

Prayerfully read Genesis 2:4–2:25 at least two times and then read the following notes.

Context: Setting the Table

After the magnificent prologue of 1:1–2:3, we find the first of the ten headings that serve to structure the book of Genesis. Continuing until the end of chapter 4, this “history of the heavens and the earth” details the Lord God’s loving care for his image bearers before relating the sad story of how the very good creation of 1:31 was transformed into the sin-cursed world of rebels we now inhabit.

Content: Reading the Text

(2:4–17) The “Forming” of the Man and the Planting of the Garden

(2:4a) This is the first of the ten “these are the generations (*toledot*)” headings which serve to structure the book of Genesis. In some cases (here, 25:19, and 37:2) this phrase functions idiomatically, meaning “record of events,” or even simply “history.” This is the history of what resulted from the creation of the heavens and the earth.

(2:4b) This is the first occurrence of the covenant name of God, translated in the KJV as either LORD or Jehovah. In combining the covenant name (LORD) with the universal name (God), Moses made the point that the almighty God of the universe who created the heavens and the earth was identical with the LORD who was in covenant with Israel.

(2:7a) The word that is translated as “formed” is one that is normally used for the work of a potter, an image the Lord applied to himself in Jeremiah 18:1–11 (alluded to in Romans 9:21).

(2:7b) As noted last week, the word translated as “man” (*adam*) sounds a lot like the word translated as “land” (*adamah*). “Earthling from the earth,” captures some of this sense in English.¹ The word translated as “man” is identical with the proper name “Adam” (Hebrew does not make use of capital letters) and it is not always clear which translation is more appropriate.

(2:7c) The Hebrew phrase translated as “living soul” in this verse is identical to the phrase translated as “living creature” in 2:19. “It is not man’s

possession of “the breath of life” or his status as a “living creature” that differentiates him from the animals. Animals are described in exactly the same terms. Genesis 1:26–28 affirms the uniqueness of man by stating that man alone is made in God’s image and by giving man authority over the animals.”² The fundamental distinction between mankind and the animals is *theological*, not *biological*. Therefore, the fact that some animals are more “intelligent” than some humans is entirely besides the point—God placed mankind, not dolphins or dogs or any other creature, as his image over his creation.

(2:8) In the Ancient Near East (ANE), gardens (particular the sort of magnificent garden pictured here) were normally associated either with royalty or with temples. Though we will only be able to mention some of them, there are an astonishing number of links between the Garden of Eden, the tabernacle/temple, and the coming New Jerusalem (Revelation 21–22).

(2:10–14) The rivers in Ezekiel 47 and Revelation 22:1–2 rather strikingly allude to this river that came “out of Eden.” Despite many attempts, the precise location at which the rivers mentioned come together has never been satisfactorily determined—which may be part of the point!

(2:12) While the precise identity of the “onyx stone,” is unclear, these stones formed a component of the High Priest’s attire (Exodus 28:9–10, 20). Gold, of course, was pervasive in both the tabernacle and temple.

(2:15) Work is not the result of the fall. While the *difficulty* of human toil is a result of the curse, the *necessity* of human labor is part of God’s creation-al design. Though *God* does not need man’s labors, the *earth* he created does. It is striking that the same Hebrew words used for Adam’s work in the garden (here translated as “dress” and “keep”) were used to refer to the service of the priests in the tabernacle in Numbers 18:7 (there translated as “keep” and “serve.”)

(2:16) “The verse is underscoring the certainty of death, not its chronology...it conveys the announcement of a death sentence by divine or royal decree.”³ As one example, see 1 Kings 2:37, where an identical Hebrew expression is used.

(2:17) The knowledge of “good and evil” is best understood as roughly equivalent to “autonomy.” “What is forbidden to man is the power to decide for himself what is in his best interests and what is not.”⁴

(2:18–25) The “Building” of the Woman

(2:18b) This is the first time that anything in God’s creation has been de-

clared to be anything other than good. As 1:27 makes clear, the image bearing role of mankind could not be carried out by a male alone. It is striking that, while the ANE preserved many accounts of the creation of man, only the Scriptures preserve an account of the creation of woman.

(2:78c) While we often think of a “helper” as a mere “assistant,” that is not at all the idea here—the LORD himself is frequently said to be a “helper” to Israel. On the other hand, “To help someone does not necessarily imply that the helper is stronger than the helped; simply that the latter’s strength is inadequate by itself.”⁵

(2:78d) The phrase “meet for him” translates a compound word that only occurs in this passage and could be literally translated as “like opposite him.” This helper, while being “like” man, would also be his “opposite,” or “complement,” two matching parts of a singular humanity that would serve as God’s image over his creation.

(2:79) This could either be understood as: (a) A reference back to the creation of animals *before* the creation of man (the Hebrew could also be translated, “The Lord God *had* formed.”), or (b) The separate creation of a special group of animals for Adam to name. Both of these options fit with the account of the sixth day given in 1:24–31.

(2:19–20) Adam was busy at work before he was given a wife. Before young men have the right to look for a spouse they need to be doing something significant enough to need a helper (v18).

(2:21) “The woman was made from a rib out of the side of Adam; not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”⁶

(2:22) The word translated as “made” is literally “built.” God “builds” a woman just as he “formed” the man. The word translated as “rib” is normally translated as “side” and occurs almost exclusively in references to the building of the tabernacle, the temple, and Ezekiel’s temple.

(2:23) In Hebrew, “woman” is “*ishah*” and “man” is “*ish*.” A similar play on words in English would be something like, “man” and “man-ess” (think of “lion” and “lion-ess”!). The first use of the ordinary Hebrew word for a man occurs in the same sentence as the ordinary Hebrew word for a woman. Man cannot be defined apart from woman any more than woman can be defined apart from man—they are both uniquely distinctive and absolutely equal.

(2:24) God did not create several women for Adam, nor did he create another man. Marriage is one man and one woman for life—any other combination deviates from God’s creational design.

Credo: Believing the Truth

When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens, he made sure that everything was very good. He formed man from the dust of the ground, an earthling from the earth. He planted a garden, providing the first man with both a lovely home and a satisfying job. Knowing that it was not good for this man to labor alone, he built a helper altogether suitable for him. Both uniquely distinctive and absolutely equal, this first couple complemented each other perfectly and clung to each other passionately. Though the coming of the curse complicated the replication of this creational pattern, it has in no way altered God’s design for those who bear his image.

Conduct: Reshaping Our Walk

Discuss the meaning of the text and then walk through the following application questions as you discuss the difference this meaning ought to make in our lives today.

Work, far from being a result of the curse, was created as God’s very good gift to mankind. How might you be tempted to think your life would be better without it?

Examples: Viewing retirement as a “perpetual vacation” rather than as an opportunity to invest in others; Complaining about the necessity of work while idolizing a life without labor; laziness.

No matter how drastically our culture re-defines marriage, God’s creational intent remains the same—one man and one woman, uniquely distinctive yet absolutely equal, clinging to one another in love as they work together to carry out the tasks God has given them. What are some of the ways in which we as believers can be tempted to deviate from this pattern?

Examples: Men ignoring the full equality of women, women envying the distinctive role of men; Couples neglecting the importance of romance or forgetting the value of working together side-by-side, etc.

Endnotes

1. Hamilton 1990, 156
2. Wenham 1987, 61
3. Hamilton 1990, 172–174
4. Hamilton 1990, 166
5. Wenham 1987, 68, slightly altered
6. Henry 1994, 10, slightly altered