

Genesis 2:18-25! God designs the perfect companion and partner for Adam

The first 12 chapters of Genesis provide an essential framework for understanding God's covenants with Abraham and his descendants – the nation of Israel. The first chapter of Genesis begins with **a formidable portrayal of the LORD God as Creator** with unlimited energy and understanding who fashions this earth according to his own design and purpose.

Chapter 2 of Genesis continues and supplements the formidable picture of God's work creating this world, portrayed for us in chapter one. Chapter two is divided into two main foci. The first two thirds of the chapter is focused upon enlarging our understanding of the world – **the garden** – the place, or the home that God formed for humanity. It elaborates upon the role and responsibility that God placed upon the newly created humanity: to work and to take care of this world – this garden that God has formed for humanity. It is important to remember what has been said so far regarding this newly created humanity, for the final section of chapter two must be seen in light of what has been said up to this point in this unfolding epic story.

Three key ideas regarding humanity which the author has already conveyed to us and that we are encouraged to remember are the following:

- First, **God created humanity in his image and likeness**. This is once again a statement of our identity and status before God.
- Second, God created humanity – **male and female**. Take note: God created humans male and female in his image right from the beginning. (Gen. 1:27)
- Third, God gave humanity the responsibility to fill the earth and **subdue it**. God created and gave humans the responsibility for managing, developing, bringing order to the earth in a similar way that God himself did in forming and developing the earth.

Now, in this concluding section of chapter two, the narrator adds a fascinating detail or development to God's creative work. This is done in order to fill out our appreciation of the already unfolding wonderful picture of the place – the garden – and of God's purpose for humanity. This concluding section of chapter two, now supplements our previously given understanding of **humanity's role in that garden**. The anxious reader wonders what will the narrator now focus on to enlarge our existing picture of this place? Answer: The remaining eight verses function to help enlarge our understanding of God's creation of humanity as male and female.¹ This section draws out several important insights for the reader to ponder and to take notice of regarding God's intention for the relationship that existed between the first pair of humans, but also timeless principles that govern all relationships. This closing section of chapter two **especially provides insights that are meant to govern the relationship that exists between a man and a woman in marriage**.

I. Something is not right with God's original creation of the man. (vs. 18-20)

God himself identifies a **fundamental need for the life of humanity** right from the beginning of His creative work. The first chapter of Genesis One concluded declaring God's final assessment of his creative work. "God saw everything that he had made and it was very good." Not just good, but very good! Now sometime before this point in the creative process, God determined himself that something was not right or good with his creation of humanity. Or perhaps it would be better to say that from the beginning God himself fashioned human beings to have the creative capacity to need and be fulfilled by being in relationships to other humans. These first three verses draw attention to the fact that this need for humans to be involved with other humans existed in humanity right from the beginning.

¹ The idea is that God created humanity [man, or in Hebrew, Adam] as male and female from the beginning.

A. God identifies a need concerning his newly created being called man (Hebrew Adam). Remember what has been said earlier concerning this man, remember especially the narrator's comments found in Gn.2:7, 15. God formed the man from the dust of the ground (Heb. Adamah). and put the man (Adam) in the Garden to take care of it. Up to this point in the story we are meant to imagine that the initial situation in which God places the man is ideal.² Except something else needs to be done for this new being before everything is just right! What is that? The very first verse of this concluding section draws attention **to what is missing** and to what needs fixing by God in order before life in this world becomes very good. God says: *"It is not good that the man – the first human – the male should be **alone**, I will make a helper fit for him."*

Let us slow down and ponder this before rushing on. The first seventeen verses of this chapter seemed to give the impression that "the garden" was truly a wonderful place for the man to enjoy, explore, and take responsibly take care of. But, verse 18 draws attention to a missing fundamental need. The first human has no one to share this beautiful place with. The first human is missing someone to enjoy, to discover, and to help take care of the place with him. The first human needs a companion – a friend, and someone to assist him in the purpose and God given responsibility of taking care and some to work in the garden – someone to help him take care of the garden and fulfill God's first commission to be fruitful and subdue the earth. Note: This is not an afterthought on God's part. God sees this need from the beginning. In the next couple of verses the first human is also led to perceive this truth of his need for a companion and helper himself.

B. God's first act to make things right for the first human. (v.19-20) Two short verses briefly describe God's response to correct the first human's need for having a companion and helper. These two verses declare that the LORD God "formed out of the ground, every beast of the field and every bird of the air and (God) brought them to the man to see what he – the man – would call them." What are we as readers meant to see? First, the idea that God created the animals – both domestic and wild, as we previously understood.³ Second, God formed these new creatures out of the ground just as the man was formed out of the ground, for the human to discover and name. Third, one unstated intention for the creation by God of these animals: was to provide a companion and helper "fit for the first human".⁴

Thus the formation of the animals especially is God's first response to meet a fundamental need of this first human. How many? Seemingly multitudes of animals, both wild and domestic. How long did it take? Who knows! Months! Years! What is the point? The point is the first human first had to become familiar with the animals before naming them. He had to discover what qualities and features that each animal possessed before he named them. The animals and birds undoubtedly made the garden and this human's first home **a better place**. Yet, this human – for the first time being called Adam – did not find, after his examination of the animals that God had formed out of the ground, one that would be a **suitable or fit**

² We can infer this from both the broad general statements "it was good" or "everything was very good" and specific comments like "God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground, trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food." The inference is that other unnamed aspects of this garden and this place of the world that God had created for humans like rivers, hills, fields, flowers, mountains, etc. were pleasing to the eye as well.

³ Gen. 1: 24-25

⁴ The juxtaposition of this account of the creation of animals to the primary acclamation regarding the first human's need for companionship is not by accident but intentional. The story of the animals coming after and not before the creation of the first human is meant to be seen by the reader as God's initial remedy and God's disclose of his design and purpose for humanity.

helper and companion for him. Wenham⁵ remarks that this delay or passage of time allowed the first human and the reader to feel his loneliness. An ancient rabbi imagined Adam saying after all the animals have passed by him, “Everything has its partner, but I have no partner.” Point: The animals that God created did enrich Adam’s world, but he was still lonely and without a helper. Among the animals there was no one suitable for the man.

II. God orders a major surgical operation for this first human. (vs. 21-23) The next three verses focuses upon how God created another human – another Adam – three short verses that whimsically communicate profound truths about the nature of our humanity.

A. The second human being – the woman – is not a distinct new creation as Adam. This second human being was **not formed from the ground** as was Adam or as the animals were. This new being called woman, twice the text informs us, “was taken out of the man”. Verse 21 describes the surgical operation in non-technical terms. The point of the verse is profound: The verse provides us with a working image that God formed her – this new being – out of material/body parts that came from Adam. Implication: This second living human that God created has an **organic connection with the first human being**. Both the first human and the second human being that God creates share the same ‘one flesh relationship’ by virtue of this process.

B. Adam recognizes immediately that this new being is a suitable companion. *“This at last is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh... (vs.23)”* Adam is telling us by this remark two truths in response to seeing the new creature. This new creature is like him, but is unlike him. She is one with him in being a human – a kindred being. She is not like the animals, for she is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh. I like that the ESV captures Adam’s excitement that the apparently long wait for a suitable companion is over. **“Now at last”** or, finally this is what I have been looking for... While not being explicit as the narrator’s negative comment found earlier in response to Adam surveying the animals, “but for Adam no suitable helper was found,” yet this response by Adam in seeing the being that God created for him does evoke a sense that now at last, the wait for and longing for a suitable companion and helper has been realized.

C. This newly created companion /helper is suitable for him, for she is both like him and unlike him. This is in my opinion and interpretation a **key idea** of this final story regarding the creation of the woman that is commonly missed even by all English translations. This key idea is found incorporated into the two statements found in verses 18, and 20 **“there was no helper suitable for him”**. This statement of “suitability” is meant to help us grasp the issue at stake in this story. It does help us. But, only to a limited degree. For the issue of suitability can be rightly inferred from the story. But, the key idea of ‘a helper matching or corresponding to Adam’⁶ is tragically missed in most if not all translations. Wenham in his translation of the original Hebrew and his commentary helped me to see and appreciate that the main idea of this section is not suitability but correspondence. God created someone who was matching the first human, but not identical to him. For the Hebrew literally says “a helper like opposite him.” This is exactly what God did.⁷ This is what I find so profound about this

⁵ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15, Word Biblical Commentary*, 1987, p. 68.

⁶ Wenham, *op. cit.* p 68, translates the Hebrew compound preposition Keneged as “matching him” which according to him best captures the literal meaning of the rare Hebrew combination of “like opposite to him” This is the only place in O.T. where this is used. The main idea is complementarity rather than identity, as he brilliantly observes.

⁷ Wenham, *op. cit.* p 44.

story. God did not fix humanity's need by creating someone completely identical, entirely new, nor different. But someone fully human equal and corresponding to the first human, yet different. This second human, a she, was created to be matching and a complement to the first human – his counterpart, someone who would be his companion and someone to help humans fulfill the role and purposes that God intended for this new creature.

III. Climax and Conclusion to the story of God's creation of the woman. (vs.24-25) These last two verses should function as the conclusion to the details of this amazing brief but expanded account of just how God did create humans – male and female. For while verse 24 signals a conclusion by the words "*therefore, or for this reason...*", which signifies that the writer is about to wrap things up. But, upon careful inspection of these two verses, we as readers are left pondering wondering what points does the narrator want me to get? **Did the narrator leave something out?** If we take the time to ponder these verses closely we will discover that the narrator does make several key points that he wants us to notice explicitly and implicitly.

A. God joined this couple together in the first marriage. (vs. 25) "The man (Adam) and his wife (Ishah) were both naked." We can but should not overlook the key idea that this first couple did become married (or united to each other). They did not just enjoy life in the garden as friends, companions, and partners together facing the task of fulfilling God's commission **without a commitment to each other**. The author introduces us to the point that for the first man and the first woman, God gave each of them to the other to be companions and to help each other. But, this is an inference that the narrator assumes that most readers would get. A second inference is that this first couple **became married or united to each other as husband and wife**. This has consequences for their own relationship as well as consequences to future generations of men and women who follow their example.

B. Application and Implication! Remember the whole story becomes concentrated and is wrapped up in this summary statement enigmatically and memorably found in verse 24, "For this reason a man (Ish) will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife (Ishah), and they will become one flesh." This is a classic text on marriage. But wait a minute. Why here? How does this text adequately conclude the story of Adam finding a perfect companion and partner, as well as functioning to provide principles for all subsequent marriages between a man and a woman? The key to unlocking the meaning to this text may be in constantly asking the question: "**For this reason what?**" When I have done this, I come up with the following proposal. The story is focused upon describing how God created humans male and female from the beginning and for what purpose. **They became united together in marriage**. For all subsequent men and women, they have to first leave their parents then cleave or "hold fast."⁸ This phrase, according to Wenham, "suggests both passion and permanence should characterize marriage."⁹ I like this statement by Wenham. It brings out what a crucial aspect of God's expectations for a couple who hold fast to each other in the bond of marriage. This passion and lifelong commitment to each other is based upon the initial realization that God has given each partner to the other partner as a companion and partner to face the challenges of life together.

⁸ ESV rightly translates the Hebrew verb DBQ as meaning cling or hold fast or be committed loyally to someone.

⁹ Wenham, *op. cit.* p 71