

What about Adam?

But...there is more. There is a story about a man and a woman in a garden, and some very significant, unfortunate events that occurred there. There is, in fact, another whole creation account. It starts in Genesis 2:4, where it says

“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.”

We can see that now we have not only a new account, but a new human author. The differences are fairly obvious. We begin not with a summary of future actions, but with a pointer to the account itself. This phrase, *“these are the generations...”* is used frequently in the remainder of Genesis to begin an account of some period of history. Another difference is that when God is spoken of here, the word used is not Elohim as before, but Yahweh Elohim, which in the ESV, and other English versions is translated as Lord God. Not only that, but this first sentence tells us, surprisingly, that we are going to hear about the creation of the heavens and the earth. Surprisingly, because we have just left God resting after having done just that. This is clearly a new account, not a continuation.

Immediately we also feel we are reading a different genre. This is not the direct telling of facts that we found in Genesis 1. Here we are given a setting where events can take place, rather in the way a writer will describe the setting for a story. We are told that there were no bushes, and no small wild plants, because God had not made it rain, even though a mist was watering everything, and also there was no man to work the ground. God remedied this last problem immediately, by making a man out of dust and blowing into his nostrils the breath of life. After the man is made from the stuff of the earth and invested with God's own breath, God makes a place to put the man. He planted a garden in Eden and put the man in it. Then God made trees, “every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.” These included the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden.

Many things make us wonder if this garden is a real place on the earth, or if it exists only in this text. We are familiar with trees that bear various kinds of fruit,

but what is a tree of life? What is a tree of the knowledge of anything? Also, the location of the garden is somewhat mysterious. It is near four rivers; one river is the Pishon, the second is the Gihon, and the location of neither of these is known. But the third and fourth are the Tigris and Euphrates, both very well-known and important in early human civilization. God put the man in the garden “to work it and keep it.” He told the man he could eat freely of the trees in the garden, except of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If he ate of this one, he would die. So in the company of God, and in a beautiful garden, with a deadly tree in its midst, the man’s life began. Right away, God saw that there was a problem.

It wasn’t good for the man to be alone. God had made all the animals out of the ground, as he had made Adam, but without God’s breath, as far as we know, and he brought these animals to Adam, who named them, but none of them was a suitable mate for Adam. It is notable that the word for Adam’s mate is translated as “helper.” The Hebrew word is “ezer,” used elsewhere for “ally,” even in some cases where that ally is God. Why should it be translated here as “helper”? Perhaps our translations need an update. Since Adam’s ally has not been found among the animals, God makes a woman from Adam’s own flesh, from his side. The location from which she is taken is appropriate since she will stand beside him. The man recognized that she was part of him, “bone of my bones,” and gave her a name that would remind him of this.

The next two sentences are filled with meaning. First, we are informed that these events, the making of the woman from a part of the man, is the reason that men do something that we might otherwise find strange. Men leave their own families and form a new family with a woman. The closeness of these two people is the center of new families. The next sentence tells us that these two people were naked, something we might not have assumed. And they were not concerned about this matter. Their bodies are not something to be hidden or worried about. This state of grace is something that humans have lost. All cultures wear clothing, however scanty or strange. There is much significance in this. Regardless of how beautiful the human body is, it is routinely hidden. It is the one trait that humans do not share with animals to any degree.

Now a new character is introduced into the story. This is a surprising character indeed. It is a serpent, a reptile, who is very “crafty,” beyond any other beast that God had made. With this animal we have clearly left the realm of natural history. This animal speaks. It wastes no time, but addresses the woman and asks her about God’s instructions for life in the garden. Has God restricted eating from the trees of the garden? The woman knows the answer to that, and she tells the creature that she and the man may eat of the fruit of any of the trees but for one. There is one tree that if they eat from it, they will die. The serpent immediately contradicts God by saying that, no they won’t die. In fact if they eat of this tree they will become like God, knowing good and evil. The woman believes what the serpent tells her. She found the fruit in question pleasing to look at, and since it would make them wiser, she took some of it and handed some to the man. The man was right there with her, and although he had listened to her repeat God’s warning, had said nothing when the serpent called God a liar. As soon as they ate the fruit, they saw their bodies, naked, and quickly did what they could with leaves to cover themselves.

Later, when the two humans heard God “walking in the garden in the cool of the day,” they hid among the trees. It is interesting that God walked in the garden. He apparently kept company with the humans on a regular basis. But this time he doesn’t find them in their usual location. He calls for them. The man answers that he was afraid because he was naked and hid. God knows immediately what has happened and asks about it. The man blames the woman who handed him the fruit, and subtly blames God for having made her for him. God asks the woman what she has done and she blames the serpent, who deceived her.

There is no discussion, no pleading; God simply curses those involved. The serpent will hereafter crawl on his belly and have his face in the dust; snakes and humans will be enemies, and speaking of the woman’s offspring, God says that “he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Turning to the woman God says that he will increase her pain in childbirth; yet she will desire her husband and he will rule her. Pain in childbirth is familiar to us; it is common and it varies greatly from woman to woman. But the question of her desire for her man, and his ruling over her is the basis of much discussion and much

misunderstanding. It is used by many fundamentalist and evangelical Christians to justify their view that the man is to be the leader of the home and that the woman must be submissive to him, and obey him. This is an easy way to read the passage, but it fails to reflect the context in which it occurs. We are not talking here about household dynamics or male-female relations. We are talking about the bearing of children. The Hebrew word involved means “longing;” your longing will be for your husband. The woman might avoid the pain of childbearing if she stays away from the man, but this will be hard to do because she will long for him, she will desire him. When I was quite young, I wondered at the fact that men caused women all sorts of difficulties, not the least of which was pregnancy; and yet women loved men, wanted men, found men irresistible. How could this be? On reading this passage I saw that God not only knew about this craziness in women, but designed it. The remainder of the sentence speaks of the man ruling the woman. When a woman desires a man, she allows herself to be easily ruled. But even in those cases in which the woman resists the man, he will still be able to overrule her and produce pregnancy because of his generally greater strength. By whatever means, children will be born.

Next, the man is cursed. If children are to be born, if the man is to have a family, he will have to provide the resources that are needed to care for helpless children for many years. God points out that the man heard his wife repeat the restriction against eating the fruit, which are the only words that the woman has spoken, and yet he ate it. As she will have pain in producing children, he will have pain in producing the resources that he and these children will need. He will be forced to work, and his work will not be easy; he will eat by the sweat of his face until he dies. The penalties are harsh, but God’s rejection of this pair is not total. He shows mercy to them by making, from skins, clothing to cover their now shameful bodies. Then, to prevent Adam from taking from the tree of life, God sent him out of the garden to “work the ground from which he was taken.” It seems that Adam was not made from the soil of the garden. A cherubim and a flaming sword guard the way to the tree of life.

What are we to make of this second creation story?

Is it factual history? Is it myth? We are given conflicting signals. Two of the rivers that locate the garden are known rivers, the other two appear only here in Genesis 2. God does not speak man into existence, but forms his body out of earth and then, with his own breath, blows life into him. This is the kind of thing that happens in fairy tales. The narrative is interrupted in order to explain to us that the close relationship between the man and woman is the reason that men marry. This kind of explanation is the sort of thing that happens in fables. Then we are told about their nakedness and unconcern about their bodies, and we share with them a feeling of freedom and delight in their happiness. Next, we are introduced to a new character in the story and it is a talking serpent. We know (and both the human and divine authors knew) that animals do not talk. When animals talk, we are no longer in standard, realistic reporting, and we know that we cannot take what we are reading strictly literally. But what this animal says and the results of this speech are devastating. This is no children's tale. Adam and Eve eat the fruit they were told to leave alone and everything changes. God removes them from the garden and their happiness is lost. Certainly no God worth the name is this jealous of a piece of fruit. The fruit must represent something else that we cannot see, something of immense importance in the relationship between God and humans, and the taking of it represents something that destroys this relationship. Before the humans' betrayal, their relationship with God was easy. God walked in the garden where the humans lived. Later in Scripture, Jesus tells us that God is spirit. If God is spirit, he lives in the spiritual realm, and the humans must have lived there too. When he sent them out of the garden, did God send them out of the spiritual realm and into the physical realm? Is having bodies and living in the physical world where we cannot see God the penalty for our betrayal of God while we were yet spirit beings? What was that betrayal? The identity of the serpent may give us a clue. In trusting the serpent, Adam and Eve decided to trust this strange creature who was so bold as to contradict God and question his motives. Were they, in doing this, siding with a being who was God's adversary? Often when a tragedy has occurred and one needs to explain it to tender children, we use a story to help them understand the painful parts of it. Genesis 2-3 sounds very much like this kind of story.

Genesis 2-3 provides answers to a number of questions. Why is it that we cannot see God? Because we were sent out of the spiritual realm where we can no longer see or hear spirit beings. What is original sin, that sin that we are all born with? It is our betrayal of God, which we all did while we were still in spirit form, and carried the name of Adam; and it continues in the urges and instincts that come with our physical body, the body that we inherit from our physical forebears. In what way are we in the image of God? We carry his spirit, the spirit that makes us alive; we are not physical creatures only. Why do humans wear clothes? And why is it the only trait that we do not share with animals? We somehow sense that having a body is the result of having betrayed God. Not that having bodies is an experience of unmitigated pain or sadness. God gave us garments to cover ourselves, and he gives us innumerable gifts in the physical realm to show his love and to encourage us: sunlight on snowy fields, the songs of birds, sunsets and sunrises. He has mercifully filled the world with these reminders of himself. Why is there suffering and pain? This world was not made to be a vacation. It is more nearly a school with a rigorous curriculum. The curses are real; women die in childbirth, men die on their jobs, and snakes do not have legs. Archeologists have found older and older fossils of snakes and the oldest fossils show vestigial legs. Somehow these legs were lost. This cannot be a coincidence. It is also no coincidence that, by studying our DNA, our lineage can be traced back to one woman from whom we have all descended. We can also find a man from whom we all descended. These two were not a couple, and it is not possible that we all descended from one pair of humans. If we had, our DNA would look quite different from the way it does. But it does feel as if in some way we have found both Eve, the mother of all living, and Adam.

Genesis 2-3 is not history, but it is something like history, quasi-history; it is *as if* it happened, although it did not. As-if history. It is the explanation that God has given us to let us know who he is and who we are, and how we are related. We should not make more of it than it is, and we should cherish every word of it, and all it teaches us, as we would cherish a mother's love.

Soli Deo Gloria