

GENESIS 2-3

2 VERSIONS OF THE CREATION STORY?

1) Chapter 1:1 - 2:4 is a doxology: a hymn of praise to the transcendent Creator and the good, created order. The stanzas of the hymn are seven 'days.' God's awesome power is expressed through language. 'Let there be,' and so it is, 'and God saw that it was good.' The portrait of creation is carefully crafted. The language is stately and measured. God brings order out of chaos, pushing back the primeval waters to make light, sky, and dry ground. Vegetation, fish, fowl, and other animals are called into being by God. The simultaneous creation of male - female 'in the image of God' is the finale of creation. Humanity is given 'dominion' or responsibility over all that is created, for better or worse, and the task of all creatures is to be fruitful and multiply. The majestic hymn ends with the establishment of Sabbath time, as a time to rest, step back, behold and enjoy the spectacular creation. Sabbath is the great 'Amen.'

Beginning in Chapter 2:4 by contrast, we step into a barren world, parched dry (vs. 5). The primeval stuff is dust (Hebrew - *adamah*) and the problem is not too much water, but too little. Springs rise up from below, clouds appear above, and an oasis is planted in the desert from which the rivers of life flow to the four corners of the earth. A human creature is formed (Hebrew - *adam*). They are patted into shape by God from the dust of the ground. God creates not by a magnificent word, but simply and by hand. The clay doll or earthling is animated by breath or spirit (*ruach*) of God blown into the human's nostrils (vs.7) To be alive is to have the breath, the spirit of God.

After 'the first day' it is the human who is created. Why? Because there is no one to till the ground, keep the garden, or tend the created order. And only after the human is created does the rest of creation take form, beginning with the trees and plants, and then followed by the animals of all kinds. Whereas in Chapter 1, human vocation is spoken in terms of dominion and responsibility before God, in Chapter 2 it is spoken in terms of stewardly care for the earth and all the living. Human beings are called to be gardeners of all life. In this 2nd creation story, the earth needs humans and is insufficient on its own. Not so with the first story in chapter one where it is all good in and of itself, and in no need of humans for its flourishing.

Also, God doesn't create male and female simultaneously (compared to the first account). First comes human (and presumably man after the second creature is created "out of man, and therefore, "woman"). The reason for woman is companionship and help to man. The positive message here is that humans are created with a need for each other. 'It is not good that man should be alone.' The negative message is that inequality and subordination of female to male is a possibility opened up. Chapter 1 clearly indicates that this is not the intention of God. Chapter 2 does not aim to promote this. Man is created out of dust and woman as a further extension of man out of dust.

Coming second doesn't have to imply subordination. But this is, in effect, what happens in human civilization as we will see when the curses are introduced in Chapter 3. The "fall" includes inequality, subordination, and hierarchy.

2) Chapter 2 and following, introduces the problem of evil. How do we account for the fact of evil in a world created beautiful and good? Out of all the trees that bear fruit, God tells humans not to eat of one tree. Why? This command sets up a limit for human beings and a boundary between God and humans. Humans are not God and cannot be God. The question is: can humans live within those limits and be content and fulfilled within the boundaries set for their life by God? Can they trust God? Can they accept their vulnerability? Can their dependence become interdependence rather than domination and control?

3) The answer to the above questions is no. Even though there is no devil mentioned in the story, the serpent enters the story as a creature which is shrewd and crafty. For the first time, we discover that human beings have freedom and choice. They can obey God, but they can also resist God and choose their own way. There is no necessity in eating from the fruit of the tree of good and evil. There is plenty of fruit to be found elsewhere. It has nothing to do with the things we do out of desperation or the need to survive. Rather, sin here is more like our need to control our own destiny and know for ourselves rather than trust another who may know better. Knowing for ourselves means losing our innocence and growing up, but it is also about our bid for autonomy, self-sufficiency, and seeking to be masters of our own fate.

Innocence is set over against the knowledge of good and evil. Innocence doesn't recognize evil, because it doesn't know anything else but what is as good in terms of the experience of life in creation. In order to know that something is specifically 'good,' there also has to be an awareness of evil which can deprive and damage that which is good.

Evil is also 'known' by personal and collective experience. Adam and Eve want to 'know' good and evil by standing above and beyond it like God. But they are not God. Thus, God has chosen a vocation for them that does not include that knowledge. But Adam and Eve cannot trust God's choice for them. As a result, eating the fruit leads to an awareness of good and evil. This 'knowledge' is deadly, for it leads to a loss of innocence. They are now ashamed, indicated by their awareness of their nakedness as well as their need to hide from God. With the knowledge and experience of evil comes the birth of conscience, the feeling of guilt and shame, and the desperate search for goodness again. But it is hard to shake the traumatic experience of evil and it is impossible to become innocent again.

Even freedom is seriously curtailed by the tendency to sin (committing evil). Humans have been mastered by what they thought they could master. They become addicted to

control because they want to escape their vulnerability. Instead of building relationships of mutual dependence and service, domination becomes the way, and this leads to isolation rather than connection. Fear of the other rather than the building of trust undermines genuine freedom.

Evil and death are twins. The experience of evil and committing evil can lead to death (sickness, injury, violence, murder, want, etc), untimely death in particular. Thus, death itself comes to be seen as a consequence of evil. As a result, the first humans must leave Eden. Besides the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is the tree of life, from which the first humans were free to eat in the garden. Eating of the tree of life would lead to immortality. That is the implication. Now, however, death and decay are a permanent part of their existence.

4) 'Knowledge' of good and evil leads to shame and hiding. When found out it leads to blaming others (Adam blames Eve) or blaming circumstances (Eve blames the snake), and a refusal to take responsibility. Only by taking responsibility and facing the consequences squarely (repentance) is there now the possibility for change and the possibility of renewal (forgiveness and atonement for injustice are now essential for any post-evil hope for new life). The grounds for the gospel are already being sown by the new reality of evil in the good creation.

5) The curses in Genesis 3 are ways of explaining things (i.e. snakes slithering on the ground, woman's special pain in child birth as well as her unfavourable subordination to males in society, human labour and toil in order to secure food to survive).

6) God continues to care for Adam and Eve even though their relationship is seriously compromised. This is indicated in that God 'clothes' them. The consequences of the mistrust between them, however, means that they have to leave Eden, and leave a life of natural abundance and immortality that would be theirs. Difficult relationships with the earth, its creatures and each other will make humans a liability God will have to figure out how to engage.

COMPARISON OF THE TWO CREATION ACCOUNTS

a) Genesis 1:1 – 2:4

- “Adam” from Hebrew *adamah* meaning “of the earth”. “Human” taken from latin *humus* also meaning “of the earth.” Adam is creature of the earth.
- Adam also male (*ish*) and female (*issa*).
- Adam also given power to name animals.
- Adam made in the image of God. What does this say about God? What does this say about earth creature? Is God non-binary male-female?
- purpose for sex given – procreative: “be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.”

b) Genesis 2:4 – 3:24

- In this account, Adam created first and Eve after, but (!) Adam initially asexual. Not created but “formed” from dust of the ground. God breathes into this ground formed creature and the creature comes to life.
- God creates woman “*issa*” out of Adam and only then is Adam describes as male “*ish*.” Gender distinction only comes to be when other is formed. Male and female simultaneously created and diversity is born.
- Purpose for sex given – unitive: “Therefore a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh.”
- No indication of superiority of male over female. Adam – male and female - has dominion over animals but not over woman. Each makes free choice about apple and tree. Both are cursed because of choice to break trust with God.
- Only when relationship with God broken and curses spoken does inequality between man and woman arise. Man is to “rule over” woman (3:16) and he “names” his wife Eve (3:20), which is a form of control. By naming her he reduces her to the status of animals he controls. Supremacy and subordination vs difference and co-operation. This is not part of original creation but a condition of sin.