

Genesis 2:4b-7, 15-17, 3:1-8;
New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

2 ⁴In the day that the **LORD GOD** made the earth and the heavens, ⁵ when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the **LORD GOD** had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the **ground**; ⁶ but a stream would rise from the earth, and water the whole face of the **ground** — ⁷ then the **LORD GOD** formed man from the dust of the **ground**, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the **man** became a living being.

¹⁵ The **LORD GOD** took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the **LORD GOD** commanded the man, “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”

3 ¹*Now the serpent* was more crafty than any other wild animal that the **LORD GOD** had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat from any tree in the garden’?” ² The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, *nor shall you touch it*, or you shall die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die; ⁵ for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

⁸ They heard the sound of the **LORD GOD** walking in the garden at the time of the evening breeze, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the **LORD GOD** among the trees of the garden.

This story of creation (Genesis 2:4-3:24) offers a different focus. The first, Genesis 1 focuses on the origin of the universe as a whole, whereas this story focuses on the origin of life on earth. Genesis 1:1 claims to be the account of the creation of heaven and earth, whereas 2:4 is the account of the earth and the heavens. They tell different stories, yet assert to have different foci and themes about the same story.

LORD GOD : “God Yahweh” This combination of divine names is the rule in 2:4b-3:24, but then is found only one other time in the Pentateuch in Exodus 9:30.

Man & ground: in Hebrew “man” is [adam] and “ground/soil” is [dama]. The story holds an obvious play on words, a common practice throughout the Bible and the ancient literatures of the East. Names were regarded as labels and also symbols. They had inherent power. This creation story emphasizes that man/woman are utterly dependent upon God.

the tree of the knowledge of good and evil :: there is no explanation of why or how the tree is in the garden. The tree of life is a common motif used throughout the 1st Testament in Proverbs 11:30; 13:12 and 15:4. It could be associated with the royal themes of the ancient world in which the monarch was responsible for guarding the mystery of life. But little, and much less, is none of the tree of knowledge.

Vocation, Permit & Prohibition :: the humans are to care for creation and tend the garden. Everything is permitted. But there is one prohibition (eating from the tree) which is never explained. Walter Brueggemann writes that human beings before God are characterized by vocation, permission and prohibition. Curiously we tend to only remember God as the one who prohibits. In the text there is a balance and juxtaposition of the three.

Now the serpent :: the story doesn’t offer any explanation for the origin of evil. It just is. The serpent was associated with evil throughout the ancient Near East. Some scholars see the serpent as a phallic symbol, from which comes the connection made between evil and sin, sin and nakedness. Chapter 2 moves from God defining the identity of the human creatures by giving them a vocation to tend the garden and permission to eat, ending with one prohibition. Here in chapter 3 the serpent, inverts all of this, beginning by invoking the one prohibition as the defining identity of the human creatures.

Matthew 4:1-11

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¹Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into *the wilderness* to be tempted by the devil. ² He fasted forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was famished. ³ The tempter came and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread." ⁴ But he answered, "It is written,

*'One does not live by bread alone,
but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.'*"

⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, ⁶ saying to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written,

*'He will command his angels concerning you,'
and 'On their hands they will bear you up,
so that you will not dash your foot against a stone.'"*

⁷ Jesus said to him, "Again it is written, *'Do not put the Lord your God to the test.'*"

⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor; ⁹ and he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away with you, Satan! for it is written,

*'Worship the Lord your God,
and serve only him.'*"

¹¹ Then the devil left him, and suddenly angels came and waited on him.

Questions for Reflection:

1. How have you always heard this second creation story? What was it about?
2. Are we fallen or frustrated? Is there a difference? How does thinking about yourself via those adjectives change the way you live?; treat yourself?; treat others?; or envision God?
3. Adam and Even choose knowledge over trust, wanting control over equality. How is that story part of your story?; our story? How is God inviting you today to choose trust over mistrust, community over control, faith over fear?

... The prohibition given in 3:3 is now presented not as a given, but as an option. The serpent relativizes the rule of God who is now talked about in the distant, abstract, third-person.

nor shall you touch it :: the woman in trying to make a point, enlarge the prohibition of God.

the man and his wife hid themselves :: the story doesn't focus on the origin of death as much as it does on the troubled, anxiety-ridden life we all face. They had trust with God, but traded it for knowledge, which has now sown primarily mistrust among them and between them and God. Where there was freedom and community, now there is binding fear and life-threatening isolation. Where there was willed by God mutuality and equality, human distrust has introduced control and distortion. We talk of sin doing this frustration of God's willed-creation, but could it be knowledge that does it? Could this be a contrast between knowledge and wisdom, knowing for knowing's sake, versus knowing in order to live well, fully and together? Comparing this to the theory of human development of Erik Erikson leads to a curious juxtaposition. He asserts that the first stage in life involves learning trust vs. mistrust. The most crucial stage, which if not learned in infancy, impedes "normal" human development.

the wilderness :: or the desert, is the place that the prophets always went to listen for the word of God, it's the place into and through which God leads the people on their journey from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land, it's also the opposite of "city-life" – it's not man-made, where one must depend upon God for sustenance, protection and deliverance.

Devil | Satan :: the name means "the dividing one" diabolos in Greek = "slanderer" In Hebrew יָצָן means "enemy" or "adversary." Throughout this account we witness the Dividing One seeking to divide Jesus from the trusting relationship he has with God.

Jesus is tempted to use his supernatural power to first take care of his own needs. He responds by quoting Deuteronomy 8:3 reminding that the Israelites had to depend upon God's manna for sustenance.

He is secondly tempted to force God to do his will, responding with Deuteronomy 6:16, a development of a commandment, remembering the story of Massah (meaning "testing") place where the Israelites rebuked Moses for not doing their will.

Thirdly he's tempted to worship a false God, trading his vocation and freedom for idolatrous enslavement for personal game. He quotes Deuteronomy 6:13 to reaffirm what it means to fear the LORD, to respect, serve, follow and worship.