

The Message *is a contemporary rendering
of the Bible from the original languages,
crafted to present its tone, rhythm, events,
and ideas in everyday language.*

Conversations

THE MESSAGE
WITH ITS TRANSLATOR



Eugene H. Peterson

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TO THE READER

If there is anything distinctive about *The Message*, perhaps it is because the text is shaped by the hand of a working pastor. For most of my adult life I have been given a primary responsibility for getting the message of the Bible into the lives of the men and women with whom I worked. I did it from pulpit and lectern, in home Bible studies and at mountain retreats, through conversations in hospitals and nursing homes, over coffee in kitchens and while strolling on an ocean beach. *The Message* grew from the soil of forty years of pastoral work.

As I worked at this task, this Word of God, which forms and transforms human lives, did form and transform human lives. Planted in the soil of my congregation and community the seed words of the Bible germinated and grew and matured. When it came time to do the work that is now *The Message*, I often felt that I was walking through an orchard at harvest time, plucking fully formed apples and peaches and plums from laden branches. There's hardly a page in the Bible I did not see lived in some way or other by the men and women, saints and sinners, to whom I was pastor—and then verified in my nation and culture.

I didn't start out as a pastor. I began my vocational life as a teacher and for several years taught the biblical languages of Hebrew and Greek in a theological seminary. I expected to live the rest of my life as a professor and scholar, teaching and writing and studying. But then my life took a sudden vocational turn to pastoring in a congregation.

I was now plunged into quite a different world. The first noticeable difference was that nobody seemed to care much about the Bible, which so recently people had been paying me to teach them. Many of the people I worked with now knew virtually nothing about it, had never read it, and weren't interested in learning. Many others had spent years reading it but for them it had gone flat through familiarity, reduced to clichés. Bored, they dropped it. And there weren't many people in between. Very few were interested in what I considered my primary work, getting the words of the Bible into their heads and hearts, getting the message lived. They found newspapers and magazines, videos and pulp fiction more to their taste.

Meanwhile I had taken on as my life work the responsibility of getting these very people to listen, really listen, to the message in this book.

I knew I had my work cut out for me.

I lived in two language worlds, the world of the Bible and the world of Today. I had always assumed they were the same world. But these people didn't see it that way. So out of necessity I became a "translator" (although I wouldn't have called it that then), daily standing on the border between two worlds, getting the language of the Bible that God uses to create and save us, heal and bless us, judge and rule over us, into the language of Today that we use to gossip and tell stories, give directions and do business, sing songs and talk to our children.

And all the time those old biblical languages, those powerful and vivid Hebrew and Greek originals, kept working their way underground in my speech, giving energy and sharpness to words and phrases, expanding the imagination of the people with whom I was working to hear the language of the Bible in the language of Today and the language of Today in the language of the Bible.

I did that for thirty years in one congregation. And then one day (it was April 30, 1990) I got a letter from an editor asking me to work on a new version of the Bible along the lines of what I had been doing as a pastor. I agreed. The next ten years was harvest time. *The Message* is the result.

The Message is a reading Bible. It is not intended to replace the excellent study Bibles that are available. My intent here (as it was earlier in my congregation and community) is simply to get people reading it who don't know that the Bible is read-able at all, at least by them, and to get people who long ago lost interest in the Bible to read it again. But I haven't tried to make it easy—there is much in the Bible that is hard to understand. So at some point along the way, soon or late, it will be important to get a standard study Bible to facilitate further study. Meanwhile, read in order to live, praying as you read, "God, let it be with me just as you say."

— EUGENE H. PETERSON

USING THIS BIBLE

This edition of *The Message* is designed to facilitate communion between you and God, with the Scriptures serving as the sacrament of that communion. Something holy will be mediated through that sacrament: the sacredness of God's words to you and of yours to him.

Eugene Peterson will guide you in that conversation. Since most of us have never had the opportunity to hear Eugene preach at his church in Maryland, or to take one of his classes at Regent College in Canada, or to converse with him on the mountain trails he hikes in Montana, the next best thing to being with him in those ways is to be with him in *this* way — through the words he has written, which come from a lifetime of conversations with God, so many of which were prompted by his time in the Scriptures.

Layered throughout this Bible are contemplative readings drawn from the words Eugene has written in thirty-four books, forty years of sermon transcripts, and various essays. You will notice when you come to these contemplations that the prayers end with an ellipsis. They have been left open-ended so you can finish them with your own heartfelt words, however the Holy Spirit may lead you.

Also layered throughout this Bible are shorter reflections, set off with a type style that readily distinguishes them from the biblical text and placed into the text in such a way as to help you pause and reflect on them. As you meditate on these reflections and contemplations, we urge you to be still and listen to how the Holy Spirit might want to use Eugene's words and those of the biblical writers to speak into your life.

Although Eugene has studied the Scriptures extensively, he has written and spoken about them more selectively. Because of that, some books of the Bible will be more thoroughly annotated than others. Some will have annotations for every chapter; others will have larger gaps between the annotations.

Before you begin your journey through this Bible, it would be helpful for you to read Eugene's introductory remarks and his essay on reading the Scriptures. Both will enhance your experience of this edition of *The Message* and of the delightfully unique edition-in-progress that is your life.

— KEN GIRE
Project Editor

THESE CONVERSATIONS

The dominant and obvious forms of Christian discourse are preaching and teaching. That is as it should be. We have a great event of salvation to announce to the world that we need to proclaim clearly and urgently. And we have a revealed truth about God and ourselves that we need to make as plain as possible. But within that large context to which preaching and teaching provide the shape and content, there are other ways of using words that are just as important, if not as conspicuous: questions and conversations, comments and ruminations, counsel and suggestion. It's a quieter use of language and mostly takes place in times and locations that aren't set apart for religious discourse. It's the quieter conversational give-and-take of relationships in which we take each other seriously, respectfully attentive to what is said to us and thoughtfully responsive in what we say in return.

Our conversations with each other are sacred. Those that take place in the parking lot after Sunday worship are as much a part of the formation of Christian character as the preaching from the sanctuary pulpit. The small talk that happens around the ritual of putting children to sleep for the night is as sacred as the most solemn of Eucharistic liturgies. But conversation, as such, though honored by our ancestors, is much neglected today as a form of Christian discourse. If we're to be in touch with all the parts of our lives and all the dimensions of the gospel, conversation requires equal billing (although not equal authority) with preaching and teaching.

The conversations I would like to have with you are more casual than formal — the kinds of conversations we would have if we walked through the mountains together, stopping here and there to catch our breath. Pointing out a scarf of snow blowing in the wind on some distant peak. Or stooping to examine the soft-petaled wonder of a wildflower. Or spotting an osprey's nest in a lofty pine across the lake.

We'll travel a lot of terrain together, some of it breathtakingly scenic, some of it ploddingly plain, and some of it precariously uncertain. Here and there along the way I'll point out details in the biblical landscape, drawing attention to a particular word, pointing out a pertinent piece of

historical background, pausing a moment to talk with you and to lead you in prayer.

With that in mind, it's my personal joy to come alongside you in the wondrous and perilous journey that is your life, and my pastoral privilege to walk with you through the Scriptures. I come as a guide as well as a fellow traveler.

Traveling mercies for us both.

And, yes, you can call me Eugene!

READING THE SCRIPTURES

In order to read the Scriptures adequately and accurately, it's necessary at the same time to live them. Not to live them as a prerequisite to reading them, and not to live them as a consequence of reading them, but to live them *as* we read them.

Reading the Scriptures isn't an activity discrete from living the gospel; it is integral to it. It means letting another have a say in everything we're saying and doing. It's as easy as that. And as hard.

This kind of reading has been named by our ancestors as *lectio divina*, often translated "spiritual reading." It means not only reading the text but also meditating on the text, praying the text, and living the text. It is reading that enters our souls the way food enters our stomachs, spreads through our blood, and transforms us. Christians don't simply learn or study or use Scripture; we feed on it. We assimilate it, taking it into our lives in such a way that it gets metabolized into acts of love, cups of cold water, missions into all the world, healing and evangelism and justice in Jesus' name, hands raised in adoration of the Father, feet washed in the company of the Son.

Words spoken and listened to, written and read are intended to do something *in* us, to give us health and wholeness, vitality and holiness, wisdom and hope.

We open this book and find that on page after page it takes us off guard, surprises us, and draws us into *its* reality, pulls us into participation with God on *his* terms.

My task is to bring into awareness that the biblical text, in the course of revealing God, pulls us into the revelation and welcomes us as participants in it. What I want to call attention to is that the Bible, all of it, is *livable*. It is, in fact, the text for living our lives.

The Scriptures not only reveal everything of who God is but also everything of who we are. And this revelation is done in such a way as to invite participation on both sides, of author and reader.

This may be the single most important thing to know as we come to read and study and believe these Holy Scriptures: this rich, alive, personally revealing God as experienced in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,

personally addressing us in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, at whatever age we are, in whatever state we are — me, you, us. Christian reading is participatory reading, receiving the words in such a way that they become interior to our lives, the rhythms and images becoming practices of prayer, acts of obedience, ways of love.

Holy Scripture is like fenced-in acreage, with rows of words and sentences that form rhythms in which we, the readers, participate but don't control. We meditatively enter this world of words and give obedient and glad assent. We submit our lives to this text so that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

Story is the primary verbal means of bringing God's Word to us. For that we can be most grateful, for story is our most accessible form of speech. But there's another reason for the appropriateness of story as a means of bringing God's Word. Story doesn't just tell us something and leave it there; it invites our participation. A good storyteller gathers us into the story. We feel the emotions, get caught up in the drama, identify with the characters, see into the nooks and crannies of life that we had overlooked, realize that there's more to this business of being human than we had yet explored. If the story is good, doors and windows open. Honest stories respect our freedom; they don't manipulate us, don't force us, don't distract us from life. They bring us into the spacious world in which God creates and saves and blesses. First through our imaginations and then through faith — imagination and faith are close kin — they offer us a place in the story, invite us into this large story that takes place under the broad skies of God's purposes.

One of the characteristic marks of the biblical storytellers is a certain reticence. There's an austere, spare quality to their stories. They don't tell us too much. They leave a lot of blanks in the narration, an implicit invitation to enter the story ourselves, just as we are, and to discover for ourselves how to fit in.

Stories suffer misinterpretation when we don't submit to them simply as stories. We're caught off guard when divine revelation arrives in such ordinary garb, and we mistakenly think it's our job to dress it up in the latest Paris-silk gown of theology, or to outfit it in a sturdy three-piece suit of ethics before we can deal with it. The simple, or not so simple, story is soon, like David under Saul's armor, so encumbered with moral admonitions, theological constructs, and scholarly debates that it can hardly move. There are, of course, always moral, theological, and historical elements in these stories that need to be studied, but never in dismissal of the story that is being told.

One of the many welcome consequences in learning to "read" our lives into the lives of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Miriam, Hannah and Samuel, Ruth and David, Isaiah and Esther, Mary and Martha, Peter and Paul is a sense of affirmation and freedom; we don't have to fit into prefabricated moral or mental or religious boxes before we're admitted into the company of God. We're taken seriously, just as we are, and given a place in his story. For it is, after all, *his* story; none of us is the leading character in the story of our life.

Spiritual theology, using Scripture as text, doesn't present us with a moral code and tell us, "Live up to this"; nor does it set out a system of doctrine and say, "Think like this and you will live well." The biblical

way is to tell a story and, in the telling, to invite us to “Live *into* this.” This is what it looks like to be human in this God-made and God-ruled world; this is what is involved in becoming a human being and maturing as one.

When we submit our lives to what we read in Scripture, we find that we’re being led not to see God in our stories but to see our stories in God’s. God is the larger context and plot in which our stories find themselves.

The story that locates us in the large world of God and enlists us in following Jesus is told sentence by sentence. Walking and following, for the most part, don’t require deliberate thought; they employ conditioned reflexes, muscle and nerve coordination acquired in the first few years of life. We walk without having to think about putting one step before another. We read a story the same way; the sentences unfold one after the other without our having to stop and ponder each period or verb tense.

But just as in walking without thinking, we sometimes miss important details in the terrain — flowers and rocks, for example — so in reading without thinking, we sometimes miss important details in the text. As we follow Jesus in making our way through this story, we find *ourselves* in the story.

But in finding some things, we overlook other things. We find ourselves from time to time stopping, or being stopped, and noticing details that make up the story. We attend to language the way a naturalist attends to flowers or a geologist attends to rocks. And we discover that words are never mere words — they convey spirit, meaning, energy, and truth. This is the work of *exegesis*, a technical term for carefully studying the text and listening to it rightly and well.

Careful study is necessary. Without study, spirituality becomes sappy. Without spirituality, study becomes self-indulgent. And without the two walking together, prayer ends up limping along in sighs and stutters.

Exegesis is necessary because we have a written word to attend to. It’s God’s Word, or so we believe, and we had better get it right. Exegesis is foundational to Christian spirituality. Foundations disappear from view as a building is constructed, but if the builders don’t build a solid foundation, the building doesn’t last long.

Too many Bible readers assume that exegesis is what you do after you’ve learned Greek and Hebrew. That’s simply not true. Exegesis is nothing more than a careful and loving reading of the text in our mother tongue. Greek and Hebrew are well worth learning, but if you haven’t had the privilege, settle for English. Once we learn to love this text and bring a disciplined intelligence to it, we won’t be far behind the very best Greek and Hebrew scholars. Appreciate the learned Scripture scholars but don’t be intimidated by them.

Exegesis is the furthest thing from an impersonal act of scholarship; it is an intensely personal act of love. It loves the one who speaks the words enough to want to get them right. Exegesis is loving God enough to stop and listen carefully to what he says. It follows that we bring the leisure and attentiveness of lovers to this text, cherishing every comma and semicolon, relishing the oddness of this preposition, delighting in the surprising placement of this noun. Lovers don’t take a quick look, get a “message” or a “meaning,” and then run off and talk endlessly with their friends about how they feel.

Exegesis doesn't mean mastering the text; it means submitting to it as it is given to us. Exegesis doesn't take charge of the text and impose superior knowledge on it; it enters the world of the text and lets the text "read" us. Exegesis is an act of sustained humility.

If the knowledge we acquire through our reading and study of this text diverts us from the very Jesus we started out following, we would have been better off never to have opened the book in the first place.

The story gives form to sentences; the sentences provide content to the story. Following Jesus requires that they hold together, thoroughly integrated. Without the story, the sentences in the Bible—the Bible verses—function as an encyclopedia of information from which we select whatever we need at the moment. Without the precisely crafted sentences, the story gets edited and revised by seductive suggestions from some and by bullying urgencies from others, none of whom seem to have much interest in following Jesus. But it was to make us followers of Jesus that this text was given to us in the first place, and if either the large story or the detailed sentences are ever used for anything else, however admirable or enticing, why bother?

THE MESSAGE

Reading is the first thing, just reading the Bible. As we read we enter a new world of words and find ourselves in on a conversation in which God has the first and last words. We soon realize that we are included in the conversation. We didn't expect this. But this is precisely what generation after generation of Bible readers do find: The Bible is not only written about us but to us. In these pages we become insiders to a conversation in which God uses words to form and bless us, to teach and guide us, to forgive and save us.

We aren't used to this. We are used to reading books that explain things, or tell us what to do, or inspire or entertain us. But this is different. This is a world of revelation: God revealing to people just like us—men and women created in God's image—how God works and what is going on in this world in which we find ourselves. At the same time that God reveals all this, God draws us in by invitation and command to participate in God's working life. We gradually (or suddenly) realize that we are insiders in the most significant action of our time as God establishes his grand rule of love and justice on this earth (as it is in heaven). "Revelation" means that we are reading something we couldn't have guessed or figured out on our own. Revelation is what makes the Bible unique.

And so just reading this Bible, *The Message*, and listening to what we read, is the first thing. There will be time enough for study later on. But first, it is important simply to read, leisurely and thoughtfully. We need to get a feel for the way these stories and songs, these prayers and conversations, these sermons and visions, invite us into this large, large world in which the invisible God is behind and involved in everything visible and illuminates what it means to live here—really live, not just get across the street. As we read, and the longer we read, we begin to "get it"—we are in conversation with God. We find ourselves listening and answering in matters that most concern us: who we are, where we came from, where we are going, what makes us tick, the texture of the world and the communities we live in, and—most of all—the incredible love of God among us, doing for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Through reading the Bible, we see that there is far more to the world, more to us, more to what we see and more to what we don't see—more

to everything!—than we had ever dreamed, and that this “more” has to do with God.

This is new for many of us, a different sort of book—a book that reads us even as we read it. We are used to picking up and reading books for what we can get out of them: information we can use, inspiration to energize us, instructions on how to do something or other, entertainment to while away a rainy day, wisdom that will guide us into living better. These things can and do take place when reading the Bible, but the Bible is given to us in the first place simply to invite us to make ourselves at home in the world of God, God’s word and world, and become familiar with the way God speaks and the ways in which we answer him with our lives.



Our reading turns up some surprises. The biggest surprise for many is how accessible this book is to those who simply open it up and read it. Virtually anyone can read this Bible with understanding. The reason that new translations are made every couple of generations or so is to keep the language of the Bible current with the common speech we use, the very language in which it was first written. We don’t have to be smart or well-educated to understand it, for it is written in the words and sentences we hear in the marketplace, on school playgrounds, and around the dinner table. Because the Bible is so famous and revered, many assume that we need experts to explain and interpret it for us—and, of course, there are some things that need to be explained. But the first men and women who listened to these words now written in our Bibles were ordinary, everyday, working-class people. One of the greatest of the early translators of the Bible into English, William Tyndale, said that he was translating so that “the boy that driveth the plough” would be able to read the Scriptures.

One well-educated African man, who later became one of the most influential Bible teachers in our history (Augustine), was greatly offended when he first read the Bible. Instead of a book cultivated and polished in the literary style he admired so much, he found it full of homespun, earthy stories of plain, unimportant people. He read it in a Latin translation full of slang and jargon. He took one look at what he considered the “unspiritual” quality of so many of its characters and the everydayness of Jesus, and contemptuously abandoned it. It was years before he realized that God had not taken the form of a sophisticated intellectual to teach us about highbrow heavenly culture so we could appreciate the finer things of God. When he saw that God entered our lives as a Jewish servant in order to save us from our sins, he started reading the Book gratefully and believingly.

Some are also surprised that Bible reading does not introduce us to a “nicer” world. This biblical world is decidedly not an ideal world, the kind we see advertised in travel posters. Suffering and injustice and ugliness are not purged from the world in which God works and loves and saves. Nothing is glossed over. God works patiently and deeply, but often in hidden ways, in the mess of our humanity and history. Ours is not a neat and tidy world in which we are assured that we can get everything under our control. This takes considerable getting used to—there is mystery everywhere. The Bible does not give us a predictable cause-effect world in which we can plan our careers and secure our futures.

It is not a dream world in which everything works out according to our adolescent expectations—there is pain and poverty and abuse at which we cry out in indignation, “You can’t let this happen!” For most of us it takes years and years and years to exchange our dream world for this real world of grace and mercy, sacrifice and love, freedom and joy—the God-saved world.

Yet another surprise is that the Bible does not flatter us. It is not trying to sell us anything that promises to make life easier. It doesn’t offer secrets to what we often think of as prosperity or pleasure or high adventure. The reality that comes into focus as we read the Bible has to do with what God is doing in a saving love that includes us and everything we do. This is quite different from what our sin-stunted and culture-cluttered minds imagined. But our Bible reading does not give us access to a mail-order catalog of idols from which we can pick and choose to satisfy our fantasies. The Bible begins with God speaking creation and us into being. It continues with God entering into personalized and complex relationships with us, helping and blessing us, teaching and training us, correcting and disciplining us, loving and saving us. This is not an escape from reality but a plunge into more reality—a sacrificial but altogether better life all the way.



God doesn’t force any of this on us: God’s word is personal address, inviting, commanding, challenging, rebuking, judging, comforting, directing—but not forcing. Not coercing. We are given space and freedom to answer, to enter the conversation. For more than anything else the Bible invites our participation in the work and language of God.

As we read, we find that there is a connection between the Word Read and the Word Lived. Everything in this book is live-able. Many of us find that the most important question we ask as we read is not “What does it mean?” but “How can I live it?” So we read personally, not impersonally. We read in order to live our true selves, not just get information that we can use to raise our standard of living. Bible reading is a means of listening to and obeying God, not gathering religious data by which we can be our own gods.

You are going to hear stories in this Book that will take you out of your preoccupation with yourself and into the spacious freedom in which God is working the world’s salvation. You are going to come across words and sentences that stab you awake to a beauty and hope that will connect you with your real life.

Be sure to answer.

THE OLD TESTAMENT



Introduction

THE BOOKS OF MOSES

An enormous authority and dignity have, through the centuries, developed around the first five books of the Bible, commonly known as The Books of Moses. Over the course of many centuries, they account for a truly astonishing amount of reading and writing, study and prayer, teaching and preaching.

God is the primary concern of these books. That accounts for the authority and the dignity. But it is not only God; we get included. That accounts for the widespread and intense human interest. We want to know what's going on. We want to know how we fit into things. We don't want to miss out.

The Books of Moses are made up mostly of stories and signposts. The stories show us God working with and speaking to men and women in a rich variety of circumstances. God is presented to us not in ideas and arguments but in events and actions that involve each of us personally. The signposts provide immediate and practical directions to guide us into behavior that is appropriate to our humanity and honoring to God.

The simplicity of the storytelling and signposting in these books makes what is written here as accessible to children as to adults. But the simplicity (as in so many simple things) is also profound, inviting us into a lifetime of growing participation in God's saving ways with us.

An image of human growth suggests a reason for the powerful pull of these stories and signposts on so many millions of men, women, and children to live as *God's* people. The sketch shows the five books as five stages of growth in which God creates first a cosmos and then a people for his glory.

Genesis is Conception. After establishing the basic elements by which God will do his work of creation and salvation and judgment in the midst of human sin and rebellion (chapters 1–11), God conceives a People to whom he will reveal himself as a God of salvation and through them, over time, to everyone on earth. God begins small, with one man: Abraham. The embryonic People of God grow in the womb. Gradually details and then more details become evident as the embryo takes shape: Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Esau, Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The pregnancy develops. Life is obviously developing in that womb but there is also much that is not clear and visible. The background history is vague, the

surrounding nations and customs veiled in a kind of mist. But the presence of life, God-conceived life, is kicking and robust.

Exodus is Birth and Infancy. The gestation of the People of God lasts a long time, but finally the birth pangs start. Egyptian slavery gives the first intimations of the contractions to come. When Moses arrives on the scene to preside over the birth itself, ten fierce plagues on Egypt accompany the contractions that bring the travail to completion: at the Red Sea the waters break, the People of God tumble out of the womb onto dry ground, and their life as a free People of God begins. Moses leads them crawling and toddling to Sinai. They are fed. God reveals himself to them at the mountain. They begin to get a sense of their Parent. They learn the language of freedom and salvation—a word here, a word there, the Ten Words (commandments) as a beginning, their basic vocabulary. The signposts begin to go up: do this; don't do that. But the largest part of their infant life is God, the living God. As they explore the deep and wide world of God, worship becomes their dominant and most important activity. An enormous amount of attention is given to training them in worship, building the structures for worship, mastering the procedures. They are learning how to give their full attention in obedience and adoration to God.

Leviticus is Schooling. As infancy develops into childhood, formal schooling takes place. There's a lot to know; they need some structure and arrangement to keep things straight: reading, writing, arithmetic. But for the People of God the basic curriculum has to do with God and their relationship with God. *Leviticus* is the *McGuffey's Reader* of the People of God. It is an almost totally audiovisual book, giving a picture and ritual in the sacrifices and feasts for the pivotal ways in which God's people keep alert and observant to the ways their relationship with God goes awry (sin) and the ways they are restored to forgiveness and innocence (salvation). Everyday life consists of endless and concrete detail, much of it having to do with our behavior before God and with one another, and so, of course, *Leviticus* necessarily consists also of endless detail.

Numbers is Adolescence. The years of adolescence are critical to understanding who we are. We are advanced enough physically to be able, for the most part, to take care of ourselves. We are developed enough mentally, with some obvious limitations, to think for ourselves. We discover that we are not simply extensions of our parents; and we are not just mirror images of our culture. But who are we? Especially, who are we as a People of God? The People of God in *Numbers* are new at these emerging independent operations of behaving and thinking and so inevitably make a lot of mistakes. Rebellion is one of the more conspicuous mistakes. They test out their unique identity by rejecting the continuities with parents and culture. It's the easiest and cheapest way to "be myself" as we like to say. But it turns out that there isn't much to the "self" that is thus asserted. Maturity requires the integration, not the amputation, of what we have received through our conception and birth, our infancy and schooling. The People of God have an extraordinarily long adolescence in the wilderness—nearly forty years of it.

Deuteronomy is Adulthood. The mature life is a complex operation. Growing up is a long process. And growing up in God takes the longest time. During their forty years spent in the wilderness, the People of God

developed from that full-term embryo brought to birth on the far shore of the Red Sea, are carried and led, nourished and protected under Moses to the place of God's Revelation at Sinai, taught and trained, disciplined and blessed. Now they are ready to live as free and obedient men and women in the new land, the Promised Land. They are ready for adulthood, ready to be as grown up inwardly as they are outwardly. They are ready to live as a free people, formed by God, as a holy people, transformed by God. They still have a long way to go (as do we all), but all the conditions for maturity are there. The book of Deuteronomy gathers up that entire process of becoming a People of God and turns it into a sermon and a song and a blessing. The strongest and key word in Deuteronomy is *love*. Love is the most characteristic and comprehensive act of the human being. We are most ourselves when we love; we are most the People of God when we love. But love is not an abstract word defined out of a dictionary. In order to love maturely we have to live and absorb and enter into this world of salvation and freedom, find ourselves in the stories, become familiar with and follow the signposts, learn the life of worship, and realize our unique identity as the People of God who love.



The Books of Moses are foundational to the sixty-one books that follow in our Bibles. A foundation, though, is not a complete building but the anticipation of one. An elaborate moral infrastructure is provided here for what is yet to come. Each book that follows, in one way or another, picks up and develops some aspect of the messianic salvation involved in becoming the People of God, but it is always on this foundation. This foundation of stories and signposts has proved over and over to be solid and enduring.



A note on translating the name of God. In the original Hebrew text of the Old Testament, the generic name for divinity used by both Israel and its neighbors is translated God (or god). But the unique and distinctively personal name for God that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush (Exodus 3:13-14) I have translated as "GOD." The Jewish community early on substituted "LORD" for the unique name out of reverence (our lips are not worthy to speak The Name) and caution (lest we inadvertently blaspheme by saying God's name "in vain"). Most Christian translators continue that practice.

GENESIS

First, God. God is the subject of life. God is foundational for living. If we don't have a sense of the primacy of God, we will never get it right, get life right, get *our* lives right. Not God at the margins; not God as an option; not God on the weekends. God at center and circumference; God first and last; God, God, God.

Genesis gets us off on the right foot. Genesis pulls us into a sense of reality that is God-shaped and God-filled. It gives us a vocabulary for speaking accurately and comprehensively about our lives, where we come from and where we are going, what we think and what we do, the people we live with and how to get along with them, the troubles we find ourselves in and the blessings that keep arriving.

Genesis uses words to make a foundation that is solid and true. Everything we think and do and feel is material in a building operation in which we are engaged all our life long. There is immense significance in everything that we do. Our speech and our actions and our prayers are all, every detail of them, involved in this vast building operation comprehensively known as the Kingdom of God. But we don't build the foundation. The foundation is given. The foundation is firmly in place.

Jesus concluded his most famous teaching by telling us that there are two ways to go about our lives — we can build on sand or we can build on rock. No matter how wonderfully we build, if we build on sand it will all fall to pieces like a house of cards. We build on what is already there, on the rock. Genesis is a verbal witness to that rock: God's creative acts, God's intervening and gracious judgments, God's call to a life of faith, God's making covenant with us.

But Genesis presents none of this to us as an abstract, bloodless "truth" or "principle." We are given a succession of stories with named people, people who loved and quarreled, believed and doubted, had children and married, experienced sin and grace. If we pay attention, we find that we ourselves are living variations on these very stories: Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, Noah and his sons, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Rachel, Joseph and his brothers. The stories show clearly that we are never outsiders or spectators to anything in "heaven and earth." God doesn't work impersonally from space; he works with us where we are, as he finds us. No matter what we do, whether good or bad, we continue to be part of everything that God is doing. Nobody can drop out — there's no place to drop out to. So we may as well get started and take our place in the story — at the beginning.

GENESIS

HEAVEN AND EARTH

1-2 **1** First this: God created the Heavens and Earth — all you see, all you don't see. Earth was a soup of nothingness, a bottomless emptiness, an inky blackness. God's Spirit brooded like a bird above the watery abyss.

The verb "create" in our Bibles is used exclusively with God as its subject. Men and women and angels don't create. Only God creates. "Create" is not confined to what the Spirit *did*; it's what the Spirit *does*. The Spirit of God who moved over the face of the primordial waters continues to move, continues to create. The Genesis creation text isn't confined to telling us how the world first came into being; it's also telling us that the Spirit of God is *still* creating, here and now, in you and in me and in everyone around us. *ET*

- 3-5 God spoke: "Light!"
 And light appeared.
 God saw that light was good
 and separated light from dark.
 God named the light Day,
 he named the dark Night.
 It was evening, it was morning —
 Day One.
- 6-8 God spoke: "Sky! In the middle of the waters;
 separate water from water!"
 God made sky.
 He separated the water under sky
 from the water above sky.
 And there it was:
 he named sky the Heavens;
 It was evening, it was morning —
 Day Two.
- 9-10 God spoke: "Separate!
 Water-beneath-Heaven, gather into one place;
 Land, appear!"
 And there it was.
 God named the land Earth.
 He named the pooled water Ocean.
 God saw that it was good.
- 11-13 God spoke: "Earth, green up! Grow all varieties
 of seed-bearing plants,
 Every sort of fruit-bearing tree."
 And there it was.
 Earth produced green seed-bearing plants,

all varieties,
 And fruit-bearing trees of all sorts.
 God saw that it was good.
 It was evening, it was morning —
 Day Three.

14-15 God spoke: “Lights! Come out!
 Shine in Heaven’s sky!
 Separate Day from Night.
 Mark seasons and days and years,
 Lights in Heaven’s sky to give light to Earth.”
 And there it was.

16-19 God made two big lights, the larger
 to take charge of Day,
 The smaller to be in charge of Night;
 and he made the stars.
 God placed them in the heavenly sky
 to light up Earth
 And oversee Day and Night,
 to separate light and dark.
 God saw that it was good.
 It was evening, it was morning —
 Day Four.

20-23 God spoke: “Swarm, Ocean, with fish and all sea life!
 Birds, fly through the sky over Earth!”
 God created the huge whales,
 all the swarm of life in the waters,
 And every kind and species of flying birds.
 God saw that it was good.
 God blessed them: “Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Ocean!
 Birds, reproduce on Earth!”
 It was evening, it was morning —
 Day Five.

24-25 God spoke: “Earth, generate life! Every sort and kind:
 cattle and reptiles and wild animals — all kinds.”
 And there it was:
 wild animals of every kind,
 Cattle of all kinds, every sort of reptile and bug.
 God saw that it was good.

26-28 God spoke: “Let us make human beings in our image, make them
 reflecting our nature
 So they can be responsible for the fish in the sea,
 the birds in the air, the cattle,
 And, yes, Earth itself,
 and every animal that moves on the face of Earth.”
 God created human beings;
 he created them godlike,

Reflecting God's nature.

He created them male and female.

God blessed them:

“Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take charge!

Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the air,

for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth.”

The image of God is both male and female. The implication is that we need someone else to complete us. This doesn't mean that we can't be whole persons until we're married. Relationship isn't limited to family life or to the expression of sexual intimacy between two people. But it does mean that we need one another. If I make myself the center and gather the world into myself, arranging life around me for my own convenience, I become smaller, not larger. I don't grow; I diminish. There's no completion in it, and there's no wholeness in it. *EP*

29-30

Then God said, “I've given you
every sort of seed-bearing plant on Earth
And every kind of fruit-bearing tree,
given them to you for food.
To all animals and all birds,
everything that moves and breathes,
I give whatever grows out of the ground for food.”
And there it was.

31

God looked over everything he had made;
it was so good, so very good!
It was evening, it was morning—
Day Six.

CONTEMPLATION

Contemplative Readings

Exodus 31:13-17 – The command to observe the Sabbath.

Hebrews 4:1-11 – The spiritual application to resting on the Sabbath.

The most prominent feature of Genesis is its rhythmic structure. The creation account is arranged in a sequence of seven days. Six times a segment of creation work is introduced with the phrase “God spoke,” followed by the phrase “It was evening, it was morning” and the number of the day, one through six.

But the seventh day is treated very differently, and that difference sets it off for special emphasis and attention. Instead of the number being the concluding phrase, it's in the introduction: “By the seventh day . . .” This number seven is then repeated twice more in successive sentences. So “seventh” is repeated three times, giving this seventh day an emphasis far beyond that of the first six.

So here's what we notice: God's work of creation is conveyed to us rhythmically. We enter the rhythms of creation time and find ourselves internalizing a creation sense of orderliness and connectedness and resonance that is very much like what we get from music. In his commentary on Genesis, Bruce Waltke conveys the musical and rhythmic character of Genesis 1 by naming this text the “libretto for all of Israel's life.”

As we incorporate this libretto into our way of living, these rhythms get into us and are expressed in our language and work.

We were created to live rhythmically in the rhythms of creation. Seven days repeated in a sequence of four weeks places us in the rhythm of the twenty-eight-day phases of the moon circling the earth. This lunar rhythm is repeated twelve times in the annual sweep of the earth and moon around the sun. These large encompassing rhythms call forth regularities of spring births, summer growth, autumn harvest, and winter sleep. In creation we are immersed in rhythms.

But we're also composed of rhythms. Physiologically we live out rhythms of pulse and breath. Our hearts beat steadily, circulating blood through our bodies in impulses of sixty or eighty or a hundred times a minute. Our lungs expand and contract, pushing oxygen through our bodies fifteen, twenty, or thirty times a minute. This is the nature of the creation of which we are a part. We're embedded in time, but time is also embedded in us.

The understanding and honoring of time is fundamental to the realization of who we are and how we live. Violations of sacred time become desecrations of our most intimate relationships with God and one another. Hours and days, weeks and months and years are the very stuff of holiness.

Time is the medium in which we do all living. When time is desecrated, life is desecrated. The most conspicuous evidences of this desecration are hurry and procrastination. Hurry turns away from the gift of time in a compulsive grasping for abstractions that it can possess and control. Procrastination is distracted from the gift of time in a lazy inattentiveness to the life of obedience and adoration by which we enter the "fullness of the time" (Galatians 4:4, NKJV). Whether by a hurried grasping or a procrastinating inattention, the holiness of time is violated. *EP*

Contemplative Questions

If the moments of your day-to-day life were recorded as musical notes, what kind of music would they make? Would they sound like a breezy pop song or hard-driving rap music? Or would they sound like a beautiful symphony with structured pauses that give resonance to the notes?

Contemplative Prayer

Dear Lord,

Help me to realize that there is a reason

why you structured the universe the way you did.

There are natural rhythms that I must not only acknowledge but enter into.

There are musical rests that are necessary if the music is to have resonance.

Help me to see that when my life is all work and no rest,

I'm violating the very music at the heart of the universe,
putting my life out of harmony with yours.

Give me grace in this area, Lord.

Especially I pray . . .

1 **2** Heaven and Earth were finished,
down to the last detail.

2-4 By the seventh day
God had finished his work.

On the seventh day
 he rested from all his work.
 God blessed the seventh day.
 He made it a Holy Day
 Because on that day he rested from his work,
 all the creating God had done.

This is the story of how it all started,
 of Heaven and Earth when they were created.

ADAM AND EVE

5-7 **A**t the time GOD made Earth and Heaven, before any grasses or shrubs had sprouted from the ground—GOD hadn't yet sent rain on Earth, nor was there anyone around to work the ground (the whole Earth was watered by underground springs)—GOD formed Man out of dirt from the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. The Man came alive—a living soul!

8-9 Then GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east. He put the Man he had just made in it. GOD made all kinds of trees grow from the ground, trees beautiful to look at and good to eat. The Tree-of-Life was in the middle of the garden, also the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil.

10-14 A river flows out of Eden to water the garden and from there divides into four rivers. The first is named Pishon; it flows through Havilah where there is gold. The gold of this land is good. The land is also known for a sweet-scented resin and the onyx stone. The second river is named Gihon; it flows through the land of Cush. The third river is named Hiddekel and flows east of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates.

15 GOD took the Man and set him down in the Garden of Eden to work the ground and keep it in order.

While Genesis 1 is structured by time, Genesis 2 is structured by place. Place is a companion gift to go with time; it locates us on the earth where we become oriented, find work, experience freedom in obedience, and find companionship in a community of others.

The place is defined as a garden as opposed to a wilderness. A garden implies boundaries and intention. It isn't a limitless "everywhere" or "anywhere." It's local: "GOD planted a garden in Eden, in the east" (verse 8).

Everything that the Creator God does in forming us humans is done in a place.

One of the seductions that bedevils Christian formation is the construction of utopias, ideal places where the righteous life can be lived unimpeded. The word *utopia* literally means "no place." But we can live our lives only in an actual place, not in an artificial place. Once in time past, that place was Eden. But ever since the Fall, that place is east of Eden (Genesis 3:24), in a land of thorned resistance that opposes not only the work of our own hands but the work of God's hands as he labors to form Christ in us. *EP*

16-17 GOD commanded the Man, "You can eat from any tree in the garden, except from the Tree-of-Knowledge-of-Good-and-Evil. Don't eat from it. The moment you eat from that tree, you're dead."

18-20 GOD said, "It's not good for the Man to be alone; I'll make him a helper, a companion." So GOD formed from the dirt of the ground all the animals

of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the Man to see what he would name them. Whatever the Man called each living creature, that was its name. The Man named the cattle, named the birds of the air, named the wild animals; but he didn't find a suitable companion.

21-22 GOD put the Man into a deep sleep. As he slept he removed one of his ribs and replaced it with flesh. GOD then used the rib that he had taken from the Man to make Woman and presented her to the Man.

23-25 The Man said,
 "Finally! Bone of my bone,
 flesh of my flesh!
 Name her Woman
 for she was made from Man."
 Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and embraces his wife. They become one flesh.
 The two of them, the Man and his Wife, were naked, but they felt no shame.

1 **3** The serpent was clever, more clever than any wild animal GOD had made. He spoke to the Woman: "Do I understand that God told you not to eat from any tree in the garden?"

2-3 The Woman said to the serpent, "Not at all. We can eat from the trees in the garden. It's only about the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'Don't eat from it; don't even touch it or you'll die.'"

4-5 The serpent told the Woman, "You won't die. God knows that the moment you eat from that tree, you'll see what's really going on. You'll be just like God, knowing everything, ranging all the way from good to evil."

6 When the Woman saw that the tree looked like good eating and realized what she would get out of it — she'd know everything! — she took and ate the fruit and then gave some to her husband, and he ate.

7 Immediately the two of them did "see what's really going on"— saw themselves naked! They sewed fig leaves together as makeshift clothes for themselves.

8 When they heard the sound of GOD strolling in the garden in the evening breeze, the Man and his Wife hid in the trees of the garden, hid from GOD.

A curious thing happens to us when we get a taste of God. It happened in Eden, and it keeps happening today. The experience of God — the ecstasy, the wholeness of it — is accompanied by a temptation to reproduce the experience as God. The taste for God is debased into a greed to be God. We abandon the personal presence of God and take up with the impersonal serpent. We flee the shining face of God for a slithery world of religion that gives us license to manipulate people and acquire godlike attributes for ourselves. The moment we begin cultivating the possibility of acquiring that kind of power and glory for ourselves, we will flee from the presence of the Lord and seek a place where we can become more prominent and acquire even more power.

This is what led to the downfall of Adam and Eve. This is also what leads to our own downfall, where we find ourselves, like them, living far from the presence of God. *EP*

9 GOD called to the Man: “Where are you?”

10 He said, “I heard you in the garden and I was afraid because I was naked. And I hid.”

11 GOD said, “Who told you you were naked? Did you eat from that tree I told you not to eat from?”

12 The Man said, “The Woman you gave me as a companion, she gave me fruit from the tree, and, yes, I ate it.”

GOD said to the Woman, “What is this that you’ve done?”
13 “The serpent seduced me,” she said, “and I ate.”

14-15 GOD told the serpent:
“Because you’ve done this, you’re cursed,
cursed beyond all cattle and wild animals,
Cursed to slink on your belly
and eat dirt all your life.
I’m declaring war between you and the Woman,
between your offspring and hers.
He’ll wound your head,
you’ll wound his heel.”

16 He told the Woman:
“I’ll multiply your pains in childbirth;
you’ll give birth to your babies in pain.
You’ll want to please your husband,
but he’ll lord it over you.”

17-19 He told the Man:
“Because you listened to your wife
and ate from the tree
That I commanded you not to eat from,
‘Don’t eat from this tree,’
The very ground is cursed because of you;
getting food from the ground
Will be as painful as having babies is for your wife;
you’ll be working in pain all your life long.
The ground will sprout thorns and weeds,
you’ll get your food the hard way,
Planting and tilling and harvesting,
sweating in the fields from dawn to dusk,
Until you return to that ground yourself, dead and buried;
you started out as dirt, you’ll end up dirt.”

20 The Man, known as Adam, named his wife Eve because she was the mother of all the living.

21 GOD made leather clothing for Adam and his wife and dressed them.

22 GOD said, “The Man has become like one of us, capable of knowing everything, ranging from good to evil. What if he now should reach out and take fruit from the Tree-of-Life and eat, and live forever? Never—this cannot happen!”