

THE GREAT REVERSAL: THEMATIC LINKS BETWEEN GENESIS 2 AND 3

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The break between Gen 1 and 2 has been discussed at length by many scholars.¹ Umberto Cassuto, for example, has made a clear distinction between the story in Gen 1 and the one recorded in chaps. 2 and 3.² Cassuto argues that the first chapter relates "The Story of Creation" to teach us "that the whole world and all that it contains were created by the word of the One God, according to His will, which operates without restraint."³ The second section, more precisely Gen 2:4-24, is part of the "Story of the Garden of Eden," which stretches to the end of chap. 3; its purpose is "to explain how it is that in the Lord's world, the world of the good and beneficent God, evil should exist and man should endure pain and troubles and calamities."⁴

On the other hand, the unity of chaps. 2 and 3 is generally recognized, although different reasons are given in support of this conclusion. Cassuto bases his argument for the unity of this passage on

¹For example, G. von Rad notes: "The difference is in the point of departure: Whereas in ch. 1 creation moves from the chaos to the cosmos of the entire world, our account of creation [chap. 2] sketches the original state as a desert in contrast to the sown" (*Genesis: A Commentary* [London: SCM, 1972], 76). Likewise, Claus Westermann states: "The narrative of Gen 1 is characterized by its onward, irresistible and majestic flow that distinguishes it so clearly from the drama narrated in Gen 2-3" (*Genesis 1-11: A Commentary* [Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1984], 80). David J. A. Clines posits that "while ch. 1 views reality as an ordered pattern which is confused by the flood, chs. 2-3 see reality as a network of elemental unions which become disintegrated throughout the course of the narrative from Eden to the flood" (*The Theme of the Pentateuch* [Sheffield: JSOT, 1978], 75).

²*A Commentary on the Book of Genesis* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978), 1:84-94.

³Cassuto, 7. For a different view see von Rad, 46: "Faith in creation is neither the basis nor the goal of the declarations in Gen., chs. 1 and 2. Rather, the position of both the Yahwist and the Priestly document is basically faith in salvation and election."

⁴*A Commentary*, 71.

noticeable similarities between certain elements found in the beginning of chap. 2 and at the end of chap. 3.⁵ Claus Westermann holds that the idea of the two chapters as an independent and separate narrative was "one of the most important and decisive results of literary criticism."⁶ The presence of thematic links between the two chapters has been proposed also by von Rad.⁷ David J. A. Clines points to four areas of harmonious relationship in chap. 2 that are disrupted in chap. 3.⁸

In addition to being a literary unit, as seen by the structural and thematic links already noted,⁹ these two chapters also show a unity of purpose. The two come together to present the first of many reversals in the Bible.¹⁰ The purpose of this article is to explore this reversal theme in Gen 2 and 3.

⁵Ibid., 159, 169-171. Cassuto argues for linking some passages through common terms; for example, Gen 2:7, 17 to 3:19; Gen 2:25 to 3:7, 21; Gen 2:5, 7 to 3:23; Gen 2:8, 15 to 3:24. Considering the two chapters as a unit, E. A. Speiser calls them "the brief Eden interlude" (*Genesis*, AB [New York: Doubleday, 1981], 18), while G. W. Coats uses the term "Paradise Tale" (*Genesis, with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 28). In their respective studies Derek Kidner (*Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary* [Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1967], 58) and John Skinner also treat the two chapters as a single unit (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Genesis*, ICC [Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1951], 1:51).

⁶Westermann notes that in consequence "it is but logical to use this same method as a tool for a more exact interpretation of the passage" (186).

⁷"The serpent 'which God had made' in ch. 3.1 points back to the creation of the animals in ch. 2.18. The theme of shame in ch. 3.7 ff. is taken up and attached (almost abruptly) to the narrative about the creation of man (2.25)" (von Rad, 100). Also contributing to the discussion is J. T. Walsh, "Genesis 2:46-3:24: A Synchronic Approach," *JBL* 96 (1977): 161-177.

⁸In ch. 3 the relationship of harmony between each of these pairs [man and soil, man and animals, man and woman, man and God, all in chap. 2] is disrupted. The communion between God and the man who breathes God's breath (2:7) has become the legal relationship of accuser and defendant (3:9ff); the relationship of man and woman as "one flesh" (2:24) has soured into mutual recrimination (3:12); the bond of man (*'ādām*) with the soil (*'ādāmāh*) from which he was built has been supplanted by 'an alienation. . .' (3:17 ff.); the harmonious relationship of man with beast in which man is the acknowledged master (2:19 ff.) has become a perpetual struggle of intransigent foes (3:15)" (Clines, 75).

⁹On the structure of Gen 2 and 3 see the whole issue of *Semeia* 18 (1980).

¹⁰See Zdravko Stefanovic, "Daniel: A Book of Significant Reversals," *AUSS* 30 (Summer 1992): 139-150.

The Content of Genesis 1:1-2:3

According to von Rad, Gen 1:1 is the "summary statement of everything that is unfolded step by step in the following verses."¹¹ The language of the chapter is simple, yet decisive: God's powerful word created the world in such a way that "it was firm, or well established."¹² The creative activity of the first three days parallels that which ensued on the following three, while the Sabbath rest, established on the seventh day, had no counterpart. The structure of Gen 1 follows the pattern: introduction + 3 pairs + climax or conclusion. This structure is visualized in **Figure 1**.¹³ The seventh day, rich with God's blessings, was the climax of God's creative work. In the words of Abraham Heschel, "Last in creation, first in intention, 'the Sabbath is the end of the creation of heaven and earth.'"¹⁴ Everything was declared to be "very good" and no shade of disorder can be traced in the complete Creation Story.

¹¹He also says that the "hidden grandeur of this statement is that God is the Lord of the world" (49). For Westermann the same verse is "a heading that takes in everything in the narrative in one single sentence" (94).

¹²Cassuto derives *kēn* (1:30) from the root *kwn* and translates the phrase "and it was firm or an established thing" (34).

¹³On this idea, see Jacques B. Doukhan, *The Genesis Creation Story* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978). See also W. H. Shea, "The Unity of the Creation Account," *Origins* 5 (1978): 9-38. A structure similar to that proposed in **Figure 1** is found in other biblical passages. In Matt 1 the disputed number of 14 generations can best be explained as 7 x 2.

¹⁴*The Sabbath: Its Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Young, 1951), 14. Further describing the uniqueness of the Sabbath, V. Hamilton notes: "Silence and stillness once again enter the atmosphere. The mood of the prologue now resurfaces in this epilogue. There is no activity, no noise, no speaking. All that God has willed and designed for his canvas of the universe is now in its place" (*The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 141). Von Rad contends that "the declarations about a Sabbath at creation contain one of the most remarkable and daring testimonies in the entire priestly document" (61). For Westermann, "the sanctification of the Sabbath institutes an order for humankind according to which time is divided into time and holy time, time for work and time for rest. The work of creation began with three acts of separation" (171).

INTRODUCTION (Gen 1:1-2) Summary of the Story	
A. FIRST DAY (1:35) 1. Creation of light 2. Light described as good 3. Light separated from darkness	A: FOURTH DAY (1:14-19) 1. Creation of luminaries 2. Luminaries described as good 3. Times divided by luminaries
B. SECOND DAY (1:6-8) 1. The Expanse created (heaven) 2. Waters divided from waters (seas) 3. Heaven named	B: FIFTH DAY (1:20-23) 1. Creatures fly toward heaven 2. Creatures move in the seas 3. Creation blessed
C. THIRD DAY (1:9-13) 1. Dry ground appears (earth) 2. Grass, plants, and trees created 3. Vegetation yields seeds according to their kinds	C: SIXTH DAY (1:24-31) 1. Earth population created 2. Livestock, ground creatures, and animals made 3. God creates man in His image and likeness
CLIMAX: THE SEVENTH DAY (2:1-3) Unparalleled Blessing	

Figure 1. A Structural Outline of the Creation Story in Genesis 1:1-2:3.

The Content of Genesis 2:4-25

After introducing the sinless and fully blessed life on the newly created earth, the Genesis narrator describes the creation of man in retrospect. This crown of all creation was placed in the beautiful garden of Eden, whose main source of blessing was a four-branched river carrying fertility to all the earth, both inside and outside of Eden.

The privileges and responsibilities of the first human being in the garden are stated. The immediate responsibility was to make an inventory of all the animals and give to each a name. This action emphasized man's loneliness. The Creator provided a solution to this problem, and man's pleasant surprise at receiving this gift is recorded.

The first part of the story climaxes in the closing verses of chap. 2 with the description of a happy life of intimacy and innocence. Verse 24 speaks of the union between Adam and Eve which perpetuated their lineage.

The Content of Genesis 3

Gen 3 opens with a new character in the story, one not necessarily unknown to the Genesis narrator's audience. The tempter described as "serpent" deceives the humans in a subtle way.¹⁵

The lengthy persuasion to taste the forbidden fruit culminates in quick action: both Eve and Adam sin.¹⁶ The tragic outcome of the transgression was increased by Eve's expectation of becoming a divine being, according to the serpent's promise. Realizing the first results of sin, the couple tried to hide from God.

God informs the man and the woman of the terrible consequences of their fall. His pronouncement of the sentence commences with the serpent, then moves to the woman, and finally to the man. This order of the sentence is reversed from the order of the narrative, forming a small-scale reversal in the story. Then judgment is pronounced and man is expelled from the garden. Von Rad notes that "the penalties go in reverse order to the trial proceedings."¹⁷ Finally a celestial guardian is set "to keep the way" to the life-giving tree.

Relationship Between Genesis 2 and 3

A close study of Gen 2 and 3 discloses a carefully-crafted structure.¹⁸ The structure is chiasmic, since the content of chap. 3 contains a reversed order of similar elements and events found in chap. 2. For the sake of comparison, the two chapters can be divided into four logical parts, each containing distinctive themes. The parts of chap. 3 are in fact reversals of those in chap. 2. Following is a detailed analysis of the structure and meaning of both chapters, stressing the chiasmic art of the narrative and showing the great reversal in the story of the Garden of Eden. (The same information is summarized in **Figure 2**.) When viewed

¹⁵Hebrew, *wehannāhāš*. The subject in this sentence precedes the predicate for emphasis.

¹⁶The lengthy dialogue between the serpent and the woman (3:1-6a) is in sharp contrast with the swift action expressed by a succession of four consecutive verbs: took, ate, gave, ate (3:6b), all four preceded by *waw* consecutive.

¹⁷Von Rad, 92. The order of subjects in the beginning of chap. 3 is serpent-woman-man. Then in the trial one finds man-woman-serpent. Lastly in the sentence the order is again serpent-woman-man.

¹⁸The Hebrew root *ʿrm* found in 2:25 and 3:1 is the best discernible lexical link between two chapters. Says J. T. Walsh: "On a literary level Gen 2:46-3:24 is a highly structured unit" (177).

this way, Gen 2 has no independent structure of its own. If this fact is overlooked, the plan of the chapter can be chronologically misleading.¹⁹

Gen 2:4—An Introductory Verse Alluding to the Reversal

This introductory verse reminds the reader that God is the Creator of heaven and earth. The emphasis on this fact is expressed by a double repetition. Everything which follows in the first part of the story reported in chap. 2 is traced back to the Creator who is the protagonist of the first part of the drama.

The words in Gen 2:4 are marked by the use of double chiasm. Not only is the subject/verb order reversed ("heaven/earth" and "created" is reversed to "made" and "earth/heaven"), the "heaven/earth" is reversed to "earth/heaven." One should see in these reversals, especially in the second one, an allusion to the reversal on a larger scale in the story as a whole, called in this study "the Great Reversal." The verse further matches the introductory statement of the Creation story in Gen 1:1.

Part One: A. Created and Settled (Gen 2:5-8);

A'. Judged and Expelled (Gen 3:22-24)

The very beginning of the story of Gen 2 and 3 speaks of innocent and carefree life on earth before man's creation. There was no toil, "no bush of the field," "no plant," no "rain on the earth" (2:5-6). The end of the story (Gen 3:22-24) stresses the opposite. Because of the entrance of sin the man knows both "good and evil."

Whereas before there were "streams" coming up from the earth to water the ground (2:6), after the sin, blessings do not come automatically and man's responsibility is increased (3:23). Thus the beginning of the story declares that "there was no man to work the ground" (2:5), while the end of the story ironically reveals that after the act of sin, man must work the ground (3:23).

¹⁹Westermann finds in "Gen 2-3 repetitions, lack of agreement, lack of balance, gaps in the line of thought, contradictions. One could not expect anything else." These he attributes to "the many-sided process of the formation of this text" (190).

INTRODUCTION Gen 2:4	
<p>A. CREATED AND SETTLED (2:5-8)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Innocent, carefree life: no toil, no plants, no rain 2. Streams water the ground 3. No man to work the ground 4. Through breath becomes a living being the tree of life and living forever 5. God plants a garden in the east 6. The man settles in the garden 	<p>A'. JUDGED AND EXPELLED (3:22-24)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The man knows good and evil 2. The man's responsibility increased 3. There is a man to work the ground 4. The man is prevented from eating of the tree of life and living forever 5. God places cherubim in the east 6. The man expelled from the garden
<p>B. BLESSINGS AND ORDER (2:9-17)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trees and plants pleasing to eye and good for food planted in the grow out of the ground in the garden 2. Blessings related to a river and its four head-waters 3. Havilah's 3-fold blessing: gold, resin, onyx 4. The man to work in the garden and care for it 5. On the day man eats he will die 	<p>B'. CURSES AND DISORDER (3:14-21)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Thorns and thistles grow out of the ground 2. Curses related to four subjects: animals, woman, man, ground 3. Serpent's 3-fold curse: being cursed, crawling on belly, eating dust 4. In sweat the man tills the cursed ground and eats of it 5. Verdict: Return to the dust
<p>C. WOMAN CREATED (2:18-23)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God's concern: Man is alone 2. The man needs a helper 3. God provides a helper 4. Man's lordship over 5. All animals in harmony with man 6. Woman taken from the man 7. Man's admiration for the woman 8. Happy intimate relationship 	<p>C'. WOMAN TEMPTED (3:1-13)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Man hides from God who still looks for him 2. Together with helper, man is helpless 3. The man blames his helper 4. Man is afraid, naked, hiding 5. An animal deceives the man 6. Woman takes fruit and gives to man 7. Woman's admiration for fruit 8. Fear and shame of naked body
<p>CLIMAX (2:24-25) Happiness in sinless and innocent human relationship</p>	

Figure 2. The Chiastic Structure of Genesis 2 and 3

The same man who through the breath of life "became a living being" (2:7) is now rendered unable "to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (3:22).

Lastly, the same God who "planted a garden in the east, in Eden" (2:8) now places "on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim to guard the way to the tree of life" (3:24). Thus the man, who had been created by God and placed in the garden (2:8), is now judged and expelled from it by God (3:23).

Following is a list of the Hebrew words and expressions shared by both sections in the story: *yhwh* ³*elōhîm*, "the Lord God"; *hā* ²*ādām*, "the man"; *la* ²*ḥōd* *et-hā* ²*dāmāh*, "to work the ground"; *hayyîm*, "life"; *gan-bē* ²*ēden miqqedem*, "a garden in the east in Eden"; *šām*, "there."

Part Two: B. Blessings and Order (Gen 2:9-17);

B'. Curses and Disorder (Gen 3:14-21)

The story continues in section B of Gen 2 (vv. 9-17) with a detailed description of the garden of Eden and its blessings. The trees that God made to grow out of the ground "were pleasing to the eye and good for food" (2:9). After the sin, in section B' of Gen 3 (vv. 14-21), the narrator reports that the ground produced "thorns and thistles" displeasing to the eye. Thus, two kinds of weed plants take the place of the two trees in the perfect garden.

The blessings of the garden are related to a river flowing from Eden, and its four "headwaters." After the sin, the curses have to do with four subjects: animals (3:14); woman (3:16); man (3:17-19); and ground (3:17).²⁰ In Gen 2 "the land of Havilah" was decorated with a threefold sign of blessings; "good gold," aromatic resin, and onyx (2:12). In contrast, Gen 3 reveals one of the animals, the serpent, carrying a threefold sign of curse: being cursed above all creatures, crawling on the belly, and eating dust (3:14).²¹ The reversal occurred because the human beings once had freedom of eating from any tree except one (2:16-17), yet they dared to eat from the single forbidden tree (3:17); they could eat from only one of these two trees at a time.

Section B closes with a prohibition against eating from that single tree lest one die (2:17), while in section B', after the sin, the verdict is pronounced: Man will return to the ground out of which he was taken

²⁰Even though the text does not explicitly state that the woman and the man were cursed, the two were deprived of many blessings.

²¹"To eat dust" is a Biblical idiom relating to an utmost humiliation and curse (see Psalm 72:9).

(3:19). The section, however, closes with a ray of hope. First, assurance is given that the line of living human beings will continue (3:20); second, God takes care of the immediate needs of the man and woman by clothing them (3:21).

The following is a list of the Hebrew words and phrases found in both sections: *smḥ* (hiphil imperfect), "grow out"; *yhwḥ* ^ʿ*elōhîm*, "the Lord God"; *hā*^ʾ*dāmāh*, "the ground"; *ʾkl* . . . *ʿēš*, "eat . . . tree"; *rō*^ʾ*š*, "head"; *šēm*, "name"; *hlk*, "walk"; *lqḥ*, "take"; *šwh*, "command"; *ādām* . . . *ʾmr*, "man . . . said"; *lō*^ʾ *tō*^ʾ*kal mimmennū*, "you shall not eat from it."

Part Three: C. Woman Created (Gen 2:18-23)

C'. Woman Tempted (Gen 3:1-13)

Section C of Gen 2 (vv. 18-23) focuses on God's concern for man's social needs. The Creator declares that "it is not good for the man to be alone" (2:18). After the sin, however (Section C' of Gen 3:1-13), that same man wants to be alone and hides from God who still looks for him (3:9). Thus the man who had no helper suitable for him (2:20) is now helpless, in spite of having a helper (3:10). God states that he "will make a helper" (2:18), yet now the man blames that very helper whom he affirms God "put here with me" (3:12).²² Man's superiority and lordship over the livestock, birds, and the beasts (2:20) stands in sharp contrast to the man who is afraid, naked, and trying to hide (3:10). Whereas part C says that all animals were in harmony with man and subject to him (2:19-20), part C' speaks of the man and the woman deceived by an animal and in conflict with it (3:13).

Section C describes the woman as the being "taken out of the man" (2:22), while C' speaks of the same woman in an active role, taking some fruit and giving to the man (3:6). Man's admiration for the woman (2:23) is replaced by her admiration for the forbidden fruit (3:6). Whereas before the man was in an intimate relationship with the woman—bone to bone, flesh to flesh (2:23)—now man and woman are ashamed and afraid (3:7-8).

The following is a list of words and phrases common to both sections: *yhwḥ* ^ʿ*elōhîm*, "the Lord God"; *hā*^ʾ*ādām*, "the man"; *ʿśh*, "make"; *qr*^ʾ . . . *hā*^ʾ*ādām lō*, "the man called it"; *lqḥ*, "take"; *ʾiššah*, "woman"; *ʾiš*, "man."

²²Hebrew *ʿezer k'negdō* is found twice in section C (2:18, 20).

The Climax of Sinless Life (Gen 2:24-25)

The climax of the Story of Creation was reached when God rested on the seventh day (2:2-3). The climax of the story of the Garden of Eden focuses on man's relationship to other human beings, beginning with the family unit. The climax speaks of a sinless, harmonious and happy human life in all its innocence.²³ A supernatural unity is related here in which two beings are able to become *bāsār 'ehād*, "one flesh" (2:24).

Summary

A structural study of chaps. 2 and 3 of the book of Genesis reveals the presence of a chiasm in the narrative and strongly suggests the unity of the story as argued by scholars. The theme of the story of the Garden of Eden is the Great Reversal brought about by the entrance of sin into the world created by God.²⁴ Clines affirms that the flood is only the final stage in a process of cosmic disintegration which began in Eden.²⁵

The presence of the chiastic structure or reversed parallelism presents the literary beauty of Genesis through a story that teaches how God was the source of creation in all its perfection, while the disorder was brought about by man's act of sin. Elsewhere the Bible teaches that the last cosmic reversal in history will be God's reversal.

²³Ibid, where v. 25 is called "The climax of the creation."

²⁴Expressed more concisely, Gen. ch. 3, asserts that all sorrow comes from sin" (von Rad, 101).

²⁵Clines, 75.