

The Garden of Eden

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‘Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them’ (*Genesis 2.1*).

IT IS OFTEN claimed by those cynical toward the Bible that *Genesis 1* is contradicted by *Genesis 2*. Naturally, such claims find their way to the top of the web search engine lists, and if anyone Googles *Genesis*, or Adam or Eve, or creation, articles come up asserting various discrepancies.

But it is clear that these articles are not by people who read *Genesis* with any degree of care, because their claims are so obviously mistaken and easily refuted. *Genesis* is amazingly precise and consistent as narrative.

The writer remembers some fifty years ago going through the so-called discrepancies in *Genesis 1* and *2* with an older teenage Bible class, and here is a recommendation for readers with teen groups and college classes. It is a great theme as long as you do not make it too complicated and it shows how unfair and inaccurate criticisms of the Bible invariably are, indeed, how desperately unreasonable.

There were two trees in the midst of the Garden of Eden, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, or the tree of death. Puritan preachers used to point out that Satan’s preoccupation before the Fall was to persuade our first parents to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil so that they would surely die. And ever since, Satan’s chief occupation has been to persuade people *not* to eat of the tree of life. We may sum up all satanic activity in that simple picture.

With the completion of the sixth day of creation we read ‘Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them,’ meaning the stars and planets, plants and animals, or the ‘ornaments’ and ‘furniture’ as some have described them. ‘And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day.’ It is obvious that the creative work actually ended on the sixth day, the seventh being God’s so-called rest. He who does not need to rest, being eternally inexhaustible, rested in the sense that he ended his creation-from-nothing work, having produced a perfect world.

Six literal days

It is also clear that the six days of creation were literal 24-hour days, and seven New Testament texts, one the words of Christ, six the words of the apostle Paul, refer to creation as though accomplished over six literal days. So we are in no doubt, the Bible being its own interpreter, that they were six 24-hour days.

But we are moving directly to *Genesis 2.3* – ‘And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it: because that in it he had rested from all his work which God created and made.’ Here is the sabbath principle, where a day is perpetually made a blessed day, sanctified by God, meaning that it was set apart and declared to be special and holy. It became a day of favour, of privilege, and clearly a commemoration of creation.

Dedicated to worship

God obviously did not do this for his own benefit, for he does not dwell in time as we do, and needs no rest. The day was inaugurated for man's benefit, to be a day of rest from ordinary labours, dedicated to worship. If Adam and Eve had continued in blissful life cultivating the Garden, there would have been a sabbath rest every seventh day. In the event they fell, but God's creational ordinance continued, and we must assume that the earliest generations of mankind, certainly the godly, kept the Sabbath ordinance as a memorial of God's creation.

It was made written law from the time of Moses in the fourth commandment, being firmly linked to the original creation ordinance by the words, '*Remember* the sabbath day,' as though to say that it had always existed. It was an obligation from the very beginning for man to reflect and to have this day set aside for God, and so it continues throughout time.

When the apostles, surely by direct inspiration, began to meet for worship on the first day of the week (the day of resurrection), the day was changed from the seventh day of the week to the first, but the Sabbath principle remained.

Some years ago a prominent pastor came to see me, and during conversation suddenly said, almost defiantly, 'I am not a sabbatarian.' He rejected with some derision the notion of a sabbath principle, and the ongoing obligation of the fourth commandment. What a great shame for himself and for his church, because it is a *creation* ordinance for the benefit of God's people. At the time of Moses it acquired a significance which went beyond creation, including the commemoration of deliverance from Egypt. Redemption became a great part of it. In the New Testament, when the day changed to the first day of the week, it further acquired the commemoration of Calvary and the resurrection, an even greater redemption.

Proceeding to *Genesis* 2.4 we read – 'These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth.' Modern versions tend to lose the word 'generations', using alternative words such as, 'this is the history of', or 'this is the account of', but 'generations' is best. It is particularly important because this phrase is used ten times in *Genesis*, each occurrence introducing a fresh section of the historical record. Later we find, 'This is the book of the generations of Adam,' where the immediate descendants of Adam and Eve are chronicled. However, the first time it is used (*Genesis* 2.4) it reads, 'These are the generations of the heavens and of the earth,' meaning that the first section of *Genesis* records mainly what the earth (treated as if it were a parent) brings forth.

People who have no respect for the Bible have claimed that *Genesis* 1 is contradicted by *Genesis* 2, but they do not realise or notice that the second chapter (in verse 4) begins a new section of narrative furnishing fuller information than the summary account of creation in the first chapter.

When, for example, chapter 2 refers to 'the day' that God made the earth and the heavens, and 'every plant of the field', the record immediately makes it clear that plant life was not made on the same day as the earth and skies. It is foolish to claim that chapter 2 constitutes a revised version of the order of creation. One could spend much time answering these ill-informed criticisms, but our purpose here is to explore the sense of the passage.

Genesis 2.6 tells us 'there went up a mist from the earth,' (some translate it 'springs') 'and watered the whole face of the ground.' God watered the earth and then produced the plants from it. After that (on the sixth day) 'the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils

the breath of life; and man became a living soul.’ the Lord breathed into man something special that was not given to the animals. this is more than a reference to life and animation, for it describes the spiritual element of man.

The language of craftsmanship, revealing how God made everything with man in mind, continues in *Genesis 2.8*: ‘the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden.’ this geographical reference shows that there was a time when people could determine where the Garden of Eden had been. Perhaps the flood obliterated all trace of it. today, some think it was in Iraq, others elsewhere, but long ago, there was a definite place: ‘eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed.’ The word ‘formed’ is a craftsman’s term, and we may note the words that follow: ‘out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.’ It is all done for the human race.

When man was put into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it, he did not have to work in a way that was onerous or difficult for him. Hard labour came later with the curse (chapter 3.19). Before man’s fall it was pleasure and delight, activity that engaged his best capacities and abilities. We can only imagine a form of creative gardening with no chores or negative aspects, no deterioration and decay, and no unwanted invasive weeds, so that all was fulfilling, enjoyable, constructive and astonishingly beautiful.

We observe that even in the ideal environment of Paradise, man was appointed to ‘work’. Before the fall, the application of man’s powers and gifts was God’s purpose for him. He was and still is constituted to be active in purposeful work, today in both secular and church life. Inactive churches are unfulfilled and unbalanced, as well as unblessed. We are made for productive serving in every sphere of our lives.

The test of man

Our attention is instantly engaged by the pivotal words of *Genesis 2.16-17*, where a great test is laid upon the first man and woman, God sanctioning every delightful fruit for his enjoyment with the single exception of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is rightly seen as a covenant between God and man, with God freely giving so much to man (life, home, happiness, food and purpose), and man for his part being required to obey God. The obedience was the easiest kind, because Adam was not asked to accomplish anything difficult, but only to desist from doing one thing that he had no need to do. For his happiness he did not *need* the knowledge of good and evil.

In other words, the only duty for man was that he should not be hostile to the will of God, or oppose him. He would have every wonderful thing, while he trusted the Lord and observed the one prohibition in a Garden of magnificent provisions.

Not only was the duty given to man easy and light, but the warning against disobedience was frighteningly severe, ‘But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.’ Later, in *Genesis 3*, will come the Fall, when man died in a number of respects. His sense of fulfilment ended, his perfect happiness was lost, his intimate communion with God disappeared, his status before God withered, his eternal blessedness fled, and his security perished. Death rushed in, bringing spiritual death and beginning the process of death in his body.

Before tracing man's Fall, we are told of the entry into the Garden of the first woman. First – *Genesis* 2.19 – there is the naming of the animals, whether the principal representatives of each species, or more, or just those which would be encountered in the Garden, is a matter of debate. They were brought, and Adam named them. There were no predators in that perfect place, no claws adapted for aggression, no gaping jaws or venom, but all creatures were docile before the first man. He is seen in the naming of animals as an astute thinker and student of zoology. As master of creation he is able to categorise the animals, naming them surely in accordance with their distinctive features.

But among the animals there was no companion fit for Adam. Not that he was looking for such a helper from among the animals, as it was undoubtedly clear to him that he was their lord, and considerably greater than they. But as he studies the animals and takes note of their powers and beauty, it becomes increasingly obvious to him that he is alone, without a worthy earthly friend. His loneliness would not have been a source of grief, for God had given him perfect happiness, but it may well have been apparent to him that God intended a further provision, far more wonderful, someone equal to himself.

We may ask – why did the Lord make Eve from Adam's side, and not from the dust of the earth, just as he had made the man? Adam knew the reason at once, describing Eve as, 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh'. She was essentially the same as himself, although given a different body and calling. Adam no doubt felt the 'one flesh' concept of mutual belonging and devotion conveyed by the manner of Eve's making.

Equal recipient

Adam came first, and Eve was made his helper indicating his primacy of place. But Eve was not then so subordinate to him as she became after the Fall when God made a greater difference between them, her desire being 'to her husband', and he having 'rule' over her. But from the beginning she was clearly his counterpart; a 'helper-meet', and an equal recipient of the commission to rule earth and beasts. The creation of man was not complete until the woman was formed, then together they constituted mankind. He possessed powers and gifts that she did not have, and she possessed powers and gifts that he lacked. This was true not only in the obvious matter of ability to bear children, but in many other respects also. While after the Fall there would be male headship in church and family, in marriage men and women are mutually dependent contributors giving mutual value and respect. They need each other, and should never lose sight of this. Although he is to be the head of the union, he must always consider her, taking account of her views, insights and feelings, and being unfailingly sensitive, kind and careful in so doing.

Some cultures in the world (and some Christians) get it all wrong, because they make the man not only dominant, but superior and special. He may be rough, unkind and dismissive of her, decrying her feelings and views as inadequate and inconsequential. He is absolute ruler, an attitude utterly out of line with 'bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh'. There is no sign of mutual calling and belonging. It is an ignorant and arrogant concept of manhood. In some American groups that claim to emphasise marriage and family matters there is the nonsensical teaching that the husband is Christ's direct representative on earth over his wife, and that she must obey him as if he were the Lord and his dictates *are* the Lord's word to her. It is based on inept exegesis and a marked lack of sanctification.

The words 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh' (verse 24) appear to be the inspired words of Moses, inserting a principle

into the narrative. Not only do these words institute marriage between one man and one woman, but they also direct that we should never behave as though the bond between parent and child is greater than the bond between husband and wife. Yet some do. Some parents intrude into and dominate the marital union of their children, against the law of God.

New relationship before God

Marriage creates a new union, and a new unit, and parents should stand back. Parents may give advice and help discreetly, but there is now a new relationship before God. Once again, in some cultures a family council may be summoned and impose upon a married couple the will of the wider family, but that is not in accordance with scripture. In all cultures there is good and bad, and wherever social culture conflicts with God's Word we decline to follow it.

Adam and Eve, we are told, were naked and unashamed, because shame did not come until the fall, and sin. shame is the humiliation produced by guilt or inadequacy or foolishness, or loss of dignity. shame for sin is generated from the conscience. shamelessness, which is due to a hardened, calloused conscience, gives license to coarseness and lewdness. It emboldens people to believe that lust and abandonment of refinement are our right and we are entitled to express them. shamelessness, as promoted by the media today, is rebellion against standards of decency and refinement, and the rejection of inhibitions. Believers should never yield to the moral abandon of today's society, in underdressing, for example, for it is part of the world's campaign to get rid of the conscience – the God-given monitor of the heart, the warning system of shame and embarrassment.

Genesis 2 describes the completion of creation, the sabbath principle, man's appointment to work, the Garden of Paradise, the test of obedience (or covenant of works), the forbidden fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the gift of the woman alongside man in the institution of marriage. All these foundational concepts are set in the most marvellous 'mansion' ever built, the Garden of Eden, the divinely provided home of Adam and Eve.