate, sexual knowledge. This couple has become sexual like the "sons of gods" mentioned in Genesis 6:1–3, who father children with human women. Yet unlike the gods, they have become mortal. Like the demoted gods of Psalm 82, they will die. They have a new means of immortality: through children.

The story continues with the repercussions that stem from the couple's disobedience: the man blames the woman but places primary responsibility on God; the woman blames the snake; the snake has no one to blame. It is in God's comments to the woman and the man that we find substantial differences among historical-critical, Jewish, and Christian readings.

The NRSV translates Genesis 3:16 thus:

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

Genesis 3 does *not* speak of the woman as cursed, although it does describe the snake as "cursed" (3:14–15), and, regarding the man, the earth is cursed (3:17–19). Rather than a curse, Genesis 3:16 is a description of the woman's new status. Pregnancy and childbirth required women to have twice the amount of work to do, since women are responsible not only for some agriculture work, textile production, culinary activity, and so forth, but also for pregnancy, parturition, lactation, and childcare. Thus, the first part of Genesis 3:16 might be better translated, "I will make great your toil and many your pregnancies; with hardship shall you have children."[18] The Hebrew root the NRSV translates as "pain" and "pangs" is the same term

it uses, in the next verse, to describe the man's situation regarding the land, but here the term is rendered "toil": "in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life."[19] While the final clause, "and he shall rule over you," could be a reference to the male as the dominant sexual partner,[20] the verb "will rule" (Hebrew *yimshol*) suggests a broader understanding: women's subordination. Until this point, the second creation story saw the man and the woman as having equal standing—no more. When they enter into civilization, gender roles, with their built-in hierarchies, enter as well. There is no "separate but equal" outside Eden. The same idea, using the same crucial verb, *m-sh-l,* that men should rule over women, is implied by Isaiah 3:12, where the prophet describes a topsy-turvy world: "My people—children are their oppressors, / and women rule over [*mashelu*] them."

God next curses not the man, but the earth:

> And to the man he said,
> "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife,
> and have eaten of the tree
> about which I commanded you,
> 'You shall not eat of it,'
> cursed is the ground because of you;
> in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life;
> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you;
> and you shall eat the plants of the field.
> By the sweat of your face
> you shall eat bread
> until you return to the ground,
> for out of it you were taken;
> you are dust,
> and to dust you shall return." (Gen 3:17–19)

Originally, while the man had agricultural obligations in the garden (2:15), *ha'adam,* "the man," and *ha'adamah,* "the earth," worked in harmony. Now, *ha'adam* and *'adamah* will have a new relationship: man will eat the earth's produce only through toil and will return to earth by decomposing.

In Genesis 2, the man (*'ish*) identified the woman as *'ishah.* Their similar names demonstrated their connection, as did the man's comment about "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Now, having tasted the forbidden fruit, *ha'adam* names the woman "Eve" (Hebrew *chavah*), which the narrator explains through "she was [to become] the mother of all living" (3:20); *chavah* is connected to the Hebrew word *chai,* "to live." Her naming is appropriate, since only at this point is the couple "knowing" or sexually active. But this naming also signals a distance between them. Not only do their names no longer sound alike, but the woman is now identified not as the man's partner but biologically as a mother.

Despite the disobedience of the man and the woman, the LORD God remains compassionate. Not wanting the couple to wander around wearing fragile fig leaves (3:7), "the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them" (3:21). We cannot determine whether animals were slaughtered for this purpose, or whether the skins were from animals that had died; later sources suggest that Leviathan hide, or the skin of the crafty serpent, served this purpose.[21]

But the story cannot end here. The garden also contains a tree of life, a tree that grants immortality. God anticipated that the original commandment might be broken. Therefore, God expels the couple from Eden not as punishment but rather out of the concern that "he [the man] might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" (3:22). This concern is so great that God places at the entrance to the garden "the cherubim, and

a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24).

This is the story—no more, no less. No identification of the garden with paradise where righteous people reside after death, no immortal soul, no Satan, no irreparable breach between humanity and divinity. The fruit, not specified, is unlikely to be an apple—apples were common in the Mediterranean world only centuries after this story was written. The connection likely began with the church father Jerome, whose translation of the Hebrew Bible into Latin (the Vulgate) rendered the fruit as *malus*, the Latin word meaning "evil" but also a term for fruits such as apples and figs. The specification of the fruit as an apple became popular around the twelfth century.

Most significant for later interpretations, the word "sin" is absent from this story. Instead, the story describes how people became both sexually aware and mortal. Like many stories of origin, it explains how the world as we know it came into being. But this new reality, according to Genesis 2–3, is not a state of alienation from God. God is outside the garden, with Adam and Eve, and with their descendants.

The Garden of Eden in the Bible Outside of Genesis

Although Adam and Eve are among the best-known biblical figures, the Torah never refers to them again.[22] Outside of the initial chapters of Genesis, the name Adam does not appear again other than in a genealogy in 1 Chronicles (1:1).[23] Several prophetic texts mention the luxuriousness of the garden, which Genesis does not emphasize, but they ignore Adam and Eve, the snake, and the trees.[24] For example, Isaiah 51 consoles the exiles in Babylon by promising,

> For the LORD will comfort Zion;
> he will comfort all her waste places,
> and will make her wilderness like Eden,
> her desert like the garden of the LORD. (51:3a)

These prophetic accounts, which often use the phrase "the garden of God," emphasize the garden's luxurious nature. How exactly this location was "the garden of God" is never clarified. For example, Ezekiel, writing in the early exilic period, uses Eden imagery more frequently than any other prophet. In 28:13, he raises a lamentation against the unnamed king of Tyre—the Phoenician city well known for its luxury goods:

You were in Eden, the garden of God;
every precious stone was your covering,
carnelian, chrysolite, and moonstone,
beryl, onyx, and jasper.

Genesis 2:12 associates gold, bdellium, and onyx with Eden. Ezekiel then describes the king's downfall, but because his depiction shares little vocabulary with Genesis 2–3, it is unlikely that he patterned this king's "fall" after that of Adam. In chapter 31, an oracle to Pharaoh, Ezekiel mentions Eden three times (vv. 9, 16, 18), again as symbolic of luxury.[25]

Joel 2:3, by noting "Before them [the ravaging locusts] the land is like the garden of Eden, / but after them a desolate wilderness," similarly depicts Eden as the antithesis of the wilderness. Later tradition conflates these edenic markers: luxury, wealth, fecundity, celebration, and joy. This imagery will inform the book of Revelation, which promises, "To everyone who conquers, I will give permission to eat from the tree of life that is in the paradise of God" (Rev 2:7b). But we should not retroject these ideas into an earlier period.

Original Sin in the Hebrew Bible?

Although the Christian idea of original sin, a genetic marker inherited from Adam (see below), is not made explicit in Genesis 2–3, the view that humans have an innate tendency to sin is found elsewhere in the Bible and is especially common in Psalms and wisdom literature. People are expected to control this tendency, and when they do sin, they are expected, depending on the biblical source, to repent, to confess, to pray, and/or to offer sacrifices. The clearest articulation of humanity's propensity to sin is in Psalm 51:5 (51:7 Heb.; 50:7 LXX), where the psalmist, identified in the superscription as David after he sinned with Bathsheba, claims, "Indeed, I was born guilty, / a sinner when my mother conceived me," and then asks for divine mercy.[26] In Psalm 130:3, another lament, the supplicant pleads, "If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, / Lord, who could stand?"; and Psalm 143:2 states, "Do not enter into judgment with your servant, / for no one living is righteous before you." According to 1 Kings 8:46, upon dedicating the Jerusalem Temple, Solomon asks God to forgive true supplicants, "for there is no one who does not sin." None of these texts, however, suggests that humanity's propensity to sin was inherited from Adam.

For all of these texts, this human desire to sin should prompt divine compassion and therefore forgiveness; the same idea appears in Genesis 8:21, when Noah offers a sacrifice after the flood: "the Lord

said in his heart, 'I will never again curse the ground because of humankind, for the inclination of the human heart is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy every living creature as I have done.'"

Similar ideas appear often in Wisdom literature. The sage observes in Ecclesiastes 7:20, "Surely there is no one on earth so righteous as to do good without ever sinning," and Proverbs 20:9 quotes a wisdom saying: "Who can say, 'I have made my heart clean; / I am pure from my sin'?" Job's "friend" Eliphaz asks, "What are mortals, that they can be clean? / Or those born of woman, that they can be righteous?" (Job 15:14). Bildad, another of Job's "friends," notes similarly:

> How then can a mortal be righteous before God?
> How can one born of woman be pure?
> If even the moon is not bright
> and the stars are not pure in his sight,
> how much less a mortal, who is a maggot,
> and a human being, who is a worm! (Job 25:4–6)

While the Psalms and Genesis focus on divine compassion and forgiveness, the Wisdom texts suggest that God is free to punish people, since they always sin.

Adam and Eve in Early Judaism

None of these early sources elaborating upon Genesis 2–3 contains any speculation about the fall of humanity or original sin.[27] Little is said about Eve's particular responsibility, and little is made of the snake. Such negative evidence suggests that these ideas may be original to the early Christ-believing community. The early Jewish focus is rather on the garden itself, the gaining of sexual knowledge and the concurrent loss of immortality, and the regaining of the garden in the future.

Following the few references to him in the Hebrew texts, Adam next appears in the second-century BCE book of Tobit, extant fully in Greek, with some passages found in Hebrew and Greek among the Dead Sea Scrolls. Tobit's son Tobias, having married his several-times widowed yet still virginal cousin Sarah, prays: "You made Adam, and for him you made his wife Eve as a helper and support. From the two of them the human race has sprung. You said, 'It is not good that the man should be alone; let us make a helper for him like himself.'" In this story, Adam and Eve are marital role models, not negative exemplars. This positive view of Adam and Eve continues in the Jewish tradition. One of the seven blessings recited at a traditional Jewish wedding begins, "Bring great joy on these loving friends, as You gave joy to Your creations in the Garden of Eden."[28]

There may be a reference, and a negative one, to Eve in the writings of Jesus ben Sira. The author of the original Hebrew version lived in the first half of the second century BCE; the Greek translation by the author's grandson was completed in "the 38th year of the reign of Euergetes" of Egypt, that is, 132 BCE. The original Hebrew was discovered only in the late nineteenth century in the Cairo Geniza, a repository for old Jewish writings. Since then, additional Hebrew fragments were discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls and at Masada. These finds attest to the importance of this book in early Judaism. Sirach 25:16–26, which begins, "I would rather live with a lion and a dragon than live with an evil woman," is a speech concerning the evils of women. The Hebrew continues, "From a woman is the beginning of guilt, and because of her we die together"; the Greek version translates, "From a woman is the beginning of sin, and through her we all die."[29] This verse is plausibly a reference to the woman eating the forbidden fruit, feeding her husband, and thus bringing mortality, hard work, and antagonism into the world. Whether Sirach 25:24 refers to Eve is, however, debated. While the verse may refer to Eve, John Levison offers an alternative translation: "From the [evil] wife [*gynē*] is the beginning of sin, and because of her we [husbands] all die."[30]

Other texts do not hesitate to blame Eve. Sibylline Oracles 1:42–43 states: "But the woman first became a betrayer to him [Adam]. She gave, and persuaded him to sin in his ignorance." First Enoch mentions Eve once (69:6), in reference to the angel Gader'el (or Gadre'el) "who misled Eve" and created other acts of mischief among humans.[31] We see here the beginnings of the eventual association of the snake with Satan.

Philo explains that women's creation led to love, which led to physical attraction, which led to carnality, which leads to sin. He begins by associating change, which is a necessary part of the mortal life, with disaster, and then maps this concern onto Adam and Eve. Speaking of the first man, Philo observes:

> As long as he was single, he resembled, as to his creation, both the world and God. . . . But when woman also was created, man perceiving a closely connected figure and a kindred formation to his own, rejoiced at the sight, and approached her and embraced her. And she, in like manner, beholding a creature greatly resembling herself, rejoiced also, and addressed him in reply with due modesty. And love being engendered . . . And this desire caused likewise pleasure to their bodies, which is the beginning of iniquities and transgressions, and it is owing to this that men have exchanged their previously immortal and happy existence for one which is mortal and full of misfortune. (*Creation* 151–52)

For Philo, it is not the woman's disobedience that creates the problem, but her very existence. Genesis becomes the rationale for Philo's promotion of women's subordinate status, for they are of "lesser dignity."

Likely influenced by Aristotle, who proclaimed that women were naturally inferior to men, Philo asks, "Why, as other animals and as man also was made, the woman was not also made out of the earth, but out of the rib of the man?" (*Questions and Answers to Genesis* 1, 27). He posits, first, that the rib indicates that the woman lacks the same dignity her husband possesses. Second, the creation from his rib suggests that wives, naturally, should be younger than their husbands. From this he concludes both that husbands should care for their wives as they do their daughters, just as women should honor their husbands as they do their fathers. The story of the rib, in Philo's imagination, reduces the wife to a subordinate state of childhood.

The Life of Adam and Eve, a Jewish writing whose origins likely

date to the first century CE, condemns Eve alone: "Oh evil woman, why have you wrought destruction among us?" (21:6). In 32:2 Eve states, "All sin in creation has come about through me." The strongest negative depiction of Eve is found in 2 Enoch, whose date is uncertain: "I [God] created for him [Adam] a wife, so that death might come [to him] by his wife" (2 En 30:17). This text complements 1 Timothy in observing that the devil "entered paradise and corrupted Eve. But he did not contact Adam" (2 En 31:5; cf. 1 Tim 2:14). For 2 Enoch, "Eve is created only to lure Adam into the trap of his ignorance."[32]

Jewish texts from the Hellenistic period repurpose Eden into an eschatological, postmortem paradise. The section of 1 Enoch known as the Book of Watchers, found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, describes the tree of life as "this beautiful fragrant tree—and no [creature of] flesh has authority to touch it until the great judgment when he will take vengeance . . . this will be given to the righteous and humble" (1 En 25:4).[33] Related is the traditional Jewish prayer concerning the dead, *'el maleh rachamim* ("God full of mercy"), which asks, "may his/her resting place be in the garden of Eden."

On the more mundane level, the Torah becomes for the community the tree of life. To this day, in synagogue services, when the Torah scroll is returned to the ark where it is housed, the congregation sings Proverbs 3:18: "She [in this liturgical context, the Torah] is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her; / those who hold her fast are called happy."

The earliest Jewish source outside Paul's letters that speaks to Adam's sin is late first-century CE 4 Ezra, which asks: "O Adam, what have you done? For though it was you who sinned, the misfortune/fall[34] was not yours alone, but ours also who are your descendants" (4 Ezra 7:118). This sentiment is also expressed in 4 Ezra 3:21–26 where Ezra says to God, "For the first Adam, burdened with an evil

heart, transgressed and was overcome, as were also all who were descended from him," and then associates Adam with the inhabitants of Jerusalem, who "transgressed, in everything doing as Adam and all his descendants had done, for they also had the evil heart."

A contrary view in the contemporaneous 2 Baruch shows that 4 Ezra's conclusions were far from universal in the late first century CE. For this text, Adam's descendants inevitably disobey God, but they do not inherit sin from him.[35] In 48:42, 2 Baruch appears to echo the lament in 4 Ezra 7:118, "O Adam, what have you done?" by asking, "O Adam, what did you do to all who were born after you?" But 2 Baruch 54:19 then explains, "Adam is therefore not the cause, save only of his own soul, but each of us has been the Adam of his own soul."[36]

Here, as in much of the scriptures of Israel and other postbiblical Jewish sources, sin is part of the human condition, the result of bad choices. Without proclaiming original sin in the sense of an inheritance from Adam, an indelible stain that can be washed clean only through Jesus's blood, these verses find their way into arguments for that position.

Some texts in the scriptures of Israel recognize that sin, while not inherited from Adam or Eve, may be inherited intergenerationally. The Decalogue, for example, suggests that God visits "the guilt of the parents upon the children, upon the third and upon the fourth generations" of those who reject him (Exod 20:5 and Deut 5:9 NJPS). Yet other texts dispute this idea of inherited guilt. Ezekiel cites a proverb, "The parents have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek 18:2), but then he immediately rejects the concept. Similarly, Jeremiah 31:30 states that in the ideal future, "all shall die for their own sins; the teeth of everyone who eats sour grapes shall be set on edge."

Later Jewish Tradition

Some Christians later deemed the act of eating the forbidden fruit the felix culpa, "fortunate guilt"—because of this "blessed fault," the Christ enters the world. This term appears as early as Ambrose, Augustine's mentor, at the end of the fourth century CE. But the dominant view of the Eden story was that it created a state of alienation between humanity and divinity, with the guilt of Adam and Eve inherited by all their descendants. In Augustine's formulation, the inheritance was biological: Adam's sin caused his "seed to become vitiated" (*Against Julian* 3.33)—or, in modern terms, his semen contained the genetic marker of original sin. Thus, all humanity inherits, literally, the sin of Adam, and this sin is manifest through our desire to do evil or our involuntary sexual longings; this is what Augustine called "concupiscence."[37]

Several rabbinic interpretations polemicize against this view, highlighting God's forgiveness instead of Adam's sin.[38] Leviticus Rabbah 29:1 states, "God tells Adam: 'Just as you came before the divine court and I pardoned you, so too will your descendants come before the divine court, and I will pardon them.'" According to Genesis Rabbah 21:6, God shows Adam "the door to repentance."

Genesis Rabbah 19:7 not only dismisses the idea that we inherit Adam's sin, but it also regards sin as no worse than any in the long line of human evil, including Cain's fratricide, the generation of the

flood, the building of the Tower of Babel, the sins of Sodom, and so on. With each sin, the Shechinah, the divine presence, moved farther away from humanity. "But as against these there arose seven righteous men: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram, and Moses, and they brought it [the Shechinah] down again to earth."[39] Sin is inevitable, but the activities of the righteous can return the Shechinah to earth.

This midrash also introduces an important theme of rabbinic literature: Sinai (and not Jesus) is the antidote to sin.[40] A later midrash quotes God:

> If I gave Adam but one commandment that he might fulfill it, and I made him equal to the ministering angels, for it says *behold the man was one of us* (Gen 3:22)—how much more so should those who practice and fulfill all the six hundred and thirteen commandments [the number of commandments found in the Torah according to the rabbis]—not to mention their general principles, details and minutiae—be deserving of eternal life?[41]

The point here is not the dreaded "works righteousness," that is, the idea that Jews follow the commandments in order to earn God's love or postmortem salvation. This idea is a mistaken view of Jewish thought. Jews do not follow the Torah in order to "earn" divine love. Jews lovingly follow the Torah in response to the love God showed Israel by giving the Torah to them.

Although Augustine's notion of vitiated seed does not appear in Jewish teaching, some rabbis did imagine that the events in Eden caused the human body to change. Genesis Rabbah 12:6 suggests that Adam had a gigantic body (as Isaiah 6 depicts God as having a gigantic body), but that body was diminished as a result of eating the forbidden fruit. A later midrash, Tanhuma,[42] suggests that in addition

to losing stature and becoming mortal because of the Eden incident, people lost four other traits: a radiant face, easy access to food, residence in the garden, and the original great luminosity of the sun and the moon.

For the rabbis, the idea of an edenic fall is a minority opinion. More popular are countervailing claims suggesting that everything, including death, was part of the divine plan. Genesis Rabbah 9:5 reports that Rabbi Meir's Torah scroll, instead of saying at the end of creation that everything was "very good" (Hebrew *tov me'od*), read "death was good" (Hebrew *tov mavet*). This fanciful claim implies that the mortality bestowed upon all of Adam's descendants cannot be seen as a curse.

Indeed, the predominant rabbinic opinion is that Adam is *not* guilty of any "original sin," as in the following midrash from Tanhuma:

> Though death was brought into the world through Adam, yet he cannot be held responsible for the death of men. Once on a time he said to God: "I am not concerned about the death of the wicked, but I should not like the pious to reproach me and lay the blame for their death upon me. I pray Thee, make no mention of my guilt." And God promised to fulfil his wish. . . . As soon as life is extinct in a man, he is presented to Adam, whom he accuses of having caused his death. But Adam repudiates the charge: "I committed but one trespass. Is there any among you, and be he the most pious, who has not been guilty of more than one?"[43]

Adam is guilty of sin—but only his own.

Concerning the woman, the rabbis, as to be expected, present a variety of evaluations of Eve herself, and of Eve as a prototypical woman.[44] Genesis Rabbah 18:1 expresses women's superiority over men by punning. The Hebrew *vayiven*, in the expression "the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made [*vayiven*—literally "he built"] into a woman" (Gen 2:22), sounds like the word *binah*, "understanding"—in Hebrew the two words share several common letters. Thus Rabbi Ele'azar concludes: "She was given more understanding [*binah*] than the man."[45] Another midrash there (17:2) lauds the importance of marriage by seeing Eve as the answer to Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone"; the midrash states, "anyone who is in a wifeless state is without goodness, without help, without happiness, without blessing and without atonement." After bringing biblical prooftexts for each point, other sages chime in by noting that an unmarried man is also without peace and without life. The passage ends audaciously, with one sage proclaiming that a man without a wife is "not a complete person" and according to some, "even diminishes the [divine] likeness."[46]

Yet the rabbis were also realists who knew of difficult, and failed, marriages. Using the phrase *'ezer kenegdo* (Gen 2:18, 20), where *'ezer* in rabbinic Hebrew means a (subservient) helper and *kenegdo* has a range of meanings, including "opposite," the rabbis adduced, "if he is worthy, she [his wife] is a help; if he is not worthy, she opposes him" (b. Yevamot 63a, also cited by Rashi on Gen 2:18).

Still other rabbinic texts understand Eve, and all women, along the same lines as Ben Sira. Although no rabbinic texts declare women to be of second-class status because they were created second, some texts do draw derogatory conclusions concerning Eve as a result of her creation from a rib. Because man was created from soil and woman from a rib, Genesis Rabbah 17:8 concludes that men do not need to perfume themselves, since soil smells good, while bones stink after a few days.

A later midrash, Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer 18, uses negative views about women to explain why the snake chose the woman to entice:

"The serpent had a discussion with itself, saying, 'If I talk to the *'adam*, I know that he will not listen to me, for it is always hard to get a man to change his mind . . . ; but I will talk to the woman, whose thoughts are frivolous, for I know that she will listen to me; for women listen to all creatures, as it is said, "She [the stupid woman] is simple and does not know anything"' (cf. Proverbs 9:13)."[47]

Similar to 1 Timothy, some rabbinic texts find that the woman's disobedience has lasting repercussions. Genesis Rabbah 17:8 takes this viewpoint but at the same time explains why women are entrusted with the commandments to keep the laws of menstrual purity, remove in baking the first part of the dough (*challah*) that is due the priest, and light Sabbath candles.[48] Other texts suggest that women must cover their hair out of shame for the sin they committed and they walk first near the corpse as it is led in procession to be buried because they brought death into the world.[49] Many Jewish women to this day do not, while they are menstruating, have sexual relations with their husbands; they toss a bit of dough into the oven before baking; and they light Sabbath candles. Most, however, do not see themselves as cursed because of Eve. To the contrary, they see these activities as a form of sacralizing their lives.

The Jewish tradition does not depict a perfect woman, such as Mary plays in some Christian traditions, any more than it depicts a sinless man. However, in attempting to harmonize Genesis 1 and Genesis 2, it does offer a negative female figure, Lilith, Adam's first wife. According to this legend, first fully developed in the ninth-century CE *Alphabet of Jesus ben Sira* (unrelated to the much earlier book of Ben Sira or Sirach), "When the first man, Adam, saw that he was alone, God made for him a woman like himself, from the earth. God called her name Lilith, and brought her to Adam. They immediately began to quarrel. Adam said: 'You lie beneath me.' And Lilith said: 'You lie beneath me! We are both equal, for both of us are from the earth.' And they would not listen to one another." Lilith eventually flees to Egypt. As the legend developed, Lilith is the cause of the death of infants and of nocturnal emissions. To prevent her from exerting her power, Jewish women are to do what the Talmud had already suggested: observe the laws of menstrual purity, toss dough into the oven before baking, and light the Sabbath candles.[50]

Today, Adam and Eve are back in the news with debates over biblical literalism coupled with "young earth" theorists. Some people insist that the story of Adam and Eve must be historically true: for Jesus to redeem humanity from sin requires Adam and Eve to introduce it. Some insist there must be a garden of Eden because that is where the righteous dead inherit eternal life. Eve becomes the reason why, in some Christian settings, women do not teach or have authority over men. As we have seen, there are other readings that do not require original sin, the fall of man, or even a historical Adam and Eve.

The story of Eden is a myth of how things came to be. It is not, however, a prescription for how things must be. Instead, it prompts us to ask the necessary questions about how things *should be*. First, it demands we attend to our relation to the earth, to plants and animals. It states we have a natural connection to the ground, since we are all earth creatures, and to the earth we will return. How then should we care for it? Second, although Genesis depicts God as cursing the ground, we nevertheless do what we can to lift that curse, using machinery, or pesticides, or genetic engineering. If we can combat the curse of the ground, there is no reason to derive from Genesis 3 an insistence on women's subordination or their experiencing pain or additional labor during childbirth.

Third, the creation narratives have led to different understandings of human nature: Are we just a bit lower than the angels, cared for by

a compassionate God, and given free will, or are we depraved from the moment of conception and worthy of eternal damnation? Do we emphasize original sin, or original opportunity?

Genesis 2–3 asks us to think about immortality. Faced with returning to dust, how do we make each moment count? Are our children, or the works of our hands, or the contributions of our thoughts, a substitute for immortality? Or do we require immortal souls in a mythical future to match the mythical past? Is Eden our true home, such that we are always in exile, or is our true home wherever we make it?

For some, seeing these multiple voices diminishes the Bible's power, and these differences must somehow be reconciled. For others, including us, it is precisely the multivocality of the Bible, its interest in offering multiple, often conflicting perspectives, that gives it its power. Already in the first chapters of the Bible, we see these multiple perspectives in the two creation stories from the Yahwist (J) source and the Priestly (P) source. For some, asking questions about the text is dangerous because the answers could lead to new choices, to different religious beliefs. For us, the text prompts us to ask these questions and others, and it is through our answers that we discover ourselves and our place in the world.

Chapter 5

"You Are a Priest Forever"