Men

The category of "men," strictly speaking, signifies a particular sexual identity or gender as well as the attendant roles, rights, and responsibilities associated with the male gender, often with special reference to roles and characteristics that are generally distinct from those associated with the female gender.

Concept Summary

Overall, "men" in the broad sense refers to humanity in general. Human beings, both male and female, were created in the image of God and are inextricably accountable to him. In the more specific sense, being a man designates being male *instead of* female—i.e., men, *not* women. The terms for "man" in both Hebrew and Greek are used for both the general and particular senses.

Hebrew has three words often translated as "man," though their range of meanings includes humanity in general. The word אָדָם (*'ādām*) commonly refers collectively to humanity or being human (Gen 6:2; Num 23:19). The second term, אִישׁ (*'îš*), typically denotes a male person or "man" in contrast with a female (Gen 2:23; compare אִשָּׁה, *'iššâ*, "woman"), but

the third, אֱנוֹשׁ (*'ĕnôš*), like *'ādām*, can nearly always be read as a general reference to humanity, rather than to males in particular.

To indicate the biological male gender explicitly, biblical Hebrew uses זָכָר (*zākār*) or זָכוּר (*zākûr*). The word גֶּבֶר (*geber*) also simply means "man," though it may carry associations of masculinity and virility (Jer 22:30; Job 38:3). The related term גִּבּוֹר (*gibbōr*) refers to a warrior or "mighty man" (Josh 1:14), while the Aramaic form גְּבַר (*gĕbar*) is simply the typical word for "man," like Hebrew *'îš*. The OT also employs a rare but interesting euphemism to designate men: מַשְׁתִּין בְּקִיר (*maštîn bĕqîr*), meaning "one who urinates on a wall" (1 Sam 25:22, 34; 1 Kgs 14:10; 16:11; 21:21; 2 Kgs 9:8). The phrase is used only six times: twice in 1 Samuel and four times in 1–2 Kings. In each context, a particular group is targeted for annihilation—not even "one who urinates on a wall" will be left.

Biblical Greek mainly uses two terms to designate "men": ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*) and ἀνήρ (*anēr*). In the Septuagint, *anthrōpos* is the Greek word most often used to translate *'ādām*, which likewise has a larger semantic field than *anēr*, the word used most frequently to denote specifically adult male human beings. The NT also uses *anēr* to indicate a hus-

band specifically. In addition to these terms, various others in both Hebrew and Greek denote "men" according to age or their familial, societal, or other relational role.

Theological Overview

To grasp the biblical concept of "men" requires sensitivity to the tensions manifest in language between the broad, general understanding of humanity and the particularities of the specifically male gender. In both biblical languages, this semantic domain includes words that designate both ends of this spectrum, but sometimes a specific term is not exclusively marked for one end or the other. In those cases, the context usually clarifies whether males in particular or humanity in general was meant. Many references in the Bible to "man" or "men" contain content relevant to all people—male or female—such as the reflection on human mortality in Psa 103:15 or Job's dim view of anyone's ability to make themselves right before God (Job 15:14).

Genesis 1:27–28 is programmatic for discerning the tension between mankind and male. God created אָדָם (’ādām) "in his own image." Throughout the OT, ’ādām usually conveys the sense of "mankind "or "human beings," distinguishing "people" both from the rest of creation and from the Creator. Neverthe-

less, "man" (’ādām), as the designation of this category, is created זָכָר (zākār) and נְקֵבָה (něqēbâ)—specifically, "male and female."

In the creation account of Gen 2, application of the word ’ādām as the proper name of the male—Adam, whom God created first and from whom God created woman—further contributes to the tension. Analysis of how this one word is used throughout both Testaments (’ādām in the OT; the name Adam in both Testaments; and ἄνθρωπος, anthrōpos, in the NT) unearths theological issues at every turn, and further investigation of the various words referring to "men" not only adds layers of complexity to these but also raises new questions. The manifold theological issues include: what the two genders of humanity reveal about the nature and character of God; what the manner of God's creation of man and of his discipline of humanity after Gen 3 imply about relationships between God and men and between men and women—whether in society, the home, or the church; how to distinguish between God's expectations of and boundaries for specifically adult male human beings and the cultural and/or sinful practices that pervert, thwart, or undermine his good designs for expressions of masculinity; what God reveals about himself via the human experience of marriage as a metaphor for his rela-

tionship with the Church; and what is theologically significant about Jesus being a firstborn son, male, and/or his identification as both Son of Man and the Son of God.

The broad and perhaps most essential concept of "men" in the Bible is that of people in general—both male and female. This concept extends from creation in God's image and likeness (Gen 1:26) to redemption (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17; Gal 3:28) to the consummation of history when God's dwelling place is among "men" (*anthrōpos*; Rev 21:3). This broad perspective, especially as it is maintained as God's intention from the beginning (e.g., Mark 10:5–9), undergirds the biblical concept of "men" in gender-specific senses of being male and not female or of manhood and masculinity.

Lexical Information

Old Testament

אָדָם (*'ādām*). n. masc. **man, mankind, humanity.** *Refers typically to humanity collectively or of man as a representative human being.*

The Hebrew noun *'ādām* is usually translated "man." In the creation account of Genesis, the first man is regularly referred to as *hā'ādām* ("the man"; e.g., Gen 1:27; 2:7). Not until Genesis 2:20 is *'ādām* (without the article) used as the man's name (although *hā'ādām* in Gen 2:19 is often translated in English as "Adam"). After Genesis 5:5, Adam is rarely mentioned (e.g., 1 Chr 1:1). The NT mentions Adam (Ἀδάμ) nine times, usually in theologically rich contexts (e.g., Rom 5:14). Ordinarily, the common word *'ādām* denotes "man" in the sense of a human being without reference to gender (e.g., Job 34:15) or in the collective sense of "humanity" or the "human race," comprising both male and female human beings (Gen 1:26–27; 5:2). In the latter generic sense, "man" (*'ādām*) is portrayed as a creature distinct from God (e.g., Gen 6:5–6; Psa 53:2) and distinct from the animals (e.g., Gen 2:19–20; 6:7; Exod 8:17–18). Context indicates the occasional gender-specific uses of the word (e.g., Josh 14:15; Judg 16:7).

אֱנוֹשׁ (*'ĕnôš*). n. masc. **man, mankind.** *Refers generally to human beings or of man as a representative human being.*

The word *'ĕnôš* overlaps semantically with אָדָם (*'ādām*) and seems phonologically and semantically related to אִישׁ (*'îš*, "man"), though the exact nature of their linguistic relationship is unclear. The term *'ĕnôš* occurs only 42 times in the OT, in most cases in poetic texts. Like *'ādām*, and sometimes used synonymously with it (e.g., Isa 13:12), *'ĕnôš* generally designates man in the generic sense of human being, often in contexts emphasizing the

contrast between mortal man and God (e.g., Psa 103:15). The Aramaic cognate אֱנָשׁ (*’ĕnāš*) occurs 25 times in Ezra and Daniel.

אִישׁ (*’îš*). n. masc. **man.** *Refers generally to specifically adult male human beings but also functions as a term of association.*

Primarily, the word refers to specifically adult male human beings (Gen 4:1; "husbands," Ruth 1:11; 1 Sam 4:9). The usual plural form is אֲנָשִׁים (*’ănāšîm*). The male denotation of the word is especially evident in the relationship between אִישׁ (*’îš*) and אִשָּׁה (*’iššâ*, "woman") in Gen 2:23. Context, including both surrounding text and historical context, generally make the gender of the person unmistakable. For example, in Gen 43:17, *’îš* ("man") appears twice, *’ănāšîm* ("men") once. Context indicates that "the man" who takes orders from Joseph is undoubtedly male, and "the men" are male—they are Joseph's brothers. In the singular, "the man" conveys the basic sense of the one who acts as Joseph's "representative" or "agent," doing his bidding. Earlier, in Genesis 43:3, Judah refers to Joseph as "the man" not to designate him as an "adult male"—which is understood and assumed—but in the sense of "the authority in question." In both cases, the Hebrew term for "man" clearly refers to or connotes an adult male, but it primar-

ily denotes that person's role or function rather than gender. In addition, *’îš* or *’ănāšîm* almost always indicate a particular individual or group (e.g., Jer 38:4).

בַּעַל (*ba‘al*). n. masc. **owner, lord, master, husband.** *Designates someone—usually a man—in a particular role implying the exercise of responsibility and/or authority.*

The noun *ba‘al* identifies a man as an owner (e.g., of an ox; Exod 21:28–29) or master (e.g., "of the house"; Exod 22:8). It is derived from the verb בָּעַל (*bā‘al*), meaning "to possess, rule over" (e.g., 1 Chr 4:22), which, by extension, comes to also mean "to marry" (e.g., Deut 24:1). Numerous phrases reflect the idea by using the term to describe a man. For example, Joseph's brothers call him an "owner of dreams" (*ba‘al haḥălōmôt*; Gen 37:19; compare Prov 18:9). The plural form may refer to the leading men, spokesmen, or army (e.g., 1 Sam 23:11) of a city or people (e.g., Num 21:28; Isa 16:8). The word *ba‘al* also describes a husband, a man who has a wife (e.g., Exod 21:22; Prov 12:4).

גֶּבֶר (*geber*); Aram. גְּבַר (*gĕbar*). n. masc. **man.** *Refers generally to an adult male.*

Although derived from the verb גָּבַר (*gābar*, "be strong"; e.g., 1 Sam 2:9), the noun *geber* seldom implies a man characterized by some form of strength (Jer 41:16

is one exception among the 68 times it occurs). In many contexts, *geber* may carry the connotation, in idiomatic English, of a "real man," one whose masculinity, leadership ability, physical strength as a warrior, or even virility (e.g., Jer 22:30)—inasmuch as such qualities ideally characterize men—cannot be doubted. When God finally addresses Job directly, he challenges him, "Gird up your loins like a man" (*geber*; Job 38:3; 40:7). Given this nuance, the passages highlighting the confidence such a man has in Yahweh tend not only to commend that trust in general but to insist that it is the mark of a true man (Psa 34:8; 40:4; 94:12; 127:5; Jer 17:7). The downfall of misplaced trust is similarly magnified when experienced by a *geber* (e.g., Psa 52:7; Jer 23:9b). Similar in meaning to אִישׁ (’*îš*), the Aramaic word *gĕbar* occurs 21 times in Ezra and Daniel and is typically used to speak of a particular man or group of men (e.g., Ezra 4:21; Dan 3:23).

גִּבּוֹר (*gibbōr*). adj. **strong, mighty**; n. masc. **warrior, mighty man.** *Refers to men of exemplary or exceptional strength, courage, or military prowess.*

Like גֶּבֶר (*geber*), this term, used 158 times, is derived from the verb גָּבַר (*gābar*), but the ot applies this term exclusively to adult males whose physical strength and bravery are outstanding as "mighty men" (e.g., Josh 1:14; 2 Sam 23:8–39) or to God (e.g., Deut 10:17; Isa 9:6; Zeph 3:17). Most frequently, the word is used in a military sense, but men who hold a leadership position also are occasionally identified as such by use of the word *gibbōr* (e.g., 1 Chr 9:26).

זָכָר (*zākār*). adj.; n. masc. **male.** *Always denotes the male gender, whether in regard to human beings or animals.*

Zākār is a gender-specific designation; it always specifies the male individual or a group of males. In the creation account (Gen 1:27) and elsewhere, this word is the complement of נְקֵבָה (*nĕqēbâ*, "female"). Used together, the phrase "male and female" implies that each gender is indispensable (e.g., for procreation; Gen 6:19). Unlike the more common words for "men," *zākār* makes the gender-specificity of certain requirements of the covenant and of a variety of other instructions in the law unmistakable (e.g., Lev 6:18; 27:3–7). For example, circumcision of "every male" set apart God's covenant people (e.g., Gen 17:10–23). The use of *zākār* in the law's proscriptions against homosexual practices also contributes to their clarity (e.g., Lev 20:13).

זָכוּר (*zākûr*). n. masc. **male.** *Refers specifically to adult males, usually with reference to family representation and leadership.*

Another form of the word זָכָר

(*zākār*), *zākûr* occurs only four times, three of which specify the three annual feasts at which all the "males" or "men" must "appear before the Lord Yahweh" (Exod 23:17; 34:23; Deut 16:16). This usage suggests the men were to appear representing themselves and their families. Deuteronomy 20:13 prescribes the death of every male (*zākûr*) in a city refusing the terms of peace extended by the Israelites; the women and very young children could be spared.

זָקֵן (*zāqēn*). n. **elderly man, elder**. *Generally refers to older men having an authoritative status tied, at least partly, to their advanced age.*

Among all occurrences of *zāqēn* in the OT, well over half refer specifically to men comprising a collective body of leadership called "elders" (e.g., Gen 50:7; Exod 4:29). In singular form, the word frequently denotes an "old man" (e.g., Gen 44:20) or "elderly people" as a category. In the plural, *zāqēn* invariably refers to the older men serving as "elders" of a house (Gen 50:7); tribe (2 Kgs 23:1); a city (1 Kgs 21:8); people (Exod 4:29); or nation (Num 22:7). Five times, such a group of men is more particularly identified as "elders of the congregation" (זִקְנֵי הָעֵדָה, *ziqnê hāʿēdâ*; Lev 4:15; Judg 21:6) or "elders of the priests" (2 Kgs 19:2; Isa 37:2; Jer 19:1) referring to men in religious leadership. Especially in the cultural context of the OT, elders were the decision makers, functioning sometimes as civil magistrates (e.g., Deut 22:18) but always exercising some level of authority (e.g., Ruth 4:2–4). Throughout Scripture, God holds the elders responsible for upholding the law and leading God's people to keep the covenant (e.g., Deut 29:10). Both the elders with official duties and the old in general were held in esteem, and refusal to listen to them (e.g., 1 Kgs 12:6–13) or to give them due respect and honor was evidence of spiritual failure (e.g., Lam 4:16; 5:12).

אָב (*ʾāb*). n. masc. **father, forefather**. *Refers literally to a biological, male parent or ancestor, but with the implied role and responsibility of family leadership.*

The common Hebrew word for "father" (אָב, *ʾāb*) first appears in the OT in tandem with "mother" (אֵם, *ʾēm*), indicating the joint importance of both as parents (Gen 2:24). God's expectation that both are to be honored, respected, and obeyed is especially evident when the two words appear together in the law (e.g., Exod 21:15; Lev 19:3; Deut 21:18). However, "father" occurs about five times more often than "mother." The sense of origination underlies figurative uses of *ʾāb* to identify a particular man as a founder, progenitor, or first ancestor (e.g., Gen 4:20–21). The plural even more broadly refers to "ancestors" or "forefather-

s" (e.g., Exod 3:15–16). The OT frequently witnesses to God's ongoing and unchanging faithfulness to his people by reference to his covenant with their "fathers" (e.g., Deut 1:21; Judg 2:1). "Fathers" refers both to specific men at the head of a family's lineage and to their assumed role of responsibility for and leadership of their "house" or family (e.g., Num 1:45; 18:1). Even in the broad sense of "previous generations," the connotation of a father's responsibility for spiritual leadership of his family informs the meaning of numerous passages referring to the obedience or unfaithfulness of Israel's "fathers" (e.g., Judg 2:17–22; Jer 7:23–26).

New Testament

ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*). n. masc. **man, human being, humanity.** *Refers generally to human beings or to man as a representative human being.*

Anthrōpos, much like אָדָם (*'ādām*) in Hebrew, is the common Greek word for "man," "humanity" in general, or "male human being." This word distinguishes the special status of human beings in God's creation (e.g., Matt 12:12) and yet clearly distinguishes them from and sets them in contrast to God (e.g., Mark 8:33; Rom 3:4). Sometimes it refers to a representative "man" in the sense of "anyone" or "no one" (e.g., Jas 2:24) or to "men" in the sense of "people" in general (e.g., Jas

3:9). In the plural, the sense is often gender inclusive, denoting a group of "people" that includes both men and women (e.g., John 6:10). When referring to an individual, *anthrōpos* always denotes a male human being, never one who is female (γυνή, *gynē*). When preceded by the article, it usually refers to a specific person (e.g., Acts 4:14). Overall, the singular word especially tends to have a masculine connotation that context makes evident (e.g., Matt 12:11). ✎

ἀνήρ (*anēr*); ἀνδρός (*andros*). n. masc. **man, male, husband.** *Refers to human males—men as opposed to women, and adult men as opposed to children.*

Like the Hebrew word אִישׁ (*'îš*), in most cases *anēr* denotes a male human being. Its use as the common Greek word for "husband" is an example (e.g., Matt 1:19). Matthew 14:21 exemplifies the typical use of *anēr* (pl. ἄνδρες, *andres*, "men") to denote male human beings in distinction from women (compare Acts 8:3) and children. Often, however, *anēr* is used in the representative and collective senses similarly to ἄνθρωπος (*anthrōpos*). For example, Jesus contrasts "a wise man who built his house on the rock" and "a foolish man who built his house on the sand" (Matt 7:24–27). Both grammatical and cultural contexts make clear that *anēr* (here in the form ἀνδρὶ, *andri*) denotes a male person, but the teaching is not

restricted to men—Jesus intends the lesson to be heard and heeded by followers of both genders (Matt 7:24; compare Jas 1:12). Similarly, "the men of Nineveh" (Luke 11:32) and phrases of address such as "Men of Judea" (e.g., Acts 2:14) may suggest that such audiences or groups actually included both men and women.

πατήρ (*patēr*). n. masc. **father, male ancestor.** *Refers literally to one who is a biological male parent but figuratively has connotations of leadership.*

The word basically refers to a person's immediate biological father or male parent (e.g., Luke 8:51), but usage expressing familial relationship may extend to more remote ancestors (e.g., Matt 3:9) or even to older men generally (e.g., Acts 7:2). In the NT the plural usually refers to ancestors or forefathers, usually those of a Jewish audience (e.g., Luke 11:48; Acts 3:13). While Jesus upholds the obligation to honor one's earthly father (e.g., Matt 15:4; Mark 7:12), he insists that allegiance to himself and the gospel must supersede all other family ties (e.g., Mark 10:29–30).

ἄρσην (*arsēn*); ἄρρην (*arrēn*). adj.; n. masc. **male, man.** *Refers specifically to the* male gender.

The term *arsēn* clearly denotes the male as opposed to the female gender and appears in five contexts in the NT: (1) To answer the Pharisees' questions on divorce, Jesus underscores the way God created man and woman as "male (*arsēn*) and female (θῆλυς, *thēlys*)" (Matt 19:4; Mark 10:6) as the basis of marriage according to God's design. (2) Because the newborn Jesus was both male and their firstborn, Joseph and Mary dedicated the child to the Lord as prescribed in the law (Luke 2:23), according to which every firstborn male was to be set apart as "holy to the Lord" (Exod 13:2, 12). (3) The word appears three times in Rom 1:27, in which male (*arsēn*) homosexuality is clearly forbidden. The compound word ἀρσενοκοῖται (*arsenokoitai*), a compound of *arsēn* and κοίτη (*koitē*, "marriage-bed"; i.e., a euphemism for the place where intercourse occurs) is used twice in the NT (1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) to denote male homosexuals. (4) Galatians 3:28 affirms that the gender distinctions "male and female" do not limit access to salvation in Christ. (5) "Male child" (υἱόν ἄρρενα, *huion arrhena*) refers to Christ in Rev 12:5, 13.

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See Also
- **Related Concepts:** Ancestry and Posterity; Children; Civil Leaders; Kingship; Military Leaders; People; Priesthood; Prophets; Violence; Warfare; Women
- **Bible Sense Lexicon:** to be male, male, male (human), man
- The Creation of Man Lexham Bible Guide: Genesis 1–11

- Women and Men in Worship Lexham

  Bible Guide: 1 Corinthians
- Proper Conduct for Men and Women

  Lexham Bible Guide: 1 Timothy