



The Eden Narrative

A Beginning in Seven Acts

Genesis 2:4b-3:24

*A literal translation by Everett Fox,
edited and expanded by John Elliott Lein.*

Tree designed by Freepik.

ACT I

At the time of YHWH, God's making of land and skies,
no shrub of the field was yet on the land,
no grasses of the field had yet sprouted,
for YHWH, God, had not made it rain upon the land
and there was no earthling to till the earth—
but a flow would well up from the earth
and water the whole surface of the earth;
YHWH, God, sculpted the earthling
from the dust of the earth,
he blew into its nostrils the *spirit* of life,
and the earthling became a living soul.

ACT II

YHWH, God, planted a Garden of Pleasure in days of old,
and placed there the earthling whom he had formed.
YHWH, God, caused to spring up from the soil
every kind of tree that was pleasing to the sight
and good for food,
and the Tree of Life in the center of the Garden,
and the Tree of the Discerning of Good and Bad.

YHWH, God, took the earthling and placed it
in the Garden of Pleasure,
to work it and to watch it.

YHWH, God, commanded the earthling, saying,
“From every tree of the Garden you may eat—yes, eat!
but from the Tree of the Discerning
of Good and Bad you must not eat!
For on the day that you eat from it,
you shall die—yes, die!”

ACT III

Now YHWH, God, said,
“It is not good that the earthling is alone;
I will make a *mighty-helper* corresponding to it.”

So YHWH, God, formed from the earth
every living-thing of the field and
every bird of the heavens,
and brought each to the earthling to see what it would call it;
whatever the earthling called each living creature
that became its name.

The earthling called-out names
for every herd-animal
and for the birds of the heavens

and for every living-thing of the field,
but for the earthling,
there could be found none corresponding to it.

So YHWH, God, cast a deep sleep
upon the earthling so it slept,
he took one of its sides and closed up the flesh there.
And YHWH, God, built the side
taken from the earthling
into a woman;
and brought her to the earthling.

The earthling said,

“*This* time!
Bone from my bones
and flesh from my flesh.
Of this be said ‘Female,’
for from ‘Male’ was this taken.”

Hence a man leaves his father and mother
and clings to his woman
so that they become one flesh.

ACT IV

Now the two of them,
the man and his woman, were *nude*,
yet they were not ashamed.
Now the snake was more *shrewd*
than all the living-things of the field
that YHWH, God, had made.

It said to the woman:

“Even though God said:
‘You are not to eat from any
of the trees in the Garden..’”

The woman said to the snake:

“From the fruit of the trees in the Garden
we may eat—
but from the fruit of the tree
that is in the center of the Garden God has said:
‘You are not to eat from it
and you are not to touch it,
lest you die.’”

The snake said to the woman:

“Die? You will not die!
Rather, God knows
that on the day that you eat from it,
your eyes will be opened

and you will become like gods,
discerning good and bad.”

The woman saw that the tree was good for *eating*
and that it was *beautiful* to the eyes,
and the tree was desirable for *wisdom*.
She took from its fruit and ate
and gave also to her man beside her,
and he ate.
The eyes of the two of them were opened
and they knew then that they were nude.
They sewed fig leaves together
and made themselves loincloths.

ACT V

Now they heard the sound of YHWH, God,
walking about in the Garden
at the breezy-time of the day.
And the man and his woman hid themselves
from the face of YHWH, God,
amid the trees of the Garden.

YHWH, God, called to the man and said to him:

“Where are you?”

He said:

“I heard the sound of you in the Garden
and I was afraid,
because I am nude,
and so I hid myself.”

He said:

“Who told you that you are nude?
From the tree about which
I commanded you not to eat,
have you eaten?”

The man said:

“The woman whom you gave to be beside me,
she gave me from the tree,
and so I ate.”

YHWH, God, said to the woman:

“What is this that you have done?”

The woman said:

“The snake enticed me,
and so I ate.”

ACT VI

YHWH, God, said to the snake:

“Because you have done this,
damned be you from all the animals
and from all the living-things of the field!
Upon your belly shall you walk
and dust shall you eat,
all the days of your life.
I put enmity between you and the woman,
between your seed and her seed:
they will bruise you on the head,
you will bruise them in the heel.”

To the woman he said:

“Multiplying I multiply
your toilsome-work and your conceptions;
with sorrowful-labor shall you rear children.
Toward your man have you directed your longing
and he will direct you.”

To the man he said:

“Because (you said) you hearkened
to the voice of your woman
and have eaten from the tree
about which I commanded you,
saying: ‘You are not to eat from it!’
Damned be the soil on your account,
with sorrowful-labor shall you eat from it,
all the days of your life.
Thorn and sting-shrub let it spring up for you,
when you seek to eat the plants of the field!
By the sweat of your brow shall you eat bread,
until you return to the earth,
for from it you were taken.
For you are dust,
and to dust shall you return.”

ACT VII

The man called his woman’s name:

Havva, “Life-giver!”,
for she became the mother of all the living.

Now YHWH, God, made the man and his woman
coats of skins and clothed them.

YHWH, God, said:

“Here, the man has become like one of us,
in discerning good and bad.
So now, lest he stretch forth his hand
and take also from the Tree of Life
and eat and live throughout the ages...!”

So YHWH, God, sent him away
from the Garden of Pleasure,
to work the *humus* from which he had been taken.
He drove the *human* out and caused to him dwell
eastward of the Garden of Pleasure;
setting the winged-sphinxes
and the flashing, ever-turning sword
to watch over the way to the Tree of Life.

INTERPRETATIONS

A vision of childhood transitioning to the contradictions and pains of adolescence and adulthood; a fable describing the emergence of human consciousness from animal origins: by gaining an awareness of time and our egos, we enter into suffering and death in a new way than pre-conscious beings; consequences exist for the kind of beings we are.

Consider: wisdom is always personified as a woman; woman providing the fruit of wisdom to man; Eden as a symbolic “womb” (which requires a woman to take the fruit); couple exercising will to leave. The serpent talks to the woman who considers and decides, while the man is standing there and merely takes and eats.

Some other interpretations include:

- “Therefore, humans now have knowledge but no longer live in Paradise: a trade-off.” (*Gunkel* 1910)
- Text addresses question: “Why is the human being, though created by God, a being limited by death, suffering, toil, and sin?” (*Westermann* 1976)
- “explains sin, a model of what happens whenever man disobeys God.” (*Gordon Wenham* 1987)
- “the possibility of an extension of human existence beyond the limits set for it by God at creation. Human hubris and consequences are thematic focus.” (*Gerhard von Rad* 1961)
- “...tells of reason for present human predicament of shortcomings and damaged relationships; the root of evil is human endeavor to form one’s own existence autonomously.” (*Odil Hannes Steck* 1970)
- “Trees show the two themes are knowledge and immortality; God is the one who comes out with a slightly shaky moral record. A story about how immortality was almost gained, but lost. God didn’t want to share.” (*James Barr* 1993)
- “fundamental conflict of the story is between Life and Knowledge. Impossibility of having both knowledge and life.” (*Stordalen* 2000)
- “Human maturation: before birth > childhood > adolescence > maturity. Knowledge as sign of maturity.” (*Ellen van Wolde* 1989)
- “Life and Death is the subject. Interpretation is a love story gone awry: Eros created, develops, is contaminated, disintegrates.” (*Phyllis Tribble* 1985)
- “Choice as the major element in human existence” (*Everett Fox*)

TRANSLATION NOTES

- **YHWH, God:** The *Tetragrammaton*, the unique and unpronounceable Hebrew name for God, is used here along with the generic “elohymn” (god/gods).
- **land and skies:** “earth/heaven” switched in order from the first story; retaining “earth” for *h’adamah*.
- **earthling to till the earth:** *h’adam* is generic word for “the human”/humankind, from word for soil/earth *h’adamah*. Begins as un-sexed being, only “Adam” in Gen. 5. Breath/Spirit + Body = Soul.
- **Garden of Pleasure:** *eden* as fertility, luxuriance, bliss; perfect harmony amongst divine and creation.
- **in days of old:** “in the east” can also be translated temporally rather than geographically, as it is elsewhere in the Bible (“from of old” in Micah 5:2).
- **center of the Garden:** both trees are central in story.
- **Discerning of Good and Bad:** “knowing” as discerning/choosing (wisdom) amongst all things.
- **on the day that you eat:** conditional “if”: warning of death as consequence rather than death sentence.
- **mighty-helper:** *ezer* is used throughout the Bible for strength coming to aid, usually God for people.
- **corresponding to it:** emphasis is on similarity.
- **one of its sides:** *t’zela* is commonly the side of a building or mountain, not rib.
- **this time:** *this* step/occurrence, implying “finally!”
- **Woman/Man:** *isha* “woman/wife” is distinct before *ish* “man/husband.” Sex, not marriage.
- **nude/shrewd:** Dr. Fox surfaces the rhyming word-play of the Hebrew behind these paired words.
- **snake:** proud fellow creation of God; crafty, disloyal, lying; trickster (mythic consciousness-raiser).
- **and you are not to touch it:** instruction added.
- **eating/beautiful/wisdom:** three growing levels of awareness of the benefits of the fruit.
- **Where are you?:** is an appeal to one’s responsibility, not just location.
- **sorrowful-labor:** psychic rather than physical toll.
- **longing/direct:** shifting from freedom in God to a codependent relationship.
- **damned:** only the serpent and ground are cursed (man’s relationship with soil of origin is disrupted).
- **you are dust to dust shall you return:** kept from the Tree of Life, humans return to original *humus*.
- **Havva:** (traditional: *Eve*) the human follows God as name-giver; Havva soon becomes a name-giver (like the human) and life-creator (the God).