

Amazing Truths from the Pentateuch (2)
A Royal Birth and a Garden of Opportunity
(Genesis 2:4-17)

Introduction:-

As we move on to the second chapter in Genesis, many scholars thought for a long time that this chapter was a "second" creation story, or another version of creation, to be compared and contrasted with chapter one. But a closer reading of this chapter, soon tells us that instead of viewing this chapter as another version of creation, it can be better understood and seen as an extended commentary on day six of the previous chapter, that culminated with the creation of the first humans, male and female, in the "image" of God. And now, in this chapter, the camera lens zooms in on the sixth day of creation, in order to take a closer look at the details of the creation of male and female in the image of God, and by doing so, reveals some amazing truths about who we are, and what God intended for us, as the pinnacle of his created order. Let us now examine this chapter more closely, as we discover these truths.

1. First we start with the creation of Adam (verses 4-7)

To begin with, the God of chapter one now becomes the "Lord God", the covenant name for God first revealed to Moses at the Burning Bush at Exodus 3:15. And so this story also links itself with Moses in a significant way. Further, this God has already revealed his intentions back at Genesis 1:26 with the words, "Let us make man in our image" - Some scholars understand this as a plural of majesty, or essence, or even that of intention. But the best explanation here is that God in his singularity is addressing his heavenly council or court who surround his throne, supported by texts such as Job 38:4, 7 = "When I laid the foundation of the earth ... all the sons of God (or angels), shouted for joy" - And so here God is drawing the angelic host's attention to his master stroke of creation - Or to put it another way, God is so excited about what he is about to do, with the creation of man and woman, that he cannot possibly keep this wondrous secret to himself any longer, but must also share its joy with his heavenly council - Thus creating a further situation for the angel's response of joy. Is it any wonder then why Luke tells us in the New Testament that there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels over one sinner who repents by returning to the Father's house and love? (Luke 15:10). One further aspect of the character of God in this passage, is that whereas Genesis chapter one reveals a God who is lofty, high, and transcendent, who creates everything by his powerful word; here in chapter two, we find the immanence of God portrayed, as one who gets his hands dirty, and draws so close to man, that he breathes into man's nostrils the breath of life, causing him to become a "living soul." What this is saying to us, is that we need both sides to God, in our worship and service, and we are also called to live in this transformational understanding of God, as one who constantly draws near to us, in order to help us, giving us new life by his breath and Spirit, as Ezekiel portrays Israel in his vision of the Valley of Dry Bones at Ezekiel 37:1-14. God is as close as a breath away!! Finally, this passage tells us that Adam was formed from the dust of the ground, with the word "formed" in Hebrew commonly referring to the work of a potter, as at Isaiah 45:9 and Jeremiah 18:6, who fashions vessels from the clay. If you have ever witnessed a skilled potter at work, this image suggests that humankind is a work of the highest skill, patience, creativity, and beauty. But there is more to come here!! We read that God finally breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, and as a result, he became a "living soul." The significance of this statement is that first of all, in Mesopotamia and Egypt, only kings were said to be in "the image of God", as visible

representatives of divine rule, but radically here, all humans, male and female, are created in the image of God. Secondly, "to be raised from the dust" often meant to be elevated to royal office (see 1 Kings 16:2), and so Adam was "raised from the dust" to reign. The remainder of verse 7 supports this interpretation with the expression, "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life." It was also commonly believed that only kings received the divine breath directly from God, especially illustrated in Egypt in the cult of Hathor (= "May Hathor give life to thy nostrils", as spoken to the king), and at Lamentations 4:20, where king Zedekiah is described as "our very life's breath", or literally, "the breath of our nostrils". Also, here at Genesis 2:7, the word used for "breath" is only ever applied to the Lord and man in the Old Testament. And so, all of these concepts are now demythologized or democratized in favour of man alone, who is the recipient of the divine breath from the Lord, making him "royal", in order to reign in God's garden. In a day and age in which low self-esteem and the feeling of counting for nothing, eats away at the fabric of modern society, it is wonderful to learn that God created us as his "royal" subjects, as well as in his image, and therefore on this basis, humankind was considered by God to be most worthy to be saved, when God finally sent his own son to die for our sins, in order to remake us in his image, and to restore to us the former dignity and worth of our royal status. We see this illustrated in the story of the Prodigal Son in Luke 15:11-32, for when the Prodigal Son finally returned to the Father's house from wandering in the far country, he was given a royal welcome by the Father, through the symbols of the new robe, as well as ring for the finger, and sandals for the feet, followed by the killing of the fattened calf for celebration. We could say, that when a royal son or daughter of God returns home, he or she deserves a royal welcome! What an amazing truth, that we can rejoice in today!

2. Secondly, we learn something about the Centre of the Garden (verses 8-14)

Scholars have reminded us that the Garden of Eden is like a special sanctuary, quite unlike the rest of the world. In Ezekiel 28:14-16 it is likened to the holy mountain of God, and is elevated as the source of living water for the world. Note that a river flows out from the Garden of Eden at verse 10, which resembles the river that flows from God's Temple at Ezekiel 47:1-12, giving life to all, finally leading to the picture we have at Revelation 22:1-6. And so, Eden (= Garden of delights), is the place where God is found within his Temple, on his holy mountain, and where Adam and Eve may commune with God, and serve him in a special way. Also, God is spoken of as "walking in the Garden" in the cool of the day at Genesis 3:8, which suggests intimacy and fellowship. And so what is the centre of life in the Garden? Verse 9 supplies this answer with the description of two trees, called the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. These trees at the centre come to represent God himself. He is the one at the centre, for it is God who is the giver of life, and it is God who has all knowledge, and knows how to perfectly use that knowledge for the good and well-being of all creation. And so, for the trees to be at the centre, means that man himself cannot be at the centre. This would also serve as a vivid and constant reminder to Adam and Eve that personal freedom and well-being also involves the making of right choices in life, as we will now see in this final section.

3. Thirdly, we learn of the Human's Role and Restriction (verses 15-17)

In verse 15, we are given some specifics of the human's role within the Garden, to "work/till" and "take care/guard" the Garden, which words also have a priestly context with reference to priests serving at the Tabernacle in the Book of Numbers. And so, humankind is given work to do, as God's kings/priests, even before the Fall,

as something important that will both define human nature as made in the image of God, as well as fulfil the command to "subdue" and rule over all the earth at Genesis 1:28. Note that there are no other distractions like gold and precious stones within the Garden itself, which may serve to highlight the importance of relationship with God. But one other feature about the Garden is very important. As we have already noted, at the centre of the Garden are two trees - the Tree of Life, and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (v.9). But notice that a "prohibition" is now placed on the eating of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (v. 17), which reminds man that true "freedom" has boundaries, and there is therefore a wisdom that only belongs to God, which humans cannot and may not grasp. Moral autonomy is not an option open to man. The wise person is therefore the one whose "fear is in the Lord" - and whose ability to fully enjoy life is therefore linked to obedient trust and faith in the Creator's greater wisdom and ability to decide what is right and good for man. (Proverbs 1:7; 9:10). In many ways, the final Book of the Pentateuch at Deuteronomy 30:15, frames and reflects these two trees in Moses' final appeal to Israel in the words: "See, I set before you today, life and prosperity (= Tree of Life), or death and destruction" (= Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil). The first involves obedience to God's Word, which leads to blessing, wisdom, and life, but the second involves disobedience to God's Word, which only leads to curse and destruction.

Conclusion:-

*In this passage, we are left with two amazing truths. First, it is more important that we seriously consider "what God thinks about us" today, as human beings created in his image, than what we and others may want to think about ourselves. As C.S. Lewis once put it about humankind, "You have never come across a mere mortal!" This is so, because in our passage, we were created royal!! In Christ, let us fully claim this truth anew, and live it out in our world today! The parable of the Prodigal Son reminds us of the royal welcome that is always ours when we return to the Father's home. Secondly, William Dumbrell (*The Faith of Israel*) 2002, p. 22 says: "Paradoxically, the world outside the Garden will be best served by humankind's service at the centre of the world in the presence of God" (end of quote). How significant this truth is! But in order to do this, we must recapture the wonder and reality of our "royal" status as kings and priests, through our Lord Jesus Christ, who enables us to enter the Holy of Holies through his blood and sacrifice, that we might stand before God, in order that we might finally stand before men, and serve humankind as we should (Hebrews 10:19-25). To use an earlier phrase, "God is only a breath away" from recreating us by His Spirit in the image of Christ to do his will, as Paul puts it: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, and the new has come", and as such, has given to us the ministry of reconciliation toward humankind (2 Corinthians 5:17-21). **Amen.***