

## Chapter Two: An Analysis of Genesis 1 – 4

Until now I have dealt with a small section of the Genesis material somewhat in the manner of traditional exegesis. I referred a few times to texts concerning Israel to make parallels between the garden and Israel's tabernacle and Temple. This may have been surprising to some readers, but this is how literary thematic analysis affects traditional verse by verse exegesis of biblical narrative. A theme or motif is traced through a larger section of material, either an entire book or series of books. Careful attention is paid to how that theme or motif is used, where it stays constant, and where it changes, and how. This is one of the methodological categories Robert Alter referred to when he said in 1992, 'The new wave of literary studies of the Bible has been gathering momentum now for more than a decade, and it promises to have far-reaching consequences for both biblical and literary scholarship.'<sup>1</sup> Using this methodology, we will now highlight the major themes and motifs as they impact the subject of work, and the consequences will be far-reaching indeed.

First, there is a very significant difference between life and work in Israel's blessed rural setting as opposed to an urban one. Israel understood that humanity was to be in direct relationship with the land as shown by Genesis 1 – 4. The first creation account, Genesis 1:1 – 2:3, describes a time of humanity's rule over the land as part of God's intended order in His good creation. Days one, two, and three describe the creation of three realms. The first realm is the realm of light, created by the separation of light from darkness (1:3 – 5), the second is the realm of the sky/heavens formed by the separation of the waters (1:6 – 8), and the third is the expanse of the land, formed by the separation of the waters below the heavens (1:9-13). The emphasis on land as the third and final realm underscores its importance. Its importance is complemented by the creation of its ruler, humankind, on the corresponding third day, the sixth, and God's double approval on days three and six as opposed to only a singular evaluation on the other days (1:10, 12, 25, 31). On day four, God created the lights in the heavens and the sun and moon to govern time and the heavenly realm created on day one (1:14 – 19). On day five, God created the creatures of the sea and sky (1:20 – 23). The sea, having no ruler, seems to still signify the chaos that is unfriendly to human life as God intended it; significantly, Israel was not a sea-going people, the beast symbolizing a government hostile to God's people arises out of the sea, and there will be no sea in the new creation (Rev.21:1). On day six, God created the land animals, then humankind to rule over the land created on day three (1:24 – 31) and the creatures of the sea and sky created on day five. There is a parallelism of importance, since humanity is clearly the most sophisticated and important of all God's creatures, having been made in God's image and put into a unique position of ruling over the earth. There is a clear message being sent from this first creation account that God has made humankind to rule over the creation, and in particular, the land. In fact, the land is the primary means God uses to bless the man and woman in creation, since the land abundantly supplies seed and food to all animalkind and humankind. Over this arrangement is imposed the rest of the seventh day (2:1 – 3).

The second creation account, Genesis 2:4 – 4:25, describes humanity's origin from, relationship with, and service due to the land, then it proceeds to describe humanity's fall which entailed frustration with, and living in exile from, the land. That these implications are present in the material are clear not only from the text itself, but the structural form of the text: the genealogy. The genealogy should really be treated from 2:4 all the way to 4:26, beginning with, 'This is the account of the heavens and the earth' and ending just before the next genealogy in Genesis 5:1, 'This is the book of the generations of Adam.'<sup>2</sup> The land existed before humanity and Adam was made from it, a detail suitable for a genealogy. He was composed of the dust of the earth and the breath of God, and was instructed to live in a specific area of land, the garden east of Eden, to tend it. The fall of Adam and Eve entailed an estrangement between humanity and God, an estrangement between husband and wife, as well as an estrangement between humanity and the land. This estrangement first took the form of exile from Eden. And whereas the land was previously God's agent of unmitigated blessing to humanity, at the fall He cursed it so that it became a mixed blessing. Though it would still yield plants of the field and grain for bread, the land would be cursed: 'Cursed is the ground because of you.'

The relationship between the land and humanity soured further with Cain, who was ironically a tiller of the ground (4:2). When this tiller of the ground tilled his brother's blood back into the ground, Abel's blood cried out to God from the land, and Cain was cursed from the land in an amplification of the curse on the land due to Adam. Whereas Adam had to toil on the land and it produced thorns and thistles, at least he was able to eat of the plants of the field and produce bread; but with Cain, matters were far worse: 'When you cultivate the ground, it shall no longer yield its strength to you; you shall be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth.' Cain then identified the

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<sup>1</sup> Robert Alter. *The World of Biblical Literature*. Basic Books: New York, NY. 1992. p.1

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on why the phrase 'This is the record of...' begins a section rather than ends it, see Garrett, *Rethinking Genesis* (Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1991), p.93 – 102.

symmetrical position God and the land stood in relation to an estranged humanity: ‘Thou hast driven me this day from the face of the ground, and from Thy face I shall be hidden.’

Cain then took refuge in a city he named after his son, Enoch. Here we see the start of a peculiar link between city-building and sons. In an attempt to regain security and eternity, Cain connected his life with his son. Perhaps after turning away from God, Cain hoped that Enoch his son would provide him with security. Enoch could farm, cultivate the ground, and defend and protect him; Enoch could overcome God’s decree. His son was now responsible for organizing this city, for providing for his father, for housing the murderer, for defending him from suspicion and insult, for making him feel secure in a world that is otherwise hostile to him, for meeting the tremendous need that only God can truly fill.

But what about Enoch? Bound to his father in a new way, Enoch could not leave Cain. Whereas God decreed that a man shall leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife, Cain made this difficult if not impossible for his son. Enoch lived in the struggle to provide security and justification for his father. He was duty bound. Here begins the story of the father who trusts no one but his sons to be loyal and faithful to him, but in turn places demands on them which crush their sanity, drive them away or turn them against him. This is a very well known human situation that is explored in both classic and modern works, from the Greek tragedy *Oedipus Rex* to William Faulkner’s *Absalom, Absalom* to the Hollywood movie *Fight Club* made in 1999. This relation also describes the patriarchal and communitarian nature of all ancient civilizations, as well as many non-western cultures in the present. Enoch’s attention is necessarily riveted onto his father, not God, which makes the city – human civilization – the first sociological and spiritual limitation on the freedom given by God to human beings. Cain established this limitation. Even though the Hebrews attributed certain economic, artistic, and technological growth to the city, since animal husbandry, music, and metallurgy originated with the descendants of Cain, the builder of the first city (Gen.4:20 – 22),<sup>3</sup> the relational and spiritual aspects of life deteriorated with the city because of this link between city-building and sons, which is another pattern in the rest of the Scriptures. Now we find a curious progression in the names of Enoch’s descendants. Enoch, whose name meant ‘consecrated,’ named his son Irad, which meant ‘townsman’ or ‘witness,’ in this context a witness to the glory of man. Irad named his son Mehujael, ‘smitten of God,’ suggesting that they saw themselves as victims of God. And Mehujael named his son Methushael, ‘death of God.’ Worst of all was Lamech (‘despair’), the first polygamist recorded in the Scriptures, who murdered a young man in a fight, retaliating far beyond the logic of ‘an eye for an eye.’ Lamech boasted about this, poetically saying that he did not need the same protection God offered Cain because he would rely on his family’s prowess in weaponry instead.

The narrative concludes with humanity engaging in urban life, the antithesis of the divinely assisted garden life that we will see upheld as an ideal in Israel’s Mosaic Law. With these developments – Cain and his family in a city, Cain’s descendants developing non-rural ways of life, and more human blood being shed – the narrative hints at a hope for a renewed humanity through the line of Adam through Seth through Enosh (4:25 – 26) which would ultimately give birth to Abraham, the nation Israel, and the promised victorious seed of the woman. This second creation account, then, fills out the fall from the ideal situation described in the first creation account, and explained to rural Israel why human cities sit on God’s land, why human labor is so intense in a world that should be at rest. Estrangement from God meant estrangement from the land, and although the relations were not completely severed, neither were they completely intact. Humanity would now range from being partially effective on the land (Adam) to being non-effectual and alienated from it (Cain). God would continue to use the land to mediate both blessing and curse to humanity. No commentator on Genesis that I’ve consulted takes this into account, especially in relation to the subject of work. This is unfortunate given that the heading of this section is about *the land*, what caused God to withdraw His presence from the land, separating heaven from earth, and what impact that had on the previously supernatural sustenance of the earth. The section is, after all, an account of how the heavens and the earth came to be what they are.

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<sup>3</sup> As secular scholars have demonstrated, humanity found it first possible to divide up labor via urbanization, not necessarily capitalism. Also, politics, law, and modes of human organization evolved rapidly in the city. See Lewis Mumford, *The City in History*, and the bibliography there.