

# I ntroduction

## The Hebrew Bible

**F**or good reason, the Hebrews have often been referred to as the "people of the book." The "book" is the Hebrew Bible, the great document of Jewish historical, literary, and spiritual experience.

### The History of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible tells the history of the Jewish people and presents the basic laws and teachings of their faith. The contents of the Hebrew Bible existed first in oral tradition. Then, over a period of centuries lasting from approximately 1000 to 100 B.C., the various parts of the Hebrew Bible were written and assembled. The Hebrew Bible was mostly written in Hebrew and Aramaic, another Semitic language that had replaced Hebrew as the language spoken by the Jews in about 400 B.C.

### What Is the Hebrew Bible?

The Hebrew Bible is not one book, but many. In fact, the very name "Bible" comes from *biblia*, the plural of the Greek word *biblion*, "a book." The Hebrew Bible consists of twenty-four separate books, beginning with the Book of

Genesis and ending with Chronicles. Christians refer to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Testament and accept it as sacred, but unlike the Jews they accept a second book of sacred writings, the New Testament (see page 196), as part of their Bible as well.

### The Books of the Hebrew Bible

The Jewish people call their Bible **Tanakh**, an acronym formed from the first letters of the Hebrew words for the three categories of books contained in it: **Torah** (Law), **Nevi'im** (Prophets), and **Ketuvim** (Writings).

The Torah, or Law, is the first and oldest part of the Hebrew Bible. Sometimes called the Five Books of Moses—for, according to tradition, Moses wrote them—the Torah consists of five books that contain the earliest historical narratives of the Jewish people: Genesis, Exodus,

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**narrative:** *a kind of writing that tells a story or relates an event.*

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Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. It also contains the basic tenets, or beliefs, and laws of Jewish faith, with detailed instructions on worship practices and

conduct for daily life. The Torah is also known by the Greek word *Pentateuch*, meaning "five scroll jars," referring to the fact that at one time the five scrolls on which the Torah was written were kept in jars. The Torah is held in such reverence by Jewish people that no copy of it, no matter how old or worn, is ever destroyed. In cases of serious damage, it must be given a full funeral and buried as a beloved member of the family.

Nevi'im, or Prophets, contains the powerful words of the prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel, among others. The prophets were not "fortunetellers" but social and spiritual reformers who were believed to be divinely inspired. The prophets called on the people of Israel to repent and lead purer lives, in keeping with God's covenant. These books also include the historical narratives of Joshua, the Judges, and the succession of Hebrew rulers that began with Saul, David, and Solomon.

Finally, Ketuvim, or Writings, consists of a rich variety of **genres**, or types, of literature, from Psalms and Proverbs to the Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon), Ecclesiastes, the Book of Job, and the Book of Ruth. The Book of Psalms contains lyrical hymns of praise that overflow with poignant emotions and imagery.

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**psalm** (sä'm): *a sacred song or hymn.*

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The Book of Ruth is a tender work about compassion, loyalty, and tolerance that is sometimes described as a "short story." And the Book of Job features a dramatic dialogue between God and a man named Job, in which the question



Torah ark curtain, late eighteenth century.

The Jewish Museum, New York/Art Resource, New York

of human suffering is deeply and movingly probed.

## The Themes of the Hebrew Bible

The Hebrew Bible is concerned above all with exploring the Hebrews' developing relationship with God. In the Hebrew Bible, God, or Yahweh, makes promises to people, but he also makes constant demands of them. Human beings are often tested, and they do not always pass their tests. They make mistakes and suffer the consequences of their actions. But they also experience the mercy of God and the constant promise of spiritual renewal, for the power to fulfill the covenant with God is within the power of each individual.

# Reader's Guide

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## IN THE BEGINNING

from Genesis

### *Background*

The Book of Genesis is the first of the Five Books of Moses, or the Torah. Genesis reflects the Hebrew people's beliefs about the origins of things, and it contains the core teachings of Jewish belief. Genesis begins with the birth of the universe and goes on to explain the emergence of evil, the cause of the Great Flood, the origin of languages, and the development of God's covenant with the Hebrew people.

Most scholars today believe that Genesis is actually a composite of separate narratives by different writers collected over a period of several hundred years. This may explain why Genesis contains two accounts of the creation of human beings. The first narrative tells us that God created the universe in six days and that man and woman were created at the same time. The second story, set in the Garden of Eden, tells us that Adam was created first and that Eve was created from his rib. Taken together, the two creation stories give us a fuller picture of the Hebrews' concept of God and humanity's relationship with God. We also come to understand their answers to some of the questions that concern all humankind: how and why people were created, why there is pain and conflict on earth, and why there is death.

### *Writer's Response*

What do you already know, or think you know, about the story of creation in Genesis? Jot down some of the details you remember about Adam and Eve and the story of creation. As you read, see if you have remembered those details correctly, or if there are any details that you have forgotten. Does anything in the story of creation surprise you?

### *Literary Focus*

**Repetition**—the repeating of words, phrases, or even entire sentences or passages—is an important feature of the Hebrew, or biblical, style. Repetition can serve several functions in a work of literature. It can create rhythm and build suspense and dramatic intensity. It can also help to emphasize important words and ideas.

# IN THE BEGINNING

from Genesis

King James Bible

‡ *The Greek word genesis means "coming into being" or "originating." What beginnings, or origins, do these portions of the Book of Genesis explain?*

## The Creation

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.<sup>1</sup>

And God said "Let there be light": and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a firmament<sup>2</sup> in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament: and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear": and it was so.

And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters he called Seas: and God saw that it was good. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb<sup>3</sup> yielding seed, and the fruit tree yielding fruit after his<sup>4</sup> kind, whose seed is in itself, upon the earth": and it was so. And the earth brought forth grass, and herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed was in itself, after his kind: And God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years. And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth": and it was so. And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also. And God set them in the firmament of

1. **waters:** According to Hebrew belief, only water existed before the creation began.  
2. **firmament:** the sky, seen as an arch or a vault.

3. **herb:** vegetation.

4. **his:** its (*its*, the neuter form of the pronoun, did not come into common use until late in the seventeenth century, after the King James Bible was published).



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THE GARDEN OF EDEN, ERASTUS S. FIELD (1805–1900).  
 ? How does this painting compare with your own image of the Garden of Eden?

the heaven to give light upon the earth, and to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that it was good. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature<sup>5</sup> that hath life, and fowl that may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven." And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind,<sup>6</sup> and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good. And God blessed them, saying, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in

the earth." And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind": and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that it was good.

And God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and

5. creature: an old plural form without the s.  
 6. their kind: their nature.



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...ing and the morning

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God said unto them, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth."

And God said, "Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.<sup>7</sup> And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb for meat": and it was so. And God saw every thing he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host<sup>8</sup> of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made. And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.

## The Garden of Eden

These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, and every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground. But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground. And

7. **meat**: In the King James Bible, meat simply means food in general. Animal meat is called flesh.

8. **host**: multitude.

the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil. And a river went out of Eden to water the garden; and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads. The name of the first is Pison: that is it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah,<sup>9</sup> where there is gold; and the gold of that land is good: there is bdellium<sup>10</sup> and the onyx stone. And the name of the second river is Gihon: the same is it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia. And the name of the third river is Hiddekel:<sup>11</sup> that is it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river is Euphrates.<sup>12</sup> And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat. But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

And the Lord God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet<sup>13</sup> for him." And out of the

9. **Pison** (pē'sən) . . . **Havilah** (hav'ə-lə): land rich in gold, perhaps located in Arabia.

10. **bdellium** (del'ē-əm): a kind of jewel—either a crystal, a pearl, or a deep-red gem such as a garnet.

11. **Gihon** (gē'hän) . . . **Hiddekel** (hid'ə-kəl): *Hiddekel* is the biblical name for the Tigris River.

12. **Euphrates** (yoo-frāt'ēz): longest river in western Asia.

13. **help meet**: helpful companion: often a spouse

ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and he took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof; and the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man. And Adam said, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man." Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

## The Fall

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Now the serpent<sup>14</sup> was more subtil<sup>15</sup> than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, "Yea, hath God said, 'Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?'" And the woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, 'Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.'" And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die. For God doth know that in

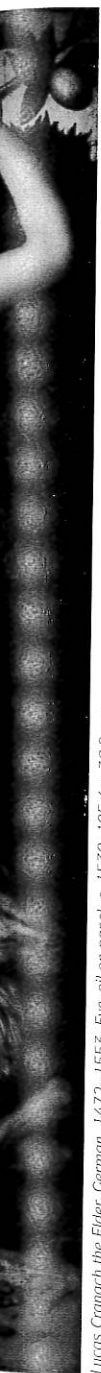
14. **the serpent:** traditionally understood to be, or to be possessed by, Satan; formerly the angel Lucifer, Satan was cast out of heaven because he set himself up as God's enemy.

15. **subtil:** subtle, meaning here crafty or sly.



*EVE, LUCAS CRANACH THE ELDER, c. 1530. Eve's temptation has been a popular subject in European art for centuries.*

Lucas Cranach the Elder, German, 1472–1553, Eve, oil on panel, c. 1530, 105.4 x 36.2 cm. Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection. Photograph © 1999 The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved.



Lucas Cranach the Elder, German, 1472-1553. Eve, oil on panel, c. 1530, 105.4 x 36.2 cm. Charles H. and Mary F. S. Worcester Collection. Photograph © 1999 The Art Institute of Chicago. All rights reserved.

the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat. And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons. And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, "Where art thou?" And he said, "I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself." And he said, "Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?" And the man said, "The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat." And the Lord God said unto the woman, "What is this that thou hast done?" And the woman said, "The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat." And the Lord God said unto the serpent, "Because thou hast done this, thou art cursed above all cattle,<sup>16</sup> and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life. And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." Unto the woman he said, "I will

16. **cattle**: a general term for all animals.

greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception;<sup>17</sup> in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee." And unto Adam he said, "Because thou hast hearkened unto<sup>18</sup> the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground: for out of it wast thou taken, for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

And the Lord God said, "Behold, the man<sup>19</sup> is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life,<sup>20</sup> and eat, and live for ever": therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubims<sup>21</sup> and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of<sup>22</sup> the tree of life.

17. **conception**: childbearing pains.

18. **hearkened unto**: listened to and obeyed.

19. **man**: man and woman.

20. **tree of life**: a second tree in Eden, apparently a source of immortality.

21. **Cherubims** (cher'yōō-bimz'): warrior angels who act as guardian spirits and support the throne of God.

22. **keep the way of**: prevent access to.



## First Thoughts

The story of creation answers many questions about the human condition, but it also raises some tantalizing questions. What questions does the account of the creation leave you with?

### Identifying Facts

1. What responsibilities or privileges does God give to humans in the first account of creation?
2. In the second creation account, how is man created? Why is woman created, and how does God create her?
3. In "The Fall," how do Adam and Eve change after they eat the forbidden fruit?
4. How does God punish Adam, Eve, and the serpent?
5. What problems that still plague humanity are explained in "The Fall"?

### Interpreting Meanings

1. **Repetition** occurs in the first account of the creation with the phrases "God said . . . and it was so" and "God saw that it was good." Why do you think these phrases are repeated so often? How do they help to characterize God?
2. In "The Garden of Eden," how does Adam's naming of the birds and the beasts assert his "dominion," or authority?
3. Does God seem to consider Adam and Eve equally guilty, or does he punish one of them more than the other? Explain your answer.
4. In the first creation account, God approves of all his creations. Men and women seem to be created equal, and no mention is made of the Fall. Why do you think that people tend to forget this story, and focus instead on Eve's creation from Adam's rib and the subsequent temptation and Fall?

## Applying Meanings

Artists often use the story of the Fall as a **metaphor** for a person's loss of innocence, or for passing from childhood into adulthood. What kinds of temptations does the world present to people your age today? Who or what could be cast in the role of the serpent? If you were Adam or Eve, would you accept or reject the fruit the serpent urged you to take? Explain.

### Creative Writing Response

**Writing from the First-Person Point of View.** Absent from the creation stories of Genesis are personal details—glimpses into the psychology of the characters. Rewrite the account of the Fall from the **first-person point of view** of Adam, Eve, or the serpent, using the pronoun *I*. Reveal as much about the character of your narrator as possible, describing the setting and interactions with the other characters in a way you believe he, she, or it would describe them.

### Critical Writing Response

**Establishing a Theme.** Many scholars say that the moral struggle of men and women is a central **theme** of the Hebrew Bible. The first book of the Hebrew Bible plays a critical role in "setting the stage" for that theme. Find examples from the accounts from Genesis that you have just read—episodes, conflicts, characterization—that anticipate or illustrate this theme. Then write a three-paragraph essay showing how your examples support this theme. You might want to use a chart like the one below to organize your evidence.

Creation	The Garden of Eden	The Fall