

Genesis 2:4-24 — Foundations Lesson for October 7, 2018

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[**Note:** This document is the speaker's note for Foundations teaching. Since it wasn't originally prepared for publication, it is lacking footnotes to commentaries and other sources. It may be incomplete in some places.]

Introduction

Last week, in Genesis 1, Moses presented a grand picture of God creating the heavens and the earth. The drama moved from “formless and void” to a state of sanctified rest. He gave his image bearers authority to rule as his representatives. God created humans to be *royal sons, kings with dominion*. Thus, God created a *kingdom*.

Genesis 2:4-25 zooms-in on Day 6 of the creation week—“**the day that the LORD God made the earth and heavens.**” We will witness the creation of the first man, tasked with special responsibility. We step inside sacred space, a garden planted by the LORD God. We encounter the first crisis in creation—something is “not good!” We meet the first woman, the helper created to serve with the man in a special way.

2:4 — “These are the generations of...” This refrain will introduce several sections of Genesis (5:1; 6:9; 10:1; 11:10,27; 25:12,19; 36:1,9; 37:2). Each time, it announces the subject of the material to follow. Here we read the beginning of “the heavens and the earth.” The history of the created universe will unfold from the man and the woman created here.

“**...In the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens.**” Moses reverses the usual pattern (“the heavens and the earth”). “The earth and the heavens” signals a change in perspective. Genesis 1 looked at creation, beginning from the heavens and working down. Genesis 2 focuses on the earth, zooming-in on the sixth day and the creation of man.

“**The LORD God**” — “Yahweh” (“the LORD” in many English translations) is the personal name that God reveals to Moses. It is the covenant name of Israel's God. Genesis 1 only used the word God. In chapter 2, Moses uses the compound name “Yahweh God” twenty times. (Moses uses this compound name only one other time; Exodus 9:30.) This condensed usage highlights the personal relationship Yahweh intends to have with mankind. The cosmic perspective of Genesis 1 gives way to a local focus in Genesis 2. The lofty transcendence of God is now complemented by a personal, immanent perspective.

This opening verse reminded Israel of their God, Yahweh. This is the God who brought man out of the dust, entered into a covenant with him, and place him in a land prepared for him. This is the same God who brought them out of Egypt, entered a covenant with them at Sinai, and was bringing them to a land prepared for them. It reminds us—new creatures through a New Covenant in Jesus—that this is our God. He is bringing us to a New Heavens and a New Earth.

2:5-6 — Here, Moses describes the general state of the land before the creation of mankind and the fall into sin. This does not contradict Genesis 1:11-12, in which God calls forth vegetation. Seed-yielding and fruit-bearing, those plants were self-propagating—neither weed nor cultivated plant-life. “Bush of the field” refers to inedible vegetation (used in 21:14 to refer to a bush that grows in the wilderness). “Small plant of the field” refers to edible, cultivated vegetation (see 3:18).

This verse anticipates the plant life referred to in the curse Genesis 3:17-19. After the fall, inedible “thorns and thistles” will grow. Man will eat plants of the field, cultivated through hard labor. Without man's sin and work, these plants do not yet grow.

5b-6 informs us of how the land was irrigated. Rain has not yet been sent (there is no mention of rain until the flood in Genesis 7). Some sort of water source rose up from the ground and spread over the face of the ground. This may refer to the four river heads that find their source in Eden's river. It may also refer to a disordered water system (similar to the waters of early Genesis 1), which man must subdue and exercise dominion over.

7 — In the creation of the first man, Moses depicts God as a potter, crafting a vessel from mud (loose earth, dust). The Hebrew word for man (*adam*) sounds like the word for dust (*adamah*). His origin in dust does not imply that he is inferior to, subordinate to, or lesser in value than dirt. He is in the image and likeness of God.

Man will not live by dust alone, but by the very breath that proceeds from God. God's breath is necessary for life. This would remind Israel that their life depends on the word of God (Deuteronomy 32:47). In exile, this picture brings hope. God can breathe life into dry bones (Ezekiel 37:9-10).

8 — “The LORD God planted a garden...” — In Iowa, a “garden” might be a tilled patch of earth in which we grow tomatoes and beans or roses and lilies. In the ancient Near East, a garden was a large, enclosed, and protected area, filled with floral life and trees. Often connected to a palace, such an oasis displayed the king's dominion over nature. It served as a place he could go to enjoy rest (see Ecclesiastes 2:4-6; Esther 1:5; 7:7-8). Scripture refers to the garden in Eden as “the Garden of Yahweh” (Genesis 13:10; Isaiah 51:3). It is “the Garden of God” (Ezekiel 28:12; 31:9). The Garden belongs to the LORD God; man has a special role within it.

9 — The LORD God causes a variety of beautiful, food-bearing trees to God (he is not stingy!). Moses highlights two. He says little of “the tree of life,” though it appears to grant endless life as long as one has access to its fruit (see 3:22). The “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” will have an important role in the next chapter.

10-14 — “Eden” is the name for a territory of land, in the east of which God will plant a garden. The description of Eden to follow portrays a paradise. It is rich with precious stones and metals, aromatic resins, and an abundant water source.

Eden appears as elevated land (a mountain), as four rivers flow down from it and water the rest of the earth. Ancient Near Eastern religions often considered mountains sacred space. They were a meeting point between heaven and earth, a place where God met with mankind. (As you read Genesis and the rest of the Bible, see what role "high places" play in worship—both of Yahweh and of false gods.)

Moses may present Eden as the dwelling place of God on earth. The garden serves as the sanctuary in which he walks with mankind.

Eden and the garden have similarities to Israel's tabernacle and temple:

- **A pleasant, fruitful garden (2:9)** — 1 Kings 6:18, 29, 32, 7:18-26, 42, 49
- **A special tree (2:9; 3:22)** — Exodus 25:31-35
- **A river flows out, source of water and life for all the earth around it (2:10-14)** — Ezk 47:1-12
- **A mountain (2:9; rivers flowing out of Eden suggest an elevated height)** — Ex 15:17; Ps 78:54
- **Noteworthy gold (2:11-12)** — Exodus 25:3, 11-13, 17-18, 24, 28-29, 31, 38-39
- **Onyx (2:12)** — Exodus 25:7; 28:9, 20; 35:9, 27; 39:6, 13; 1 Chronicles 29:2
- **Bdellium (2:12; a fragrant gum resin related to myrrh)** — Num 11:7 (Ex 16:31-33; Heb 9:4)
- **God assigned a person to "serve it and keep it" (2:15)** — Numbers 3:7
- **God gives his commandment from there (2:16-17)** — Exodus 25:22
- **God is present and walks here (3:8)** — Ex 25:8; Lev 26:11-12; Deut 23:14; 2 Samuel 7:6
- **Entered from the East (3:24)** — Numbers 3:38; Ezekiel 8:16; 41:14; 42:15; 43:4; 47:1
- **Guarded by cherubim (3:24)** — Exodus 25:18-22; 26:31-33; 1 Kings 6:23-35

This suggests that the garden is a sanctuary. (It is possible that the whole heavens and earth are as Yahweh's temple. Eden is his Holy of Holies, the Garden is his inner courts where the priests serve, and the earth is the outer courts.) It was here, in his sanctuary, that priests would serve God, who would dwell and walk with his people.

Eden-like terms describe the Promised Land—and the New Earth. It is a land "flowing with milk and honey," prepared by God, in which he will walk with his people.

The garden in Eden does not point forward to Israel's tabernacle and temple. These point back to Eden. They remind the reader that God intends to redeem and restore what was lost—and to do it in global proportions.

We've noted the use of the covenant **name**, "**Yahweh**," for God. This name reminds us of the special **relationship** God has with his people (**covenant**). It recalls the special **place** he meets with them (**sanctuary**), which we've seen Eden to be.

Next we will see two more aspects of that special relationship: a special task (**priesthood**) and special instruction (**law**).

15 — God placed man in the garden "to work and to keep it." "**Work**," which means to "serve" or "minister" is often used of man's service of God (Ex 3:12 8:1, 20; 9:1, 13; 38:21; 39:32, 42). "**Keep**" ("tend" / "guard" / "protect," "take care of," "obey") often refers to care for the tabernacle and God's word (Gen 3:24 KJV; Ex 17:9; 18:19; Num 1:53).

The words occur as a close pair only in Numbers 3:7-8 and 8:25-26 of priestly service in the tabernacle. **God put man in the garden to serve a priestly role** (to worship God through fulfilling his mandate)

16-17 — In the midst of abundant provision, there is only one thing off limits—“the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Trespassing this command (“law”) will bring a sure and sudden death.

In the Bible, God will relate to his people through an unfolding series of covenants. A simple definition of “covenant” is a solemn agreement between two parties. It establishes their relationship and defines their obligations. Covenants are often marked by a “sign.” They also include “instruction” (*Torah*, “law”) to inform the behavior of the lesser party. They often include “blessings” and “curses” for obedience and disobedience. **There seems to be good evidence that God made covenant with Adam—a covenant that depends on Adam’s obedience (a covenant of works).**

Looking Beyond Genesis

Let’s think about **Israel**, the original audience to which Moses wrote.

Exod. 19:5-6 — Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’

These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.”

In what ways was Israel to be a second Adam? How was the Promised Land and temple like a second Garden of Eden?

We observed how the LORD God built a garden sanctuary and then placed a man in it to function as a priest. **The context is one of worship.**

Think back to our study of Genesis 1-2:3 in week one. Recall that this week’s passage is an up-close look at Day 6. **This reminds us that worship is the goal of all creation—**God created this world to get glory as his image bearers ruled as an act of worship to him. **Worship was never intended to be thought of primarily or solely as an event, but as all of life lived under the authority of our good Creator God.** This why Paul says (Romans 12:1), “present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.”

18 — The refrain “God saw that is was good” occurred seven times in Genesis 1. Now God says something startling—“It is not good that the man should be alone.” Even in a sinless state and perfect environment, man is unable to fulfill its purpose.

This reminds God's people that proper worship is impossible outside of community. Mankind was never intended to worship God or fulfill his commission in solitude. We cannot separate love for and life with God from love for and life with our neighbors (see Mark 12:28-31; 1 John 3:16-18; 4:7-12). Your involvement in your church and your community are necessary parts of worship.

“Helper” — God’s intended solution, to deliver man from his aloneness, is to make a “helper fit for him.” The Hebrew word translated “helper” (*ezer*) means to “give support or assistance.” It means to provide what is lacking and even to “save from danger.” The Old Testament most often uses the word to describe Yahweh as Israel’s helper (see Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7,26,29; Ps. 33:20; 115:9-11; 124:8; 146:5). “Helper” never indicates a lesser status, inferiority, or a subordinate place.

“Fit for him” means one who “matches” or “corresponds.” It means someone who shares his distinctiveness. The presentation of the animals highlights *differences*, which are overcome in the creation of a helper that highlights *sameness*. The helper must be created in the “image and likeness of God,” capable of assisting in the creation mandate (1:26-28).

19-20 — The LORD God brings the living creatures before the man, who gives them names. But there is no “helper fit for him.” Presenting the animals first emphasizes that the only helper “fit for him” is a human. Animals are good and useful creatures, but they are not complementary to the man.

21-22 — God causes the man to go into a deep sleep, likely to spare him the pain of the impending operation. He removes an undisclosed part of the man’s side (the translation “rib” is unlikely). From it, he crafts a woman, which he presents to the man as a father presents a bride.

Why from his side? Consider this oft-quoted explanation:

→→Matthew Henry Commentary — “...not made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved.”

→→*Genesis Rabbah* — “[God] thought to himself: ‘We should not create her beginning with the head, so that she not be frivolous, not from the eye, that she not be a starrer [at men], nor from the ear, that she not be an eavesdropper, nor from the mouth, that she not talk too much [a gossip], nor from the heart, that she not be jealous, nor from the hand, that she not be light-fingered, nor from the foot, that she not be a gadabout, but from a covered up place on man. For even when a man is standing naked, that spot is covered up.’”

Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (1a, 92,3c) — “For since the woman should not have ‘authority over the man’ (1 Tim 2:12) it would not have been fitting for her to have been formed from his head, nor since she is not to be despised by the man, as if she were but his servile subject, would it have been fitting for her to be formed from his feet.” (as cited in *Genesis*, Kenneth A. Mathews)

We should avoid fanciful and allegorical interpretations of the creation of woman from man’s side; the answer is before us in this verse: she is the same as him, fully human—the image and likeness of God.

23 — Upon seeing her, the man exclaims, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh.” Using the exalted language of poetry, the first recorded words of a human

celebrate the fact that the woman is equal to the man. **This verse emphasizes the value of women and their equality with men.**

(1) It was not good for man to be alone. The man had all creation, including God, the animals, and a bountiful garden. Yet, in all creation, nothing could remedy this "aloneness." The woman alone was "fit for him." She corresponded to his nature and status as "the image and likeness of God." Far from inferior, she is his equal.

(2) When God created woman, he created an "ēzer," a word referring to one who provides support for one who is lacking and needing help. The verb behind it (*‘āzar*) means to "deliver/save" from danger or death. Through her, God is delivering man from the first "not good"—his "aloneness."

(3) The Old Testament uses "ēzer" most of Yahweh's relationship to Israel. He is helper because he is stronger and supplies what Israel lacks. The word used to translate it in the LXX refers to help from one who is stronger.

In general, males have a natural physical strength they must steward (1 Peter 3:7). But that does not deny the unique strength of women. Men must not be threatened by the strength of women. Their strength is something that men cannot live without. Their strength should be acknowledged, celebrated, and encouraged.

(4) God makes the woman from man's "side"—his very flesh and bone. Thus, we should afford women the same dignity and respect as men—they are of the same flesh! All misogyny is a denial and hatred of the image of God. All abuse of women is an act of violence against God himself.

(5) When God presents the woman to the man in Genesis, the man does not name her. (Moses uses a different formula for naming—"to call." This is passive.) His exclamation is not an expression of authority or sovereignty. Playing on the similarity sound (*ish/ishshah*), it highlights sameness in essence. She too is the image and likeness of God!

The first two chapters of the Bible, when speaking of male and female, speak to sameness in essence and task. When thinking and speaking of women, our first emphasis should be what we have in common.

(6) In thinking of women, we should not think of an animal to subdue, domesticate, use, or rule over. To think of woman should bring to mind God. Like God, her absence is "not good." Like God, her help is desperately needed. Like God, the good life is impossible without her presence.

The woman's importance as "helper fit for him" should be celebrated and encouraged in every realm of life—the world, the church, and the home. What about different roles?

Genesis and Gender Roles — In the New Testament, Paul appeals to the sequence of Genesis 2 to defend his instruction for men and women in the church.

In Church — In 1 Tim. 2:12-13, Paul writes, “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve.” He prohibits women from carrying out the main functions of the elders over men (teaching and exercising authority). His first reason is not the Fall, but the order of creation.

In 1 Corinthians 11:8-9, Paul gives instructions on the proper way for women to pray and to prophesy in the public assembly. His reasoning is the order and purpose of her creation in Genesis 2. He writes, “For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man.”

In neither text does Paul base his instruction on subordination (lower rank) or inequality. He points out the sequence of events and stated purpose found in Genesis 2. **The man is given *primacy* in the task; she is his helper.** (This is also why the husband is the head of the wife.)

Such distinctions do not diminish exercising dominion together, nor do they diminish equality. Paul emphasizes the interdependence of men and women (1 Corinthians 11:12).

We should honor any and all distinctions that God places between men and women in any context. Yet, where God has not placed limitations, the church should celebrate freedom. Our aim is not to avoid a "slippery-slope" toward wrong applications of conservatism or liberalism. Faithfulness to Scripture and the glory of God in his creation is our charge. The church should encourage women to serve in any capacity not prohibited by the normative instruction of the New Testament.

24 — Moses explains that this event established the institution of marriage.

Established before the fall, marriage is a good gift. It is for the benefit and enjoyment of all people on earth. It is not a result of the fall.

Moses speaks of marriage in covenantal language; it is not an informal arrangement. It is public, so that all see and know that a man has left his family of origin to begin a new family with this woman. This union in marriage is as complete as being of “one flesh.” It cannot be dissolved without harm.

This passage speaks of the primacy of marriage among human relationships. It supersedes the relationship with one’s family of origin. (Notice that it does *not* say, “She shall remain with her father and mother...” It highlights that he leaves too—the opposite of their cultural norm. A whole new family is created. This upends patriarchy.)

It is a vital creation ordinance, given by God before sin enters the world, for the good

of the world. Yet, the New Testament affirms the goodness of singleness (1 Corinthians 7:8). The Lord Jesus lived his entire earthly life and ministry as an unmarried male.

God did not say, “It is not good that the man should be *unmarried*.” He said, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” We ought to ask if our church makes it easy for those who are not married to be not alone? (Ask an unmarried church member this question this week. Then, listen.)

Is there a place for non-romantic friendship between the men and women? Does your church or spouse encourage or discourage such friendships?

25 — This is the only verse in the Old Testament in which nakedness is not associated with humiliation. Here alone, nakedness does not produce shame between humans. This hints at the shame to come in chapter three.

It also pictures the unashamedness of redemption in Jesus Christ—as we will be clothed in his righteousness with heavenly bodies.

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[CONNECTIONS TO TODAY]

It is not an overstatement to say that Genesis 2 is one of the most important chapters in the Bible. It gives us a glimpse into life as God intended it. As such, it sets the pattern for redemption, a model of what things will be like in the new world (the “re-genesis”). Thus, Genesis 2 speaks in broad ways to both the church and the world:

Life and Freedom — God intended us to thrive. He lavished our first parents with provision, good things of which they were free to eat as they pleased. Yet, we learn that true freedom exists within the restraint of God’s word. Transgression of God’s boundaries brings death.

Ethics — We see in Genesis 2 that morality and ethics are revealed by God (2:15-17). We learn how to live by paying attention to God’s Word.

Human Dignity — The gift of life is more than molecules and chemical interactions. God designed and blessed life. He fashioned humans, in particular, in his image and likeness. As such, we are complex and wonderful beings—physical, emotional, relational, sexual. We are social and spiritual—kings and priests.

The Human Body — The human body matters to God. The New Testament reminds us that God will resurrect all people on the last day (1 Corinthians 15). The human body should matter to us; we live life as embodied persons and should treat the body with dignity, including before birth and after death.

Human Equality — Every human being ever to live descended from these same first parents. Every human is the image and likeness of God. Thus, we ought to treat each with such dignity, without regard to physical differences (skin color, ethnicity, gender, age, size, location), social differences (economic class, intelligence, family of origin), or differences resulting from the curse (genetic malformations, disease) or sin (sexual orientation, religious beliefs).

Work — In both Genesis 1 and 2, God assigns mankind a task, a commission to fulfill. Work is not the result of the fall, it is a good gift to mankind to enjoy. Work-for-profit is not a primary concern in either the Old or New Testament. Rather work is an act of service, done to bless both God and neighbor.

Marriage, Gender, and Sexuality — God established marriage in Garden. This includes the gift of sex. Genesis 2 also sets the parameters for marriage. It is a covenant between one man and one woman, the only appropriate context for sexual intimacy.

The pattern of marriage is monogamous. It forbids polygamy, adultery, and pornography. Each of these aberrations introduce foreign flesh into a “one flesh” union.

Marriage is a heterosexual covenant between an adult man and an adult woman. As such, it forbids fornication, homosexuality, bisexuality, pedophilia, bestiality.

Gender and Sexuality — We live life as sexual and engendered beings, embodied as male or female. The New Testament affirms the goodness of sexuality (1 Corinthians 7:1-5). It reminds us that we cannot separate bodily behavior from our worship of the Lord. Committing ourselves to one union excludes the possibility of union with another (1 Corinthians 6:12-16).

Community — “It is not good that the man should be alone.” That statement remains true today. God made us to live and serve him in community. Love for neighbor is inseparable from love for God. This speaks beyond the importance of local church membership. Loving our non-Christian neighbors as human beings involves fostering healthy communities.

[GOSPEL CONNECTIONS]

Genesis 2 abounds with connections to the Gospel.

Grace — In Genesis 1-2, life is the undeserved, unearned work of God from first to last. God creates the first man and woman; they do not generate themselves. God creates the man outside his garden. He places man into the garden. Humans are aliens and foreigners, guests of grace, from the beginning. God is the provider of the habitat, the work, the food, and the fellowship. Every aspect of life comes from God's initiative. Humans do not deserve or merit life in any way.

Life — Jesus will appear as the source of life (John 10:10; 11:25-26; 20:22).

Marriage — Paul commends singleness (1 Corinthians 7). But, marriage remains an important aspect of life and Christian witness. Marriage, we learn, is finally about Jesus Christ and his bride, the church (Ephesians 5:31).

Priesthood — God fashioned Israel as a second Adam. Israel existed as God's son to serve him (Exodus 4:23) as a kingdom of priests (Exodus 19:5-6). Though Israel failed, God's purpose did not. Jesus arrived as the perfect priest, who came to serve and to give his own life to ransom many (Mark 10:45). Those united to the crucified and risen Jesus through faith become a kingdom of priests to God (Revelation 1:5-6; 5:10; 20:4-6; 22:4-5).

Temple — The Garden is lost in the fall. Israel's Temple is destroyed due to the nation's sin. Even so, God's purpose to have a sanctuary where he walks with his people continues. The incarnate Son—God and man—appears as the temple (John 2:13-22), the place where God meets man. He is torn down for our sin and raised again for our redemption. As the Holy Spirit dwells in believers, they become the temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19-20; 2 Corinthians 6:16; Ephesians 2:21). In the new world, there will be no temple, for God will be our temple (Revelation 21:22).

Church — God's redeemed community on earth is the church, gathered in local assemblies. In community with one another, we carry out our commission. The local church should be an essential part of every believer's life.

A Better Land — This present existence is not our final state. With the saints before us, we are looking for a better land, like Eden, prepared for us by God (Hebrews 11:8-10, 13-16). The final chapters of the Bible correspond to the opening chapters of Scripture. Revelation 21-22 remind us that God has not abandoned his purpose. A royal priesthood will dwell in a garden-paradise, partaking of the tree of life, and ruling the earth. Read these chapters and rejoice in our glorious hope!