

# Chaos and Order, Order and Chaos: The Creation Story as the Story of Human Community

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Extended prolegomenon

Along with a number of other contemporary scholars, Walter Brueggemann has asked us to remember that God speaks to us in scripture most often through narrative and storytelling rather than systematic theological exposition. Speaking of the first chapters of Genesis, he makes the following observation:

The story is not explained. It is simply left there with the listening community free to take what can be heard. There is, of course, talk here of sin and evil and death. But it is understated talk. The stakes are too high for reduction to propositions. The story does not want to aid our theologizing. It wants, rather, to catch us in our living. It will permit no escape into theology.<sup>1</sup>

As Brueggemann says, the story is both concrete and imaginatively open-ended, allowing us the freedom to consider the variety of ways in which present events and those of the story may overlap.<sup>2</sup> Scripture calls for a different kind of reading than what we use for a modern history, philosophy, or theology text.

I will try to take the substance of Brueggemann's warning to heart and read scripture differently than I would read a theology text. And I certainly hope not to read it merely as an aid to theologizing. Nevertheless, I will be doing scriptural theology. But I do so precisely because I think that is a kind of theology that can "catch us in our living" by helping us to read differently than we previously have.

My general interpretive strategy is to make the most sense of the text that I can, as that text presently stands in the canon. I assume that what we have is the product of redaction. Obviously it is also, for most of us, the result of translation and interpretation. Few of us are knowledgeable enough to read the Hebrew text for ourselves. Further, as a cultural artifact and something that we read from within a long history of its influence, the first chapters of Genesis are the result of interpretation for all of us.

But I also assume that the redactors and interpreters who have given us these texts were not blind to what they were doing. In particular, the redactors brought the texts together as they did for some reason. So for me the question is not the historico-critical question, "How did the redactors combine texts to produce the text we have?" but the hermeneutic question, "What meanings do we find in the existing, though redacted, text?" That means that I will read the text literally and typologically. But neither of those terms, particularly not the first, means what our usual thinking about them assumes.

Consider a clue we find in the Bible about how to read biblical texts: Paul speaks of allegory, *allegoria*, in Galatians 4:24, where he uses the story of Hagar and Sarah to make a point about the new covenant and the old covenant. But Paul probably means by allegory what we call typology. In a typological reading the reader accepts the literal sense of the text but assumes that there is, in addition to the literal meaning, a deeper meaning.

It is important to note, however, that in premodern usage the word literal also does not mean what it has come to mean. In other words, it does not mean "free from metaphor, allegory, etc."<sup>3</sup> The word does mean, as it does for us, "depicting a historical event"; but the ancient understanding of history was not our understanding, so it did not cleave apart an account of past events and figurative meaning as we do. As John Walton observes, the first

composers and readers of our text “believed that something existed not by virtue of its material properties, but by virtue of its having a function in an ordered system.”<sup>4</sup>

Ancient history was, therefore, more a matter of giving an account of the order within which things took part than representing the material conditions of an event. In addition, because the historical question had not arisen, resolving the question of a text’s historicity was not part of interpreting it. Thus, as Mark Gignilliat says, “the historicity of the OT documents in the pre-critical tradition did not carry the weight that it does in the modern period. To work within this [modern] framework is an imposition of modern sensibilities onto a pre-modern world.”<sup>5</sup>

Given these differences between ancient and modern sensibilities, we can say that Paul isn’t concerned with the historical accuracy of the text. Surely he understood the story of Hagar and Sarah literally; it is unlikely that he questioned the historical accuracy of the chapters we are reading, though he rarely refers to them (which ought to give us pause). Yet when he does refer to our story, he uses it for its typological significance. For Paul the literal and typological are of a piece, aspects of the same whole. He is concerned with the full sense of the text, including its typological meaning, and not with whether the account is historical.

So I will read the creation story in a way similar to that of Paul: I won’t concern myself one way or the other with the historical accuracy of the text. I will read it literally: by the letter. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that I will give a reading of the plain sense of the text. Plain carries less philosophical baggage than literal, but as I use these terms neither says anything about historicity. That means, for example, that I won’t read the text as if I know that the serpent is Satan, an equivalence established in later texts but not set forth in this narrative or any other part of the canonical Bible. In fact, as part of the narrative, the serpent is a more complicated figure than that straightforward equivalence allows. So I will read this episode as the biblical narrative tells it.

That said, I will not refrain from sometimes reading the creation story with allusions to or pointers from the restoration. Even apart from those references, I will read as a Latter-day Saint. I cannot do otherwise if I take a position in which I recognize the text as canonical.<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that the restoration provides the only or the original meaning of the text. It is to say that the restoration has given us a legitimate reading of the text, even if that legitimacy is based partly on later prophetic inspiration rather than on the original work of the author or the interpretations established in the interpretive traditions.

Long obsessed with the chapters we are reading, I wrote about them in my PhD thesis and have delivered several previous papers on them and published an essay on them in a scholarly journal.<sup>7</sup> But I continue to be obsessed, and I continue to see new things in their story. I will try here to say something new about a theme that has long fascinated me—community, a theme that I’ve often explored.

My focus will be on the creation story found in Genesis 2–3, which I will treat as a distinct story from the narrative in Genesis 1 or Genesis 1–2:3 (depending on how we understand the first three verses of chapter 2). But I will also read the two stories as related to each other, the first informing my interpretation of the second.

Let us start with the overall structure of the story. Several commentators have noted the chiasmic structure of Genesis 2–3. Their ways of laying out that chiasmus vary, but they see a chiasmus with its center at Genesis 3:6, Man and Woman’s transgression of God’s commandment not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Taking a cue from Gordon Wenham’s way of understanding the chiasmus, I will focus on the movement from outside the

garden to inside and then back out again. I'm less concerned, therefore, with the chiasmic structure itself than I am with the story's movement and what happens in that movement. I want to think about the changes that occur as the story moves from outside to inside to outside.

As I read the story I will also have in the back of my mind what I take to be part of the original reason for giving this story the shape it presently has: Whatever the origins of the most ancient versions of the text, the story we are looking at was redacted for a sixth-century-bce audience living in exile in Babylon. Significantly, it situates the Garden of Eden, like Babylon, on the Euphrates (Genesis 2:14), perhaps suggesting thereby that Babylon is a usurper.

I am not a scholar of the ancient Near East, so I am in no position to do anything more than raise a question and make a suggestion. But I wonder whether the serpent in Genesis 3 was meant, among other things, to remind those who heard the story of the Sumerian (and thus Babylonian) god Enlil, the god of air and storms (and breath!) whom humans see as a snake. If so, then one point of the story would be to show that what others take to be a god is, in fact, powerless before the God of Israel.<sup>9</sup> Whether that is the case or not, however, the story certainly refutes the Babylonians' claims about their gods by offering a counternarrative of humankind's relation to Israel's God.

A reading of the garden story as a contestation of Israel's circumstances makes possible a comparison to the situation in which contemporary believers find themselves: in a more or less hospitable world that nevertheless understands human being-in-the-world very differently than the surrounding culture does. In spite of that difference in understanding of what it means to be a human being in the world, the ways of the surrounding culture appear to be similar enough that it is sometimes difficult to tease apart and see the differences between the two. In the sixth century bce the question was, "How does a believer living in a world that is, in the end, utterly alien though hospitable, retain the relationships with God and other human beings given in the religion of Israel?" Contemporary believers, and certainly not just LDS believers, ask themselves the same question. For me that question takes this form: What does it mean for believers to be together in the world, and is that the fundamental way of being together (whatever fundamental might mean here)? I will read with that question at work in my reading.

## The story

Most commentators believe that the first verses of Genesis 2 are the final comment of the first creation story rather than the first comment of the second story. We don't have to reject the scholarly consensus to see what previous readers have seen in the traditional chapter division, which includes verses 1 through 3 in the second story as the link between the two stories of creation. I will read the text in that way, against the grain of contemporary scholarship but along with much of the tradition since the tradition tries to make sense of the redacted text as a whole rather than of the elements that have made up the redaction. Traditionally our story begins on the Sabbath, with God delighting in the world that he has created. He has brought harmony to physical chaos, and he delights in that harmony. But the earth is as yet barren of cultivated plants, nor does it have someone to cultivate them. Creation remains unfinished.

Significantly, God creates the tiller before he creates the plants to be tilled. In his celebratory delight, he forms an as yet sexually undifferentiated Man. The term man specifically designates "male and female" in Genesis 1:27, but in Genesis 2:7 it does not yet specify either sex. That is, man is not yet male, because he is singular, and maleness makes sense only in relation to femaleness. Sexual difference is unlike other biological differences. Other differences of kind divide genera and species, but the male/female difference cuts across or within those genera and species. At this point in the story, because Man is alone and has not yet been sexually differentiated, he is not

yet fully human. Imitating what he did in the physical creation, God creates Man from “dust” and God’s moist breath. God’s breath waters the dust to create Man in the same way that the mist—more accurately a flood or overflow<sup>10</sup>—waters “the whole face of the ground” (Genesis 2:6). Dust is a chaotic nothing or almost nothing from which one must be raised (1 Samuel 2:8; 2 Nephi 1:21). Yet Man’s creation from dust suggests also a greater destiny, as Victor Hamilton observes:

Especially interesting for possible connections with Gen. 2:7 are those passages which speak of an exaltation from dust, with the dust representing pre-royal status (1 K. 16:2), poverty (1 Sam. 2:8; Ps. 113:7), and death (Isa. 26:19; Dan. 12:2). To “be raised from the dust” means to be elevated to royal office, to rise above poverty, to find life. Here man is formed from dust to be in control of a garden. Thus, the emphasis on the dust in Gen. 2:7, far from disagreeing with ch. 1, affirms ch. 1’s view of man’s regality. He is raised from the dust to reign.<sup>11</sup>

But what does it mean to reign, and over what and how will Man reign? Initially it appears that Man is to reign over the garden that God creates immediately after Man has been created. It is as if, like an ancient king, God has planted a garden for his pleasure, and he has placed within it a gardener to care for it. Someone must “dress and keep it” for the ruler’s pleasure. But there are indications that Man is to be more than just the gardener appointed to maintain the harmony and beauty of the royal garden. Perhaps the most important indication is that Man is created before rather than after the garden is planted.

Man is “a living soul” (Genesis 2:7), a breathing being rather than one without breath, in Man’s case the breath of God.<sup>12</sup> As such he has an importance in the world superior to the plants of the garden, which are without breath. He comes before them. We see a further suggestion of Man’s status as more than servant in the word translated “till” (Genesis 2:5: “There was not a man to till the ground”). That word is more often used of worship, as in Deuteronomy 4:19, and it is especially used of the Levites’ duties in the tabernacle (Numbers 3:7–8; 8:26; 18:5–6). In the same vein, Gregory Beale notes that the Hebrew words translated “dress and keep” in the King James translation can easily be, and usually are, translated “serve and guard.” When these two words occur together later in the OT, without exception they have this meaning and refer either to Israelites “serving and guarding/obeying” God’s word (about 10 times) or, more often, to priests who “serve” God in the temple and “guard” the temple from unclean things entering it (Num 3:7–8; 8:25–26; 18:5–6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14).<sup>13</sup>

Tilling, serving, and guarding are the work of Levite priests. Man is to be God’s priest in the garden temple, to serve him there and to guard against any unclean thing entering that sacred space and disrupting its harmony. In the first creation story, God brought order to chaos. In the second, Man is created to guard against chaos. In particular, because the tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil are the only plants specifically named, it appears that Man is to dress and guard them from disorder.

But Man is commanded not to eat of the second tree. Part of his duty as guard is to guard the tree of knowledge from himself. He is implicitly noted as a potential source of disorder from the beginning. As gardener, he may share in the fruit of the garden, even in some of the best, but the fruit of the tree of knowledge is reserved, one might assume, for the King.

Whatever it means for this to be the tree of knowledge of good and evil, the knowledge it imparts cannot be just the ability to discern between right and wrong. If it were, it would be impossible to later hold Man and Woman responsible for disobeying the injunction against eating the fruit. They cannot be punished for choosing wrongly if they do not know the difference between right and wrong at all. As is easily imaginable, the question of what kind of knowledge was provided by the forbidden fruit has been much discussed over the last several millennia. The

conclusions vary, but I find convincing the arguments of W. M. Clark and others, such as Umberto Cassuto, that the wisdom given is the divine ability to act autonomously, not just the ability to discriminate right from wrong.<sup>14</sup>

In the first story of creation, we were told that sexually differentiated human beings (that is, male-female “man,” Genesis 1:27) are made in the image of God. On that understanding they are like the statues that ancient Near Eastern kings set up in their kingdom to assert their rule even where they were not present.<sup>15</sup> In the story of the garden, however, the as yet sexually undifferentiated Man is not yet a representative of the King’s presence. Even if a different future is intimated early in the story, in the beginning he is only a servant, and to servants some things—in Man’s case the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil—are forbidden.

However, this gardener cannot do his work of serving God and guarding the garden as long as he remains unique, sexually undifferentiated. He is not yet fully in the image of God. As yet creation is not fully ordered; it remains chaotic. As yet neither male nor female, Man can neither dress nor keep the garden.

Though he finds himself in the garden temple, Man cannot be God’s priest. God says that this is not good (Genesis 2:18), using a Hebrew emphatic negative. Then he teaches Man about his lack by having him compare himself to “every living creature” (Genesis 2:19). That comparison reveals Man’s uniqueness: he alone is alone. Because he is asexual, no other creature is the helper in the garden who is appropriate for him. But God will take care of that problem by creating a help meet for him.

The Hebrew phrase translated “help meet” literally means “helper like [and] opposite him.”<sup>16</sup> The point appears to be that the new creature will be like but not identical to Man. This relationship of both sameness and difference that characterizes sexual difference is essential to creation. Without it, God has said, the world is emphatically not good. It remains chaotic. Creation is incomplete without sexual difference. The problem is that with sexual difference there is always a possible new source of chaos.

As we will see, in this story the source and resolution of chaos are the same: human, sexually differentiated being. From the beginning of the garden, when it was planted as part of creation’s Sabbath, it contained chaos that came from outside the garden, namely, Man’s chaos of lack and absence. That is the implicit chaos of being neuter and singular and, so, unable either to serve God or to protect the garden from impurity. The answer to that chaos is sexual difference within the garden. But as those who already know this story, we know that the answer is also going to be a problem.

In sum: God expressed his Sabbath rest by creating Man and planting the garden of paradise. But by giving singular Man the duty of the gardener, God reintroduced chaos to creation. The irony, of course, is that the resolution of this particular chaos, namely, the resolution of Man’s lack by the creation of sexual differentiation, will introduce chaos again. Chaos and order are inextricably entwined. Each creation is an ordering of chaos, but each ordering of chaos brings new potential for chaos, and there is no end to that entwined relationship. In fact, creation is that entwinement. Traditionally, religions of “the Book” have seen an eventual end to the continuation of creation, an ultimate overcoming of chaos with perfect harmony in one kind or another of an eschatology. But this story, at least, envisions no such end.

Genesis teaches us, then, that for Man to have a companion—in other words, for there to be both male and female—neuter Man must be wounded by having a rib removed, anticipating the wound of childbirth that Eve will later be given (Genesis 3:16). By wounding asexual Man, God makes—literally builds—Woman and in doing so creates not one new being but two. Now we have not only Woman but also Man in a sexual sense. The sexually differentiated

couple, the new Man and the new Woman, come into being together as the first human beings, and they come into being via the wounding of a singular, asexual Man, a sexually undifferentiated human being. The chaos of the wound makes possible the harmony of the Man-Woman couple. They are now—almost—full human beings.

Before he entered into the deep sleep from which a new creation would emerge, neuter Man recognized that he lacked something. But he seemed not to understand what he lacked. Now, in a song of joy, the newly reborn Man recognizes what had been missing: Woman. “This one (zō’t) at last is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh [a standard kinship formula]; this one (zō’t) shall be called woman (’išš.) because this one (zō’t) has been taken from man (’š).<sup>17</sup> Man has found the one he could not find among the animals. “This one” is the helper appropriate to him. As one flesh, one heart, one soul,<sup>18</sup> the needed gardener has come into being in this couple. As a couple they are presumably ready to serve in the garden and to guard it against impurity.

But their service and guarding will turn out to mean more than serving and guarding. In fact, it will eventually mean that they can no longer serve as priest and priestess in the Edenic temple, though it will also mean the representation, the imaging, of God. We find the possibility of the commonality and coming together of human community (and human being with God) in human identity as sexually differentiated. However, the difference that makes community possible is also the possible source of the community’s disruption, chaos. Living in the tension of that sameness and difference is what it means to be kin, to be companions in the bone and flesh. That similarity and difference is what is necessary for one’s being able not only to serve but to represent or image another.

The couple is the real entity, a whole. Each member of the couple represents not only himself or herself but the couple as a whole. As part of the couple, each person represents all of humanity, though humanity is disrupted by a sexual difference that cannot be incorporated into its individual members. That differenced unity, which is the ground for human representation, is similar to the way in which the couple is related to God: each is like God and yet not like him at all. This relation of sameness and difference is what will eventually make it possible for the First Couple to go beyond merely serving God to representing him.

With the creation of Woman, human beings, as a sexually differentiated couple of one bone and one flesh, can now serve God and guard the garden. They can begin to represent the King in his garden. But all who know the story know that this first representation of the King’s gardeners in the King’s garden will reintroduce chaos and put the couple outside the garden where, not without irony, they will finally be in the image of God and will be expected to serve him. This irony is foreshadowed by the redactor’s comment in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife.” In an earlier essay I pointed out the hermeneutic importance of this seemingly parenthetical note:

Man and Woman will be forced to leave their father and mother—in this case God—and cleave to each other: in order to be human Man and Woman must leave the divine communion of paradise to live in community with others. In other words, they must die; they must live in history. . . . It is not simply that Man and Woman have the option of remaining immortally in the garden in ignorance or leaving with knowledge to die. But—if their lives are to be meaningful, . . . if they are to escape the emphatic negative with which God has judged the situation of one alone, in other words, if they are to be human—they must live in community and they must do so estranged from God.<sup>19</sup>

At the end of chapter 2 (a division created millennia after the text came into being) the redactor is explicit about the nature of ongoing creation: it requires ongoing separation and union, a separation and union revolving around sexual difference. We see in chapter 2 the beginning, but only the beginning, of human community. Full human

community, the verse suggests, is as yet something to continue to anticipate. I believe that this necessity of ongoing separation and union, chaos and harmony, drives the rapid turn of the story from “They were naked and not ashamed” (Genesis 2:25) to “Behold, the man has become as one of us” (Genesis 3:22) and to the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the garden. The translation “not ashamed” is problematic because the Hebrew word that the phrase translates doesn’t carry the sense of guilt that we associate with shame. “Unabashed” might be a better translation.<sup>20</sup> In any case, the transition from unabashed nakedness to being like God requires the story of separation and union that we find in chapter 3.

The first thing to notice about Genesis 3:1 is that, though God has been very much a part of every step of the story so far, now he is suddenly absent. On my reading, in which the original Man is unable to be the gardener, the creation of the Edenic couple has made it possible for the King to leave his garden in the gardeners’ care. But left to their care in the King’s absence, the garden is quickly defiled: a snake enters in. Man and Woman have not been at their task of guarding the garden against defilement. But not only has God disappeared, perhaps so has Man. Man and Woman are, at the moment of Genesis 3:1, not yet a couple. They are in some sense individuals, and the serpent will appeal to that individuality.

Like God, the serpent has a wisdom. He is described as “crafty” or “shrewd,” which translates a word that is mostly a positive trait in the Old Testament, the ability to know what to do. He is the shrewdest of any living nonhuman creature. But for readers familiar with the eating prohibitions of Leviticus 11, the serpent is also one of the unclean animals, perhaps one of the most unclean, given the ordering of the Leviticus text.

Chaos has entered the garden from outside, and the story as a whole turns on that entry, the entry of a kind of wisdom other than godly wisdom. In Genesis 3:1 the text marks the turn by making perhaps the most obvious and most important wordplay of the story, for the Hebrew term translated “naked” (arom) in Genesis 2:25 is very much like the word translated “subtil” or “shrewd” (arum) here. As we all know, the serpent’s wisdom is that of rhetoric and, as Brueggemann points out, theology. The snake replaces obedience to God’s wisdom with critical reflection and theological parsing.<sup>21</sup> He has wisdom, the wisdom that we continue to prize, but he doesn’t have the wisdom of God, the “knowledge of good and evil.”

Odd as that sounds, it is important to recognize that the serpent assumes, correctly, that divine wisdom means choosing between good and evil without any appeal to authority, such as revelation. But in his shrewdness the serpent confuses that divine wisdom with his analytic wisdom of reflection, critique, and parsing, making the latter at least the same as the former, if not superior. Lacking God’s wisdom, his ability simply to know the good from the evil, the serpent conflates that wisdom with his own shrewdness, his know-how, his wisdom for getting things done by analysis. He is modern well before his time.

Though the serpent never contradicts what God has said, he skeptically suggests that God has commanded something different than he in fact did: perhaps, his question suggests, God forbade Man and Woman from eating from any tree rather than forbidding only the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Notice, too, that the serpent never tells Woman to eat the fruit of the tree. He makes his skeptical suggestions and allows her to choose. And though (in Genesis 3:4) he contradicts God’s declaration that those who eat the forbidden fruit would die (Genesis 2:17), what the snake says is almost precisely what the text later tells us happened: Man and Woman do not die when they eat the fruit; instead their eyes are opened (Genesis 3:7), and they become like God and those with him (Genesis 3:22). Using the truth against God, the serpent suggests that God is trying to keep human beings from becoming like him, that the only way to become like God is to defy him. Misunderstanding divine wisdom, the serpent assumes that he knows what God’s wisdom is, and therefore he suggests to Woman that to

become like God is to exercise autonomous will. Autonomy is confused with individual will. Once again, the serpent says what is true but says it falsely, for he implies that becoming like God means stepping out of the harmony of Man-Woman and God in the garden to become an individual will.

But the Woman is no simpleton merely following the lead of a shrewd tempter. She shows what appears to be at least the beginning of rhetorical or legal skill even before she eats the fruit. She expands the commandment that had been given, putting a hedge about the commandment by adding “neither shall ye touch it” (Genesis 3:3). She has designed to protect herself from violating God’s prohibition. Yet she also responds to the serpent’s suggestion that God is keeping something from her by seeing the tree in a new way. It is no longer forbidden, but has become “good for food, and . . . pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise” (Genesis 3:6), and this new way of seeing makes the hedge ineffective.

The wording of Genesis 3:6 suggests that what Woman does is already comparable to what God has done. As sovereign Creator, at each stage of creation, he “saw that it was good.” Now Woman looks at the fruit of the tree and “sees that it is good.” The Hebrew is the same in each case. Thus, even before Woman eats the fruit, she has begun to act in a godlike way, assuming the position of a sovereign, someone autonomous, over whom no one else has authority. Then she eats and shares the fruit with Man so that he, too, can be an individual. What was created as a differenced unity intended to be one flesh has become two individuals.

As we look at Genesis 3:6, it is important to note that the story isn’t that of simple rebellion against God’s authority. Rather, it is “a quest for wisdom and ‘the good’ apart from God’s provision.”<sup>22</sup> It is the attempt to find the good individually and autonomously. But that quest is a letdown. As the wordplay of Genesis 2:25 and 3:1 already predicted, through the serpent’s shrewdness Man and Woman go from being unknowingly naked to knowing that they are naked. In probably a variety of ways, they come to know that they are embodied beings. The text doesn’t tell us that they were ashamed of that embodiment, only that they knew it needed covering. They have discovered bodily need. As their fig-leaf garments show, they have also discovered that as autonomous beings they cannot meet their need in any satisfactory way.

Left to serve in the garden and to protect it from defilement, Man and Woman have allowed it to be defiled. They have introduced chaos. And chaos has defiled not only the garden but them. And they cannot remedy their defilement. God must step in to re-create the world and restore order, though as in each previous case, the order will be a new order, not merely a return to the old. When God first encounters Man and Woman, they are hiding for fear (the same emotion that in other places is the awe of God’s presence, e.g., Psalm 110:10). Perhaps they are ashamed of their naked bodies, but that isn’t what the text says. It says they are afraid of God because they know they are naked. Rather than understanding their response to their nakedness as shame, perhaps we should understand it as a fear induced by the absence of the priestly clothing they now know they should wear if they are to serve God and guard his temple. Or perhaps it is simply awe: previously the gardeners had known God but appear not to have been in awe of him. Now that they have his wisdom, they are awestruck in his presence.

Whatever the cause of Man and Woman’s fear, in that fear they experience the distance between themselves and God, distance created by eating the fruit. But eating it has also put distance between themselves, as Man’s attempt to blame Woman (Genesis 3:12) and her attempt to blame the serpent (Genesis 3:13) show. They have acted in autonomy and now find themselves in the separation and chaos of that autonomy.

At the end of chapter 2, as Brueggemann notes, the story was one of trust and obedience. Now it has become what at first reading appears to be a story of crime and punishment.<sup>23</sup> But it is less straightforwardly that than we might



assume. For, though God's response to their fear and blaming is to curse the serpent,<sup>24</sup> when he turns to Man and Woman his language has neither the form nor the wording of curses.

Though centuries of interpretation have dimmed the possibility of reading these pronouncements as anything other than punishment, I think it makes sense to read them instead as sentences of grace. God's graciousness is not just what we see first in Genesis 3:21 with God's gift of clothing, but what we see in Genesis 3:16: "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children."<sup>25</sup> That doesn't sound like a gift, but I argue that it is.

Equally, the response to Man is to curse the earth "for thy sake," according to the King James translators," but simply "because of you" for most modern translators. But we can see the reasoning behind the King James translation: if the earth is cursed because of Man, then unless this is simply an injustice to the earth, it is cursed for human beings. He will eat the fruit of the earth in sorrow, the same word in both Hebrew and English that he used to describe the consequences of Woman's transgression. The Hebrew word ('is.s.ābhōn) suggests physical pain as much as it does sorrow.<sup>26</sup> Both Man and Woman learn that to be human with the wisdom needed to discriminate between good and evil on one's own means work and that work means suffering. That is God's grace to them: he gives them their full humanity in work and pain, which is also their imitation of Divinity. The result of the story, as God tells us, is that the couple has come to be "as one of us" (Genesis 3:22). In other words, Adam and Eve learn that divine wisdom comes only in a relation between individuals who are both together and separated in creating, rather than merely autonomous.

The result of eating the fruit is chaos. But that chaos is the chaos within which human community arises, and it is the chaos resulting from God's pleasure in creation. Genesis 3:16 says that Woman's urges are toward Man. But Genesis 3:20 suggests that Man is also turned toward her as her creation: she was taken out of wounded, sexually undifferentiated Man, but Adam is now who he is as a human being through what wounded Woman has done. He calls her Eve because "she was the mother of all living" (Genesis 3:20, emphasis added)— including him.

Just as sexually undifferentiated Man was wounded in order for the human couple, Man and Woman, to exist, humanity's existence presumes Eve's wound. At the beginning of creation is a wound, chaos. Comparably, at the beginning of all full human being is Eve's wound. The result of these two wounds is Adam and Eve's laboring pain as persons living together in community: the constant undoing and redoing and undoing of the wound of chaos.

It is impossible not to recognize that for millennia the Genesis story, among other uses, has been used to explain and justify the subordination of women to men. I do not see this story as a story that intends to call that subordination into question—at least partly because the question had not yet arisen. But because it speaks from outside the realm of that question, neither do I think that the story must or even ought to be read as supporting that traditional subordination. We can read the text against that particular grain. When we do, I believe that, instead, we see this pericope even more fully as a story about the origin of human community as a relation of tension between sameness and difference, between harmony and chaos.

## Conclusion

The community begins in Sabbath harmony outside the garden, in a singular, unsexed Man created ostensibly to represent his maker. He is placed inside the garden not only to represent God but also to serve him and to guard the garden. All three (representation, priesthood service, and guarding against defilement) turn out to require the sexing of human being, the relation of male and female and the need to leave father and mother and cling to one's mate. But the harmony of the garden watched over by Man and Woman cannot last. If Man and Woman are to

represent God, they will need not only the wisdom of gardeners—they will also need God’s wisdom, a wisdom presumably acquired in watching and guarding his creation through work and without avoiding suffering.

So the story turns out to be a story about moving outside the garden, leaving the presence of God in order to live with one another in divinely given life. But the story of divine life is about the unavoidable work and pain of human existence together. It reminds us that inevitable chaos makes the labor of human existence in community continually necessary. As human beings we are not just Man, nor are we merely Man and Woman. We are Adam and Eve, individuals with the wisdom of God’s relational, sexually differenced existence rather than the critical reflection and theological parsing of the serpent’s individual autonomy. We live with the consequences of our divine existence in ongoing tension of chaos and creation that defines the human and godly world.

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## NOTES

1. Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), 50.

2. Brueggemann, Genesis, 4.

3. Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “literal.”

4. John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2009), 26.

5. Mark Gignilliat, “Paul, Allegory, and the Plain Sense of Scripture: Galatians 4:21–31,” *Journal of Theological Interpretation* 2 (Spring 2008): 138.

6. That is not to say that Latter-day Saints can only read as Latter-day Saints. There is no reason to believe that a Latter-day Saint cannot read the Old Testament as a good critical historian rather than as someone taking the text as canonical. Readers of a text do not always read it from the same position within the world.

7. James E. Faulconer, “Adam and Eve—Community: Reading Genesis 2–3,” *Journal of Philosophy and Scripture* 1/1 (Fall 2003): 2–16, [http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/Issue1-1/James\\_Faulconer/james\\_faulconer.html](http://www.philosophyandscripture.org/Issue1-1/James_Faulconer/james_faulconer.html).

8. See, for example, the HarperCollins Study Bible (New York: HarperOne, 2006), based on the NSRV; and Gordon J. Wenham, Vol. 1, Genesis 1–15, *Word Biblical Commentary* 50 (Dallas, TX: Word Inc., 1998).

9. According to Wenham, the fact that the text specifically speaks of the serpent as having been created by God (Genesis 3:1) makes that idea suspect: it is unlikely that the text would portray God as having created the god of another nation (Genesis 1–15, 72). Since God is the creator of everything, I don’t find that argument convincing.

10. Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *The Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, electronic ed. (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, 2000), s.v.

11. Victor P. Hamilton, The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1–17, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990), 158.

12. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, electronic ed. (Chicago: Moody, 1999), 588, s.v.

13. The passage from which this shorter quotation is extracted is instructive: First, the temple later in the OT was the unique place of God's presence, where Israel had to go to experience that presence. Israel's temple was the place where the priest experienced God's unique presence, and Eden was the place where Adam walked and talked with God. The same Hebrew verbal form (hithpael), hithallek, used for God's "walking back and forth" in the Garden (Gen 3:8), also describes God's presence in the tabernacle (Lev 26:12; Deut 23:14 [15]; 2 Sam 7:6-7). Second, Gen 2:15 says God placed Adam in the Garden "to cultivate it and to keep it." The two Hebrew words for "cultivate and keep" (respectively, 'ābad and shāmar) can easily be, and usually are, translated "serve and guard." When these two words occur together later in the OT, without exception they have this meaning and refer either to Israelites "serving and guarding/obeying" God's word (about 10 times) or, more often, to priests who "serve" God in the temple and "guard" the temple from unclean things entering it (Num 3:7-8; 8:25-26; 18:5-6; 1 Chr 23:32; Ezek 44:14). (Gregory K. Beale, "Eden, the Temple, and the Church's Mission in the New Creation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 48/1 [March 2005]: 7-8.)

14. W. M. Clark, "A Legal Background to the Yahwist's Use of 'Good' and 'Evil' in Gen 2-3," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (1969): 266-78; and Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I, from Adam to Noah, Genesis I-VI* 8, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1961).

15. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 32.

16. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 68.

17. Translation from John J. Scullion, "Genesis, the Narrative of," in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 2:945.

18. Scriptures such as Psalm 84:2 suggest that heart, flesh, and soul are different ways of speaking of the same thing, the whole of human being.

19. Faulconer, "Adam and Eve," 16.

20. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 71. See Judges 3:25 and 2 Kings 2:17 for uses of the Hebrew root (svb) that do not carry the connotation of guilt.

21. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 47-48.

22. Sailhamer, "Genesis," 52.

23. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 48.

24. The wordplay continues, for the serpent who had been crafty (arum) is now cursed (arur).

25. Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 49.

26. See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. עֵץ. Cassuto suggests that there is a wordplay here on the Hebrew word for tree: "it was with respect to עֵץ 'ēś. [tree] that man and woman sinned, and it was

with עֵצֶב es.ebh ('pain') and עֵצְבוֹן 'is.s.ābhōn ('toil, suffering') that they were punished" (Cassuto, *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, 165).