CHAPTER 5

DIVINE HOSPITALITY IN GENESIS

This study began by presenting an understanding of metaphor as a cognitive rather than rhetorical device of language, a figurative way of speaking of one thing in terms of another. In chapter 3, this view of metaphor was extended to the level of a model, a conceptual metaphor which organizes a variety of coherent metaphorical expressions. The discussion then turned to consider the nature of anthropomorphic models for God in the Bible and their function within biblical theology, sketched as a multiplex discipline. In preparation for the study of the “GOD IS A HOST” model, chapter 4 examined the issues of divine and human hospitality in the ancient Near East with a view to clarifying the features of the model’s source domain. The study now turns to consider the way in which the Pentateuch speaks of God and his relationship with humanity in terms of a host with guests.

A. The Five Books of Moses

1. Literary Criticism and Literary Approaches

Before interpreting texts from the Pentateuch, I will elucidate some features of my hermeneutical framework and thus situate the next two chapters of this dissertation within the context of other approaches.

Every recent study of the pentateuchal material necessarily follows a
long tradition of scholarly attention which has tended toward both atomism and geneticism. Atomism is that concern with small bits of text or extremely narrow subject matter, often presented by specialists who have expected others to synthesize the aggregate into a “big picture.” Geneticism is that concern with how the biblical text originated and developed into its present form, often seeking to understand the historical placement and ideological orientation of hypothetical oral and written sources. Many times, these matters relating to textual composition and transmission have been considered as essential prolegomena to interpretation of the text as it now stands (and has stood for over two millennia). Yet the decidedly hypothetical nature of the results of these approaches has provided an unstable foundation for the interpretation of larger blocks of material let alone whole books or collections. The seemingly endless search for the “world behind the text” has hindered exploration of the “world within the text.” But this foregoing statement may be too mild—some practitioners of traditional biblical criticism have equated their reconstruction of reported events and the process of their textual representation with the subject matter of the stories themselves, thus eclipsing the act of realistic narrative reading and placing the meaning of the Bible as a whole practically out of reach.

1 David J. A. Clines, The Theme of the Pentateuch, JSOTSup 10 (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984) 7-10.


3 Stated in other terms, the appetite of historical-critical research has
Recent studies have undermined the consensus of the classic Wellhausen reconstruction of Israelite history and scriptural authorship by addressing its philosophical and historical presuppositions and offering fresh analyses of the data of Scripture. Robert Longacre is representative of others who point to the ultimately negative effect that this method tends to have on readers. Having traced the evolution of traditional biblical criticism, he confessed,

Above all, I want to stand on the side of those who want to listen to the text. Like many contemporaries, much of my coolness towards source criticism is that it hinders us from listening to the text; it muffles the voice which we want to hear.

In contrast to earlier investigations of the Pentateuch, new studies tend to pay more attention to the present form of the text as a whole. Jan Fokkelman even reversed the priorities of previous biblical scholars and proclaimed that exegesis should have precedence over studying the processes of text creation. Fishbane concurred, placing the task of “inner-biblical exegesis” ahead of the study of pre-textual tradition-history. He stated, “Inner-biblical exegesis... takes the stabilized literary formulation as its basis and point of departure.”

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7 Michael Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel (New York:
David Clines’ book on the theme of the Pentateuch is one example of the fruitful interpretive yield made possible by attending to the literary dimensions of the text as a story. Clines stated the theme of the Pentateuch as “the partial fulfilment—which implies also the partial non-fulfilment—of the promise to or blessing of the patriarchs.” This promise has three elements: posterity, the divine-human relationship, and land. It is the promise of relationship which provides the general category for the specific development of the host-guest relationship between God and his people. The language of God “being with” his people points to one dimension of this relationship which also includes blessing and guidance. This broad promise is especially evident in the books of Exodus and Leviticus and is brought to expression in the two focal points of these books: the exodus event and the Sinai revelation. It will therefore be relevant to consider how this host-guest relationship is initiated, maintained, and rebuffed throughout Israel’s experiences between Egypt and the Promised

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8 Clines, Theme of the Pentateuch. Other stimulating treatments have appeared, approaching the same material from different methodological points of view. In addition to Longacre’s technical study of the Joseph narrative, see the works of John H. Sailhamer, The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); Thomas W. Mann, The Book of the Torah: The Narrative Integrity of the Pentateuch (Atlanta: John Knox, 1988); and Warren A. Gage, The Gospel of Genesis: Studies in Protology and Eschatology (Winona Lake: Carpenter, 1984).

9 Clines, Theme of the Pentateuch, 29.

10 Ibid., 35.

11 Ibid., 47.
Newer literary approaches thus hold promise for increasingly better exegesis inasmuch as they reveal the conventions of biblical literature, stress whole texts, and focus on the process of reading.\textsuperscript{13} It is unwise, however, to willfully ignore the significance of genetic (author-centered) concerns prompted by biblical study for to do so would be to dismiss the obvious composite nature of the Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{14} But noting that such atomistic concerns have received a great deal of attention already, my interest is less with the hypothetical pre-history of the text than with existing textual features, inter-textual connections and thematic lines of development.

2. The Pentateuch as Torah

Since at least the writing of the Wisdom of Joshua ben-Sira (Ecclesiasticus), the word “Law” (\textit{nomos}) has been used to designate the unit embracing the first five books of the OT which together with the “Prophets”

\textsuperscript{12} John Goldingay even went so far as to tie the patriarchal narratives into the broader biblical context stretching from Genesis through Second Kings. Although he unpacks the patriarchal promise only in terms of “blessing, land, increase, and influence,” he successfully followed these themes into the exodus, conquest, monarchy, and exile (“The Patriarchs in Scripture and History,” in Essays on the Patriarchal Narratives, ed. A. R. Millard and D. J. Wiseman, 1–34 [Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1983]). Since other themes also unite this material, it would not be surprising to find literary and ideological connections between the Pentateuch and the Deuteronomistic History when investigated with “\textit{GOD IS A HOST}” model in mind.


\textsuperscript{14} Mann, Book of the Torah, 6
and the “other books of the fathers” (also called “the others which have followed them” and “the rest of the books”) make up the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Yet the single word “law” hardly does justice to the rich content or tone of the Pentateuch which interlaces narrative, imperatives, and liturgical directives into an authoritative whole designated from antiquity simply as Torah. This Hebrew word is often mistaken as equivalent to the English term “law” which comprises only a component of its semantic range. Mann explained,

The word *torah* in its widest sense means “guidance, instruction, discipline,” and only in its most narrow sense “law.” The *Torah* is the definitive “guide book” of ancient Israel, and it guides in the form of both narrative and law so that the two become inseparable and indispensable.

It is with this understanding of the Pentateuch as divine instruction that this chapter will proceed to investigate how God is depicted in the language of a host. It will look closely at the accounts of creation in the first few chapters of Genesis and the events of the garden of Eden. Next it will consider how God acts like a host in the renewal of creation after the flood. Finally, it will use the perspective of divine hospitality to examine a pivotal event in the life of Jacob and so offer insight regarding the transformation he experienced.

B. The “Beginning”

In chapters 1—11, the book of Genesis covers what is commonly known


16 Mann, *Book of the Torah*, 7-8 (italics original).
as the primeval history. From this point on, the biblical story follows the life of Abraham and his descendants. The historicity of these patriarchs is certainly open to discussion, but most interpreters recognize the fact that the text of Genesis 1—11 sits rather loosely with regard to datable historical signposts. As a book known simply as a “beginning” (תֵּיוֹר), Genesis is less concerned with describing the rise of civilization and early religion than it is with setting an agenda for the rest of the Bible to delineate. In short, the message of the whole Bible is a linear narrative stretching from creation to new creation.

The stories of Genesis as a whole are notably terse and this is especially true of the primeval history. What readers find here are poignant vignettes of early humanity which, by virtue of their succinct and sometimes laconic style, have engendered the widest possible range of interpretations. The rather open-ended character of these early narratives and the ideas they embody may be focused somewhat by the canonical reading proposed here, but their embryonic nature remains. These succinct yet sophisticated passages offer points of reference for subsequent texts to reuse and shape according to the hopes and needs of believing communities that situate themselves at a number of different historical moments. In this sense, the book of Genesis is both protology and eschatology. With regard to the theme of this study of divine


18 Gage, Gospel of Genesis.
hospitality then, my aim is to consider the matter of creation and its postdiluvian renewal with a keen eye toward ideas that present God in the role of a host. What is compact in Genesis tends to be developed in the rest of the Pentateuch and even more so throughout the rest of the Bible.

While not wanting to over-read these texts, I must respect the inherent power of metaphor to fuel the imagination and foster insight. Therefore, the interpretations that follow deliberately lay aside a number of otherwise-important critical questions in the interest of pursuing a more focused line of inquiry.

C. God as the Host of Creation

1. The Cosmos as Respondent

a) God Calls

The first account of creation runs from Genesis 1:1 to 2:3. Although this passage is commonly thought to deal with God’s creation of the universe through a series of actions, its verbal content is heavily weighted in favor of a series of oral statements. In spite of the initial verb (אָרָא בָּא) which functions in a

19 This point was established in chapter 2.

20 The standard source-critical analysis of this passage distinguishes between two accounts: P (1:1–2:4a) and J (2:4b–25). The verdict concerning the exact point to divide the material in these first two chapters is not significant to the present discussion, but the choice to end the first passage at 2:3 finds broad support from Umberto Cassuto (A Commentary on the Book of Genesis: Part I: From Adam to Noah, trans. I. Abrahams [Jerusalem: Magnes, Hebrew University, 1989] 96), Frank Moore Cross (Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic: Essays in the History of the Religion of Israel [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973] 302), and Gordon J. Wenham (Genesis 1—15, WBC 1 [Waco: Word, 1987] 6).
summary statement,\textsuperscript{21} the rest of the account is dominated by verbs of speaking rather than doing.\textsuperscript{22} Clearly, God is presented here primarily as a God who speaks. It does not appear that Walter Brueggemann has imposed an inappropriate rubric on the text of Genesis when he proposed the idea of “call” as the interpretive center of the book as a whole.\textsuperscript{23} God’s creative speech structures the text of 1:1–2:3 into six “days,” each beginning with the phrase “and God said” (\textit{µyhî àô na}). The seventh day is distinguished from the rest and lacks this introductory formula, but is marked by God’s verbal act of blessing (2:3, \textit{µyhî eô ŵr}).

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{22} Analysis of the 39 instances of third-person verbs in independent clauses in 1:1–2:3 with God as either the explicit or implicit subject yields the following data. There are 5 verbs of speaking which appear 20 times, thus comprising 51% of the total count: \textit{rma} (“to say,” 10), \textit{arq} (“to call,” 5), \textit{JrB} (“to bless,” 3), \textit{vdq} (Piel “to pronounce holy,” 1), and \textit{hlK} (Piel “to complete,” 1). I take the Piel of \textit{vdq} as delocutive-estimative, a subset of the more general factitive use (IBHS 24.2f). Victor Hamilton noted that this classification of \textit{vdq} in 2:3 results in an attractive parallel with a declarative use of \textit{hlK} in 2:2 (The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1—17, NICOT [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990], 142, following Alexander Heidel, The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation, 2nd ed. [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951] 127). There are 11 instances of 4 verbs of activity which comprise 28% of the whole: \textit{arB} (“to create,” 5), \textit{hc[} (“to make,” 3), \textit{ldB} (Hiphil “to separate,” 2), and \textit{tn} (“to put,” 1). There is one instance of a verb of inactivity: \textit{tbv} (“to rest,” 1, 3%). There are 7 instances of a verb of perception: \textit{har} (“to see,” 18%).
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Walter Brueggemann, Genesis, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, ed. James Luther Mays (Atlanta: John Knox, 1982) 1. He later extended this thought to assert that perhaps the single most defining characteristic of Israel’s God across the entire OT is Yahweh’s linkage to the verb \textit{hwx}, “command” (Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997] 182).
\end{itemize}
b) Creation Answers

In the beginning, God did not speak into nothingness but into a world unformed and unfilled (1:2). The result of God’s speech is certainly more than matter or even “creation.” It is an organized universe which now stands in relation to God. This relationship is a direct function of the divine command epitomized in the single Hebrew word יְהִי (let there be”). Claus Westermann noted the significance of creation existing in relation and response to God’s decree.

The creation commands are different from those in history in that they have no personal address. Nonetheless, they elicit obedience: In a way incomprehensible to humans, the creator orders that which does not exist to exist. And the recognizing answer is concealed in God’s judgment that it is good. Then, however, what is created will answer the creator with praise (Ps. 148).

Terence Fretheim observed that as a tool of communication, God’s word does not stand completely on its own.

God’s word is not spoken into a void . . . or to unthinking creatures; it assumes that there is an audience for that word, those who can hear and interact with that word. God’s word is not a monological reality.

Genesis 1:1–2:3 is not so much about God’s act of creation as it is the initiating-responding interaction of God and the cosmos. Although not yet initiated by formal invitation, this relationship begins with a call which is

24 This Hebrew phrase is a hendiadys signifying a pre-existing “utter chaos” which stands in opposition to the merism “heavens and earth” (1:1) as the “total cosmos” (Waltke, “Literary Genre of Genesis,” 4).


answered by some part of creation coming into order before its Creator.
Command, instruction, blessing, rebuke, and invitation—all of these and more are expressions of the God who speaks; and when God speaks the listener ought to respond. This fundamental protocol is an integral part of creation itself.

2. Humanity as the Guest of God

This verbal address to the universe provides the backdrop for God’s words of blessing to the original couple (1:28–30) whose creation is told in relatively short compass (1:27).

28. And God blessed them by saying to them, “Be fruitful and reproduce! Fill the earth and subdue it! Rule over the fish of the sea and the fowl of the air and over every living creature that moves on the earth!”

29. And God said, “I give to you every plant

27 I construe this verb as explanatory with regard to the initial (IBHS 33.3.3b).

28 I interpret the Qal suffix conjugation of this fientive verb as a present-time perfective use indicating an instantaneous situation (IBHS 30.5.1d). I should note at this point that there is no universally accepted nomenclature for denoting various constructions of Hebrew morphology and syntax. Furthermore, the variety that does exist often reflects different theoretical understandings of the forms in question. For example, it makes a
And to every animal of the earth and to every bird of the sky and to everything that moves on the earth—in which is the breath of life—every green plant I give for food.”

Most of this discourse is concerned with the provision of food (1:29, 30).

Genesis 1:28–30 falls into two unequal parts. The first (1:28) is a volitional statement commanding the newly-created humans to reproduce, subdue the earth, and to rule over animals. The second (1:29–30) is over twice as long. It is introduced and distinguished from the first by the discourse marker "and he said" (1:29) (“and he said”) and is an indicative statement informing humanity that seed-bearing vegetation is a gift which God “gives” to be received as food and that vegetation in general is a divine gift for terrestrial animals and flying birds.
to eat.

Here is the first indication that God occupies the role of a host in relation to part of creation which accordingly stands before him as a collective guest. Both animals and humans ingest nutrition in the process of growing and staying alive. But only people can understand this provision specifically in terms of a personal gift and therefore have the capacity and opportunity to live with a sense of gratitude which stems not from human sentiment, but from being rooted in the creative purposes of God.32

Awareness of the existence of the host-guest relationship is necessary to being grateful for it. But the expression of gratitude is never an automatic or guaranteed response; it is a choice based on what one holds to be of value. For now, the silence of humanity in Genesis 1 does not appear rude or out of place. On the contrary, this chapter presents God as self-sufficient and sovereign. The cosmos is his house—formed and filled by his wise decree.33 Furthermore, this “house” is prepared as a home and its “pantry” well-stocked in order to provide for the bearers of God’s image, the focus of God’s favor.

32 For a fruitful extended discussion of this perspective which informs a significant part of OT theology, see Claus Westermann, Blessing in the Bible and the Life of the Church, trans. Keith Crim, OBT 3 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978).

33 Ugaritic combat mythology linked victory with house building. Fowler White has demonstrated that the OT has borrowed this imagery and applied it in the context of both creation and redemption. With regard to Genesis 1:1-2:3, God’s victory over chaos is followed by the construction of creation as God’s macro-cosmic house (“Victory and House Building in Revelation 20:1-21:8: A Thematic Study” [Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1987] 26-33).
3. The Week-End Rest

a) A Time to Look Back

The creative activity of the first six days culminates in God’s personal address to the primal couple and is followed by a superlative evaluation of everything so far as “very good” (1:31, daom).34 On the seventh day, God reflected and rested. The pairing of work and rest is thus an integral feature of the created order which never stands autonomously on its own but always in relationship to the one who called it into being. Brueggemann observed, “The creator does not spend his six days of work in coercion but in faithful invitation. God does not spend the seventh day in exhaustion but in serenity and peace.”35 From the establishment of this fundamental pattern, God commanded Israel to observe and celebrate a Sabbath day as a sign of the lasting covenant between himself and his people (Exod 31:12-17). The stated purpose and result of this law is not a matter of individual purity, but of relationship: “So that you may know that it is I, Yahweh who makes you holy” (Exod 31:13). Although the Sabbath legislation comes with more force than a simple request, I do not think Brueggemann is wide of the mark in concluding, “The rest of God is an invitation to form a new kind of human community.”36 Scripture does not view Sabbath-keepers as legalists but as believers who merely follow the example set by God himself. As the master of the house, God

34 The placement of daom following an adjective here indicates an absolute rather than merely comparative superlative (IBHS 14.5b).
35 Brueggemann, Genesis, 35.
36 Ibid., 36.
defines (and in this case models) what appropriate behavior is. Reflection is the beginning of appreciation.

The rubric of the Sabbath day was eventually extended to a Sabbath year (Lev 25:1–7) and the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:8–55). Regardless of the degree to which Israel ever practiced these instructions, the promise of divine provision of food remains. The “natural” growth of the land will be “food for you” (25:6, מִֽכָּל הָאָדָם). The language of the law of the year of Jubilee indicates that this abundance is a generous personal gift of Yahweh: “I will command my blessing for you in the sixth year and [the land] will produce a yield sufficient for three years” (25:21).

In these fallow times, the people of Israel were to enjoy a measure of rest due to the fact that they did not cultivate their fields and vineyards. But that is not the main point of the Sabbath laws in Leviticus 25. It is the land that rests (25:4–5) after the work of extra production. Both the people of Yahweh and the land on which they lived would be the favored subjects of Yahweh and were to follow his divine example.

37 The level of faith and trust necessary to refrain from farming would have been enormous. The Chronicler gives evidence that the Sabbath year was not practiced during the monarchy and that the “seventy” years of exile was a divinely appointed time for the land to “catch up” and be refreshed in preparation for the return under Cyrus (2 Chr 36:21 in recognition of Lev 26:34–35). For evidence that the sabbatical year (but not the year of Jubilee) was practiced in the post-exilic period, see B. Z. Wacholder, “The Calendar of Sabbatical Cycles during the Second Temple and the Early Rabbinic Period,” HUCA 44 (1973/74) 153–96.

38 This particular grammatical expression is linked to earlier divine provisions of food (Gen 1:29; 9:3; Exod 16:15 [manna]; Lev 11:39 [clean animals]).
The rhythmic alternation between work and rest is mirrored in mealtimes as well as in the observance of the Sabbath day. God did not rest on the seventh day because he was tired and the command to observe the seventh day with regularity suggests that this particular cessation from work is not occasioned by periodic exhaustion. The same principle also holds for other times of rest. Rather than eat only when feeling hungry, people generally come away from daily activities to eat together according to a regular pattern of mealtimes. And it is precisely at these times when people of faith tend to publicly recall the generosity of God who has brought the goodness of the one-time creation as a whole to concrete expression as the periodic placement of food on the table. Blessings at mealtimes are testimony of a relationship between divine Host and human guest.39

b) A Time to Look Ahead

Before crossing a significant boundary into the next textual unit, it is worth briefly noting that Genesis 1:1–2:3 portrays an unspoiled world never again to be enjoyed until the very end.40 What lies in-between is a mixture of

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39 For a treatment of the history of Jewish mealtime blessings, see Baruch M. Bokser, “Ma’al and Blessings over Food: Rabbinic Transformation of Cultic Terminology and Alternative Modes of Piety,” JBL 100 (1981) 557–74. Brueggemann noted that the theology of the host-guest relationship is less likely to be expressed in times of gathered worship than it is at meals as can be seen in this simple blessing: “Come dear Lord Jesus, be our guest, and may these gifts to us be blessed” (Genesis, 39).

40 The literary connection between the books of Genesis and Revelation is well-known. For a discussion of the book of Revelation that is especially sensitive to the Hebrew Bible and Jewish hermeneutical tradition, see George Wesley Buchanan, The Book of Revelation: Its Introduction and Prophecy, Mellen
rebellion and response which will become nothing more than a memory of an aeon gone by when “he will wipe every tear from their eyes” (Rev 21:4). The future relationship between God and humanity will be characterized by the peace and unity which typified their life together at the beginning (Rev 21:3). After the words “It is done,” the residents of the new Jerusalem hear the promise of restored divine hospitality: “To the one who thirsts I will give from the spring of the water of life without cost” (Rev 21:6).⁴¹

D. God as the Host of Adam and Eve

1. The Garden Narrative as the Account of a Meal

a) God as a Non-Metaphorical Host

Chapters 2 and 3 of this dissertation set forth an understanding of metaphor and theological models in order to situate the study of God in the anthropomorphic terms of a host. It was noted that in distinction from the linguistic presentation of God in terms of some human role (using anthropomorphic metaphor), the Bible much less frequently presents God as a full character in what may be called anthropomorphic stories.⁴² Nelly Stienstra

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⁴¹ Diane Edwards offers a thoughtful consideration of Eden as a garden in comparison and contrast to the New Jerusalem as a city (“From Garden to City: Closure in the Bible,” in Mappings of the Biblical Terrain: The Bible as Text, ed. Vincent L. Tollers and John Maier, 102-17, Bucknell Review 33/2 [Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990]).

⁴² Nelly Stienstra, YHWH is the Husband of His People: Analysis of a Biblical Metaphor with Special Reference to Translation (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1993) 56.
observed that these anthropomorphic stories gradually give way to anthropomorphic metaphorical concepts which present God’s actions and attitudes in terms of a human person or role.43 Outside of Exodus 24, the book of Genesis is the only place in the OT where these stories occur, and 2:4–3:24 is the first. Thus, like a booster rocket, the bold non-metaphorical language of the early anthropomorphic stories of the Bible propels the depiction of humanity’s relationship with God from that of direct contact to a realm where people hear from and understand God in terms of a king, shepherd, warrior, host, and so on.

b) Eating Is at the Center of Eden

Aside from Gen 2:4a which functions as a heading,44 the rest of the narrative through 3:24 is a highly structured unit of seven scenes arranged concentrically.45 The topic of eating is pervasive. Jerome Walsh offers the following outline of the passage:

1) 2:4b–17. A predominantly narrative section with Yahweh God as principal actor and man in a completely passive role.
2) 2:18–25. A predominantly narrative section with Yahweh God as the principal actor, man in a subordinate role, and woman and animals as passive figures.
3) 3:1–5. A dialogue between the snake and the woman.
4) 3:6–8. A narrative with two characters, the woman and the man.
5) 3:9–13. A dialogue involving Yahweh God, the man, and the woman.

43 Ibid., 63.

44 Wenham, Genesis 1—15, 49 (listing the support of Jacob, Cassuto, Cross, Woudstra, Tengström, and Childs).

45 Chiastic arrangement shows an A–B–B–A structure, but concentric arrangement adds a lone pivot, resulting in an A–B–X–B–A structure (Shimon Bar-Efrat, Narrative Art in the Bible, Bible and Literature Series 17 [JSOTSup 70. Sheffield: Almond, 1989] 98).
6) 3:14–19. A monologue of Yahweh God; the snake, the woman, and the man are passive figures.
7) 3:22–24. A predominantly narrative section with Yahweh God as principal actor and man in a completely passive role.46

The structure depends on more than content; several lines of analysis converge on 3:6b which economizes the account of the couple's sin, spending only eight words to drive home the main point. Walsh observed, “The sonant structure reinforces the metric effect noted above and puts the final, critical deed—the man’s acquiescence in sin—in a highly emphatic single word: wayyō kal ['and he ate']”.47 The act of eating is not only the axis on which the passage turns, the theme of eating is a key feature which though possibly mundane, is nevertheless of high symbolic significance for biblical religion.48

2. Eating “in front of” God

In this second account of creation, initial concern is with “the man” Adam (עֲדָן), the garden, its watering by four rivers, and God’s creation of a helper (Gen 2:4–24). Unlike the next chapter, Genesis 2 depicts God, Adam, and


48 Donald E. Gowan, Genesis 1—11: From Eden to Babel, International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988) 43–44. Gowan noted that the verb לָכָה (“to eat”) is used 16 times. I counted 21 instances of it in chapters 2—3, making it the most frequently used verb, outdoing even the extremely common רָמָה (“to say”) which appears 19 times.
Eve living together in unspoiled harmony. The couple experiences no alienation from their creator and no shame with respect to one another. Unlike the divine speech of Genesis 1, the first words of Yahweh God are addressed to the newly-formed man by himself.

a) The Call to Eat

(1) A Strong Invitation from the Host

The first recorded words that Adam received from God are found in Genesis 2:16–17 reads,

16. And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying,
   “From every tree of the garden—eat!

17. But from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

49 The verb here takes the direct object with (as in Isa 5:6) with no appreciable difference in meaning from the direct object as marked with or (Tyler F. Williams, “[# 7422],” in NIDOTTE, vol. 3, 776–80 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997] 776).

50 As a distributive expression, (a non-numeral counting term) before a definite singular often signifies an aggregate or totality, thus warranting the translation “every” (IBHS 15.6c). The difference between this and “any” is often merely idiomatic (BDB, 482).

51 The word an infinitive construct from the verb and is used as a genitive after a noun in the construct state. In these cases where an infinitive construct functions nominally, an English gerund is seldom appropriate, thus favoring the translation “knowledge” over “knowing” (IBHS 36.2.1b, c). The citation of Genesis 2:9 in IBHS 32.2.1e #13 regards the phrase “the tree of the knowing of good and evil” not as a translation but as a gloss for instructional purposes (see IBHS, xi).

52 The construction “knowledge of good and evil” is stylistically difficult
You must not eat from it. Because on the day of your eating from it you will surely die."

This address falls into two parts: a positive and negative command. Both the translation and meaning of the former call for some treatment. The positive command consists of a prepositive cognate infinitive absolute functioning as an absolute complement followed by a second-person masculine singular prefix conjugation form of the verb lka. Since the value of the infinitive absolute is conditioned by the aspect of the main verb, I will consider the verb first. Nearly all English translations understand this verb in a permissive sense and routinely use the word “may.” The prefix conjugation is often called the “imperfect” although technically it stands over against the suffix conjugation and can signify a wide range non-perfective aspects as opposed to the more narrow perfective aspect. While the prefix conjugation with the infinitive

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53 The infinitive absolute in this type of sequence has a well-established role of affirmation (IBHS 35.3.1f).

54 IBHS 35.3.1.

55 “Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat” (KJV); “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden” (NIV); “From any tree of the garden you may eat freely” (NASB); “You may freely eat of every tree of the garden” (RSV); “You may freely eat of every tree in the garden” (NRSV); “Of every tree of the garden you are free to eat” (NJPSV); “You may eat from every tree in the garden” (NEB).

56 IBHS 29.6.
absolute may indicate permission (one type of modal use), it can also express volition in terms of injunction (request or positive command), instruction, and prohibition.

Several observations support taking this instance of the main verb לַקֵּאַתְו as a non-perfective of injunction. First, the contextual proximity of the verb “command” (הָנֵא) which introduces this address fits better with an injunction than with a statement of permission. Second, the main verb is paired with a prohibition, a strong negative command (אלְ with the prefix conjugation) which is common in legislative contexts. Third, the infinitive absolute can give emphasis to an antithesis, which is precisely the relationship of v. 16 to 17. Fourth, for orders and admonitions the infinitive absolute usually precedes the prefix conjugation as it does here. Consequently, I do not construe the first

57 IBHS, 597, n. 31.

58 IBHS 31.5

59 “One notes with interest that the entire verse—not only the prohibition of the one tree but also the generous provision of food from the other trees—falls under the main verb ‘to command’. Moreover, the permission to eat is stated not grudgingly but strongly, with the infinitive absolute strengthening the verb ‘to eat’ and the whole garden (‘eat of every tree’), with one exception, offered by God” (Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr. Whoredom: God’s Unfaithful Wife in Biblical Theology, New Studies in Biblical Theology, ed. D. A. Carson [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996] 17, n. 7).

60 IBHS, 31.5d.

61 GKC §113p. In light of this observation it is inconsistent that GKC still understands Genesis 2:16 in a permissive sense as “thou mayest freely eat” (GKC §107s, 113p).

62 IBHS, 35.3.1h. When used with the imperative, the infinitive absolute usually follows the verb.
part of God’s address to the man as granting mere permission to eat from the trees in the garden (what else would he eat?), but a direct command to do so. With the meaning of the main verb clarified, the infinitive absolute may now be understood as intensive, affirming the volitional sense of the main verb. This sense may be expressed in English using “surely” or “must,” or simply as an exclamation point.

(2) A Mostly-Positive Command

God’s word to the man is a strong call to eat and is important in the context of the Eden narrative. The essentially positive orientation of the command is seldom recognized by popular and scholarly interpreters alike who seem much more interested in the following prohibition. Brueggemann observed, “The God of the garden is chiefly remembered as the one who prohibits.” For example, Thomas Mann noted, “As in chapter 1, the first words spoken by God to humankind are a command, in this case a prohibition: ‘of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat’ (2:16–17).” Likewise, Larry Walker wrote, “The main point [of the narrative in Genesis 3] simply seems to be probation—the first human pair was given a test of whether

63 A volitional use of the prefix conjugation can also communicate a positive request, but considering the social distance between God and the man, this is unlikely.

64 IBHS 35.3.1b, 35.3.1h.

65 Brueggemann, Genesis, 46.

66 Mann, Book of the Torah, 17.
they would obey or disobey their Creator.\textsuperscript{67} Though restrictive in scope unlike its generous positive counterpart, the role of the prohibition in the following narrative should not be underestimated, but then neither should its affirming framework. Von Rad’s perception of this point is important: “In the narrative as a whole, the prohibition (v. 17) is completely imbedded in the description of God’s fatherly care for man.”\textsuperscript{68} Commenting again on this anthropological aspect of God, von Rad explained, “God begins with a great release, which again reveals the abundance of his fatherly care, but also shows the greatness of the realm in which man can move, quite freely and untempted, limited by no restraint. Only one tree is singled out from the many.”\textsuperscript{69}

Not only is the command of 2:16 positive, it holds a degree of priority as the first, true “command” of the Bible. Jewish tradition regards the mandate of Genesis 1:28 as the first commandment found in the Pentateuch.\textsuperscript{70} But given the chronological frame of reference assumed by the text, that mandate was issued to collective humanity (1:27, μα neger) as male and female, while the command in 2:16–17 was for Adam (2:16, μα neger) before the creation of his feminine counterpart. The point ought not to be pressed too hard since the


\textsuperscript{68} von Rad, \textit{Genesis}, 82.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 80 (italics original).

\textsuperscript{70} Sailhamer, \textit{Pentateuch as Narrative}, 96, n. 28.
concept of chronology during this primeval period bears little resemblance to what it means later in the Bible. The question of priority also plays into the issue of sources or strands of tradition which lay behind the text. But the command (with its caveat of prohibition) nevertheless stands at the beginning of God’s relationship with his human creation and functions as a textual anchor for many subsequent divine provisions of abundant food which carry either an implicit or explicit invitation to enjoy.

(3) Humanity as Essentially Hungry

Whereas the command in 1:28–30 was mostly about food, this command is completely devoted to the topic. Genesis 2:9 simply states that the trees of Eden were visibly attractive and “good for food” (אֱלֹהִים). There is no divine speech at this point, but the first (and only) words from God to a person in this chapter are totally concerned with food (2:16–17). An alert reader would notice that Adam would likely have had other material needs besides food, such as shelter and tools with which to work the garden. But these are not symbolically important at this point. It is almost as if Adam had been created hungry, and God immediately moved to address that fact, making Adam aware of the abundant and diverse bounty that lay before him. At best, the royal banquets of Solomon and Ashurnasirpal II could never be more than temporary imitations of the abundance now open to Adam.

It may seem odd that the act of eating should receive this degree of attention, especially considering that it is impossible to imagine life without food. For the affluent, the availability of food is practically a “given,” though
not usually regarded in the personal sense as a “gift” from God. But remembering that the Eden narrative is saturated with symbolism, Fretheim is surely correct to note that fruit here is more than food and that the metaphor of eating signifies taking something into one's life which shapes one's total being.71

b) The Menu of Fruit

We do not know the identities of these trees from which the garden-dwellers were commanded to eat except that according to Genesis 2:9 one of them was the “tree of life” (יָדוֹת אֲדֹנָי), one was the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (יָדוֹת אֲדֹנָי), and that, based on Genesis 1:29, they all presumably had seed-bearing fruit.72

(1) Fruit for Life

All of the OT references to “the tree of life” as a definite item appear in Genesis 2—3.73 Much remains unknown and indeed, unknowable. Westermann


73 Elsewhere, the indefinite phrase “a tree of life” (יָדוֹת אֲדֹנָי) appears only several times in the book of Proverbs, always with clearly metaphorical intent (11:30; 13:12; 15:4). The LXX of Isa 65:22 translates the MT’s אֲדֹנָי (“a tree” with a generic article) as τοῦ ἄνθρωπος ἁμαρτία ("the tree of life"). This tree appears four times in the book of Revelation (2:7; 22:2, 14, 19) as well as in apocryphal and pseudepigraphical literature (2 Esdr 8:52; 1 Enoch 24:4; 2 Enoch 8:3, 5, 8; 9:1; 3 Enoch 24:1–6; 25:4–6; 31:1–3).
follows Budde in claiming that there was only one tree in the middle of the
garden and that the present form of the narrative which names two trees
incorporates an earlier Paradiesgeschichte which acknowledged just one tree.\textsuperscript{74}
From a modern point of view, the Eden narrative is not completely self-
consistent and, like poetry, readily spawns a variety of readings. Whatever the
history of tradition has been, the present form of the text testifies to the
presence of two trees.

Those who are inclined to interpret biblical motifs in the light of
parallels from comparative religion tend to regard the tree of life as legendary
in that its fruit magically protected one from disease and that in order to enjoy
this immunity, one had to regularly ingest the fruit.\textsuperscript{75} Most interpreters of the
Bible are more apt to see the writer of Genesis as having used an older,
mythical motif of a magical tree as a foil, emphasizing the decisive role of
human disobedience as the explanatory factor for humanity's separation from
God.\textsuperscript{76} In its fullest and most ideal form, “life” is a function of a proper
relationship to God rather than mere physical and amoral access to the
exceptional plant.

Humanity’s access to the tree of life was not an automatic consequence

\textsuperscript{74} Westermann, Genesis 1—11, 212. See also the discussion by Wenham
(Genesis 1—15, 62) and Howard N. Wallace (The Eden Narrative, HSM 32

\textsuperscript{75} Pamela R. Frese and S. J. M. Gray, “Trees,” in The Encyclopedia of

\textsuperscript{76} Brevard S. Childs, “Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life,” in IDB, vol. 4,
of living in the garden but the result of God’s decree which was issued during a
time of amity. The trees not only stood in the center of the garden (2:9), they
stood in the center of the divine-human relationship just as the command of
2:16–17 stands in the moral center of the narrative.\footnote{Explicit references to this command appear in 3:1, 3, 11, and 17. The
centrality of the tree is further demonstrated by Carol Meyers who studied the
form and meaning of the tabernacle menorah and concluded that it was more
than a central apparatus. As a motif, it resembled the tree of life which
communicated the concept of God’s presence. She wrote, “Insofar as minds are
metaphoric by nature, God’s nearness could be expressed symbolically to
provide the necessary emotional reassurance. Hence the life theme of the tree
motif of the menorah, in entering the cosmic sphere, can be seen as performing
the function with the tabernacle shrine of establishing the center of the center,
brining the organizing principle of God’s presence in the cosmos into visible
focus in the midst of the people” (The Tabernacle Menorah: A Synthetic Study of
a Symbol from the Biblical Cult, American Schools of Oriental Research

The alienation from God
which Adam and Eve experienced immediately upon their disobedience (Gen
3:8–10) stands in the narrative as a predicament that was presumably
uncharacteristic of their previous relationship. The narrative’s terseness
prevents the reader using explicit textual statements to fill out the extent of
that association prior to Genesis 3:1, but rather leaves the nature of this
background state to imagination based on the amicable and harmonious nature
of scene already depicted.

(2) Fruit for Knowledge

Though the text does not elaborate on what the knowledge of good and
evil entailed, there has been no shortage of commentators willing to explain
The knowledge it yielded has been variously understood as the acquisition of human faculties such as the ability to make moral decisions, enlightenment about sexual relations, and universal knowledge (taking the phrase “good and evil” as a merism). Rather than yield to these questions, the text situates the tree of the knowledge of good and evil not only in the middle of the garden, but more fundamentally within the commandment of God. Von Rad dismissed the issue of the tree’s nature as a separate question from that raised in Genesis 2:9 and went on to say,

To seek a purpose in the divine prohibition, as exegetes have often done, is in our opinion not permissible; the question cannot be discussed. Nothing is said to indicate that God combined pedagogical intentions with this prohibition. . . . On the contrary, one destroys the essential part of the story with such rationalistic explanations. Man in his original state was completely subject to God’s command.79

The analysis by von Rad is faithful to the text. Malcolm Clark named this central tree “the tree of command” and noted that in Genesis 3:11, 17 this tree is called “the tree I commanded you not to eat from.”80 The relationship of Adam and Eve to God is not a matter of what the two trees of represent; it is a matter of loyalty. Mann correctly observed,

The relationship between God and humankind is properly that between one who commands and one who obeys. The maintenance of this relationship—and of all its benefits symbolized by life in the garden—requires that human beings not step beyond the limits imposed on them
by the command.81

c) Summary

What then, does Genesis 1—2 contribute to the notion of divine hospitality? Prior to the disruption of chapter 3, features of hospitality exist in embryonic form within the parameters of humanity's relationship with God the creator. The divine speech to humans in Genesis 1 classifies certain vegetation as more than mere provision; seed-bearing plants are a personal gift from God which are “good for food” (2:9).

At this stage of the divine-human relationship the notion of an invitation to eat is not explicit, though the positive command to eat (2:16) performs this function. Felicity conditions for the offering and acceptance of hospitality are absent. The text does not expressly indicate that God and people have a sincere desire to take on the roles of host and guest, nor are there formulaic phrases of politeness. The gift of food is not yet a meal to be shared by both parties. God does, however, present a verbal offer of food and there is no indication that the addressee(s) do anything other than act upon it. Indeed, the dimensions of fellowship in general between God and the original couple before Genesis 3:8 are unknown but assumed to be ideal by any standard of evaluation. The early chapters of Genesis present fellowship with God as an ideal that has been lost. The rest of the Bible is concerned with how humanity may relate to God, given the parameters of a post-Eden existence.

The narrative invites the reader to view the world from within the

81 Mann, Book of the Torah, 18.
boundaries of the garden, to ponder just what undisturbed fellowship and peace with God would be like. Considering the unyielding realities of contemporary human life and the fact that we have personal knowledge of no other type of existence, imagination is our only vehicle to the intimate place where God converses with people in an audible voice while strolling in the cool of the day. Grounded in Eden and prompted by the idyllic descriptions of the new Jerusalem, such a productive imagination instinctively stirs a deep-seated sense of hope and for the restoration of this Host-guest relationship.

3. Eating “behind” God

Genesis 3 continues the narrative begun in 2:4, but with an obvious difference. The function of eating is prominent in both chapters, but the contexts are totally opposed to one another, beginning with the serpent’s opening address to Eve. The crafty serpent turned a divine “prohibition” into a “point of discussion” by asking the loaded question, “Is it really true\(^{82}\) that God said, “Do not eat from any tree in the garden’?” (3:1).

a) Adam and Eve’s Choice of Food

The text of Genesis 3:1–24 is commonly known as “the fall” even though, as Westermann correctly noted, this description is lacking in Genesis and the rest of the OT.\(^{83}\) To regard the events of this chapters simply as “the fall”

\(^{82}\) I read the introductory compound adverb \(\text{יֹכֶל} \text{בַּלָּא}\) emphatic with respect to the following question (IBHS 39.3.4d).

\(^{83}\) Westermann, Genesis 1—11, 276. The word “fall” appears in 4 Ezra 7:118, “Ah, Adam, what have you done! When you sinned, your fall did not just
opens one to the impression that what happened was merely accidental. It was not. Just as the trees of chapter 2 were essentially trees of command, the sin of eating lay not in the knowledge which was gained but in the relationship which was lost. So far, eating was the only provision God had made for people and to disregard it is tantamount to rejecting the one who gave it. Adam and Eve shared a meal together, eating from the forbidden fruit, apart from communion with God and in violation of his express word. Westermann stated the same matter but in a positive tone.

The command [of 2:16–17] remains the word of the one who commands. One can only hear it while one hears in it the one who commands and is obedient to him. The command then opens up the possibility of a relationship to the one who commands.

Neither God nor the text ever named their sin. God merely asked Adam and Eve in turn what they had done. The answer of each contains the tell-tale offense: “I ate” (lxol, 3:12 and 13 with reference to the central verse, 3:6). The same command to eat which initiated the Host-guest relationship is at the center of its destruction.

b) God’s Immediate Response

Because eating lay at the heart of the couple’s disobedience, the subject of eating is a fitting motif in the three-fold judgment meted out by God.

come upon you, but also upon us, your descendants!” (Westermann, Elements of Old Testament Theology, 95).

84 Gowan, Genesis 1—11, 43–44.

85 Westermann, Genesis 1—11, 222–24.
The curse of Yahweh God on the serpent falls into two parts: the first (3:14) is a degradation in status with regard to the wild animals; the second (3:15) is the injection of perpetual hostility (hbya) between the serpent and humanity, resulting in sure defeat.

And Yahweh God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, you are cursed more than all of the animals and more than the animals of the field. On your belly you will go, and dust you will eat, all the days of your life.”

The word “dust” (rp) is used frequently in the OT, both literally and figuratively, in contexts having to do with humiliation, grief, judgment, and defeat. The expression “to eat dust” is a metaphorical depiction of utter defeat. This curse is the first biblical instance of the idea of eating something...

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87 The collocation of the verb l\(\text{k}\)a ("to eat") and the noun \(\text{rp}\) ("dust") is used only with regard to the serpent (Gen 3:14; Isa 65:25). The verb újl ("to lick") appears 3 times with \(\text{rp}\); always in terms of humiliating judgment (Isa 49:23; Mic 7:17; Ps 72:9). The synonym \(\text{rbw}\) ("ashes") is used twice in connection with food: once as the food in the lament of an afflicted man (102:9[10]) and again as the food of a deluded idol-worshiper (Isa 44:20). The synonyms q\(\text{dp}\) ("dust") and q\(\text{f}\) ("dust, dust clouds") do not appear with verbs of eating or drinking.

According to Isaiah 11:8 and 65:25, even after the renewal of creation when the harmony between snakes and the rest of creation is restored, the snake’s degradation will remain (Robert C. Stallman, “\(\text{vj}\) [\#5729],” in
repulsive and it appears in the context of judgment. It is a concept which will be re-used and re-shaped throughout biblical literature, especially in prophetic pronouncements.

(2) The Demotion of Adam as Distinguished Guest

The woman is not cursed and the word of judgment to her has no reference to eating or food. The judgment regarding Adam consists of a curse on the ground and the promise of hard labor for daily sustenance (3:17b–19).

17b. כִּי עַל-כָּל-חָרְבָּה יַעֲשֶׂה אֵצְיָק (Cursed is the ground on your account. Through hardship you will eat [from] it all the days of your life.

18. חֲרָבָּה יִרְצֶה לָכֶם וְתָּשָׁה אֹっぽּוּ (Thorns and thistles it will sprout for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.

19. בְּשַׁעָּת הָנָּתַן דֵּהיָהּ (By the sweat of your brow you will eat bread)


88 The word here is identical to that used in God’s judgment regarding Eve, “I will greatly multiply your hardship (יִשְׁבַּע) and your childbearing (יִשְׁבַּע) (Gen 3:16). These two Hebrew words (the second of which is a hapax legomenon) constitute a hendiadys which stands for the collective pains associated with pregnancy and delivery.

89 This hendiadys has a single referent: unintended inedible vegetation.

90 Waw-relative plus the suffix conjugation (with the expected shift in accent) following a prefix conjugation form here expresses a consequential future situation (IBHS 32.2.1d).

91 Gunkel, Genesis, 22 and most major English translations. The NIV reads “food.”
until you return to the ground, because from it you were taken, for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

This address was occasioned by the act of illegitimate eating (3:17a), emphasizes the man’s essential association with (and disassociation from) the ground and dust, and concerns both diet and the nature of eating. It has at least two ties with the earlier state of the earth. First, the mention of “plants of the field” is identical to the situation before Yahweh God planted trees in Eden (2:5). Second, the verb יָנָךְ ("sprout") appears in 2:5, 9 and 3:18, first of the “plants of the field” but then of the “trees” and finally of “thorns and thistles.” The vegetation (2:5) thus stands in contrast to the “trees” (2:9) which are supplanted by the “thorns and thistles” (3:18).

In contrast to the food which God had earlier provided as a gift (1:29) and set before the man by injunction (2:16), the food humanity would eat from this point on must be cultivated through hardship. Man’s service of the garden was part of his original state in the garden which can hardly be deserving of the elysian connotations commonly associated with the non-OT name “Paradise.”

But now, work is transformed. Von Rad protested concerning the popular understanding of this pivotal moment.

Must it be emphasized again that the passage does not consider work in itself a punishment and curse? Work was ordained for man even in Paradise (ch. 2.15). But that it makes life so wretched, that it is so threatened by failures and wastes of time and often enough comes to nothing, that its actual result usually has no relation to the effort

92 von Rad, Genesis, 80.
expended—that the narrator designates as a dissonance in creation which is not accounted for by God’s original ordinance.93

As a guest, Adam’s refusal to eat at God’s table according to God’s rules was an affront to the honor of his divine Host. The Host-guest relationship was not severed at this point, but Adam’s sin was a grave violation of the code of behavior that obtained in God’s “house.” God would not punish humanity with starvation, but neither would he merely overlook the offense. As Willem VanGemeren noted, certain blessings endure even beyond Eden.

God’s blessing is not removed, however, even in view of life’s uncertainties and man’s corruptible nature. Family, provisions, and cultural expressions are still within the sphere of God’s rule. As a good ruler [a model which is compatible with “host”], he takes care of his creation. It is most significant, therefore, that after the Fall God renews his pledge to provide people with food by the regularity of the seasons (8:22), to bless the human family (9:1, 7), and to help man in his relation to animal life (v. 2). Our very existence today is an expression of his blessing on the human race.94

The centrality of the act of eating both before and after humanity’s disobedience is not overlooked by subsequent writers who were concerned with the manifold dimensions of God’s association with people. John Sailhamer pointed out,

Such a focus on eating, which seems to dominate the author’s depiction of the Fall, is connected with the author’s interest elsewhere in the importance of eating and its association with humankind’s relationship to God, that is, in the Torah’s teaching regarding the clean and the unclean food (Lev 11; Dt 14) and the regulations for annual feasts to celebrate God’s gift of the good land in the covenant (Lev 23). To this material one could also add the larger context of the role of feasts and eating in the

93 Ibid., 94–95 (italics original).

Indeed, the contrast of the land’s condition on either side of Genesis 3:6 highlights the fact that human rebellion has occasioned a fundamental change in creation as originally intended. Sailhamer noted that by choosing to focus on land, “the author has paved the way for a central motif in the structure of biblical eschatology, the hope of a ‘new heaven and a new earth.’” The depiction of the new heavens and new earth in Isaiah 65 refers back to the three-fold judgment of God in Genesis 3. John Sawyer observed,

In the new age the serpent still eats dust, but the woman’s labour pains are somewhat eased by the knowledge that they will always result in the birth of a perfect child, and the man’s toil is relieved by the knowledge that it will always lead to success (Isa. 65.23–25).

c) The Loss of Access to God’s Table

With Yahweh God’s judgments in place, the “tree of life” is now off-limits (3:22). According to the book of Revelation, it will be available only to those with access to the “Paradise of God” (Rev 2:7) and the new Jerusalem (Rev 22). The tree of life is thus an eschatological goal and part of a complex of creation and paradise motifs which characterize the new creation. In the light of humanity’s consignment to labor for sustenance (Gen 3:23), subsequent divine gifts and provisions of abundant food represent both echoes of the

95 Sailhamer, Pentateuch as Narrative, 109.

96 Ibid., 109 (cf. Isa 65:17; Rom 8:22–24; Rev 21:1).

original generosity characteristic of the unspoiled created order and proleptic foretastes of eschatological restoration. Genesis establishes a pattern of expectation: Just as God brought life out of chaos, God brings fruitfulness out of barrenness.  

98 Throughout Scripture, God’s unmediated provision of food, as in the case of manna in the wilderness, together with divine promises of eschatological feasting (Isa 25:6–8) stand in radical opposition to the collective self-sustaining efforts of humanity who sits exhausted at the end of the day.

E. God as the Host of Postdiluvian Humanity

The numerous parallels between the original creation events of Genesis 1–3 and the flood narrative of chapters 6–9 are well known and do not need to be recounted here.  

99 Each account includes a creation mandate to be fruitful and reproduce (1:28; 9:1–2, 7) followed by the gift of food (1:29–30; 9:3). Both have a prohibition against one specific type of food (2:17; 9:4) followed by sin with regard to either eating or drinking (3:6; 9:20–22). Noah’s awakening after his experience of nakedness (9:24) is parallel to the eye of Adam and Eve being opened to perceive their own nakedness (3:7). In Genesis 9:3, God extends the gift of food from the green plants to animals in general.

98 Brueggemann, Theology of the Old Testament, 204.

99 See Gage, Gospel of Genesis, 7–16 and Clines, Theme of the Pentateuch, 73–76. As traditio, Genesis 9:3 supplements the traditum of 1:29 and extends its legal scope (Fishbane, Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel, 318–21).

3. “All small ground animals\textsuperscript{101} that are alive will be as food for you.\textsuperscript{102} As with the green plants, I give\textsuperscript{103} you everything.”

Again, God has given a reason for humanity to consider food not as a bare fact of creation but in terms of divine bestowal. Again, this is not quite the language of invitation, meal, or fellowship but as a parallel to the original account of creation it shares the same rudimentary quality. Despite the discontinuity between the ante- and postdiluvian situations, God still fills the role of a Host. Fretheim commented, “This world is no new Eden, but every creature—human and nonhuman—is assured that God is still the Creator and that the basic divine relationship to the world still holds, with its blessings and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{101} Andrew E. Hill, “\textit{Cn} (#8253),” in NIDOTTE, vol. 3, 1127–28 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 1127.
\item \textsuperscript{102} It is generally assumed that until now, people were only permitted to eat a vegetarian diet. Although I do not find his case convincing, it is worth noting that Meredith Kline has argued that the creation mandate of Genesis 1:29 authorized the eating of vegetation, but was not restrictive; humanity’s dominion included the right to eat animals, use their skin for clothing, and so on. If this is the case, then 9:3 simply removes the restriction regarding the eating of unclean animals that God imposed on Noah’s family during their stay in the ark (Kingdom Prologue [South Hamilton, MA: Meredith G. Kline, 1989] 35–37).
\item \textsuperscript{103} One instance of the verb $\textit{t}m$ has been elided. While it is syntactically possible to read $\textit{y}T\textit{t} \&$ as part of the 3b ($\textit{As I gave you the green plants}$”), the Masoretic disjunctive accent ($\textit{z}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{\text{q}\overline{\text{e}}\overline{p}}$ parvum) on $bc\&$ suggests the translation proposed here. I read $\textit{y}T\textit{t} \&$ as an instantaneous perfective in the performative sense, so that the act of speaking and giving are identical (IBHS 30.5.1d).
\end{itemize}
The prohibition against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is now expressed as a prohibition (9:4, al plus the prefix conjugation of lka) against eating meat which has not been drained of “lifeblood” (µD: vp,n<à). As before, the Host reserves the right to determine what is on or off the “menu.”

F. God as the Host of Jacob the Somewhat-Uncooperative Guest

Yahweh’s promise to Jacob in Genesis 28 took place at Bethel where Jacob later returned (Gen 35:1–15), making this location the two structural pillars of the Jacob cycle (Gen 25:19–36:43). His first visit there was as the deceitful “Jacob” in flight from his vengeful brother; his eventual return however, was as “Israel,” obediently responding to the call of God as a changed man. The narrative as a whole and chapter 28 in particular are both carefully structured. Each time Jacob was at Bethel, Yahweh issued assurances (28:13–15; 35:11–12). Jacob’s vow (28:20–22) matches the last part of Yahweh’s promise (28:15).

20. And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, “If God will be with me, 108

104 Fretheim, Pentateuch, 82.

105 Mann, Book of the Torah, 65.

106 Ibid.

107 See the careful analysis of Fokkelman (Narrative Art in Genesis, 70–81) and Gordon J. Wenham (Genesis 16—50, WBC 2 [Waco: Word, 1994] 219–21).

108 The prefix conjugation with a conditional particle signifies a
and will watch\textsuperscript{109} over me on this trip which I am taking,
and will give\textsuperscript{110} me bread to eat,
and clothes to wear,

so that I return in peace to the house of my father,
then\textsuperscript{111} Yahweh will be my God,

and this stone which I have set up as a sacred pillar will be God’s house,
and everything that you give to me—
I will surely\textsuperscript{112} give a tenth\textsuperscript{114} to you.”

contingent use of the non-perfective (IBHS 31.6.1b).

\textsuperscript{109} The waw-relative plus the suffix conjugation here and in the next two instances follow the prefix conjugation form \textit{hy<hyI}, showing simple consequence. “In this example, \textit{ynrmvw} and \textit{÷tnw} represent chronologically (and logically) successive situations; \textit{ytbvw} is a situation logically successive to all three preceding situations; and \textit{hyhw} expresses the apodosis to this extended protasis.” (IBHS 32.2.1c).

\textsuperscript{110} The waw-relative plus the suffix conjugation of \textit{tn} could possibly be epexegetical (IBHS 32.2.3e), yielding the sense, “... and watch over me on this road which I am going on, by giving me food to eat and clothes to wear ...” But this is unlikely since the epexegetical \textit{w qataltí} (waw-relative plus the suffix conjugation) construction usually follows either wayyqtl or suffix conjugation forms. Rather, it appears that Jacob is stating a separate condition.

\textsuperscript{111} Here the waw-relative shows its essential meaning of clausal subordination, marking the apodosis of a conditional clause (IBHS 32.2b, 32.2.1b). This reading is to be preferred over that of Fokkelman who is reluctant to view Jacob as shrewd or taken with hybris. Consequently, based on the atmosphere of the passage, he regards v. 21b as the last part of the protasis, understanding \textit{taZœh’ ÷b,a,&h;wÒ} as “then this stone ...” (Narrative Art in Genesis, 75).

\textsuperscript{112} Waw plus a non-verb breaks the chain of \textit{w qataltí} constructions.

\textsuperscript{113} The paronomastic Piel infinitive absolute intensifies not the lexical meaning of the verbal root \textit{rG}, but the force of the Piel itself in its affirmative context (IBHS 35.3.1b).
In comparison to the creation narratives, this text occupies a minor role with regard to divine hospitality but is nevertheless noteworthy. Jacob’s response to Yahweh’s promise of help and blessing is surprisingly uncharacteristic of a guest, being flawed by a breach of protocol. Like an invitation, Yahweh’s appearance to Jacob carried with it a serious obligation. Brueggemann explained,

The appearance of God leads Jacob to make deep commitment and overriding decisions. The appearance does not leave Jacob free to be an interested spectator of some religious phenomenon. The appearance presents a word of promise which demands a decision.115

His initial reaction in 28:16–19 shows clear evidence of faith in Yahweh, but it is followed by a vow which adds a tell-tale condition to Yahweh’s offer. The language of Jacob’s vow mirrors Yahweh’s promise of divine presence and protection. But Jacob added a tell-tale condition: “If you give me bread to eat and clothes to wear . . .” (28:20). Before fully committing himself to Yahweh, Jacob expected God to do more than what he had explicitly promised; he expected Yahweh to provide sustenance and raiment as well. This bold expansion betrays a lack of trust which will not be fully overcome until Jacob’s pivotal experience with God at Peniel (32:22–32). As a visitor in the “house of

114 With reference to future time, the prefix conjugation represents a situation not as accidental, but as a logical consequence of some expressed or unexpressed situation (IBHS 31.6.2a). The Piel here is transitive and therefore not frequentative; Jacob is not necessarily committing himself to more than a one-time contribution. Rather, the denominative Piel RC[ bears a resultative meaning which is awkward to express in English in distinction to the simple Qal (IBHS 24.3, 24.4i). The precise sense Genesis 28:22b is, “and everything that you give to me—I will surely make it into a tenth to you.”

115 Brueggemann, Genesis, 248.
God” (28:17, μὴ ἀφανεῖ ὑμᾶς) Jacob stood as a guest before Yahweh the Host who offered extremely generous and sincere commitments to bless and care for him. Jacob’s renaming of Luz to Bethel counts as a recognition of that fact. His act of worship there counts as acceptance of the offer. But his call for Yahweh to provide food and raiment goes beyond the right of a guest who ought not ask for anything but rather gratefully receive what the host extends.116 That Yahweh did care for Jacob is consistent with the incomprehensible grace evident here.117 Jacob’s month-long enjoyment of Laban’s hospitality (29:14) is a faint prelude to the generous blessing by Yahweh, echoing the command and blessing to be fruitful and reproduce (35:11; cf. Gen 1:28; 9:1; 17:6) as well as the promise of royal descendants and land issued to Abraham (35:12; cf. Gen 13:14–17; 17:6). When Jacob later returned to Bethel, he responded to the blessing of God as reiterated (35:11–15). But this time, Jacob’s response was completely unspoiled by the conditional language which marred his earlier vow, signifying Jacob’s full adjustment to his subordinate role as guest who had finally learned to appreciate his Host.

G. Summary of the Discussion

This chapter observed that the early chapters of Genesis picture God as an ideal Host in spite of the terse and symbolic narratives in which the traditional language of invitations, food preparation, and mealtime fellowship


117 von Rad, Genesis, 287.
are seldom explicit. Like a host issuing an invitation, God speaks to creation which responds spontaneously to God’s summons to exist, becoming his cosmic “house” which is amply-supplied with stores for his creatures. God’s initial word to humanity is full of the language of food. This divine word establishes God not only as a provider but also as the initiator of a personal relationship. Vegetation is not “feed” or even mere food—it is a personal gift from Host to guest. God also established a weekly time of rest and reflection. God’s command for people to observe the Sabbath instills this same appreciation for the need to reflect on creation and be grateful, a mental act that also tends to take place at meals which themselves are times of periodic rest from work. Finally, the blessedness of creation before its spoiling stands as a benchmark toward which the rest of Scripture moves. The pristine quality of divine-human fellowship that is centered around food informs the hope regarding the restoration of that relationship when even the wolf and the lamb will feed together (Isa 65:25). Whereas Genesis opens with a command to eat, the book of Revelation fittingly closes with an invitation to drink. At each pole of Scripture, God is in ideal communion with the bearers of God’s image and food is part of each scene.

The idea of eating is central to the narratives dealing with the garden of Eden. Yahweh’s word to the man commanded him to eat from the trees which God had planted for his well-being. The prohibition regarding the tree of the knowledge of good and evil does not stand alone but is embedded in the generous and positive offer of fruit as food. Whatever the trees of the garden actually provided, they were expressions of God’s care and constituted
opportunities for Adam and Eve to either respond to or ignore divine generosity. Beyond being trees of beauty, food, life, and knowledge, they were essentially “trees of command.” Adam’s attitude and behavior as God’s guest is unspecified, but any assumption that his response was less than ideal is textually unwarranted, especially in light of the disheartening events in Genesis 3 which seem to be the initial stages of complication in the divine-human relationship.

The transgression of Adam and Eve was not accidental. They chose to share a forbidden meal with each other, displacing their life-nurturing godly fellowship with alienation. One effect of this episode was a curse on the serpent, resulting in its humiliation and consignment to “eat dust” as a talion-like counterpart to its temptation toward Eve to eat what was not part of God’s plan. This repulsive and “dirty” meal prefigures other food-based descriptions of divine judgment. Another effect was a curse on the ground so that it would reluctantly yield food for humanity who must labor for a crop that would inevitably include an undesired amount of inedible vegetation. Thorns and thistles replace the easy fruit of the garden. God would still provide, but the wrongdoing that damaged the divine-human relationship would also effect a change in the order of creation. In the flood narrative, creation once more experienced a change because of humanity’s rebellion, but even in the aftermath of the deluge, God was still the divine Host. The realities of the spoiled creation did not negate the divine Host-guest relationship but set the stage for a depiction of the eschatological future in terms of a restoration and improvement of the fundamental aspects of life with God in the garden. The
spoilage of creation would not be reversed until the arrival of the ultimate future when abundant food would be a gift from God, not the product of tiresome cultivation.

Jacob’s experience with God also displayed evidence of the Host-guest relationship. Jacob’s travels from Bethel to Bethel provide the context of his transformation into “Israel.” Part of Yahweh’s promise to Jacob was a commitment to provide for his needs. Yet Jacob’s response to that word of grace revealed a secret desire to be in control, hence he informed God that he expected food and clothing to be part of the “deal.” After having encountered God in the life-changing wrestling match, Jacob appears at Bethel as a changed man who stands as a model of obedience and gratitude.

H. Analysis of the Model of God as Host

This chapter has investigated how Genesis gives expression to God’s activity in terms of a singular host who provides food for a variety of guests. Chapter 3 of this dissertation suggested that biblical models or motifs may be profitably analyzed in terms of their distribution, range, and form.

1. Distribution

The depiction of God as Host is distributed in two types of material. In the primeval history, God appears as Host in an anthropomorphic story where the human and divine worlds coalesce onto the same plane of existence. In the patriarchal narrative, God provides for Jacob in a less-direct way, “from above.” In each type of literature, divine hospitality and its benefits are realistically described with a minimal amount of figurative language.
2. Range

The range of the “GOD IS A HOST” model deals with the variety of meanings within the model and may be considered from the perspectives of the giving host and the receiving guest. As Host, God gives quality food in abundance as a blessing to all humanity as represented by the original couple and later by the family of Noah. Later, God extends hospitality to a specific individual, Jacob. But God also specifies food as a curse, consigning the serpent to “bite the dust.” Furthermore, God relocates humanity outside of the garden, thus making it necessary for people to scratch out their existence from ground that has been cursed by God. Before Genesis 3, there is no textual indication of how Adam and Eve responded as the guests of God. Their sin in eating from the fruit of the tree of knowledge, however, was beyond rude—it was defiant of their divine Host. In contrast, the event involving the drunkenness of Noah and his subsequent nakedness is less severe and does not evoke a response from God. Jacob accepted God’s hospitality and responded with worship, but the condition he laid down about God providing him with food and clothing was an inappropriate response to the generous and undeserved promise he received from God.

3. Form

The form of the model has to do with its definition, linguistic signals, and the analogies it entails. Divine hospitality in Genesis operates on the level

118 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., Toward an Old Testament Theology (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 78.
of provision of foodstuff in general rather than dealing with the preparation and serving of food in the social context of a meal. As it progresses through the story of redemption, Scripture focuses divine hospitality to the climactic point at which Jesus of Nazareth as the incarnate divine Host serves bread and wine to his closest friends in the context of a sacred meal and issues an invitation with these words, “Take, eat—this is my body” (Matt 26:26). In Genesis, explicit lexical indications of hospitality in terms of invitations, seating arrangements, descriptions of the host and guests, meals, and manners are lacking, but the roles of host and guest are present and the centrality of food as a personal gift is clear.

a) Positive and Negative Analogies

Positive and negative analogies may conveniently be handled together. Human hosts in the ancient Near East were responsible for those who entered their zone of obligation. With creation as God’s “house,” God cared for those within his range, though the idea of obligation is foreign to the notion of God’s sovereignty. This host is also a king with authority. The Host-guest relationship begins with a verbal address from the “head of the household,” as will always be the case in divine hospitality. God’s verbal address (not yet an invitation) does not need an RSVP119 and humanity does not reciprocate with telling news from afar, or by bringing gifts. These acts were typical of ancient guests. Like other royal hosts, God’s provision of food was abundant, although God doesn’t

119 The French, “répondez s’il vous plaît” means “please reply.” This request often accompanies formal invitations to social events.
yet prepare a meal or set a table, even metaphorically speaking. God does, however, observe the Sabbath and the Decalogue later enjoins God’s covenant partners to do the same. The association of Sabbath days and years with meals and food parallels ancient invitations to turn aside, rest, and eat. Unlike feasts among humanity, divine hospitality in Genesis carries no notion of seating arrangements or of a meal as a social engagement with specified time limits. On the contrary, Adam and Eve’s access to God’s “table” was open-ended.

As with human hospitality, food is given within the context of a personal relationship. The quality of the trees in the garden represent God’s best for his human creation. Concerning the prohibitions against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as well as from meat with blood still in it, as master of the house and Host, God reserves the right to decide what is both on and off of the menu.

When Adam and Eve rejected God’s hospitality, they exercised the guest’s right of refusal and incited their Host to respond accordingly. But in issuing the three-fold judgment regarding the serpent, the woman, and the man, God does not appear to be offended, rash, or personally hurt as a human host might be when potential guests rebuff his generosity. Instead, God responds appropriately and with justice.

b) Neutral Analogies

The neutral analogies of a model invite reflection and exploration and may not fit neatly within the categories of the positive and negative analogies. For example, if the guest is to remain under the protection of the host, then
how are we to interpret the serpent’s access to Eve? One of Adam’s God-given commissions was to “care” for the garden in the sense of guarding it (Gen 2:15). The verb יָרָא used here is common in priestly contexts. For example, Moses charged the Levites with the responsibility of “guarding” the sacred space of the tabernacle precinct from trespassers (Num 1:53). With reference to the concept of hospitality then, it may be that God delegated the Edenic portion of his “zone of obligation” to the man who, in turn, failed to protect Eve from the harmful influence of the intrusive serpent.\(^{120}\) The consequences of that neglect stand as a reminder that guests have obligations too.

As guests, Adam and Eve were likely expected to take full advantage of their opportunity to eat in God’s presence. Part of this would involve the expression of sincere gratitude, but this element is lacking in Genesis which is driven by other concerns. Rather, words of appreciation lie at the center of Israel worship and thankful acknowledgment for God’s provision of food is more at home in the book of Psalms.\(^{121}\)

Thinking of life in Eden, one can only imagine what form Adam and Eve’s fellowship with God could have taken. But the description of this relationship and its particular setting which overflows with symbolism stands

\(^{120}\) The origin of this creature falls outside the sphere of the text’s illumination. Genesis offers virtually no support for evaluating the serpent as an integral part of the “very good” creation (Gen 1:31), nor is there ground for supposing that the serpent was created good and then “fell” at some primordial point. Its eternity is ruled out by the fact that only God existed at the ultimate beginning. The simplest observation to make regarding its origin then, is that the text is silent.

as an encouragement for the reader to step into its “world” and “look around.”

In light of the entire preceding discussion, it may be better to say that the text
invites the reader to pull up a chair and take a seat at the table.