

Genesis - Chapter 2

Throughout the history of Christianity this chapter has been understood to be the second account of creation. In some ways this is a bit misleading. It is misleading because it is not so much an account of creation as it is an account of the purpose and place human beings have in God's created order.

When the story opens, the earth and the heavens are already created, just not decorated, meaning there are no plants or animals. There hasn't been any rain, though there is a stream coming from inside the earth to water it. It is at this point that God creates "man." God creates Adam from the dust, as his name implies (Adam is derived from "*adamah*," or earth in Hebrew). The image of being made from "dust" can also be translated as being made from "mud" or "clay." If we choose dust, this will remind us that we are all dust; from dust we have come and to dust we shall return (as we say on Maundy Thursday). If we move toward mud or clay then we are depicted as living beings that God shapes to God's own desires; God is the potter and we are the clay. Either way we are intimately tied to the earth itself since that was our origin.

God next breathes into Adam. Though many people want to see this "breath" as the gift that separates us from the animals, it does not (Genesis 7:5 tells us that animals also contain the breath of life). It is merely God's animating force which separates animals from the rest of the created order. Thus, we mud-people are not only intimately tied to the earth, but we are tied to all animals because we share the breath of life.

It is only at this point that God begins to decorate creation. God plants a garden and fills it with everything that man needs for sustenance and beauty, but not as we shall discover, for companionship. Included in the garden are two trees. These are the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God makes it clear that while Adam may eat the fruit of any tree, including the tree of life, he may not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This command has long puzzled readers. Why would God not want human beings to know the difference between good and evil? The answer is never fully explained, but can be inferred by what happens in chapter 3. In addition, man is given the task of caring for the garden. He is to till and keep it (2:15).

The next step in the evolution of the story is that God decides that it is not good "*that man should be alone*" (2:18). Man is somehow incomplete, evidently having been designed for community rather than for a solitary existence. God tries out all the animals, which Adam names, as companions, but none quite fills the bill. God then puts the man to sleep and out of man, forms woman. Adam immediately understands the significance of this event. He and the woman are one. They are equal. They are bone of bone and flesh of flesh. This part of the story closes with the declaration that husbands and wives become one flesh and that the pair were naked and not ashamed.

This chapter offers us several insights beyond those already mentioned. The first is that human beings can live together in harmony; that there need not be anger, hatred or jealousy. Second, that human beings can have an intimate experience of a loving God who provides for them. Third, that God desires human beings to enjoy all aspects of God's creation.

Questions:

1. What insights do you draw from the description of humans being made from dust or mud?
2. How do you understand the relationship between human beings and creation? Why?
3. What would your perfect world look like? Why?