

Genesis 2: Biblical Reading and Reflections

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 02 January 2020

Preacher: Alastair Roberts

[0 : 00] Genesis chapter 2 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done.

So God blessed the seventh day, and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation. These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created.

In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens. When no bush of the field was yet in the land, and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up, for the Lord God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground, and a mist was going up from the land and was watering the whole face of the ground, then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.

And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.

The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and there it divided and became four rivers.

[1 : 23] The name of the first is the Pishon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good. Bdellium and onyx stone are there.

The name of the second river is the Gihon. It is the one that flowed around the whole land of Cush. And the name of the third river is the Tigris, which flows east of Assyria.

And the fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Then the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone. I will make him a helper fit for him. Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them.

And whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field.

[2 : 34] But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man. And while he slept, took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.

And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man, he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.

She shall be called woman because she was taken out of man. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife and they shall become one flesh.

The man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. Genesis 2 begins with the establishment of the Sabbath. Now it might seem a little strange that the story of creation has seven days when the final day is a day of rest.

No creation seems to be done on that day at all. But when we look through the pattern of creation, what we see is that temporal patterns are a very important part of it. The first day is the establishment of a temporal pattern, the beat of evening and morning, as the light is separated from the darkness, the period of the day from the period of the night.

[3 : 49] On the fourth day, the middle day of creation, the sun, moon and stars are established for signs, for seasons, for days and for years. And all of these things have a significance beyond the initial work of creation.

What they do is they establish enduring patterns that will continue into the future. And in the seven day pattern, six days of work and one day of rest, God sets the pattern of the week for all the years that follow for the entirety of human history.

God does the work week first and then we're supposed to follow his pattern. The day, the year and the seasons, they've been entrusted to the sun, moon and the stars to maintain, but the Sabbath is implicitly given to man.

It's a cycle of labour and rest that belongs first to God, that characterises God's own activity and is then entrusted to man to uphold. It's also a day that is holy and set apart, a principle from which other holy days develop, as we'll see as we get into the law.

It's, in this sense, it's a principle of blessedness as well. It's a day that's been set apart as particularly blessed by God, as something that is a time of enjoyment of the good gifts of his creation, resting in our labours, not just working non-stop, but enjoying the fruits of our labours.

[5 : 09] These are the generations, as we see in Genesis chapter 2 verse 4. It's a common refrain in the book of Genesis. It's almost invariably used as a heading.

So you'll see key figures have a series of generations and then it begins a cycle of the story. And Matthew alludes to this at the beginning of his gospel, the book of the generation of Jesus Christ.

The question of whether Genesis 2 verse 4 is a heading for what follows or a summation of what preceded is not one that scholars are entirely settled upon.

It could, in fact, be both and maybe it's best to allow it to be open enough to include both of those possibilities. I'm inclined to take it, in some ways, as a heading primarily.

That it expresses these are the generations of the heavens and the earth. The generations of the heavens and the earth are the creatures of the earth, human beings and the animals that arise from the heavens and the earth.

[6 : 11] And the creation of man being the first great example as heaven, God's activity, and the earth, the dust taken from the earth and fashioned to a human frame.

These things brought together are what forms humanity. Many have argued that Genesis 2 gives us an alternative creation narrative.

It could perhaps be seen better as the street view to the satellite view of chapter 1. And if we read through chapter 2, we'll see a very similar pattern play out.

So first of all, we see this initial situation where things are formless and void. There's no one to till the ground. There's no real order upon the earth.

There's this indiscriminate body of water, this surge or this mist that's covering the whole face of the earth as the deep covered the whole face of the earth in chapter 1. And then, in the creation days, a similar pattern follows out.

[7 : 10] So the first day was the creation of light. The creation of light to rule the day and the night. And the first day of the new creation narrative is the creation of man, who is supposed, in some sense, to be the light of the world, to maintain moral standards, to provide light in that sense.

The second day is the division of the heaven from the earth, the waters above from the waters beneath with the establishment of the firmament. On the second day of the second account, God establishes a firmament garden, a realm in which he will walk in the midst of his people and provide a model for the way that the rest of the world should be.

On the third day, there is the creation of vegetation and the separation of land and sea. In the second account, we have waters going out from the garden, vegetation growing up, the lands being divided by these rivers that are going out.

And then on the fourth day, the lights are placed in the firmament, sun, moon and stars. And on the fourth day, as it were, the man is placed in the centre of the garden to rule and to divide, to divide between what should be eaten and what should not be eaten, the tree of life, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which should not be eaten from.

The fifth and sixth days, the animals and the fish are created and the animals are formed and brought to the man to name. And in the climactic action of the sixth day in the first creation account, humanity is formed.

[8 : 41] Here, the woman is formed. And so it's a very similar pattern playing out. And if we follow this pattern all the way through, what we end up with is that the establishment of the rest of marriage is something that is paralleled with God's own rest on the Sabbath.

As we go through the scripture, it would seem obvious that these things do go together. The final rest is described as a wedding feast, a bringing together a bride and bridegroom.

Now, the creation of the man is the creation of an Adam from the Adamah, an earthling from the earth. There is a connection between the two.

The Adamah is feminine and the Adam is masculine and one is formed from the other to have a particular duty to uphold and to serve the earth that he was born from.

Now, the Garden of Eden is a miniature world model. It's a training ground for labor in the wider world. God establishes a temporal pattern for man's labor in the sixth days of creation and the one day of rest, but he also establishes a spatial pattern.

[9 : 45] This one particular realm that's bounded off from the rest of the creation, it's a realm that has been tamed and domesticated, an order has been established within it. And this is the context within which man will learn how to act within the wider world.

The themes of the garden are also taken up in later sanctuaries, waters flowing out into the world, seven days of creation represented in the establishment of the tabernacle.

Many of the same words used. The serving and the guarding that the man is commissioned to do in the garden is the same task that is commissioned for the Levites. And so it's a sanctuary realm.

It's a realm where God is dwelling in the midst of his people. God walks in the midst of the garden. There are cherubim later on to guard the entrance to the garden, just as there are cherubim drawn or embroidered onto the certain of the curtains of the tabernacle.

And then you see other things that would connect the two, fruit trees and other images of garden in the temple and elsewhere. So the man is learning the task within the garden.

[10 : 58] He's learning the priestly task here. And then later on, he'll have to be a king within the wider world. God is teaching his son his trade. And then later he brings him a wife.

Adam names the creatures as God named his creations on days one to three. And the garden is just the beginning. The implicit message of Genesis chapter two is that man's labor will later on flow out into the entire wider creation.

The gold in the land of Havilah needs to be mined. It needs to be brought into the garden to dress up the garden and make it glorious, as we'll see at the very end of Revelation, where there's a garden city.

It's also a world of particular things, of trees, animals, men and women, particular lands and precious stones and rivers, each with their own meaning. Now we tend to think in terms of great big ideologies that are abstracted from reality, concrete reality.

But the story of Genesis is very much an on-the-ground story where specific particular things are charged with significance. And when we read this, it will make a bit more sense of why we have things like the sacrificial system in the book of Leviticus.

[12 : 07] It's working with the particular meanings of these variegated aspects of a diverse and beautiful creation where things are dancing with each other, where there are analogies between different levels of reality and connections and homologies, ways in which things are associated are governed by the same logic.

The woman is created because the man needs a helper. The man is particularly charged with heading up the mission. He's been given the task, he's created for the task of tilling the ground and he's commissioned with the task of upholding the order of the garden, the rule concerning the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

But the woman is not created as the man's sidekick or his understudy or his secretary. The statement that it's not good for the man to be alone isn't primarily about the man's subjective state of loneliness.

That this is a lonely bachelor who needs some company. No, it's about his insufficiency for the purpose for which God was establishing humanity. Mankind needs womankind and without man and woman together, they will not be able to form and fill the world as God has designed.

The woman needs to be not merely a helper, the animals can be helpers, but a true counterpart to the man, one that can stand alongside him as his equal, but yet one who is truly different from him.

[13 : 29] The man breaks forth in poetry when he sees the woman. Just as he was called the Adam in a way that connected him with the earth, the Adamah, now he recognises himself as man, Ish, when faced with woman, Ishah.

It's not primarily that we are individuals, but we are sexual persons. At the heart of humanity is a sort of magnetic polarity that is to be experienced as beautiful and good.

And the first time that was ever experienced, it elicited poetry. And within the story of Genesis, this provides the model of what is good about this relationship and this difference as well in relationship.

A man should leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife and they should become one flesh. Now later on in Ephesians 5, Paul says that this is a mystery, but it's about Christ and the church.

Now what he might be saying is not just that he's talking in that particular passage about Christ and the church, but that this statement in Genesis itself is anticipating something of the mission of Christ and the establishment of the church.

[14 : 37] So even in this statement concerning the establishment of marriage, it's already looking towards what Christ is going to accomplish, even before the fall, if this is the case.

And that is quite a startling and stunning statement and worth reflecting upon. Notice then the Sabbath themes as marriage and Sabbath are both periods of rest that are brought together in these same sort of patterns.

Some questions to think about. What is the significance of the deep sleep that God places Adam in? And also, why the change from referring to God as God in chapter 1 to speaking of him as Lord God or Yahweh God in chapter 2?