

Genesis 2.4-7: The Dignity of Man

Genesis 2 develops the general description of creation (1.1-2.3) by giving a focussed account of the creation of mankind and his special relationship with God (2.4-25). “*The emphasis transfers from the power and activity of God to the position and responsibility of man*” (Richard Catchpole). It is therefore significant that the name Jehovah Elohim (“LORD God”) is introduced for the first time (2.4). *Elohim* is the *powerful creator* God, but also a God in *relationship* with those He has created (Jehovah).

v.4: “These are the generations of” (*tôlēdôt*) is a very important phrase in the book of Genesis. The word comes from a root meaning ‘to bear children’ and signifies what is *produced* or *brought into being by someone*. It divides the entire book occurring *thirteen* times in all (2.4; 5.1; 6.9; 10.1, 32; 11.10, 27; 25.12, 13, 19; 36.1, 9; 37.2). The phrase introduces more than a mere genealogy – it begins a narrative (record of events) that describes what became of the subject. Here, the *tôlēdôt* explains what became of the heavens and earth God created. The word always acts as a heading introducing subject matter to follow. The name of the book of Genesis comes from the Greek rendering of the Hebrew *tôlēdôt*.

	Reference (Genesis)	Generation (<i>Toledoth</i>)
1	1.1 - 2.3	The <i>Beginning</i>
2	2.4 - 4.26	Generations of <i>the Heavens and Earth</i>
3	5.1 - 6.8	Generations of <i>Adam</i>
4	6.9 - 9.29	Generations of <i>Noah</i>
5	10.1 - 11.9	Generations of <i>sons of Noah</i>
6	11.10-26	Generations of <i>Shem</i>
7	11.27 - 25.11	Generations of Terah (Abraham)
8	25.12-18	Generations of <i>Ishmael</i>
9	25.19 - 35.29	Generations of <i>Isaac</i>
10	36.1 - 37.1	Generations of <i>Esau</i>
11	37.2 - 50.26	Generations of <i>Jacob (Joseph)</i>

As a general principle, God takes up the *second* and sets aside the *first*. Thus, Ishmael is before Isaac, and Esau before Jacob. This principle underpins the entire plan of redemption. Because of sin, the human race, under the federal headship of the *first*, natural (earthly) man Adam, was condemned at the cross. But God has taken up the *second*, spiritual Man, the “Lord from heaven”, under whose headship a new order of mankind is bound for heaven (1 Corinthians 15.45-49; cf. Romans 9.12; Hebrews 10.9).

As noted above, *Jehovah Elohim* (“LORD God”) is introduced for the first time in this verse and is used throughout Genesis 2-3. The sovereign God of creation (*Elohim*) has a *close* and *personal* covenant *relationship* with man. *Jehovah* is sometimes labelled ‘God’s redemptive name’. “*As Elohim, He tossed the worlds into space; as Jehovah, He planned man’s redemption before ever He fashioned Adam’s clay*” (John Phillips).

v.5: *Two* types of vegetation are mentioned in this verse. Every “plant (*śîaḥ*) of the field” refers to wild, desert shrubs including thorns and thistles (cf. 2.15) whilst “every herb (*‘ēšēb*) of the field” refers to cereal crops such as wheat and barley (1.11-12). This is not simply a description of the initial, barren state of earth before vegetation was created. These are particular plants that grow because of human cultivation through *planting* and *artificial irrigation*. It seems, then, this verse is anticipatory and further explained by 3.18: “thorns also and thistles (a particularisation of *śîaḥ*) shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb (*‘ēšēb*) of the field” (see also 3.23). Neither of these kinds of growth appears in the fields until after the creation of man and after man’s transgression (Hamilton). Before the fall, man was able to live on fruit from the trees of the garden. After the fall, and entry barred from the garden, man was compelled to till the ground. “*‘ēšēb* are the cultivated grains, such as wheat and barley, from which fallen man was to make his bread. In cultivating them man would now encounter thorns and thistles. The thorns and thistles grow by themselves but must be rooted out lest the grain which man needs for food be choked.” **v.6:** Though there was no rain at this stage, there was ample moisture provided by a “mist” that “went up... from the earth” (cf. Job 36.27). The LXX translates this word as “spring” suggestive of subterranean waters that rose to the surface to moisten the earth. At some point, this order was changed so the earth was watered by rain coming *down* rather than water coming *up*. God was thus able to withhold the blessing of rainfall as a judgment upon the sin of His people (cf. Leviticus 26.18-21; 1 Kings 8.35; Haggai 1.10-11).

v.7: The creation of man was described in 1.26-27 with emphasis on the *word* of God and *worth* of man (as one created in the “image” of God). This verse describes the *work* of God in more detail – He “formed man”.

As far as God’s word is concerned, “let us” (1.26) is a deliberate statement of divine purpose – a consultation in the Godhead. As to mankind’s worth, he is made in the “image” (representation) and “likeness” (resemblance) of God. The word “image” suggests that man was created to *represent* God in and to creation. Though man is made in His image, he is only *like* God, and serves as His vice-regent. The Fall has *impaired* (marred) but not *removed* the image (1 Corinthians 11.7; James 3.9). Creation in the image and likeness of God is unique to man. Mankind has *intellectual* (to think and reason whereas animals act by instinct) *emotional* (to love), *spiritual* (communion with God) and *moral* (discerning right from wrong) aspects – humans alone being capable of a personal relationship with God (cp. 1.22, 28). As bearing God’s image, man is a creature accountable to God. The Lord Jesus is the “image of the invisible God” (Colossians 1.15). As such, He is the full and perfect expression (manifestation) of the invisible God. Whilst Adam was “made” in the image of God, Christ “is” the *eternal* image of the eternal, invisible Father. In contrast to Adam, Christ is never said to be in the “likeness” of God, for the simple reason that He **is** God, not *like* Him (but note Romans 8.3; Philippians 2.7).

As to the work of God, He “formed man”. The Hebrew word means to fashion (shape) by plan or design, as would an artist, goldsmith (Isaiah 44.9) or potter (Isaiah 29.16). This is a master craftsman shaping a work of art to which he gives life. The same metaphor is used for the creation of *every* human being (Job 10.8-9). Such careful design was necessary, since a human body would be the suitable vehicle for the expression of all God is when His Son became incarnate (cf. Isaiah 49.5). Though man will be made a “living soul” (dignity), he is yet formed from “dust” (lowliness). The word “dust” describes loose, granular material like soil and is synonymous with clay (Job 4.19; 10.9; 33.6). Such a modest material from which mankind is formed symbolises his lowly estate (Genesis 18.27; 1 Samuel 2.8) and reminds us of the destiny to which his body will return (Genesis 3.19; Psalm 22.15, 29). Henry Law says, “*We are all made of the same base material. The material you normally wipe off the soles of your shoes before entering a reasonably furnished house.*” Yet, in Christ we have been seated among princes and enjoy the prospect of *resurrection* and *redemption* of the body.

Into this work of art, the Master Craftsman infuses His own breath. Only of man is it true that God personally “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life” (*něšāmâ*). Genesis 7.22 could also include animals, but only to man is it *directly* given. The man is animated with the breath of God, causing him to become a “living soul” (Job 33.4). If God withdrew His breath, all flesh would perish (Psalm 104.29; Isaiah 2.22). Thus, man’s worth is not in the physical components that form his body, but in the quality of life which forms his soul (Matthew 6.25). The plural, ‘breath of lives’, that is, the breath that *produces* lives, suggests that Adam is the representative head of every life that would spring from him.

As a result of this in-breathing, man became “a living soul” (or *being*). The Hebrews did not think in terms of a soul apart from the body. Rather, the word *nepesh*, “soul,” describes the whole person – the consciousness principle. Thus the same term is used to denote sea and land creatures (1.20, 24). Whilst the teaching of man as a tri-partite being cannot be substantiated here, it is the clear teaching of scripture (1 Thessalonians 5.23). “*Man has a material body through which he is earth-conscious... a soul, which makes him self-conscious, imparting to him intuition, feeling, a will... But, beyond that, he has a spirit that can lift him above the intellect, understanding and reasoning of the soul, to bring him into fellowship with God, and to reflect the very character of God*” (Richard Catchpole). Again, Alan Summers writes, “*The Bible distinguishes between plant life and living creatures. Every living creature has a ‘soul’. The distinction between plant life and animal life is that ‘living creatures’ are capable of thought, emotions and will. In the OT when the word ‘soul’ is used in connection with man it also carries with it the idea of God-consciousness. In the NT another word is added – ‘spirit’... Although animals have ‘souls’ in the broad sense they do not have a spirit since the spirit enables an appreciation of divine things.*” It is sobering to think that when God recovers man through redemption, He gives him His own Spirit; that is more than innocent Adam ever had. It is God’s way when anything fails which He has set up to bring in something better.

In summary, man is a *deliberate* creation (1.26), a *divine* creation (1.26), a *direct* creation (2.7) and a *dual* creation (male and female, 1.27). But not only is man’s *formation* described, but also his *function*. He was to *rule* for God (dominion, 1.26), *resemble* and *represent* God (1.27), as well as *re-plenish* (fill) the earth (1.28).