

As It Is Written

The Story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden

Introduction

The story of Adam and Eve beginning in the second and third chapters of Genesis, presents a highly allegorical view of how mankind became estranged from God. At its narrative level these two chapters are a straightforward tale of how mankind came to be separated from God – a story of how the innocence of utopia was rejected in favor of procreativity and a mortal life. Read more closely, with an eye toward the context of ancient Hebrew and the Canaan cultures, however, there are deeper truths to be contemplated. For example, the Garden story teaches us about the nature of evil, the existence of suffering. It teaches us why salvation is not reachable through earthly deeds. And, it contemplates and describes the biblical understanding of sexuality and marriage. If we can move beyond the narrative and reflect on why God felt it necessary to inspire such a story, our minds will be forced to engage some of the most enduring theological (or philosophical if you're secularly inclined) truths of the Western Tradition – such as:

- That mankind freely chose the ephemeral existence of the mortal life over the permanent but benign existence of utopia.
- That mankind's loss of immortality was not a punishment for *disobeying* God. It was a consequence of the exercise of what is arguably God's greatest gift – free will.
- The resulting separation from God was a necessarily physical one, not a spiritual one and not the catastrophe as often imagined.
- The knowledge of good and evil refers to carnal knowledge – a prerequisite to procreativity. This story institutes the principle that such knowledge is to be confined within a covenantal commitment between men and women.

The crux of the story of the Garden of Eden, understood as did the ancient Hebrews, is one of utopia and immortality lost that mortality and procreativity might be gained. These divinely revealed truths constitute much of the bedrock upon which the Western moral tradition stands.

Here, then, is the translation. Following the translation is an explanation of why another translation is warranted and then a bit about how translations are made.

Genesis 2:4b-3:25

Chapter 2 – The Garden of Eden

When the LORD God made earth and skies¹, all the wild plants were not yet present in the earth and the cultivated plants were not yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not yet caused the rain to fall upon the earth nor was there a man to cultivate the soil. So, rain clouds arose from the earth and all the surface of the ground was caused to drink. Next, the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man came to life.

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden toward the East; and there He placed the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the LORD God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the eye and good for food; in the midst of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and bad².

(Now, a river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold and the gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there. The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Asshur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.)³

And the LORD God placed the man in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and maintain it. And the LORD God warned⁴ the man, saying,

"You are free to eat from any tree in the garden, but you should not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and bad, for when you do, you will surely become mortal and subject to death."

Then the LORD God said,

"For the man to be by himself is not good. I will make for him a redeemer as a complement to him".

(But the LORD God had already formed out of the ground all the living animals of the field and all the flying things of the air. Moreover, He had brought each of them before the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that became its name. Thus the man had given names to all the beasts, and to the birds of the sky, and to all the wild beasts. But for Adam, a redeemer complementary to him had not been found.)⁵

¹ This appears in most Bibles as the last sentence of the first creation story.

² From the Hebrew da'at tov vara which can mean either good and evil/bad. Its proper translation is context dependent.

³ These verses are thought to be a means by which narrative tension is produced. The narrative picks up where it left off after the rivers are described – hence the parenthesis.

⁴ From the Hebrew tsavah which means commanded – except when when associated with a consequence. In such cases it is translated as warning (see, for example, the NLT's translation).

⁵ Op. cit – like #5 above, these verses are intended to provide color and narrative tension.

So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to come over the man and he slept. Next, He took from one side a rib then closed the flesh below it. Then the LORD God built a woman from the rib He had taken from the man. Then He brought her to the man. And the man exulted, saying,

*“At last, this⁶ is bone of my bone
and flesh of my flesh.
For this reason she will be called woman
because from man this was taken.”*

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and stand by his woman for they will be one flesh.

And the man and his wife were both nude but were not ashamed⁷.

Chapter 3 – The Loss of Utopia

Now the serpent was more shrewd⁸ than any other wild animal that the LORD God had made so he said to the woman,

“Did God really say, ‘if either of you eat from any tree in the garden you will become mortal and subject to death’?”

And the woman said to the serpent,

“From the fruit of all the trees of the garden we may eat. However, from the fruit of the tree which [is] in the middle of the garden, God said, ‘you should not eat from it, nor touch it’⁹, lest you become mortal and subject to death.”

And the serpent said to the woman,

“It is not certain you will become mortal, for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will open and you will become like gods, knowing good and bad.”

And the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and delightful to the eye, but also [was] desirable for reasoning. So, she took fruit from the tree and ate it and she also gave some to her husband who

⁶ The 3-fold repetition of ‘this’ (z’ot) is a Hebrew poetic form meant to focus our attention on the woman.

⁷ This verse is an editorial comment by the author and not, strictly speaking, part of the narrative.

⁸ A typical Hebrew play on words: Eve was arummim (nude) and her interlocutor, the serpent, was arum (shrewd).

⁹ Nowhere in the text does God tell the couple not to “touch” the tree. This is an enlargement of God’s warning and foreshadows later biblical teaching that we are not to change God’s words.

was with her; and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked¹⁰; So, they each sewed a fig leaf and made for each a girdle to cover their loins¹¹.

Then they heard the thunder¹² of the LORD God rolling through the garden during the wind storm. So, the man and his wife hid among the trees of the garden from the LORD God. Then the LORD God called out and said to the man,

“where are you?”

And the man said,

“I heard the sound of you in the garden and I was afraid so I hid because I was naked.”

Then God said,

“Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I warned you not to eat?”

And the man answered,

“The woman whom You gave to be with me? She gave me from the tree, and I ate.”

Then the LORD God said to the woman,

“What is this you have done?” And the woman said, “The serpent led me astray, and I ate.”

The LORD God then turned to the serpent and said,

“Because you did this, cursed are you more than all domesticated beasts, And more than every wild animal; On your belly you will go, And dust you will eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your offspring and her offspring, hers shall bruise you on the head, And yours shall bruise him on the heel.”

To the woman he said,

“I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children, but towards your husband you will turn and he will take care of you¹³.”

But to Adam He said,

“Because you listened to the voice of your wife and ate from the tree about which I warned you saying, ‘You shall not eat from it’; cursed is the ground¹⁴. In toil you shall eat the produce of the ground. And thorn and

¹⁰ *The Hebrew word da'at means carnal knowledge especially the intimate knowledge from having physically experienced the nakedness of someone other than oneself.*

¹¹ *Significantly, they only cover their genitals; again calling into view the sexual aspect of their embarrassment.*

¹² *Translated from qol which is normally translated as sound or voice. The context here suggests a divine storm theophany.*

¹³ *Fully explained in the March and April issues of the SHLC As It Is Written columns – “Does the Wife Obey the Husband?” – <http://thussaidthelord.com/blog/bible-studies/as-it-is-written/>*

thistle will be caused to grow for you, but you will eat cultivated plants. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For from it you were taken because dust you were and to dust you will return.

Then, the LORD God made tunics of skin for Adam and his wife. Thus were they clothed. Then the LORD God said,

“Behold, mankind has become like one of Us, knowing good and bad.”

Thus, lest he stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever, the LORD God expelled them from the garden of Eden, to cultivate the ground from which he was taken. So He drove mankind out; and at the east of the garden of Eden He placed the flaming, ever-turning sword along with the cherubim to prevent their return to the tree of life.

About the Translation

This chapter presents a full translation of the Hebrew text of Genesis 2:4b-3:25, the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Ede. While there are footnotes accompanying the translation, the translation is fully commented and footnoted at the website, <http://thussaidthelord.com> (click the translations tab).

But first, why offer yet another translation?

Two reasons: First, many of the existing English Bibles are copies of earlier Bibles originally translated into English sometimes hundreds of years ago and have remained largely unchanged today. At the same time, our understanding of the cultures of the Ancient Near East (ANE) – their literature, their languages and customs, and even their daily lives – has advanced dramatically, especially in the last century and especially since the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSC). The result is that many of the words and language constructs that heretofore have puzzled the original, medieval translators are much better understood. Unfortunately, many of these new findings have yet to make their way into most of the common, commercially available English Bibles today.

Second, biblical Hebrew is a language, like most others, in which a single word can have multiple, disparate meanings. It is markedly different, however, from English in that the biblical Hebrew is a concrete language, largely lacking the ability to express abstract thoughts. Hence, to convey such ideas requires the extensive use of idioms, allegory, and other metaphorical constructs. For example, someone who is patient and long suffering is expressed idiomatically as having a long nose (see Exodus 34:6). Accordingly, choosing the best translation for a given word or phrase is seldom straightforward. Grammar, literary and cultural context,

¹⁴ *The ground isn't being punished. God is conveying to Adam the consequences of having to cultivate the earth outside of Eden – in the real world. In this verse, 'curse' means restricted to, or constrained.*

the translator's hermeneutics¹⁵ along with the translation model serve to color and shape the translation model.

What is a translation model? A translation model is a set of axioms that govern the choices available for a given word or phrase. For example, a translation model with a very limited but strict set of options available to the translator is the *word-for-word* or *mechanical* model. These translations map each Hebrew word with one or more English equivalent words. Such translations, when used to render biblical Hebrew are largely useless¹⁶, and often lead to egregious mistranslations.

Probably the most commonly used translation model is that of functional equivalence. Also called dynamic equivalence, this model attempts to convey the thought of the original author using contemporary words and phrases. For example, functional equivalence is the method used by U.N. translators to render speech in real-time – as the speaker talks. In the previous example of a patient man, a translator using functional equivalence would translate “long nose” as ‘patient’.

Finally, there are paraphrased or free translations. These translations make no attempt to convey the original sense of the text. The free translation (e.g., Eugene Peterson's (no relation) *The Message*) is often more understandable to the lay reader and I recommend them highly, especially if reading a difficult passage. However, free translations often lose the literary, poetic sense of the text. Indeed, some Hebrew words take on different meanings when used in poetic passages. For example, the Hebrew word for heart is often used poetically to mean the seat of intelligence, the very opposite of the Western understanding of the heart as the seat of emotion.

In general, I tried to use a combination of functional equivalence and free translation, with an emphasis on functional equivalence.

¹⁵ *Hermeneutics is the study of methods of textual interpretation. A historian translating the Bible will likely make different translation choices than, say, a Christian theologian. More simply put, hermeneutic is a fancy word for a point-of-view.*

¹⁶ *Actually, when I translate biblical texts, my first step is always to produce a word-for-word translation. I then study the word-for-word translation for insights as to what the author meant to say.*

References

Below are the references used in this translation. However, the titles of those works I used the most extensively and which I strongly recommend have been bolded. Many of these, with few exceptions, can be obtained from the King County Library (KCLS.org).

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