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WHAT HAPPENED TO ADAM AND EVE?
A Literary-Theological Approach to Genesis 3

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1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to illustrate the advantages of an interpretive approach to Old Testament narrative that is based on insights from discourse analysis and literary studies, which have made important contributions over the last 20 years or so. Hence I will first outline the approach, presented as a series of questions an expositor should answer, and then apply that approach to a passage that has traditionally been seen as full of theological intent, namely Genesis 3.

One reason I have chosen Genesis 3, besides its obvious merit in its own right, is the fact that James Barr has told us that Old Testament scholarship “has long known that the reading of the story [of Genesis 3] as the ‘Fall of Man’ in the traditional sense, though hallowed by St Paul’s use of it, cannot stand up to examination through a close reading of the Genesis text.”¹ But this claim raises the question of *how* we might “know” such a thing, and what methods are appropriate to interpretation of these narratives.

The methods informed by discourse analysis and (conservative) literary studies aim at achieving “ancient literary competence”:² that is, they seek to read the text the way a competent reader in the original audience would have done, to the best we can reconstruct that competence. This should bring benefits to exegesis, to theological synthesis, and to the exposition and application of the OT narratives. Given that narrative is such a major form of Biblical material, and

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¹James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), ix and elsewhere. It is certainly true that a great number of the “critical” commentaries and articles published this century fit this description.

²The term comes from V.P. Long, *The Art of Biblical History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 33.

that it is notoriously easy to abuse it, the help from such methods should be welcome.³

2. OUTLINE OF THE METHODS⁴

Discourse analysis as applied to OT interpretation owes much of its impetus to linguists associated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL). With experience analyzing the communicative patterns of non-Western languages around the world, these linguists began asking similar questions of the Hebrew of the Old Testament. A seminal paper by Robert Longacre appeared in 1976, "The discourse structure of the flood narrative."⁵ Longacre summarized his concerns:

contemporary discourse analysis is interested in questions of genre classification...; the articulation of parts of a discourse such as formulaic beginnings and endings, episodes, and high points in the story (called peaks); the status of discourse constituents such as sentences, paragraphs, and embedded discourses; the cast of participants in a given discourse ...; author viewpoint and author sympathy as indicated in the text; the main line development of a discourse ...; the role of tense, aspect, particles, affixes, pronominalization chains, paraphrase, and conjunctions in providing cohesion and prominence in a discourse; ways of marking peak in a narrative; and the function of dialogue in discourse.

(Granted, that is a mouthful; the relevant parts should become clearer as we proceed, however.) Essays that reflect these interests have appeared in publications sponsored by SIL, and rarely outside of such venues.⁶

³This paper may function as a test case for the benefits of this kind of approach: since we can compare our conclusions with Paul's use of Genesis 3, we may find encouragement to use these methods in other places.

⁴My aim in this section is to *outline* my approach. Those wanting fuller discussion beyond what I illustrate in my examination of Genesis 3 may consult C. John Collins, *A Study Guide for Old Testament Historical Books* (St Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary Bookstore, 1999), with the bibliography given therein.

⁵Robert Longacre, "The discourse structure of the flood narrative," in G. MacRae, ed., *Society of Biblical Literature 1976 Seminar Papers* (Missoula: Scholars, 1976), 235-262. See also Robert Longacre, "Interpreting Biblical stories," in Teun A. van Dijk, ed., *Discourse and Literature* (Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1985), 169-185.

⁶E.g., Barbara D. Heins, "From leprosy to shalom and back again: A discourse analysis of 2 Kings 5," *OPTAT (Occasional Papers in Translation and Textlinguistics)* 2:1 (1988), 20-31; Calinda Hallberg, "Storyline and theme in a Biblical narrative: 1 Samuel 3," *OPTAT* 3:1 (1989), 1-35. In 1993 SIL hosted a conference on Discourse Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew in which I participated, and some of its papers appeared in Robert Bergen, ed., *Biblical Hebrew and Discourse Linguistics* (Dallas: SIL), 1994, or in the *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics* (the successor to *OPTAT*).

Conservative literary approaches share some of these concerns, and add some of their own.⁷ These methods stem from the observation that the Biblical narratives are stories, and hence involve characters, events (plot), and scenes. To call them stories is not to downplay their historical claims (indeed, to do so would, in my judgment, be a *mis*-reading of them); instead, it directs our attention to the narrator's ways of portraying characters' good and bad traits, and of displaying or hiding his own point of view. The most helpful survey of these approaches is the PhD dissertation of V.P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul*.⁸ Some of the features we find in the OT narratives include:

- the reliable and omniscient narrator (i.e. he serves as the voice and perspective of God);⁹
- "scenic narration" (i.e. emphasis on direct action and interaction of the characters rather than on descriptive detail of the environs);
- sparsely written narratives (i.e. focus on what is essential for the narrative);
- key-word/root repetition ("*Leitwortstil*," i.e. repetition of a root to draw attention to thematic issues);
- word-play (e.g., words or roots used with different meanings; words that sound alike; generally used for ironic contrasts);
- poetry as heightened speech (elevated diction of a speech as evidence of its significance;¹⁰ often oracular, may even be divine speech);
- repetition (e.g., similar kinds of events, and even scenes, in different circumstances);
- analogy and contrast (characters and scenes are like and unlike one another).

This means that, as a general rule, the means of communicating point-of-view will be indirect and laconic. The emphasis will be on *showing*

⁷I use the qualifier "conservative" to indicate those approaches that focus on the text having a meaning, as opposed to the "post-modern" kind which locate meaning only in the reader or in the reader's interpretive community, or which deny the possibility of communication altogether.

⁸V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul* (Atlanta: Scholars, 1989). He has a section on "Selected features of Hebrew narrative style" (21-41).

⁹Traditionally the narrators are called "prophets," i.e. spokesmen for God.

¹⁰This will often include "poetic" devices such as parallelism, chiasmus, artistic word order, and vocabulary choice.

(displaying the heart by action and speech) versus *telling* (the narrator telling us explicitly what kind of person the character is).

Hence if we want to be good readers of OT narratives, we will pay attention to, for example, the way people speak: we will look for the relation between what they say and what they do, or between what the narrator has reported and what the character reports (if the character adds or deletes things, how does this reflect “spin”?), or between what someone says (or is told) he will say and what he does say. The Biblical narrators are fully aware that humans are sinful, and that even the best of us have mixed motives and imperfect morality. Very few important Biblical characters get off with a purely positive portrayal, since the heroification of humans is not part of the Bible’s purpose.

As it turns out, both these classes of method often result in refuting conventional source- or redaction-critical results. This is because, while they agree with the source critics about the existence of certain difficulties in the texts, they explain them as literary devices rather than as seams between (incompatible) sources. The contribution of these methods to the task of theological exposition of the books, however, has not been explored much.¹¹

We can combine the insights of these approaches into a method for theological exposition of OT narrative. The expositor should study the passage in order to answer the following questions:

1 / What is the pericope, and who are the participants?

We want to identify the boundaries of our pericope, for example by noticing places where the location changes, or a new set of participants is introduced, or there is some grammatical expression of discontinuity, or some problem is introduced at the beginning and then resolved at the end. We also list the cast of characters, and note when they enter and when they leave.

2 / What is the paragraph structure of the pericope (including peak)?

Here we outline the broad structure of the events described in our passage. A paragraph would consist, for example, of a single exchange between two characters; or a connected set of actions. The “peak” is that part of the narrative that has the maximum interest: for example, when God finally makes his opinion known; or when the narrative

¹¹An attempt to do so, but without a clearly articulated method, is C. John Collins, “From literary analysis to theological exposition: The Book of Jonah,” *Journal of Translation and Textlinguistics (JOTT)* 7:1 (1995), 28-44. An application of some of these methods to a vexing and controversial issue is C. John Collins, “Reading Genesis 1:1-2:3 as an act of communication: Discourse analysis and literal interpretation,” in Joseph Pipa, Jr. and David Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), 131-151.

tension is at its climax; it is often the communicative focus of the pericope.

3 / What is the basic sequence of events?

In a Biblical Hebrew narrative, the function of the *wayyiqtol* verb form (also improperly called “the *waw*-consecutive with imperfect”) is as “the backbone or storyline tense of Biblical Hebrew narrative discourse.”¹² Hence, if we want to find the main sequence of events in a narrator’s presentation, we should begin by looking for the *wayyiqtol* verbs.¹³ Other verb forms, when part of the narrator’s presentation (as opposed to the reported speech of participants), are used for supplying background information: e.g., the “perfect” (*qatal*) is used to denote events off the storyline, while the “imperfect” (*yiqtol*), “converted perfect” (*weqatal*), and participle (*qotel*) denote activities with process aspect (“something *was happening*”).¹⁴

We may include here questions of the order of events (which may or may not be the same as order of narration)¹⁵ and historical truth claims our narrator is making.¹⁶ I consider it important to raise this question, and invalid to bracket it out (as some literary studies do): after all, such claims, when made, are part of the communicative intent of the narrative.¹⁷

¹²Robert Longacre, “Discourse perspective on the Hebrew verb: Affirmation and restatement,” in Walter Bodine, ed., *Linguistics and Biblical Hebrew* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 177-189, at 178. Cf. also Randall Buth, “The Hebrew verb in current discussions,” *JOTT* 5:2 (1992), 91-105.

¹³Of course, since this verb form can be used for imbedded storylines, we cannot mechanically identify the occurrence of the verb form with this function.

¹⁴“Process aspect” has a number of contextually inferred nuances, such as habitual action, repeated action, one action in process, inceptive action.

¹⁵For a grammatical discussion of when the event denoted by a *wayyiqtol* verb form is not directly sequential to the previous event, see C. John Collins, “The *wayyiqtol* as ‘pluperfect’: When and why,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 46:1 (1995), 117-140.

¹⁶We must be careful what we mean by “historical truth claim”: I take it in the ordinary language sense of “a record of events that the author wants us to believe took place in the space-time world in which we live.” This is of course separate from “historical truth value.” Further, if we say an account makes an historical truth claim, that does not settle every question we might ask about whether, for example, things are narrated in the order in which they occurred; or whether the description is complete: or whether we must interpret the account without reference to metaphor, hyperbole, literary devices, etc.

¹⁷Joseph Pipa, Jr., in “From chaos to cosmos: A critique of the non-literal interpretations of Genesis 1:1-2:3,” in Joseph Pipa, Jr. and David Hall, eds., *Did God Create in Six Days?* (Taylors: Southern Presbyterian Press, 1999), 153-198, at 198, expresses the fear that an approach to Biblical narrative based on these methods will lead to the down-playing of historical truth claims; he seems to think it is inherent in the methodology. But since this methodology recognizes that

4/ How do those events follow causally from what comes before, and affect causally what comes after?

This concerns the relationship between our pericope and its context. The events in our passage may be influenced by choices characters made in earlier passages; while the choices the characters make in our pericope may influence events later (e.g., the connection of David's sin with Bathsheba, 2 Samuel 11, to the rest of 2 Samuel). This reflects the Biblical position that, under divine sovereignty, our choices are freighted with unimaginable significance and effect.

5/ Are there repeated key words or roots (both within this pericope and across several pericopes)?

The repetition of key words can bind passages with a theological unity, as well as giving them a unity across pericope boundaries. For example, Long has shown that 1 Samuel 2:30 is a controlling principle for the first part of 1 Samuel: "those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed" (RSV). Here, the word "honor" is from the Hebrew root *k-b-d*, from which other forms are derived meaning "heavy," "harden [the heart]," and "glory." The word "lightly esteemed" is from the root *q-l-l*, the natural antonym of *k-b-d*. Use of words from these roots serves to remind the reader that 1 Samuel 2:30 is the relevant interpretive principle.¹⁸ Further, repetition of roots within a pericope can provide anaphora (back-reference to something mentioned previously), or can be used for irony.

6/ How does the author present the characters?

For example, look for the ways their action and speech reveal their hearts; the way they describe events as compared to the way the narrator does (their "spinning" of events); the ways people develop or deteriorate; the ways an author may create sympathy or suspicion.

7/ What devices does the author use to communicate his point-of-view?

For example, sometimes he gives an explicit evaluation of characters or events (this is rare); sometimes he allows us to see contrasts between characters (e.g., between the chaste Joseph and the lustful Judah,

historical claims are part of the communication event, and since the expositor should address the question, that fear is seen to be unfounded.

¹⁸V. P. Long, "Scenic, succinct, subtle: An introduction to the literary artistry of 1 and 2 Samuel," *Presbyterion* 19:1 (1993), 32-47; this also appears as "First and Second Samuel," in Leland Ryken and Tremper Longman, III, eds., *The Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 165-181. Additional linguistic discussion appears in C. John Collins, "*k-b-d*," no. 3877 in Willem VanGemeren, ed., *New International Dictionary of OT Theology and Exegesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 2:577-587.

Genesis 38-39); sometimes he uses ironic foreshadowing or back-reference; sometimes he omits the mention of things we would have expected.

8/ How are covenantal principles on display here?

For example, how does this passage demonstrate God's grace; or how do we see the tension between the conditionality and unconditionality of covenant participation; or how do we see divine sovereignty at work; or the success or failure of covenant succession (cf. the promise in Genesis 17); or the function of the mediatorial kingship (e.g., David and Goliath)? Further under this heading we should consider the way later Scripture refers to the passage we are studying. For example, the historical psalms (e.g., 78, 106, 106) lead us in our theological reflection on the history of Israel; and Paul's reference to Abraham (Romans 4:3-5) should lead us to find a religious kinship between Christians and their forefather in the faith.¹⁹

Answers to these questions can provide the jumping-off point for theologically-sensitive application to ourselves: whether that be in discerning the covenantal principles by which God deals with his people, or in the examples of individuals who act faithfully or unfaithfully towards God's gracious covenant, and what happens as a result.

3. PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS FROM GENESIS 2²⁰

Before we can proceed to Genesis 3, we must address three interlocking questions that grow out of chapter 2: What are the two trees of 2:9? What is the nature of the relationship God establishes in 2:15-17? What is the meaning of the threatened "death" in 2:17? Now, the literature on these is large; but since this essay is intended to illustrate a method, and since extensive critical interaction with the secondary literature would expand this study far beyond its intent, I have generally refrained from such detailed interaction.²¹

¹⁹One must be careful, though: it does not follow that the later reference exhausts all the possible applications of the earlier one. For example, the fact that Hebrews 2:6-8 uses Psalm 8:4-6 does not require us to conclude that the Psalm is exclusively Messianic: instead the psalm lends itself to the context of Hebrews because Jesus is an ideal representative of human nature.

²⁰I shall assume that the reader will consult both the Hebrew of Genesis 2-3 and a generally formal equivalent translation such as RSV or NASB. A very literal translation of these chapters with detailed annotations appears in C. John Collins, *Christian Faith in an Age of Science* (St Louis: Covenant Theological Seminary Bookstore, 1998), chapter 2. I shall use the RSV as the base, and modify it for closer accord with the Hebrew.

²¹Commentaries whose opinions I have considered include: Yehudah Kiel, *Sēfer Bērēšīt* (Genesis, Da'at Miqra; Jerusalem: Mosad Harav Kook, 1997);

To explain the two trees, “the tree of life” and “the tree of knowing good and evil,” a host of proposals have been advanced: any competent commentary will summarize the possibilities. For our purposes, the key thing to note is that the author of Genesis gives us no explanation of the natures of these two trees. From the narrative that follows, though, we can infer the reasons for their names: the tree of life is apparently some kind of sacrament (i.e. there is no reason to believe it is *magical*) that would confirm the man in his moral condition: hence he needed to gain access to it by obedience, and would have been rewarded by being confirmed in holiness forever. This is why God does not want him to have it after his sin (3:22): he would then be confirmed in his sinfulness forever, and this is horrible. This would explain the use of this tree as an image, both in the OT (Proverbs 3:18, applied to wisdom; 11:30, to the fruit of the righteous; 13:12, to desire fulfilled; and 15:4, to a healing tongue: they are means to keep us on the path to immortal happiness, i.e. of perseverance),²² and in the NT (Revelation 2:7; 22:2, 14, 19, where it functions as a symbol of confirmation in holiness).

To understand the tree of the knowing good and evil (to call it the tree of *knowledge* is quite misleading; a specific kind of knowledge is in view), we must ascertain what is the knowing of good and evil it designates.²³ Whatever our theory, it must account for the fact that in

William Reyburn and Euan Fry, *Handbook on Genesis* (UBS Handbook Series; New York: United Bible Societies, 1997); John Sailhamer, *Genesis* (Expositor's Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Victor Hamilton, *Genesis 1-17* (New International Commentary on the OT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990); Gordon Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary; Waco: Word, 1987); Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1-11* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984 [German original, 1974]); Derek Kidner, *Genesis* (Tyndale OT Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967); Umberto Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961 [Hebrew original, 1944]); John Skinner, *Genesis* (International Critical Commentary; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930); Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1997 [German original, 1910]); S.R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis* (Westminster Commentary; London: Methuen, 1904); G.J. Spurrell, *Notes on the text of the Book of Genesis* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1896); August Dillmann, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark [German original, 1892]); Franz Delitzsch, *A New Commentary on Genesis* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1888); C.F. Keil, *The Pentateuch* (Keil and Delitzsch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [reprint of 1875 ET from German]); John Calvin, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1979 [Calvin Translation Society edition of 1563 Latin original]); and Howard Wallace, *The Eden Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985). I have not transferred all my notes from the margins of these works to the footnotes here. Commentaries are cited by author's name and page number.

²²Cf. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs* (Tyndale OT Commentary; Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1964), 54.

²³For critical discussion cf. Hamilton, 163-166; Wenham, 63-64. The explanations most commonly offered for the knowledge resulting from eating this fruit include: sexual experience (emphasizing “knowing,” Hebrew *yādaʿ*, cf. Gen 4:1); advancement in general knowledge (i.e. from primitive to civilized);

3:22 God acknowledges that the humans have in fact become like God “in respect to knowing good and evil”:²⁴ this means that it must be some property they share with God. Further, usage of the expression “to know good and evil” elsewhere in the OT carries the nuance of discernment, and is “characteristic of maturity and adult life.”²⁵ These point to the conclusion that the tree is, as Delitzsch argued,²⁶ the intended means by which humans were to attain to knowledge of good and evil: either from above, from the perspective of mastery of temptation, or from below, from the perspective of slavery to sin.²⁷

knowledge of everything (taking “good and evil” as polar opposites, hence including everything in between); and moral autonomy (one becomes an autonomous arbiter of good and evil, like God is). The “sexual experience” interpretation is not worth considering, first because the “knowing” is called “knowing good and evil,” not “knowing” simply; and second, because sexual complementarity and reproduction are not presented as things that God would withhold from his human creatures (cf. 2:18-25; 1:28). The idea of advancement to a civilized state is also to be rejected, among other reason because it is hard to see why this would be prohibited. Wenham favors the “knowledge of everything” interpretation, while Hamilton prefers the “moral autonomy” scheme.

²⁴Hebrew *lādaʿat tōb wārā*; this is more accurate than RSV “knowing good and evil.”

²⁵R. W. L. Moberly, “Did the serpent get it right?” *JTS* n.s. 39:1 (1988), 1-27, at 21-22. Cf. Keil, 85: “not to know what good and evil are, is a sign of either the immaturity of infancy (Deut. i.39) or the imbecility of age (2 Sam. xix.35); whereas the power to distinguish [using *hābîn*, “to discern, distinguish,” which has partial semantic overlap with *yādaʿ*, “to know”] good and evil is commended as the gift of a king (1 Kings iii.9) and the wisdom of angels (2 Sam. xiv.17 [using *šāmaʿ*, “to hear,” RSV “to discern”), and in the highest sense is ascribed to God Himself (chap. iii.5, 22).”

²⁶Delitzsch, 138. T.C. Mitchell also endorses this after surveying several other possibilities in “Eden,” in J.D. Douglas, ed., *New Bible Dictionary* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1982), 296a-298a, at 297b. See also Keil, 85-86. Possibly Ben Sira 17:7 supports this, if it is in fact an allusion to this text (the Hebrew original of this part of Ben Sira is not extant, and its Greek does not exactly match the Septuagint of Genesis): in making man God is said to have “filled them with the knowledge of understanding, and showed them good and evil.” Here to “show good and evil” is to impart discernment (cf. John Snaith, *Ecclesiasticus* [Cambridge Bible Commentary; Cambridge University Press, 1974], 87; and Moshe Segal, *Sēfer Ben Sīrāʿ Haššālēm* [Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1958], 105; both of whom think the meaning in Genesis is something else).

²⁷Delitzsch’s explanation comports very nicely with some comments C.S. Lewis made in *Mere Christianity* about the relationship of moral performance and mental acuity. In Book iii (*Christian behaviour*), chapter 4 (“Christianity and psychoanalysis”), the last paragraph, Lewis observes that “when a man is getting better he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his badness less and less. ... Good people know about both good and evil: bad people do not know about either.” Then in chapter 5 of the same book (on “Sexual morality”), he comments, “those who are seriously attempting chastity are more conscious, and soon know a great deal more about their own sexuality than anyone else. They come to know their

Now to the matter of God's relationship with Adam in 2:15-17. The particular question to address is, may we properly call this a "covenant"? Some object, since the text does not employ a term with that meaning;²⁸ but we err if we insist on identifying the presence of the concept with some particular vocabulary. If by "covenant" we mean the formalization of a relationship between two parties, with conditions to be met and consequences for keeping or not keeping those conditions,²⁹ then we certainly do have here a covenant.³⁰ The ground for the relationship is of course God's initiative, not human merit. The condition for its continuation is stated clearly in 2:16-17, obedience to the divine will.³¹ The punishment for breaking the command is "death" (see below); the reward for faithfulness is not stated, but is implied: the continued relationship (which will result in the right kind of knowing good and evil), and access (either for the first time or continued) to the tree of life.

What is the nature of the "death penalty" with which God threatens the man? Many read this as a threat of physical death as

desires as Wellington knew Napoleon, or as Sherlock Holmes knew Moriarty; as a rat-catcher knows rats or a plumber knows about leaky pipes. Virtue – even attempted virtue – brings light; indulgence brings fog." The other strong possibility, argued by Moberly in "Did the serpent get it right?" is that "'knowledge of good and evil' signifies *moral autonomy*" (24). This, however, suffers from failure actually to explain what happens in the narrative.

²⁸E.g., John Murray, *Collected Writings of John Murray* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1984), 2:49.

²⁹Compare the use of Hebrew *bērit* "covenant" to denote marriage, Proverbs 2:17; Malachi 2:14.

³⁰The best interpretation of Hosea 6:7 is as a reference to the events of Genesis 3: *wēhēmmā kē'ādām 'ābērū bērit* "like Adam they have transgressed the covenant" (cf. NIV, NASB, RSV margin). For the arguments cf. Thomas McComiskey, "Hosea," in McComiskey, ed., *The Minor Prophets, 1* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 95; C.F. Keil, *The Minor Prophets* (Keil and Delitzsch; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981 [German original 1888]), 99-100. In defense of the RSV emendation, cf. G.I. Davies, *Hosea* (New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans), 171.

³¹The solemnity of the command comes out in three ways: first, according to Delitzsch, 132, the phrase in verse 16 rendered "the Lord God commanded the man" would be better rendered "the Lord God *strictly* commanded the man" (he claims that the verb *šiwwā* "he commanded," when it governs its object with the preposition *'al* "upon" – as it does here – carries the nuance of *commanded strictly*). Second, we note that the beginning of verse 17 reads literally, "and from the tree of knowing good and evil, you must not eat from it." That is, the clause begins and ends with the preposition "from," with the tree as object in both cases; and one of the "from"-phrases is redundant. Therefore it frames the clause and highlights it, which makes this the "strict command" of verse 16. And thirdly, the severity of the penalty for disobedience, death, lays extra weight on this command.

such.³² Those who read the text this way then must say that the snake was in some sense right (cf. 3:4); and if they draw back from such a conclusion, it is in the direction of either seeing the threat as one of becoming mortal, or coming under a death sentence, or else as being of immediate death but which was not carried out due to divine grace (of which the snake would of course not have been a part). But need we go to these explanatory lengths or draw these unwanted conclusions?

It seems clear to me that the right method is (a) to consider the semantic range of the Hebrew word “die” (Hebrew root *m-w-t*); and (b) to use the context to ascertain which part of that range is present in our text. And it seems further plain that cooperation with the narrator requires us to assume that the Lord God is a “reliable character” and the snake is not.³³ This means that we should assume that what happens may serve to identify the meaning of “die”.

To begin with, then, what is the semantic range of the Hebrew root *m-w-t*? Whereas its most common referent is physical death (e.g., Genesis 5:5), it can also refer to what we call “spiritual death,” that is, estrangement from a life-giving relationship with God.³⁴ This appears in Proverbs 12:28:

In the path of righteousness is life [Hebrew *ḥayyim*],
and the course of (its) way is “no-death” [Hebrew *ʿal-māwet*]

Since Proverbs does not suggest that righteous people do not physically die (indeed, in 14:32 they take refuge in their death), this “no-death” must refer to a blessed afterlife (that is, it is parallel to “life,” which is life in its fullest aspect, life with God forever); which means that “death” in this context would be perdition. Similarly, in Proverbs 23:13-14 we read (cf. RSV):

³²The literature is quite large. For a sample, cf. Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 8-11, who asserts strongly that immediate physical death was the threat, not mere mortality; and “the serpent was the one who was right in such matters. They did not die” (8). Wenham, 68, says, “The text is a straightforward warning that death will follow eating”; while Hamilton, 172-174, concludes that it is a death sentence that can be averted through repentance.

³³This, I think, is axiomatic. Though Biblical writers will wrestle with God, though they express deep perplexity over his dealings, they would never cast aspersions on his truthfulness. Hence when Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 14, concludes that “the person who comes out of this story with a slightly shaky moral record is, of course, God,” he should instantly have re-examined his reading of the story.

³⁴In the interests of clarity of thought we should reject altogether the labels “literal” and “figurative” for these two senses: because in most people’s minds, “literal” means “more *real*” than “figurative.” In the Biblical world-view, not only is spiritual death real, it is by far the more horrible of the two.

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if³⁵ you strike him with the rod he will not *die*.

You, with the rod you will strike him, and you will save his life from Sheol.

The parallel is between not dying and being saved from Sheol (i.e., from perdition).³⁶ There is of course no question of one's child not *physically* dying; the question is instead, where does his moral orientation take him?³⁷

Now we have the semantic range of the word; we can go no farther in applying the contextual information until we have studied Genesis 3, which we are now prepared to do.

4. A LITERARY-THEOLOGICAL EXPOSITION OF GENESIS 3

To begin with, we delimit the pericope and its participants. It is easy to see that the pericope is Genesis 3:1-24, since verse 1 introduces a new character (the snake) in a grammatically disjunctive way (*waw* + subject + perfect verb), and 2:25 ends 2:4-25 with a verb type that sums up that chapter's situation ("and the man and his wife were both naked") and also sets us up for disjunction ("and they were not ashamed"; the verb form here breaks the *wayyiqtol* storyline sequence). This makes for an undefined time break between the events of this pericope and those of chapter 2.³⁸ Note that 2:4-3:24 are a larger segment, united by such factors as the unique divine name *yhwh 'ēlōhîm* "the Lord God," the location (Eden), the characters (Adam and Eve), the two special trees, and the conflict around the command in 2:17. The participants are (in order of appearance): the snake, Eve, Adam, and God.

³⁵The NASB renders the Heb. *kî* as "although," and this is inexcusable in view of the connection with verse 14: *kî* followed by the imperfect here introduces the protasis of a conditional clause (cf. P. Joüon and T. Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew* [Rome: Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, 1993], §167i).

³⁶Although some would take Sheol simply as a name for the grave (the policy of the NIV; cf. R. Laird Harris in *JETS* 4 [1961], 129-135), the evidence is quite against this interpretation, and favors the interpretation that it is the place where the ungodly go: see Philip Johnston, "'Left in Hell?'" in P.E. Satterthwaite et al., eds., *The Lord's Anointed* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995), 213-222, at 216-221 (drawing on his PhD research); T. Desmond Alexander, "The OT view of life after death", *Themelios* 11:2 (1986), 41-46; Alexander Heidel, *The Gilgamesh Epic and OT Parallels* (University of Chicago, 1949), 170-191.

³⁷See further Kidner's subject study "Life and death" in *Proverbs*, 53-56.

³⁸As I have argued elsewhere (e.g., Collins, "The *wayyiqtol* as pluperfect," 138), the events of Gen 2:5-25 are to be reckoned as taking place on the sixth "day" of Genesis 1. See further Jack Collins, "Discourse analysis and the interpretation of Gen 2:4-7," *Westminster Theological Journal* 61:2 (Fall, 1999), 269-276.

Now we delineate the paragraph structure. It is not hard to find that the paragraphs are:

- 1a introduction of *the* snake
- 1b-5 the snake converses with Eve
- 6-7 the human pair sin and begin to reap the consequences
- 8-13 the human pair try to hide from God
- 14-19 God expresses his sentence
 - 14-15 on the snake
 - 16 on the woman
 - 17-19 on the man
- 20-21 humans perceive divine mercy
- 22-24 God expels humans from the Garden

The peak is at verses 14-19, as evidenced by: (1) it is God's speech, and his opinion, after all, matters the most; (2) the language is elevated (set as poetry in English versions); (3) the judgments extend beyond the time and space of the characters themselves; (4) the verbs "said" in verses 16, 17 are perfect tense and not *wayyiqtol*, though the events are clearly on the main storyline.³⁹

The basic sequence of events is plain from the paragraph structure above, and needs no further discussion. As we observed in describing the peak, God's speech acts in verses 16 and 17 ("said") are part of the storyline, even though they are reported with perfect verb forms. This is evidence of the weight given to these statements.

How would we assess the presence of historical truth claims in a narrative? We would consider such factors as the genre of the narrative, and its characteristic use. Our passage is narrative prose, whose characteristic use in the Bible is to report events in space and time. We would then ask about the book in which it is set: does the book show an interest in historical people and events? At the very least, we can say that the genealogies of Genesis show the link between the original pair and the generation that entered Egypt, and is part of the larger narrative of the Pentateuch, which has an interest in historical events. We should further look for explicit statements the narrator makes about historical precedents, circumstances, and consequences of the events he records. For example, here we find that Eve was to be the mother of all living (people), and this is evidenced in her parentage of the humans in Genesis 4-5. We further see that this pair were made morally upright and enjoyed a happy relationship with each other, the world, and God in chapter 2, but as a result of the events in chapter 3 they brought themselves into an unhappy condition;

³⁹Cf. Stephen Kempf, "Genesis 3:14-19: Climax of the discourse?" *JOTT* 6:4 (1993), 354-377, at 368-370. As a matter of fact, this refutes (or at least makes uninteresting) the redaction-criticism of authors such as Westermann, which argues that the judgments are not part of the original account.

and this is the only possible explanation for the spread of sin we find in the chapters that follow. We leave the discussion of further possible historical claims, such as those about the agent of temptation, the theological status of Adam and Eve, and the divine promises for remedy, until after we have treated those issues below.

This has expositional payoff: namely, it eliminates interpretations that take Adam, not as a particular historical figure,⁴⁰ but as “Everyman,” who represents us all as we face temptation.⁴¹

When we look for causal connections with what comes before and what comes after, we see on the one hand, that these events depend on the settling of the man and his wife in Eden, with the strict instructions regarding the two trees (chapter 2). We see further that the events of chapter 3 provide the explanation for the rapid decline into sin and strife of Adam and Eve’s descendants in chapter 4, and the pile-driver-like refrain of chapter 5, “and he died.” The promise of a “seed” (“offspring”) in 3:15 explains the interest in Genesis as a whole in the “seed” and in genealogies.⁴²

Now we consider repeated key words. There are small ironic word-plays in this pericope, some of which can be obscured in English versions. For example, in verse 5 the snake promises that their eyes will be *opened* and they will *know* something; while in verse 7 it is fulfilled: their eyes were *opened* and they *knew*⁴³ something—but it was just that they were naked! Since they already knew that in 2:25 (and knew it blissfully), we may conclude that their dispositional stance toward that knowledge is different, as is immediately evident in their attempt to cover themselves. Similarly, there is a play between the use of the root *r-b-h* in 3:16 (“I will surely *increase* your painfulness in childbearing”), and its use in the commission of 1:28 (“be fruitful and *increase in number*”). Whereas procreation had previously been the sphere of blessing, now it is to be the arena of pain and danger.

⁴⁰ That is, *in the original author’s presentation*: whether we should believe the claim is another matter (see below).

⁴¹ E.g., Moberly, “Did the serpent get it right,” who says, “the story as a whole gives the impression of being a portrayal of what is generally true, rather than what was true on one particular occasion” (20); and “Adam is clearly ‘Everyman’” (26); cf. Westermann, 251. But this presupposes that the two concepts – Adam as Everyman and Adam as particular historical person – are in opposition, which certainly begs the question. Further, Moberly has no discussion of the criteria for historical truth claims, and hence does not consider the factors discussed here. Kempf, “Genesis 3:14-19,” 375, notes (in opposition to Moberly) that “the ‘spread of sin’ theme in the macrostructure of Genesis 1-11 shows that the author intended the judgments of Gen. 3:14-19 as something more than what happens to any disobedient individual.”

⁴² On which see T. Desmond Alexander, “Genealogies, seed and the compositional unity of Genesis,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 44:2 (1993), 255-270.

⁴³ The NIV translation “realized” here obscures the repetition.

Other repeated words and phrases that give thematic cohesion to the pericope include “eat” (*ʿ-k-l*, verses 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 11, 12, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19) and “which I commanded you not to eat from” (verses 11, 17), and the divine acknowledgment that the humans *are* in fact in some way “like God” (verse 22, cf. verse 5). The trees (cf. verse 22) also serve to unite this with 2:4-25. In verse 22, the Lord God is concerned that the man might “reach out” (*š-l-ḥ*, literally “to send”) his hand to take of the tree of life, so he “sends him out” of the garden (also *š-l-ḥ*, piel, “to send away”). This is ironic.⁴⁴ Finally, we may mention another repetition that unites 2:4-25 with 3:1-24: in 2:5 there is no man to “work” (*ʿ-b-d*) the ground and raise “plants of the field” (*ʿēšeb haššādeh*). In 2:15 he is put into the garden to “work” its ground and to “keep” (*š-m-r*) it.⁴⁵ Then in 3:23 the man is sent out to “work the ground from which he was taken,” and in 3:24 the Cherubim will “keep/guard” (*š-m-r*) the way to the tree of life. This depicts the reversal that came about from the expulsion: no longer working the ground of the garden, he must work the ground from which he was taken, outside the garden; and now that no man is there to keep the garden, angelic beings must keep it—particularly, to keep the humans out!

The characters, as we observed, are the snake, the woman, the man, and the Lord God. Consider how the narrator presents them.

The snake is introduced in a very mysterious way. He is “*the* snake” (Hebrew *hannāḥāš*, with a definite article): commonly the definite article is anaphoric, that is, referring back to “the snake we have been talking about,” but no such snake has been mentioned before now. Either this is “the snake we [Moses and his audience] know about” (but we today no longer have the shared cultural heritage), or else it is just plain mysterious, and we readers ask, “*Which* snake?” and get no answer. This snake begins by asking in verse 1, “Did God actually say,⁴⁶ ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” His strategy is to undermine the relationship of trust that is the engine of obedience, by attributing unreasonable motives to God. Hence when the woman corrects him (verses 2-3), he responds by denying the threatened

⁴⁴Cf. Collins, “*š-l-ḥ*,” no. 8938 in VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE*, 4:121-122, where it is argued that this word-play actually refutes the source-critical position of Westermann, 271, that verse 23 was originally independent of verses 22-24.

⁴⁵The Hebrew of 2:15 tells us that the man was put in the garden *lēʿobdāh ūlēšomrāh*: the suffixes are feminine, and cannot refer to the garden itself (a masculine noun). As Hamilton, 171 (cf. Kiel, 60), suggested, the suffix would refer to the ground (*ʿādāmā*, a feminine noun) of the garden.

⁴⁶Hebrew *ʿap kī ʿamar ʿēlohîm*, which Delitzsch, 147-148, calls a “half-interrogatory, half-exclamatory expression of astonishment” which does not express uncertainty as to *whether* God had said it, but implies instead that it is so unreasonable that God must be far too restrictive to be trusted (cf. also Moberly, “Did the serpent get it right,” 6).

outcome (verse 4, “you will not surely die,” a direct contradiction of 2:17),⁴⁷ with his exposition of the divine selfishness (verse 5, “God knows that in the day you eat of it⁴⁸ your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil,” which he casts as benefits God wants to withhold). After this we hear no more from the snake. Moberly makes a fine observation:⁴⁹

It is noteworthy that the serpent never tells the woman to transgress God’s prohibition. He simply calls into question both God’s truthfulness (by denying his warning) and God’s trustworthiness (by impugning his motives), and leaves the woman to draw her own conclusions.

It is interesting to note that, though the deity throughout Genesis 2:4-3:24 is “the Lord God” (*yhwh ʿēlōhîm*), the snake only calls him “God,” and he and the woman only use only that title in their conversation, 3:1b-5. Now, as many have observed, the name “God” designates the deity in his role of cosmic Creator and Ruler (cf. its use in 1:1-2:3), while “the Lord” (“Yahweh”) is his name particularly as he enters into covenantal relationship with human beings.⁵⁰ By dropping the covenant name, then, the snake is probably advancing his program of temptation by diverting the woman’s attention from the relationship the Lord had established. The woman’s use of it shows that she is trapped; and we begin to have a clue as to how she could be led into disobedience: by forgetting the covenant.

Further, even though Genesis never calls the snake Satan, it is unmistakable that the snake is not acting as a mere snake but as the mouthpiece for a dark power, as Delitzsch put it:⁵¹

an animal is intended, but an animal not speaking of its own accord, but as made the instrument of itself by the evil principle...The narrator confines himself to the external appearance of what took place, without lifting the veil from the reality behind it.

A number of arguments confirm this: (1) the precise wording of verse 4 reflects knowledge of 2:17 (the snake, not the woman, has introduced “surely,” the infinitive absolute, into this conversation; he also uses “in the day you eat of it”); (2) animals do not have the faculty of speech in

⁴⁷In 2:17 we find *môt tāmût*, “you will surely die” (RSV omits the infinitive absolute, rendered “surely”); in 3:4 the snake says *lōʾ môt tēmûtân*, “you will not ‘surely die’” (again, RSV omits infinitive). In the woman’s citation of the warning in verse 3 it is merely *pen tēmûtân*, “lest you die.”

⁴⁸Hebrew *bēyôm ʾākolēkem*, an echo of 2:17 “in the day that you eat.”

⁴⁹Moberly, “Did the serpent get it right,” 7.

⁵⁰Hence the peculiar use of the composite title in this section (it is rare elsewhere): to show that the cosmic Creator and the covenant God of Israel are the same.

⁵¹Delitzsch, 149-152.

the Bible, hence there is some supernatural activity here;⁵² (3) the evil the snake speaks (his direct contradiction of God's solemn warning and incitement of disobedience) can only be explained by demonic interference with God's good creation; (4) there is a Jewish interpretive tradition reflected in Wisdom 1:13; 2:24, and in the NT in John 8:44; Revelation 12:9; 20:2, identifying the snake of this passage with Satan. That is to say, a competent reader from the original audience would have been able to infer that the snake is the mouthpiece of a dark power.⁵³

The woman reveals herself through her speech. A major interpretive problem is her reply in verse 3, where she has "added" the restriction "neither shall you touch it." Is this innocent or is it playing into the hands of the snake's question of verse 1? I do not know if we will ever be able to know; this may in fact be an intentional "gap."⁵⁴ It is also possible to detect a slight deflection of her commitment in her final phrase of verse 3, "lest you die." Is this a dilution of the solemnity of the warning of 2:17?⁵⁵ Again, it is hard to be sure. In verse 6, as she regards the tree and saw that it was "good for food, a delight to the eyes, and desirable for giving insight," the irony of the parallel with 2:9 (in the garden was already "every tree desirable to the sight and good for food") should not escape us: she already had everything she could possibly want, and she even had the resources to get everything she thought the tree had to offer. Hence now she is clearly

⁵²In Numbers 22:28, when Balaam's donkey speaks, it is because "the Lord opened its mouth," denoting a supernatural action. This is why the notion that we have here a "mythological world" in which animals talk (Gunkel, 15) misses the point badly.

⁵³Many commentators, e.g., Westermann, 238; cf. Gunkel, 15-16; suppose that we have here nothing but a snake, an ordinary reptile. They do not consider these arguments, however. Calvin's position is fascinating for historians of hermeneutics: he takes the declaration of 3:15 in its "simple sense" to be speaking of ordinary reptiles, but also finds a "literal anagogy," apparently meaning that the author wanted us to apply this by analogy to the eventual defeat of Satan (167-168).

⁵⁴A gap is something left unresolved; when it is intentional it makes us wonder about it. Since the question here is an obvious one, it may well be the author's intent to say to us, "I know you are curious about this, but since the purpose of the account is elsewhere, I will not satisfy your curiosity." Other gaps in this account include: what is the origin of the evil that possesses the snake; whence came the woman's willingness to entertain the temptation; and what was the man doing when he was "with her" (verse 6)?

⁵⁵An interesting point comes from comparing the verb inflections in 2:17 with those in 3:3. In the institution, the Lord God addressed the man only, and the verb is inflected in the second person singular. When the woman refers to it, she cites it with the verb in the second person plural: "lest you all die." This shows that she had appropriated the command of 2:17 via her husband, i.e. she accepted him as her covenantal representative.

under the sway of the snake's deception.⁵⁶ At this point she is changed completely: she invites her heretofore silent husband to join her in rebellion, responds to her new "knowledge" (verse 7), follows her husband into hiding from God (verse 8), and confesses only when she cannot escape (verse 13).

And what of the man's part? He enters in verse 6, where we read "she also gave some to her husband [who was] with her, and he ate."⁵⁷ If he was "with her," what was he doing when Eve was being led astray? Why did he eat—did he put up no struggle? Again, I do not think our author has given us the wherewithal to answer these questions. Instead, the focus is on other factors: namely that the couple sinned freely (that is, without any compulsion or pressure from God or their created nature).⁵⁸

The man is presented to us as the leader in this account from this point on: in verse 8, though "they" heard the sound of the Lord God walking, the man himself is the subject of "hid"; we might render the Hebrew:⁵⁹

and they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man hid himself, along with his wife, ...

⁵⁶Westermann, 249, says, "It is a case of the general human phenomenon of the attraction of what is forbidden. The prohibition itself fixes attention on what is forbidden, making it in a mysterious way seductively and irresistibly attractive." Besides the fact that this attributes the phenomenon to a good Creator (a possibility the Biblical writers would not allow), it misses the obvious fact that, according to the text, it was the snake who introduced the doubt and desire.

⁵⁷RSV inexplicably omits the phrase "who was with her."

⁵⁸Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 6, makes the astonishing claim that we do not have a primeval *disobedience* described in this passage: "it is not without importance that the term 'sin' is not used anywhere in the story ... nor do we find any of the terms usually understood as 'evil', 'rebellion', 'transgression' or 'guilt'." Barr, the scholar who has done so much to introduce exegetes to sound semantics, should of course know that the existence of the referent or concept is not limited to the presence of certain vocabulary. Indeed, God's question in 3:11 "It wasn't from the tree which I commanded [Hebrew *šiwwâ*] you not to eat from it, that you ate, was it?" (cf. 3:19) could hardly be improved upon as a description of "disobedience." We might also note that Barr's position makes no sense of Eccl 7:20, "there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins," compared with verse 29, "God made man upright." See also the comments on Hosea 6:7 above (considerations that Barr does not address).

⁵⁹The verb is singular ("he hid himself"), although the subject is strictly speaking compound ("the man and his wife"). Cf. E.J. Revell, "Concord with compound subjects and related uses of pronouns," *VT* 43:1 (1993), 69-87, at 75: when the verb inflection matches only the first element of a compound subject, this puts the spotlight on that first member (in many cases as the leader in the action, cf. 1 Sam 15:9). Hence the spotlight is on the man as the covenantal representative, both of his family and of the race.

Then in verse 9 the divine call “where are you?” is addressed to him (masculine *singular* suffix, not *plural*); similarly in verse 11 “you” is masculine singular, and in verses 22-24 the divine actions are taken toward *the man*. All of these factors highlight the man’s role as covenantal head, not only for his immediate family but also for his posterity.⁶⁰ The sad thing is, though, into what does he lead the way? The making of clothes (verse 7) shows that the blissfully innocence about their nakedness of 2:25 no longer holds.⁶¹ To try to hide from God is obviously stupid⁶²—besides, we should contrast this to what must surely have been their accustomed practice of rushing out to greet him! The man explains his actions as due to fear and shame in verse 10, which God directly connects with doing what he had forbidden (verse 11). And instead of owning up to his responsibility in verse 12 the man declares, “the woman that you gave (to be) with me: *she* is the one who⁶³ gave to me from the tree and I ate.” Like the woman’s explanation in verse 13 (“the serpent deceived me and I ate”), this is true so far as it goes: but it is not the whole truth. Both humans “spin” their accounts of what happened to put their own actions in the best

⁶⁰We saw earlier that this is implicit in the way the woman appropriates 2:17.

⁶¹Moberly, “Did the serpent get it right,” 8-9, suggests that this is actually something positive, since “the dislike of nakedness is never considered something negative or sinful in the Old Testament.” This assumes too many things: first, that the passage is not about a particular event whose consequences all humans receive; second, that the text *reflects* a “Hebrew outlook” as opposed to trying to *shape* that outlook. Since the action of clothing themselves is in contrast to the unashamed nakedness of 2:25, it is appropriate to find here evidence of a change in their condition. Further, this would be the *origin* of the importance of clothing oneself for subsequent time. Also, as many commentators point out, the fact that their next reaction is to hide in the bushes at the sound of the Lord’s approach (verse 8) is evidence of a bad conscience. Westermann, 253, objects to such reasoning: “these words express directly neither a consciousness of guilt nor a fear that results from it. Had J wanted to say that, he would have said it clearly and unequivocally.” But this is an insistence on *telling* rather than *showing*, contrary to the Hebrew narrative style! Further, he says, the couple hide because of their “fear of being naked before God”; but what else is this but a bad conscience? And surely this misses the point of the stark contrast with 2:25.

⁶²We might compare the idiocy of Jonah, who “feared the Lord, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land” (Jonah 1:9) and yet tried to flee from him across the sea!

⁶³Note the emphatic use of the pronoun: since he had identified the woman in the first part of the verse, Adam could have simply said *nātēnâ-lî* “she gave to me” Instead he adds the pronoun to focus on her responsibility, *hî’ nātēnâ-lî* “*she* is the one who gave to me” Westermann, 255, in rejecting the “shifting the blame” interpretation of verse 12, misses the point of the emphatic pronoun, as well as the “spinning” by the man and the woman.

light. The pristine condition of delight in God and harmony with one another and with their own consciences has been shattered.⁶⁴

However, in verse 20 the man's act of naming his wife "Eve," "Life-giver,"⁶⁵ is likely an expression of faith in the divine words of judgment-and-grace of verses 14-19.

It is dangerous to try to draw a portrait of God when he is a character in a narrative: God is far beyond human attempts to describe him, and those attempts to describe may turn into attempts to limit. Nevertheless we can say the following: we see him blasphemed in verses 1, 4, and he makes no reference to it in the account (as if to show, he is not subject to *our* evaluation of *him*, it is the other way around; but also to show that in his mercy he can overlook even such vile insults); we see him taking his own command seriously in verses 11-19. The questions to the humans in verses 9-13, far from exhibiting God's ignorance, instead give the man and woman the opportunity to confess their fault (which opportunity, sadly, they did not take).⁶⁶ We see him pronouncing just judgment, which is tinged with mercy in verses 14-19. Rather than rejecting his defiled creatures, he actually provides clothing for them in verse 21: he replaces their pathetic fig-leaf loincloths with something more durable, more suited to the hard lives they will face outside the garden. And the expulsion from the Garden is, ultimately, an act of mercy too: he cannot stand the thought of their being confirmed in their rebellious state (as suggested by the broken sentence at the end of verse 22, which indicates strong emotion). As we will see below, God also takes upon himself the task of rescuing these people (and their descendants) from the slavery and degradation they have made for themselves, verse 15. In all of this we see as well the clear marks of God's authority over all his creation, including over humans: he made it all, even the snake (3:1); he established a relationship with the humans at his own initiative, and on his own terms (2:15-17); the humans hid when they disobeyed him (3:8); he

⁶⁴Cf. the last lines of Book ix of Milton's *Paradise Lost*: "Thus they in mutual accusation spent the fruitless hours, but neither self-condemning; and of their vain contest appeared no end."

⁶⁵In Hebrew this is *Hawwâ*. There has been some discussion over whether this word is in fact related to the verb *h-w-y* "to be alive," with suggestions that it actually is related to an Aramaic word meaning "snake," and "the mythological ancestor of Eve was some sort of 'serpent goddess' who was, perhaps, the goddess of life" (Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 65). Fortunately there is a helpful article by Scott C. Layton, "Remarks on the Canaanite origin of Eve," *CBQ* 59:1 (1997), 22-32. He concludes that "from the perspectives of etymology and morphology, the symbolic name *hawwâ* is derived from the root **hwy*, 'to make alive,' and it may be analyzed as a noun of **qattâl* form to be translated 'Life giver'" (31).

⁶⁶Cf. Keil, 97-98: "Not that He was ignorant of his hiding place, but to bring him to a confession of his sin. ... In offering these excuses, neither of them denied the fact. But the fault in both was, that they did not at once smite upon their breasts."

had the right to question the parties and to pronounce his sentence (3:9-19); and when he decided to expel Adam and Eve from the garden, out they went (3:23-24).⁶⁷

In the light of this description of God's character, and his reliability, we are now in a position to address the meaning of the death threat of 2:17. God takes his solemn command with the utmost seriousness, and may be relied upon to do as he said. In the light of what happens (the actions and changed attitudes of the humans), we can see that the part of the semantic range of "death" that is present here is "spiritual death," estrangement from God; physical mortality, which 3:19 predicts, is a consequence of the humans' disrupted condition—which even those who have been morally recovered will have to undergo.⁶⁸

Finally, consider the covenant principles on display in the passage. We can see the importance of this passage in redemptive-historical terms. Those who read the idyllic Genesis 1-2 must of course ask, why is my experience not just like that? Genesis 3 explains why. We have seen that the relationship between God and the humans was a "covenant" (2:17); and Adam acted, not just for himself, and not just as head of his family, but as representative of his posterity: Adam and Eve are expelled from the garden, and neither they *nor their posterity* may return; and their posterity decline into sin in Genesis 4-6, and they likewise die—even though they did not directly receive the stipulation of 2:17.⁶⁹ This also explains why any relationship with

⁶⁷Westermann, commenting on 3:8-10 (253), makes the odd remark, "The following scene presumes that God and human beings are on the same level. This is not to be explained as an anthropomorphic presentation of God." But the text says otherwise.

⁶⁸Does this imply that humans were by creation not mortal? One must ask this question carefully: since the humans were not intended to remain in their first condition, but to attain to the knowledge of good and evil by perseverance in obedience, and to receive unending access to the tree of life, the question is one for which there is no simple *exegetical* answer. However, since physical mortality is presented to us as a consequence of this disobedience, it follows that mortality as such was not part of their created nature. Calvin suggests that Adam's "earthly life truly would have been temporal; yet he would have passed into heaven without death, and without injury. ... Truly the first man would have passed to a better life, had he remained upright; but there would have been no separation of the soul from the body, no corruption, no kind of destruction, and, in short, no violent change" (127, 180). Commentators such as Westermann deny this, but only by disconnecting the command of 2:17 from the punishment in 3:16-19, by making the punishments an addition to the narrative (267, 270).

⁶⁹Moberly, "Did the serpent get it right," 20, denies this when he says "the story as a whole gives the impression of being a portrayal of what is generally true, rather than what was true on a particular occasion. ... The condition of the world, therefore, is presumably to be seen as the result of the constant disobedience of mankind. ... There [in Genesis 6:5; 8:21] the writer (generally

God, any good that he might intend for us, will have two features: (1) it will depend on divine grace and initiative, not on defiled humans; (2) it will be remedial, that is, directed at removing the polluting and harmful effects of human sinfulness.

In particular, 3:15 is the promise of a remedy:⁷⁰

I will put enmity between you and the woman,
and between your offspring [“seed”] and her offspring [“seed”];
he shall bruise your head,
and you shall bruise his heel.

Verses 14-15 are the sentence, as we saw, on the power of evil behind the snake. The key thing for us now is the word “he” in verse 15. Grammatically it just refers to the woman’s seed/offspring, and most have argued that it would be better to translate it as “it,” taking it as a reference to “humanity” in general, which has descended from the woman. In this view a *specific* human is not in view (though not ruled out). Our standard versions, however, are based on the interpretation of the Greek version (which makes it a specific offspring).⁷¹

In a published grammatical study, however, I argue that the grammatical form found in 3:15 (a singular pronoun referring to “seed,” when it means “offspring”) indicates that the reference is to an individual offspring. Hence, here in Genesis 3:15 we have a specific human who will engage in combat the evil power that spoke through the snake, and at cost to himself will defeat the enemy, *for the sake of humans* (that is, not for himself). We may conclude the following about this figure:

- while human, he is also a special person (with supernatural *power* to win);
- his work is that of a champion (he fights *on behalf* of others);

considered to be the same as in Gen. 2-3) stresses that the regular condition of mankind is that of being disobedient to God and deserving of judgment.” What Moberly neglects to consider is the possibility that the events of Genesis 3 provide the explanation of the *origin* of the “regular condition of mankind”: surely an explanation is required if we are not to suppose that God made man sinful (which contradicts 1:26-27, the humans in God’s image, and 1:31, the whole creation was at first very good). Further, the opposition between a particular occasion and the possible paradigmatic nature of the description is a false antithesis: why must we choose one or the other? The reason we can all identify with the workings of temptation here, is because our sinfulness is rooted in this particular disobedience. (After all, many of the psalms, and many hymns, take their start from the particular experience of the author, and present it in such a way that we can identify with it.)

⁷⁰For a fuller discussion of many of the particulars here, see C. John Collins, “A syntactical note (Genesis 3:15): Is the woman’s seed singular or plural?” *Tyndale Bulletin* 48:1 (1997), 139-148.

⁷¹That is, the Greek noun for “seed” is σπέρμα, which is neuter; while the pronoun referring to it is αὐτός, which is masculine: the mismatch in gender indicates a specific offspring.

- he will inflict a decisive defeat on the Evil One.⁷²

Genesis 3:15, then, is a promise of a personal redeemer who will undo the trouble Adam brought us all into, by acting as a *champion* or *representative*. This points the way to Paul's exposition in Romans 5:21-19: the first Adam represented humanity in the first Covenant; the second Adam represents his people in the second Covenant.

We may summarize the representative character of Adam's disobedience as follows: the test came, not from created human nature (which was good), but from a demonic enemy; it involved deceit, which then blossomed into desire, which led to disobedience, and thus to "death" (first spiritual, then physical).⁷³ All humans inherit the results of this action: as guilty and as sinful bent, from conception. The miseries we all do or might experience—lost communion with God, pain, frustration, futility, death, and eternal damnation—derive from this corruption of God's good creation, and show why we are at God's disposal if there is to be a remedy.⁷⁴

This is presented to us as an historical event. But that does not mean that there is nothing "paradigmatic" about it: in fact, there is much to learn about the course of temptation in our present condition. It comes, not from our created humanity as such, but from the corruption of it. Hence, for example, sexuality is not in itself an evil, but expression of it outside of monogamous marriage is. The way to deal with temptations, therefore, is not by attributing evil to our sexuality as such, but by finding ways to channel its expression properly. We see further that temptation commonly proceeds by deceit: by trying to persuade us, either that God is unreasonable to deny us something, or that he has withheld from us some good that we deserve, or that he will not carry out his threats. The key, then, is to hold on to God's truthfulness and trustworthiness. Similarly, if it be the case that the shift of the divine name from "the Lord God" to simply "God" signals a shift away from a focus on relationship, then a strong factor in resisting

⁷²This last point is an important, and frequently neglected, strand of NT teaching on the work of the Messiah: cf. 1 John 3:8; Hebrews 2:14-18; Colossians 2:15.

⁷³As observed earlier, we are left in the dark about the exact psychology of Eve's and Adam's motivation. Neither Moses nor Paul speak to that. Hence Barr's objection (*Garden of Eden*, 13) to traditional readings, that they introduce the explanation of pride (of which the text says nothing), is a red herring: he himself attributes it to Augustine, which means he has not found it in Paul. Therefore this is useless as a critique of Paul.

⁷⁴Contrast these conclusions with what Barr calls his basic thesis: "taken in and for itself, this narrative is not, as it has commonly been understood in our tradition, basically a story of the origins of sin and evil, still less a depiction of absolute evil or total depravity: it is a story of how human immortality was almost gained, but was in fact lost" (*Garden of Eden*, 4).

temptation would be to hold fast to our consciousness of the relationship and of God's loving initiative that established it, and to our desire for its continuing untroubled. We learn from the effects of Adam's sin that we are easily susceptible to temptation, and easily deceived by it; and hence we must be vigilant and studious of our own souls; and we learn from the nature of the "knowledge of good and evil" that the only way to gain skill at resisting temptation is by practice. As members of the covenant people, we must above all lay hold of the resources of the Woman's Seed and his victory, since apart from that we are easy prey to the enemy of our souls.

We may further consider the meaning of the penalties meted out in 3:14-19. They are pronounced on the snake (verses 14-15), the woman (verse 16), and the man (verse 17-19). The most obvious question is, what kind of changes do they imply about the workings of the creation? Do snakes now crawl because of this? Has their diet changed? Do women have pain and danger in childbearing as a result of this? Is male domination over women a penalty? And is the creation as a whole "cursed," and does this become part of the explanation for the problem of evil?

Our study has already shown that it would be a mistake to interpret the snake as a reptile acting on its own. The punishment of verse 15 comes, not to the snake as such, but to the dark force that used it. The same would likely apply to verse 14. That this is so follows, not just from this overall reading, but also from the details of the verse. For example, it is unlikely that any Hebrew would think that snakes "literally" eat dust; it does not take much observation to find out their predatory diet. Rather, as in Micah 7:17 (the abashed Gentiles "shall lick the dust like a serpent"; cf. Isaiah 49:23; Psalm 72:9), the expression "to eat dust" denotes humiliation and defeat. Likewise the crawling on the belly would do the same. That is, in verse 14 as well as in verse 15, the interest is not in snakes as such, but in God's victorious warfare against the power that used the snake.

In verse 16a God tells the woman:

"I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing;⁷⁵
in pain you shall give birth to children."

We have already seen that this is in contrast to 1:28. It seems to imply that childbirth for an unfallen Eve would not have been connected with such pain and danger.

⁷⁵Hebrew, "your pain and your pregnancy." The phrase "and your pregnancy" is best understood as an explicative *waw* (having the nuance "namely"), followed by an accusative of reference ("with respect to your pregnancy"). This is clear from the clause that follows, which seems to restate the punishment. Hence the above interpretation of the first clause (as RSV). (To call it a "hendiadys," as some do, is imprecise.)

Then in verse 16b we have:

“And toward your husband shall be your desire,
but he must rule over you.”

The majority of commentators find in this an aspect of the woman's punishment, namely the domination of man over woman.⁷⁶ But this overlooks three very important factors. (1) The verb “rule” (Hebrew *māšal*) does not carry the negative connotation “dominate” (cf. 1:16; 2 Samuel 23:3); if that is present, it comes from the nature of the things talked about. (2) The noun translated “desire” (Hebrew *těšûqâ*) appears in the Bible only here, in 4:7, and in Song of Songs 7:10 [Hebrew verse 11]. Many draw the conclusion from the Songs passage that the word indicates sexual desire; but this does not follow: instead, the word indicates a “craving” or “urge,” with the context supplying what kind of craving is in view.⁷⁷ (3) This line of 3:16 is identical in structure to the line of 4:7, which God says to Cain of “sin” personified as “crouching in wait at the door”:

“and toward you shall be its desire
but you must rule over it.”

The parallel between the two verses is exact, and it is clear that in 4:7 the “desire” is “desire for mastery,” while the “ruling” is not a punishment but the prescribed remedy. Hence in 3:16 it is far better to find a prediction of the common condition of human marriages, namely the competition for control. The proper remedy is for the man to exercise loving leadership, as he was intended to do at the first.⁷⁸ Here again, justice is shot through with redemptive mercy.

The man receives the longest pronouncement, verses 17-19. We note that as the woman will experience “pain” in her normal sphere of labor, so will the man: “in *pain* you shall eat of it [i.e. the produce of the ground] all the days of your life” (verse 17). Nevertheless, though painful, the process will still yield food, and work (“working the ground,” cf. verse 23), a creation ordinance, remains a true expression of humanness.

But verse 17 declares, “cursed is the ground because of you.” In what sense is the ground cursed? Does this lead to the doctrine of a “fallen” natural realm? To begin with, the notion of “cursing the ground” with

⁷⁶Cf. the wording of RSV: “yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”; this takes the woman's desire as a contrast to the pain of childbearing.

⁷⁷Cf. David Talley, “*těšûqâ*,” no. 9592 in VanGemeren, ed., *NIDOTTE*, 4:341-342.

⁷⁸This general line of exposition, so far as I can ascertain, begins with an article by Susan Foh in *WTJ* 37 (1975), 376-383. Wenham, 81-82, cautiously endorses it.

the terms used here (*ʿ-ṣ-r*, “curse”) only appears in 3:17; 4:11; 5:29.⁷⁹ Related usages (i.e. where natural things are cursed, not people) include Deuteronomy 28:17-18, where the curses fall upon the basket, the kneading trough, the fruit of the body, the fruit of the ground, the increase of the cattle and the young of the flock. Then in 28:20 we read, “The Lord will send upon you curse [*mēʿerâ*, a noun derived from this verb], confusion, and frustration, in all that you undertake to do” The outworking of this appears in verses 38-46. In no case does this imply that somehow the actual functioning of the natural elements is distorted due to human sin: rather, it emphasizes that agricultural production is to be the arena of God’s chastisement.

If we return to the context of Genesis 3, we can see how this applies. The man was formed from the dust of the ground in some unspecified place, and then transferred to the garden (2:7-8, 15), where the woman was formed. In their commission they are to “fill the earth and subdue it,” exercising their headship (1:28): this implies that their task was to start from Eden and bring the rest of the earth’s land under control, and make it fruitful under God’s blessing. However, the expulsion from Eden sends the man back to “the ground from which he was taken” (3:23), barred from his former headquarters in Eden. The account never implies that “the ground” did not produce “thorns and thistles” prior to this point: it instead indicates that working the ground is to be the arena of “pain”; and this is due, not to a change in the properties of the ground, but to the change in humanity and to God’s providential purposes of chastisement. There is no indication that human dominion over the creation has been rescinded, but there is every indication that humans will exercise it badly.⁸⁰

Several authors have noted interesting parallels between the description of the garden, and the features of the Israelite sanctuary.⁸¹

⁷⁹The term in Gen 8:21, “I will never again *curse* the ground because of man,” uses a different Hebrew verb, *q-l-l*, which in the piel means “to treat with contempt, to dishonor.”

⁸⁰It is necessary to point out that the Genesis passage nowhere suggests that animal death (or carnivorous behavior) is in any way a consequence of the “curse.” To begin with, we note that 2:17 is spoken only to the man, and 3:3-4 refer only to the human pair. Then we note that, even if we take 1:30 as a prescription for the pre-fall vegetarian diet of animals and birds, it only applies to land animals: it says nothing about anything that lives in the water, many of which are carnivorous (e.g., jellyfish, trout, sea snakes, penguins, otters, orcas, and seals). And finally, the Bible in general does not portray animal death in itself as a theological problem: in Psalm 104, which leads the covenant people in marveling at how the creation still works according to God’s plan, we read of lions roaring for their *prey* (Hebrew *terep*) and getting their food *from God* (verse 21).

⁸¹E.g., Kiel, 75-76, 99 (Hebrew page numbers), with Rabbinic comments; Wenham, 76, 84, 86.

For example, in the garden the Lord would “walk about” (*hithallēk*, 3:8); and in the sanctuary, the Lord would make his dwelling among Israel, and “walk about” (*hithallēk*) in their midst (Leviticus 26:11-12; 2 Samuel 7:6-7).⁸² We note further the presence of the Cherubim and the entrance on the east as common features of the garden and the sanctuary (3:24; Exodus 27:13; Ezekiel 11:1). Kiel’s conclusion is therefore warranted: “The ‘garden’ was therefore the first place on earth where the Shekinah dwelt.”⁸³ But even though physical access to the garden, and to the tree of life, is now closed for humans, nevertheless there is an access to God’s presence via the sanctuary, in its public worship and sacramental rites that address human guilt.⁸⁴ This becomes a foretaste of eschatological glory, where the old wound in man and nature will be healed; and it equips the covenant people for perseverance in the covenant under the forgiving grace of God.⁸⁵

5. HISTORICAL TRUTH VALUE

From our discussion above, we may outline, in a very broad-stroke way, the basic historical truth-claims the narrative makes: (1) all humans have this pair, Adam and Eve, as their ultimate ancestors; (2) this pair were made morally upright and enjoyed a blissful relationship with each other, the world, and God; (3) a dark power used an ordinary animal as a mouthpiece to deceive this pair and lead them into disobedience; (4) this couple, and specifically the man, was the representative head of all their descendants in their moral relationship to God, and hence they brought upon themselves and their descendants sinfulness and divine judgment, which explains why no one now experiences the blissful relationships mentioned above; (5) God promised to do something remedial for the humans, and our first parents apparently believed this promise.

⁸²Cf. Deuteronomy 23:15 [ET verse 14], where the Lord “walks about” (*hithallēk*) in the camp.

⁸³Kiel, 76 (Hebrew page number).

⁸⁴Cf. Psalm 22:4 [ET verse 3], where the Lord “inhabits [or sits enthroned on] the public praises of Israel” (RV, RSV, NASB, NIV margin; NIV text is inexcusable); Psalm 63:3 [ET verse 2], “so I have looked upon you *in the sanctuary*, beholding your power and glory”: in this sacramental and liturgical setting God is present in a way not otherwise available.

⁸⁵Hence the opinion of some, that public worship and the sacraments are not at the center of covenant life, is far from the Biblical position. E.g., Heinrich Heppe, *Reformed Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1978 [German original 1861]), xxiv:28 (page 609): “Hence a man who is so strong in faith, that he can be joyfully confident of his state of grace, can do without the sacraments.” Biblical authors would not agree!

In this section I shall address briefly two lines of denial of the truthfulness of this account, both of which appear in Driver's commentary:⁸⁶

(1) How could this be historically reliable, when it records events that took place so long before the writing? How could the Hebrews have had access to such information?

(2) How could this be a reliable record, when scientists tell us that man is the result of evolution and that human culture and morality likewise developed?

A full reply to these objections would itself be a long article, beyond the scope of this one. However, before presenting the evidence in favor of the historical truth value of this account, we would need to clear away some premises that underlie the above objections. And we would do so in a two-fold manner. First, we must understand that both of these objections result from the projection of a naturalistic worldview onto the empirical data. For example, the first objection is only compelling if we know beforehand that such reliable information is not available because only natural causes are operative: that is, no supernatural revelation is a possibility to guarantee historical truthfulness. And the interpretation of the data on the origin of man is highly influenced by one's worldview.⁸⁷

Secondly, to deny the actuality of the events recorded in this account (or something just like them) would lead us to deny something we know to be true of ourselves and of everyone else: we are out of sorts, and we feel this to be *wrong*. Pascal keenly observed:⁸⁸

Man's greatness is so obvious that it can even be deduced from his wretchedness, for what is nature in animals we call wretchedness in man, thus recognizing that, if his nature is today like that of the animals, he must have fallen from some better state which was once his own.

⁸⁶Driver, 53-54. Note that this does not mean that Driver thinks the account is theologically worthless; instead he separates moral and spiritual truths from historical ones.

⁸⁷Cf. John Bloom, "On human origins: A survey," *Christian Scholar's Review* 27:2 (Winter, 1997), 181-203. I provide further discussion and defense of Christian supernaturalism, including how it applies in the questions of the origin of Scripture and the origins of human beings, in C. John Collins, *The God of Miracles: An exegetical examination of God's action in the world* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000).

⁸⁸Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, A.J. Krailsheimer, ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), nos. 117, 149. Cf. Peter Kreeft's annotated edition of Pascal, *Christianity for Modern Pagans* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1993), 59, 65-66. The French original can be found in Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, Ch.-M. des Granges, ed. (Paris: Éditions Garnier Frères, 1964), nos. 409, 430 (using the Brunschvicg numbers). For insightful application of this line of reasoning, see Kreeft's section 2; and Douglas Groothuis, "Deposed royalty: Pascal's anthropological argument," *JETS* 41:2 (1998), 297-312.

Who indeed would think himself unhappy not to be king except one who had been dispossessed? ... Who would think himself unhappy if he had only one mouth and who would not if he had only one eye? It has probably never occurred to anyone to be distressed at not having three eyes, but those who have none are inconsolable.

Man's greatness and wretchedness are so evident that the true religion must necessarily teach us that there is in man some great principle of greatness and some great principle of wretchedness. It must also account for such amazing contradictions.

To make man happy it must show him that a God exists whom we are bound to love; that our true bliss is to be in him, and our sole ill is to be cut off from him. It must acknowledge that we are full of darkness which prevents us from knowing and loving him, and so, with our duty obliging us to love God and our concupiscence leading us astray, we are full of unrighteousness. It must account to us for the way in which we thus go against God and our own good. It must teach us the cure for our helplessness and the means of obtaining this cure. Let us examine all the religions of the world on that point and let us see whether any but the Christian religion meets it.

Science or philosophy which fail to face this is not worthy of our adherence.

Indeed, as G.K. Chesterton observed, this "bad news," so in touch with reality, is at the same time refreshingly helpful.⁸⁹

The Fall is a view of life. It is not only the only enlightening, but the only encouraging view of life. It holds, as against the only real alternative philosophies, those of the Buddhist or the Pessimist or the Promethean, that we have misused a good world, and not merely been entrapped into a bad one. It refers evil back to the wrong use of the will, and thus declares that it can eventually be righted by the right use of the will. Every other creed except that one is some form of surrender to fate. A man who holds this view of life will find it giving light on a thousand things; on which mere evolutionary ethics have not a word to say. For instance, on the colossal contrast between the completeness of man's machines and the continued corruption of his motives; on the fact that no social progress really seems to leave self behind; ... on that proverb that says "the price of liberty is eternal vigilance," which is only what the theologians say of every other virtue, and is itself only a way of stating the truth of original sin; on those extremes of good and evil by which man exceeds all the animals by the measure of heaven and hell; on that sublime sense of loss that is in the very sound of all great poetry, and nowhere more than in the poetry of pagans and sceptics: "We look before and after, and pine for what is not"; which cries against all prigs and progressives out of the very depths and abysses of the broken heart of man,

⁸⁹G. K. Chesterton, *As I Was Saying*, Robert Knille, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 160.

that happiness is not only a hope, but also in some strange manner a memory; and that we are all kings in exile.

It goes beyond the intended scope of this study to explore the consequences of these conclusions for an apologetic regarding the “problem of evil”: how can God be infinitely good, wise, and powerful, and at the same time there exists evil in his world? Here I would simply outline a few points. First, we must make a careful definition of “evil.” The Bible would not support the contention that the natural processes of the creation themselves—including animal predation, and natural phenomena such as earthquakes and hurricanes—are contrary to the will of God. It does, however, tell us why we humans are infected with evil; and this helps us to see that (1) we do not have the sympathetic feel for the natural world necessary to govern it to uniformly benign purposes; and (2) we do not govern ourselves by uniformly benign purposes. To call the existence of pain and evil a “problem” is to acknowledge a sense that they are not right; and this means that we are implicitly recognizing that we inhabit a formerly good world that has been spoiled (as well as a standard of rightness external to the world, to which the observed world does not measure up).

6. PAUL’S USE OF GENESIS 3

We may begin this consideration of Paul’s use of this account by noting that one of the advantages of the above conclusions about “death” is that it allows us to make sense of what Paul says in Romans 1-8. Paul uses the Greek word *θάνατος* “death” and the verbs *ἀποθνήσκω* “to die” and *θανατώω* “to cause to die” for the sacrificial death⁹⁰ of Jesus (e.g., 5:6-8, 10; 6:3-5, 8-10; 8:34),⁹¹ and sometimes for ordinary human physical death (e.g., 7:2-3; 8:36), and once for (divine?) judicial punishment (1:32). But an important usage is for what we call “spiritual death”: e.g., in 6:16, 21, 23; 7:5, 9-11, 13, 24; 8:2, 6, “death” is the condition of estrangement from God (experienced in this life and potentially forever).⁹²

⁹⁰I consider this a special category because theologically it was not Jesus’ physical death as such that won believers their salvation: it was the entire complex of events in which he suffered the full weight of divine wrath and rejection against sin on behalf of sinful human beings (that is, the words are being used as a theological shorthand).

⁹¹Perhaps the image of believers having died to the law and to sin (e.g., 7:4, 6) is based on their having been joined to Christ in his death (6:5-11).

⁹²To make this complete we would need to compare the usage of the antonyms “live” and “life” which Paul uses here, as well as the adjectives *θνητός* “mortal” (6:12; 8:11) and *νεκρός* “dead” (e.g., 6:11; 8:10, 11; cf. Eph 2:1, 5); but the above is sufficient to establish the semantic point.

This latter usage appears as well in Rom 5:15, 17, 21, where “death” is paralleled to “condemnation” (16, 18) and to “being constituted sinners” (19), and contrasted to the “abounding of grace” (15, 20), to “justification” (16, 18, cf. 19 “being constituted righteous,” 21), and to “life” (17). In 5:14, however, Paul claims that death reigned from Adam until Moses, presumably thinking of the genealogies of Genesis 5 with their refrain “and he died.” That is, the physical death of Adam’s descendants, who did not disobey in the specific way that Adam did (Genesis 2:17 was not spoken to them) but nevertheless died physically, shows that the consequences of Adam’s disobedience passed on to all his descendants (which means that Adam acted as their representative; this gives Paul the grounds for arguing that Christ did what he did as a representative of *his* people).

The places where Paul seems particularly to refer to the Genesis account (e.g., 5:12-19; 7:9-13) are quite consistent with the interpretation of that account given above: indeed, they seem to presuppose it.⁹³

Therefore we may conclude: Paul refers to the “death” threatened in Genesis 2:17 as the moral condition of alienation from God, experienced by humans in this life, and which, if allowed to continue, results in eternal alienation from him. Physical mortality comes now to all people as a consequence for Adam’s disobedience, regardless of whether they are redeemed, and will be healed in eschatological glory. This understanding underlies Paul’s discussion in Romans, based on Genesis 2-3; and our reading of Genesis 3 agrees with Paul.

This leads into another way in which Paul used Genesis 3: namely, as the record of the first human, who acted as the covenantal representative of all mankind, and who by his disobedience brought himself and all those he represented into a condition of sinfulness. In contrast to this result of Adam’s disobedience, Christ acted as the covenantal representative of his people, and on their behalf paid the debt that Adam had incurred for them, and earned the status of righteousness (Romans 5:8-19). This is in full accord with the account of Adam’s sin as well as with the promise of the champion.

Next, consider Paul’s teaching on the consequences of the fall for the created order. In 1 Timothy 4:4 he affirms that “everything created by God is good,” indicating that God’s verdict of Genesis 1:31 still applies. Nothing in Genesis 1-3 contradicts this.⁹⁴ However, what shall we make of Romans 8:20-22, where that same Paul says that the creation was subjected to futility and awaits its liberation

⁹³Here we must note that Paul, like Genesis, refers only to human death.

⁹⁴Indeed, the theme of Psalm 104, with its echoes of Genesis 1-2, is precisely the same point. Only the presence of sinful humans mars God’s handiwork (verse 35, the only mention of sinners in the whole psalm).

from the slavery of corruption, and that it groans and suffers birth pains together? Is this a contradiction? No: instead, we *humans* are out of kilter, and unable properly to perform our function of ruling on behalf of God (all our leadership is defiled; and sometimes we express our sinfulness more specifically by exploiting and abusing the creation). In that respect the creation groans with us as it awaits the glorification of believers, who will then rule it properly and purely. The entire context of Romans 8:18-25 is eschatological, with a focus on *humans'* hope of glory: as seen in the repetitions of “awaits,” verses 19, 23; “hope,” verses 20, 24; “groans,” verses 22, 23; and the “glory” theme, verses 18, 21, 30. The creation will be liberated when humans are morally perfected (“glorified”), because then they will be what the test of Genesis 2-3 was supposed to make them.

Another aspect of the Pauline reading of the Genesis 1-3 is the way he finds there a foundation for complementary role relationships for men and women (e.g., 1 Corinthians 11:8, 11-12; 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12-15).⁹⁵ From the way the Genesis narrator focuses on the man, as described above, we can see that he supposes that such complementarity is built in to the way God deals with people. We see further that he sees its continuation as a part of the remediation of the punishment (Genesis 3:16), i.e. the complementarity still applies to the covenant people—and Paul teaches the same.⁹⁶

Hence we see that Paul applied Genesis 3 in full accord with the features of the text. To the extent that modern scholars cannot read Genesis 3 the way Paul did, they—unlike Paul—have failed to read Genesis 3 with ancient literary competence.

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⁹⁵Barr, *Garden of Eden*, 51, acknowledges that this theme is present in Paul but drastically misinterprets his teaching as “seriously discriminatory” (his very choice of words begs too many questions).

⁹⁶For further discussion, see Ray Ortlund, Jr., “Male-female equality and male headship: Genesis 1-3,” in John Piper and Wayne Grudem, eds., *Recovering Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1991), 95-112.