
THE CREATION OF THE MAN AND THE WOMAN - AN OVERVIEW

The opening verses of Genesis (1:1 - 2:3) are like a "grand opening" - not only to the book of Genesis, but also to the whole Bible. The main "body" of Genesis begins in chapter 2:4, and is comprised of 10 sections - each of which is called an "account." (Translations will use various words such as: *account*, *generation*, *history*, *story*, or when it involves a list of descendents, *genealogy*.)

The first of the written "accounts" (beginning in 2:4) has to do with the creation of the first people. This will be the center of our focus, but we will find it necessary to compare this account with the words that are found in the first chapter of Genesis.

Chapter 1 (and the first few verses of chapter 2) describes the creation of all things, in a chronological order. It describes it as being the sum total of seven days of activity by God - specifically, six days of "work" followed by a cessation of that work on the seventh day. The primary focus of chapter 1 is on man's environment (with man being the "climax" of the story). Details that do *not* have an immediate impact on man and his environment (example: the creation of heavenly beings) are not considered important to this account, and are therefore not mentioned.

In contrast, the account in chapter 2 focuses specifically on the creation of humans - the man and the woman. Specific details about other aspects of creation are mentioned only to the extent that they are necessary for understanding the creation of these two people. This account is presented in a logical or topical manner. The *emphasis* of the passage is not on chronology - although certain things are obviously chronological.

The "account" that begins in verse 2:4 (the first of the 10 "accounts" given to us in Genesis) includes the statement, "**...in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven.**" In the original Hebrew text, the word "day" occurs, but the context shows that it is being used in a figurative sense, rather than indicating a 24-hour time period. (Because of this, many translations will say something like, "...*when* the LORD God made the earth and heaven...") There are some who may wish to point this out, because they want to use this verse as a basis for rejecting the natural meaning of the word "day" in chapter 1. But these are two separate accounts! To tear a word out of the one context and use it to reinterpret something in a different context is not wise! Chapter 1 is definitely chronological, with the time element very present; specific events are described as happening within specifically-defined days. In contrast, the beginning sentence of

this section (in chapter 2) is *not* focused on chronology, but is merely presenting a brief summary of events - describing the preparation for the "introduction" of humans onto the scene.

Actually, in verse 2:4, it does *not* matter whether the word "day" is interpreted as referring to the first day of creation (Genesis 1:3-5) or to the entire period of creation, looked at as a unit. The resulting message is the same. Either way, there *no* need to use the word "day" in the *second* chapter, to "redefine" the events described in the *first* chapter.

Genesis 2:4-8

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made earth and heaven. Now no shrub of the field was yet in the earth, and no plant of the field had yet sprouted, for the LORD God had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no man to cultivate the ground. But a mist used to rise from the earth and water the whole surface of the ground. Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed.

The grammatical structure of the Hebrew seems to be somewhat difficult to translate - compare various translations - but the flow of thought in this introductory statement goes like this:

"On the day that" [= "when"] God created the earth (v. 4) ...
(a) certain things were *not* present (plants, rain, people - v. 5) ...
(b) and then he made certain things (mist or streams, the man, a garden - vs. 6-7+).

In the rest of the chapter, specific details are described, keeping in focus the creation of the man and the woman.

Some people try to find some type of "discrepancy" in the order of events in this "introductory statement," but they completely miss the point. This account does *not* say that on one specific day, something happened, and then on another specific day, something else happened.

So, what were things initially like in creation? Verse 5 tells us that there were no shrubs or plants yet present. Does this agree with Genesis 1? Yes! Now why were there no plants yet present? This account tells us that there was not yet a water source to enable them to grow. This would have been *after* dry land was formed (at the beginning of Day 3) - but before the plants were made (later in the day). The Genesis 1 account does not mention when the water source came into existence.

In addition to the absence of plants, there was also no one present to cultivate or take care of them.

But God takes care of these matters. First, he provides the water source that would be necessary for the plants (verse 6). Instead of "rain" (as in verse 5), verse 6 refers to a "mist" or "stream," depending on interpretation. God also formed the man who would take care of them (verse 7) - mentioned on Day 6, in Genesis 1. So far, there is nothing incompatible with the Genesis 1 account. (The specific details related to the creation of the man will be examined later.)

Genesis 2:8-14

Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground--trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now a river flowed out of Eden to water the garden; and from there it divided and became four rivers. The name of the first is Pishon; it flows around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold. The gold of that land is good; the bdellium and the onyx stone are there. The name of the second river is Gihon; it flows around the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris; it flows east of Assyria. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

God prepared a specific garden in which the man was to perform his tasks. The passage does *not* say time-wise when this was done. The word "planted" (in 2:8) is *not* the same as the words used in the Genesis 1 account of the third day ("produce" or "bring forth" - in 1:11-12). If this preparation of the garden was not done on the third day, it could have been done at a later time, with already-existing vegetation. As for the exact time sequence between the creation of the man and the formation of this special garden (or park), it can be interpreted either way - and translations differ. It doesn't matter, since the preparation of the garden did *not* have to occur on the third day.

This "garden" could have been very large - perhaps like a huge "nature park." It contained all sorts of fruit trees, along with two additional trees which had special significance. It was watered by a *river* that split into four rivers. This was not a little brook, and not the word that is translated as "mist" or "stream" in verse 6. Whether or not any of the rivers correspond with presently-existing rivers is unknown. If there is any correspondence, it would involve only the Tigris and the Euphrates Rivers.

After the preparation of the garden was complete, the man was put in it.

Now let's look at the creation of the man and the woman. Genesis 1 presents an "overview" of the event, whereas Genesis 2 describes the event in greater detail.

The account in Genesis 1 goes this way:

Genesis 1:26a, 27

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...

**So God created man in his own image,
in the image of God he created him;
male and female he created them.**

The Genesis 2 account goes this way:

Genesis 2:7

Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.

Genesis 2:18-24

Then the LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him."

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helper suitable for him.

So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.

The man said,

**"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."**

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Two words are used to describe this event: "create" (chapter 1) and "form" (chapter 2). Some would interpret this as a contradiction, claiming that the idea of "create" implies "something from nothing," whereas the idea of "form" implies "working with something that already exists"

(such as, a potter "forms" a jar out of clay). If we focus on how these words are used, however, we see that there is *no* contradiction, and that *both* accurately describe what happened. Each emphasizes a different aspect of that event.

It was *not* the body - the "material" aspect of man - that was "created" on the sixth day. The "dust" (from which man was "formed") was created on the *first* day... and then "put together" (or "formed") on the sixth day - just as chapter two says. *Only then* did the "creation" aspect begin!

So what was "created" out of nothing? It was the "immaterial" aspects of man that are described as being "created." Look again at 1:26. It was the aspect described as "the image of God" that is the focus of this passage. God created the man with a nature that would reflect *God's* nature and moral character. Man was also to rule over creation, as God's delegated authority - but under the rule of the Creator himself.

In chapter 2, we read about the man becoming "a living being," once the "breath of life" was breathed into the body that had been "formed." This, too, is part of the "immaterial" aspect that would have been "created."

The phrase "living being" is also used of some of the animals. Though they don't bear the "image of God" (which humans alone bear), they *do* have this immaterial aspect to them - and the word "create" is used in connection with it (1:27). In contrast, in chapter 2, where the *material* aspect of the animals is emphasized (verse 19), the word "formed" is used!

Verse 1:27 describes "man" as "male and female." (The concepts expressed in the verse's three poetic lines are parallel, all describing one basic idea, but in different ways.) But other than the "image of God" aspect, this passage gives very few details about the event. Chapter 2 describes this "male and female" aspect in greater detail - describing the way each came into existence (paralleling the phrase "male and female" in 1:27, line 3). It also describes their union as "one" (paralleling the word "man" in 1:27, line 1).

When God says, "**It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him**" (2:18), this does *not* indicate that God made a mistake, or that there was something "bad" in his work. This concept of "goodness" has to do with the *completeness* of the work. It simply indicates that the work was not yet finished. "Day 6" was not over yet!

What follows is something like an "object lesson." God gave the man the task of "naming" (describing the significance of) the animals, in order to reinforce in the man's mind his own need for a "suitable helper." As with the other parts of this account, the "time element" for the creation of animals is *not* mentioned. The text simply states that God *did* it, not that he did it at a certain time on "Day 6."

This having been accomplished, God formed the woman from part of the man, emphasizing the unity that was to be between them. The man understood the significance of all this. And just as he had previously "named" - that is, expressed the significance of - the animals, so he now expresses the significance of the woman:

Genesis 2:23

The man said,

**"This is now bone of my bones
and flesh of my flesh;
she shall be called 'woman,'
for she was taken out of man."**

This significance would have far-reaching ramifications for all generations to come:

Genesis 2:24

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

This is connected with the command in **Genesis 1:28**, "**Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth...**"

There were specific instructions regarding what man was to do in the garden.

Genesis 2:15

Then the LORD God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.

Genesis 2:19-20a

Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field...

Even before the woman was formed, the man had specific instructions (Genesis 2). First, he was to work with the garden. Second, he was to take care of it - to guard or protect it. (The Hebrew word has reference to the duty of a sentry or watchman.) [He failed to follow this second instruction in Genesis 3.] He was also to rule over the animals (see the verse below) and he demonstrated his rule over the animals, when he named them. [When he gave the animals names, he chose words that expressed their significance. This is not so obvious with names in the English language.]

More details about this task are given in chapter 1:

Genesis 1:26b, 28

Then God said, "... let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

Both the man and the woman, working as *one* (= united, as one flesh), and in complete cooperation, were to fulfill these responsibilities. They were to work with the things of creation - to understand them and to use them in a proper way. (The idea of "abusing" creation was not even thinkable at this time, before sin entered the world!) To accomplish this task worldwide, they would get additional help! They would "be fruitful and increase in number" (1:28), and other "man-woman units" (2:24) would share in the task.

The emphasis in the above verses (1:26b, 28) has to do with man's relationship to the animals. But plants also had a place and purpose.

Genesis 1:29-30

Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground--everything that has the breath of life in it--I give every green plant for food." And it was so.

Genesis 2:16-17

The LORD God commanded the man, saying, "From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you will surely die."

The word "every" (1:29) and the word "any" (2:16) are the same Hebrew word. The emphasis of this Hebrew word is on the *group*: the whole group of plants, etc., were given as food to the man and woman, and to the animals. Poisonous plants apparently did not have their poisonous characteristics, at that time. (This change would have most likely occurred after the man and the woman fell into sin - chapter 3.)

The word "every" or "any" does not exclude the possibility of an isolated instance of a plant being set apart for a specific purpose (2:17). Furthermore, the issue regarding the "forbidden" tree was not an "edibility" issue; it was a *moral* issue. (Would they be willing to trust and obey the God who created them?) And this restriction apparently applied only to humans - there was

no restriction given to the animals, regarding this tree! Had the man and woman *not* disobeyed and eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil when they did (chapter 3), it is always possible that later (having successfully resisted the serpent) they may have been granted permission to eat of it.

And so, this summarizes the creation of the man and the woman on the sixth day. Now all of God's creation work was done, and it was time to "rest" - to cease from the work of "creating."

Genesis 1:31-2:3

God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning--the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array. By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

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