

# Human Sexuality in the Genesis Creation Narrative

by  
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Theologian Skip Moen, who holds a Doctorate of Philosophy from Oxford University, has pointed out that “The Bible puts an enormous emphasis on sex... Creation of the entire universe occupies a few terse verses in the opening chapter, but creation of sexual distinction between human beings is a much bigger deal. The story of the creation of woman, [emphasised as **the creation of complementary human gender**], found only in the Hebrew ancient literature, stands at the pinnacle of the entire creative activity of God. Furthermore **sexuality in both positive and negative demonstration is woven throughout the entire biblical text**. Marriage dominates the metaphorical landscape as a symbol of our relationship with God. Sexual misbehavior is front and centre in descriptions of idolatry and disobedience. And the covenant mark for males is located on the instrument of sexual performance. There is no doubt about it. The God of the Bible is the God of sex.” But he also notes that, contrary to the pagan notions of sexual deities, “**God creates sexuality**. Sexuality is *not* resident in the divine being.” Moen further claims, “**Marriage is not simply the building block of Hebrew society. It is the representation of God in the world.**”

These observations are based on a careful study of biblical teaching and acceptance of the Bible’s final authority in deciding moral issues. Since the time of the Apostles orthodox Christians have accepted the claims of the Bible to be the very Word of God. They have believed that God’s revelation of Himself and His purposes for His creation, recorded by human writers under the guidance of His Spirit, has been reliably transmitted through the agency of first the biblical authors themselves and later of careful copyists and translators. Thus they have taken as authoritative and binding what the Scriptures teach on sexuality.

But in recent centuries this approach has taken a considerable knocking from academic skeptics who question such claims, and who instead **read into OT texts the influence of the near-eastern cultures of the time**, thus reducing Scripture itself to a purely human reflection upon God and his ways.

Consequently, as commitment to the Bible as God’s very Word has loosened, many now see the Bible as a very human vehicle through which supposedly each individual, listening to the Spirit, may discern God speaking. As the emphasis shifts from close objective study of the written Word to subjective listening to a voice within, **readers’ interpretations have become increasingly influenced by their own surrounding cultures**. Others even question whether the bible is an appropriate source for evidence in modern-day enquiry into what constitutes ethical behaviour.

This study, however, takes the orthodox approach of taking the Scriptures at their face value, not reading *into* them contemporary notions and values, but rather observing where Biblical ideas and standards are in direct *opposition* to both a) the prevailing culture *in which they were written* and b) the contemporary culture *in which they are now read*. If we are to arrive at a truly biblical understanding, **it is important that we do not apply our own cultural values to sexuality**. We need to remember that one of the first rules of historical enquiry is: **thou shalt not read contemporary assumptions into ancient texts**.

I hope to show that it is quite reasonable to place confidence in the Bible as providing a definitive answer to the question: ‘how did God intend us to use our human sexuality?’ as also the question: ‘what are the limits he has set on this use?’ For the purposes of this paper we will confine our study to the former, though we will provide evidence to show that divergence from God’s revealed purpose leads to a spiritual and redemptive dead end. When men and women rebel against his will, they remove themselves from his covenantal blessing. This is the assumption behind the *toledot* structure of the book of Genesis. (See the *DIVERGENCES* in Appendix on TOLEDOTS.)

## Moses' Sources

Undoubtedly the credibility of the book of Genesis, treating as it does people and events from the earliest times, presents a particular challenge for the modern reader.

Yet two lines of investigation will show how extraordinarily trustworthy these documents are as accurate conveyers of texts passed down the millennia. The first is the **archaeological testimony** to the existence of cuneiform writing on clay tablets dating back to before Abraham. The second concerns the **textual transmission** involved prior to the compilation of the Torah (Pentateuch) by Moses, whose authorship inspired by God's Spirit was acknowledged by Jesus himself.

In ancient Mesopotamia communication was by means of cuneiform (wedge-shaped) inscriptions imposed on fresh clay tablets which when dried could be stored in order on shelves in much the same way we place books on book shelves today. Such records might be about business invoices, family news and, significantly for our study, **family genealogies**, termed '*toledots*' (from the phrase "these are the *generations*" which we find written to differentiate each of the 'family' sections of Genesis." Related tablets would be strung together with a *colophon* at the end providing means of identifying the document.

The word *toledot*, from the root *yalad*, 'to generate', refers to *that which 'came out of' a person* whose life has previously been recounted (rather than being a record of *their own history*). Thus the *toledot* of Terah introduces the story, not of Terah, but of the significant person who 'came out of' Terah, namely Abraham. The first *toledot* (Gen. 2:4) is exceptional in that it designates the historical result of the creation of the **cosmos** which itself obviously came out of nothing.

These *toledots* have been compared to **colophons** (lit. 'crowning touch') which *conclude* information recorded on clay tablets. Such *colophons* operated as 'catch phrases', helping the reader to organize and identify various tablets and keep related tablets together, rather as we now print a title on a book's spine. Such a *colophon* has been found dating back to the times of Abraham. So it is not improbable that Abraham collected even older tablet records going back to Noah. He was certainly in the right region of the world to collect records of *oral* records going back to earliest times before the Flood.

Tablet with *colophon*, written  
in the time of Abraham

## A God of His Word

Why did God go to such lengths to have recorded in writing the history of his creatures and the origins of the world itself? The Genesis account of creation emphasizes the fact that everything came into existence because God 'spoke'. God is a God who communicates His purposes by His Word. Satan may question the validity of that Word ("has God said?"), but **God brings about what he wills through speech**. "And God said, 'Let there be light', and there was light." (1:3) Communication is the precursor of action. Recording what He says provides both confirmation of its content and permanence for its accessibility.

Some have tried to prove that the Bible was composed under the influence of Near Eastern cultures. But this confuses the faith of the Patriarchs, flawed though it was, with the religion of their pagan neighbours. The Old Testament stands in direct opposition to the superstitions and immoral practices of Israel's neighbours. The creation myths of the Near Eastern city-states originated in political propaganda put out to allow kings to control their people like gods. By contrast, the Bible story of creation, of the first human beings and of the patriarchs represent three phases of **God's account given to men of the early history of his people**.

This becomes clear when we study the Torah (Book of Moses) on its own terms (rather than trying to read in sources from neighbouring cultures), especially the opening

chapters of Genesis that describe God's creation of the world, including human sexuality which can only be properly understood in the context of the whole of creation. That raising heirs to implement the line of promise was an essential aspect of God's plan for his creatures, is signified by the *generations* divisions of Genesis. (See the Appendix A on TOLEDOTS. Note that these *generations* were of two categories: those belonging to God's faithful people in the line of promise, and those whose disobedience exempted them from God's ultimate blessing.)

Pagan religion taught that the gods were male and female, fertility cults mirrored the activity of the gods, and men could ensure their land's fertility by sex with sacred priestesses. By contrast, **sex was the creation of God**: he himself was without gender, even though occasionally he could use gender imagery to describe his character. That Israel sometimes succumbed to the false notions and practices of paganism is undeniable; but God's people were disobeying divine guidance thereby. To see the true role that God had planned for sex we must study the Creation chapters of Genesis and note those verses that speak of God as in turn 'creating', 'making', 'forming' and 'fashioning' His creatures.

## Genesis Texts on Creation (including the creation of gender)

### *Section 1: The origin of the Cosmos*

- Gen1:1 God **created** [*bara*] the heaven and the earth  
 Gen 1:7 God **made** [*'a-sah*] the firmament  
 Gen 1:16 God **made** [*'a-sah*] the two great lights  
 Gen 1:21 God **created** [*bara*]... every living thing  
     "Be fruitful, and multiply" (1:22)  
 Gen1:25 God **made** [*'a-sah*] the beast of the earth  
 Gen 1:26 "Let us **make** [*'a-sah*] man in our image." (Gen 5:1)  
 Gen 1;27 God **created** [*bara*] man – in the image of God **created**[*bara*]  
     He him – male and female **created** [*bara*] He them (Gen 5:1)  
     "Be fruitful, and multiply" (1:28)  
 Gen 1:31 God saw everything that He had **made** [*'a-sah*]  
 Gen 2:2 God finished His work which He had **made** [*'a-sah*] (x2)  
 Gen 2:3 He rested from all His work which God in **creating** [*bara*] had **made** –[*'a-sah*]

### *Section 2: The origin of Adam ('out of' heaven and earth)*

- Gen 2:4 The **generations** [*toledot*] of the heaven and of the earth when they were **created** [*bara*] in the day that the LORD God **made** [*bara*] earth and heaven (2:4)  
 Gen 2:7 The Lord God **formed** [*yatsar*] man from the dust of the earth (x2)  
 Gen 2:18 I will **make** [*'a-sah*] him a help meet for him,  
 Gen 2:19 God **formed** [*yatsar*] every beast of the field  
 Gen 2:22 **Fashioned** [*banah*] He a woman

### *Section 3: The lineage of Adam ('out of' Adam)*

- Gen 5:1 The book of the **generations** of Adam.  
     In the day that God **created** [*bara*] man,  
         in the likeness of God **made** [*'a-sah*] He him.  
 Gen 5:2 male and female **created** [*bara*] He them... called their name Adam,  
     in the day when they were **created** [*bara*] (5:2)

## Observations

When God **'creates'** (*bara*) He makes something out of nothing. Thus the cosmos (1:1), life (1:21), mankind(1:27) and human gender/sex (1:27)

It is used in the Torah (Book of Moses) only of God, who alone 'creates' ex nihilo – out of nothing, as in Num 16:30: “if the Lord brings about something entirely new...” Significantly *bara is* used to begin the total Biblical revelation starting with God calling everything into existence by means of his spoken word. As the Psalmist says, in the beginning God spoke (Ps 33:9) and the cosmos came into being. God's powerful word creates everything. Isaiah extends 'everything' to include 'darkness' and even 'evil (Is 45:7]. Nothing came into being outside of God's agency. (This denies any dualistic notion of two original sources of existence: one good, the other evil, though it begs the question of the origin of evil itself.)

When God **'makes'** something, (*'a-sah*), He is, like us, making it out of something already 'created'. Thus the firmament, our sun and moon (1:7,16), the animals (1:25) and everything else that he has 'made' (1:31, 2:2,3)

Regarding the relation of the 'beasts' (1:25) relation to 'every living creature' (1:21), the *initial* creation of animated life is now *formed* into all the beasts of the earth. Interestingly, though God announces his intention to **'make'** [*bara*] man in his *image* man is **'created'** (*bara*) in that *'image'* but actually **'made'** (*'a-sah*) in his *'likeness'*. Thus in one sense both **man and woman** are **a new creation out of nothing**, distinct from animals who are **'made'** (1:25) out the substance of life already created (1:21) and with the sexual ability to propagate themselves. But in a more profound sense God's intention to **'make man in our image'** (1:26) requires in the event a completely new **'creation'** (1:27). Nothing else in creation reflects God's image in the way humankind does. What is so special about humankind is its **unique source**: the **divine image** out of which it is **'created'**. The change in verb between the two verses serves to emphasise just how special is humankind in the whole gamut of creation. Man is not just another animal. He is a fresh 'creation'. Yet he derives his uniqueness from God's own image, from which he is 'created'. Being **'made'** in God's *likeness*, on the other hand, indicates the spiritual element from which man is made, from whence he gets his divine likeness.

The uniqueness of human gender is also expressed when the writer expands the creation of 'man' to include the creation of 'male and female', with the emphasis not on 'man and woman' but 'male and female' (1:27; 5:1). Sexually mankind can, like the animal, “be fruitful and multiply”. But human sexuality has a higher more significant quality: gender, **'male'** and **'female'** being **created** (not merely **made**). **Complementarity** is added to sex. Yet **woman's origin** is still derivative, since woman was made out of man (2:23); that aspect is emphasised by the use of *'a-sah'* when God declares his intention to **'make'** a 'help' for man (2:18).

God has man survey all the animals for a 'help' before he finds the solution in one **'fashioned'** (*bana*) from his own side.

Here a third word is introduced. 'Fashioned' denotes being built up from something else. It points to *how* woman was made from man

But there is one more word to consider. We read that God **'formed'** (*yatsar*) both man (2:7) and animal, (2:19) the former from the dust of the earth.

This word stresses **purpose** involved, such as that which a potter has in 'forming' a clay pot. Both humans and animals have their divine purpose for which they were **'formed'**.



### Section 5

#### T 10:1 “The generations of the sons of Noah”

*The direction taken by the descendants of Noah's sons [DIVERGENCE]*

10:1-32 The families of Noah's sons [THE NATIONS]

11:1-9 The tower of **Babel**

### Section 6

#### T 11:10 “These are the generations of Shem”

*The lineage of Shem's family (Semites)*

11:11-26 Geneology from Shem to Terah

### Section 7

#### T 11:27 “these are the generations of Terah”

*The story of Abraham and Isaac*

11:26-32 Terah's migration to Haran and death.

12:1-9 **Abraham's call** and migration south **SPECIAL REVELATION HISTORY OF GOD'S PEOPLE**

12:10 -20 Famine drives Abraham into Egypt; Sarah and Pharaoh; Expulsion from Egypt

13:1-18 Lot separates from Abraham [DIVERGENCE]

14:1-24 Local wars embroil Abraham's relatives.

15:1-25:11 God's **covenant** with Abraham- **Hagar** bears Abraham Ishmael – every male circumcised – **Sodom** - Abimelech – Sarah bears Isaac – Hagar sent away – **Offering of Isaac** – Sarah's burial plot – Rebekah Isaac's bride – Abraham's burial

### Section 8

#### T 25:12 “Now these are the generations of Ishmael”

*The descendants of Ishmael [DIVERGENCE]*

25:13-18 Ishmael's family records

### Section 9

#### T 25:19 “these are the generations of Isaac”

*The story of Jacob*

25:20-34 Esau and Jacob

26:1- Abimelech and Rebekah – **Esau and Jacob at Isaac's bed** – Esau marries a Caananite – Serves Laban 14 years for Rachel – Jacob's wives and concubines squabble – Jacob and Laban' flocks - **Wrestling with God** – Jacob reconciled with Esau – more trouble over women [DIVERGENCE]

### Section 10

#### T 36:1 “These are the generations of Esau - the same is Edom”

*The descendants of Esau [DIVERGENCE]*

36:2-8 Esau's family records

### Section 11

#### T 36:9 “These are the generations of Esau - the father of Edom”

*The descendants of Esau*

36:10-37:1 The political structure of Esau's family the setting for (the chosen) Jacob

### Section 12

#### T 37:2 “These are the generations of Jacob”

*The story of Joseph*

37:3-50:26 **Joseph sold** by his brothers – Judah's immorality – the story of **Joseph in Egypt**– Jacob's family records – deaths of Jacob and Joseph

## Acknowledgements

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