

# A Journey through Genesis

*The 50 Day Bible Challenge*

SAMPLE

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# A Journey through Genesis

*The 50 Day Bible Challenge*

Edited by Marek P. Zabriskie

FORWARD MOVEMENT  
Cincinnati, Ohio



*Dedicated to Charles Zabriskie Jr.,  
my father,  
who has been the genesis of  
much that is good in the world,  
in our family, and in the church,  
and has equipped his sons for life.*



## Preface

The Bible Challenge began as a simple idea in 2011: to encourage daily reading of scripture. Simple ideas can bring forth great change. Since then, over a million people have participated across the Anglican Communion.

Developing a daily spiritual discipline or practice is crucial for all Christians who wish to be faithful followers of Jesus. Saint Augustine and many other great Christians have written about the power of reading the Bible quietly on our own. There is no other book in the world that can so transform the human heart, motivate the human spirit, and give us the mind that was in Christ Jesus himself.

The Bible remains the world's best-selling book year after year. However, Episcopalians, Roman Catholics, and other mainline Christians often do not read it. Yet, studies show that prayerfully engaging scripture is the best way for Christians to grow in their faith and love of Jesus. For our churches to grow and our members to deepen their spiritual lives, we must devote time each day to engaging God's Word.

The goal of The Bible Challenge is to help individuals develop a lifelong, daily spiritual discipline of reading the Bible so that their lives may be constantly transformed and renewed. Hundreds of thousands of people around the world have taken on the Bible Challenge. The series includes a yearlong study of the Bible, and the Bible Challenge Gospel Series: reading each book (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) over a 50-day period. In addition, thematic Bible Challenge books offer a way for readers to go deep into scripture to learn what God is saying on a particular subject. The Social Justice

Bible Challenge builds upon the hunger to engage in scripture and connects our desire to help with God's mandate to love and serve others. The Way of Love Bible Challenge explores seven core spiritual practices through the lens of scripture. And the Creation Care Bible Challenge calls us back into relationship with God the Creator of all creation.

Regular engagement with the Bible develops a strong Christian faith, enhances our experience of worship, and helps each of us to become a more committed, articulate, and contagious Christian. This is exactly what the world needs today.

With prayers and blessings for your faithful Bible reading,

**The Rev. Marek P. Zabriskie**

**Founder of The Bible Challenge**

**Director of the Center for Biblical Studies**

**[www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org](http://www.thecenterforbiblicalstudies.org)**

**Rector of Christ Church Greenwich, Connecticut**



## How to Read the Bible Prayerfully

Welcome to a journey with Genesis. We are delighted that you are interested in reading God's life-transforming Word. It will change and enrich your life. This book is an ideal resource for individuals, small groups, churches, and dioceses. Here are some suggestions to consider as you get started:

- You can begin your journey with Genesis at any time of year. Since it's the first book of the Bible, some people may want to start the new year with a new practice of daily scripture reading. With 50 meditations, the book is a perfect companion for the 50 days in the season of Easter—or the 40 days (plus Sundays) of Lent. Reading and reflecting on the Bible is a year-long, day-in, day-out endeavor, and the book can be read at any period.
- Each day has a manageable amount of reading, a meditation, a few questions, and a prayer, written by a host of wonderful authors.
- We suggest that you try to read the Bible each day. This is a great spiritual discipline to establish.
- If you need more than fifty days to read through *A Journey through Genesis*, move at the pace that works best for you.
- Many Bible Challenge participants read the Bible using their iPad, iPhone, Kindle, or Nook, or listen to the Bible on a mobile device using Audio.com, faithcomesthroughhearing.org, or Pandora radio. Find what works for you.

- Other resources for learning more about the Bible and engaging scripture can be found on our website at [www.ForwardMovement.org](http://www.ForwardMovement.org). In addition, you can find a list of resources at [www.thecenterforbiblicalresources.org](http://www.thecenterforbiblicalresources.org). The center also offers a Read the Bible in a Year program and reading plans for the New Testament, Psalms, and Proverbs in a Year.
- Because the Bible is not a newspaper, it is best to read it with a reverent spirit. We advocate a devotional approach to reading the Bible, rather than reading it as a purely intellectual or academic exercise.
- Before reading the Bible, take a moment of silence to put yourself in the presence of God. We then invite you to read this prayer written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer.

*Blessed Lord, who has caused all holy scriptures to be written for our learning; Grant us to hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that we may embrace and ever hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life, which you have given us in our Savior Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

- Consider using the ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*. In this form of Bible reading, you read the text and then meditate on a portion of it, be it a verse or two or even a single word. Mull over the words and their meaning. Then offer a prayer to God based on what you have read, how it has made you feel, or what it has caused you to ponder. Listen in silence for God to respond to your prayer.

- We encourage you to read in the morning, if possible, so that your prayerful reading may spiritually enliven the rest of your day. If you cannot read in the morning, read when you can later in the day. Try to carve out a regular time for your daily reading.
- One way to hold yourself accountable to reading God's Word is to form a group within your church or community, particularly any outreach and ministry groups. By participating in the Genesis Bible Challenge together, you can support one another in your reading, discuss the Bible passages, ask questions, and share how God's Word is transforming your life.
- Ask to have a notice printed in your church newsletter that you are starting a group to read and study *A Journey through Genesis*. Invite others to join you and gather regularly to discuss the readings, ask questions, and share how they transform your life. Visit the Center for Biblical Resources website to see more suggestions about how churches can participate in The Bible Challenge.
- Have fun and find spiritual peace and the joy that God desires for you in your daily reading. The Center for Biblical Studies aims to help you discover God's wisdom and to create a lifelong spiritual practice of daily Bible reading so that God may guide you through each day of your life.
- Once you've finished one complete reading of the Bible, start over and do it again. God may speak differently to you in each reading. Follow the example of U.S. President

John Adams, who read through the Bible each year during his adult life. We highly advocate this practice.

- After participating in The Genesis Bible Challenge, you will be more equipped to support and mentor others in reading the Bible—and to connect your ministry of advocacy and assistance with Holy Scripture.

We are thrilled that you are participating in The Bible Challenge. May God richly bless you as you prayerfully engage the scriptures each day. To learn more about The Bible Challenge, visit us at: [www.thecenterforblicalstudies.org](http://www.thecenterforblicalstudies.org) to see all of our resources.

## Introduction to the book of Genesis

Perhaps no book in the Bible offers more powerful, riveting, intriguing, and at times disturbing stories than the book of Genesis. Indeed, Genesis qualifies for great literature. Some of the stories told within it transcend the Bible and have become part of our vernacular, for church and unchurched folks alike. For instance, the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, and Joseph and his brothers are well known in both secular and religious circles.

The name genesis means "origin" or "birth" in ancient Greek. In the Hebrew Bible (the *Tanakh*) the book of Genesis is known as *Bereshith*, taken from the opening line, "In the beginning..." Genesis is part of the Torah, the first five books of the Old Testament, also called the Pentateuch, taken from the Greek word for "five books."

Traditionally, authorship of the Torah or Pentateuch was ascribed to Moses. This belief carried into the New Testament (see Luke 24:27). But the book of Genesis also refers to events that take place after Moses's life, such as when the Canaanites were no longer in the land (Genesis 12:6). And the fifth book of the Torah, Deuteronomy, refers to Moses's death and burial; obviously Moses would find it difficult to write about his death, which led scholars to conclude a different source for authorship.

Today, scholars believe Genesis was written by several writers known as "J," "E," and "P," which stand for the Yahwistic source (J for Jahwist in German), the Elohist (these writings are identified by the name that they use for God, "Yahweh" or "Elohim"), and finally, the Priestly Writer. Each writer had his own style, theology, and

story to tell. Their combined works were then redacted or edited into one cohesive work after a long history of being kept alive in both written and oral tradition.

Genesis was written over many centuries. Most scholars believe Genesis was composed in the tenth century after the establishment of the monarchy in Israel. Many important parts of Genesis, however, were not written until after the fall of the monarchy in 586 BCE, when Nebuchadnezzar's troops swept down from the north to sack Jerusalem. The invaders took many of the inhabitants of Jerusalem captive and marched them to Babylon.

It is important to recognize at the outset that Genesis contains folk tales, legends, and myths. Legends are not lies. We should not dismiss the truth of these tales, for legends and myths were ways of transmitting truth in the ancient world. These stories precede any understanding of science as we know it. Hence, we must suspend our scientifically trained minds to encounter Genesis on its own grounds as a collection of stories that illuminate life.

The stories of these characters are vital not only to Jews and Christians, but also with the advent of Islam in the sixth century, the Quran features stories of Adam and Eve, Abraham and Ishmael (who is said to be the father of all Muslims), and Joseph. In the Quran, it is Ishmael, not Isaac, who Abraham nearly sacrificed to God (Genesis 22). Hence, the three major Abrahamic religions share a common reverence for the stories of Genesis.

We are told that God created the universe. For believers, this truth still holds. There is an intelligent design of sorts to all that we see and know. People of faith do not have to believe that the world was created in six days or that God used a flood to destroy the earth.

No man or woman was present at creation. Hence, reading Genesis should never be confused with reading a newspaper. Instead, Christians have traditionally read Genesis metaphorically and allegorically.

The story of Adam and Eve conveys a vital truth, namely that God created humans and intended for them to prosper and experience joy, but humans violated boundaries set by God and were held accountable. When we violate the boundaries that God has established, we face consequences, not because God is vindictive, but because we have violated the protections that God has provided to keep us safe.

The Bible is a strange book full of very human stories. The best and worst of humanity is depicted within its covers. It tells the story of how God made a covenant with an individual named Abraham, whose children become a family and then a tribe, then a collection of tribes, and finally a nation. Genesis and the Torah are the story of the Jewish people. But Genesis begins by examining the advent of humanity at large and the interplay of God and humans.

The first eleven chapters of Genesis constitute primeval history. They are divided up into stories about the first humans (Genesis 1:1-6:4) and the flood and dispersal of humanity following the flood (Genesis 6:5-11:9). Chapters 1-11 offer archetypes of humanity found in Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and the Flood, the Tower of Babel, and Joseph and his brothers.

In chapters 12-50, we switch from the wide-angle lens of primeval history to a narrow focus on ancestral history, examining Abraham and Sarah (chapters 12-25), Jacob and Esau (chapters 26-36), and Joseph and his brothers (chapters 37-50). The role of the ancient

matriarchs—Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah—also play a vital role in carrying out the fulfillment of God’s promises. Along the way, we move from the urge for fratricide (Genesis 4:1-16; 27:41-45, 33:12-17) to full reunion when Joseph reconciles with his brothers who sold him into slavery.

Embedded in Genesis is the story of God’s covenant that begins with Noah, who is given a sign of this covenant in a rainbow, and is officially established with Abraham, who is to become the father of the Jewish people with more descendants than stars in the sky.

The Bible itself begins in a garden (the Garden of Eden) and ends in a city (the City of God depicted in the book of Revelation). Early on, Adam and Eve are flung out of Paradise, and the Bible becomes the story of Paradise Regained, when Jesus offers himself on the cross to reconcile humanity with God.

God created the world, but human sin mars God’s creation. Nevertheless, the overall message of Genesis and the Torah is a hopeful one. God is in charge and is watching over humankind. God intervenes when humans make a mess of their lives and seeks to bring about good from even the most difficult situations.

Ultimately, Genesis is part of a much bigger story. We need to read the entire Torah (or, as Gerhard von Rad would argue, the entire Hexateuch—the Torah and the book of Joshua) in order to understand what Genesis is trying to communicate. Many of these stories were aetiologies, meant to explain the facts of tribal history, about a place. They are episodes of country life. They take place at springs and watering holes, inside bed chambers and at work sites. All of these wondrous stories are meant to convey that God is with us, working to reconcile us.



# A Journey through Genesis

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## DAY 1

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### Genesis 1

**1** In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, <sup>2</sup>the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

<sup>3</sup>Then God said, “Let there be light”; and there was light. <sup>4</sup>And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness. <sup>5</sup>God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

<sup>6</sup>And God said, “Let there be a dome in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.” <sup>7</sup>So God made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome. And it was so.

<sup>8</sup>God called the dome Sky. And there was evening and there was morning, the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the earth put forth vegetation: plants yielding seed, and fruit trees of every kind on earth that bear fruit with the seed in it.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The earth brought forth vegetation: plants yielding seed of every kind, and trees of every kind bearing fruit with the seed in it. And God saw that it was good. <sup>13</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the third day.

<sup>14</sup>And God said, “Let there be lights in the dome of the sky to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made the two great lights—the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night—and the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the dome of the sky to give light upon the earth, <sup>18</sup>to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. And God saw that it was good. <sup>19</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fourth day.

<sup>20</sup>And God said, “Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the dome of the sky.” <sup>21</sup>So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, of every kind, with which the waters

swarm, and every winged bird of every kind. And God saw that it was good. <sup>22</sup>God blessed them, saying, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” <sup>23</sup>And there was evening and there was morning, the fifth day.

<sup>24</sup>And God said, “Let the earth bring forth living creatures of every kind: cattle and creeping things and wild animals of the earth of every kind.” And it was so. <sup>25</sup>God made the wild animals of the earth of every kind, and the cattle of every kind, and everything that creeps upon the ground of every kind. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup>Then God said, “Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and

over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.”<sup>27</sup> So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.<sup>28</sup> God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

<sup>29</sup>God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed

that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food.”<sup>30</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” And it was so.

<sup>31</sup>God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

## Reflection

According to the Jewish tradition, God authored the original Hebrew scroll of the Torah, the Five Books of Moses. Each Hebrew word, syllable, and letter within the Torah is considered *Lashon Kodesh* or Holy Language.

The first Hebrew word in the Torah is *B'reisheet*. “In the beginning” begins with the letter *bet*. The last word in the Torah is *Yisrael*; “Israel” ends with the letter *lahmed*. Together, these two Hebrew letters spell the word *lehv*, which means heart, and this is understood to teach that God provided Torah to humanity as an act of divine love.

In chapter one, Genesis notes how God ordered Creation with divine purpose. Genesis 1:7 teaches that God “made the dome and separated the waters that were under the dome from the waters that were above the dome.” The Torah is like water. Just as water sustains and nurtures physical life, Torah study sustains and promotes our spiritual lives and gives us the inspiration by which we seek God’s purpose in our lives.

Genesis 1:27 notes that God created the human being *B'tzelem Elohim*—in God’s image. Judaism asserts three primary teachings on *B'tzelem Elohim*:

1. All life is sacred and must be protected.
2. No human is inherently more important than another.
3. Although we may look different from one another, the infinite nature of the Divine means that we are all equally created in the image of God.

Every single human life is precious and equal. Within our too often contentious world, we forget the inherent divine equality between all of us. We indulge in the sin of thinking “I am more important” than another and subsequently permit our behaviors to reflect this denial of our intrinsic human equality.

If we could all continually look at the “stranger’s face” and see our equal, we would demand that all people receive universal support such as food, shelter, clothing, education, medical care, etc. God’s intention is for us to look in everyone else’s faces and see God and manifest God’s love. To embrace God’s purpose, we must continually strive to combat hate and violence within our community, nation, and world and actively pursue love and peace.

— **Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz**

## Questions

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When can you see God's image in others' faces?

When is it more difficult for you to see the image of God in other people?

How can the responsibility of being created *B'Tzelem Elohim* help inform our choices?

## Prayer

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God, each of us is created equally in your divine image. Our sacred obligation is to treat everyone with the respect and love you manifest for us. Help us to recognize within everyone your spark of the divine and treat them with as much respect, blessing, and welcome as we would in our love for you. May we be worthy of your sacred intention and love for us. *Amen.*

### Genesis 2

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all their multitude. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished the work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all the work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and hallowed it, because on it God rested from all the work that he had done in creation. <sup>4</sup>These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created. In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens, <sup>5</sup>when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground; <sup>6</sup>but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the ground— <sup>7</sup>then

the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

<sup>8</sup>And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east; and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup>Out of the ground the LORD God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food, the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. <sup>10</sup>A river flows out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it divides and becomes four branches. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is Pishon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold; <sup>12</sup>and the gold of that land is good; bdellium and onyx stone



are there. <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is Gihon; it is the one that flows around the whole land of Cush. <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is Tigris, which flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates. <sup>15</sup>The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it.

<sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die."

<sup>18</sup>Then the LORD God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner." <sup>19</sup>So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them;

and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every animal of the field; but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner.

<sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. <sup>23</sup>Then the man said, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken." <sup>24</sup>Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh. <sup>25</sup>And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.

## Reflection

The first chapter of Genesis refers to God as *Elohim*, whereas chapter two uses the title of *Yahweh-Elohim*. These Hebrew names for God indicate God's actions through two distinct divine attributes. *Elohim* is characteristic of God's justice and *Yahweh*, God's mercy.

"In the beginning," according to the Jewish tradition, God intended to create the world solely based on the divine attribute of justice. But God quickly realized that such a world would not survive. Thus, God gave precedence to the divine attribute of mercy and allied it with the quality of justice.

God is like a parent. We must follow God's divine instructions because this is how we lead sacred lives. But, like children who know a parent's expectations, we can fall short and disappoint. Subsequently, God's love and mercy are more evident than God's justice.

Also, because God created us equally in the divine image, we emphasize mercy over justice within our human interactions with each other. When we act with the priority of mercy, we more easily fulfill God's commandments to love our neighbor and the stranger in our midst.

A famous ancient rabbinic legend tells of Rabbi Meir traveling on a road where there were hooligans. One afternoon, his wife, Beruria, heard him pray that these wicked men should die. Beruria challenged her husband: "Would it not be better to pray that these evil men should change their ways?" Rabbi Meir learned from Beruria the true meaning of prioritizing mercy over justice. Mercy is the more

powerful lever by which we can help cultivate others to change for the better.

Every individual desires justice against others but would prefer mercy be extended to themselves. God's love emphasizes mercy over justice because the divine intention is that we provide everyone the opportunity to grow and change for the better. God teaches us that the purpose of our lives is to love the "other" as we want to be loved. There is no more excellent ingredient to love than emphasizing mercy over justice.

We do not set aside justice, but we seek mitigation whenever possible. Our desire and emphasis on mercy guard us against going too far, and we create the love-filled world God intended "in the beginning."

— Rabbi Mitchell M. Hurvitz

## Questions

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When have you emphasized mercy over justice?

What mixture of mercy versus justice do you feel most matches God's will?

How do we cultivate our willingness to extend greater mercy to others, especially those we think might not deserve it?

## Prayer

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Merciful God, we pray to you for the strength to emphasize our mercy for others. Guide our hearts and hands to love as you love. Inspire us to live up to the divine ideals by which you created us in your image. May the knowledge of your love and mercy help us to bring peace to our lives. *Amen.*

### Genesis 3

**3** Now the serpent was more crafty than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden?’”

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die.’”

<sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; <sup>5</sup>for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

<sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she

also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.

<sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. <sup>8</sup>They heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God among the trees of the garden.

<sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, “Where are you?” <sup>10</sup>He said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.”

<sup>11</sup>He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?”

<sup>12</sup>The man said, “The woman

whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit from the tree, and I ate.” <sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent tricked me, and I ate.”

<sup>14</sup>The LORD God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you among all animals and among all wild creatures; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup>I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will strike your head, and you will strike his heel.”

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said, “I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”

<sup>17</sup>And to the man he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have

eaten of the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup>thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”

<sup>20</sup>The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

<sup>21</sup>And the LORD God made garments of skins for the man and for his wife, and clothed them.

<sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God said, “See, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever”— <sup>23</sup>therefore the LORD God sent him forth

from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup>He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of

Eden he placed the cherubim, and a sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life.

## Reflection

The world we live in is not as God originally intended it to be. God has mysteriously baked into creation the possibility of going awry from God's original plans and purposes, but this actually comes to pass not due to God but to our own free decision-making. Humanity has exiled itself from the perfect communion with God, which was our original glory, ushering in consequences not just for us but for all creation—pain and death foremost among them.

All this is embedded in the second creation myth in Genesis, told through the incredible drama of Eve's temptation, Adam's assent, God's curses on the serpent, the woman, and the man, and humanity's expulsion from the verdant garden in which we were once in God's personal company. Theological truths are told here in the language of a story.

The narrative can make God's acts seem arbitrary, even capricious: God has put in the garden a desirable tree only to forbid eating of it; God curses our first parents when they transgress this prohibition and banishes them from the garden so that they won't eat of the tree of life and gain immortality as well as the knowledge of good and evil; and so on.

Many of the early church fathers, though, interpreted the curses that befall our first parents in the narrative more as organic consequences of their actions rather than as juridical punishments doled out by God. Athanasius, for example, says that God made humankind mortal, capable of dying, but intended us originally to share in the grace and power of God's own life and so live forever. But we forsook



this lifegiving communion with God, and so reverted to our natural, mortal state. The punishment of life without God is life without God. This is what life east of Eden means.

The mystery of the Fall opens the door for chaos to rush into creation, even into our human hearts, minds, and bodies. But we need not lose heart. The Bible begins with our forsaking Eden. It ends with God bringing us back to it (Revelation 22:1-5).

— **The Rev. Dr. Justin E. Crisp**

## Questions

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Where have you felt the effects of the Fall most acutely: in bodily or mental illness, for example, in difficulty knowing what is the right thing to do, or in difficulty *doing* what you know is the right thing to do?

Deception and mistrust are integral to the story of the Fall: the serpent lies to Eve, and she acquiesces to the serpent's suggestion that God hasn't been completely forthcoming with her and Adam about the forbidden tree. How might God be calling you to trust his promises to you rather than give them up for some other, sham promise of security or happiness?

## Prayer

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Lord God, you made us for yourself, to share your company and partake of your own life and goodness: we give you thanks that, when we gave ourselves reason to hide from you, you did not hide yourself from us, but persisted to love, shield, and restore us; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

### Genesis 4

**4** Now the man knew his wife Eve, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have produced a man with the help of the LORD.”

<sup>2</sup>Next she bore his brother Abel. Now Abel was a keeper of sheep, and Cain a tiller of the ground.

<sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain brought to the LORD an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup>and Abel for his part brought of the firstlings of his flock, their fat portions. And the LORD had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.

<sup>6</sup>The LORD said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is lurking at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

<sup>8</sup>Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out to the field.” And when they were in the field, Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him.

<sup>9</sup>Then the LORD said to Cain, “Where is your brother Abel?” He said, “I do not know; am I my brother’s keeper?” <sup>10</sup>And the LORD said, “What have you done? Listen; your brother’s blood is crying out to me from the ground! <sup>11</sup>And now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. <sup>12</sup>When you till the ground, it will no longer yield to you its strength; you will be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth.”

<sup>13</sup>Cain said to the LORD, “My punishment is greater than I can bear! <sup>14</sup>Today you have driven me away from the soil,

and I shall be hidden from your face; I shall be a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth, and anyone who meets me may kill me.”<sup>15</sup> Then the LORD said to him, “Not so! Whoever kills Cain will suffer a sevenfold vengeance.” And the LORD put a mark on Cain, so that no one who came upon him would kill him.

<sup>16</sup>Then Cain went away from the presence of the LORD, and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.<sup>17</sup> Cain knew his wife, and she conceived and bore Enoch; and he built a city, and named it Enoch after his son Enoch.<sup>18</sup> To Enoch was born Irad; and Irad was the father of Mehujael, and Mehujael the father of Methushael, and Methushael the father of Lamech.

<sup>19</sup>Lamech took two wives; the name of the one was Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

<sup>20</sup>Adah bore Jabal; he was the

ancestor of those who live in tents and have livestock.<sup>21</sup> His brother’s name was Jubal; he was the ancestor of all those who play the lyre and pipe.<sup>22</sup> Zillah bore Tubal-cain, who made all kinds of bronze and iron tools. The sister of Tubal-cain was Naamah.

<sup>23</sup>Lamech said to his wives: “Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; you wives of Lamech, listen to what I say: I have killed a man for wounding me, a young man for striking me.<sup>24</sup> If Cain is avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy-sevenfold.”

<sup>25</sup>Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and named him Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, because Cain killed him.”<sup>26</sup> To Seth also a son was born, and he named him Enosh. At that time people began to invoke the name of the LORD.

## Reflection

Human history begins with banishment, and civilization is kicked off by murder. HBO has nothing on the Bible.

What takes place between Cain and Abel is all too human. Cain, the elder son of Adam and Eve, and Abel, the younger, both make sacrifices to God from the results of their labor. It's said that God "had regard for Abel and his offering," but not for Cain and his. The reason for this is unsaid. Regardless, Cain envies Abel his esteem in God's eyes and resolves to kill him. Cain murders Abel in a place of seclusion and tries to lie to God about it when confronted, but the ground itself testifies against Cain. Cain is exiled from God, east of Eden, where he and his descendants give birth to hallmarks of civilization, to cities, nomadic cultures, music and art, and metalworking. Good and noble as these may be, Cain's murderous streak lives on in his descendants, as Lamech ups the ante of violence and kills two men who have wounded him. To the other side of Cain's legacy and lineage is that of Seth, Adam and Eve's son after Abel, whose descendants are said to worship the Lord.

It's tempting to read the Bible as though it's a story about other people. But these two lineages, Cain's and Seth's, the line of murder and the line of love, run right through our world, and they run right through us—even what is best and most ingenious in and around us. Humankind is fragile after the Fall, and we are perennially tempted to shore up our fragility by resorting to violence and revenge. Jesus, cut down like a new Abel, puts a divine stop to the line of violence. Whereas Abel's blood cries out to God for recompense from the

ground, Jesus's is "the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel" (Hebrews 12:24), the word of forgiveness. God refuses to play by the stratagems of Cain, refuses to avenge even himself. And it changes everything.

— **The Rev. Dr. Justin E. Crisp**

SAMPLE

## Questions

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When have you felt drawn to respond to some pain, loss, hurt, or vulnerability in your life with violence or harm? What happened to prevent you from acting on this desire, or, if you did act, what “better word” do you hear once you see that harm in the light of Christ?

Murder is Cain’s response to his envy of Abel. In what way is envy a force in your life and soul? What would it take for you to feel safe and secure enough to give up envy, and for what renewal of God’s promises might you ask in prayer so you can do so?

## Prayer

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Lord Jesus, yours is the blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel: pardon us when we lose ourselves in the ways of the world and give us grace to follow you in the way of the cross, which is the way of life. *Amen.*