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# Served to Serve: Why Food is Central to the Anthropology of Creation in Genesis 1–3 and to the Plot of Genesis

Steffen Jenkins

## Abstract

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The book of Genesis is laden with references to food. Recent scholarship has begun to pay attention to food in the Bible and especially found that it functions as a Leitmotif in the Joseph narrative which concludes Genesis. This article will demonstrate that food is central to the opening three chapters of the book. Creation and the place of people within it cannot be understood without close attention to food, which explains its prominent place and function in the rest of Genesis. We conclude with some reflections on the food imagery of redemption on the lips of Jesus, and by noting the inescapably earthy and physical contribution of food to the future hope held out in the gospel.

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## I. Introduction

Food is everywhere in Genesis. A famine drives Abraham to Egypt (12:10). After he rescues Lot, the only prize he will accept is the food that his men have already consumed (v. 24). In the middle of that refusal of food, Melchizedek appears out of nowhere and feeds Abraham. The rest of the Bible sees the event as greatly significant

(Ps. 110, Heb. 7), whereas Genesis tells us virtually nothing about him or about this incident, but one of the few things we are told is that he brings out bread and wine (v. 18). When Abraham hosts Yahweh and His angels before the destruction of Sodom, Genesis paints a picture that is ripe with food references (18:1–8): we are given much detail of what was cooked and of the culinary fuss made over the guests.<sup>1</sup> Or again, consider Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, which is also deemed significant in the canon (Rom. 4, Heb. 11, Jas. 2). Of all the ways that Yahweh could require the death of Isaac, he elects a burnt offering, which is food for God (22:2).<sup>2</sup> A turning point in world history is the fate of Ishmael: while rejected, he is to be *fruitful* (17:20). His fate is advanced by the *weaning* of Isaac and a resulting *feast* (21:8); Abraham's involvement ends in giving food and water (v. 14). If we ask how Lot escapes Sodom, it is not only because Abraham entertained Yahweh and the angels with a meal and pleaded with them, but because Lot too shares a meal with the angels (19:3).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Sharon briefly mentions this incident, noting that there is no pattern of mentioning eating in an annunciation scene (a well-recognised biblical type-scene see Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* [London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981; repr., New York: Basic, 1983], 50–51), suggesting that its mention here is also significant: Diane M. Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny: Narrative Structures of Foundation and Doom in the Hebrew Bible* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 127 cited in Nathan MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone: The Uses of Food in the Old Testament* (Oxford: OUP, 2008), 12. However, note the parallels which do link hospitality with birth announcement, mentioned in Terence E. Fretheim, "Genesis," in *General & Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus* (ed. Leander E. Keck; vol. 1 of *Old Testament Articles, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus*; NIB; Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 1994), 462. Wenham analyses the episode as containing two scenes, the first of which is 'the welcome meal' (Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* [WBC 2; Dallas: Word, 1994], 45).

<sup>2</sup>Gordon Wenham has argued that this event parallels Ishmael's rescue in the preceding chapter; in his analysis, sacrificial paraphernalia in this chapter parallel food in the previous one (Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 99–100).

<sup>3</sup>In fact, a feast (*BDB*, 1059; *HALOT*, 653 [please note that this is an electronic edition with different page numbers: *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament [Volumes 1–4 combined in one electronic edition]*); that it is not merely a drinking festival is certain from the bread that is provided. The two stories are closely paralleled in their scenes, with food preparation and eating matching (see the outline in Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 43). One is tempted to mention also his wife, who famously is turned into a condiment (19:26). However, the widespread

Just as Abraham was moved along by a famine, the second patriarch is caused to move by a second famine (26:1): the link is explicit.<sup>4</sup>

Not only does Esau trade his birthright for a mess of pottage,<sup>5</sup> but the account of his stolen blessing (chap. 27) is told with food and eating repeated frequently. For instance, **דְּשִׁיבָה** ('Delicious morsel' or 'tasty or savoury food') appears six times in the chapter (and only eight in the whole OT).<sup>6</sup> The blessing itself has food and drink in pride of place, on a par with international dominance (vv. 28, 37, 39).

We have seen that the first two patriarchs are forced to make a journey by the first two famines in Genesis. The third patriarch adds a twist to this pattern: he moves not because of a current lack of food, but because he has brought about a future famine for his brother. By stealing the food-laden blessing that was Esau's, the latter is left with a 'blessing' of hunger,<sup>7</sup> and his desire for revenge prompts Jacob's

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use of salt as a flavouring probably post-dates the conquest (Nathan MacDonald, *What Did the Ancient Israelites Eat? Diet in Biblical Times* [Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008], 40).

<sup>4</sup>The link to the previous famine is highlighted by the narrator stepping out of frame. See Adele Berlin, *Poetics and Interpretation of Biblical Narrative* (Bible and Literature Series; Sheffield: Almond, 1983), 57–58.

<sup>5</sup>On the way that food richly adds to the characterisation and the significance of this event in biblical history, see Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 44.

<sup>6</sup>'Delicious morsel' HALOT, 574; 'tasty or savoury food' BDB, 381.

<sup>7</sup>Arguably, this could be a genuine blessing of food, rather than a curse of being away from food. See the discussion in Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 212. It is understood as (effectively) a curse (with **יָרָה** being privative) by Laurence A. Turner, *Announcements of Plot in Genesis* (JSOTSup 96; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 125; Fretheim, 'Genesis,' 539; Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1995), 228; Bruce K. Waltke and Cathi J. Fredricks, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 381; William David Keyburn and Euan McG. Fry, *A Handbook on Genesis* (UBS Handbook Series: Helps for Translators; New York: United Bible Societies, 1997), 638–39 and as a (lesser) blessing (with **יָרָה** being partitive) by Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (IBC 1; Atlanta: John Knox, 1982), 234; Nahum Sarna, *Genesis: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation* (JPSTC; Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 194; Robert Alter, *The Five Books of Moses: A Translation with Commentary* (New York: Norton, 2004), 145.

flight (27:39–43).<sup>8</sup>

Examples could, and will, be multiplied, but what are we to make of this smorgasbord? Spurred on by a wider trend, biblical scholarship has recently begun to see food as a subject worthy of attention for its own sake, particularly in the last few decades.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>It is normal to notice four famines that advance the plot in Genesis, the two aforementioned and two in the Joseph narrative (e.g., Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 99–100), but not this one; my example may be arguable as a famine, but the significant and plot-advancing reference to food surely stands. And as Heffelfinger points out, the famines can be noticed and yet dismissed as irrelevant, e.g. by von Rad, Brueggemann and Westermann (Katie M. Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing: The Significance of Food in Genesis 37–50', in *Rounded Stones: Literary Readings of Genesis Narratives* [ed. Diane Sharon and Dennis Olson; SBLSymS; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, in press], n.p., n. 3–5; as the book is still in press, no page numbers are available; where possible, I have used her footnotes as an aid to locating an idea, even if the point is to be found in the main body of her text).

<sup>9</sup>On the history of attention to food see MacDonald, *Not Bread Alone*, 2–16; Nathan MacDonald, 'Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch', in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology* (ed. Rachel Muers and David Grumett; London: T.&T. Clark, 2008), 21–22; Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing', n.p., n. 1. A quick survey of some standard works confirms that food has not been particularly prominent until now. This is not a criticism of these authors, since there is scarcely a limit to the number of subjects that can be explored afresh in detail in the Bible. It simply explains why some fresh insights are appearing now. For example, there is no entry for 'eating' or 'food' in the subject index of Waltke and Fredricks, *Genesis*, 644–45; Hamilton, *Genesis 18–50*, 717–18; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11* (trans. John Scullion; CC; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1984), 629; Tremper Longman III and Raymond B. Dillard, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 527; William J. Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel: A Theological Survey of the Old Testament* (2d ed.; Leicester: IVP, 2002), 344; David W. Baker and Bill T. Arnold, eds., *The Face of Old Testament Studies: A Survey of Contemporary Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1999), 481–82; John Goldingay, *Israel's Life* (vol. 3 of *Old Testament Theology*; Leicester: IVP, 2009), 883; John Goldingay, *Israel's Gospel* (vol. 1 of *Old Testament Theology*; Leicester: IVP, 2003), 910–11. Only 'famine' makes it into John Goldingay, *Israel's Faith* (vol. 2 of *Old Testament Theology*; Leicester: IVP, 2006), 860. Only *unclean* foods make it into Gordon J. Wenham, *A Guide to the Pentateuch* (Exploring the Old Testament 1; Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 204. In the same vein, there is no entry for 'food,' but only for 'Foods, Clean and Unclean' in T. Desmond Alexander and David W. Baker, eds., *DOTP* (Leicester: IVP, 2003). Moberly's index lists 'food, symbolic

Recently, Katie Heffelfinger has analysed the place of food in the Joseph narrative and concluded that it functions as a *Leitmotif*.<sup>10</sup> In that narrative alone she has found over a hundred mentions of food:

In analyzing this imagery in these chapters I have included references to eating, food and food products (fifty-seven occurrences), persons whose profession is described in terms of food (eight occurrences), meals (two occurrences), agriculture (forty-seven occurrences) and famine (eighteen occurrences).<sup>11</sup>

Is there some underlying reason for the peppering of Genesis with food?

In this article we will argue that food is a major theme and literary device in Genesis because food is an integral concern of the theology of the book. The opening chapters of the book set out an anthropology which puts food at the centre of human activity, with the result that the rest of Genesis can use food as a literary device, precisely because of its significance for human culture. The strong theology of humankind as food producer for the animals in Genesis 1–3 explains why the rest of Genesis makes use of food (food production, consumption, grazing and general care of livestock) to advance the plot and even as literary markers.

We will see that, for instance, the opening two chapters set up an ecology of creation that is dominated by the production of food, and an anthropology that sets up humankind as the farmer of the ground, with a task of producing food (plants) to feed the animals. The marring of creation in Genesis 3 follows the disobedience of the only command: eat from any tree in the garden, but do not eat of *this* one tree. The ensuing curses are directed precisely at humankind's

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function of' (R. Walter L. Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* [Old Testament Theology; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009], 266) but even that turns out to be a footnote answering an objection to the ethics of Genesis 3 by Barr. Walter Brueggemann should be given an award for copious attention to food in his *Theology*; significant references are Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 51, 155, 191, 202, 214, 240, 258, 336, 340, 352, 390, 504, 540, 737. (It has no subject index, so we cannot tell whether it would have been deemed significant enough to merit an entry.)

<sup>10</sup> Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing', n.p., n. 7.

<sup>11</sup> Heffelfinger, 'From Bane to Blessing', n.p., n. 8.



activity as a producer of food for themselves and for the animals.

The reader may well feel that eating is such a commonplace activity, that it should not be remarkable for it to appear frequently in a narrative of people's lives. However, Hebrew narrative is inherently terse, so that the default assumption about anything narrated should be that it is significant.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, Hebrew narrative is entirely unconcerned with the everyday unless it be significant. Robert Alter goes so far as to say that

the Bible touches on the quotidian only as a sphere for the realization of portentous actions: if in the Bible someone is brewing up a mess of lentil stew, the reader can rest assured that it is not to exhibit the pungency of ancient Hebrew cuisine but because some fatal transaction will be carried out with the stew, which even proves to have a symbolically appropriate color.<sup>13</sup>

Eating is so commonplace that we can assume it to be happening on all sorts of occasions, despite it not being reported; when it is mentioned it will be significant.<sup>14</sup>

We will show that food is central to the opening chapters of Genesis. The plot of creation and fall in these chapters cannot be summarised in a way that neglects food: the backbone of the story involves the creation of food, its classification, production, allocation, consumption, corruption and prohibition. Remove food from this story, and you will be left to string together abstractions into a narrative that few will recognise.

This article will analyse the opening of Genesis and establish that food is central to the plot of those chapters, that it is emphasised in them, and particularly that food is at the heart of the mandate given to people at creation. That mandate suffers from various corruptions after sin, yet remains in force. Genesis 1–3 sets an expectation of bountiful dividends from reading and digesting the rest of the book with food in mind, as we hope to do in a forthcoming article.

## II. Anthropology and Ecology of Creation

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 41.

<sup>13</sup> Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, 51.

<sup>14</sup> Sharon, *Patterns of Destiny*, 108.

Genesis 1–2 organises the categories of creatures that are to fill the compartments of creation, and how they relate to one another. Genesis introduces food as part of that process of organisation. Food is what people make the ground produce, in order to feed the living things and themselves, in order that the living things will fill the land, the sea and the heavens. People exist to turn the dry land into a farm for the whole creation.

Of these three zones of creation, land, sea and heavens, land is the focus of 1:1–2:3 and has the most complex dynamic between its inhabitants. Whereas the seas and sky will somehow teem with fruitful fish and birds (vv. 20–23), land-dwellers are not so automatic. This dynamic is highlighted by the combined creation account.<sup>15</sup>

### 1. The Creation of the World: Genesis 1:1–2:3

The land contains two major classes of living inhabitant: animals and humankind (vv. 24–26). Plants are then added, also in two classes, as food for the two classes of living things:<sup>16</sup> green plants for all the animals and seed-bearing fruit for people (v. 29). The living things will need this food to fulfil the command of verse 28: people are to cause themselves and the animals to fill the ground. The stage is now set, as all the players have what they need.

At various points God declares what he has done to be ‘good’ and finally ‘very good.’ Attention to the place of food suggests some

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<sup>15</sup> On the canonical combination of accounts and the peril of seeing them as two unrelated accounts see Brevard S. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979), 149–50. As we are here concerned with food as a literary theme in Genesis, the sources do not concern us as much as what Genesis tells us by bringing them together. Keil argues that the first part concerns the creation of the world, while the second concerns the creation of people in more detail, so as to set the scene for human history, which that account also begins (K&D, 1:47–48). My headings below follow him.

<sup>16</sup> There is no consistent designation for living things in these chapters, but a variegated terminology. The most general terms are ‘living souls’ (נַפְשׁוֹת חַיִּים) 1:20, 21, 24 2:7, 19) ‘living things of the earth’ (חַיֵּי הָאָרֶץ, 1:25, 28, 30), ‘living things of the field’ (חַיֵּי הַשָּׂדֶה, 2:19, 20, 3:1, 3:14). The common term then is חַיִּים. Following Alter’s translation (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 18–26), we will refer to living beings in general as ‘living things.’

nuances in these declarations. 'Good' cannot mean perfect and complete in a static sense, the way a painting might be; rather it means that a process is ready to begin, because nothing is missing that is initially needed. The farming project, which is the purpose of creation, can start. We are left not with a complete and static creation, but with a creation that is ready to develop in obedience to its creator. This fits with John Rogerson's suggestion that 'good' means 'fit for purpose.'<sup>17</sup> The climax of 'very good' on the sixth day (v. 31)<sup>18</sup> indicates not just that each bit of what is there is fit for purpose, but that all the parts together make up a full complement of what is needed for work to begin. 'Very good' appears not after the creation of everything, nor the creation of people, nor after the provision of food for people, but after the arrangement of what may be eaten by people and animals (vv. 29–30). Only once we have been told who does what and where so that food appears in the right places and is eaten by the right creatures can the creation begin to function.<sup>19</sup>

Gordon Wenham aptly notes that 'God's provision of food for newly created man stands in sharp contrast to Mesopotamian views

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<sup>17</sup>John Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11* (OTG; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 61.

<sup>18</sup>The shift to a climax has often been noted; for details of how this is achieved in Hebrew see, e.g., Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (WBC 1; Dallas: Word, 1987), 34.

<sup>19</sup>There is a prior progression which is usually overlooked. Whereas from v10 onwards the formula is 'God saw that *it* was good', where 'it' refers back to the whole as it stands, in v4 it is specifically the light that is good ( וַיֵּרָא אֱלֹהִים ( אֶת־הָאֹר כִּי־טוֹב ). It could be, therefore, that it is only after the separation of water from land in v10 that the whole project is seen to be good. That in turn might be explained by the fact that land is where food is grown for the whole of creation. However, the distinction is assumed not to be there by Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 30; Sarna, *Genesis*, 7; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 18; Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 113, 123. It is brought out well in Speiser's translation: '[v4] God was pleased with the light that he saw, ... [v10] God was pleased with what he saw, ...' (E. A. Speiser, *Genesis: Translated with an Introduction and Notes* [AB 1; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964], 3), but his comments are so brief that this is not remarked on. Similarly, Rogerson notes the variant wording but attaches no significance to it (Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 60). It is probably not to be assumed that the 'it' refers to the whole of creation, but rather to what is described in the first act of seeing on each day, so that an assessment of the whole is delayed until the sixth day (Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 34). E.g., Westermann sees the declaration in v10 as restricted to the separation of land from sea (Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 123).

which held that man was created to supply the gods with food.<sup>20</sup>  
Compare Genesis with these texts:

*Enūma Elish*, Tablet VI, lines 5–9, 34–36:

(5) 'I shall compact blood, I shall cause bones to be,  
I shall make stand a human being, let "Man" be its name.  
I shall create humankind,  
They shall bear the gods' burden that those may rest.  
I shall artfully double the ways of the gods'  
...  
He imposed the burden of the gods and exempted the gods.  
(35) After Ea the wise had made mankind,  
They imposed the burden of the gods on them!<sup>21</sup>

*Atra-Hasis*, lines 1–5, 190–193, 240–244:

(1) When gods were man,  
They did forced labor, they bore drudgery.  
Great indeed was the drudgery of the gods,  
The forced labor was heavy, the misery too much:  
(5) The seven (?) great Anunna-gods were burdening  
The Igigi-gods with forced labor.  
...  
(190) 'Let the midwife create a human being,  
Let man assume the drudgery of god.'  
They summoned and asked the goddess,  
The midwife of the gods, wise Mami:  
'Will you be the birth goddess, creatress of mankind?  
(195) Create a human being that he bear the yoke,  
Let him bear the yoke, the task of Enlil,  
Let man assume the drudgery of god.'  
...  
(240) 'I have done away with your heavy forced labor,  
I have imposed your drudgery on man.  
You have bestowed (?) clamor upon mankind.  
I have released the yoke, I have [made] restoration.'<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 33.

<sup>21</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, 'Epic of Creation (*Enūma Elish*)', in *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; vol. 1 of *The Context of Scripture*; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 400–401.

## Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet XI

I set up an offering stand on the top of the mountain.  
 Seven and seven cult vessels I set out,  
 I heaped reeds, cedar, and myrtle in their bowls.  
 The gods smelled the savor,  
 The gods smelled the sweet savor,  
 The gods crowded around the sacrificer like flies.<sup>23</sup>

The clash in views of God and humanity is clear. Babylonian gods lazily create people to unburden themselves in feeding *Heaven's* population; Elohim ordains people as his freely-chosen means to feed *earth's* population. Babylonian gods, in their weakness, tyrannise people, while Elohim demonstrates His aseity by creating food unaided, and His generosity by providing that food for others.

## 2. The Creation of People: Genesis 2:4–25

The second part elaborates on the relationship between people, the ground, food and the animals. Plants, surprisingly, are not 'living things' in the ecology of Genesis, in that they lack the breath of life which makes things living (2:7). In the flood all living things die (6:17) yet plants survive (8:11). When vegetation is destroyed, it requires burning sulphur and merits special mention (19:25).<sup>24</sup> So we can divide land-creatures into plants, which are food, and living things, which eat plants (1:29–30). However, at this point the distinction between people and the other living things is key: *people* produce the plants as food. '[No] shrub of the field being yet on the earth and no plant of the field yet sprouted, for ... there was no

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<sup>22</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, 'Atra-Ḥasis (1.130)', in *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; vol. 1 of *The Context of Scripture*; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 450–51.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin R. Foster, 'Gilgamesh', in *Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (ed. William W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger; vol. 1 of *The Context of Scripture*; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 460. We will return to this text when we consider Noah in a forthcoming article.

<sup>24</sup> This is all the more striking given the deliberate parallel of the flood and the destruction of Sodom, as described in Wenham, *Genesis 16–50*, 40.

human to till the soil' (2:5).<sup>25</sup> Thus, while the first account relates that the ground produces plants which the living things eat, the second clarifies that people work the ground, so that it produces plants, for the living things to eat.

Humanity is thus a steward of the ground *for the sake of* the living things. This is what it means to rule over them (1:26–28): to farm them, by feeding them so that they are fruitful and so that they fill the earth.<sup>26</sup> Food clarifies an aspect of the *imago Dei* here: God uses dominion to provide for others, and so must humankind. I would not want to be ruled by someone who was created in the *imago Marduk*.

This arrangement leaves humankind, as the lead supplier of food, to pull itself up by its own bootstraps: what are people to eat in order to get the energy to produce the first food? Yahweh creates the garden of Eden for that very reason: so that people can eat from its fruit while they work (2:8). So, by contrast with the seas and sky, which God simply declares are to be filled, He describes the mechanism for filling the land: He plants a mature garden, creates people to work the ground (feeding themselves from the garden) and produce food. The people feed some of that food to the living things and cause them also to fill the ground.<sup>27</sup>

### 3. Food in God's Speech

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<sup>25</sup> Alter's translation (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 20–21). MacDonald notes that the plants given to man for food are precisely those which require cultivation, as opposed to the (less valued by Israelites) green shrubs which are food for animals (MacDonald, 'Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch', 18). While he is surely right on the former, 2:5 makes clear that the food of animals also requires human activity. Only after it is cursed does the ground grow anything apart from people's work, and that is not edible (3:18).

<sup>26</sup> MacDonald observes that the original vegetarianism of the Priestly creation account, and Isaiah's vision of eventual vegetarianism, go largely unnoticed by Christians (MacDonald, 'Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch', 17); noticing the centrality of food in the story of these chapters makes his observation hard to miss.

<sup>27</sup> Noticing the food link between these two accounts strengthens Rogerson's contention that Gen 1 is not merely describing the order in which things were made, but laying down the eternal ordering of creation (Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 60).

I have shown that the plot so far has food in pride of place, but there is a different kind of indicator of the prominence of food in the creation account: its literary function in ways that are not essential to recounting the story.

In Genesis 1–2 food is prominent in God’s speech. The first word addressed to a creature is פָּרָוּ (1:22) with the same food-like pun in Hebrew as in English.<sup>28</sup> It is also the first word addressed to people (1:28). In the second part of the creation account, the only commands to humanity concern eating: eat of every tree, except this tree (2:16–17). This links the second part of the account to the first part: both concern permission regarding food.<sup>29</sup> While the first half of the account gave a series of snapshots of creation being populated, the second half focuses on the dynamics of how the land will be further filled.

Genesis opens with a picture of God blessing living things and of providing abundant food for them. His generosity to people is seen in making every tree good for food, allowing eating from all but one of them, and emphasising the unfettered freedom to eat (2:16 מִכָּל (עֵץ-הַגֵּן אָכַל תֹּאכֵל)).<sup>30</sup> Notice the parallel construction in the next verse, using an infinitive absolute followed by a finite form: God is as serious about their freedom to eat as about the certainty of their death if they eat the wrong fruit. There may even be a poetic emphasis in the similarity of sounds: מִכָּל ... אָכַל תֹּאכֵל where ‘from all’ almost sounds like a participial form of ‘eat.’ His generosity to all living things on land, air and sea is seen by providing people to produce abundant food for them (1:29–30). The text again emphasises openhandedness: נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת-כָּל-עֵשֶׂב ... כָּל-הָאָרֶץ וְאֶת-כָּל-הָעֵץ. Walter Brueggemann captures the mood here: ‘At the root of reality is a *limitless generosity* that intends an extravagant abundance.’<sup>31</sup>

The pun on ‘be fruitful’ thus works neatly. People must bear fruit

<sup>28</sup> Edwin C. Hostetter, ‘פָּרָוּ’, *NIDOTTE* 3:676–79; *TWOT*, §1809–1809a; *HALOT*, 963–64; *BDB*, 826.

<sup>29</sup> MacDonald, ‘Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch’, 23.

<sup>30</sup> Joüon §123.h.

<sup>31</sup> Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 559.

(reproduce) to fill the ground. This will produce enough people to work the ground. When people work it, the ground will bear fruit (literally). People will then take the fruit of the ground and feed themselves and the animals, so that the animals will in turn be fruitful (reproduce) and fill the ground. People are fruitful to fill and work the ground, so that animals and more people are fruitful and fill the increasingly fruitful ground.

### III. The Fall of Anthropology and Ecology: Genesis 3

The place of food, eating and food-production is conspicuous in the fall narrative. The only command given to people is to *eat* from every tree except one, and humanity's first sin is to *eat* from precisely that tree. The punishment for the serpent and for humanity involves *eating, fruitfulness, and food* production. אכל is the most frequent word in the chapter.

The literary structure of these chapters also highlight the significance of eating. Jerome Walsh has shown that Genesis 2:4–3:24 is a unit composed of seven scenes, arranged in a classic palistrophe, such that scene four stands alone as a turning point.<sup>32</sup> That scene is 3:6–8, where various poetic devices also highlight vv6–7, which stand at the centre of the narrative.<sup>33</sup> What is at this artfully constructed apex? Eve eats and feeds Adam.

#### 1. They Sinned By Eating

At issue in the temptation by the serpent is eating (1–6): the command not to eat and its consequences are distorted and challenged. Eve's summary of God's command rightly captures that it was a command in two parts, both about eating.

Three things appeal to Eve about the fruit (food, beauty, wisdom), but its goodness for food appears first. We are not told whether she enjoyed gazing at it or whether she longed for wisdom, but she did

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<sup>32</sup> Jerome T. Walsh, 'Genesis 2:4b–3:24: A Synchronic Approach', *JBL* 96, no. 2 (1977): 161–62, followed by Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26* (New American Commentary 1A; Nashville: Broadman, 1996), 184; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 50–51.

<sup>33</sup> Walsh, 'Genesis 2:4b–3:24', 166.



eat it. We lack any knowledge about what went through Adam's mind, but we know that he ate (6). After eating, the consequences are immediate; no further action is needed or indeed possible (7).

Just as Genesis 1–2 set up the *imago Dei* as enjoying the provision of food from a generous God and caring for creation by growing plants for food and feeding the animals, with Eve helping Adam in the whole process, this scene shows how each of these elements is corrupted. God's generous food is spurned in favour of the only food that is forbidden; it is an animal (the serpent) that effectively feeds people, rather than people feeding the animal; Eve does help Adam, but to subvert their task rather than perform it; faced with a fig tree, they neither eat the fruit nor feed its leaves to the animals, but rather turn the leaves into coverings for themselves. In such a carefully constructed passage, it is hard to avoid the suggestion of a word play here, since  $\text{וַיִּתְּפְרוּ}$ , while surely being a *qal wayyiqtol* of  $\text{תָּפַר}$ , looks identical to a *hitpa'el wayyiqtol* of  $\text{פָּרַה}$ , which has recurred throughout Gen 1–3 as the mandate to be fruitful or to eat fruit. They 'make fruit for themselves' by stitching together a pathetic covering.

God's challenge stresses eating in three ways (11). It is the first and only explanation offered for the new state of humanity's knowledge. Eating is repeated both as what they have done and as what God forbade. Eating is placed at the end of the sentence so that it is emphatic and brings both  $\text{אָכַל}$  forms close together as the climax of the challenge,  $\text{אָכַל-מִמֶּנּוּ אָכַלְתָּ}$ .<sup>34</sup> Adam and Eve's replies both serve only to explain how it came to pass that  $\text{וַאֲכַל}$ , which in both cases ends their explanation tragically.

This analysis answers James Barr's protest that eating 'an apple' should not be punished in such a disproportionate way.<sup>35</sup> Genesis to this point makes the ethical significance of 'merely eating an apple' abundantly plain: food is tied to the heart of anthropology and to humankind's place under God. Nothing is more serious than eating, in the story that leads to sinful eating. Not only does humanity eat

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<sup>34</sup> Brought out nicely by Alter: 'From the tree I commanded you not to eat have you eaten?' (Alter, *The Five Books of Moses*, 25.).

<sup>35</sup> James Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1993), 11–12.

what is forbidden, but they allow themselves to be fed and “served” by an animal, whereas their job is to feed and serve the animals. They have reneged on their duty and subverted the order of creation, specifically with regard to feeding. There are other answers to Barr: Walter Moberly points to trust in God as at issue,<sup>36</sup> and to the symbolic significance of food;<sup>37</sup> MacDonald challenges Barr’s unstated assumption that food cannot be ethically serious, citing the later Dietary Laws.<sup>38</sup> These are excellent observations, but the narrative itself to this point makes the seriousness of unauthorised eating unmistakable.<sup>39</sup>

## 2. They Swallowed the Punishment

God had displayed His munificence in ecology through food and fruitfulness, and He now dishes up punishment that sours that ecology.

The serpent loses all the blessings that it had enjoyed, as an animal, at people’s hand. If humanity was supposed to *eat* from *all* the trees, the serpent instead will *eat* dust *all* its days. If man and woman were to eat *seed*-bearing fruit for the sake of filling the earth with their *seed*, for the sake of tending the animals, the serpent is now excluded from their stewardship. Instead, the woman’s *seed* will wage war and defeat the serpent’s *seed*.<sup>40</sup> People, who once fed and tended the serpent, will now hunt a serpent that feeds itself on dust.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, 82.

<sup>37</sup> Moberly, *The Theology of the Book of Genesis*, 82n15.

<sup>38</sup> MacDonald, ‘Food and Diet in the Priestly Material of the Pentateuch’, 22.

<sup>39</sup> As Brueggemann points out, the punishment is *less* than what was promised and deserved; God will have life, not death, for people (Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 49–50). Sin and punishment may *match* (Victor P. Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17* [NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990], 202) but that is gracious restraint, not justice. Matthews’ explanation of why ‘punishment fits the crime’ (Mathews, *Genesis 1–11:26*, 252) merely shows that the punishment fits Adam’s role; it does *not* fit the crime retributively.

<sup>40</sup> While it is fine to translate **וְרֵעָא** as ‘offspring’ in modern translations of 3:15, yet as with **פְּרִי** the Hebrew has the dual meaning of agricultural produce and of descendants (*HALOT*, 283; *BDB*, 282), so that the food-laden imagery works here. This is no coincidence: **וְרֵעָא** is linked with **פְּרִי** as early as 1:11.

<sup>41</sup> There may be a poetic contrast here between dust and fruit: **עָפָר** vs **פְּרִי**.

If Adam needed Eve alongside, for humanity to be able to fill the earth with offspring by being fruitful and *multiply* (פָּרוּ וַיִּרְבוּ 1:28), now it is God who *multiplies* pain greatly (גַּדְּלָה אֶת־כָּבוֹד) in the process, which is no longer referred to as fruitful. Eve has been cursed in the project of feeding the world in the very activity for which she was distinctively created. We must distinguish between identifying Eve's distinctive role and labelling that as the *sole* or even chief purpose of her creation. In the project of filling and subduing the earth, reproduction is obviously the one thing for which *both* Adam *and* Eve are needed. In that sense, Adam by himself is entirely unable to do only one thing, which is multiply humanity. This does not mean that this is the only way that Eve helps; there may or may not be a huge overlap in their daily functions; the text does not specify either way, though it would take a very stunted anthropology to deny that companionship is in itself a help. We disagree, therefore, with Clines' statement that 'No one gets thanked for helping when all they have done is stand around being intellectually equal or alleviating people's isolation through identity—not when there is work to be done.'<sup>42</sup> My qualification 'distinctively' is the distinction missing from Clines' argument, when he identifies reproduction as the only thing for which she is *needed*.<sup>43</sup> Nor is his array of her lack of activity telling, for Adam does *nothing* at all in the narrative. He rightly identifies from the curse, as we do above, that reproduction is her sphere, but fails to notice that it is neither her only sphere nor even uniquely her sphere, since Adam is hardly uninvolved in the process.

With Adam, the rest of the farming project is cursed in great detail (17–19). Once again, the eating sin is stressed by repetition (17a). If Eve will have pain (עֲצָבוֹן) in producing offspring to grow food, Adam and the offspring will have pain (עֲצָבוֹן) in growing food from the ground (17b). Just as אָדָם was made from אֲדָמָה,<sup>44</sup> so

<sup>42</sup>David J. A. Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (JSOTSup 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 33.

<sup>43</sup>Clines, *What Does Eve Do to Help?* 35.

<sup>44</sup>There is a possible etymological link between these similar words, perhaps having a common root in Akkadian, but it is uncertain and disputed (c.p. Victor

Adam's punishment produces a cursed ground. The ground, though, was the very thing that caused creation to be good on the third day and which Adam grows food from; thus his *eating* requires painful work. Supremely uncooperative, it will spontaneously produce inedible weeds (18a) while he must now toil to produce food (18b). Instead of trees of the garden, he must eat plants of the field.<sup>45</sup> For the third time, eating is cursed (19) and food<sup>46</sup> explicitly mentioned.

So the serpent's relationship with people has gone from guardianship to guerrilla; Eve's abundant productivity is now agonising pain; and Adam's smorgasbord has turned to scarcity. One final sanction is needed, once again on account of food: people are expelled from the garden, so that they do not eat from the tree of life.

#### IV. Conclusion: People are Shepherd-Farmers

The mandate given to people, and the account of their first performance on the world stage, as examined above, leads to the following conclusion: people are livestock farmers. Their charge to work the ground and to farm plants is an intermediate one: their goal is to grow the population of living things, and to that end they produce plants as food for them. The place of food in the plot of Genesis 1–3 bears out Rogerson's conclusion that 'the task given to humanity in Genesis 1:28 in relation to the rest of the created order is to be a shepherd.'<sup>47</sup> In a nutshell, people are to grow food in order to cause themselves and the animals to fill the ground.

Food provides one way to make sense of how humanity has the world under its feet (Ps. 8) and how the whole of creation is groaning

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P. Hamilton, 'אֲדָמָה', *NIDOTTE*, 1:262 with Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 59). However, the word-play here is certainly deliberate and the conceptual link being made between man and ground is evident in the narrative.

<sup>45</sup> 'The purpose of this half-verse is to draw attention to the change of food' (Hamilton, *Genesis 1–17*, 265).

<sup>46</sup> אֲדָמָה can mean bread or food generally (*HALOT*, 526–27; *BDB*, 536–37), as in English 'meat' once stood for 'food.' O'Connell suggests that 'bread' is an idiomatic usage of the root meaning 'staple food,' (Robert H. O'Connell, 'לֶחֶם', *NIDOTTE* 2:790).

<sup>47</sup> Rogerson, *Genesis 1–11*, 19. His focus on Gen 1 means that the intermediate step of crop farming (seen in Gen 2) need not detain him.

in the expectation of the redemption of people (Rom. 8:19–22). They steward the ground as the source of food for all that lives, not only on the dry ground, but also in the sky and sea; thus they are in charge of all that lives in those three compartments of creation. On the other hand, the ground was cursed and no longer yields food abundantly. The resulting food scarcity is one tangible way that all the spheres of the created order groan. That state of affairs is the result of people's sin, which explains why the whole of creation is awaiting the outworkings of redemption from sin.

How does the new Adam appear in history to begin the redemption of all this? 'The Son of Man came eating and drinking' (Mt. 11:19). The number of miracles, parables of the Kingdom, controversies, and metaphors for teaching which involve food, eating, feasts or harvests is such that even just a search for food, eating or bread yields 246 verses in the NT.

Just as Adam could not begin the task of giving life through food without first receiving food from outside of creation, relying on God to feed him in the garden, so Jesus has a source of food that intrudes into creation, 'I have food to eat that you know nothing about. ... My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work.' (Jn. 4:32–34)

Satan tempted Adam with illegal food, and he succumbed, and he also tempted the new Adam, who upheld the law. 'The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread." Jesus answered, "It is written: 'Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.'"' (Mt. 4:3–4)

The source of eternal life has been inaccessible to Adam's seed since Gen 3, but the new Adam brings life into the world from outside, just as Adam was to give life to the world out of Eden:

<sup>27</sup> 'Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you.'

...

<sup>32</sup> Jesus said to them, 'I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. <sup>33</sup> For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.'

<sup>34</sup> 'Sir', they said, 'from now on give us this bread.'

<sup>35</sup> Then Jesus declared, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.'

...

<sup>48</sup> 'I am the bread of life. <sup>49</sup> Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. <sup>50</sup> But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. <sup>51</sup> I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.' (Jn. 6:27, 32-35, 48-51)

In the creation account, deciding what may be eaten is strictly God's prerogative, yet the Messiah ate what was unlawful ('Haven't you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests.' Mt. 12:3-4) while the divine Messiah is free to *legislate* what may be eaten ('In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean".' (Mk. 7:19)

No sooner has the new Adam risen from the dead and re-gathered his disciples around himself, than he provides food and feeds them and charges the leader to feed others (Lk. 24:30; Jn. 21:9, 13, 15), which is how he is recognised (Lk. 24:35; Jn. 21:6), and sets a pattern for their life together (Acts 2:42, 46; 6:2). When he departs again, he has taught them to rely on food from above: "Give us today our daily bread." Moreover, the daily concerns about which they are not to worry are food, drink and clothing (Mt. 6:25, 31; Mk. 6:8; 1 Tim. 6:8), clothing being one of the problems apparent in the fall account (Gen. 3:7, 10-11, 21). At the same time, like the first Adam, the people of the new Adam aren't being fed for their own sake, but for the sake of doing God's work in stewarding creation:

<sup>7</sup>...We were not idle when we were with you, <sup>8</sup> nor did we eat anyone's food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. <sup>9</sup> We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. <sup>10</sup> For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: 'If a man will not work, he shall not eat.'

<sup>11</sup> We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. <sup>12</sup> Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. (2 Thess. 3:7-12)

This all makes sense precisely because the original purpose of creation has never been abrogated. The opening chapters of Genesis do not present us with food as a convenient metaphor for human disobedience to an arbitrary divine will, the details of which may be ignored as long as one takes home the lesson that sin is a problem to be solved. As Geerhardus Vos warned us:

It is not biblical to hold that eschatology is a sort of appendix to soteriology, a consummation of the saving work of God. ... it is not merely an omission to ignore the pre-redemptive eschatology; it is to place the sequel in the wrong place. There is an absolute end posited for the universe before and apart from sin. The universe, as created, was only a beginning, the meaning of which was not perpetuation, but attainment.<sup>48</sup>

Again, 'there was something in the pre-redemptive eschatology that was not eliminated but reincorporated in the redemptive program. ... redemptive eschatology must be restorative and consummative.'<sup>49</sup> The physical side of redemption was not to be superseded by a purely spiritual redemption, as some have maintained, nor is the nature language an allegory.<sup>50</sup>

We can test Vos's warning by examining two visions of an eschatological 'golden age' against the litmus of Gen 1–3, with particular attention to food production. Either,

This period is described as one in which ships will no longer sail the seas, commerce will be unnecessary, the earth will produce everything, agriculture will not need to be practiced, and wool will grow dyed upon the sheep's back.<sup>51</sup>

Or,

Sharon will become a pasture for flocks,  
and the Valley of Achor a resting place for herds,  
for my people who seek me.

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<sup>48</sup> Geerhardus Vos, 'Eschatology in Its Pre-Redemptive Stage', in *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (ed. James T. Dennison; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 73.

<sup>49</sup> Vos, 'Eschatology in Its Pre-Redemptive Stage', 74.

<sup>50</sup> Vos, 'Eschatology in Its Pre-Redemptive Stage', 74.

<sup>51</sup> Virgil's Fourth Eclogue, as described by Geerhardus Vos, 'Pagan Eschatologies', in *The Eschatology of the Old Testament* (ed. James T. Dennison; Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001), 60.

...

'My servants will eat,  
but you will go hungry;  
my servants will drink,  
but you will go thirsty;

...

'Behold, I will create  
new heavens and a new earth.  
The former things will not be remembered,  
nor will they come to mind.

...

They will build houses and dwell in them;  
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.  
No longer will they build houses and others live in them,  
or plant and others eat.  
For as the days of a tree,  
so will be the days of my people;  
my chosen ones will long enjoy  
the works of their hands.  
They will not toil in vain  
or bear children doomed to misfortune;  
for they will be a people blessed by the LORD,  
they and their descendants with them.  
Before they call I will answer;  
while they are still speaking I will hear.  
The wolf and the lamb will feed together,  
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,  
but dust will be the serpent's food.'<sup>52</sup>

Which of these is biblical, and which is pagan? Which conforms to the creation vision of Genesis, and to the renewed mission of the church? Which more closely resembles the hope of most Christians today?

STEFFEN JENKINS  
London.

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<sup>52</sup> Isa 65, NIV.