

Exegetical Notes – Genesis 2:4-17

“Man”

Prepared by Charles H. Jensen for Cornerstone Fellowship

101 Kylies Road, Coatesville, PA 19320

610-384-1375

charleshjensen@aol.com

Having answered the first question that the Book of Genesis asks, “Whose world is it anyway,” by affirming that we live in God’s world because God made it, Genesis addresses the process by which God created (see the introduction to Genesis which accompanies the Exegetical Notes for Genesis 1:1-2 for a fuller explanation of the three questions that Genesis asks).

Genesis 2:4-17

Having given an account of the full process of how God created the heavens and the earth in Genesis 1:3-2:3, the Bible now gives a fuller account of the events which happened on day six of creation, and, in particular, the creation of human kind.

Verses 4-7

This is the account of the heavens and the earth when they were created, when the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.⁵ Now no shrub had yet appeared on the earth and no plant had yet sprung up, for the LORD God had not sent rain on the earth and there was no one to work the ground,⁶ but streams came up from the earth and watered the whole surface of the ground.⁷ Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

- This “account” of the events of creation summarizes the events of the first five days of the creation process into one sentence. God created the heavens and the earth. He caused dry land to appear and plants to appear on it. He provided streams to water the plants. These streams watered the earth to support life but there was no rain until after the fall (see Genesis 3). There was no one to work or care for the earth.

- Then God “formed” man, meaning a male human being. The word translated “formed” is the Hebrew word which describes the work of a potter.
- God made man from the “dust of the earth.” Man is literally made from what God has created. Everything else is made from God’s command. God simply commands it to be, and it is. However, man is distinct. He is fashioned from creation itself by God.
- Then God breathed life into the man he had created. God blew life into man. It is a personal and distinct act. The Bible does not say that God breathed life into any other creature. The Bible wants us to understand that man is made differently from everything else by the way he was created. Man is distinct and different from everything else because he was made in the image of God (see Genesis 1:26).

Verses 8-14

⁸ Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ A river watering the garden flowed from Eden; from there it was separated into four headwaters. ¹¹ The name of the first is the Pishon; it winds through the entire land of Havilah, where there is gold. ¹² (The gold of that land is good; aromatic resin and onyx are also there.) ¹³ The name of the second river is the Gihon; it winds through the entire land of Cush. ¹⁴ The name of the third river is the Tigris; it runs along the east side of Ashur. And the fourth river is the Euphrates.

- God had prepared the place where the man would live. It was a garden named Eden. “Eden” is derived from the Hebrew word which means delightful and/or from the Mesopotamian word which means plain or flat. It was a delightful, pleasant, flat place. The Garden was located between four rivers, The Pishon (unknown to us today), the Gihon (unknown to us today), and the Tigris, and the Euphrates. Since two of these rivers are entirely unknown to us, it is impossible to locate the exact spot where Eden was located prior to the fall. The description of its location is given to establish it as historical fact. It did exist and it existed in this place.
- In the center of the Garden were two special trees: the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Verses 15-17

¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷ but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

- God put the man in the garden. Unlike any other creature, man was given a purpose. He was to work the garden and take care of it.
- Man was also given a clear and specific command. He was free to eat from any tree in the garden except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. That tree was forbidden to him by God’s command. Man was told that when, not if, he ate the fruit of that tree, he would die. There is a certain and specific consequence attached to the command. When, not if, man violated God’s command, death would become a reality. Prior to that time, death did not exist.

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