

## “Life As God Intended”

*Genesis 2<sup>4-25</sup>*

### Introduction

Have you ever wondered [SLIDE1] – *What makes a human, human?* Before we explore what Genesis says about what makes a human “human” I thought it would be interesting to consider some of the responses to this question that we find in our world.<sup>1</sup> Take the classic evolutionary stages of man as an example [SLIDE2]. What are the distinguishing features that make a human, human? The sciences that study the origins of the human species (biology, anthropology<sup>2</sup>, paleontology, etc.) focus on the a,b,c’s: **abilities** (e.g. walking, handling tools, fire) and **anatomy, brain size & function** (self-reflection), **communication** (speech & social) and **culture**. So what distinguishes Australopithecus from:

- 1) Ramapithecus – “pithecus” = ape (most ancient human ancestor)
- 2) Australopithecus – “Lucy” = biped (walking on two feet), 1/3 brain size
- 3) Homo habilis - “home handy man” (first homes? fire & complex stone tools, ½ brain)
- 4) Homo erectus – “upright human”, larger brain, speech, better tools,
- 5) Homo sapiens – wise or thinking human, Neanderthals... 1<sup>st</sup> spiritual development?<sup>3</sup>
- 6) Homo sapiens sapiens – very wise humans, hunters, artists

With the human genome project’s exploration of the final frontiers of our biology, and with genetic engineering actively exploring ways to adapt our design and destiny, the question of what makes a human is a very relevant one (especially regarding human sexuality, psychology, morality, embryology, etc.). So what could an ancient text like Genesis possibly contribute to the discussion?

In 1971, Dr. Richard Bube (“Byoub”) professor of materials science and engineering at Stanford University in California wrote a book that was different from his other books (e.g. *Photoconductivity of Solids* and several textbooks on solid-state physics—all real page turners!!). The book he wrote was entitled [SLIDE3] The

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/15689-evolution-human-special-species.html> suggests “Top 10 Things that Make Humans Special” (speech, upright posture, nakedness, hands/grip, brain, clothing, fire, blushing, long childhoods, life after children)

<sup>2</sup> <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/evan.21328/pdf> James Calcagno and Agustin Fuentes gathered 800 word responses from 13 evolutionary anthropologists.

<sup>3</sup> [http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/waymac/African%20Canadian%20Studies/Unit%20%20About%20Africa/00human\\_evolution.htm](http://hrsbstaff.ednet.ns.ca/waymac/African%20Canadian%20Studies/Unit%20%20About%20Africa/00human_evolution.htm)

Human Quest: A New Look at Science and the Christian Faith and in he stated an important thesis, [SLIDE4] that *reality, and human beings within it, have to be studied and understood on many different levels and from many different angles. Why? Because as he noted “there are many levels at which a given situation can be described. [SLIDE5] And an exhaustive description on one level does not preclude a meaningful description on another level.”*

When I read the 800 word answers 10 evolutionary biologists gave to the question, “What makes us human?” (e.g. “genetically not much”), I realized even more why we need far more than mere biological or anthropological answers. Understanding a complex entity like a human being will require input from many levels: physics, chemistry, biology, psychology, sociology, including *theology*. We need an interdisciplinary approach because “all truth is God’s truth.”

“Let no man or woman, out of conceit or laziness, think or believe that anyone can search too far or be too well informed in the Book of God’s Words or the Book of God’s Works: religion or science. Instead, let everyone endlessly improve their understanding of both.” (Sir Francis Bacon—1605)

**Biblical Contact** – [SLIDE6 – “In the Beginning”...] So we come to Genesis...

Commentator Derek Kidner rightly makes the observation that “The creation story has stood as a bulwark against a succession of fashionable errors—polytheism, dualism, the eternity of matter, the evil of matter, astrology...If every generation has needed this emphasis, perhaps none has had greater need of it than the age of scientific knowledge. The scientific account of the universe, realistic and indispensable as it is, overwhelms us with statistics that reduce our apparent significance to [the] vanishing-point...In [the] face of these immensities...the divine word...orientates us...saying to each generation...*Stand here...to get the meaning of the whole. See this world as My gift and charge to you...and its creatures [being] under your care.*”<sup>p.57</sup>

Thus the Genesis one creation story with its cosmic wide-angled lens view of the creation of “the heavens and the earth” is supplemented with a close-up view on the creation of human beings in Genesis 2. Genesis one gives us

tremendous insight into the nature of ultimate reality (God), and Genesis 2 provides incredibly rich insights into the nature of who we are. **Read Gen. 2 [SLIDES7-10]**

**Structural Contact** – Defined by our *relationships*...Four of them: our Relationship with the Earth...With LORD God...Other Creatures...Humans

### **1) Our Relationship With the Earth [SLIDE11]**

The drama begins in 2<sup>5</sup> with a series of negative statements (no shrubs, no edible plants...no rain...no man). The stage is set, but it is missing someone—the human creature featured in chapter one. The earth is shown, in v.5, to be in waiting for the earthling to “work it and keep it” (2<sup>5,15</sup>) and God to send rain on it (= a collaborative venture, a partner people).

The story flows with what appears to be a different chronological order (man...then animals vs. animals...then man). Why? Most likely because it is told to us from a human vantage point—unveiling the world as we are meant to see it.<sup>4</sup> As a literary artist, the biblical writer is using a historical and geographical framework (vv.10-14), but his pallet of words and images are rich in symbolism (e.g. River = source of life. For example, when the writer says that the LORD God “formed Adam from the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2<sup>7</sup>), he is not making any statement about how he was brought into being *biologically* (fully formed? By evolution?). The language used of God “forming” the *earthling* from the dust of the *earth* (word play) is borrowed from the potters’ workshop. And the language of God “making” a woman from the man’s rib<sup>v.22</sup> is borrowed from the temple builders’ domain (lit. = “built”). By using metaphorical language he is underlining things like: **[SLIDE12]** our organic and practical connections to the earth.

- a) Our deep organic connectedness to the earth is see in the very language (*'adam* & *'adamah* = earth & earthling, human & humas). We draw

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<sup>4</sup> Verse 19 is translated “had formed” (ESV main text) or “formed” (ESV footnote) because the verb is Qal non-perfective. As Waltke & O’Connor note, “Since the Hebrew conjugations do not simply represent absolute time but the speaker’s subjective representation of a state or an event, the interpretation of the forms is also subjective.” *Intro to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, p. 501. Thus the non-perfective can either present and activity “in the liveliest manner possible” or “represent it as ongoing” (*IHBS*, p. 504).

our spiritual life from God<sup>v.7</sup> but our physical life from the earth<sup>v.9</sup>

- b) Notice our practical connectedness (a partner people, co-workers!) given our pre-planned existence (i.e. wanted children vs. accidental) and God’s intimate earthy involvement in our formation (such “hands on” involvement compared to chapter one...LORD God language...)

*“Children and adults who form things with their hands can understand some of the relationship between God and the person expressed in these few words. The ‘forming’ creates a bond between the artist and the work.”<sup>5</sup>*

- c) Notice also the goodness of our bodies & physicality (a living *nepesh*...)

“Dust-man became living-man by God’s grace; therein lies his humility and his dignity.”<sup>TWOT.1664</sup>

## 2) Our Relationship With the LORD God<sup>6</sup> [SLIDE13]

- a) A Relationship of Intimacy – notice the intimacy of God’s breathing into his nostrils the breath of life. [SLIDE13a...]
- b) A Relationship of Responsibility – Recall the language of humans as God’s “image” and “likeness” (representatives and reflections of Him)
- c) A Relationship of Dependence – God is our provider and sustainer giving:
- Our very breath and life (**N.B.** the provision for *ongoing* and *abundant* life with the “tree of life”<sup>7</sup>...both a quantity and quality of life)
  - Providing our *physical* needs (“rain”, “earth”, “every tree”) as well as our *aesthetic* needs (the need for beauty—“pleasant to the sight”—and artistry and culture to feed mind and spirit) as well as our *social* needs (v.18ff)
  - Providing our freedom (within minimal limits compared to the rest of God’s creatures; cf. Exodus 20<sup>2</sup> and the Exodus; cf. Galatians 5<sup>1</sup>)
  - Providing our protection (garden always = a walled structure in ANE)
- d) We are in a Relationship of Accountability with God as Lawgiver

<sup>5</sup> Eugene Roop, Genesis, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> The double name *the LORD God* is used to underline the unity of God the creation and LORD of the covenant (used 20x in Gen. 2-3; 16x elsewhere—e.g. **Ex. 9<sup>30</sup>**.) The LORD who delivered Israel from Egypt is not a local or tribal deity but “God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth” (Gen. 14<sup>19</sup>).

<sup>7</sup> Trees as a symbol of life are well known in the Bible. Proverbs describes wisdom (3:18), the fruit of righteousness (11:30), a desire fulfilled (13:12), and a gentle tongue as a tree of life: in other words they give fullness of life to their owners. Because trees remain green through summer droughts, they are seen in Scripture as symbolic of the life of God (e.g. Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:8). See Wenham, Genesis, p. 62.

The story makes it clear that humans are in a dependent and accountable relationship with God (He is Lawgiver<sup>v.16</sup> and Judge<sup>ch.3</sup>). This is implicit in the presence of “the tree of the knowledge of good and evil” mentioned in verse 9 and explained in further detail in the LORD’s “command” to the man in verse 16-17 regarding it. It will of course become the centre of attention in the chapter 3 where God enforces it as judge.

The phrase “knowing good and evil” is a compound phrase that is used in the Old Testament to refer to: (a) Intellectual self-sufficiency (Deut. 1<sup>39</sup>; 2 Sam. 19<sup>35</sup>)<sup>8</sup> and, (b) Moral autonomy (Gen. 3<sup>6</sup>; Ps. 19<sup>8-10</sup>; Deut. 4<sup>2</sup>; Jos. 1<sup>7</sup>). It is sobering to realize that God has invested so much into bringing a creature into being, a creature with immense freedom and responsibility, that has the potential to mess up everything God has made.

### **3) Our Relationship With Other Creatures [SLIDE14]**

- a) We are organically similar (v.7 & v.19) in that both are “formed” “out of the “ground” and like him, are “living creatures” but not the same (the word “living”—*hayyah*—anticipates “Eve” *hawwah*). None of the living creatures God brings to the man are a complete and corresponding match.<sup>9</sup>
- b) We are also in a position of supremacy over the animals. The “rule” and “dominion” of chapter 1 is here illustrated in the process of naming (Jesus = our perfect model...)

### **4) Our Inter-personal Relationships [SLIDE 15]** (focus = marital & familial bonds)

We were designed relationally to need human community and companionship.

- a) Note the primacy, exclusivity, intimacy, and permanence of the marital union in this story of the “gift of the bride” (notice the delay after v. 18).

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<sup>8</sup> “omniscience in the widest sense of the word” Von Rad, Genesis, p. 81; cf. Wenham, Genesis 1-15, p. 63 “the wisdom literature also makes it plain that there is a wisdom that is God’s sole preserve, which man should not aspire to attain (e.g. Job 15<sup>7-9,40</sup>; Prov 30<sup>1-4</sup>), since a full understanding of God, the universe, and man’s place in it is ultimately beyond human comprehension.”

<sup>9</sup> “The compound prepositional phrase ‘matching him,’ literally, ‘like opposite him’ is found only here.” Wenham, Genesis 1-15, p. 68.

- b) Male Hierarchy or Equality? – The first thing to be noted is that naming is not always an expression of authority over someone or something in the OT (e.g. story of Hagar “naming” God in Gen 16<sup>13</sup>; Leah’s naming of Gad in Gen. 30<sup>11</sup>). In this case, the use of the passive<sup>10</sup> “she *shall be called*”<sup>v.23</sup>, as well as the poetry, parallelism and word play of *’is* and *’issah*<sup>11</sup>, all suggest that the name-giving “here is an act of discernment, rather than an act of domination.”<sup>12</sup> And, as all the standard Hebrew lexicon’s also note, the phrase translated as “a helper<sup>13</sup> fit for him”<sup>v.18,20</sup> is a compound prepositional phrase that is literally, “like opposite him” (i.e. “matching him”).
- c) I commend to you the 17<sup>th</sup> Century commentator Matthew Henry note that,

*“God did not make the woman out of this 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 loved.”*

## Conclusion/Application

Aim for life as God intended in our relationships with:

- The earth
- God
- His creatures
- Human community

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<sup>10</sup> As Dr. Allen Guenther notes, “the man does not name the woman. The passive (she will be called) is never used in the Scripture to describe the naming process by which a person asserts responsibility for, or authority over another.” *Equality or Subordination?*, in *Your Daughters Shall Prophecy*, p. 53.

<sup>11</sup> See Henri Blocher, *In the Beginning*, p. 98 for a more detailed explanation.

<sup>12</sup> So G. W. Ramsey cited in “*qara*” *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*: Volume 3. 973.

<sup>13</sup> “To help someone does not imply that the helper is stronger than the helped; simply that the latter’s strength is inadequate by itself (e.g. Jos. 1<sup>14</sup>; 10<sup>4,6</sup>; etc.). Wenham, *Genesis*, p. 68.