

Inside The Lines

Genesis 2:15-18

Dr. Pierre Cannings

I. You Have One Job v. 15

- a. The Lord Took & Put
 - i. Brought Adam to the Garden
 - ii. Placed him
 - 1. His placement is not optional
- b. To Work
 - i. To Cultivate – work, care for maintain
 - ii. To Keep- Watch over
 - 1. In the garden God gives the man a purposeful existence that includes overseeing his environment. Work is a God-given assignment and not a cursed condition.⁹¹⁴ It was sin that spoiled the pristine relationship between the man and his environment, making work a toilsome chore that became a requirement for mere existence
 - 2. It also speaks of “service” to another (e.g., 29:15; 31:6) and is often used of worship (e.g., Exod 3:12). The verb and its noun derivative “service” (*‘ăbōdâ*) frequently describe Levitical duties in tabernacle and temple worship
 - 3. Once again the primary lesson is related to the people of God under Moses. God prepared mankind with a specific design and gave them the capacity for moral responsibility. He set them **in the Garden** to be obedient servants, warning that before them was life or death

¹⁹⁴ Cassuto argues that tilling the ground was imposed on man for sin (cf. 3:23); however, the punishment is not “working the ground” but laboring outside the garden against the harsh new conditions of the land, which was “cursed” as a result of the fall (3:17–18; *Genesis*, 122).

II. Just Stay In Bounds vs. 16-17

- a. Command- Forbid
 - i. You are free to eat
 - 1. You have freedom
 - 2. Establishes Free Will
 - ii. Just not from Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil
 - 1. The prohibition against eating the fruit of the “tree of knowledge” gave Adam opportunity to worship God through loyal devotion
 - 2. You will surely die
 - a. This prohibition, however, is stated in the strongest terms, as was the provision. The adversative beginning the clause (“but”) establishes the contrast between provision and prohibition
 - iii. Required Adam’s Obedience

Attention: A scorpion asks a frog to carry it across a river. The frog hesitates, afraid of being stung by the scorpion, but the scorpion argues that if it did that, they would both drown. The frog considers this argument sensible and agrees to transport the scorpion. The scorpion climbs onto the frog's back and the frog begins to swim, but midway across the river, the scorpion stings the frog, dooming them both. The dying frog asks the scorpion why it stung, to which the scorpion replies "I couldn't help it. It's in my nature."

III. Do It Together vs. 18 & 22

- a. Not good to be Alone
 - i. Good- Not of value
 - 1. Such observation emphasizes the importance of the woman in the mind of God.
 - ii. Alone – In solitude
- b. God will make
 - i. Helper - an aid fit for him,” meaning one “alongside” or “corresponding to him”
 - 1. which defines the role that the woman will play. In what way would Eve become a “helper” to the man? The term means “help” in the sense of aid and support¹¹²² and is used of the Lord’s aiding his people in the face of enemies (Pss 20:2 [3]; 121:1–2; 124:8). Moses spoke of God as his “helper” who delivered him from Pharaoh (Exod 18:4), and it is often associated with “shield” in describing God’s protective care of his people.¹¹³³

²¹¹² E.g., Deut 33:7; Josh 1:14; Isa 30:5; Dan 11:34.

³¹¹³ E.g., Deut 33:29; Pss 33:20; 115:9–11; cf. Ps 70:5 [6].

2. the “helper” is an indispensable “partner” (RE⁴B) required to achieve the divine commission. “Helper,” as we have seen from its Old Testament usage, means the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes. . As Paul said concisely, the man was not made for the woman “but the woman for the man” (cf. 1 Cor 11:9). The woman makes it possible for the man to achieve the blessing that he otherwise could not do “alone.” And, obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man.
 3. Divine “help” (*‘āzar*) and “blessing” are found in parallel in Jacob’s benediction for Joseph (49:25). Similarly, the woman is the provision of divine “help” for the man so that the Lord will bless them as they achieve the mandate
 4. “Helper” is not a demeaning term; it is often used in Scripture to describe God Almighty (e.g., Pss. 33:20; 70:5; 115:9,
 5. They both had the same nature. But what man lacked (his aloneness was not good) she supplied, and what she lacked he supplied
- ii. Suitable- **that which is opposite, that which corresponds**
1. **Opposites are good thing**

Word Studies:

v.15

Took- to put him down “be brought” (Gen 2:15) suggests that such “taking” is against the will of those taken.⁵

Put- **place** somewhere, **set, lay**

Cultivate - ⁴⁷ **tn Heb** “to work it and to keep it.”

sn Note that man’s task is *to care for and maintain* the trees of the orchard. Not until after the fall, when he is condemned to cultivate the soil, does this task change.⁶

to **toil** with acc⁷: a) to **till** the ground⁸ When used in reference to things it is usually followed by an accusative of the thing upon which the labor is expended, e.g. “to till” a field (Gen 2:5 and often elsewhere);⁹

Keep- watching over locations, objects¹⁰

v.16

Command - to **give an order, command, to forbid**

God “commanded” the world into existence (Ps 33:9; Isa 45:12). All creatures and elements therefore obey his command (cf. I Kgs 17:4; Job 37:12; Ps 78:23). God also directs the course of history by decreeing crucial events; indeed no determinative event happens without God’s ordaining it (Lam 3:37). Indeed he decrees that his people be victorious (Ps 44:4 [H 5]).

What God commands to be done, he provides the means to accomplish, e.g. he instructed Moses concerning the building of the cultic furniture and buildings; then he inspired Bezalel and Oholiab with the Spirit of wisdom to be able to accomplish the work (Ex 31:2–6; 35:30–36:1). Regarding the making of these objects the text first details the instructions and then describes Israel’s careful fulfillment of God’s commandment (Ex 25–30; 36–39; Lev 8; cf. Ex 39:5, 7, 32, 42f.).

God insures the truth of his word by commanding it; he commanded the covenant (Ps 105:8; 111:9) and will command blessing to those faithful to the covenant (Deut 28:8; Ps 133:3).

⁵ Walter C. Kaiser, [“1124 לקח,”](#) ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 482.

⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Ge 2:15.

⁷acc. accusative case

⁸ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 773.

⁹ Walter C. Kaiser, [“1553 עבד,”](#) ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 639.

¹⁰ Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 1582.

God remembers what he has commanded and is careful to fulfill every part of his side of the command decreed (I Chr 16:15).

Blessing accompanies obedience to God's commands; rebellion, however brings curses (Deut 11:26ff.). Adam and Eve disobeyed and encountered curses (Gen 3:16–19). In contrast, God commanded Noah to build an ark; Noah did all that God commanded and survived the flood (Gen 6:22; 7:5). Israel obeyed the commands of God at the Exodus, particularly regarding the Passover and they escaped their enslavement (cf. Ex 12:28, 50). But unfortunately Israel was prone to leave the way God directed (cf. Deut 31:29). To follow his commandments results in a good and long life (Deut 5:33). Therefore, Israel was not to deviate to the right or to the left from what God commanded them (Deut 5:32). Obedience to God's command becomes the obedient one's righteousness (Deut 6:25).¹¹

v.17

Tree of the knowledge of good and evil

Surely Die

v.18

Good **good as to character and value**¹²

Alone - **Solitude** Then too it is not good for a man to live alone without a wife (Gen 2:18) and a man alone may be exposed to personal danger (II Sam 17:2). One feels the cold solitude of Jacob as he waits alone at night before his encounter with Esau, and finds himself reassured only after he secures the angelic benediction (Gen 32:24 [H 25]).¹³

Helper - **help, assistance HELPER** (Heb. *āzar* Gk. *antīlēmpsis*).¹⁴† In the Old Testament a helper is one who provides aid or relief, most notably the Lord (e.g., Ps. 30:10; 54:4). Eve (RS¹⁵V “a woman”) is created as a helper or partner for the man (Gen. 2:18, 20; KJ¹⁶V “a help meet for him”; J¹⁷B “helpmate”; E. A. Speiser [*Genesis*, 3rd ed. (1979), p. 17] reads “an aid fit for him,” meaning one “alongside” or “corresponding to him”)¹⁸

¹¹ John E. Hartley, “[1887 צֵדֶק](#),” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 757.

¹² Ludwig Koehler et al., [The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 371.

¹³ Louis Goldberg, “[201 בָּדָד](#),” ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1999), 91.

¹⁴† Major revision

¹⁵RSV Revised Standard Version

¹⁶KJV King James Version

¹⁷JB Jerusalem Bible

¹⁸ Allen C. Myers, [The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1987), 480.

Suitable- substantive **that which is opposite, that which corresponds** only in אָדָם like his opposite ¹⁹> proper for him Gn 218.20²⁰

V.22

Fashioned

The rib

Brought her to the man

Commentary Studies

2:15 God placed the man in the garden for the stated purpose of supervising it. Verse 15 continues the thought of v. 8 but with a subtle difference in the language. “Put” in v. 15 translates the causative form of the verb *nûah*, “rest,” and so could be rendered literally “caused to rest.” In v. 8, however, the term is *šim* (“put, place”). Here the language of v. 15 is essentially equivalent to v. 8 in context, but “rest” bears a special significance for depicting deliverance from Noah’s waters (see 5:29 discussion) in Genesis 1–11 and for speaking of the safety that Israel would experience as found in the Pentateuch. God promised to give Israel safety (“rest”) in the land from its enemies (e.g., Deut 3:20; 12:10; 25:19). This is illustrated by Lot and his family; visiting angels “led them safely [“gave rest”] out of the city” (19:16). It also is used of dedicating something before the presence of the Lord.⁹²¹² God prepares the garden for man’s safety, where he can enjoy the divine presence.⁹²²³

In the garden God gives the man a purposeful existence that includes overseeing his environment. Work is a God-given assignment and not a cursed condition.⁹²³⁴ It was sin that spoiled the pristine relationship between the man and his environment, making work a toilsome chore that became a requirement for mere existence (3:17–19, 23). Mesopotamian accounts of human creation typically show how human beings were created for the purpose of work, but there human beings work to supply food for the selfish, lazy gods. Divine travail over their incessant labors is relieved by the creation of a human workforce. In contrast the biblical

¹⁹> develops into

²⁰ Ludwig Koehler et al., [*The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*](#) (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994–2000), 666.

²¹⁹² E.g., Exod 16:33–34; Num 17:4; Deut 26:4, 10; cf. priestly garments, Lev 16:23.

²²⁹³ Cf. E. R. Clendenen, “Life in God’s Land: An Outline of the Theology of Deuteronomy” in *The Church at the Dawn of the 21st Century* (Dallas: Criswell Publications, 1989), 162–63.

²³⁹⁴ Cassuto argues that tilling the ground was imposed on man for sin (cf. 3:23); however, the punishment is not “working the ground” but laboring outside the garden against the harsh new conditions of the land, which was “cursed” as a result of the fall (3:17–18; *Genesis*, 122).

account portrays God as Provider for man's needs, a part of which is the honorable, meaningful labor of tilling the soil. "Life without work would not be worthy of human beings."⁹²⁴⁵

The man's principal commission is to "work" and "take care" of his pristine garden home (v. 15). The word translated "work" (*'abad*) is the common one for tilling the soil (e.g., 3:23; 4:2, 12) or for other labor (e.g., Isa 19:9); it also speaks of "service" to another (e.g., 29:15; 31:6) and is often used of worship (e.g., Exod 3:12).⁹²⁵⁶ The verb and its noun derivative "service" (*'abōdâ*) frequently describe Levitical duties in tabernacle and temple worship.⁹²⁶⁷ It also speaks of the completed "work" on the tabernacle (Exod 39:32, 42). "Take care" (*šāmar*) probably specifies the nature of Adam's labor. It describes the occupation of Abel (4:9), attending property and flocks (e.g., 30:31), protecting persons (28:15, 20), and frequently of "observing" covenant stipulations.⁹²⁷⁸ For priestly duties it describes the faithful carrying out of God's instructions (e.g., Lev 8:35) and the caretaking of the tabernacle (e.g., Num 1:53; 18:5). Both terms occur together to describe the charge of the Levites for the tabernacle (Num 3:7–8; 18:7), thus again suggesting a relationship between Eden and tabernacle.

We have commented that "work" and "guard" in our passage anticipate 3:23–24, where the man and woman are expelled from the garden. Here there is a play on the word *šāmar* in the narrative: because the man fails through sin to "take care" (*šāmar*) in the garden, he is expelled, and God's cherubim "guarded" (*šāmar*) its access (3:24). Thus the man's assignment was fulfilled in an unexpected way by angels, and, ironically, Adam himself was prohibited from entry.

2:16 As God had given the natural world and all life-forms boundaries, human life too is instructed to live within prescribed boundaries. The verb "commanded" (v. 16) occurs twenty-five times in Genesis, but this first occurrence is the only place in Genesis where the narrative introduces a divine command by this formula: "And the LORD God commanded" (cp. 3:11, 17). Elsewhere in Genesis the formula, introducing direct discourse, always has a human subject (e.g., 12:20; 26:11; 28:1). "Commanded" (*šāwâ*) is common in the Old Testament and is often found in pentateuchal laws (particularly Deuteronomy) where Israel, "commanded" by God through Moses, received the "commandments" (*mišwôt*) of the Lord for their way of life. The companion expression found in the Pentateuch, "[all] which the LORD commanded [Moses],"

²⁴⁹⁵ Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, 220.

²⁵⁹⁶ A grammatical problem with the infinitives לְעַבְדָּהּ ("to work it") and לְשָׁמְרָהּ ("to take care of it") is the identity of the antecedent for the third feminine suffix (MT's *mappiq*). "Garden" (גַּן) is masculine, and "ground" (אֲדָמָה), though feminine gender, is distant (v. 9). Cassuto reads the final *hē* (without *mappiq*) as the infinitive (with additional *hē*) and renders them "to serve and to guard," indicating the sense of sacrificial worship (*Genesis*, 122–23). Sailhamer agrees and points to how these terms in the Pentateuch indicate worship and obedience to God's commands ("Genesis," 45). We have discovered that the language of the garden has double entendre, but the inferential meaning is always secondary. It is best to interpret our infinitives as referring to "work" but secondarily anticipating the Mosaic context of worship and obedience. The problem of gender is best resolved by taking the gender assignment from the place name "Eden" (absolute) rather than the construct "garden" (*IBHS* § 6.4.1d).

²⁶⁹⁷ E.g., Exod 38:21; Num 3:10; 18:6; 1 Chr 24:3, 19; 2 Chr 8:14.

²⁷⁹⁸ E.g., Gen 17:9–10; 18:19; 26:5; Deut 4:6; 7:12; 29:9.

with its slight variations, is especially frequent in the narrative of the tabernacle's construction (chaps. 39–40).⁹²⁸⁹ At the ark in the tent of meeting, God met with Moses where he gave all “which [the LORD] commanded [Moses] for the Israelites” (Exod 25:22; cf. also 34:32). This same expression for faithful obedience commends Noah's construction of the ark (6:22; 7:5, 9, 16) and Abraham's circumcision of Isaac (21:4). Unhappily, in the ensuing garden story the same cannot be said for Adam and Eve.

The man is addressed personally as an individual “Thou.”¹⁰²⁹⁰ Unlike all other created life, the human being is endowed with special significance as a “person” in the eyes of his Creator, enjoying a privileged depth of divine-human communion. This is likewise evidenced in the creation narrative, where God spoke to mankind, unlike the creatures, when bestowing his blessing of procreation (1:28). All human life merits respect and protection by virtue of the esteemed position to which God has exalted it. The prohibition against eating the fruit of the “tree of knowledge” gave Adam opportunity to worship God through loyal devotion. Luther likened the tree to “Adam's church, altar, and pulpit. Here he was to yield to God the obedience he owed, give recognition to the Word and will of God, give thanks to God, and call upon God for aid against temptation.”¹⁰³⁰¹

The instruction of the Lord is given as a positive expression of God's goodness rather than a harsh restriction (v. 16b). The Hebrew clause is headed by “from any/every tree [*mikkōl 'ēš*] of the garden,” evidencing God's broad provision. This generosity is heightened by the following Hebrew construction translated “you are free to eat,” which could also be translated “you may eat freely” (cf. NRS^{31V}).¹⁰³²² This strong affirmation indicates that the provision of God for the first couple is plentiful and to be enjoyed liberally by them.

2:17 But freedom has no meaning without prohibition; the boundary for Adam is but one tree. This prohibition, however, is stated in the strongest terms, as was the provision. The adversative beginning the clause (“but”) establishes the contrast between provision and prohibition. The NIV's rendering reflects the nuance of strong prohibition by “you *must* not eat.” The form of the prohibition is the style of command prominent in the Ten Commandments and occurring often in the laws of Moses. The causal clause (“for,” *kî*) that follows explains the severity of the prohibition; the consequence of such an action is stated emphatically: “you will surely die.” This construction is the same kind as in v. 16, where the emphasis is on the liberality of God's provision.¹⁰³³³ Here its emphatic nuance underscores the forewarning of the Lord. Commonly the expression “you shall surely die” decrees death for a culprit either by God (Gen 20:7; Ezek 33:8, 14) or a king.¹⁰³⁴⁴ It occurs repeatedly in the legal collections of the Pentateuch, condemning criminals to death (e.g., Exod 21:12; Lev 20:2; Num 35:16–18).

²⁸⁹⁹ Exod 39:1, 5, 7, 21, 26, 29, 31–32, 42–43; 40:16, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, 32. Also cf. 29:35; 31:6, 11; 34:4, 18; 35:1, 4, 10, 29; 36:1, 5; 38:22.

²⁹¹⁰⁰ Noted by Atkinson, *Genesis*, 63.

³⁰¹⁰¹ LW 1.95.

³¹NRSV New Revised Standard Version

³²¹⁰² אָכַל תֹּאכַל with the infinitive absolute.

³³¹⁰³ מוֹת תָּמוּת with the infinitive absolute.

³⁴¹⁰⁴ E.g., Gen 26:11; 1 Sam 14:39, 44; 22:16; 1 Kgs 2:37, 42; 2 Kgs 1:4, 6.

The preemptive warning is necessary because, unlike the other members of the created order, mankind alone has the potential for crossing moral boundaries. Out of God's goodness and mercy he informs the man that the consequence of disobedience is death; what is at stake is whether he will choose to trust God's words. There is no suggestion from the passage, as is assumed by some, that Adam was created immortal but subsequently forfeited immortality by his sin.¹⁰³⁵⁵ There is a difference between man's creation, in which he receives life by the divine inbreathing (2:7), and the perpetuation of that life gained by appropriating the tree of life (cf. 3:22).¹⁰³⁶⁶ Immortality is the trait of deity alone (1 Tim 6:16). Calvin rightly noted that without sin Adam's "earthly life truly would have been temporal; yet he would have passed into heaven without death, and without injury," thereby receiving eternal life.¹⁰³⁷⁷ Perpetuating or renewing earthly life was possible through the "tree of life" (v. 9), but once sin was committed, the sanction of disobedience necessarily meant the man and woman's expulsion from the garden and its tree of life (3:22–24).

The theme of provision continues in the story as God creates a "helper suitable" for the man (vv. 18, 20). Unique to the creation account is God's declaration that the man alone is "not good." The same formula, "then God said," which introduced God's creative word in chap. 1, expresses God's contemplation over what in his otherwise "good" creation requires his special attention. Such observation emphasizes the importance of the woman in the mind of God. Divine initiative is center stage in this passage: "The LORD God said" (v. 18), "the LORD God had formed" (v. 19), "the LORD God caused ... a deep sleep" (v. 21), and "the LORD God made a woman" (v. 22). This full description of the woman's creation is unique to the cosmogonies of the ancient Near East. The Hebrews' lofty estimation of womanhood and its place in creation was not widely held by ancient civilizations, and Israel itself failed at times to give proper recognition and honor to women.¹⁰³⁸⁸ The law of Israel, however, was designed to protect those who were commonly subject to abuse by society: the orphan, widow, and alien (e.g., levirate marriage, Deut 25:5–10). Genesis's account of the woman's creation demonstrates that God intended women to be equally important in the purposes of Providence. This was already found in chap. 1, where both "male and female" are said to be image bearers of God and both are commanded to rule the world (1:26–28). The role and relationship of the man and woman is now spelled out in more detail in the garden story.

2:18 The Hebrew construction of v. 18 accentuates the negative phrase "not good" by placing it at the head of the sentence. God has made the man and provided a beautiful environment with honorable work, a setting men may sometimes consider idyllic, but God announces that more is to be done to achieve the ideal for the man. God's concern is that man

³⁵¹⁰⁵ Sarna observes that man did not die immediately, and since there is no evidence that God rescinded the penalty, it is best to see the penalty imposed by denying man access to the rejuvenating benefits of the tree of life (*Genesis*, 21). In the *Epic of Gilgamesh* the plant of life is said to restore the youth of its possessor (*ANET*, 96).

³⁶¹⁰⁶ Observed by Wallace, *The Eden Narrative*, 103.

³⁷¹⁰⁷ Calvin, *Comm.*, 127.

³⁸¹⁰⁸ E.g., provision for divorce in Deut 24:1–4 is Moses' regulation of the abusive power of the Israelite husband; this may have been in response to the practice of wife swapping.

is “alone.” Whether the man felt his aloneness at first is not stated; only the divine viewpoint is given. God has created human life to have fellowship with him but also to be a social entity, building relationships with other human beings. “[Man] will not live until he loves, giving himself away to another on his own level.”¹⁰³⁹⁹ Isolation is not the divine norm for human beings; community is the creation of God. The commissioning of man and woman to reign over the good land (1:28) involves procreation, and only together can they achieve their destiny. This unity, however, is not merely sexual; it involves sharing spiritual, intellectual, and emotional dimensions as well. Jewish sentiment noted this: “Whoever has no wife exists without goodness, without a helpmate, without joy, without blessing, without atonement ... without well-being, without a full life; ... indeed, such a one reduces the representation of the divine image [on earth].”¹¹⁴⁰⁰

Moreover, the dignity of the woman is heightened by the monologue of God’s creative contemplation. This stands in opposition to the creation of the man and the animals, which are described in the third person. Particularly, the creation of woman gives rise to God’s creation of animals in the garden as a pedagogical device for the man’s observation. The woman is deemed by the divine mind “a helper suitable for him.” “Suitable” (*kēnegdô*, lit., “like what is in front of him”) indicates a *correspondence* between the man and the woman.¹¹⁴¹¹ The focus is on the equality of the two in terms of their essential constitution. Man and woman share in the “human” sameness that cannot be found elsewhere in creation among the beasts. In every way the woman shares in the same features of personhood as does the man. In 1:26–28 this equality of the man and woman as image bearers has priority over their differences in sexual roles, although both were crucial to realizing the intended blessing.

Here, however, the garden narrative moves beyond that initial assessment by specifying a functional difference that exists between the man and woman. She is called Adam’s “helper” (*‘ēzer*), which defines the role that the woman will play. In what way would Eve become a “helper” to the man? The term means “help” in the sense of aid and support¹¹⁴²² and is used of the Lord’s aiding his people in the face of enemies (Pss 20:2 [3]; 121:1–2; 124:8). Moses spoke of God as his “helper” who delivered him from Pharaoh (Exod 18:4), and it is often associated with “shield” in describing God’s protective care of his people.¹¹⁴³³

There is no sense derived from the word linguistically or from the context of the garden narrative that the woman is a lesser person because her role differs (see more at 2:23). In the case of the biblical model, the “helper” is an indispensable “partner” (RE⁴⁴B) required to achieve the divine commission. “Helper,” as we have seen from its Old Testament usage, means the woman will play an integral part, in this case, in human survival and success. What the man lacks, the woman accomplishes. As Paul said concisely, the man was not made for the woman “but the woman for the man” (cf. 1 Cor 11:9). The woman makes it possible for the man to

³⁹¹⁰⁹ Kidner, *Genesis*, 65.

⁴⁰¹¹⁰ *Gen. Rab.* 17.2, quoted by Sarna, *Genesis*, 21.

⁴¹¹¹¹ So BDB, 617.

⁴²¹¹² E.g., Deut 33:7; Josh 1:14; Isa 30:5; Dan 11:34.

⁴³¹¹³ E.g., Deut 33:29; Pss 33:20; 115:9–11; cf. Ps 70:5 [6].

⁴⁴ REB Revised English Bible

achieve the blessing that he otherwise could not do “alone.” And, obviously, the woman cannot achieve it apart from the man.

Divine “help” (‘*āzar*) and “blessing” are found in parallel in Jacob’s benediction for Joseph (49:25). Similarly, the woman is the provision of divine “help” for the man so that the Lord will bless them as they achieve the mandate. Also ‘*ēzer* in 2:18 anticipates in an unexpected way how Eve will be a “helper” to her husband. She will be instrumental in providing salvation for fallen Adam by her “seed,” who will defeat the serpent (3:15). Hebrew *zera* (‘seed’) may be a wordplay with the similar-sounding ‘*ēzer* (“helper”). Since God is said to exercise the role of “helper,” the term does not diminish the person who holds that role. If anything, the divine nuance of the term “helper” in the Pentateuch gives special dignity (e.g., Deut 33:7, 26, 29).⁴⁵

18–25. The making of the woman. The New Testament draws much of its teaching on the sexes from this crowning paragraph of the chapter, which is the dynamic, or dramatic, counterpart of 1:27, 28. The naming of the animals, a scene which portrays man as monarch of all he surveys, poignantly reveals him as a social being, made for fellowship, not power: he will not live until he loves, giving himself away (24) to another on his own level. So the woman is presented wholly as his partner and counterpart; nothing is yet said of her as child bearer. She is valued for herself alone.

In more detail, we may find the following emphases here. First, man is prior to woman (1 Cor. 11:8, 9; 1 Tim. 2:13).²⁴⁶⁰ Secondly, the sexes are complementary: the true partnership is expounded by the terms that are used (*a helper fit for him*, 18, 20, ^{RS47V}; literally ‘a help as opposite him’, i.e. ‘corresponding to him’), by the fruitless search elsewhere, as man discerns the natures (expressing them in the *names*, 20) of other creatures, and by the fact that Eve is of the very stuff of Adam²⁴⁸¹ and yet a wholly new being. Adam’s joyful ‘*at last ...*’ (23, ^{RS49V}) grows into the first poetic couplet in the Bible, and his work of naming is triumphantly concluded in a

⁴⁵ K. A. Mathews, [Genesis 1-11:26](#), vol. 1A, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1996), 212–214.

⁴⁶²⁰ This priority, like that of, e.g. parents to children, is built into this world, not the next (Luke 20:35f.). God’s people, living in both time and eternity, are under his temporal order for their practice (Eph. 5:22f.; 1 Cor. 11:8f.; 1 Pet. 3:6, 7) and his eternal one for their fundamental attitudes (Gal. 3:28).

⁴⁷ ^{RSV} American Revised Standard Version, 1952.

⁴⁸²¹ Attention has been drawn to the connection between a rib and the creation of a woman in the Sumerian story of Enki, for whose healing Nin-ti was made. The latter name can mean both ‘lady of the rib’ and ‘lady who makes live’. See S. N. Kramer, *History begins at Sumer* (Thames and Hudson, 1958), pp. 194–196; D. J. Wiseman, *Illustrations from Biblical Archaeology* (Tyndale Press, 1958), p. 9. But apart from the two themes of rib and life-making (verbally linked in Sumerian but not Hebrew) the stories have little in common. Enki was a god who had brought eight diseases on himself, and Nin-ti was one of eight goddesses created to heal the eight affected parts (in this case, his rib). If this originated in the Eden story it has traveled very far from it.

⁴⁹ ^{RSV} American Revised Standard Version, 1952.

title that echoes his own. Thirdly, the union of the two in marriage is to be an exclusive (*a man leaves ...*,²⁵⁰² 24, *RS*^{51V}), permanent (... *and cleaves*), God-sealed bond (*one flesh*: cf. Mark 10:8f.); for 'God himself, like a father of the bride, leads the woman to the man' (G. von Ra⁵²d).²⁵³³ Fourthly, there is, in God's true pattern, perfect ease between them (25). But it is the fruit of perfect love, which has no alloy of greed, distrust or dishonour; it was understandably an immediate casualty of the fall (see further on 3:7), and the chapter ends with a pointed reminder of our vanished concord.⁵⁴

2:15–17. Man's purpose is to provide spiritual service, as the carefully selected words indicate: he was placed (*nûah*, "set to rest") **in the Garden ... to work it** (*'ābad*, "to serve") and to **take care of it**. Whatever work he did was therefore described as his service to **God**.

Verse 16 includes the first use in the Old Testament of *šāwâh*, the major verb for "command." God's first command to man concerned life and death, good and evil. As with all God's subsequent commandments, there were positive blessings and negative prohibitions. All earthly goods and pleasures were at man's disposal, except this one **tree** which was forbidden. The Hebrew wording in verses 16–17 states the command in strong terms: **man** could **eat** freely from all the other fruit, but if he ate from the forbidden **tree** he would **surely die**.

Once again the primary lesson is related to the people of God under Moses. God prepared mankind with a specific design and gave them the capacity for moral responsibility. He set them **in the Garden** to be obedient servants, warning that before them was life or death, depending on whether they obeyed the commandment. Deuteronomy 30:11–20 set forth for Israel all the instructions parallel to the motifs of Genesis 2:8–17: obedience to the commandments of God results in life and blessing.

2:18–25. This section records the creation of the first woman and the institution of marriage; so it says much about the mainstay of Israel's society. God intended husband and wife to be a spiritual, functional unity, walking in integrity, serving **God**, and keeping His commandments together. When this harmony is operative, society prospers under God's hand.

Adam was **alone** and that was **not good**; all else in Creation was good (cf. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25). As man began to function as God's representative (naming the animals [2:19–20] represented his dominion over them; cf. 1:28), he became aware of his solitude (2:20). **God** therefore put him to **sleep** (v. 21) and created Eve from his **flesh** and **bone** (vv. 21–23).

⁵⁰²² Note the order: 'leaving' before 'cleaving'; marriage, nothing less, before intercourse. So this question, as well as divorce, was settled 'from the beginning' (Mark 10:6ff.). See also on 34:7.

⁵¹_{RSV} American Revised Standard Version, 1952.

⁵² von Rad *Genesis* (Old Testament Library) by G. von Rad, Eng. tr. 1961.

⁵³²³ *Genesis*, p. 82.

⁵⁴ Derek Kidner, *Genesis: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 1, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1967), 70–71.

God decided to **make a helper suitable** (lit., “a helper corresponding to him,” or “a corresponding helper”) **for** the man (v. 18). “Helper” is not a demeaning term; it is often used in Scripture to describe God Almighty (e.g., Pss. 33:20; 70:5; 115:9, where it is trans⁵⁵. “help” in the NI⁵⁶v). The description of her as “corresponding to him” means basically that what was said about him in Genesis 2:7 was also true of her. They both had the same nature. But what man lacked (his aloneness was not good) she supplied, and what she lacked he supplied. The culmination was **one flesh** (v. 24)—the complete unity of man and woman in marriage. Since Adam and Eve were a spiritual unity, living in integrity without sin, there was no need for instruction here on headship. Paul later discussed that in relationship to the order of Creation (1 Cor. 11:3; 1 Tim. 2:13).⁵⁷

⁵⁵trans. translation, translator, translated

⁵⁶NI^v New International Version

⁵⁷ Allen P. Ross, [“Genesis.”](#) in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 31.