

1. Genesis 19:1-11 (Sodom) and Judges 19: Inductive Study in Context

Introduction. The destruction of Sodom forms part of the J narrative (from the Yahwistic Pentateuchal source), perhaps dating as early as Solomon (around 900 BC), although often now dated later.

Translation. See especially the NIV or NRSV and our notes below.

1 How had Abraham received his three celestial visitors in the preceding chapter (18:1-8)?

2 How did Lot receive the two visiting angels in 19:1-3? Who was the third visitor in 18:1-2 who does not visit Lot in 19:1? What had happened to the third visitor (18:22)?

3. Who surrounded Lot's house and how did they want to treat the angels (18:4-5)? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew), in 19:5 probably has the sense here of "have sex with" which in this context would be "rape" (see "Adam *knew* his wife Eve, and she conceived," Gen 4:1 literally).

4 How does Lot respond to the threat to rape the visiting angels (19:6-8)? Does he (and the narrator) view the men of Sodom as "homosexuals" or just as delinquents intent on humiliating the visitors by gang rape? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew) in 19:8 again has the sense "have sex with" but here in reference to Lot's daughters as virgins who had now "known" men. What does Lot's offer of his daughters to the would-be rapists indicate about the place of women and children in his patriarchal society and about the importance of hospitality to visitors? See Hebrews 13:1-2; 3 John 5:5-10; Matthew 25:35, 43.

5 What does the story of the rape of the Levite's concubine (Judges 19:1-30) have in common with the story of Sodom? Note: "know" (*yada'*, Hebrew), in Judges 19:25 is translated "raped" in both the NIV and NRSV. Would you consider it legitimate to conclude from the gruesome story of the gang rape of the Levite's concubine in Judges 19 that the text condemns all heterosexual relations? Would you think it legitimate to conclude from the attempted gang rape of the two visiting angels in Genesis 19 that the text condemns all male homosexual relations? Why do you think so many readers have used the story of the attempted gang rape of two angels in Genesis 19 as a basis for condemning even loving committed same-sex relations but do not so distort the meaning of Judges 19?

Note. Of the 39 references to Sodom in Hebrew Bible texts, none refers to the sin as sexual, but as arrogant injustice/oppression, neglect of the poor and needy, etc. (see Ezekiel 16:49-50). In the New Testament, with its nine references to Sodom, Jesus uses the city as an example of inhospitality (Mat 10:11-15 // Luke 10:8-12 = Q). The first to refer to the sexual dimension of Sodom's sin was the New Testament book of Jude, but he makes it explicit that the sexual sin involved "going after different [angel] flesh" (v. 7; see above and NJB literal translation and note). The Jewish philosopher, Philo of Alexandria (20 BC-50 AD), was the first to interpret the Sodom story as a condemnation of same-sex relations. His misinterpretation evidently was influenced by his acceptance of neo/platonic and stoic philosophical views that any sexual relations that were not procreative were condemned as "unnatural". Philo's revisionist view that the Sodom story sought to condemn male same-sex practices was not accepted by any Christian writer until Augustine and John Chrysostom (around 400 AD). For historical details, see Theodore Jennings, *Plato or Paul? The Origins of Western Homophobia* (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2009), 88-108.

Bibliography For documentation see the article on Sodom on the website www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar with its extensive bibliographies.

2. Jude 7 Inductive Study.

Introduction. Jude (Greek: “Judas”) probably was written between 50-60 AD by Jesus’ brother (Mark 6:3; Mat 13:55), a prominent leader and missionary (1 Cor 9:5), and thus reflecting early Palestinian Jewish Christianity (as does James, from Jesus’ other brother; see Jude 1). This would explain why Jude refers to Jewish works that are not in the Old Testament canon (1 Enoch, cited in Jude 6, 14-15; and in v. 9 an apocryphal story about Moses’ burial that he may have read in the now lost ending of the *Testament of Moses*). Such apocryphal literature was popular and valued in Judaism at that time.

Translation

6 And those **angels** who did not maintain their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling [Gen 6:1-4], God has maintained in eternal chains in deepest darkness for the judgment of the great Day.

7 Similarly, Sodom and Gomorrah [Gen 19] and the surrounding cities, which, in the same manner indulged in sexual immorality/prostitution (*ekporneúsasai*) and went in pursuit of *different flesh* (*sarkós hetéras* [that of the visiting **angels**], serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire

8 *In the same way* (Greek *homoios*) these men in their dreaming defile the flesh, reject **lordship** and blaspheme the **glorious ones** [“lordship” and “glorious ones” are Hebrew terms for orders and types of angels] (Countryman 2006:750).

9 But when the **archangel Michael**, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses....[Jude here cites the Jewish Apocryphal book, *The Assumption of Moses*]

1 What three stories about angels does Jude refer to in 6-7 and 9 (note: the angels are referred to as “Sons of God” in Gen 6:1-4, as in Job 1:6; 2:1 and other texts). What other terms does Jude use to describe angels in v. 8?

2 Why would Jude describe angels as having “different flesh” (v. 7; see King James: “strange flesh”)? What did the men of Sodom try to do to the two visiting angels and how did the angels respond (Gen 19:1-11)?

3 Note: the translation above reflects the literal Greek, followed by the Jerusalem Bible and well explained in its note on the text. How do other translations render v. 7? Why do you think they avoid the literal sense? Why would they interpret non-literally with phrases like “unnatural lust” (NRSV), even when they acknowledge in notes that the Greek literally says “went after other flesh”?

4 What had the men of Sodom tried to do to the angels in Gen 19:1-11? Does the Sodom story seek to condemn “homosexuality” or is it rather the lack of hospitality (see Abraham’s hospitality to the angels in Gen 18) and attempted gang rape of the visiting angels?

4 Some Study Bibles refer to the sin Jude 7 condemns as “homosexuality.” Do you think the common understanding today of the term “homosexuality” refers to attempts to rape angels? Had the men of Sodom denied hospitality and attempted to rape angels who were female, would you think that provided a basis for condemning all heterosexual relations?

Bibliography For documentation see the article on Jude on the website www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar with its extensive bibliographies.

3. 1 Corinthians 6:9-11 and 1 Timothy 1:12. Inductive Study

Introduction. Paul himself wrote 1 Corinthians around 54 AD, probably from Ephesus in the Roman province of Asia (16:19). 1 Timothy, however (along with 2 Timothy and Titus), probably was penned by a disciple after the Apostle's death (around 63 AD), perhaps as early as 75 AD, but more likely a decade or more later.

Translation

9 Do you not know that the **unjust/oppressors** [*adikoi*] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor **softies/cowards** [*malakoi*, soft males], nor males who sexually abuse other males [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], **10** nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor robbers will inherit the kingdom of God. **11** And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God (**1 Cor 6:9-11**)

9 Now we know that the law is good, if any one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, **10** for the sexually immoral/adulterers, and **males who sexually abuse other males** [*arsenokoitai*, male/s + bed/s], for **slave traders**, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching (**1 Tim 1:9-10**).

1 Paul introduces the “vice list” of 1 Cor 6:9b-10 with a general principle in 6:9a. What kind of person does the Apostle say will not inherit God's kingdom? Note: “unrighteous,” the term commonly found in English translations (Greek: *adikoi*) is best translated “unjust” or “oppressors,” those who abuse their power to harm persons in a weaker position (the poor, slaves, women, immigrants, etc.).

2 Why would Paul repeat the terminology about inheriting the Kingdom of God in 1 Cor 10b (9a → 10b, thus creating a kind of envelop for the vice list in 9b-10a)? Should we, then, understand the specific ten terms of the vice list within this “envelop” as examples of oppressors who abuse their power to harm others? ¿How will this affect our interpretation of the sexual offenders in the vice list (#1, 3, 4, 5)? Note the variety of translations for the fourth and fifth terms (literally, “softies” and “bed-males”—a euphemism for some kind of male sexual activity).

3 Which of the terms in the vice list of 1 Cor 6:9 are repeated in 1 Tim 1:10? Why would 1 Tim 1:10 link “slave traders” with the preceding two sexual vices? Since slave traders commonly acquired young slaves and then sold their services of as male prostitutes, would this context support the interpretation of “bed-males” as those who sexually oppress and abuse others who are in a weaker position socially (slave prostitutes)?

4 Does condemnation of “adulterers” in the vice lists (1 Cor 6:9b and 1 Tim 1:10) provide a basis for an ethical absolute condemning all heterosexual sexual acts? See the prophet Nathan's denunciation (employing a rhetorical trap) of David's adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:1-14). Does the condemnation of slave traders and the “bed-males” who abused the young slave prostitutes constitute a basis for condemning all consensual adults in a loving committed same-sex relationship?

Bibliography For documentation see the articles on 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy on the website www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar with their extensive bibliographies.

4. Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13. Inductive Study in Context

Introduction. Although traditionally ascribed to Moses (around 1300 BC), most biblical scholars today conclude that Leviticus 16-26 constitutes a “Holiness Code,” the latest part of Leviticus, dating from Exilic (586-539 BC) or Post-exilic times (539 and following).

Translation

18:22 And with a free male (*zacar*) you shall not lie
the lying down of a woman (*mishkebe 'ishah*)
= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)
=like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive);
that is an abomination (*to'ebah*)....

20:13 And a man (*'ish*) who lies with a free male (*zacar*)
the lying down of a woman (*mishkebe 'ishah*)
= like one who lies with a woman (penetrator, active)
=like a woman who lies down (penetrated, passive);
they did an abomination (*to'ebah*);
the two of them must surely die; *their* blood is upon *them*.

1 Is either prohibition directed to women? Why do you think only free males are the subject? Can we be sure that the intent is also to prohibit all female-female sexual relations when this is not specified?

2 Does either prohibition refer to the sexual orientation of the free male involved? Why do you think the prohibition focuses exclusively on sexual acts and not to sexual orientations?

3 If the prohibitions refer only to sexual acts, not sexual orientations, and only to free males, not to females, would it be an error to say that they condemn “homosexuality”?

4 Why do you think the prohibitions are directed only to free males and not slaves? Would slaves have had any choice or were their bodies the property of their owners (male or female)?

5 Note: biblical scholars now generally recognize that the texts use a euphemism (“the lying down”) to specify sexual penetration, first referring to a woman (“the lying down of a woman” = penis in vagina) and second prohibiting a free male from “lying” with another male (anal sex). If the texts thus specifically prohibit only free males from practicing male-male anal sex, can we be sure that the intent is also to prohibit all male-male sexual intimacy (mutual masturbation, oral sex, kisses, caresses, etc.)?

6 What does Leviticus mean when it designates certain acts as an abomination (*to'ebah*)? Which of the sexual acts in Leviticus 18 and 20 are designated as an abomination? See 18:26 and 20:23. Do churches today consider it an abomination for a man to have intercourse with his wife during her menstrual period (Lev 18:19; 20:18)?

7 What penalty does Lev 20: 13 prescribe and for whom? Would you think this an appropriate penalty for a male who was gang raped (as the men of Sodom attempted with the angels)? What about cases where a youth is sexually abused by a priest? Do you think the churches did well when, more than a century ago, most supported the move to abandon the death penalty for “sodomites” and prison terms were substituted (recall the case of Oscar Wilde)?

8 Why do you think Lev 18:22 and 20:13 sought to prohibit free males from practicing male-male anal sex? Do the other prohibitions (sex with a woman menstruating, sex with animals, child sacrifice) suggest that the concern was to maximize procreation? Note: the decimated population in post/exilic period would have made procreation almost as urgent as it was for Adam and Eve (Genesis 1:28). Today when rapid population growth is the problem, should we continue to insist on the prohibitions of Lev 18:22 and 20:13?

5. Romans 1:26-27. Inductive Study in Context

Introduction. During his stay in Corinth around 57-58 AD, Paul addressed his letter to the Romans to some five house and tenement churches in Rome whose members were mainly unmarried slaves or ex-slaves, with women in prominent leadership (in Ch 16, Paul greets 28 persons, but only three married couples).

Translation

1:16-17 *Jesus' Good News for the oppressed* 16 For I am not ashamed of the Good News [to the oppressed], for it is God's power for integral liberation to everyone believing, both to the Jew first and to the Greek. For in it God's liberating justice is revealed from faith to faith, as it has been written: "Now the just man by faith will live" [Hab 2:4]

1:18-32 Elaboration of the Rhetorical Trap: *Bad news for idolatrous oppressors*

18-23 *Idolatry* 18 For the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all idolatry and oppression of men, who with their oppression even suppress the truth, 19 because what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For ever since the creation of the world, his eternal power and divinity, though invisible, have been understood and clearly perceived in the things that have been made, so they are without excuse, 21 because although they knew God, they did not glorify nor thank him, but became futile in their reasonings, and their undiscerning heart was darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools 23 and **changed** the glory of the immortal God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man and birds and quadrupeds and reptiles;

1:24-27 *Covetous desires and unclean sexual acts* 24 wherefore, **God gave them up** in the (covetous?) desires of their hearts to uncleanness, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 who **exchanged** the truth about God for the lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator who is blessed unto the ages! Amen. 26 For this reason, **God gave them up** to dishonorable passions, for even their females **exchanged** the natural/procreative use (*chresis*) for the unnatural/nonprocreative (*para phusin*); 27 and similarly also the males, **leaving** the natural/procreative use (*chresis*) of females, were inflamed with their desire for one another, males in [other] males working up their shameful member and receiving back in their own persons the recompense due their error.

1:28-32 *Catalogue of 21 evils (vices and persons): Injustice, oppression, violence [nothing sexual]*

28 And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, **God gave them up** to a debased mind to do what is not proper, 29 having been *filled* with all

1-4 oppression, [*porneia*, sexual immorality, Textus Receptus, KJV], wickedness, covetousness, malice,

5-9 *full of envy*, of murder, of strife, of guile, of malignity,

10 gossipers,

11 [30] slanderers,

12 haters of God,

13 insolent/bullies,

14 arrogant,

15 boasters/braggarts,

16 inventors of evil projects,

17 disobeyors of parents,

18 [31] *undiscerning*, 19 *unfaithful*, 20 *unaffectionate*, 21 *unmerciful*;

32 Who, knowing God's just ordinance that those who practice such things deserve to die, not only do them, but even approve/applaud others who practice them

2:1-16 *The Rhetorical Trap Sprung: God's just judgment of hypocritical judges*

1 Wherefore, O man, you are inexcusable, everyone of you who judges; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, since you who judge practice the same things. 2 Now we know that God's judgment is according to truth against those who do such things. 3 So do you suppose, O man—you who judge those who do such things and yet do them yourself—that you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you despise the riches of his kindness and forbearance and longsuffering? 5 But by your stubbornness and your impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's just judgment will be revealed.

6 He will repay according each one's deeds: 7 on the one hand, to those who by manly perseverance in doing good work seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give life in the age to come; 8 on the other hand, to those who are self-seeking and disobeying the truth, but practicing oppression, there will be wrath and fury. 9 Affliction and poverty on every soul of man working evil, the Jew first and also the Greek; 10 but glory and honor and peace to everyone working good, the Jew first and also the Greek. 11 For God shows no partiality.

12 For as many as have sinned without Torah also will perish without Torah; and as many as have sinned in Torah will be judged by Torah; 13 for it is not the hearers of Torah who are just with God, but rather the doers of Torah will be justified [at the future final judgment]. 14 For whenever Gentiles who do not possess Torah by nature the things of the Torah do, these, though not having the Torah, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the Torah to be written in their hearts, to which their own conscience bears witness; and their conflicting thoughts will accuse or perhaps excuse them 16 on the day when, according to my good news, God, through Messiah Jesus, will judge men's secret thoughts.

1 To whom does "them" refer in 1:24 and 26? To modern individuals? To individual contemporaries of Paul? To ancient humanity as a whole when they chose idolatry instead of worshipping the only true God? See 1:18-23, 25.

2 How did God respond to the ancient human choice of idolatry? See 1:24, 26, 28.

3 Why would Paul say ambiguously that God gave humanity over to "uncleanness" instead of "sin" in 1:24? See 14:20, which in the original Greek refers to "all *things*," not just "food."

4 What expressions does Paul use in 1:24, 26-27 to describe strong desires? Which of the Ten Commandments prohibited excess desire (coveting)? See Exodus 20:17; Deuteronomy 5:21. Why does Paul condemn coveting in 13:8-10. Are the strong desires in 1:24, 26-27 necessarily sinful or is Paul again purposefully ambiguous?

5 What expressions does Paul use in 1:24, 26-27 to describe certain (sexual) activities as dishonorable and shameful? Are activities the world condemns as dishonorable or shameful always sinful and to be avoided? Did Jesus avoid everything society condemns as dishonorable or shameful? See Romans 3:21-26; Hebrews 12:2; Romans 1:16. Should we even rejoice/boast in some experiences that the world deems dishonorable or shameful? See Romans 5:2-3, 11.

6 Would the reader/listener who had not yet read/heard 1:26-27 have any reason to think that the dishonoring of bodies referred to in 1:24 did not refer to common (male with female) sexual acts?

7 What new phrase does Paul introduce in 1:26 to describe the sexual acts of "their women/females"? Would the first-time reader/listener of 1:26 have any reason to conclude that the women (like the males in 1:27) had exchanged male partners for female? Since Plato "unnatural" commonly referred to any sexual activity that was not procreative (male penis in female vagina), what other sexual acts might be so described? Since the prohibitions of Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 refer only to males, would Paul likely invent a new law condemning lesbians in Romans 1:26 (note: 1 Cor 6:9, 1 Tim 1:12 and Jude 7 also refer only to male sexual activity).

8 Are all acts "against nature" always sinful? What act of God is described as "against nature" in Romans 11:24 (the only other place in the New Testament that phrase is used)? Note that Rom 2:14 refers to Gentiles "who do not have the Law by nature (=birth)" and 2:27 refers to Gentiles as uncircumcised "by nature" (=by

birth), implying that the act of circumcision, which God commanded Abraham (Gen 17), is an act “against nature”. What does Paul mean by “nature” when he refers to male and female hair lengths as determined by “nature” in 1 Corinthians 11:14? Since the Apostle, preferring the single life to marriage (like Jesus), never expressed interest or concern in procreation, is it possible that by “nature” he simply refers to the dominant custom in a given culture? How does the concept of against/nature link 1:26 to 27? Could the “similarly” that introduces 1:27 refer to similar non-procreative acts of anal sex (females with males, 1:26; males with males, 1:27—without the health benefits of condoms in antiquity)?

9 What “ex/changes” are referred to in 1:23, 25, 26 (see also “leaving” in 1:27)? Is Paul such a traditionalist as to think that any change should be condemned as sinful? See Rom 12:1-2; 8:18-25; 2 Cor 5:17. What kinds of change would Paul condemn as sinful? See Rom 13:8-10 again and 14:15.

10 What great “error” had the males of 1:27 committed? See 1:19-23, 25. In what, then, did the “requital” consist? See “God gave them up....” in 1:24, 26, 28. According to Paul’s argument, then, are the unclean sexual acts of 1:24, 26-27 portrayed as sinful or as the divine punishment for the sin of idolatry?

11 How should Paul’s laying of a rhetorical trap (1:18-32; note the ambiguous expressions of “uncleanness” and “desires/lusts”) and the springing of his rhetorical trap (2:1-16) affect our interpretation of 1:24-27? Would it be wise to try to elicit ethical absolutes from a text that aims to trap arrogant judgmental readers into condemning themselves? Would the negative rhetoric in 1:24-27 apply only to those who were idolatrous and involved in sexual acts of abuse of power to oppress others (1:18, 29)? Would 1:27 apply only to those males who originally had sexual relations with a female and then abandoned that relationship for sex with males (the original human option for idolatry)? Would the sexual acts referred to in 1:24, 26-27 only be sinful if they were acts of excess passion (coveting) that harmed the neighbor instead of expressing love for the neighbor?

12 Do you think Paul intentionally sets forth negative elements in his rhetoric to trap judgmental readers in 1:24-27 (uncleanness, dishonorable/shameful, un/natural, changed/leaving) and then consciously undermines or “deconstructs” each element later in the letter or is this just coincidence? Note that a fifth element, the desires/lusts/coveting becomes a negative norm later in the letter (13:8-10; see above).

13 Does Rom 1:26 provide a basis today for condemning all female sexual acts that are not procreative (prohibiting all family planning and use of contraceptives, as well as sex with women past menopause)? Having examined carefully the actual words of Rom 1:27 in their context, do you find any basis in this text for condemning a loving committed relationship between two Christian adult males who have never had sex with a woman? Do you think Paul knew nothing about such persons or intentionally failed to refer to them?

14 When the preceding context already so clearly condemned the ancient human option for idolatry, why do you think Paul interrupts his treatment of sexual uncleanness (1:24...26-27) to insert another condemnation of idolatry (1:25)? Would he be thinking mainly or only of pagan temple prostitutes with their fertility cults?

15 What kind of churches does Paul envision resulting from his letter? Tolerant, inclusive churches that celebrate their diversity or intolerant, exclusive churches that condemn sexual minorities? See the climax to the epistle in 15:7-13; compare the tensions between the strong and weak in 14:1-15:6.

16 Why was Paul eager to see the house churches in Rome united in love, rather than judgmental and divided? See Rom 15:23-24. Give examples of the way prejudices against persons of color, women and sexual minorities (racism, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia) undermine the churches’ mission and the proclamation of Jesus’ liberating Gospel today?

Note. For 350 years after Paul wrote, no church father interpreted Rom 1:26 as a condemnation of female-female sexual relations (lesbians). Around 400 AD John Chrysostom introduced and propagated this “liberal, revisionist” interpretation and during the Middle Ages it became the only interpretation people knew. Before Chrysostom’s time the only interpretation given was that 1:26 referred to females with males in non-procreative sex acts. **Bibliography:** www.fundotrasovejas.org.ar For documentation see the articles on Romans on the website with their extensive bibliographies.

6. Genesis 1-2. Inductive Study in Context.

Translation. See especially NIV, NRSV, NJB.

Introduction. Most biblical scholars recognize that Genesis begins with *two creation narratives* and that the first probably comes from a much later date than the second.

2:4b-3:24, from the *Yahwistic source (J)*, which uses the name *Yahvéh Elohim* for God, perhaps was composed as early as ca. 1000-900 B.C., during the reigns of King David and Solomon

1:1-2:4^a, from the *priestly source (P)*, which uses only the name *Elohim* for God, probably was composed during the Exile, ca. 586-539 B.C.

Instead of harmonizing the two creation stories and imposing a single theology, we should respect their differences, remembering that the first in canonical order is actually from a much later date (see the four gospels in the NT). We thus seek to appreciate the message each narrative had for the original hearers/readers in the light of the different historical contexts reflected and not expect answers to all our modern questions, which are quite distinct from the horizon of the original context (see NISB, HCSB, NOAB and NJB with their with notes). We will study the earlier text first, since often it's distinctive teaching is blurred by harmonizing it with the more familiar later account placed before it.

Genesis 2:4b-25 Creation in the Garden of Eden

1 What *name* is used for God throughout this narrative (also in 3:1-24, but see 4:1ff)?

2 What is the *order* of the LORD God's creative work in this narrative? Why is the earth, field and ground given priority over the heavens in this account (2:4-7, 9,19; see 3:17, 19, 23)? Would this emphasis reflect the perspective of the small Israelite farm? Note: God forms "the Adam/man" from the ground, the '*adamah* (2:7). Note: in 2:19 the NIV translation of the verbs ("Now the LORD God *had* formed...all the beasts of the field...") seeks to harmonize the text with the order of 1:1-2:4a; the NRSV translation reflects the normal meaning of the Hebrew original: "So out of the ground the LORD God formed every animal...", implying the creation of animals *after* the first human. Similarly, in 2:8 "Now the LORD God *had* planted a garden..." (NIV harmonizing interpretation); compare "And the LORD God planted a garden..." (NRSV), indicating that God planted the garden after forming the man.

3 Why does the LORD God put the man/Adam in the garden (literally "serve," 2:5,15; see also 3:23;)? Does the perspective also seem to reflect the agrarian perspective of Israelite farmers?

4 What evidence do you find in the narrative that the LORD God is portrayed as working like a potter (2:7, 22) or gardener (8; 2:19) and sharing human limitations (anthropomorphisms; see 3:8; 2:18-20)?

5 Why and how does the LORD God create the woman (2:18, 20b-25)? Note: The same Hebrew word for woman is translated "wife" in 2:24-25 (NRSV and NIV). Does the text say anything about the relationship between the man and woman being one of "complementarity"? Note: the woman as the man's "helping partner" 2:18, 20; '*etzer kenegedo*) in the original patriarchal context indicated someone inferior and submissive (3:16), not equal and complementary. However, the word "helper" elsewhere even refers to God, the stronger one, as Israel's "helper" (Ex 18:4; Deut 33:7, 26, 29; Ps 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5, etc.). Often the modern concept of "complementarity" is read into this text, but it is modern concept, developed in the early 19th century to replace the traditional view of woman as inferior.

6 How is the becoming "one flesh" expressed and with what result in 4:1-2a? Note: the NRSV ("knew") is more literal, but the NIV (euphemism "lay" = had sex with) suggests the meaning in this context. Is there any indication that Adam and his woman "got married" before they procreated Cain and Abel? Was the main purpose of Eve's creation companionship or procreation? See 2:18, 24; 4:1-2a. Does procreation seem to be more of an after-thought in this narrative? How did Jesus and Paul deal with the problem of working alone (without getting married)?

Genesis 1:1-2:4a. Creation and the Sabbath. **Note:** Genesis 2:4a (priestly) concludes the first creation narrative (forming an inclusion with 1:1), but also introduces the second creation narrative and thus functions as a kind of editorial bridge or link between 1:1-2:3 and 2:4b-3:24. This later account reflects the more expansive perspective of the Babylonian exile (sky, sea, land and all that populated them).

1 What *name* for God is used throughout the narrative? See also 5:1-2; 17:3-23, etc.

2 What is the *order* of God's creative work in this narrative? Compare the order in 2:4b-25. According to the argument in 1 Tim 2:11-15, shouldn't humanity be subject to the animals instead of vice versa?.

3 How does God accomplish the creative work on each of the days 1-6? Compare the more anthropomorphic ways of creation (potter image) in 2:4b-25.

4 Is only the male created in God's image in 1:26-28 or is woman included (compare 1 Cor 11:7)? Does procreation seem to have prior importance as the purpose of their creation? Compare the emphasis on companionship in 2:18 and the change after the couple's disobedience (3:16). Should we understand God's command for maximum procreation (1:28; 3:16) to be an ethical absolute, or should recognize legitimate exceptions? See Jeremiah 16:1, Jesus, the eunuchs in Mat 19:12; Paul, the virgins in 1 Cor 7; Rev 14:3-4 etc. Does this first creation narrative say anything about marriage as a prerequisite for procreation or in any way "define marriage"?

5 How is humanity's relationship to the animals expressed in 1:28b? Compare 2:19-20, which leaves the fish uncreated and nameless (but the naming also indicates authority over). Should we understand human dominion over the animals as central to the meaning of being created in the image of God as sovereign and king? Compare the more humble task of humanity as working/serving the arable land in 2:5,15; 3:23:

6 What is to be the relationship of humans and animals to plants (1:29-30)? When does this change and why (Gen 9:1-7)? When will it change again (Isaiah 11:6-9)? Would it be accurate to describe the first human pair as "naked vegetarians" (compare 2:25; 3:7)?

7 What is the conclusion and climax of this first creation narrative (2:2-3)? Why would this conclusion have been important for ancient Jewish readers? See Exodus 20:8-11. How is the responsibility of work implied in this first narrative (1:28) and in the 4th commandment in Exodus 20? Note how hard work becomes a necessity, not an option, after the disobedience (3:17-19). What rule does Paul lay down in 2 Thessalonians 3:10? Do you think he would have admitted exceptions in the case of children and persons who are ill or unable to work?

8 How does Jesus apply the "one-flesh" teaching of Genesis 2:24 to the question of divorce in Mark 10:1-12? Does the Bible elsewhere permit any exceptions? See Mat 5:32; 19:9; Luke 16:18; 1 Cor 7:15; Genesis 21:8-21; Ezra 10:3. Why does Paul urge men to break their "one flesh" relations with prostitutes (1 Cor 6:12-20)?

Conclusion. We have seen that the two creation narratives in Genesis 1-2 present the original pair as naked vegetarians commanded to engage in maximum procreation (to fill an empty earth) and expected to rest on the 7th day (as God did). Since such explicit commands and norms as maximum procreation and Sabbath keeping are not usually considered ethical absolutes for Christians today, is there any basis in Genesis 1-2 for trying to extract an ethical absolute from the story of God's creating the first humans as male-female who unite as "one flesh" in order to procreate? Commonly this is the procedure followed in order to forbid committed loving same-sex relations, despite the examples of so many others in the Bible who did not fit the Adam-Eve paradigm. Theoretically everyone recognizes the difficulty and complexity of any effort to derive norms for human conduct from the *narrative* portions of the Bible. Commonly we object, for example, when a Pentecostal teacher concludes from the story of the experience of glossolalia (Acts 2) that all Christians thereafter should have the gift of tongues (a conclusion that would contradict the explicit teaching of Paul in 1 Cor 12-14). Therefore most biblical scholars understand the creation of male and female with the divine command to procreate as etiological, explaining why male and female commonly unite to procreate—but not as establishing ethical absolutes (that all males and females are under obligation to unite with a member of the opposite sex in order to procreate). Innumerable other biblical narratives (Ruth and Naomi, David and Jonathan, and Jesus with his beloved disciple, etc.) make clear that other loving relationships with purposes other than procreation are possible and blessed by God. As an etiological account, Gen 2:4b-3 seeks to explain *why* life is commonly the way it is (males unites with females to procreate), not to dictate ethical absolutes that would obligate all humans to unite with persons of the opposite sex and to maximize procreation.

7. Genesis 3:1-24 The First Sin and its Punishment (“The Fall of Man” NIV)

Introduction. As Theodore Hiebert points out “Like the idea of creation out of nothing, the notion of the fall is not found among OT writers but first emerges among Jewish interpreters in the last two cent. before the birth of Christianity (Sir 25:24; Wis 2:23-24; 4 Ezra 7:118). While later largely abandoned in Judaism, Paul embraces this view, and thus the fall of humanity—and nonhuman creation with it—becomes a central feature of his interpretation of Christ’s purpose on earth...While central to Paul, the idea of creation as fallen is not found elsewhere in the NT, and it does not therefore assume a prominent position in the NT view of creation” (NIDB 2006:787). Paul’s teaching on the “fall” is found in Romans 5:12-17; 8:18-25 and 1 Cor 15:20-25. Although the doctrine of the fall provides a convenient explanation for the universality of sin (Rom 3:9, 23), death (5:21) and natural evil (8:18-25), it would appear to be contradicted by evolutionary teaching of human “ascent” from other forms of life. Notably Jesus emphasizes the universality of sin without reference to any fall (Mk 7:20-22; Mat 7:11) and for his brother James, humans, although prone to sin, still bears the image of God (James 3:9). Hence, in our reading of Genesis 3 we must be careful to avoid reading into the story later Pauline teaching about the “fall.”

- 1 How do both the serpent and Eve exaggerate the strictness of God’s prohibition (Gen 3:1-3; 2:16-17)?
- 2 Is the serpent’s denial of the divine threat correct (Gen 3:4; 2:16-17, NRSV literally “in the day,” NIV paraphrasing to harmonize, “when”? See Gen 5:5, perhaps the source for 2 Peter 3:8, “With the Lord a day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are like a day”).
- 3 What are the three dimensions of the attraction of the forbidden fruit that prompted Eve to succumb to the temptation (3:6; see 1 John 3:16)?
- 4 Does the serpent’s affirmation in Gen 3:5 prove correct (3:7)?
- 5 How does the concept of God in 3:8 compare with that in Gen 1:1-24a?
- 6 Whom do the man and woman blame for their disobedience (3:9-13)?
- 7 What punishments does God decree for the serpent, the woman and the man (3:14-15, 16, 17-19)?
- 8 Would “the man’s” naming of Eve indicate his new authority over her (3:16; 2:19-20)? The-man/Adam seems to be named first in 2:20 and 3:17, 21 but the-Adam/man (with the article) continues to be used in 3:22,24 and 4:1 and then without the article (Adam) in 4:22 and 5:1-7, where God calls both the woman and the man “Adam/man/humanity” (5:2). Note that the same Hebrew term *ishah* (woman) is also translated “wife” in some versions (NIV 3:20-21; 4:1) and Eve’s “man” is translated “husband” (3:6 NIV).
- 9 To whom would the “us” refer in 3:22 (also 1:26)? Is Eve banished also or only the man (3:22-24; 4:1)?
- 10 Was the man created with an immortal soul or was eternal life only potentially his (3:22)? Note that animals also have the breath of life (3:7; 7:22; Ps 104:24-30).

Conclusion. The Hebrew texts of Genesis 1-3 say nothing about any marriage or even a husband and wife, since the narratives tell a story and do not propound any definitions (as would be common in Greek philosophical texts). But even if we interpret the texts as providing the first example of heterosexual marriage, it would be difficult to imagine any gay or lesbian marriage with comparably disastrous results (3:16-19; Rom 5:12). The narratives are rather etiological, answering human questions about why things are the way they are (serpents slithering and striking, women under male authority in patriarchal societies and bearing children in pain/labor, farmers sweating to grow enough food and finally dying). Much less do the texts say anything about the 19th century concept of “complementarity” which contemporary authors often read into the narrative in order to deny the legitimacy of same-sex marriages. Some seek to blame “homosexuality” on “the fall” but in Romans 1:18-23 Paul specifies a time when ancient humanity abandoned the true God for idolatry and nothing in Genesis 1-3 indicates that Adam and Eve started worshipping idols (4:1, 25-26).

Excursus. Genesis 1-3 and Science.

Biblical scholars commonly recognize that Genesis 1-3 gives us stories that reflect ancient understandings of the world, and thus include abundant evidence of perspectives that are “prescientific” Had the chapters miraculously anticipated modern scientific insights, no one would have understood them until the present, and they would soon be outmoded by future scientific developments. These “prehistoric” narratives, similar in literary genre to Jesus’ parables, provide us with profound theological insights, but do not pretend to represent modern “historography” or other sciences, which pursue questions related to the “how?” of creation (what happened and when), but make no pretense of asking or answering the “who?” question (which is beyond the scope of scientific investigation). Often the prescientific character of the narratives has been masked by modern translations, such as the NIV, but is made clearer in the NRSV..

- The sky consists of a large inverted “dome,” a hard substance, hammered like metal (Gen 1:6-8, NRSV);
- This firmament (Hebrew: *raqia*) like an inverted dome or bowl, separates the waters above it from the waters on the flat earth below (1:6-8);
- Like a parent decorating a Christmas tree, on the fourth day God sets the sun, moon and stars in the heavenly dome in order to provide light for the earth and to regulate Israel’s calendar of sacred festivals (1:14-19 NRSV; note the geocentric and anthropocentric perspective, with the stars almost an afterthought);
- Light is created three days before the creation of the sun, moon and stars in a process perhaps intending to depreciate the worship of heavenly bodies in surrounding imperial cultures;
- The earth begins to produce vegetation and trees before the creation of the sun (1:11-13) and not only humans but also the animals are originally all vegetarian (1:29-31);
- In addition to fish and birds, God created “great sea monsters” (1:21; see Isa 27:1; 51:9; Ps 74:12-14; 104:26; Job 3:8; 26:12-13; 41:1-34);
- God created the universe in six days (1:1-31), but also in a single day (2:4a NRSV, where the NIV paraphrases with “when”).
- When Yahweh Elohim created the first human, there had been no rain, but the earth was irrigated by a single spring/stream that rose from the waters beneath the flat earth (2:5-6; see also 7:11-12, where the subterranean waters break forth and “windows” in the sky-dome open to flood the earth);
- The symbolic (not historical) character of the Garden of Eden is indicated by the geography of the four rivers, which include two from Mesopotamia (the Tigris and the Euphrates) and one that flows around Cush (Ethiopia) in Africa (2:10-14; see existence of the “tree of life” (2:9; 3:24) in the heavenly Jerusalem, which at the end descends to the earth (Rev 21:2; 22:2);
- In Gen 1:21 the serpent is a simple creature but in Gen 3:1-7, 14-15 it is more intelligent than humans, understands divine speech, speaks, pointing out deficiencies in God’s discourse, originally did not creep on the ground, now eats dust and is ever hostile to of humans;
- God appears to err, threatening humans with immediate death, literally “the day” (2:17 NRSV, literally), not “when” (NIV; compare 3:4 and 5:5, where Adam lives 930 years);
- God and the first humans spoke only Hebrew (see the plays on Hebrew words in Gen 2:7, 19, 23; compare 11:1-9);
- Cain has no trouble in finding a wife (Gen 4:17), since God loves the diversity in creation (Ps 104:24) and had created many humans in addition to the first couple: some left-handed, bisexual, lesbians, gays, etc.; see the more than 1500 animal species in which scientists have confirmed the existence of homoerotic acts and same-sex relations)

Note. In the Ancient Near East creation is understood as bringing order out of chaos, not producing matter. Therefore, although the Hebrew verb *bara*’ (create) is only used with God as the subject (Gen 1:1, 21, 27, etc.), the idea of creation out of nothing (*creation ex nihilo*) is not found in the Hebrew Bible but represents a later Jewish interpretation (2 Macc 7:28; 2 Baruch. 21:4; 2 Enoch. 24:2), also taught in the New Testament (Rom 4:17; Hebrews 11:3) and eventually became the orthodox Christian viewpoint. The doctrine reflects the Greek philosophical development of distinguishing between matter and spirit.

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