

# The Beginning of History

*Genesis 2:4 - 3:24*

## **Introductory Remark**

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The previous three verses belong to the history of creation of Genesis 1 and are the conclusion thereof. From 2:4 on, the beginning of history is described, of the earth, but also of heaven which sympathizes with the earth. Although Genesis 1-2:3 is written in narrative style, it does not give a historical description. This does not begin until verse 4: “These are the generations (the history) of the heavens and the earth,” which serves as a heading above what follows. We find a similar heading in 5:1, 6:9, 10:1, 11:10, 11:27, 25:12, 25:19, 36:1, and 37:2, ten times in all. The author himself has divided his book into ten chapters, plus Genesis 1-2:3. We might compare the ten chapters to a building, and that which precedes it to the foundation of the building, which belongs to it but yet is distinguished from it.

That with Genesis 2:4 a historical description begins is also apparent from the fact that from now on the name LORD occurs quite frequently, whereby God is indicated as the God of the covenant and of history, wherein He remains true to His Word (Exodus 3:14, 6:1-7). From this we learn that one can only speak of history when people have begun to take part. History is the purposeful course whereby God performs His world plan with the introduction of the actions of men. Genesis 1 is the “book” of God’s creation; with Genesis 2:4 begins the book of God’s providence, to use this expression for the sake of brevity.

## **The Creation of the First Man**

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It is remarkable that the author first returns to the creation. Yet it is different from chapter 1. In 2:4-7 the author describes the creation of man

as a necessary introduction to what follows. In Genesis 1 man appears *last* as *creature* and lord of the creatures, for whom creation is laid out. In Genesis 2 man appears as the *first* with whom *history* begins. Only then do we see *when* and *under what circumstances* man is created and places his foot on the path of history. It was at that time when the LORD God created earth and heaven (the earth being named first now because that is what gets most of the attention);- it was when vegetation did not shoot up on earth and herbs did not spring up because there was only a vapour but no rain since the third day of creation, and there was as yet no man to till the earth. It is apparent from this that dryness hampered the growth despite the moisturizing vapour, and human labour was lacking.

It is further related *how* God created that first man: He made him out of the sandy dust of the earth, and blew the breath of life into his nose, so that man became a living being. It has already been mentioned that man was created after the image of God. With an eye to the historical process of the earth man is now described as simply a living being, which can also be expressed as a “living soul,” meaning that man with his earthly body is subject to the laws of this earthly, natural life and has the breath of life in his nostrils which he breathes out and in. One day, however, we will bear the image of the heavenly (Christ) and be a quickening spirit, that is to say that we will live through the power of our spirit, which itself is nourished by the Holy Spirit and not by heartbeat, breathing and metabolism (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

It does not need further proof that man is different from and more than an animal. Even nature teaches this, and Genesis 1 already mentions the image of God, of which Scripture says (as we have seen) that it exists in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness. Animals live by instinct; human beings have a reasoning mind and will, which were originally holy, pure, and clean. It also needs no argument that in addition man has an existence that is not earthly, but spiritual. Although this is not expressed here in so many words, nevertheless the Scriptures clearly bring it to the fore: there will come a time that “the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God Who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Soul and spirit, moreover, are words which are used interchangeably in the Scriptures. Generally speaking we may say that the word spirit describes the principle of life,

and soul is more indicative of the relationship to the earthly and bodily life. We should regard Genesis 2 in the light of 1 Corinthians 15.

## **Paradise**

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Genesis 2:8-14 tells us that on the sixth day, after creating the first man, God planted a garden for him in Eden, in the East, and caused all kinds of fruit trees to grow therein, pleasant to the sight and good for food. In the midst of the garden He put the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And He made a river to flow through the garden which had its source somewhere outside of it, and which, upon leaving the garden, branched out into four directions, as the Pison, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. It is said of the first of these four branches that it flows around the country of Havilah, where men might obtain their ornaments. In that sole example the Scriptures show already the wealth of the earth which man would exploit.

It is remarkable that the Scriptures, which at the beginning describe the earthly paradise, in the last chapters (Revelation 21, 22) describe the far more beautiful heavenly paradise, a garden in the midst of the city. There will be the river of the Spirit with its blessed action, and the tree of life as indication of the salvation through Christ, Who feeds us with plenty. At the beginning, a garden with merely two people; at the end, the city, “Babylon” with all that is city, where man lives with his misery, and where there is lack of food; but on the new earth, the populous city *with* the garden as image of fullness and joy of life, of which the earthly paradise was a prophecy and type. The path of mankind goes from the earthly to the heavenly, although, because of the fall into sin, it goes past Golgotha as a road of cross-bearing, which is a road of grace.

Where paradise was situated and how far it extended is not known. The names Tigris and Euphrates remind us of the area in present day Iraq, but those rivers each have their own source now and are therefore no branches of another river. We may perhaps say that the flood has brought a complete change there also. Regarding the word “paradise,” this originates from a Persian word (“pairidaeza”, pronounce: paridaza), which means a royal garden or pleasure grounds (cf. Ecclesiastes 2:5). In the New Testament it is taken up in Luke 23:43, 2 Corinthians 12:24,

and Revelation 2:7, and translated as paradise. Hence our usage in calling the garden of Eden paradise, which was already done in the Greek translation of the Old Testament.

### **The Covenant**

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That which is told in 2:15-17 we call the revelation of the covenant of God, which He gave to the first man. That word “covenant” does not occur here, but is clearly so expressed in Hosea 6:7. When the LORD God had brought man into the garden to cultivate and keep it (preserve, protect it), He imposed the commandment not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, to which was added the threat of punishment of (eternal) death. Man might freely eat from all the other trees. God therefore determined what man was and was not permitted to take as food. In this way God proved man, placed him before a free choice, so that in the service of his responsibility man might show his faithfulness in holiness. The other side of the coin was that man through obedience in life would persevere and thus would once attain the blessed eternal life, for which the tree of life served as a sacrament. This is not expressly stated, but man, who was put to work with his pure and discriminating knowledge, was able to infer this from the threat of the curse from the name and significance of the tree of life, and from the knowledge of the existence of angels and their dwelling place (cf. 3:24, assuming that there has been an oral tradition of the paradise history and that the first man had seen the cherubim in their guarding of paradise, and known them from earlier observance).

### **Creation of the Woman**

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After this the LORD God, on that sixth day, created woman (2:18-25). Preparation was made for this when the LORD God gathered the land animals and fowl which He had created before the first man, in order that he would know and name them, but also in order that it would create the desire for a help fit for him. Naturally, the animals meant here were in or around the garden; it is even the question whether God immediately created so many animals that they were spread over the whole earth from the beginning. Then the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon man, took from him a rib, from which the woman was to be formed, and brought her as by His hand to the man who in the meantime

had awakened and risen. Upon seeing the woman, man sang in his great joy—”This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this shall be called Woman because she was taken out of Man,—even this.” It is the first song out of a human mouth, in which the triple “this” expresses his delight (so the original has it). And the writer adds that for this reason a man will leave his father and his mother, and will cleave unto his wife and that they will be one flesh; that is, the man will take the initiative to arrive at the forming of a family of his own in marriage, wherein husband and wife make a union of two, physically as well as spiritually. When finally it is stated that the first man and wife were naked without being ashamed before each other, this indicates the acceptance of each other in a marriage according to God’s order. Shame shows a transgressing of God’s revealed and known ordinances.

We rightly speak here of the first marriage, which the LORD God Himself has solemnized, and whereby we should probably think of a divine appearance in human form (cf. Genesis 18:1, 2; 28:13; 32:24). Even now in His providence God still provides every man who marries with his wife as by His own hand, even though after paradise marriages have been solemnized by humans. This does not mean, of course, that every marriage is made in God’s favour (cf. Genesis 6:1-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14). When God allows a man to follow his sinful path after his own will, He punishes sin with sin. Yet He is merciful to send blessings when there is conversion.

Concerning the legal relationship between man and wife, it must be remarked that the formation of the woman out of a rib, from the side, indicates that woman is set as a help beside the man, as a supplementary part. Yet man is the first, he was created first and with him did God establish His covenant, in which the woman is included since she was taken out of man. Moreover, there is the aspect of priority in the expression “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,, (Compare, according to the literal translation in the Statenbijbel, 2 Samuel 19:12, 13; 1 Chronicles 11:1; Ephesians 5:30).

### **The Fall Into Sin**

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Life in paradise probably did not last very long; we do not yet read of the beginning of an increase in the human race; it also appears from 3:22 that

the first people had not yet eaten of the tree of life when the first act of sin was committed. The great enemy, murderer, and arch-liar, the Satan (that is opponent), was lying in wait to destroy God's work. He was created as a good angel and as the mightiest one, but became unfaithful (John 8:44; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6; Revelation 12:3, 4). It is clear from the story of the Fall that he had heard which commandment the Lord God had set before the first man, and he addressed the woman with a deceitful question referring back to this, in which he was successful (Genesis 3:1-7).

For this purpose he used the serpent which was the most subtle animal. Just as in the time of Jesus' life on earth there were many possessed people through whose mouth devils spoke (Matthew 8:28ff. and others), so there was in paradise a possessed snake through whose mouth Satan spoke. The subtle approach of the devil is also clear from the fact that he turned to the woman and not to the man who had heard the commandment out of God's mouth.

It started with the deceitful question: "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?'" a question which the woman answered pleasantly. It is striking that this answer did not in the least correspond with the word of the LORD, as she had heard it from the man. This does not only mean that she used different words, which would not have been wrong in itself if only the same meaning were expressed thereby, but the woman actually changed the contents by her words. Carefully compare 3:2, 3 with 2:16, 17. Consider specifically the following expressions: "*the tree which is in the midst of the garden*" (a neutral description without mentioning the significance of the tree); "*neither shall you touch it*" (making the command more severe); "*lest you die*" (belittling the punishment). She thus gave an untrue representation of the word of God: in the midst of the garden is a tree which may not even be touched for fear of death.

The question arises how it was possible that the woman, who was created holy and after God's image, also in the purity of her knowledge, had received such a mutilated representation of the commandment. Sin cannot be explained by psychological factors. We will have to look for the explanation along the following line, namely, that the woman listened willingly to the word of the snake which was sowing doubt, instead of dismissing the

snake with a sharp answer: Begone, serpent, for the LORD has spoken thus (compare the words of the Lord Jesus during the temptation in the wilderness of Judah; Matthew 4:4, 7, 10). The willingness of the woman already meant unfaithfulness toward God, and the strange happening of an animal concerning himself with this matter should already have caused her to keep the utmost distance.

The answer of the woman therefore indicates a darkening of her ability of representation, wherein can be seen a first symptom of the removal of the image of God.

In this light it can be seen that the woman, with interest, permitted the lies of the serpent to influence her. It is remarkable that in the words of Satan it is clearly shown how well he listened when God gave His commandment; cf. 3:4, 5 with 2:17 and especially the expressions: “when you eat of it.” knowing good and evil,” and “you will not die.” And with covetous eyes the woman beholds the fruit of the forbidden tree which would let her know, by experience, good and evil, and from looking she arrives at the consideration that the tree is good indeed to make wise according to the word of Satan.

Then follows the *deed* of disobedience and with it the completion of sin: she took and ate in the presence of her husband and she gave him also, and he ate.

It is true that the punishment was not immediately executed: in fact, God would first call them to account, yet the consciousness of guilt arose, for their eyes were opened (by God) and they discovered that they were naked. It does not say that they were now ashamed before each other; we should not relate this to the sexual aspect; consciousness of guilt brings the dislike of openly appearing before someone else. An arrested criminal avoids publicity and attempts to hide from the photographer. And so the first human couple picked fig leaves, which cling together easily because of a stickiness in the stems, and by this means they made a covering.

## Judgment and Grace

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In the rising of the wind of day (some believe the evening wind) the coming of God into the garden was heard. It is not impossible that the LORD God visited the garden more often around this time to speak with Adam. Even with their covering of fig leaves, they both hid themselves among the trees. However, the LORD God called him (singular): “Where are you?” Man had to give account of himself; he had transgressed the covenant! God, of course, knew everything, but the inquiry was to lead to confession.

When man had appeared and referred to his nakedness in explaining his fear to meet the LORD God thus, He asked him: “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” Man could not deny this, but what is remarkable is that he put the woman’s blame in the foreground, and even added: “whom Thou gavest to be with me.” In other words, if that had not been done, then this would not have happened either. Similarly, the woman, in answer to the question, ‘What is this that you have done?’ did confess, but also emphasized that she had been deceived by the serpent. It is clearly evident from the verdict which God gave (3:14-19) that these excuses as such did not remove the guilt.

Regarding the *serpent*, it was cursed; and as a sign of that curse it had to go on its belly and eat dust as long as it lived. We will ignore all such questions as whether the snake had also crawled before, or whether this would be a sign of the curse from now on; also whether this is not contrary to the fact that God also created creeping animals: as well as the fact that there are serpents that move differently, while they feed on much more than dust. One might also pose the question whether this curse applied only to the possessed snake. More important is the word directly intended for Satan: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel” (3:15). Here the LORD God put the woman at His side once more and destroyed the alliance with Satan. She would produce seed, the seed Jesus Christ, born of a woman after the flesh, and all those belonging to Christ would be accounted as her seed, just as the seed of the evil one indicates the children of the devil (John 8:44, cf. Matthew 3:7; Acts 13:10). It should be noted that the first man is now set back for the



sake of the seed of the woman, the Redeemer, on Whom the course of history will now be fixed. The addressing of the devil in the serpent can be compared to Mark 5:9,10. In Revelation 20:2 he is called “that old serpent.” The victory, to be sealed with the bruising (of Satan - Romans 16:20) on the day of Christ’s return, would not come but through the depth of suffering.

The punishment for the *woman* contained: the great difficulty of pregnancy, the pain of bringing forth, and yet the desire towards her husband; furthermore, the dominion of the husband over the wife, which meant a change in the relationship.

The punishment for the *man* would be the difficult work on an accursed earth which would bring forth thorns and thistles, even though God maintained the promise of food; and finally death. It is true that the so-called spiritual death began immediately, namely, the power of sin (Ephesians 2:1), but the full working-through of the threatened complete and eternal death God postponed by the interjection of the bodily death, which would not prevent the progress of history.

To cover the nakedness God provided also other garments than those of fig leaves, namely, those of animal skins. This covering was given for the sake of people, but also in view of man’s presence before God, since man wanted to cover his nakedness before Him.

Without clothing, it is not only impossible to have an orderly society, but also to have a true relationship with God in worship. The word garment has received a symbolical meaning in the Scriptures, namely, that of being clothed with Christ’s righteousness (Isaiah 61:10, Matthew 22:11ff.; Galatians 3:27; Revelation 16:15; and others). The fact that God gave garments for which animals had to be killed, taught the first people that they had the lives of animals at their disposal.



Moreover, we may say that here already exist the basic features of the sacrifice (of which we read already in Genesis 4); later the Scriptures teach us that there is a relationship between the covering of sins and the shedding of blood.

Finally God sent man out of the garden and set up a guard of angels, so that man [having learned from bitter experience, (i) the distinction between good and evil] might not eat of the tree of life to seek life in that way. The promise directed him to the Redeemer, Who now is our tree of life (Revelation 2:7; 22:2).

### **Questions**

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1. From a Bible-critical point of view, Genesis 2:4-25 is called a second history of creation. What can be said about this?
2. May we say that man could *earn* eternal life by his obedience?
3. Why do we speak of a test commandment?
4. How should we imagine the earth outside paradise with regard to natural condition, production, animal and plant life?
5. Did man have a free will in paradise? Is his will still free to choose good or evil?
6. Would Satan have been able to approach the woman without the means of an animal? Is direct conversation possible between invisible spirits and human beings?
7. Was Satan able of himself to make a serpent speak?
8. Was it necessary that man should fall into sin, considering the image of God?
9. Why did Christ have to be tempted? (Cf. Mark 1:12.)
10. Was the temptation of Christ more severe? (Cf. Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13.)
11. Why does Genesis 3 say that the man was called, and not the woman? (Genesis 3:9).

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12. What does it mean that God cursed the earth but not man?
  13. May we attempt to soften the punishment over man and woman, or if possible to divide it into subdivisions?
  14. What can be said about the emancipation of woman?
  15. What does 1 Timothy 2:15 mean, where it says that the woman will be saved in childbearing if she continues in faith, etc.: Does the bearing of children have anything to do with faith, charity, and holiness?
  16. What does it mean when we call clothing a necessary dressing? Does it have anything to do with the present-day love of fashion?
  17. Is it permissible for a woman to serve in an office such as elder or minister? (Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:34; 1 Timothy 2:12). May she perform assistant services?
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