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**WOMAN'S**  
STUDY BIBLE



RECEIVING GOD'S TRUTH FOR  
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FULL COLOR

NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION

*The*  
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## GOD CARES FOR WOMEN

*Eta Linnemann*

In my pre-conversion life, I bitterly fought for women's equality in "spiritual office." The thorn of embitterment was ever driven into me anew by my so-called "brothers in ministry," especially by those who were my mental inferiors and possessed no other merit than the privilege of wearing trousers on the basis of their physical constitution. If my achievements had not been any better than theirs, I would not have made it even into the position in which I had to bear, of all things, the lifelong title of "lady curate" (assistant), while my male colleagues after one to two years exchanged the title of "curate" for that of "pastor."

At the general conventions, I was wounded with unkind regularity by such "brothers" in ministry in that at least one of them, or more likely an entire group, apprised me of the fact that the problem of women in ministry would indeed be solved if each of the women would marry a minister. That was the twofold wounding. Had I completed an entire course of theological study, including the two theological barrier examinations and even taken a doctor's degree, only to engage myself with children and kitchen as the wife of a minister? Even if I had wanted that—wouldn't I have only had the remotest possibility for it, now that a considerable portion of the men in my own age group had been killed during the Second World War on the battlefields of Europe?

My dear sisters, I felt that the fight for equal rights for women had been entrusted to me, along with the pain that these inequities caused. This *fight* was terminated with my preconversion life because now I am prepared to submit myself to God's Word—even to that which stands written therein concerning the woman. The *suffering*, however, was not yet ended thereby. It hurt just as badly when a "ministering brother" made it clear to the sisters, with arrogance and a pasha's behavior, that the assignment of all women was to work with their hands and to serve the brothers with their time and resources. Perhaps later the Lord would give women a prophetic office. That the "ministering brother" had made it up to cook in his former life, whereas the sister had made it to a double doctorate in theology and a professorship was only marginally noted.

The reaction I faced was a rebellion, albeit resisted, against this God and a deep depression over my misfortune to have been created a woman. So it would have remained, had not God himself taken up my case. I had begged him to allow me to be done with this situation, which I could not resolve because I could find no acquiescence within myself to the role that he as Creator had assigned to me. Years later I grasped that this role was not simply identical with that which this "ministering brother" had ascribed to me. That God in the meantime had drastically interfered in the life of this brother should only be noted in passing, since it is not the most important thing.

God intervened. He healed me of my bitterness and the rebellion against being a woman. Renewed by *his grace*, I became a fulfilled woman—happy, contented, and full of thanksgiving. Perhaps this path is not reproducible for everyone. I am not at all saying that God has the same path in mind for others, but I do desire to share my testimony as a witness to his grace in my own life.

In my quiet time, I read Deuteronomy 21:10–14; through this often overlooked regulation concerning the treatment of women who had become spoils of war, God healed my heart. By means of these unlikely verses, his concern and love toward women became overpoweringly known to me.

Clearly, in my own heart, this regulation had been given in the midst of the raw reality of a fallen creation. The women of the vanquished became spoils to the victors. After a centuries-long Christian experience, indeed now this tragedy is no longer the usual thing, although even in this century, it became the gruesome experience of countless German women, who were delivered up defenseless to an incited, inflamed red beast called an "army."

Among all peoples it was self-evident that a woman who had become the spoils of war could come to

be used at will as a slave of lust or labor. But God gave to his people totally different regulations, which served to protect the human worth of such captive women.

When you go to war against your enemies and the LORD your God delivers them into your hands and you take captives, if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her. (Dt 21:10–14)

What tenderness and sympathetic understanding call out from this admonition! The victor was not allowed to rush upon booty; he had to approach the prisoner of war with respect. He had to decide whether to retain her as worker or to take her as wife. Everything else was excluded. If he should take her as wife, he was henceforth not allowed to treat her as a prisoner. He must provide her with clothing because she was supposed to lay aside the clothing of her captivity. He was to allow her a full month of mourning, during which she was to be permitted to mourn and weep, according to proper decorum, for all of the relatives she lost in the war.

How God knows our feelings; how he respects them! With what love has he arranged the individual details that led to the restoration of the woman! She should be permitted to become whole again. She should have the opportunity to earn a positive attitude from her proprietor, who would perhaps then want to become her husband. The respect with which he had to treat this woman made marriage possible and even constituted the prerequisite for her success.

With what love and care had God personally taken precaution in the case of the failure of this marriage, which indeed stood beneath particular burdens because it took place across national and cultural lines! How he lovingly took up the woman himself, guarded against her being reduced from the position of wife to that of a slave, and also did not permit her to be treated as an object from which money could be earned at will. Her husband was allowed to put her away only by respecting her as a free person having full disposition over herself. Just as he himself was only allowed to approach her as a husband, with full respect for her personhood, so he was only allowed to dismiss her with full respect for her personhood.

How very much does God love women! How he respects us as persons of equal value to the man in that he has expended such care to decree these regulations concerning our protection! I can believe his disposition concerning me is that I should be a woman—together with what all that means according to God's Word—for my ultimate good. Once I began to accept his decree concerning me—to be a woman, then, little by little, I also have been made conscious of the good that he has thereby intended for me.



# Genesis

## TITLE

Genesis (Heb. *Bere'shith*, lit. “in the beginning”) is the first book of the Pentateuch or *Torah* (a designation for the first five books of the Old Testament). The title “Genesis” was first used in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Old Testament).

## AUTHOR

Though Genesis has no explicit authorship statement, its inclusion in the Pentateuch suggests Mosaic authorship. Other books—Exodus, Numbers and Deuteronomy—all assert Mosaic authorship (Ex 17:14; 24:4–8; 34:27; Nu 33:1–2; Dt 31:9,22). In the rest of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch is referred to collectively as “the Book of the Law of Moses” (Jos 8:31; 2Ki 14:6; Ne 13:1). The New Testament confirms this authorship (Mt 19:8; Lk 24:27; Jn 5:45–47; Ac 3:22; Ro 10:5; Rev 15:3). The familiarity of the writer of Genesis with Egyptian geography (Ge 45:10; 47:11) confirms that the author was well acquainted with Egyptian culture, as would have been Moses, who was reared in the household of Pharaoh. Some short sections of Genesis, such as the list of kings from the period of the Israelite monarchy, may have been added during the time of the divided kingdom (Ge 36); in the same way, cities are often given the names they bore during the time of the monarchy rather than their patriarchal names. These scribal additions could well have been made in the process of copying manuscripts and do not affect the book’s message other than to improve the clarity of Genesis for contemporary readers.

## DATE

The book tells the story of mankind from creation to the death of Joseph. Dating the events that relate to the creation, the flood, and the repopulation of the earth is impossible (Ge 1–11), but the remainder of the book deals with the patriarchal age, which is roughly the same as the Middle Bronze Age (1950–1550 BC). The customs found in Genesis bear striking parallels to laws and customs recorded in other documents of the second millennium, most notably those found in tablets discovered at the Hurrian city of Nuzi in northeastern Mesopotamia.

The Pentateuch as a whole was written between the exodus and the death of Moses (Dt 34). The exodus is variously dated, with 1445 BC as the earliest date. If this date is assumed, the death of Moses would fall around 1400 BC. Genesis was thus produced sometime in the late fifteenth century BC, several centuries after the patriarchs whose lives it describes.



## BACKGROUND

### *Setting*

The setting is vast in scope since the book opens with the creation of the universe and closes with the small but growing number of the descendants of Jacob, now identified as Israel, who settled in the choice land of the Nile delta of Egypt. In between, the action focuses on the entire Fertile Crescent from the universal flood (which ended on the mountains of Ararat) and the tower of Babel (in the land of Shinar) to Abraham's journeys throughout Canaan.

### *Purpose*

Genesis answers the question, "Who are we, and where did we come from?" God as the only Creator presented himself to a people about to enter a land filled with false idols. God confirmed his selection and sovereign preservation of this nation facing hardships in a new land. Most importantly, Genesis reveals that Israel was set apart by God from the very beginning of creation. This knowledge provided a motivation for Israel to remain free from the idolatry and paganism surrounding the nation.

### *Audience*

The Israelites were about to enter Canaan. Since the older generation (except Joshua and Caleb) had died in the desert, no others were left with a personal memory of God's miraculous deliverance from the Egyptians. The young nation entering the promised land would be faced with an immense temptation to assimilate the idolatry, intermarriage and customs of the pagan nations around them. This same temptation faces God's people in every generation; Genesis reveals that God's plan for setting apart his people stretches back to creation.

### *Literary Characteristics*

Genesis is a carefully structured book; its literary structure reinforces its explicit message. The first section, the story of creation (Ge 1:1–2:3), is set up in two segments of three days each. The creative works of the first and the fourth days are parallel, since during the first day God created light and darkness, while on the fourth day he created the sun and moon to govern the periods of light and darkness. On the second day, the firmament divided the waters; on the fifth day, the inhabitants of the sky and water were created. The third day dry land and vegetation appeared; the sixth day land-dwellers were created to consume the vegetation. The structure emphasizes God's plan and control over all aspects of creation.

After the introductory section, the book is divided by the recurrent phrase "This is the account of" (Heb. *toledoth*). Each occurrence of this phrase marks a new stage in God's development of a chosen people. The story of mankind is presented as a whole (Ge 2:4—4:26). After the judgment of mankind, the phrase appears repeatedly as a reminder that God chooses one man from each family (for example, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) to lead in preserving and carrying on the godly line. Also clear are the partnerships the patriarchs enjoyed with their wives—Abraham and



Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Jacob and Rachel were part of God's plan as well. The passing of God's covenant promises from one generation to the next is emphasized by the parallel structure of the stories themselves. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob all traveled to Egypt; all three endured tests followed by covenant renewals. Sarah, Rebekah and Rachel all suffered from barrenness, but each experienced God's grace in bearing children who would play a major role in the building of a nation.

The primary theme of Genesis is God's formation of the nation and his providential protection of a special people for himself. The methods God used to call out and shape this nation form the minor themes of the book.

*God's Sovereignty*—God appears first as sovereign Creator and Ruler; his power over history and the actions of his people reappears throughout the book in his preservation of his chosen ones.

*God's Covenant*—God uses the “covenant” (Heb. *berith*) continually to separate one man from the rest of mankind. The first covenant is made with Adam in the Garden of Eden (Ge 2:16–17; see chart, The Covenants of Genesis). After the fall, God continues to make covenants with each subsequent generation, selecting one man from each family to continue godly seed for the next generation. Covenants are made with Noah (Ge 9:9), Abraham (Ge 12:1–3), Isaac (Ge 26:2–5) and Jacob (Ge 28:13–15).

*God's Redemption*—The story of the formation of the chosen people is the story of redemption. The “offspring,” the godly line of those faithful to the Lord, will eventually crush the “offspring” of the serpent, the wicked who live in rebellion against God (Ge 3:14–15). This prophecy was ultimately fulfilled in the coming of Christ. Since Israel was God's chosen nation from whom the Messiah was to come, Israel's story reveals God's redemptive action in human history.

## THEMES

*The Threat to God's Plan*—The fourth theme of Genesis is the struggle of the serpent and his offspring to destroy the chosen family. Sin, famine, war and the threat of national assimilation into the surrounding Canaanite culture conspired to block the fulfillment of God's covenant promises. These threats are continually diverted by God's sovereign, preserving power.

## OUTLINE

- I. Introduction: The Origins of the Heavens and the Earth (1:1–2:3)**
  - A. The first day: light and darkness (1:1–5)**
  - B. The second day: firmament (1:6–8)**
  - C. The third day: seas and earth, vegetation (1:9–13)**
  - D. The fourth day: sun, moon and stars (1:14–19)**
  - E. The fifth day: sea creatures and birds (1:20–23)**
  - F. The sixth day: land animals and mankind (1:24–31)**
  - G. The seventh day: God's rest (2:1–3)**



- II. The Generations of the Heavens and the Earth: The Entry of Man (2:4—4:26)**
  - A. The placement of man in the garden (2:4–17)
  - B. The creation of woman (2:18–25)
  - C. The sin of the primal couple (3:1–7)
  - D. The pronouncement of God’s judgment (3:8–24)
  - E. The introduction of the family of Adam (4:1–26)
- III. The Generations of Adam: The Chosen Line (5:1—6:8)**
  - A. The godly line of Seth (5:1–32)
  - B. The great wickedness of the earth (6:1–8)
- IV. The Generations of Noah: Judgment on the Earth (6:9—9:29)**
  - A. The pronouncement of God’s judgment (6:9—7:6)
  - B. The preservation of Noah by the ark (7:7—8:19)
  - C. The making of a covenant with Noah (8:20—9:29)
- V. The Generations of Noah’s Sons: The Spread of Mankind (10:1—11:9)**
  - A. The descendants of Noah (10:1–32)
  - B. God’s division of the nations (11:1–9)
- VI. The Generations of Shem: God’s Choice of Abram (11:10—25:11)**
  - A. The godly line of Shem (11:10–32)
  - B. God’s choice of Abram (12:1–9)
  - C. Abram’s journey from his homeland (12:10—14:24)
  - D. The miraculous birth of Isaac (15:1—21:7)
  - E. The extension of God’s grace to Isaac (21:8—25:11)
- VII. The Generations of Ishmael and Isaac: The Blessing of Abraham (25:12—35:29)**
  - A. The sons of Ishmael (25:12–18)
  - B. God’s choice of Jacob (25:19—28:22)
  - C. Jacob’s journey from his homeland (29:1—33:17)
  - D. Jacob’s sojourn in Canaan (33:18—35:29)
- VIII. The Generations of Esau: The Edomites (36:1–43)**
- IX. The Generations of Jacob: The Saving of Israel by Joseph (37:1—50:26)**
  - A. The conflict among the sons of Jacob (37:1—38:30)
  - B. Joseph’s slavery in Egypt (39:1—40:23)
  - C. Joseph’s rise to power (41:1–57)
  - D. Joseph’s encounter with his brothers (42:1—45:28)
  - E. Jacob’s journey with his household to Egypt (46:1—47:26)
  - F. Jacob’s blessing on his descendants (47:27—49:28)
  - G. The deaths of Jacob and Joseph in Egypt (49:29—50:26)

## The Beginning

**1** In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. <sup>2</sup>Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.

<sup>3</sup>And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light. <sup>4</sup>God saw that the light was good, and he 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 vault between the waters to separate water from water.” <sup>7</sup>So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. <sup>8</sup>God called the vault “sky.” And there was evening, and there was morning—the second day.

<sup>9</sup>And God said, “Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear.” And it was so. <sup>10</sup>God called the dry ground “land,” and the gathered waters he called “seas.” And God saw that it was good.

<sup>11</sup>Then God said, “Let the land produce vegetation: seed-bearing plants and trees on the land that bear fruit with seed in it, according to their various kinds.” And it was so. <sup>12</sup>The land produced vegetation: plants bearing seed according to their kinds and trees

bearing fruit with seed in it according to their kinds. 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 vault of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark sacred times, and days and years, <sup>15</sup>and let them be lights in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth.” And it was so. <sup>16</sup>God made two great lights—the greater light to govern the day and the lesser light to govern the night. He also made the stars. <sup>17</sup>God set them in the vault of the sky to give light on the earth, <sup>18</sup>to govern the day and the night, and to separate light from 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 water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the

I COULD WISH THAT ALL YOUNG  
PERSONS MIGHT BE EXHORTED TO . . .  
READ THE GREAT BOOK OF NATURE, WHEREIN  
THEY MAY SEE THE WISDOM AND POWER  
OF THE CREATOR, IN THE ORDER OF THE  
UNIVERSE, AND IN THE PRODUCTION  
AND PRESERVATION OF ALL THINGS.

Anne Baynard, 1697

**1:1** The first verse of Genesis reveals the book’s vital underlying assumption: God is the ultimate Creator of everything. The verb “created” (Heb. *bara’*, lit. “to make from nothing,” vv. 1,21,27; Ge 2:4) is used almost exclusively of divine activity (see Isa 43:15). The other verbs used for God’s creative activity are “made” (Heb. *’asah*, vv. 16,25–26; Ge 2:18; Heb. *banah*, lit. “built,” Ge 2:22) and “formed” (Heb. *yatsar*, Ge 2:7,19). The first chapter of Genesis uses the Hebrew word *Elohim* for God, emphasizing God’s character and power as the true and only God, the sole actor in creation. Though plural in form, the reference in number is to one and thus is used with a singular verb. This plural of majesty expresses honor and power.

**1:2** This formlessness describes an earth wrecked by divine judgment (Isa 34:11; Jer 4:23). Some have theorized that the creation of the heavens and earth described in verse 1 was destroyed in the judgment of Lucifer (see Isa 14; Eze 23). This “Gap Theory” assumes a stretch of time between verses 1 and 2; verse 2 then begins the story of the re-creation. More likely, Jeremiah and Ezekiel simply used the phrase as descriptive of utter desolation. According to this view, verse 1 describes

God’s first creative act, while verses 2–31 follow with a detailed description of his creative work with an interlude of unfinished business between verses 1 and 2. Here God is depicted as having a “Spirit” (Heb. *ruach*, lit. “wind” or “breath”) who acts as his agent in creation, although the Spirit is not revealed as a separate member of the Trinity until the NT (see Jn 3:1–21; 14:16–17,26; 16:5–14; 20:22). “Hovering” implies “brooding” in the sense of a mother bird nurturing life.

**1:5** The first day. The word “day” (Heb. *yom*) is somewhat ambiguous. It may refer to the 24-hour period of darkness and light (see Ex 12:18) or simply to a specific period of time: for example, the “day of the Lord” is a time of judgment (Isa 13:6). “Day” is further defined as “evening” and “morning” (see Ps 55:17).

**1:11** The order of creation demanded that reproduction only occur within certain limits. Although it is impossible to determine the exact boundaries of “kinds,” divisions existed between types of plants (v. 12), types of sea creatures and birds (v. 21), and different species of earth animals (v. 25). Man is sharply separated from animals (v. 26).

## Theological Foundations for Headship

THEOLOGICAL TRUTH	REFERENCE
The priority of Adam's creation.	Ge 2:7
The use of the name "Adam" for the entire race.	Ge 2:20
The investiture of Adam with authority prior to Eve's creation.	Ge 2:15
The assignment to the man of the responsibility for provision and protection.	Ge 2:15–17
The responsibility of the man in naming the animals.	Ge 2:20
The designation of the woman as the man's helper.	Ge 2:18,20
The naming of the woman by the man.	Ge 2:23; 3:20
The recognition of the man as leader and spokesman.	Ge 3:9,11

earth across the vault of the sky.”<sup>21</sup> So God created the great creatures of the sea and every living thing with which the water teems and that moves about in it, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good.<sup>22</sup> God blessed them and said, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the water in the seas, and let the birds increase 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 land produce living creatures according to their kinds: the livestock, the creatures that move along the ground, and the wild animals, each according to its kind.” And it was so.<sup>25</sup> God made the wild animals according to their kinds, the livestock according to their kinds, and all the creatures that move along the ground according to their kinds. And God saw that it was good.

<sup>26</sup> Then God said, “Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals,<sup>a</sup> and

over all the creatures that move along the ground.”

<sup>27</sup> So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.

<sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

<sup>29</sup> Then God said, “I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.<sup>30</sup> And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds in the sky and all the creatures that move along the ground—everything that has the breath of life in it—I give every green plant for food.” And it was so.

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

<sup>a</sup> 26 Probable reading of the original Hebrew text (see Syriac); Masoretic Text *the earth*

**1:26** The plurality used by God in reference to himself does not detract from his unity (see v. 1, note). “Mankind” (Heb. *Adam*) is obviously a generic reference to both man and woman. The text of Scripture does not use gender-inclusive language and often lets the masculine serve for both mascu-

line and feminine, as here (see also chart, Female Metaphors for God). The passage does not specify in what way mankind bears God's image. “Image” (representation) and “likeness” (similarity) are synonymous—both referring to something made after the pattern of something else.



## HEADSHIP

## SERVANT LEADERSHIP

Headship is a responsibility to assume with humility and not a right to demand with pride. As defined in Scripture, it is first assigned to the husband during the act of creation as part of the pre-fall perfection. The man was created first (Ge 2:7), and the woman was created as his helper so that he would not be alone in his dominion over the world (Ge 2:18). She was always part of the divine plan for fellowship, continuing the generations, and doing the work assigned by God (Ge 1:26–28). This is further verified when Adam is vested with the ultimate responsibility for disobedience because he received the directive concerning the forbidden fruit from God himself (Ge 2:15–17). Eve was only aware of the command through her husband.

The apostle Paul further clarified how headship was established as he reiterated the order of creation and stated that the woman was created for the man and not vice versa (1Co 11:2–12). Paul did not appeal to the curse on man or the fall as a reason for man's headship; rather, he appealed to the act of and purpose for the woman's creation before the fall.

Marriage was designed by God, before there was any creative activity, to be a picture of his own relationship with his people, then to pattern the relationship between Christ and his church. The fall introduced sin, and the relationship between husbands and wives was distorted: loving servant headship was replaced by tyranny and a desire for power or by an indifference and unwillingness to offer spiritual leadership.

In Biblical headship, the husband is assigned the primary responsibility for Christlike, servant leadership in the home (Eph 5:23–29). The wife is then expected to respond in honoring and affirming her husband's leadership (Eph 5:21–22,33; 1Pe 3:1–4). A balance between leadership and servanthood is necessary. Our Lord is a pattern for such leadership. Jesus' servanthood did not cancel his leadership. His servanthood defined leadership (Lk 22:26; Heb 13:17).

Headship should not merely prescribe who does what but rather should be a basis for moving forward the goals of a family in an orderly manner. The husband is not Christ; however, he should encourage his wife and children to give allegiance to and depend on Christ.

The husband is to lead his wife in a partnership that glorifies God. In loving headship, the husband humbles himself to meet the needs of his wife—loving, nourishing, and cherishing her as a treasure (Eph 5:25–29; 1Pe 3:7).

*See also Ge 3:1–20; Col 3:18–19; Heb 13:7; chart on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (Job 31); notes on Authority (Jn 19); Femininity (Ps 144); Husbands (Job 31; 2Co 6); Marriage (Ge 2; 2Sa 6; Pr 5; Hos 2; Am 3; 2Co 13; Heb 12); Masculinity (Ge 2); Patriarchy (Ge 28); Submission (1Pe 3); Wives (Pr 31)*

**2** Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

<sup>2</sup>By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the sev-

enth day he rested from all his work. <sup>3</sup>Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

**2:2** The word “Sabbath” (Heb. *shabbath*, lit. “cease”) is reserved for the seventh day, during which there is cessation from labor. The author of Hebrews links God's rest at creation with the gospel. Believing the gospel is entering his rest (Heb 4:3), and God's day of rest at creation is like the rest we have from our works when we believe in Jesus for salvation (Heb 4:10). God modeled this rest at creation and gives instructions to his children to do the same (Ex 20:8–11).

**2:3** Making the Lord's day holy is to separate it from the rest by dedicating it to God. God set this day apart after creation and reminds us through the Sabbath that we have rest from our works through him (Heb 4:1–10). Unlike the other six days of creation, the record of the seventh day is not recorded with the “evening and morning” formula, perhaps suggesting the continuing observance of the Sabbath throughout the history of Israel.



## MASCULINITY

## THE NATURE OF A MAN

God has gifted men with great capacities for responsible leadership. This can be channeled positively into the church and all walks of life through teaching, leading by moral example and supporting righteous causes (1Ti 2:8). Masculine power when sanctified can be used in a positive way, such as in the lives of great men through whom God provides leadership. Abraham showed us the trait of “adventure” with God by taking steps of faith where no man had gone (Ge 12–18). We see vision in Moses (Exodus) and faithfulness in Joshua, even when he was in the minority (Dt 31:6–8). David showed courage to fight against incredible odds (1Sa 17), and Nehemiah had initiative as a builder, organizing men to rebuild a wall and a city (Ne 1–8). By contrast, men like Nebuchadnezzar used their power for destruction and cruelty in war (2Ki 24:10–17). How wonderful that God balances this image of dominant masculine strength and power with the example of the Lord Jesus who was moved by compassion (Mt 20:34), loved little children (Mk 10:14), cried at the death of his friend (Jn 11:35), and gave his life so that others might live (Jn 3:16). The “man of integrity” (Job 31) finds a parallel in the “woman of strength” (Pr 31:10–31).

See also Eph 5:25–33; 6:4; chart on *Biblical Manhood and Womanhood* (Job 31); notes on *Biblical Equality* (Eph 5); *Fatherhood* (Eph 5); *Femininity* (Ps 144); *Husbands* (Job 31; 2Co 6)

**2:4** The account of the heavens and the earth. Some scholars have suggested that Genesis 1 and 2 are different creation stories placed side by side. The structure of chapter 2 does not support this theory. Verses 1–3 complete the recounting of the seven days of creation; verses 4–7 in Hebrew are one long sentence summarizing God’s creative activity. A more detailed description follows of the creation of the man (vv. 7:15–17), of the garden in which the man and woman would live (vv. 8–14), and of the woman who was to be his “helper” (vv. 18–25). The word “account” (lit. “generations”) is elsewhere used to introduce genealogical lines (Ge 5:1; 10:1). The name of the Creator (Heb. *Elohim*) is here joined to his covenant name (Heb. *Yahweh*) and translated “Lord God,” making clear that the great Sovereign of the universe and the covenant God of Israel are one.

**2:8** The garden in Eden (perhaps meaning “delight”). This original habitat (Heb. *gan*, lit. “a place hedged round” or “a

*Adam and Eve*

<sup>4</sup>This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.

<sup>5</sup>Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth<sup>a</sup> and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground, <sup>6</sup>but streams<sup>b</sup> came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground. <sup>7</sup>Then the LORD God formed a man<sup>c</sup> 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>Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. <sup>9</sup>The LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

<sup>10</sup>A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. <sup>11</sup>The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. <sup>12</sup>(The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin<sup>d</sup> and onyx are also there.) <sup>13</sup>The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush.<sup>e</sup> <sup>14</sup>The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. 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 work it and

<sup>a</sup>5 Or *land*; also in verse 6 <sup>b</sup>6 Or *mist* <sup>c</sup>7 The Hebrew for *man* (*adam*) sounds like and may be related to the Hebrew for *ground* (*adamah*); it is also the name *Adam* (see verse 20).

<sup>d</sup>12 Or *good*; *pearls* <sup>e</sup>13 Possibly southeast Mesopotamia

protected place”) was a delightful shelter, containing everything the man and woman needed: food (v. 9), beauty (v. 9), water (v. 10), fellowship with God (v. 16; see also Ge 3:8) and human companionship (Ge 2:22–25).

**2:11–14** Two rivers may have connected the Tigris and Euphrates, which run parallel. The Pishon (v. 11) and the Gihon (v. 13) may also have been tributaries of the Nile. Havilah was probably in Armenia or Mesopotamia. The name is preceded by the definite article in this verse, distinguishing it from the territory mentioned in Genesis 25:18 and 1 Samuel 15:7. Cush is traditionally Ethiopia or Nubia but may also refer to Kassite territory east of the Tigris. “Ashur” was probably a city.

**2:15** Labor was instituted before the fall, not as a result of the curse. “To work it” carries the idea of service; to “take care of it” (Heb. *shamar*) is to “guard” and “preserve” (a word used in reference to the cherubim who guard the tree of life, Ge 3:24).

## MARRIAGE

## GOD'S PLAN FOR MARRIAGE

God's plan for marriage is introduced here (Ge 2:24) and repeated in the Gospels (Mt 19:5) and in the New Testament letters (Eph 5:31). Marriage was perfect in its establishment: one man and one woman in a lifetime commitment.

God never intended for man to be alone (Ge 2:18). The very bone from which woman was crafted came from man (Ge 2:23). Woman was taken out of man and then presented to man in order to complete him. God created the man and the woman in his image (Ge 1:26) with physical and emotional needs that only another human being could meet (Ge 2:18).

No parents were in Eden, but God's plan extended to the future with his formula for oneness in marriage. The partners are to "leave" their parents and "be united" (KJV "cleave") in order to become one (Ge 2:24). They are to be willing to lay aside all that pertains to their old loyalties and lifestyles of separate goals and plans and be united to one another. This "uniting" refers to a strong, enduring bond—making one unit bound together by unconditional commitment, love and acceptance—resulting in a combined unit much stronger than either individual had been separately (Ecc 4:9–12).

No other human relationship, not with parent or child, is to supersede the bond between husband and wife. Marriage is a covenant commitment—a vow made to God and the partner, not only to love but also to be faithful and to endure in this lifelong exclusive relationship (Mt 19:6).

Marriage is a threefold miracle. It is a biological miracle by which two people actually become one flesh; it is a social miracle through which two families are grafted together; it is a spiritual miracle in that the marriage relationship pictures the union of Christ and his bride, the church (Eph 5:23–27). God clearly intended transparency and openness as part of his plan for the marriage relationship—vulnerability without shame (Ge 2:25).

*See also notes on Biblical Equality (Eph 5); Family (Ge 32; 1Sa 3; Ps 78; 127); Husbands (Job 31; 2Co 6); Marriage (2Sa 6; Pr 5; Hos 2; Am 3; 2Co 13; Heb 12); Wives (Pr 31)*

take care of it. <sup>16</sup>And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; <sup>17</sup>but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

<sup>18</sup>The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him."

<sup>19</sup>Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. <sup>20</sup>So the man gave names to all

the livestock, the birds in the sky and all the wild animals.

But for Adam<sup>a</sup> no suitable helper was found. <sup>21</sup>So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs<sup>b</sup> and then closed up the place with flesh. <sup>22</sup>Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib<sup>c</sup> he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

<sup>23</sup>The man said,

"This is now bone of my bones  
and flesh of my flesh;

<sup>a</sup> 20 Or the man    <sup>b</sup> 21 Or took part of the man's side

<sup>c</sup> 22 Or part

**2:18** The word for "helper" (Heb. *'ezer*) is a strong term. It can also mean to "nourish" or "sustain." The term is used for God himself throughout the Old Testament (see Dt 33:29; Ps 33:20; 70:5; 121:1–2). The woman was created in the image of God (Ge 1:27), and her creation as a "helper" to the man reflects

aspects of the character of God, particularly related to his nourishing, sustaining and protecting care of his children.

**2:19** The word "man" referred to man and woman collectively and revealed their origin (v. 7, *'adamah*, Heb., lit. "ground" or "earth"; see Ge 1–5).



## THE CREATION OF THE WOMAN

God identified himself as a “helper” (Heb. *‘ezer*) to Israel (Ex 18:4; Dt 33:7). The word does not imply inferiority. It describes function rather than worth. No one loses value in humbly assuming the role of helper. As a “helper” to the man, the woman became his partner spiritually in the overwhelming task of obedience to God and dominion over the earth. She was also to be a vital part of extending the generations (Ge 1:28). The woman, as ultimate friend to the man, would bring him comfort and fellowship (Ge 2:23–24). No one else could encourage and inspire him as she was created to do. The phrase “suitable to him” (Heb. *kenegdo*, lit. “corresponding to what is in front of him”) occurs only in verses 18 and 20, emphasizing the commonality of the man and the woman. Designed as the perfect counterpart for the man, the woman was neither inferior nor superior, but she was alike and equal to the man in her personhood while different and unique in her function.

Man and woman were both created in God’s image. Just as man was formed from earth, woman was formed from man. She corresponds perfectly to the man, the same flesh and blood, and in “the image of God” just as the man, equal to him in every way (Ge 1:27). By the creative act itself, she is inseparably linked to the man. The unity of the race is assured (Ge 1:27–28); the woman’s dignity and worth is affirmed (Ge 2:22); the foundation for Christian marriage is set forth in a memorable way (v. 24).

The woman was not an afterthought. The man was designed and created physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually with her coming creation planned and assured. In fact, God said that the man “alone” was not good; he needed the woman (v. 18). God made man from “the dust of the ground,” but he made the woman from “one of the man’s ribs” (Heb. *tsela’*, lit. “side”).

God uses Adam to express the uniqueness of the woman in a unique play on words. Even the language itself reflects the unity God planned between the man (Heb. *‘ish*) and the woman (Heb. *‘ishshah*). The expression “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament as an expression of blood relationship. Though Adam’s naming of the woman does not in itself require his authority over her, the act of assigning a name in the Oriental culture—even to now—is significant and in most cases does imply both authority and responsibility. Note, for example, the naming of the animals (vv. 19–20), Pharaoh’s renaming of Joseph (Ge 41:45), the renaming of Mattaniah by Nebuchadnezzar (2Ki 24:17), and the renaming of Daniel and his friends by Nebuchadnezzar’s eunuch (Da 1:6–7). The woman’s name is a recognition of her origins, in the same way that Adam’s name acknowledges his creation from the earth (Ge 2:19, note).

See also Ge 1:27; 24:67; chart on God’s Plan for Marriage; portrait of Eve (Ge 3)

she shall be called ‘woman,’  
for she was taken out of man.”

<sup>24</sup>That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.

<sup>25</sup>Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame.

### The Fall

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

<sup>2</sup>The woman said to the serpent, “We may

**2:24** The marriage covenant has three parts (see chart, God’s Plan for Marriage):

- 1) to leave father and mother, a reference to the wedding ceremony or time of public commitment,
- 2) to be “united,” suggesting tender affection and faithful commitment in a permanent relationship of growing love, and

3) to “become one flesh” in physical union, which notes the deepest and most exclusive intimacy.

The Hebrew verbs translated here as “leaves” and “is united” are used elsewhere in Scripture to describe covenant relationships (see Dt 4:4; Jer 1:16).

**3:1** Satan chose to disguise himself as a “crafty” (lit. “shrewd” or “clever”) creature. The text does not comment on why the



## THE FALL OF CREATION

### REJECTION OF THE CREATOR'S PLAN

The sentences passed on man and woman at the time of the fall affected their relationships to God, nature, and each other. The judgment that followed is not necessarily related to the nature of the sin committed. However tragic and far-reaching the consequences, sin does not force the Creator to cancel his plan. Rather, sin perverts and hinders our response to his plan. As a result of the fall, pain has been added to childbirth, tyranny to headship, rebellion to submission, and problems to work, as well as separation to the fellowship of union.

Of particular interest to women is the twofold judgment of Genesis 3:16. Women were assigned “pains in childbearing.” Childbearing itself is not the judgment. Children are a heritage and reward from the Lord (Ps 127:3), and giving birth is a woman’s opportunity to link hands with the Creator to continue the generations (Ge 1:28). Imagining a pain-free childbirth experience is difficult, but this is apparently the original plan of the Creator.

The second part of the judgment—“your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”—described the painful consequences of sin in the male-female relationship. Both the man and woman chose to ignore the Creator’s plan and do things their own way. The complementary roles of man and woman, which had originally functioned to produce unity and harmony, would henceforth be a source of friction. God’s plan did not change. However, woman would have a sin tendency to disrespect man’s role of leadership, and man in his sinfulness would tend to abuse his authority and even crush the woman.

Christian men and women are given clear principles to counteract these effects of sin and are reminded of their equality as persons (1Pe 3:7) and of the complementary, harmonious relationship for which they were created (Eph 5:21–33; Col 3:18–19).

*See also notes on Biblical Equality (Eph 5); Marriage (Ge 2; 2Sa 6; Pr 5; Hos 2; Am 3; 2Co 13; Heb 12); Submission (1Pe 3)*

eat fruit from the trees in the garden, <sup>3</sup>but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”

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

<sup>6</sup>When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wis-

dom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

<sup>8</sup>Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. <sup>9</sup>But the LORD God called to the man, “Where are you?”

serpent approached the woman—perhaps because she, unlike Adam, did not receive this prohibition directly from God (see Ge 2:16–17).

**3:3** Satan began his conversation with the woman by questioning God (v. 1). The woman distorted God’s command by adding her own interpretation, “and you must not touch it, or you will die” (v. 3). Either she was exaggerating in hopes of making God’s directive so restrictive as to appear unjust, or Adam did not properly convey the prohibition to her.

**3:5** The serpent contradicted God, using the phrasing of the

divine command (v. 4). The temptation to disobedience involved gaining knowledge without first learning obedience. Ultimately, every temptation is to go your own way instead of God’s way (Pr 14:12; 22:6, note).

**3:6** The tree is pleasing to the eye, good for food, and desirable for gaining wisdom. Both the man and the woman sinned through listening to another created being rather than to God (see Jas 1:15; charts, The Results of Sin; Temptation: The Analysis of a Successful Trap).



## THE CURSE

The curse is not just a judgment rendered but is also an explanation of the relationship between the man and the woman after the fall. Alienation is now present between the man and the woman, and between the couple and God, and that means a distortion of God's plan, but there is no indication in the text that he has eliminated the headship of the man in marriage. God does not make his plans dependent upon perfect people or the right circumstances. The curse offers a vivid description of the conditions that exist in a fallen world: pain in childbirth, abuse of headship, and defiance rather than submission. Childbirth could not be a curse because that has always been God's plan for producing the next generation. Nevertheless, pain and suffering now accompany the experience. Work is not a curse since that, too, was part of the Creator's plan. The man needed a helper for his responsibilities of dominion. Sin made the work difficult. Some suggest that the woman assumed leadership and ignored the directive that came to her through her husband (Ge 3:6), and the man listened to his wife, abandoning his own responsibility for leadership (v. 17). In any case, both the woman and the man determined to go their own ways rather than going God's way, and this act of disobedience is what broke their fellowship with God.

*See also Pr 22:6, note; charts on The Results of Sin; Theological Foundations for Headship; Role Relationship Between Men and Women; note on Headship (Ge 1)*

<sup>10</sup>He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid."

<sup>11</sup>And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?"

<sup>12</sup>The man said, "The woman you put here with me — she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it."

<sup>13</sup>Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?"

The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate."

<sup>14</sup>So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this,

"Cursed are you above all livestock  
and all wild animals!

You will crawl on your belly  
and you will eat dust  
all the days of your life.

<sup>15</sup>And I will put enmity  
between you and the woman,  
and between your offspring<sup>a</sup> and hers;  
he will crush<sup>b</sup> your head,  
and you will strike his heel."

<sup>16</sup>To the woman he said,

"I will make your pains in childbearing  
very severe;  
with painful labor you will give birth to  
children.

Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you."

<sup>17</sup>To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,'

<sup>a</sup><sub>15</sub> Or seed      <sup>b</sup><sub>15</sub> Or strike

**3:12** Adam's response indicates his refusal to take responsibility for his own actions. The woman copied this typical response to sin (v. 13).

**3:14** God's judgment on the serpent does not distinguish between the earthly creature and Satan, who is later revealed as the animal's motivating intelligence (Rev 12:9). The serpent is charming but deadly (Nu 21:6; Ecc 10:11) and represents opposition to God (Job 26:13; Isa 27:1).

**3:15** The first prophecy of the coming of the Messiah is known as the *protevangeliu*m (Lat., lit. "the first preaching of the gospel"). In the OT, "offspring" is used to refer both to individual offspring and to descendants in general. The woman plays a key role not only because she was approached and entrapped by Satan but also because she is "the mother of all the living" (v. 20), for through her the Savior would come (Gal 4:4).

Whereas in human reproduction the sperm is delivered to the womb of the woman by the man, in the miraculous conception of Jesus the Messiah, the offspring came to the woman as a result of the Holy Spirit's overshadowing her (Lk 1:35; see Isa 7, The Virgin Birth). A messianic interpretation is justified since the crushing of the serpent's head implies a mortal wound. On the other hand, the striking of the "heel" is not fatal, a reference ultimately to the Savior's sufferings, which were only preparatory to his victorious resurrection (see Isa 53:5).

**3:16** The woman's judgment. Unlike his words to the serpent and the man, God did not use the verb "cursed" (Heb. *rur*) in passing judgment on the woman. The first part of the judgment can also be translated "your sorrow in conception"; the blessing of fertility still exists but has been distorted. The Hebrew word for "sorrow" is a form of the word translated "pain"

## Eve: THE MOTHER OF ALL LIVING

Adam was given supervision over the creation, but God declared that for him to live his life alone was not good. From the man's rib God created a woman and presented her as a wife to Adam, climaxing his creative work (Ge 2:18–24). Eve was not an afterthought or happenstance but an indispensable part of God's plan. Both Adam and Eve, made "in the image of God," stood as his representatives in the world to care for all he put under their dominion.

Purity and innocence were shattered, however, when the serpent entered the scene. Eve chose to believe Satan's lie. She was free to put her will above God's will, and she did. When she offered the fruit to her husband, he, too, disobeyed. In the New Testament, Paul clarified their actions, saying that Eve was deceived; whereas Adam ate with full knowledge of wrongdoing (2Co 11:3; 1Ti 2:14). Then, filled with guilt, the couple hid from God, fashioning fig leaf coverings to hide their shame. Not only had they broken their relationship with God, but also they had broken their relationship with one another and with all the generations to come and even with the world and nature over which they were to rule.

God cursed the serpent and the ground for man's sake, and he prophesied sorrow, toil and death for the first couple. Pain for the woman would come in giving birth and rearing children and in her relationship to her husband. She would resist his leadership just as his rule over her would be distorted (Ge 3:16).

Evicted from her lovely home, Eve conceived and bore two sons, although her joy at their birth was changed by the heartache predicted by God. Cain murdered his brother in defiance of God's command concerning sacrifices, and God banished him. Eve was left childless until God's grace once again appeared in the form of another son, Seth, who became an ancestor of the Messiah.

Eve stands as an archetype of womanhood. Although created in God's image (Ge 1:27), she exercised her will to disobey the Creator (Ge 3:6), daring to challenge his authority. Disobedience was not in itself a motive but presupposed the motive. Her temptation was not merely to disobey but ultimately to have her own way or to get possession of what she wanted. As her daughter, every woman bears her likeness. Eve voices an early warning to every woman to follow the path of obedience and a resounding note of hope for women when they fail; she encountered God's justice, but she also experienced his grace (see Ro 5:18–19).

*See also Ge 2:18—4:25; 2Co 11:3; 1Ti 2:13–14; notes on Marriage (Ge 2; 2Sa 6; Pr 5; Hos 2; Am 3; 2Co 13; Heb 12); Motherhood (1Sa 1; Isa 49; Eze 16); Obedience (Phm)*

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

<sup>18</sup>It will produce thorns and thistles for  
you,  
and you will eat the plants of the  
field.

<sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your brow  
you will eat your food

until you return to the ground,  
since from it you were taken;  
for dust you are  
and to dust you will return.”

<sup>20</sup>Adam<sup>a</sup> named his wife Eve,<sup>b</sup> because she  
would become the mother of all the living.

<sup>21</sup>The LORD God made garments of skin  
for Adam and his wife and clothed them.

<sup>a</sup>20 Or *The man*    <sup>b</sup>20 Eve probably means *living*.

in this verse, implying hard labor and appearing again as “toil” (v. 17). The word “desire” (Heb. *teshuqah*) appears only twice more in the OT (Ge 4:7, where sin “desires” Cain; SS 7:10, where the man's longing for his beloved is described).

**3:20** Adam's naming of Eve (Heb., lit. “life” or “living”) was an act of faith in God's promise (v. 15). After the sentence of

death, before any children are born, Adam affirmed the woman and her role in producing future generations, providing a counterbalance of hope.

**3:21** Garments of skin. The contrast is to the inadequate coverings of verse 7. God, not man, is able to cover shame and guilt. This reference is often seen as a prefigurement of

## The Covenants of Genesis

COVENANT	REFERENCE	TERMS
Edenic	Ge 2:15–17	<i>GOD:</i> Provides for all man's needs. <i>HUMANKIND:</i> Forbidden to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil.
Adamic	Ge 3:14–21	<i>GOD:</i> Gives promise of the Messiah. <i>HUMANKIND:</i> No requirements, but humanity will suffer consequences of sin until coming of the Messiah.
Noahic	Ge 9:1–19	<i>GOD:</i> Will never flood the earth again. <i>HUMANKIND:</i> No requirements. <i>SIGN:</i> Rainbow (vv. 12,13).
Abrahamic	Ge 15:3–21	<i>GOD:</i> Will make a mighty nation of Abraham's descendants and give them the land of Canaan. <i>ABRAHAM:</i> Will walk before God and be blameless (Ge 17:1,2). <i>SIGN:</i> Circumcision (Ge 17:10–14).

ground—so they can multiply on the earth and be fruitful and increase in number on it.”

<sup>18</sup>So Noah came out, together with his sons and his wife and his sons' wives. <sup>19</sup>All the animals and all the creatures that move along the ground and all the birds—everything that moves on land—came out of the ark, one kind after another.

<sup>20</sup>Then Noah built an altar to the LORD and, taking some of all the clean animals and clean birds, he sacrificed burnt offerings on it. <sup>21</sup>The LORD smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: “Never again will I curse the ground because of humans, even though<sup>a</sup> every inclination of the human heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done.

<sup>22</sup>“As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease.”

### God's Covenant With Noah

**9** Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. <sup>2</sup>The fear and dread of you will fall on all the beasts of the earth, and on all the birds in the sky, on every creature that moves along the ground, and on all the fish in the sea; they are given into your hands. <sup>3</sup>Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

<sup>4</sup>“But you must not eat meat that has its lifeblood still in it. <sup>5</sup>And for your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each human being, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of another human being.

<sup>6</sup>“Whoever sheds human blood, by humans shall their blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made mankind.

<sup>a</sup> <sup>21</sup> Or *humans, for*

**8:20** Noah's altar is the first mentioned in Scripture. Noah, acting as did Adam, is given the task of repopulating a re-created earth. His first act is to worship God. Noah's sacrifice was a burnt offering in which the entire animal was consumed. In the covenant relationship between God and man, the primary purpose of this whole burnt offering was atonement (Lev 1:4), symbolizing the complete consecration of the worshiper to God (see chart, The Offerings of the Lord).

**8:21** An aroma pleasing to God is associated with burnt offerings (Lev 1:9,13) and indicates God's acceptance of the aton-

ing sacrifice. Although God recognized that the judgment of the flood had not changed individual hearts, he promised to exercise mercy. Thus, this is the first example of an OT sacrifice as propitiation for sin (i.e., satisfaction for the righteousness of God).

**9:5** Because the man and woman are made in God's image (v. 6), their lives belong to God. The divine image was not destroyed by the fall. God himself instituted the penalty of death for murder (v. 5), and civil authorities are to execute that penalty (v. 6).



## INFERTILITY

### CHILDLESS IS NOT LESS

Most couples anticipate children after marriage. Indeed, children are a part of God's plan for a man and woman united in marriage since God instructed Adam and Eve to "be fruitful and increase in number" (Ge 1:28). Scripture teaches that children are a heritage from the Lord, a reward from God (Ps 127:3–5). Therefore, it can become very confusing and disconcerting to a married couple when children are not conceived as planned or desired. This was especially true in Bible times.

Barrenness is not merely a personal pain in the Bible. Children were a sign of material blessing (Ps 127:3–5). They provided caregivers for older family members. Offspring were a sign of spiritual blessing: the "family line" continued because there were family representatives in the land of the living. A person lived on through her descendants. Barrenness, then, carried with it a sense of termination.

Infertility is defined by the medical community as the inability to achieve pregnancy after a year or more of regular sexual relations without contraception or the inability to carry repeated pregnancies to live birth. About 15 percent of all married couples today are infertile. Although there are numerous causes of infertility in women and men, medical advances have made it possible to diagnose and treat many of them. Still, some couples remain childless despite years of treatment. A couple's decision to manage the timing of conception, pursue fertility measures, or adopt a child is a responsibility they share before God, the Author of life. "Childless" is not "less" if that is God's perfect will for a couple. Infertile couples have not been abandoned by God.

Couples who face infertility can experience a wide range of emotions. Like Sarai (Ge 11:30), Rachel (Ge 30:1), Hannah (1Sa 1:2), and Elizabeth (Lk 1:36), a childless woman often feels a wide range of emotions: disappointment, helplessness, anger, self-pity, grief, low self-esteem or guilt. Regardless of how infertility impacts the couple, the personal pain is often great. Fellow Christians can help heal this pain by offering encouragement and understanding, by respecting the couple's efforts to explore their options and by talking freely about infertility when the subject is introduced. Most importantly, the church needs to accept childless couples and encourage them to discover and pursue outlets for ministry.

God does not give children to every couple. God may have other blessings in store for the childless. Though we can only speculate as to their family lives, none of these notable women in the Bible are associated with the bearing of children: Miriam, Esther, Priscilla, Mary and Martha, and Mary Magdalene. Once a woman realizes that the rearing of children is not the only responsibility God assigns to Christian couples, she often finds true joy in embracing her personal assignment from God.

*See also Ge 16:1–2; Ps 113:9; Mt 18:3; Lk 2:36–38; notes on Bitterness (Heb 12); Marriage (Ge 2; 2Sa 6; Pr 5; Hos 2; Am 3; 2Co 13; Heb 12); Miscarriage (Ex 21); Motherhood (1Sa 1; Isa 49; Eze 16); Pregnancy (Jdg 13); Self-Esteem (2Co 10); Pain (Job 7); portraits of Hannah (1Sa 1); Rachel (Ge 29); Sarai (Ge 11); Elizabeth (Lk 1:5–25)*

same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. <sup>7</sup>Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other."

<sup>8</sup>So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped build-

ing the city. <sup>9</sup>That is why it was called Babel<sup>a</sup>—because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

<sup>a</sup> <sup>9</sup> That is, Babylon; *Babel* sounds like the Hebrew for *confused*.

## Sarai (Sarah) : A SUBMISSIVE WIFE

Sarah appears in the Bible as God's paragon of a married woman. Two notable characteristics mark her life: beauty and barrenness. Because of her beauty, even pagan rulers desired her; yet her infertility caused deep domestic humiliation and even marital dissension. Sarah undoubtedly had beauty, brilliance and creativity, but the quality that implants her in our memories and sets her apart is her unique and unequivocal devotion toward her husband Abraham. She shared not only her husband's challenges and heartaches but also his dreams and blessings. She did not waver; she stood by his side through good choices and bad decisions, adversities and blessings, in youth and old age. She is a fine example of a woman who loved her husband unconditionally and tenaciously.

More space is devoted to Sarah than to any other woman of the Bible. An entire chapter discusses her death and burial (Ge 23). Both her husband and son grieved deeply when she died (Ge 23:2; 24:67).

Two New Testament citations commend Sarah (Heb 11:11; 1Pe 3:6); she is mentioned in Romans as well (Ro 4:19; 9:9); and she is used to illustrate the differences between the bonded and free (Gal 4:21–31). She is styled as one of “the holy women” of old because she entrusted to her husband her willing cooperation. From the narrative it is apparent that Sarah was strong willed; yet she chose to submit to Abraham, an attitude which God commended. She was consistently identified as Abraham's wife, reinforcing the fact that God viewed the pair as one flesh. Together they were asked to believe that God would give them a son.

Sarah is the only wife named in the heroes of the faith (Heb 11:11). Sarah's mothering experience fluctuated from emotions of skepticism, embarrassment, envy, and cruel recrimination to intense exhilaration and joy. Even though Sarah fell into sin, God faithfully kept his promise that she would be “the mother of nations” (Ge 17:16).

Perhaps more than any other Biblical woman, Sarah stands to teach women two supreme characteristics of godly womanhood: humble submission to their husbands in marriage and fervent commitment to nurturing the next generation.

See also Ge 11:29—23:20; Isa 51:2; Ro 4:19; 9:9; Gal 4:21–31; Heb 11:11; 1Pe 3:5–6; notes on Infertility (Ge 11); Submission (1Pe 3); Wives (Pr 31)

### From Shem to Abram

<sup>10</sup>This is the account of Shem's family line.

Two years after the flood, when Shem was 100 years old, he became the father<sup>a</sup> of Arphaxad. <sup>11</sup>And after he became the father of Arphaxad, Shem lived 500 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>12</sup>When Arphaxad had lived 35 years, he became the father of Shelah. <sup>13</sup>And after he became the father of Shelah, Arphaxad lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>14</sup>When Shelah had lived 30 years, he became the father of Eber. <sup>15</sup>And after he be-

came the father of Eber, Shelah lived 403 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>16</sup>When Eber had lived 34 years, he became the father of Peleg. <sup>17</sup>And after he became the father of Peleg, Eber lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters.

<sup>18</sup>When Peleg had lived 30 years, he became the father of Reu. <sup>19</sup>And after he be-

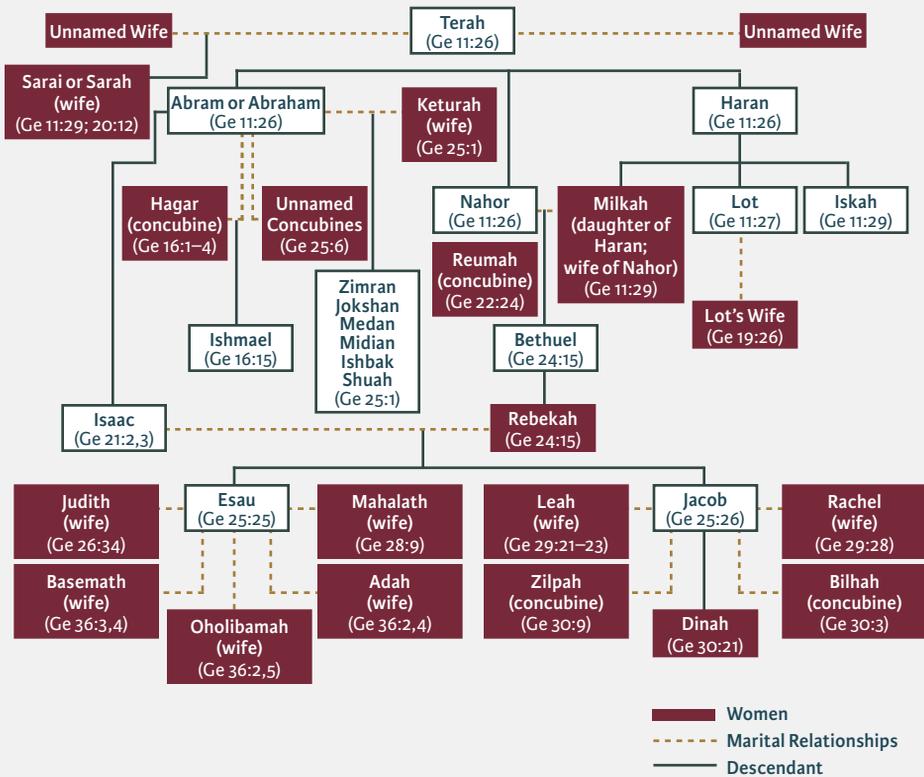
<sup>a</sup> <sup>10</sup> Father may mean ancestor; also in verses 11–25.

<sup>b</sup> <sup>12,13</sup> Hebrew; Septuagint (see also Luke 3:35, 36 and note at Gen. 10:24) 35 years, he became the father of Cainan. <sup>13</sup>And after he became the father of Cainan, Arphaxad lived 430 years and had other sons and daughters, and then he died. When Cainan had lived 130 years, he became the father of Shelah. And after he became the father of Shelah, Cainan lived 330 years and had other sons and daughters

**11:10** The genealogy of Shem is repeated after the story of Babel to emphasize God's preservation of a godly line in the midst of wickedness. The genealogy is presented in multiples of seven, with the seventh places occupied by men of partic-

ular importance. From Adam to Enoch are seven generations; from Enoch to Eber, ancestor of the Hebrews, are seven; and from Eber to Abram are seven generations.

## The Family Tree of Abraham



altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

<sup>5</sup>Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. <sup>6</sup>But the land could not support them while they stayed together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. <sup>7</sup>And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's. The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.

<sup>8</sup>So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. <sup>9</sup>Is not the whole land before you? Let's

part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

<sup>10</sup>Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) <sup>11</sup>So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: <sup>12</sup>Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. <sup>13</sup>Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

**13:9** Abram's concession. By allowing Lot first choice of land, Abram put aside his own right as head of the family. This appears to be an act of faith in God's promise and stands in contrast to his earlier actions based on fear (Ge 12:7,10-20).

**13:13** Sodom, like Zoar, probably lay at the southern end of the Dead Sea and may now be underwater. Sodom was a center of homosexuality (Ge 19:5), a sin directly against *Yahweh* (see Ge 19:5; Lev 18, Homosexuality).

## Rebekah : A WOMAN OF FALTERING FAITH

Rebekah would certainly rank among the most appealing of the young women in Scripture. She is pictured as chaste and beautiful (Ge 24:16), courteous and helpful (v. 18), industrious (vv. 19–20), hospitable (v. 25), as well as responsive and trusting (v. 58). She was chosen as the intended bride for Isaac.

Family ties were obviously close, for Rebekah's first response was to tell the women in her household all about her encounter at the well (v. 28). For a girl to be chosen for marriage to a wealthy relative was indeed considered a blessing of God. Her father and brother knew also that this was from God (v. 50), but the choice to leave home was hers to make, reflecting the autonomy that young women in her culture enjoyed (vv. 57–58).

Rebekah volunteered a lowly service (v. 19), which opened to her a lofty destiny as God worked his plan for her life through her mundane daily responsibilities. Her courage and faith motivated her to venture from the known and familiar (family and friends) to the unknown (a new life in a strange land).

God rewarded Rebekah's faithfulness with a monogamous marriage, which began with romance and loving affection (v. 67; Ge 26:8), and, in answer to Isaac's prayer for his wife's fertility, God removed her barrenness with the birth of twins, Esau and Jacob (Ge 25:21).

In later years, Rebekah's weakness became clear at two points: the lack of reverence and respect for her husband and his leadership and the exhibition of favoritism concerning her sons, which brought into the home rivalry, deceit and contention (Ge 25:28; see Pr 28, Favoritism). Rebekah's unwavering faith of her youth faltered, and she took into her own hands the direction of the future of her sons. Perhaps her own discernment of her sons—that is, recognizing Esau as worldly and adventuresome (Ge 26:34–35) and Jacob as having more potential for spiritual sensitivity (Ge 25:31)—or her own affinity toward one son over the other (Ge 25:28) or even a strong faith in God's revealed plan (Ge 25:23) motivated her own deceitful acts.

In any case, the deceiving of her husband was without excuse, and her poor example to her sons was a far-reaching tragedy (Ge 27:12–13). Even if her motive was pure, her action was wrong. She paid a bitter price in living out her final years in separation from the son whose presence she desired, in alienation from the son who would ever remember his mother's deception toward him, and in broken fellowship from a husband who had loved her devotedly.

*See also Ge 25:19—27:46; notes on Favoritism (Pr 28); Marriage (2Sa 6)*

a beka<sup>a</sup> and two gold bracelets weighing ten shekels.<sup>b</sup> <sup>23</sup>Then he asked, “Whose daughter are you? Please tell me, is there room in your father's house for us to spend the night?”

<sup>24</sup>She answered him, “I am the daughter of Bethuel, the son that Milkah bore to Nahor.”

<sup>25</sup>And she added, “We have plenty of straw and fodder, as well as room for you to spend the night.”

<sup>26</sup>Then the man bowed down and worshiped the LORD, <sup>27</sup>saying, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of my master Abraham, who has not abandoned his kindness and faithfulness to my master. As for me, the LORD has led me on the journey to the house of my master's relatives.”

<sup>28</sup>The young woman ran and told her mother's household about these things.

<sup>29</sup>Now Rebekah had a brother named Laban, and he hurried out to the man at the spring.

<sup>30</sup>As soon as he had seen the nose ring, and the bracelets on his sister's arms, and had heard Rebekah tell what the man said to her, he went out to the man and found him standing by the camels near the spring. <sup>31</sup>“Come, you who are blessed by the LORD,” he said. “Why are you standing out here? I have prepared the house and a place for the camels.”

<sup>32</sup>So the man went to the house, and the camels were unloaded. Straw and fodder were brought for the camels, and water for him and his men to wash their feet. <sup>33</sup>Then food was set before him, but he said, “I will not eat until I have told you what I have to say.”

<sup>a</sup> <sup>22</sup> That is, about 1/5 ounce or about 5.7 grams

<sup>b</sup> <sup>22</sup> That is, about 4 ounces or about 115 grams



# Esther

## AUTHOR

Although no one knows who wrote the book of Esther, it was apparently written by a Jew who was familiar with Susa, the royal palace, and Persian customs. The Jewish Talmud attributes Esther to the “men of the Great Synagogue,” anonymous teachers who lived in the period between the last prophets and the earliest rabbinic scholars. Early church fathers, such as Clement of Alexandria, as well as Jewish authorities like Josephus, ascribed the book to Mordecai.

## DATE

The date of the book’s composition is also unknown. The events described in the story occurred during the reign of the Persian king Xerxes, whose name was rendered in Greek histories as Xerxes and who reigned 486–465 BC. Although some scholars date its composition as late as the first century BC, there is evidence to indicate the book was written shortly after the events it narrates and before the Persian Empire fell to Alexander the Great in 331 BC. The Hebrew of Esther is similar to that of the books of Chronicles and Daniel, which suggests that these three books were composed during the same period (see chart, Timeline for Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther). The author’s knowledge of Persian court life and customs and the book’s linguistic evidence point to the late fifth century BC.

## BACKGROUND

### *Setting*

The story of Esther occurs during the Achaemenid period of Biblical history (559–330 BC) in the court of the Persian king Xerxes who ruled Persia from 486–465 BC. This places the events of the story at least fifty years after the decree of Cyrus (538 BC), which announced that the exiled Jews could return to Jerusalem, and about twenty-five years before Ezra’s return to Jerusalem.

Esther and Mordecai were living in the royal city of Susa (Heb. *Shushan*). Susa had been an important political, cultural and religious center for centuries. At the time of Esther, the city was one of the capital cities of a vast empire stretching from what is now India in the east to Turkey and Ethiopia in the west. The ruins of Susa are in Iran near its border with Iraq.



### *Purpose*

As traditionally understood, the purpose of the book is to explain the origin of the Jewish holiday of Purim as a celebration of deliverance. From the Second Temple Period until now, the Megillat Esther (Heb., lit. “scroll of Esther”) in its entirety is read in the assemblies of the Jews as the central rite of the observance of Purim. Although women are normally exempt from mandatory attendance at worship, they are required to be present for the reading of Esther.

The story has provided encouragement and hope for the Jews, who from that day until this, like Esther and Mordecai, have lived far from Jerusalem. The story of Esther is similar to that of Joseph in the court of the Egyptian pharaoh (see Ge 37–50) and of Daniel in the court at Babylon (see Da 1–2). Each of these stories is about a Jew who was delivered from a death plot and rose to a high position in a pagan government.

The book as Christian Scripture is part of God's saving work in history that culminated in the coming of Jesus the Messiah. It reminds Christians that God is never absent, even though those living in a world hostile to the Christian faith may not always be aware of his presence.

### *Audience*

The events recorded concern the well-being of the Jews in Persia. Certainly Jews were the original audience, but whether the book was written for the Jews living in Persia or for Jews facing a similar situation elsewhere at another time is uncertain.

The book has long been included in the canon of Scripture for both Jews and Christians. Its message is relevant to readers in every generation.

### *Literary Characteristics*

The book of Esther is a prose account of an event in the life of the Jewish people who lived under Persian rule. The opening words of the book (Heb. *wyhy*, lit. “This is what happened”) are also used to open the historical books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. The reference to “the book of the annals of the kings of Media and Persia” implies that additional historical information about Mordecai was once available (Est 10:2).

Such features suggest that the author intended the story to be taken as history. Irony and humor are literary features appropriately used to dramatize historical events.

## THEMES

A most conspicuous feature of the book of Esther is the complete absence of any mention of God, the temple, Jerusalem, or the law. In this sense, it appears to be a completely secular book, which relates its story on the purely human plane of history. Nevertheless, this book is about God's chosen people, and it appears in both the Jewish and Christian canon of Scripture. Therefore, the book must be understood in the canonical context of redemptive history.



The major theme of the book is God's sovereign power to work, even through pagans, in order to preserve and deliver his people. The enemies of God's people, portrayed possibly as Amalekites in the book of Esther, cannot prevail over his purposes, even when God himself seems strangely absent (see Est 3:1).

The name of the holiday, Purim (or the Festival of Lots), which celebrates this great deliverance, commemorates the theme that the destiny of God's people will not be determined by anything other than the purposes of God himself.

## OUTLINE

- I. The Ascension of Esther to the Throne of Persia (1:1—2:18)**
  - A. A banquet given by the king (1:1—22)**
    1. Queen Vashti's scandal (1:1—12)
    2. Queen Vashti's dethronement (1:13—22)
  - B. The selection of a new queen (2:1—18)**
    1. The search for candidates (2:1—8)
    2. The choosing of Esther (2:9—18)
- II. The Conflict Between Mordecai and Haman (2:19—3:6)**
  - A. An assassination attempt foiled by Mordecai (2:19—23)**
  - B. Mordecai's refusal to bow to Haman (3:1—6)**
- III. Haman's Evil Plan to Annihilate the Jews (3:7—7:6)**
  - A. Haman's plot to destroy the Jews (3:7—15)**
  - B. Mordecai's appeal to Esther for help (4:1—5:8)**
    1. Queen Esther's plan (4:1—17)
    2. Queen Esther's banquet (5:1—8)
  - C. Haman's plot to kill Mordecai (5:9—14)**
  - D. The king's honoring of Mordecai (6:1—14)**
  - E. Queen Esther's revelation of Haman's plot (7:1—6)**
- IV. The Reversal of Haman's Plot (7:7—9:17)**
  - A. The death of Haman (7:7—10)**
  - B. Queen Esther's saving of the Jews (8:1—9:4)**
    1. A new decree (8:1—14)
    2. The rejoicing of the Jews (8:15—9:4)
  - C. The Jews' destruction of their enemies (9:5—17)**
- V. The Origin of Purim (9:18—10:3)**
  - A. The establishment of the Feast of Purim (9:18—28)**
  - B. The decree of Queen Esther (9:29—32)**
  - C. The advancement of Mordecai (10:1—3)**

## PERSIAN EMPIRE



he spoke with the wise men who understood the times <sup>14</sup>and were closest to the king — Karshena, Shethar, Admatha, Tarshish, Meres, Marsena and Memukan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

<sup>15</sup>“According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?” he asked. “She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her.”

<sup>16</sup>Then Memukan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, “Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. <sup>17</sup>For the queen’s conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, ‘King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.’ <sup>18</sup>This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who

have heard about the queen’s conduct will respond to all the king’s nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

<sup>19</sup>“Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. <sup>20</sup>Then when the king’s edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest.”

<sup>21</sup>The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memukan proposed. <sup>22</sup>He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in their own language, proclaiming that every man should be ruler over his own household, using his native tongue.

**1:22** Many languages were spoken such as Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian dialects, as well as Assyrian, Arabic, and Indo-European dialects. Aramaic was the lingua franca used for trade and diplomacy across the empire. Inscriptions

from the reign of Xerxes are mostly trilingual, in Old Persian, Babylonian (Akkadian), and Elamite. Throughout the empire there was an excellent postal system using horses and riders in relays (see Est 8:10).

## Esther : A COURAGEOUS QUEEN

How could a modern-day woman imagine the fear and insecurity that would plague Queen Esther, who was chosen solely on the basis of her beauty and appeal to the king? She was no princess with the clout of her father's kingdom to enhance her position in the court. When she was not summoned for thirty days, she did not know if the king had found someone more pleasing or if she was merely losing her influence.

As a displaced, orphaned Jewess, Esther had been reared by Mordecai, an older relative. Whether at his bidding, by force of evil officials or by her own choice, she had entered the beauty contest and won. Now Mordecai's sources informed Esther that the Jewish people were scheduled for extinction by the wicked Haman, a self-promoter who had elevated himself to vice-regent, second only to the monarch, King Xerxes. Faced with a desperate challenge to survival, Esther pondered Mordecai's question: "Who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" (Est 4:14). Three principles are embodied in his advice:

- 1) No place of privilege can ever exempt a person from responsibility to respond to God's call.
- 2) Although a situation may look hopeless, God is never helpless.
- 3) A God-given opportunity is an individual's received privilege.

Courageously Esther formulated her plan, even if it meant dying in the effort. In the court she had been taught to prepare herself physically, but she had also learned to prepare herself spiritually, as was evidenced by her fasting (Est 4:16; 9:31). According to Near Eastern tradition, with patience the queen invited Xerxes and Haman to a pair of banquets. Then, seizing the right moment, she presented her case, not questioning the king's justice or righteousness but humbly asking for mercy for herself and her people.

Divine guidance seemingly directed Esther's thoughts, words and actions. She had won the respect and the ear of her royal husband. In response, he assigned to her the task of rewriting the law (see Est 9:29), and she became quite properly the heroine of her people. To every woman she is a reminder of God's sovereignty. God used her beauty, her intelligence and perhaps even her respectful attitude toward her husband, as well as her remarkable, fearless faith to accomplish his will. Through her obedience, Esther became a true "star" (the meaning of her Persian name) in the kingdom.

*See also notes on Heroines (Heb 11); Influence (Est 4); Submission (1Pe 3); chart on Esther: A Leader of the Jews*

<sup>12</sup>When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, <sup>13</sup>he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. <sup>14</sup>For if you remain silent at this time, relief

and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

a message requesting an audience. A carved relief excavated from the royal city of Persepolis shows Darius I seated on his throne with the royal scepter in his right hand and Crown Prince Xerxes standing behind him. The royal bodyguards, complete with ax, sword and bow, flank the throne. Because she had not been summoned by the king for 30 days, Esther was not expecting an opportunity to speak with him in the near future. Esther believed that she had to violate court protocol at the risk of her life because of the urgency of her mission (v. 16).

**4:12–16** These verses most clearly express the book's

theme: God works through human decisions (see Mt 26:24; Ac 2:23 for NT expressions of the concurrence of God's sovereignty and human responsibility).

**4:14** Mordecai's belief that the Jews would be delivered is rooted in the promises of God to preserve Israel while in exile (see Jer 29:1–14). Mordecai's remark, implying the improbability of an unknown Jewess becoming the wife of the Persian king, designates Esther herself as the means of their deliverance. Mordecai's remark is a veiled reference to God's providential work in orchestrating life's circumstances.



## INFLUENCE

## MAKING YOUR MARK

Women in Bible times are often thought of as being weak pawns in the world of mighty men. A careful study of the Bible, however, reveals women of enormous influence over their families, communities, and nations.

- Queen Esther was used of God to accomplish his purpose. She offered a moving petition for the lives of her people, swayed a king's opinion, and was given the authority and resources to devise a strategy for saving her people (Est 8:7–12).
- Deborah judged all of Israel and led a general into a victorious battle (Jdg 4:4–24).
- Jochebed cleverly defied the evil ruling of the pharaoh and put together a creative plan to save the life of her son, who eventually led his people out of slavery (Ex 2:1–10).
- Rahab offered shelter to two spies, saving her family from the invaders who destroyed all others in her city. Ultimately, she committed herself to *Yahweh*, the God of Israel (Jos 2:12–14; 6:22–25).
- Abigail worked creatively to circumvent her husband's foolishness and in so doing saved her family and servants from certain death, putting herself into a position of great influence (1Sa 25:3–42).
- Huldah, wife of the keeper of the king's wardrobe, boldly spoke as a prophet of the Lord to her people (2Ki 22:14–20).

The same kind of influence is evident today among women all over the world who use their gifts and talents to lead movements, rear families, and nurture the body of Christ. Women have a real ability to impact society in their homes and in their professional lives by practicing the same sacrificial attitude of these women whose testimonies are found in Scripture. The issue is not whether women have influence but whether they will choose to use their influence for evil or good, to extend God's kingdom on the earth or attempt to destroy it.

*See also Ru 3:10–11; Pr 11:16; 31:10–31; Mt 15:21–28; 26:6–13; 1Pe 3:15–17; notes on Feminine Leadership (1Sa 25); Intuition (Heb 5); Motherhood (1Sa 1; Isa 49; Eze 16); Women's Ministries (Jn 4; Ac 2; 1Co 11; Eph 2; 1Ti 3; Titus 2); portraits of Abigail (1Sa 25); Deborah (Jdg 4); Esther (Est 2); Huldah (2Ki 22); Jochebed (Ex 6); Rahab (Jos 2)*

<sup>15</sup>Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai:  
<sup>16</sup>“Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”

<sup>17</sup>So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

### *Esther's Request to the King*

**5** On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance. <sup>2</sup>When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter

**4:16** Fasting was closely associated with prayer (Ezr 8:23; Ne 1:4; Da 9:3; see Mt 6:16–18, note). The omission of any mention of prayer at this point is so conspicuous in its absence that the author, for whatever reason, may well have deliberately chosen to avoid all explicitly religious language.

**5:1** Greek historians described the royal robes of the Persian king. The outer robe was dyed with Phoenician purple and embroidered with gold in patterns of fighting hawks or

serpents. White or crimson trousers edged with purple were worn under the robe. Gold jeweled earrings, bracelets and a filigree collar adorned the king. The king's sword, with a sheath reportedly made of a single precious stone, was supported by a belt made of gold. Bright color, precious gems and abundant gold made the royal dress a glittering splendor. The queen's royal robes were no doubt commensurate with the riches of her position.

## Esther: A Leader of the Jews

EARLY YEARS	Her Hebrew name was Hadassah (lit. “myrtle”), but she was known by her Persian name Esther (lit. “star”). Her family was carried into captivity and chose to remain in Susa. She was reared by her close relative (possibly cousin) Mordecai in Persia as part of a minority race (Est 2:5–7).
FAMILY STATUS	She was the orphaned daughter of Abihail of the tribe of Benjamin. Her close relative Mordecai was her guardian (Est 2:7,15).
LEADERSHIP TRAINING	She was reared in the home of Mordecai, who sat within the king’s gate, having at least an understanding of court life and probably some official responsibilities (Est 2:21–23). She disciplined herself to be obedient to authorities in her life (Est 2:8–9,20).
GOD’S CALL	The words of Mordecai, “who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this,” presented her call (Est 4:13–14).
GOD’S PROMISES	God’s timing was perfect (Est 4:14). God’s providence, which uses his people to accomplish his purposes, was certain (Est 4:14–15). God’s provision, including service, was not without cost (Est 4:16).
GOD’S INSTRUCTION	Mordecai delivered God’s instruction (Est 2:22; 4:8–14).
THE PEOPLE’S AFFIRMATION	Esther’s leadership was followed by palace staff (Est 4:5–9). Mordecai respected and responded to Esther (Est 4:17).
ESTHER’S LEADERSHIP	She accepted God’s will (Est 4:16). She was confident of God’s providence (Est 4:17). She was active in mobilizing her staff and others for “fasting”; prayer and fasting were usually done in concert in times of grief or anguish (Est 4:15–16; see also 2Sa 12:16–17; Ezr 8:23). She set an example of fasting herself (Est 4:16). She presented herself in humility and obedience (Est 5:1—6:14). She used creativity of effort and talent in her task (Est 5:3—6:14). She considered timing in her plan (Est 6:1–14). Her influence reflected extraordinary power and authority for a woman in Esther’s historical setting; it traveled far and wide; it continued unto the generations after her death (Est 9:32). She wrote a decree that was entered in official records with full authority (Est 9:29,32).
OBSERVATIONS	She was courageous and self-sacrificing (Est 4:14,16). She was clever (Est 5:3–4; 8:3). She was used of God to save her people.

### *The King’s Edict in Behalf of the Jews*

**8** That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. <sup>2</sup>The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman’s estate.

<sup>3</sup>Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. <sup>4</sup>Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him.

<sup>5</sup>“If it pleases the king,” she said, “and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right

**8:1** The house of Haman. Herodotus and Josephus both recorded that the property of a traitor became the property of the king. Xerxes gave the confiscated property to Esther as restitution for the offense against her.

**8:2** Mordecai’s promotion. Not only is Mordecai’s life spared from Haman’s murderous attempts, but Mordecai is also pro-

moted as Haman’s successor in the court. Haman’s attempt to kill Mordecai leads only to Mordecai’s exaltation and Haman’s own destruction. Clearly this reversal is meant as a warning to the enemies of God’s people and as an encouragement to those on whom God’s promised protection rests.

**8:4** See Est 4:11, note.

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